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Music

JVC Jazz Festival in Review



Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

Phil Ranelin, left, and Marcus Belgrave of Tribe at the JVC Jazz Festival on Friday night.

Le Poisson Rouge

Tribe was a musicians' collective and a record label and a magazine started in Detroit in the early '70s. It operated in a self-empowerment, community-building spirit that was similar to other musician-run cooperatives in Chicago and Los Angeles and St. Louis, all outgrowths of the Black Arts Movement. Tribe's sound was street and chic and spacey, but always concerned with straight-ahead entertainment; these musicians had gotten their

chops through Detroit hard bop and Motown and the [Ray Charles](#) band. They were the local elite.

The trombonist Phil Ranelin, the tenor saxophonist Wendell Harrison and the trumpeter Marcus Belgrave, among others, recently recorded a new Tribe album in the old sound, this time produced by the Detroit techno D.J. Carl Craig, a club-music superstar one full generation younger. The record comes out in the fall, and the band has already started promoting it. Mr. Craig himself was supposed to appear with the band at Le Poisson Rouge on Friday night, adding electronics to the band's set and then performing his own late-night D.J. set afterward.

But Mr. Craig did not make it to New York. Strangely, it didn't seem to matter. His attachment to the [JVC Jazz Festival](#) show — heavily promoted by the festival — didn't seem to do its job in drawing a crowd. The three older musicians, with a younger rhythm section, played a set of new and old instrumental music with socially conscious spoken-word inserts, and giving a few New Yorkers one of those necessary periodic lessons about jazz history from other parts of the country.

It was especially fascinating to hear Mr. Ranelin, a player whose name is associated with '70s soul-jazz and free jazz, because he's such a disciplined player in the hard-bop mold. His solos used

long, warbling tones, then changed into stiff percussive blasts and smart melodic lines.

Mr. Belgrave, well known as a teacher but still underrated as a performer, played subtle, wide and logical solos on trumpet and fluegelhorn that were like compressed pieces of wisdom. Mr. Harrison played the most mannered and authentic '70s solos, fitting the tone of the music (and Mr. Ranelin's poetry) with honks and flurries and shouts.

The music used ebb-and-flow vamps, a little boilerplate rhythmically but with shrewd harmony; the mentholated music sounded like electric [Miles Davis](#) meeting [James Brown](#)'s backup group in the early '70s, and a bit like the European downtempo electronic music it inspired in the early '80s. In the back line were musicians with mostly Detroit roots: Kelvin Sholar on electric piano, Damon Warmack on electric bass, John Arnold on guitar, and Jaimeo Brown on drums. But this was a wandering, solo-oriented music, and most action came from the old heads up front. **BEN RATLIFF**