CODA MAGAZINE

THE JOURNAL OF JAZZ AND IMPROVISED MUSIC * ISSUE 219 * APRIL/MAY 1988 * THREE DOLLARS

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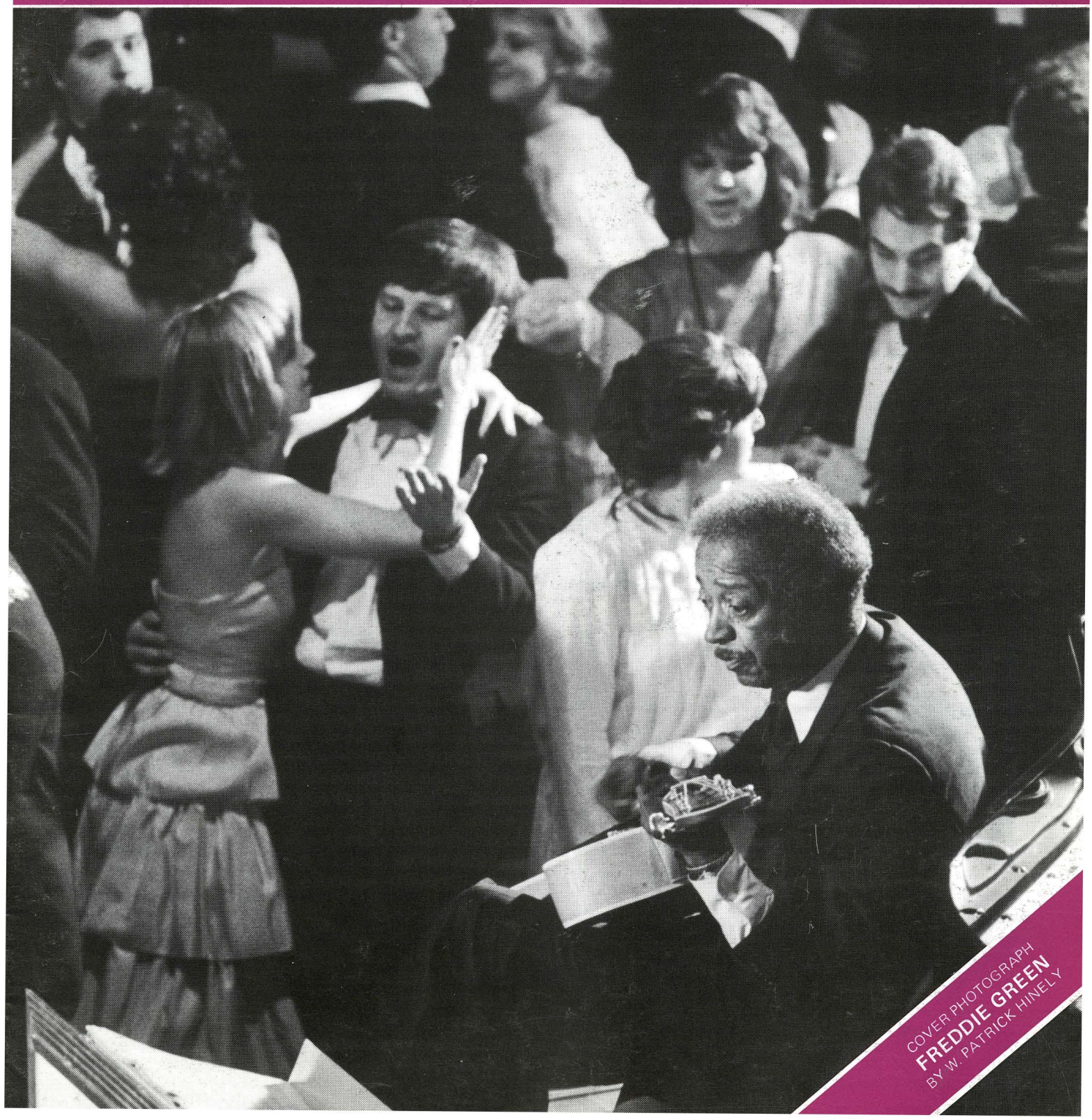

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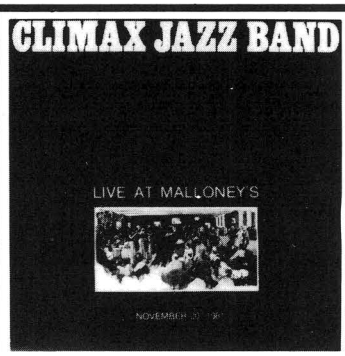

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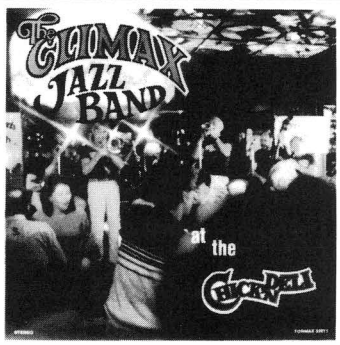

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CODA MAGAZINE ISSUE NUMBER 220

To celebrate our **30th Year Of Publication** we will feature the art of the **Jazz Piano** with feature articles on **CECIL TAYLOR * MISHA MENGELBERG * JOHN HICKS** * Canadian musician **OLIVER JONES** * A tribute to the late **DICK WELLSTOOD** * Plus **RECORD REVIEWS * JAZZ LITERATURE * AROUND THE WORLD * VIDEO REVIEWS * AND MUCH MUCH MORE** * Subscribe NOW.

RENE LUSSIER

AN IMAGINARY FOLKLORE

NUMBER TWELVE IN A SERIES OF CANADIAN INTERVIEWS * INTERVIEW BY MARC CHENARD

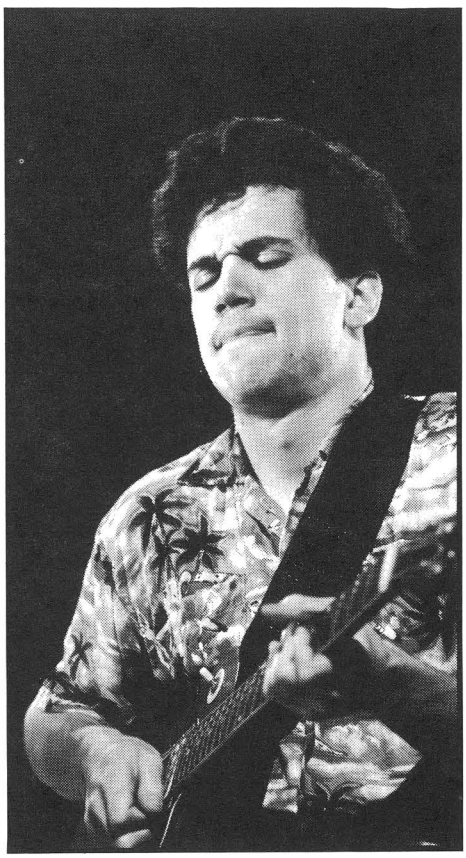
Although "improvisation" and "jazz" were once synonyms in our western musical culture, they have now become more and more distinct. In fact, many younger musicians coming out of the rock and folk traditions are increasingly interested in the former without really converting themselves to the latter. In Canada – and in the province of Quebec in particular – an alternative scene has grown out of its cultural specificity. Among the many participants in this area, guitarist Rene Lussier has worked through these first "popular" influences to develop something he calls an "imaginary folklore" in which improvisation is largely non-contingent on any of the configurations found in the jazz language. It is on this very point – his perception of jazz and its significance to his own musical pursuits, that this interview began.

R.L.: In my music, there is a lot of improvisation which, to me, came directly from jazz – and free jazz in particular. In fact, it might be the first music on this planet that has dealt with improvisation to such an extent. But the jazz influence on me is not one of style or form, it's more in terms of the 'spirit' of the music. Not only does it talk about freedom, but it also involves elements of chance and timing, which are all needed in order to make improvisation work. So, if one hears these things in my music, I think you could link it to the 'spirit' of jazz.

However, I would describe the music I play with my various colleagues as a 'hybrid' music borne out of jazz, rock, folk and even certain kinds of commercial music. Still, it's hard to describe exactly what we do, but the only way I can is by talking about certain components drawn together into a larger category that you could call 'innovative', 'New Music' or whatever. You see, as much as we are into electric music, we also have a connection to our own folklore, like the old-fashioned reels, the songs, the tapping of the feet that the fiddlers do to accompany themselves.

I could also say that our music is "mechanical", not so much in an electric or computerized sense, but more in terms of a direct physical involvement of the musicians with their instruments. At this time, I am not into synthesizers and electronics, I just prefer working with a straight electric guitar and a fuzz box for a few effects. But even though those effects are old ones by now, I find it important to assimilate those sounds and also to be close to an instrument you can tune and work with in an acoustic way.

I do that a lot with Jean Derome (saxophone and flute player) when we play as a duo: he may bring along little instruments of his own invention and we slowly bring them in to create more and more sounds around those of our main instruments. In that way, we are creating



a kind of orchestral music by working out these sounds into arrangements. And this brings us back to jazz, and even to classical music, because structures are very important to them. In contemporary music, for instance, composers have actively experimented with timbres and textures in a very serious way, maybe too much so. In contrast, I would like my music to work on that too, but in a somewhat more "popular" way. By that, I do not mean in purely commercial or monetary sense, but rather in a way where the music can reach people more effectively. Presently, I enjoy working in a duo, because it allows both of us to work out new possibilities on an on-going basis. And since it is more difficult than ever to hold a band together and to get a lot of gigs, it's easier to work as a duo and to travel too. Musically though, we are striving to compensate for the lack of personnel by creating an orchestral type music within the duo format. Of course, I first went through the whole rock craze of the 60's, the Beatles, the Stones and all of the progressive rock that came along. Hearing those sounds from the electric guitar is what really made me want to play it. I started playing the blues after hearing Johnny Winter, then, as I discovered Frank Zappa and his "Mothers of Invention", that turned me on to a lot of other things.

As for jazz, I got into it in a strange way: it was through John McLaughlin and the Mahavishnu Orchestra, which I first saw here in town (Montreal) at a live concert. That, to me, was a powerful band! From then on, I worked my way backwards, going from Mingus and Dolphy, to Coltrane, Davis and Parker. But I have always avoided listening to any one style for too long; as much as I can be digging some progressive rock, I can switch right into Bartok or Messiaen, both wonderful composers. Even if I do try to listen to a great variety of genres, I do not feel guided by any one of them in particular; instead, those who influence me the most are the people with whom I work on a regular basis.

M.C.: *Over the last ten years, you have been actively taking part in the local 'new music' scene. How did you meet up with these musicians, especially with those who were close to the 'Conventum' group of the late 70's?*

R.L.: At 17, I returned to Montreal – I was actually born in the city but moved out of town with my parents as a child – and, as I was finding my way around, I ran into guitarist and singer André Duchesne who was working with a band called 'Conventum'. He invited me to a few of their productions and I liked what I heard. At that time, I had a rock band going and we were playing some of my

RENE LUSSIER (Photograph by Mark Miller)

tunes, so I was getting into music more and more. Then, I met pianist Pierre St-Jak who got me interested in improvisation – and he is a very good improviser too. Through him, I first met Jean Derome, who was just playing flute at the time, then I made friends with bassist Claude Simard and saxist Robert Lepage a few years later. At that time, 1978, we played a lot of free music at a small local bar that St-Jak was in charge of. Out of those sessions, small bands started appearing, like 'Nébu', whose first album I worked on as a sound technician, then did some playing on their second release. From that period on, Derome and I have been working together at regular intervals, and up to now we have done about 30 soundtracks for different visual productions as well as two recordings for our own label. (See discography at the end of this article.)

M.C.: *In the late 70's, 'Conventum' was like a rallying point for a lot of people wanting to share new ideas.*

R.L.: *That's true.* It was a bit like the 'Music Gallery' in Toronto, because we too had our own local, 'Le Centre d'essai Conventum', in which we held festivals with all kinds of music. We invited folk groups or even families to come and show us their dances and songs. On other occasions, we had contemporary dance and music ensembles performing. Mind you, none of these guests were directly involved in the place, but they would drop in from time to time. In fact, we would even hire them for shows, and I did some of the booking for a while.

M.C.: *Now in the 80's, the record label 'Ambiances magnétiques' seems to be the new focus for those musicians who were close to 'Conventum' in the late 70's. Do you see a continuation here?*

R.L.: In a way, yes, but the label is a cooperative while the other was just a band, that became a closed one by the end; we wound up as a quartet that played about six nights every week. In 1979, the band broke up and we all went our own directions, more or less. This led to a period of searching, but not just for the heck of it; instead, we really wanted to come up with something else, we wanted to forge a new path, or paths. But when you have people who know their instruments, this is bound to happen anyway. For a while, I got back into more of a rock groove, because I felt like playing with energetic people. Nowadays I am part of a guitar quartet – Les quatre guitaristes de l'Apocalypso Bar – with drummer Chris Cutler as an added member. In the last few years, I've been working with Fred Frith, who is a hard worker and very powerful player too. In fact, when I started meeting up with these people, I was quite surprised to learn that they knew of our work in the late 70's, though we never had any contact with them at that time.

M.C.: *In 1982, the 'Festival international de musique actuelle de Victoriaville' (FIMAV for short) came into being, which seems to have added a new impetus for those active in alternative music.*

R.L.: The important thing with that festival is its ability to bring in many great musicians from elsewhere, be they in jazz, contemporary, rock or whatever category you want. Two years ago, you had Johnny Dyani and John Tchicai one night, then David Moss, Elliot Sharp or 'Cassiber' on other nights. I talk about the '86 event, because I had the opportunity of doing a duet album with Fred Frith. That project came about after Michel Levasseur – the festival director – got a grant to record some of his concerts for commercial release. Fred Frith and I first played together after his solo concert at the previous festival, and, at Michel's suggestion, we jammed one night privately. From then on, we kept in touch regularly and two weeks before the date, we did some rehearsing to develop our programme. But the concert was to be our first public performance, so there was some pressure on us. Afterwards, though, we did a small tour of the province so things got more relaxed; by the last gig in Montreal, there was real joy between us.

M.C.: *Last fall, you released a second duet album with Jean Derome. Are there further recording projects or concerts in the works?*

R.L.: As we are talking, I'm about to leave for a small tour of France and Germany with cellist Tom Cora, who is coming into town beforehand. We will join a French drummer and play at a festival in France and one in Berlin. As for recordings, I'm thinking of doing a third album with Jean Derome, something more spontaneous, or, at least, with less overdubs than the previous LP. At the moment, though, I am in the early stages of a larger project, which I will call 'Le trésor de la langue' (The Treasury of Language). In it, I will use tapes of recorded conversations on which I will add a musical line that replicates the speech pattern. For this project, I intend to use much more instrumental colour by including different kinds of horns, like a trumpet, flute, cello, bass, clarinet. Using all of this, I want to build a kind of story, one that has to do with a small history of our province over the last thirty years.

M.C.: *I have noted that your previous albums rely heavily on a narrative structure. Is there any particular influence or motivating factor in using this element of story telling?*

R.L.: Well, songs are stories in themselves. But as much as I like singing, I am no songwriter. Instead, I use other materials to build stories which I piece together by editing them in the studio. For my project, I have also selected certain excerpts from our local sound archives to enhance the story. I might use De Gaulle's famous "Vivre le Québec libre" statement as part of my project, but I do not pretend to make a specific or partisan political statement with it. Of course, you cannot completely get away from that, because the way you choose to edit these materials is a political choice in itself.

As a personal goal, I'm rather trying to work through the spirit of different musical styles than attempting to pass on any specific messages or creating major works of art. When people ask me what my favourite album is, I truly don't know what to say, because each one is so different from the others. And that, to me, is more important than thinking about how I can create a work of significance or something we best call in French as a "chef d'oeuvre".

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Conventum réédition 1977-1979 AM003 004

Soyez vigilants restez vivants (Derome/Lussier) Vol. 1 AM005

Le retour des granules (Derome/Lussier) Vol. 2 AM006

Chants et danses du monde inanimé (Lepage/Lussier) AM001

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(All previous recordings are on the 'Ambiances magnétiques' label) For more info write to Ambiances magnétiques, C.P. 263, Succ. E, Montréal, Québec, Canada H2T 3A7

Nous Autres (with Fred Frith, Chris Cutler, Christoph Anders and other guests) Les Disques Victo 001

FREDDIE GREEN * MISTER RHYTHM

Freddie Green, the great guitarist with the Count Basie Orchestra for fifty years, passed away on March 1, 1987 in Las Vegas, Nevada. The cause of death has been given, in the media, as apparent heart attack. He lived, for seventy-five years, one of the most productive lives known to the world of jazz.

Mr. Green was born March 31, 1911 in Charleston, South Carolina. He made his first engagement, with Mr. Basie, at age twenty-six in March 1937. That long term relationship came to an end in April of 1983, one month after March, with the death of Count Basie. All in all, the Ides of March played an unusual role in the life of Frederick William Green.

The role of the guitarist in the large jazz/dance orchestras has too often been a limited one. It was Freddie Green who elevated the rhythm guitar to its great stature. No one else has gained the recognition that he did as he sat, night after night, with his unamplified guitar, bringing a type of uniqueness to the Basie band like no one else has to other similar units. That he brought fame to jazz with what he did, so consistently, over the years, can be witnessed in the large number of announcements of his death in newspapers and trade publications.

Freddie Green, and the name has often been spelled Greene, was, obviously, well liked by his peers and colleagues. He was supplied with a variety of names and I wish that I knew the origin of some of them. A few of the ones in public domain include Pepperhead, Pep, Green Bay, Bif, The Claw, Quiet Five and Esquire.

A great deal of information is scattered throughout the jazz literature about Freddie Green and it is hoped that, in time, a biographer will pull together his life and work. I looked for interviews of Freddie and the closest I have come to is one that Stanley Dance conducted with Basie and Freddie. Appropriately, it appears as the opener in the Dance treatise, ***The World Of Swing***. Bill Ramsey, in an interview with Jim Wilke on National Public Radio, said that Freddie would simply refuse to grant interviews. Ramsey thought that Freddie wanted his place in the band to be elevated no higher than any other contributing member of the group, and maybe after fifty years in the band, Freddie had said all that was needed to be uttered. Herein, then, is an effort to assemble some thoughts, I have come across, about Mr. Green, that have been in print for some time. Hopefully, the whole story of this fascinating personality will ultimately be unveiled to those of us who know him only as a reserved, but public figure.

Published data on his personal life are almost non-existent. Samuel Walker was of help to Freddie when he began learning to play the banjo at age twelve. Otherwise he was self-taught. A close friend, Lonnie Simmons, is reputed to have been of assistance to Freddie in securing his first professional job with the Nighthawks. A tour with the Jenkins Orphanage Band, as a non-resident, brought Freddie out of the south. Cat Anderson was also in that band. In 1930 Freddie came to New York at age nineteen to complete his education. Which type and where has not been mentioned.

A series of events led Freddie to daytime employment as an upholsterer and in the evening he sat in or made gigs. The manager of the Yeah Man Club gave the advice that led Freddie from the banjo to the guitar. Working with Willie Gant at the Excelsior Club followed. In 1936, good fortune led Freddie to get a job at the Black Cat Club in Greenwich Village. Here he joined with his friend Lonnie Simmons in a group that included the soon-to-be-famous drummer, Kenny Clarke. It was in this club that John Hammond heard the new and upcoming guitarist.

There is limited information on the family structure of Mr. Green. Leonard Feather listed a New York, Harlem,

FREDDIE GREEN (Photograph by Gerard Futrick)

address for him. Another source listed his three children, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He was a widower. Like many other jazzmen, he protected the privacy of his family. A lot of terms and labels have been offered to allow us some insight into his personality. These include: self-effacing, quiet, reserved, dignified, and according to Buck Clayton, "a nice cool gentleman".

It was in March, 1985 that Mr. Green was profiled in the Sequel section of ***People Magazine***. When the article was called to my attention by several persons who knew of my interest in and admiration for him, I was pleasantly surprised. I did not understand how this modest and retiring man had been suddenly catapulted into being a public figure. The writer was Eric Levin. There sat Freddie on the band gear, backstage in Wooster, Ohio. A second picture was of the fabulous "All-American Rhythm Section" taken in 1938. Count Basie, Freddie Green, Jo Jones and Walter Page had been caught in an action shot. What a fascinating scene depicting four great men whose names will forever be in the forefront of the annals of jazz. Aaron Woodward, Basie's son, talked about the close relationship between Basie and Green and the importance of Freddie to the band. He was described as one who eats lightly, neither drinks nor smokes, and who rises early to walk or play golf, a game that he must have loved. I carry the magazine article all the time in the case of the guitar which I use for rhythm. For a sideman, such as Freddie, to achieve a degree of recognition, by being showcased in a widely circulated popular magazine, carries a symbol that should mean a lot to all involved in the jazz arena.

John Hammond, after raving over hearing the guitar of Freddie, eventually brought him to audition for Basie, who tells the story in ***Good Morning Blues***. Freddie was on the bus the next day heading for Pittsburgh. Another version of the entry of Freddie into the Basie fold is related to possibly how and why Claude Williams, also known as Fiddler, was replaced by the new guitarist. Those who know Fiddler may feel that his side has not been fully heard. Fiddler is the remaining figure left in the changeover. What we know is jazz history. Freddie joined the band in March, 1937 and left it, from his final gig in March, 1987. That is tenure in its best and most stable form.

What made Freddie Green so great as a rhythm guitarist? Why has he not been equaled? Why can't others play in his style? Why can't he be imitated? These questions are all in books on jazz, but there are no accompanying answers. There are educated guesses.

One explanation is related to how Freddie held the guitar. It was slanted at an angle that allowed him to strike the strings in an unusual manner. In the valuable tome, ***The History Of The Guitar In Jazz***, Norman Mongan writes, "Part of the secret of his sound is the way he holds the guitar. With the instrument tilted flat, he can play deeper chords on the bass strings, voicing them essentially on the lower four strings, thus getting his distinctive full sound". Some have felt that it was the type and quality of the instrument itself. In the 1930s, Freddie played a guitar from the maker, Charles A. Stromberg. No exact model has ever been named but it sounds as if it were the Stromberg New York 400. Irving Ashby would know since he hung around the shop of Stromberg and often set up the guitars for the new owners of these fine instruments. Freddie Green is reported to have selected three of the Stromberg models. In later years, and I have not read just when, he turned to the Gretsch line. In both cases, he was involved with class, top of the line, guitars.

Bill Ramsey told Jim Wilke that Freddie did not use a plectrum but combined his thumb, in some special way, with the index finger to design a picking motion that would also make partial use of the thumbnail. Freddie set the strings' action high so that he could be heard better. In an interview conducted by Max Jones and quoted by Mongan, Freddie stated, "At first, when I joined Basie, I tried single string, but it didn't fit the band. Evidently they didn't want that, so naturally I dedicated myself to playing rhythm. It was tough for a time, but this being my first band job, that is, I played that way to satisfy them. That's how I became a rhythm guitarist, by accident really."

One other factor may relate to the manner in which Freddie constructed his chords, as well as how he voiced them. Several instructional manuals for the guitar mention the use of the last four strings. Others describe chord formations on strings 3, 4, and 6 (G, D and E). The strings 2, 3 and 4/5 (B, G and D/A) have been treated by the writers. I have seen no treatise by Mr. Green on his chordal style. He should have been encouraged to publish one. Bucky Pizzarelli wrote an instruction book that incorporates the Freddie Green style. The book is entitled, ***Power Guitar***. Herb Ellis, and many others have written about the use of three-string chords as well as broader chord construction. I suspect, that in the final analysis, it is one's ear that decides where the chords are formed and how they are voiced. Freddie has been credited with having a great ear. Kenny Burrell reminds the student guitarists of the necessity to maintain a line and that Freddie Green was not just chord hopping all over the place. Freddie was as musical as he was rhythmical.

