

Aaron Parks Trio @ Regattabar, 2/7/2026

By the time the second set approached, the Charles Hotel had taken on the feel of an event. Despite more snowfall than was expected, the line into Regattabar ran down two flights of stairs toward Henrietta's Table, setting the tone before a note was played. Someone exiting the first set glanced around and summed it up simply: "Jazz lives."

Pianist Aaron Parks' trio featured **Billy Hart** on drums and **Ben Street** on bass — three quarters of the band that recorded Parks' latest album as a leader, *By All Means* on Blue Note. That album has been widely described as having a "classic," almost throwback Blue Note sound, and hearing that material live — distilled into a trio drawn from the album's multi-generational lineup — underscored how naturally Parks' music spans eras.



The set opened with "Parks Lope," one of the catchiest tunes on the new album. While the studio recording highlights Ben Solomon on saxophone, the trio setting allowed Parks to play more freely with the melody, keeping it rich and full at the piano. From there, the set leaned into a slower burn: "Reinventing the Wheel," dedicated to Kenny Wheeler, unfolded with a steady internal pulse, while Duke Ellington's "Warm Valley" began with an extended solo piano introduction before the trio eased back in.



Street's playing anchored the group throughout — a solid, grounding bass sound that never felt static, full of melodic invention and creativity in the spaces between the roots. Hart, meanwhile, was less concerned with pyrotechnics (though the chops are clearly still there) than with making the most of every sound and texture. His solo later in the set, and especially on Parks' original "The Isle of Everything," where he worked the rims of the drums with a Latin-inflected feel, drew an audible response and marked one of the night's peaks.

Parks' vocalizing at the piano became another strand in the trio's ongoing conversation — a habit that naturally invites comparison to another pianist long associated with the trio format, but here it functioned less as a calling card than as something folded into the group's shared momentum, rather than drawing attention to itself.

Later in the set, Parks introduced a new composition, "Alright," describing it as a tune about living through moments when things are not OK. Parks is outspoken politically, and the music carried a clear sense of desperation, but also of hope — blues-and gospel-tinged, holding uplift and heartbreak in the same breath.

There were enjoyable moments outside the music too: Parks giving a shoutout to his mother in the room, and later allowing himself a quick aside about the title of "Parks Lope" — as the father of two, he noted his entitlement to dad jokes, including the tune's play on his former Brooklyn neighborhood. Hart often smiled broadly behind the kit as Parks and Street visibly appreciated the feel and flourishes from the elder statesman. The set closed to a standing ovation, followed by an encore of the standard "For All We Know," a beautiful ending to the evening.

On a cold, snowy night in Cambridge, the message felt unmistakable — not that it was ever in doubt. "Jazz lives," indeed.