

Gil Lewis Trio Wails at Monty B's, Atlantic City

By Norman Spurgeon

Tucked away in the unassuming quarters of the Quality Inn, at South Carolina and Pacific in Atlantic City, is a down home after hours bar called Monty B's, where jazz is not history.

Keeping it kicking on Friday nights is a terrific organ player named Gil Lewis, who's presently heading up a trio? Quartet? Who knows! It's hard to say who is in the band and who isn't; Gil knows so many quality players, who are sure to drop by, confident he'll offer some hospitality, and a chance to play.

Gil is a superb jazz organist who has so many abilities it's hard to list them all. First of all, he's a smoking soloist. He drives rhythmically, but also plays the complicated runs that jazz listeners crave. As an accompanist, he not only provides discriminating harmonic structure, but also presents an engendering, complimentary attitude towards his soloists. As if that weren't plenty, he's also a first rate vocalist, which I didn't know until the third or fourth time I'd heard him.

Apparently he's a jammer at heart, and only brings out the vocals on special occasions. His vocals are strong, with excellent intonation. And he's no ball hog! He could simply present himself as a star vocalist, but only presents the vocals as part of what's going on.

Each of the four nights I've seen him have been completely different. The first two nights he featured two different guitar players, each of whom were excellent. Wayne Morgan has been doing a fine job on drums, and is apparently Gil's stalwart companion.

The last two Friday's have seen Sam Reed as the featured soloist on tenor, and he is a very exceptional player. He isn't a hard biting 'avant garde' player, he doesn't wander off by himself into the harmonic stratosphere, and yet, he can take a 5 or 10 minute solo with no problem, always leading the band and the listener with his great sound, pinpoint turns, and "chicken and biscuits" blues riffs.

Talking to him between sets is equally interesting. He's done the kind of upscale professional work that would put any jazz historian on pause. He has far too many gigs in the bank to cover here, but just to name a few, he's worked with McCoy Tyner, Kenny Barron (pianists), and singers Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughn, and Tony Bennet.

He even told me that once, in Philly, he called John Coltrane for a gig; he needed a reading player for his 10 piece band. John was a scuffling side man at the time, and according to testimony, the nicest