Freddie Green recorded with the Basie band from 1937 until one week before his death. His last session was with Diane Schurr and the Basie band. The recorded output of the Basie band was prolific. In addition, Freddie recorded with the following and more: Mildred Bailey, Emmett Berry, Kenny Burrell, Benny Carter, Buck Clayton, Al Cohn, Herb Ellis, Karl George, Benny Goodman, Lionel Hampton, Billie Holiday, Illinois Jacquet, Jo Jones, Joe Newman, Jimmy Rushing, Pee Wee Russell, John Sellers, Sonny Stitt, Joe Sullivan, Jack Teagarden, Joe Turner, Earl Warren, Dicky Wells, Teddy Wilson, Lester Young.

When Rufus Jones was with the Basie band, he told me that Freddie Green was quite sought after for record sessions. So, I suppose that the list, given above, could be vastly expanded were one to have access to the log book, or Freddie's records of his recording dates.

Fifty years is a long time to have a constant relationship with one group and forty-seven years with one leader is something short of a miracle. What did it all mean? Thad Jones said, "I don't think it's possible to speak of the Basie band with-

out Freddie Green. He's the link that keeps the tradition alive."

The tribute that Freddie gave at the Basie funeral is an often quoted one. He expressed his feelings toward his long-term friend by saying, "I've been with the band since 1937, what am I to do now?" That, to me, is a definitive definition of closeness and friendship.

Freddie was a composer along with being an instrumentalist. His song, ***Corner Pocket (Until I Met You)***, will probably become one of the all time jazz classics. The 1941 composition, ***Down For Double***, has been recorded by Basie several times. He wrote ***Free Eats*** with Snooky Young. Another of his recorded works was ***Right On***. There must be many more. Jo Jones and Freddie put words to about twenty of the compositions of Duke Ellington. Where are these tunes? What will be done to them? Many friends, colleagues and companions from the band have been quoted in the past with reference to Mr. Green. Some selected ones are presented here.

Harry "Sweets" Edison: "Freddie Green is about the closest friend I have."

Preston Love: "(Freddie) was right at home on the sea coast with crabbing basket in hand. He was also a master swimmer."

Gene Ramey: "Freddie Green, that famous guitarist in Basie's band, does not flirt with the chords. Chords can follow progressions. Or chords can just stay on rudiments, and that way people know where you are and don't have to clash with you. Why Freddie is so great is that he plays that fundamental chord and doesn't get in the way of the piano."

Eddie Barefield: "Walter Page on bass was the making of Freddie Green."

Lawrence Lucie: "...a guy like Freddie Green, with Count Basie, liked Rhythm and felt rhythm."

Dennis Wilson: "It's as if in the Bible, they said 'let there be time' and Freddie started playing."

Eric Dixon: "People could imitate Basie for a couple of seconds, but not longer. You can't imitate that unique touch. It's the same with Freddie."

John Lewis: "Freddie developed little melodic lines when he plays behind someone, and you have to listen closely or you'll miss them."

Bill Ramsey felt that Freddie could have been a big star and made a lot of money had he formed a quintet or sextet and traveled, especially in Europe. Freddie had the opportunities, according to Ramsey, but remained with the Basie band, as he was not one to seek accolades or stardom. Freddie liked the fellowship in/with the band and it was his family as well.

Leigh Kamman, on Minnesota Public Radio, like Bill Ramsey, gave an extensive eulogy the day of the funeral of Mr. Green. Leigh played a lot of little known recordings in which Freddie participated during the early years, especially those on which he backed Billie Holiday and swung so hard with Lester Young, who initiated that light, fluid beat in the small group setting.

The reader may gather that I lionize Freddie Green. I do. I have followed his career, from a distance, since he joined Basie. I was in high school in those years. In my college years, I became a rhythm guitarist although I failed, then, to take it as seriously as I should have. In the past twenty-five years, however, I made a complete switch. I play whenever I can at the local level. I did not know Mr. Green. I did speak with him on two occasions, for a possible total of two minutes. I was thrilled. In 1985, the band played in a small town in western Minnesota, Perham, on a mid-week night. It was an outdoor place and we expected the worst, just as we were surprised to see him there. We heard the best. The band, under Eric Dixon, roared and romped. Freddie never let up. The performance was spectacular. I met Mr. Green at the refreshment stand. I bought him a hot dog and a soft drink and parted from him feeling as if I had just spoken with as fine a person I have ever met. He was.

Freddie has now rejoined his friend, Count Basie. We enjoyed both of them for a lot of musical years. Bill Ramsey felt that the band may not try to replace Freddie.

Sonny Cohn, in 1985, made a very prophetic statement when he remarked, "The most important part of your body is your heart. It keeps everything else going. That's what Freddie does."

Freddie's heart stopped. It lost its rhythm.

— James Condell

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Opus In Swing. Savoy, MG12085. (Frank Wess, Kenny Burrell, Freddie Green, Eddie Jones, and Kenny Clarke.)

Rhythm Willie, Herb Ellis and Freddie Green. Concord Jazz, CJ-10. (Herb Ellis, Freddie Green, Ray Brown, Jake Hanna and Ross Tompkins.)

Sonny Stitt Plays. Roost, LP2208. (Hank Jones, Freddie Green, Wendell Marshall, Shadow Wilson and Sonny Stitt.)

SOMETHING OLD / SOMETHING NEW

...something bold/something Blue Note! To paraphrase the old adage alluded to in the title may be a fitting way to describe one of the best known jazz labels of all time. In terms of quantity, few companies had such a prodigious output of albums in one musical genre; more significant, though, was the level of quality achieved by the label's two founders, Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff.

Both immigrants from Nazi Germany, they arrived in the U.S. within months before the outbreak of W.W.II just to seek out those sounds of American music that had so impressed them in their native Berlin. To that effect, Alfred Lion said his life was changed the night he heard the Sam Wooding orchestra playing in a local arena that he used to frequent. As a sixteen year old in 1925, he immediately sought out anything on record that would feed his newly discovered passion.

But it would be thirteen years later, when Alfred Lion would make it to the shores of America, eager and willing to discover the music first hand. By May of 1939, he had been joined by his childhood friend and as young entrepreneurs, they had ventured into the recording business by creating a new label, ***Blue Note Records.*** Their first session had been recorded a few months earlier and the sides featured both solo and duet performances by Albert Ammons and Mead Lux Lewis. Right from the start, both founders set the tone for years to come in that they stated their purpose in their first promotional brochure:

Blue Note Records are designed simply to serve uncompromising expressions of hot jazz or swing, in general. Any particular style of playing which represents an authentic way of musical feeling is genuine expression. By virtue of its significance and place, time and circumstance, it possesses its own tradition, artistic standards and audiences that keep it alive (...) Blue Note records are concerned with identifying its impulse, not its sensational commercial adornments.

For the next 25 to 30 years, Blue Note stuck to its principles and its producers succeeded in shaping a sound, if not a whole concept of jazz. But this was less the result of direct intervention in the actual creative process, but more in setting a context for the musicians to do their own thing. But, in the ensuing years, good intentions succumbed to the trappings of success, hence the appearance of certain formulas. For starters, one surely remembers the house rhythm section phenomena; then, there was the increasing use of fade-outs, which had almost reached epidemic proportions by the late sixties.

In 1966, Alfred Lion suddenly sold out (literally) his share of the company to Liberty Records, a subsidiary of the United Artists group. From then on, Blue Note started to falter on its principles, even though Francis Wolff stayed on till his death in 1971. After that date, the 'corporatization' of the label spelled its own demise; once a standard bearer of "The finest in Jazz" (as per its motto), it had turned into a haven for the emerging pop-soul and fusion fads. Even if the old albums were being reprinted and some unissued material came out on a twofer series, Blue Note had finally 'sold out' (in the figurative sense). By 1980, the label was, for all intents and purposes, dead.

Just when Blue Note had been consigned to the annals of history, here it is back with us again, reborn out of its ashes like the proverbial phoenix. This time around, the dynamic duo of Bruce Lundvall and Michael Cuscuna are presiding over the company's rebirth. But unlike Wolff and Lion, who started an independent recording company from scratch, the Lundvall and Cuscuna team have wheeled and dealed their way in with Capitol Records, a subsidiary of EMI International.

To mark its second coming, both men organized the "One night Preserved" concert in 1985, which as been documented by no less than four albums (BTDK 85117 for the boxed set) and two video packages. Since then, the label has now been busy recruiting a roster of musicians, some of whom were once part of the original company. Amongst them, one can name Joe Henderson, McCoy Tyner, Jackie McLean, Jimmy Smith, Kenny Burrell, Tony Williams as some of the 'returnees'.

To that list, one must not forget Freddie Hubbard, surely one of its most important recording artists. Over the last 25 years, he has been recognized as one of the major trumpet stylists; yet, instrumental merit alone does not make the musician. Proof of that is the string of albums he churned out for a couple of labels throughout the seventies, few of which were ever considered as priorities on a jazz collector's shopping list. Nevertheless, his live appearances in recent years have helped us to overcome some of our doubts.

Following an album with Woody Shaw (***Double Take*** 46294), recorded in 1985, he comes back with ***Life Flight*** (BT-85139), an album that calls into question some of the hopes we had after the first one. Once more, Freddie is straddling the fence between jazz and fusion. Just the presence of George Benson on Side A is a tip off; add to that an electric bass and keyboards, and that is enough to give you the picture. Side B, however, fares a bit better because Larry Willis sticks to the old 88 and Rufus Reid steps in at the (acoustic) bass chair. With Benson absent and Ralph Moore replacing Stanley Turrentine, we get a more straight ahead session with Freddie clearly doing his

JACK WALRATH (Photograph by Gerard Futrick)

best solo work on the title cut. Even if his solos avoid most of his usual pyrotechnics, the material at hand is still strongly derived from his early 70's albums, certainly not the most memorable part of his career from a jazz perspective.

But today's Blue Note is not just content to have an old family reunion; instead, it is seeking both established and new talents, mainstream that they may be. Nowadays, the music field is brimming with an array of musicians, some of whom have been billed as media sensations. Of course, a lot has been made of Stanley Jordan, but beyond that, Blue Note has sought out a number of solid artists deserving wider exposure.

Jack Walrath, for one, is no superstar, but he has been trained in the best of jazz traditions: under the tutelage of Charles Mingus, he not only had the chance to occupy the trumpet chair in the bassist's last working bands, but learned a great deal of his trade by transcribing arrangements that the master dictated to him from his wheelchair. Judging from the results of his first album for Blue Note (***Master Of Suspense*** Blue Note BL-46905), some of that influence has rubbed off on him, though not in a strictly imitative way. Clearly, the focus is on the writing: with 9 tracks, eight of which feature a seven piece band, one is sure not to hear a run of the mill blowing session.

Upon first listening, one gets the feeling that the leader is trying to cram in all sorts of ideas, both harmonic and rhythmic, hence the designation of 'suspense'. To that, one must also expect the unexpected, though not necessarily the innovative. Be also prepared to hear out two contributions by the Country & Western Superstar Willie Nelson (no kidding!). (For the full story of this "collaboration", read Michael Cuscuna's postscript at the end of the back jacket liner notes.)

Granted, the music takes all kinds of twists and turns, but sometimes this occurs to the detriment of clarity. Some free blowing sections, for instance, sound diffuse, as though they are an adjunct to – and not a part of – an organic whole. Without a doubt, the Mingus heritage can be associated to the music, but it is one of spirit more than mere substance. Hopefully then, this album may just set the stage for future outings by this trumpeter-composer of high caliber.

Interestingly enough, the Mingus connection also appears on Blue Note with the George Adams/Don Pullen Quartet. In their second album for the label (***Song Everlasting*** BLJ-46907), they remain faithful to the nuts and bolts of good jazz: well crafted themes, plenty of gutsy blowing and flawless support by the bass of Cameron Brown and the drums of Dannie Richmond, Mingus's alter ego in person. Born out of the Mingus Dynasty band, the quartet has now paved its own way since 1979, recording a few albums along the way. Together with the Walrath album, one gets the two edges of the Mingus sword, so to speak; on the one hand, the trumpeter acknowledges the composer side of the bassist, while, on the other, this quartet upholds the energy and soulfulness that the master could arouse from his sidemen.

With 5 cuts (plus another one on the CD configuration), the two co-leaders take most of the solo space, the tenor player holding back a bit on his patented calesthenics, the pianist still indulging in his neo-Taylorish licks. With a ballad, a latin piece, a shuffle beat blues number, an up tempo groover and an ingenious variant of Miles's "Tune Up" (here called "Warm Up"), the programme is varied and consistently musical, as is the case for most of the better mainstream jazz albums nowadays.

The resurgence of the jazz mainstream in this decade has been without a doubt one of the most hotly talked topics amongst jazz fans. More than ever, new bands are coming to the fore, which are ***explicitly*** moulding themselves on a number of past and present jazz institutions. One such example is OTB (a.k.a. Out of The Blue), whose parentage with Art Blakey's Messengers is as evident in its instrumentation as in the material they play. After two studio sessions, their newest album (***Live At Mt. Fuji*** BT-85141) captures the sextet at an outdoor concert in Japan.

As part of a three day "Blue Note goes East" festival, held in August of 1986, this new release focuses on three lengthy tunes played by the whole band, prefaced however by two trio cuts featuring pianist Harry Pickens, who surely qualifies as one of the jazz 'giants' – in the literal sense of the term that is. Even though parallels can be drawn, this Band does not have a driving musical force behind it, as is the case with the Messengers. All members are relative newcomers who are individually striving for a place on today's scene, which makes us wonder about the band's future as a whole. Proof of that is the recent departure of altoist Kenny Garrett for the greener pastures of the Miles Davis band.

If this is to be their final curtain call, it is certainly a worthy one, for the band responds well to the enthusiastic crowd by playing a collection of material already featured on their previous two releases. Incidentally, CD owners will get two extra cuts on their small disk, which is bound to frustrate those who have not availed themselves of this new technology. In any event, give this band a listen, it's in keeping with the times, I guess.

When it comes to today's mainstream, one recognizes the importance of certain musicians as role models for many a younger musician. As much as the Coltrane-Rollins paradigm has been the shaping force for a generation of saxophone players, the dual influences of Chick Corea and Bill Evans have been equally pervasive amongst many academically trained pianists.

In her debut album as leader, Eliane Elias uses these very terms of reference, adding to her keyboard work the rhythmical panache of her native Brazil. Overall, ***Illusions*** (BLJ-46994) is an enjoyable trio album, though a brief cut with Toots Thielmans on harmonica and a longer number with an electronic keyboard deter from the basic acoustic format. Drummers Lenny White and Steve Gadd stay away from their funky cliches as does bassist Stanley Clarke for the most part. Also present in this album of variant personnel are bassist Eddie Gomez and drummer Al Foster who play on most cuts. In short, an LP with plenty of soothing grooves and a bit of latin flair thrown in for good measure.

So much for the 'something new' aspect of the story. On the other side, the 'something old' part of Blue Note still conjurs many fond memories for the devotees, because almost every release was eagerly awaited. In its own way, Blue Note kept abreast of things, changing its orientation to assimilate new ideas. First faithful to the realm of 'hot jazz', it eventually made room for the emerging boppers, who eventually became the bread and butter of the label. Even in the sixties, when it was starting to lend its ear to the 'New Thing', it was still trying to keep up with the scene. Yet, this modest undertaking was cut short after the company fell into corporate hands.

Nowadays, we are fortunate that the new Blue Note is recognizing its past by reprinting many classic albums and unlocking the vaults for us to discover some hitherto unissued material. Just the task of transfering the wealth of that material for vinyl and CD digital configurations will be enough to keep the company busy for years to come, and that is surely good news for those caught with their worn out or scratchy originals. Of course, it is always a pleasure to hear those surfaces devoid of all the cracking noises, but, at the same time, it is interesting to hear them from a historical point of view. In the past, we reacted to these releases with a greater degree of emotion because they were immediate to us; now, we listen to them being conditionned by the passing of time and with it comes our lingering doubts whether the music has worn well over the years.

In Blue Note's case, their catalogue has aged well, even though some albums have not fared

as well as others. But in our epoch of consolidation, there is still something valuable to be gained by the classics and not so classics alike. Just the very fact that Blue Note is back is indicative of this consolidation taking hold of the jazz world. Not only do we see reissues of old albums, but there are also new groups reexamining older bodies of music and, in some cases, forgotten ones. A good example of that is the John Zorn and Wayne Horvitz tribute to Sonny Clark (***Voodoo*** Soul Note BSR 0109 — See Review in Coda #215, p.39).

When such projects come out, we are often tempted to look back at the originals, just to compare and wonder how new wine can be put into old bottles. Amongst the many Blue Note albums issued under the late pianist's name, ***Cool Struttin'*** (BST 81588) was one of his better sessions. With two originals and two lesser known tunes, including Bird's under-recorded "Sippin' At Bells", this gives us the opportunity of hearing Jackie McLean sharing the front line with Art Farmer in his pre-fluegelhorn days. We might bemoan the lack of music on the LP (37 minutes), but CD owners are advised that a Japanese import has two extra pieces, but beware of its price!

Once more, Sonny Clark returns on a release of particular interest to all collectors, Ike Quebec's ***Easy Living*** (BST 84103). If the name of that album does not strike a bell, do not be surprised, because it was never issued despite having been slated for publication. Side A contains three sextet performances (released in the earlier ***Congo Lament*** LT-1089), while the flip side has three "new" ballad performances featuring the leader's lusty tenor, reminiscent of the Hawkins and Webster sound. Even though he acted as A&R Man in the late 50's and had brought in many solid musicians from the bop and hard bop stream, he himself never quite fit in with the prevailing style of the label. Moreover, his untimely death in January of 1963, only three days after Sonny Clark, never gave him the chance of making a lasting impression as a recording artist.

Given his more traditionalist leanings, the music, recorded less than a year before his demise from lung cancer, shows its age on both sides. But as a document of that time it is a worthy addition because one gets to hear a very contrasting tenor team of Quebec and Stanley Turrentine with trombonist and session arranger Benny Green in the middle: just the contrast in sound between the two saxophonists is an excellent starting point. Finally, lest we not forget that this completes his LP production, though many singles of his have now been grouped together in a recent three record set for Mosaic records (***The Complete Blue Note 45 Sessions Of Ike Quebec*** — MR3-121).

Certainly better remembered than Ike Quebec was Hank Mobley, who had been an active sideman throughout the late fifties and early sixties. Once designated by fellow tenorist Dexter Gordon as "the champion middleweight of the tenor saxophone", Hank Mobley also had the chance to record a couple of albums under his own name. ***Soul Station*** (BLJ 841031) was one of his rare opportunities to lead a quartet and even some 28 years after the session he surely took full advantage of that occasion. From start to finish, we are treated to a musical performance in the best sense of the word: each of the six tracks is like a well told story without a bad note anywhere. Even the age old practice of quoting is convincing in his mid tempo rendering of "If I Should Lose You", an interpretation that exudes both inspiration and musical joy in the art of improvising.

And who would not enjoy listening to Lee Morgan in his prime, as is the case with his album ***Search For The New Land*** (84169)? Few musicians had been so quintessential to the label as the late trumpeter for his style coincided perfectly with the musical values of the label. Out of this association, he even had a hit with his ***Sidewinder*** in 1963. In February 1964, he cut the present album which, from a musical point of view, was a superior product in that Morgan's abilities as a composer are better developed than on his previous album. The title track, for instance, is one of the trumpeter's rare attempts at creating an extended compositional framework, which is both moody in feeling and substantial in harmonic concept. This album is a solid example of the mid-sixties Blue Note production; moreover, it gives full credence to Alfred Lion's belief that "proper preparation before the studio date allowed the musicians to be spontaneous and creative with challenging material".

This very idea was one of the hallmarks of the label, and rarely did a session sink to the level of a musician's jam or, even worse, a cutting contest. In its new form, the label seems equally committed to that principle, and all releases up to now confirm this. Hopefully, the Lundvall-Cuscuna team have finally carved a secure niche for themselves; based on previous experience, however, both men have played musical chairs with a number of the majors just to keep their aspirations alive. Amidst all of this, we must not forget Alfred Lion himself: when he died just about a year ago, he surely must have been a happy and contented man. And from all of us jazzfans, thanks for the memories! And now that your life's work has been given a second chance, we can also look forward to its future too. — ***Marc Chénard***

THE AVANT GARDE IN TORONTO

Over the past decade or so, Toronto has developed a new reputation in the international world of music. Although historically there has always been the idea that Toronto was a "jazz" city, what has now evolved is on a more elevated plane than the previous idea of the local rhythm section supporting the invited American star. This period has in fact developed into a community of improvisers and composers who are more inclined to specific projects, with the foreign musicians. From my own perspective, and the events that myself and my friends have been involved with, mostly in the later part of the seventies and early eighties, events that included the likes of Gunter Christmann, Julius Hemphill, Roscoe Mitchell, Paul Rutherford, Peter Kowald, Joe McPhee and Leo Smith, the latter two resulting in recordings being released, I would have to say that, this was not only to invite the "guest star", but also to elevate our knowledge of the music, and to assist on many levels in the development of our own art by working in an area that we had developed as an original art form in our own community, and could enlarge by working with musicians that had different experiences than our own. So it is with much pleasure that I find myself in this particular time writing about a continuation of this very idea.

Although there are not a large number of musicians trying to make this idea occur, the small amount that do exist, are a devoted and serious force. The musicians that come to mind immediately are Tim Brady for his projects, mostly to do with orchestras utilising Gil Evans and Kenny Wheeler; Paul Cram for his orchestra project with alto saxophonist Julius Hemphill that resulted in a very fine recording being produced ("Beyond Benghazi", Apparition A-0987-8), and the latest development of Jane Bunnett and Larry Cramer inviting Don Pullen, Dewey Redman and Vincent Chauncey to participate in a project that will also finalise itself in the release of a recording on the new Toronto-based label, DarkLight.

The winter season, although by the time that you read this spring will be well on its way, has unfolded in a wondrous manner for the contemporary music scene in our city. The two most important venues for this have been Clinton's and Sneaky Dees, both located in my own local neighbourhood of Bloor Street West. The clubs have been elevated to this grand position, not by the owners, indeed it is with some surprise that we find them "allowing" music of this kind to be presented in their venues, but in the case of the Clinton, where music of an improvised nature can be heard almost every night, by Serge Sloimovits, who is fast becoming a major force as a promoter of jazz music, and indeed is the owner of the aforementioned DarkLight Record company. At Sneaky Dees, on Monday nights only, the music is directed by Jane Bunnett and Larry Cramer. There has been the occasional presentation at the BamBoo, but this has little to do with the attitude of the club, which has to be considered a "hip hangout", rather than a serious venue.

Between the Clinton and Sneaky Dees, there has been an interesting assortment of music presented, from the Monk project, featuring saxophonists Jane Fair and Jane Bunnett, the presentation of saxophonist Bob Mover, a big band project that I myself directed, Roger Turner and Phil Minton on tour from England (this produced by Mike Dyer), and a trombone project organised by Tom Walsh, featuring Michael Vlatkovich, there has been more than enough original creative music to keep everyone content.

Clinton's - A Sunday Night in December

Tom Walsh and Michael Vlatkovich, trombones; David Mott, baritone saxophone; Mike Milligan, bass; John Leonard, drums.

