

EXPRESS

■ The East Bay's Free Weekly

■ July 16, 1999 ■ Volume 21, No. 41

JAZZ

ANTON SCHWARTZ QUARTET

At the Jazzschool, Sunday, July 11

The late Sunday afternoon summer sun poured into the Shattuck Avenue front window of La Note Cafe, which serves as the performance space for the Jazzschool upstairs, as tenor saxophonist Anton Schwartz kicked off "Gingerbread Boy" at a searing tempo. A graceful improviser at any tempo, Schwartz surged through Jimmy Heath's classic blues, taming the tune's jagged lines and handling tricky intervals with aplomb. In many ways it was a characteristic performance, as Schwartz is a player who always seems in control. His music is marked by emotional balance and a self-confident narrative drive. The title of his original piece "Poketown," a wonderfully loping tune with an almost singsong melodic line, derives from a nickname a friend tagged him with for his deliberate style.

With the flexible drummer Jason Lewis and superb pianist Paul Nagel, Schwartz brought two thirds of the rhythm section from his excellent debut album, *When Music Calls*, on Antonjazz. East Bay bassist Michael Silverman displayed a big sound and propulsive rhythmic feel. Usually heard with his band Fabulous Hedgehogs or as multi-instrumentalist wonder That One Guy, Silverman provided an effective, rough-hewn counterpoint to Nagel

and Lewis' polished accompaniment. Nagel was particularly eloquent on Schwartz's gorgeous new ballad, "Then Again," taking a lovely, gospel-tinged solo.

In both his tunes and his playing, Schwartz makes a strong case for the continuing vitality of the mainstream jazz tradition. While it's easy to hear the influence of Joe Henderson, Dexter Gordon, and Stanley Turrentine, he's not attempting to recreate anyone else's sound. When he tackles an oft-played standard, such as Sonny Rollins' "Doxy," he gives it a distinctive spin. With Lewis laying down a light backbeat, Schwartz turned the classic 16-bar blues-based theme into a funky delight. Bud Burrige, a fine New York trumpeter, sat in on Schwartz's New Orleans funk workout "Alligator Strut," a bright, pulsing blues line that ended that set with a graceful arc as it echoed Heath's *Gingerbread Boy*. Based in Daly City, Schwartz has become one of the busier players in the Bay Area since absconding from Stanford after completing all the course work in an artificial intelligence PhD program. Sure, his grad school buddies are probably driving up Bay Area real estate prices as you read this, but they probably don't have half the fun that Schwartz does when he locks into a Crescent City groove.

-Andrew Gilbert