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T.S. Monk Sextet top-notch players

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Byline: Chris Smith

THE T.S. Monk Sextet doesn't waste any time.

The band came out playing hard, fast and great yesterday in the first of its two Winnipeg shows. Of course, the musicians may have been trying to warm up.

As Thelonious Monk Jr. explains: "I know everybody who comes here tells you this, but it's cold. I've been on this planet 53 years and I haven't experienced this."

The opening number, *The Dealer Takes Four*, puts every member of the band through his paces as they get a feel for the sound of the theatre.

It also gives each of them a chance to solo and show the audience what a top-notch bunch of players Monk brought to the city for two performances as part of the Asper Foundation **Jazz** Performances series.

Monk, son of the legendary jazz pianist and composer, is a terrific drummer who knows all the tricks and knows not to use them all.

He is ever-present on every number the band plays, but not overwhelming. He propels the band's mainly hard-bop sound with a fierce energy; you know the drummer is the boss, but you know it from his skill rather than just muscle.

This band is a working band, and no matter how many times you say it, you can't beat the musical camaraderie that like-minded players build on the road.

Tenor saxophonist Willie Williams, alto saxophonist Bobby Porcelli, trumpeter Winston Byrd, bassist David Jackson and pianist Ray Gallon make a formidable ensemble in front of drummer Monk.

Williams, in particular, is a brilliant soloist and a solid part of the three-horn front line that sounded so fine yesterday. Porcelli, who was featured with a solo spot backed just by piano and bass, has a beautiful alto sound.

Gallon is a tasteful accompanist and soloist who drew a lot of audience attention.

Monk is a man in motion from the moment he sits behind his drum set. His whole body moves and he nearly leaves his stool as he works his drums.

He soloed during band numbers, of course, but he also performed what he called "a little drum thing" that he learned as a child from his drum teacher, Max Roach. The piece, *To The Max*, was a tour de force of drumming.

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