

JAZZ FESTIVAL REVIEW

The Battle of the Bands, Part Two

By PETER WATROUS

Silence played a big part in the Battle of the Bands, a showdown between the jazz orchestras of Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center on Friday night at Avery Fisher Hall. The concert, in its second year as part of the JVC Jazz Festival, featured two orchestras at their peak.

Silence was part of the huge arsenal brought by both bands to the show: in stop-time sections and as part of false beginnings and endings, it appeared in just about any form. One of the many tricks meant to grab an audience's attention and win the fight.

Jazz, it has been pointed out with accuracy, isn't boxing. But it can be competitive, and often competition forges excellence. Competition can produce a sensibility based on extravagance that doesn't leave much room for introspection; the music may fall short of great art or not sound particularly worthwhile on record. But competition does produce drama and a supercharged virtuosity onstage, both of which make for an event.

The two bands offered radically different conceptions, and in conception and execution, the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band won the first half of the concert. Led by the trumpeter Jon Faddis, Carnegie Hall's orchestra turned in a perfect set. Basing its style and swing on the Count Basie Orchestra of the 1950's and 60's, the band produced a large, glossy sound that chugged along on the graceful drive of its rhythm section — Kenny Drew Jr. on piano, Howard Alden on guitar, Peter Washington on bass and Lewis Nash on drums.

Each band performed a piece and was answered by the other orchestra. The Lincoln Center Jazz Orches-

tra based its conception on the Ellington sound, playing intricate compositions in contemplative tempos not destined to silence a louder, tighter orchestra.

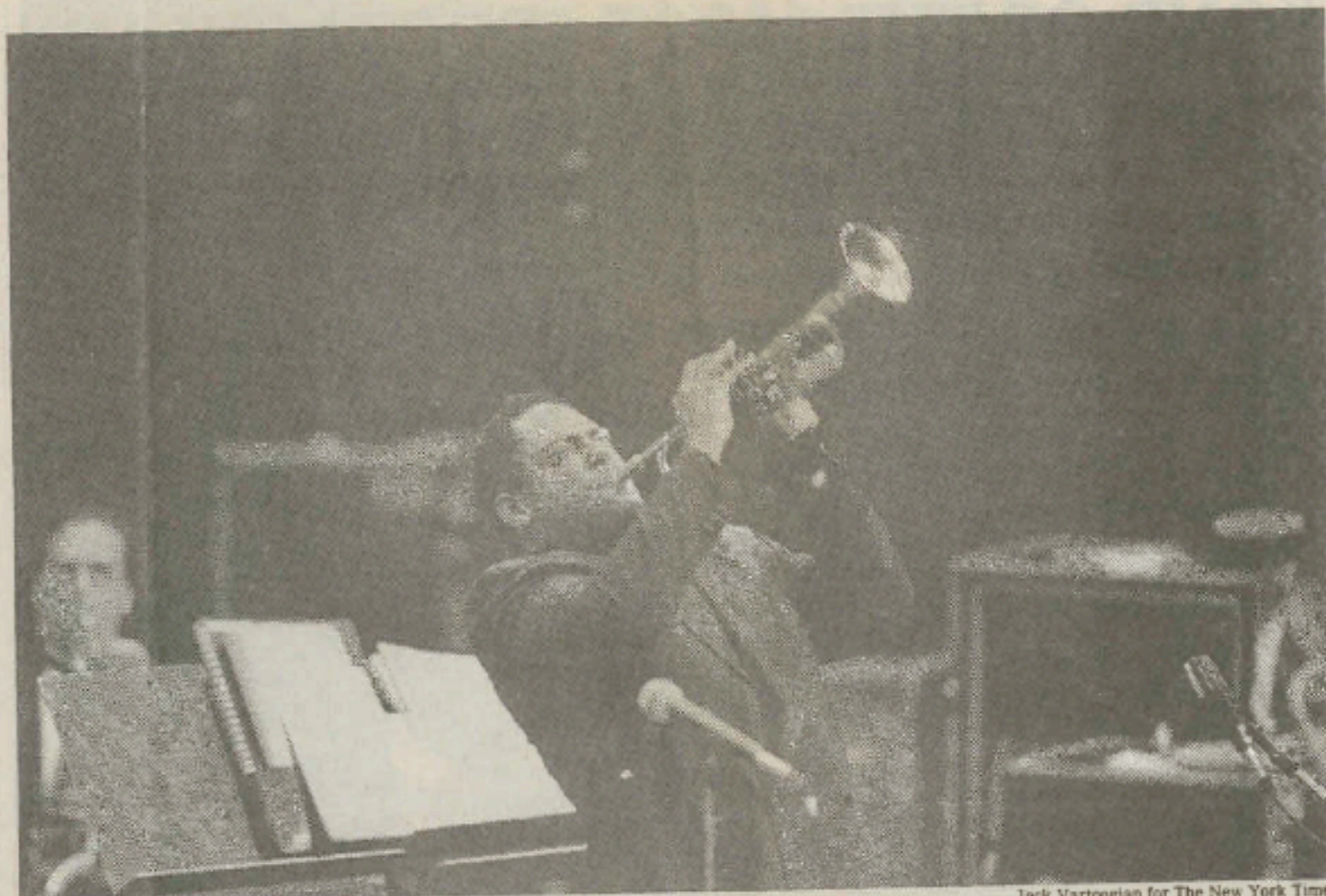
And when the Lincoln Center Orchestra answered a gorgeous ballad played by the trumpeter Lew Soloff by performing a shrill and not particularly grooving piece by Tito Puente, the fight was over, at least for the first half.

The second half found the Lincoln Center band revived; its rhythm section — Cyrus Chestnut on piano, Ben Wolfe on bass and Herlin Riley on drums — started swinging with authority. And the band's leader, Wynton Marsalis, opened the piece "Wild Man Moore" with blues-laden phrases that led into a swinging back beat. Mr. Marsalis then returned with a series of choruses on the blues that were stunning in their reach.

Mr. Faddis answered with a reinterpretation of "Sing, Sing, Sing," which opened with a traditional Count Basie ending, then silence. He

brought up the soprano saxophonist David Liebman to perform, and Mr. Liebman unfurled complicated, savagely rhythmic lines that verged on free improvisation. Mr. Faddis improvised at points with the orchestra, having them imitate Mr. Liebman's lines. Mr. Marsalis and his band answered with a mocking section of free improvising.

And on it went until the final piece of the night, "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue," featuring the bands trading rhythm sections and charged performances by the saxophonist Lew Tabackin and Claude (Fiddler) Williams. By the time the concert ended, so much music had been played that everybody involved, musicians and audience members alike, were blessed. New York is profoundly lucky to have two bands working at such a level of excellence. The competition, a ticket-selling ploy, also sharpened the bands' knives, making drama and excitement the value system in which they both flourished.



Jack Vartogian for The New York Times
Jon Faddis performing with Carnegie Hall's orchestra on Friday night at Avery Fisher Hall in a showdown with Lincoln Center's band, led by Wynton Marsalis. The two groups offered radically different approaches.