
March 8, 2007

MUSIC REVIEW | KENNY WERNER ALL-STAR QUINTET

Yep, That's Quite a Band, but Its Days Are Numbered

By [BEN RATLIFF](#)

Occasionally you hear jazz performed that's so detailed, chiseled and compressed with energy that it's hard to imagine the musicians doing it twice a night, six nights in a row. Such is the case with the pianist Kenny Werner's quintet at Dizzy's Club this week.

Mr. Werner's career has been all over the place for 25 years: a long-running trio that never quite rose above the hedges, long-standing gigs with the harmonica player Toots Thielemans and the singer [Betty Buckley](#). He is a radical melodic improviser and a strong, logical organizer of rhythm and harmony. He processes a lot, all the time, and often produces music that's pleasant and easy on the outside, but rippling with incident: shifts in meter, tempo and tonality.

His quintet at Dizzy's includes Chris Potter on tenor saxophone, Nicholas Payton on trumpet, Hans Glawischnig on bass and Brian Blade on drums. The gig is a consequence of Mr. Werner's very good new album, "Lawn Chair Society," released this week on Blue Note. It isn't a working band; after this week it has no more dates on the calendar. Yet it was crazy how much it behaved like one, in the old-fashioned sense of steady comportment spread across consecutive solos, and the front line's strong connection to the rhythm section.

In the many recent eulogies for the saxophonist Michael Brecker, much was said about how hard it was to follow him after one of his solos, almanacs of jazz knockout gestures from the late 1950s to the present. Mr. Potter's solos were much like this: narrow and dense with passing tones and long, athletic strings of notes all over the horn, then suddenly wide open with meditative, smoky long tones.

Some of the brilliant moments of the set were contrasts of energy, either within a single solo, or between Mr. Potter's solos and Mr. Payton's, which were cool, supple, focused and inventive. In "New Amsterdam" everyone's strengths came together. It began with a broken funk pattern from the piano, and the horns ran harmonized chromatic lines through it. Suddenly it changed over to swing time, and Mr. Payton played through the switch without breaking stride. By the time Mr. Blade crashed his cymbal to signal the change in rhythm — in the middle of the measure, one of the ingenious delayed-gratification strategies he used throughout the set — Mr. Payton was off

and running. The crash forced a gasp from audience members, but they were probably already silently gasping a few beats before.

Continuing on, Mr. Payton used pointed, abrupt blues lines; he played rising and falling patterns, the phrases balancing precariously on the rhythm; then he handsomely wrapped up his solo, with melodic improvising. When his turn came, Mr. Werner played with great force and velocity, pushing out abstract gushers with a steely touch, then sequences of easy swing.

Given some time a band like this could transform into something extraordinary; it could achieve the more modern working-band feeling of freedom within mere suggestions of external structure. And it wouldn't be short on original material, since Mr. Werner's tunes range from Wayne Shorter-like deep-harmony miniatures to meditative, tolling pieces anchored by open left-hand chords to post-bop mazes. Keep your fingers crossed.

The Kenny Werner All-Star Quintet continues through Sunday night at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Rose Hall, 60th Street and Broadway, (212) 258-9595 or jalc.org.

[Copyright 2007 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
