By HUGH WYATT

THE NEW JazzMen

He looks like he walked right out of the pages of Gentlemen's Quarterly. He wears his hair styled, not merely cut. His suit is stitched by hand, or at least by some well-known European designer. And his shoes are top of the line.

A model? A movie star? A banker? Nope. It's none other than Mr. Jazz Musician, 1986 style.

That's right. In the past he may have looked like a zoot-suited hipster or disheveled sixties-type hippie. But today he's beginning to look more like a musical Duke of Windsor.

There's a new generation, as the song says. These young turks of jazz are not only changing the direction of the music but are drastically changing their public "image" as well. They are the same men and women, too, who are slowly but surely succeeding the veterans who are passing into well-deserved retirement or into the Great Beyond.

Gone are the days, it seems, when jazzmen took to the stage either in outlandish "threads" or casual and rumpled drab attire. And all too often they were slumped over in poor posture or appeared glassy-eyed and mesmerized on the bandstand even while producing that "sweet thunder" that so many people now recognize as America's own true classical music.

I don't mean to imply that sloppiness has been the rule. Look at people like Duke Ellington, Billy Taylor, John Lewis, Max Roach. They've always been sartorially splendid, and so has their music. Today, though, there's a whole school of them coming on the scene. People like Wynton Marsalis, the young gifted trumpeter who perhaps has been as much of a role model as anyone else in sparking this new conservative sensibility. There are others: Charles Fambrough, Terence Blanchard, Jean Toussaint, Lonnie Plaxico, Donald Harrison, Johnny O'Neal, Fred Hopkins, Kevin Donald Harrison, Johnny O'Neal, Fred Hopkins, Kevin Eubanks, Joe Bowie, Billy Pierce, Donald Brown, Ray Drummond, Mulgrew Miller, Craig Harris, David Murray.

Notice, also, that these latter artists have brought a lot more formal training to jazz than was the case previously. They read music in a much more advanced way than their predecessors, who of course did not have the same opportunities. The old-timers lived hand to mouth; they had to play for their supper.

And notice, too, that these youngsters seem to have rejected the drug culture, which unfortunately was so commonplace in jazz in past years. Art Blakey, the great drummer and leader of the Jazz Messengers, told me some time ago that he was able to stop smoking and to give up poor eating habits as a result of his association with the Young Turks. Blakey has been more instrumental than anyone else in bringing along a succession of young jazz virtuosos and the ironic fact is that they're influencing him in the newer ways of clean living.

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Hugh Wyatt is a syndicated music columnist.

(Top to bottom) Wynton Marsalis, Terence Blanchard and Donald Harrison, Art Blakey, Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie.

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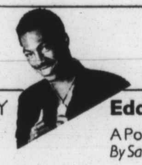

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