Bob Matthews

NIGHT SCENE SEEN

Kinda floating this week, since we got a chance to hear a couple of musical giants live and close up.

Made it to Charlie's of Georgetown for the opening of the Oscar Peterson Trio's 6-day stint, and still haven't quite recovered. Have been listening to Pete for many years, stretching back to the early 50s.

But have never ceased to be amazed at the sheer technique of the man. The last couple of times he was in Baltimore, appearing at the Harborlights Music Festival at Pier 6, he was in solo performance.

This time, his current trio consisting of Martin Drew, drums and Nils Henning-Orsted Pederson, bass, and Pete, is the group on tap, and they literally made the rafters ring.

Pete had his beloved bosendorfer piano in place—in fact, they had to put an enlargement on the stage to accommodate the 9-foot long monster.

Looking a bit heavier than he did when we last saw him, his touch remains as light and airy as ever. A packed house was hushed as he launched into "Here's That Rainy Day" as an opener, and an excursion into exquisite sound was under way.

This was followed by an original tune, "Cake Walk," in which Pete gets the chance to demonstrate his agility in the stride mode, as well and pouring forth the cascade of glissandi for which he is famous.

Next up was another original, "The Love Ballad," in which he duets with Nils, and it was almost like two lovers entertwined, so close was the musical rapport between the two.

Must say here, that we closed our eyes for the nonce and evoked visions of that great Peterson Trio in which Ray Brown formed the keystone. Nils fills that slot in royal fashion—he has never sounded better.

As is usual these days, Pete did a medley of Duke Ellington songs, including "In A Sentimental Mood," "Sophisticated Lady," "C-Jam Blues," "Perdido," "Lush Life," and ending with a romping version of "Caravan."

The house was packed, and this was on a Tuesday night, which indicates the kind of esteem in which Pete is held in D.C. The tab is a bit steep by Baltimore standards, $25 cover, plus $5 minimum drinks/food charges, mandatory.

But, if you've never heard the Peterson Trio in action—then this should be a must.

Here at home, blues singer Joe Williams is in place through Sunday night at Ethel's Place, and it was a distinct pleasure to watch a top pro work the room.

We usually associate Joe with a big band backing so much, that the realization takes a moment to sink in, that here is a singer—not just a blues singer—who leads his own group.

He is ably accompanied by Norman Simmons, piano; Gary King, drums, and Paul West, bass, and they form a perfect counterpart to the Williams doings.

Arrived a bit late for the 2nd show on opening night. In fact, Joe was about to launch into the tune, "Close Enough For Love," a lilting ballad which found him almost crooning as did singers of yore.

That evidently was enough of that, for Joe then launched into a stomping "Well, Allright, OK, You Win," a tune he has recorded many times with the Basie band — and stands the test of time.

This was such an infectious number that one of the fans in the audience completely showed off during it, but being the cool hand he is, Joe never lost his aplomb, and earned the respect of the gathering at his good natured handling of the situation.

By now, Joe had a roll going. It was time for "Going to Chicago Blues," with a nod to Jimmy Rushing; followed by "You Be You, I'll Be Me," which set the stage for a hilarious satirical romp.

Done with a straight face—or should I say straight voice—the tune is entitled: "Tain't Easy Being White." In it, of course, he lampoons the country-Western fans, who try to get into jazz blues.

It was time for the showstopper, a rollicking version of "Person to Person," after first acknowledging the debt owed Joe Turner, who set the style for this type of blues singing.

Joe included Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson in his tribute, and really could have added Jimmy Witherspoon, who has recorded the tune often.

Joe was in fine voice. In fact, he seems to thrive best in this intimate setting of a club, and being able to engage in interplay with the musicians.

He'll be around through Sunday night. Cover charge is $15 with a two - drink minimum — and worth every penny as the capacity crowd on opening night can attest.

Trophies presented by Billy Taylor at the Oldies But Goodies Cabaret included those Bob Matthews, AFRO's All That jazz editor (L) and Bob Wade, Dunbar coach. Taylor also presented $50 to AFRO's Clean Block program and $50 to League for Handicapped.

Billy Taylor presented trophies to the Poet Followers at his recent Oldies, But Goodies Cabaret. The Poet followers at Dunbar High School help the athletic program and present scholarships to athletes. Above from (L) Joe McLendon, Ray Short, president; Ms. Diane McLean, treasurer; Billy Taylor and Miss Vivian Hockaday.

James Booker's New York

Congratulations to Newsday's Dennis Bell and Ozier Muhammad on winning the Pulitzer Prize for their excellent moving reporting on the Ethiopian famine... Atlantic City's Mayor James Usry pulled a coup in garnering the 1986 convention of the National Conference of Black Mayors for his city over Chicago's Mayor Harold Washington... Gov. Mario Cuomo has named Yale Law graduate Jeanne Edna Theiwell, law clerk to Supreme Court Justice Howard Bell, as a $54,300-a-year State Corrections Commissioner and dropped Buffalo's State Parole Board member Theodore Kirkland in favor of Assistant State Attorney General Veronica Thomas... Corporate Headquarters is the name of a new quarterly on black employment opportunities for minority professionals being put out this month by Harold Fisher... LeVerne McCummings, dean of the Graduate School at the University of Denver, has been named as the new interim president of troubled Cheyney University... Hartford, Connecticut's popular Mayor Thirman Milner announcing he will seek a third term.

