

REVIEW

Doug Talley Quartet triumphs at Jazz Workshop

By Chuck Berg

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On Sunday afternoon, the 34th season of the Topeka Jazz Workshop ended with a rousing finale thanks to the Doug Talley Quartet.

Hailing from the greater Kansas City area, Talley (tenor saxophone), Wayne Hawkins (piano), Tim Brewer (double bass) and Keith Kavanaugh (drums) offered a spirited program of artfully revamped standards.

On the foursome's opener, a luxuriously paced limning of Cole Porter's "So In Love," a sultry breeze buoyed Talley's heart-on-sleeve meditations.

Stoking amour's furnace with an elan at once earthy and ethereal, the rhythm section simmered and sizzled.

In an exuberant reading of Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are," Talley's tenor again sailed with dramatic urgency. At the same time, Talley pushed the limits of conventional jazz harmony with dazzling improvisations.

Here, as in everything else, one sensed a great heart as well as a great intellect at work. Ditto for the rhythm section. Hawkins, Talley's primary soloistic foil, painted with a broad palette.

On Talley's ear-grabbing arrangement of "Love for Sale," a dramatic upward glissando reminiscent of Gershwin's introduction to "Rhapsody in Blue," segued into bluesy alternations between Latin and swing beats that propelled robust improvisations by Talley, Hawkins and Kavanaugh.

Throughout the concert, one was impressed by the foursome's hand-in-glove rapport. Yes, they have been together eight years. More important, though, is their shared vision.

Instead of four guys just getting together to play for the fun of it (although they obviously have plenty of that), they have worked hard to develop a repertoire of exquisitely reframed standards that re-animate such well-known fare as "I Concentrate on You."

On Hawkins' chart for that indelible Cole Porter line, the initial statement of the melody was impressively intoned by Brewer's bass. Setting the improvisations atop a lithe bossa nova set was another nice touch. So, too, was the decision to showcase Talley's soaring

soprano saxophone.

Also appealing was the group's subtle use of dynamics and effective pacing. Since each tune spotlighted no more than one or two solos, the basic contours of such venerable melodies as "It's All Right With Me" remained a vital part of the experience.

Talley and his men are to be credited with pushing themselves and their audience. For example, their moving rendition of Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood" seemed to both celebrate and question the notion of sentiment.

By any measure, the concert was a triumph for the Doug Talley Quartet, and the infinite capacity of jazz to renew itself and its audience.

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