



Buster Williams and Something More

By C. Andrew Hovan
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Night Town
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There's no denying the power of working jazz groups and when the individuals involved are some of New York's finest the sparks are sure to fly. As such, it would have been good enough to have bass legend Buster Williams winging through Cleveland, but then consider that his regular quartet was part of the package (including drum master Lenny White and pianist George Colligan) and one couldn't ask for anything better. Over the course of two sets, Williams and his cohorts engaged in the kind of high-octane music that is de rigeur if you happen to be out on the town in New York City.

The first set kicked off with a brisk take on "All Of You," complete with a solo foray by Williams that touched on a variety of moods. At first bowing in a style that recalled the Mingus masterpiece "Ysabel's Table Dance," Williams then went pizzicato and spun a yarn complete with a quote of "Summertime" delivered in double stops. "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" got its groove from the solid and funky back up provided by Colligan and White. In fact, these two have been working together regularly over the past few months and the chemistry they've developed makes for an absorbing study upon careful listening. Colligan also rigged some subtle, but effective electronics via a small keyboard and his laptop computer.

The second set, which was announced as "the late show", much to the amusement of Colligan who was sitting just a few inches away from me ("The late show? It's only nine o'clock!"), was no less impressive. The highlight was easily Williams' distinctive original "Song For Sensei." Alto saxophonist Casey Benjamin, who had sounded somewhat reticent during the first set, finally seemed to catch some inspiration and delivered his best statement of the evening in his Cannonball-influenced style. The fact that Colligan is also a proficient drummer came shining through in his masterful solo, set off by displaced rhythms and odd phrase lengths that were often echoed by White. A closing romp through the Monk gem "Epistrophy" also allowed White a chance to stretch out at length, reminding us of his strength as one of the finest drummers of his generation.

It can't be overstated that the depth of experience gained from seeing this type of experienced ensemble is far more substantial than when you get the old "star with the local rhythm section" treatment. Even at their most intense, this quartet never overpowered the room and the fact that they were all listening to each other was immediately apparent. A first class event all the way!