I had some years ago, received in the mail, a record and a friendly letter from a trombone player of whom I had no previous knowledge. Michael Vlatkovich. Although he was born in St. Louis, in recent years he has developed a reputation as a Californian musician, playing with the likes of Vinny Golia, Bobby Bradford, and other members of the west coast new music community. It is quite surprising that he would find his way into the Toronto scene, even for one performance, and trombonist Tom Walsh must be thanked for this chance to hear such a fine player. As is often the case for musicians, they had met each other when they were both performing at last year's Vancouver Jazz Festival, and being of like intent, they became friends. What better reason for creating an event, than out of friendship and a love for the music, two elements that were most apparent at the concert. Most of the music had been written by Michael Vlatkovich, and due to the shortage of rehearsal time, the group of musicians that Tom Walsh had assembled proved to be most suitable. From the academic knowledge of baritone saxophonist David Mott, to the amazing creative energy of drummer John Leonard, when considered collectively, gave forth a complete and as relaxed a performance as a group of players who might have had a more intimate knowledge of each other. The baritone and two trombones presented a heavyweight front line in the true natural meaning of that description, and for the most part made the music tough sounding. A great deal of humour was present in the compositional stance of the band, not so much to do with the actual tunes, although that indeed did contribute a great deal to the evening, but the development of the group organisation – removing the string of solos syndrome so common in such a configuration, and presenting the music in a small orchestra context, much in the style of Charles Mingus; better groups, a spiritual force that was most apparent in Vlatkovich's music.

Although he was an exceptional trombonist and composer, I could not think of him in any way being "better" than the Toronto players, but for all concerned it was a fine experience, because the visitor does attract a larger audience (import is better than home grown), and indeed does create another level of energy due to their different cultural experience. A positive realisation.

The story continues, and although based in a similar concept, is on a slightly more ambitious level, for not only are three world class visitors invited to participate in a concert held at the BamBoo Club on Toronto's trendy Queen Street West, but it will also, in a few months, be realised as the first recording to appear on Serge Sloimovits' newly formed label, DarkLight. I was fortunate enough to be present at both the live performance and the two day recording session that followed.

The live presentation at the BamBoo (February 24th), was a well thought out affair that utilised Don Pullen (piano), Dewey Redman (tenor saxophone) and Vincent Chauncy (french horn), in a creative and imaginative way. Instead of just presenting the three visitors as guests with the Toronto band of Jane Bunnett (flute & soprano saxophone), Larry Cramer (trumpet & flugelhorn), Brian Dickerson (piano), Scott Alexander (bass) and Claude Ranger (drums), a series of combinations were selected, making the evening a very interesting pastiche of musical adventures.

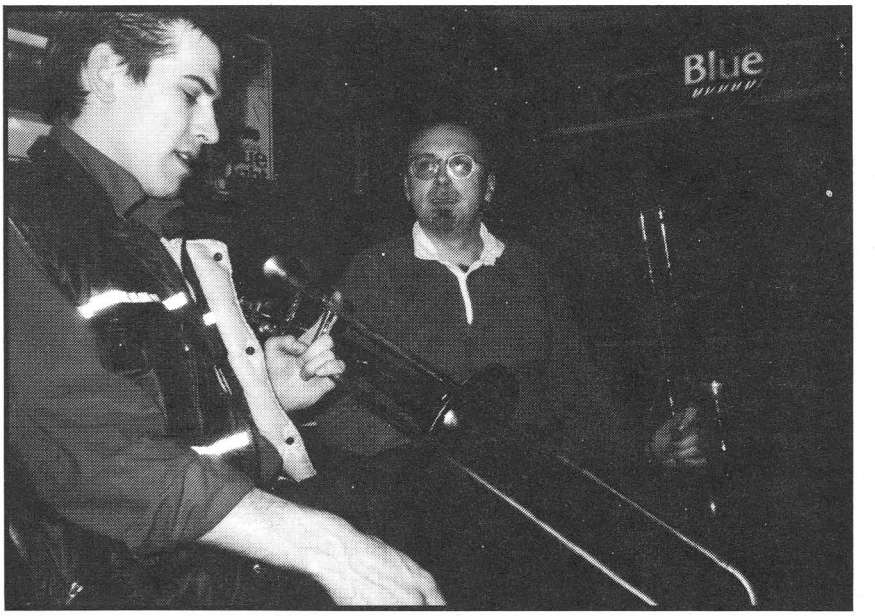
Although surprised by the announcement that he would open the concert solo, Don Pullen rose to the occasion in his normal vivacious manner, and proceeded to enthrall the capacity audience of some four hundred fans, with his composition *Richard's Tune*. From the offset his music immediately became a masterful display of tension and release, transcending idiomatic stylism insomuch that although a contemporary performer, his own history as an American "jazz" pianist is clear to behold. Moving freely about his Steinway tuned drum he produced the blues, sheer sheets of rapid arpeggios, calypsos and with his own power calling momentarily on Bud & Monk, filled the room with so much power and joy that the stance for the evening to unfold was set in positive motion. So strong in fact, that the evening, regardless of the combinations to follow, never faltered for even a moment. Jane Bunnett on flute joined Don for a duet rendition of *Big Alice*, a composition that will likely, for future generations, become what is known as a jazz standard. Bunnett has studied her history well, so much so that at times one could well imagine Roland Kirk smiling down from his lofty perch. The evening continued with the Toronto quintet gradually enlarging, first with Vincent Chauncey playing a ballad on french horn, its soft textures blending

into a most interesting sound with the flute. Then Dewey Redman on tenor replacing Chauncey, to change, once again, the overall feel of the music. Considering who the new addition was, it was quite fitting that the song, written by Cramer, should have a certain Ornette feel to it. Dewey's solo was one of those beautiful examples of how to build a solo from small, rhythmically placed phrases, gradually evolving into the sound of what is unmistakeably Dewey Redman. The music on this piece also opened up into another area because for the first time in the evening there was no piano in the group. Interest was also sustained by using a variation of different duet and solo combinations between Cramer, Bunnett, Alexander and Ranger. The great strength of the evening however, came when the Canadian and American players became the long awaited septet. The music just exploded! Wonderful music by all concerned, with special moments coming from a trio of Redman, Pullen and Ranger, the Canadian drummer relishing every moment of this opportunity, and moments in the middle of all this when Dewey Redman was calling back all the spirits of Albert (Ayler), speaking in tongues, like improvised music in its most magical moments can do. And just when it seemed there could be no more, it was Don Pullen.

A time to say goodnight, for an audience and a group of players who definitely did not want it to end.

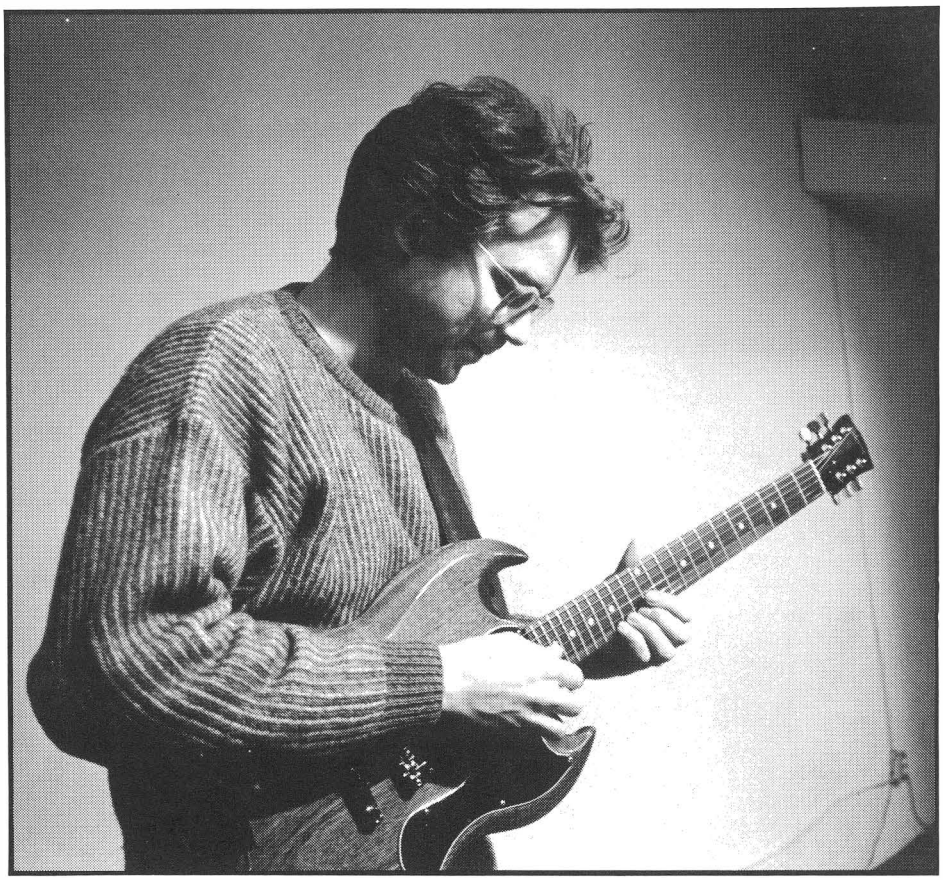
The next two days at the recording session, the music which in its raw exuberance the previous night had excited everyone to such an extent, was more finely tuned, as would be expected on a record, without losing, and in some cases enhancing its quality, illustrating that if the players and organisers are serious about their ventures, then it matters not if the artists come from Canada or America, only that they should all be doing it for the same purpose. The continuation of our fantastic art.

– Bill Smith



TOM WALSH & MICHAEL VLATKOVICH / DON PULLEN & JANE BUNNETT (Photographs by Bill Smith)

BILL FRISELL * THE NEW FACES



SMALL HANDS – THE UNMISTAKABLE TOUCH OF BILL FRISELL

Bill Frisell sounds preoccupied, distant. Phoning from his home in Jersey City on a sunny afternoon in December, he tries to remember dates, recording sessions, concert tours, and record releases, attempting to put the past year in perspective. After all, 1987 has been a busy and productive year for the young guitarist. Having spent most of the summer and fall on the road, touring with Paul Bley, Marc Johnson's Bass Desires, and his own new quartet, he's only just arrived home. 1987 also saw a bumper crop of albums in which Frisell participated – albums by Bley, Marianne Faithfull, John Zorn, Power Tools, and Bass Desires. As if that weren't enough, he somehow found time to record a third solo album with his new band in Oslo.

The first few questions are easy enough; he has no trouble talking about his equipment. "Well, it's a Gibson SG Jr. with one pickup, a volume pedal, distortion pedal, I use a compressor all the time, and an Electroharmonix 16 second digital delay. That's basically it." It's when asked about his approach to playing, how he attunes himself to an ensemble's needs, how he feels for each note, that he begins to reach for words. "It's such a combination of ... It depends on what the music calls for. I guess I just try to assimilate all the music I've heard, and then go for the feeling." The pauses between question and answer grow more protracted as he hesitates, trying hard to put into words what can't even be notated on staff paper.

Yet his shyness speaks volumes when one considers his music. In a time when most young guitarists are busy imitating their influences, Bill Frisell has, using the same six strings, forged a unique and singularly distinctive style, pulling out some of the most surprising colors and tones to come from an electric guitar in quite some time. The grace and quaver of his guitar is instantly recognizable – whether it's in the bluesy notes of a Paul Bley fragment, *Monica Jane*, the fuzz-driven textures of his own *Tone*, or the complexity and power of John Zorn's arrangement of Ennio Morricone's *The Big Gundown*. With a deep personal language, a maverick technique no-one's come close to replicating, and a sophisticated mix of effects and instincts, Bill Frisell plays guitar like Lester Bowie plays trumpet – with feeling.

Born in Baltimore but raised in Denver, Frisell is a lapsed clarinet player. Listening to the radio in his teens exposed him to pop music, the Chicago Blues, and the electric guitar. After graduating from high school he met guitar instructor Dale Bruning, whom he credits with opening his ears to Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, and Thelonious Monk, and introducing him to jazz guitarist Jim Hall, one of Frisell's most important early teachers. He also counts Wes Montgomery, Jimi Hendrix, and even his home town among his other influences.

"I grew up in Denver, Colorado. There was a lot of music around at the time that I thought was really unhip; I really wasn't interested in it. But somehow it must have seeped in there some way." This would account for the playful, healthy country & western streak through his compositions. With easy-going songs entitled *Rambler* and *Amarillo, Barbados*, it comes as no surprise that Frisell has a deep admiration for the crossroads of country and jazz found on Gary Burton's seminal **Country Roads and Other Places.**

After completing music studies at the University of North Carolina, Frisell attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he first met many of the musicians he works with today, and where he first discovered a volume pedal. Common enough among rock musicians, the volume pedal seemed a little out of place in a jazz guitarist's setup. Nevertheless Bill found that the pedal made his guitar unusually expressive, and he added a distortion pedal and an analog delay, finding a warm and resonant voice amidst the hardware, a voice that can be heard in the lyrical circles of his first solo release for ECM, **In Line**.

After some overseas session work with ECM heavyweights Eberhard Weber and Jan Garbarek, and some time spent living in Belgium, Bill moved to New York. His big break came there, in 1983, when a drummer by the name of Paul Motian asked him to join his quintet. A percussionist of rare grace and intensity, Motian had played with the best – Mose Allison, Don Cherry, Keith Jarrett, Bill Evans. After seasoning his chops in such distinguished company, Motian formed trios and quintets of his own, groups displaying his seemingly natural abilities as a bandleader. Upon completion of the "80/81" tour with Pat Metheney, Motian asked his advice in choosing a suitable guitarist for his new quintet. Pat knew Bill from their Berklee days, and highly recommended him.

Once in studio recording **Psalm**, the first of many albums together, Frisell and Motian felt an immediate musical kinship. The Paul Motian Quintet is a remarkable oddity in jazz – five musicians (Motian, Frisell, saxophonists Jim Pepper and Joe Lovano, bassist Ed Schuller) unique in their own voices, a band of individualists who feel comfortable joining forces. According to Frisell, Motian was a very influential teacher. "He gave me a lot of responsibility. It really feels like it's *my* band, almost. I've never played with anyone where I've felt *that* much support musically. No matter where I go,

BILL FRISELL (Photograph by Bill Smith)

whatever I'm playing, he's always there with you. He listens *so hard* to whatever you play."

Listen to the space Motian gives Frisell to solo in *Lament*, from the quintet's 1985 LP **Jack Of Clubs**. This event is rare enough on a drummer's record, yet rarer still considering Bill's exquisite solo. Or take *Abacus*, from their latest release, **Misterioso**, where Bill bends and twists away, with Paul firmly behind him every step of the way. This special musical understanding led Motian to sit behind the traps on Bill's second solo album, **Rambler,** and Bill to handle the guitar chores on Motian's 1985 ECM project **It Should Have Happened A Long Time Ago.** What's interesting about this pair of releases, besides the illustration of the growing relationship between guitarist and drummer, is that they both showcase Frisell's latest acquisition – the Roland GR300 guitar synthesizer, a device enabling him to bend notes and smear chords like never before, as in the warped funk of *Resistor* or the gentle textures of *Two Women From Padua*. Bill experimented with the more advanced Roland GR700 for a while, but sold it and shelved the GR300 because he felt they were taking him further away from the music.

Learning how to listen was to be the most important lesson Motian could teach Frisell. It taught him to approach different ensembles differently. The lineup for **Rambler** (trumpeter Kenny Wheeler, tuba player Bob Stewart, bassist Jerome Harris, and Motian) had different needs and demands from the sessions with Garbarek, Weber, and Motian's quintet. Yet Frisell intuitively gauged what his role was, and, without sacrificing his sound, played differently in each case, unselfishly contributing his best to each ensemble's alchemy.

"I don't necessarily play differently for different people, I just listen to what everybody's playing and try to react," Bill attests. "So whether it's with Jim Hall or Arto Lindsay, I'm still using the same kind of instincts." Bill's recent work as saxophonist Tim Berne's foil and as axeman for Wayne Horvitz' popular revisionist NYC combo The President are ample proof that he really feels at home in an ensemble setting.

ECM boss Manfred Eicher knew this when he was casting around for players to form a quartet with pianist Paul Bley in 1986. Eicher and Bley chose Frisell, reedist John Surman, and Paul Motian. All four musicians, chosen for their emotion and responsiveness, share an aversion to practising and rehearsal, and have all played with at least one other in the group, guaranteeing a certain measure of cohesion. The album, **Fragments**, is halfway between a retrospective of sorts, including Bley standards such as *Closer* and *Nothing Ever Was, Anyway*, and a collection of interpretations of compositions by Surman, Frisell, and Motian. Perhaps the best example of Frisell's ensemble work, *Fragments* is a rich masterpiece of mood in which it's difficult to tell where one musician stops and another begins. When the four become one – as in Carla Bley's *Seven* – it's breathtaking.

Frisell looks back on his work with Bley as invaluable, and a great influence on his craft. "I've just finished doing a tour with Paul where we didn't have any rehearsals, didn't use any music for the whole tour, we just got on stage every night for five and a half weeks and just started playing, with no discussion. It was great. Rehearsals were useless."

His improvisational skills and love of ensemble work garnered Frisell a reputation as a talented and understanding guitarist – and one who is open to challenges. This led to a lot of work with the vibrant downtown New York crowd, to Lower East Side pacesetters like Arto Lindsay, Jim Staley, Wayne Horvitz, and an artist who would not only challenge him, but would force him to rethink his ideas – reedist/composer John Zorn.

"When I met Zorn it kind of shook up some of the methods I'd been using," Frisell recalls. "His music is based on quick changes; the basic premise of a lot of his work is that there's a drastic change every few seconds. A mood change, volume change, any kind of change. As a musician you have to really get to the centre of whatever it is in just a fraction of a second and make it clear, and then be able to change your focus really fast to whatever's coming up next. That sort of went against a lot of what I'd tried to do in the past, and still do, which is to develop a small idea over a long time, or a single sound over a long time."

After his work in **The Big Gundown**, Zorn's hommage to the spaghetti western scores of Ennio Morricone, Zorn cast Frisell in *Cobra* – a composition based on a war game where the improvisational possibilities are endless. A composition without notation, *Cobra*'s musical framework has the players come up with different musical situations – duets, battles, group imitations of a musician – indicated by a series of hand signals, then improvise within that context, before changing it at the drop of a hat. A maniacal, cartoon-inspired postcard from our fragmented, chaotic, and sometimes supersonic world, *Cobra* is the ultimate test for the improvisor, and, along with a raft of other avant garde hipsters like Christian Marclay, Elliot Sharp, Bobby Previte and Zeena Parkins, Frisell holds his ground and passes it with flying colors.

Frisell put this experience to good use as he entered studio in early 1987 with two former Decoding Society members, Melvin Gibbs and Ronald Shannon Jackson, to cut an album of live compositions under the name Power Tools. No stranger to the Society (he collaborated on a fine guitar textbook LP, **Smash & Scatteration,** in 1985, with their guitarist, Vernon Reid), Bill looked forward to the opportunity to record live with no overdubs. "Power Tools was fantastic. We really wanted to *play* and not mess around. We just wanted to document what was happening in the room, not try to patch things up."

Mess around Power Tools don't, and **Strange Meeting**, the first (and hopefully not last) album from this modern power trio features some of the finest playing of any jazz record of 1987. The interplay is immediate and intuitive, recalling some of the cutting edge composition and playing of Decoding Society albums like **Barbeque Dog.** While the proceedings are kept in tight check by Jackson (still one of the jazz scene's most underrated drummers), Frisell's uncharacteristically electric performance dominates the sound. Filling Vernon Reid's shoes was a bit of a tall order, but Frisell proves more than able, giving a technical tour-de-force, carefully pulling out all the stops in the controlled fury of *Wadmalaw Island* and the curious martial arrangement of *Unchained Melody*.

Mere months after recording with Power Tools, Frisell was in studio again, although he had left the high-voltage intensity of that trio behind for the tasteful subtlety of Marc Johnson's Bass Desires. When Marc Johnson formed Bass Desires a few years back, recruiting guitarists Frisell and John Scofield, and Weather Report alumnus Peter Erskine, critics prophesied that they were merely ECM's version of the slickly packaged, esoteric jazz "supergroup", and were destined to go the way of Steps Ahead. Two albums later, it's a pleasure to see them stand corrected. Not only is **Second Sight**, Bass Desires' most recent LP, a testament of the quartet's virtuosity, it's a rare example of how two distinctive guitarists can share the same spotlight. Johnson was smart in picking Scofield and Frisell; they complement each other without clashing, Scofield's quicksilver notes standing out against Frisell's burnished chords. The two delightfully trade leads in Scofield's windup *Twister* and Scofield lends a passionate touch to a gorgeous version of *Small Hands*, perhaps the most beautiful piece Frisell has written.

With all the laurels he's gathered for his consummate and considerable body of work in the jazz field, his seemingly inimitable technique drawing some of the most solitary, influential, and talented performers to him like a magnet, it's only a matter of time before Bill Frisell breaks through to a larger audience. He stands a good chance to do so through his contributions to the popular collaborations of Hal Willner. The genius behind the inspired tribute albums **Amarcord Nino Rota, That's The Way I Feel Now – A Tribute To Thelonious Monk,** and **Lost In The Stars – The Music Of Kurt Weill** (where musicians ranging from Carla Bley to Todd Rundgren to Van Dyke Parks offer personal interpretations of the composer's work), Willner was working with British singer Marianne Faithfull on a proposed album of old and new standards. Frisell had made his solo recording debut on **Amarcord** back in 1982, and Willner, impressed with his musical growth and maturity, asked him to play guitar on the Faithfull record.

Continually in awe of the people he finds

himself working with, Bill says of the sessions with Faithfull, "Working with Marianne was great. And easy. Most of the songs were first or second takes. It wasn't like a lot of pop records where things are pieced together and the vocals done a line at a time. Most of what you hear on the album is one performance – we really went for the feelings." Along with Mac Rebennack on piano, J.T. Lewis on drums, and Fernando Saunders on bass, Frisell and Faithfull weave their way through moving covers of *I'll Keep It With Mine, Boulevard Of Broken Dreams*, and the song that made her a star so many years ago, *As Tears Go By*. Bill is particularly good at enhancing the timeless feel of the material, and *Strange Weather* reestablishes Faithfull as one of our finest contemporary torch singers. Or, as Willner would have it, "our Lotte Lenya". Frisell continues to work with Willner; soon to be released is a round-robin effort with poet and peace activist Allen Ginsberg, tentatively entitled **The Lion For Real**, and featuring the usual Willner cast.

When Bill wasn't busy touring or guesting with other performers last year, he was hard at work with his new quartet, touring and making preparations to record a third solo album for January release. The band is "new" only in the sense they've been playing as a quartet for a little over two years now, but Bill has known cellist Hank Roberts and bassist Kermit Driscoll for over twelve years, meeting both in Boston while attending Berklee. Similarly, drummer Joey Barron is an old musical acquaintance. Bill is excited about his new group, and hopes that their sound will reflect not only the years of musical friendship between them, but Bill's valuable experience in ensemble playing as well. "This is the first time in a long time that I've had my own band, so I'm trying to distill all these different situations that I've played in, what I've learned from all these people, and hopefully some kind of interesting mixture comes out, without sounding too derivative. I think the new album has a cohesive sound, but it can go in all sorts of directions too."

Lookout For Hope is everything Frisell hoped it would be. In much the same way that Denver seeped into his musical consciousness, his work with others can be heard in his playing, and has left a lasting influence. The band itself possesses a charming musical inquisitiveness, and enjoys an identity as individual as that of the Bley quartet or the Motian quintet. Joey Barron is a colorful and impassioned drummer, and with Kermit Driscoll builds a flexible rhythm section while Hank Robert's cello spars with Frisell's guitar in the tradition of Kenny Wheeler's trumpet on *Rambler* or John Surman's clarinet on *Fragments*.

