

## Ensemble: Bluiett's Clarinets

**F**ROM contrabass up to soprano, clarinets of all sizes meshed in the music of Hamiet Bluiett's Clarinet Family at the Public Theater Sunday — a group that joins Licorice Factory as one of New York's all-star clarinet ensembles. Mr. Bluiett and six fellow clarinetists, plus Fred Hopkins on bass and Warren Smith on percussion, played pieces that exploited the clarinet's ability to blend as well as the individuality of each clarinetist.

The music, which was composed by members of the group, often interspersed melodies with sections of pure clarinet sonority — glissandos, overblown squeals and group trills. There were a waltz, a blues and a chorale-like arrangement by Mr. Bluiett, a Latin workout by Don Byron and a funk-and-bop piece by J.D. Parran.

A modal tune by Ed (Kidd) Jordan, "The River Niger" — which assigned Mr. Jordan a high-speed, repeating bass line on the unwieldy contrabass clarinet — was adopted on the spot as the Clarinet Family's theme and played twice.

Sooner or later, most of the pieces turned into vamps, with from three to five clarinets puffing out chords below a solo. Mr. Bluiett delivered bluesy soliloquies on alto clarinet, while John Purcell was suavely understated on clarinet and forthright on bass clarinet. Mr. Byron played industrious solos in a piercing high register on ordinary (soprano) clarinet; Dwight Andrews kept a songful tone on soprano clarinet, and Eugene Ghee completed the group.

Jon Pareles