

Bennington College Weekend Shows Off New Sounds of Jazz

By LISA TATE

NORTH BENNINGTON — Unlikely. A dozen jazzmen leaving New York this past weekend to find their long way to an isolated college campus in Vermont. Bennington College, unused to jazz, despite the fact that its otherworldly Carriage Barn, wooden and red, has reverberated many times to the sounds of contemporary music. "Serious" music some have called it, though men like Cecil Taylor and LeRoi Jones took exception to that phrase this past weekend by saying it could as well and better be called "silly" music; that way you might destroy the semantic social concept the word "serious" implies and take jazz out of the entertainment slot, admitting its existence as a way of life, a dead-serious way, known only to those who live in a particular Negro community with the particular social and economic concerns that set it apart from the white men's society.

Unlikely that a dozen musicians could reach any agreement. Words flew, music happened, bodies moved, minds worked and the most important thing about jazz to emerge and then evaporate was its very elusiveness. It

seemed well in hand with the playing of blues, bossa nova, and 'Round Midnight by the Billy Taylor Trio on Friday night. The piano was bright and bold, with Dave Bailey and Ben Tucker providing background on drums and bass.

As the Taylor men were leaving on Saturday, Hall Overton arrived with Teddy Charles (vibes), John Beal (bass) and Steve Butler (drums) in tow. They did a tea-time improvisation in the sun-shafted Carriage Barn like anything but tea. Overton was less of a flash on the keys than Billy Taylor, but he set his group up for some good moments where the music moved, creating itself as it went along. Great sounds from John Beal's bass, imaginative harmonies on the piano, plasticity on the vibraphone. Thelonius Monk figured strongly despite his absence, especially in the concluding number, Trinkle Tinkle, written by him.

By that time Cecil Taylor had arrived, and with him Andrew Cyrille and his drums, Jimmy Lyons and his tenor sax, Henry Grimes and his bass, but they saved their fire for the next day. Martin Williams said in a panel

discussion on Sunday morning that if you wanted to know about the shape of jazz to come, all you had to do was to "hear Cecil." He got heard, verbally and otherwise, but it would be hard to say that any "shape" was apparent . . . unless fury and furiousness have a shape. Cecil and what could be heard of his players tore down any preconceived or audible limits of sound and its organization, maybe paving the way for someone else somewhere else to create a something new which may or may not get called jazz . . . or even music for that matter. It made Teo Macero's music for a new dance by Anna Sokolow, "Quest" which got a first performance in the College's theatre Saturday night, sound pretty fragile by comparison, though the dancing itself was exquisitely done.

What comes out of a Jazz Weekend in the country? Not necessarily jazz, which has a way of hovering into sight and then disappearing into the silence, with only a faint inner throb of the beat to remind us what it was like. Not necessarily knowledge or understanding or agreement that might satisfy the mind's hunger. Whatever happened was first felt, then maybe heard or understood by those who can hear and understand. But feeling hit everyone who followed the weekend through its slow moments and fast, its bitters and sweets, its warm-ups, its take-offs, its groundings.

You could feel the differences that divide us from each other, that divide the performer from the audience, that divide one jazz group from each other, that divide one player from another. You could feel the bonds that tie us together, some of them uncomfortable, that allow us and sometimes force us by the fact of being what we are to make things happen.

The most urgent feeling was the instinctive recognition that differences are real but that something — not necessarily a beautiful something — stirs and grows when our whole being leaves itself open to that particular form of expression called jazz.

When all is said and done, we are all improvisers.