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Review of 2/9/78 show.

Maynard Ferguson Entertains Faithful

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By Tim Carr

Over the last 20 years or so, or since Maynard Ferguson left the Stan Kenton Orchestra to lead his own band, music promoter Dick Clay has brought the "screech" trumpeter and his brass-powered big band to the Twin Cities for 140 concerts.

The first 138 were held at Clay's Prom Center, a dance hall in St. Paul. Then last year, riding in on the crest of his first major Top-40 hit, "Gonna Fly Now," the theme from "Rocky," Ferguson gave a concert in Orchestra Hall. It sold out shortly after tickets went on sale.

To meet what seemed like an ever-growing popular demand, Ferguson's band was brought Thursday night to yet a bigger hall, the Metropolitan Sports Center, which has a capacity of approximately 18,000. It was a risky venture, booking the mainstream jazz performer into such an immense hall, and one that despite an expansive advertising campaign didn't pay off for the promoter.

The 2,000 stalwart fans who did lay their money down (predominantly corduroy-clad high school students, their stage band teachers and a few long-time Ferguson fanatics), however, knew that they would make good on their bets, get what they bargained for.

They knew that May-Nard, an inveterate showman, couldn't help but deliver the goods. And, true to form, he did deliver, by offering a splendid, highly entertaining 95-minute concert of dynamic big band arrangements of show, pop, jazz-rock, traditional jazz and even Italian opera tunes.

The tuxedoed trumpeter led his young 15 man ensemble through the performance by stating the opening theme and the recapitulation of each tune with equal parts bravado and bravura on his customized M.F. Horn, an extended for-the-high-notes trumpet.

During the middle sections of the selections he conducted his collegiate-bred team with a bouncing stage manner, constantly smiling, bobbing his head, strut-shuffling around the stage. Once, during a particularly hot solo by one of the ensemble, he even let out a wild whoop.

This may sound like Ferguson has affected a few mannerisms associated more with rock 'n' rollers than jazzmen. Indeed he has, both in his stage style and in his music. His music is now a tasteful mixture of traditional big-band arrangements and rock combo riffing.

Likewise, the program played Thursday night included the traditional "Stella By Starlight," the jazz-funk classic by Herbie Hancock, "Chameleon," a jazz-rock interpolation of a theme from the Italian opera "Pagliacci," and, of course, his disco-brass hit, "Gonna Fly Now."

Ferguson's band has expanded to accommodate the changes or to roll with the punches. He still carries a huge brass section, whose best soloists came out of the saxophone section. But now, it has been augmented

by a guitar and synthesizer led rock quintet, which included the funky and funny bass player, Gordon (Flash) Johnson from Minneapolis.

Matrix, a nine-man contemporary brass band that opened the show, is, like Ferguson's band, a product of collegiate stage bands and academic music programs. This group, from Lawrence University in Appleton, Wis., and recently signed to RCA Records, played perhaps too academic but still considerably exciting 40 minutes of original material.

It is worth noting that the sound crews for both bands worked wonders with the usually miserable acoustics of the Met, making the always cavernous echo-ridden hall seem a bit less so and less ominous.