

147 1/6/2000

A Sprightly Septet, Feeling Right at Home

Continued From First Arts Page

week's engagement probably isn't a one-shot reunion — Mr. Marsalis put a richness of history and mood into its music, effectively fusing different jazz idioms across sections of the band. He showed that arrangement and composition are important, but not the entire picture; the band paid minute attention to tone color in its collective improvising as well as its written material.

New Orleans street rhythms are always bubbling to the surface in the playing of the drummer Herlin Riley. He would prefer to hit a cowbell once or drag an index finger across the head of a snare drum than to do anything that flattened the other sounds of the band. His interlocked patterns with the bassist Rodney

Whitaker on Tuesday, cogent to the bone, allowed the audience to glean the most from the whole group's sound. It was often flavor, rather than force, that made the performances special.

There were changes in instrumentation and severe manipulations of sound in nearly every song of the set, something that has become much more commonplace in the jazz world since Mr. Marsalis's maturation. He and Victor Goines (on bass clarinet) each played ballad standards, mostly backed only by bass and drums.

There was a brass-duet version of Ray Noble's "Cherokee" in which Mr. Marsalis and the trombonist Ron Westray both played with Harmon mutes, producing a comically small, narrow sound. (Again, the club's acoustics worked in collaboration with the band leader.) And Mr. Mar-

salis's remarkably moving piece "Sunflowers," from the soon-to-be released "Marciac Suite," was mostly arranged for four harmonized horns, with Mr. Riley playing hand drums and tambourine.

Mr. Marsalis's performance was more subdued than usual. The need to press toward quick-articulation triumphs in so much of his playing can make it hard to distinguish one glittering performance from another. But on Tuesday he was different: relaxed, putting long pauses between phrases, making amiable yarns of his solos more than steel-edged soliloquies.

This will change, and with a huge book to draw from, so will each performance, as one of the decade's best bands continues through Sunday in its perfect habitat.