

REVIEW

Trombonist Gordon takes stylish charge

Jazz Orchestra's guest artist displays impressive technique and multi-instrumental skill.

By **LIBBY HANSSEN** Special to The Star

The Kansas City Jazz Orchestra took the opportunity in its "T-Bone Sizzle" concert Friday night to feature not only guest artist Wycliffe Gordon, a trombonist and composer, but also its entire trombone section. Led by artistic director Clint Ashlock, they treated the crowd in Helzberg Hall to a performance of swinging, straight-ahead tunes and Gordon's original compositions.

The orchestra began both sets by highlighting the trombonists. Earlie Braggs opened a fluid solo over Thad Jones' "Tip Toe," following crisp saxophones. On Johnny Mandel's ballad "Emily," Jeff Hamer intoned the melody, switching to a looser feel with tight turns when the tune turned up-tempo.

Bass trombonist Paul Roberts wrote his feature piece, "Mr. Mean," dedicated to valve trombonist, arranger and Kansas City native Bob Brookmeyer, and used the low end of the horn, initially playing on pedal tones. Steve Dekker brought a warm, smooth tone and lighter approach to John Fedchock's arrangement of Thelonious Monk's "Ruby, My Dear."

When Gordon came onstage, though, he not only took the limelight, he took over the band. He started out with "The Woogie" on a brightly toned solo of smears and growls with boogie-woogie action from pianist Charles Williams.

Gordon's solos exhibited the range of effects available on the trombone and a determination to flaunt these somewhat unfamiliar sounds by incorporating them into musical ideas with ease. He used jabbering doodle-tonguing and raspy flutter-tonguing, a wide, blaring vibrato and singing into the horn to create multiphonic overtones, all with impressive range and flexibility.

He also displayed his multifarious instrumental skills. He played trumpet and sang with a throaty, emulative timbre in "Hello, Pops," a tribute piece to Louis Armstrong with dance hall energy and endearing lyrics. Using a pixie mute and plunger to create vocal-like effects on tenor trombone, he nearly imitated speech in a bluesy "Somebody New." And he played a brash soprano trombone for Sonny Rollins' "Oleo."

Gordon spoke/sang the gospel-tinged "What You Dealin' With" over a funky backbeat by drummer Tim Cambron, the band's shout-outs encouraging guitarist Rod Fleeman's solo. He also coerced Ash-lock to trade scat-singing choruses on "Hallelujah Shout."

The descriptively titled blues "Grease Bucket" featured the rhythm section in an impressive and deceptive pianissimo, before a startling forte hit from the horns.

An impassioned Williams joined Gordon on his vocalistic encore of Thomas A. Dorsey's spiritual "Precious Lord, Take My Hand," as a beautiful, pensive coda.