Listening to the music on **Lookout For Hope**, one can hear the echo of Bill's acoustic and country work in tracks like *Lonesome* and *Little Brother Bobby*, which seesaws back and forth between C&W swing and a waltz. His stint in Zorn's groups and Power Tools shows in the tricky timing and flawless playing of *The Animal Race* and *Alien Prints*, the latter a reworking of **In Line**'s *Start*, using that song's delicate beauty as the backdrop for some great pyrotechnics. They even put a clever and nimble spin on Thelonious Monk's *Hackensack*.

In addition to laying a lot of the groundwork for the future of guitar improvisation through his progressive attitudes in playing, his compositional credit on nine out of the ten tracks on **Lookout For Hope** clearly reveals that Frisell is also developing an individual stamp as a composer – something he remains characteristically modest about. "Sure, it's important that we learn the written music before we play it, and it's necessary to rehearse," Bill says. No longer distant, his voice is filled with excitement. "But *then*, hopefully we can forget about all that when we get on stage, and get away from the paper, and just listen to the music."

Sound advice. – *Andrew Jones*

DISCOGRAPHY

Solo:	
"In Line"	ECM 1241 (1982)
"Rambler"	ECM 1287 (1985)
"Lookout For Hope"	ECM 833 495 (1988)
With Bass Desires:	
"Bass Desires"	ECM 827 743 (1986)
"Second Sight"	ECM 833 038 (1987)
With Tim Berne:	
"Theoretically"	Minor Music 008 (1986)
"Fulton Street Maul"	Columbia (1987)
With Paul Bley:	
"Fragments"	ECM 829 280 (1986)
With Marianne Faithfull:	
"Strange Weather"	Island 90163 (1987)
With Jan Garbarek:	
"Paths, Prints"	ECM 1223 (1982)
"Wayfarer"	ECM 1259 (1983)
With Wayne Horvitz:	
"The President"	Dossier 7528 (1986)
With Paul Motian:	
"Psalm"	ECM 1222 (1983)
"The Story Of Maryam"	Soul Note 1074 (1984)
"Jack Of Clubs"	Soul Note 1124 (1985)
"It Should Have Happened A Long Time Ago"	ECM 823 641 (1985)
"Misterioso"	Soul Note 21174 (1987)
With Power Tools:	
"Strange Meeting"	Antilles ISL 1551 (1987)
With Vernon Reid:	
"Smash & Scatteration"	Minor Music 005 (1985)
With Jim Staley:	
"Mumbo Jumbo"	Rift 12 (1987)
With Eberhard Weber:	
"Fluid Rustle"	ECM 1137 (1979)
"Later That Evening"	ECM 829 382 (1982)
With Hal Willner:	
"Amarcord Nino Rota"	Hannibal (1982)
"The Lion For Real"	Label not known (1988)
With John Zorn:	
"The Big Gundown"	Icon 79139 (1986)
"Cobra"	Hat Hut 2034 (1987)

THE BLUES ON FANTASY RECORDS

THE LEGENDARY BLUESVILLE REISSUES * REVIEWED BY BLUES WRITER DOCTOR LORNE FOSTER

ALBERTA HUNTER, LUCILLE HEGAMIN, VICTORIA SPIVEY / Songs We Taught Your Mother / Fantasy BV 1052

KING CURTIS / Trouble In Mind / Fantasy TRU 150001

LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS / Goin' Away / Fantasy BV 1073

JIMMY WITHERSPOON / Evenin' Blues / Fantasy PR 7300

ETTA JAMES AND EDDIE "CLEANHEAD" VINSON / The Late Show / Fantasy F 9655

MEMPHIS SLIM / Steady Rollin' Blues / Fantasy BV 1075

The story of the mojo hand has circulated in blues culture from its inception. As the story goes, there is a Louisiana voodoo charm, passed down from generation to generation, that puts magical powers in the hands of the one who wears it. The possessor can use conjuration to ask favor from the gods, or *laos,* in order to cast spells and influence others. Presently, someone at Fantasy Records has got the mojo hand.

This is the only way to explain the nature of the sorcery wherby a single record company could distribute such an impressive, and even spellbinding, array of powerhouse albums in a single year.

At the head of the Fantasy list is the **Alberta Hunter, Lucille Hegamin, Victoria Spivey** album appropriately entitled **Songs We Taught Your Mother.** These three grand ladies got together in a New York studio one day – it was Wednesday, August 16, 1961 to be exact – and, as they might put it, proceeded to chirp the blues. If we were to put it another way, we could say they decided to bequeath a vinyl legacy of mammoth proportion.

The album is filled literally with songs that these three original blues viragoes taught our mothers. But don't expect nostalgia or wear and tear. Phil De Lancie of Fantasy Studios remastered the entire musical package. The result is a well balanced sound with almost no surface hiss. (As a matter of fact, this nimble reproduction skill shines through on all the Fantasy recordings.)

At first sitting, you marvel at the raw and crystalline vocal energy of Alberta Hunter, and you're sure she blows the other gals away *(You Gotta Reap Just What You Sow)*. Then in the next sitting you're sure you made a mistake the first time, because Lucille Hegamin's vibrating timbre tugs at your soul *(You'll Want My Love)*. Later, Victoria Spivey's rolling narrative thunder, with its classic mixture of sauciness and pathos, wrings out the last drop of your emotions *(I Got The Blues So Bad)*. Finally, you have to realize that what we have here is a gift package that captures the full range of human moods; a musical hydra.

Songs We Taught Your Mother is an album that should be heard by everyone who is negative, neutral or undecided about the blues. It is a veritable "takes a worried woman to sing those worried songs" mini-series. And when you have three of the highest mombo priestesses there ever was, or ever will be, chirpin' the beatified nitty-gritty, it's hard to remain a non-believer. They may be dead and gone but the message lingers on. Even the most sceptical among us will wake up one day chanting: "If blues were whiskey, I'd stay drunk all the time".

The **King Curtis** album, **Trouble In Mind,** is the closest reflection of his own life and feelings that was ever recorded. Prior to this album, which was recorded in 1961 on the Tru-Sound Label and now remastered by the Fantasy Studio witch doctor, King Curtis worked primarily as a saxophonist/sessionman for a long line of famous singers. He also made ballad albums with lush strings and vocal groups, and hard-swinging albums of contemporary jazz. Later in his career – before he was brutally stabbed to death outside his New York apartment on August 31, 1971 – he achieved some measure of recording success in soul and pop, leading his King Pins band. But blues was the closest music to his heart, as well as closest to the surface of anything he played. And while it is possible to imagine other artists that know and understand the blues as much as King Curtis, it is practically impossible to imagine anybody else playing with so much conviction.

One of the main things that makes **Trouble In Mind** unique – apart from the fact that I have never heard so much conviction on vinyl – is that it marks the first time King Curtis was the exclusive vocalist in an exclusively blues genre. He actually sang professionally throughout his career, which was from the time he was fifteen years old. But his vocal talents were always somewhat overshadowed by his ability to play the tenor saxophone. From the

LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS (Photograph by Bill Smith)

time he graduated from highschool, and turned down several scholarships to join the Lionel Hampton Band, he was recognized as one of the top saxophonists in the business.

The other thing that makes the material on this blues album a unique collector's item, is the painstaking craftsmenship. It took several months to collect the songs for this set, from singers of several eras, such as Bessie Smith's *Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out,* Chuck Willis's *Don't Deceive Me,* and B.B. King's *Woke Up This Morning*. In addition, King Curtis rounded up a stellar group of background vocal chirpers – Margaret Ross, Ethel McCrea, and Dorothy Jones – to complement his regular band and ensure a deep blues feeling.

The conscientious preparation and solid musical support provide the perfect backdrop for King Curtis's holistic skills. To say that he has a Cleanhead Vinson-like raunchy, sinewy sax mixed with a Ray Charles-like, crackling, pleading vocal, doesn't quite say enough. In actuality, King Curtis's vocal and sax creates a kind of synergy that makes him as different from, as he is like, Vinson and Charles. Remarkably, he and his saxophone seem to be telling the same story, as two reliable witnesses, with alternate nuances and inflections.

In the end, both stories are interwoven into a sardonic, funny, sad and moving completion of each other; resolving into one moral imperative. The prosaic life is not worth living. And I guarantee, even listeners with trouble in mind, people so blue they don't know what in the world to do, will come out of the experience positively convinced the sun is going to shine in their backdoor someday.

Sam 'Lightnin' Hopkins has been called "the best of the post-war Texans". He has also been described as "an authentic poet, who reminds us, in the midst of commercial shoddiness and intellectual pretense, that real people prevail, unautomated and untouched by analytic self-consciousness, to create authentic testaments of our times and lives". Be this as it may. The one thing we can say for sure is that the man could really boogie down. And there are jook joints scattered throughout the twentieth century that have sacrificed many a barbecued and fried chicken in his honour.

Goin' Away is a new re-release from Fantasy that displays some original Lightnin' Hopkins songs, which match his early and best work for Bill Quinn's defunct Gold Star label. The album is comprised of poetic ballads and two instrumentalizations: domestic strife blues *(Wake Up Old Lady; Don't Embarass Me, Baby);* love blues *(Goin Away);* boogie-woogie stomp blues *(Little Sisters Boogie; I'm Wit' It);* an old Negro dance tune *(Business You're Doin');* and two utterly delightful bottle-neck masterpieces that will surely outlast the vicissitudes of history and musical form *(Stranger Here; You Better Stop Her).*

As always, Lightnin' is at his expressive best when dealing with episodes from his own life. But he also invests in that common pool of deep blues tradition with his own sense of immediacy and subjective drama. As always, the voice is down-home and direct, and the guitar accompaniment is crisp and gritty. As always, Lightnin' proves that with a little subtle but solid support (in this case, from jazzists Leonard Gaskin on bass and Herbie Lovelle on drums) he can turn a morsel into a banquet.

A final point needs to be made. **Goin' Away** is an especially significant Hopkins album, because the crystal clear production (and by this I mean it sounds like Hopkins is in your living room) reveals that he was not only a great technician, but that he never viewed his great technique as an end in itself. For Lightnin' technique is only good in so far is it allowed him to capture what is universal about our feelings, our frailties and strengths, our longings and disillusionments, our bad luck and troubles, and preserve them for posterity in the electric age. And the beauty of it all folks, is that no matter how much anomie and cynicism our technological future holds, we will always have the frozen moments when Lightnin' Hopkins committed the human spirit to flight as object d'art.

When one speaks of **Jimmy Witherspoon** the words 'compelling' and 'versatile' come immediately to mind. In the blues world's definition of the situation, this means, he can sing damn well anything, and anything damn well – a talent that has prevailed from the time he was 18 and would sit in with the various bluesmen who visited his home town of Gurdon, Arkansas. And throughout the electric metamorphosis of the twentieth century, he has remained a viable entity, capable of producing exciting, genuinely superior singing that encompasses blues and its crossovers into jazz, R&B, soul and rock.

Along the way, Witherspoon got together with **T-Bone Walker**, the Texas born father of electric blues guitar (T-Bone is reputed to have 'gone electric' as early as 1935), and they crafted **Evenin' Blues**. This newly remastered album from a 1963 session includes such standards as *Money's Gettin' Cheaper* (a Spoon favorite since he borrowed it from Charles Brown in the late Forties), *How Long Blues* (a Brownie McGhee, Chicagoian rhythm romp), the proverbial *Kansas City, Grab Me A Freight* (a Walkeresque classic blues tune with plenty of room for stellar solos), and Witherspoon's own light and lively *Drinking Beer.*

Evenin', a blues ballad associated with Walker, was also recorded by Spoon's mentor Jay McShann, with whom he spent his early post-war apprenticeship. However, Spoon's version here is less a straight forward tribute to "The Hootie Man" McShann than it is an exploration into the structural and conceptual possibilities of the song. With the help of Clifford Scott on flute and saxophone, Bert Kendrix on organ, Clarence Jones on bass, and Wayne Robertson on drum, T-Bone and Spoon turn *Evenin'* into a soulful lamentation:

Evenin' every night you come and you find me / And you'll always remind me / That my gal is gone.

Anyone who has experienced lost love can commiserate with the dread of creeping sentimentality brought on by the silent nakedness of the night. This is Spoon's frame of reference, where all defences are stripped, and trepidation, loneliness and regret are magnified ten-fold. It is also in counter-distinction to the Kansas City Jump frame of reference made famous by Jay McShann. In McShann's uptempo version there is something wickedly wonderous, and even purgative, about the blackness of the night. He feeds on creeping sentiment:

Evenin' shadows fall on my boudior wall / That's when I miss your hugs and kisses most of all / Even though outside the lights shine bright.

Of course, both frames of reference are equally valid, equally illuminating. For the lost lover, evenin' is a form of incarceration and a form of sanctuary. And it brings with it alternate possibilities of fear and ecstacy, penitence and release, treachery and faith in new beginnings.

So, with Jimmy Witherspoon's **Evenin' Blues** we have another musical chapter on the rich texture of social life. It is filled with cascading images of sombre reflection, and laurels to the occult gods of the night. It is a bold stroke coloring in subtle nuances in our collective imagination. It is also an industrious contribution and tribute to the sensuous worldview of his predecessors. All of this put together serves to remind us why, when we speak of Jimmy Witherspoon the words 'compelling' and 'versatile' come immediately to mind.

The Late Show is the second volume of music by **Etta James** and **Eddie Cleanhead Vinson**, recorded live at Marla's Memory Lane Supper Club in Los Angeles. One could be tempted to think it is technical virtuosity that accounts for the continuing sweet symmetry of Etta and Eddie. Eddie's expansive saxophone is matched by Etta's equally effusive voice. Actually, though, it is their emotional power and integrity, exuding naturally like sweat from a pour, that makes them the ideal modern blues coupling.

To begin with, in the spirit of the classic female blues tradition, Etta James bases her interpretations (especially *Baby, What You Want Me To Do; Sweet Little Angel,* and *I'd Rather Go Blind*) around secure center tones; while she meanders scattily, using improvisational banter, making instrumental imitations with her voice, using key changes to vary the impact, then returning to the center to produce a stark, incantory effect. Etta also adds "a modern urban hip" to her music that classic female blues singing never had. She has a metropolitan savoir-faire and self-confidence that suggests she's heard it all and seen it all, and she disguards all of the non-essential theatrical trappings, in order to cut right to the chase scene.

If Bessie Smith was The Empress of The Blues, then Etta James is The Duchess of The

Down And Dirty. She is totally evocative and suggestive. And when she is combined with the supple sax of Eddie Cleanhead Vinson, we have the makings of one of the magnificent partnerships of the late twentieth century (a la Bessie Smith and Charlie Green).

Cleanhead is not only an affecting foil for Etta *(Teach Me Tonight; Only Women Bleed;* and *He's Got The Whole World In His Hands),* he contributes two of his own compositions. *Old Maid Boogie* is a song that is synonomous with The Cleanhead Man and actually defines his punch-line, crescendo vocal style, and enormous, sweet-meat alto sax. This is perhaps why the tune is included on both musical volumes coming out of the gig at Marla Gibb's place. *Home Boy* is a vocally disguised remake of *Railroad Porter Blues,* Vinson's tribute to his roots in a segregated America. But there is nothing weary or emulsified about either tune on the LP. If anything, they crackle with even more energy than elsewhere, aided by the pumped-up supper club audience.

The Late Show was produced by Ralph Jungheim in conjunction with Etta's long time associate, band leader and saxophonist, Red Holloway. And the other personnel includes some notables in their own right, such as, Jack McDuff on the Hammond B-3; Shuggie Otis (Johnny Otis' son) on guitar; Richard Reid on acoustic bass and bass guitar; and Paul Humphrey on drums.

It is fair to say that the reticulation of the principals and artist here, has effects that total more than the sum of the parts. Etta and Eddie are multi-faceted and definitive blues interpreters in their own right. But Etta and Eddie together equals black magic; eudemonism; gestalt blues; or whatever you want to call it. Together they magically transform blues into happiness, and happiness into a moral and ethical obligation. Moreover, the whole thing is just a cake-walk for these two.

As **Memphis Slim** was fond of saying, he left the old country without a passport in 1932, he played a little blues and a little boogie too. The old country, of course, is Memphis, Tennessee; it's the birth site of W.C. Handy and the death site of Martin Luther King. Infamy hangs over it like a pall.

While the young Peter Chapman earned his ticket and his moniker in Memphis, his destiny was always to one day make the pilgrimmage to the mecca of the blues. When he left for Chicago to launch his pianistic career, the mecca already had a long history as the hot-bed of piano-playing and blues recording. The slow tempos of Leroy Carr and the pastel lyricism of Clarence Williams defined the era. But the time would come for the barrelhouse cum boogie woogie school, when Memphis Slim's steady rolling blues piano would redefine the idiom.

The re-released **Steady Rolling Blues** album is from a period (originally recorded in 1961) when Peter "Memphis Slim" Chapman had already emerged as one of the blues scene's dominant voices and personalities. It has the feel of the tumble dives and chittlin circuit where Slim first learned his craft flying solo. Here, he flies solo once again, not as an apprentice, but as a master craftsman. His singing is intensely urbane and sure, his organ piano work is lusty and rock-solid, and his talents as a song writer reveal his worldly intellect and humour.

Slim has always been known for his well-constructed story-telling blues compositions. Like Big Bill Broonzy, one of his mentors and proteges, Slim wrote a host of tunes that have become standards in the genre (such as, *Everyday I Have The Blues; Messin Around; Angel Child,* and who will ever forget *Beer Drinking Woman).* Yet, not much has been made of the fact that between Jelly Roll Morton and Otis Spann, Slim was the major exponent of increasing the scope of the piano. He was able to use piano voicings in ways that were suggestive of an entire band.

This full-bodied, hard-driving approach characterizes the **Steady Rolling Blues** LP. Unless the listener specifically attempts to distinguish the instruments, it will not occur to the senses that the music is all Memphis Slim. He alternates between the piano and the organ – and reports are that this is the first time organ-blues was ever recorded – which adds a rich, plaited texture to the music. But, for the most part, it is the muscular renditions of the straightforward, unpretentious material assembled for this collection that makes it compelling. Particularly noteworthy are Slim's reworkings of Leroy Carr's *Mean Mistreatin' Mama*; as well as B.B. King's *Rock Me Baby*. These meaty numbers are matched by Slim's own *Steady Rolling Blues*, the whiskey-soaked title track; and the inimitable *Three Women Blues*, where Slim lays down his low-down tremolo:

I've only loved three women in my time / My mother, my sister, and you baby / The girl that wrecked my life.

There is something irresistibly human about a Memphis Slim composition. Early on, Big Bill Broonzy recognized the providential abilities of his young sideman; and as the story goes, he took Slim aside one day and confided: "You's good enough now to go on your own. You don't need Big Bill or no other blues singer with you. Just get you some good musicians to play with you and you'll be Memphis Slim just like I'm Big Bill".

The words are portentous. Just like William Lee Conley Broonzy is Big Bill; Peter Chapman is, now and forever, Memphis Slim...

THE IRRESISTIBLE POSTSCRIPT: If it is true we talk about our gods in contemporary civilization, we no longer talk through them; if it is true we have been fulgurized by the urbi-electric age into freeze dried cynics; then Fantasy Records is something of an anthropological throw-back. Call it wanga, juju, bewitchery, call it what you want. Somebody at Fantasy Records has got the mojo hand.

– Lorne Foster

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VIDEO * THE HOME ENTERTAINMENT UNIT?

The technological revolution has dramatically altered the way we perceive things. It has certainly changed the very nature of jazz music. Even the ways in which the music is documented have taken on many new dimensions.

Jazz, like all music, remains fundamentally an aural experience but it hasn't been able to avoid the demands of an age which places great emphasis on vision. Modern society perceives the world through the visual medium of television and much of its success has been made possible through the development of the video process. Television can instantly capture events and bring it quickly to an audience hungry for fresh images to replace those seen previously.

Now that close to 50% of most modern societies have their own video recorders these ever changing images can be frozen in time and viewed later. Home video machines have also made it possible for the Hollywood motion picture to be shared with all the other diversions of home entertainment.

Home video entertainment has dramatically altered the motion picture industry and it has had a significant impact upon other forms of entertainment. Only the most hyped-up and spectacular of events can attract the kind of audiences which were once commonplace.

Videos are slowly finding a place alongside audio recordings of jazz music. As television offers audiences a broader spectrum of music through various subscriber services it is inevitable that they will need more jazz programming. Many of the videos distributed by Sony, for instance, come from concerts taped at the Smithsonian and at Paul Masson's Winery in California. They have had wide circulation on television and differences between the quality of these manufactured videos and home taping seems marginal.

Most jazz videos fall into three categories. The greatest number are concert/club performances with minimal production values. Documentaries profiling the career and importance of individual musicians tend to be more ambitious and finally, you have videos which assemble a variety of historical film clips of musicians who are no longer alive – those who shaped the course of jazz music. A growing number of film documentaries are also becoming available as videos. The market for 16 mm film is small once you move beyond the institutional field and even there video is rapidly rendering the film obsolete.

The most extraordinary thing about **Celebrating Bird: The Triumph Of Charlie Parker** is that there is almost no film footage of the great innovator. The one hour documentary is filled with interviews *about* Parker rather than extensive opportunities for us to see him performing. This is the same fate experienced by the majority of the music's great innovators. The film industry was only interested in using the talents of musicians who were also great entertainers – artists with considerable popular appeal.

The archives are relatively well represented with examples of early Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Fats Waller and Artie Shaw but you will find little footage of James P. Johnson, Sidney Bechet, the Erskine Hawkins Orchestra or Don Byas. There is a feature length movie documentary made about Bix Beiderbecke without a single clip of film with the legendary trumpeter!

It was only after the arrival of television that performances of jazz musicians began to be filmed more frequently. Most of those programs have disappeared. In the early days they were broadcast live and simply evaporated into the air. Those that survive are technically limited filmed copies of the actual broadcasts. Through this process we can still experience and marvel at the extraordinary performances in the 1957 **Sound Of Jazz** CBS Special with Count Basie, Thelonious Monk, Billie Holiday, Coleman Hawkins, Pee Wee Russell, Jimmy Rushing and many others.

The sixty one minute documentary **The Coltrane Legacy** includes rivetting performances by the tenor saxophonist with Miles Davis in New York, with his own quintet in Germany (including Eric Dolphy) and with his quartet in San Francisco. All the performances are from television shows and are visually inept except for the extract from the Robert Herridge Theatre production with Miles Davis.

Performance videos are limited by all kinds of intangibles. The performance level of the musicians can be affected by the pressures of the video production crew and in many instances musicians show little consideration for the visual presentation of their music. The video camera tends to emphasis both the strengths and weaknesses of the performer's stage presence. In the series of concerts recorded at the Smithsonian Alberta Hunter is one of the few who manages to step beyond the footlights and grab the viewer through the magnetism of her stage personality.

Singers often seem to fare better. Perhaps it is because they are always required to project their personalities as well as their musicianship when they perform. Mel Torme's many fans will be pleased with his **Special** which blends together a taped concert performance in San Francisco with interview segments and rehearsals with George Shearing.

Lovers of West Coast Traditional Jazz will find much to enjoy in **Blowout At Crazy Horse** which features California's South Frisco Jazz Band and Argentina's Fenix Jazz Band. Both bands interpret the repertoire of black jazz bands from the 1920s with the vigour and enthusiasm one associates with these organisations. This is one performance video where the director seems to know all the arrangements of the bands. Not once is there a missed cue when a musician is taking a break or a solo. The variety of visual images is high for a performance within the cramped conditions of a crowded but spacious bar.

