

Vibraphone: Elliott Plays Favorites By Yip Harburg

DON ELLIOTT, who divides his playing time between vibraphone and mellowphone (and sometimes plays a few bars on both together), had the death of E. Y. (Yip) Harburg on his mind while his jazz quartet was playing over the weekend at Bechet's, Third Avenue near 75th Street, where the group continues through next Sunday.

It was a rewarding preoccupation because songs for which Mr. Harburg wrote lyrics — "Over the Rainbow," "Only a Paper Moon," "April in Paris" — provided Mr. Elliott with particularly good material for the rich and warmly singing tone he gets from his mellowphone and the surprisingly dark and mellow sound of his vibes. They served as contrast to the close, swinging drive that his group — Mike Abene, piano; Steve Lespina, bass, and Mike DePasqua, drums — developed on other pieces.

Mr. Abene's spider-fingered crawls across the keys gave the ensemble playing an interestingly edgy tone but his solos were in a completely different mood. Playing one solo piece in each set, Mr. Abene, like Mr. Elliott, had one composer on his mind — Billy Strayhorn. The pastel colors and the softly simmering sounds that Duke Ellington and his musicians brought to Mr. Strayhorn's "Passion Flower" and "After All" were transformed by Mr. Abene to a piano style that was a fascinatingly personalized distillation of Johnny Hodges, Mr. Ellington and the whole Ellington milieu.

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