THE JOURNAL OF JAZZ AND IMPROVISED MUSIC

CODA MAGAZINE

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BRASS FANTASY
LESTER BOWIE

TRUMPET LEGEND
HOT LIPS PAGE

THE PRODUCER
CHUCK NESSA

NEW BLOOD
JOEL FUTTERMAN

THE WRITER
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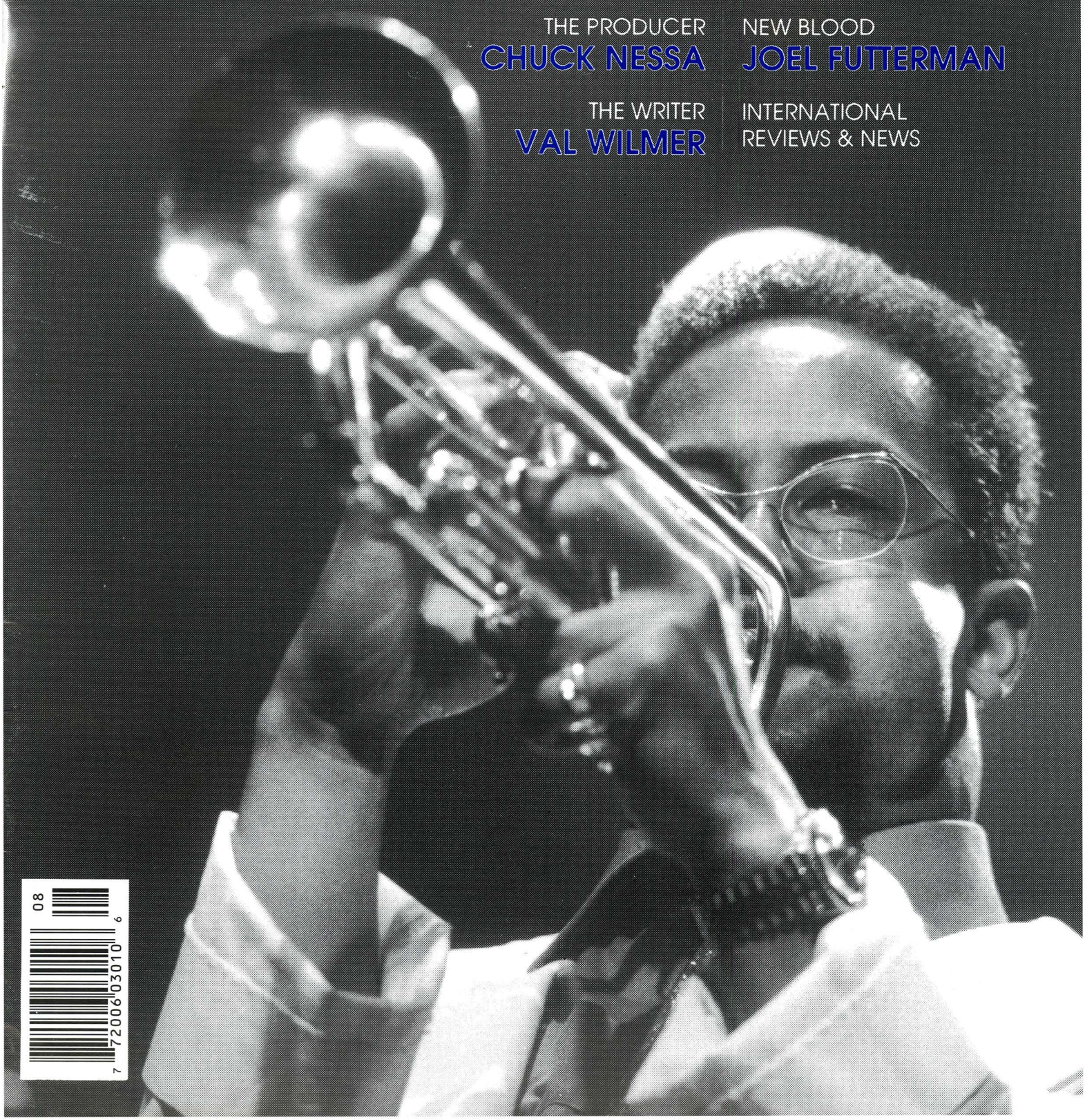
INTERNATIONAL
REVIEWS & NEWS



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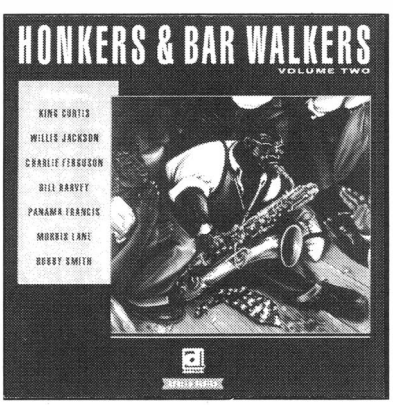

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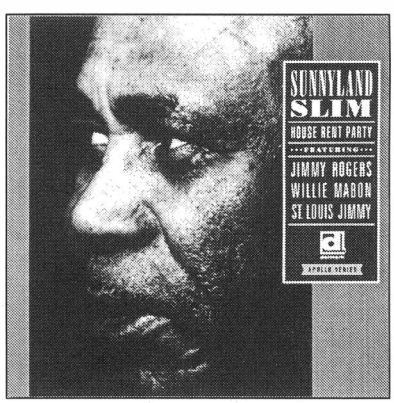

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CONTENTS

Cover Photograph Of Lester Bowie By Peter Danson

LESTER BOWIE • A BRASS FANTASY

PROFILE • INTERVIEW BY BILL BESECKER

FOR THOSE WHO CAN APPRECIATE JUST HOW FAR APART JAZZ EXISTS FROM THE OTHER WORLDS OF MUSIC - AT THE SAME TIME IT DEFINES SO SUCCINCTLY ALL THAT MUSIC IS AND EVER HOPES TO BE - LESTER BOWIE REMAINS HARD AT WORK.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK WERNICKI

I met him for the second time at Buffalo's Colored Musicians Club, on a late October evening. Other than drummer John Bacon, Jr., and the few members of "Multi-Jazz Dimensions" - the Buffalo band who brought Bowie to town for a guest appearance and workshop - the club was near empty. No star-ogling public surrounded Lester Bowie. Contrary to his sometimes extravagant stage style, he almost seemed to prefer his solitude. He was wrestling through a busy week, still he found the time to join me on the radio to play some of his favourite jazz recordings, and talk about his love for the music.

"Kenny Dorham was a turning point in my life. When I heard him, I wanted to play just like that. I wanted to be like Kenny Dorham," confessed Bowie, before he cued up Dorham's first record as a leader, ***Blue Spring***.

I remembered him more agitated the last time we met in 1985. Back then he almost apologized for the then up and coming neo-traditional focus of younger generation players like Wynton Marsalis and Terrance Blanchard. "The jazz tradition," he said at that time, "allows for copying only when learning. When it comes to producing music, the musician must create with an individual voice, and individual vision. If I just played like Miles, he would be ashamed of me."

"The jazz tradition forces us to extend on what came before, not merely repeat it. Today, anybody can play like Charlie Parker. There are schools, methods and play along records that teach that. But Parker and Gillespie created that music, and the tradition is about creating."

"These guys are going backwards. They have the talent but are being misled by the media structure." Remember, these are words from one who was sought out by Miles' own son for lessons.

Bowie began playing the trumpet in 1946, at age 5, when Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie were revolutionizing music a long way from Little Rock, Arkansas.

His trumpet-playing father, who once sought a career as a classical musician, never had the opportunity to prove himself. "When he found no openings for black classical musicians, he ended up like most, teaching high school band."

Still, he encouraged Lester to follow in his footsteps. "I still know all the marches! Man, I got (John Phillips) Sousa DOWN!" Bowie chuckled.

It wasn't until he attended high school in the 1950s that he first heard real jazz. Some early favourites were Louis Armstrong and Clyde McCoy, who's '50s hit, *Sugar Blues* was especially influential. Then came Kenny Dorham.

"Dorham was such an intelligent player. He's very subtle. It takes another musician to really appreciate where he was, inside. His was an understated style. He wasn't flamboyant like Dizzy, nor a dark prince like Miles. His sound wasn't so overbearing that it grabbed you by the collar. So unless you knew WHAT he was playing, followed the way he phrased and made those chord changes, it all might pass you by," Bowie observed.

"My high school in St. Louis, Missouri, was an interesting one. (Singer) Tina Turner and (writer) Dick Gregory attended at the same time. Things were happening!" And Bowie found himself in a band. "The first tunes I played professionally as a trumpeter were, *The Great Pretender*, and *I Only Have Eyes For You*. We backed up doo-wop groups at dances and talent shows, so those were some of the first songs I got paid to play."

Consequently it's no wonder that when he conceived the second-line sound of his **Brass Fantasy**, he didn't reach back to New Orleans' charts. Instead he chose to reinterpret his own R&B roots, something much closer to home.

He even admitted having kept the door open to R&B gigs until the **Art Ensemble of Chicago** left to live in Paris for 2 years. "I did the R&B thing from 1955 till 1969, doing the Art Ensemble one day, and backing (singer) Jackie Wilson the next."

Although the move to Paris arose from the group's collective desire to work, Bowie quickly cut to the underlying reason. "The French have always been big jazz fans. But I want to refute the often accepted notion that there's something inherent in the European personality that makes them more cultural and accepting of the music. That's not really the case! We get just as much enthusiastic support here in the U.S., and Mexico. It's really about the amount of exposure. All types of people will react. If people are allowed to hear it ...they'll like it."

"In France, jazz is PRIME TIME. We did prime time TV shows, prime time radio. Jazz is on the radio 24 hours a day there. Concerts take place all over the country. The Ministry of Culture in France sent us on a tour of 70 cities in France - small towns, little coal mining towns - to keep the people informed of what was happening musically in the rest of the world."

Asked about their lack of visibility since ECM's ***The Third Decade***, Bowie disagreed, "We just came off tour last week. We have already released four records on DWI, a Japanese label. AECO produced the new Brass Fantasy album. We're quite active, although through foreign record companies. But that's always been the case, I guess. I can't remember when an American company approached us about doing anything."

"They have tunnel vision. If it doesn't seem to fit an established category, they aren't interested. Our banner, 'Great Black Music, Ancient to the Future' simply means we don't limit our frame of reference. We can be free to interpret everything that's ever been played, to things that have never been played."

"We're not even limited to jazz. We're free to interpret all types of music. I feel we have created a truly WORLD music, comprised of music from everywhere, for people everywhere."

"People expect all my influences to be trumpeters. However, the way you actually achieve your own style is by listening to a lot of different musicians and a lot of different instruments. As you try to adapt some of their distinctive techniques to your instrument, you eventually find a new and individual sound. Art Tatum is one of those for me. The way he played melody, and how he embellished melody, his facility - it really impressed me. So, when I would play songs, I would try to envision the way Art Tatum would approach them. This helped to make me sound a little bit different on trumpet."

"So my influences came from everywhere. I got them from drummers, from sax guys. I love Rollins, Art Blakey. All those giants have had something to do with influencing my style, and everyone else's style."

We talked about one of his other projects, **Roots to the Source**. "It's not a working band. We do a few special events." It's concept revolves more explicitly around a gospel influence. "The band includes Martha Bass, the great gospel singer, as well as Fontella Bass (Bowie's first wife) and her brother David Peaston. We had a traditional style jazz quartet backing them up."

"Some of Roots' concerts were very moving. I remember one in Italy where the audience was in tears - even though they didn't understand the English lyrics. It was unbelievable."

Born in Frederick, Maryland but raised in St. Louis, Missouri, Bowie helped form the Black Artists Group (BAG) there, modeling it after Chicago's AACM.

When the Art Ensemble couldn't raise enough money to tour Africa, Bowie went on his own. He got to Lagos, Nigeria, where he met tenor player Fela Anikulapo Kuti. "He noticed my trumpet case and asked me if I was a musician. 'Yes,' I said. 'From where,' he asked. 'New York,' I replied."

"'You must be heavy, then...' Fela stared. 'Well...,' I said. 'Well you've come to the right place, because we're the baddest band in all of Africa!' I stayed three months, until it got politically uncomfortable for me to remain."

From the Brass Fantasy album, ***Serious Fun***, Bowie wanted next to play Billie Holiday's composition, *Strange Fruit*. He warned, "This is not as cheerful a song as the word fruit would seem to signify. Billie wrote it after taking a leisurely drive through some southern countryside. She was enjoying the scenery until she came upon a lynching scene. The victim's hanging bodies were the images of her 'Strange Fruit.'"

Next Bowie wanted to play some Clifford Brown. "Listen for his articulation," he advised. "Articulation is very important when you play an instrument - just as it is when you speak. It's how clearly you say things. Where you put your periods, commas and exclamation points determines how effectively you communicate."

"Clifford was a master of articulation. The things he played were so definite. You knew exactly WHAT he was playing, WHEN he was playing it - and could almost feel the WHY of his playing it."

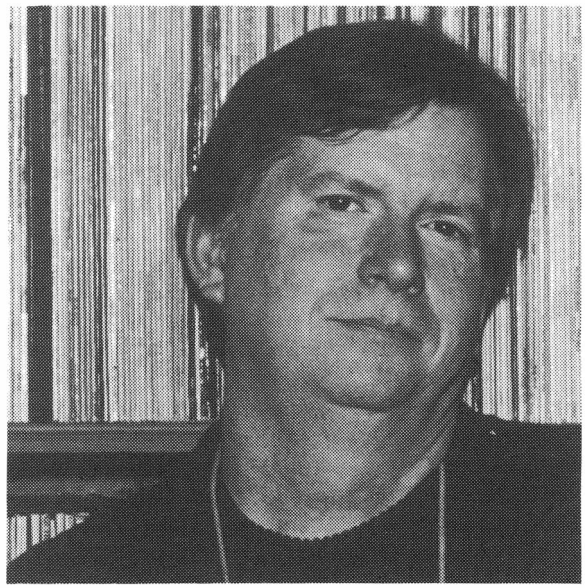
He played *Sweet Clifford* from the ***Brown & Roach Inc***. LP. Out of time, Bowie didn't want to quit without crediting Max Roach for his musical contributions, as well as vocalist Bobby McFerrin.

"I like Bobby quite a bit. We've done concerts together in Europe. I'm always interested in interpreting what singers do, adapting their styles to brass instruments is really tricky. We had a lot of fun attempting *Don't Worry, Be Happy*.

Bowie doesn't do much vocalizing himself, preferring instead to sing through the trumpet. And what a sweet sound that is. □

CHUCK NESSA

NUMBERS ONE AND TWO
AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE JOHNSTON



For me, the concept when I was a kid, that there was an individual that made it possible for records to exist, seemed a romantic notion. The fact that I could sit at home and listen to Louis Armstrong's Hot Five recordings, and the idea that somebody made that happen, interested me. I didn't know what producers were yet because it was early in my fandom. As time passed, I started to find out that there were people who supervised these things. Later when I was going to school at the University of Iowa, I went on a trip to Chicago and met Bob Koester who owns Delmark Records and the Jazz Record Mart. He offered me a job running the store. And I said I would if he would let me make some records. We came to an agreement and I was hired. It was done on the spot so I went out and found a group of musicians and recorded them.

It was the Roscoe Mitchell Sextet. So I did that for about a year and I quit the job in a huff one day. Shortly after that Roscoe came to me and said that it's time to make another record. I told him that I wasn't doing that anymore. Well, I went and talked with Bob and said I'd like to do another record. He threw a tantrum and tossed me out of the store. So Roscoe suggested that I do it myself. My grandfather had left me some bank shares from some stocks, so I called home. My parents sent me the money (around eighteen hundred dollars). I booked a studio and we went in and did what came out as the ***Lester Bowie Record, Numbers One And Two***. It was really Roscoe's group, but Roscoe had that contract with Delmark so we released it under Lester's name. We went in planning on doing half of the record. We knew we were going to do two long pieces. And the plan was to do one-one day and the other a week later. We went in the studio and the very first take of the tune that was prepared was perfect. So we had been in the studio a half an hour and were done and I had the studio booked for four hours. So I suggested that we do something else. And they said that they didn't have anything prepared. So Roscoe said "let's deal some long tones." So they started holding this note and varying it and worked it into a piece of music. We wound up using that piece for the record. Then when we came back a week later Roscoe added Joseph Jarman. We redid the first tune that we had done in a quartet format which changed it's character quite a bit. And Nessa records grew from these semi-accidental circumstances.

MIKE: *Which records did you do for Delmark?*

CHUCK: Well I have to give a lot of credit there. Bob had this failing record store and this small struggling record company and he authorized me to sign these musicians to contracts for one record a year. He totally left me alone to decide which artists to sign and he never attended any of the recording sessions. He basically left me off on my own. I certainly would never do that. So I'm grateful to him for the opportunity. I first signed Roscoe, then Muhal Richard Abrams, then Joseph Jarman.

I set the first sessions up, decided the personnel and the dates. But I quit a couple of weeks before Muhal's recording session, so I didn't supervise that particular date.

Also, at that time, I was lobbying with Bob(Koester) to up our profile on the new music scene. So during that brief period we acquired the New York Contemporary Five Live session and also bought the Sun Ra tapes from Transition, to try and bolster the catalogue.

MIKE: *How did you come to learn about the AACM musicians?*

CHUCK: Pete Welding wrote a concert review on the AACM in Down Beat's Caught In The Act section. It was on a Muhal concert with Roscoe. It sounded really interesting to me. So when I came to Chicago with my new job, I wanted to check out who these guys were. I spent my first months checking out the club scene which was people like Eddie Harris, and young John Klemmer and latter day bebop bands. Through people I met at the store I asked where I could find these AACM guys. The first concert I went to was a Roscoe Mitchell Sextet, the same band that I recorded on the ***Sound*** record. Immediately after the concert I ran backstage, introduced myself, and asked them if they wanted to make a record. So Roscoe came downtown with me the next day and we chatted with Bob briefly and agreed to terms and then did it. At this point I asked Roscoe for advice. Asking him who else that I should listen to and he recommended Muhal and Joseph. He didn't steer me wrong.

MIKE: *Can you elaborate on what struck you about the AACM music at the time?*

CHUCK: I honestly had no idea what they were doing. At that time I was still trying to come to terms with some of the early ESP records like Albert Ayler's ***Spiritual Unity***. Coltrane's ***Ascension*** was new then, too, the beginnings of Screech Music. I was twenty-two years old then and I'd been interested listening to jazz since I was seven-

teen. In that period of time I'd encountered Ornette, Dolphy and Trane and Albert Ayler, and all of this stuff was happening and changing and I was trying to come to terms with what was going on. I was trying to figure out how this music worked or whether it was bullshit or not. Which was a big thing at the time. I remember the revered Kenny Dorham doing a review for Down Beat on ***Spiritual Unity*** saying basically that these guys had been inhaling too much smoke in the cellars on Bleeker Street, or something to that effect and that they should get out of there and learn their instruments. So I was trying to come to terms with that myself. I then encountered these AACM guys who sounded different in yet another way. The thing that was obvious to me was that they knew what they were doing musically. I was lost but they had such confidence in their presentation that I was drawn to it. I thought that it was beyond my knowledge but that when I would get there I would enjoy it. One thing that I sensed early on was that they seemed to put some sort of structure on top of free techniques. But I didn't feel the music and understand how it functioned at that point.

MIKE: *Was the AACM music as visual and theatrical during this early period?*

CHUCK: Different musicians were into different things. The AACM had a concert series with a lot of different bands. There was the Troy Robinson Sextet, Virgil Pumphrey, Gerald Donavan(Aja Ramu) with Amina Myers, The Artistic Heritage Ensemble, Muhal's band, Jarman's band, and Roscoe's Group. Many times they would interchange members and they all had different outlooks. Generally Roscoe's music wasn't as theatrical as Joseph's. I remember one of Joseph's concerts where there were dancers wrapped in tin foil with strobe lights going off, which was very theatrical.

