

THE JOURNAL OF JAZZ AND IMPROVISED MUSIC

# CODA MAGAZINE

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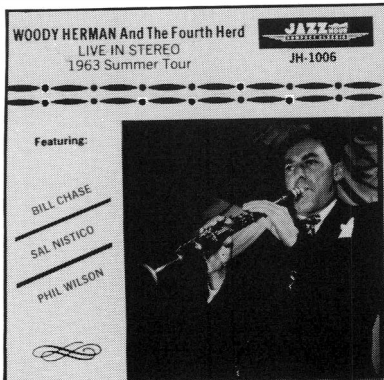
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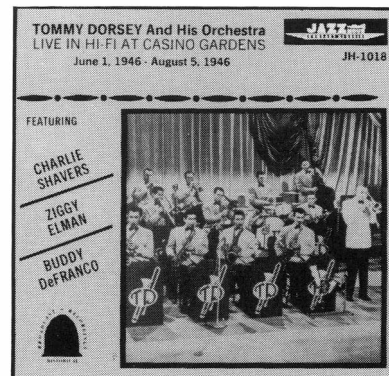
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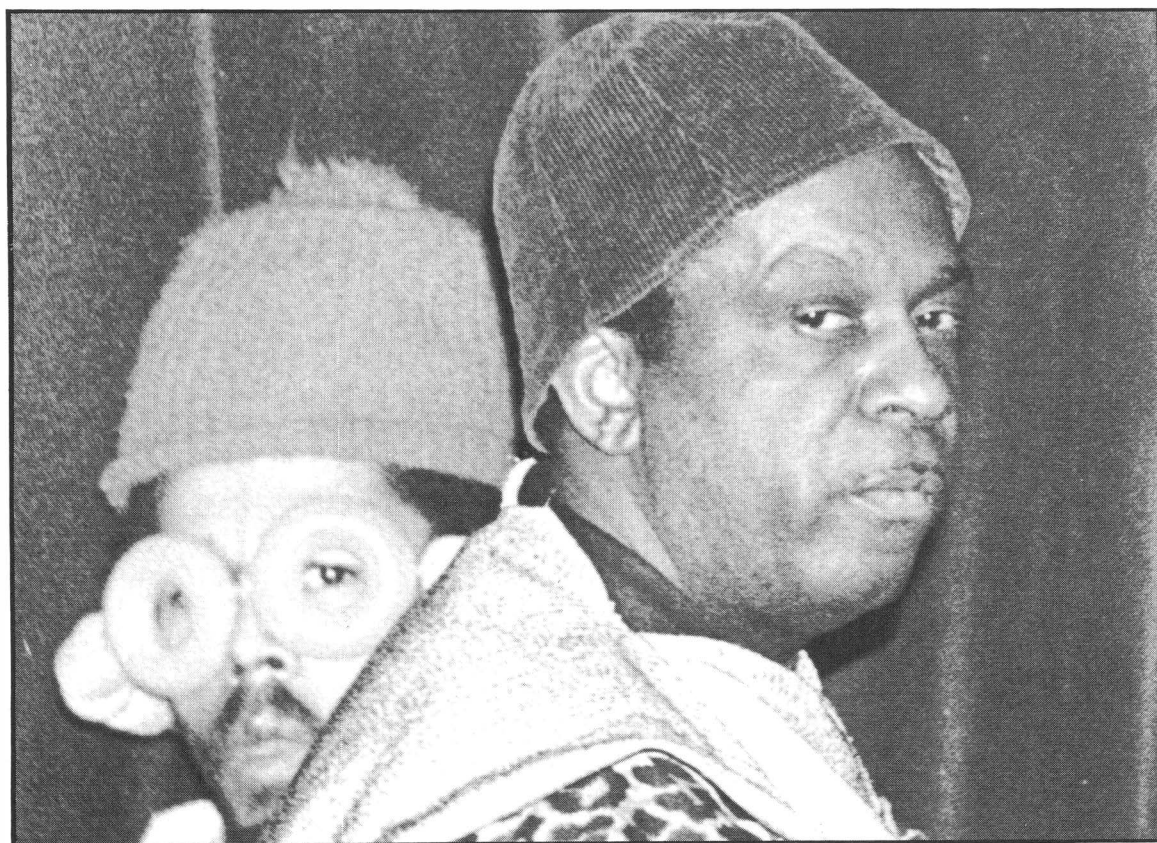
COVER PHOTOGRAPH OF JOHN COLTRANE BY JOE ALPER



# SUN RA • MR MYSTERY

JAZZMASTER INCARNATE, THEATRICAL PRESENCE EXTRAORDINAIRE, Sun Ra has enriched and enlivened the creative scene throughout the world for more than forty years. The most innovative Jazz orchestrator since Duke Ellington and Big Band Father Fletcher Henderson, Ra's pioneering ways have helped pave the way for a wealth of breakthroughs. From the emancipating modalities of Miles Davis and John Coltrane, to the chromatic challenges posed by pianist Andrew Hill, and the pan-idiomatic dramatics employed by the Art Ensemble Of Chicago, Sun Ra's influence is everywhere.

AN OVERVIEW BY  
MICHAEL F. HOPKINS



PHOTOGRAPHY  
BILL SMITH

Few know, for instance, that Ra helped establish the concept of the artist owned company with his **Saturn Record** label, decades before the idea came into vogue. His use of stage costumery and otherworldly scenario, dismissed for years, is but intensified African American minstrelry: a traditional expression which the Myth Realist and his Arkestra has freed from cork-toned degradation. Stripped of the pre-Rap mammyface imposed by Al Jolson and others, what's left is a master storyteller's song and dance, a wondrous show. Rich in its ties to the Jazz film shorts which pioneered the

first half of this century, Ra's thespian musicality continuously sets precedents which the likes of MTV have both misappropriated *and* ignored.

Yet, if Sun Ra has been accepted, it has been only on the most grudging terms. Like Lena Horne and Eubie Blake, Ra became another African American elder whose career seems to have been applauded chiefly for surviving youth, and enduring critical apathy. The point of exactly *what* has prevailed, has been obscured by the media and industry alike. Time and again, each has distorted Ra's showman-

# TREASURES FROM THE FILES OF SATURN

ship into the hokum-ridden image of flim-flamming lunacy. The same industry which currently promotes wholesale plagiarism in the name of ethnic pride, and genocidal buffoonery in the name of cultural genius, has always shown its readiness to uplift nonsense to the grace of Imperial new clothes, while denouncing the efforts of authentic Music scientists (especially those rooted in Jazz) as charlatanism.

The fact that even the tersest of Ra's efforts will reveal a deep mastery of a Music ( a grip that one *must* have to be *effectively* avant garde) has gone largely unrecognized by the public-at-large. A 1970s reissuing of vintage **Saturn** recordings by ABC-Impulse went ill-promoted, and poorly distributed. Recent CDs on A&M and Black Saint are erroneously surmised to be his "traditional Jazz reformation" from his "out past". With the exception of the two albums from the Delmark label (one of which, Ra's very *first*, is now on CD), there exists no well-marked documentation of Ra's early years, and no verification of what only the most longtime concertgoers have always known.

Until *now*. From the efforts of a new-found label, **Evidence Music**, come five Saturn recordings released for the first time on compact disc. The remastering is superb, and the CD booklets contain each album's original cover art, along with astute annotations from some of the foremost jazz critics around. With solid distribution, and a fidelity which far surpasses their original releases on LP, the music of Sun Ra and His Arkestra can be enjoyed as most have never enjoyed it before; deep from the pocket, *straight on out*. Ranging from his very first recordings taped at home in the early 1950s, to the mysteries of solo piano in the late 1960s, this series showcases a mastery of Jazz, its bold history, and dutiful transitions which is unlike anything *anyone* has done before. Or since.

Start with 1956's **Supersonic Jazz** (ECD 22015), recorded not long after the

inaugural **Jazz By Sun Ra** (now the Delmark CD **Sun Song**). There, you hear the twilight-sculpted use of early electric piano on modal precursors like the entrancing *India* (Ra's Third World prance, not the Coltrane classic from 1961), or the stunning solo performance of *Advice To Medics*. That this is a Big Band that can take even the Bop runs of Gillespie and Tadd Dameron elsewhere is evident upon hearing the surging *Super Blonde*, or *Soft Talk* by trombonist Julian Priester (one of many jazz notables started on their way by the jocular Mr. Mystery). The gospel-based *El Is A Sound Of Joy* was first recorded here, and we see that the Ra use of a tonal colour is already well in place. Fresh from time with Earl 'Fatha' Hines and Sonny Stitt, tenor giant John Gilmore shows the classic tonality and daring balladry that marks his work with Ra throughout this series, and throughout the decades. Here, one can enjoy other longtime Arkestra perennials like baritonist Pat Patrick, forgotten Raphiles like trumpeter Art Hoyle, and more familiar players like Priester and baritonist Charles Davis.

1958's **Jazz In Silhouette** (ECD 22012) is a hallmark of tasty swing, regality, and depth, ranking alongside the 1940-41 Ellington as some of the most essential Music ever recorded. Try the magical summons of *Enlightenment*, or the spell and chant of *Ancient Aethiopia*, and feel the musical bond between continents spoken of frequently by South African-born master Abdullah Ibrahim. Ra standards like the fast-galloping *Saturn*, and the finger popping cool of *Images*, make classic appearances here. A particular treat is *Blues At Midnight*, a streamlined blowing session which includes the enigmatic maestro on piano *and* celeste. The selection is presented in its entirety on the CD, and will please those only familiar with the truncated version on this album's Impulse release. Among those invaluable to the timeless quality of **Jazz In Silhouette**, one must note the haunting trumpet of Hobart Dotson, the sturdy, supple wizardry of bassist Ronnie Boykins, and the alto saxophonics and flutistry of

the renowned James Spaulding and Arkestra shootist Marshall Allen. An epic.

Between 1958 and 1960 marks the period for the original recordings that bore the title for the CD **Sound Sun Pleasure** (ECD 22014); the standout of which is a bewitchingly beautiful rendition of Monk's *'Round Midnight* that will bring tears to many an eye. A sumptuous orchestral reading of the epic ballad, it features the beguiling voice of singer Hatty Randolph. The Chicago-based chanteuse renders *'Round Midnight* in a plainerly vibrant manner akin to the vocal-ity of Ellington great Ivie Anderson, or Ra's own sorceress, June Tyson. Randolph also shimmers on *Back In Your Own Backyard*, with Ra's celeste sprinkled in for good measure. The rest of the session features the soft melancholy some find in the *Hour Of Parting*, and a comely reprisal of *Enlightenment*. *You Never Told Me That You Care* plays a wistful smile upon the lips, and *I Could Have Danced All Night* bids you to do just *that*, gladly.

The rest of the CD, however, is of special interest for a different reason. Consisting of music taped mostly at home between 1953 and 1955, they represent Sun Ra's *earliest* recorded efforts. While the sound quality here is not the equal of the rest of the CD (or the rest of the series), the sound is a vast improvement over the Saturn LP release in 1973, and the music is vital. Of special historic note is *Deep Purple*, which finds Ra softly note-spinning on an organ-like keyboard alongside the legendary violinist Stuff Smith. Note, too, singer Clyde Williams amiably delivering some of Ra's most cheerful lyrics on *Dreams Come True*. The CD ends with singer Randolph belting out a lively version of *Lover Come Back To Me*. A true touch of joy.

By 1966, Ra's abilities as an exploratory leader would be showcased on a trio of classic avant garde LPs released on the ESP label (now available on imported CD through Magic Music). In the midst of these creative tempests, the Myth Realist found the time to record **Monorails And**



PAT PATRICK

Fueled by the reactionary nature of this adulation, the media (and many older Jazz artists) made sure that the likes of Cecil Taylor, Gunter Hampel, Walt Dickerson, and Jeanne Lee paid the price. To this day, the term “avant garde Jazz” is mistakenly thought to mean “anti-white”, “anti-Swing”, and “anti-Jazz” because of media irresponsibility, and the community’s own failure to take care of business.

Easily the most visible of the New Wave in Jazz, Sun Ra was one of the precious few from *within* the aesthetic (along with the likes of *Omni-Americans* author Albert

Murray) to denounce the pseudo-nationalism of the late 1960s as a betrayal of not only these judicious musical uprisings, but the very principals of Black Awareness that it supposedly upheld. Liner notes for albums like Black Lion’s *Pictures Of Infinity* feature Ra’s scathing pronouncements on the hypocrisy found amongst Blacks by this time; many of whom, he felt, were dangerously close-minded to anything but what was deemed “Black enuf”. Here, the science fiction showmanship takes on its most speculative ingenuity, as Ra’s calibre of Blackness assumes the quality of the proverbial stranger in a strange land, incisively noting what we precariously take for granted.

It is this precious gift of insight which empowers the series’ fifth CD, *Holiday For Soul Dance* (ECD 22011). While the late 1960s and early 1970s feature some of Ra’s most creative abstractions (like the freewheeling tango of the anthem *Space Is The Place*, this late-1960s CD features Ra and Arkestra at their most expressively gentle. A collection of finely-rendered ballads and standards, *Holiday For Soul Dance* stands as a testament to how tradition may be both upheld *and* furthered. More Arkestra perennials (like log drummer James Jackson and reedsman Danny Thompson) enter the picture here, while singer Ricky Murray delivers pining reflections of lonely need

on *Early Autumn*. Gilmore and Ra serve up the Jazz artist’s challenge, *Body And Soul*, with unforgettable elegance. From loveable themes like *Holiday For Strings* to the upbeat tip pumping *Keep Your Sunny Side Up*, Ra and the Arkestra lights a candle in the window of the ages, filling our eyes with the eternal workings of stardust.

With five more Saturn releases set for this fall, and more in the works, one can hope for the eventual CD release of the late-1970s/early 1980s masterworks like the two-fisted *Live At Montreux* (featuring a *hardjamming* version of *Take The A Train*, the ethereally-swinging *Omniverse*, and the breathtakingly tender *Interstellarism*. The last, a 1980 LP, features June Tyson singing a jaunty *Sometimes I’m Happy*, and the sweetest, most acutely dramatic version of Charles Chaplin’s *Smile* since the classic Nat King Cole rendition. Yes, there is much in the offering, waiting to be heard.

All in all, this is a historic series which holds essential listening for any serious jazz connoisseur. From Blues-shouting stomp to hymnlike refrain, the Evidence collection shows definitive, irrevocable proof of the Myth Realist’s awesome credentials as a Jazz master. Even if you’re not a Sun Ra fan, you owe it to yourself to give these recordings a chance. Simply put, they happen to be some of the sweetest sounds this side of Saturn.

*Write Evidence Music, 1100 East Hector Street, Suite 392, Conshohocken, PA 19428, U.S.A. for further information on these, and future releases from El Saturn, Theresa Records, and more. Special thanks to Jerry Gordon and Howard Rosen for their help in the preparation of this feature.*

Author of the independent column **Bloods Edge**, Michael F. Hopkins teaches **Perspectives In Jazz** for the Dept. Of African American Studies at the State University of N.Y. at Buffalo . A Ph.D. candidate for UB’s Department of American Studies, he also teaches **Topics In Art And Culture** for that department. Artist-In-Residence for the N.Y. State Alternative Literary Programs In the Schools since 1980, and the author of **A Kind Of Twilight**, a collection of poem and essay. □

*Satellites* (ECD 22013), a liltily sure-fingered recital for solo piano. Recorded a decade before his highly acclaimed late-1970s LPs for the Improvising Artists label, this earlier session is a masterpiece, featuring the balance of scamp and serenade that many revere in Ra’s pianistry. Listen to his soothing ruminations on *Easy Street*, the teasing boogie rumbling through *Space Towers*, or the starlight twinkle of *The Galaxy Way*, and you hear the outpourings of a great artist alone with his expression. Intimate and outstanding.

By 1968 and 1969, Ra’s experimentation was badly misunderstood and cruelly ridiculed, largely because of the media-shaped militancy compromising much of the Black Aesthetic, particularly in America. For far too many (then, and since), to be Black no longer meant the reaching humanity spoken of by Langston Hughes and Martin Luther King, but an embittered narcissism that settled for the same pettiness and hatred it condemned in others. Where Malcolm X said “By Any Means Necessary”, vested interests from all sides twisted this credo for survival and growth into an excuse to *vandalize, scandalize, and dogmatize* in the name of racial upliftment. The myriad emotionalism of avant garde Jazz was badly misinterpreted by misguided youngbloods, who rallied around what they thought to be “angry sounds” alone.



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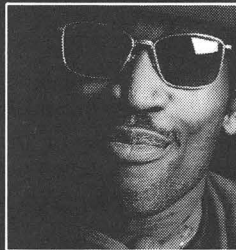


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# DAVE McMURDO

## THE ORCHESTRA ALIVE IN RUSSIA

WE ARE OUTDOOR SPECIALISTS, DAVE McMURDO SAID RECENTLY AS HE LOOKED BACK ON HIS ORCHESTRA'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The band was the opening act for the 1991 version of the DuMaurier Downtown Festival at Toronto's Nathan Phillips Square. Later in the summer they participated in the Woodstock-like environment of the Beaches Festival. These events were in stark contrast to the 16 day tour of the then Soviet Union in early June.

The attitude towards artistic things is so different there and we had no idea of how much respect is given to performers, commented Dave as he thought back about the hectic days in several of the Russian republics. The tour took the band to parts of that huge land mass where few foreigners had been before. The reception everywhere was the same. The audiences responded enthusiastically and the warmth and hospitality of the local musicians was overwhelming.

All cultural presentations were handled by the State Agency until the political climate began to change in 1991 when the McMurdo band finally got to make its long planned trip.

"It was nearly five years ago when a friend of mine who worked in External Affairs in Moscow first suggested that I try and set up a tour. It took many letters and phone calls to get things moving. External Affairs in Ottawa became the primary sponsor. They liked the idea of sending a large jazz band to the Soviet Union, something which had never been done before. Once the basic idea had been approved it took another 2 1/2 years to turn it into reality. External Affairs put us in contact with an agency which was doing business with the Russians. They had been presenting such groups as the Kirov Ballet here and were sending Canadian troupes to the Soviet Union. They were dealing with independent impresarios and this made it much easier for us to meet the local people and interact with their musicians."

Additional financial support came from the Ontario Government's Ministry of Culture and Labatt's Brewery. Finally, after a false start, the band got the word that they were to tour the Soviet Union for 16 days in June 1991. Two large containers contained all their equipment and an abundance of useful souvenirs (musical accessories and food) as gifts for the local musicians they expected to meet.

"From the beginning I had insisted that we were to have the opportunity to not only meet the local musicians but also to have a chance to play with them. We already knew that there were a lot of



good musicians there and we felt it was important to be able to exchange ideas and views in this way."

