



UAPRESENTS STUDENT CRITIC PROGRAM

T.S. Monk: “Monk on Monk”

Review by Genevieve Smith

As I sat down in preparation to listen to T.S. Monk’s performance “Monk on Monk,” I wasn’t sure what to expect; my only non-lyrical jazz experience were hour long sentences (otherwise known as road trips) spent listening to the smooth jazz radio station with my dad as a kid. I was, however, anxious to meet this fabled Mr. T.S. Monk and hear his father’s work. When T.S. Monk walked out onstage wearing his cool shades and grinning, he welcomed the audience, thanked us for coming, and took a moment to honor his father. After a bit of banter, T.S. Monk climbed behind his drum set and began his expounded tribute known as “Monk on Monk.”

Throughout the entire performance, Monk brought in various instruments that all added significantly to each piece. From an array of saxophones to the tuba, each instrument contributed to the overall performance and, in turn, was given the stage for its own moment of glory and adoration. Monk opened the act with the swinging piece “Skiffy” using a sextet. As the bass soulfully carried the piece and Monk kept at the cymbals, the room was filled with a mood of dancing and joy. The young woman on piano had such spirit in her playing that it brought the audience into the dancing aspect and allowed the audience to sympathetically join in the dancing (beyond the rhythmic foot tapping I think everyone succumbed to at some point).

This performance was such an enlightenment of what it meant to be part of a jazz group. The amount of communication and equality between all of the musicians was a surprise and, at first, a bit disconcerting. In contrast to the typical single guitar rift heard in most music, each instrument participating in “Monk on Monk” was given an equal share of the group’s performance as well as his/her own performance. I was pleasantly surprised to see how much of a group effort the jazz performance is. As for the communication, there were many moments of head nodding, some of head shaking, holding up of hands and fingers. Admittedly, I was a bit distracted by one of the saxophone player’s etiquette. It seemed as though he was turning around and signaling to T.S. Monk incessantly during the performance. Perhaps he was trying to communicate something important that I, as a non-participant of the performance, wouldn’t understand, but the minute that the hand waving begun, my attention was unfortunately drawn away from the performance.

However, my favorite moment of the night was the performance of “Monk’s Mood.” A sweet ballad hosting a sleepy tempo, “Monk’s Mood” was accompanied by several saxes, the piano, and most

significantly the trombone. Every artist contributed to the overall melancholic mood but in time each artist fell away, leaving the trombonist, Andy Hunter, to shine. His heartfelt solo pealed throughout the hall, drawing every audience member into the inexplicable soul of “Monk on Monk.”

Overall, I was delighted to have witnessed such a performance. Not only was the beauty of Thelonious Monk’s brilliance apparent but also his son’s flair and highest adoration of his father’s work. Upon looking up the inspirations for some of Thelonious’ work, I found that many of his pieces were dedicated to, and even named for, family members and friends of his, such as “Nellie” for his wife and “Little Rootie Tootie” for his daughter. This trait within Thelonious seems to have been passed to his son, as seen in T.S. Monk’s respect for everyone present on the stage. I am happy to say that “Monk on Monk” turned out to be both a pleasant landscape of emotion and an educational experience in what it means to be an artist in a collaborative process.