At the other end of the scale you have an uninterrupted 105 minutes of **Keith Jarrett's Trio** concert from Tokyo in 1985. It's an excellent document of the event with some fine playing by Jarrett, bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Jack DeJohnette. Despite the effective camera work by the Japanese crew it ultimately becomes visually boring. There is a big difference between sitting in a concert hall or club and viewing the concert from a fixed spot while absorbing the music being performed and sitting at home being distracted by the multiple close ups and not so quick fades. The viewer has no choice over who to watch.

Concert performances will become the raw material for future documentaries

about important artists. The footage of **Alberta Hunter From The Cookery** in a recently shown PBS documentary about the late singer was integrated into a fascinating portrait of the singer. It highlighted her qualities, drew you into her life and left you wishing there had been more. Taped concerts seem to have the opposite effect.

Confessin' The Blues ... The Music Of Jay McShann is an all too brief (35 minutes) documentary about the Kansas City pianist which manages to compress much of the man's essence into its short time frame. He is seen in performance with a small combo in Kansas City, in solo performance at Toronto's Cafe des Copains and in a classroom workshop in San Diego. He discusses his music in brief interview extracts while his friends help put his career into focus. The narrative direction of the program is handled in a unique way – two silhouetted voices link together the various performances by McShann.

This video also highlights the limitations and potentiality of the medium. It ends with a multi-image, visually stimulating collage of pictures as McShann confesses the blues. It is the closest we get to any kind of creative visual work in any of the jazz videos I have yet seen.

At the opposite end of the scale is the video verite style of **The New York Musical Tribute To Turk Murphy**. It was taped at a reception/performance at New York's Grand Hyatt Hotel the night before Turk Murphy's 1987 Carnegie Hall concert. The video crew taped the conversations of the guests, obtained testimonials to Turk Murphy's musical qualities from fellow musicians and captured on tape performances by Jim Cullum's Band, the Hot Antic Jazz Band, Vince Giordano's nighthawks as well as two numbers by Turk Murphy's own band. The love and affection shown by all who attended is evident in every minute of this tribute but it fails to communicate any sense of *why* Turk Murphy generated such a following over the years.

Both **Piano Legends** and **Trumpet Kings** are historically invaluable documentaries which trace the evolution of the music through these two instruments. Weight is added to the educational value of the statements because they are made by Chick Corea and Wynton Marsalis although it should be pointed out that they were working from scripts which were not of their own creation.

The material for both these videos comes from David Chertok's collection and allows us an opportunity to see and hear many of the music's grand masters. Each performance is short and to the point. They emphasize the qualities of the performers within the program's overall framework. Obtaining clearances for collections such as this must have been horrendous but the overall standard is high. Different choices could have better shown the talents of some of the performers but they may not have been available. For instance, the definitive Waller clip is his performance of *Ain't Misbehavin'* in **Stormy Weather** and Meade Lux Lewis' *Honky Tonk Train Blues* in **New Orleans** better illustrates his unique style than the much later example used in **Piano Legends**.

The video is the medium for the future but the instantaneous way in which the director usually assembles the images at performances is a weakness still to be overcome. The magic of film is not the raw camera shots but the imagination and creativity of those who edit together the final work.

Bruce Ricker's **The Last Of The Blue Devils** (Count Basie, Joe Turner, Jay McShann), Ron Mann and Bill Smith's **Imagine The Sound** (Paul Bley, Bill Dixon, Archie Shepp, Cecil Taylor) and John Jeremy's **Born To Swing** (Buddy Tate, Buck Clayton, Gene Krupa) are excellent examples of the film medium heightening the images we have of the artists. Too many videos tend to flatten them.

– John Norris

VIDEO SUPPLY SOURCES

Sources for jazz videos are uncertain. Video Arts International produced the Coltrane, Piano and Trumpet videos. BGM/RCA distribute them in the U.S. and Canada. The Sony videos are widely distributed and can also be ordered through Coda Magazine. The Turk Murphy and Crazy Horse Videos are available from Present Past Productions, 1433 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 513, Santa Monica, CA 90404 and the Jay McShann is available from M.T. Productions, 301 Armour Blvd., Suite 20, Kansas City, MO 64111. Videos of many jazz documentaries can also be obtained from Rhapsody Films.

BRUCE FORMAN * JAZZ GUITARIST

I first saw and heard Bruce Forman at the Monterey Jazz Festival. The sound? Smooth. Warm as velour. Yet cool, confident, contemporary: standard jazz tunes revamped, archaeological excursions deep into the structure of the music. And, for me, a spate of deja vu, a feeling which Forman, at thirty, would have few reasons to share. I grew up in that era when, fascinated by then fresh technologies (the long playing phonograph and automatic can opener!) we were dazzled by a solo instrument you didn't have to blow into. Plug it in, pick a bit — all this before Rock 'n Roll — and out came that slightly liquid burnished copper sound I loved: a warm ***inward*** feeling I hear more than a trace of in Bruce Forman.

How many synonyms for the word "cool"? Afebrile, unwrinkled, velutinous, slightly lugubrious, that sound — spare in dynamics, crowded (it seemed then) with notes, but notes of whispered confidentiality — was appropriate to the age, and especially in the hands of such skilled practitioners as Herb Ellis, Chuck Wayne, Tal Farlow, Kenny Burrell and ...

"Johnny Smith," a slightly dandyish middle-aged black man vigorously chewing gum says to his wife. "This guy reminds me of Johnny Smith."

I look down at my notes where, next to a drawing, a quick sketch of Bruce Forman, who's up on the Garden Stage at the Monterey Jazz Festival — and just before the man sitting next to me offered this observation — I had written the name "Johnny Smith" — a fine and popular jazz guitarist of the 50s.

Continuity is grand; comparisons not always odious — but the latter have limited value.

"I met him last year," Forman says. "I listen to Johnny Smith and love it, but ***my*** first influences were horn players. Then came George Benson, Wes Montgomery, Grant Green, Joe Pass ... I like to scream but I don't like it to be bloodcurdling or hair-raising. When you're hearing me, you're hearing the pure sound of the instrument. I like the personal quality that allows. The more electronics, the less subtlety of acoustics and mechanics. I'm working ***inward*** rather than outward ... I'm not making sociological statements or getting back at my parents for making me practice all those years. It doesn't make it ***old*** just because you're holding within certain perimeters. Sometimes nothing's better than the real blues."

Forman was born in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1956, and moved to San Francisco at age thirteen. He did take classical piano lessons for seven years, switched to guitar at fourteen, and played sax at Polytechnic High School. He looks like a lot of guys with a mustache. He's lean and tall, a commanding, animated but not prancing, punishing, disproportionately imposing presence on stage. He ***is*** the leader (he formed his first group at eighteen) and, like a lot of younger players, looks perfectly at home, at ease, with his considerable virtuosity.

Later this day, on the Jazz Festival's main stage in Patee Arena, he will sport a white coat and white tie reminiscent of Jay Gatsby, and a red shirt that could start the bulls running at Pamplona, yet even then his presence is cool, controlled, submerged in the music: that rich sound which, not calling all that much attention to itself (it seldom barks at you, or reaches out to grab you by gullet or gonads), does call attention to the ***notes*** — fine legato sequences, motes in sunlight, just right and just there, fleet and fresh and focused.

"I have taste. I do like to hear music that is well played, well conceived, that is sensible and effective yet has all those elements of total spontaneity within it ... I want to be able to do ***anything*** my mind desires at the time it comes up — anything my mind and ears can imagine. I'm doing what I like to do for today, today."

What in Forman's appearance does call attention to itself — aside from a light sensible fire in the eyes — is what you might expect: the hands. "It's unfair; it's all ***anatomy***," a pianist friend has complained to me, speaking of Oscar Peterson's walking left hand tenths. I've known some piano players with stubby fingers, but you're not likely to run into many guitarists constructed that way. Bruce Forman, true to his clan, has fingers designed to subdue frets: slender, tendrillar, seemingly endless as a dancer's legs.

"Soul, feeling, dynamics: these are the intangibles every creative musician must have, but they have to be ***given*** ... vocabulary, the more I can really nail down what I want to say ... It's important for me to be completely well-versed. I am aspiring to be a great improviser, so I need all the tools, all the things that have come before me."

He may feel he's aspiring to become a great improviser, but to some ears (mine) he sounds as if he's already there. The music is so snugly quick, both level and hard, firm, flexible, adept that Forman may well have invented this physically comfortable instrument — the one shaped like a scaled-down wooden loved one — himself. Jazz guitar. Despite its sleek svelte appearance, the evolution has been rough. The trumpet — from Buddy Bolden to Miles Davis — hasn't changed much. The guitar has been through a series of seismic shocks.

Rhythm. You start out with the ***banjo***, a steady plunk, and move then to an essential but buried presence: an abundant presence in the hands of Freddie Green, but what about a guy like Eddie Condon, who some people claim they have never heard ***play*** on a record, even when you know he's there? Then on to the smooth comping of Billy Bauer, Bill DeArango and the Nat "King" Cole Trio's Oscar Moore.

Harmony. The cycle veered from the mold with adroit artists such as Eddie Lang (chord substitution, out-of-key intros), the unconventional tuning of Carl Kress, the full orchestra sound (the guitar as piano) of George Van Eps, and the delightful mutations (the lush invention and gypsy drive) of Django Reinhardt.

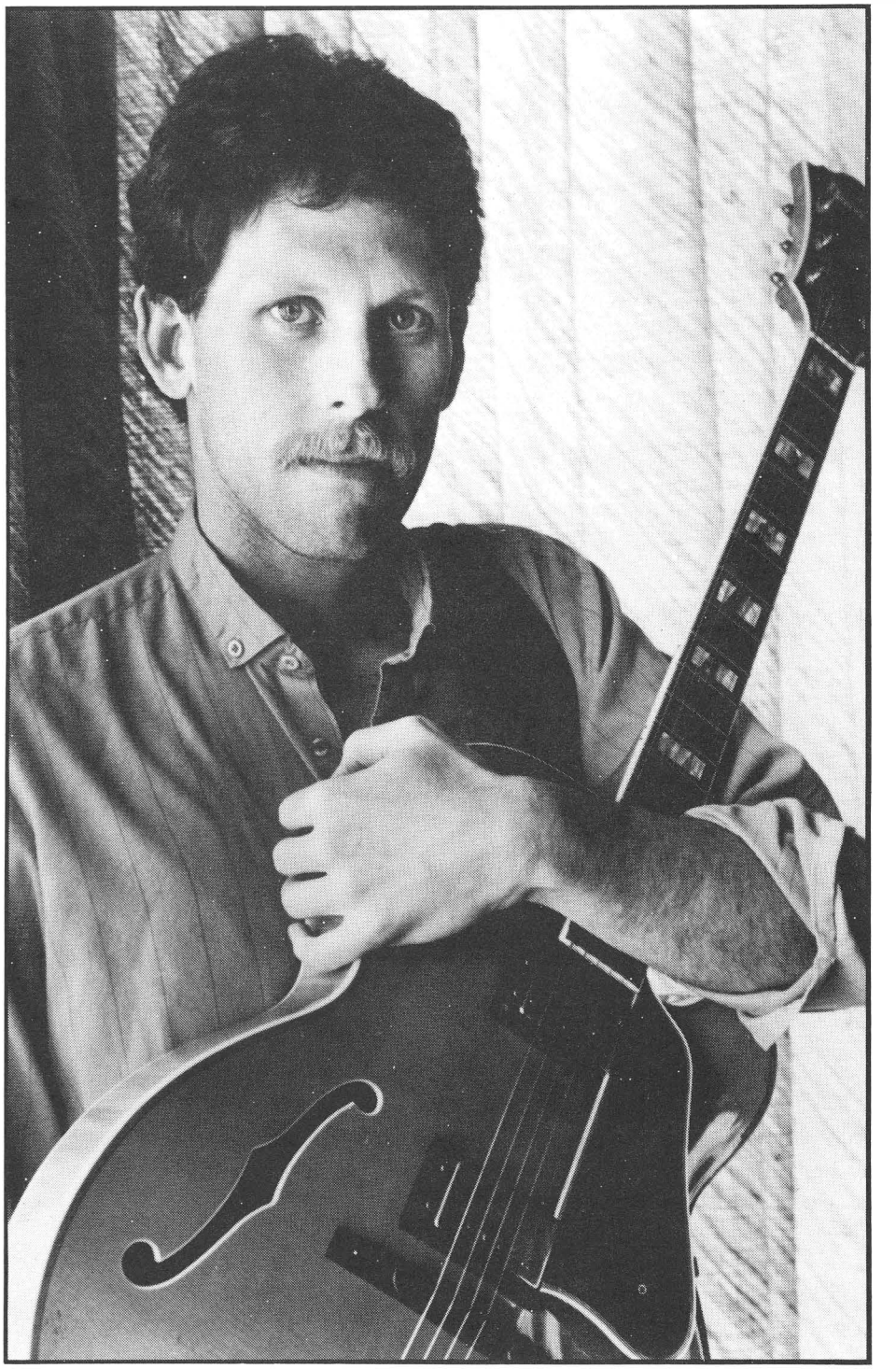
Melody. Lang again, Lonnie Johnson, thumb soloist Teddy Bunn, Reinhardt, and then — we discover e-lec-tric-i-ty! Critics may argue over who got there first, but it's interesting that a trombonist/arranger who doubled on guitar, the late

Eddie Durham, is a prime candidate for "enlarging the instrument's sound", in Peter Welding's words, "so that in terms of volume it might perform on an equal footing with horns." Charlie Christian is the acknowledged top shock, that major faulting that hoisted the Sierra Nevada of modern jazz guitar. The rest is more history: that legacy of smooth labyrinthine line players I grew up on (add Jimmy Raney and Barney Kessel), and those who influenced Forman. Which brings us forward, or back, to Bruce Forman.

Where does he fit in? Everywhere. The whole tradition. He does it all, from cool crisp comping to composing, hot blues to bop, fast "horn" runs, extended lines of amazing invention. And structural exploration. Bill Evans said that jazz was "structural thinking ... you have to have an architectural sense, and a real respect for the building blocks in music." Forman, speaking of a tune called ***Mimi's Song,*** the solemn serene statement he opens it with, the expansion that follows, uses the same words: "Building blocks ... I'll take the next step, like walking up a staircase."

He's come "Full Circle" – which is the name of an album Forman made with Bobby Hutcherson, a man he praises for being "one of the planet's most masterful ***re***harmonizers of standards," an appellation that might apply to Forman himself. I've listened to a swinging up-tempo ***Lover Man,*** a breakneck ***Polka Dots And Moonbeams, Summertime*** in 5/4 time, a sedate respectful ***Skylark,*** and a delightful ***Sunny Side Of The Street***, on which fine drummer Eddie Marshall offers six bars of alternating ***melodic*** chores. Or, the quest extended to even more offbeat pastures: turning ***Be My Love*** into a romp beyond Mario Lanza's wildest expectations, or – one of my favorites – a frisky duet on ***Slow Boat To China*** with pianist Dick Hindman. This turns into a rapid fire rococo conversation, a chase, a game of musical chairs as dizzy as those ads in which someone talks with inhuman speed and accuracy. It's an O-honest-to-God jam (the rest of the group had packed up at the recording session) and you can almost hear the two of them laughing after. And, at the Monterey Jazz Festival, I caught Forman sneaking the quoted spice of ***Bye Bye Blackbird*** into an already sizzling ***Strike Up The Band***.

He applies the same wit, daring (with time, harmony, improvised line) and respect to strictly jazz standards: Tadd Dameron's ***Lady Bird***, John Coltrane's ***Giant Steps*** (which, as if not already tough enough, Forman plays as a samba), a laconic nearly drowsy interchange with pianist George Cables on Sonny Rollins' ***Doxy*** – two peers ambling through the park, conversing, on a grand day. Some of my favorite music occurs on the album "Dynamics", made with Cables, strictly duets. They'd done full justice before, with Hutcherson, to the pianist's fine tune ***Helen's Song*** and, following that and



a gig at Kimball's, recorded a session of often serious, subtle "My Dinner With Andre" dialogues, pieces filled with give and take, take and give, an elegant natural counterpoint. They get spirited on Monk's ***I Mean You,*** as if each had a strong point to prove, a noncombative argument. And they just play damn pretty on haunting ballads such as Ares Tavolazzi's ***Anna*** or Forman's own composition ***Toscana.***

"For a person who doesn't actually play piano, I probably know the piano better than most ... we did it out of respect (George is the world's greatest piano comper), wanting to make it work. The guitar provides structural support, leaves the color to the piano. Then I'm choppy, he's smooth. We create through contrast. I don't cover him up, he doesn't cover me ... we knew each other would be playing well. Constantly improvising. It's exciting, fun, and a lot of it is the danger factor."

Forman's analogy for this session is — somewhat surprisingly — the fast break in basketball. No slow carefully plotted maneuver, but a quick move, the object of which is ***not*** to let the ball touch the floor. The tune ***Mutt & Jeff*** is a good example. Here, the traditional piano/guitar conflict (non-sympathetic functions) is transcended through courage, respect, playful tension. When Cables "goes berserk, I'm supportive." Yang-Yin in action. The result is excitement coupled with elegance.

Although Forman's background, training, the extent of his "vocabulary" permit him to hear all that's going on while listening to music, he admits that, frequently, what he hears most is ***feeling.*** The music he plays himself — and that which he composes — seems constructed of, structured around, ***emotional*** building blocks.

"I tell students to think of ***shape,*** the shape of someone's solo — the sound, the feeling. Scales, licks, vocabulary, technique — they're all just tools. You can't look at your tools. Think most of what you want to express, rather than what you are using ... I've got so much freedom in improvisation. If I want to stir up some shit, I do! We're expressing real unique stories. We're stretching the bounds..."

However, Forman's conception, his definition of jazz, seems less loose (or wishy-washy) than some I have run across. You won't often find him playing, or skipping, in fields in Synthland, toying with patches, polyfuzz and rock overlays — those further seismic upheavals that may have carried jazz guitar beyond jazz itself. Nor will you find him baking many strictly atmospheric New Age souffles, manufacturing the sort of jazz Musak that tends to evaporate on the spot. Forman has set some limits, perimeters, and very high standards, for himself. How, given the temptations — rock, pop, punk, funk, fushion, free jazz — that surround one, did this come about? Circumstance, choice, and destiny, it seems. "Who knows, if I'd worked with Ornette Coleman rather than Richie Cole..."

Forman works often with his own trio (Jeff Carney or Larry Grenadier, bass; Eddie Marshall or Vince Lateano, drums) but also plays with Mel Martin's "Bop And Beyond." What's beyond?

"An open ticket to anywhere I want to go. I have visions of the Ultimate Jazz, but I'm reluctant to try it. I want the music to be evocative, to satisfy my need for creativity. I ***need*** to play, to be out on the edge of my sensibility, to challenge myself, yet I still want to present considerate thoughtful spontaneous music full of feeling ... music and entertainment; there's a big area where they cross over. You can't change the format. Only in certain circumstances would that be advisable to do. I want to do what ***I*** want to do, to create the highest forms on earth, yet temper that with wanting to get across to as many people as possible ... Frustrating? No, in a way it's good. Communication with listeners is important. Arrogance takes away soul. I'm not compromising or watering down. I'm ***always*** totally there..."

Several months after I'd first seen him play at the Monterey Jazz Festival, I spent an afternoon with Bruce Forman, at his home in San Francisco's Bernal Heights. You can't miss the front door, the large numbers — tasteful turquoise and salmon — that fill it, handsomely composed. The interior of the house is not all that different from yours, or mine. A small drum set sits in a far corner, an acoustic guitar has been cast in a high soft chair. A non-ostentatious row of records, phonograph, VCR, TV. A dog named "Willy" who barks whenever I mention other guitar players. Forman's wife, Darryl — for whom he has written a handsome song — is out sunning on a back terrace.

We talk about the Bay Area jazz scene ("great musicians, not enough places to play, not enough fan base") and, although he finds this a "great place", he says, "I'm not a ***local*** musician, nor do I want to be." Even in the relaxed setting of his home, Bruce Forman's musical designs read large. Like Orpheus (whom he mentions), he truly would like to change the world, through music. He shows me a video tape made with producer Barbara Hackett, part of an East Bay Jazz in the Classroom series he's at work on. A father, seated, asked what he's doing while perusing the newspaper, rises, takes his inquisitive son in his arms, and breaks, suddenly, into a full-throated soul song, "Reading Is Fun". "It's really number one/ Let your imagination soar/ The whole world is at your door." A chorus of kids in dark blue "Reading Is Fun" T-shirts joins in, and carries the snappy tune to gospel proportions. It's great. Forman wrote both words and music, and has plans for tapes on similar subjects: Don't be a couch potato, Respect yourself, Respect your neighbors.

The message takes hold. So much so that, leaving Bruce Forman, I feel like walking, and do so, the twenty-one blocks up San Francisco's Mission Street from Cortland to Van Ness, his uncommon joyous Orphic improvision on ***Common Touch***, a piece I seem to have memorized, playing in my mind as I hike among a sprightly Saturday crowd of shoppers, fellow strollers, even a wedding party. The notes rush forward, tuck under each other, as neatly folded as tortillas, the smell of which has begun to surround me. Laughter, brightly punctuated block chords, fast smooth intricate runs among the street's warm chatter. The rhythm wants to go Latin, and in my mind it does; the language — like that of jazz — one I know and do not know, but filled with elegance and surprise: the complete guitar of Bruce Forman on a complete Bay Area day. — ***William Minor***

TEDDY BUNN

THE MAN WITH THE BLUES GUITAR

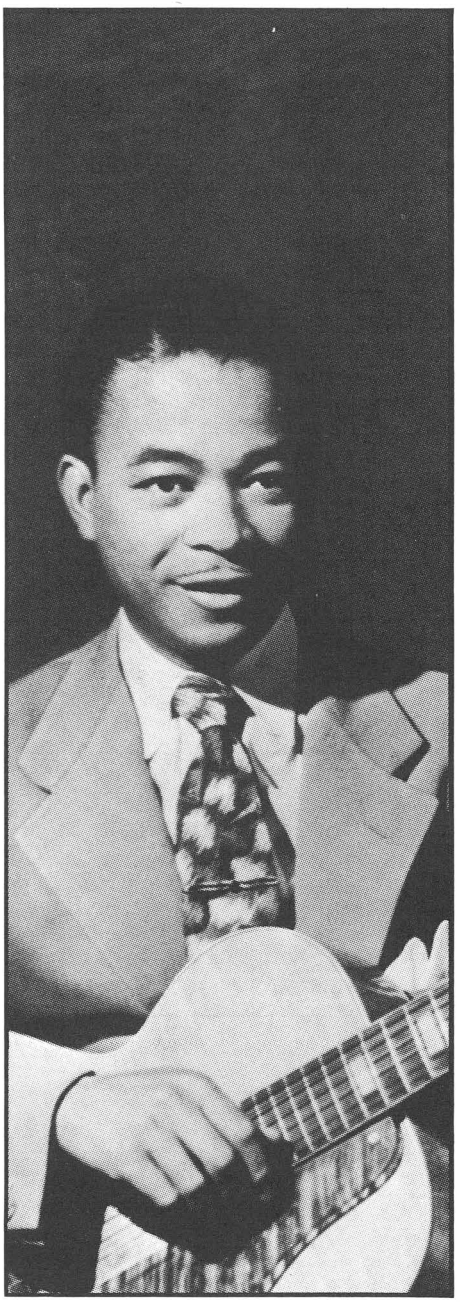
....."They said, 'You have a blue guitar / You do not play things as they are.' The man replied, 'Things as they are / Are changed upon the blue guitar.