The Art Ensemble didn't coalesce as a group until around 1969. 66 through 68 were basically the formative years. The Art Ensemble resulted from Roscoe's Sextet turning into a quartet. Then Phillip Wilson left the group and they decided not to deal with a drummer.

Roscoe has always been a stickler for rehearsing and making their musical systems work. He likes to have everybody in tune with one another. One of the things he was always working on was to prevent players from following what other players were playing. His idea was for each to make his own music but to have stuff happening on different levels that meshed into a full sound. Where each player would play say at a different tempo to create a Kaleidoscopic effect. An example on the ***Old Quartet*** record, there is a piece where you have really soft drum patterns with brushes, and the bass playing a fast running line, with the saxophone and trumpet all sounding like they are playing a different kind of music. The overall effect of tension and release of this music is wonderful, and is really hard to sustain. I think that this was the greatest creative music band that I've ever heard. They were incredibly consistent. It takes intense rehearsal to sustain that kind of music, and keep a flow going in it.

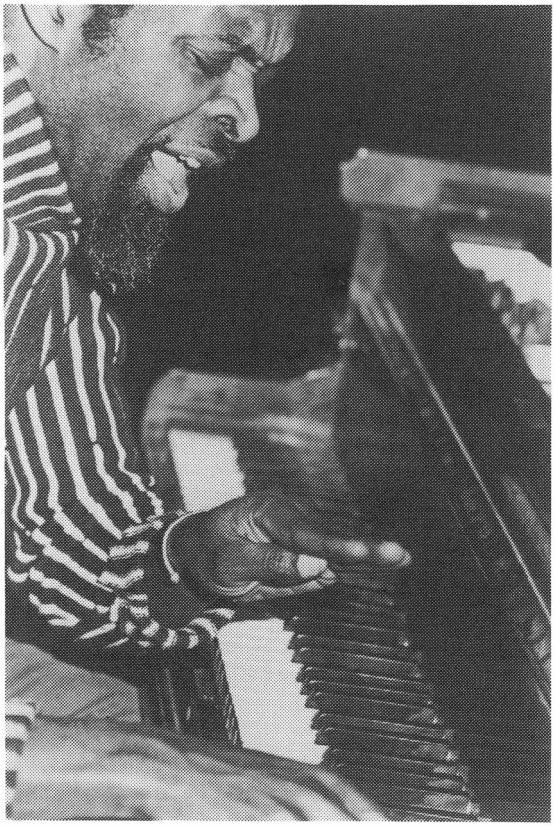
Phillip Wilson had a family to support and he had to go on the road (with the Butterfield Blues Band) just to feed his family. So Roscoe realized that there was a problem of not getting enough financial return for all of this work. Around the same time Joseph Jarman's quartet had two members die, Charles Clark and Christopher Gaddy. That was, I'm sure, a tremendous jolt to Joseph. So Joseph was sort of adrift and Roscoe invited him in and they decided to make a co-operative group. Because Roscoe didn't want the responsibility of trying to keep everyone together. So at that point it became a co-operative band, and by doing that, it changed the character of the music. In the Art Ensemble's music there are pieces that are say more Jarman-like, or more Bowie-like, or Mitchell-like. Not simply in who wrote the theme but in how the pieces are developed. They all make compromises to make their group music which is why they are all interested in their own various projects.

MIKE: *I've noticed that "classic" jazz recordings from the 60's seem to be more scarce on CD's than say earlier periods of jazz. Why do you think that this is the case?*

CHUCK: There are many reasons really. A lot of the good material is owned by smaller companies or individuals like ESP by Bernard Stollman, a very interesting man by the way, and the money simply isn't there to do it. It's an unfortunate thing. There are a lot of independent labels out there that don't have the money to make the transition from lp to CD.

MIKE: *A lot of earlier independents like Blue Note have been purchased by larger companies. Do you think that they maybe aren't as interested in the 60's music as much?*

CHUCK NESSA • PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE JOHNSTON
ROSCOE MITCHELL • PHOTOGRAPH BY BARRY THOMSON



CHUCK: Yes, I think that's part of it too. We are into this big nostalgia phase right now with all of these young beboppers. And this on some level gives the false impression that the 60's music failed. We are still too close to it for large numbers of people to grasp the aesthetics of it. I believe that the creative music was artificially stopped by a combination of things. One being that the independent labels that were doing a large part in recording the music survived by selling equal amounts of records in Europe, Japan and the United States. Shortly after Ronald Reagan came into power the interest rates were driven way up and the value of the exchange rate went sky high. The foreign markets, because of the exchange rate, couldn't afford to buy American goods. So in a short period of time, roughly half a year, these labels lost two thirds of their market. That financially crippled me to a point that I've never been able to recover from. I got caught with a tremendous amount of money in unissued or just issued masters and two thirds of my client base was gone. Just as I started to reach some sort of equilibrium the CD revolution came in. So I went from having a catalogue of twenty four titles for sale to nothing. Because I didn't have enough money to convert to the new medium.

This also coincided with the new conservatism in the music. With all of the young beboppers playing old music. That really is an 80's phenomena. Jazz is supposed to be a creative art form and here you have all of these people who are wearing Michael Milken clothes. Here are your supposed artists, well they aren't artists, they are playing music in "the style of". They aren't making music. It is no different than a bunch of young guys starting a barbershop quartet. It's not creative and they are not making their own music.

MIKE: *Do you think universities are to blame for this as well?*

CHUCK: Well to me it is the whole education process, including high schools. It seems that these help regiment the music. I don't think that this even pays respect to the tradition. Hank Mobley and Sonny Clark died for their music, and these young punks are coming along robbing their graves. The sad part is that they are stealing the least valuable properties. The most valuable thing in Hank Mobley and Sonny Clark is the fresh making of music you never heard before. Doing things in new personal ways. That is the strength of their music, and that is the strength of jazz music. These new people aren't doing that. Their music isn't even jazz to me, it's jazz-like.

Also, paradoxically, one thing that I'm sure is very daunting for a young person coming up as a musician or a fan, is the entire mass of stuff available. If you want to get into jazz, where do you start. What do you do to get a grasp on this. So these great riches that we have at our fingertips are hard for people to approach.

MIKE: *Don't you think the mass media limits awareness too? Take tv, you have maybe fifty cable tv stations but you don't really have that many real choices.*

CHUCK: Right, you have a choice of a new Cheers episode on one channel or a rerun on another. Our culture is being marketed by a half dozen corporations. Television, video tapes, music publishing, record publishing are all the same company. So the best thing for them to do as businesses is to make it efficient. And the most efficient thing to do is to sell fewer varieties of things to more people. This makes it much easier and more profitable. That's what we're getting culturally.

MIKE: *I've noticed that in record stores or music stores years ago each store would have an individual character. And most employees would have specific musical interests. Now many stores seem more like a fast food chain. Bring up the products, punch em out on the register, and hit the road. If people want to know information about musical content, the employees don't know anything.*

CHUCK: There are less privately owned stores as well. There are more chain stores where you have minimum wage sales clerks with little or no knowledge about what they are selling. Record stores and book stores used to be a source of education where you could go in and spend an hour talking to someone and learn something. That's how stores built sales and that's how people expanded their horizons. And that's to a large part gone. There are people with various interests out there that aren't being served. But there are also much larger numbers of people that don't even know what's been taken away from them.

MIKE: *With this in mind, why would you say artists like Leo Smith and Walt Dickerson aren't being recorded right now, by somebody?*

CHUCK: It winds up being not a saleable commodity. That's what it's about, commodities. I'm sure if Walt Dickerson were so inclined he could mount a campaign to build a group around being an imitation Lionel Hampton band and get that marketed and for a short time get some attention and a recording or two out, as a retrogressive artist, but it's not Walt Dickerson anymore. All you're doing is finding a way to make yourself a marketable commodity. So real existing artists out there, a lot of them are suffering and losing their audiences and losing their ability to earn a decent living.

So young players coming up see that the successful working jazz musicians are the ones who are dressing like Michael Milken and playing thirty year old music. It's not their language. This bop music is not a 90's language it's a learned product. These players are far enough removed from this music that it's a foreign language to them,

it is like hearing Hamlet done in Eskimo, and it makes about as much sense to me. Every Dexter Gordon or Hank Mobley phrase grows out of the last one. It tells a story. You don't get that feeling with these new players. They have all of the devices but they don't quite know how to put these devices together to tell their own story. It sounds awkward to me.

Reflecting on Jazz, and other music that I know about, blues and classical, they all seem to be in a similar creative doldrums. The most important and attractive things in this music are a sense of immediacy, urgency, and interest in the joy of expression. To me that's missing from the music now. You hear it in Louis and Earl Hines in 1927, it's in Johnny Dodds, it's in Bird's music, and Albert Ayler and Cecil Taylor. That is the quality that is missing from music in general today. Perhaps it's a product of our communication-laden times where all information is being bombarded, so all information has the same value, none. There's definitely something missing.

MIKE: *It's like a friend of mine says ... "that rock, wrestling and movie stars are all the same package."*

CHUCK: Yes, it does sort of seem that way. It seems like there is no driving, burning vision to be focused on one thing. Nothing seems all encompassing to them. So they are filling the void by adding additional medium, and by doing that maybe nobody will notice that it's hollow. All of the technology is willing to fill the void.

No matter how many times I listen, I will never exhaust intellectually the power of Schnabel playing the hammerclavier sonata or Johnny Dodds and Louis Armstrong playing off one another. I've been listening to some of this stuff for thirty years. I'll never absorb everything that's going on in ***Ghosts*** or ***Spiritual Unity***, with Ayler, Gary Peacock, and Sonny Murray. It's an endless source of joy and stimulation. On the other hand a lot of new stuff that's coming out has exhausted itself before it's half over. I feel like I know the package ahead of time, the creative spark is not there.

A friend of mine says jazz isn't dead it's just over. But it's not just jazz, it's aesthetic creativity and I think it was killed. I don't think it was a natural death. Economically, commercially and politically it has been killed.

MIKE: *Don't you think for things to happen or things to change that they have to run a cycle and that death is a part of that?*

CHUCK: Sure and as long as there are humans there's potential. But I think our society is going to have to make some major changes to allow that to come back. Turmoil has always had a stimulating effect on art. So maybe we should hope for some kind of disaster(laughs). The turmoil that has been going on for some time now seems to be economical and emotional.

MIKE: *It seems to me that a lot of 60's figures, whether you are talking about the Kennedys, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, or Albert Ayler, the people that had something to say or some power, got rubbed out. Perhaps there is a fear now to not come out and cut loose?*

CHUCK: Of course that's possible. It's kind of terrifying to contemplate. I'm perfectly willing and able to get more paranoid than you can imagine about a scenario where Dan Quale knows the guy, who knows the guy who killed Albert Ayler. I can go down that path. I don't know how fruitful it is.

It isn't only in arts that this has happened, it's in business and politics. There are no striking leadership figures anywhere in the world. There are minute brief flash in the pans. Gorbechov is already a has been and Yeltzen seems on his way to being last week's exciting figure.

MIKE: *What is the outlook for Nessa Records?*

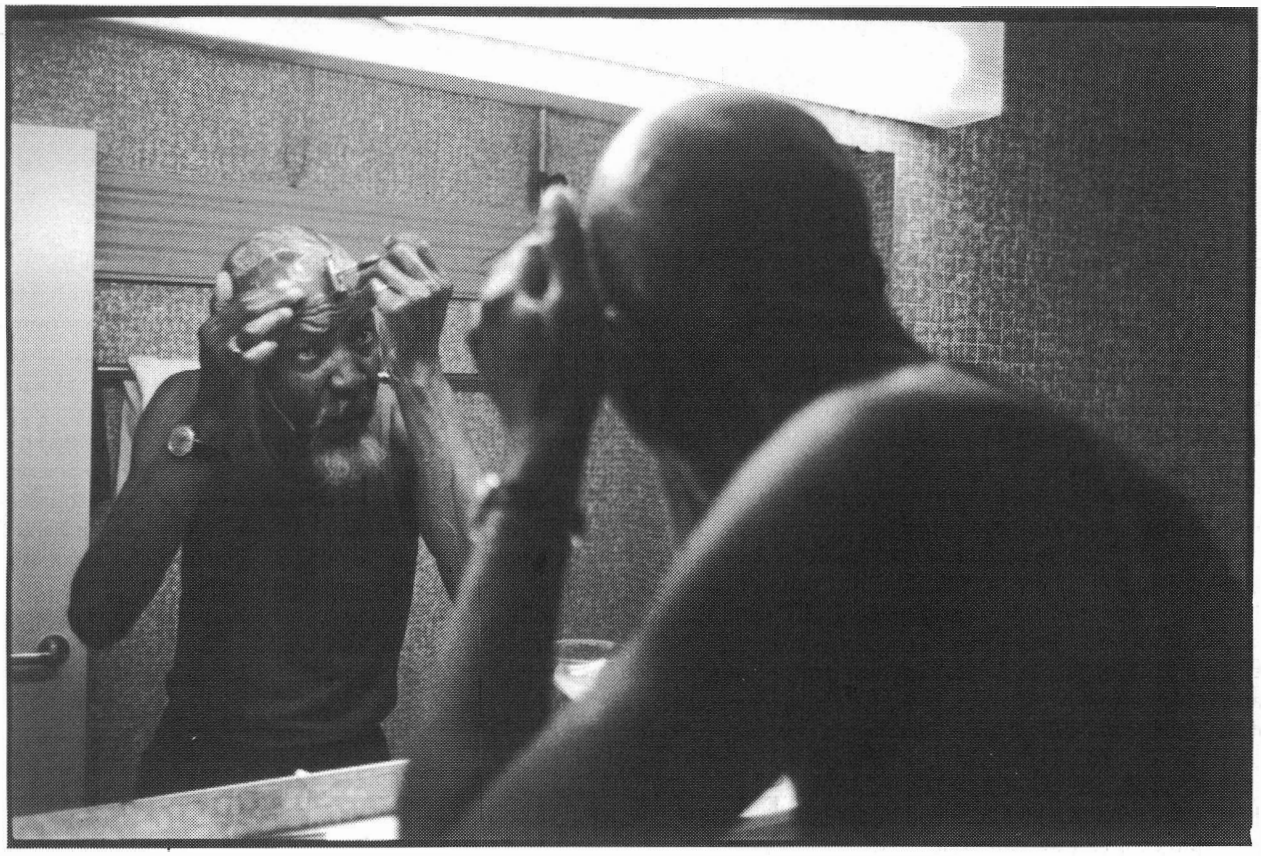
CHUCK: Well my personal pessimism, bad luck, or bad reaction to circumstances is something that I take some blame for as well. For small independent labels who have the ability and have found themselves in financial condition to operate, the change over to CDs can be a gold mine. The biggest problem that all small independent labels have is having a consistent flow of new product to sell. When you have new releases your old releases sell better too, because you are happening and people make associations. Now with this change in format, every title that the independent labels own is a potential new release. A label like Delmark that has been able to put things out can have as much visibility as say RCA with their Bluebird and Novus series. They can bring out many titles in rapid succession and generate as much press coverage as a major label. So it's a great opportunity for the people who are in a position to take advantage of it. From that standpoint one person's adversity is another's opportunity. □

MUHAL RICHARD ABRAMS • PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN
JOSEPH JARMAN • PHOTOGRAPH BY ENRICO ROMERO

MAMA SAID THERE WOULD BE DAYS LIKE THIS

THE REALITIES OF JAZZ ARE VERY HARD FOR AMERICANS TO DEAL WITH
mainly because of America's unwillingness to honestly confront its history. The insistent search for newness and innovation, one of the centre-pieces of American pride (right up there with freedom and democracy) is actually it's converse: an unwillingness to deal with history and tradition.

A Book By Val Wilmer • Reviewed by Kalamu ya Salaam



What does social self delusion have to do with jazz? Answers are found in Val Wilmer's insightful autobiography. Subtitled "my life in the jazz world", the book often says a whole lot more about us than it does about its author.

Ms. Wilmer is most widely known as a major jazz photographer and author of jazz books including ***As Serious As Your Life***, a classic of sixties new music. A British born, female who grew into womanhood in the company of African American (and African) musicians and the women with whom these musicians interfaced, Val Wilmer at first blush seems like an unlikely source of sociological insight into jazz. But Wilmer's bold linking of cross-racial sexual and psychological self-discovery with Black music makes this an engaging and thought provoking book.

She begins as a typically curious child:

As schoolgirls growing up in south London, we didn't know exactly why the words 'rock 'n' roll' were shunned by some older people, though there was a hint that they were not particularly 'nice'. ... At the time we had no cause to consider how it was used to disguise what we were hearing. 'Rock 'n' roll' was an expression coined to obscure the fact that Whites were dancing to Black music — that is, the blues. It was also used to relegate the music to the realm of 'natural' sensuality rather than 'intellectual' creativity, as has happened to every African-derived form, from ragtime and the cakewalk up to the rapping and styling of today.

But once smitten by Black music, she quickly goes beyond the entertainment factor and begins to see what others close their eyes to:

Among British jazz enthusiasts there was a general interest in Afro-American culture... By and large, though, the music press offered no indication of the movements of change taking place internationally and the idea that Afro-American music could in itself function as a kind of resistance was unknown. Yet the music would lead me to discover the literature of protest and struggle, and to go beyond, eventually to recognize how the Afro-American oral tradition has, as one writer

put it, offered a radical alternative to Western literary values.

Moreover, though now an out-of-the-closet lesbian, she writes this odyssey with an immense respect for both the mainly male-centred music and music-makers, and, at the same time candidly confronts a lot of unpleasant and/or uncomfortable personal questions.

By this time I was, apparently, known as a 'chick on the scene' and therefore available. Inevitably I did have sexual encounters with some of the visiting musicians, but with nothing like the degree of promiscuity that has been fantasized about by those who cannot imagine what a young white English woman and a middle-aged Afro-American man might have to say to one another. Quite simply, I got along well with a great number of musicians; having sex with all of them would have been impossible, not to say foolhardy. Yet I acquired an ignominious reputation that was to hound me for years and crops up even to this day. Only recently a woman I know was interviewing some dodo saxophonist and happened to mention my name. 'Oh, she just fucks all the Black musicians,' was his response.

When you read Wilmer's response you will be enlightened and enriched. At every significant social crossroads, Wilmer directly addresses both personal and social dilemmas — whether travelling through the American south to visit the habitat of delta blues greats or living in New York, the mecca of jazz, whether working in Britain as a photographer and full time jazz fan or living in Africa as a student of life and culture. In both personal relationships and political struggle, Wilmer is not only willing to put herself on the line, she is also insightful and skilled enough to define the line and declare why it was important to step forward. Some may disagree with her conclusions, however, none can doubt the relevance of her experiences in terms of helping us to face up to what has traditionally been a shameful silence regarding the social context of the music called jazz.

Some writers deliberately kept away from the players. They felt it was important to keep their 'critical' faculties intact, so as not to be swayed, as they saw it, by personal considerations. I felt the opposite. If you knew someone personally, it was less easy to write irresponsibly about what they were doing. It was not good enough to make a reputation for yourself at the expense of someone else's means of earning a living, although that was the method the popular music weeklies encouraged. There, ego was all, and style the major consideration. Had it not been for my close contact with the musicians, though, it would have taken me far longer than it did to reach these conclusions.

Certainly the validity of those conclusions is a major reason why Wilmer's photographs are often so moving. However, one must note that Wilmer is not a liberal enthralled by Black exotica.

I'd been trying to make sense of the music through my pictures, but wherever I turned I came up against the way that images were 'consumed'. It was not a word in my vocabulary then, neither was 'representation', but I felt what was selected to be shot could have far-reaching consequences, depending on the way the subject was viewed in the consuming society. The idea of the concerned photographer was nothing new, but recognizing the way people reacted to my pictures had taught me that there was a need for responsibility on the part of the photographer both in making that selection and in exercising control over the way an image was used...

