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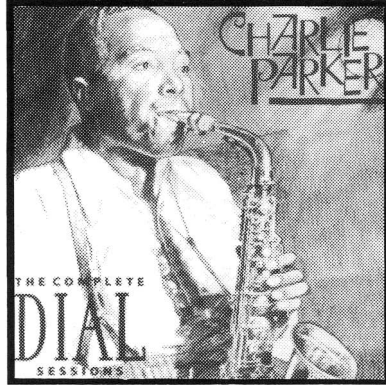
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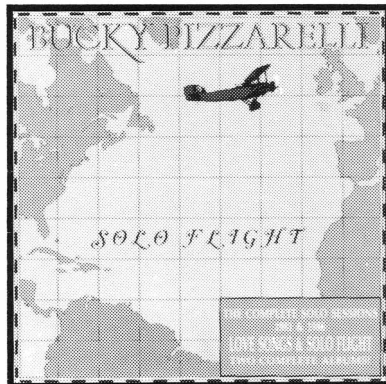
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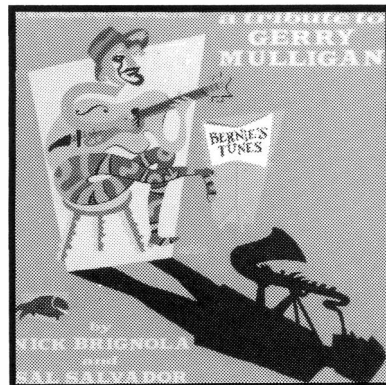
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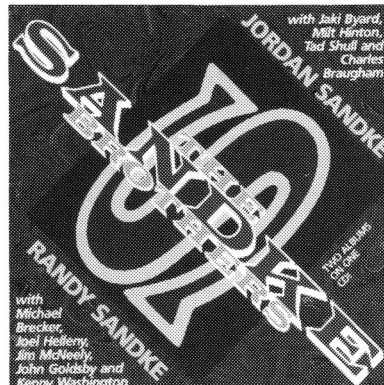
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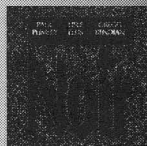
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COVER PHOTOGRAPH OF DON BYRON BY GERARD FUTRICK



MILFORD GRAVES

A CONVERSATION WITH **MIKE JOHNSTON**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JEFFREY REED

MIKE JOHNSTON: *WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING, I HAVE NOT SEEN MANY RECORDINGS LATELY?*

MILFORD GRAVES: I've been at Bennington since 1973. I haven't been that active musically as far as personal appearances are concerned. But I'm always in touch with the music: teaching at Bennington, to individual instruction, through having a dance ensemble, and also at my home with various musicians passing through. I have chosen not to play clubs and in situations that don't suit my spirit.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN RECORDING?

I RECENTLY DID A RECORDING with David Murray that is coming out on D.I.W. I've also been playing some gigs with Charles Gayle and William Parker. But so far the right terms haven't come about to do a recording with that group.

HOW DID YOUR EARLY E.S.P. RECORDINGS COME ABOUT?

THE FIRST THING I RECORDED on E.S.P. was with The New York Art Quartet (John Tchicai, Roswell Rudd & Lewis Worrell). Through that recording Bernard Stollman asked me to record something on my own. So I contacted Giuseppe Logan and we did that first date and decided to release it under his name.

ON ONE OF THOSE GIUSEPPI LOGAN LP'S YOU PLAY TABLAS. DO YOU STILL PLAY THEM?



I STILL PLAY A FULL RANGE OF DRUMS. Jimbe', conga, timbales, and bongos but because I don't play in Latin bands anymore I just keep that side of my playing internal. I don't use them on stage. For me the trap drums were really an after thing. Because these other drums came first. Early on I played in Latin jazz bands and I also did a recording with Miriam Makeba.

ANOTHER RECORDING I'M CURIOUS ABOUT IS THE LOWELL DAVIDSON TRIO RECORDING THAT YOU'RE ON.

I THINK THAT, THAT'S A PRETTY GOOD ALBUM. Overall the things that I feel good about with the E.S.P. records is that each recording is really quite different, each one has an entirely different feel. As far as having a favourite recording among those it's impossible to say because each one was about something different.

Lowell Davidson just passed away not too long ago. It seems that in the 60's a lot of things happened to a lot of people. It seems like a lot of musicians that came out of that era have disappeared. There was a lot more going on with a lot of these people than just music. The social and political things that were going on were such that a lot of people just couldn't survive.

