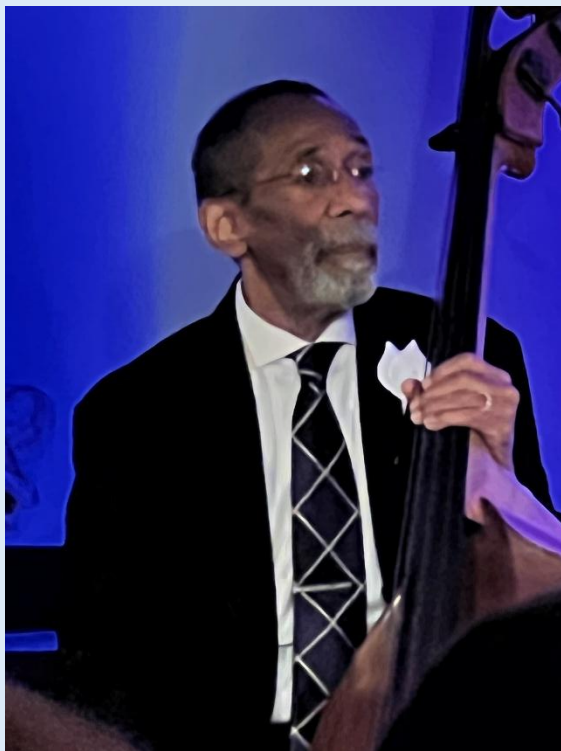


The legendary Ron Carter played a two-night stand at the Regattabar in Cambridge on Friday and Saturday nights (Dec 5-6). These shows featured his “Foursight Quartet” which consists of Mr. Carter on bass, Renee Rosnes on piano, Jimmy Greene on Tenor Saxophone and Payton Crossley on Drums. This review is based on Friday night’s second set.

Mr. Carter, of course, is probably best known on two fronts – his role as bassist in the second great Miles Davis quintet, and his prolific recording career (he maintains his position in the Guinness book of world records as most recorded jazz bassist, having appeared on over 2,200 recordings). Possibly overshadowed by these accomplishments is his role as a composer, though he has authored well over 100 tunes and released over 40 albums in his name.

Mr. Carter carries with him a reputation as a refined gentleman, strongly emphasizing manners and dress, perhaps unsurprising for a music college professor of 20 years with



roots in classical music. This characteristic – refinement – is embodied by his writing. His compositions tend to be airy, thoughtful, gentle, relaxed, leaving plenty of room in performance for subtle (or at other times dramatic) shifts to funkier sounds, or tensions, or sharp left turns.

His strengths as a composer were on full display in the set, in which he authored six of the eight songs played. Mr. Carter opened with “595”, which sounds a bit like a pastiche of Miles Davis classics “So What” and “Freddie the Freeloader” – this makes sense as it is one of two new compositions that wrote for the well-received 2007 *Dear Miles* album.

When the song began, it was immediately noticeable that the sound was perfectly balanced across the group, making it possible to

focus on any particular instrument or take in the group’s combined sound. It was a perfect opener - medium tempo and relaxed - for performers and audience alike to ease into the set. Towards the end of the opening head, Ms. Rosnes improvised a quiet 8-note phrase, up and down the scale. The same phrase was then sounded by Ron Carter’s bass, and then by Mr. Greene, who expanded on the phrase throughout his first chorus. It was an

early display of the connection that was demonstrated by the players throughout the evening.

The conclusion of the tune demonstrated the band's penchant for musical interludes, as they flowed into a Spanish-tinged minor vamp ("Baaaah, Bump Baaah") that carried us directly into "**Mr. Bowtie**", the title song from Mr. Carter's 1995 album. The group kicked off the tune with a light and breezy Latin jazz feel, a funky vamp separating the choruses. Mr. Greene's saxophone solo maintained the opening emotional state of the tune, remaining relaxed and flowing - jazz on a summer's day. However, as Ms. Rosnes entered, almost immediately the tension began to ramp up. The drums got busier and louder, driving the tune to a more active place, and Ms. Rosnes responded with heavy ascending block chords followed by waterfalls of descending runs. Mr. Crossley's extended drum solo kept the intensity high, until the return to the recurring vamp, which led directly into the next song.

