

## The Lighthouse Café Hosts Elliott Caine

by Skoot Larson

Hard bop brass man Elliott Caine headlined the Lighthouse Café's early show last Thursday (August 30<sup>th</sup>), giving an excellent performance in spite of his bass man getting ill just before show time and bowing out. The evening's Elliott Caine *Trio*, featuring keyboardist Rick Olson and the drums of Don Littleton, held their own with Olson taking on the extra duty of walking a bottom line with his left hand.

Elliott Caine grew up in Indianapolis, a city that's produced many jazz superstars including: Freddie Hubbard, Wes Montgomery and his brothers, Slide Hampton, Mel Rhyne and more. After graduating from Indiana University, Caine decided that he needed to "spread his wings," and get out of the Midwest. Fortunately for us jazz fans that reside on the Left Coast, Caine chose Los Angeles as his destination.

As a young man, Caine had a fondness for the stable of heavy, hard-swinging artists that Alfred Lyon recorded on his famous **Blue Note** label. In the ensuing years, Caine has developed a personal style that Lyons would have adored. The Elliott Caine Sextet's three compact disc recordings to date would have fit right into the 60's **Blue Note** catalog of swinging hard-bop music.

Showcased in this Lighthouse trio setting, the audience got to enjoy Caine's style and sound in an intimate and relaxed atmosphere. The group *jumped* right out of the box, grabbing their assembled listeners with Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way." Caine's take on the changes began with short, but nicely connected phrases, sounding almost like a conversation as his trumpet built a solid foundation for the some exemplary 16<sup>th</sup> note figures of three and four bars each that were like riding over the gently rolling hills of a varied sonic landscape.

Olson dazzled with his own take on Brubeck's line, offering some tasty syncopated two-handed licks, delivered just slightly ahead of the beat. It should be noted that Olson had no problem expressing his ideas while keeping the feeling of the bass framework behind his musical thoughts.

Although not yet a "household name," this versatile musician has been playing with some of L.A.'s jazz legends since the 80's, when Olson found his way here from

Minneapolis. On Benny Golson's "Whisper Not," Olson gave forth an amazing chorus pitting his piano in 6/8 time against the song's 4/4. Throughout, Olson is fond of large, open voiced chords spread all across the keyboard with a strong, solid structure.

Elliott Caine demonstrated his rich, warm flugelhorn tone on his own composition, "After Thought," a memorable ballade that first appeared on his "Blues From Mars" disc. Caine's melody half-cycles up in key across four, then two bar phrases, and then reconciles itself in steps back to the original tonality, only to rise again in a very catchy pattern. This song and the lively "Bossa for Bert," composed in honor of Caine's young son, showcase Caine's special gift for composing melodies that provide an excellent improvisational framework for his fellow players.

Caine's tone, on both trumpet and flugel, is sweet with just a slight enough edge to make it his own, easily recognizable sound. One can sense as much as hear the influence of Lee Morgan and Caine's fellow Indianan, Freddie Hubbard. Caine demonstrates an easy upper register, but he doesn't resort to screaming when his music travels up the scale. The man's sound remains mellow where-ever his thoughts may take his notes and ideas. Caine also seems to use the rhythm of each selection as a mode for adding emphasis as he plays around the beat.

The comfortable bossa-nova rhythm of Lee Morgan's "Ceora," is a fine example of Caine's voiced respect for Morgan with his own spin on it.

To this writer, Elliott Caine's most melodic solo of the night came in Duke Pearson's fine blues line "Jeannine," an easy-going line with an interesting mix of major and minor tonality. Caine's trumpet made fine, articulate use of the juxtapositioning of A<sup>b</sup> and F<sup>#</sup> chords against the minor counterparts.

Other highlights of the performance included Lou Donaldson's "Elizabeth," pitting Elliott Caine's trumpet against Olson's keyboard effect that almost sounded like a church organ or, at times, a little bit like a circus calliope! Olson's left hand walked a pattern of low notes, just as if he had a set of Hammond bass pedals under his feet.

Littleton kept perfect time in every setting, occasionally trading fours with the soloists. On "If I Were a Bell," part of a salute to Miles Davis, Don Littleton got to show off with a very vouty romp around his kit, making excellent use of his tom toms.

Watch for Elliott Caine. If you have the chance, spend an evening digging this band: quartet, quintet or sextet doesn't matter. Even in a trio setting, this is one up-and-coming cat you want to both see and hear! Elliot Caine will blow you away with his relaxed style that never resorts to "over-blowing." This young trumpet and flugel cat is genuinely deserving of more national and international attention. You can learn more about Caine and/or purchase his CDs at [www.elliottcaine.com](http://www.elliottcaine.com), but your really must catch this group live to garner their full effect!