

Bluesy 'Twice' worth a listen or two

By Steve Dollar
POP MUSIC CRITIC

The blues prevail on "I Heard You Twice the First Time" (Columbia), the first album from saxophonist Branford Marsalis since he took the musical helm of "The Tonight Show."

If Mr. Marsalis's newfound status as a household name brings more listeners to his music, it's a twofold blessing — for the musician and his audience. This conscious and deliberate blues cycle offers a cultural history lesson that needs to reach a wider market.

Its 10 tracks seamlessly weave guest shots from B.B. King, John Lee Hooker, vocalist Linda Hopkins, Atlanta guitarist Russell Malone and arranger Dwight Andrews of Emory University, who conducts Mr. Marsalis and vocalists on the capella spiritual "Berta, Berta" from August Wilson's "The Piano Lesson."

More than an all-star jam session, however, the album boasts a coherent agenda, as Mr. Marsalis traces a clear line from field hollers and the gutbucket, through the signature blues idioms of Memphis, New Orleans and Chicago, to contemporary clamor and social injustice in

ALBUM REVIEW

"I Heard You Twice the First Time." Branford Marsalis.

Columbia. 10 tracks. CD and cassette.

New York and Los Angeles.

Mr. Marsalis gets a chance to flex creatively within various aspects of the blues, making a case for their enduring relevance. "B.B. Blues," co-written with Mr. King, is a breath-catching essay in the guitarist's fluid style, matched to the red-wine glow of Mr. Marsalis's alto. In contrast, "Rib Tip Johnson," a collaboration with Mr. Malone, bypasses urbanity to flaunt a blue soprano wail over guest drummer Herlin Riley's trash-can shuffle and the guitarist's gutbucket acoustic figures.

For those who admire Mr. Marsalis's brasher instincts, there's the bustling cityscape of "Brother Trying to Catch a Cab (on the East Side) Blues."

To hear selections from "I Heard You Twice the First Time," call *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* free Soundline at 222-8600 and enter access number 150.

► A taste for the blues infuses saxophonist Marsalis's style. **C8**



BRUCE CAINES/Special

Branford Marsalis's new album, the first since he began his stint on "Tonight," showcases aspects of the blues.