

# Jazz brings KC state of mind to New York

By STEVE PAUL  
The Kansas City Star

NEW YORK — It's Sunday afternoon at Café Loup, a comfortable French bistro off Sixth Avenue in the West Village. This is the kind of place that feels like it has been around forever. Black-and-white photographs by the likes of Brassai and Berenice Abbott catch your eye along the walls. Portraits of a young Woody Allen and a biker Dennis Hopper lend a certain flavor of American hip. And the brunch prices are, for New York, outrageously reasonable.

"It makes you feel like home," Chuck Haddix is saying.

He could be talking about the eggs or the tab, but the Kansas City jazz historian and radio host really is talking about the music.

On Café Loup's bandstand at the moment, a New York saxophonist and a Kansas City rhythm section are serving up the pleasant bounce of Kansas City jazz.

Haddix has been in New York the last few days taking in the KC tribute put on by Wynton Marsalis and company at Jazz at Lincoln Center. Haddix and Frank Driggs, co-author of the newly published history *Kansas City Jazz*, signed copies outside the concert halls where the sounds of same wailed for three straight nights. The previous night, Haddix co-hosted a national radio broadcast of one of the concerts.

So by now, relaxing with the music is welcome business.

And it *does* feel just like home.

Bram Wijnands sits at the old upright piano and Lucky Wesley plucks a borrowed stand-up bass. The Kansas City duo joins saxophonist Bob Kindred, who has led this brunch gig for nearly a year. All three musicians shared a stage the previous three nights with saxophonist Bobby Watson, who led a KC-style "jump band" through the paces at Lincoln Center's new jazz hall.



GARY DUNKIN/Special to The Star

Bram Wijnands (piano) and Lucky Wesley, at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York. For previous stories, including Steve Paul's blog, see [www.kansascity.com/entertainment](http://www.kansascity.com/entertainment).

"Bobby Watson really plays," Driggs allows.

Kindred and Wijnands go back a few years. Kindred has played at the Topeka Jazz Festival. Lucky Wesley is a veteran of the Scamps, KC crowd-pleasers for decades. Wesley hadn't played in New York since 1956. The travel on that trip was so hard — sleeping in cars night after night — that he gave up life on the road.

But he was thrilled to be in the spotlight at Lincoln Center and now here at Café Loup. "This is something else," he says.

Then imagine how John Armato feels. He's this afternoon's drummer. He also is from Kansas City. Today's his first anniversary in New York, where he works for one of

the big PR agencies. And this brunch marks his first gig as a musician in the big city. "Unbelievable," he says between sets.

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Kansas City's name was in lights in the performance halls. Each show — two concerts per night — began with a gentle prodding from the disembodied auditorium announcer: "Stomping, growling and ah-yessin' are strongly encouraged."

Marsalis further suggested that Kansas City music was meant to make you smile. "You don't have to sit here like something bad is happening," he told the second-night audience in the 1,200-seat Rose Theater.

Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra deliberately included lesser-grazed material. The gigs could have lived on chestnuts alone — we did hear "Lester Leaps In" and an inventively reheated "Motel Swing" — but Marsalis chose to mix it up. A set of four tunes came from the pen of Tadd Dameron (1917-65). They were arrangements he'd made for Harlan Leonard's Kansas City band before moving on to write for Count Basie.

Marsalis spent the first half of the concert in a small-group setting, evoking the sound of Basie's later six-, seven- and eight- or nine-piece groups. He emphasized that the sound often was meant to be silky soft, a point driven home by the drummer's faint brush work, the guitarist's crisp, waferlike strokes and the soloists' whispered poetry.

Critic Ben Ratliff of the *New York Times* was impressed: "It was the kind of concert that Mr. Marsalis and his band have elevated to a potent formula... in playing music like this the band has no peer."

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Karrin Allyson sits in a chair, tapping her hands against a 24-channel sound board big enough to land a space shuttle. It's a Saturday afternoon and Allyson, the former Kansas City singer, is listening to her own voice coming over the speakers at a mid-town recording studio.

She's singing lyrics to a Hank Mobley tune, "The Turnaround," written specially for her and her new record project by lyricist Chris Caswell:

*Once I thought love was a lie, now that's history*

*I found the turnaround when he kissed me.*

"That one sings itself," Allyson says as the ast couple of lines repeat.

Caswell likes what he hears, too.

"Let's change the name to 'I Found the

Turnaround,' because that's the out line."

"Yeah, let's change it," Allyson says, illustrating the fluidity of the early days of a record project.

The CD will feature duets with Allyson's singing idol, a bopping scat-singer named Nancy King of Portland, Ore., and the veteran bop lyricist Jon Hendricks. Oscar Brown Jr. had also been lined up, but he died last May, at 78 years old.

The recording session features a haunting tribute to Brown. Allyson runs through Brown's doleful tone poem called "The Tree." It suggests planting one's ashes with a sapling so both can grow together toward immortality.

There's some debate whether to layer an electric keyboard over the sparse piano line. "It's a pretty thing right now," Caswell says.

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Last week Bobby Watson was back in action on campus at the UMKC Conservatory.

He has been teased no end about his opening-night gaffe at Jazz at Lincoln Center. He'd been on the run for a week, crashed for a late-afternoon nap and caused a 20-minute delay. "I'm 52 years old," he told the next night's crowd. "They say the warranty runs out at 40, you know."

Watson says he felt blessed to work with the Juilliard Jazz Orchestra, a band of mostly well-seasoned students. But he's glad to be back in the classroom with his own students.

"That may be Juilliard," he says, "but really my band is not far off that. The only thing they have on us is soloists. We have a great swing feel and we have a lot of fire. I'm very proud of my band."

To reach Steve Paul, senior writer and editor, call (816) 234-4762 or e-mail [paul@kcstar.com](mailto:paul@kcstar.com).