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Kendrick Scott stands out, alone and with jazz greats

He performs with his band, Oracle, Friday at The Loft @ UC San Diego



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Drummer Kendrick Scott's band, Oracle, makes its San Diego debut. *Mathieu Britton*

Kendrick Scott counts Herbie Hancock and Charles Lloyd among the jazz giants in whose groups he has performed. Both welcome his ability to drum with equal power and subtlety, often at the same time.

Trumpeter Terence Blanchard, another happy Scott employer, this year declared: "Kendrick has become the Art Blakey, Elvin Jones and Tony Williams of his generation. He's a brilliant mind bringing innovation to the music, at the same time as creating a safe place for young talent to develop and grow."

Given that he's only 35, it may be a bit premature to place Scott alongside such giants as Williams, Jones and Blakey. Perhaps not by much, though, as this very gifted drummer demonstrated during Lloyd's masterful Athenaeum at TSRI Auditorium concert here last month.

Blessed with great feel, technical prowess and impeccable taste, Scott has the ability to deftly drive the music forward whether playing at a hush, a roar, or anywhere in between.

He demonstrates these same attributes leading his 9-year-old band, Oracle, which makes its long-overdue debut here Friday night at the intimate, all-ages Loft@UC San Diego. The group teams him with pianist Taylor Eigsti, saxophonist and bass clarinetist Josh Ellis, guitarist Michael Moreno and bassist Joe Sanders (who, for this tour, has been replaced by Ben Williams).

On their third album, "We Are the Drum," which was released Sept. 25 on Blue Note Records, Scott and his band make some of their biggest statements in their most delicate moments. It is rare, indeed, to hear a group that embraces nuance this well.

By doing so, Scott and his members nimbly dance across the notes they are playing. And when they kick into high gear, their music surges with greater force, precisely because of how skillfully they negotiate its softer segments.

More unusual still, especially for a band led by a drummer, is that the drums do not play a dominant role. While all five members are accomplished soloists, it is their lithe ensemble work that most impresses. This, clearly, is a group of equals seeking to make a cohesive artistic statement.

The carefully crafted sonic tapestries that result on "We Are the Drum" are often impressionistic and rich in textures. Even in the few instances in which Scott takes the spotlight, as he does during the intro to the Flying Lotus song "Never Catch Me," he sounds like his goal is to serve the music, not to show off.

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