

Hayward, Marsalis at the Biarritz Lounge

By Brent Banulis, president, New England Jazz Alliance

BOSTON (Dec. 8, 2003) - Those who have followed the local jazz scene in recent years know that Sunday nights with Kurtis Rivers and his group at the Biarritz Lounge in Roxbury often recall the great jazz clubs that once thrived in the Boston neighborhoods. But on Dec. 5, the club, which is managed by Peggy Duncan, really outdid itself. To the three or four dozen loyal patrons present, Christmas - as well as winter - arrived early this year.

With the season's first snow blowing about outside, trombonist Andre Hayward and friends blew up a storm of their own inside for five memorable hours. Dorchester resident Hayward, a member of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra led by Wynton Marsalis, made the most of the orchestra's appearance earlier in the week at Symphony Hall by inviting several of its members to this Biarritz jam.

Kicking things off about 7 p.m. were Hayward, Roxbury's Steve Neil on bass, and drummer James Williams from Monterrey, Calif., who is currently studying at Berklee. For those hungering for a night of straight-ahead, hard-swinging jazz, this trio more than answered the call. It didn't take long for the Biarritz "regulars" to realize they were witnessing something special, as they soon set aside their pool cues, domino games, knitting needles and even cameras to pay full attention.

By the end of the first set, the trio was joined by alto saxophonist Wes "Warm Daddy" Anderson and pianist Aaron Diehl, both of whom were in town with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. Anderson's masterful rendition of Johnny Green's "Body and Soul" transformed the traditional into a most creative new, while striking a beautiful balance of virtuosity and respect for melody.

"Body and Soul" wasn't the only standard reinvented this night. In the second set, Jerome Kern's "All The Things You Are" became the vehicle for a scat vocal by Hayward. And this was followed by a magnificent reunion of pianist Marcus Roberts and Wynton Marsalis, who demonstrated an improvisational wizardry in this setting that is seldom heard in his television or concert stage appearances. And Roberts, joined by LCJO drummer Herlin Riley, took the harmony and rhythm to a new level.

As for Neil, he played all evening without relief, through five hours of great jazz. It is difficult to imagine a more consistent, hard-driving session on the acoustic bass.

Also worthy of note is the Biarritz itself. Special presentations like this, along with the regular Sunday group headed by tenor man Rivers, make the Biarritz a worthy successor to Connolly's, the Pioneer Club, the Hi-Hat and other great Boston jazz clubs gone



The weather outside was frightful, but all was warm inside the Biarritz Lounge in Roxbury as Andre Hayward and Karin Parker (left) hosted a jazz jam that included (from left) pianist Aaron Diehl, drummer Herlin Riley, pianist Marcus Roberts, alto saxophonist Wes "Warm Daddy" Anderson, and vocalist Cynthia Renee Hardy. All but Parker and Roberts performed in Boston's Symphony Hall with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra.



Wynton Marsalis joined hosts Andre Hayward and Karin Parker both on and off the Biarritz bandstand.

by. And frequent guests include Hayward, Neil, drummer Bobby Ward, baritone sax man Henry Cook, tenor man Salim Washington (founder of the Roxbury Blues Aesthetic), and vocalists Mae Arnette and Karin Parker,



Local favorite Steve Neil kept pace for five hours with Roberts, Marsalis, and the other fine players.

As the Hi-Hat and Connelly's did in the past, the Biarritz provides a Roxbury connection to the New York jazz scene. In past decades, the commuting musicians included Johnny Hodges, Lloyd Trotman, Howard Johnson, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Gigi Gryce, Roy Haynes, Sabby Lewis, Makanda Ken McIntyre, Charles Mingus, Charlie Mariano, Jaki Byard, Clifford Jarvis and Tony Williams. Friday night, the names were Hayward, Marsalis, Anderson, Roberts, Riley, Neil and Diehl.

According to Rivers, he and Washington, who now lives in Harlem, plan to solidify the Boston-New York connection with a new group called the Roxbury-Harlem Art Ensemble. Drop by the Biarritz any Sunday after 9 and you just may witness the carrying on of a great jazz tradition.

The Biarritz Lounge is at 177 Dudley Street near Warren Street, across from the firehouse.