

Marsalis Alumni Regroup For at Least 3 Good Reasons

By PETER WATROUS

A sizable chunk of Wynton Marsalis's last band came into the Village Vanguard on Tuesday night to present their version of jazz. The trombonist Wycliff Gordon, the alto saxophonist Wessel Anderson, the pianist Eric Reed and the bassist Ben Wolfe have all spent time in the band; the drummer Greg Hutchinson was the ringer.

The band had at least three important things going for it outside of the soloists. It had arrangements. The rhythm section had a profound sense of time, the sort usually used by swing-era musicians.

Good time — the consistent awareness of a piece's beat — is extremely rare among younger musicians, but this rhythm section, which has been working together fairly regularly, had it. They gave the band an airtight feel. Mr. Reed is astonishingly secure rhythmically, never wavering

even when executing difficult poly-rhythmic passages; he always returned to the basic pulse and made it swing.

The band played a set's worth of rarely performed compositions by Thelonious Monk, including "Bright Mississippi," "Brake's Sake" and "Wee See," arranged with varied instrumental combinations. "Bright Mississippi" featured just bass and trombone, while "Wee See" moved from a quartet performance with Mr. Anderson on soprano saxophone to a duet by Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Anderson, and back. One piece had the horns playing the melody, then giving way to solos by members of the rhythm section. These are all simple arranging tricks, but they took the band out of jazz's deadly routine, where every band member solos on every tune.

It was all authoritative and mature, and its power suggested that these promising musicians have come into their own.

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