MASTER DRUMMER

COULD YOU LEND SOME OF YOUR THOUGHTS ON IMPROVISATION?

I THINK IT'S DANGEROUS to try to intellectualize on improvisation. Especially if it comes from the African American experience, in relation to African American culture. Personally I didn't come up the way that a lot of people came up. I see a lot of people going to institutions and they use a language that I never grew up with. Especially about describing music and how to play music. The danger I see in that is that a lot of the people that are going to school now use blackboard and paper to write their tunes. They put this in and that in and you have to have certain abilities and knowledge to play their music. When I came up it was people just sitting in and being on the set and you just listened and watched and had to use your soul and feelings.

When I first came out on the scene I read some things about players that said their music had cosmological connections, and others said that their music was spontaneous and totally improvised. When I tried to relate to how people were playing their music I was very disappointed because a lot of the so called spontaneous music was really laid out pretty thoroughly. A couple of times I went to play with some folks and I thought we were just going to do it and let things happen. But most players seemed to be dealing with what I'd call a word thing, using abstract, intellectual and mystical words to describe their music. I was very disappointed when I'd hear their playing, because it was a lot more structured than what they were describing.

Some players have a spiritual approach and other players, many of the schooled players have more of a western approach. I saw a lot of musicians that didn't have institution or conservatory technology backgrounds that were being put down by these other players and many felt then they had to go back and hit some books. I feel that a lot of the musicians that say came out of the 60's stopped at a point and drew a line around themselves and said we've got to stay within this area. We can't go out of this area unless we know the chord changes and or the right notes. And I didn't relate to that because that's not the way I came up.

When I was young I remember some of the do-wop groups would go to Manhattan to audition. The groups would come back and they would say "they liked us but they told us that we need to go and get some voice lessons because we were singing out of tune." And we'd laugh because their music sounded great to us. That had a lot of impact on me and got me interested in doing research on the idea of right note and wrong note, and basically I saw how screwed up it was.

I RECENTLY READ AN INTERVIEW WITH JAPANESE COMPOSER TORU TAKEMITSU WHERE HE WAS TALKING ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINE'S INSTRUMENT THE DIDJERIDU AND HOW THESE ARE LOGS THAT ARE HOLLOWED OUT BY INSECTS AND THEN USED AS INSTRUMENTS. THEIR TONAL RANGE IS BASICALLY DETERMINED BY NATURE AND NOT A MAN MADE SYSTEM, AND THAT BY "TUNING" INSTRUMENTS WE MAKE THEM EASIER TO PLAY BUT, SOME OF THE MORE IMPORTANT SOUNDS AND ASPECTS ARE LEFT OUT AND FORGOTTEN.

EXACTLY, I TEACH A COURSE AT BENNINGTON where I go through the history and origins of how scales are constructed and why they are screwed up, and relate that to how sounds in nature vibrate and how your body responds to certain tones. And also the idea of what sound is about and how it affects people.

YOUR DRUM KIT IS VERY UNIQUE AND HIGHLY PERSONALIZED, WOULD YOU CARE TO GO INTO THAT IN TERMS OF WHAT YOU'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT WITH NON-WESTERN MUSIC SYSTEMS?

WELL FOR ONE THING I DON'T USE A SNARE DRUM. I think to have wires laid across the skins is for effects. To me that has nothing to do with relating musically to what's going on. Drums are for keeping time, it's one thing to use wires for effects, but to use them in a musical sense and have them there to accentuate rhythm phrases is ridiculous.

It's a drag hearing wires on the drums. It interferes with changing tones and reduces the drummer into a time keeping and noise making role. I could never relate to that because I've never used anything like that on skins. So that never made sense to me.

YOUR DRUMS ALSO SOUND LIKE THEY ARE TUNED LOWER THAN "NORMAL."

I DON'T USE DOUBLE HEADS on my skins and I tune them for the kinds of techniques that I use. I use a lot of different pressure factors on the skins so if I tuned them high it would be hard to go low. But by having them tuned lower by pressing the skins I can bring them up to higher pitches.

WHAT MUSIC DO YOU LISTEN TO?