No one could have anticipated the extent to which this simple idea in human relations was to be taken. "Everywhere we went the reception was fantastic. We got to take part in sessions and the standard of musicianship was very high. In Sverdlovsk we were invited by the bandleader to hear this big band. They are very formal about such things and it was something we would not have been able to decline. The band was set up to play in the Red Army Hall where we were to perform later that day. It was a nineteen piece band and you must realize we had no idea what to expect. We practically fell off our chairs when the band opened up with a Thad Jones chart. I recognized it from one of the Thad and Mel records and they played it well. They had a great drummer and

an excellent lead trumpet. The jazz solos weren't terrific but they got by. Later when they took a break we noticed that the parts were all hand-written. It turned out that the bandleader had taken all those complicated parts off the records because they have no access to printed charts!

We spent three days in Sverdlovsk, a city in Western Siberia and, until January 1991, not open to foreigners due to the sensitive nature of the products manufactured there. On the opening night at Philharmonie Hall, a magnificent Concert Hall built in the 1890s, we had the choice of four different grand pianos. The packed house loved us! It was the same two nights later at Red Army Hall. That night we played straight through without an intermission as we had a train to catch. The audience just didn't want to let us go. The Russian people tend to be a little reserved at the beginning and then they warm up. They are very romantic and know all about American composers and their works like Rodgers and Hart, Gershwin and the major jazz composers like Monk! At that concert we played a new Reg Schwager piece called *Forget Me Not* and a voice from the front at the end shouted out, 'Bravo! We will never forget you!'

The band's music continues to be heard and seen. In Sverdlovsk the band taped a one hour TV show which has been repeated several times across the local networks. An earlier TV show in Tblisi, the Georgian capital, also included extensive interviews with the individual musicians in the band.

For most of the tour the band performed in beautiful concert halls with excellent acoustics and wonderful pianos. These high points were framed with a beginning and ending which were less salubrious. Difficult long distance communications sometimes meant that the local entrepreneurs were uncertain whether the band was really coming. The final concert in Moscow, for instance, was only set up while the band was actually into the tour. As noted jazz commentator and host Alexi Bateshev observed, "This is a city of 8 million people. If we had known sooner we could have filled a large concert hall several times over. There are a lot of jazz fans here." So it was a disappointment that the band's music only got to be heard by several hundred people in Moscow. At least the city's musicians were there in force.

After more than 40 hours of travel from Canada the band arrived in Batumi, a Black Sea resort only ten kilometres from the Turkish border. This was the first of three concerts in Georgia. The venue was a wonderful old building which normally housed a circus. The only piano in the place was way up on the balcony. As Dave explained, "These concert promoters were wonderful. They couldn't do enough for you. Somehow or other he found a Fender Rhodes and the concert ran smoothly with an audience of close to 600 enjoying the music. The next day we went to Kobuleti. We played in a football stadium, and a concert had never been held there before! Once again the entrepreneur was improvising, trying to get the stand built to support the band!"

From there the bus headed to Tblisi, the capital of Georgia. It's a beautiful sub-tropical city set in mountains and has a very Mediterranean feel. Like the event in Moscow too little time prevented the word from getting out and only a small audience heard the band performing in the Sports Palace, capable of holding 20,000. It was the site of one of the Benny Goodman concerts in 1962. The local musicians were there, of course, and the band put out as if there were thousands on hand.

Everyone was impressed with the warmth and hospitality of the people of Georgia. The Canadian musicians experienced the same unending sense of celebration as that experienced previously by Goodman's musicians.

The musical high point of the whole tour was probably the three days in Perm. "We even called a rehearsal there, just to touch up on things which weren't quite right. It was such an unusual experience for any Canadian band of any size to play for such large audience on a nightly basis that we wanted to make sure we were ready!"

On arrival in Perm a TV news crew was waiting to interview "the Maestro". Not only was the interviewer knowledgeable about jazz she also wanted McMurdo's view on the elections then being held for the

first time. Neatly sidestepping a potentially awkward moment he merely stated that he was glad the Russian people were exercising their democratic rights.

Three sold out concerts were held at the Tchaikovsky Ballet and Opera House. A large sign over the stage backdrop carried a huge maple leaf flag and the name of the orchestra in Russian. In the lobby, each night, there was a brisk trade in posters in English. The acoustics of this hall are phenomenal and the band responded with brilliant performances.

Hospitality in Perm was first class: a lake cruise, sessions and plenty of parties. It was there that the band pooled all its Canadian foodstuffs, augmented by a few local delicacies, and threw a party in its hotel suite for the local hosts and musicians. The Russians gobbled up the Canadian canned foods while the Canadians filled up on Russian specialties. Contrary to the fear before they left that there would be food shortages it must be said that nearly everyone returned home a few pounds heavier! There was always plenty of food and at the private parties in people's homes all manner of food and drink magically materialized!

So it was appropriate that the final Moscow concert took place in the Theatre of Friendship. That was certainly what was achieved by this group of highly skilled and dedicated Canadian musicians who carried the jazz message across thousands of kilometres of Soviet territory.

Donna McMurdo and Gord Graham kept the organization moving while Dave McMurdo concentrated on musical matters and his role as "The Maestro", a position of respect rarely accorded the leader of a jazz band in the culturally and financially moribund Western world. □

BAND PERSONNEL OF THE DAVE MCMURDO ORCHESTRA WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE JUNE 1991 TOUR OF THE SOVIET UNION.

**Trumpets:** Sandy Barter, Mike Malone, Chase Sanborn, Kevin Turcotte, Neil Christoffersen

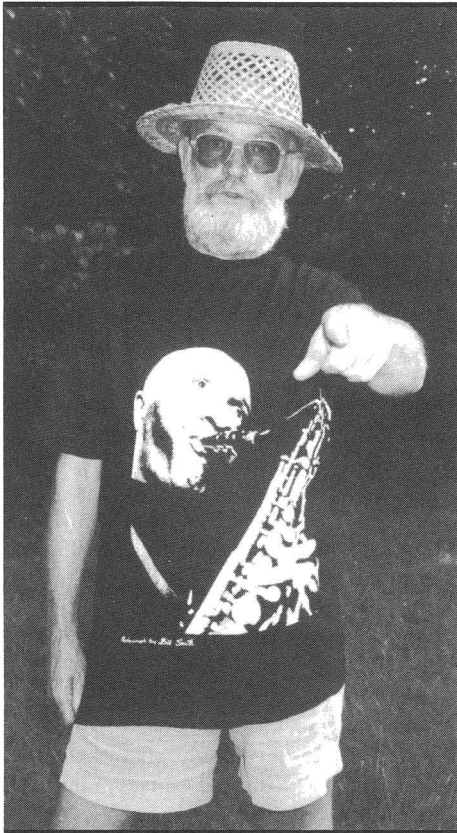
**Trombones:** Dave McMurdo, Rob Somerville, Terry Lukiwski, Ted Bohn, Bob Hamper

**Reeds:** Don Englert (alto), Mark Promane (alto), Alex Dean (tenor), Michael Stuart (tenor), Perry White (baritone)

**Rhythm:** Gary Williamson (piano), Reg Schwager (guitar), George Mitchell (bass), Kevin Dempsey (drums)

## AN ARTICLE BY JOHN NORRIS

**FOOTNOTE:** In April 1992 the Dave McMurdo Orchestra performed for five nights at Toronto's Montreal Jazz Club. Phil Sheridan recorded the music for future release on CD. The band's first recording is now available on Jazz Alliance and features the compositions and arrangements of Mike Malone, Dave McMurdo, Phil Nimmons and Don Thompson.



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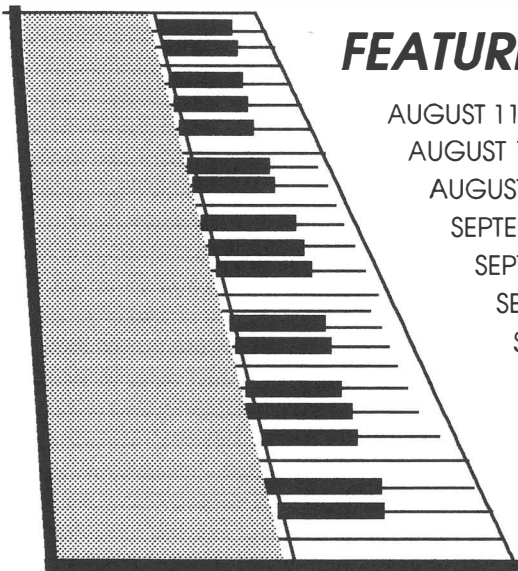
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# BOB THIELE

## ONCE AGAIN FLYING DUTCH

An Article  
By James Rozzi

Not long ago a sixty-eight year old record producer named Bob Thiele was heard making this comment in his warmed-over Bogart accent: "It's too much work trying to produce records and run the entire business end of a record company too. Being a producer is what I find I really should have been doing all along." And yet, the man who gave us such diverse and classic sounds as Coleman Hawkins' *The Man I Love*, Jack Kerouac's controversial readings to the tune of tenorists Zoot and Al, Buddy Holly's *That'll Be The Day*, and John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* is back from a relatively short tenure as an independent producer and once again delving into the "business end" with his own newly inaugurated record label called Red Baron Records.



COUNT BASIE, BOB THIELE AND DUKE ELLINGTON • PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL MORH

In what is often regarded as the most cut throat of businesses, success in the recording industry doesn't come easy, whether measured by dollars and cents or the making of a true to your heart good record. Not being one to succumb to the whims of society, Bob Thiele has always marched to the beat of his own drummer. It is by happenstance that throughout his fifty years in the studios, Thiele's drummer just happened to be playing a beat that everyone could groove to. "I never think in a commercial sense," states the unassuming Thiele. "The jazz records I've made are made for me. I put together the players that I personally love."

Recalling his early childhood which found his family abandoning Brooklyn for suburban Forrest Hills when he was seven, Thiele reminisces, "There was always music around the house. My father was always bringing home records, 78s of the popular big bands, but there was no musical background to speak of. Hal Kemp lived about three doors down from us. While I was in early high school, I became interested in jazz and collected jazz records. I spent an abnormal amount of time listening to them. It was records in the daytime and live music at night; we'd go to Nick's in the Village, which was sort of a home for Eddie Condon's groups. My parents probably thought I was nuts because while most kids were out in the street playing baseball, I was in my room for four or five hours straight listening to

jazz...Jelly Roll Morton, Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman...."

"In my last year of high school, one of the year end assignments was to design a logo for a fictitious operation and I picked a record logo and designed two, one of which was called Signature. Coincidentally, about that time I began to hear so many musicians who weren't being recorded that I went ahead and started to make records for what became a real company called Signature."

How did the musicians take to the seventeen year-old producer? "I was always well received. It's difficult to talk about yourself," says Thiele candidly, "but my personality was such that they knew I was for real and not just some jerky kid. I was really into the music and I think they respected that. I've always gotten along with musicians very well. That's the reason I've been able to work with so many of them and maintain those relationships."

At about the same time—in the late 1930s—Thiele and his friend Dan Priest started one of the earliest monthly jazz magazines, titled **Jazz**. Thiele remembers, "We had great writers, like Doug Ramsey, Charles Edward Smith, and Charles Paine Rogers who would write for us for nothing, just to get their stuff in print. There was no outlet for important jazz writers."

Following his initial sessions with Art Hodes (available along with Erroll Garner's first sides on **Classic Pianos** CBS 38851), Thiele's Signature label became quite successful, pressing as many records as possible with the limited quantities of shellac available during World War II. Thiele entered the Coast Guard and was lucky to be stationed at Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn, from whence he and his cohorts (including fellow Guard member Shelly Manne) could wander onto 52nd Street and dig on a nightly basis while making important contacts for recording. "We'd record at midnight because of the military schedule; we had to be back by dawn," remembers Thiele. "One of the sessions produced what I consider to be a classic, *The Man I Love* (available on **Classic Tenors: Lester Young/Coleman Hawkins** CBS 38446). At the time, most companies would press only 10-inch 78s. But the reason *The Man I Love* turned out as a 12-inch 78 was simply because Coleman Hawkins wouldn't quit. He'd take extra choruses. I'll never forget..We were recording at radio station WOR in the middle of the night and right during the middle of that record, a cleaning woman walked in with a mop, intent on cleaning the studio. I literally walked out into the studio, put my fingers to my lips to be quiet, then held her arms. They played, and I'm holding the cleaning woman. That's a part of *The Man I Love* that not too many people know about."

After selling stock in the company and expanding into the pop field with records by Johnny Long and Skinny Ennis, Signature became unwieldy as badly organized distribution by General Electric Corporation pushed the early independent label into bankruptcy. "General Electric's branch managers were told to order a lot of records and did, so we thought we were selling a lot of records," Thiele recounts. "We couldn't figure out what was wrong. One summer we travelled West and found thousands of records in the basements of their stores. It happened so quickly that Signature just folded up in 1948 or 49."

Following several "meaningless jobs," Thiele went to work as assistant producer for the newly formed Coral label, conceived by Decca's Jack Kapp to give the burgeoning independent labels a run for their money. "Coral was distributed by people who were distributing the independents," recalls Thiele, who soon became head of A&R. "Decca was really out to drive these smaller labels out of business." The scenario that followed surpassed their greatest hopes.

"The Crickets had recorded *That'll Be The Day* in New Mexico and the record wound up with me, to audition it. Unbeknownst to me, it had already been played at Columbia and several others. Nobody wanted it. I freaked out...I loved that record. I wanted to put it out but the company brass were opposed, mainly because it was a little too raucous for the Coral label, which was into Lawrence Welk and Teresa Brewer. I remembered that Decca owned the Brunswick label, so I suggested we put it out on that. They agreed, only because I was the young 'hot' producer. By this time I had a lot of hits. In fact, that's how I was able to record jazz at Coral—Hot Lips Page, Terry Gibbs...Jazz Town, U.S.A, which was like Jazz At The Philharmonic and really quite exciting. Basically, it was like the brass saying, 'Let's keep Bob happy. Let him have his fun with jazz records as long as he keeps making pop hits.'"

"I'll never forget. I was sitting in the office and the Philadelphia

distributor called up and wanted sixteen thousand copies of the record shipped overnight. Later, I had the idea to put Buddy Holly on Coral and leave The Crickets on Brunswick without breaking up the group. The rest is history. More hits came with R&B singer Jackie Wilson."

From Brunswick and Coral, it was on to Dot Records where Thiele was able to produce a few jazz sides by Manny Album, Yank Lawson, Bob Haggart, and Steve Allen, but was principally responsible for maintaining a pop label—an easy task after Thiele persuaded Debbie Reynolds and Lawrence Welk to make the switch from Coral to Dot with him. "The beginning of the end of my association with Dot," remembers Thiele, "was when I recorded Jack Kerouac reading his works with Steve Allen noodling on piano. The record was seen as obscene and pornographic, so they pulled it off the market. One thing led to another and I left the company. Steve Allen and I then started a company called Hanover/Signature, obtained the masters and issued the Kerouac record ourselves. Then we made a second one with Jack, Al Cohn and Zoot Sims; Kerouac said he'd only do another one if his favourite musicians would play. I was sceptical...with two tenors blowing against him...but it became a call and answer situation and turned out beautifully. I think what affected Steve and myself was Kerouac's feel for jazz. He loved jazz, but the way he read his poetry...there was sort of a flow to it that made you think of jazz if you knew jazz. It made you think of a horn, as if the guy played."

Now available through Rhino Records, this boxed set (**The Jack Kerouac Collection** R-70939) also contains Kerouac's third and final recording (originally issued on Verve) as well as a lavish 40-page booklet. Even Thiele is impressed: "It's one of the most beautiful boxed sets you'd ever want to see. Steve and I helped them by doing interviews. It's just beautiful."

After achieving a reasonable amount of success with Hanover/Signature by following up the Kerouac releases with comedy recordings of Steve Allen, Jose Jemenez and Don Knotts, along with jazz recordings by Ray Bryant, Toots Thielmans, and an interesting Don Elliot/Sasha Berland record of chipmunk-type scat—**The Nutty Squirrels**—Thiele changed companies, leading to a quantity of recordings that set the jazz world on its ear.

As the first ads announcing the arrival of ABC's new label, "Impulse! The New Force In Jazz Recording," appeared in a 1961 issue of **Downbeat**, Creed Taylor's initial sides as A&R man were in fact not nearly as forceful as those yet to come. The first Impulse releases were: **The Great Kai & J.J.** MCA 39109 (sideman Bill Evans keeps this somewhat interesting), **Ray Charles: Genius + Soul = Jazz** (available on DCC Jazz Classics), and **The Incredible Kai Winding Trombones** (currently unavailable). The fourth, and by far the most interesting of these, **Gil Evans: Out Of The Cool** MCA 5653, gathered up five stars from **db**, finding reviewer Gilbert M. Erskine impressed at seeing "Evans plain—not concerned with creating suitable settings for Miles Davis."

Taylor was soon replaced by Bob Thiele, who relates in Ted Fox's **In The Groove: The Stories Behind The Great Recordings** (St. Martin's Press/1986): "I don't know the arrangement [Taylor] had with ABC,

but after he made the first six or seven, I came in and they asked me to continue the Impulse catalogue. I know I was *living* in the studio. Over a period of three to five years, maybe, I must have made literally two hundred albums.”

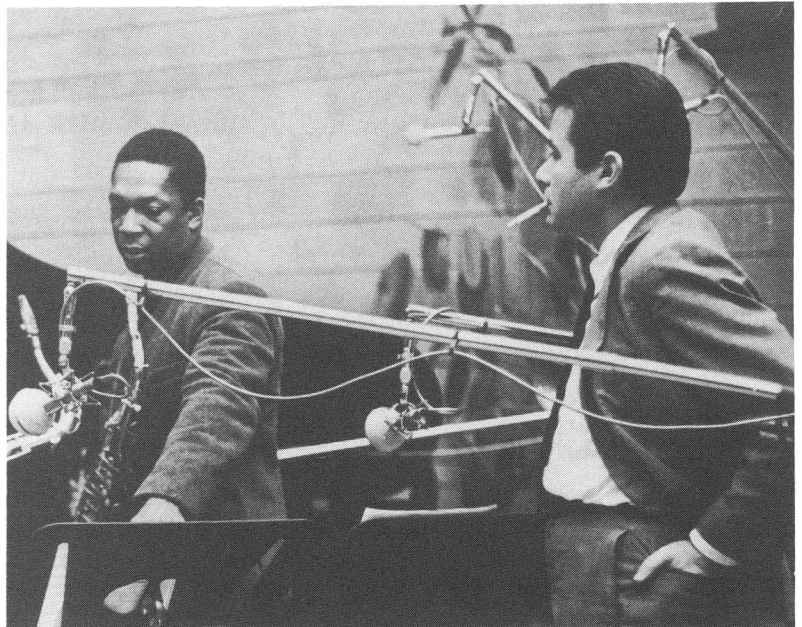
Coincidentally, tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, who became Thiele’s principal artist, was the only Impulse artist signed to a contract upon Thiele’s arrival. Coltrane’s first Impulse album, **Africa/Brass** MCA-Impulse 42001, is comprised of beautifully orchestrated arrangements by Eric Dolphy. This Creed Taylor production was the sixth album in the catalogue (followed by Oliver Nelson’s triumphant **Blues And The Abstract Truth** MCA-Impulse 5659). The current CD edition has been expanded to include the original **Volume 1**, plus **Volume 2**—three additional takes from the same early summer 1961 session, first issued in 1974.

