

All that jazz found pleasing by critic

By IFAN PAYNE
Music Critic

The names mentioned the most frequently during the tenth annual National Association of Jazz Educators Convention held at the Hyatt Regency in Kansas City this past week were those of Southern Comfort and Matt Betton.

The name of Southern Comfort was on the lips of so many at the microphones because that company was a major underwriter of the convention.

The name of Matt Betton was oft-mentioned, not only because the Manhattan resident is Executive Director of the NAJE, but because Mr. Betton was the Convention Director.

And a superb job Mr. Betton and his staff did. The numbers alone tell the story. More than a thousand people were in attendance, the Hyatt Regency booked more than six-hundred rooms for the convention and there were fifty-eight exhibitors with booths in the exhibit area.

And there was jazz, and plenty of it.

There were bands playing on all three main floors, and in the lobby, there were clinicians demonstrating licks and scales in every nook and cranny, and taped jazz seeped under the door of every bedroom.

There is no way to report the several-score events of the convention, but some impressions stand out in recollection.

There was Bill Watrous stunting during a long closing solo with the Purdue University Jazz Band, showing that he has been listening to the likes of Stuart Dempster and blowing a series of multiphonics. Those who had never heard two and three notes being produced simultaneously as genuine chords on a trombone heard a treat from Mr. Watrous.

There was Dick Hindman, an attractive pianist with the hard-hitting Richie Cole trio and also the rhythmic variety that the trio produced during each of their numbers.

There was the realization that, despite the reputation, jazz people are in one respect a surprisingly clean living people, as the events took place in noticeably smoke-free rooms.

There were the members of Manhattan's Palace Jazz Band forming the nucleus of the Dixieland jam session.

There was the thrill of the well known: Billy Taylor, Free Flight, and a real blow-off amongst four of the best alto saxophone players of the day, the rhythmically complex Richie Cole, the soft-toned Arnie Lawrence, Bunky Green, and the bright-toned and extroverted Paquito d'Rivera running on all five cylinders.

There was the pleasure of discovering new and very young talent in the winners of the Young Talent Awards, including eleven-year-old sax wunderkind, Chris Potter.

There was the fascination of learning something new. Carol Comer

taught me more in an hour-long clinic on vocal jazz improvisation than I had learned during the rest of my life up to that point. And, as someone in the audience commented, "Just look at all these people!" It was clear from the convention as a whole that vocal improvisation is very much alive and well.

Even the PA systems — and I know that I complain a great deal about the generally poor standards of all too many systems — were superb as set up and operated by Big Dudes Music City.

And, finally, I heard more words from Tommy Newsome in ten minutes than I have ever heard in ten years of the *Tonight Show*.

No complaints, then, and much good feeling about the contribution of Manhattan and its residents to the world of jazz.