

DO THE G!G NYC

Charles McPherson Quintet at Dizzy's 3/3/18 (by Nathan Bellott)

PERSONNEL: Charles McPherson alto saxophone, Yotam Silberstein guitar, Jeb Patton piano, Todd Coolman bass, Jonathan Blake drums

SET LIST: Deep Night (Rudy Vallee), Nature Boy (Eden Ahbez), Lover (Rodgers & Hart), Jeb Patton Solo Number, Polka Dots and Moonbeams (Van Heusen & Burke), Song of the Sphinx (McPherson), Tenor Madness (Rollins)

HIGHLIGHTS: Charles was in top form, particularly on the blues and one of his blazing signatures, "Lover." Another fan was in the house, Lee Konitz, who even got up during a song to join them on stage to scat on "Polka Dots And Moonbeams."

Any chance to hear Charles McPherson in person is a treat: He's right in the lineage from Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges and Bird: a bebopper at heart who takes no prisoners.

The first tune was Rudy Vallee's 1929 hit "Deep Night," in this case possibly inspired by the canonical version by Sonny Clark. Charles's operatic tone on the alto soared above the ensemble. All of the old masters know that projection comes from air, not audio equipment.

"Nature Boy" was prefaced by a dedication to Maxine Gordon, widow of Dexter Gordon, who was in the house (Dexter would have been 95 this year) as well as Charles's wife Lynn. The arrangement was centered around a bass line played flawlessly by veteran Todd Coolman. The tune's misterioso feel was enhanced by Yotam Silberstein's atmospheric guitar, which fluidly moved between being a second "horn" in the band and providing texture.

When McPherson announced the next tune would be "Lover" I knew I was in for a treat. This is Charles's bread and butter- changes and tempo. The tune featured Jonathan Blake, a chorus out front and an extended solo after that. In between the drum explosions, Charles played an inspired solo. Rawness is one of the true qualities of bebop, and McPherson's rhythm explodes in unexpected ways. (We often focus on the advanced harmony of bebop, but the true essence may be in the rhythm.)

The band took a break to allow Jeb Patton to play a solo number in which he took us through the history of jazz piano. Rooted in stride, this piece sparkled and showed that Patton had, in McPherson's words, "done his homework."

“Polka Dots and Moonbeams” was intended to feature Yotam Silberstein but that concept took a left turn when I saw Lee Konitz get out of his seat and head towards the stage. Nobody considered this a problem, when you’re 90 years old and a living relic of the music you can kind of do what you want. Silberstein realized this as well and played a short solo, giving the mic to Konitz to scat a chorus or two on the standard and then take the tune out.

The sole McPherson original, “Song of the Sphinx,” was a modal piece with an “esoteric” vibe. There were moments when Charles’s alto evoked faraway references such as Jimmy Lyons with Cecil Taylor on “Nefertiti, the Beautiful One Has Come.” Upon further thought, both saxophonists are essentially coming out of Bird....

My hope that I’d hear the blues was fulfilled at the very end of the set with “Tenor Madness.” I love the choice of such a simple tune, a vehicle to get at the essence of jazz. McPherson didn’t disappoint, running up and down the horn as well as playing some of the dirtiest blues riffs you could hear today.

— by **Nathan Bellott**

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