Despite a lengthy and productively active career spanning three decades, Teddy Bunn remains, except to the most avid jazz fan, a forgotten man. Sandwiched between the well-documented exploits of his white counterpart, Eddie Lang, and the explosive stardom of an exciting, young Charlie Christian, Bunn's mastery of his instrument was generally overlooked by a record-buying public, though musicians themselves were well aware of his abilities, so that he was always in demand for frequent roles as a sideman. As recordings under his own name are very few and difficult to obtain, it must be on that basis, as a supporting player, that any judgements are made concerning his unique skills and the lasting importance of his playing in the overall development of the jazz guitar.

Theodore Leroy (Teddy) Bunn was born in Freeport, Long Island, in 1909. "You could say I was self-taught, though my papa helped me ... mama played organ in the church there. She didn't go along with blues and jazz, 'sinful music', she called it ... Papa bought me an old guitar and that was it ... pretty soon I could play almost anything," (*Storyville*: Oct.-Nov. 1978).

Certainly, Bunn remained firmly rooted in the blues idiom, and it is not surprising that some of his earliest single-line blues stylizations first appear on record with the likes of J.P. Johnson, the Ellington Cotton Club Orchestra, or vocalist, Spencer Williams. The results are brief banjo-like, single-string offerings behind Bigard's solo on *Haunted Nights*, against Nanton's trombone introduction to *Swanee Shuffle* (Ellington, 1929), in relief of the corny vocals on Johnson's *You've Got To Be Modernistic* (1929), or as a clear, resonant tone displayed between vocal duets on Williams' *Pattin' The Cat* and *It's Sweet Like So* (1930). However, his most successful early sessions were those made with various washboard groups – the Washboard Serenaders (1930), the Alabama Washboard Stompers (1930), the Washboard Rhythm Kings (1931). The former had already made two successful cuts for Vocalion with Ellington (Six Jolly Jesters, 1929), and here Bunn shows his torrid side *(Washboards Get Together)* as well as a delightful solo following the unknown trumpeter's growl introduction on *Teddy's Blues*. "Are you sure it wasn't me on banjo-guitar? That's a banjo strung and tuned like a guitar – it made a good recording sound. I used it on most everyone of my early records like those with Spencer Williams and that wonderful pianist J.P. Johnson." (*Jazz Journal*: Oct. 1976). Succinct runs on *Walkin' My Baby Back Home* and *A Porter's Love Song* for the Washboard Rhythm Kings (1931) clearly indicate that banjo-guitar effect; "Some people think I use a pick. Never used a pick in my life, mostly my thumb, that's how I figured it when I first had that first guitar." (*Storyville*).

Teddy's first real break came in 1932 when he joined the group soon to be known as The Spirits Of Rhythm; "My buddy Leo Watson got me the job there too. That bandleader Ben Bernie, he had a slice of the group. When I joined, it was called Ben Bernie's Sepia Nephews." (*Storyville*). The players gained public attention during a lengthy run at Chick Gorman's Stables in NYC, soon changing their name to The Spirits Of Rhythm. Besides Bunn on guitar, the Spirits included Wilbur and Doug Daniels on tipples (ukuleles strung like guitars),



Leo Watson on 10-string tipple as well as handling vocals and scat-singing, and former dancer Virgil Scroggins on suitcase with whisks ("After awhile, he found he was a better drummer than a dancer, and figured using the suitcase would save him from buying a drum outfit." – *Storyville*). It was a fun aggregation from the start, a throwback to washboard and jug band days, and a forerunner of the Slim and Slam pairing of the late 30's, or the early Rhythm-and-Blues movement to follow. When it hit the Onyx Club on 52nd Street in late 1933, "Everyone came in. Segovia comes in one time and he says if he could play like me he would have it made." (*Storyville*).

The recordings of that period reflect the high-spirited drive and inventive ingenuity of its members. Though sides with Red McKenzie (*Way Down Yonder, From Monday On,* et al) are somewhat marred by McKenzie's rather stilted singing style, Bunn's enthusiasm and versatility shine on many of the performances: his beautiful 16 bar solo on *Rhythm*, his Django-like introduction and startling solo breaks on *I Got Rhythm* (24.10.33), the tongue-in-cheek foray in *That's What I Like About You* (cf Teagarden/Waller session from 1931), and the parody of the "Gallagher & Shean" number from Ziegfeld Follies of 1922 *(Dr. Watson & Mr. Holmes)* with Wilson Myers adding a Slam Stewart routine on bass. As Teddy stated in an interview with Peter Tanner, "I guess my happiest days was with The Spirits Of Rhythm. I wish I had them days back!" *(Storyville)*.

Bunn left the group in 1937 (though it was to disband and reform at various intervals over the next decade), and joined John Kirby's band for a brief time, a period that Teddy summarizes as "...the worstest time I ever had ... I just couldn't get with that guy. He just didn't like guitar players, especially me. How many of his records have guitar? Not many, huh? *(Storyville)*. During the late 30's, Bunn found fairly consistent work with the Decca studio, recording with such a diversity of performers as Milt Herth, Jimmie Noone, Peetie Wheatstraw, Johnny Dodds, Trixie Smith, Bob Howard, Cow Cow Davenport, and Rosetta Crawford. The results did not often afford the guitarist much solo space; yet, some of the sides remain quite memorable.

On Noone's *The Bumps*, the guitar lays down an infectious rhythm, breaking through behind Noone's solo and in the closing riffs; with Dodds' *Melancholy*, he swings into the clarinetist's opening solo, chording out in strong support of the final chorus ("...people say I never play chords, only do that single string stuff. Sure I can play that chord stuff when I want to." *Storyville*), while on *Wild Man Blues* his swinging, crystal-clear performance makes this one of my personal favourites.

TEDDY BUNN (Photograph courtesy Mosaic Records)

As well, *Trixie Blues* (Trixie Smith), *I'm Tired Of Fattening Frogs For Snakes* (Rosetta Crawford), and *Voo Doo Blues* (Fat Hayden) admirably reveal the blues side of Bunn's playing, with gorgeous horn-like responses to the vocal choruses. The most noteworthy sides, perhaps, are the 19 he made in four sessions with vocalist Bob Howard; in particular, Bunn's guitar "vocalizings", his rapid tempo and key changes, and the close affinity he shares with pianists Frank Froeba and Billy Kyle (especially) make numbers like *There Ain't Gonna Be No Doggone Afterwhile, Toodle-oo, Keepin' Out Of Mischief,* and *Any Rags* some of the best from his Decca sojourn.

Several freelance dates were also recorded during that time, notably with Mezzrow-Ladnier groups for RCA Bluebird, and the Port Of Harlem Jazzmen for Blue Note featuring such high profile figures as Sidney Bechet, J.C. Higginbotham and Frankie Newton. Again, though Bunn's solo work is sparsely represented, there are moments of stunning beauty and dramatic intensity such as his discursive, thoughtful effort following Newton's soulful break on *Port Of Harlem Blues*, his understated blues rendering of *Weary Land* (Higginbotham Quintet), his preacher-like "story-telling" approach to *After Hours Blues* (Newton Quintet), or his complex yet solid jump style on *Gettin' Together* (Mezzrow-Ladnier Quintet). These sessions are greatly prized by collectors, and Teddy Bunn's contributions undoubtedly enhance their worth.

In 1940, Teddy Bunn cut his finest recordings – works for solo guitar (Blue Note) and the first under his own name. Circumstances were, to say the least, unusual, considering the eventual success of the session: "This guy at Blue Note ... says, 'Teddy, I want you to do four numbers, two slow, two fast.' I thought I'd do *King Porter* as a warm-up as I knew it well ... I made the others up right there on the date. Didn't have any rehearsal ... I called one *Blues Without Words* on account of I ran out of words. Couldn't make up any more verses, so I just hummed the tune. That guy said he had to have two with vocals, so that's what he got!" (*Jazz Journal*: Oct. 1976). The four are truly gems of virtuosity and dramatic colouring, covering the whole range of the guitar's capabilities. Plaudits go especially to *A Guitar In High* (Teddy's own favourite) with its magnificent breaks, changes and fingering.

1940 also saw Bunn with the Sidney Bechet quartet where he set down a fertile groundwork for Bechet's many dynamic sorties on numbers like *Dear Old Southland*; none, however, approached the calibre of his wonderful melodic improvisations to the earlier *Summertime* (1939), a classic by any standard. Bunn also switched from acoustic to electric guitar, a move he states he never regretted; recordings with Lionel Hampton and Hot Lips Page show him to advantage in that new format: *A Martin On Every Block* (Hampton), *Do It If You Wanna* and *Just Another Woman* (Page). A final transformation that year saw him leave New York for the West Coast. He never returned.

There were a few attempted reincarnations of The Spirits Of Rhythm; recordings were cut in 1941 (some with Scottish-born singer, Ella Logan), and in 1945. Bunn found relatively steady employment around the Los Angeles-Sacramento area during the 50's and 60's in a variety of contexts – with Big Joe Turner, Edgar Hayes, Jack McVea, Hadda Brooks, and Louis Jordan; however, documentation on disc is difficult, for such sessions were sporadic and often recorded for labels that were short-lived or had limited distribution. In 1970, Teddy suffered a mild stroke, followed by 3 successive heart attacks which rendered him partially blind and paralyzed. Despite his condition, he never lost his enthusiasm for a music he loved: "I'll be back working again real soon. This time I'll be boss. We'll play the way we want, just how we feels, maybe ballads, maybe blues, rock and roll, we can play it all, just have to get those guys together." (*Storyville*).

Teddy Bunn died on July 20, 1978. He remained to the end, truly, a spirit of rhythm, and, as such, deserves more than a casual nod from fans of jazz and jazz guitar.

I cannot bring a world quite round,
Although I patch it as I can ...
If to serenade ...
Is to miss, by that, things as they are,
Say that it is the serenade
Of a man that plays a blue guitar.
(from a poem by Wallace Stevens)

– John Sutherland

THE TEDDY BUNN DISCOGRAPHY

Recording Date	Artist Listing (parentheses = no. of sides made)	Original Issue	Reissue(s) (bold = complete session)
16.9.29	Duke Ellington Cotton Club Orchestra (4)	Victor	**RCA 741039**/Camden 459(1)/RCA 730576(1)/RCA 430616(2)
16.9.29	Walter "Fats" Pichon (2)	Victor	**RCA 17060**
29.10.29	Six Jolly Jesters (2) (Ellington)	Vocalion	Decca 79241(1)/**MCA 510017**/Ace of Hearts 23(1)/A of H 89(1)
18.11.29	Jimmie Johnson Orchestra (2)	Victor	**RCA 741094** (Fats Waller)
31.1.30	Adrian Rollini Trio (3)	Brunswick	(unreleased)
27.2.30	Lizzie Miles (4)	Victor	Camden 147(1)
24.3.30/ 31.3.30	Washboard Serenaders (4)	Victor	RCA 10018(2)/Jazum 13(1)/RCA 430700(2)
7.4.30	Teddy Bunn with Spencer Williams (8)	Victor	Historical 5(2)
3.6.30	Wilton Crawley Orchestra (J.R. Morton) (4)	Victor	**RCA 741087**/LPV 524(2)/Meritt 5(1)
26.6.30	Victoria Spivey (2)	Victor	(unreleased)
13.10.30	Alabama Washboard Stompers (3)	Vocalion	**Gardenia 4013**
8.5.31/ 4.6.31	Washboard Rhythm Kings/The Rhythm Kings (9)	Victor	**RCA 10018**/Stash 105(1)
4.6.31	Buck Franklin (Washboard Rhythm Kings) (1)	Victor	unreleased
20.9.33/ 24.10.33/ 20.11.33/ 6.12.33/ 14.9.34	The Spirits of Rhythm (8)	Brunswick/ Decca	**JSP 1008***/Caete 1(5)/Tax 8030(4)/**Gardenia*4009** (*includes 3 unissued nos.)

11.9.34	Red McKenzie (with The Spirits of Rhythm (4)	Decca	**JSP 1008**/Caete 1(3)/**Gardenia 4009**
1.1.37	Jimmy Noone Orchestra (8)	Decca	**CJM 38/Swaggie 1226**/Affinity 1023(3)/Queen Disc 014(1)
21.1.38	Johnny Dodds Chicago Boys (6)	Decca	**CJM 42/MCA(F) 510106**/Ace of Hearts 161(5)
7.2.38/ 8.4.38/ 27.6.38/ 26.7.38	Bob Howard Orchestra (19)	Decca	Rarities 58(3)/Rarities 61 (16)/Stash 100(1)
28.4.38/ 17.5.38/ 30.11.38	Milt Herth Quartet (5)	Decca	(unreleased)
8.5.38	Cow Cow Davenport (5)	Decca	MCA 82024 (box set) (2)/Ace of Hearts 158(1)
12.5.38	Jimmie Gordon's Vip Vop Band (7)	Decca	Swingtime 2002(1) (Sammy Price)
26.5.38	Trixie Smith (6)	Decca	Decca 9230(2)/Ace of Hearts 72(1)/Stash 100(1)/MCA 1330(3)/ MCA 4064(1)/MCA 82040 (box set) (2)
26.6.38	Grant & Wilson (2) (Leola B. Wilson & Kid Wesley Wilson)	Decca	**MCA 82040** (box set)
21.11.38/ 19.12.38	Mezzrow-Ladnier Quintet (7)	Bluebird (RCA)	**LPV 542/RCA 7132/RCA 45728**/RA(J) 5324(5)/RCA(EP) 75523 (4 - alternate takes)
28.11.38	Tommy Ladnier Orchestra (4)	Bluebird (RCA)	**LPV 542/RCA 730509**/LPV 510(1)/RCA(EP) 75694 (4 - 2 are alternate takes)
1.2.39	Rosetta Crawford (with J.P. Johnson's Hep Cats) (4)	Decca	Decca 9230(1)/MCA 82040 (box set)(2)
6.3.39	Johnnie Temple (6)	Decca	(unreleased)
30.3.39	Peetie Wheatstraw (8)	Decca	White Label VJBR 8 (2)
7.4.39/ 8.6.39	J.C. Higginbotham Quintet (2)	Blue Note	**Mosaic 108**
7.4.39/ 8.6.39	Frankie Newton Quintet (2)	Blue Note	**Mosaic 108**
7.4.39/ 8.6.39	Port of Harlem Jazzmen/Port of Harlem Seven (5)	Blue Note	**Mosaic 108**/Blue Note 81202(2)
28.4.39	The Ramblers Quartet (4)	Decca	(unreleased)
18.5.39/ 26.5.39(?)	Georgia White (5 + 5(?)	Decca	Rosetta 1307(1)/Jazz Society 19 (10" - 2)
26.5.39	Fat Hayden (2)	Decca	**MCA 82040** (box set)
8.6.39	Sidney Bechet Quintet (1)	Blue Note	**Blue Note 81201/B Note 7002/B Note 158/Mosaic 108**
27.3.40	Sidney Bechet Quartet (4)	Blue Note	**Blue Note 7002**/B Note 81201 (1)
28.3.40	Teddy Bunn (solo guitar) (4)	Blue Note	**Mosaic 119** (including 1 alternate take)
19.8.40*/ 21.8.40	Lionel Hampton (2*, +4)	*LP only Victor	***Jazz Panorama 2** (2)/**Bluebird 66536**(box set)/**RCA 731053**
10.12.40	Hot Lips Page Quartet (5)	Bluebird (RCA)	RCA(EP) 75592(4)
4.9.41	The Spirits of Rhythm(2)	*LP only	Epic 24027(1)/**Gardenia 4009**(2)
4.9.41	Ella Logan (with the Spirits of R) (4)	*LP only	Epic 24027(1)/Gardenia 4009(3)
29.5.44	Teddy Bunn's Teddy Bears (3)	Keynote	(unreleased)
24.1.45	Spirits of Rhythm (6)	Black & White	(unreleased)
28.4.45	Hadda Brooks Quintet (2)	Modern	**Oldie Blues 2826**
1945(?)	Smokey Joe Whitfield (4)	Gilt Edge	(unreleased)
1945-46	Monette Moore (2)	Gilt Edge	(unreleased)
23.1.46/ 30.1.46	Big Joe Turner (with Bill Moore's Lucky 7 Band) (6)	National	Savoy 14016(4)
1947-1952	Hadda Brooks Quartet (many)	Modern/Okeh	(unreleased)
1948(?)	Edgar Hayes' Stardusters (5)	Exclusive	(unreleased)
1949	Teddy Bunn Quintet (4)	Selective	(unreleased)
late 50's	Louis Jordan's Tympany 5 (some)	(no details)	(no details)

* Any additional information that readers may be able to contribute will be gratefully received.

GUITAR VARIATIONS

JIMMY RANEY & SONNY CLARK / Together! / Xanadu 209

BARNEY KESSEL with THE MONTY ALEXANDER TRIO / Spontaneous Combustion / Contemporary C 14033

PETER LEITCH Featuring NEIL SWAINSON & MICKEY ROKER / On A Misty Night / Criss Cross Jazz 1026

RORY STUART QUARTET / Hurricane / Sunnyside SSC 1021

GRANT GREEN / Idle Moments / Blue Note BST 84154

SILK STOCKINGS / Silk Stockings / B. Fish 002

SONNY GREENWICH / Bird Of Paradise / Justin Time JUST-22

SONNY SHARROCK / Guitar / Enemy 88561-81177-1

LAST EXIT / The Noise Of Trouble / Enemy 88561-8178-1

FRED FRITH & RENÉ LUSSIER / Nous Autres / VICTO 01

Now that electric guitar styles are merging into a single rock-influenced style it is interesting to look back at how the instrument first emerged into jazz. It is also puzzling. Here is a music that thrived on every kind of expressive distortion of timbre and an instrument that could easily be adapted to new sounds – as easily as turning a knob – and yet jazz electric guitar remained with a uniformly mellow sound with little variety of dynamic or attack. Think of the blues guitarists of the same period. Right away they were experimenting with the expressive possibilities of distortion, string bending and primitive "special effects": jazz guitarists never did. It is as if guitarists took the piano as their model, which meant that when they played in groups with piano, as they often did, their playing had to be even more restrained. For whatever reason, the style of jazz guitar as established in the late 40's and early 50's has been generally smooth and tasteful but ultimately limited in expressive range. What is amazing is how many remarkable players were able to work creatively within this style.

That **Jimmy Raney** is one of these is clear from the music on **Together!** recorded in 1953 with **Sonny Clark** on piano, Red Mitchell on bass and Bobby White on drums. His ability to sustain long flights of invention is displayed in every solo on the record. In this he is a good match for Sonny Clark and, even though they had never played together before these Paris and Stokholm dates, they provide ideal foils for each other. While Raney solos he gets a punchy backup from the trio; while Clark solos Raney stays back, avoiding the usual piano/guitar tangle. The band glides through a set of the most standard standards transforming each one completely. Two added bonuses: a trio version of *Once In A While* that stays with you long after hearing it, and a feature for Red Mitchell where he plays the head. The whole record is a straight ahead example of articulate energy.

Barney Kessel was one of the creators of the modern jazz guitar style and he continues to be one of its masters. As you might expect, there are few surprises on **Spontaneous Combustion – Barney Kessel With The Monty Alexander Trio**. Everything is in the right place and there is a solid feel throughout. The great virtue of this music is its looseness. Kessel manages to be relaxed at any tempo and the band fits in around him all the way. The piano and guitar voicings work well together and get some interesting textures, particularly on the full orchestral chords on *Bluesy*. Kessel's playing is never far from the blues and some of the best moments happen when he starts bending strings.

Peter Leitch is another guitarist who is strong on chording. **On A Misty Night** with **Neil Swainson** and **Mickey Roker**, while unadventurous (adventure isn't everything) demonstrates his distinctive control of the harmonic language of jazz guitar. Five of the seven tunes are ballads and most of them have interesting changes that lend themselves to the wide range of colours that Leitch brings to his chord-soloing. This is particularly true of the title tune by Tadd Dameron and a medley of two ballads from Billie Holiday's repertoire. For me the standout is his acoustic solo version of Monk's *Crepescule With Nellie*. The almost folk-guitar treatment of Monk's harmonies seems to bring them alive in a way that few electric versions have – or piano versions for that matter.

Grant Green's Idle Moments suffers the disadvantage of being compared to all the wonderful records that were coming out of Blue Note in the same period, with the same sidemen – **Bobby Hutcherson, Joe Henderson, Duke Pearson**. By any other standard it would probably be an enjoyable record but it never really delivers on its potential. Of the 4 tunes, 2 are by Duke Pearson who did all the arrangements and one by Green plus John Lewis's *Django*. Each of these has a distinctive mood which all the soloists read with great sensitivity. In particular Henderson on *Nomad* and Hutcherson on *Idle Moments* stand out. Overall however the playing is fairly subdued. It makes me wonder why there wasn't a "Blue Note guitarist" the way Hutcherson was the Blue Note vibes player.

Rory Stuart Quartet is a guitarist-led group which has played together for the last five years. The tunes on their first record, **Hurricane**, are all by Stuart except for one by the pianist, **Armen Donelian** and Monk's *Rhythm-a-ning*. Each tune has a distinctive feel and there

is a sense of skilled craftsmanship throughout. What seems to be missing is the presence of a distinctive voice either collectively or individually. This record will appeal to listeners who like their jazz in its most standard and straightforward form. (The most mysterious thing about it is the photograph of a fire hydrant on the album cover.)

All of these guitarists are basically working with the jazz guitar sound as it was first developed in the bop era. **Sonny Greenwich** is one of the few guitarists who has extended this sound without leaving it completely. His sound is richer and more sustained than most jazz guitarists. His latest record, **Bird Of Paradise**, is a collection of original tunes with one standard thrown in. He is accompanied by **Fred Henke** on piano, **Ron Seguin**, bass and **André White** on drums. Most of the tunes are modal explorations by Greenwich with swelling underpinning led by Henke's Tynerish chording. For many players this approach would end up in sentimentality but Greenwich pulls it off by force of pure lyric intensity. On Sondheim's *Not While I'm Around* he does what jazz interpretation is supposed to do – he makes you think that no one else has ever played the tune before.

Silk Stockings is a Toronto based quintet led by guitarist **Rainer Wiens**, but it is not a guitarist's band in the sense that Stuart's or Greenwich's are. On the band's self-titled first album, a collection of Wiens originals, the horn players, **Mike Murley** on saxophones and **John Lewis** on trumpet, are in the forefront, playing most of the heads and soloing extensively. Wiens plays closely with the rhythm section of **Richard Bannard** and **George Koller**, in single notes rather than chords, and together they put together some wonderfully subtle and varied rhythms. But it is the compositions, all by Wiens that really hold the record together. They range from jazzy lines using 4ths predominantly, to free rhythms, to pieces showing a variety of cross-cultural influences. These last are the most interesting in that they lack the usual corny derivative effect. On *Clea*, Wiens gets an oud-like sound; on several of the tunes the horns have a Slavic feel of a Bulgarian brass band; on *One Step Closer*, Bannard and Wiens invent a kind of Korean free music.

One way of dealing with the tradition of jazz guitar is to leave it altogether, which is what **Sonny Sharrock** does. In fact the only style it does relate to, to my ears, is San Francisco acid rock – it has a lot of that free-wheeling energy, as well as some of the limitations. **Sonny Sharrock – Guitar** is a solo record with double tracked accompaniments by Sharrock. Most of the tunes are simple folk-like melodies played with heavy distortion followed by modal improvisations. Unlike many contemporary guitarists, he never falls back on speedy technique as a substitute for feeling. There is not enough in the tunes however to sustain a whole record. The best moments are when Sharrock's intensity overwhelms the material as with his slide playing on *Flowers*.

