



MUSIC REVIEW

A potent combination

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Globe Staff / March 30, 2009

THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA and THE PRESERVATION HALL JAZZ BAND

At: Symphony Hall, Friday night

The Deep South came north Friday night. The roof-raising concert - the party! - put on by the Preservation Hall Jazz Band and the Blind Boys of Alabama was transporting. We weren't in Boston anymore. We were in the French Quarter. We were in Talladega.

Background: These two groups are institutions. The Blind Boys are a gospel act that has been going in one form or another since 1939, when students at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Blind formed a singing group. The Preservation Hall Jazz Band is a traditional jazz combo that has been based at Preservation Hall in New Orleans since the 1960s. Both of these groups have been performing for many, many years. Together, however, they make a potent combination.

It's too bad they didn't capitalize more on their decision to tour together. But we are hardly complaining. An old saw says you should leave the audience wanting more. This they did, if only because of the way the concert was organized.

Preservation Hall played the first set, inviting members of the Blind Boys to sit in

only briefly. After an intermission, the Blind Boys took the second set and were backed by a few Preservation Hallers on a few tunes.

The first set was old-time Southern jazz - trumpet, trombone, tuba, clarinet, saxophone, bass, piano, and drums - that required you to get up and move (though, this being ever-reserved Boston, few people did). Trumpeter Mark Braud did double-duty on vocals for "Sugar Blues," and Charlie Gabriel gave up a particularly rich solo, as though he'd been doing it all his life (he has) yet still found new things to say. Walter Payton contributed his gruff, rumbling vocals for a rousing "Sister Kate," and the PHJB closed the first act with its old standby, "When the Saints Go Marching In," complete with audience singalong and even a quote from Parliament's "Give Up the Funk (Tear the Roof Off the Sucker)."

The Blind Boys switched things up for part two, going all electric-gospel on us with their electric guitar, electric bass, Hammond B3 organ, drums, and trio of vocalists. They did "I'll Fly Away" and they did "Amazing Grace," but they also did the unexpected: They did a gospelized version of Tom Waits's "Way Down in the Hole." They did "Spirit in the Sky" with spine-tingling three-part harmony. And they had several PHJB members join them for a perfect encore of the traditional gospel tune "Down by the Riverside."