

# Baker Quintet Provides Excellent Jazz

By BOB WARD

Like the five fingers of a hand, each member of the Dave Baker Jazz Quintet works with a sure feel for what the others are doing and knows instinctively how to help the group get where it's going.

The quintet appeared Tuesday night at Havens Auditorium as the third program in the week of Focus on Black America sponsored by IU-K. Baker is professor of music at Indiana University. His professional background includes stints with Lionel Hampton and the pioneer of the progressive movement in jazz, Stan Kenton.

The Kenton influence could be heard Tuesday night, particularly in the first part of the program that included two tunes popularized by Miles Davis, "Walkin'" and "Dear Old Stockholm."

The style is less melodic and more intense than in the cool jazz forms that have come up since the late fifties. Unlike the tight, neat work of a Wes Montgomery or Art Farmer, Baker's music features the wild-running tenor, the reaching, driving trumpet whipped on at an unforgiving pace by percussion and piano.

Sax and trumpet both showed more restraint and even as the excitement grew the feeling of restraint was there like a pot boiling with its lid on. When the tenorman took off the link to the basic theme and beat was more direct than in the earlier numbers.

One of the most intriguing touches in Baker's music is the use of a slow, legato piano in a rhythmic counterpoint to a fast-moving drum and bass. This was done rather frequently and provided a good change of pace without let down from the high pitch of excitement.

This technique was especially noticeable and well-used in the piece composed by the group's own piano player, Shelby James. The tune, also contained by some unconventional intervals and unexpected phrasings was held together by Baker's muscular bass.

In the evening's final selection, drummer Harry Wilkinson finally slipped his leash. After an evening of creative work in support of the group, he took off for a solo that was among the neatest pieces of work that night.

Baker, in describing his approach to jazz, says he finds greater opportunity — although more risk — in working from the melody line of a tune rather than the changes in it.

Baker uses his own bass as much for a lead instrument as for rhythm. He frequently plays high on the fingerboard or slides along the strings to make it sing. In his solo work he does things no one would ever demand of a bass player. Assisted by Shelby James' sensitive piano work and the support of drummer Harry Wilkinson, Baker toys with the basic theme. Under his expert hands, the big bass has all the suppleness that comes naturally to a guitar.

Baker is even more amazing a musician that can be appreciated simply by hearing him play a bass. To really appreciate his talent you have to know that he has been playing the instrument only since last summer. He was originally and professionally a trombonist. An auto accident about five years ago collapsed his face and, as he says, "I had to learn another instrument to get a job."

In 1962 he began playing the cello. This introduced him to strings, and ultimately to the bass.

After his first two numbers, Baker announced he would move "a little left of center," and do a tune developed by Thelonious Monk. Here the style was cooler. Larry Wiseman on trumpet took the lead with tenorman Harry Miedema following along and supporting underneath. Their rhythm was stronger, closer to the lead.

This means, he explains, that by improvising from the melody line rather than on the harmonic structure, there are more different directions you can go but there is less to guide you.

His time with Kenton, middle 1950's, had as much influence on him as any big band, he says, but not as much as his work with the smaller groups. It's the smaller combos, he says, that make the real innovations in jazz happen. Kenton and Ellington were exceptions, he declares, especially Kenton whose work with the 40-piece orchestra in the late forties was not even progressive but downright "experimental."

Baker's own days with Kenton, he said, came well after the great innovator had returned to "something like normality."

Among the present day groups, he says the really new sound have come from such groups as the Blood, Sweat and Tears and Cream. He definitely excluded the Beatles from the makers of new sounds.

The Beatles, and most other of the new rock groups, are using ideas explored ten to 15 years ago by Bo Diddley. "There is no tune in the top ten," he asserted "that doesn't do things Bo Diddley did long ago."

Many of the new sounds in today's

jazz, we went on, are not new to music. Jazz is a young art form and can't cover all the ground that older forms of music, some of them 600 or 700 years old, have been able to cover. Even some of the really far-out sounds can be found in the atonal music of Schoenberg and other non-jazz composers active as long ago as the turn of the century.

Wednesday night at Havens, the Black Focus program continues with a talk on "Renaissance in Black: Teaching About Afro-American Culture" by Mrs. Beatrice Young.

Mrs. Young is director of education services for the Illinois Commission on Human Relations.



MIEDEMA, WISEMAN



WILKINSON



JAMES



BAKER

Kokomo Tribune

March 1969