



## UAPRESENTS STUDENT CRITIC PROGRAM

### **T.S. Monk: “Monk on Monk”**

Review by Andrew Wang

Before I start this review, I have to clear the air of something. I love jazz. I listen to it every day, I know all the great tunes by heart, and I've even played and sung in a few jazz combos. Imagine my happiness when I found out that I got to see the son of the legendary (and my personal favorite) piano player Thelonius Monk! My heart skipped a few beats. While this performance was a great one, I don't feel as though it captured the soul of Thelonius Monk as well as I would have liked. This being said, it was surprisingly refreshing to hear another take on his music, and while it doesn't quite match the quality and masterful playing of his father's work, T.S. Monk put on a great show.

As a musician myself, I cannot help but try and analyze the player's technique and compare it to the original band that Thelonius used. With this being said, I'd like to start with the set list. There was smattering of his less popular pieces with his more popular pieces- with “Evidence” and “Monk's Mood” coming to mind. However, some of his signature pieces (e.g. “Epistrophy” and “Blue Monk”), were missing, and I found that to be a bit upsetting as a Monk fan. However, T.S.'s interpretation of what songs he did play was interesting. Rather than going the slower tempo that his father liked to use, he went full blast, letting his players rip into their instruments at light speed. While this soloing is very technical, I felt it lacked the same kind of feeling that Thelonius usually has. Let us take the pianist for instance, Helen Sung. Though she played with outstanding technical ability, she did not channel in any sort of faithful way. Thelonius was known for soloing using extremely sparse and dissonant notes. Drop a note here, a quick run there, everything from him had a poignant statement to make. Helen's solos were much longer winded and didn't breathe as much. With her right hand, she would attempt to sprint up and down the keys as fast as she could, rarely taking a break from the wave of sound she created with her piano. Though she was playing a Monk standard with Monk written notes and chords, she wasn't playing Monk. Same goes for the horn players- all amazingly proficient, but none making a faithful rendition of his band's unique voice. The closest player to mimicking his voice was actually his son- his drumming was very subtle and varied and one had to pay very close attention to him to pick up on what he was doing.

This is not to say that it was a bad performance. It was a great show, filled with humor and very proficient artists playing music they obviously knew well. The atmosphere that was created did very good about being real. It was an organic conversation between the players and the audience, and I feel as though everyone was comfortable and happy at the end of the performance. While T.S. Monk didn't capture his father as well as I would have liked, he did an amazing job; perfectly

capturing the feeling and attitude of jazz. A great misconception about this concert might be that it was unprofessional. This is far from the truth. Jazz musicians should talk to each other during the performances and Monk should make on-the-fly decisions. The freeness, the casualness, the ability to improvise, and the playfulness he demonstrated is what jazz as an art form is all about. I'm almost glad that he didn't follow his dad play by play, because in doing so it wouldn't have been jazz. It would have been some instrumentalists playing a jazz musician's music, and that wouldn't have been as genuine as an experience as the one had.

T.S. Monk did a good job picking great musicians and setting a fun, light atmosphere for his performance. In my opinion, he didn't capture the experience of a 1960's Monk concert. However, his band's adept playing and his ability to channel the core of jazz music's soul was more than enough to ensure that this concert was not one to forget.