

Red-hot Hargrove

BackBeat
with Cornelius Thomas

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RED-HOT: Trumpeter Roy Hargrove in a mellow mood.

VICTORIA JUNCTION Hotel, Greenpoint. The early April night was turning from navy blue to deep grey. And still he was blowing hot. Really hot. Trumpeter Roy Hargrove.

Still the audience, who had at 03h00 hastened over from the North Sea Jazz Festival in Cape Town's Good Hope Centre, allowed themselves to be suspended by his notes.

The young man, now 31, had brought the magic of jazz to its aboriginal African shores and he played tunes from his then forthcoming album, *Roy Hargrove with Strings*.

On the built-in bench to his right sat Gerald Cannon, the biggest, baddest bassist from Chicago country, plucking the stand-up in a trance.

Cannon, famous for his Grant Park appearances and sessions with all the top jazz musicians in the world, had also earlier that night played with Johnny Griffin and Hargrove.

By mid-1999 Hargrove, who started out as a high school prodigy 10 years before, already had six major albums to his credit, including *Crisol Habana*, *Approaching*

Standards and Tenors of Our Time. But he got restless and struck out for the US West Coast, destination Big Sur.

He had fallen in love with that rugged coast which, jutting into the Pacific, had inspired beatnik Jack Kerouac, Beach Boy Al Jardine, Jim Morrison, and every free spirit who had travelled there to see a glimpse of forever.

In 1997 at a live outdoor performance at the Esalen Institute, the stage of which is set on a high cliff overlooking the Pacific, Hargrove observed: "What is this place. I love playing here."

October last year, with autumn settling down over Big Sur, the young man with the trumpet and flugelhorn gathered his core of backup musicians, including Cannon, and hired the 17-member Monterey Jazz Festival Chamber Orchestra.

In a rare experiment of reeds meeting strings, Hargrove then produced *Hargrove with Strings*.

Although one of the great improvisers of 1990s jazz, Hargrove loves standards and "pretty songs" also.

And so the experiment made Pat Metheny's *Always and Forever*

over into a waltz in 4/4 time; rhapsodised Henry Mancini's complex *Moment to Moment*; and improvised Jimmy Dorsey's *I'm Glad There is You* into a light dance mode with a power-ending.

Cannon's composition *Peri* also features strongly — with the big guy swooping solos with saxophonist Sherman Irby and Hargrove himself.

While only one Hargrove original features on the album, he holds the whole together, and it bears his unmistakable stamp — the reeds prevailed, and the standards were delightful.

Hargrove with Strings puts period to the 1990s revisitation of the standards but also leaves a space serving as an entrance to 21st century jazz experimentation.

When he played at the Junction that night in April he showed the mostly male listeners how to approach standards, until their hearts hung out, and until the wives and girlfriends hooted outside.

Those who had not been lucky enough to be there, however, will always have *Hargrove with Strings*.