This intensity serves him well in the context of **Last Exit**. Together with **Peter Brotzmann, Bill Laswell** and **Ronald Shannon Jackson** he makes a kind of full-throttle free jazz that is nothing if not intense. Listening to **The Noise Of Trouble**, recorded live in Tokyo in 1986, I wonder if this isn't what Albert Ayler would have sounded like if he had been able to continue his experiments with electric bands. The album also features **Akira Sakata** on clarinet and alto in some great duets with Brotzmann, as well as a very strange piece by **Herbie Hancock**. In addition it has the dubious distinction of what might be the worst cover of a Jimmy Reed tune ever put on vinyl. Somehow it all seems to work because of the unique chemistry of this band. There is something appealing about a group that can be so fierce and yet still not take itself completely seriously.

Listening to **Nous Autres** by **René Lussier and Fred Frith**, also recorded live in 1986, at the Festival Actuelle in Victoriaville, gives you the sense that it must have been a wonderful concert to be at. There is a feeling of good humour and rapport with the crowd that doesn't often get captured on record. Most of the twelve pieces are less than five minutes long and represent an eclectic range of musical flavours – from art-rock to country jigs to electrified improvised music. What they have in common is an adherence to tight repeated rhythmic figures punctuated by bursts of vocal-like electronic effects. This gives a sense of unrelenting control throughout. Sometimes this is used to comic effect as on *Cage de Verre* where the pattern keeps fading out and inevitably returning; sometimes it allows for complex meters (*J'aime La Musique* has a 15/8 funk beat). The presence of a number of "guest artists" adds to the variety – **Chris Cutler** on drums on one cut; and **Cristoph Anders, Genevieve Letarte** and **Tenko Ueno** singing on others. Jelly Roll Morton even makes an appearance. Sometimes I find the repeated rhythms a little rigid but overall this is a very enjoyable record.

– Arthur Bull

SONNY SHARROCK (Photograph by Bill Smith)

AROUND THE WORLD

NEWS & VIEWS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL JAZZ SCENE * COMPILED BY PUBLISHER JOHN NORRIS

CANADA – **Rob McConnell** directed the Olympic Jazz Band in three performances in Calgary during the Olympics. The orchestra was made up of young musicians (20-27 years old) from across the country. The first concert, following five days of intensive rehearsal, was broadcast by the CBC and showed remarkable cohesion for such an ad-hoc organisation. Highlighting the concert was the first performance of **Phil Nimmons**' specially commissioned work "The Torch". The band tackled the ever-shifting and harmonically rich music with dedication and considerable expression. The concert, which also included works by Rick Wilkins, Don Thompson and Ron Collier, was an excellent showcase for such soloists as tenor saxophonists Ralph Bowen and Ted Nugent, guitarist Reg Schwager, pianist Jon Ballantyne and baritone saxophonist Perry White.

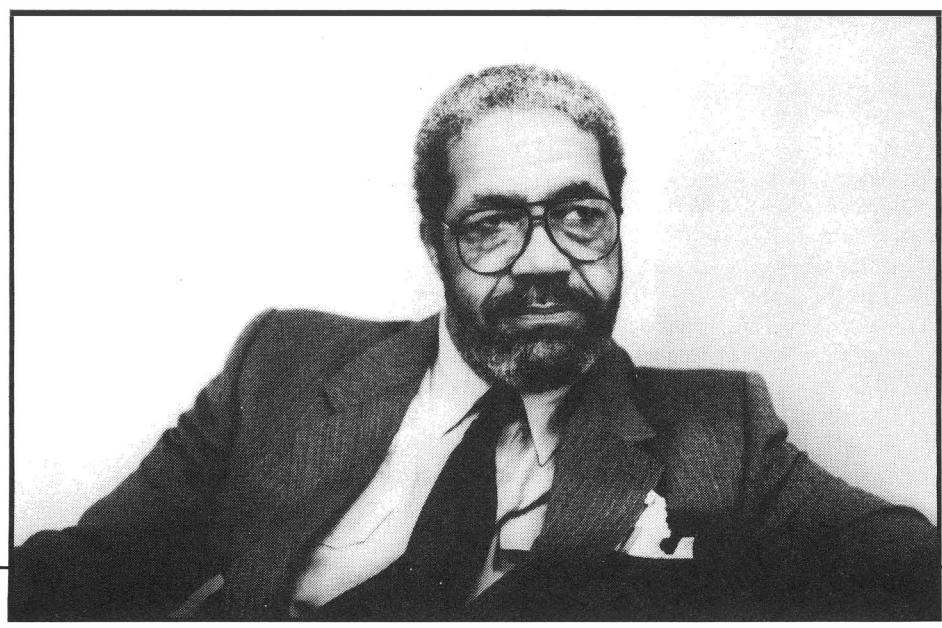
A curious aside to the tremendous amount of work involved in such a project was the absence of any publicity material about the band or the concerts. The Coda office was bombarded with press releases about various aspects of the Olympics but didn't receive a single sheet of paper about this project or the concert featuring **Oscar Peterson** in a performance of his "Olympic Suite", which was televised nationally. Arranger/composer **Rick Wilkins** deserves the credit for getting that work into shape for its premiere performance.

Tenor saxophonist **Clifford Jordan** was at Toronto's Underground Railroad for a week in late February with George McFetridge (piano), Steve Wallace (bass) and Keith Blackley (drums). Jordan's roots are deeply entwined in the Lester Young/Coleman Hawkins/Charlie Parker era and he was impressive exploring material associated with his idols. That same week (Feb. 22-27) found Rob McConnell executing fluently on trombone at George's Spaghetti House with strong guitar support from Rob Piltch, and the remarkable solo piano of **Don Friedman** at Cafe des Copains.

Ron Allen, James Pett and **Don Thompson** all gave solo concerts at the Walker Court of the AGO in a series under the direction of Contemporary Music Projects.... One of The Music Gallery's most successful projects was its "String World" concerts in February with **Bill Frisell, David Prentice, Arthur Bull** and **David Lee** among the participants.... Kenny Wheeler became sick upon arrrival in Canada for a short January tour. His Clinton's gig went on without him, with a **Claude Ranger** trio featuring Mike Milligan and Perry White.... Pianist **Mal Waldron** and the **Pat LaBarbera Quartet** were scheduled for a March 13 concert at the BamBoo and the same venue played host to **Steve Garrick's** 17-piece band on March 17.... **Guido Basso** subbed for Moe Koffman at George's Spaghetti House on February 8. Also appearing recently at the club was the **Lorne Lofsky Trio** with Neil Swainson and Bob McLaren.... Rob McConnell has accepted a teaching job at California's Grove School of Music.... Two concerts designed to benefit Northwestern General Hospital's Equipment Fund will be held in April at Roy Thomson Hall. **An Evening with Don Francks** takes place April 8 with the orchestra under the direction of Jimmy Dale. April 28 Peter Appleyard presents yet another **Tribute to Benny Goodman** with Abe Most, Bucky Pizzarelli, Major Holley and Butch Miles joining his Spring Fever Band.... There's live jazz Sunday nights at Yuri's - a neighbourhood bar at 5415 Dundas St. West in Etobicoke.... Sunday evening jazz concerts began March 20 at Cafe des Copains with the duo of **Oliver Jones and Dave Young**. On the following Sunday **Jim Galloway and Neil Swainson** collaborated with pianist **Jay McShann**. The series continues, showcasing Toronto-area performers on a regular basis.

John Arpin was guest soloist with the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra March 13 at a Dofasco Family Pops Concert.... Just released is an lp documenting the work of the University of Calgary's Red Band which is under the direction of **Warren Rowley**. They gave a concert January 17 to launch the recording.... **Mwendo Dawa**, a Swedish jazz group co-led by tenor saxophonist Ove Johansson and pianist Susanna Lindeborg, were in Edmonton February 24/25 as part of an extensive North American tour. This same trip took them as far south as Argentina.

In preparation for an exceptional summer festival the **Coastal Jazz and Blues Society** has hosted a number of events in Vancouver. James Moody began the series February 6 with Bob Murphy, Rick Kilburn and Claude Ranger completing the quartet. Two days later Lew Tabackin's Trio were in town. France's Christian Vander Trio performed March 7 and were followed by the Willem Breuker Kollektief (March 12), Max Roach Quartet (March 27/28) and the Peter Leitch Trio (April 18).... Vancouver's **New Orchestra Workshop** presented a series of events at the Centre Culturel Francophone in March. Claude Ranger's Trio, Jay Clayton/Julian Priester/Jerry Granelli and the Paul Plimley Trio were among the participants.... Montreal's **Jean Beaudet Quartet** has a new recording issued by Justin Time Records. That company also recorded **Paul Bley** in a solo setting on December 28.



ELSEWHERE

Koko Taylor and members of her blues band were seriously injured in a car accident February 4 near Sewanee, Tennessee. Their band van plunged down the side of a mountain in dense fog. It will be at least two months before the award winning singer will be able to return to work.

Toshiko Akiyoshi, Miles Davis, Randy Weston and the Art Ensemble of Chicago were recipients of the first **"Roots"** awards given by the Nigerian jazz magazine. A special awards concert was held March 11 to 13 at the National Theatre in Lagos.

New York's Universal Jazz Coalition offers established and up-and-coming artists an opportunity to showcase their talents on a regular basis at the Jazz Center of New York. It is an unique workshop/concert setting for the music. Jamil Nasser hosted an evening dedicated to Harold Vick with tenor saxo-

phonists George Coleman, Frank Wess, Junior Cook and Billy Mitchell in attendance. The Billy Harper Quintet was in residence February 12/13 while Curtis Lundy's Quartet celebrated the memory of the late Paul Chambers on February 20. UJC's annual fundraising event and birthday celebration for the organisation's founder (Cobi) took place March 5.... Sun Ra, the Paul Bley Group (John Abercrombie, Red Mitchell, Barry Altschul), Jim Hall, Steve Lacy, The Jazztet, James Moody, Abdullah Ibrahim and David Murray are in the **Sweet Basil** lineup through May 8.... Guitarist Rick Stone was at Kendall Gallery January 23.... The Bruce Smith Jazz Ensemble was at Comedy U./55 Grand on January 31. "Bright Ideas" is the name of the group's record which is available from 463 West Street, B645, New York, N.Y. 10014.... Guitarist Peter Leitch was at the Angry Squire February 5/6 with Bobby Watson and Cecil McBee.... The Reggie Workman Ensemble was at Washington Square Church February 12/13. ... **Vinylmania Jazz** is a new specialty record store located at 30 Carmine Street in Greenwich Village between 7th Avenue South and Bleeker.

The Junior Mance Duo was presented by the International Art of Jazz at Long Island's Garden City Ethical Humanist Society Center on February 21....**Tom Everett** is teaching a full semester extension course on "Miles Davis: The Evolving Artist" this spring at Harvard University.... **Lester Bowie** was at Dartmouth College February 13 for a performance with the Barbary Coast Jazz Ensemble.... **Old Pine Street Church** (4th & Pine) in Philadelphia is the venue for Sunday concerts. Don Patterson was there January 17 and on March 20 the music was provided by Lovit Hines and the Settlement School Youth Band.... This summer's concert schedule at **Art Park** in Lewiston, N.Y. includes appearances by Wynton Marsalis and Nancy Wilson (September 4), the Preservation Hall Jazz Band (Sept. 10) and Dizzy Gillespie (Sept. 11)....Jane Ira Bloom, Dewey Redman, Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy and Ahmad Jamal all gave concerts in Ann Arbor for Eclipse Jazz.

James F. Condell is best known to Coda readers for his informative reviews and articles. His talents cover many disciplines besides his principal occupation as a teaching professor at Moorhead University. He worked his way through college as a musician with The Kentucky State Collegians. The band was the subject of an extensive article in the Spring 1987 issue of "Black Perspectives in Music". Condell has studied classical guitar extensively but continues to work in the jazz field in his area. "Condell & Company" gave a concert at The Underground February 16 focusing attention on Black Composers (jazz) in honour of Black History Month. Condell also hosts a weekly jazz radio show on KDSU-FM in Moorhead.

Clarinetist **Kenny Davern** performed for the Gainesville Friends of Jazz on February 9.... Ernestine Anderson and Emily Remler headlined a jazz concert March 19 which was part of Primavera: A Celebration of Women in the Arts in Tuscon, Arizona.... Lewis Porter and Joe Morello gave lectures at North Texas State University recently.... Austin, Texas' Creative Opportunity Orchestra recorded live in concert February 26 at the University of Texas.

Peter Erskine, Marty Krystall and Buell Neidlinger were at Los Angeles' Le Cafe Feb. 10.... **Horace Tapscott** had two gigs early in 1988. He was at Catalina's Bar & Grill January 8/9 and The Alleycat Feb. 23-25.... **San Francisco's** Bright Moments Music Lovers Club (P.O. Box 24172, San Francisco, CA 94124-2630) organised an event at Kimballs on February 22 to raise funds to expand their youth project. An all-star band performed with John Handy, Donald Bailey, James Lewis, Michael Howell and Rudy Mwonzi among those featured. J.C. Burris, the well-known blues singer/harmonicist, opened the event.... Tito Puente, Ernestine Anderson, Bruce Forman, Ray Skjelbred/Barbara Lashley, Johnny Coles/Frank Wess and Carmen McRae were heard in concert performances over KJAZ in February/March.... Pianist **Andrew Hill** wishes to inform bookers, concert/club promoters, record producers, friends and fans that he is now booked exclusively through Jazz Fund, P.O. Box 415, CA 94565-0041. Phone (415) 439-0486.

The Muddy Waters Scholarship has been established by the Blue Heaven Foundation to assist students in the Chicago area. The foundation was established by **Willie Dixon** who also announces that instruments have been donated (thanks to the support of Yamaha) to DuSable School in Chicago and Vicksburg Junior and Senior High in Mississippi.

The Toshiko Akiyoshi Orchestra was on tour in the Western States during February. They will perform June 27 in New York at Town Hall and are working on European and Japanese tours for July and August.... Writer/teacher/musician **Lewis Porter** has been busy. He is readying a course on Teaching Jazz for college teachers at Rutgers this summer. He gave a paper on Ornette Coleman's music at Trento, Italy in November as well as performing on three occasions while in Italy. He is currently working on books on the music of John Coltrane and a history of jazz.... **Peter Leitch** begins an extensive touring schedule March 11 with appearances in Cincinnati, Denver, Albuquerque and San Diego. He then heads for Canada for two weeks where he'll work with bassist Neil Swainson and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith.... Blues pianist/singer **Katie Webster** toured the West Coast during January.

Denmark's **Page One** was the overall winner of the International Jazz Federation's 1987 competition. This year's finals take place October 20-22 in Leverkusen, Germany.... The **George Gruntz** Concert Jazz Band embarks on a spring tour in Europe with concerts in Stuttgart, Geneva, Basel, Munich and four days of

CLIFFORD JORDAN (Photograph by Peter Danson)

video recording in Hamburg for NDR Television.... Bassist **Heikki "Haka" Virtanen** was winner of the Finnish Jazz Federation's annual Georgie Award. Major Finnish festivals take place in Helsinki (June 16-19) and Pori (July 9-17).... **FMP** concerts in Berlin include "Just Music - Just Piano" (April 1-4), "Improvised Music 1/88" (April 23-24), Workshop Freie Musik "Saxophones" (May 4-8).... The Michael Brecker Group appear April 7 in Ravenna, Italy and the Lee Konitz Trio (Joe Pass, Niels Pedersen) are at the same location April 24.... **The Amsterdam Blues Festival** took place March 18/19 with Gatemouth Brown, Matt Murphy and Robert Jr. Lockwood among the performers.... Ed Thigpen's Trio with Slide Hampton, Lars Estrand, Tom Harrell-George Robert, Kenny Davern and Charly Antolini are all appearing at Zurich's Widder Bar in March/April.... DeDe Bridgewater, James Moody, Ahmad Jamal and Kenny Burrell were members of the Philip Morris-sponsored "Super Band" who toured the Philippines and Japan in December.

Newly available books from Scarecrow Press (P.O. Box 4167, Metuchen, N.J. 08840) are "This Horn for Hire" by **Pee Wee Erwin** as told to Warren Vache Sr, "**Benny Goodman:** Listen to his Legacy" by D. Russell Connor and "**Ellingtonia**: A Collector's Manual" by W.E. Timner.... Nightwood Editions (Box 607, Station C, Toronto, Ontario M6J 3R9) is following up the success of **Mark Miller's** "Boogie, Pete & The Senator" with a paperback reissue of Miller's 1982 "**Jazz in Canada: 14 Lives**".... Another source for jazz discographies is Mr. Stu, 1716 Ocean Ave, Suite 9-L, San Francisco, CA 94112. Write him for a catalog.... The February 1988 issue of Audio included an in-depth interview with Commodore founder **Milt Gabler.... Arts Midwest Jazz Letter** (528 Hennepin Ave., Suite 310, Minneapolis, MN 55403) has extensive listings of jazz activities in the midwest.

New recordings on **BMG-Novus** include Henry Threadgill's "Easily Slip into Another World", "Ebony" by Richard Stoltzman and Woody Herman's Thundering Herd and Hilton Ruiz' "El Camino".... The same company has another flock of Bluebird reissues ready. Look for a second multi-disc collection of Duke Ellington band sides from 1944-45 as well as a single collection of "The Great Ellington Units". It looks as though the Ellington/Blanton duets have slipped through the net and remain unreissued by the company in this latest "overall" series. Back in print are "The You and Me That Used To Be" by Jimmy Rushing, a Ruby Braff collection, The Newport Jazz Festival Tribute to Charlie Parker, Woody Herman's 40th Anniversary Concert, "Up To Date" with Earl Hines, Anthony Braxton's "Live" concerts from Arista and collections by arrangers (Gil Evans, John Carisi, George Russell, Rod Levitt) and Chicago/Dixieland which includes Muggsy Spanier's The Great Sixteen and titles by Eddie Condon and Bud Freeman. Most of these reissues will only be on CD.

Phil Woods has signed with **Concord**. Just out on the label is Gene Harris' Big Band date and another collaboration between Monty Alexander, Herb Ellis and Ray Brown.... Newly issued on **Delmark** are blues albums by Yank Rachell and Roosevelt Sykes.... **DMP** is giving away a 3 inch compact disc sampler ot its jazz recordings. Send $3.00 to cover mailing costs to CMP, Park Square Station, Box 15835PR, Stamford, CT 06901.... **MA Music International** is a new European jazz label funded and run by Marion Kaempfert. U.S. distribution through K-Tel should ensure wide availability. "First Brass" features Derek Watkins, Allan Botschinsky and Bart and Eric Van Lier without any rhythm section while "Duologue" is a collaboration between trumpeter Botschinsky and bassist Niels Henning Orsted Pedersen.... **Zebra Records** has issued a collaboration between David Grisman and Svend Asmussen.... "Free Fall" is a CD release of music by the **Minnesota Composers' Forum**. It's available from them at Markethouse #206, 289 East Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55101.

Previously unissued Erroll Garner material from 1961-65 is being issued by **Polygram** on **Emarcy**. Already out on **Verve** are CD issues of Bill Evans' "Alone", Bud Powell's "Jazz Giant", "The Individualism of Gil Evans", Stan Getz plays with Duke Jordan and Jimmy Raney, Count Basie in London as well as Art Blakey's 1958 Olympia Concert and a 23-tune collection from Don Byas' Blue Star recordings. Polygram Classics is now handling directly the distribution in the U.S. of **Black Saint & Soul Note** records.... "Three Way Mirror" is a new release on **Reference Recordings** (P.O. Box 77225X, San Francisco, CA 94107-9944) with Joe Farrell, Flora Purim and Airto Moreira.... Look for a new Dirty Dozen Brass Band lp on **Rounder** as well as a second one by bluesman Walter "Wolfman" Washington.... The Tom Cunningham Orchestra, active in the Washington area, has just released its own lp on **Eagle Records** (2513 N. Quebec St., Arlington, VA 22207).

JASON WEISS reports from Paris about some newly issued recordings:

"Why it should take twenty years for significant recordings to be issued by some of the great jazzmen may be partly explained by France's vast bureaucratic legacy, but better late than never! The Institut National de la Communication Audiovisuelle has at last, by arrangement with the company **Esoldun,** released the first six albums of tapes from their vaults. They are the fruit of original live recordings (unfortunately in mono) made in Paris and elsewhere in France during the 1960s mostly.

"Earl Hines, on **Hines' Tune (FC 101),** brings out the members of his all-star band one by one till at the end they are all playing together on his long boogie-woogie version of *St. Louis Blues*. The musicians include Jimmy Woode, Kenny Clarke, Don Byas, Stuff Smith, Ben Webster, and Roy Eldridge. How could it possibly go wrong with a line-

up like that? Of course it can't.

"Charles Mingus' band, on **Meditation (FC 102)**, features Eric Dolphy, Jaki Byard, Clifford Jordan, and Dannie Richmond, from a 1964 Paris date. The record opens with *Peggy's Blue Skylight*, followed by tunes often performed by that group, and while other albums from that time are now available, this is as fine as any.

"On **Play, Milt, Play (FC 103)**, Milt Buckner appears with Roy Eldridge, Illinois Jacquet, Jimmy Woode, Slam Stewart, and Jo Jones, in several groupings. A good introduction to this organist's work.

"On **Lover Man (FC 104)**, Coleman Hawkins is playing at full force and the band is jumping. Most of the album was recorded at the first Paris jazz festival in 1964, with Sir Charles Thompson, Jo Jones, Harry Edison and Jimmy Woode, while the last two numbers are from the first Antibes festival in 1958, with a band that included Roy Eldridge and Vic Dickenson.

"Thelonious Monk's **Evidence (FC 105)** was recorded on several Paris dates with his classic quartet featuring Charlie Rouse, playing six tunes including a nice *Bright Mississippi*. It's clear as ever that Monk can do no wrong.

"Lastly, there's the beautiful John Coltrane performance, **A Love Supreme (FC 106)**, where his classic quartet plays the title tune for 48 minutes at Antibes in 1965. This, as much as any of them, should not be missed.

"Five more releases are due to be issued soon. They include dates with Bill Evans, Roland Kirk, Wes Montgomery, Freddie King, and a second Mingus performance.

"The records are handsomely produced, though the liner notes (straight out of a jazz encyclopedia) suffer comically in their English translation. They are available from: Joel Arlot, Esoldun, 69 rue Henri Barbusse, 92000 Nanterre, France. Telephone: (1) 47-29-27-39."

*

George Coppens has issued a CD of "Your Neighbourhood Saxophone Quartet" on his own label under the title "The Walkman". It should be available in Dutch record stores.... Sweden's **Dragon Records** has issued a two-disc set of Monk Quartet recordings from 1961 Stockholm concerts.... London's **Leo Records** has released CDs by the Cecil Taylor Unit live in Bologna 1987 and Sun Ra Live in Utrecht 1983.... "Alternate Changes for Bud" is the title of Mike Melillo's new trio recording on **Red Records.... The Silkheart Records** catalog is being distributed internationally through **Storyville** Records in Denmark. Initial releases include sextet and quartet sessions by Steve Lacy and quartet dates by Ahmed Abdullah and Charles Brackeen.

