



HIROYUKI ITO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Wynton Marsalis, center, with Willie Jones III, left, and Freddie Hendrix at the Rose Theater.

Sounds That Remain Miles Ahead

In the best of Gil Evans's work, nothing signifies a finished style. Achieving his kind of openness took stubborn drive: The ease with which his arranging and

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composing came to connect Maurice Ravel, George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, Kurt Weill, Claude Thornhill, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan, Charles Mingus and Jimi Hendrix didn't indicate a path of least resistance. His work, from the 1940s to the 1980s, represents jazz's thousand limbs, its endless reach.

"Sketches of Gil Evans," the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra's program this week organized around Evans's work, should come with an asterisk. Thursday's program, at least, contained no music dated after 1960. It got up to his collaborations with Miles Davis — parts of the albums "Miles Ahead" and "Porgy and Bess" (nothing from "Sketches of Spain") — and then stopped. Evans was a natural expander; this concert was a delimiter.

"Sketches of Gil Evans" will be presented again tonight in the Rose Theater, and Branford Marsalis will perform the music of Gil Evans with a small group in the Allen Room, Frederick P. Rose Hall, Jazz at Lincoln Center, 60th Street and Broadway; (212) 721-6500, jalco.org.

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra Rose Theater

A result, obviously, was no loud electric guitars, no electric piano, no free collective improvising, no backbeats: all parts of Evans's music at a certain point, and basically alien to the mission of Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. They are interested in what they see as the core of jazz, the commonalities that they feel make jazz a tradition. Inclusion for its own sake just isn't their game. It's hard to imagine them playing Evans's late work with much enthusiasm, and hearing it delivered halfheartedly would be worse than not hearing it at all.

On the other hand, the work Evans did before he became famous — the arrangements he wrote for Thornhill's big band in the 1940s, tense, slow-moving, mysterious and wry — was dealt with seriously, by an expanded 27-piece version of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. So were parts of the records "New Bottle, Old Wine," "Gil Evans & Ten," "Great Jazz Standards" and "Out of the Cool," wherein Evans rewrote Lester Young, Jelly Roll Morton, Horace Silver, Leadbelly, Weill and others.

There are fairly serious jazz enthusiasts who don't know this music very well, and it deserved the time it got: the sudden traffic

of tailgating trombones and New Orleans parade beats in "Sister Sadie"; the hopalong western-movie atmosphere and floating feeling of "Happy Stranger"; the long, gliding notes worked into swing in "Nobody's Heart." And Weill's "Bilbao Song," conducted by Andy Farber, was magnificent, its melody moving in a different time from the drum pattern, the bass line bumping over continuous tuba and flute notes.

What people do know, of course, are Evans's collaborations with Davis. If you're going to block out the second half of Evans's career, it becomes more urgent to get this music in great shape, and it wasn't quite there. These are not casual pieces; they're more like shrewd and brilliant concertos for trumpet, in which the strangely hued orchestral arrangements finally serve as background.

Trumpeters took turns up front to solo, and worked hard: Mr. Marsalis, in "New Rhumba," and Marcus Printup, in "Gone, Gone, Gone," delivered on a fairly deep level — Mr. Marsalis, especially, engaging with the drummer Willie Jones III and revving up the band.

But much of this music seemed to elude the orchestra a little bit; it is wickedly intricate, coming down to tiny details of dynamics and timbral and rhythmic combinations, and in Thursday's performance it felt incomplete.