Little Waltz, one of Mr. Carter's most beloved compositions, was first released on his *Uptown Conversation* in 1969. The composition is starkly beautiful and simple, and it was a perfect arranging decision to have Ms. Rosnes lead the opening melody with a delicate, crystal clear sound, until Mr. Greene's warm saxophone took over at the bridge. A highlight of the song was Ms. Rosnes' solo, which continued the intervallic exploration of love (or loss?) that is raised by the initial melody.

Joshua, from Miles Davis 1963 *Seven Steps to Heaven* album, was the only song of the evening to directly reference Mr. Carter's time with Mr. Davis. It's a barnburner, with shifting time signatures to negotiate. Mr. Greene's solo was excellent. Using a robust tone he flew through the twists and turns with intricate phrasing. Mr. Crossley was right there with him, frequently joining, or responding to, his rhythmic statements. Unexpectedly, Mr. Carter called back to a vamp heard earlier in the set, and a brief reprise of **Mr. Bowtie** was played to end the song.

During Mr. Carter's introduction to "**Cut and Paste**", it was easy to imagine being a student in his classroom. He wryly asked if we remembered things called newspapers ("with writing on both sides!") and the copy editors who worked on them. It was to these professionals, along with others having increasingly marginalized skillsets in a changing world, that Mr. Carter dedicated the song.



This theme of loss made its way into the tune's performance in a couple of ways. First, the song itself is a rhythm-changes vehicle having a melody that heavily incorporates space – the notes tend towards offbeat splats at unexpected moments (a “Monkian” vibe to be sure). The melody's generous use of space causes us to consider what is not there – as we can consider those fading careers. Second, for long periods during the saxophone and piano solos, only the drums remained as support, with the others coming in only when the bridge came around. Again, the listener is confronted directly with what is missing. It was thought-provoking - but as important, there was a real emotional resonance created each time Mr. Carter would rejoin on the bridge. Towards the conclusion, everyone dropped out except for Mr. Carter, who soloed with a combination of blazing lines and other tune references (including perhaps a country-ish “Happy Trails” call out that earned an appreciative audience chuckle).

“**Caminando**”, from *When Skies Are Grey*, Mr. Carter's 2006 Latin jazz themed album, proved an ideal canvas for the band to display its strengths. The composition is structured on a set of frequently shifting suspensions and resolutions - equal parts ethereal and soulful – which allow for many twists and turns. Mr. Crossley began with a roiling drum solo, imaginatively leveraging all surfaces of his drumkit, before being joined by Mr. Carter, who stepped in with a brief bass solo (still out of time). Before long the saxophone began the theme. The title (spelled on some of his albums as “Cominando”) is translated from Spanish as “walking”, and indeed we find ourselves loping along at ~60 bpm. Mr. Greene was clearly in his



wheelhouse here, starting with slow funky statements to pull the crowd in, and steadily and logically building up to a full emotional boil, for which he received perhaps his biggest hand of the night. Ms. Rosnes took a more skitterish and abstract approach, providing a series of fast runs and ascending two handed statements. The bass and drums effortlessly followed her in and out of double-time. At the end of her solo, Ms. Rosnes slowed down with an unexpected pair of chordal 4-bar sequences that were stately and stunningly beautiful, sitting somewhere between classical and gospel. No closing theme was needed after that, and none given.



The group ended the set with an up-tempo **You and the Night and the Music**, a standard and the first selection not directly associated with Mr. Carter. After relatively brief opening statements from sax and piano, the band began to “trade fours”, with the piano and saxophone alternately exchanging statements with Mr. Crossley. This lasted for the majority of the tune. Seeing them creatively conversing with each other in this way was yet another example of the band’s connectedness, and a wonderful way to send home the audience.

I heartily recommend the recording of this quartet from a live 2018 Stockholm show that shares much of this material. The quartet continues to play sporadically (it is one of several bands that Mr. Carter currently leads) and the next set of shows appear to be a brief tour through Japan next month. See him if you can, and short of that, don’t hesitate to dust off your copies of his wonderful *Uptown Conversation* and *Third Plane* albums.

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