...The more I thought about it, the more I realised there was a parallel to be drawn between the way my pictures of people like Son Thomas on his broken-down doorstep were welcomed and the way the blues was seen as a music of poverty and pain. It reassured Whites of their place in society and I understood why Black people objected to images of deprivation being the only ones on display. From now on, I decided, my photography would be celebratory. Given the nature of the photographic process, I knew it would be impossible to avoid making some negative images, but, I promised myself, unless these could be viewed in a suitable context, those I did take would remain on the shelf.

Before she raises the camera to her eye, she has already seen more than most and thus, as a self-conscious visual artist, she reveals aspects of her subjects that we don't usually see. Rather than focus on the stereotypical, Wilmer frames the essential and thus brings to light more than mere snapshots of men with instruments, she gives us portraits of creative humans at work.

Val Wilmer's autobiography is, like the music she celebrates, a serious undertaking which speaks through the horn of her pen about the realities of the life she has lived. Some might ask from whence cometh this white woman's insights into Black music, the answer is complex in it's details, simple in its essence.

There was another reason for the understanding that I encountered. Oppression creates a particular kind of awareness, the ability to grasp what is taking place in any situation with a speed and shrewdness that leaves the oppressor bemused. Gay men and lesbians have developed intricate strategies for survival, in the same way that people of oppressed races have done — indeed as women everywhere do in their relationship to men. The degree to which this is necessary differs according to the severity of the oppression, but exclusion can produce a particularly enlightened sensitivity.

Any human who struggles to make sense out of the realities (as opposed to the fantasies and conceits) of life, who struggles to overcome rather than submit to the strictures of an oppressive status quo, and who works hard at masterfully articulating the fruits of that struggle, can be an inspirational example. Clearly, the dignity of Val Wilmer's writing and photography is expressive of a true soulfulness, of a profound and passionate commitment to life and art.

At the close of her book, Wilmer notes the difficulty of living in the often conflicting worlds of jazz and feminism. However, through internalizing the lessons of coping with contradictions learned from Afro-centric existence in the post-colonial world, Val Wilmer is able to embrace both jazz and feminism with the triumphant, albeit hiply ironic, anthem: "I had come to terms with the fact that both worlds were mine. An unholy mixture, for sure, but one you can work at if you want to."

And perhaps that is all that 20th century life is, "an unholy mixture" that you can work at if you want to, if you really and honestly want to.

Read this book, it will inspire you to become a better person. □

EDDIE CLEANHEAD VINSON • PHOTOGRAPH BY VAL WILMER

Suggested sources for this book are: Pages Books, 256 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 1Z8 or The Jazz Store, PO Box 43179, Dept. CO, Upper Montclair, NJ 07043, U.S.A.

AROUND THE WORLD

COMPILED BY PUBLISHER
JOHN NORRIS

DENNY CHRISTIANSON
PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER DANSON

The last week of June and the first week of July are when Canada's principal jazz festivals are held. Unfortunately they make a habit of only announcing their attractions in the middle of May, far too late for inclusion in magazines with worldwide distribution. To offset this inadequacy we are willing to provide artist lineups where known if you call CODA's Toronto office after June 1 during business hours (10 am to 6 pm EDT). The number is (416) 593-7230. We hope to have the schedules for Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto and Montreal.

CANADA

A new jazz room opened in Toronto May 13. ***The Guitar Bar*** will feature guitarists of all persuasions in intimate small group settings. Ed Bickert, Charlie Byrd, Jim Hall and Herb Ellis are among the early bookings. The Guitar Bar is operated by The Senator Restaurant, who already have a thriving jazz room in the same building at 253 Victoria Street.

The ***Classic Jazz Guild of Calgary*** (Suite 401, 100 Fourth Ave. SW, Calgary, AB T2P 3N2) is a new organization dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of classic early jazz. More information is available from Paul White at the above address.

Oliver Jones is to receive an honorary Doctorate Degree in Music at Sudbury's Laurentian University November 7...Fraser MacPherson has recorded a new CD for Concord...**Don Friedman** collaborated with bassist **Don Thompson** for duo concerts in Peterborough and Hamilton in early April. These events were recorded for future release on Sackville... Trumpeter Guido Basso will be producer Jack Budgell's second TV profile for the CBC's Sunday afternoon Arts program. His profile of guitarist Ed Bickert was seen nationally in March. That same program was also the rather surprising spot for an underpublicized showing of ***Music On My Mind***, a documentary about **Mary Lou Williams** which is well worth seeing if it surfaces in your community.

Historic recordings by the **Fletcher Henderson** Orchestra with **Louis Armstrong** the featured soloist are the focus of a 3 CD set on Forte Records. All known recordings from this period have been assembled in this well produced set which is the brainchild of early jazz enthusiast Jeff Healey (who also happens to be a highly successful blues-rock guitarist). John R.T. Davies transfered the music from 78s owned by prominent Canadian collectors. There are comprehensive notes by Eugene Miller.

Spirits of Havana is a collaboration between Jane Bunnett and some of Cuba's finest musicians. The soprano saxophonist was joined on the trip to Cuba by trumpeter Larry Cramer and bassist Kieran Overs. The Cuban performers included pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba...Both **N.O.M.A.** and **Fourth Inversion** launched new CDs in the spring with special performance parties...Denon Canada has announced the release of 40 more CD facsimile recordings from the classic Savoy LP catalogue...**Ranee Lee**'s new Justin Time recording ***The Musicals - Jazz on Broadway*** includes Red Mitchell, Denny Christianson and Richard Ring among the supporting musicians...Winnipeg's **Kerry Kluner** Big Band features **Paquito D'Rivera** in its ***Live at the West End Cultural Centre*** recording on Justin Time. That company has also reissued on CD **Sonny Greenwich's *Live At Sweet Basil*** and the **Pepper Adams / Denny Christianson** collaboration on ***Suite Mingus***...Pianist **Steve Holt** and bassist **Kieran Overs** launched their new CD ***Just Duet*** on the Sackville label while working a week at the Montreal Jazz Club in May.

UNITED STATES

Summer Festivals & Parties

Complete listing of these events can be found in a recent issue of ***Jazz Times***. Here is information on just a few of these presentations. July 24-26 are the dates for this year's ***Centrum Jazz Festival*** in Port Townsend, Washington. Freddy Hubbard, Benny Green, Slide Hampton, Benny Golson,

the Four Freshmen and John Clayton are among the headliners...After a few years hiatus ***Artpark*** is, once again, presenting a weekend jazz festival over the Labour Day weekend (September 4 and 5). Abbey Lincoln, Elvin Jones, Bobby Previte, Herb Ellis, Eddie Daniels / Gary Burton, Paquito D'Rivera, Jimmy Smith, Bobby Watson, Joe Henderson and Holly Cole are among those who will be featured... The ***Delaware Water Gap Festival*** begins September 9 and continues until September 13...The New Music Alliance has organized a ***New Music Across America Festival*** for October 1-4 with presentations in Springdale (Utah), Valencia and Venice (California), Vancouver (BC), Burlington (Vermont) and Helena (Montana)...The fourth ***Jerome Jazz Party*** takes place October 9-11 in Aspen, Colorado. The three day event will showcase the talents of Ralph Sutton, Dick Hyman, Jack Lesberg, Bob Haggart, Jake Hanna, Frankie Capp, Kenny Davern, Bob Wilber, Bob Cooper, Scott Hamilton, Marshall Royal, Randy Sandke, Warren Vache, Harry Edison, Dan Barrett, George Masso and Roy Williams. Write Jerome Jazz c/o Barbara Guy, Box 412, Aspen, CO 81612 for more information.

Music Schools and Camps

The University of Denver's Lamont School of Music hosts an International Guitar Week July 11-17. **Gene Bertoncini** will be one of the representatives from the jazz world...Illinois Benedictine College hosts Janice Borla's Vocal Jazz Camp July 12-13 on the University campus in Lisle, IL...Jazz Camp 92 takes place July 18-25 in Aptos, near Santa Cruz, California. The week long program draws on the Bay area for most of its faculty. Additional information is available from 1831 Francisco Street, Berkeley, CA 94703.

Competitions

The ***Great American Jazz Piano Competition*** takes place during the Jacksonville Jazz Festival. Entry forms are available from 100 Festival Park Avenue, Jacksonville, FL 32202...The ***Thelonious Monk International Drum Competition*** will be held in New York and entry forms are available from 5000 Klingle Street N.W., Washington, DC 20016...The ***1992 European Jazz Competition*** takes place October 22-23 in Leverkusen, Germany. The competition is open to young European jazz groups and entry forms are available from Udo Gerling, Kulturamt der Stadt, Postfach 10 11 40, 5090 Leverkusen 1, Germany.

THE CARIBBEAN

It's too late to take part in the action this year but if you enjoy a blend of sun and jazz no less than three Caribbean islands now have early summer jazz events. The ***Barbados Festival*** took place May 22-24 in a variety of settings. Max Roach was the event's "patron" and **Ernest Ranglin**'s group came from Jamaica...One week later, in ***St. Lucia***, the island's first jazz festival was held at Morgan Bay's plush new resort, The Hotel Pullman. Wynton Marsalis, Kenny Barron and Joe Sample were among the headliners...The fifth ***Aruba Jazz & Latin Music Festival*** was held the weekends of June 12-14 and 19-21 with well known Latin and Fusion jazz artists. Advance information on these events in future years can be obtained from the Tourist Boards of the islands concerned.

EUROPE

ROOTS is the brainchild of jazz writer Mike Hennessey. It is an all-star jazz repertory group assembled to pay tribute to some of the great jazz saxophonists. The band (Arthur Blythe, Nathan Davis, Chico Freeman, Sam Rivers, Don Pullen, Santi Debriano and Tommy Campbell) made its debut last October at the Leverkusen Jazz Festival in Germany. The concert was recorded for In & Out Records and featured tributes to Ben Webster, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Dexter Gordon, Coleman Hawkins, Sonny Rollins, Gene Ammons and Lester Young.

Roots returned to Europe in March / April during which a special concert in England was videotaped for future release by the Japanese company Videocarts. The band made its US debut June 20 at Philadelphia's Mellon Festival and will also appear at the New York JVC Festival June 25 before leaving for a tour of the European summer festivals.

1992 Jazzpar Winners were showcased in concerts in Denmark in March. Taking part were Steve Swallow, **Misha Mengelberg** and Lee Konitz. Kenny Barron, Carla Bley, Tommy Flanagan, Jimmy Heath and **Martial Solal** are the nominees for the 1992 prize.

Carla Bley is to be artist in residence at this year's Glasgow International Jazz Festival to be held July 2-11.

European CD recordings cover a wide spectrum of the music. **World Circuit Records** has captured the fiery spirit of the new generation of musicians in England with the release of ***Celebration***, featuring South African pianist and tenor saxophonist Bheki Mseleku and ***What Goes Around*** with tenor saxophonist Jean Toussaint... Two new cassettes from **ARC Music** (c/o Trevor Watts, 20 Collier Rd, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 3JR, England) showcase the Trevor Watts Drum Orchestra Live in 1989 (ARC04) and Trevor Watts' Moire Music Unexpected Pleasures 1982 & 1986 (ARC05)... **Maya Recordings** has issued ***Elsie Jo*** with Barry Guy, Irene Schweizer, Evan Parker, Barre Phillips, Connie Bauer and Paul Lytton... **Ace Records** continues its exploration of the Modern vaults with the release of B.B. King's ***My Sweet Little Angel***... New from **Red Records** is a live concert date by Jim Snidero with Mark Cohen, Peter Washington and Victor Lewis.

Literature

North Country Distributors are handling the sales of what has been described as "the ultimate jazz discography". Approximately 20 volumes are planned and the first is now available. Simply called ***The Jazz Discography***, it will cover 90 years of jazz recordings. Tom Lord, the compiler, has utilized the latest in sophisticated computer technology in assembling and presenting the information. Computer technology also has made possible an ongoing updating process so that the discography does not become obsolete.

From The Peri Press comes ***Best Rated CDs 1992 - Jazz, Popular, etc.***, a handy reference guide to reviews in various publications.

Manfred Selchow, Eekeweg 14, D-2957 Westoverledingen, Germany has begun research on a book about trombonist **Vic Dickenson**'s life. He welcomes any information readers might have. The same applies to John Szwed, Dept of Anthropology, Yale University, Box 2114, Yale Station, New Haven, CT 06520 who is working on a book about **Sun Ra**.

Videos

Wild Bill Davison: His Life, His Times, His Music is a documentary video about the musical world of the cornetist. The video was conceived and created by cornetist Tom Saunders, an avid

follower of Wild Bill's unique style. There's an 800 number for people in the US and Canada to order through (800-531-7444) or you can write TT & T Network Inc., 1158 Bedford, Dept 1506, Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230.

Recordings

Blue Note has picked up the pace with new issues by George Adams, Joey Calderazzo, Jack DeJohnette, Ralph Peterson, Don Pullen and McCoy Tyner. These were followed by new material from John Scofield, Tony Williams and Benny Green.

BMG has issued new recordings by Marcus Roberts (solo), Steve Lacy's Sextet at ***Sweet Basil*** and Steve Coleman's ***Rhythm In Mind***, where he performs with a mixed generation of musicians which include Von Freeman, Tommy Flanagan and Dave Holland.

Cadence Jazz Records has issued four new recordings which offer "some creative relief in this age of retro soundalikes". First up is ***Searching for Harmony*** by European pianist Alvaro. ***Ernie Krivda Jazz*** is the third release by the Cleveland tenor saxophonist. ***Seeking Spirit*** is a debut recording for Philadelphia saxophonist Bobby Zankel. ***Innocence*** is a recording by Joe Gallivan's big band and features such soloists as Evan Parker, Elton Dean and Paul Rutherford.

Both Tete Montoliu and Dick Whittington have new trio recordings on **Concord** while ***Race Point*** is the second collaboration between Scott Hamilton and Gerry Wiggins.

Delmark continues its documentation of the Chicago scene with recordings by Jodie Christian (Experience) and Franz Jackson (Snag It with Jim Beebe's Chicago Jazz) as well as a new recording by Malachi Thompson (The Jazz Life) and a second set of reissues from Tab Smith.

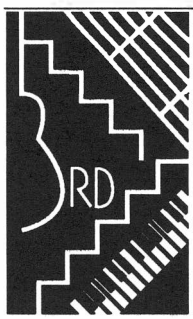
The **International Association of Jazz Record Collectors** has issued its first CD - a collection of rare Lucky Thompson recordings made on the West Coast in the 1940s... **Jazzology** has issued no less than eleven CDs by Wild Bill Davison drawn from different periods of his career.

Mosaic Records' spring release is the complete Candid recordings of Lightnin' Hopkins and Otis Spann. Upcoming in the summer are The Complete 1960 Blue Note Recordings of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. The Complete CBS Studio Recordings of Woody Shaw and The Complete Master Jazz Piano Recordings featuring among others Ram Ramirez, Teddy Wilson, Earl Hines and Jay McShann.

Sahara Records has issued a new Tentet recording by Erroll Parker. A ***Night In Tunisia*** marks the tenth anniversary of the band... Vocalist Stephanie Nakasian has a new CD titled ***Home Cookin'*** out on **VSOP** Records.

Obituaries

Baritone saxophonist **Ronnie Ross** died in England December 12, 1991... Trumpeter **Andrew Blakeney** died February 12 in Los Angeles. . . Bassists **Red Callender** and **Monte Budwig** died in Los Angeles March 8 and 9... Saxophonist **Percy France** died in New York in January. . . Saxophonist **Jim Pepper** died February 10 in Portland... Artist **David Stone Martin** died March 6 in New London, CD... Drummer **Willie Jones** died early April in New York... Pianist **Sammy Price** died April 14 in New York. □



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ABDULLAH IBRAHIM

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9:30 p.m. -- Brigantine Room. $8

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CRISPELL/BROETZMANN/ DRAKE TRIO

special guest **TIM BERNE**
8 p.m. -- du Maurier Theatre Centre. $9

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9:30 p.m. -- Brigantine Room. $8

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MICHEL PETRUCCIANI GROUP

special guests **MIKE MURLEY QUARTET**
8 p.m. -- du Maurier Theatre Centre. $12

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HOT LIPS PAGE RECONSIDERED

AN ARTICLE BY DAVID SCHACKER

IN HIS DAY, TRUMPETER/VOCALIST ORAN "HOT LIPS" PAGE (1908 - 1954) WAS ONE OF THE MOST DYNAMIC, CELEBRATED AND BELOVED FIGURES IN JAZZ. TODAY, HIS LEGACY SEEMS TO BE NEARLY EMPTY RECORD BINS AND BLANK STARES OF NON-RECOGNITION AMONG YOUNGER JAZZ FANS.

FELLOW MUSICIANS HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN HIM; FAR FROM IT. TO MAX KAMINSKY, PAGE WAS "THE GREATEST TRUMPET AFTER LOUIS." RALPH SUTTON SAYS, "NOBODY PLAYED LIKE LIPS. I CAN STILL HEAR HIM." AND ACCORDING TO DIZZY GILLESPIE, "WHEN IT CAME TO THE BLUES, NOBODY COULD MESS WITH LIPS — NOT LOUIS, NOT ROY, NOT ME ...NOBODY!"

Hot Lips Page was one of many outstanding jazz musicians born in the Texas-Oklahoma area in the early years of this century, all deeply rooted in the blues — a generation from which Jay McShann, Sammy Price and Buddy Tate are practically the last survivors. He played with nearly everyone from Sidney Bechet to Thelonious Monk. His career cut a wide swath through jazz history, encompassing the legendary Blue Devils, the great Bennie Moten band, the heyday of Kansas City with Count Basie in the 1930s, the jam session scene at Minton's in New York in the 40s, and national recognition through star turns with Artie Shaw's band. Why does a once-luminous jazz presence remain in such eclipse? The answer probably lies in the bad luck and bad timing that dogged Lips Page throughout his career. He had been one of the main attractions of the Basie band "discovered" by John Hammond in Kansas City in 1936, and would have come East with Basie had not fate intervened in the form of manager Joe Glaser. In what seemed like a great career break at the time, Glaser signed Lips to front a band of his own. But whether because of Glaser's heavy handed ideas about jazz presentation or Lips's own deficiencies as businessman/leader, his band went nowhere. Apparently Glaser soon lost interest, and Lips ended up as another freelancer on the New York scene.

A second big opportunity presented itself in late 1941 when Artie Shaw, then at his peak of fame, hired Lips as guest soloist (no doubt to compete with Gene Krupa - Roy Eldridge). This partnership produced some popular sides, and Lips seemed on his way to stardom. But America was soon drawn into World War II and the ever unpredictable Shaw decided he had had enough of the band business, so he enlisted in the Navy. End of band, end of opportunity. (And before long, end of big-band era as well.)

Worn out by hard living, tired of scuffling for work, scorned by the beboppers ("broken-hearted" is how Bud Freeman put it), Hot Lips Page died in 1954, when the long-playing record was still relatively new. Ralph Sutton has said, and others agree, that "the records don't capture him." No wonder. By background and temperament a jam session player (one of the best, by all accounts; "a carver," Buck Clayton called him), Lips was a prodigious improviser who, in Max Kaminsky's words, "could play chorus after chorus without ever repeating himself." Eddie Barefield, a colleague in the Moten band, said that in live performances of *Toby,* "Lips would play maybe fifty choruses and we would make up a different riff behind each chorus." For a player of this calibre, the three minute time limit of the 78-rpm record was a straitjacket. His untimely death at age 46 was thus doubly tragic; the LP era, when extended takes and "live" recordings became commonplace, would have been the perfect showcase for him.

The timing of his premature death also robbed him of the chance to benefit from the rhythm 'n' blues explosion of the 1950s. While his blues style was probably too earthy for popular tastes in the 1940s, it would have appealed greatly to the next generation of listeners. Renewed mass interest in the blues would surely have revived his career, just as it did for his old Kansas City sidekick Joe Turner.

