

What Becomes a Legend

Roy Hargrove

Village Vanguard
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BY DAVID M. YAFFE

grove's eminence almost rivals Marsalis's; he has nearly as much breath as his old mentor, but he's not quite as conservatory clean, possessing a tone that can incorporate Art Farmer's dark, rich flügelhorn on the middle notes and Fats Navarro's brassy, bright trumpet on the high notes, with still enough grit to convey a sound that's human, all too human.

Playing at the Village Vanguard with his quartet, part of Hargrove's mission was to show how and why he is distinct from those influences. On earlier recordings, Hargrove has often made virtual carbon copies of jazz classics; his version of "Pinocchio" is nearly a note-for-note replay of Miles's version of the Wayne Shorter tune on *Nefertiti*, while his rendition of "Valse Hot" borrows heavily from the Sonny and Clifford track on *Sonny Rollins Plus Four*. *Family* (Verve), his latest recording, and the forthcoming *Extended Family* have him holding his own among jazz royalty like Joe Henderson and John Hicks, imposing the mentorship he and other young

But the recording is a mere flicker of the inferno he provides live. Like Rollins, Hargrove's at his best away from the studio, saving his strongest performances for the clubs and halls. Roy and his band make their youth work for them; Roy, pianist Charles Craig, and tenor player Ron Blake often jump during climaxes as if a fire were under them. Providing the flame at the Vanguard was guest conga player Anga, a Cuban conflagration with such immense chops that Roy's rhythm section often stopped in their tracks, jaws agape at otherworldly rhythms that could even humble Don Alias. The contrast between Anga and Hargrove's band was startling; while the rhythm section often sported pained, almost tortured expressions, Anga was always playful, cheerfully enchanted by the muse while the rest of the band had to sweat for it.

In originals like "Public Eye" and standards like "The Nearness of You," Roy could swing as hard as any living trumpet player, playing fluid, melodic lines with a seemingly endless supply of oxygen, enticing the audience by pushing his range until it reached its peak—a high A. I believe. But what re-

trumpeters is his understanding of funk: Originals like "Roy Allan"—written for his father—reveal a musical palette not only formed by Dizzy, Fats, and Clifford, but by Parliament, the Ohio Players, and Stevie Wonder. Such distinctions between Roy and his influences are crucial.

I'm reminded of Arthur Danto's rather hasty proclamation of the End of Art after first seeing Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes. The End of Jazz has been proclaimed ever since Miles Davis first incorporated elements of rock music on *Bitches' Brew*, and the Wynton-led neoclassical movement would seem to perpetuate the notion that jazz ended around 1968. But Roy's vivacity as a player indicates that reports of jazz's death have been greatly exaggerated. His band is not quite on the level of the masters they emulate: pianist Craig seems to wander on ballads, and tenor player Blake, while steeped in the styles of Rollins and Coltrane with the harmonics of Shorter, is also still in search of the confidence that will solidify his musical ideas. But Roy is a master showman, and when he sings, at the end of "Roy Allen," "You helped me find my own identity" you begin to be-

interviewed Sonny Rollins last summer and asked him to make the painful choice between Clifford Brown and Roy Hargrove. Rollins reluctantly settled on the former, but in retrospect I felt the question was too tough on Hargrove, even if, at 26, he's now older than Brown was when he died. Still, Roy's career has soared at such an astonishing rate, he's able to stand up to harsh scrutiny. By the time I began my freshman year at the Arts Magnet High School in Dallas, Hargrove, who was then a senior there, was already a celebrity. He had just finished a European tour, had played with the likes of Wynton Marsalis, Herbie Hancock, and Dizzy Gillespie, and was on his way to a major recording contract.

Roy's discovery was already the stuff of legend: One day, after hearing about the 15-year-old trumpeter, a man named Wynton came by the school and was so blown away by Hargrove's playing, he marched the young man with a horn to a practice room to give him a private two-hour lesson. Later he told Roy's future manager, "Man, I heard this little kid today that's