

The Telegraph of Calcutta

March 22, 1996

Shortly after the concert at Kala Mandir, a member of the audience commented that it had made her want to sit around with friends, just unwinding and being together. She had a point, for the performers had just demonstrated how vital forces are released by doing things together in unison and harmony.

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Performance ensemble featured musicians of impressive skills and potential. Some of them have already played alongside accomplished greats at recording sessions — trombonist Jamal Haynes, for example, with Ron Carter, and trumpeter Darren Barrett with Antonio Hart. The rest undoubtedly will, and soon. All of them displayed their individual virtuosity, but more importantly, combined brilliantly to create the kind of "collective improvisation", as Wynton Marsalis called it in a recent interview, which is such an essential trait of jazz.

Then, of course, there was special guest Herbie Hancock. In recent years, perhaps, his name has been more readily associated with electric — and electronic — jazz. He has constantly experimented with non-traditional jazz sounds, and has attempted successfully to fuse jazz with rock, disco and even hip hop. Occasionally, however, he has come back to acoustic jazz, touring with Chick Corea on all-acoustic sets and mak-

ing albums like *VSOP* and, more recently, a *Tribute to Miles*. It was this acoustic side of Hancock that the audience got a taste of.

The concert began with Hancock in a lengthy solo recital, with rippling linear runs that settled into an introspective, languid mood piece showcasing both his classicism and his feel for improvisations and shifting rhythms. It was mesmeric. What followed was exuberantly magical. Hancock introduced the members of the ensemble, and they exploded into action with *One Finger Snap*, a Hancock composition. Drummer Sean Thomas and bassman Keala Kaumahaiewa set up a super-charged rhythm and trumpeter Darren Barrett, guitarist Ofer Gaynor and then Hancock himself took rollicking solos before Thomas finished off with a flourish.

For the second piece, Helen Sung took over from Hancock at the piano as the ensemble glided smoothly into *Theme for Maxine*, a Woody Shaw composition which moved along in a dreamy, easy rhythm. Saxophonist Ignaz Dinne impressed with his mellow, restrained playing. Dinne, incidentally, had written the only original that the band performed, the ner-

How high Hancock

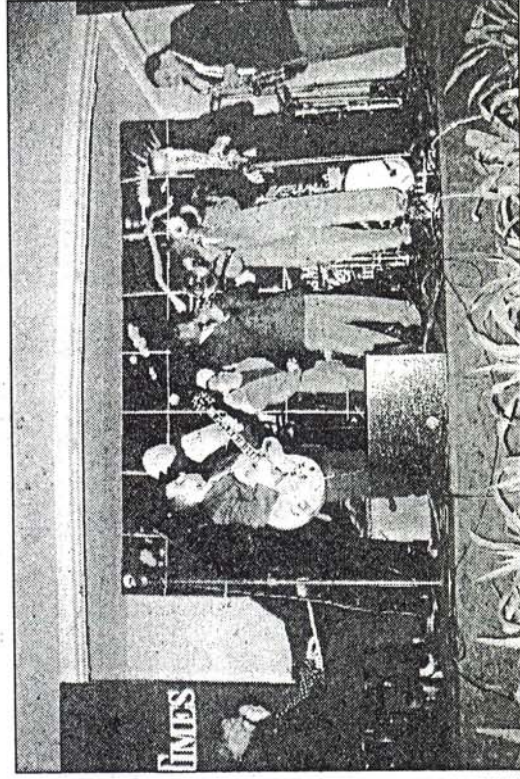
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viously energetic *First Step*, on which Dinne's staccato saxophone bursts and Barrett's frantic, feverish trumpet solo were particularly brilliant.

The first half concluded with

the Miles Davis creation *So What*. Percussionist Sean Thomas took over the parts normally played by the bass at the beginning, substituting these with deftly produced tones on the steel pan, a West Indian variant of the idiophone. Hancock, playing the piano on this set, had a frenetic solo, ably supported by Jamal Haynes, who had taken over on the drums.



A concert by the musicians of The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz
Performance: Doing things in unison and harmony

The second half began with a brisk reworking of Curtis Fuller's *Alamode*, but the band really soared with the next item: *Dolphin Dance*, a Hancock classic written during his days with the Miles Davis Quintet. Hancock's wistful piano introduction, Haynes' disconsolate trombone solo and Dinne's lyrical saxophone, topped by Thomas' crashing cymbal work — all this made it a memorable reworking of a modern standard.

The band climbed even higher with their swinging version of *Monk's Dream*, an uncharacteristically uncomplicated Thelonious Monk tune; but with the last number, Billy Strayhorn's classic *Take the A Train*, they really went beyond the stratosphere. Guitarist Gaynor supplied a scintillating little solo, and the three-piece wind section added a humorous train-whistle for good effect to leave the audience clamouring for more. For an encore, the ensemble did *Watermelon Man*, the third Hancock composition that evening. The simple, brilliant theme and the cheerful, relaxed rhythms have an infectious appeal that never fails. At the end of the show, sponsored by the USIS and *The Economic Times*, nobody seemed to mind that only one side of Hancock, the man they call the Chameleon of modern jazz, was displayed. Or perhaps what had been on view was so good that nothing else mattered.