

Ralph A. Miriello, Contributor Freelance Jazz Journalist

High Art at Atlanta's High Museum, "Jazz on Fridays": The Dave Potter Quintet

03/22/2017 04:20 pm ET



miguel Alvarado, sax; Darren English, trpt; Louis Heriveaux, keys; Crag SHaw, bass; Dave Potter, drums

Last Friday night, as part of the “Jazz on Fridays” series at Atlanta’s High Museum, patrons of the museum were treated to some of Atlanta’s finest jazz musicians as they performed standards from the American songbook and some original music. The featured group was The Dave Potter Quintet, with Louis Heriveaux on keyboard, Craig “Shawbox” Shaw on upright bass, Darren English on trumpet, Miguel Alvarado on saxophones, and drummer/ leader Dave Potter.

Potter is an Atlanta based drummer who studied music at Florida State University under the mentorship of the pianist Marcus Roberts. He received his master’s degree from FSU in 2008. Besides sharing the stage with pianist Roberts, trumpeter Marcus Printup and others he has been an integral part of Jason Marsalis’s Vibe Quartet and recorded with the vibraphone artist on several albums including his latest, highly received *The Twenty-First Century Trad Band*.

On this early evening, there was a line of people anxiously waiting the opening of the atrium where Potter and company would perform. The atrium area at the High Museum is a soaring, light filled expanse that is surrounded by an exposed stairwell that coils its way to the upper floors of the museum and offers a view of the City. The architectural firm of Richard Mier & Partners consciously designed the High museum with Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim in mind. The glass exterior wall floods the area with natural light, which in the designer’s plan is a symbol of the enlightenment an institution of art and culture brings to its community as all who enter the museum’s doors.



The Light-filled Atrium at the High

Museum

There were by some counts upwards of one thousand patrons enjoying the music. Some were seated, some stood, others milled around the atrium enjoying the diverse, cosmopolitan community that is Atlanta in all its splendor, while being thoroughly entertained by these top-notch musicians. For the uninitiated, it was a time of discovery as most of these musicians are all based in Atlanta and can be seen fairly regularly in local venues. Lest anyone fear they have to go to New York or New Orleans to see great jazz, these gentlemen shot an arrow into that balloon of nonsense.



After a brief introduction by WCLK Jazztones DJ Jay Edwards, the group started the set off with a quick paced, hard bop blues composed by the trumpeter Freddie Hubbard. Mr. Potter resplendent in his white suit with dark shirt and light tie leading the way. Mr. English and Mr. Alvarado charging into the melody in synchronous precision. They moved into the Jimmy Van Heusen/Johnny Mercer standard “I Thought About You” followed by another Van Heusen song “Polka Dots and Moonbeams,” where Heriveaux enchanted the crowd with his marvelous keyboard work. If there is one criticism I can levy it is the disappointing lack of a real grand piano in this space. For such a marvelous musician as Mr. Heriveaux not to have a suitable piano here is a crime.

The band followed with the contemporary sound of Wayne Shorter's "Night Dreamer." After a spell I took off my journalist's hat and just listened to the music, paying less attention to what songs they were playing and more into how well they were being played. The front line of trumpeter Darren English and saxophonist Miguel Alvarado was sensational. They often stated the melody line in crisp unified form before each taking robust and creative solos. The rhythm section, driven by Potter and anchored by Shaw and Heriveaux was superb. The pace of the music was often double time, with the rhythm section driving the two horn soloists to step up their game not to be left behind.

This was my first exposure to the saxophonist Miguel Alvarado who now hails from Nashville, Tennessee and what a pleasant surprise he was. His tenor had a rich, deep tone reminiscent of sax legend Houston Person, but when the pace was pushed by Potter and company he became an incendiary soloist of the highest order. The young South African, now native Atlanta trumpeter Darren English did an admirable job trading solos with Alvarado. English used mutes effectively to change up the sound of his open bell trumpet and intensify the exchange with Alvarado. Not enough can be said about the stabilizing influence of "Shawbox" Shaw's bass who kept an unerring pulse to the often-frantic proceedings and offered some nice solo work of his own invention.

The second set was more exploratory in that it offered some original tunes by Potter's mentor Marcus Roberts, a Thelonious Monk composition and a rendition of "The Nearness of You" that had Alvarado 's tenor sounding very Dexter Gordonish. The group also did a Potter original "The Ratio Man" with Alvarado picking up the soprano saxophone for this one. "Letting Loose" was an off to the races sprint that had Potter pushing the tempo with Elvin Jones like flourishes.

While I did not stay for the third set, the atrium was still SRO by the end of the second set, showing that Atlanta's sophisticated listeners appreciate a good time and good music and will support highly cultural experiences like "Jazz on Fridays." The High museum, in association with WCLK, should be proud for presenting such a community service that obviously fills a need while at the

same time preserving our only truly all American art form. To paraphrase a famous saying from an endearing baseball movie "If you present it, they will come."