Several months after the **Africa/Brass** sessions, Thiele was on location, recording Coltrane with his working band of McCoy Tyner (p), Reggie Workman, Jimmy Garrison (b), Eric Dolphy (bcl) and Elvin Jones (d). Unfortunately, only some of the material recorded during Trane’s November week at the Village Vanguard was released, a little at a time, on several individual albums, including: “**Live**” **At The Village Vanguard** MCA-Impulse 39136, **Impressions** MCA-Impulse 5887, and **John Coltrane: The Other Village Vanguard Tapes**, an important twofer LP, issued in 1977 but now unavailable. With only a small portion currently available, one can only wonder why MCA hasn’t taken the time to compile all twenty-two tracks of this important music into a boxed set, for these are undisputed classic Coltrane sides in spite of the controversy surrounding their initial release.

In the early 60s, a barrage of critical denunciations that centered around the call to arms, “anti-jazz,” led Coltrane and Dolphy to subject themselves to a callous interview, published in the April 12, 1962 issue of **Downbeat** as *John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer The Jazz Critics*. Thirty years later, Thiele still gets emotional as he recounts the critics’ egoistical train of thought: “We decided to straighten these guys out once and for all by showing them that John was as great as we thought. I had the idea, but I put it through to John, and that’s how the albums **Ballads** (MCA-Impulse 5885) and **John Coltrane And Johnny Hartman** (MCA-Impulse 5661) came about. I had the idea of the vocal; he chose Hartman.”

As coincidence would have it, Coltrane’s regrettable decision to have his mouthpiece refaced at this time temporarily rendered him incapable of playing anything outside the realm of stately lyricism. His “sheets of sound” were gone with the wind, but regardless of the circumstances, Coltrane was at his expressive peak on these LPs, pouring his soul into gorgeous ballads such as *Say It (Over And Over Again)*, *You Don’t Know What Love Is*, *Too Young To Go Steady*, *I Wish I Knew*, *What’s New*, *It’s Easy To Remember*, *All Or Nothing At All*, *Nancy (With The Laughing Face)* on **Ballads**, and *They Say It’s Wonderful*, along with *Dedicated To You*, *My One And Only Love*, *Autumn Serenade*, *You Are Too Beautiful* and *Lush Life* in the company of the beautifully resonant baritone voice of Hartman. The resulting blatant affirmation of Coltrane’s sensitivity sent many a critic scurrying to save face.

“Coltrane was not one of these ‘haters’...anti-establishment guys...LeRoi Jones, guys like that,” emphasizes Thiele. “They were really reading more into his music than they should have. They assumed too much. Coltrane was playing *music* and that was it. I never heard him say two words about social problems or economic problems. He gained freedom from all of that through his music. He was really a very down to earth, relaxed, quiet sort of guy. He was finding peace, really.”



JOHN COLTRANE & BOB THIELE • PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE ALPER

“A lot of musicians at that time *were* militant,” he continues. “There was *that* period, and I was into it myself. I thought I was helping the cause by getting involved with some of these people. [Charlie] Haden’s group was definitely inspired by this...a militant musical organization (**Liberation Music Orchestra** MCA-Impulse 39125).”

Thiele also brought together the seeming unlikely pairing of Coltrane and Duke Ellington in September of 1962 (**Duke Ellington & John Coltrane** MCA-Impulse 39103), with dramatic results. “I had become friendly with Duke back when I was a kid,” Thiele reminisces. “Whenever I had a chance, I’d go and hear his band. I idolized him. He was a great musician and a great human being.” In addition to being one of Ellington’s close friends and biggest fans, Thiele had previously recorded Duke and Coleman Hawkins (**Duke Ellington Meets Coleman Hawkins** MCA-Impulse 5650) with empathetic aid from Ellington sidemen Ray Nance (crt,v), Lawrence Brown (tbn), Johnny Hodges (as), Aaron Bell (b) and Sam Woodyard (d), as well as the wonderful combination of Duke with Louis Armstrong’s band playing an all-Ellington program, available as **Louis Armstrong/Duke Ellington: Together For The First Time & The Great Reunion** Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab UDCD 01-10514. Another Louis Armstrong/Bob Thiele collaboration generated Armstrong’s hit single *What A Wonderful World*, co-written and produced by Thiele.

“I think one of the most important things about being a producer is

to keep the enthusiasm level high and also, to let the musicians know when we've captured something classic. For jazz, it's true that the more you record something, the more it's liable to go downhill. The spontaneity is so important. Of course, with Ellington, if it's there in one take...even if there are some flaws in a solo or whatever...if it's exciting, usually Duke would go with that one version. Coltrane would always record a piece over and over again; he'd be in the studio for hours."



ARCHIE SHEPP AND JOHN COLTRANE • PHOTOGRAPH BY DENNIS HENDLEY

"During the Ellington-Coltrane session, at the end of one of the tunes...first take...I looked out into the studio and I could see that Coltrane wasn't quite sure. I went over to Duke who said, 'Yeah. That was it.' He looked at Coltrane and said, 'John, let's go with this.' So, Coltrane said to use it as the master. From that period on, Coltrane learned that you don't have to dwell on one tune over and over again."

"We were making more records than we could release of Coltrane," continues Thiele, "but I knew that I needed to capture as much of him as possible. I'd schedule the date at night, then come in the following morning and say, 'Oh, I recorded Coltrane last night.' I figured if they were going to fire me, at least I would have made that last record."

In response to the inevitable question, "Which Coltrane record do you feel is most important," Thiele is quick to respond: "I think **A Love Supreme** (MCA-Impulse 5660) is probably most important," then reiterates, "Coltrane and Hartman, Coltrane and Duke, and **Ballads**..." As a footnote, for this reviewer's ears, **Crescent** MCA-Impulse 5889, **Coltrane Live At Birdland** MCA-Impulse 33109, and of course, the sides recorded live at the Village Vanguard belong right up there as well.

In the October 18, 1969 issue of **Billboard** magazine, Frank Kofsky rightly predicted, "It is as certain as anything can be that when the history of the black music from this tumultuous decade is written, considerable space will have to be devoted to the recording activities of Bob Thiele." Always willing to share accolades, Thiele gives credit where credit's due: "Coltrane was always responsible, because John would always call me and tip me off as to who was good and what guys were playing where." Thiele's open-mindedness resulted in fine recordings by the likes of saxophonists Albert Ayler (**Live At Greenwich Village** MCA-Impulse 39123) and Archie Shepp (**Fire Music** MCA-Impulse 39121) who succeed at depicting the plight of 1960s African Americans, using a musical medium.

Despite condemnation by those who refused to understand the music, the records sold well. But convincing the critics of even this hard fact often took a concerted effort. For example, published in the April 21, 1965 issue of **Variety**, was Thiele's letter to the editor regarding a piece from an earlier issue entitled *Jazz Mugged By "New Thing,"* by staff writer Herm Schoenfeld: "Schoenfeld is on thin ice when he states that records by 'new thing' artists do not sell," begins Thiele. "Today's college students, young writers and critics all recognize the new jazz as a sincere means of expression. Jazz record sales (especially avant garde music) are greater than ever."

Even at ABC-Impulse, Thiele had his battles, as he relates in a 1975 issue of **The Songwriter's Review**: "I wanted to record Pharoah Sanders for ABC. It took me two months to get approval to record him and no one wanted to spend any money. The first album was made for scale. I think he got \$300 or \$400 to make the record. And until the record came out, everyone said, 'What kind of crap is this; this isn't going to sell; it doesn't mean anything; it's a lot of junk; you can't dance to it; you can't listen to it.' But after the record came out, I remember the president of the company saying, 'Hey, did we sign that Pharoah Sanders?' I said, 'No, you didn't want to.' 'Oh,' he said, 'Sign him up now; let's get him.'" For his follow-up, Sanders' second Impulse album, **Karma** (MCA-Impulse 39122), topped the **Billboard** jazz charts for the entire summer.

Never abandoning his roots, Thiele continued to promote the non-"New Black Music" (NBM) side of Impulse as well. Swinging straight-ahead dates prevailed, such as the classic recordings: **Count Basie And The Kansas City 7** MCA-Impulse 5656, an outstanding swinger from 1962, features Thad Jones (tpt), Frank Foster (ts), Frank Wess (fl), Eric Dixon (fl, ts), Freddie Green (g), Ed Jones (b) and Sonny Payne (d); a 1965 quartet date of **Sonny Rollins On Impulse** MCA-Impulse 5655; **Sonny Rollins: Alfie** MCA-Impulse 39107, with fine arrangements by Oliver Nelson; **Art Blakey: Jazz Messengers** MCA-Impulse 5886, featuring Lee Morgan (tpt), Wayne Shorter (ts), Curtis Fuller (tbn), Bobby Timmons (p) and Jymie Merritt (b); **Charles**



**Mingus: Mingus Plays Piano** Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab MFCD 783 highlights Mingus' gentle side with solo piano renditions of ballads *Body And Soul* and *I Can't Get Started*; **Black Saint And The Sinner Lady** MCA-Impulse 5649, a dynamic extended work for Mingus' all star eleven-piece ensemble; **The Artistry Of Freddie Hubbard** MCA-Impulse 33111, finds the trumpeter sharing the front line with the underrated tenor of John Gilmore, who is seldom heard outside the realm of Sun Ra's Arkestra.

Thankfully, the future of the Impulse reissue program (which has been at best an MCA afterthought), lately has come under the guidance of Michael Cuscuna, who already has worked his magic on many labels, including Blue Note and his own reissue label, Mosaic. The MCA subsidiary, GRP Records—previously known for pop-jazz—is now the umbrella label under which all MCA jazz, including Impulse, will be issued and reissued. Several Thiele-produced Impulse sides recently reissued under the GRP banner are **John Coltrane: Live In Japan** GRD-4-102, a remarkable four CD set from 1966 which was three-quarters unavailable in this country until now; the turbulent sounds of **John Coltrane/Archie Shepp: New Thing At Newport** GRD-105; duets with percussionist Rashied Ali on **John Coltrane: Interstellar Space** GRD-110; folksy melodies and expressive overblowing on the exemplary **Albert Ayler: Love Cry** GRD-108; **Stanley Turrentine: Let It Go** GRD-104, a swinging quartet recording featuring Shirley Scott on organ; introspective trio and sextet sides from 1964, now released as **McCoy Tyner: Today And Tomorrow** GRD-106; and **Oliver Nelson: Soundpieces** GRD-103, big band arrangements with an additional five tracks of outstanding small group blowing by the leader.

Impulse continued into the late 1960s and 70s without Thiele, who remained at ABC for a short while starting a label called Bluesway, dedicated to the recording of great bluesmen like B.B. King, Muddy Waters, T-Bone Walker, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson and Joe Turner (Turner's **Singing The Blues** MFCD 780, now available through Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab is a fine example). Many of these relationships carried over into Thiele's own BluesTime label, one of several subsidiaries of the Flying Dutchman label he began in 1969. Then it was Dr. Jazz and Teresa Gramophone in the 1980s, which, despite their successes, led Thiele to make the statements which introduced this article. Before throwing in the towel to end those ventures, he was caught in a moment of scepticism, telling Ted Fox in 1985, "I have a label right now called Dr. Jazz. If that label was not distributed by CBS, I would not be in the record business."

After a stint as an independent producer with a slew of well-received late 80s and early 90s recordings for a number of labels (check out **Power Trio** on RCA Novus, with John Hicks (p), Cecil McBee (b) and Elvin Jones (d), or a straight-ahead blowing date by David Murray, entitled **Mingus Samba**, on CBS-Portrait), the Dutchman is once again flying Dutch—Thiele is back with his own label,

again distributed by CBS (more precisely, in the succinct corporate jargon of one of their publicists, CBS is now "SONY...no baloney."). The release of Red Baron Records' first four recordings shows that Thiele hasn't lost his touch at producing winning combinations of artists and repertoire.

Tenor saxophonist David Murray is not particularly renowned as a performer of the standard tune, but as the first artist to be featured in a series of biannual recordings under the heading, "**The Bob Thiele Collective**—a rotating cast of today's best artists," his original material yields to highly personal interpretations of familiar romantic fare on **Sunrise, Sunset** (Red Baron AK 48632). Six of the seven cuts are ballads (*Body and Soul, Round Midnight, Old Folks, We'll Be Together Again, You Don't Know What Love Is, Goodbye*), the only exception being the title track, which initiates intense blowing over a vamp reminiscent of Coltrane's *My Favorite Things*. Similarly, this release calls to mind the semblance of another, previously cited moment in history when players leaning toward the hard avant-garde were given the opportunity to re-acquaint themselves with their softer sensibilities. This is not to mention the inevitable exploration of their roots. One musical quote comes by way of Murray subliminally copping a taste of Coleman Hawkins on the very first turnaround of *Body and Soul*... no great surprise as Murray's sound is steeped in the richness of the big-toned tenors of yore. John Hicks (p), Cecil McBee (b) and Andrew Cyrille (d) round out this well-conceived co-op who chose to tastefully revitalize seven old poetic beauties.

Reaching into a "previously unissued" bag of tricks and coming up with 64 minutes of marvellously recorded, live **Duke Ellington** is as fine a way as any to inaugurate a new record label. Recorded in July of 1960 at Mather Air Force Base, California, **Hot Summer Dance**

ERIC DOLPHY AND CHARLES MINGUS • PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE ALPER



(Red Baron AK 48631) finds this band at its swinging best, with many spirited intros and codas by the maestro. The title is deceiving as Ellington chose to cover a broad spectrum of the band's repertoire, some of which was never conceived as dance music. In addition to more familiar danceables like *Satin Doll*, *Laura*, *I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good*, *Just Squeeze Me*, *Tenderly*, *All of Me*, and *It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing* (the latter three featuring Johnny Hodges), Ellington concertized with fresh renditions of the Ellington/Strayhorn adaptation of *The Nutcracker Suite*, *Such Sweet Thunder*, *Pretty and the Wolf*, and tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves' extended foray through *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*. Ellington's road band consisted of: Willie Cook, Fats Ford, Eddie Mullens (tpt); Ray Nance (cmt & vcl); Lawrence Brown, Britt Woodman, Booty Wood (tbn); Russell Procope, Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Hamilton, Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney (reeds); Ellington (p); Aaron Bell (b); Sam Woodyard (d). Considering the broad array of well-played material in conjunction with the excellent sonics (which clearly and accurately reproduce both the band and Duke's spirited verbal cues from within), this CD is a very welcome addition to the Ellington discography.

Thiele's wife of nineteen years, singer **Teresa Brewer**, celebrates a tribute to Louis Armstrong by giving ample solo space to twelve of the brightest trumpet stars ever to appear on a single recording: Red Rodney, Lew Soloff, Terence Blanchard, Yank Lawson, Wynton Marsalis, Clark Terry, Freddie Hubbard, Ruby Braff, Nicholas Payton, Roy Hargrove, Harry "Sweets" Edison and Dizzy Gillespie. If you're a fan of Brewer's prepubescent style and a jazz lover, this recording may prove to be the best thing that ever happened to you. With all of the great blowing, it's undoubtedly the best thing that ever happened to her. **Memories Of Louis** (Red Baron AK 48629) is a sincere effort to convey the joyfulness of Pops, with felicitous renditions of *St. Louis Blues*, *What A Wonderful World*, *Basin Street Blues*, *I Can't Give You Anything But Love*, and eight other Armstrong chestnuts.

Coltrane's most famous bandmate, pianist **McCoy Tyner**, is found reviving his heated days at Impulse on **44th Street Suite** (Red Baron AK 48630). Fluid and fluent conversations evolve from David Murray (ts), Arthur Blythe (as), Ron Carter(b) and Aaron Scott (d), as Tyner picked relevant topics, from reiterations of the "new thing" to strictly "old business." Stated most articulately is the improvisatory title track (in quartet with Scott, Carter, and a very happening Blythe), with more conventional topics covered by the quintet: two pounding blues (*Not For Beginners* and *Bessie's Blues*), and two introspective ballads (*Falling in Love with Love* and Ellington's obscure tribute to Thiele, *Blue Piano*).

As Bob Thiele assembles the players he loves and issues his recordings with the care and attention to detail that come through years of experience, we can once again anticipate some of the hottest sounds available. "I think the producer is like the in-house critic at a recording session," summarizes Thiele. "When the take is good, that's the one you should go with. All I've had to guide me are my two ears."

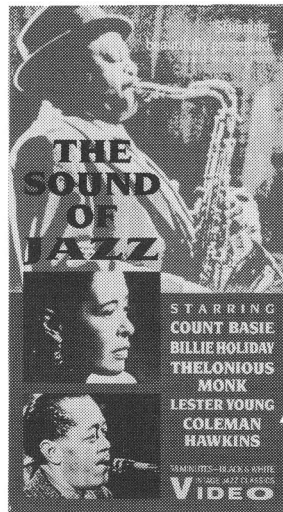
Two ears and the beat of his own drummer—who grooves.



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# THE TIM BERNE PIECE

An Article By Gary Parker Chapin

PHOTOGRAPH BY PEGGY CWIAKALA

FOR ABOUT AS LONG AS HE'S BEEN PUTTING OUT RECORDS, ALTO & BARITONE SAXOPHONIST TIM BERNE has been heavily into arrangements. From the earliest releases on his own Empire label to his Black Saint and Columbia days to the current JMT/Polygram recordings, Berne has lived out his reputation as a prolific composer who knows how to set creative challenges for creative musicians.

**T**wo current recordings — *I Can't Put My Finger On It* (JMT/Polygram), by the co-operative trio Miniature (Berne, cellist Hank Roberts, drummer Joey Baron); and *Pace Yourself* (JMT/Polygram), featuring a Berne led sextet — make this case nicely.

On *Pace*, Berne presents the *Caos Totale*, a sextet featuring Mark Dresser's bass, Steve Swell's trombone, Bobby Previte's drums, Herb Robertson's trumpet, and Marc Ducret's guitar. Taking some detours into Mingus country, this brass heavy ensemble works through some of Berne's most intriguing charts to date. Ambiguity within the ensemble (e. g., the solos are buried in a bass line, sections wind in and out of each other) works to create textural layers and the unity of voice that is Berne's trademark.

Oddly enough, says Berne, this fascination with the writing end of the music came not out of any compositional obsession, but out of a dissatisfaction with his alto playing.