As a result of all this mischance, Lips Page's recorded output is largely unworthy of his talents. One CD has appeared under his name, a Danish import titled ***Hot Lips Page 1938-40*** (Official 830470). The quality of personnel and performance on these small group sides is uneven and Lips is not always inspired, but there are high points: his blues playing and singing on *Old Man Ben;* a sparkling *I Would Do Anything For You;* the reworkings of two old Moten favourites, *South* and *Lafayette* (including some fine, non-boogie-woogie Pete Johnson piano); his poignant vocal and growl solo on the minor-key *I Won't Be Here Long.*

The other collection under Lips' name is ***Feelin' High and Happy***, a 1971 LP from RCA's Vintage series (LPV-576). On a purely musical basis, it is nothing special. Included are ten sides by Lips' 1938 big band under the aegis of Joe Glaser. Lips' playing is solid, but the pedestrian charts do not play to his strengths. (Incredibly, there is not one blues in the bunch.) Lips could work the plunger with the best of them, including Cootie Williams, but on a remake of Duke Ellington's unsurpassable *I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart* his growling seems coarse and insensitive. One noteworthy side is *At Your Beck and Call,* an all-too-rare example of Lips' winning way with a ballad. Also included are five 1940 small group sides with guitarist Teddy Bunn, mostly blues, which (if you can get past a faint whiff of condescension in the blues lyrics penned by jazz critic Leonard Feather) contain some good "talking" muted solos by Lips. The best thing about this LP is the affectionate and informative biographical essay by longtime Page friend and advocate Dan Morgenstern.

To hear Lips Page at his finest, one is left to pick and choose carefully among air checks, privately made recordings, anthologies and historic reissues on which he appears as sideman (if they are still available and if you can find them).

Territory Bands Vol. 2 (Historical LP HLP26) contains the only two sides recorded by the Blue Devils, from 1929. *Blue Devil Blues* is worth the price of the LP. It begins with Lips' highly charged minor-key solo, sounding exactly like Louis Armstrong, a solo in which the student fully equals the master, and proceeds to a blues vocal by a young Jimmy

Rushing, behind which Lips' masterly muted obbligatos, played with a shimmering vibrato, reflect his apprenticeship as accompanist to Ma Rainey. In his memoirs, novelist Ralph Ellison describes the potent effect the Page-Rushing combination had in those days on the musically minded black youths of Oklahoma City. To these young aspiring musicians, Page and Rushing were local heroes. Listening to *Blue Devil Blues,* it's easy to see why.

For anyone interested in Kansas City, the history of big bands, the development of the modern, swinging rhythm section (and the importance of bassist Walter Page), or just good jazz, ***Basie Beginnings: Bennie Moten's Kansas City Orchestra 1929-1932*** (Bluebird CD 9768-2-RB) is indispensable. Though his solos are by necessity short, Lips Page, along with Basie, Barefield and Ben Webster, was a key participant in the landmark recording session of December 13, 1932, which produced such classics as *Toby, Moten's Swing, Lafayette, Prince of Wales,* and *Blue Room* (the last two choruses of which contain some of the most thrilling high-precision section riffing ever recorded). These drily recorded three minute sides can hardly do justice to what must surely have been one of the greatest of powerhouse bands, yet they still make for exciting listening. Listen especially to Lips' relaxed way of coping with the breakneck tempo on Toby, his gruff brand of lyricism on *Moten's Swing,* his behind-the-beat languor so appropriate to the mood of Hoagy Carmichael's *New Orleans,* and the hair raising ferocity of his growl solo on *Lafayette.*

One highlight of John Hammond's Carnegie Hall ***Spirituals To Swing*** concerts of 1938-39 (Vanguard VCD 2-47/48) is Lips Page's reunion with the Basie band on *Blues With Lips.* Here, free from recording studio constraints, Lips is allowed eight choruses and delivers blues playing of the highest order: full-toned, majestically phrased, accented with the glissandos, half valving and false fingering which make his blues style so eloquent and personal. It is a treasurable moment in jazz history, not to be missed.

Lips' time with Artie Shaw was, by his own account, the happiest of his career, bringing him widespread acclaim for the first time. His work with Shaw can be heard on ***Artie Shaw and his Orchestra: Blues in the Night*** (Bluebird CD 2432-2-RB). The force of the Page personality registers strongly on *Suite No. 8, Blues in the Night, Take Your Shoes Off, Baby* and, especially, the two part *St. James Infirmary Blues,* and his solos are full of showy glissandos and growls. This is good stuff of its kind, and it certainly pleased the customers when Shaw went on tour ("Lips broke it up everywhere," recalls Max Kaminsky), with Page bringing a needed edge to Shaw's slick, facile brand of swing.

Hot Lips Page is just one of many good reasons to invest in ***The Complete Commodore Jazz Recordings*** (Mosaic MR23-123 and MR23-128). From 1941 comes a four title session which features Chu Berry, but Lips has his moments, open and muted, on *Blowing Up A Breeze* and *Monday at Minton's.* Most memorable is Lips' singing and playing on *Gee Baby, Ain't I Good to You.* Though he never strays far from the haunting Don Redman tune, Lips delivers one of his most affecting performances. His statement of the melody, played muted with a finely controlled vibrato, is a model of unadorned yet heartfelt playing. In its own simple, quiet way, *Gee Baby* is more involving than anything he did with Artie Shaw. (These selections are also on Commodore CCD 7004).

Lips' best work on Commodore is from 1944, in four sextet sides (eight takes) headed by Albert Ammons, with Don Byas, Vic Dickenson, Israel Crosby, and Sid Catlett. All the elements are right for Lips: the material, the looseness of the arrangements, the colleagues. It is a first rate session in which the four contrasting soloists, individualists all, ruminate on the blues, solidly supported by Lips-led riffing, Ammons' rolling left hand, and the incomparable Catlett. The two takes of the slow *Bottom Blues* are the high point, with lyrical Ammons, wry Dickenson and suave Byas; but it is Lips who raises the emotional temperature and puts this in the "desert island" class of recordings. His playing combines ringing utterance with subtle inflection through selective use of vibrato, some patented half-valving, swooping glissandos and amazing "bent" notes. The overall effect is at sometimes a wailing quality, at others a more intimate talking quality, as if Lips were preaching personally to the listener. For anyone who thinks Hot Lips Page was nothing more than an Armstrong imitator, *Bottom Blues* should be required listening.

There is a lesson in this kind of blues playing. At his best, Lips Page expressed himself with great economy; almost never did he resort to mere note spinning, or hide behind torrents

of thirty - second notes. On *Bottom Blues* particularly, Lips' heart and technique are in perfect partnership and, without one superfluous note to muddy the waters, the emotion of the moment is simply, honestly and eloquently revealed. Easy to say, hard to do. (These selections are also on Commodore/ Teldec CD 8-24297.)

Lips' big band, 1944 edition, can be sampled both on Commodore and on a highly worthwhile Savoy collection called ***The Changing Face of Harlem*** (2 LPs; SJL 2208). Here, in contrast with the "Glaser band" of 1938, the forces are smaller, there are able soloists (Byas, Dickenson, Earl Bostic, Ike Quebec, Tiny Grimes, Clyde Hart) and the material, mostly Page originals, is congenial. Noteworthy are *I Got What It Takes,* another first rate Page ballad vocal, and the definitive *Lip's Blues.*

Also included in the Savoy collection are four 1944 sides by ***Hot Lips Page and His Hot Seven*** (including Byas, Hart, Catlett and the rarely-heard alto saxophonist Floyd "Horsecollar" Williams). These ***Hot Sevens***, all Page originals, may be the best sides ever recorded under Lips' name. They are not without commercial appeal, but compared to the work of Louis Jordan, Slim Gaillard and other fringe jazz practitioners and jump bands of the time, they are grittier, with far more jazz content. Lips' vocals on *Uncle Sam's Blues* and *I Keep Rollin' On* confirm that he was one of the best blues shouters of his, or any, time.

To complete the picture of this remarkable musician, the "live" recordings are essential. "You had to catch him when he was at ease," says Art Hodes, "just lettin' go." For the afterhours side of Lips Page, seek out ***TrumpetBattle at Minton's*** and ***Sweets Lips & Lots of Jazz*** (Xanadu LPs 107 and 123). The participants range from barely competent to inspired, but these privately made recordings will give you some idea of Lips as a formidable jam session gladiator. ***Midnight at V-Disc*** (Pumpkin LP 103) consists of after-hours recordings with a jam session feel, made in 1944 for the US Government and distributed to servicemen around the world. This LP is a gem, with an all-star lineup headed by Louis Armstrong, Jack Teagarden and Lips Page. Lips is in fine, relaxed form on *Miss Martingale,* a blues, and the best available version of his specialty, *The Sheik of Araby,* which also contains solid solos by Bobby Hackett, Teagarden, Ernie Caceres (on clarinet) and Johnny Guarnieri, and a swinging (and well recorded) rhythm section of Herb Ellis, Al Hall and Specs Powell. Lips' ride-out chorus, soaring above the ensemble, is an inspiration.

Lips can also be heard on a 1944 series of radio transcriptions with Ben Webster, collected on ***Ben and the Boys*** (Jazz Archives LP JA-35). Webster is the star, but Lips has his turn to shine, especially his growling solo on *Woke Up Clipped,* and *The Horn,* a high energy massaging of *I Got Rhythm* changes.

Hot Lips Page: Play The Blues in B (Jazz Archives LP JA-17) contains some memorable, extended concert performances. A 1944 sextet fronted by Edmond Hall, including Lips, Benny Morton, Teddy Wilson and Sid Catlett, plays a fine *Honeysuckle Rose,* in which Lips displays an extraordinarily rich, burnished low register tone that few trumpeters in jazz (Bunny Berigan among them) could match. From 1950 comes a sextet set with Lips, Cutty Cutshall, Peanuts Hucko and Ralph Sutton. The highlight is a ten minute *Blues in B* (B-flat, really) featuring a characteristic storytelling vocal by Lips, and a magnificent, wailing, six-chorus trumpet solo (the third chorus of which is a replication of Louis Armstrong's famous solo on his 1927 *S.O.L. Blues*).

Eddie Condon's Town Hall Concerts were broadcast Saturday afternoons over NBC's Blue Network starting May 20, 1944. Lips Page was an early recruit for the series, appearing on the first six concerts (Jazzology JCE-1001/1002 and JCE-1003/1004). Lips is featured in one number per broadcast, and figures prominently in the jam sessions (or "ham sessions" in Condonese) which end the shows. One of the more memorable of these closing ensembles, *Buy Bonds Blues* of June 17, 1944, has Lips issuing this warning just eleven days after D-Day: "I'm callin' Mr. Hitler to notify his next of kin/ It's only eight miles to Paris and five to Berlin." Flawed geography notwithstanding, Lips then leads the charge, muted, as the blues segues into *Ole Miss.* Admittedly he is closely miked, but it is remarkable how much power and drive come through that mute.

By the early 1950s, changing tastes and the ascendancy of bop had forced erstwhile swing era stars, many still in top form, into dixieland jobs at joints like New York's Stuyvesant Casino and Metropole Cafe. ***Hot Lips Page at Stuyvesant Casino*** (Stycon LP 300) captures an undated radio broadcast (probably 1951) in which Lips, abetted by George Wettling, Cecil Scott and Bobby Byrne, among others, manages to breathe new life into such warhorses as *The Saints* and *Royal Garden Blues.* Unsubtle playing, to be sure, but good fun, with a noisy, well lubricated crowd adding to the barrelhouse atmosphere.

One needn't make extravagant claims for Lips Page to suggest that his rightful place in jazz history is long overdue for recognition. Nor is he the only trumpeter to be so undervalued (Bill Coleman is another). Others may have played higher, or faster, or with more complexity, but nobody ever played with more feeling than Hot Lips Page. It remains for some enterprising record producer to pull together "The Best of Lips" from all these disparate sources, and restore the reputation of one of the most forceful and expressive musicians in jazz. □

THE CLUSONE TRIO LIVE IN CANADA

Han Bennink (drums) • Ernst Reijseger (cello) • Michael Moore (clarinet & alto)

The Glass Slipper • Vancouver • April 11th & 12th

In these times, when every penny counts, the decision to invest hard earned money in entertainment takes a certain amount of debate. However, when the flyer from the Coastal Jazz & Blues Society arrived in the mail there could be no hesitation. For this style of Dutch improvised music is not a form that can be heard often in venues in this country, and certainly music of this calibre, regardless of its origin, is not an everyday event.

We had spent two days in Seattle, an enjoyable enough time, even managing to hear Queen Ida and her Zydeco band at Jazz Alley. But often, in those two days, talk of returning to Vancouver for the Dutch treat, surfaced. Just the thought of the as not yet evening bubbled up positive expectations.

The Glass Slipper is an important club in Vancouver. Organised and operated by local musicians, it provides an intimate environment for music that is not so readily accepted in the more commercial establishments, and is often the home for international touring artists that have been labelled avant garde. A description that seems to indicate, in these conservative times, art that will at the very least arouse one from slumbering convention.

Although the members of the Clusone Trio are not household names, Han Bennink must be considered at the forefront of modern percussion. One of the earliest of the great improvising musicians of the European tradition, and perhaps the forefather of such astounding players as the Pauls Lytton and Lovens, he, alongside the British drummers John Stevens and Tony Oxley, created a special language for percussion that was outside of the American jazz ideal. It is common practice to refer to the master drummers of Africa, America, Japan etc., so this would be a perfect time to introduce the idea that European music has also created such a category.

The set began before co-producer Bob Kerr could finish his introduction, with Han's hands snaking rhythms from his bag of "junk" and borrowed drum kit. Ernst Reijseger, also a product of the Dutch way of thought, with no hesitation became his partner in what, when joined by the American (Dutch resident) Michael Moore, evolved into lunatic swing jazz that caught the whole audience in its exuberance.

At first, and we were seated in the front row, it is a little difficult to not concentrate solely on Bennink's theatrical clown antics, an element of his music that gives it a special charm. Quickly though, the realisation that this is but one part of the art, clarified to become brilliant musicianship with a natural cohesion where the two join into a flowing mirage of wonderment.

The continuous jokes could hide the sonic discourse taking place, as our hearts were singing with laughter, but then the song bursts forth making Duke smile down from his lofty perch. Or Bird. Or.... An interpretation of jazz so pure, that what might be considered avant garde by some, for us privileged to be there, was what jazz could and should be.

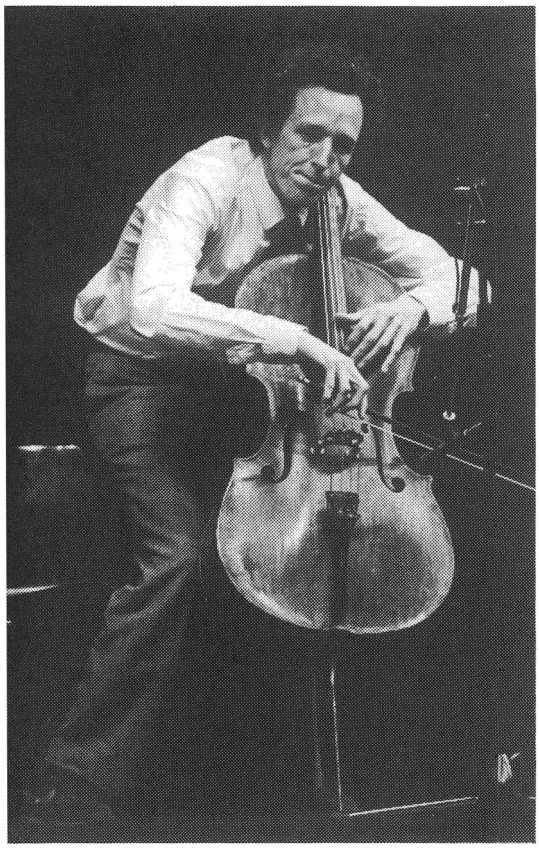
Reijseger is a quite astounding cellist who does not allow his prodigious technique to interfere with the real music. He managed to move between startling and often extreme action and the walking bass (cello?) lines of the jazz tradition with such dexterity that it was not even apparent there was a separation.

Michael Moore's contribution was that of a fluid fluent improviser working the jazz language into clarity from the most extended corners. A melodist, with what appeared to be a photographic memory for a whole book of tunes.

With such a Pandora's box of tricks at his disposal it would be a catalogue in itself to describe what Han Bennink does. So I have chosen this one example to illustrate his humour. Just off stage, out of sight so to speak, was a wooden step ladder, which from lack of use had been coated with a layer of dust. He dragged this, all the time thrashing rhythmically at the rungs, the side, the top, generating into view a whirling dervish enveloped by the dust fleeing. You should have been there.

Someone once expressed the thought that "straight ahead" jazz was interesting to listen to on recordings, and improvised music had to be experienced live. There is of course nothing that can replace a live performance, for music, produced by creative artists, is a living form. On this night, the Clusone trio and we the audience were delighted that we were not a recording, but participants in magic. □

REVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPH BY
BILL SMITH



TRISTAN HONSINGER PHOTOGRAPH BY DELAHAYE

La Quinzaine de Montréal

THE CELLO WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED

APRIL 1ST-15TH

A REVIEW BY MARC CHÉNARD

In a cultural landscape dotted with festivals of all shapes, sizes and ambitions, Montreal has had its share of special artistic events over the last few years. The latest addition to this list was **Quinzaine de Montréal**. The focus of its initial edition was set on the cello, this choice being a daring premise in itself. According to its subtitle, **With No Strings Attached**, this event was aimed at cross-cutting the usual stylistic boundaries which often ghettoize festivals into discreet genres. Classical, contemporary chamber music, jazz, rock , folk (or any combinations thereof) were all included in an ambitious program, which attracted dancers, singers and instrumentalists of all kinds. The only common thread running through all the performances was the presence of at least one cellist.

Given the instrument's history, the whole classical idiom was well represented, with concerts ranging from baroque to early Twentieth Century works. In its continuity, much contemporary music was to be heard. The presence of the famous German virtuoso **Siegfried Palm** created added attention to that musical sector.

Closer to our immediate concern, jazz and improvised music was well served. A nice initiative was the selection of a musician in residence, the choice being Holland's **Ernst Reijseger**. Over the two weeks he spent in town, he not only concertised in a variety of contexts, but also held workshops, one of them with school children. This experience, according to him, was as stimulating as it was challenging, as it demanded from him much more effort and resourcefulness to keep his young audience involved.

In his own performances he amply demonstrated these last two assets. The night preceding an all solo recital, he played an opening a capella set in a club-setting, strumming at times guitar-like folk-blues runs with his instrument set across his lap, while bowing with much panache in other instances. Following that, he teamed up with **Tristan Honsinger** in a telepathic cello duel that combined thematic and spontaneously improvised material in a totally cogent whole. Two shorter sets ensued, one being a duet between Reijseger and visual artist/drummer **John Heward**, the finale adding the second cellist.

At the same venue, a locale simply known as ***Le Club***, there were a whole series of worthwhile presentations. Before the Reijseger evening, there were appearances by the quartet ***Icarus***, whose cellist **Eric Longsworth** provided a lot of ostinato vamps for violinist **Stéphane Allard** and guitarist **Marc Villemure**, their work egged on by the driving percussion of drummer **Pierre Tanguay**. The next night it was Tristan Honsinger's turn. He was joined by guitarist **Jean-Claude Petit**, who produced sound layers with his various pedals before engaging in melodic counterpoint . Never one to lay back, Honsinger was hard at work, and his occasional vocal interjections were in keeping with his iconoclastic approach to music.

Other acts featured at the same place covered a wide range of styles. **Chris White**'s quartet, the ***Cayuga Jazz Ensemble***, was a middle-of-the-road jazz combo playing for the most part a number of the leader's prim and proper originals. Much more intense was the high density electronic soundscaping of **Martin Schütz** and **J.A. Deane.** While the former was going from his acoustic cello to a hi-tech clone, the latter was busy switching from his amplified trombone to his assorted keyboard paraphernalia. Through their hour plus set, yours truly could not help but think how the quantity of sound can be inversely proportional to that of music.