I LISTEN TO DIFFERENT THINGS. Sometimes I listen to radio stations to keep in tune with what's happening. When I teach or play I like to know what people are being exposed to. Also, there's that chance that something might be happening. I have a discipline within myself not to be too influenced by

MILFORD GRAVES

things especially those done for commercial purposes. When I'm performing I don't do things to be hip. Primarily I would say that I'm not too influenced by things I hear because basically I don't believe a lot of things are being done. Most musicians are busy trying to make money which I understand. But when it comes to doing really great art, I feel there are a lot of people capable of that, but they've chosen to make money. They'll put out a product that maybe can catch and sell. That type of thing saddens me when I see good musicians that have reduced themselves.

CAN YOU SPEAK ON YOUR VOCALS OR VOICINGS?

THERE AGAIN I'M NOT INTERESTED in vocalizing the twelve notes. For me it's not about relating what other people have done. I try to go down into the deeper parts of me and hit on a certain feeling and then at that point I just breathe out and vibrate my body and let go. I really don't know what's going to happen and when it comes out it probably can't be reproduced again quite like that. I don't think in terms of being conscious of singing. Melodies are valid but there are other deep areas within and without our environment, and if you are talking about playing cosmic music you have to really extend yourself.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR DRUMMING ON YOUR EARLY ALBUMS SAY THE NEW YORK ART QUARTET? YOUR DRUMMING TO ME SOUNDS VERY INDIVIDUAL AND UNIQUE AT SUCH AN EARLY POINT.

WELL I THINK I CAN SAY THIS NOW. If I had said this back then people would have said that I couldn't play. In 1962 there was a guy that lived about two blocks from me in my neighbourhood. He had a trap drum set and he knew I played drums, conga's and stuff. I heard him a few times and went up to his house. He told me that he had been taking lessons. So I sat down and started doing a couple of things I was thinking about Cuban and African things. So I played different rhythm things, relating the kit to timbales and conga drums and with the bass drums and high hat, I just moved my feet like I was dancing. That just made sense to me, because I wasn't really thinking like jazz or any thing, it was more direct like just hitting drums. He responded because my approach was a lot different than the rudiments that he'd been practicing. He let me borrow his kit for a few days so I took them home and played. I played to a lot of things. I remember I had an Art Blakey record with Sabu that had some African things on it.

Around the same time in 1962 a friend took me to a club in Queens where John Coltrane was playing. At that time Coltrane meant nothing to me because I hadn't heard of him yet. My friend told me that Elvin Jones was the best drummer in the world. They did "My Favorite Things" and Elvin was mixing in a lot of things. The most unusual things he was

doing were in threes and sixes. My mind was racing in a lot of other directions because I'd been playing African music. I liked the way that Elvin played real loose and tight and dry like most drummers, but I thought at that point that I'd get a trap set because I saw where I could get a different expression using one.

Then in 1963 I got a call to go to Boston. Don Alias a percussionist called me up. Him and Dick Mesa (on saxophone) formed a Latin band and I played timbales in it. Sometimes Dick liked to play jazz so I'd take my cymbals and timbales and set them up and play along doing variations while tapping my feet on the floor. They liked my approach so I was also encouraged by them to play traps.

Also, at this time I went to a gig where Giuseppi Logan was playing. He was up on the stage alone and there were some drums on stage. I liked the way he was playing so I went up and started cutting loose on the drums. That was in 1963. Then I participated in the October Revolution in 1964 and that's when it hit and came together for me. I would say basically that I never tried to sound like other drummers. I was hearing Africa and the Caribbean and trying my best to put them on the drum set. I saw what the trap drummers were doing, but I made a connection with Africa that was different from what they were playing. One of the differences was that the trap drummers weren't changing a lot of tones like African Drummers did. So I was thinking about talking drums and I saw a way that I could slip those sounds into the kit and dance with my feet and I knew that was it.

I feel like if I said certain things when I was young people would say that I had an ego, but I feel like I've been conscious of what's going on. I'm a teacher and I like to turn people in the right directions. There are a lot of musicians who don't make the big magazines or whatever that don't get the credit they deserve. Also, a lot of the people that want to learn things go to the wrong people. They should go to the originators to find out what the real deal is. The real stuff doesn't often get into the publications. So a lot of the facts are messed up and many things are misrepresented.

It comes to the point where people should be presented in a correct way. A lot of people don't get their due respect. In the issue of Modern Drummer with Rashied Ali, Ed Blackwell, Andrew Cyrille and myself, I feel like we're all thrown in there together and everything is skipped over so fast that it ultimately ends up not doing anybody any good.

