

An idea of what hot jazz is

THE concert on Sunday night of last week was an illustration of how four jazz musicians from very different head-spaces can take to a stage without any rehearsal at all and find a common denominator enabling them to pull off a gig reasonably successfully. The standards are the common denominator, popular tunes and Broadway hits, some thirty or forty years old which all jazz musicians know backwards, and these tunes were the canvas coloured by the improvisational skills of the Johnny Fourie Band.

It was just a pity that the constraints of the format of the evening allowed no more than a fleeting glimpse of what makes the principal players of the band so interesting.

Make no mistake, the solos were all quite excellent. Opting for an overdriven valve sound heard quite a lot of late at Eddels, Johnny Fourie played fluent graceful lines with a marvellous ease on his jumbo Gibson electric hollow-

body. But there was none of that way-out ethereal sound heard in his recent work with The Abstractions or the burning intensity evident during his last performance in Pietermaritzburg where, a few years ago, he did a concert with his protégé pupil Steve Elovson, playing original material on steel string acoustics. (Shortly thereafter, Elovson was contracted to record overseas with THE jazz label, ECM, which speaks volumes about the pitch of the music played back then.)

Rob Payne on a Yamaha DX7 synthesizer whizzed about the keys like a bullet ricocheting off the walls of a small room. His tremendous fluency and his lyricism were demonstrated, but the material played by the band provided him

no opportunity to strut out the stuff that fundamentally distinguishes him from other heavy-weight jazz pianists like Melvin Peters. So on Sunday there were none of the peculiar mesmerising shifting cross-rhythms of for example, *Dawn*, a composition on his solo album which won him first prize in the competition Roland staged in Britain in 1986 for keyboard players.

In the rhythm section Mark Duby and George Ellis on bass and drums held it down reliably and offered some pretty good solo playing too.

But the performance in general created a sense of four musicians with disparate styles stooping to find common ground. Stuck with a repertoire of ancient and close to

JAZZ REVIEW BY ANTHONY BRINK

The Johnny Fourie Band
Venue: Eddels

hackneyed standards, the band at times seemed like a mutt with an old sun-bleached bone. However intently it gnaws it, the life and flavour are really a thing of the past. (Understand now why Miles Davis, referring to standards-based jazz, once remarked: "Jazz is dead!"?)

It is just one of those things but if only the band members could have spent some time together before going onto the bandstand. Had they been able to do so, the huge talents of Johnny and Rob would no doubt have whipped the band into a better shaped and directed unit to enable it to play more adventurous music with more synergy.

There was not much excitement in the material played — close your eyes and the basic sound you could have heard thirty years ago — but the solos were hot, and after all, the band was pulled together for the specific purpose of giving the audience some idea, if not the full picture, of what brilliant musicians Johnny Fourie and Rob Payne are.