



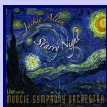
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# New Tricks at Cecil's Jazz Club

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New Tricks  
Cecil's Jazz Club  
West Orange, New Jersey  
July 17, 2009

Over the past few years, the northern New Jersey-based band New Tricks has painstakingly developed a distinctive sound during weekly sessions in the basement studio of saxophonist Mike Lee. It is almost bad form to single out contributions of the tightly knit quartet's members, which include Lee, trumpeter Ted Chubb, bassist Kellen Harrison and drummer Shawn Baltazor. An excellent, self-titled compact disc recorded in 2007 and released several weeks ago on New Tricks Records only approximates the high energy and single-minded intensity they generated throughout an opening set at Cecil's Jazz Club. "We are New Tricks," Lee declared after the first number, as if to underscore the group's "one for all" ethos.

The liberty provided by the absence of a piano or guitar was used wisely, as each player adroitly shifted between support and assertiveness. Harrison served as the band's workhorse, nailing down the bottom of Lee's and Chubb's compositions. On the head of Lee's "Old Dog," while the rest of the band swelled around the bassist, Harrison's minimal foundation was a model of stability. Throughout most of the set, Baltazor jostled the soloists by moving (and frequently blurring the boundaries) between jazz, Latin, and funk rhythms. The drummer stayed on top of Chubb during a burning rendition of Charlie Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha" (the only non-original of the set and on the record). A pointed tom-tom fill answered the trumpeter's initial phrase and a few bars later a snare and tom-tom combination imitated some brief biting lines. Knowing that laying back is as important as hitting hard, Baltazor all but vanished during Chubb's simple and eloquent tones at the onset of the "Old Dog" solo.

On the heads of Chubb's "In His Steps," and Lee's "Jackie's Day," the trumpeter and saxophonist wrapped around each other like vines. They took turns playing a part of the melody of Chubb's exquisite tribute to his grandfather, "1919 (Dedicated to Donald Jacobus)," each stating the theme in his own manner. Lee offered brief, discreet commentary during Chubb's improvisation on "J's Other Bag." He followed with a soprano solo that alternately locked into and danced over Baltazor's straight jacket funk beats. Occasionally referring to the melody, Lee waxed both deliberate and verbose. He shaped a few long cries into phrases, and entered into a playful dialogue with Chubb. The trumpeter offered neatly clipped lines over the Latin-funk foundation of Lee's "After Much Discussion, Josie Moves East." Playing against the bass and drums, Chubb blazed his own trail by improvising a series of song-like melodies.

The band was relentless throughout "Ah-Leu-Cha," the set's final selection. Harrison's walking bass anchored explosive solos by Chubb and Lee, and his turn entailed vivid, percolating lines over the buzzing of Baltazor's sticks on the hi-hat. The drummer's four-bar breaks evoked the spirit of Max Roach and brought the group's energy level up to a fever pitch. Each stroke produced a broad, thick-set sound as he brazenly moved around the set in short, choppy phrases.

If this set is any indication, we can look forward to many more interactive performances from New Tricks in the years to come.

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