

Gerry Mulligan Is Blowing Strong

By Jon Hendricks

"What is real never ceaseth to be. What is unreal, never was."

So says the Bhagavad-Gita, and it defies human re-utation. Jazz music is real, and the musicians who play it will someday be regarded as the true cultural artists of America that they are, whether anybody digs it or not. History doesn't wait for opinions. It has opinions of its own.

Like all cultural art forms, jazz has its heroes, and Gerry Mulligan, baritone saxophonist, is one of them. The first time I ever saw him he was playing in the Apollo Bar on 125th Street in Harlem with Charlie Parker and a group including Tommy Potter on bass and Roy Haynes on drums. Gerry was blowing up a storm, and he's still doing it the only way he knows how: With warmth, sincerity, superb musicianship and love.

Opening Tuesday night at El Matador, he utilized what is easily one of the best rhythm sections in town; Larry Vuckovich on piano, Bob Maize, bass, and Benny Barth, drums, (my rhythm section). Being a creative artist, Gerry brought all new music with him, all of which he composed and arranged, and they were played with superb artistry all down the line.

Pianist Vuckovich has long held an enviable reputation as one of the best pianists on the scene, and his section mates, Bob Maize and Benny Barth, both have made excellent reputations for themselves.

The baritone saxophone doesn't seem to lend itself to being a solo instrument. Like the bass or the drums, it's generally considered to be a supportive instrument rather than a solo one, yet Gerry Mulligan has made it

into a solo instrument; perhaps more notably than anyone since Leo Parker and Serge Chaloff. It's a big horn, and you have to have a whole lot of air in you to blow it with any degree of authority. Gerry, long and lean as he has always been, put enough air in that horn to make a sound heard 'round the world.

His presence back on the night club scene is bound to bring smiles of delight to jazz club owners all over the world, just as Miles Davis' recent re-emergence did. With his hair grown to some

length and his beard back, Gerry looks like he used to, and what's even better, he's sounding like he used to — good.

Although he announced all the tunes together after he had played them (so that it remained a bit difficult to know which was which), they still had the Mulligan stamp of melodic inventiveness, harmonic beauty, and rhythmic intensity. A ballad which he played on piano, "Song For Strayhorn," was particularly moving, as well as illustrative of where Gerry's heart lies.

Gerry Mulligan is respectful of the music he spends his life playing, and that respect and the love that goes with it is what you hear when you listen to him.

With Ron Carter at Keystone Korner (to be reviewed later), and Gerry at El Matador, it's a musical feast that has been set before us this time around, and we ought not worry about over-indulging. It don't happen everyday. Gerry Mulligan always did make me feel good, and thank goodness, he's up to his old tricks.



GERRY MULLIGAN
Back in the clubs