Pianist **Gene Rodgers** died in late 1987.... Blues singer/accordionist **Clifton Chenier** died December 12.... Drummer **Ray Bauduc** died January 7.... **Joe Albany** died January 18 after a lengthy illness.... Bassist **Al Hall** died in New York January 18.... Tenor saxophonist **Al Cohn** died February 15. – *compiled by John Norris*

IN PERFORMANCE

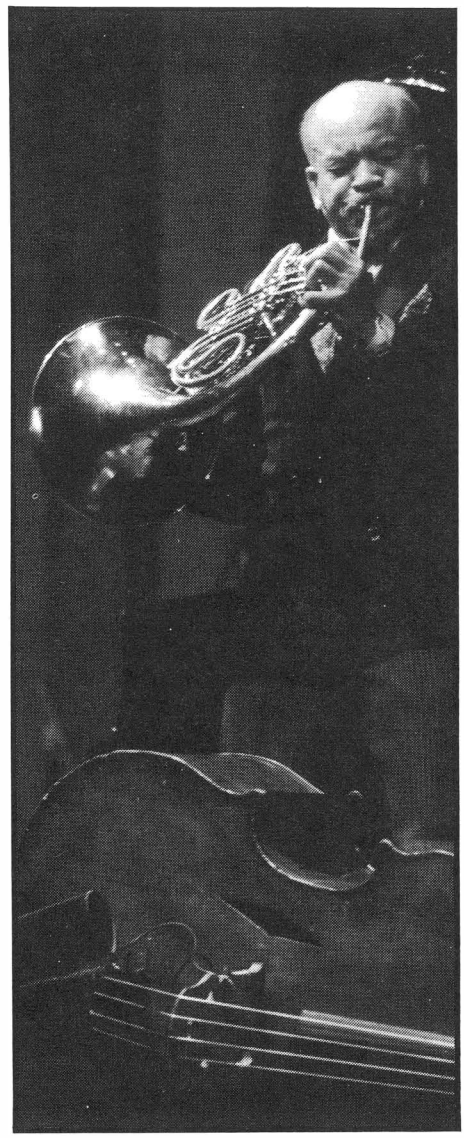
JAZZ FREEDOM CONCERT
Duke Ellington School for the Arts, Washington, D.C., December 7, 1987

This program was billed as a benefit for the Jazz Section of the Czechoslovakian Musicians Union, so some recounting of that group's plight is in order. Formed in 1971, the Jazz Section grew like the jazz bin in many a small record shop – all sorts of things that wouldn't easily fit into other existing categories ended up there. It gained UNESCO recognition, had some 7,000 members, and more than ten times that many read its publications. As part of a full-fledged union, the Section had relatively uncensored publishing privileges, and made use of those to produce books and magazines on subjects ranging from dada art to John Lennon's music.

The post-1968 powers-that-still-be in Prague have recently banned even some issues of *Pravda*, presumably those in which Gorbachev might be mistaken for Dubcek, so it's not too surprising that they would shut down the entire Musicians Union just to do in the Jazz Section. When Section leader Karol Srp testified at his trial that he had sent 130 enquiries through official channels asking for clarification of that ruling (made under a 'temporary' statute enacted in 1968), he was told that replies cannot be made to an organization which does not exist. Among the charges were use of an office telephone for personal calls and the unauthorized placing of a small stone in a public place. The stone, in a park, commemorated the United Nations. It seems that Kafka as well as Bird lives.

Before bringing on Kurt Vonnegut, a rep from the concert's sponsor, the International Jazz Coalition, led the audience of several hundred in a resounding "Hello Prague!" since the VOA was taping the concert for later broadcast in Czechoslovakia. Vonnegut read a letter from the Jazz Section and offered H.L. Mencken's definition of puritanism: "a nagging suspicion that someone somewhere might actually be happy", to shed some light on the bureaucratic mentality in Prague. Vonnegut is to American letters what Mose Allison is to American music. It's worth a trip to the library to search out his op-ed piece on the Jazz Section in December 14, 1986's *New York Times.*

Vonnegut introduced Sonny Rollins, whose recent dental work precluded any tenor work. After briefly describing strong feelings of empathy with fans and musicians alike during his recent tour of eastern Europe, Rollins brought on Dwike Mitchell and Willie Ruff. Ruff got a good laugh by renaming Gershwin's "Summertime" as "Summit Time", in keeping with the Gorbachev-Reagan dog & pony show which commenced that same evening, but also delivered the goods in full with his partner of 32 years. In his boppish moments, it is eerie how like Bud Powell Mitchell looks at the piano. Ruff excelled on both bass and french horn, having sufficiently long-standing chops on both that one does not suffer for the other. He has no peers on french horn. Their elegant swing earned them a standing ovation.



Expatriate Czech novelist Josef Skvorecky read from his *Bass Saxophone,* considerably less comfortable before such a large audience than Rod MacLeish, who followed him. A National Public Radio commentator as well as writer, MacLeish read a letter he wrote to Czech government leader Husak, congratulating him for "... creating a new symbol for consideration by the rest of the world. It is a trumpet, lying in the gutter of the state, dropped after the trumpeter was arrested for making a sound that displeased you ... You have misunderstood the nature of silence because you do not seem to understand the nature of sound. Our species has been making sounds of one sort or another since even before we attained the full status of *homo sapiens.* I expect we sang before we spoke ... When you forcibly smothered that trumpet, you were choking off something that has a natural place in the world ... You have disordered the ordinary. Far from achieving real silence, you created a deafening absence of what should be there ..." MacLeish's ease and eloquence in person were pleasantly surprising, considering how officious (but nevertheless insightful) he can sound over the airwaves.

Closing the concert was Billy Taylor's trio, a silken threesome of the same mature calibre as Mitchell & Ruff, and equally in the mainstream of the tradition. Sure, we've heard it all before, but it was just as enjoyable this time around. Bassist Victor Gaskin shone brightest with his exquisite, exact, viciously swinging arco work, especially in the encore "All Blues", double stopping as easily as breathing.

Despite having sent it several weeks before to the Soviet embassy, an invitation to the concert for Mrs. Gorbachev was not accepted. That's a shame, certainly, but her duties in the media extravaganza were already taxing enough, so maybe we should be thankful that the treaty got signed and let it go at that.

Traditionally, the greatest nagging fear among journalists is that events between deadline and the finished product hitting the streets will render the latest masterpiece obsolete. If that would put the good works of the Jazz Section back into full swing, I would gladly embrace obsolescence. – *W. Patrick Hinely*

FACULTY ENSEMBLE
"In The Spirit Of John Coltrane"
Crowell Concert Hall, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT – November 13, 1987

Wesleyan University, a liberal arts school in Middletown, Connecticut, is blessed with a faculty ensemble that would do many a music school proud. The all-star here is the venerable New Orleans-rooted, former Ornette Coleman percussionist Ed Blackwell, but there are highly talented, less familiar names, too: trombonist/tubist Bill Lowe, pianist Fred Simmons, bassist Wes Brown. At a recent concert dubbed "In The Spirit Of John Coltrane", part of a three day commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of Coltrane's passing, the faculty ensemble was joined by trumpeter Kamau Adilifu and special guest saxophonist/composer/"Keeper of the Trane" Andrew White.

The ensemble was remarkably tight for a one-off concert, displaying strong compositions and committed blowing that ranged from thoughtful to fiery. Andrew White's playing, on alto and tenor, was a continual source of delight, his solos tasteful and energetic without

WILLIE RUFF (Photograph by W. Patrick Hinely)

lapsing into histrionics. A big man, all arms and legs, White hunches his shoulders and often seems to be marching in place when he plays. He is one of those seldom-sung players who could cut many a better known star.

Bill Lowe sculpts his trombone and tuba solos with big, bold strokes that go straight to blues territory. His warm, rounded sound contrasted nicely with White's sharper tone. The same was true for Kamau Adilifu (formerly Charles Sullivan), who coaxed an attractively brassy edge from both trumpet and flugelhorn, sounding at times Dizzyesque. Fred Simmons is a relaxed player who knows the value of space, but on White's intriguingly titled *Popeye's Biscuits* he showed a command of Horace Silver funk. Wes Brown provided a solid, swinging bass backdrop and interacted closely with Blackwell.

And as for Ed Blackwell: he's the juju man of the drums, whose playing – steeped in primordial rhythms – swings joyfully. Perched behind an old three-piece psychedelic blue-wave drumset which he had tuned to a singing tautness so that each note was clearly defined, wearing a blue and maroon striped tunic with a white sunburst pattern on the chest and a matching cap, Blackwell was the visual and auditory focal point of the stage, his variegated drumming the cohesive pulse coursing through the music, subtly shifting textures.

An extremely patient drummer who is unafraid to sustain a groove, Blackwell pops rimshots, stirs and delicately dings cymbals, executes blazing single stroke tom rolls, cross-hand patterns between drums, and one-handed press rolls, kisses his tight snare with brushes, draws satiny sighs from his hihat – all with the authority that comes only with much playing and an absorption of the tradition behind one's instrument. These are important aspects of Blackwell's style, but the distinctive quality of his voice as a musician is his idiosyncratic amalgam of New Orleans second line parade rhythms with African polyrhythms. Ed Blackwell doesn't betray much emotion while he plays – the eyebrows may curve above his tinted glasses – but his expansive drumming evokes the spirit of Mardi gras.

The ensemble performed compositions by each member save Blackwell and Brown. Two of the more striking of these were Simmons' *Soft Shoeing* (called *Shoeing In* in the program), which featured an evocative, smoky tenor solo by White, and the saxophonist's *Popeye's Biscuits*, a pleasant, laidback funk. The highlight of the concert, though, was a reading of *Moment's Notice*, whose flaming bop demands these players were up for.

This concert wasn't related to Coltrane in any obvious way; there were none of his compositions, but if it was the "spirit" these musicians were after, they succeeded in grand fashion. – *Robert Gaspar*

JAZZ LITERATURE

JAZZTALK
by Robert D. Rusch
(Lyle Stuart Inc.)

Author Bob Rusch brings a fan's love of the music, good reporter's instincts, and thorough research to this lively and wide-ranging collection of ten interviews with jazz improvisors, all of which originally appeared in *Cadence Magazine*. The question and answer format preserves each musician's voice, but Rusch's editorial choices also shapes the over-all impression which the book makes. On the surface, the musicians may seem selected with no special purpose in mind, yet recurrent themes emerge which unify the book. Rusch's catholic tastes uncover a deeper truth about improvised music than a theme book organized around a period, instrument, or style ever could.

In *Cadence Magazine* editor and guiding spirit, Bob Rusch, we certainly have one of our finest interviewers and oral historians. Obviously his love of the music commonly called jazz is deep and abiding. But beyond his status as fan-in-good-standing, Rusch knows what to ask musicians, and how to ask it. He is a skillful reporter. Take, for instance, the opening interview with Freddie Hubbard. Rusch conducted it under severe between-set time constraints, after Hubbard stood him up without an apology earlier in the day. Under these daunting circumstances, Rusch homes in immediately on the important issues – Hubbard's participation in the history-making "Free Jazz" and "Ascension" sessions and Hubbard's subsequent sell-out to commercialism. Rusch's direct approach elicits some surprising answers from Hubbard and the book is off to a fine start. Rusch's demonic abilities as a researcher (how *does* he know that Milt Jackson recorded with an a capella vocal group in Italy in 1964?) also lift the book above the norm. He is also not afraid to ask tough questions or disagree with his subject. This combination of honesty and preparation evokes some surprising and equally honest responses from the artists with whom he talks.

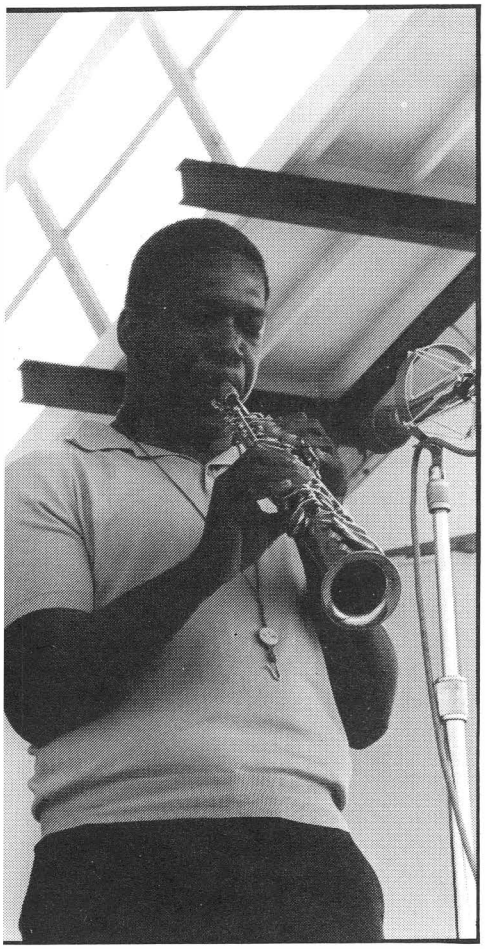
The interviews contain everything from the trivial to the significant, the comic to the serious. Anecdotes such as Paul Quinichette's about Minnesota Fats hustling Bojangles Robinson at pool, are relatively trivial, but entertaining. On the other hand, the information Rusch digs out of Sun Ra about his early, pre-Arkestral career, is historically important. You learn things about musicians' private personality and public career. Bill Dixon loves fast cars. Paul Quinichette mistrusts women. Cecil Taylor played with Hot Lips Page. Von Freeman spent time with Sun Ra's Arkestra in Chicago. The book climaxes with Rusch's masterpiece – a 50 page discussion with trumpeter Bill Dixon – that by itself justifies purchase of the book.

At first, it would seem that musicians like Milt Hinton and Cecil Taylor would have little in common besides the fact that their art is categorized under the unfortunately vague term, jazz. But interconnections become apparent as you read the book. After you read a few of the interviews you can feel the sense of community developed among musicians. Musicians with remarkably different styles nevertheless respect differences among themselves, by and large. The itinerant nature of the job (for some more than others) brings musicians together for a short time, separates them, then reunites them, until it seems that everyone has played with everyone at some time in their careers.

Most importantly, underlying the lives of all these artists is the refusal to compromise what they believe, an unwillingness to be less than 100% honest to themselves. It's a theme which emerges again and again. For instance, Milt Jackson says, "for 37 years I've been beating my head against the wall trying to remain pure." Everyone in the book echoes those words at one time in their piece. Perhaps the articulate Cecil Taylor best sums it up, "the real issue is that you can respect ... and perhaps even love musicians ... of a lot of different eras ... the legacy of those preceding generations still lives, not only in the musical present of those people who are still alive, ... but the major principles of musical organization that those people have given us, are the property of all succeeding musical generations." Freddie Hubbard, the lone exception to the rule, serves as the book's cautionary tale. He regrets his decision to compromise for money.

Recommended reading for information, entertainment, and for the ability

of all those involved to see and express the essential unity beneath the surface diversity found in jazz. – *Ed Hazell*



LE CAS COLTRANE
(Marseille: Editions Parenthèses, 1985)

There is a certain quality about the French psyche – a successful synthesis of eloquence and curiosity – which has for centuries predisposed French intellectuals to become self-proclaimed historians and analysts of every civilization, past or present. Hardly anywhere is this more obvious than in the case of Afro-American culture. It should be remembered that the French were the first to write intelligently on the subject of Black American music forms: jazz, blues, ragtime. Recent evidence would suggest that they continue to excel at this controversial and hence dangerous craft.

Le cas Coltrane by Alain Gerber is one of the most recent products of a tradition dating back to the pioneer works of Messieurs Hodeir and Panassié, both of whom wrote years before the Second World War and the "Bebop Revolution". Gerber's book is part of the high-profile Parenthèses/Epistrophy series, which also features works by Hodeir, Lucien Malson, as well as French translations of the Charles Mingus and Billie Holiday autobiographies. Published in book form in 1985, these writings originally appeared as a serial in Jazz Magazine in 1972, a mere five years following John Coltrane's untimely death.

What is even more relevant about the time-period in which Gerber wrote this work is that it was the era of "l'après soixante-huit" in France, those turbulent years following the student-generated upheavals of May 1968. There was a seemingly irreconcilable gulf between the French youth and the social and political norms of the day and free jazz, and in particular Coltrane's music, shared the centre of the heated debate which encompassed all of French society.

Much of the very palpable passion emanating from Gerber's text can be attributed to the fact that at the time of its writing the author found himself, willingly no doubt, in the eye of the revolutionary storm. Today, some fifteen years later, these winds have lost much of their fury. The waves which carried Gerber's generation have become the object of an awed fascination to a jazz community which seems to have swallowed and digested all revolutions and remains but a sea of ripples today. In his 1985 preface to the book, Francis Marmande writes that jazz is a passion which in recent years has sadly stopped provoking passion.

In his native France, Gerber is now probably best known for his recent works of fiction. And, upon reading "Le cas Coltrane" one is indeed struck by the future novelist's breathtaking eloquence. But, over and above its stylistic elegance, the book's greatest virtue is its methodological approach based on Freudian principles of analysis. Gerber chose to focus his study on four releases dating from Coltrane's crucial output on the Atlantic label: "Olé", "My Favourite Things", "Giant Steps", and "Coltrane Plays The Blues". But rather than presenting the reader with an extensive critical discography, Gerber undertakes the far more challenging ambition of probing the wellsprings of Coltrane's creativity. Within these pages, he offers us the conclusions of his analysis which was, by all evidence, a painstakingly elaborate labour of love.

Perhaps the greatest virtue of Gerber's methodology is that it enabled him to pick up where others had left off in their discussions of the many controversial aspects of Coltrane's music. For example, the author is most convincing when analyzing the saxophonist's obsession with acoustic density, the often-quoted "sheets of sound" and what developed from this. Gerber discusses this phenomenon at great length: "If silence is the basis of Monk's interpretation then Coltrane's, to the contrary, is based on a singular obsession with density and fullness." This obsession, according to Gerber, is both a desperate struggle for life and a conscious acceleration of the dying process, be it spiritual or physical. In other chapters, Gerber totally reinvestigates such questions as the dynamics of the Coltrane-Elvin Jones relationship, the "rivalry" between Coltrane and his contemporary Sonny Rollins, as well as the influence of Ornette Coleman's unique musical vision on an ever-probing Coltrane.

Upon initial reading, some of Gerber's psychoanalytical conclusions might appear somewhat exaggerated and therefore a trifle difficult to swallow. The occasionally excessive use of Freudian jargon can also be troublesome. But this is a small price to pay for a work which, unlike most existing literature on the subject, does so much more than merely chronicle the various steps of Coltrane's evolution or stick labels on his array of instrumental techniques.

For decades, psychologists and analysts have dwelled upon the lives and works of Western classical composers but for reasons difficult to fathom jazz musicians and composers seemed not to be perceived as suitable or worthwhile subjects for this type of study. Thus, in many respects, "Le cas Coltrane" is a pioneer work. Fifteen years after the text first appeared, it still stands as one of the most original treatises ever written on jazz. But more than being a bold, brilliant study, "Le cas Coltrane" is Alain Gerber's tribute to a man who has kept him, and so many of us, up all night searching, feeling, discovering.

– *Dominique Denis*

SITTING IN – SELECTED WRITINGS ON JAZZ, BLUES, AND RELATED TOPICS By Hayden Carruth
(University Of Iowa Press $22.50)

Unfortunately, there's a striking similar-

JOHN COLTRANE (Photograph by Bill Smith)

ity between poet Hayden Carruth's "jazz writing" and that of Philip Larkin.

Why "unfortunately"?

For one thing, both Carruth and Larkin tend to favor the pre-1945 developments in Jazz at the expense of what's happening now (or even close to "now"). For another, discussion of early "Dixieland" and its various hybrids, along with a miniscule glance at such personalities as Eddie Condon, Pee Wee Russell, and Don Ewell – seem so far removed from the historical threads of significant influence (in terms of modernist and postmodernist modes of improvisatory practice), that peripheral "speculations" concerning early Jazz and the work of these musicians hardly seem to matter. Curiously enough, its probably this romanticism for the originary features of Jazz that leads Carruth – like Alain Locke before him – into an embarrassing position: that of having to display an ideological bias in favor of Jazz's supposed(ly) "folk roots".

Thus, "Sitting In" oscillates between two polarities: on the one hand it speaks against antiquarianism and genericism; on the other, it glorifies the hirsute label "Jazz" and the heuristicism of *categorical* inventiveness generally. The problem, of course, is that these two modes of speculation are at odds with one another – and tend toward an uncomfortable "overlapping", at least as far as "investigative" writing is concerned. (Carruth, for instance, simply will not face the fact that it is the phonograph record itself which has made Jazz a cultural phenomena, and not merely the classifitory desires of a blague infested intelligensia.)

But what is most puzzling and disturbing about Carruth's commentary, is his very own privileging of the generic term "Jazz" over that of "blues" (he would, undeniably, merely see them both as plain-Jane nouns). "'Jazz' is a noun, a description, and an explanation all in one(.)," says Carruth. And right after that sentence, beginning a new paragraph: "A word that should be much more offensive to everyone is 'blues'."

A curious exegesis, wouldn't you say? Particularly from a poet whose supposedly against aquarianism and genericism "wherever it arises". What then could account for this – shall we say – glaring dichotomy? I'd like to render the following: Carruth sees "Jazz" as an authentic designation because it is merely that – a name, a label (and contrary to what Carruth tries to make go down, *it is an alien name and label*); while "blues" is deemed "offensive" exactly because it is expressive of an authentic feeling, a feeling that *cannot be circumstantially neutral* – either appropriationaly or ideologically.

There is, then, a thinly veiled *"civic" ideal* at work in Carruth's writing. Not the kind of the conventional pragmatist-philosopher, but the kind of the turn of the century journalist-poet. Carruth's hidden agenda is reserved unscathed for his pieces on "literature" and poetry, not in those where he pretends to confront Jazz directly. In a sense, then, for Carruth poetry is the result of Jazz. But why deny Jazz while privileging poetry?

The answer to this question, surprisingly or not, would probably lie in the "socialist" directed *noumenon* of improvisatory practice itself. No doubt what Carruth most fears. For he tends to favor explication and self-aggrandizement (which is little more than writing as a kind of therapeutic aid to education), over mindful feeling (the flight of intellection into culture). Ergo: the real reason why Carruth is especially against the cultural when applied to Jazz would have to be seen as a demarché toward a racialist prospective, or *a cultural disdain so drastic that it ignores everything (particularly everything "objective") in its path.*

Just as Carruth could never comfortably sanction the unconditional use of *vers libre* and the ballad form in poetry (that is, in its "up to the moment" insinuations and manifestations), so too is he opposed to "folk art" when it begins to legitimately make its way along the cultural divide (discussions of the supposed un-purity of the transplanted "blues scale" from Africa to these diatonic shores notwithstanding). As musician-composer-theorist Jimmy Stewart has said, the "'folk' rooted arts and music ... are attached and exposed to consumption so rigidly" that they are "used up" almost immediately, "as opposed to a 'cultured' market where the emphasis" is on "preservation...." Hence, poets like Carruth (Robert Creeley would be another) use Jazz as a kind of capital that is *stored* rather than *spent*, its depleted manifestation(s) partially finding its way in the dictional structure of their valoristic poems. (A) hideous irony: allowing culture to be scorned, by the very people who have sworn to protect it.

– Roger Riggins

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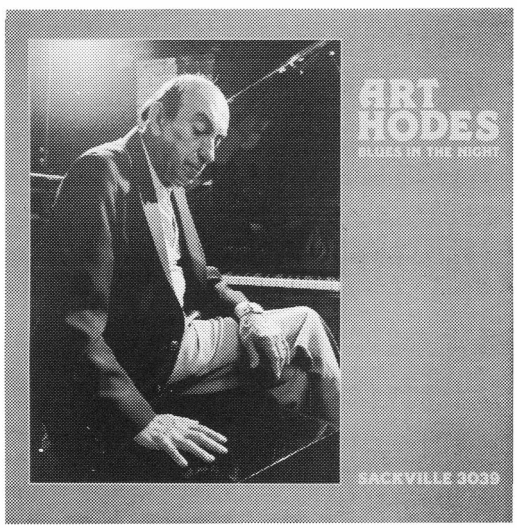

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