

Jazz: Rare Nagaswaram

Charlie Mariano, one of the saxophone stars of Stan Kenton's orchestra in the 50's who has been living in Europe for the last six years, is making one of his infrequent visits to this country, playing with Mike Nock's trio at Sweet Basil, Seventh Avenue near Bleecker Street, through Saturday.

His primary instrument is now the soprano saxophone, which he plays with a big, open tone that falls somewhere in between the broad, expansiveness of the pioneer soprano saxophonist, Sidney Bechet, and the relatively tight, hard tone common to most current soprano saxophonists.

He also plays flute and alto saxophone, but the most provocative instrument in his arsenal is a nagaswaram, a long, primitive oboe. He started playing it 10 years ago in Malaysia, where, under the sponsorship of the United States Information Agency, he taught music to members of the State Radio Orchestra.

The nagaswaram produces a reedy wail, somewhat like a bagpipe, when Mr. Mariano plays a traditional Malaysian tune on it. But when Mr. Nock's trio joins in—Mr. Nock on synthesizer and Ron McClure on bowed bass playing unison lines with Mr. Mariano over Bob Moses' drum rhythms—the piece turns into a bright and lively dance laced with the exotic colors of the nagaswaram, dark, whooping melodic lines.

On other selections, playing soprano saxophone or flute, Mr. Mariano blends into the close-knit ensemble work of Mr. Nock's trio as though he had been playing with them regularly—actually, this is his first week with them. The arrangements are imaginative and exploratory. They are not simply a hook for a succession of solos, but solid foundations from which solos emerge as part of a developed overall structure rather than as self-contained entities.

JOHN S. WILSON

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