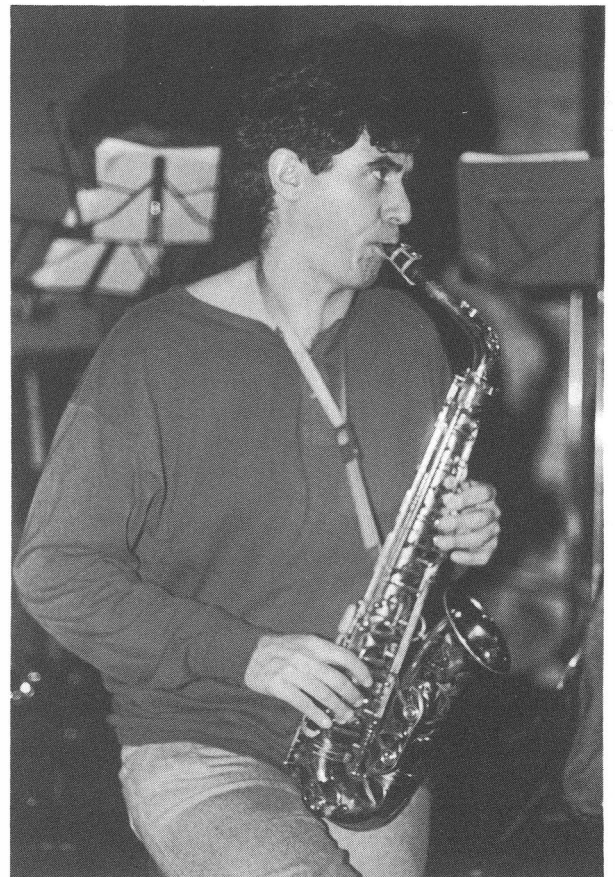
Berne is sitting in a coffee house, working on his second cup. He's a big man, bigger than he seems at a distance, and seems forever tired. Talking about his life and music, Berne can tell a story as effectively as his music can.

"It wasn't until these past two years that I felt confident about my playing," says Berne, "I always had to look at the total picture. I had to deal in ideas and getting people to play together, generating ideas. I worked on playing, and I'm okay with it now, but for the past eight or ten years I just felt that I had to have the writing thing down."

In a way, it makes sense that Berne should feel this way. He came to the alto late (while in highschool) and to music only at the age of twenty.

"In terms of getting me interested in playing jazz," he says, "when I was sixteen or seventeen I heard McCoy Tyner, and I saw Sun Ra play for three straight nights. That was pretty much the first jazz stuff I heard. The big thing was when I went into New York and Sun Ra was doing one six hour set. I went three straight nights, and it just totally blew my mind.

"As far as playing is concerned," he continues, "the record that really turned me around was Julius Hemphill's *Dogon AD*. It combined the music that I had been listening to as a kid — R&B and stuff like that — and this other wildness, particularly [Abdul Wadud's] cello. I just thought it was incredible. It captured everything I like in music. Soon after, I started playing.





"I moved to New York in 1974, and took a few lessons with Braxton. He told me that Julius was in town. I hadn't been playing for long at all, so I called him up, went over to his house, and I just asked if he taught. He said, 'Well, okay.' He never had before that. So a few days later I went over there for the lesson, and he asked me, 'Well, what can I do for you?' I think he forgot I was coming. I totally freaked out. So I said, 'I don't know. You tell me. I just want to learn how to play the saxophone.' And he just said, 'Well, okay.'"

**A**s might be expected, Hemphill's lessons presented a more holistic approach to the horn and music, with some important themes of focus.

"The big thing with Julius was always tone, that was a real focus. He showed me things to do in terms of getting a sound that, in the end, became the most important things I'd learned. But we'd have these lessons. They were almost totally free form, sometimes they'd last five hours. It was pretty haphazard. We'd talk about magic. We'd talk about anything. It wasn't very regimented. It wasn't done incrementally. But as it turned out, that was a blessing because it taught me how to think for myself. I would say, 'Well what about this?' He'd say, 'That's cool, and you can do this and this, too.' He never narrowed it down."

For a beginning player, as far as approaching the instrument is concerned, this kind of teaching could seem quite confusing. Berne admits that like a lot of young players he was indeed looking for some kind of system, and he did study with others to fill that aspect of his playing. "But I always came back to what Julius was talking about, which was the big picture."

A lot of what Berne learned from Hemphill came from just being around at the right times, seeing the right things.

"I lived with Julius at certain points, observing the process he went through to make music, and that really influenced me. He was always writing music, and I thought, 'Wow, this must be what everyone does.' So I started writing music. I didn't know what that meant. I just threw down some notes that sort of simulated things that I'd heard. Some of it was horrible, some of it was good. I didn't understand any of it.

"But Julius was really supportive. I would bring things in, and he would show me other things. He never once said, 'You're not ready to write music.' Which I wasn't, theoretically, but I was starting this

process that became a habit. It became like playing for me. It was just something you did. And by the time I figured out that not everyone did this, it was just too late. Ignorance was kind of a useful thing."

Aside from Hemphill, Berne was attracted to people like Braxton, the Art Ensemble, and others of that ilk. As he puts it, he enjoyed music that he had to work at.

"I was always attracted to music that I didn't understand. I would buy records that I had never heard. I would look for things that weren't obvious. So, like Braxton, all those people were really puzzling and exciting at the same time. The first time I listened to Ornette it made no sense, so I just listened to it over and over until it connected." This translated well into his own compositions.

"When I write," says Berne, "I really don't try to make things obvious. When it gets comfortable, I go to something else. When it becomes clear, I change it. To me, that's the whole drama of it. That's what makes it dramatic, to keep moving. As soon as something is about to peak you leave. You go to something else. It's kind of like you're eluding the music with the music. It's a weird kind of cat and mouse."

The use of the word *drama* is fairly appropriate to Berne's music. He's always been one to tell stories with his compositions, there's a definite linear unfolding in pieces like *The Legend of P-1* on *Pace*, or *Hong Kong Sad Song/More Coffee* from the earlier **Fractured Fairy Tales**. Although their music is very different, Berne was inspired to examine structural issues by John Zorn.

"It's weird, but Zorn inspired me just to think about structure. It occurred to me, right from the beginning, that there was no reason to start with the same thing you end with. If you read a book, it doesn't end the same way it begins. It's hard for me to do a head-blow-head type of thing. I always feel like I'm copping out. I know that's not true, but for me the challenge is to write something that almost has a narrative, cumulative effect. Everyone talks about structure, and free jazz, and how it has no structure. In a sense, a lot of people I know, and maybe myself, are redefining what structure is. And it's not necessarily original, but we're taking the same materials, and stretching them in a different way. But it's all structure."

**B**erne's way of doing this stretching is to follow the Ellington road. Not that he sounds like Ellington — he doesn't — but he seems to have the same ability to play his band like an instrument, working with ensemble textures and trusting in his improvisors.

This is where Berne gets a little antsy, "I'm not wild about talking about what I'm trying to do on a technical level. I've done it in the past but I'm at the point now where it limits what can happen with the listener. There are a lot of things I'm doing with the composition. I want the composition to melt into the improvisation. I don't necessarily want you to discern which is which, and focus on soloists, per se. I really want the band to stand out. Not me. A particular soloist is there because that's the voice I want at that moment, or that texture, or that personality. A lot of times the solos are immersed in a fairly dense or complex background that isn't necessarily subservient. A lot of different levels of activity — for me that keeps things kind of interesting."

For Berne the personality of the player is primary. He doesn't write for "a cellist," he writes for Hank Roberts.

"For different people you've got to write different things. You don't necessarily want them to be comfortable. You try to find an area where they're going to be stretched, but it's not impossible or unreasonable. Then you see what's going to happen. It's like adding spices. You just get these diverse elements, these musicians and ideas, and stick them together. I think I have a knack for that."

Although he's spent most of his time working with larger groups, Berne has also been heavily involved in the collective trio Miniature. Their first, eponymous album was released in 1988, and even at that early date a powerful rapport could be heard. Just as in Berne's ensembles, Miniature is three musicians (Berne, Hank Roberts' cello, Joey Baron's drums) acting as one, but, instead of this unity coming from Berne's charts, the affinity is genuinely felt between the members.

"With musicians, the personal element is really important for me. If someone's a good player and I like them — I can hangout with them, our ideas work, we create well together — then the chances that we'll be able to play together are good. Because it's really about communication. We're having a conversation on the stage. A lot of it is magic. There's nothing spelled out that says, 'I'm going to play this and Hank's going to play that, and then we're going to connect.' It's a feeling you get. You have this vocabulary, and you have this music. All these things are going by, and you're reacting on the spot."

Actually, though, Berne has been doing duets and trios for years. Why did he do this if he was so insecure about his horn playing?

"That was *why* I did it," he says, "I started Miniature *because* I was terrified of playing in a trio. I had to do it. I really had to work up my confidence. Because, in a trio, you really have to play. Also, it's a challenge to get the structure happening in a small group, to have a small group but have it sound big. That was the whole concept of Miniature."

Listening to Miniature's first recording next to the recent **I Can't Put My Finger On It** one gets an understanding of what a difference four years can make. On the current record the compositions and improvisations seem stronger, more daring, than anything they had done before. Next to the new record, the first, which by any standard is a solid recording, seems almost delicate. What does Berne think of the new Miniature?

He laughs, "You're asking me? I say it's great. I'm really into it. I think it's the best sound-

ing thing we've done, by far. Compositionally, it's light years ahead of the last one, and I was happy with that one, at the time. But we've done two long tours since that record, and we have twenty or thirty different tunes. We've just played a lot together, and the rapport that I have with Joey and Hank just keeps getting better. Also, I'm playing baritone, which, in a certain way, definitely adds some humour and colour."

Good examples of this are tunes such as, 'Zilla and Roberts' *Jersey Devil*. The baritone, a recent addition to Berne's arsenal, casts the music in much broader sweeps. Is the humour something Berne strives after.

"I don't try for anything, but my personality is what comes out in the music. And I like to laugh more often than not. So, I don't think one sits down and says, 'Okay, now I'm going to write something funny. Now I'm going to write something serious.' You just do what you do."

By these standards, **I Can't Put My Finger On It** is a successful record. Musically, at least, the trio does a great job of doing what they do.

"We really captured our personality on this record," Berne agrees, "and that was a concern. The trio is kind of like a workshop. The thing is, when you lead the band, the players contribute, but ultimately, you're making all the decisions, and the people are hired. They are not going to go out of their way to shape the compositions. You're sort of a benign dictator."

"In Miniature, though, we'll play some tune ten times before it's happening, but we always try. I kind of dig that. It's not as sacred as the other stuff. Nothing is bad enough not to get played. Hank and Joey have so much spirit, it's pretty hard to have a bad time in that group. I have a feeling that Miniature is going to last a long time. This last recording session really felt good."

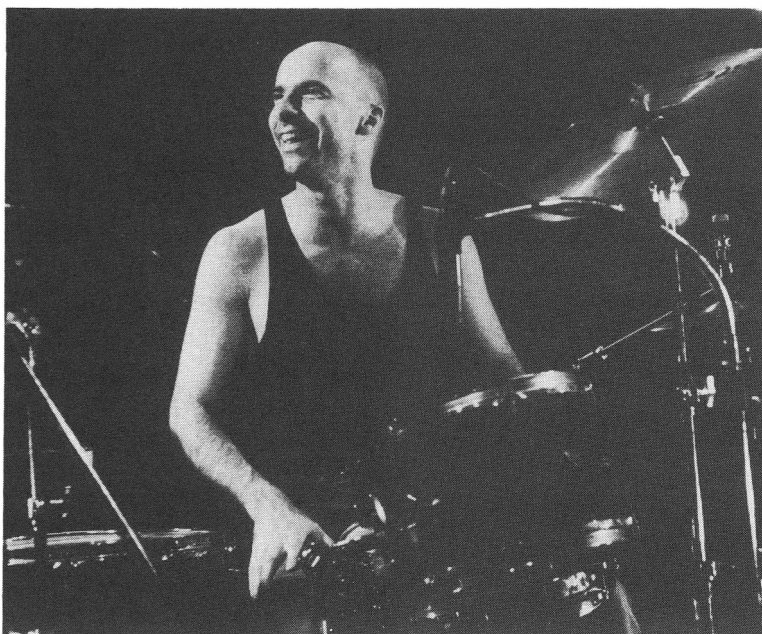
So what's coming up? Berne talks about various projects in the works. A record with bassist Mike Formanek. Another record with Lindsay Horner. Possibly a Miniature tour.

But where is his music headed?

"Oh, I don't know," he shakes his head. "I just sit around and drink coffee until I get an idea. I'm writing some stuff that's different. It may be more groove oriented and weirder at the same time. But at some point I'll hit a wall, and I'll try something else."

□

HANK ROBERTS  
Photograph Patrick Hinely  
JOEY BARON  
Photograph Gerard Futrick



# THE MAN WHO WALKED IN BALANCE

JOHN COLTRANE IS JAZZ'S LAST UNDISPUTED HERO — even though late-period Trane, dating from the breakup of the classic quartet, is controversial, Coltrane's body of work and profound impact is universally respected. But that is no secret, the real question is "why". What is it about Coltrane that so inspires us even twenty-five years after his death?



PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK ROSENBAUM

I used to walk out of the room when Coltrane came on in the early sixties on Saturday afternoons during my musically-religious four hour ritual of listening to Larry McKinley's *This Is Jazz*, on WYLD, our New Orleans, Black oriented radio station which was mainly a R&B station. In fact for most of his time on the air, Larry McKinley was known as Larry and Frank, a made for radio one person "duo" which featured the Simple-est character Frank F. Frank who was not known to have a serious bone in his body nor a sober word in his vocabulary. On Saturdays Frank was off duty and Chicago born Larry McKinley would regale us with the latest jazz recordings which invariably included Coltrane's most recent release — who can imagine the quarter hour *Chasin' The Trane* being played on a contemporary urban format commercial station today?

## AN ARTICLE BY KALAMU YA SALAAM

In the early sixties I was so ignorant that I passed up my one chance to see Coltrane live when he came to New Orleans, but I heard about it, especially about Elvin Jones literally nailing his bass drum to the bandstand.

Don't get me wrong, I dug some of Trane's stuff. I liked his solos on *Kind Of Blue* better than anything Miles played, and of course Trane's stuff with Monk was killing, I wrote a poem using Monk's famous shout as he called on Coltrane to solo: "Coltrane!, Coltrane!" — later readings asserted that Coltrane had been nodding out and Monk was shouting at him to get his attention. Then there was Coltrane's solo on *Someday My Prince Will Come*. After Trane's outpouring there was literally nothing else to say, in fact, that was Trane's swan song in the Miles context and what an exit it was.

Like many other serious jazz fans, I felt unalterably in love when Trane released *My Favorite Things*. I was in Nashville on a one week exchange program between Carleton College in Northfield, MN and Fisk University. It was there that I met John Oliver Killens and talked with him and vividly recall listening to Trane in the student centre where our exchange group would meet. (I was poor, Black and a long ways from home in Northfield; I was not about to be denied the chance

to return south even if the trip was supposed to be an exchange between presumably White students from Carleton and Black students from Fisk). Anyway, that's when Trane really got to me the way he had to this guy whom I remember standing next to at The One Stop Record Shop on Rampart Street who was telling me that *Coltrane Jazz* was the most exciting new release ever: "man, he be playing two notes at once".

A few years later, I was in Korea, high in the mountains on a missile base and a fellow soldier gave me a record he had bought but just couldn't dig: *Meditations* by John Coltrane. I spent countless hours on my bunk listening through headphones transported to another world through the power and majesty of Trane's music.

I remember I was stationed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas when I read the news that Trane had died, in fact I was somewhere in New Mexico on a temporary duty assignment learning chemical, biological and radiological warfare. By then I was buying and getting into every record that Coltrane released. I even swallowed my pride once to get Trane's last release, *Expressions*. When I walked into the record shop on Canal Street, then the main retail street in New Orleans and still the widest street in America, I was ignored by a white clerk even though I had the record and money in my hand. After two minutes of being ignored, I slammed the record down and walked out in a huff. I hadn't gone two blocks before I came to my senses. That was Coltrane's latest release and this store was the first in town to get it.

Since then I've bought everything by post-Miles, Coltrane I could find. I'm also one of the handful of Trane fanatics who love his later recordings more than the early work. I moved from someone who would voluntarily walk out on Trane to someone who, regardless of having to suffer a racial slight, couldn't walk away from Trane.

I know I'm not unique.

**W**hat is it about Coltrane, is he really so important? Reviewing three recent multi-CD releases (**John Coltrane The Prestige Recordings**/a Prestige 16 CD set; **The Major Works of John Coltrane**/an Impulse 2-CD set; and **John Coltrane Live In Japan**/and Impulse 4-CD set) have helped me focus on why Trane means so much to me, to others and to jazz and the world of music as a whole.

First, every individual's relationship to Trane's music is personal—it's sort of like a Protestant religious connection in which one communicates with God unmediated by intercession of a priest. But the relationship is also formal. We refer to him by his surname, Coltrane, rarely by his given name John or his spiritual name Ohnedaruth. Part of this is the mystery of Coltrane.

Second, Coltrane epitomized self transformation from the ordinary to the extra-ordinary without the necessity of personal popularity colouring the journey. Unlike Miles or Bird, no one wanted to dress like Trane, or talk like Trane, or do anything else like Trane except possibly play the saxophone, and though many have tried, that, clearly, was and remains impossible. In one sense Trane was unattainable. And yet, the very example of his life, suggested that all things were possible. From the first recordings with Dizzy Gillespie and Johnny Hodges to the last recordings was an incredibly long journey. There was nothing in the first years to give us a clue of what was to come in the later years.

My theory is that Trane was a Black revolutionary musician who understood the necessity of both spiritual development (in a world dominated by commercialism) and pragmatic institutionalization (within the relatively ephemeral field of music). On the one hand Trane grew out of and valued tradition, and on the other hand he fostered an opening of the music to global influences and non-western modes of expression. He was the archetypical African American: master of both emotional expressiveness and rational technology. Trane's playing could make you cry tears of joy or gasp in awe at the prodigious display of his musical ability. With Trane, unlike

with some others, neither emotion nor technique took a back seat one to the other—Trane was a man who walked in balance.

A fuller understanding of Trane's technical accomplishments is better handled by other writers—Andrew White for example who has transcribed hours and hours of Trane's music. Besides I do not have more than a rudimentary technical grasp of music, so, even if I wanted to I could not explain the scales, the harmonic progressions, the choice of melodies and rhythms. But I do understand some of the social implications and contexts of Coltrane's music.

**J**ohn William Coltrane was a product of the virulent strain of American apartheid popularly called the Jim Crow South. Born September 23, 1926 in Hamlet, North Carolina, he moved with his family to Philadelphia in 1944 where he briefly formally studied music before a two year stint in the Navy. Upon returning to civilian life he began his professional apprenticeship working in both R&B and jazz bands, first recording a solo while in Dizzy Gillespie's 1949 big band. After two years with his idol Johnny Hodges in 1953-54, Coltrane went on to land celebrated tenor chairs in the bands of both Miles Davis and briefly (six months) Thelonious Monk throughout the fifties. In 1959 Coltrane started his own band. In 1960 *Giant Steps* was released and the rest is a mixture of history and legend. While we justifiably marvel at Coltrane's accomplishments, we should not ignore the context which molded him and which he subsequently gracefully transcended.

