

Baker reveals his personal side

By Kevin Lynch

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His slender figure curved around his trumpet, Chet Baker gathered Jazz Gallery listeners around him Tuesday night and offered up a piece of his innermost self.

The experience transmitted through his trumpet and voice was rare in its intimacy even for the Jazz Gallery. It was like overhearing a murmured conversation between a man and his trumpet, or his lover.

Baker's music glows with a moody romanticism, which takes his trumpet into a role uncharacteristic for the normally declamatory instru-

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ment. Notes hang from the trumpet's edge like ripe plums. They vibrate from a sensibility that remains gentle at the core despite a life of many trials.

But Baker's playing is more than moody wafting. The intelligence displayed on the venerable "Round Midnight" was engineered with skill and imagination. Like a ghost slipping through the crack of a door, Baker slid into the familiar shrouded melody, stripped his second chorus to an elegant sparseness, then overlaid it with several plush phrases.

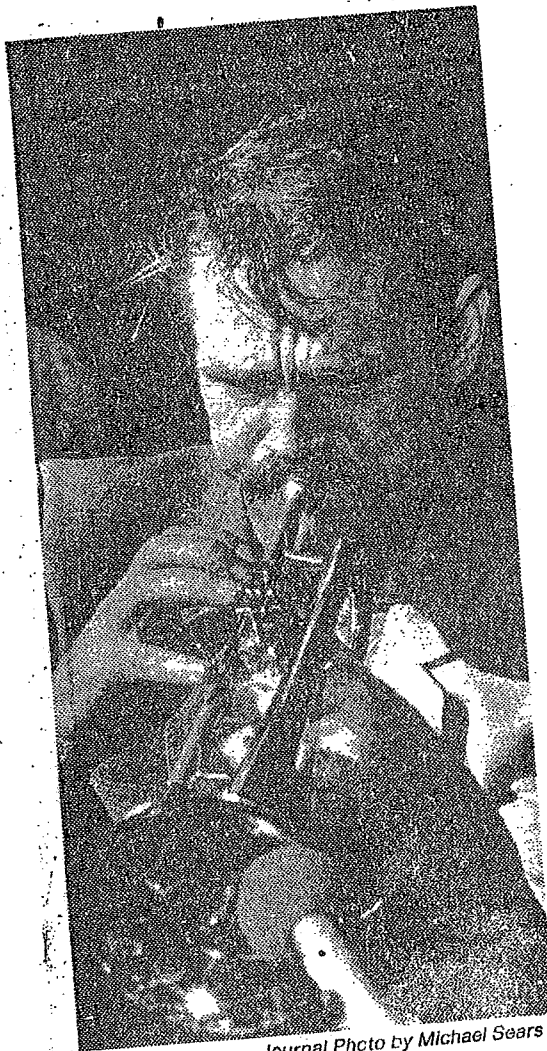
Baker's singing reveals an even closer view of his personal expression — lyrics of broken love flowing from a tenor feathered with soft gray textures.

Betraying a tendency of jazz vocalists since Louis Armstrong, Baker forgot the written lyrics of "Just Friends" at one point and fell back on his scat singing. But unlike many jazz singers, Baker's vocal improvisations are free of extraneous syllabic encumbrances. Every sung note, like every trumpet note, touches the tune's melodic and harmonic essence.

His band gamely followed the trumpeter's incalculable pauses and sudden swoops. Pianist David Hazeltine's solos invariably quickened the music's pulse with incisively swinging bursts of bop phrasing.

Drummer Joel Spencer added just the right amount of sinew to Baker's lean constructions. Admirable bassist Skip Crumby-Bey seemed to measure his playing more than usual to coincide with the graceful curves of Baker's style.

Chet Baker will perform again at 8 tonight at the Jazz Gallery, 932 E. Center St.



— Journal Photo by Michael Sears

Chet Baker at the Jazz Gallery