

Class Act has lots of potential

By IFAN PAYNE
Music Critic

I mentioned in passing in my review of Mainstreet the other day that guitarist T.J. Hittle had left that band in order to join a new group called Class Act. Now we can all have an opportunity to hear whether or not the group is well-named when Class Act debuts with its first booking this Friday and Saturday evening at Bockers II.

Class Act has arisen from the ashes of Alfie Stein's group, which played occasionally at Midtown, before that establishment evolved yet again into its latest guise. Anyway, that group was a straight ahead jazz group, as was its successor under Bill Harshbarger.

Mr. Harshbarger has kept a nucleus of that group, traded draft

choices for Mr. Hittle and added a keyboardist and a vocalist and is in musical business again.

What makes Class Act a potentially interesting group is the quality of the players. In addition to Bill Harshbarger himself on saxophone (and presumably the occasional clarinet) and T.J. Hittle on guitar (and I'm sure a vocal or two) the group comprises some of the most talented players in the area.

Tim George is the bass player, and there is surely none better in Manhattan. Connaitre Miller finally gets an opportunity to reach a wider audience with her singing. She is an exceptional vocalist and it is way past time that we had a local group which will demonstrate with regularity that the men hold no inherent rights in the singing department. Ms. Miller is also a fine jazz pianist and I hope that some of the arrangements will give her an opportunity to show her versatility. Paul Harrison is the drummer (he has played with Mr. Harshbarger and with Mr. George before and is the drummer with the KSU Concert Jazz Ensemble) and John Hulbert the keyboard player.

Although all of these players have a jazz background — indeed, are noted for their abilities to play jazz — Class Act is not a jazz group but considers itself to be a novelty group. Its repertoire will be a wide one. As Bill Harshbarger said, "The commercial realities of the music scene here have to be faced. So we're doing some country and some rock. You can expect to hear us play everything from Hall and Oates to *Tuxedo Junction* to *Route 66*."

It would seem as though Class Act will be chasing the same bookings as Mainstreet. I hope that the competition turns out to be healthy for both groups and not mutually destructive and I hope that there are enough venues and opportunities in this area for both groups to survive. Certainly, after its recent super performance in Arts in the Park, Mainstreet is going to be a tough act to follow.

On paper, and individually, Class Act consists of a talented group of players and has the potential of making a strong impression on the musical scene here, so its debut on Friday and Saturday should be of more than passing interest.