

"Now Hear This"

2/10/2002

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THE SIDNEY BECHET SOCIETY

Jam Session Concert

(Nagel-Heyer Records)

The Sidney Bechet Society is an indispensable part of the jazz world, as it seeks to remind the public of a man who may have been the greatest jazz clarinet player. Had Mr. Bechet not died in 1959 at the relatively young age of 62, he might have joined fellow pioneer Louis Armstrong as a permanent part of American pop culture.

Unfortunately, as a musical group on a live album, the society never rises above merely good. This latest recording, captured live in New York in 1999, assembles a group of talented musicians to play songs composed or made famous by Mr. Bechet. The playing is impeccable and the arrangements are smooth and energetic.

But the sad fact is, the musicians never manage to transcend the conventions of small-combo jazz and bring something new to Mr. Bechet's old songs.

The one remarkable standout on the album is clarinet player Evan Christopher, who comes close to capturing the heartbreaking beauty and longing of Mr. Bechet's playing. — Sean Scully