I LOVE MUSIC AND I LIKE TO THINK THAT I'M OPEN TO DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO PLAYING MUSIC, BUT SO MUCH OF WHAT I HEAR NOW SEEMS TO LACK SPIRIT AND ENERGY OR LIFE.

MASTER DRUMMER

EXACTLY, PEOPLE MAY BE DOING WHAT THEY'RE DOING and learning music. But they miss the deeper involvement point entirely. It is lacking, and that's what makes it so sad. A lot is not too genuine.

We started talking earlier about improvisation. As far as jazz is concerned I see a lot of people approaching it from an intellectual perspective. In the old days improvisation was part of the lifestyle, it wasn't something separate. It wasn't like going to school and then making something up. People had to be improvising for survival. So the spirit of improvisation and how to bring things together was a part of their life.

may be a way but, that's not the old way that I know. When you do it the old way it has some meaning to it because you are living it.

DO YOU HAVE ANY THOUGHTS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS THAT RELATE TO YOUR MUSIC.

PEOPLE OFTEN TELL ME THAT I'M NOT ON THE SCENE because I'm not playing in clubs, but I feel maybe it is reverse that they're not on the scene. Just because I don't play concert halls doesn't mean I've stopped. I still do everything that I've always done, and I feel better than ever.

I teach martial arts and I do acupuncture and herbology. I believe in the Modern Drummer article that it made mention of the fact that it was interesting that I still play with high energy at fifty-one years old like I did when I was younger. The fact is that I'm doing more now than I did in my twenties. I'm stronger and quicker and more precise than ever. I think it is a misconception that you always go down as you grow older instead of up. The reason I do acupuncture, martial arts and herbs is not just for the outer part, it is an inner and outer way of keeping fit. It has to do with discipline and self understanding. A lot of the misunderstandings are people thinking that you must do drugs to play a certain way and all sorts of other crazy

ideas. But it really is about discipline and a way of having your physical self being ready to express your deeper self. □

*Mike Johnston is a bassist and photographer residing in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. His photographs are published in two books of Native American poetry - **Songs From This Earth and South Line**. He hosts a weekly radio show, **Destination Out**, on C.M.U. public radio.*

Previous articles on Milford Graves have appeared in **CODA MAGAZINE** issue 183 (April 1982) & issue 150 (Sept. 1976). These are available from CODA PUBLICATIONS for \$2.50 each.

When I was living in Japan it was a challenge for me to get people to improvise in such a highly structured society. It was when I was living there that I began to understand this concept better. If you're living in a situation where everything is predetermined it is going to be hard to understand how to improvise, because everything is so calculated. But if you are coming from a situation where each day you don't know what's going to go down, and you've always got to figure things out, you will become a great improviser.

Today I see people that think they can learn a lot of scales and different chord changes and then they are ready to do it. That

ALBERT AYLER

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AFTER ALMOST THREE DECADES OF REVOLUTION, ACCEPTANCE, AND BACKLASH, ALBERT AYLER'S TENOR SAXOPHONE SOUND REMAINS—ABOVE ALL ELSE—A UNIQUELY EXHILARATING SPIRITUAL WAIL.

When Ayler recorded and performed in the 1960's, he was linked to the wave of radicals who created what was considered "the new jazz." Like Ornette Coleman, he dispensed with conventional notions of orderly chord progressions, and they both shaped ideas of collective improvisation. Ayler's sonic hurricanes ignored sophisticated subtleties as did the fiery work of Pharoah Sanders and Archie Shepp. John Coltrane's embrace of the free movement, after building his career on swing and bop, came largely as a result of Ayler's influence.

A term that has been mistakenly applied to Ayler is "iconoclastic." He did break as many perceived rules as his contemporaries, but Ayler—who came from a family of ministers—never abandoned his ties to church music, especially spirituals. While his solos did not "swing" in the accepted sense of his time, he utilized marches and affecting melodies just like the New Orleans bands he always admired.

