

MAIN PERFORMANCE

NEW ORCHESTRA WORKSHOP FESTIVAL
Centre Culturel Francophone, Vancouver
November 25-28, 1987

In the face of the conservatism endemic to the Canadian jazz scene, the Vancouver musicians who are concerned with developing a more personal expression have adopted a cooperative strategy. The New Orchestra Workshop was originally formed in 1977 by pianist Paul Plimley, drummer Gregg Simpson, bassist L.S. Lansari-Ellis, brass player Ralph Eppel, and saxophonist Paul Cram. With only the inspiration of the legendary Al Neil, who tutored Simpson, the first edition of NOW produced many recordings and performances, the highlights being a collective recording entitled "Up-Til Now" and Paul Cram's "Blue Tales in Time", the latter eventually released on Onari. The organisation lapsed after 1981, but in the past few years NOW has revived with a vengeance thanks to the energy of new members bassist Clyde Reed, guitarist Ron Samworth, and saxophonists Coat Cook, Graham Ord, and Bruce Freedman - Plimley and Simpson remain.

With the support of the Centre Culturel Francophone, NOW has mounted several concert series over the past few years. The latest culminated with a four-night festival at the CCF November 25-28. Unique to Vancouver among Canadian cities - and the eclectic and adventurous programming by the Coastal Jazz and Blues Society during their big-budget summer festivals certainly deserves some credit for this - the so-called boundaries between different styles of jazz remain exceptionally permeable. "Outsiders", the Bob Murphy Quartet, composed of studio players stretching out, appeared on the first night, and the Philippe Lapointe Quintet with their New York in-the-pocket style, opened the second night. I was unable to catch either, but from all reports, their more commercially-oriented styles were welcomed by audience and performers.

The Coat Cook Quintet opened the Thursday night with a set mostly of free improvisation. This is a challenging format for younger musicians, and at times a sameness crept into the middle of the pieces - didn't the last one sound like this too? Still, there were many rewarding moments provided by Cook, Samworth, and three newcomers to NOW - Daniel Lapp on trumpet, Scott White on bass, and Roger Baird on drums. Guest vocalist Kate Hammett-Vaughan stepped out from her usual torch-standards to provide several numbers with wordless vocals a la Jeanne Lee with Gunter Hampel.

That highlights one of the most exciting aspects of the New Orchestra Workshop - it provides performers with a supportive environment in which to stretch out musically. Graham Ord has spent time earning money in

the studios and playing rock gigs, as well as being a member of Plimley's octet, but Thursday night found him for the first time leading a group performing his own music. His array of saxophones was joined by Baird and White for a varied set, all originals except for Jimmy Garrison's *Ascendence*. Interestingly enough, while playing soprano on that tune Ord avoided the Coltrane influence apparent in his tenor playing.

Friday night opened with Lunar Adventures, powered by the all-purpose rhythm section of Simpson and Reed. This is a very interesting group; I really haven't heard anything else like them. Though showing influences of rock, noise music, Celtic music, and harmolodics, they completely avoid fusion blandness. This night they took a few tunes to warm up - for their

music to work Cook's sax and Samworth's guitar have to be as telepathic as Ornette and Don Cherry. It's especially interesting to hear Simpson's high energy harnessed to the more structured demands of this music.

Reed and Simpson stayed on the bandstand as the rhythm section for Paul Plimley. Plimley seems to be moving into artistic maturity, the multitude of influences - particularly that of Cecil Taylor - melded into a seamless whole reflective of Plimley himself. Very intellectual, yet filled with passion, and always charged with that sly Plimley wit, the never-ending flow of ideas encompasses the entire keyboard. Unfortunately, the piano at the CCF is poor, but with the busy yet supportive encouragement of Reed and Simpson, Plimley and the audience didn't seem to mind. They were joined by

