

Payton, Pelt & Hargrove: 3 (Sorta) Young Lions of the Jazz Trumpet

by Con Chapman

Jazz cares for its children; the “Young Lions” feature is a hardy perennial of those who write about the art, since new talents on the scene are, by their nature, news. Jazz does all right by its aged as well; at the point when it's not clear that a musician will be around for another swing through your town, you're more likely to go out to see him, and the career achievement awards and good-paying gigs with mainstream stars are more likely to fall in the path of such a senior citizen.



Jeremy Pelt

It's the middle-aged jazz musician who tends to get lost in the shuffle; no longer news, and not ready for the marble statue-treatment, the player in the summer of his career is just one among many entertainment options to choose from, and the audience for jazz being what it is, the volume of the public relations horn sounding his arrival in your town or a new CD will be faint.



Roy Hargrove

That's why it's a gratifying to report that three young, or at least fairly young trumpeters have, in their middle years, already assembled bodies of work that qualify them as journeymen in their union, and the prospects that they will rank as masters by the time they hear their last funeral parade are good.



Nicholas Payton

The granddaddy of the group at 41 is Roy Hargrove, a slight man with a big sound and a taste for experimentation that has led him to try his hands at standards, Afro-Cuban music and (with his eponymialed group, The RH Factor) a blend of hip-hop and funk. Recalling the days when jazz musicians recorded the popular music of the day and transformed Tin Pan Alley tunes into lively art, he even took a whack at Disney, and knocked him out of the park with "Beauty and the Beast". More than one reviewer praised it highly, and if you want to introduce your kids to America's classical music, it's the jazz equivalent of a sugar-coated lollipop with something to chew on at its core.



Nicholas Payton (r), with Doc Cheatham, who was old enough to be his great-grandfather

Next in line at 37 is Nicholas Payton, a New Orleans native whose tone has been described as “fat”, but as with wine terminology, the literal truth of that figurative expression may not reveal much to your ear's palate. Payton swings with New Orleans syncopation on “Gumbo Nouveau”, recorded when he was only 22, and he honored Louis Armstrong with “Dear Louis”, but his catalog also includes the experimental Sonic Trance, if you like that sort of thing. If my house were on fire and I could only choose one Payton title, however, it would be “Doc Cheatham and Nicholas Payton”, released in 1994, three years before Cheatham died at the age of 92 and Payton was only 21.



On the junior varsity squad is Jeremy Pelt, just thirty-four but already with a string of fine efforts to his name, including the lush “Close to My Heart” and his latest, “November”, which made Down Beat's “Best CD's of 2008” list.

All are living and playing among us, with new music to hear in person or at your local “record” store (how quaint) or internet connection. Don't let them get old and grey before you hear them.

