

Julius Wechter Quartet

Personnel: Julius Wechter (vibes), Cy Colley (alto), Jim Bates (bass), and Frank Divito (drums).

Items: "Trousseau" (arranged by Wechter), "Autumn Leaves," "Love Letters," and "My Melancholy Baby" (the last three arranged by Colley).

THE 21-year-old vibist Wechter led a quartet that won an annual Light-house College Jazz contest while he was majoring in music, studying harmony, counterpoint and arranging at Los Angeles City College. Colley was part of the unit and the two have continued to collaborate since. The instrumentation of the group (no piano) stems from Julius's ideas about the inhibiting effect of block piano chords on freedom-loving soloists. He thinks of the vibes not as a substitute for the piano but as another linear horn.

There is no piano, says Wechter, because "we found that a much more liberated feeling can be attained by not being held down to chords. Not that the chords aren't there, but it's a matter of feeling or suggesting them rather than actually hearing them. The use of contrapuntal lines and basic chordal notes becomes a major part of our accompaniment. A group of this type needs a very unified feeling and understanding, and each man is individually essential." Bassist Bates and drummer Divito supply a dependable, tasteful background with Bates's melodic bass lines practically creating a third solo instrument.

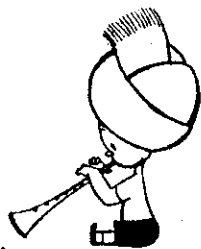
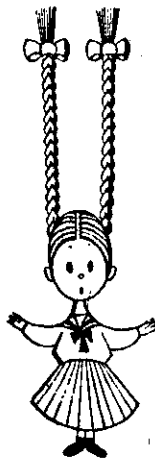
The texture of the quartet is light without being brittle and interplay between Wechter and Colley is flowing and sensitive. Wechter is a promising vibraphonist and should develop into an individualist of some note. Colley displays the Paul Desmond influence and blows with a silvery tone that is lyrically attractive.

Funnily enough, you don't miss the piano in "Trousseau" or "Baby," but the other two items are not quite so suitable for this instrumentation. This is particularly so in the first chorus of "Letters," where the bassist is playing only one beat to the bar. Things improve when the bass changes over to a lifting four to the bar with the drums in attendance.

The most attractive number in the programme is "Trousseau," an up-tempo original with an appealing melodic line. Colley's alto is beautifully light and easy on the ear, while the vibe backing is intelligently and thoughtfully performed, one instrument complementing the other.

Listen, especially to the opening chorus of "Baby." Vibes and bass start things off and have played several bars before Divito adds his beat to the group; Colley leaves his entrance until later again.

The whole musical approach of this quartet reflects the serious study of each member, and although the newness of the names will probably mean a smaller listening audience, make a point of tuning into this



(C) Punch

session—it is really worth your while. **First Playing:** Station 2YA, June 24, 10.30 p.m.

The Billy Usselson Sextet

Personnel: Usselson (tenor), Burgess (trombone), Moer (piano), Aaron (bass clarinet), Clark/Pollan (bass) and Capp/Morales/Bunker (drums).

Programme to be chosen from: "Coquette," "Dinah," "Tangerine," "Smokey," "Margot," "Liza," "Annabelle Lee," "Delilah," "Cleone," "Jill," "Georgia," "Sweet Sue."

This is "polite jazz" of the partially arranged, partially ad lib style. For some reason or other the music of this group means nothing to me at all, and I think its main fault lies in the arrangements. All the instrumentalists have good musical backgrounds and I feel sure have felt more at home in other settings.

Usselson is a swinging tenor man with fresh ideas and a light and liquid style which is deceptively assertive. Trombonist Bob Burgess was one of the more forceful trombonists in Stan Kenton's band of a few years back. Pianist Paul Moer has starred with Stan Getz and Zoot Sims. These three musicians and most of the others are fellow sidemen in the Les Brown band, but on this date do not play in the Brown tradition. Yes, there are traces of the Brown influence here, but not the personality and drive.

Perhaps the worst track of all is "Dinah." I have never known the girl treated like this before, and I don't want to again. The tune is buried from the start in a mass of "technicolour background-movie" sounds, and to make matters even worse, is played at a tempo that drags everything down with it. Maybe the arranger was carried away with the idea of using the bass clarinet and counterpoint. I don't know. The strange thing is that Paul Moer who arranged "Dinah" also arranged "Liza," "Jill" and "Delilah," all of which are amongst the best on the date. Jerry Fielding's three do not appeal. They are "Coquette," "Margot" and "Cleone."

Med Flory arranged the remaining five, of which "Tangerine" (a lovely melody anyway) and "Annabelle Lee" stand out as swinging performances.

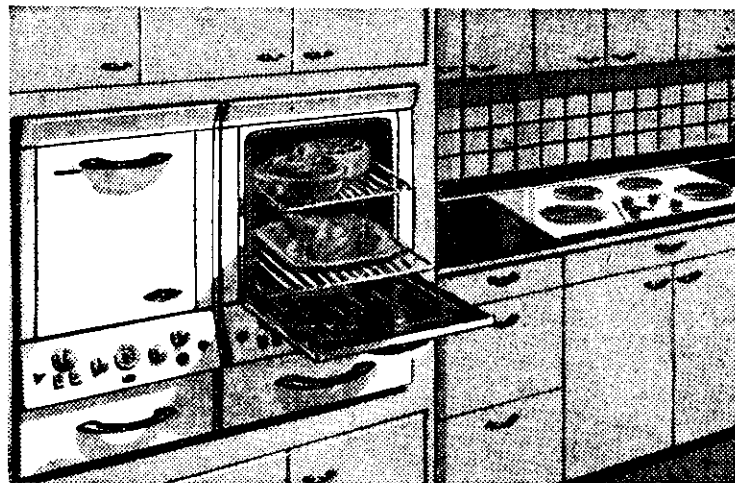
From the 12 tracks I would choose "Liza" as the best. Moer spots his own fleet piano in the arrangement, as well as some tasteful key changes, and the whole thing is sent swinging along by Frank Capp's drums.

I am quite sure that Usselson and his group are capable of better work (I would suggest a "jam" session where they can all blow), and with that idea in mind I shall look forward to his second album. As for his first, from which this session is taken, I can only suggest it be used for background purposes to some of the breakfast session commercials.

First Playing: Station 2YA, June 17, 10.30 p.m.

—Ray Harris

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