

Milestones has a hot show going

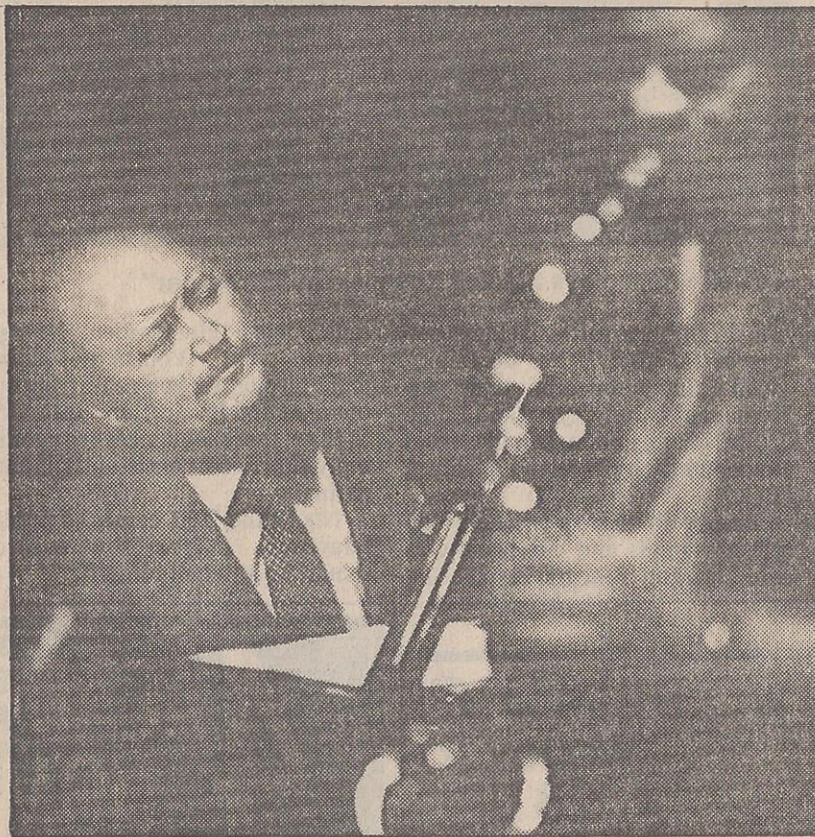
By Philip Elwood

EXAMINER MUSIC CRITIC

FINE JAZZ performances have always been hard to find. The combination of expert musicianship, knowing improvisational skills, cooperative ensemble participation and keen selection of tunes (to say nothing of competent production techniques) is seldom satisfactorily organized in nightclub performances, or orchestrated into a memorable presentation.

Last night in two sets at Milestones, the Larry Vuckovich-Charles McPherson Quartet (Vuckovich, piano; McPherson, alto sax; John Heard, bass; Albert Heath, drums) gave the patrons a steady stream of truly elegant, definitively magnificent jazz renditions. The large crowd, the congenial and warm club, the near-overwhelming instrumental artistry seemed to work together — it was a night of jazz magic.

Vuckovich is treating his cur-



Larry Vukovich, left, and Charles McPherson played beautifully

rent Bay Area tour as something of a triumphant homecoming — after years of local performance he went, last year, to find fame and fortune in the Big Apple.

He didn't get all he might have,

but Vuckovich *did* gain confidence, respect and sidemen as a result of his New York City performances. A tribute to his abilities was that he worked more in Manhattan over a few months' time than he would

have had he stayed in the Bay Area.

Last night Larry was more a team leader than dominant soloist, although his "Blues For Red (Garland)" was pure gold — touching, expansive, sometimes brilliant.

The night's most impressive soloist was McPherson; for over a decade a particular favorite of mine, he last night overwhelmed the whole Milestones audience.

He's had Johnny Hodges' lyricism, Charlie Parker's inventiveness, and the technique, charm and brilliance of a number of earlier jazz greats. And his extemporaneous flights of free fancy were incomparably brilliant.

McPherson's tone and technical control were unbelievable — he played some of the older Hit Parade-style ballads with the same fervor as that applied to mainstream-mod.

Drummer Heath needed only to be heard (and seen) to gain approbation. His swinging mix of basic rhythms, crisply played against the churning front-line sax and piano lines was awesome, yet he appeared so relaxed and easygoing in execution.

Heard's bass, impeccable as always, provided an ensemble cohesiveness — important, essential, stirring.

This wonderful happening extends through tomorrow night; and next Wednesday-Saturday, too.