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MUSIC REVIEW | GUILLERMO KLEIN

Argentine Visitor Arrives With Armloads of Rhythm

By [BEN RATLIFF](#)

The Argentine pianist and composer Guillermo Klein brought his big band to the Village Vanguard for the first time last summer, and New York reacted as it should. Word got around, and an artist whose music was easy to follow even if its referents were hard to determine — having crafted his individual, worldly, not-quite-jazz in various basements in New York, Buenos Aires and Barcelona — became a little less obscure that week.

The Vanguard has invited him back for two weeks this year. Though the music sounds even stronger, Mr. Klein is still holding it together without a lot of self-serving flash. He deserves credit for this, especially because he has a specific sound: Even songs written by other members of Los Guachos, his 11-piece international band, become Klein-like through the machine of his orchestration ideas. With his band you hear a song from all its corners; a piece of music bounces around its dimensions, treated with care and bolstered with strong, emotional soloing.

Mr. Klein's writing hardly ever uses the jazz bandleader's common prerogative: though he's the pianist, he doesn't overexercise that instrument. In about 75 minutes of music there was only a short moment toward the end that could have been considered a piano solo. Instead Mr. Klein did a few things that are still fairly uncommon at the Vanguard. He sang, and gave visual cues to his band. The sung piece was "Va Román," which Mr. Klein wrote for an Argentine soccer player, and he used his modest voice for it: raspy and melancholic without affectation. The song put its verses up front, before a long section of some improvising over vamps by the saxophonists Chris Cheek and Miguel Zenon; it had a little bit of the authority with form that some progressive rock of the '70s had, and it never slackened.

Mr. Klein loves compound rhythm, and he loves when a band passes a melody around. (To achieve this end he sometimes uses the medieval-music device called hocketing, in which a continuous line is rendered in short pieces by different instruments.) Los Guachos has made some fairly difficult pieces sound even more fluid than they did last year. But the result of the band's labor is a natural, songlike music, not a math class or a jazz-technique clinic, and anyone can tell that this was Mr. Klein's desire all along.

Though he has learned the pedagogy of big-band jazz arrangement, his music doesn't come from swing rhythm and bebop harmony. He doesn't strain to make up the difference, either. Rather than 4/4 swing, he feels rhythm much more often in 6/8, like the folkloric Argentine chacarera; most of the music in Tuesday's first set used this rhythm in some way.

But he doesn't stop there. He gives all sections of the band equal play; this is not another brass-heavy big band. He layers rhythms or writes in changing chunks of rhythm, so that a few pieces were extremely hard to count. He saves his crescendos for the most important part of a song. And in "Miula," a song he wrote for his

brother, the polyvalent rhythm even slowed down and sped up, flexing like a whip.

Guillermo Klein y Los Guachos perform at the Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Avenue South, at 11th Street, West Village, (212) 255-4037, through Sunday, and again next week from Tuesday through Sunday.

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