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SUNDAY

Spotlight

Sizing Up the Southland Scene: They Might Be Giants

By DON HECKMAN

The Southland's bubbling vitality as an arena for world-class jazz isn't always apparent in releases from the major labels. New York is largely the center for their activities, despite the many sessions held in only in small type in the liner notes. But take a look at some smaller labels and a different picture emerges, with a virtual cornucopia of releases featuring the area's many talented jazz artists. Here's a quick sampling of a few current releases that demonstrates the wide range of available music:

Lanny Morgan. "A Suite for Yardbird" (★★★, Fresh Sounds). No one is better qualified to deal directly with the music of Charlie Parker than alto saxophonist Morgan. A veteran of the Terry Gibbs and Maynard Ferguson big bands, and a permanent member of the Parker-oriented Supersax and perennial in L.A. recording studios, he has never really received the attention that his bop-revisited improvising deserves. He rips through a program of Parker pieces ranging from "Yardbird Suite" and "Bird Feathers" to "Marmaduke" and the difficult "Ko Ko" (played at a rampaging tempo) with consistent imagination, easily demonstrating the life that remains in the bop style when it is employed by a player with first-rate skills. And he deserves special credit for succeeding so well in a setting that might intimidate a lesser player—interpreting music written by and intimately associated with one of the most important figures in jazz history.

Los Angeles Times