In contrast, **Diedre Murrray** and **Fred Hopkins** valued the latter over the former in a performance of striking beauty. So much so, that with a minimum amount of amplification, both string players hushed the audience. Quite an accomplishment in a club setting. A truly moving evening of music. The last act caught at that venue was the duet of **Byard Lancaster** (saxes) and **David Eyges** (cello). Passionate as the reedman was, his counterpart was somewhat more reserved. Playing more pizzicato than arco on his electric cello, he came across as rather perfunctory in his solos. Given the rapidly dwindling audience, which normally ensues on Sunday nights, both musicians called it an evening with a 15 minute midnight set.

A prominent personality in American New Music circles, **Tom Cora** was also slated in three spots. Apart from the brazen Dutch rock band, the ***Ex***, he appeared twice in tandem with percussionist **Samm Bennett** in their two plus one

format known as ***Third Person***. While the two partners have achieved a great deal of empathy, problems surfaced with both of the guests. Quebec's musique actuelle hero **René Lussier** was heard first ,but his busy and frantic scrapings just did not lock into any of the rhythmic or melodic ideas put forward by the basic unit. Marginally better was the reedist **Michael Moore** who fleetingly tuned in to what was happening around him, yet did not make significant inroads. The most successful moment was when an instrument maker named **Ken Butler** took to the stage. With a mere rubber band, which he let vibrate like an upper register clarinet, he managed to work into the groove set up behind him.

In the concert hall, two bills were greatly awaited by the cognoscenti. The first one had three very different groups sharing the scene of the ***Montreal Spectrum***. Cellist **David Darling** opened the evening with a violinist and clarinettist . While their set was decidedly atmospherical in style, it was to be a prelude to a more ambitious work, composed by Diedre Murray. Scored for a jazz quartet (also with Fred Hopkins) and five vocalists (three women, two men), *The Unending Pain* was a soulful piece replete with references to the gospel tradition, but also extending beyond it. Topping off this evening was a joyful finale with the Clusone Trio from Holland. With drummer extraordinaire **Han Bennink** launching off the set with an all-out barrage, he was soon joined by his partners Moore and Reijseger, fuelling their forays, but covering a wide range of dynamics with delicate brush strokes and firm attacks with mallets and sticks alike. If you wondered where their name came from, it comes from a town in Northern Italy where they played their first concert.

The second concert of note opened with a nine piece improvisational work "conductioned" by none other than **Butch Morris**. An intense performance for six cellos (four of them looking like space age variants) and a three-man drummerless rhythm section, the musical flow segued into more gentler episodes along the way. A pizzicato bass riff surfaced throughout, acting as a leitmotif that would link the different collective episodes together. The second brought on the aforementioned Ex, a rock band of heavy handed dynamics that went from triple fff upwards. Couldn't figure out what the vocalist was barking in the microphone though.

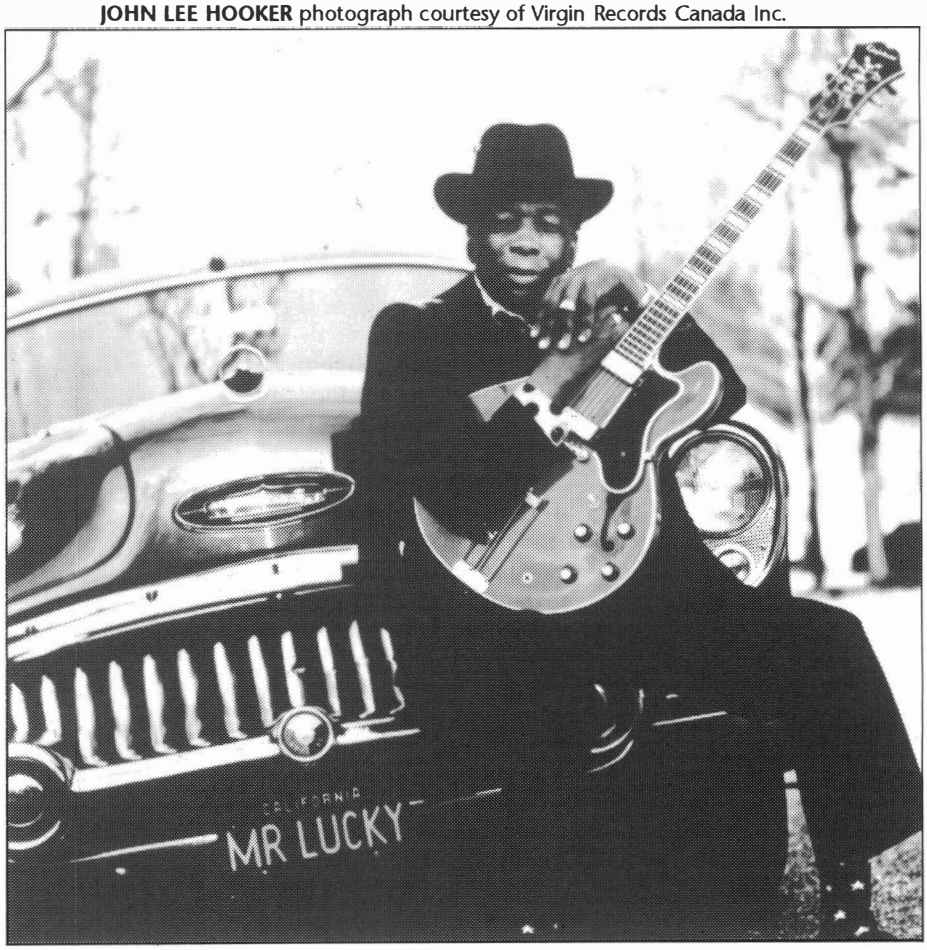
Presenting all kinds of music in a festival is by no means new, but using an instrument to cross-cut all genres is somewhat more of an exceptional occurrence, and for that alone a festival like this one is worth the venture (and adventure). Obviously amazed by the talent gathered at the event, cellist Murray profusely thanked the head organizer for making this happen, a sentiment echoed by many keen observers of all musical styles and cello fans alike. If all goes well, a second edition of **La Quinzaine** will take place, most likely in two years from now, this one to be focused on the voice. □

PAINT MY MAILBOX BLUE

BLUES REVIEWS BY DAVE "DADDY COOL" BOOTH

IT WAS WITH GREAT TREPIDATION THAT I LEARNED, EARLY IN 1991, OF THE SALE OF ART RUPE'S LEGENDARY SPECIALTY label the the Berkeley-based conglomerate, Fantasy Inc. My concern was that this purchase might signal the end of the fantastic, 'LEGENDS OF SPECIALTY' CD series. Fortunately, all my fears were laid to rest by a recent, second wave of Specialty compilations, this time under the Fantasy banner. The new label has changed nothing and I'm glad. The series remains in the capable hands of Billy Vera and we continue to get the best possible sound, 20 to 25 cuts, including many previously unissued titles plus a great looking and informative package.

JOHN LEE HOOKER photograph courtesy of Virgin Records Canada Inc.



From this second batch I have zeroed in on **Floyd Dixon's *Marshall Texas is My Home*** SPCD-7011-2. To the best of my knowledge this is the first legitimate disc dedicated to this relatively unknown west coast bluesman. Unfortunately, up until this release, all there has been available, unless you owned Dixon's original 78's and 45's, were three fine bootlegs, issued with Floyd's blessing, on Jonas Bernholm's Swedish Route 66 label. Those records are dubbed from discs and for the most part concentrate on the performer's better known Aladdin recordings.

In 1953, shortly after Dixon and Aladdin parted company, Specialty boss, Rupe, produced two excellent sessions of the piano playing blues singer. The label only released three singles from those dates, none of which charted nationally. All six sides are included on this new CD, along with eight previously unreleased cuts and one alternate take, all of which are top notch. Floyd Dixon's mellow, slow blues style is often compared by blues writers to Charles Brown. Both singers were born and raised in Texas, moved to California at an early age, play piano and have a similar, 'supper club' style. But on the slow blues I find that Floyd has a harder edge than Brown and on the uptempo jump songs, Dixon rocks harder than his contemporary ever did. Check out, *Hole in the Wall*, (which is loosely based on Amos Milburn's 1948 number one R&B hit, *Chicken Shack Boogie*) where Floyd really really moves, urged along by Carlos Bermudez's honking tenor saxophone. To help fill out the CD, compiler Vera wisely licensed Floyd Dixon's most well known song, thanks to the Blues Brothers, *Hey Bartender*, from Atlantic-Cat Records. Musically, the Cat recording fits perfectly between the fifteen Specialty sides and the Cash and Ebb material which balance out the remainder of this disc. With the exception of the Little Richard style rocker, *Oooh Little Girl*. I found the final five tracks weaker than the Specialty material, but don't let this put you off. Floyd Dixon is an excellent blues singer who has deserved his own CD for a long time. Now let's hope that EMI will follow Fantasy's lead and reissue Floyd's Aladdin material.

Another long neglected west coast performer who has deserved his own shot for a long time is **Johnny Heartsman**. Listening to his debut, ***The Touch***, Alligator ALCD 4800 it is difficult to understand why it has taken fifty-four years to get it out. Heartsman has been in the studio before, lots of times, you only have to look at band line-ups on the back of your Oakland and California blues collections. In the 50's, the late Bob Geddins had the young Heartsman playing either piano or guitar on most of his productions of Jimmy Wilson, Johnny Fuller and a myriad of others. In the 60's he was the guitar player on a lot of the Shirley label output including Al King and Ray Agee. When he wasn't in the studio, Johnny Heartsman was on the road. During the 50's he played bass with Jimmy McCrackin's band, the Blues Blasters, and in the 70's Johnny once again hit the highway, this time playing organ for soul singer, Joe Simon.

If you enjoy the modern, sophisticated blues by artists such as Phillip Walker, Robert Cray and Joe Louis Walker then Heartsman's Alligator debut will suit you to a T. Johnny, who is now based in Sacramento, shines as he slides from instrument to instrument and excels at all of them. The only one which might give blues fans trouble is the flute which he features on a couple of instrumentals. The songs are all originals, with the exception of a cover of Amos Milburn's *Walkin' Blues* and a rockin' version of Taj Mahal's *Paint My Mailbox Blue,* (which for some reason Heartsman claims to have written. It has to be an error as it first appeared in 1968 on Taj's Natch'l Blues LP credited to Taj Mahal.) If you are a blues fan with an open mind and looking for something different you will enjoy this recording.

On the other hand if you are looking for something tried and true then **John Lee Hooker**'s new disc,***Mr Lucky*** Charisma/Virgin/Pointblank CDV 3128 is for you. Prior to Hooker's wildly successful 1989 release ***The Healer***, the 'boogie man' hadn't had a record worth listening to since he went into the studio with Canned Heat back in May 1970. Anyone who was a fan of Hooker's great early records and had gone to see their hero in concert left feeling frustrated and cheated. His voice was still on the money and was highly individual guitar playing but they were buried by the overly loud band. Up until Roy Rogers, modern producers didn't seem to know what to do with Hooker. He has to have sympathetic players, musicians who are aware of his work. No wah-wah pedals, forget the big band, forget the horn section. Some of his most incredible records are just John Lee and his guitar. Most of the guests of ***The Healer*** were familiar with the man's musical strong points and that's why it was so good.

Wisely, producer Roy Rogers stays with the same formula on ***Mr. Lucky.*** Once again the seventy-four year old blues singer is surrounded by recognizable guest singers and players and this time the result is even better. The CD's opening song *I Want to Hug You* jumps right out of your player. John Lee sounds so good working with ex-Chuck Berry piano man Johnnie Johnson. Let's hear more of this hot combination. Next Robert Cray shares the vocals with Hooker on the disc's title song. This too works well and it is nice to hear snatches of John Lee's guitar in the mix. Most of the songs on this package will be recognisable to long time fans. The 1967 tune,*Back Biters and Syndicators,* is here as *Backstabbers.* It opens to another easily recognisable guitar sound, Albert Collins' Telecaster, and once again the teaming works well. Another musician with his own sound is Ry Cooder. Fans of both Hooker and Cooder will love their version of a Hooker 1963 Vee Jay recording,*This is Hip,* which didn't see the light of day until 1980 when it was released for the first time as the title song of a UK Charly compilation CRB 1004. Bobby King, Terry Evans and Willie Green lay down their soulful backup vocals and the song is indeed one of the many highlights on ***Mr. Lucky***.

Superstar Van Morrison has recorded previously with John Lee Hooker. He sang *Going Down* on Hooker's 1971 ABC album ***Born in Mississippi, Raised Up in Tennessee***. The reunion, a moody version of *I Cover the Waterfront,* easily eclipses their earlier attempt. A share of the credit for the song working so well must go to Booker T. Jones' brooding organ which adds the right atmosphere to this Hooker Classic. I thought that Carlos Santana's title song for ***The Healer*** was the previous disc's weakest moment and once again I have a problem with Santana's contribution, a new song *Stripped Me Naked*. It's not a incongruous as *The Healer,* but it reminds me of what was wrong with Hooker's records in the late 60's and 70's.

Over the years, bluesman John Hammond has performed and recorded many of John Lee's tunes so he had no problem working with one of his heroes. He is the only guest here to appear on two songs, *Father was a Jockey* and *Highway 13*. Johnny Winter jumps in next, with a rechristened *Maudie,* Hooker's old girlfriend is now calling herself,*Susie.* On this hot rocker we once again get to hear Hooker's fine rhythm guitar while Johnny tears along on lead. Pure excitement! More John Lee Hooker guitar opens his combination with Rolling Stones guitarist, Keith Richards. Their song, perhaps one of Hooker's best known classics *Crawling King Snake,* proves that there is no doubt that Richards is also totally familiar with his recording partner's legacy. It is this respect all throughout the new CD, which makes ***Mr. Lucky*** one of the best new blues releases of 1991.

I have to admit that I am a long time sucker for anything on the Chess/Checker label. Consequently I keep a very close eye on the ongoing MCA reissue program and when I read about a **Bo Diddley** compilation with unreleased sides I couldn't wait to get a copy of it. After last year's excellent, but lightweight, boxset (only two CD's) I was hungry for more by big bad Bo. I realize that Bo Diddley is viewed by himself and most rock historians as a rock and roll artist, but I find a lot of his music, especially the early sessions, to be pure blues. This new CD, ***Rare & Well Done*** MCA CHD-9331, is a winning combination of rare 45 flip sides, which up until now haven't shown up on North American discs, alternate and undubbed takes, and the most exciting, previously unreleased songs.

With the exception of three weaker songs, recorded in the 60's, *Cookie-headed Diddley, We're Gonna Get Married* and *I'm High Again,* everything is stunning. The collection opens with an undubbed version of *She's Alright,* a song which first showed up on Bo's third Checker LP,***Have Guitar Will Travel***. It does sound better without the wailing women's chorus. The next tune, *Heart-o-matic Love* was left in the can after the Originator's second session in July 1955. It's great and should have been released as a single or added to the first LP. It is followed by a couple of previously unreleased alternate takes of *I'm a Man* and *Little Girl* which in all honesty don't differ that much from the released versions. The three 45 flip sides, *She' s Fine, She's Mine,* the novelty, *Bo Meets the Monster* and the menacing *I'm Bad* show up next. I realize that most hard-core Diddley fans will already have these songs but it is sure nice to have them on CD. My only beef is that the other hard to find flip, *Oh Yeah,* Checker single 914, wasn't included.

Blues Blues is another excellent unreleased gem. The Elmore James influenced blues tune sounds very similar to *Live My Life* from the ***In The Spotlight*** CD, CHD-9264. Turn up the next track and stand back. It too is unreleased and is simply called, *Rock 'n' Roll*. It sounds as though someone in the studio yelled out "Bo sing a song using the words, rock and roll" and that's what he does. File this next to Iggy Pop and the Stooges. Most of the remaining titles are from the 60's with some in true stereo. With the exception of his first, self titled, album, Bo's records always featured one or more doo-wop flavoured ballads. Here we get to hear an alternate take of the doo-wopper, *No More Lovin',* which like the released take on ***The Gunslinger*** LP (or CD CHD-9285) features the excellent backup vocals of Moonglow Harvey Fuqua and an unknown group. *Moon Baby* and *I Want My Baby* are both good songs, left in the can since 1961. But it is the great talking jiver, *Please Mr. Engineer* complete with Bo's Guitar providing the train sounds, which lifts the tail end of the CD. The five minute song, also previously unreleased from a 1961 session, is an extension of an earlier Diddley train tune, *Down Home Special* which can be found on Bo's box set CHD2-19502. I can only hope that MCA compiler Andy McKaie continues to root through the Chess vaults and comes up with enough material for a volume two. Meanwhile I think I'll hit the replay button.

See ya ... □

APPLE SOURCE
New York Notes By Kevin Whitehead

ANTHONY BRAXTON PHOTOGRAPH BY MARCUS DI FRANCESCO

After hearing and reading for so long that **Anthony Braxton** has no rank and-file fans—only a few admiring egghead critics—even this admirer was surprised by the huge turnout for his three nights at the New Music Cafe at the end of February. It was his first New York engagement in over a year, and his quartet was raring to play; no set was less than very good, and some were on the ceiling. After seven years, the band with Marilyn Crispell, Mark Dresser and Gerry Hemingway feels like it'll stay together forever. As usual, the compositions were dense with ideas, the execution tight but not too tight—Braxton doesn't like it too neat. One fiendish piece for sopranino and piano drew its tension from the way the unisons would wander slightly out of phase, then snap back in. It could be hard to tell what was written and what was improvised—in the middle of a furious solo, Crispell stopped, turned a page, and then barrelled on. The music was full of passion and clarity, sometimes swinging—one piece had a surprising latin tinge—and sometimes shuttling between chamber-music and blues phrases with total naturalness. And by the way, the prominent musicians who came down to check out Braxton outnumbered the handful of critics who did.

Braxton was back in town March 21 at the Asia Society, where he and Richard Teitelbaum (on synths and samplers) sat in with Meisho Tosha, who plays yokobue—Japanese transverse flutes, from which he coaxes the register leaps and wide and variable vibrato and dynamics one associates with the endblown bamboo shakuhachi. In performance, Braxton's *Composition No. 166* for three instrumentalists drew Tosha closer to his world than he bent toward Tosha's—a surprise, considering how much shakuhachi has come out in one or two of his solo alto pieces. Teitelbaum's beautifully rendered *Intera*, using his complex and flexible live-sampling programs, revealed each player's character (to use Richard's analogy) as a mirror does. A long and detailed open discussion with the principles the next afternoon was a very nice bonus—the sort of verbal exchange lay listeners rarely have access to. Braxton scoffed at one observer's notion that *166* wasn't explicitly cross-cultural: "Americans don't always notice how much we have a universal culture."

That point was confirmed at the Alternative Museum on March 4: **Andrew Cyrille** celebrated his Haitian roots in trio with Fred Hopkins and island-born singer and guitarist Alix "Tit" Pascal, whose folky material and quirky time didn't allow full exploitation of his grand rhythm section, splendid as they managed to sound anyway. On the same bill, bassist **Lindsey Horner** let his years in Ireland creep into his rowdy trio, picking up wood flute to blow a pastoral tune. But Herb Robertson was best plungering gutbucket blues, and the drummer was Russian, Grisha Alexiev.

The Lincoln Center jazz series first season hit a high mark March 25 with **Betty Carter's** packed-house tour de force at Alice Tully: about 18 tunes, almost nonstop, using three rhythm sections, big band and a modest cello-and-bass string section. On the one hand, this showcase highlighted her mannerisms—Betty makes every melody sound like she wrote it, even the ones you'd rather she left alone, like *If I Should Lose You*. On the other, her attention to pace and texture is unrivalled among vintage beboppers (she deployed her expanded forces very sparingly, on only a few tunes), she knows how to work a crowd, and anyone who recasts a melody as deftly as she did *Moonlight in Vermont* can hardly be expected to sing songs straight. The best of her many accompanists was pianist Cyrus Chestnut, a comper of uncommon sympathy; the worst was Jack DeJohnette, whose across-the-beat accents did everything to call attention to himself and nothing to serve the music. The show made up for the fizzle of **Freddie Hubbard-Joe Henderson** big band night, done in mostly by the pedestrian arrangements of his compositions which Hubbard commissioned. Freddie, playing lyrically if not in the greatest lip, found more fresh ideas in *Up Jumped Spring*, which he's played a zillion times, than arranger Bob Belden did. However Henderson's charts of his own pieces and standards were a little fresher harmonically, more imaginatively voiced and finely detailed—on *Without a Song*, the tension between his staccato melody statement and the rhythm section's jaunty tempo wasn't resolved until brass punches on the second chorus united the two conceptions.

