

Tim Armacost Quartet

April 9th at Vanessie's

Exciting. Exuberant. Powerful. Real. These are just a few of the words that come to mind after seeing and experiencing the Tim Armacost all star quartet Friday night (April 9th) at a full Vanessie's Bar. The Friends of Santa Fe Jazz hit a home run by presenting this less than well known sax and flute man, but everybody there that night will need no further introduction to this versatile player and composer. Tim, a former student at the Berklee School of music in Boston, was warmly greeted by Mr. Lee Berk himself, then introduced by KSFR's Jazzman, John Greenspan. John has been a champion of Tim's music for years on his radio show and has opened many ears to Tim's CDs.

All the elements for a great jazz show were in place: the drive and swing of the players, the fine and engaging compositions of Mr. Armacost, and the good ears of the audience hungry to take it all in. Members of this band have played with Maria Schneider, Herbie Hancock, The Tonight Show Band, Karrin Allison, and many others. But none of that mattered in the here/hear and now of the actual show, because these were *our* guys now....they have come to play for us, and play they did.

The band consisted of Bruce Barth on piano, Kenny Davis on Bass, and the legendary Billy Hart behind the drums. All had their moments. But all the moments revolved around Tim's compositions, which offered a veritable playground for these fine musicians. The first tune featured Tim on soprano sax, in a mid-tempo number with long, easy lines to ease the listener in. Billy's polyrhythms accentuated the beat and added some cool counterpoint to the melody, as Bruce's head bopped his way through a forceful solo ending in Tim and Billy trading 8's. Bruce on piano sounded like a "strong" Bill Evans and he didn't hold back. This tune was called "I'm Happy Anyway" and had something to do with an airport in Japan. (There was a story for every tune, and it was nice to hear the "story behind the song".) Next up was "Nimble Pany", which started by merging elements of Indian raga-type music on Tim's Coltrane-like tenor, blowing long, sustained notes full of power and resonance. Somehow the tune evolved into a near Latin groove as Billy swung his heart out, and Kenny offered a muscular solo, as quick on the bass as I've ever seen. By now the audience knew they were in for more than an average jazz gig, and everything began to heat up. And this was a good audience- (and lucky as it turns out!). The next tune was a new composition called "Great Falls", only played once before. I guess Tim was feeling adventurous on this his first night of a ten-date tour, but this straight-ahead, up tempo number was a

real crowd pleaser. Billy was propelling the beat forward as the band wailed through the changes, everybody getting a chance to play out. And by out I don't mean "outside"; no one went too far out, in an avant guard, damn the key, full steam ahead manner. The players all respected the structure of the tunes, just took advantage of the freedom inherent in jazz and took it *out*, man. Tim was clearly pleased, hearing his songs played so artfully and with passion. Moving on the band slowed down a bit to provide soul food for the soul, "In a Sentimental Mood", with an extended head leading to an almost model treatment of the tune. Kenny played arco for the first time, filling the room with the dark richness only the big bass can provide. Then it was on to Herbie Hancock's "I Have a Dream", with Tim playing wonderfully on flute. Great tone. Again, solos by Bruce and Kenny were exciting, both players telling a story in the process. Tim then pulled out a 20 year old tine of his called "Pull" that romped in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, Tim on soprano and Bruce providing, again, a Bill Evans-like, two fisted approach to his solo. The tune had a bluesy element to it, which was perfect for Kenny strong and articulate solo. Of course, Billy got in there and ended the tune with some nice touches of his own that had the audience calling out for more...more of everything! But the show went long by Vanessie's standards, and the standing ovation was well deserved and heartfelt. Everybody had a smile on their face.

I know reviewers are not supposed to say "you should have been there", since it's our job to be your eyes and ears. But, if you weren't there, you did miss a great jazz performance, a roller coaster ride of music that had everybody's arms up ready for the big ride. Lee Berk summed it up with one word: "sizzling!" Amen.

By Michael Handler

(Mr. Handler acts as Operations Manager for the Friends of Santa Fe Jazz shows)