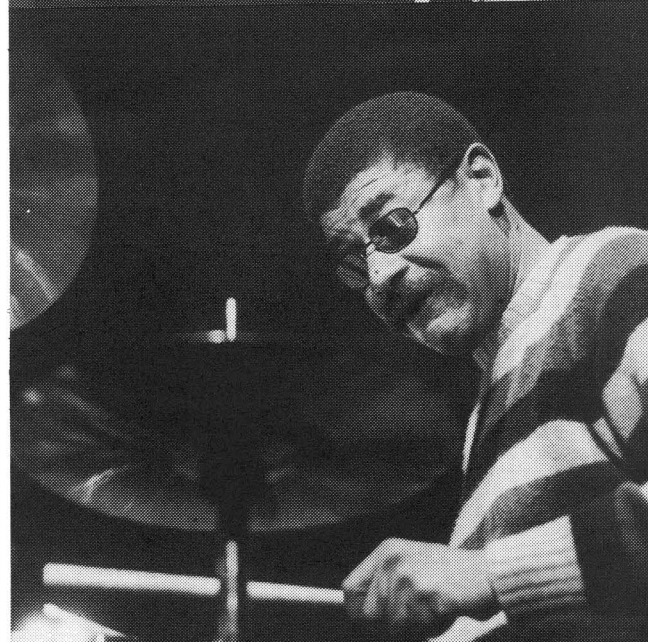
Most of Ayler's definitive recordings were made for jazz lawyer Bernard Stollman's tiny, but important, ESP-Disk label between 1964 and 1965. Thanks to financial backing from the German ZYX company, these long-lost albums have been recently released on four CDs.

Stollman had no idea that he would start a music label when he heard Ayler play in a Harlem club. But he was so struck by Ayler's fervour, he found himself asking the saxophonist to record for him even though the company existed, at that time, only in Stollman's imagination.

ESP became a vital label despite its short life-span. Not only did the company allow outsiders like Ayler to record for them (at a time when major labels shied away from even the most traditional jazz musicians), but the artists themselves decided on the contents of the records. What started with Ayler became a legacy as ESP released important work by a legion of insurgents, including Sun Ra, Coleman, and Milford Graves. The label's production stopped in the 1970s, but ESP's entire catalogue is being reissued by ZYX.

In the summer of 1964, the Albert Ayler Trio went into the studio to record **SPIRITUAL UNITY** for ESP. By this time, Ayler had journeyed from the rhythm and blues bands of his native Cleveland to the free-form jam sessions that he participated in while serving in Europe during an army stint. When he performed in Sweden, his preferred audience were the children on the street who he says, "heard my cry."

The first song on **SPIRITUAL UNITY**, *Ghosts: First Variation*, contained Ayler's most memorable theme; with its melody based on European nursery rhymes,



AN OVERVIEW BY AARON COHEN

it might have been a tribute to his young Stockholm fans. While the tune is pleasant and hummable, Ayler powerfully plows through the piece with his distinctive delivery. His sound was based on extreme overtones that the heavy-sounding tenors who preceded him, especially Sonny Rollins, only occasionally struck. His slurred notes would have made a lesser player the fodder for parody, but Ayler played them with remarkable authority. These overtones are effective not only on his fast and furious compositions; *Spirits* is a haunting, mournful work that reveals the melancholia that Stollman says Ayler constantly felt. The record closes with the triumphant *Ghosts: Second Variation*, which has an even more glorious tempo than the first version. On the first ESP recording, Ayler's inner turmoil ends with an optimistic resolution.

One week after he made his ESP debut, Ayler's **NEW YORK EYE AND EAR CONTROL** sextet recorded the soundtrack to Michael Snow's experimental film of the same name. As a work of collective improvisation, it was a bridge between Coleman's *FREE JAZZ*, and Coltrane's *ASCENSION*. The ESP free session is more open than Coleman's, and less overpowering than Coltrane's. Ayler's dominating tone is a catalyst for the players who create an array of textures as they enter and leave the record whenever any spirit moves them. While a painting by Pollock was included in *FREE JAZZ*, the collage of notes on **NEW YORK EYE AND EAR CONTROL** is closer to the abstract expressionist's cacophony of colour. Trumpeter Don Cherry (by this time a Coleman veteran), and alto saxophonist John Tchicai are distinct with their open and inwardly logical solos. If any of Ayler's recordings embody his quote that, "our music is no longer about notes, it's about sounds," it would be this one.

The communal approach to sounds from **NEW YORK EYE AND EAR CONTROL** and the grab bag of melodies heard on **SPIRITUAL UNITY** were combined on **SPIRITS REJOICE**, which was recorded the following year. Ayler is joined by his brother Don on trumpet and Charles Tyler on alto. Perhaps having family in the front line fills this record with so much humour. The title song's main theme is a subversive take on *La Marseillaise* that cosmically foreshadowed the Paris student uprisings that occurred four years after this recording. **REJOICE** also includes, *Holy Family*, which—at slightly over two minutes—could have been the pop single to bring overtones to a mass audience. But the most adventurous piece may be *Angels*, with Call Cobbs joining the band on harpsichord. Cobbs' twists on rococo is an intriguing contrast to Ayler's deep blues.

