

Jazz violinists band concert blends excitement

By JIM WINDELL

Noel Pointer's concert on Sunday afternoon was an hour late to start. But it was a placid group of fans who stood in the autumn sun outside the Detroit Institute of Arts on John R. patiently waiting for the doors to open.

The unexplained delay did not in-

terfere with Pointer's second annual performance at the art museum's auditorium, an intimate setting that allows more closeness between artist and audience than some of the bigger concert halls around Detroit.

This concert was billed as an "Autumn Rhapsody" by the promoters, a group of businessmen who call them-

selves the Detroit Cultural Ensemble. Not a bad description of Pointer's music, if the definition of rhapsody is used that emphasizes the irregular form and the improvisational nature of his exciting blend of rock, jazz and disco.

Noel Pointer is one of jazz and pop music's premiere violinists as well as a versatile artist. He started out studying the violin as a fourth grader, and by the time he was 13 was appearing with symphony orchestras.

By age 18 he and one of his compositions were featured in a Detroit Symphony Orchestra tour.

HIS INITIAL CONCERT appearances were as accompanist to such diverse acts as The Jackson Five, Barry White, The Stylistics, Jon Lucien, Randy Newman, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Aretha Franklin.

Pointer recorded his first record under his own name two years ago, and "Feel It" his third LP, is a best seller on the jazz lists across the country.

Now fronting his own jazz-rock fusion band, Pointer is a strong violinist, bandleader and composer. Not only does he lead the sextet that is traveling with him on his present national concert and promotional tour, but he has written many of the tunes the band performs.

That, by the way, is not the end of his versatility. He appeared last year as actor and violinist in Joseph Papp's production of "The Cherry Orchard" for the New York Shakespeare Theatre, and he is writing a book about the history of black violinists.

Unlike other contemporary violinists, Pointer is not strictly an instrumental musician. Nor does he always stay with the violin. This concert began with Pointer, a baby spot on his head, at the acoustic piano singing a poetic short song in a voice that is surprisingly much higher than his speaking voice. He ended his 80-minute performance in the same way.

IN BETWEEN, the rock rhythms pulsatingly flowed along with little interruption. His classical background



NOEL POINTER

has little chance to peek through in this kind of situation, although his sure touch on the violin is always evident. Only at times, such as when he does a "Fiddler on the Roof" number does a certain amount of romanticism and sentimentality creep in.

Mixing songs from his three albums, Pointer could seemingly do no wrong in front of an enthusiastic sell-out crowd. His melodic sense of improvisation gets buried beneath a sea of electronics and percussion sometimes, but Pointer is properly restrained in allowing his sideman to share the solos.

His excellent group is composed of musicians that Pointer refers to as "people players." This means that they can play in public as well as in the studio. Their slashing, driving style seemed well suited to what Pointer wants to accomplish in his performances.

Daniel Mixon is on acoustic piano, and Crumar is a pounding frenetic piano player who takes long solos. The other keyboard player, John Anderson, is more delicate on electric keyboard.

Review

The rest of the group is Charles Ellerbe on guitar, Leonard Gibbs on percussion, William Johnson on drums and Larry McRae on bass guitar.

Despite its heavy disco flavor, "For You (A Disco Concerto)," written by Pointer, is an effective number with a soaring violin with echo effect. Pointer's tenor is pleasing and, almost falsetto when he sings, "There's a Feeling (When You Touch Me)," a tune his brother wrote the lyrics for.

THE BEST MOMENTS of this concert, Pointer's vocals while playing quietly at the piano ("There's a Feeling") and "Stardust Lady" were marred by an irritating hum of electricity from the amplification system.

Nevertheless, hums and an hour delay could not detract from the solid musicianship of the young Noel Pointer. Before the concert, 24-year-old Pointer said that his age has a lot to do with the music he plays.

"Rock is a part of my culture," he said. "So is disco. These are the kinds of music I've grown up with."

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Among the workshops which are available are: fabric painting, Barbra Carney; pierced lamp shades, Peggy Freeman; soft sculpture angel in needlepoint, Katie Curry; Swedish strawcraft, Mildred Webb; and Williamsburg holiday decorations, Pat Bentley.

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