**THE ARTS**

### 21-year-old Fringe still plays on frontiers of jazz

**BY DAVE FOX**

Local jazz trio the Fringe, giants of the Boston jazz scene, celebrated their Twenty-first anniversary with a pair of performances at the Willow Jazz Club in Somerville this past weekend. As you might expect after twenty-one years, the Fringe's individual members are so aware of each other's playing that their music is extra-ordinarily cohesive, even in the midst of a three-way improvisation, and they always have something new to say with their music.

Consisting of saxophonist George Garzone, bassist John Lockwood, and drummer Bob Gullotti, the Fringe concentrate on making music at the absolute frontiers of jazz. Specifically, they do not play standards or pre-composed "tunes"; rather, one member will begin playing, and the others will join in with their own interpretations of the prevailing mood. The lack of a piano, guitar, or any other "chord" instrument opens up the tonal possibilities immensely, and the formidable technique of each of these musicians allows them to exploit this freedom to an amazing degree.

Garzone, who plays tenor and soprano saxes, is what I would term a "saxophone player's saxophonist." He divides his time between teaching at the Berklee College of Music, collaborating with such artists as John Patitucci, Bill Evans, Joe Lovano, and Dave Liebman, and maintaining an imposing presence on the Boston jazz scene with the Fringe and other groups. In spite of his towering achievements, Garzone remains open and friendly to his students, his admirers, and aspiring musicians.

John Lockwood and Bob Gullotti are equally accomplished musicians. Lockwood, has played and recorded with such diverse artists as Nick Brignola, Pharoah Sanders, Freddie Hubbard, and Sonny Stitt. His bass playing focuses on the "core" of the music, rather than the surface, allowing him to adapt to different musical styles and settings. Similarly, Gullotti approaches the drums with a great deal of emotion, allowing him to weave a perfectly appropriate percussive background behind the two treble instrumentalists no matter where the music leads them, and also allowing him to perform dramatic drum solos. He has played and recorded with a wide variety of artists, including Jerry Bergonzi, Richard Beirach, Steve Turre, and Miroslav Vitous.

When Garzone, Lockwood, and Gullotti get together as the Fringe, intense, thought-provoking music is the guaranteed result. Friday evening was a case in point. The Fringe opened with a thirty-minute piece, which Garzone began on soprano sax with Gullotti adding cymbal solos. Garzone's playing was flawless as he let the music flow, from sort of somber to rather lively. At the appropriate point in the music, Lockwood entered with an undersized bass line. By this point, Garzone had already dazzled the sax players in the audience (including yours truly) with highly technical solos, allowing him to adapt perfectly in tune (often not the case with many upright bass players), and used the entire length of the fingerboard, isolating, resonating strings of jumps of more than an octave. This was truly magnificent bass playing of a sort not often heard.

Lockwood's bass solo gave way to a wonderful drum solo by Gullotti, using brushes. He put a lot of energy into the solo, using the brushes in a very rapid manner. This put the crowd on edge, and led by the big explosion at the solo's completion. At this point, Garzone and Lockwood joined simultaneously, and the trio gradually resolved the piece into a sort of coordinated jazz hook, alternating with more free sections. This further resolved into the ending of the piece.

The music continued in this fashion throughout the evening, covering many music styles, depending on the audience's mood, but always keeping the audience in the palm of its hand. The trio went on for several minutes, reflecting each other's playing that their music is extra-ordinary, and so one by one they all went out into the street. When the Fringe emerged from the room, Garzone commented, "They've taken the audience in the street (at 12:30 a.m.). Of course, everyone filled back into the club, and the Fringe concluded the piece with some humorous kinks. The laughter in the crowd was overwhelming, and it was rewarding to see the true nature of this incident (borderline almost on performance art!).

As Garzone, Lockwood, and Gullotti have been yet another type of cutout edge jazz appropriate to their own musical styles, and to the audience's appreciation of their music. This is not for everyone, but to true lovers of jazz, they are a treasure. As Garzone has said, the Fringe is a must-bear trio. Fortunately for Boston jazz fans, the Fringe hold forth at the Willow Jazz Club every Wednesday night. They are absolutely worth hearing.