

Talley Quartet cultivates common ground

By Tom Ineck

Eight years and three full-length recordings have done wonders for the Doug Talley Quartet, honing the group's sound to a fine edge and liberating the soloists to attempt more adventurous flights within the security of a long-standing relationship.

The Kansas City quartet's veteran status is a rarity in jazz, where musicians shift allegiances with the seasons, moving as stylistic or economic needs dictate. Saxophonist Talley and his cohorts—pianist Wayne Hawkins, bassist Tim Brewer and drummer Keith Kavanaugh—are the exception, four talented artists who have cultivated a common ground where all are able to express themselves and continue to grow as a team.



That was apparent in their Dec. 5 appearance at P.O. Pears in downtown Lincoln. Whether performing original music or unique interpretations of familiar standards, the rhythm section was always in the pocket and everyone effortlessly followed the often-difficult changes.



Vincent Youmans' "Without a Song" kicked things off with an impressive tenor sax statement by Talley. Shifting to a Latin mood, the quartet launched into a mid-tempo reading of Clare Fischer's "Pennsativa," with Hawkins delivering a stunning solo on his versatile Kurzweil keyboard.

By contrast, they attacked the standard "Autumn Leaves" in an unconventionally fast tempo, propelled by Talley's driving tenor statement, full of interesting twists and turns, building in momentum and spinning off variations on the theme while Brewer and Hawkins deftly traded interweaving lines.

With a mid-tempo rendition of Charlie Parker's "Billie's Bounce," they proved their ability to play the blues with feeling. Cole Porter's classic "Night and Day" accelerated from a medium tempo, moving from an opening tenor statement to a brilliant keyboard solo by Hawkins. Throughout the tune, and throughout the evening, the transitions were flawless.

Again drawing from their 1998 Cole Porter tribute CD, *Night and Day: Musings on the Cole Porter Songbook*, the group played a Hawkins arrangement of “I Concentrate on You,” with Brewer stating the melody on bass, followed by Talley on soprano sax and Hawkins on piano. Talley and Brewer took brief solos, with Talley exhibiting a lovely “cool” tone on soprano.



Porter, the favored composer of the evening, got another nod with an up-tempo “I Love You,” arranged by Kavanaugh. After solo statements from Hawkins, Talley (on tenor) and Brewer, Kavanaugh brought it all together with a solo that demonstrated his ability to easily change direction while keeping the time constant. Hawkins was the star on an up-tempo version of Porter’s “Just One of Those Things.” Talley’s unaggressive—almost passive—playing on tenor was overwhelmed by the pianist’s two-fisted Tynesque style.

“Polka Dots and Moonbeams” got a delicious reading with Talley on tenor, shifting from a ballad to a medium tempo. Another outstanding piano solo was followed by a tenor/bass finale.



Dipping into their most recent recording, 2001’s original *Kansas City Suite*, Talley and company belted out the swaggering “Pendergast,” a reference to the tough boss who ruled Kansas City as mayor in the 1920s and early 1930s. Hawkins’s piano solo and comping was pounded out in an aptly two-fisted style. Also from the KC suite came “City of Fountains,” shifting from waltz tempo to a straight 4/4 and back again. Well-named, the tune had a bright, shimmering, bubbling major-key optimism about it, which was reflected in Hawkins’ upbeat solo.

Brewer’s tribute to his son, “For John,” was a tender waltz that received an especially creative solo from Hawkins. Porter returned with a wonderful, buoyant rendition of “Love for Sale,” that featured an intriguing Hawkins solo. Porter’s great ballad “Ev’ry Time We Say Goodbye” followed, with Brewer stating the melody line, which was then taken up by Talley on tenor.

Sending everyone home with a smile was a very fast rendition of “Cherokee,” building from tenor and drums, then adding bass and keys to finish with a grand finale.

Again, the quartet exuded a confidence that results from years of working together—in long hours of rehearsal and in heat-of-the-moment improvisation.

Talley and crew lend personal insights

By Tom Ineck

Saxophonist Doug Talley and his longtime bandmates are as engaging in the classroom as they are on the performance stage. That became clear when the Kansas City quartet attended a Dec. 6 session in front of Tom Larson's jazz history class at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



A couple of hundred students gathered to hear the quartet in the lecture hall at Westbrook Music Building. They were treated to a well-chosen clutch of tunes, both old and new, as well as some personal insights into the world of the professional jazz musician.

The Talley quartet began with a bit of Kansas City jazz history entitled "Basie and the Pres," an original piece from the quartet's CD *Kansas City Suite*. The bluesy swinger, of course, pays homage to Count Basie and tenor saxophonist Lester Young (also known as "Pres"), whose careers were launched in the musical hothouse of 1930s Kansas City.

Switching to a Latin rhythm, the quartet evoked the Spanish architecture of KC's Country Club Plaza in "Plaza Lights." The stark rhythmic contrast between these two tunes sparked a discussion about the importance of time in jazz music. With examples, pianist Wayne Hawkins expertly delineated the differences between samba, salsa, montuno and Afro-Cuban styles.

Talley's arrangement of Cole Porter's "Love for Sale" served as another excellent example of time changes, smoothly moving from 6/4 to 4/4.

The subject then turned to the musicians' backgrounds and what led them to jazz. When Talley was growing up, for example, his father, while not a musician himself, loved to play Dixieland-style recordings at home. Like many who grew up in the 1960s, Hawkins was a Beatles fan, but had loved music in general from a very early age. Bassist Tim Brewer, whose dad was a drummer, began playing in rock bands when he was just 13. Drummer Keith Kavanaugh turned from rock to jazz in high school.

Finally, the subject of income reared its ugly head. Most jazz musicians, even in Kansas City, can't make a living at music alone.

Of the four, only Hawkins is a fulltime musician, but he supplements jazz performances with composing and arranging jobs, commercials and documentary films, jazz and classical symphony gigs. Talley is a music teacher and conducts youth camps. Brewer is a dentist, and Kavanaugh is a graphic artist specializing in designing CD covers.

In its music and its commentary, the Talley quartet shed new light on the agony and the ecstasy of following the jazz muse.