Coltrane came of age during a period when a Black man had to be inordinately dedicated (some would say stupid and/or crazy) to become a hard core jazz musician. At that time the only major Black jazz musicians (as opposed to crossover artists such as Nat King Cole or later Ray Charles) who were making any significant money were Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, both of whom literally played on the road until they died. Moreover, it was generally conceded that Armstrong had ended his career more as a showman than as a jazzman, and that Duke's main source of income was publishing royalties. Although globally loved and admired, neither of these men had earned respect commensurate with their achievements in the land of their birth. In a particularly cruel twist, Ellington was denied a Pulitzer prize because his work was not serious enough.

And what of the other jazz musicians, the legions of yeoman who tilled the field of music year in and year out, at best eking out a tenuous hand to mouth economic subsistence, the jazz men generally derided as socially unreliable dope heads, who had strange habits and weird appetites? Except among an exceedingly small, elite cognoscenti, jazz musicians were not much valued as significant artists in the cultural life of America. In other words, by electing to professionally pursue a life as a jazz musician Coltrane had de facto taken what amounted to a vow of obscurity and poverty. As with all realities, there were exceptions, but given America's cultural apartheid and Coltrane's lack of theatrics there was little if any hope that he would become a "star."

So first of all, Coltrane felt strong enough about his music that he would choose to be a jazz musician. Moreover, because he was Black there was little if any hope that Coltrane would ever be crowned the

King in his chosen profession. From the aptly named Paul Whiteman, to Benny Goodman, down through Dave Brubeck and Michael Brecker (who won numerous polls as jazz's best tenor saxophonist even though, at the time, he only had two albums out as a leader), the "kings" of jazz have been non-Blacks. If you are a Black musician, or a Black observer of the scene, this mainstream anointed march of monarchs within a field of music founded and creatively developed by African Americans is a shameful reality which can not be ignored.

As does any jazz musician who stays the course of a lifetime commitment to the music, Coltrane embodied the basic optimism of the blues: "the sun gon shine / in my back door / someday". When that day will be and if the individual will ever see it is unknown, but as a blues musician, one must continue despite the midnight meanness of most days in America.

Here is where the most basic strength of the jazz musician resides: an almost fanatical commitment to a field whose promise is limited, if one is lucky, to an occasional hit record. Moreover, except for the actual musicians themselves, one quickly finds that the overwhelming majority of the controllers of the music (from show and record producers and publishers, to managers, journalists/critics, and financial investors) are non-African Americans. Ironically, even foreign whites have had a greater impact on the business side of the music than have African Americans.

Coltrane was not oblivious to this reality. Up from the ashes of racial degradation, super economic exploitation, personal struggles with chemical dependency, and all of the attendant psychological debilitations resultant from these conditions ascended the magnificent musical phoenix John William Coltrane.

The Prestige set is an exciting document both for its musical value and as a document for hindsight investigation. It is an almost exhaustive account of Coltrane's maturation process — "almost" because it does not include the important work with Miles which is released in its own Prestige set, nor does it include the important work with Monk which is also released in its own Riverside box set. What is most astounding is that this 16-CD set (although covering only a year and a half in the life of this major musician) documents without contradiction the artistic coming of age of a musician whose recorded output has no peer in terms of stylistic development and influence.

Here Coltrane interprets standards and jazz classics in the company of sympathetic musicians who range from competent to brilliant but none of whom match Coltrane's consistency. Two aspects of Coltrane's style are resplendently displayed, one is his handsome lyricism and the other is his uncanny knack for investing a blues vibration (even when he wasn't playing a blues per se) into both his tone and phrasing. Whether playing in a sax, bass, drum trio or as part of large scale jam sessions, Coltrane was nearly inexhaustible in his ability to find gold in every song he mined. Considering that many of the sessions were thrown together affairs featuring a stylistic variety of musicians, some of whom rarely played together, Coltrane's triumph is even more amazing. Based on the sheer variety of musicians and music, and the durability and brilliance of Coltrane's solos, this 16-CD, approximately 18 hour-long, box set is more than simply a superb buy, for serious jazz followers this is an essential investment.

The Prestige period covers the years when Coltrane not only coalesced his first major developments as a musician, it also covers the period when Coltrane divested himself of a chemical and emotional dependency on heroin and alcohol. If his early decision to be a jazz musician was a vow of obscurity and poverty, this period of cleaning up was a full commitment to the spiritual forces of life as opposed to any dependency on physical pleasure of anaesthesia.

**T**he Prestige period represents Coltrane's last exclusive grappling with American standards. Of the over one hundred and twenty compositions included in this set, only nine were written by Coltrane and the bulk of those were blowing improvisations over blues changes. In fact, pianist Mal Waldron has seventeen compositions in the collection, and Tadd Dameron with eight and Tommy Flanagan with six have almost the same number of compositions as does Trane.

A number of forces were at work here. One, Prestige owner Bob Weinstock had a get rich quick mentality toward the recording of the music: record as much as possible as quickly as possible with as little expenditure of resources as possible. This meant little if any paid rehearsal time, marathon sessions which produced two, sometimes three or four albums worth of music, and, most important of all, nearly all of the original publishing going to Prestige Music-BMI.

A related note is that Coltrane's most famous composition, *Naima*, was reportedly the subject of a publishing dispute with Atlantic Records and Coltrane was unable to legally record it until relatively late in his Impulse career. The composing and publishing ownership question is particularly important in Coltrane's case because of his significant accomplishments as a composer — indeed were it not for his unrivalled prowess as an improviser and musical innovator (the reintroduction of the soprano saxophone in the modern jazz context alone is enough to ensure Coltrane's enshrinement in any modern jazz hall of fame), Coltrane would probably be remembered mainly as a composer of modern jazz. In my estimation only Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk outrank Trane as influential modern jazz composers, and neither of them were as influential as soloists as was Coltrane.

During the period covered by this Prestige set, Coltrane cut *Blue Train* on the Blue Note label, thereby serving notice that he could put together a classic album emphasizing original compositions and including musicians whom Weinstock preferred not to record. Within four months of leaving Prestige, Coltrane recorded *Giant Steps*—a recording which revolutionized jazz. So it was not a question of ability but rather a case of business relationships limiting musical output. Indeed, why would Coltrane leave Prestige after the success of *Blue Train* unless there were compelling business reasons.

It is instructive to note:

1. Robert Weinstock took credit as composer for one composition, *Sweet Sapphire Blues*, —which, given the time period, was not an uncommon prerogative of the producer/overseer.
2. Coltrane took publishing as well as composing credits for *Black Pearls* (Jowol Music-BMI) recorded May 23, 1958 but is listed as the composer and not the publisher of *Goldsboro Express* (Prestige Music-BMI) recorded nearly half a year later on December 26, 1958.



3. This multi-CD set did not unearth any previously unissued selections, nor any previously unissued alternate takes. Every available minute of material featuring Coltrane had already been released on Prestige.

4. Two of the twelve covers for albums Coltrane recorded as a leader clearly show him playing soprano saxophone which he never did on any of the Prestige recordings.

The late fifties marked the cataclysmic inception of the civil rights movement in America and it's corollary in the music was an increasing disenchantment with the normal way of doing business and the reliance on American pop standards for both material and form. In this light, Coltrane's Prestige period can be more fully appreciated and the influence of the civil rights movement on Coltrane's music can be more holistically assessed.

Prestige was a musical plantation, and though there is no doubt that Coltrane matured under these exploitative conditions, it is also clear that if Coltrane's music was to develop, he had to leave Prestige.

These recordings, the negativity surrounding them notwithstanding, offer exciting examples of the fifties Afro American ethos of making the best possible expressions within the rather narrow band of options open to Black jazz musicians. While this is not my favourite Coltrane, this is exquisite and essential Coltrane.

This marks the end of Coltrane's romantic period, of reinterpreting American song forms as the preferred vehicle for self-expression. If one is not familiar with Trane's sometimes unbelievably tender readings of Broadway tunes, or if one prefers romantic lyricism, then one ought to seriously listen to this Prestige set.

One of the most revelatory aspects of this set is hearing Coltrane work with various pianists (especially since the bulk of Trane's post-Prestige recording was done with either McCoy Tyner or Alice Coltrane). While Mal Waldron is an exemplary composer/arranger and Tommy Flanagan (one of three pianists tapped to play the *Giant Steps* sessions) is a technician of superb finesse, it is his Miles stablemate Red Garland who preceurs the chordal approach which McCoy Tyner later epitomized. Alternating block chords of rich harmonic sophistication with darting, fleet fingered filigrees, Garland not only established a precedent, I believe he also set the standard by which Coltrane chose Tyner and measured every other pianist with whom he worked. In other words, it is not so much that Garland is a primitive Tyner as it is that Tyner, within the Coltrane context, became a modern extension of Red Garland.

Trane's harmonic ear was ultra sophisticated and he needed a pianist who could not only follow but also contribute. Garland was excellent for the romantic period, i.e. the interpreting of American popular music. The spiritual period, i.e. the expression of a striving for "freedom from" rather than "freedom within" the mainstream, required not an encyclopedic knowledge of American standards

(which was Garland's forte), but an encyclopedic knowledge of harmony and scales mated with an exploratory outlook (which quickly proved to be Tyner's contribution). In fact if one listens to the light touch of pre-Trane Tyner playing standards, Tyner's debt to Garland is even more apparent. As if dropping a hint of things to come, Coltrane along with Garland as the pianist, recorded *The Believer*, a McCoy Tyner composition on January 10, 1958.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE ALPER



*The Believer* also became the title of the album on which it was originally released. Symbolic of spiritual conviction, this composition affirmed the move away from Christianity as the sole religious force in Coltrane's life—a move which paralleled what was happening throughout Black America. Unknown to many, bebop had ushered in the first wave of non-Christian religiosity among some of the major musicians of that period. Well before peace and love spiritualism of the hippies and the new ageism which followed, African American musicians were actively converting to Islam and/or looking for alternative sources of spiritual sustenance. This search not only reflected itself in the music, this search also coloured the choices of musical associates that Coltrane and other musicians were to make.

Thus, we counterpoise Garland's Christian orthodoxy to Tyner's Muslim iconoclasm. All of this happened at a time when, partly as a result of the civil rights movement's use of Negro spirituals as a basis for freedom songs, there was a renewed interest in and use of Black Christian liturgical music (from Horace Silver, Bobby Timmons and Cannonball Adderley's obvious use of baptist-based expressive song forms, to the more experimental, but nonetheless gospel music based experiments of Max Roach and Donald Byrd).

Trane's non-sectarian religiosity is a major aspect of his revolutionary

thrust. Trane was neither Christian nor Muslim. Describing himself, Trane said "I believe in all religions". His outlook was larger than any single orthodoxy and this enabled him to creatively use religious material to maximum effect because he could discern and draw on the spiritual truths of all of them. This spiritual and musical ecumenism was a completely different track from that taken by most people who became deeply spiritual.

The Prestige set literally marks an end of an era for Coltrane. Trane was self-consciously headed in other directions. Quoted in the liner notes, speaking about 1957, Coltrane clearly states his case: "I went through a personal crisis, you know, and I came out of it. I felt so fortunate to have come through it successfully, that all I wanted to do, if I could, would be to play music that would make people happy. That's basically all I want to do. But so many other things come in along the way and I often forget that. I let technical things surround me so often that I kind of lose sight. I can't keep them both together, you know. Maybe, if I think of it more, I may be able to find a way, a path to follow..."

**J**ump cut to 1965, the world is literally on fire and Coltrane is flying high dropping more than his share of mega-ton musical bombs which are exploding chaos all over the jazz landscape. While there are many musicians taking part in the free jazz movement, none of them has the technical credentials nor the mainstream respected resume of John Coltrane. Coltrane could not be dismissed as a charlatan or theatrical faker. But at the same time his music was bewildering and delivered a chaotic jolt which threatened all the American musical traditions that had preceded this new music.

It was almost as if the height of the Viet Nam war (and we must not forget that this was a period of liberation struggles and violent clashes between contending forces throughout the Third World), the Catholic pope had converted to Buddhism on one day and immolated himself the following week. There can be no understanding of **The Major Works of John Coltrane** without an understanding of world events and the psychological state of Black America during that era. That much is obvious, but it is also true that without a tradition to work from (both in the sense of foundation on which he could stand and a prison from which he had to escape) Coltrane would never have become the revolutionary he became.

We would be impossibly naive if we believed that Coltrane was unaware of the social and musical controversies swirling around him. Musically, he was first accused of fostering a style dubbed as "anti-jazz" and then he was accused of creating chaotic noise which was totally unmusical.

"Anti-jazz" was simply a negative way of recognizing that Coltrane had rejected standard American forms for the organization of his music. A number of critics accused Coltrane of abandoning swing. These critics were obviously oblivious to the fact that swing is not a western concept in the first place.

There are two major schools of physics: Newton with the emphasis on matter and Einstein with the emphasis on energy. In metaphorical terms, what happened was the eminent Newtonian John William Coltrane converted to Einstein's quantumism. Or to put it another

way, after perfecting manned-flight at supersonic speeds, Coltrane jettisoned the use of a technically complex air/space-craft for the rush of astral travelling, out of body projections without any visible vehicle of travel.

The mistitled **Major Works** is a cosmo-gram of Trane's astral travelling. It contains both editions of *Ascension* plus *Om*, *Kulu Se Mama*, and *Selflessness*. It would have been much more accurate to simply call this "Coltrane 1965" or "A Year In The Life". While there is no doubt that *Ascension* is a major work, the other pieces hardly qualify for that title especially when compared to *A Love Supreme* and *Meditations*. Moreover, one of the cuts, *Kulu Se Mama*, is not even a Coltrane composition.

Once again, we catch Coltrane at the end of an era. The classic quartet was being augmented to the breaking point. In fact, all of these selections feature at least seven musicians, and *Ascension* includes eleven musicians. Shortly the old quartet would be broken up, replaced by a quintet that included Pharaoh Sanders as a second horn player, pianist Alice Coltrane replacing McCoy Tyner, and drummer Rashied Ali replacing Elvin Jones.

Coltrane's public appearances often included an unannounced bevy of horn players and percussionists. From the inception of the Impulse years until his death, Coltrane chose to record exclusively with African American musicians in sharp contrast to the prevailing tendency toward a racial integration of ensembles then espoused by the majority of jazz musicians. While no one has ever accused Coltrane of Crow Jimism, i.e. the so-called reverse racism charge that was levelled at a number of other artists, the fact is that Coltrane consistently loaned both his name and his talents to the blossoming, racially oriented Black Arts Movement of that era.

Furthermore, Coltrane was using his clout at Impulse to champion the recording of artists such as Archie Shepp, Marion Brown and others. Seemingly single-handedly John Coltrane was assaulting the barricades of the music world, leading a battalion of true believers into an apocalyptic and impassioned fray against the forces of traditional musical taste and order.

To say the least, none of this music was meant for casual or recreational listening, nor as cocktail background muzak. These are more like sacred texts which offer the listener no familiar handle of accessibility but reward repeated listening if one is willing to accept the music on its own terms—and admittedly these terms are revolutionary terms. Of the selections, *Kulu Se Mama* is the most accessible and *Om* the most out.

*Kulu Se Mama* would today be described as world beat and even has sections of lilting afro-percussive swing. *Kulu Se Mama* is actually closer to Sander's later work such as *The Creator Has A Master Plan* than it is close to anything else in the Coltrane canon. On the other hand, as Coltrane's use of multiple drummers/percussionist as well as Coltrane's hook-up with Olatunji indicated, Coltrane was interested in moving toward the incorporation of African rhythms into his music.

*Om* is a beautiful nightmare. A frightening immersion into the spirit

world where all things are possible and fantasy is the norm. There are not many people who can listen to *Om* all the way through without being repulsed - but the value of this music is precisely its ability to upset the norm, to cause us to examine all "received" truths that we believe based on tradition and social indoctrination. In essence *Om* is a musical recreation of the chaos of birth, the rupturing of the maternal womb in preparation to enter into a larger world which offers more opportunities for growth and development.

In this context, the last track, *Selflessness*, is the least original in its form and execution. Whereas the other selections are fully realized performances, *Selflessness* has the air of the intentionally experimental about it.

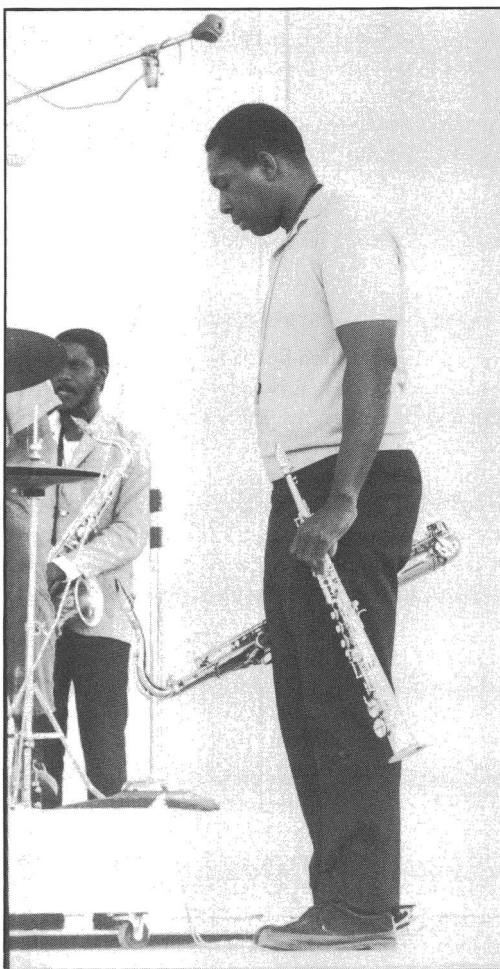
Clearly the two versions of *Ascension* are the pieces de resistance. Released within months of each other with only notations scratched into the vinyl to distinguish them one from the other, these are similar albeit differently executed takes of the same selection. In Edition I the collective is stronger, in Edition II the solos are stronger, or so it seems to my ears. I prefer the first edition because of its power and passion.

**B**y the end of 1965 Coltrane had not only stylistically broken with the past, he had created an alternative to even his revolutionary tradition - consider it a revolution within a revolution. Much like the Chinese political drama of that period: the first revolution had been to gain the power of self-determination while retaining (albeit radically altered) traditional forms. That was the revolution against and this is what **The Major Works** most clearly represents.

In the liner notes for *Meditations* Coltrane told Nat Hentoff: "Once you become aware of this force for unity in life you can't ever forget it. It becomes part of everything you do ... My goal in meditating on this through music ... is to uplift people, as much as I can. To inspire them to realize more and more of their capacities for living meaningful lives. Because there certainly is meaning to life."

Coltrane went on to delineate the centrality of what politically has been defined as permanent revolution (or the revolution within the revolution): "There is never any end. There are always new sounds to imagine, new feelings to get at. And always there is the need to keep purifying these feelings and sounds so that we can really see what we've discovered in its pure state. So that we can see more and more clearly what we are. In that way, we can give to those who listen the essence, the best of what we are. But to do that at each stage, we have to keep on cleaning the mirror."

