



UAPRESENTS STUDENT CRITIC PROGRAM

T.S. Monk: “Monk on Monk”

Review by Austin Pillon

The musical genre *jazz* has come up many times in music classes or casual conversation among friends about guitar players and theory, but it had never really been on my musical radar before I saw T.S. Monk. Walking into Centennial Hall with little clue of what to expect, I sat next to Genevieve and listened to the formalities of introducing the act, listing the sponsors, and finally thanking the University of Arizona.

When T.S. Monk first walked out on stage, he had a sense of cool; an attitude of swagger that flowed from him. As he approached the microphone to speak to the audience, his band followed him and took their seats, all seeming to be in formation with Monk at the front, as if the band was a cohesive unit that ate, drank, and slept for nothing but rhythm and swing.

A heartfelt intro paying tribute to his father preceded the start of Monk’s first song, “Skiffy.” A sextet of piano, bass, drums, a trumpet and two saxophones erupted into a sweet cry of singing brass and shrill piano. Monk displayed a mastering of his artful drumming with expressive use of his toms on a solo that followed a staccato crescendo. The orange background behind the sextet perfectly represented the mood of construction and beauty out of the chaotic melding of the brass, piano, and string bass.

The next tune, and arguably the most enjoyable of the night, “Monk’s Mood”, begins with a blue background that envelops the band in a somber, introspective mood. Monk switches to brushes on the drums to match his band mates in a slow, drudging, melancholy reflection that is as sleepy as it is sorrowful. The trombone solo stole the show, as trombonist Andy Hunter takes a long 3 minute brass soliloquy to express his inner melancholic mood.

The next song comes in without introduction. An upbeat, major key song with a walking bass line is complimented by certain bounce in Monk’s drumming. A skipping trumpet solo by James Zollar and high horn hits from the brass really set this track alive. The highlight here was Monk’s drum solo. Although he played minimal hi-hat and snare rhythms throughout the show, Monk lets loose with massive rolls and huge bass hits complimented by cymbal crashes.

Monk changes up the tone by jokingly transitioning with his band onstage into a tune named after him, “Little Rootie Tootie”. This song is special in the set, from the composition to the performance. The drums lays down a solid rhythm while Dan Loomis’ strong string bass line weaves in and out of the percussion beat and finally the piano plays call and receive with the brass. The other trumpeter, Jeff Stockham’s solo erupts with Satchmo swagger before he switches to his throaty French horn with a beautiful and legato vibrato.

Walking out towards the intermission, it was difficult to keep my mouth from gaping. I conversed with my peers about the different tones and elements of the music and I found it astounding that though we all agreed on the virtuosity and talent of Monk and his band, we all had different interpretations on the songs on their meanings.

The show continued with tunes such as “Think of One”, a grand, party themed song with lots of piano runs and fluid brass slides, and “Ask Me Now”, a purple background song with weeping sax croons from tenor saxophonist Willie Williams and a slow, melodic piano off beat. On a humorous note, when noticing a page missing from the tenor sax sheet music, Monk simply explains to the audience, “We just gonn’ do it.”

When the show ended, our attending group was elated and excited, brought alive by the jazz experience we were just a part of. Overall, T.S. Monk and his band put on a great performance that showed not only Thelonious Monk’s genius, but also his son’s spirit. T.S.’s interpretation of his Thelonious’ music pays a perfect tribute to his father and keeps his music alive.