When ESP originally released **BELLS**, it was a promotional item that only comprised one side of an lp. Since re-releasing it as it originally appeared would have made the CD a hair short of twenty minutes, it's combined on one disc with **PROPHECY**. Both recordings were taped at concerts. During the mid-60's, Ayler's groups were described as sounding like "a Salvation Army Band on LSD" (considering the times, this was probably a compliment). On **BELLS**, the comparison is somewhat appropriate. The fragmented piece seems to start in the middle of a blaring free-for-all that's broken by Ayler's stark solos, and then coalesces around a hallucinatory hymn.

The concert that was taped for **PROPHECY** is the same trio from **SPIRITUAL UNITY**. While this is usually said about live vs. studio recordings, there clearly is a different intensity at work on these two dates. Ayler does not slur over the notes as often, and there is more dramatic tension, especially in the mournful title song. The disc ends with a flurry of overtones, and then subdues itself into silence.

Special credit must be extended to the rhythm section on just about all of Ayler's ESP recordings. Percussionist Sunny Murray expanded the notion of what drummers could do for group dynamics by stepping ahead of strict timekeeping duties. Since Murray dispensed with meter, he created waves of sound using mostly his cymbals and snare. Caught in a sandwich between two titans, bassist Gary Peacock (who appears on all of the discs except for *Bells*) created steady and naturally flowing pulses.

Under the tutelage of Coltrane, Ayler left ESP to record for the major Impulse company. He did some fascinating work after 1965, but his Impulse material is not as consistent as his previous records. Sometimes he recreated his early intensity, but he also produced some misguided dabbling in rock, and reduced his playing to backup forgettable vocalists. In 1970, after he disappeared for three weeks his body was found in New York's East River. Ayler was thirty-four years old.

The influence of Ayler's creation of distinctive sounds, without adhering to strict rhythm, scale, and proper notes, was immediately heard in Chicago during the late '60s with the emergence of Roscoe Mitchell. His group, The Art Ensemble of Chicago also utilized Ayler's experiments in collective improvisation. Throughout the '70s, David Murray played with a wide vibrato and overtones that bore a striking resemblance to Ayler. While Murray has shied away from any direct links, he wrote and recorded a beautiful tribute titled *Flowers for Albert*.

Other saxophonists who are outspoken in their reverence for Ayler are Peter Brotzmann and the late Hal Russell. Brotzmann has combined Ayler's phrases with the velocity of a machine gun. Russell, who successfully brought a comic timing, and punk rock energy into free jazz, once said that if he were to have ten records on a desert island, nine would be Ayler's (the tenth was Gene Krupa).

While the established jazz critics and scholars initially dismissed Ayler and his peers, his profound impact proved he was no charlatan. But by the neo-conservative/neo-classic movement throughout the '80s, he was considered to be a decadent distant cousin to so-called real jazz. Sadly, critics like Stanley Crouch, who once championed free players became the most vocal in dismissing these visionaries.

Now that Ayler's best recorded work is again available for admirers, the jazz community can actively show how important he has been. Perhaps the contemporary musicians who owe him the most can get together somewhere and hold a festival in his honour. Maybe a big band of the world's foremost improvisers can perform a version of *Ghosts* that will illuminate Ayler's spirit. His legacy deserves at least that much. □

DON BYRON

AN ARTICLE
INTERVIEW BY
ROBERT HICKS

IN THE LINER NOTES TO HIS LATEST RELEASE *Don Byron Plays The Music of Mickey Katz*, BYRON RELATES KATZ'S KLEZMER DIRECTLY TO HIS OWN INTEREST IN ANALYZING AMERICA'S SOCIAL ORDER, PARTICULARLY AS IT PERTAINS TO HOW ETHNIC GROUPS ARE PERCEIVED AND HOW THEY FIT INTO THE OVERALL WASP CONTROLLED SOCIAL ORDER.