Breaking the bonds of slavery is easy when compared to the difficulty of constructing a new society. In June of 1966 Coltrane toured and



PHOTOGRAPH OF PHARAOH & TRANE BY BILL SMITH

recorded in Japan. The 4-CD set **Live In Japan** is the result and contains essential Phase 3 Coltrane. By now Coltrane had not only formed a new band, he was also well into developing his own record label and hooking up a cooperative venture with African drummer and musicologist Babatunde Olatunji and fellow saxophonist Yusef Lateef.

Writing in an article titled **John Coltrane My Impressions and Recollections** Olatunji recalls:

*After a few minutes of silence (Coltrane) opened up the conversation by asking me if I would be willing to join him and brother Yusef Lateef to form an organization or a trio without any specific grandiloquent titles or high sounding catchy names, but a union that would bind three of us together to accomplish certain goals. I asked him what he had in mind, John Coltrane said, "Tunji, I am tired of being taken and exploited by managers, club owners and concert promoters. I worked too hard to get where I am today and still don't get adequately compensated for my talent. I hate to see promoters manipulating one artist after another.*

*When you get a bad review, that means your concert price is going down. They don't really care about you, your music, what you are trying to accomplish artistically, nor do they give a damn if you are up today and down tomorrow because they know they will soon discover another victim!" I asked him, "what do you think we should do, because I am tired of the whole thing myself."*

*Trane answered and said, "Look Tunji, we need to sponsor our own concerts, promote them and perform in them. This way we will not only learn how to take a risk but will not have to accept the dictate of anybody about how long you should play, what to play and what you get."*

Coltrane died before the proposed collective or his record label could come to fruition. But nonetheless, it is clear that Coltrane was actively in search not just of an alternative sound but indeed of an alternative economic reality - a search still underway in jazz circles.

While journalists often speculate on who will be the next Coltrane (the leading contender has been David Murray) no one has yet emerged to fulfil the prophecy. In part because the whole system of jazz has changed. Whereas formerly there were bands within which a young player could serve an apprenticeship much as Trane did with Johnny Hodges, Earl Bostic, and Dizzy Gillespie, today most bands are made up of one-generational peers performing contemporary music.

Another factor is the dearth of club dates, where three sets a night over a week long period allowed a band the opportunity to work on new materials. These have been replaced by one sets concert performances. This discourages experimentation. While more lucrative than the standard club gig, concert appearances are by nature much more conservative. This is part of what Trane was alluding to in his conversation with Olatunji. When a jazz musician plays one song for over an hour, few if any drinks are sold and a two or three song set becomes the whole night, thus limiting admissions.

**T**rane's new music was uncommercial not only in sound but also in form. It just didn't fit within the strictures of the mainstream jazz world. In fact, there were even technological limitations in the reproduction of this music. Originally, one-CD's worth of **Live In Japan** was issued as a two record set in the United States, and that included only two selections which were cut up in jig-saw pieces and not even presented in proper playing order. Were it not for the introduction of the CD, the whole of this music might never have been made commercially available. That's how revolutionary Coltrane's music was.

The alleged failure of the avant garde to find an audience was not an aesthetical failure as has often been asserted but was actually an inability to establish revolutionary forms for the presentation and distribution of the music. The venues were limited, the recording and broadcasting opportunities even more limited. Unfortunately, no business apparatus was built to support the aesthetical revolution which had occurred. The conventional business interests prevailed and disallowed the institutionalization of an alternative. Even though Prestige had been a plantation, at least the music had been recorded. Except for Coltrane, the bulk of the avant garde recordings were done in Europe or for tiny independent companies resulting in comparatively little exposure in the United States for this music.

So without the learning and listening opportunities (for the development of both the musicians as artists and the development of an audience to support the music) offered by venues, recording companies, radio stations, publications and the like, the new music was destined to be isolated and overwhelmed by a planned commercial onslaught called fusion - planned both by profit driven record companies and by reputable jazz musicians (exemplified by Miles Davis) who were more interested in mass appeal than in cleaning the mirror.

To Coltrane's credit, while others succumbed to commercial pressures he remained steadfast and **Live In Japan** documents Coltrane's unflinching revolutionary commitment. A record of uncompromising execution, **Live In Japan** is not for everyone. Close to four hours of lyrical wailing with nary a thought to conventionality. Forget everything you ever knew about western song forms, don't even think about looking for a steady beat. Everybody I know who digs Trane of this era does so on an other-worldly plane — we meditate to and with this stuff. Lay quietly with our eyes closed and think about nothing. Let the music wash over us and transport us to another level of consciousness.

What Trane figured out is how to get around thinking about the making of music and how to go straight into feeling and being.

Twenty-five years after it was recorded, this music is still insanelly avant garde, still steady forward: and will always be so, precisely because it is not concerned with thinking, with worldly concerns, it's all about hooking into cosmic life force. Or as Trane said in his interview with Wilmer: "All a musician can do is to get closer to the sources of nature, and so feel that he is in communion with the natural laws. Then he can feel that he is interpreting them to the best of his ability, and can try to convey that to others. As to the music itself and its future, it won't lessen any in its ability to move people. I feel certain of that. It will be just as great or greater."

**Live In Japan** ranks as one of Coltrane's crowning recording triumphs. Partially this is because it was not intended as a recording session, so no thought was given to offering manageable chunks of the music cut down to accommodate the recording techniques of the time. Secondly, this is a document of Coltrane playing for an appreciative audience on what was by all accounts one of his most positive touring experiences ever. Finally, included are rare instances of Trane playing alto, the horn he started his career playing. The only other recorded alto generally available is on a Gene Ammons recording which is included in **The Complete Prestige** set.

**Live In Japan** finds Trane stretching out and gives us the closest approximation to what the group sounded like in concert. The only other available document, **Live At The Village Vanguard Again** is equally intense but far too short to give the full picture. On **Live In Japan** the shortest selection is 25-minutes long, two of the selections clock in at just a few minutes shy of an hour. Two whole concerts contained on 4-CDs.

This is a quantum physics textbook of jazz. From lyrical yearnings of *Peace On Earth* to the explosive power of *Leo* this music sings of human possibilities, of going beyond the boundaries of the present to the place where the essence of matter becomes vibration rather than mass, where the third eye opens to the universal by gazing simultaneously inward into the self and outward at the world, going both deep and most high.

This is not about sense but rather sensations, acknowledgement of life. Everybody knows that when you're standing by the track you can feel and hear the train coming and going long before you see it's arrival, long after you see its departure. What we see limits us, what we can sense frees us. And Trane of this period was a cosmic can opener who best summed up the thorny issue of the difficulty of understanding this revolutionary music, when he said, "You'd like an answer to this? Well, I don't feel there is an answer to this. It is either saying a person, who does not understand, will understand in time from repeated listening or some things he will never understand. You know, that's the way it is. There are many things in life that we don't understand. And we just go on with life anyway."

The going on with life has been made a bit easier because a man named John William Coltrane chose to illuminate the path with the brilliance of his music. I thank the wind, the earth, the spirit of creation from which Coltrane came and to which he has returned for the gift of his music and for the opportunity to experience that beautiful sound of life. I give thanks for Ohnedaruth, aka John William Coltrane - may we always recognize the importance of his revolutionary contributions. □

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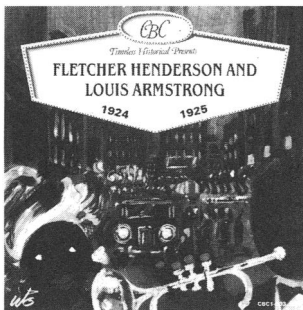
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# THREE IN ONE THE ANATOMY OF A JAZZ FESTIVAL

AN OVERVIEW BY PUBLISHER JOHN NORRIS



FESTIVALS AND THEIR CLOSE RELATIVE THE JAZZ PARTY have become the principle vehicle for employment exposure for an increasing percentage of musicians who make a living playing jazz.

**T**he traditional venues - nightclubs, restaurants and joints - are fast disappearing. Their customers are moving further and further away from urban centres at a time when the total cost of presenting live entertainment has escalated dramatically. It represents a no win situation. Even in New York the clubs are hurting. If the tourist buses don't come by there are often more musicians than customers in the club.

Festivals, on the other hand, attract large audiences to venues which are often subsidized by government and industry to the point where there is little or no charge for the music. Both the quantity and quality of music during these events is high and, in many cases, is the one time of the year when "live" music is plentiful.

No two festivals are alike. Most large cities overwhelm the listener with multiple choices. Small communities, on the other hand, usually present more compact events where listening flexibility is reduced. A smorgasbord is offered to audiences who are casually interested. Listeners with specialized tastes tend to be frustrated with this approach. Their horizons are better catered to by such events as those in Sacramento (traditional jazz), Cen-

tral Pennsylvania (bebop) and Victoriaville (avant garde).

Bern, Elkhart and Toronto, despite widely differing philosophies, all presented above average festivals this year.

**L**ongest running is the one in Bern, Switzerland. While a few people take advantage of the "festival Pass" to hear five nights of stylistically different music, the majority of the audience changes nightly. The formal concert setting enables more than 2000 people to hear some of the world's greatest musicians in a comfortable setting. This year the highlights included the insinuating blues piano and vocals of **Charles Brown**, the dramatic reworking of classic blues by **Ruth Brown** and an evening of jazz piano by **Junior Mance**, George Shearing, Marian McPartland, **Billy Taylor** and Gene Harris. Any one of those pianists could hold an audience for an entire concert so each set was but a succinct summary of their best moments. Junior Mance's fiery opening set put everyone on their mettle. Billy Taylor's set was particularly good with tasty drumming from Bobby Thomas, whose sensitivity to every nuance of Taylor's improvisations was a highlight. It contrasted dramatically with the overwrought theatricality of Gene Harris' collaborations with Ray Brown and Jeff Hamilton. Another pianist, **Ramsey Lewis**, caught the fancy of the audience in a night of more contemporary musical styles while **Bill Allred's** Classic Jazz Band showed great skill in their reworkings of some

BERN • SWITZERLAND  
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1950s big band dixieland charts by Matty Matlock. Clarinetist Chuck Hedges, baritone saxist **John Barnes** and pianist Johnny Barro had tasty spots while the brass players offered contrasting dynamics.

This band more effectively handled its goals than the Dizzy Gillespie Diamond Jubilee Concert Band on the final night. **Slide Hampton**, who directed the band, also wrote several new charts of Gillespie compositions. Freddie Hubbard, Harry Edison, Roy Hargrove, James Moody, **Jackie McLean**, Hank Jones, Avery Sharpe and Lewis Nash had difficulty achieving orchestral cohesion but individually there were many outstanding solo statements.

The **Canadian All Stars** fared somewhat better. This band was also assembled specially for the festival. Jim Galloway and Fraser MacPherson were featured with Oliver Jones, Ed Bickert, Dave Young and Terry Clarke. Once again the individual solo features proved to be the best moments but there were some good performances of a number of Johnny Hodges small band charts.

The festival feeling in Bern was enhanced by a variety of daytime concerts in the city squares, informal late night sessions and a Sunday morning "club" session in the Kornhauskeller.

Despite its success (all the concerts are televised and broadcast nationally on radio), the Bern Festival is organized and run by a volunteer organization. Their dedication is a key factor in its ongoing success.

**C**ommunity support has also been crucial in the growth of both the Elkhart and Toronto festivals. But these events have widely different concepts and philosophies. However, they have each begun to achieve their long range goals.

Elkhart, a once prosperous town, has seen its manufacturing base dwindle over the years. The jazz festival is one of the events which is contributing to the revitalization of the town. In just a few short years it has outgrown its basically traditional format to present a concise cross section of jazz styles on a smallish budget within a single hotel location (plus

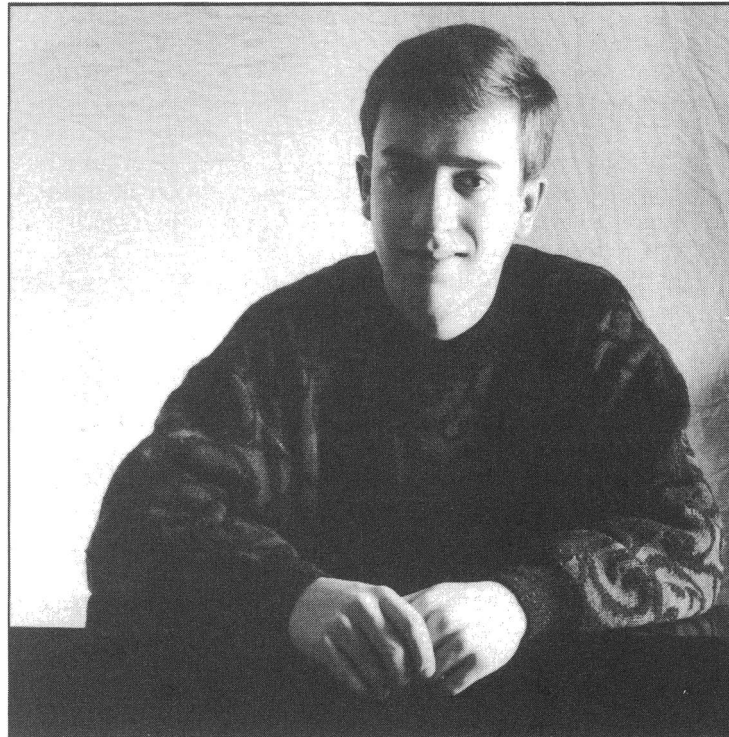
other venues within walking distance).

The Basie Band, **Gary Burton**, Ralph Sutton and Jay McShann were the "big" names this year but audiences were equally thrilled with such regional favourites as **Jim Dapogny's** band, the Varsity Ramblers and Bobby Lewis' Quintet. Young guitarist **Mark Whitfield** represented the contemporary direction while such ad hoc veterans as Peter Appleyard, Butch Miles, Bobby Rosengarden, Tom Saunders, **Eddie Higgins** and **Red Holloway** were featured in different settings. The Gary Dial / Dick Oates band took care of the bebop department. Four locations within the hotel rotated most of the musicians and listeners were free to circulate and catch the widely differing presentations.

A turn of the century theatre was close to capacity (2000) for the one concert by the Count Basie Orchestra. **Frank Foster** has written many new charts and the band, while reflecting the Basie tradition, has a life of its own. Gary Burton's Quintet turned on the heat in a version of *Summertime* which contrasted sharply with much of the other music they performed. Piano recitals by **Makoto Ozone**, Ralph Sutton and Eddie Higgins in the local art gallery (once the town's bank) were highly personal moments away from the continual bustle of the hotel.

Regional events such as Elkhart are a reflection of the changing status of jazz. Each venue was sponsored by a different business and overall funding came from Miles Laboratories. Audiences were enthusiastic about all of the music and the overall standard of performance justified their enthusiasm.

**T**he logistics of such an event are multiplied enormously in a city the size of Toronto where more than a thousand performers took part in more than 300 events. The program listed 36 different venues and more music was heard at shopping malls and other such places.



The heart of the festival was the contribution made by Canadian musicians. They were an overwhelming force and hopefully this visibility will translate into more gigs and larger audiences throughout the year.

The festival was able to present **Vic Vogel's** big band, vocalist Ranee Lee and the Andre Bernard Trio from Montreal and **Fraser MacPherson** came in from Vancouver. There was a special reunion concert of Phil Nimmons n'Nine Plus Six and both **Dave McMurdo's** Big Band and Jim Galloway's Wee Big Band also got a rare opportunity to perform. All these events were held at Nathan Philips Square. The core musicians of Toronto's jazz community were kept busy. Mike Murley, Pat LaBarbera / Don Thompson, Time Warp, **Fourth Inversion**, Bernie Sensensky and vocalists Trudy Desmond and **Arlene Smith** were all highly visible.

## THE ANATOMY OF A JAZZ FESTIVAL

**B**ut a festival should be more than a catalogue of names and events. It has to develop an ambience - a feel - and Toronto has now begun to achieve this. Two Queen Street stages were new this year and they helped centralize the open air venues. At Harbourfront evening cruises on the Mariposa Belle were a delightful new idea. The core complex of the festival was completed with international headliners showcased at the city's four year round jazz venues: The Bermuda Onion, Geroge's Spaghetti House, Montreal Bistro and Top O' The Senator.

The festival reaffirmed the music's great traditions with the wonderfully imaginative charts conceived by **Howard Alden** and **Dan Barrett** for their quintet, the vibrant tenor saxophone of **Harold Asby** and the elegant piano improvisations of **Dick Hyman** and Keith Ingham. Both pianists included in their repertoire selections from the first decade of jazz recordings by such people as King Oliver and Bix Beiderbecke. **Jay McShann** had the Mariposa Belle rocking for two exciting nights. Bassist Kieran Overs and drummer Tony Bazley completed what turned out to be a most compatible and swinging trio. Tenor saxophonist **Brian Ogilvie** was featured the first night and festival director Jim Galloway abandoned his festival responsibilities to complete the quartet on the second night.

A different kind of tradition permeates the work of **Myra Melford** and **Geoff Keezer**. It is always thrilling to hear exceptionally talented newcomers creating fresh and invigorating music which relates to the music's past but which is very much of today. Myra Melford's trio gave one concert at the Ontario Lottery open air venue. The beguiling blend of compositional and conceptual influences were perfectly in harmony with the setting. All her music is her own but it has the structural balance and rhythmic drive which keeps it firmly within the parameters of what constitutes jazz. Her playing is a balance, if you will, between the traditions of the Sixties (Cecil Taylor, Abdullah Ibrahim, Don Pullen, Keith Jarrett) and a sensibility all her own.

Geoff Keezer's focus is more easily defined. He is an extension of the virtuosic piano styles which began with Tatum and culminated in Phineas Newborn. His view of the music is his own and he has transformed his

instrumental ideas into the music his quartet played. The spirit of John Coltrane hung heavy in the air for tenor saxophonist **Joshua Redman** has captured the inner truth of Coltrane's music. But the music performed by Joshua Redman is no mere echo of Coltrane; it is something whole and of its own. With Christian McBride on bass and Leon Parker on drums the music created by this quartet at the Montreal Bistro was the most exciting evening of music I experienced during the Festival.

Without a major stylistic force to change the shape of jazz most musicians are busy trying to find fresh ways within existing concepts. A major coup for the festival was the chance to present the Boston based band **Orange Then Blue**. Charles Mingus is the spiritual force behind the band but echoes of Ellington can also be felt.

The brashness of Freddie Hubbard and the angularity of Wayne Shorter help focus the musical ideas of the Dutch quintet co-led by **Ben van den Dungen** and **Jarmo Hoogendijk**. These musicians, like others in the world, reflect ideas which were seminal to jazz thirty years ago but the compositions and improvisations are their own.

Also present at this festival were such diverse talents as Johnny Griffin, Joe Williams, Barbara Dennerlein, **Gonzalo Rubalcaba**, Abdullah Ibrahim, **Annie Ross**, Herb Ellis, Joe Henderson, Richard Davis / Roland Hanna, Toshiko Akiyoshi, **Tim Berne**, Leroy Jenkins and **Marilyn Crispell**.