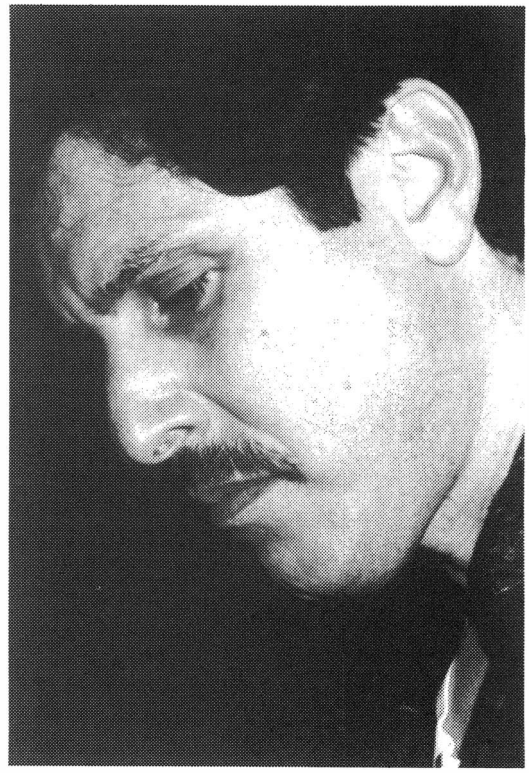
Pianist **Michael Weiss'** March 18 Merkin Hall concert promised "rediscovered rarities" by Monk, Bud and Bird—some little known as Bud's *Dusky and Sandy*, as well as more com-

mon ones like *Blue Monk* and *Ah-Leu-Cha*. It was nice to hear how much Monk Weiss got into his playing on the first segment, disconcerting to hear how quickly it evaporated when he moved on to Powell and Parker. We often hear how desirable it is for young players to emulate the masters, but why bother if their virtues are only trotted out for homages? Charles McPherson's heartfelt Birdisms, by contrast, demonstrated how one personalizes such master lessons. Tom Harrell had an off night, and I didn't dig drummer George Fludas, but I liked the way the whole band played acoustic, including bassist John Webber, who gained in natural sound what he lost in speed. He was totally audible 15 rows back. The concert was NEA-funded, rebutting charges of rampant radicalism at that federal agency: do we need subsidized bebop in the neo-con age?

In repertory, performances of ***Cobra*** continue the last Sunday of every month at the Knitting Factory. Assigning authorship is tough: John Zorn wrote the rules (as opposed to score), inspired by the board game. For each performance, **Anthony Coleman** appoints a leader who picks the band, refereed (rather than conducted) each month so far by Norman Yamada. Some regular scrimmagers include Coleman, saxist Roy Nathanson, drummer Jim Pugliese, and keyboardist Even Gallagher, although many others have been involved. It plays less like a game than a sport, with much frantic waving of hands a la basketball players looking for a pass. (if the ref doesn't call on you, you can't play.) It's visual fun—I learned more about Zorn's game pieces in a half hour than in ten years of reading about them or hearing records—but also surprisingly good even when your eyes are closed. In January, Coleman presiding, there was a wall-shaking hookup between trombonist Curtis Fowlkes and tubist Marcus Rojas; in David Shea's version, almost all the sound was sampled, or swiped off CD players; Nathanson's, with a full complement of Jazz Passengers, was the jazziest, albeit subject to Marc Ribot's guitar-noise interruptions. If only every game didn't seem to go into extra innings; the players lose track of time more than the audiences do.

Whitney Balliett on Red Allen in the March 2nd *New Yorker:* "His playing never lost its matter-of-fact flavour. No matter how complex it got, it always had its hands on its knees." □

JOEL FUTTERMAN



THREE YEARS AGO, WHILE RESEARCHING AN ARTICLE on the local jazz scene, I was repeatedly told about a local pianist named Joel Futterman that had worked with Sonny Stitt, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Jimmy Lyons, Jimmy Garrison and other giants of the business. These were rather startling stories in our local cultural backwater where jazz aspirations and music sometimes seem to begin and end with a trio combo at the local country club dances.

EVEN MORE SURPRISING THAN FUTTERMAN'S PAST ASSOCIATIONS THOUGH were the character of the stories. At first, I thought I had stumbled across a retired obscure jazz pianist from the sixties; good for a local interest story. But the stories I heard, were not of a retired musician but of the mythic type we have come to associate with Liszt interpreter, Ervin Nyiregyhazi, or in the jazz world, Charles Gayle or maybe, Buddy Bolden.

Had the stories been written for the tabloids, the headlines would have gone something like, "International concert stage pianist performs at local bar." Or, "Mysterious pianist performs for twelve hours without stopping." I had one gentleman tell me about Joel Futterman playing "strange music" on the upright at a local hospital. Another couple had fond memories of him playing for their Sunday afternoon tea dances. My personal favourite had Joel Futterman on the pipe organ at an old movie theatre that still showed silent films. In any event, they were certainly not the stuff of a retired jazzer. Unfortunately, there was no theme to the stories so, no one knew where to find him. Joel just seemed to appear in the oddest sorts of places every now and then.

A quick check through the jazz discographies was no more revealing than the stories. A few calls to the national jazz publications editors' desks were also not much help. Two editors had heard of him somewhere, but could not place him much closer in space than that. Another editor thought he had died in Chicago. Another thought he had moved to India and finally, another thought he was living somewhere in northern Europe. They were all incorrect.

The following interview is the result of many conversations Joel and I have since had over the past three years. Never one for publicity, Joel only recently gave permission to publish this story.

I found Joel living very quietly in a tree lined, three bedroom, brick ranch neighbourhood that could be Any City, USA. With two children in public schools and a wife that bakes bread from scratch, the only thing seemingly out of the ordinary with this Rockwellian picture is a large addition on the back of the house with only a grand piano to occupy it's space. I say seemingly out of the ordinary, because that would only be if you couldn't hear the music that pours nonstop out of this room for six to eight hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Just as it has for the past seventeen years.

You know how when you're growing up, there is always a house in the neighbourhood that has a name. Well the Futterman house is known in his neighbourhood as the "Piano House". It is the kind of house Jimmy Lyons could slip into unnoticed by the media and gig for eighteen hours straight without anybody asking questions. It is also the friendly kind of house all the neighbourhood kids shoot hoops at in the afternoons. The kind of supporting house where budding elementary school-age musicians give their first recitals. The kind of house that warms you with it's aura of genius and support of growth for all ages and all endeavours.

I once asked Joel about the apparent incongruities of his daily living situation and his music. Joel replied, "Jazz musicians, especially those from my era seem to live very destructive lives. Some say it is the nature of the business, but I don't think it has to be that way. I believe you can take control of your musical destiny and not let the club scene and the recording industry chew you up. The jazz business seems to be one of extremes; either you're hustling to pay rent, or you're recording and on the road all the time doing concerts to make money for the producers. In either extreme, the musician and his art seem to suffer. Obviously, I have made a trade-off in terms of commercial success to raise a family and maintain some stability in my life. But, how illusionary and transitory is success?"

Born on the north side of Chicago in 1946, Joel Futterman began playing the piano at fourteen. By the time he was seventeen, he was working illegally at the afterhours jazz clubs in Chicago. For the next ten years, he played with almost every jazz musician that worked Chicago during that period. On the surface, he was doing all the right things to make a living, such as it was, as a jazz pianist. But underneath, there was a restlessness that could not be satisfied by the opportunities available in jazz during the sixties.

"During the sixties, the bop players were the ones working, and making a living, but free players were the ones pushing the music. We were all struggling with that transition. It was like the transition to talking films, some made it and others couldn't. I related to the

complexities of the free sound, but I was playing bop to survive. Actually, as it turns out, I couldn't find a home in either school.

"I used to hang out with the poets and the artists in Hyde Park and Old Town. I always felt more of a kinship with the poets and artists than with other musicians. My musician friends like Speedy, Fred Humphreys, Robert Pilot, Bill Protz and Purnell Whitley—cats from Chicago during the sixties will remember these guys—had the vision, but couldn't keep their personal lives together to realize the music. The better known musicians that I worked with like Gene Shaw, had reached a level of music that they were comfortable with and worked for them, but it didn't work for me.

"Don't get me wrong though, no amount of money could pay for the lessons I learned from those cats. Gene taught me phrasing concepts and the basics about living as a jazz musician. In terms of life styles, it is probably closer to that of a poet. In other words, very difficult and full of ways to destroy yourself, if you let it.

"I also worked for awhile with Jimmy Garrison, and I learned so much from him about phrasing in the bass and how to use the bass to sustain a centre of gravity in the music. Many people have said I approach the piano like a horn player. Well, that is Gene's influence coming through. And, my left hand work comes from a realization I had, even back then, that I couldn't always rely on having a Jimmy Garrison on bass. I was learning, but I was also reaching for something beyond.

"You also have to remember, Muhal Richard Abrams was just getting the AACM off the ground during this period, and I did get involved with the AACM for awhile. I met Rahsaan Roland Kirk, with whom I worked for awhile, through the AACM. But many of the jazz players in the sixties, especially the free players, were very angry about life. They were using the music to express that anger. Believe me, I understand that and its OK because that it is the beauty of jazz in the purest sense—it is, and should be the expression of life. But I have never been a political person and anger is a very destructive emotion that I try to avoid. As a result, I didn't see myself growing in the free school direction either. So, getting back to what I was originally saying, I hung with poets.

"There was a man named Joseph Schwartzbaum in Chicago at that time. I think he was psychic, but he was also a very creative individual. His house was a gathering place for all the artists working on the cutting edge. It was at Joseph's that I began thinking about translating life's everyday experiences into art. If I heard a bus splash through a rain puddle, I would shed until I could recreate that sound on the piano. It was also at Joseph's that I began to understand the concept of being totally involved in the present. It is something we forget as we grow and have to re-learn to ever truly develop the genius inside us all.

"During the late sixties and the early seventies, I became obsessed with wood shedding. The obsession was like my own personal answer to the confusion of this country and the transition that was going on in jazz during that period.

"I had a little apartment on the north side of Chicago at that time, and I put the piano next to the refrigerator so I wouldn't have to stop playing to eat. I used to sleep at the piano. I would go for four or five days when the only time I got up from the bench was to go to the bathroom. My back would ache and my body would cry out for rest, but I would not stop. I trained my body, like a marathon runner does, to continue through the pain.

"Long distance swimmers and runners talk about hitting the wall. I found there was also a wall in music, and if I could get through the wall, my mind and my hands became as one. It was an incredible realization for me. The potential of the mind and hands becoming as one completely turned my life around. I found what I had been striving for and realized that I had to leave Chicago to develop the realization. In other words, I had to find a quiet place to practice.

"That was in 1973. By then I was completely burnt out with the jazz scene in Chicago anyway. I had also been working fairly regularly in New York City and the West Coast, and had basically decided that none of those scenes were for me.

"So, in 1973, my wife and I loaded up the car and decided to drive until we found a place we liked. For a year, we drove around the country looking for a quiet place. We stopped in Virginia to see some friends and have been here ever since.

"There is no support for the arts here, but the schools are good, the traffic is not too bad, and we have trees, the ocean and the mountains close by. Most important though, its a good place to raise kids and practice. I have been able to continue the training regiment, I developed back in Chicago, ever since we moved here.

"Of course, it is much easier now, because after tens of thousands of hours, and twenty years of practice, my mind and my hands are one. I also still hit the wall occasionally, but it is very rare these days, because I don't usually practice for more than twelve hours a day anymore."

One of the first things that intrigued me about Futterman was his reticence to perform or record. Actually, it was his penchant for performing in situations so completely out of character for a musician with his obvious gifts that actually intrigued me. The lack of recordings is another issue that, in reality, is almost self explanatory for those that understand the vagaries of the recording industry.

"I am often asked why I perform in public so rarely, or why I don't record more often. It is difficult for me to explain, but playing the piano is truly a religious experience for me. I don't play to impress, and I don't play to please the crowd, and I have a very difficult time adjusting to the constraints of a recording studio. The truth is that, in all humility to the music, I have achieved something with the

piano that transcends the realities of the business side of the music. So, generally, I only perform in public for pure self indulgent reasons and this creates some interesting situations.

"You see, for most musicians recording and performing in public are not done to achieve any kind of spiritual experience. They are done simply to make money. The music has become defined in terms of ticket or record sales. That is why there is so much gimmickry in music these days. That is why, I believe too, that bop is seeing such a big resurgence these days.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSEPH ANDREANA

"It is a good thing that the old tunes are being learned by the younger players, but they should be learned as practice exercises, not as a means to make a living. But the jazz buying public is paying money for that sound again so the record companies are producing it and churning out young players and trying to position them as crossover artists.

"I find it saddening that so much money is going towards producing technically perfect training exercises and so little is going towards promoting jazz as an art form. I think much of the confusion in jazz today is a result of record companies trying to package jazz the way popular music is packaged. The emphasis becomes the package that, by definition, must be constantly changed to keep the product selling.

"I recently read an interview with one of the younger horn players that is being pushed hard by the media. I won't repeat his name because it is embarrassing, and he may have been misquoted, but the article quoted him as saying something to the effect that if you haven't made it in your twenties you might as well give it up. Now, that is a truly sad statement and one he probably believes, because it is certainly what the record industry is selling. Like I said, the music is being defined in terms of sales figures."

Since I first met Joel, and thanks to the help of people like producer, Philip Egert, he has been relatively successful in terms of releasing seven albums to go along with three self produced earlier efforts. The inevitable result has been a number of comparisons between Joel and other pianists. It is probably more so in his case, because he appears to have suddenly come from nowhere, and people are uncomfortable with that. We need points of reference for comfort sake.

Because it is difficult to characterize Joel's music, listeners and critics tend to approach it from different orientations. As a result, the comparisons form a rather eclectic crowd. At various times, I have discussed those comparisons with Joel. His answers provide a great deal of insight to his approach to and vision of jazz.

Some critics have likened Futterman's technique to that of a modern day Tatum because of his incredibly rapid extend phrases and his left hand technique. "People seem to like to talk about how fast I play, but the tempos are only the result of all the shedding I've done. It really isn't anything special. I have practiced so much though, I can hear and play two or three phrases in the same space most musicians can only hear or play one phrase. I guess it is just human nature for people to be impressed with up-tempo pieces.

"I only wish people would talk about my ballads. I work on those far more than my up-tempo compositions. The reason is simply because it is much more difficult to play slow than fast. When you are playing slow you have to play and hear the silence just like the musical notes, and that takes tremendous concentration. My left hand though, now that is another story.

"About ten years ago, I had the idea that if my mind and hands could be as one, why couldn't my hands become as two different entities, like two different musicians. Ever since I got that notion, I have been working on developing the concept of completely independent hand playing.

"For about a year, I only played with my left hand. I studied Ravel's concerto for left hand to help me develop a total technical capability with my left hand. Then, I began to integrate my left hand with my right hand. The most difficult part was to train my mind and ears to read and hear two completely different parts simultaneously. Now, it is second nature for me which is why I seldom use a bass player when I perform. I can only work with bassists that have big ears, like Richard Davis, because most bass players can't work off of my left hand."

Many listeners and critics come to Futterman's music from a classical music orientation and have likened Futterman to an "unschooled" Rachmaninov. When I asked Joel about this comparison, he found it rather amusing. "Yeah I know. Usually, the first question people ask me is if I went to Julliard. I'm not sure if that is a compliment or not.

For some reason, people are more comfortable accepting a certain amount of technical facility if they think you have classical training.

"There is some validity here in the concept, but only from the stand point of the intense amount of discipline that is required to be a concert pianist. I find very little discipline in the jazz world. That is why there are so few true virtuosos in jazz. Jazz musicians, as a whole, tend to reach a certain level of technical competence early in their life and then never progress beyond it. You know Rubenstein was still practicing his scales in his nineties.

"There is however, a great deal of difference between the reasons I practice and why a concert pianist practices. A classical musician practices to recreate the written music with pure authenticity while interpreting the music emotionally. I practice to be able to compose in the moment. The only way I know to do that is to have total control of my instrument, much like a classical musician does."

"I also think that those comparisons with Rachmaninov, which I find very flattering, got started when a critic heard my three hand technique—something that you don't hear at all in jazz. It is a technique I have been working on for the past five years. Actually, it was a logical extension of the training I did with my left hand, but it is very, very difficult. Not so much from a technical standpoint, because that is only a matter of practicing, but from the standpoint of being able to hear the phrases far enough ahead in my mind to compose for three hands at the same time. It takes so much from me that when I'm finished playing, I am totally exhausted. I like to play chess and find it somewhat analogous to playing three games at the same time."

There have been, of course, the frequent comparisons of Joel with Cecil Taylor. Of all the comparisons, it is the one that seems to bother him the most. "Critics and record reviewers like to make that comparison, but it is one that I really don't understand. The only reason I think writers make this comparison is maybe, the difficulty they find in articulating the differences in our music. Cecil's music is an expression of his life's experiences just as mine is. We both came out of the bebop school, but we have both tried to push the envelope in very different ways."

"There are very obvious differences in terms of our approach and concepts of dynamics and phrasing. There are also some very distinct differences in our approach to the piano as an instrument. These aren't important though. What is important is that comparisons imply preconceived ideas which are a contradiction in terms when talking about this music. Cecil and I both force people to listen and think about what they are hearing, and from that standpoint there are certain similarities. Other than that though, and the fact we both play the acoustic piano, I really don't think comparisons have any validity here."

Joel and I have often discussed the future, in terms of his musical career, and we generally, come full circle to his reasons for moving to Virginia in the first place. "I'm not sure that it is my destiny to ever achieve any notoriety with my music. Today, the business side of music has become more important than the music itself, and I have found a serious philosophical problem with that. It seems that unless you can be suitably packaged, the media treat you as if you don't really exist—just like the homeless.

"I've been there and you lose your mind when all you can worry about is survival. There is no virtue in poverty. People like to talk about it, but only because the people doing the talking have never had to live on the street. Being poor doesn't make you creative, it just makes you hungry and angry. I admit though, there is a fine line between artistic integrity and having enough to eat and raise a family. Every artist has to define that line for himself and then live with it.

"I have been very fortunate in that I've met some people, that understand my vision and are able to interpret the commercial aspects of it for me. I have been able to make a few recordings over the past couple of years that did not compromise the music, and there are more in the pipeline."

It is not possible to finish an article about Joel without saying a few words about his business partner and producer, Philip Egert. When you meet the two of them, the critical Macero/Miles or Theile/Coltrane partnerships immediately come to mind. For the past five years, Egert has been able to translate Joel's creative genius into a tangible business without any compromise to the music or musician.

"We are plowing new ground" Egert says, "from a business standpoint, so we are taking it one step at a time. There is no rush. Joel's artistic integrity is the only thing that matters. But we might indeed, change the conventional thinking regarding compromise and integrity vis-a-vis making a living as a working musician. Only time will tell.

"For example, I have half a dozen of Joel's recordings in the can that we are waiting for the right circumstances to release. They vary from a solo piano recording of Dolphy interpretations —the only time this has ever been attempted—to a collection of original ballads that will water the eyes of Bill Evan's fans. I also have a series of piano drum duets that are on the very cutting edge of jazz. Each recording is a unique statement, requiring individual treatment and circumstances to realize. Like I said, there is no rush."

When Joel called me to say that it would be alright to publish this story, he was on his way to Berlin for a concert. As he hung up the phone, he also provided the story's ending.

