

CONCERT REVIEW

Saxman Mulligan: Honoring a Master

Temperley, Marsalis lead all-star memorial to the baritone who influenced generations

By **GENE SANTORO**

SATURDAY NIGHT AT ALICE Tully Hall, Lincoln Center Jazz' warm tribute to the late saxist-composer Gerry Mulligan, who died Jan. 19 at the age of 68, more than made up for what artistic director Wynton Marsalis wryly called "the monsoon."

Marsalis launched the concert by reading the letter President Bill Clinton, a saxman himself, sent to mark the evening. "Gerry Mulligan," Marsalis read, "was the most significant baritone saxophonist in the history of jazz."

The Prez well be right. Mulligan's list of achievements is as long and daunting as his peer Joe DiMaggio's.

He was a key part of Miles Davis' "Birth Of The Cool" band in 1948-50, which changed jazz' direction. He formed the first pianoless small group, injecting space and an easy-going counterpoint between horns where the keys used to be. His baritone work was smoothly, almost crooningly articulate, unflashy yet thought-provoking.

And his arrangements, for everything from quartets to big bands, thrived on taut ideas, lean angularity, and sly flourishes of good humor. That, and a light but brisk sense of swing,

marked his style at its best.

Originally, what became a tribute had been planned as a fete for Mulligan while he was still alive. Still, the maestro's spirit clearly hovered over it, shining through the music.

The main transmitter was baritone saxist Joe Temperley, at 67 one of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra's veterans. Playing the role of Mulligan, Temperley had a rare and wonderful and welcome chance to strut his own formidable yet understated stuff out front — and in the process, became the pivotal character onstage.

His solo during the small-group version of "Sweet And Lovely," for instance, offered the limpid charm and almost elegant flow that made Mulligan the champ.

Backing Temperley, trumpeter Art Farmer (a former key Mulligan associate) and Marsalis, the Jazz Orchestra displayed its own sharp-creased command of Mulligan's demanding, often whimsical charts.

And the tribute isn't over. On Thursday night, the Walter Reade Theater presents the world premiere of "The Biography Of Gerry Mulligan," a documentary with unseen footage that was rushed to completion for this occasion. Call 212-875-5600.

(Santoro writes on jazz.)



GERRY MULLIGAN: Remembering musical beauty, grace and humor.

DANCE REVIEW

Taking Stock of Milken's 'Ball' Game

BY **TERRY TEACHOUT**

KAROLE ARMITAGE'S 'THE Predators' Ball: Hucksters of the Soul,' which opened a four-day run Wednesday at the BAM Opera House in Brooklyn, is a 2½-hour extravaganza that tells the tale of the rise and fall of junk-bond king Michael Milken in words, music, dance and video images.

The 40-member cast includes rappers, voguers, ballerinas in tutus and five hard-working actors, including one busy fellow who plays 12 roles, among them Rudolph Giuliani, Ron Perelman and Congressman John Dingell. The results are a hell of a mess — but never boring.

Like Milken, Armitage was one of the high fliers of the '80s. A choreographer who sought to fuse ballet and punk rock, she attracted vast amounts of press coverage, made dances for Mikhail Baryshnikov and Madonna, abruptly fell from critical grace and retired to Europe to lick her wounds and earn a living as director of Maggioranza di Firenze, the Italian company that supplied the dancers for this production. "The Predators' Ball" is the first new work she has shown in New York in seven years.



'SOUL' MATES: From "Predator's Ball"

Midway through the first act, Thomas Jay Ryan, the actor who plays Milken, yells, "Low grade, high yield!" He's talking about junk bonds, but much the same thing could be said of "The Predators' Ball."

John Gould Rubin's script is flabby and platitudinous, R. Nemo Hill's lyrics lack bite and Armitage's own mix-and-match dances are strictly functional.

But Armitage gets the most out of her third-rate material, and then some. She has staged "The Predators' Ball" brilliantly, locking together the disparate elements — including David Salle's excellent décor and David Shea's high-voltage electronic dance music — into a fast-moving whole that holds the eye from start to finish.

Karole Armitage's real gift seems to be for directing, not choreography. An Armitage-staged version of, say, the Bertolt Brecht-Kurt Weill "Seven Deadly Sins" (which is the all-too-obvious model for "The

Predators' Ball") would be something to see.

This show, by contrast, is a production in search of a script: great frosting, no cake.

(Teachout writes about music and dance for *The News*.)

B.B.'s Book of Love

FROM COVER

growing up black and poor, finding mercy and cruelty in unlikely places. He admits he still feels the sting of a cousin's eating dinner in front of him when the cousin knew B.B. had none.

It's the story of a work ethic, of a man whose voice still rings with pride when he tells you he regularly picked 400 pounds of cotton a day in his youth, sometimes up to 480.

"My cousin and I would go out to the fields at dawn, because the dew made the cotton heavier," he says. "I did that for long enough to know that I'm glad I've been able to make my living playing music."

He tracks his life through the '50s, when earning a living was night-to-night, then into the '60s and '70s and his discovery by white audiences. When "The Thrill Is Gone" became a hit, it made him the poster man among surviving black blues players — a comfortable position he accepted with grace and never used as an excuse to neglect his art.

Today, a month past 71, he talks about cutting back on his road schedule "at some point." Of course, there isn't too much he hasn't already done: He's won Grammys, traveled the world, met Presidents.

In a sense, he suggests, the book was one of his few bits of unfinished business. "I wanted to tell the whole story," he says. "Not just the cold facts, but how it felt and how it all fit together."

He is asked if perhaps he is also writing this book for the blues players who had many of the same stories but never had the chance to write them, like T-Bone Walker, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Lonnie Johnson.

"I didn't think of it that way," he says. "But I'd be honored if that's how it came out."