Film Buffs were treated to some remarkable jazz on film in the **Reel Jazz** screenings at Harbourfront curated by Marc Glassman and Michael Chertok... CJRT-FM Radio was everywhere recording enough music for eleven Saturday morning broadcast reminders in July/August of the festival's excellence.

It was quite a celebration, and a great antidote to all the political and economic doom and gloom being forced upon us all by those in charge of this now flawed country. □

**FRASER MACPHERSON**  
PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK MILLER  
**GEOFF KEEZER**  
PHOTOGRAPH BY CHEUNG CHING MING

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**Saturday, Oct. 17, Jazz Festival featuring bands led by Alex Dean, Bernie Senensky, Mike Murley, Kirk MacDonald, Brian Dickinson and Time Warp. Afternoon and evening shows at Artspace, \$16**

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# APPLE SOURCE

## New York Notes By Kevin Whitehead

**F**OR NEW YORKERS, NEW YORK IS THE WORLD, BUT THIS SPRING ALL EYES were on TV from L.A. Late April's celebration of Jury System Week—aka the Rodney King Riots—inspired Apple antics that made Spielberg's 1941 look like a comedy. On Friday, May 1, New York was rife with unfounded riot rumours, begetting civic hysteria—plywood sales boomed as merchants boarded up. At a major-label reception for two of its artists at a lower Broadway eatery, the spectacle of orderly marchers on the street outside snapped the overwhelmingly white label execs and publicists into a state of pure racial paranoia—ohmygodwearegonnadiel! It was one of those profoundly depressing moments when you realize that many people in the jazz business (including the seasoned label-head, in this case) are really scared shitless of black folk.

MICHAEL VLATKOVICH PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL SMITH



**A**t the Bottom Line a block away, later the same evening, **Benny Green** did his bit for tolerance by playing *Down by the Riverside* even though, as he assured us, it wasn't on his set list. Headliner **Tony Williams** put things in perspective telling the audience you must really love jazz to come out on a night like this—the weather was fine, but the club was almost half-empty—so congratulate yourselves.

(Tony was way too loud—loud drummers are the legacy of the amplified bass—but Mulgrew Miller still sounds great. Like Kenny Barron, he's the sleeper of his generation. Wallace Roney is obviously taking this Miles-passed-the-mantle-at-Montreux stuff very seriously. He's working arduously on that sound, and getting somewhere. Benny Green, zeroing in on Garnerish schtick, clomped without Erroll's wit when not xeroxing Bud. Carl Allen, unjustly suppressed, was hemmed into Bu's rudiments. Good thing Chris McBride was on wood bass.)

Once riotmania faded, TV addicts clicked over to the baton-passing from Johnny and Doc to Jay and Branford, as a nation enjoyed the guilty pleasure of seeing Carson remade as culture. Severinsen's relentless teakettle brass (pace Snooky) won't be much missed at my house; **Branford Marsalis'** taking over as Tonight's bandleader bodes better—his midsize band played some Monk and Miles their first nights on the air—but B's new nasal-tenor kickoff is "generic" late-night TV music, to use a putdown he's fond of. The arrangements haven't been great, but Marcus Belgrave sat in one night and got introduced. Weirdly, the show's formatted to keep Branford from bantering with Leno. He's way too funny to waste—wasn't that part of why they hired him?

Brother Wynton ended Jazz at Lincoln Center's first full season, at big Avery Fisher Hall May 27, with a resounding thud. A year ago, Lincoln Center (where he's a paid consultant) commissioned from him a long work for his septet, *In This House/On This Morning*, paying him about \$20,000. He's been working on it five or six months, explained celeb MC Ed Bradley. Well, more like a month, you know how it is, shrugged the perfectionist composer. Its 12 sections "depict an Afro-American church service," according to the inevitable Stanley Crouch program notes.

Marsalis was raised as a Catholic, not in the gospel church. *In This House* moves like the coronation of a pope. This writer's not often in sync with public opinion re: Wynton, but we lockstepped that night. I never saw so many folks not perusing programs during the show. A third of the house split at intermission, and more streamed out as the music crept on for nearly two hours. One besuited chap tried to lead a standing ovation after one section, and left after the next. There was nothing good in this misshapen, sluggish, under-rehearsed and overdetermined epic that didn't come from Ellington or the blues—the New Orleans parts were Dixielandy—but Ducal pastiches call attention to its lack of Ellingtonian virtues melody, daring sonorities and structural ingenuity. Duke could get carnal; Marsalis seems hardly to have a

body. For all that, Duke could have slapped together a more coherent piece overnight. With Wynton, composition appears to be about delaying return to the tonic for a couple more bars.

Reginald Veal and Todd Williams are the only members of the septet who deserve to be on stage with the leader; Wes Anderson trying to play like Johnny Hodges is seriously sad. Management, hailing the artistic success of the commission, blamed walkouts on an unavoidably late start, not the first time jazz history has been rewritten to Wynton's benefit. (The joke going around was that Wynton wanted to keep the audience out so late they missed Branford.) Even Jon Pareles, the least venomous daily critic in town, noted the mass defections in his charitable Times review. *In This House* was subsequently recorded, so you can judge yourself. Then seek out some old LP by the raucous Harlem gospel band of Daddy Grace to hear what such music can sound like.

Jazz at Lincoln Center's schedule for next season is more of the same—Betty Carter and Michael White again, another Wynton commission (for the NYC Ballet), bop, hardbop, postbop, lots of Marsalis sidemen—Edward Blackwell meets Herlin Riley—and no acknowledgment of jazz from abroad, or even of white Americans living or dead whose music is worth celebrating. Representing jazz since 1965, Muhal Richard Abrams was scheduled to play one or two selections at an all-solo-Monk concert in July.

Few noticed—the house wasn't packed—but L.A. trombonist **Michael Vlatkovich** served up a more animated and organic mix of gutbucket grooves and extended form at his KnitFac set with a bicoastal sextet May 3. His multiple-theme pieces flow in ways that feel right to the ear, so they don't feel like a patchwork (or even suitelike). They also leave lots of room for broad-brush blowing from the leader and tenorist Bill Plake. Rory Stuart has a nice way of avoiding under-the-fingers guitar licks; he's a master of craggy rests (sic). Chris Garcia and Hollis Hedrick split percussion and drums; Andy Swanson thumped bass.

The Alternative Museum was jammed for a tribute to **Reggie Workman** June 3; his guests were violinist Jason Hwang, Milford Graves, and tenorist Charles Gayle, who'd never played with his bandmates until he stepped on stage, but who upped the heat and ante whenever he put the tenor to his lips. That was obviously just what Reggie had in mind—Charles was his Pep Section.

Hostile as the environment may appear for new jazz, **Charles Gayle** has been rolling. This spring, between the Knitting Factory and New Music Cafe, he worked once a week for 15 straight weeks. His regular rhythm section—overamped bassist Vattel Cherry, overpowering drummer David Pleasant—is the despair of faithful fans. Their din forces him into his clear-channel falsetto too much, but toward the end of his March-April Monday KnitFac series—during second sets, when Pleasant was pooped—Charles settled down into some terrific out of character stuff that showed how well he knows theory and his horn. One week, it was a long low slow dirty pants blues; the next, he slid sideways through *Ghosts*, *Lush Life* and *Oleo*, and pulled from the air a lengthy thematic improvisation with the throaty sound and grand authority of 1957 Sonny Rollins. You could hear fans' jaws hit the floor even above the drums.

Lincoln Center's narrow focus exacerbates the scene's chief problem—every clique's isolated, side by side like TV channels. It's not good for the music. Starting off as an attempt to break down cliques three years ago, this April's Corner Store Syndicate Festival at the KnitFac hasn't brought together all communities the way its approachable organizers have hoped—participants are still overwhelmingly white. As de facto honcho Phil Haynes points out, at least his founding Paul Smoker/Ellery Eskelin bunch has effectively merged with the Herb Robertson/Tim Berne/Mark Dresser axis, with audible benefits. But the lack of interplay with black scenes is affecting the music too. Haynes digs Buddy Rich, and in its debut, the **Syndicate Big Band** sounded avant-Doc; a couple wiseacres back at the bar worked on their Carson impressions whenever trumpets and

drum sticks aimed for the roof. Corner Store folk have an adventurous approach to form, are ready to play with anybody, and are self-confessed jazz musicians, but this night they lost the blues. Eskelin's solo set was the fest highlight—he's the only tenor player who suggests Hawkins' *Picasso* when he plays alone.

In the clubs, familiar faces. **Johnny Griffin**—Village Vanguard, May 7—still sounds terrific, still counts off tempos to wilt sidemen. (How does Peter Washington play bass that fast and steady?) But he's weeded out the jokey quotes that studded his solos 15 years ago—Giant matures at 64? At this rate he'll peak soon. **Don Cherry**—at a World Music Institute show with master drummer Edward Blackwell at Symphony Space on June 6, at the Vanguard with Blackwell, Carlos Ward and Bob Stewart the following week—demonstrated he never picks up the trumpet save when he's packing. His African guitar the doussn'gouni has become his best instrument—you don't need a lip to finger John Lee Hooker riffs. But when Don disappeared, feebly bleating, the tuba-buoyed trio sounded fine. Carlos should hire them.

At a WMI/Symphony Space concert May 15, I caught up with The **NY-Buenos Aires Connection**, run by Argentine bassist Pablo Aslan and Montevidean bandoneon ace Raul Juarena. (The violinist is Russian, the reading pianist American.) They play the classics and Piazzolla with verve and grace—it is hard not to love authentic tango, listening to the tug of the beat and the pull of the bellows. Caribbean rhythms are common coin in New York jazz, but a tango strain is rare, and this band hasn't caught any valuable worldbeat hype. Talking with Pablo Aslan weeks later, I lamented that there isn't more of a tango-jazz interface, decrying isolationism blah blah. Actually, Aslan says, some jazz musicians have expressed interest in playing tango with him, but he put them off, because the South American players he works with aren't comfortable improvising, and the jazz musicians don't know tango's language. He's the only fringe musician I know with a good word for sectarianism. □

# AROUND THE WORLD

COMPILED BY PUBLISHER JOHN NORRIS

HEMISPHERES MUSIC PROJECTS IS GEARING UP FOR THE FALL SEASON with new works by Helen Hall, **Nic Gotham**, Harry Freedman and others. Their October 3 Great Hall concert (1087 Queen Street West) will be part of the New Music Across America festival. There will be two further nights at the Music Gallery December 18/19 and a March 6 1993 date at the DuMaurier Theatre Centre at Harbourfront in Toronto. For more information call (416) 971-5905.

PHOTOGRAPH OF P.J. PERRY BY MARK MILLER

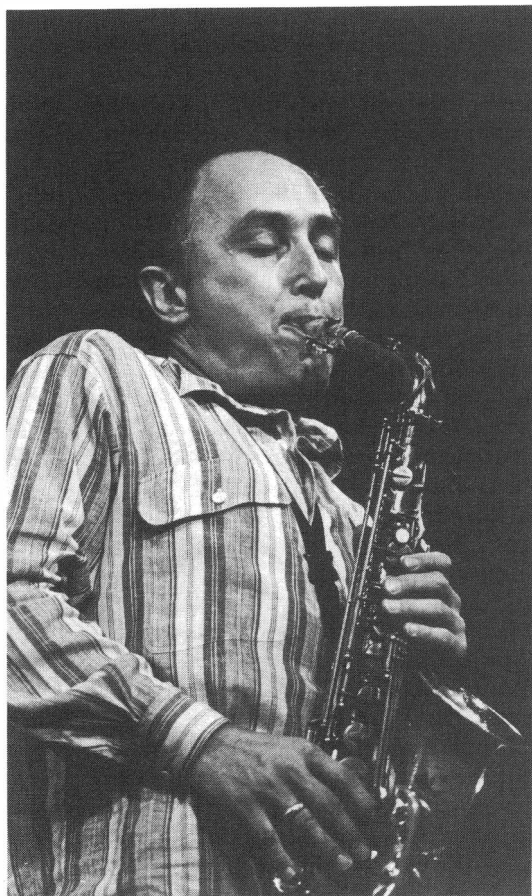
## CANADA

Peterborough's **Kawartha Jazz Society** is a flourishing organization with several seasons of successful concerts behind them. **Bob Mover** launches the new season with a concert/lecture September 13. The following month there's a one day festival showcasing the talents of musicians who record for **Unity**. Six different groups will be presented.

Even though this news is very late it should be documented. There was a three way tie for best Canadian jazz recording this year at the Juno Awards. **Brian Dickenson's *Transition*** on Unity was the only one of the three which was a full blown Canadian production. **Rene Rosnes *For The Moment*** was produced and released on a US label while **Rob McConnell's *Boss Brass*** recording of ***The Brass Is Back*** was recorded in Canada and issued in the US. It's time the Junos became really Canadian and gave credit to the performers and companies who function wholly in Canada.

Guitarist **Lloyd Garber** has featured the Toronto subway in his new improvisation works, ***City Under The City***. A booklet of improv sketch is available by calling (416) 594-6888. Lloyd's latest cassette release on Scratch 006 is titled ***London On Air*** and features the guitarist with trombonist Herb Bayley.

**The Banff Centre** has published a 40 page booklet tracing the 17 year evolution of the Banff Jazz Workshop. ***Notes*** is priced at \$12.50 and is available from the Banff Centre, Box 1020, Banff, AB T0L 0C0, Canada.



**Jack Litchfield** has published an interesting booklet on the Toronto Traditional jazz scene in the 1940s. It documents the bands and sessions which Jack attended and lists personnel as well as all the tunes performed on each occasion. There are also well produced photographs of the musicians. The book is available in Toronto through The Music Book Store and Pages or by mail from Jack Litchfield, Suite 503, 35 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1T3. Mail order cost is \$27.00 including postage.

Discques Avant Garde launched their latest release last April with special performances by the artists - string bassist **Michel Donato** and electric bassist **Alain Caron**. The CD is titled ***Bass ToBass...*** New from Justin Time is a long overdue showcase for **Nelson Symonds**. ***Getting Personal*** features the guitarist with Jean Beaudet, Norman Guilbault and Wali Mohammad. Guitarist **Larry Roy** and pianist **Marilyn Lerner** collaborate in another Justin Time release which also features US drummer **Peter Erskin** under the title ***Quarter To Three...*** Bassist **Kieran Overs** is the leader on Unity's ***Gateway***. It features trumpeter Kevin Turcotte, pianist Brian Dickinson, guitarist Lorne Lofsky and drummer Bob McLaren. Also on Unity is a new recording by alto saxophonist **P.J. Perry**. This follows quickly behind his US released session for Jazz Alliance which featured Kenny Barron. This time it's Mulgrew Miller at the piano along with Neil Swainson and Victor Lewis...New from Victo is trombonist **Konrad Bauer's** Music Gallery performance from 1991 ***Toronto Tone*** (Victo 017) and **Zeena Parkins' *Ursa's Door*** on Victo 018...Sackville has reissued clarinetist **Herb Hall's *Old Tyme Modern*** on CD and released a program of solo piano pieces by **Ronnie Mathews** from a performance at Cafe des Copains. Coming in September is the first of two CDs repackaging the **Abdullah Ibrahim** performances from 1973 and a newly recorded quintet session under **Junior Mance's** leadership which features flutist Bill McBurnie, guitarist Reg Schwager, bassist Kieran Overs and drummer Norman Marshall Villeneuve.

## UNITED STATES

History is viewed as a contemporary fact in

the United States so it seems appropriate for **The Knitting Factory** to publish a 74 page book tracing the first ten years of the club. It's a fascinating glimpse into the personal commitment from its founder, Michael Dorf, who also wrote the text for the book.

History of another kind has been on display this summer at the Smithsonian. **The Jazz Masterworks Orchestra**, under the direction of David Baker and Gunther Schuller, has been presenting concert performances drawn from jazz history's past. The series concludes August 29-30 with two nights of the music of Duke Ellington, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, Horace Henderson and Charlie Barnet.

Pianist **LaMont Johnson** has been a regular performer at Mario's Place in Riverside, California...San Francisco is preparing for the 10th anniversary edition of its jazz festival. The dates are October 23 to November 8. Elvin Jones, **Benny Carter** and **Tommy Flanagan** are among those already scheduled.

#### ELSEWHERE

Antwerp, Belgium was host city for a festival of Actual Improvised & Composed Music August 6-8 which featured the Dutch/USA **Trio Clusone** and the **String Quartet of Tokyo**... FMP is still a vital force in Berlin's music scene. This September 25-27 **Lol Coxhill**, **Steve Lacy** and **Evan Parker** join forces for a series of concerts featuring the soprano sax. The 25th edition of the Total Music Meeting takes place November 25-29... **Hal Crook** and Jerry Bergonzi were among the many US musicians to take part in summer music courses in Europe. They both participated in programs organized in Langau im Emmen-thal, Switzerland.

#### ROAD NOTES

Vienna's leading jazz club, **Jazzland**, celebrates twenty years of continuous activity this year. A variety of all-star combinations have been an ongoing highlight. Earlier in the year Art Farmer fronted a group which also featured Red Holloway, Junior Mance and Butch Miles. Trumpeter **Doc Cheatham** was there for a week in early May and Jim Galloway and Ken Peplowski are scheduled

for later in the year. The cellar club is located in the old part of the city and is a warm vibrant place. Its history is documented in **Geschichte und G'schichtln**. The 135 page book has excellent photographs of many of the musicians who performed at the club and, if you read German, the text will be even more useful to you. US\$25.00 will cover the cost of the book and postage. It can be ordered from Axel Melhardt (owner of Jazzland and author of the book), c/o Jazzland, Franz-Josefs-Kai 29, 1010 Wien, Austria.

Copenhagen has long been a major force on the European jazz scene. It is home of the legendary Cafe Montmartre although that venue rarely features jazz these days. It is also home for Steeplechase and Storyville Records. Today the first place to check out on a visit is **The Copenhagen House**. This concert style club showcases visiting headliners from other countries, usually one night at a time. In mid May guitarist **Peter Leitch** was featured alongside long time resident **Doug Raney** in a friendly exchange of ideas on familiar themes. There are four or five other venues which feature such prominent Copenhagen jazz musicians as **Jesper Thilo**. The tenor saxophonist was heard to great advantage at a Saturday matinee at Finn Ziegler's Hjerne in a trio setting with pianist Soren Kristiansen and bassist Hugo Rasmussen. There's a useful guide to Copenhagen's jazz clubs available at any one of the participating venues. You can also hear jazz on the radio at 102.9 FM most nights of the week between 10 pm and 1 am.

When Polygram purchased the Sonet Group last year Karl Emil Knudsen reclaimed ownership of **Storyville Records** and has begun an accelerated program of reissues and new recordings. There's a ten CD set of **Sounds of New Orleans** issues drawn from radio broadcasts in New Orleans and of New Orleans bands at San Francisco's Club Hangover in the 1950s. Storyville has also issued new recordings of Jazzpar Winners **Hank Jones** and **Jesper Thilo**. Knudsen's subsidiary company, Jazz Media, has just published an elaborate book on the day to day activities of the Ellington Orchestra as well as discographies of **Miles Davis** and **Duke Ellington**.