"The mystics used to go to the mountains to seek enlightenment before they wandered the earth. For me, moving to Virginia was my mountain. I have been here for seventeen years, and it's time to come down, metaphorically speaking. What happens now is not up to me. I have something to share, if anyone wishes to listen. And if not, that is all right too, because I'll still be whole with myself and the world."

□

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Cafeteria - *JDF* • The End Of The Beginning - *JDF* • Inneraction - *JDF*
Vision In Time - *Silkheart* • Inner Conversations - *Ear-Rational*
In-Between Position(s) - *Bellaphon* • Moments - *Ear-Rational*
Passage - *Konnex* • Berlin Images - *Silkheart* • To The Edge - *Konnex*

On the Road... Again

Marc Chénard Travelling In Europe

TO ANY TRAVELLING JAZZ FAN, IT IS ALMOST A TRUISM TO SAY THAT EUROPE HAS NOW BECOME THE land of opportunity for the music. Unlike North America where live jazz is essentially concentrated in urban centres, the "Old World" is virtually dotted with venues all over its landscape, from the biggest of cities to the tiniest of towns. But size has nothing to do with the scope or ambition of the presentations, because many small communities have name performers coming to their area, be they European or American. In fact, a lot of exciting music can be heard in the most remote of locations, some totally off the beaten path of the tourist trade.

An integral part of the European cultural scene, festivals are spread throughout the year with nary a lull. As in North America, there are big events with as much financial clout as commercial appeal, but there is more than a fair share of alternative-oriented festivals which attract very knowledgeable audiences to areas far removed from the big cities.

BOBBY PREVITE
PHOTOGAPH BY GERARD FUTRICK

Among the major events, the ***Berliner Jazztage*** is one of the better known festivals. Since its inception in the mid-60's, it has achieved much of its reputation based on its specially commissioned projects and exclusive concert engagements. From year to year, the festival also comes up with a dominant theme, this year's being a salute to the Windy City, Chicago.

As the last survivor of the early Chicagoans, **Art Hodes** let his fingers spin tales of years gone by during his solo keyboard outing, a lesson of living history to say the least.

At the centre of this year's theme was a focus on the still thriving A.A.C.M. And what tribute to that organization would be complete without the presence of its first guiding spirit, **Muhal Richard Abrams**?... With his 17-piece big band in tow, the pianist directed and participated in a sterling performance, the opening number featuring consecutive solos by all of its members! An extravaganza in its own right, the ***Art Ensemble of Chicago*** teamed up with **Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy** (which, was the main act) and the African **Amabutho Male Chorus**. Interestingly enough, the once pioneering AEC is now playing second fiddle, so to speak, to Bowie's "avant-pop" aggregate. Representing the younger generation were the **"Eight Bold Souls"** of reedman **Ed Wilkerson**, a multi-horn pianoless ensemble that stretched out in a set which unfortunately ran late into the night.

Not to be outdone in power was **Hal Russell's *NRG Ensemble***, a band that never ceases to amaze in its explosive forays by the mad professor and his young cohorts. All the more wild was their act, since it preceded the headliner group of the double bill, one **John McLaughlin** and his tepid World Beat Trio. Talk about non sequiturs.

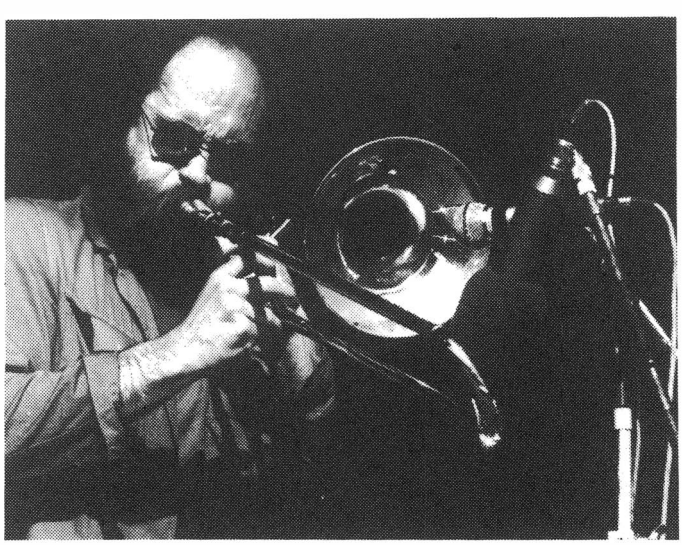
Beyond its main theme, the festival also presents a full slate of musical projects from both far and near. The gamut ran from the glitzy traditional big band of **Louie Bellson** to the meanderings of German

saxophonist **Sybille Pomorin** with **Terri Jenoure** on vocals and violin. In between, there was some excitement too, one example being drummer **Bobby Previte**'s invigorating post-bop septet ***Clear Weather Fast Track***. A couple of European projects were also worth noting, one being the unusually named sextet ***La Danse des Bouffons*** of altoist Michael Riessler, the other a six piece woodwind ensemble called ***Tà Lam Six***, a premiere concert for this band spearheaded by tenorist **Gebhard Ullman**.

Last, but not least in ambition, was the band-to-end-all-bands, the 31-piece ***Epitaph*** orchestra under maestro **Gunther Schuller**'s watchful eye. While this band has now mastered the Mingus magnum opus with great polish, it is worth noting that trumpeter Jack Walrath upon hearing the originally recorded fiasco of 1962 stated that that performance merited five stars while the modern-day rendition, of which he is a charter member, merits but two and a half. Food for thought...

Overshadowed as it may be by the Jazztage, FMP's ***Total Music Meeting*** has established itself for many years now as the viable alternative jazz event of the city. This year's edition was a nine-man bout featuring the triple tenors of **Evan Parker**, **Charles Gayle** and **Peter Brotzmann**, the three basses of **Fred Hopkins**, **Peter Kowald** and **William Parker**, and the three drum sets of **Rashied Ali**, **Andrew Cyrille** and **Tony Oxley**. On each of the three nights, four hour marathons began with the first half hour as a collective which would segue into a series of half hour trio constellations, and a final collective blast for all. An unexpected guest appearance by trombonist **Conrad Bauer** on the last evening added an element of surprise. Exhaustive music indeed.

By mid-fall, Europe is literally rocking with festivals, of which the Berlin events are two drops (albeit significant ones) in the bucket. In neighbouring Holland, there were no less than three festivals running during the second half of October. Rotterdam's ***Heineken Jazz Festival***, is a week long event with concerts in one of the city's major halls, and a wide range of club activity going on at the same time. On my one night in town, there were a number of shows slated at the main venue, called The Doelen. Both an eye and ear-opener was the Dutch singer **Greetje Bijma**, whose very stage presence was as stunning as her considerable vocal prowess over a remarkable six octave range. Although the music she presented with her quintet had popish twists to it, the singer was certainly worth catching. Also present was the AEC who opened once more for the Brass Fantasy (but no male chorus in this instance). Closing out the night was Ray Baretto's latin band, an entertaining way to wind up the evening despite the terrible acoustics of the hall's foyer.



The real rendezvous for all aficionados of the New Music scene was the ten-day ***October Meeting***, held for the most part at Amsterdam's Bim Huis. Essentially a reprise of the premiere in 1987, this second edition featured many return guests meeting in a number of specially conceived projects and some more informal ones. The night I attended yielded varying results, ranging from the engaging to the dubious. For starters, the trio of **Marilyn Crispell**, **Gerry Hemingway** and **Urs Leimgruber** attempted to work out a meaningful whole from their open-ended excursions. But the meeting did not really gel, the saxophonist seemingly not on the same wavelength as the two well-acquainted Americans. On the dubious side of things, the Italian tenorman **Daniel d'Agaro** brought a traditional Sicilian folk ensemble, with a couple of dancers in traditional attire for added colour, and the cello of **Tristan Honsinger**. The proceedings came off as an awkward meeting of free improvisation, string ostinatos and stomping feet. You figure it out... After this set of lengthy duration, an awaited first time encounter between **Paul Bley** and **Anthony Braxton** was now in the offing. True to himself, Braxton was skipping all over his alto and soprano while Bley mused over his keyboard. Though a meeting of the minds was not far away, each of them seemed to retreat into his own corner, concluding their set rather anticlimactically with a sheepish version of *I'm Getting Sentimental Over You.*

The best set of the evening, was the trio of **Guus Janssen**, **Ernst Glerum** and **Gerry Hemingway**. Together, they glided in and out of swinging pulses, mixing good grooves and free form forays in a stimulating way. Regrettably, it was time to move on to another destination, but by the looks of it there was plenty of interesting action in store for the remaining six days of the event.

Elsewhere, there was a three day symposium in Bremen dealing specifically with the whole European improvised music phenomena. While very learned and astute talks were scheduled in the afternoon - the speakers being academics and journalists, with one notable exception, - there was a series of evening

concerts that was the best demonstration of the state of that art. Solo outings and duets were the main formats presented. Bassist **Joëlle Léandre** and the Dutch saxophonist **Luc Houtkamp**, the indomitable team of **Misha Mengelberg** and **Han Bennink**, the free improvisation guru himself **Derek Bailey** and a pianist unknown to me, one **Pat Thomas**. Whereas the fun of the Dutch team was enjoyable, Bennink using everything in sight for percussion, the seriousness of the latter duet required close concentration. By the way, Bailey was that one exception noted above, and true to his ethic his talk was in keeping with his music. Totally spontaneous and interspersed with recorded snippets from cassettes. His approach set all of the other formal and well thought out speeches on their heads. A delightful subversion to say the least.

The highlight of these days, however, was the performance of the ten piece ***King Übü Orchestrü*** of **Wolfgang Fuchs** which had an eleventh member on this occasion, the Finnish bassist **Teppo Autaaho**. Unlike its free orchestra predecessor, the Globe Unity, the emphasis here is on timbre and subtle dynamics, all of this revealing much fine detail and nuance in its shadings. Apart from the nominal leader, whose solos were effective in their concision, there were many more good moments to be heard, thanks to the trombones of **Gunther Christmann** and **Radu Malfatti**, the violinist **Phil Wachsmann** and the reeds of **Peter van Bergen**, displaying his tall standing contrabass clarinet.

As busy as the festival schedule is at that time of the year, the whole club scene on the continent is always humming. Generally overlooked in most music surveys, Belgium has also much to offer, though on a somewhat more modest scale. Divided between two cultures, like Canada, that country has two communities of musicians that only occasionally intermingle. On the one hand, the French part, known as Wallonia, has stronger ties with the jazz mainstream, its main city, Liège, being the birthplace of such notables as René Thomas, Bobby Jaspar and Francy Boland. Nowadays, that city has a devoted jazz following, some of whom are responsible for the country's only jazz magazine, ***JAZZ IN TIME*** (in French). Apart from a yearly jazz festival in Liège, and another summer event on its outskirts, there's live jazz produced on a regular basis at the Lion Sans Voile. Caught on two occasions were the trio of San Franciscan pianist **Jessica Williams**, and a young Dutch quintet called ***Scapes***.

While the all-American trio played in the jazz tradition with the leader showing her allegiance to Monk, the Dutch quintet sported a two saxophone line and a repertoire of intelligently conceived post-bop originals by the bassist **Tony Overwater**. In Flanders, the other half of the country, experimental and free music have more solid roots, with saxophonist André Goudbeek and pianist Fred van Hove being its best known representatives. Time not permitting, a visit to that part of the land will surely be on the agenda for yours truly's next junket.

In neighbouring Germany so much is happening that it would take an article in itself just to give a mere overview. In and around Stuttgart, for instance, a live music scene is happening on a daily basis. Thanks go in part to the active Musikhochschule and its dynamic director of the jazz studies program, **Bernd Konrad**. While there, the Hungarian bassist **Aladar Pege** demonstrated his impressive virtuosity, running up and down the neck with gusto and at the same time stoking the fires for his quartet of compatriots, egging on the saxophonist **Laszlo Mako**.

In a suburb by the name of Esslingen, one club has forged a solid reputation as an in-place for new music, the Dieselstrasse. Chicago-born but New York-based pianist **Myra Melford** was heard there with her trio of **Lindsay Horner** (bass) and **Reggie Nicholson** (drums). A very personal (and personable) melodicist, she combines the blues with impressionistic harmonies and sudden energy bursts akin to those of Marilyn Crispell. Sounding neither derivative nor radical, her style is nonetheless a fine example of the contemporary jazz idiom, her best suit being her clever compositions that distil many influences creatively.

By the end of the journey, one feels stimulated by all this action, and one can only look forward to a return visit. Stay tuned for the second instalment of this "jazz-travelogue", dealing with a survey of European recordings gathered while being on the road... again. □

For visitors travelling to Europe this fall, jazz information can be obtained by writing ***Det Danske Jazzcenter, Borupvej 66B, DK-4683 Ronnede, Denmark.***

GUNTHER CHRISTMANN photograph by Bill Smith.
FRED HOPKINS photograph by William Ellenberg.

MUSIC FROM MONTREAL

In The Myth • **Yannick Rieu Ensemble** • Amplitude JACD-4011
Reunion • **Bernard Primeau Jazz Ensemble** • Amplitude JACD-4019 / A Few Colours • **Luc Bourgeois** • Amplitude JACD-4024
Musique-Idee • **Michel Ratte** • Amplitude JACD 4017 / Beating The Racoon • **Icarus** • Amplitude JACD-4022

THESE FIVE RELEASES FOCUS ON MUSICIANS WHO ARE PRIMARILY ACTIVE IN THE MONTREAL AREA

AS I RECALL, MY FIRST opportunity to hear saxophonist **Yannick Rieu** was on a recording by Montreal drummer Guy Nadon (Guy Nadon et la Pollution des Sons - Jazz Image JZ110). A take charge, no nonsense kind of player, Rieu's solos stood out boldly, bringing that little something extra to an otherwise well coordinated but lackluster session. ***In The Myth*** presents Rieu on his own terms and emphasizes not only his skills as an instrumentalist but his capabilities as a composer and group leader as well. Preferring to rely on a dark, brooding sound, Rieu's tenor dominates most of the time. His very able sidemen bassist **Norman Guilbeault** and drummer **Michel Ratte** shadow ever so closely as all three combine to leaf through a sketchbook of abstract originals. The only non-Rieu composition is a highly personal rendition of that old classic standard *Body And Soul*. Pianist **Paul Bley** hops aboard for several cuts (*Ouverture, Esquisse No.1 & Esquisse No.2*) adding his own special dash of ingredients to an already bubbling and flavorful brew. This date proves unequivocally that Yannick Rieu is on an equal footing with his contemporaries the world over and that also includes the lower 48.

A 25 year veteran of the Montreal jazz scene, drummer **Bernard Primeau** has also kicked around the San Francisco Bay Area where he had the good fortune to rub elbows with the heavies like Eddie Henderson, John Handy and Art Pepper. On ***Reunion*** he maintains a steady course steering his ensemble in a typical, modern mainstream direction. The main attraction here however, is a rare appearance by the elusive **Nelson Symonds**, recognized by many as being one of the true legends of Canadian Jazz, a distinction he shares with fellow guitarist Sonny Greenwich. Another major plus is Primeau's intelligent choice of material. *All Passengers Aboard* proves to be the ideal opener. A bluesy Jimmy Heath original, it gives everyone a chance to unwind. Symonds sets a comfortable groove by slowly building his solo to a stunning climax. Not to be outdone, pianist **Jean Beaudet** digs in and delivers on this and every other track. **Norman Guilbeault's** plump, luscious bass lines not only help to shore up the rhythm section, but his own individual statements are awash in a perfect blend of technical brilliance and gut level soulfulness. Check out his lightning dexterity on the quick tempoed *Domino* or the way he works his bow into a gorgeous *Time After Time* dialogue with guitar and piano. An up beat, festive mood permeates Newk's *Everywhere Calypso* as Alain Labrosse is added on percussion and Primeau brings his pots to the boiling point. The remainder of the tracks include *Fair Weather* one of Benny Golson's lesser known pieces, a delightfully swinging *Too Marvellous For Words* and as the grand finale, Monk's *Bemsha Swing* is given an extended workout courtesy of the entire ensemble which again features the percussive talents of Labrosse.

A Few Colours is a polished, tightly disciplined septet dedicated in its pursuit of musical excellence. This particular session revolves around the compositions and arrangements of **Luc Bourgeois** who is also the group's guitarist. Unveiling a substantial assortment of colours, shapes and patterns, Bourgeois' finely crafted charts extend a challenge to performer and listener alike. Although this is largely a joint effort, there is a liberal sprinkling of spirited solo work with everybody getting in a lick or two. Special mention should be made of **Andre Leroux's** hefty tenor, **Jeff Johnston's** fleet keyboard explorations and the pleasingly sour tone and keen edge of **Michael Marcuzzi's** trumpet. A far better than average improvisor in his own right, Bourgeois is equally at home on acoustic and electric guitar. In fact *A Tear In My Ear* which features his fresh, unfettered acoustic approach is just one of many highlights this exhilarating CD has to offer.

Judging from the rather lengthy liner notes and the overall direction of its basic concept, drummer **Michel Ratte's** ***Musique-Idee*** aims more for the head than the viscera. Much of what is presented comes across as sounding cold and calculated however, there are enough rewarding moments to stimulate one's interest and imagination. An exceedingly high level of professionalism among the participants also allows the music to unfold in a precise, flawless manner. On the initial cut the trio swells to sextet size with the inclusion of violin, cello and viola. Saxophonist **Yves Charuest's** Braxtonian tendencies introduce an early AACM flavour to a couple of tracks while *Cinq* a duel between Ratte's drums and **Guillaume Dostaler's** synthesizer brings to mind one of Sun Ra's interplanetary excursions. Regardless of the setting, Ratte's hands are always firmly on the controls. It is precisely this constant interaction between rigid structuralism and complete freedom that makes this collection so appealing.

In an effort to gain greater public acceptance as well as retain a respectable amount of artistic integrity more and more groups are attempting to merge a myriad of sounds and divergent, stylistic influences into a uniquely singular voice. While many of these bands have met with only marginal success, others have been able to hit the mark on a more consistent basis. By incorporating various ethnic strains (African, Latin ,European etc.) with elements of jazz, free form, new age and rock, **Icarus** creates a pleasing concoction that should whet a broad range of musical appetites. The unit's off beat instrumental make up in conjunction with the intriguing compositions of **Marc Villemure** and **Eric Longsworth** help imbue ***Beating The Racoon*** - a bizarre title if ever there was one - with a special charm. All four players seem completely at home in these surroundings as they effortlessly adapt to the sudden shifts in mood, direction and tempo. Individually, violinist **Stephane Allard** takes top solo honours with guitarist Marc Villemure running a very close second. Both cellist Longsworth and drummer **Pierre Tanguay** work closely together with Longsworth at times assuming the rhythmic duties of a bassist. The end result is a zestful and imaginative jaunt that demands more than just a cursory listen. - ***GERARD FUTRICK***

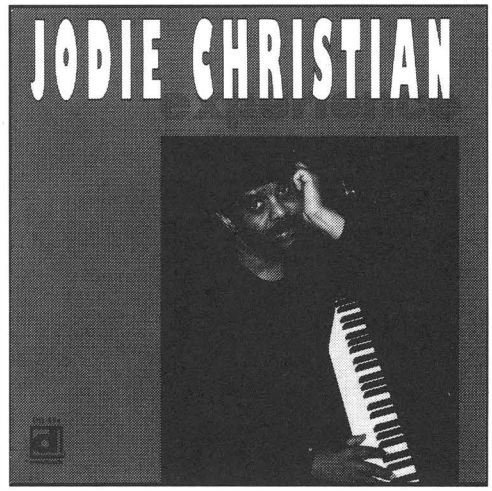
JEAN BEAUDET PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL SMITH

JAZZ SPECTRUM

MALACHI THOMPSON

The Jaz Life (453)

"The Jaz Life" is the name of a musical by trumpeter Malachi Thompson. It has received a couple of showcase readings featuring some of the music on this recording. Adding more fire to the *"The Jaz Life"* are saxophonists Carter Jefferson and Joe Ford.



