NEWPORT OFFERS HISTORY OF JAZZ

Sounds of '20's to Present Are Heard at Festival

By JOHN S. WILSON
Special to The New York Times

NEWPORT, R. I., July 1 — The grab bag of names that is poured out each year at the Newport Jazz Festival often seems to have no particular pattern or direction. It is simply a musical eruption.

This year, however, the opening program last night at Festival Field, in attempting to tell the story of jazz from its origins to the contemporary and beyond, not only placed the performers in perspective, but also clarified the fact that each year jazz history is visited and renewed at Newport even though it is not usually presented in those terms.

Most of the musicians who played yesterday have appeared at Newport in other years. In those years, they were just another act. They were good or they were not so good. And that was all there was to it.

This year, as part of the story of jazz, they were more than acts. They were playing themselves, both in historical context and as they are today. There was Earl Hines, sitting ramrod-straight at the piano, flashing his relentless toothpaste smile, playing the flaring, eruptive runs and the high tremolos that startled the Chicago jazz world in the 1920's.

Pee Wee Russell Heard

Bud Freeman was there, rolling out looping saxophone solos that constantly threatened to turn into his 35-year-old speciality, "The Eel." Pee Wee Russell mournfully coaxed soft, shy, breathy notes from his clarinet.

All three are survivors of the rugged jazz of the 1920's whose playing has retained its original outlines and still has validity in today's jazz setting.

Count Basie's orchestra, on the other hand, presented a split personality. The Basie orchestra of today is quite different from the original Basie band of the 1930's. A smooth, impersonal machine has replaced the loose-jointed, joyous group of an earlier day. The only connecting link between the two is Mr. Basie himself, who still flicks out his sly, single-note piano figures with immensely telling effect.

Even an attempt to recall the Kansas City Six, a small group drawn from the early Basie band, by calling in two one-time stars of that band—Buddy Tate, tenor saxophone and Buck Clayton, trumpet—missed the point despite Mr. Tate and Mr. Clayton because the present Basie rhythm section has little relationship to the superb section that powered Mr. Basie's band in the 1930's.

The be-bop era of the 1940's was represented by five giants of that period—Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Milt Jackson, Percy Heath and Max Roach, and a stand-in, James Moody, who took the role of the late Charlie Parker.

Monk Goes His Own Way

Time, as it had for the veterans of the 1920's, seemed to have stood still for these men. Mr. Monk went his own iconoclastic way—he played his piano part and then got up and danced around the piano. As each man soloed, the other members of the group ignored him, chatting with each other and seeming to pay no attention to what was going on—just as they did two decades ago in smokey little clubs on New York's 52d Street.

The last two groups in this brief historical review — the Modern Jazz Quartet and the Albert Ayler Quintet—were sufficiently contemporray to perform simply as they are. Mr. Ayler, an avant-garde saxophonist, who mixes odd, off-key melody and simple little chants with violently discordant explosions, brought the program around full cycle.

There were strong points of similarity between the playing of his group and that of Olatunji's African percussion ensemble (which included three saxophones and a trumpet), which opened the evening with performances intended to suggest one of the root sources of jazz. Mr. Olatunji's primitivism was so sophisticated and Mr. Ayler's sophistication was so primitive that they seemed to occupy the same piece of ground in the jazz spectrum.

The New York Times
Published: July 2, 1967