Jazz... Burton Quartet impresses with rock-influenced jazz

By Mark Wilson

DINNER BY the Gary Burton Quartet: Gary Burton, vibes; Larry Coryell, guitar; Dave Swallow, bass; Roy Haynes, drums.

If you’re not distracted by the long hair, some really exciting music can be heard from the Gary Burton Quartet. The Quartet is a somewhat renegade group due to Burton’s and Coryell’s looks as well as so their personal brand of music. The sounds these men lay down can best be described as rock-influenced jazz.

With the recent upgrading of the musical quality of rock and roll groups (Jefferson Airplane, Beatles, Mothers) many jazzmen and jazz critics have brought up the possibility of a future rock-jazz musical fusion. It is yet to be determined whether such a merging would benefit either jazz or rock. Only a few articles have been successful in the mixing of the two musics. Among the prominent have been Gabor Szabo, Charles Lloyd, and the Burton group. Burton himself says, “I would prefer not to have our music classified as jazz, rock or any thing. It has a variety of elements in it, the most important being improvisation.”

By looking at their back-ground it is easy to see how the group has reached its present attitude towards the making of the music. Burton has worked with such conventional jazzmen as George Russell and Russ Gerts. He has created a brand new voice on the vibes, an instrument that usually evokes the artist’s identity. Larry Coryell’s guitar work shows the influence of his native Texas, and reflects his further education in the blues in Seattle. Finally, in New York in 1966 he helped form a forward looking rock group called the Free Spirits. Early in 1967 he joined Burton’s group. Even though Coryell is only 24, his individual approach to jazz guitar has caused many of the older, more conventional musicians to sit up and take notice.

Dave Swallow, though conservative in dress, is with it in spirit. His bass playing is versatile and powerful. He and Burton contribute most of the originality performed by the group.

One of the great modern innovators on the drums is Roy Haynes. His perfection of a new approach to percussion has attracted him as disciples such modern giants as Elvin Jones and Tony Williams. Along with a considerable jazz structure Haynes adds a sensitive, always propelling backing for the group.

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