JODIE CHRISTIAN

Experience (454)

If the name Jodie Christian is familiar to you it's either because you are a Chicagoan or because you have already heard him playing piano on other artists' albums. This debut as a leader features Jodie playing both in piano solo and trio settings.

FRANZ JACKSON

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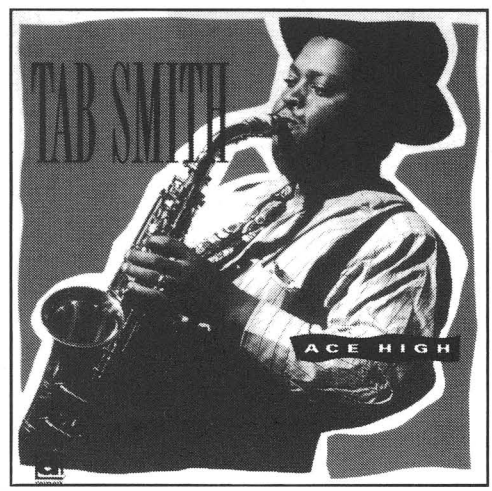

TAB SMITH

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TRIANGULARITY

PIANO TRIO RECORDINGS IN REVIEW

BY BEN RATLIFF

MYRA MELFORD
Photographer Unknown
STANLEY COWELL &
WALTER BISHOP JR.
Photographs By Gerard Futrick

ABOUT FIFTY YEARS down the road since it became commonplace, the piano trio—the basic chicken stock of *modern* jazz playing—is still capable of new surprises, though one finds a lot of out-of-date ideas in an average pile of new jazz piano trio recordings. Since a trio can present such a distilled vision of a pianist's organizing principle (or, in some cases, of three different organizing principles), trio sessions are the records one finds most rooted into a style, a tradition, a tight leather briefcase of musical values. And, yes, they can be boring. But the spartan roominess of only three instruments playing together—and the balance of two percussive instruments, over the variable personality of the bass—often affords enough space to show bulges and idiosyncratic angles that don't come out so easily in other group situations. The piano is the jazz instrument with the largest harmonic palette, and by the same token, when a musician looks deep within himself, he can express what he sees most trenchantly with the use of the piano. Piano trios as we know them are essentially a creation of the bop era, when the individual imagination began to be celebrated instead of the ensemble sound. So when you hear a piano trio record, you are always hearing a personality. You may also be hearing the result of a record company's penury, or its bravery. Whatever they represent, piano trio records of all description are flowering lately, and we've received a dozen which constitute a pretty neat cross-section of the current jazz scene.

Henry Chaix, whose trio's new record is ***Jumpin' Punkins*** (Sackville CD 2-2020) is a Swiss pianist with an unpredictable taste in choosing tunes. He loves the Corinthian, baubles-and-bangles swing contraptions in melodies like Benny Carter's *Titmouse,* and seems to take to the prim optimism of Gershwin, Berlin, and Kern (represented here with one song each) as much as the big-city blues (in his own *Jack's Blues*). Chaix, who led an orchestra in the sixties which has been recorded with guests like Buck Clayton and Rex Stewart, is an eclectic, circa 1955, with a spartan style: there's no fat on his lines, even on *Ruby, My Dear,* that beautiful Monk sketch which always makes pianists want to darken in all the empty spaces with harmonies. This is Chaix's first recording under his own name for a decade, and it was recorded live as a sort of 65th birthday party. I found Romano Cavicchiolo's hi-hat clenched too tightly shut (and at that, too loudly miked) to enjoy much of what the rhythm section does, but Alain du Bois' performance on bass is solid, if not adventurous: he walks in all the expected places.

Another little-known, seasoned piano eclectic is **Hod O'Brien**, who spent about twenty years as a sideman (with Oscar Pettiford, Rene Thomas, and Roswell Rudd, among others) before making his first record under his own name in 1985. ***Ridin' High*** (Reservoir RSR CD 116) is his second, and it proves O'Brien to be a real

find. All his patient, linear solos are small, hard-won battles: he's constructing lines, not just reeling them off. His own compositions are slightly less interesting—a fast-tempo ballad; a strolling blues; a slow, minor key bossa nova—but they're secondary to O'Brien's marvellously logical, sensitive playing. He sounds like a slightly more relaxed Bill Evans, without all the tight springiness in the attack. The rhythm section here is Ray Drummond on bass and Kenny Washington on drums, who have been used on an endless list of trio sessions, and for good reason—they're never anything short of completely sympathetic to whatever's in front. Drummond gets the opportunity to prove himself all the way through the album, as he weaves in and out of O'Brien's zigzagging single-note solos: for example, the five choruses in Gigi Gryce's *Up In Quincy's Room,* where pianist and bassist play an increasingly complex round of hide-and-seek.

A jazz record for people who rate Carole King and Jackson Browne as great composers of our day, the **Warren Bernhardt** Trio's ***Ain't Life Grand*** (Digital Music Products CD-478) is all touching sentiment and gooey balladry. About half its selections were written by Bernhardt, the former pianist for the fusion group Steps Ahead, and all of them stick to your fingers: even in the absence of electronic saxophones, Yamaha DX-7 keyboards, and the other usual trappings of pop-jazz, the music seems to establish a corniness in its every move. It's dinner music—for a mushy, overcooked stew—and Bernhardt can take all the discredit, because his sub-Ahmad Jamal mistiness isn't especially echoed by the rhythm section of bassist Jay Anderson and drummer Danny Gottlieb (although Gottlieb adopts the annoying habit of using his sizzle cymbal at every possible opportunity). This will be well-reviewed in **Jazziz,** because they're all unquestionably competent musicians, and because DMP prides itself on sonic cleanliness—so much so, in fact, that they print the technical information about which microphones, pre-amps, and A to D conversions were used for these sessions, in lieu of listing the musical personnel. But if you're more in tune with the aesthetics of this magazine, steer clear of this one.

Serious Fun (Enja R2 79659), a live set by the **George Gruntz** trio, is an interesting

boiling-down project: the result is unlike anything else George Gruntz has done with his big bands, simply because it's been hard to imagine what he would do with only two accompanists. What he does here is shrewdly pursue the spirit of the album title for about three-quarters of the set, and play in a heavily-chorded, exultant flush for the other, less interesting quarter. The good parts, and the reason for the record's appeal, are homages. *Death March,* a scaled-down version of the finale to Grunt's 1988 opera *Cosmopolitan Greetings,* is a kind of humor-found-in-despair, pentatonic adaptation of Monk's *Blue Monk.* There are also two pieces inspired by ***Kind of Blue,*** *ALL-ergic BLUES* and *SO: WHAT fun???,* which play games with the restrictions of modality, keeping the original premise of Miles' themes but often leaping into witty, driving blues choruses. There's one guest appearance by the flugelhornist Franco Ambrosetti, which is only middling—and it's a ballad, a variation of *Autumn Leaves.* It's an interesting adaptation, but it disrupts the playful mood of the record's best parts.

For many of the record companies mentioned here, piano trio recordings are curiosities, experiments, or short-run projects. Up to the beginning of the sixties, the prominent jazz labels pushed piano trio records as a matter of course, but with the advent of bigger waves to catch (free groups, pianoless quartets, large-band concepts), piano-trio sessions were marginalized into the province of small, independent labels. That's still in effect—Blue Note, RCA, and Columbia still have a virtual embargo on trios, except for the occasional Marsalis or Harry Connick project—but Japan's DIW label seems to have plans for the re-emergence of piano-trio sessions as vital music. They've been steadily issuing interesting sessions for a few years now, very high-quality recordings of what might be above-average performances at Bradley's

(the home of post-bop piano trios, in New York's Greenwich Village). One of their recent issues is the **Walter Bishop Jr.** Trio's ***What's New*** (DIW-605), which has the often overlooked bop-era pianist pushing out the corners aggressively. This is one of those albums in which comportment is everything: you can take Bishop's technical proficiency for granted, as you can with the bass-drum battery of brothers Peter and Kenny Washington. But there's a certain touch Bishop has—in his astonishing *I'll Remember April,* he's playing rapid-fire bebop piano without sounding like he's breaking a sweat, and he injects quotes from *Un Poco Loco* and *Misterioso* for good measure. Bishop's more than comfortable with '60s moodiness, too, as heard in his version of Wayne Shorter's *Speak No Evil.* These are the highlights, along with a loose-limbed reading of *Things Ain't What They Used To Be.* (Kenny Washington, in case you didn't already know, can do anything: he can lay back and get himself in that secret position behind the beat that makes for a perfect, relaxed shuffle-swing; he can also make himself sound hemmed-in, paranoid, navigating through a maze of tall buildings.) But all the tunes on the album are interestingly chosen, and all given the same madly inventive treatment: at times, it's as though Bishop's not even really in the tune, but commenting on it from a distance.

Stanley Cowell's such an intriguing musician, and such an anomaly in his crystalline perfection, that you couldn't really imagine a uninteresting trio session under his name, especially one with the solid hitters Cecil McBee on bass and Ronnie Burrage on drums. These are the players on ***Close To You Alone*** (DIW-603 E), and it's exciting listening. Cowell is a daredevil in every facet of pianistics—those hard, glinting glissandi, all the harmonic depth, and the sureness of touch make him a piano player's piano player. The attention to structure and correctness is at a minute level; these performances are like delicate glass sculptures. Cowell's never been a big name because he's refused to make his rebellions obvious or extra-musical. It seems that all his drive to create a new contribution to the music has gone into the depths of his technique, not his general approach to making music. So on his records you'll have a blues like Cecil McBee's *'D' Bassic Blues,* which is pretty straight-ahead on the surface, but Cowell gives it odd little chordings, and sudden flashes of an almost perverse dexterity bubble up in the cracks. Each member of the trio contributes two compositions to this record, and it all ends with a *Stella By Starlight* which sounds revised, as though written by Cowell in the 1970s.

In a recent issue of **Wire** magazine, Jack Cooke made the following comparison: as Earl Hines' *trumpet style* of piano playing evolved from Louis Armstrong's principles, so has John Hicks' *tenor style* of piano playing evolved from Coltrane's. If you don't like that, how about a baseball analogy? Hicks is a clean-up hitter, heaving a huge amount of notes at you; the power and heft of his constant crescendo-building is usually more convincing than his rhythmic ideas, which have a sameness. Great for home runs, limited as a singles hitter. By that theory, ***Power Trio*** (RCA/Novus 3115-2-N), which pairs **John Hicks** with Elvin Jones, is an ace-in-the hole idea: they're perfect for each other, burrowing into their own rippling waves of music, with Cecil McBee making his bass sound as fat as possible to complement it. But they don't go far enough. It certainly was wise to put in a couple of Coltranes—*Cousin Mary* and *After the Rain* are crescendo builders if there ever were any—but Elvin only gets used as a prop for the entirety of Strayhorn's *Chelsea Bridge* and almost all of Ellington's *Duke's Place.* A great album for Hicks admirers, but if you want a better glimpse at Elvin Jones these days you have to go to Sonny Sharrock's new ***Ask the Ages. East Side Blues*** (DIW-828), on the other hand, is a less self conscious John Hicks trio album (with Curtis Lundy on bass and Victor Lewis on drums), and it's much more pleasing: Hicks seems less trapped in his own heavy-duty mannerisms, even somewhat versatile. Seven of the eight tracks are written by Hicks, and they show a very personal, velvety kind of sensibility, even as the hailstorms of notes keep moving along through his winding theme passages.

Ronnie Mathews is a much more straight-and-narrow player than most of

the pianists discussed so far, and seems to turn up romance underneath every modulation. But he's not overflowery about it—he's great at what he does, modestly pretty readings of standards and quiet originals. His ***Dark Before the Dawn*** (DIW-604) is a perfect example of the sort of record which is now either released on DIW or not at all, considering that Mathews is past the career-building stage and is still little-known. The compositions are mostly a mixed bag of little-known covers (including one by Bill Lee, the consistently underrated composer and father of Spike), except for Billie's *You Don't Know What Love Is* and a treatment of Johnny Mandel's *Theme from MASH* which, don't worry, will not engage your gag reflex. Melodic in a taut, balanced way, this music is equally adaptable for concentration or unobtrusive background music, which by itself is good proof of its seriousness and lack of ostentation.

James Williams always has come across as an extremely organized musician, but without the sparseness that usually goes along with that trait. He's eloquent, both fancy and logical at the same time, and his DIW trio record ***I Remember Clifford*** (DIW-601)—which, due to his inability to grandstand, is not under his own name but appears as a co-op session with Richard Davis on bass and Ronnie Burrage on drums—has everything nailed in place. That might be dull for some listeners, but after all, Williams only appeals to some listeners. He's not daring, aggressive, or experimental in any way, but his sense of timing is unerring, and from a technical standpoint he has one of the best right hands in the business. The single-note runs in Ellington's *Take the Coltrane* are dizzying—he's great at fast tempos—but a little vapid and inconclusive in Phineas Newborn's andante *Shelly.* Williams is a perfect team player—always right in the music, never hijacking the session, and the baton-passing of solos are accomplished so effectively that you barely notice what's happening.

Although the straight-ahead DIW sessions mentioned thus far can seem sometimes to represent the definitive present state of the piano trio, there are still a few exceptions to the rule, music which is more suited to the Knitting Factory than Bradley's. The **Geri Allen/ Charlie Haden/Paul Motian** trio whose new DIW album ***Segments***, is truly a co-operative group, each member bringing a wonderfully distinct personality into the arena, and they react to each other tirelessly. The music they've been making since they first started playing together in the mid-eighties is really an extension of what was first explored in Paul Bley's early Savoy trio records with Steve Swallow and Pete LaRoca; since that music was never able to make the deep impression it should have (recorded in '62 and '63, those records were drowned by the tidal waves of Ornette, Coltrane, and Miles' new inventions), it's a wonderful thing that this trio is doing the job now, and in their spare time, at that. Allen, of course, is jagged and deeply lyrical at once—listen to her bold self-assertion here with the well-trod syntax of Parker's *Marmaduke!* — and highly sensitive to her rhythm section, which is not the two-dimensional scrim of so many piano trios, but a bubbling, rumbling, kinetic cartoon, constantly changing colours and redefining itself. Haden's pathos is never lugubrious, Motian's exactness is never predictable. It's improvising without a net, but entirely melodious, and the three personalities shine through like beacons. This record is the trio's best yet, but they keep outdoing themselves.

Myra Melford doesn't have the benefit of a foreordained chapter in musical history—her only previous recordings were self-produced solo and duet (with the flautist Marion Brandis) tapes. But with ***Jump*** (Enemy EMCD 115) she couldn't make a more auspicious leap out of the starting gate. Like Allen, as well as Bill Evans and Paul Bley, she's not just treating the trio situation as another session: you can tell that many of these three-way conversations were written for a trio, and probably this particular trio (Lindsey Horner is on bass and Reggie Nicholson, of the AACM, is on drums). Her natural bent is percussiveness, and her driving precision fits tightly with Nicholson's similar way of drumming. Every so often she'll build up speed and start to demonstrate her earnestness as a free player, for which Horner and Nicholson are always there as ballasts, but I'm always impressed by her advanced way with structure: if, in her first album, she's already into multi-partite compositions, successful blues and latin inflections, and broken structures that can whiz past you without your noticing them, where will she go next? For its coherence, and for Melford's fearsomely virtuosic hand technique, this is the kind of record which might persuade a timid listener that *outside* music has something to say. □

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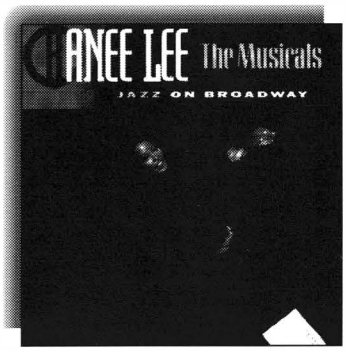

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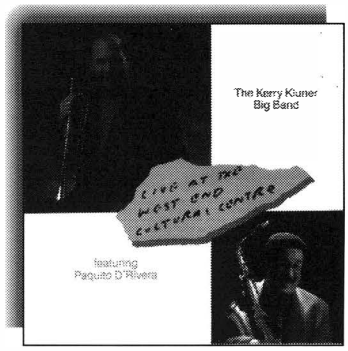

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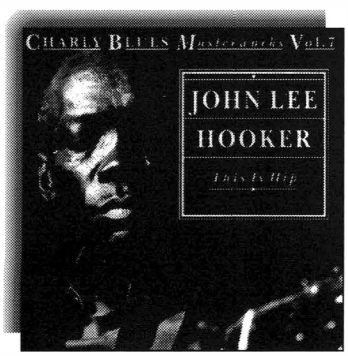

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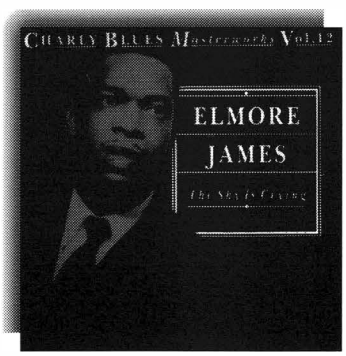

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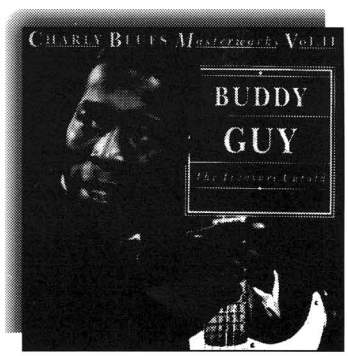

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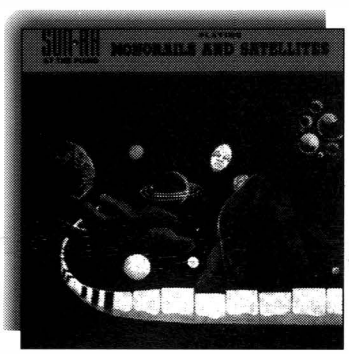

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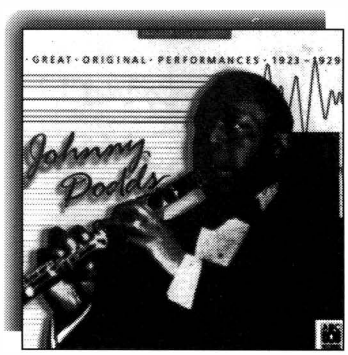

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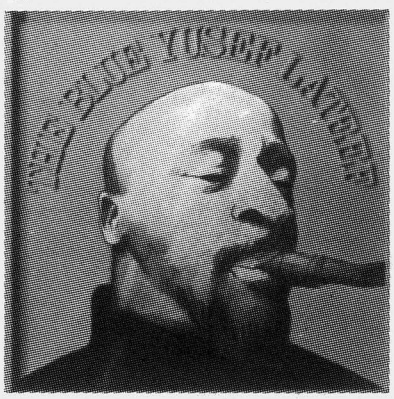

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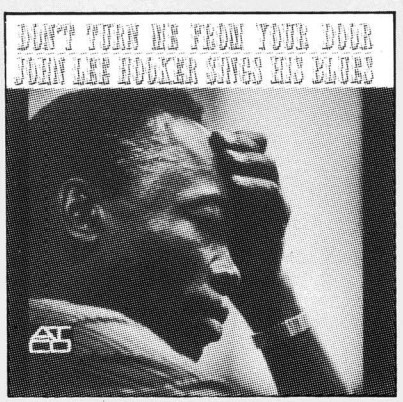

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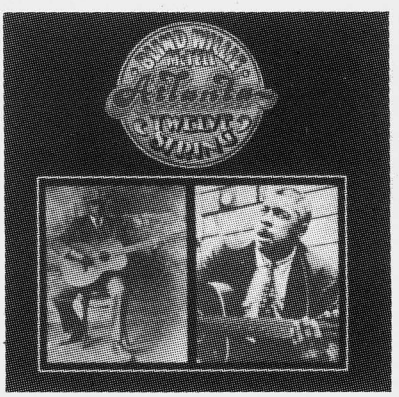

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