

Off Beat

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mat or our post-bebop format or our lounge format or our funk format, and either you fall somewhere into one of those marketable categories or else we don't want you.' "

And so he's hoping to find a more receptive audience elsewhere. I think he'll get it, for the music that the Paul Plimley Octet has been making for the last few months has been world-class: not your usual trained-musician's smorgasbord of pre-digested influences but a quietly radical, very personal music that reflects powers as diverse as Cecil Taylor and Bach, Debussy and Zappa, but that has more to do with Plimley's own growth as a musician and as an individual, a process that has not always been smooth, but that is now starting to pay dividends.

It's a theme that Plimley keeps returning to in conversation. "One of the timeless functions that music allows us to experience is the sense of really 'being there' in the music, the sense of feeling fully alive, and not necessarily saying, 'Well, gee, I hope this will communicate with the people,' but just being yourself on that level. And that in itself will always touch any people who are really interested in being open to a strong musical experience.

"I toss around questions of originality, and the uniqueness of the social context that one belongs to, and I think that these things tend to emerge in the music simply by one just wanting to be oneself. What I'm feeling more strongly these days is that while these areas are very interesting — and one can be very absorbed in them — the bottom line is simply to express what one feels about life, the energy that that pertains to, the kinds of melodic or pitch-oriented or rhythmic or timbral kinds of sounds that one naturally has a gravitation to."

Paul Plimley's ability to find his own musical voice has been audible for some years — check out his composition *Delicate Chestnut Roll* on the New Orchestra Quintet's 1979 LP **Up 'til Now** — but only in the last few months has that per-

sonality found full expression in a band format.

Concerts by the Paul Plimley Octet have left very satisfied listeners making comparisons with Ellington, Evans, and Mingus: heady company! Like those pioneers, Plimley has learned to write for the strengths of his bandmates without sacrificing the individuality of his vision, and one of his major achievements must be the way in which he can spark assertive, personalized solos from players schooled in the bland and conservative values of West Coast jazz education.

"Once the musicians understand the ground rules that the music is dealing with, then they're usually happy to do some exploring, on their own and collectively. It sometimes takes a bit of time, but I think that's understandable. The notion of players wanting to emulate past models is a useful practice, but it can also reinforce that sense of self-doubt that keeps us from not being afraid of exploring new territory, that keeps us from saying, 'I'm going to let this music be.' Just taking risks, and saying, 'I don't really care if my music doesn't sound like Trane, or Bird, or Herbie Hancock, or whoever,' just paying attention to one's own rhythmic framework, the way that one moves, the way that one talks, the way that one naturally has a kind of physical, gestural repartee with one's instrument.

"Things like that are just natural to playing, and I think that that is something that a lot of players don't pay attention to because they're very responsive to peer pressure, to media, to people who have very clear product-oriented lines on what music is supposed to be.

"But I'm interested in playing music where there's a real sense of vitality, and where the music is really saying something. Not something that we can put in an analogue sense to something literary, or verbal, or social, necessarily, but something that people who care to can really respond to emotionally. So that the music goes beyond passive consumerism. And so that we as musicians can deepen the values of the kind of lives that we're living in North America and Europe, or even

in other parts of the world.

"Even if there are cultural and political and economic differences, perhaps there is something fundamental in music that unites us as human beings. I don't find that at all an idealistic, highfalutin', cosmic notion: there's a reality to it. If nothing else, music demonstrates an incredible depth of language and ex-

pression: the kinds of sonic landscapes that we can be exposed to and feel something for are endless."

A pause, and a sigh.

"It's so difficult to express all that you want to say about music, and do so in a verbal fashion which is understandable and yet also complete to your own intentions. If I could express all of those things verbally, I

might be a poet. Or whatever."

On the available evidence, Paul Plimley is a poet anyway: a poet of sounds and emotions manipulated with easy grace and probing insight.

The Paul Plimley Octet (which currently includes saxophonists Graham Ord, Coat Cook, and Gordon Bertram, trumpeter Kevin Lee,

trombonist Ralph Eppel, acoustic bassist Paul Blaney, and drummer Buff Allen) will be doing one more concert before the leader's continental drift: at the newly-opened Granville Island Room, 1502 Duranleau Street (Granville Island) this Friday, September 6th at 9 pm. Advance tickets are \$6.00, at Highlife, Black Swan, and Revolutions.