



Mercer Ellington relaxed with a beer in the Stadium dressing room Friday before leading the Duke Ellington Orchestra in the Kool Jazz Festival. —Seattle Photo

Kool Festival Is Lukewarm

By MIKE PLEMMONS

About 20,000 people at the Stadium Friday night embraced the cool and generous lineup of talent at the Kool Jazz Festival.

But the music had its ups and downs.

Under the direction of Mercer Ellington, the Duke Ellington Orchestra was rigid and overbearing.

Mercer's stepped up arrangement of "Feelings" obliterated the sensitivities of the original music, throwing too much of each instrument into the melody.

The vocal stylings of Anita Moore sounded like an untrained Ella Fitzgerald out of her mellow element. However, Miss Moore's singing was promising, although her appearance was too brief for judgment.

Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson, writing-producing-performing spouses, put on a powerful and tender performance.

Ashford and Simpson have collaborated to write some of the industry's greatest songs — "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing," and "Reach Out and Touch" — all made immortal by other names.

But Friday's stage was theirs alone and they utilized the forum to the fullest.

The crowd cheered the couple's delicate choreography and gazed with near wonder at the almost embarrassing bigness of their arm in arm love songs.

Frankie Beverly and Maze, playing before Gladys Knight and the Pips, reeled off some lengthy and probably too contrived quasi-jazz numbers.

Beverly's compositions seemed to confuse rather than penetrate the listening thousands.

Saturday night, the Commodores will headline another event. Acts LED and Platinum Hook will also appear.

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