

ARTS & Lifestyle

TOOTING Hub's horn

Despite Big Apple's appeal,
award-winning trumpeter
calls Boston home



Darren Barrett performing at the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition.
Herald photo by Amy Thompson

Music

By BOB YOUNG

If Wally's is more crowded than usual the next few weekends, blame trumpeter Darren Barrett.

The Roxbury resident, who performs at the Boston jazz club as often as he can, last Friday took the top prize in the prestigious Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition.

Besides winning \$20,000, Barrett quickly saw his world change. In short order, he made his network TV debut and heard from several record labels. Now he's being prodded to relocate to the Big Apple.

Not bad for a guy who had to be convinced to enter the competition at all.

Pushed by Boston friends to send in a tape of his playing, Barrett eventually relented and found himself one of 15 finalists being judged at the Washington, D.C., event by a Who's Who of jazz trumpet.

Art Farmer, Jon Faddis, Clark Terry, Arturo Sandoval,

Randy Brecker and Wallace Roney gave Barrett first prize, Diego Urcola of Manhattan second and Berklee College of Music undergraduate Avishai Cohen third.

"I thought long and hard about it," Barrett, 30, recalled. "I wanted to go out there and play the history of the instrument. Ron Carter taught me about that."

From 1993 to 1995, bassist Carter was a mentor to Barrett at the New England Conservatory, where the trumpeter was part of the first class admitted to the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. Barrett applied his real-life lessons well during last weekend's competition.

"I made it to the finals and it was even scarier (than the semifinals), because I got to hear the four other cats in it and they were killin'," Barrett said. "And I had to play last."

Backed by the stellar rhythm section of drummer Brian Blade, pianist Eric Reed and bassist Roxbey Whitaker, he performed "Sweet Lorraine," Monk's "Raise

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Four" and an original. Yet it was clearly more than his sleek playing that captured the judge's attention.

"I went out there to entertain," he said. "Cats were going out there blazing and I said to myself, 'Man, I'm going to go out there and put on a show, the way Louis Armstrong would put on a show.'"

"It's not only how great you play. People want to feel close to you. They want to feel that they know you or can get to know you by the end of the performance. I felt that by the end of my perfor-

mance, they were able to know a bit of my personality."

Carl Atkins, program director at NEC's Monk Institute, wasn't surprised to hear that Barrett nabbed the award.

"We certainly like to think that while he was here we helped him get to a place in his playing where he's ready to compete at that level and be successful," Atkins said. "I'm proud as punch of Darren and I'm happy for the program."

Barrett, who graduated from Berklee College of Music in 1990 and earned a master's degree from Queens College before moving back

to the Hub in '95, said that he isn't tempted by the offers to relocate to New York. He plans to continue using Boston as his base of operations for his new gig as a member of alto man Jackie McLean's quintet.

"People are sleeping on Boston," he said. "They don't realize the musicians who are here. They're going to go out and be the next scene."

"I can play Wally's anytime I want. For where I'm trying to get to in terms of my musical growth, Boston is the place for me. I love Boston because I can really, really work my stuff out here."