SO IN A SENSE, BYRON HASN'T DEPARTED TOO MUCH CONCEPTUALLY FROM HIS DEBUT *Tuskegee Experiments*. ITS TITLE REFERS TO TWO EXPERIMENTS CONDUCTED ON BLACK AMERICAN MEN AT TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE. THE FIRST, IN 1932, CARRIED OUT BY THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE, DOCUMENTED THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF SYPHILIS LEFT UNCHECKED. NONE OF THE SUBJECTS - SOME 400 BLACK MEN - WERE TOLD ABOUT THEIR CONDITION. THE SECOND STUDY SUBJECTED BLACK PILOTS TO AN AVIATION EXPERIMENT TO PROVE THEIR ABILITY TO FLY MILITARY AIRCRAFT.

WHAT BYRON PERCEIVES IN KLEZMER great Mickey Katz is a music that deals with the contemporary changes in ethnic traditions and with the changing array of a people's culture that made up America in the '50s. According to Byron, Katz, unlike earlier Yiddish entertainers and klezmer traditionalists, didn't present a sentimental nor romanticized view of the old country.

One thing Byron admires about Mickey Katz, who died in 1985, is his ability to recognize what is "jive" about the whole '50s popular music climate and to parody it in a way that's at once humorous, socially insightful and intelligently orchestrated.

Byron was first introduced to klezmer and to the music of Mickey Katz while performing in The Klezmer Conservatory Band at the New England Conservatory of Music where Byron was studying clarinet (mostly a classical repertoire). By 1989, Byron had begun his own The Music of Mickey Katz

band project with occasional appearances in the group by Katz's son Joel Grey.

When we first spoke, Byron was just back from a European tour with his Mickey Katz band. Byron recalled playing at a Town Hall in Vienna the night after the Epstein Brothers performed at a municipally sponsored Jewish Festival. In Holland and Finland, Byron found people collected Mickey Katz records. Like his Katz concerts stateside, Byron drew a preponderance of older Jews (who even understood the jokes in Katz's lyrics) rubbing shoulders with a young crowd.

Drawing from a variety of Katz albums and 78s for his material on this new release, Byron pays tribute to his mentor with respect for the originals as well as a bent for original interpretation, especially when it comes to soloing and phrasing. He frames Katz's music with two of his own compositions *Prologue: shed not tears before the rain...* and *Epilogue:Tears*.

“BRAHMS, MOZART, WEBER. THOSE ARE THE BIG CATS WHO HAVE WRITTEN THE HEAVY STUFF FOR THE CLARINET,”

After his hectic tour schedule and an appearance on Jay Leno's Tonight Show, Byron and I spoke about his tribute and his politics over the phone:

What type of mood did you want to create in your prologue?

THESE TWO PIECES FRAME THE RECORD in a certain kind of way. They're pieces that feature the more avant-garde part that we can play - frames the way that we're looking at it. In a way, Mickey Katz makes an appearance himself. I thought that was important that he make an appearance, though not a musical one. In that piece, it's actually the rhythms of the way they deliver the jokes that we're using for the rhythmic energy of the piece. It let's you have a feeling that you're going to a different place, a different time, to a vibe that's different. I don't feel like it's quite as sad as the second piece.

What values do you feel Katz's parodies instill?

THEY HAVE A TERRORISTIC RELATIONSHIP to the normality of that period. There's something a little malicious in them, just a little bit of what I perceive to be, 'This is jive' like this whole setup is jive so I'm pokin' fun at it. You know now it could be totally that I'm readin' Mickey Katz wrong. I mean he ain't around to defend himself. As a theoretical way of lookin' at what he was doing - that's just the way that I'm interpreting it. That's the real danger of this repertory stuff. You know you do Duke's music and one guy thinks he's doing it totally great and maybe Duke would puke if he heard it. Now Mickey Katz did hear me play klezmer music and he did like my playing, so I feel maybe I'm not so far off. This is the way I'm interpreting his relationship to the social order.

How did you interpret Katz's parodies?

