

## Willy Dalton: Says new CD best captures his band's character

### Continued from D1

Rich, Machito, Lionel Hampton, Tito Puente, Daniel Ponce and Cissy Houston, among others.

The Dalton Gang recently released its latest disc, "Just For Tonight," which follows "Miami Shadows" (1995), and "Rhythms" (1993). Dalton says this newest work best captures the band's character, spending more time on the production and helped by ace engineer, Jay Messina (Aerosmith, Buck Hill).

"We actually had time to mix it," he says. "Rhythms" we did in one night, which I don't understand how we did that, but it came out pretty good. "Miami Shadows" was done live to DAT over about four nights. This one we spent about six days and recorded it to analog tape, which is the older way of doing it, but it's coming back."

Dalton says the analog tape gave the band a warmer sound, and the mixing provided a clean balance. The band's diligence seems to be paying off. Jazz-Week, a publication that tracks radio airplay, ranked "Just for Tonight" in the top five for bands added to radio playlists, right behind Branford Marsalis' new record.

But big-time pop stardom was never the aim of The Dalton Gang. Over the years, Dalton has resisted moves that might make the band more marketable, saying that it's a pure creative, artistic outlet.

That's not to say the music of The Dalton Gang is avant-garde. Larger than the average combo and smaller than your traditional big band, the band's tunes are quite catchy, fusing funk, Latin and swing. Dalton says he was going for style that afforded soloing from everybody but had rhythms that were more in-the-



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The members of The Dalton Gang are Vinny Cutro, trumpet; Mark Friedman, alto sax and flute; Frank Elmo, tenor sax and flute; Tom Boras, baritone sax; Conrad Zulauf, trombone; Frank Valdes, percussion; Mike DiLorenzo, piano; John Hughes, bass; Vince Chericco, drums; and Willy Dalton, guitar.

pocket than traditional bebop.

"We take a little from those Latin bands and a little bit of a Tower of Power thing but no vocals," he explains. "People say I should get a vocalist, a chick singer, but I've resisted pushing it into a commercial direction."

The non-commercial direction is one of the reasons The Dalton Gang maintains a limited concert schedule. All the members are accomplished players with a variety of steady and freelance gigs to pay the bills. Dalton, along with

club dates with a trio and a variety of jobs as an arranger, is a long-time music teacher.

"The guys in the band work a lot, and over the whole 20-year period there are periods where we've been busy and not busy. Now we're on an even keel," Dalton says. "The guys in the band are on the short list of musicians you'd want for a session. If you want a trumpet player, you call Vinny Cutro. If you want a percussionist, you call Frank Valdes, and so on."

Dalton says he's been giving private lessons since the mid '80s and recently began teaching 12 students a semester at Passaic County Community College.

"I get a lot of satisfaction (from teaching)," he says. "It gets you really in touch with the physical aspect of playing. After a while, you begin to really understand the physical adjustments you have to make to play the guitar, when you see how awkward it is for the students. That stuff, you usually take for granted."