

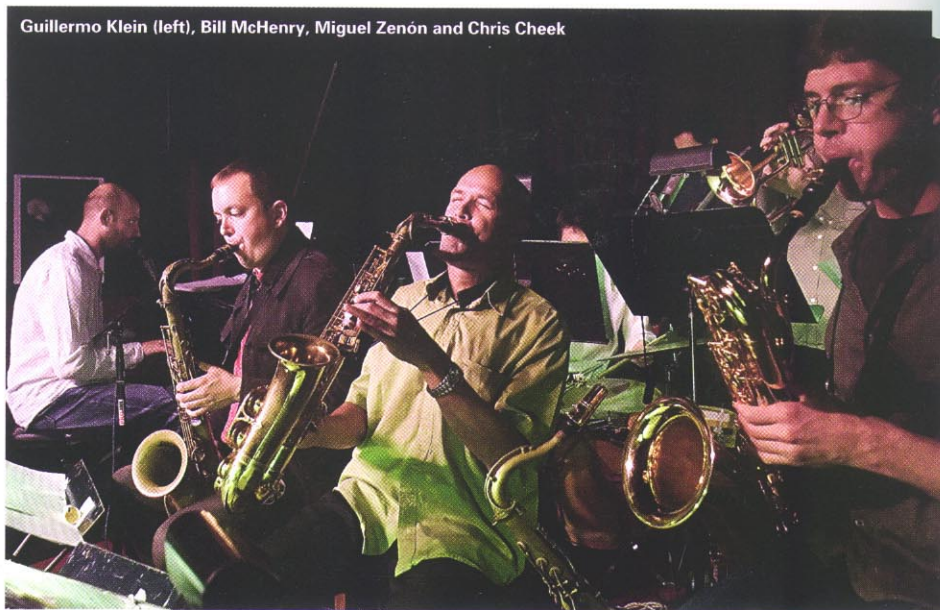


Guillermo Klein Big Band Channels Thad Jones

Midway through the final set of Guillermo Klein's fortnight at the Village Vanguard in June with his 11-piece group, Los Guachos, the Buenos Aires-born pianist seemed to share an esthetic intersection with Thad Jones, who reinvented the big band canon on the same Vanguard bandstand when Klein was still, so to speak, in knee pants.

The common threads are less stylistic than procedural. Klein, like Jones, is steeped in the formal devices of classical music, through which he shapes the flow of his compositions—dramatic and passionate in the Argentine way. Like Jones, he builds them on strong melodies, striking harmonies and orchestrational ideas specific to him. Also like Jones, he follows Duke Ellington's practice of weaving the tonal personalities of his musicians—among them several virtuoso soloists—into his own inventions. Klein likes to establish a dialogue among the sections, and takes liberties with form, postulating unorthodox cluster voicings that interweave fluidly. He writes in odd phrase lengths and sets them off with explosive rhythms, often pairing the drumset with percussion, diverging from the Ellington–Jones continuum by swinging not to 4/4 permutations, but rather to Argentina's folkloric 6/8 chacarera beat and subdivisions of Afro-Cuban clave.

It's unclear whether Klein was influenced by Jones' oeuvre during his 1994–2000 New York residence, when he developed Los Guachos' sound on weekly gigs at Smalls, along with a core group of collaborators. Among them was the personnel for this engagement—tenor saxophonist Bill McHenry,



Guillermo Klein (left), Bill McHenry, Miguel Zenón and Chris Cheek

alto saxophonist–flutist Miguel Zenón, saxophonist Chris Cheek, trumpeter Taylor Haskins, trumpeter–valve trombonist Diego Urcola, trombonist Sandro Tomassi, guitarist Ben Monder, trumpeter–percussionist Richard Nant, electric bassist Fernando Huergo and drummer Jeff Ballard.

A resident of Barcelona since 2002, Klein convenes Los Guachos infrequently. But on its second Vanguard gig—Los Guachos debuted there in June 2006—the band inhabited the gnarly charts, sometimes ignoring the sheet music, projecting a two-months-on-the-road, breathe-as-one ensemble sound. Brilliant solos often emerged organically from the sections.

On “Filters,” the first tune on Sunday's second set, Klein huskily incanted a lyric over a vamp melody, which the horns doubled. They dropped out, and Monder picked up an off-kilter variation over a stuttery, layered beat from Ballard on drums and Nant on bombo. As the piece developed, he established a call-and-

response with McHenry and Zenón or Urcola (trombone) and Duane Eubanks (filling in for Haskins) in tandem.

On “Moral Interchange,” a new piece, Klein and Monder stated a gentle melody, followed by McHenry's carefully structured statement. After the ensemble stated a poppish line over a firm eighth-note beat, Cheek uncorked a take-no-prisoners baritone solo that had his section-mates smiling; Zenón ratcheted the energy higher with a soaring, ascendant declamation. Nant played lead trumpet over Ballard's crisp funk beat; woodwind polyphony ensued, and an emphatic overtone from Cheek's baritone propelled McHenry into a lengthy one-chord explication.

The Sunday set continued, completely different in tone from two sets on the previous Thursday, when Los Guachos authoritatively addressed established repertoire like “Va Román,” “Miula,” “La Ultima” and “Venga.”

—Ted Panken