

Jazz organist doesn't mind second billing

By JIM WINDELL

When Lyman Woodard is at the organ, it's Motor City groovin' organ time. That means solid blues, foot-stomping, rocking jazz. And it usually means standing room only.

Surrounded by a tight sounding band called the Lyman Woodard Organization, Woodard is a successful Detroit Jazz artist. With a hot selling album in the local record stores, the Lyman Woodard Organization has reached a large number of the jazz and modern music public in the metro area.

But, the ironic thing is that at 8 p.m. Friday night the Lyman Woodard Organization will be appearing at the Royal Oak Music Theatre for the first time. While other bands have opened for name acts, Lyman Woodard, playing around Detroit for some 16 years,

has been shut out.

Woodard remains philosophical about this and he doesn't even mind opening for a musician several years younger than himself. "He's the big act," he says referring to Jeff Lorber and the Jeff Lorber Fusion. "I'm the local boy."

Organist Woodard is the local boy, originally from Orono, who has led one of the most powerful jazz and bebop musical organizations in town. For a good number of years he has called his band the Lyman Woodard Organization and through it has passed some of the best Detroit talent.

review

PLAYING AT VARIOUS clubs around the city for the last couple of years, Woodard has been a fixture at a friendly, swinging Cobb's Corner in the Cass Corridor. There, he recorded a live album on January 26, 1979.

Called "Don't Stop The Groove," it was released in a sheeshing by Woodard himself in August of last year. Combining a big band drive, a disco influence and a danceable, insistent beat, the music is an appealing combination of jazz and pop that has gone over well with metro audiences.

"It's done great," Woodard enthused recently. "I've gotten a very good response in the stores and at local clubs where I've played it's sold well." So well in fact that all 2,500 of the first pressing copies have been sold and he is now preparing for a second pressing.

The record was not cut in a studio under ideal recording conditions, but live in a crowded Cobb's Corner. "I tried to do it as we would in a studio. When a tune didn't sound right or the tempo wasn't right, I would stop it and start over. That was bothering my engineer that night."

THE ENGINEER FOR this unique recording session was sitting outside in a van. "He was outside and concerned that the audience would get uptight about stopping and then not respond to the music. But, no way. The people were into the music." That fact is evident by the response of the crowd on the recording and in the great music produced in just a few hours in one night's recording session.

Woodard, in trying to account for the success of his second album (his first

was "Saturday Night Special" released in 1975 by Detroit's musician-owned Strata Records label), says that the sound is "oriented to what a cross-section of people can enjoy."

His background, varied as it is, makes him especially qualified to be able to play what people can appreciate. Early in his musical career he studied with Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown at the Advanced School of Contemporary Music in Toronto. After being flipped out by the sound of Jimmy Smith's organ, he purchased his own portable Hammond organ and began carting it around to various gigs in Flint, Jackson, Lansing and Detroit.

MIGRATING TO DETROIT finally in the early '60s, he worked the Frolic Lounge, directed the Workshop Music Ensemble at the Artist's Workshop, led

a constantly changing orchestra at the Wisdom Tooth on Plum Street and spent some time on the road as musical director for Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, the Undisputed Truth and Eighth Day.

His present organization includes Allan Barnes on tenor sax, Kerry Campbell on alto sax, Robert Lowe on guitar and Andrew Gibson on drums. Woodard said that at the Royal Oak Music Theatre he plans to highlight the tunes from his album in his 45-minute set to open the show.

If his club performances are any indication, however, the audience at the Royal Oak will never let him get away that easily or quickly. His powerful formula of classic rhythm and blues with a generous helping of today's modern disco sounds makes for the kind of excitement that audiences want more of.



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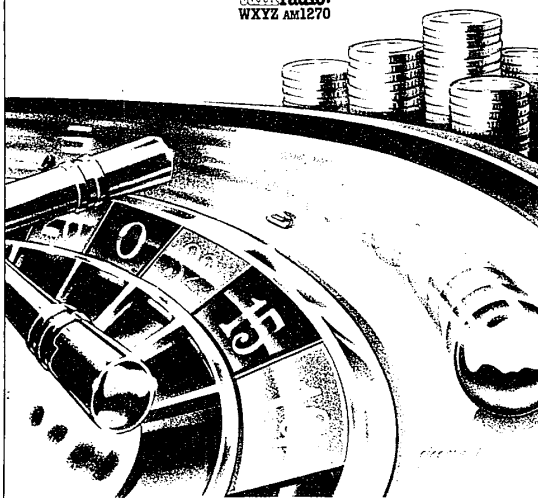
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