Around Town: Friends around the country rooting for well-known newsman and advertising specialist C. Melvin Patrick, on the serious list at Beth Israel Hospital... Ascent Magazine presenting its second annual Black Rodeo championships on May 18-19 at the Colonel Young Park... Much credit should go to Con Edison for its annual Yankees Kid outings now in its 18th year, with over two million youths having been its guests at the games during that period. The program is under the direction of highly capable Ellis Bullock Jr., Con Ed.'s Manager of Community Relations, with ex-Yankee Earl Battey as game host... Harlemites hear that while Assemblyman Herman Denny' Farrell is having a hard time in his bid for mayor, he will also face troubles from an insurgent group seeking to oppose him as Democratic district leader... Popular Parks Department administration Pelham Fritz, who also heads the Holcombe Rucker Community League, to be feted May 17 for his lifelong efforts in behalf of Harlem youth, at the Dunlevy Milbank Center, which will also celebrate the modernization of the Center... Fritz' longtime friend, Arlington Ollie' Edinboro presented with the 1985 Pierre Toussaint Medallion at the Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral presided over by newly-named Cardinal John J. O'Connor... ICBO's Malcolm Corrin deserves plaudits for running the smoothest annual dinners. The organization's 22nd annual affair at the New York Hilton last week honored the Coca-Cola Company, J. Bruce Llewellyn, chairman of the Philadelphia Coca-Cola Bottling Company, and Washingtons Ted Adams.

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Show Biz: Harlem regained the world spotlight last weekend as hundreds of big name celebs and corporate executives clamored to the gala television benefit re - opening of the famed Apollo Theatre with the actual community opening on May 23. For the later affair ex-showgirl Chickie Martin, now 73, and the Swinging Seniors will turn over their famed chorus line mantle to a new younger group on the fabulous redecorated Apollo Hall of Fame, with photos of the entertainment greats who have appeared at the world renowned theatre... The famed Copasetics, who were a show stopper last week at the Showman's benefit at the Savoy Manor, off this week for their annual series of performances in Italy, after a brief stopover in Florida...

Step Brother's founder; dead at 74

Los Angels (UPI)- Al Williams, who founded and starred as one of the famed dancing Step Brothers who entertained in theatres, films and television for more than 30 years, died today at a hospital near his home. He was 74.

The Step Brothers, which Williams started in 1926, appeared in 28 movies and often were guests on the Bob Hope, Milton Berle, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin TV Shows.

In its early years, the dancing quartet played the Cotton Club and the Apollo and Lafayette theatres in New York. It was featured with Duke Ellington's band from 1933-59, and in the late 1940s gave a command performance for the King of England and played Chez Paris with the legendary Josephine Baker.

After the act closed in 1959, Williams became an artist manager with clients including Sarah Vaughan and Scatman Crothers.

Williams, born near Savannah, Ga., in 1910, lived in retirement in the Sherman Oaks district. The cause of his death at the Rancho Encino Hospital was not immediately known.

He is survived by a son, Joel, a dancer in Los Angeles. Services were planned for May 8 at Forest Lawn Hollywood Hills. In lieu of flowers the family requested that donations be made to the Hoofers Club in Sherman Oaks.

Howard University Museum

A mechanical doll-like figure named "Wynotta" highlights an exhibition at the Howard University Museum marking the first public display of the 19th-century automaton, according to museum curator Dr. Thomas Battle.

Purported to represent an African queen, Wynotta is making her public debut after being completely restored in Switzerland. The character was manufactured in Paris around 1880.

Battle believes the richly dressed figure is a representation of the presence of blacks in Europe in the 19th century "and indeed may be an African queen or princess."

The show is billed as "The Reopening of the Exhibition of Gifts to the Howard University Museum," which first opened in 1983. Wynotta was not on display then.

Fifty-five works will be exhibited, featuring African artifacts and other items significant in black history ranging from the Nimba fertility mask, considered one of the most monumental of African masks, to a sculpture of Paul Robeson.

The exhibition includes donations from individuals as well as the Prince Hall Shrine and the United Republic of Tanzania.

The Howard University Museum, housed in the University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center located in Founders Library, was inaugurated in 1979. "This is a teaching museum, a museum of black history," said Dr. Michael R. Winston, then center director and now Howard's vice president for academic affairs.

The musuem acquired Wynotta in 1978 from Esther Peyton, a 1931 Howard graduate. The mechanical figure plays the harp while performing several synchronized movements. A video display of Wynotta's movements accompanies the exhibit.

The museum is open to the public from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. Tours of the museum are provided to public schools and community groups. For tour informations, contact Scott Baker at (202) 636-7239.

Top Hits

Top Video Rentals

1. The Terminator
   Thorn-EMI
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3. Bachelor Party
   CBS-Fox
4. Police Academy
   The Ladd Company
5. Country
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Friday Plus

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