

Zeitlin Trio at Its Best in the Salon

The Saturday Twilight Concerts presented by the S.F. Art Commission in the de Young Museum's Hearst Court proved this weekend that new jazz sounds belong more properly in a chamber music salon than in a raucous saloon.

The Hearst Court has peculiarly attractive acoustics for such a group as Denny Zeitlin's trio which appeared Saturday night before an overflow audience.

With its tapestried walls and vaulted medieval great hall plan and stone-tiled floors, the music played leaps out from the instruments. The problem for Zeitlin at the piano and his bassist Joe Halpin and drummer Oliver Johnson was controlling the effects, not in specifically emphasizing them.

ENSEMBLE EAR

Zeitlin has a remarkable ear for ensemble projection. Even when he plunks an African finger harp into a mike or blows on a melodion (a miniature accordion using a mouth-hose to activate its reeds) he is sensitive to the contributions of his colleagues.

And on the traditional piano-based themes there is a sense of grandness about the Zeitlin-Halpin-Johnson collaboration which few jazz trios can match.

The Baldwin piano which Zeitlin used Saturday was the best I've heard him play. Even when he prepared it with special tuning rods or plucked it while adjusting timbre with such alien resonances as provided by ash trays and jingle bells there was a lively projection.

'LITTLE FOOT'

And his "Put Your Little Foot Right Out," among others, was exquisitely turned — a bit of Bill Evans, a touch of Miles Davis, some Herbie Hancock lilt and flow and mostly what I will call the Zeitlin dynamic romanticism.

Bassist Halpin played with more assurance and greater finesse than ever before. His surprising broken rhythms in mid-solo, combined with expanded range and obvious delight in occasional bombastics, make Halpin not only a crowd pleaser but an im-

portant stimulant for Zeitlin.

Halpin and drummer Johnson are an integral part of Rafael Garrett's Circus, a free-form semi-jazz group which encourages collective improvisation. It has helped them to create within the Zeitlin structures a feeling of emotional independence without the usual accompanying brazen noisiness.

The last of this year's jazz events in the Twilight Concert program series comes on August 17 when the John Handy Ensemble will be featured.

— Philip Elwood