**Jazz Zeitung** is a monthly jazz news magazine which is published by Hans and Barbara

Ruland. There are two separate editions which cover jazz activity in Hamburg and Munich. It's the source for what's happening in both cities. The editorial office is at Titurelstr. 9, 8000 Munich 81, Germany.

#### AWARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Northsea Jazz Festival honoured **Michiel De Ruyter**, **Norman Granz** and **Pete Felleman** (a pioneer of radio jazz journalism in Holland), who are the recipients of this year's BIRD Awards...**The Note**, the magazine of the Al Cohn Memorial Jazz Collection (East Stroudsburg University, Music Department, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301) is an important primary source for the views of jazz musicians through its many excellent interviews as well as the regular Phil Woods column.

#### RECORDINGS

**Arabesque** is "a label with a difference". Their first release features CDs by tenor saxophonist Craig Handy (Split Second Timing), Carmen Lundy (Moment to Moment) and 8 Bold Souls (Sideshow)... **BMG/Novus** continues its support program for its artists with new material from Christopher Hollyday (And I'll Sing Once More) and Roy Hargrove (The Vibe). They also have released an overblown effort by trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis, who is better known as a record producer. A lot of money must have been spent on the production of **Pontius Pilate's Decision**. Hope it was worth it!

Hank Jones and Jaki Byard are the most recent artists to have **Maybeck Hall** recordings issued by **Concord**. There's more of Stan Getz from the Keystone (Spring Is Here) and the Jeannie and Jimmy Cheatham Sweet Baby Blues Band has **A Basket Full Of Blues** in circulation. Concord continues its support of Canadian artists with a new Rob McConnell Boss Brass date called **Brassy & Sassy**. Fraser MacPherson shares the spotlight with trombonist Ian McDougall with **In The Tradition**. Tana Reid's second Concord CD (Passing Thoughts) features alto saxophonist Craig Bailey and tenor saxophonist Dan Faulk. Both Art Farmer (Warm Valley) and Dick Johnson (Plays) have new CD versions of older lp recordings out.

Pete King, Gerard Presencer, Brian Lemon and Dave Green join Charlie Watts for a special *Tribute To Charlie Parker* recording on *Continuum*... Pianist Sumi Tonooka (Here comes Kai) and Joe Chambers (Phantom of the City) have new CDs on *Candid..Evidence Records* is reissuing on CD recordings made for Japanese King. Art Blakey, Michel Camilo, Gil Evans and Jim Hall are among those showcased. The label has also resurrected *Either Way*, the legendary Al Cohn / Zoot Sims collaboration for Fred Miles and the 1958 Everest recording of Woody Herman's band (The Herd Rides Again)... Phil Woods' latest recording (Full House) is on *Milestone*. So too is the debut recording (on location) of the Clifford Jordan Big Band.

*Gazell* has issued *Virtual Reality* by the Oliver Lake Quartet and an historic session by Stan Getz in Sweden in 1960... A previously unissued solo session by Erroll Garner from 1954 is available as a two disc package on *Emarcy*.

The flow of recordings from small independent labels continues to expand. The mail order service run by several of the distributors (City Hall, North Country, Rounder) and direct mail order services like Daybreak Express are good bets if you want to consolidate your acquisitions. Most of these organizations will also sell their recordings directly to you.

*Accurate Records* (Box 390115, Cambridge, MA 02139) has issued *The Calculus of Pleasure* by the Either/Orchestra and Warren Senders' unique musical blend on *Antigravity*... *AEC Records* (Box 53429, Chicago, IL 60653) has issued *Calypso's Smile* with Don Moya, Joseph Jarman and Essiet Okon Essiet... *Undercurrents* is a self-produced recording by flutist Jamie Baum. Randy Brecker, Vic Juris, Salvatore Bonafede, Jay Anderson and Jeff Hirschfield complete the group ... Saxophonist Victor Goines is featured on *AFO Records' Genesis* with Nicholas Peyton (trumpet), Peter Martin (piano), Chris Thomas (bass) and Brian Blade (drums). . . Bassist Jeff Johnson has released a cassette of his music. *My Heart* features Art Resnick (piano), John Gross (tenor sax) and Billy Mintz (drums). It's available from 29439-18th Avenue South, Federal Way, MA 98003... *Muscle Memory Hoedown* is the title of David Lahm's quartet session on *Generation Records* (248 W 22nd Street, New York, NY 10011). Thomas Chapin is featured on alto... *Notes from the Underground* fea-

tures John Medeski (piano), Billy Martin (drums) and Chris Wood (bass). It's on *hap-Jones Records*, 140 Plymouth Street, #5, Brooklyn, NY 11201... Guitarist Joe Morris' latest CD is *Flip and Spike* on *Riti Records*, 7 Broadway Terrace, Cambridge, MA 02139... Matthew Shipp, William Parker and Whit Dickey have a new recording (Circular Temple) on *Quinton Records* which is available through North Country.

There's a nice overview of contemporary Danish Jazz in a sampler CD entitled *All That Jazz* from Denmark 1992. It was produced in cooperation with the Danish Music Information Centre, Vimmelskaftet 48, DK-1161 Copenhagen K, Denmark... *Celestial Glory* is the title of Gunter Hampel's newest recording, from the Knitting Factory in 1991. He's busy reissuing his *Birth* catalogue on CD. They are available from Ph Reis Str. 10, 34 Gottingen, Germany... Tenor saxophonist Joachim Mulder, who was part of the 1991 Jazz from Sweden package which toured in the US and Canada, has a new CD on *Opus 3* (Consensus). The label is handled by May Audio in North America... Saxophonist Gebhard Ullman has a new release on *Nabel* called *Suite Noire*. Andreas Willers, Bob Stewart and Marvin Smitty Smith complete the quartet... *Cat Records* has reissued on CD their 1972 recording of Ben Webster at the Harlem Jazz Club with Tete Montoliu, Rob Langereis and Tony Inzalaco.

#### OBITUARIES

Guitarist **Mary Osborne** died March 4 in Bakersfield, CA... Drummer **Philip Wilson** died April 1 in New York... Guitarist / banjoist **Al Lewis** died April 12... Writer/historian **Martin Williams** died April 13 in Washington, DC... Blues singer **Johnny Shines** died April 20... Vocalist **Sylvia Syms** died May 10 in New York... Pianist **Nat Pierce** died June 9 in Los Angeles and vocalist **Big Miller** died the same day in Edmonton. □

#### ERRATUM

**Issue 243** - May/June 1992. The Jazz Drummers page 36. Chick Webb died in 1939 not 1989.

**Issue 244** - July/August 1992. Triangularity page 39. The number of the Geri Allen/Charlie Haden/Paul Motian album Segments is DIW-833.

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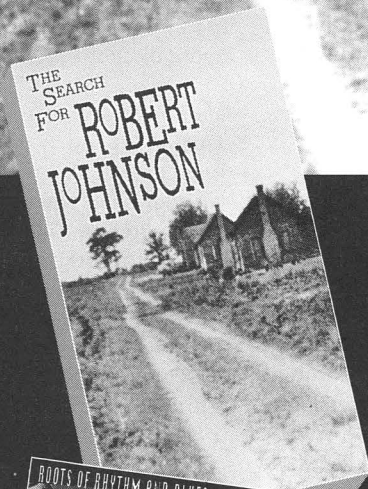
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# JUST CHI • HOT AIR FROM THE WINDY CITY



## CHICAGO NEWS BY JOHN CORBETT

HAMID DRAKE PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL SMITH

USUALLY, I FIND IT HARD TO MAKE ANY USEFUL GENERALIZATIONS about the "big picture" of the contemporary music scene. Just when something major seems to be taking flight, something else folds its wings. Still, I'll risk saying that things have never been better in the five years I've been on the Chicago beat; there are now more places to play, more people playing and more ongoing groups that are more fully developed. Things are okay in onion city. Good news? Don't blink.

Three consistent venues, each occupying its own particular niche, constitute the environment for this bustle. **Club Lower Links**, which has reduced its music programming somewhat over the last year to accommodate more performance art and poetry, is a dark, pleasantly claustrophobic black-walled basement space, with tables, couches and a low stage. Once-peripatetic **Southend Musicworks** has now settled down in a bright, high-ceilinged site, with auditorium style seats and a tall stage. Newest spot **Hot House** was renovated from a cavernous storefront warehouse loft into a friendly, multi-culti hotbed with a combo of tables and rows of chairs, colourful walls, hangings, art and commissioned mural, cool bar and medium-height corner stage.

So much for the specs, how are the sounds? Lower Links (not to be confused with Links Hall — now primarily a dance space — from which Southend was a revolutionary splinter five years back), keeps an eye on the rock world. Late last year, **Borbetomagus** gave a 2/3 strength show; guitarist **Donald Miller** was DOA onstage, allowing saxists **Jim Sauter** and **Don Dietrich** to work their deaf-defying bells-together magic. **Eugene Chadbourne** recently played dobro solos 'n' songs after invited guest **Tony Trishka** had finished a wide-ranging set of banjo pieces, though I missed the ensuing duet.

On a brief North American tour, AMM percussionist **Eddie Prévost** stopped at Lower

Links to play with an odd assortment of Chicagoans. In addition to a brilliant snare solo based on the two-stroke roll from M. Prévost, the evening elicited strong work from two of the city's bright new lights: guitarist **Jim O'Rourke** and clarinetist **Gene Coleman**. O'Rourke plays tabletop electric sometimes, though his most interesting exploration is presently being undertaken with an acoustic steel string. There, he grafts elements of the timbre and technique of Derek Bailey onto the harmonic and structural vocabulary of Morton Feldman. He is also a sometime member of Coleman's **Ensemble Noamnesia**, a flexible forum for the reedman's mixed bag of concerns: free improvised music, his own (graphically notated) structured improvisations and the work of contemporary composers like Kagel, Cage and Boulez.

Instrument inventor / percussionist / musical sawist **Hal Rammel** is a mainstay of Noamnesia; I also caught him at an art gallery not long ago weaving his unearthly "triolin" and saw sounds together with two cellists, **Bob Marsh** and **Russell Thorne**. This trio, augmented by synthist/trumpeter **Frank Sarvello** constitute **Nebulae**, and their Southend concert with guest saxophonist **Jack Wright** was a microsystem of action and texture. Thorne, who's an elegant and responsive player (whew, chops!) was bassist in the Joe Daly Trio — among Chicago's earliest free jazz groups in the late 50's — alongside young drummer Hal Russell.

Speaking of whom, **Hal Russell** is now preparing his third release for ECM (give me a "big picture" explanation of that!), and with

the **NRG Ensemble** he jammed 'em in at Lower Links for one of several record release parties...all for the same record. Russell has also appeared regularly (not to say, regular) at the Heartland Café on the extreme north side of the city with his **NRG 3**, a trio with drummer **Ed Ludwig** and Hadenite bassist **Noel Kupersmith**. Altogether different was Russell's two-night duo stint with pianist **Joel Futterman** at Southend. After the first set, the piano paramedics were sent in to assess the viability of the instrument, which was rocking wildly under the pressure of the Futterman pummel. Oblivious, Russell switched back and forth between traps, trumpet, soprano and tenor saxophones. In places, Futterman, too, picked up a curved soprano, adding a cackle to the joyous dischord.

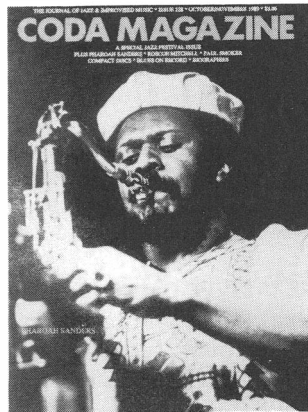
Apart from its endless support of local musicians, Southend is most important as the single major port in Chicago for European musicians. This year saw a number of visitors: **Willem Breuker Kollektief**, **Peter Brötzmann** (duets with worldwide percussionist **Hamid Drake**), a monster set from **Phil Minton** and **Roger Turner**, pristine percussionist **Fritz Hauser**. And Southend often gets involved in cooperative projects with other city presenters; in May they held open rehearsals with **Anthony Braxton**, who was preparing a large scale piece subsequently presented by the Jazz Institute of Chicago at the Getz Theatre.

Hot House has brought in some exciting outtatowners, as well, like the breathtaking **David Murray Octet** with alto saxophonist **James Spaulding** and trombonist **Frank Lacy** blowing it out. Snow disaster prevented a flawless night with **Wayne Horvitz's the President** and the **Bill Frissell Trio**, but wait-



ing for planes to arrive did permit an unprecedented and thoroughly enjoyable **Joey Barron/Bobby Previte** drum battle. I also caught several new Chicago bands there, including a free jazz offshoot of the rock ensemble Shrimp Boat called **Etoian Shrdlu**. Unfortunately, I've missed **Malachi Thompson** every time, but the trumpeter has had a myriad of reportedly excellent projects at Hot House. Although saxophonist/clarinetist **Ken Vandermark** threatens to leave Chicago to return to Boston, he remains one of the strongest newer players in the city, and his quartet — which features **Chris DeChiara** on guitar, **Kent Kessler** on bass and **Michael Zerang** on drums — plays original music with muscle, wit and conviction. They took Wednesdays in May at Hot House by storm (if that's possible on a Wednesday). Zerang has been extra-busy himself, developing a productive relationship with Hamid Drake that started with a set of concerts on mesopotamian frame drums only and has now grown to include percussion of all shapes and sizes. With his longtime associates **Don Meckley** (who plays shortwave radiotar — a shortwave radio mounted with a neck that controls its fine tuning) and **Dan Scanlan** (who plays normal ole guitar...and violin, and trumpet...and very well, at that!), Zerang is the third member of **Liof Munimula**, the single free improvising unit to persist in Chicago. In June they celebrated their 10th anniversary (!) at Hot House.

Finally, after a period of germination and more than a little woodshedding, three groups have emerged from the AACM and are bearing some serious fruit. **8 Bold Souls** should need no fanfare; their new disc **Sideshow** lets you in on the fact that they're a heavy band — even better live, as they were Thursdays in May at Hot House, the club with the most intense AACM connection (though all three clubs book AACM gigs). Souls' multi-reedman **Mwata Bowden** has his own group called **Sound Spectrum**, featuring **Ari Brown** on piano and (too little) tenor; currently they're looking for a smart label to put out their music. Alto saxophonist **Ernest Dawkins'** **New Horizons Ensemble** so blew the roof off a festival in Europe last year that Sound Aspects bought the tape and are set to release it soon. Last time I saw them at Hot House, drummer **Avryelle Ra** just about knocked me out of my chair. □



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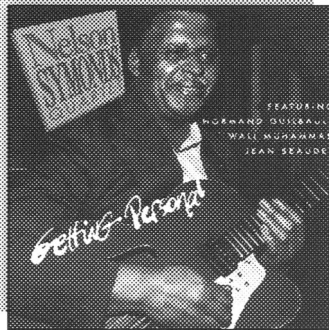
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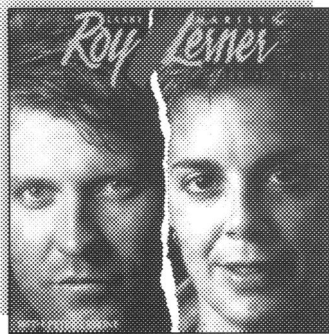
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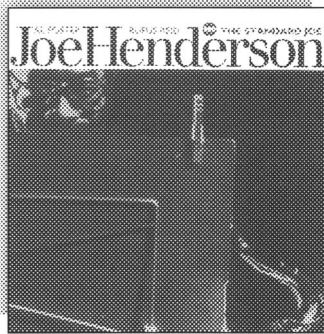
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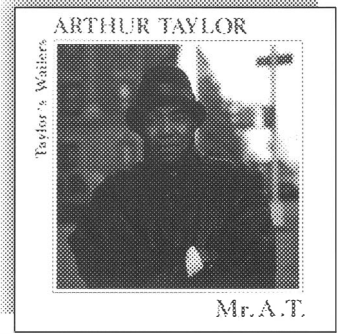
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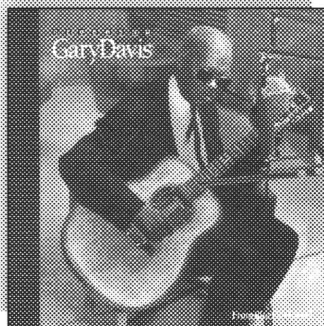
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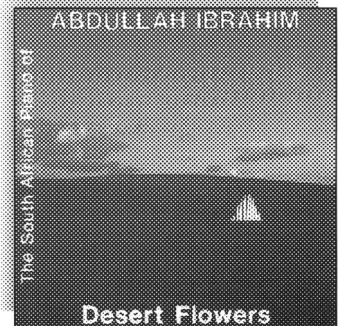
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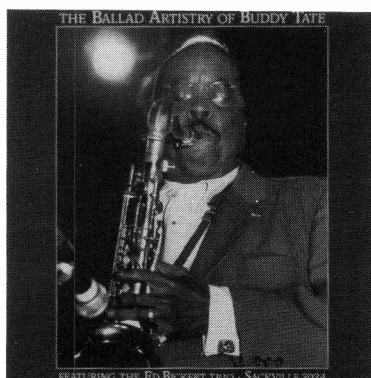
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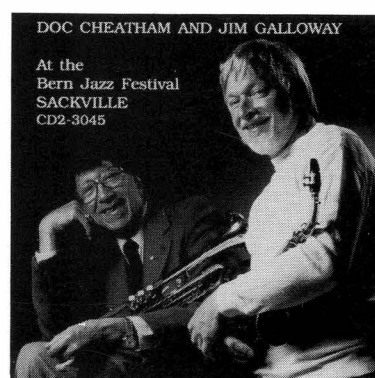
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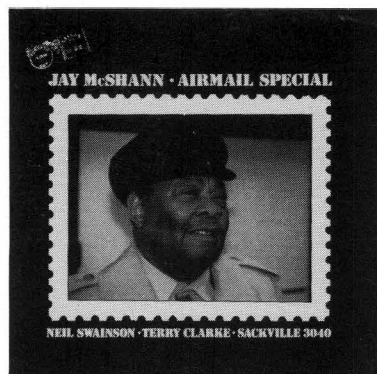
Ralph Sutton  
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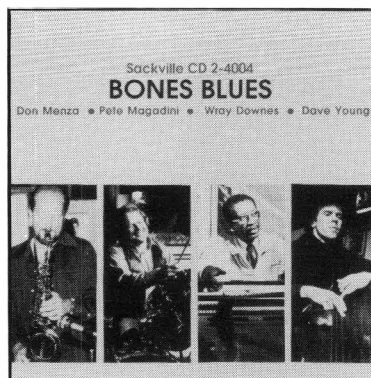
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