

November 22, 2005**Jazz Review | Roswell Rudd**

A Little Nostalgia and a Lot of Unruly Trombone

By NATE CHINEN

The big, braying sound of Roswell Rudd's trombone has been a prominent feature of jazz's avant-garde landscape for more than 40 years. It still has a way of turning up in strange places: Mr. Rudd's latest album, "Blue Mongol" (Sunnyside), puts him in touch with Buryat throat singers from Mongolia. On Sunday afternoon at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York, he went for something more familiar - although, in a way, almost as uncommon. For a celebration of his 70th birthday, he reunited with Eli's Chosen Six, the Dixieland band from his student days at Yale.

A boisterous bunch of white revivalists, Eli's Chosen Six had its hot minute in the mid-1950's, when "college jazz" suggested a catchphrase rather than a curriculum. With the help of the producer and Yale alumnus George Avakian, the band recorded an album for Columbia Records in 1955, and it appeared a few years later in the film "Jazz on a Summer's Day." (Mr. Rudd missed the shoot, which would have involved zipping around Newport, R.I., in a convertible jalopy.) In the years since, the group has performed sporadically - and almost always without Mr. Rudd, by far the most prominent musician to have emerged from its ranks.

The reunion, and the occasion, put Mr. Rudd in a nostalgic frame of mind. He spent much of his two hours of stage time in free-associative reminiscence, praising his bandmates and working toward an oral history of the group. This included tributes to founding members who could not be there, like the accomplished bassist Buell Neidlinger, whose successor, Bob Morgan, acquitted himself with a Fender electric. Reaching back at one point to his childhood in Connecticut, Mr. Rudd invoked the memory of his father, an amateur drummer. "By the time I was 8 years old, Duke Ellington and Spike Jones were my main guys," he said. "Music was like a big cartoon."

The same could almost be said of Eli's Chosen Six. The cornetist Lee Lorenz and clarinetist Leroy Sam Parkins joined Mr. Rudd in scrappy frontline counterpoint - a hallmark of both Dixieland and the 1960's avant-garde. One of the liveliest pieces, "Sheik of Araby," opened with Mr. Rudd's plunger-muted blare over the thumping toms of the drummer, Steve Little. Another tune, "Tishomingo Blues," elicited rambunctious and well-rounded improvisations from all the horns, plus a few keyboard choruses by Dick Voigt. Buoyancy and brightness were common undercurrents, bubbling to the surface during the better solo choruses, like most by the cool-headed Mr. Lorenz and nearly all by the extroverted Mr. Rudd.

Of course, Mr. Rudd was the star. Filling the function of a tailgate trombonist, he leaned on what he has memorably termed his "mammalian vocabulary" - a trove of anthropomorphic smears, wobbles, buzzes and slurs - but never loosened his grip on harmony or rhythm. He was as galvanizing a presence as ever; at his best, he made the music sound as if it were still being discovered.