I DID THE PARODIES PRETTY CLOSE to the way that they were done. I mean my vibe - you know if I want to do some new music, I can just go out and get a new band and play some new music. On the other hand, if we talk about old music, any kind of old music, I mean, since I've had this involvement in Ellington's music, I've seen the way that certain old cats go about doing old music. They'll hand out a job transcription of something that Duke used to play and then write out exactly what Johnny Hodges played off the top of his head on a given day and make cats play that exactly. And my vibe is if you're gonna have some old music and the shit's gonna be "live", you have to give the musicians a certain amount of leeway. So for me I like to put in front of the cats exactly what got played the day that they recorded. But I also know that like you know in anybody's case, in Duke Ellington's case or Mickey Katz's case, if a cat re-records some stuff a year later, he's gonna come out with some different stuff (if he's worth anything) and so I put it in front of them knowin' that they're gonna change it. On the other hand, they need to be able to

tell what in the arrangements should be played exactly like a solo lead with voiced up voicings that are moving through time - that you should play a note - then when it's your solo, you got it, or... a cat's solo should be different - you've gotta get cats who are smart enough to do smart things in those situations. When I first started playing klezmer music, everybody who was playing it was copying those Dave Paris records and Nactalia Brownwein records and playin' the exact thing that he played on that day - they wouldn't... not even at the end of a phrase would you hear a little flourish - it would be like that day, that take, that guy. To me, when I started playin' the music, I ain't doin' that. I can transcribe better than anybody that was playin' that music at that time, but I would refuse to play in public more than once or twice. And so when I put together the Mickey band, I put together cats that were smart enough that they could go off. And I let them see me varying the music. To play that kinda music, it's not like you're improvising, but you need to be able to vary. You need to be able to change, or ornament, or put it in a different place, like to move around the melody or maybe play a couple of different notes in a melody but you can still hear what the melody's supposed to be. There's some jazz like that, but I mean this is a skill that's different than all out improvising and you need to be able to get cats who can do that... You need to empower some cats to play klezmer instead of intimidating them with some stuff and saying, 'This is perfect and you are nothing.'

Why did you start your klezmer band?

I HAD GONE THROUGH THE BASIC KLEZMER GUYS. Katz's music is really cleverly arranged and the cat can play. There's a certain kind of intensity that you get from people who can play on that level. You could feel this instrumental muscle. I found that klezmer fulfilled my general esthetic in music closer than most anything else I had heard. The level of arranging, orchestration and harmonic sophistication in that music is the kind of stuff I look for in music I'm playin'.

DON BYRON, NOW 34, grew up in the South Bronx, NYC across the street from a synagogue. Jews and Italians populated his neighbourhood along with some Blacks and Hispanics. This cultural mixture provided Byron with diverse musical experiences, but his early studies focused squarely on classical music.

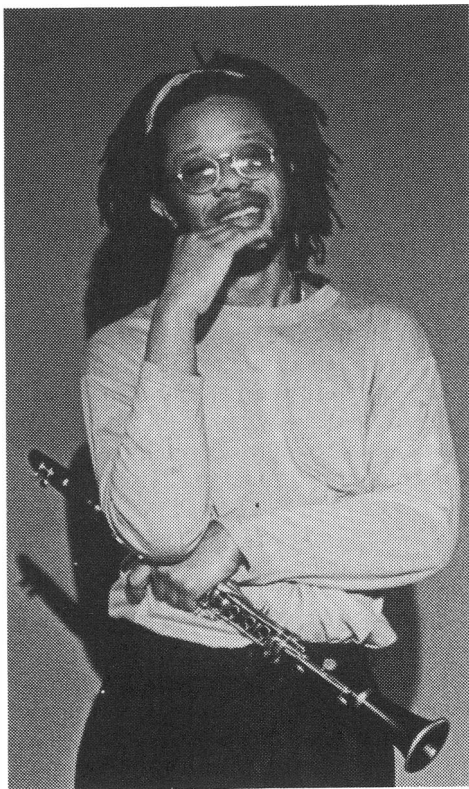
"Brahms, Mozart, Weber. Those are the big cats who have written the heavy stuff for the clarinet," said Byron.

He studied clarinet privately from age 6 and played only classical music until after high school. His dad, who played bass in a calypso band, worked as a mailman, and his mom, who played piano, worked for the phone company. She's the one who was hip to R&B and jazz singers.

DON BYRON ARTICLE/INTERVIEW BY ROBERT HICKS

"My mother was really into female singers like Gloria Lynne, Dinah Washington and Nancy Wilson. But I mean every middle class black kid heard these records," said Byron.

WRITING MUSIC HELD SWAY OVER BYRON EARLY ON. From New York Philharmonic concerts he attended with his parents to working with neighbourhood Latin bands and hours of listening to Katz's records, Byron developed a knack for transcribing and arranging.



"When we got into the junior high school vibe and you decided you could play in a band, my interests took a different turn," said Byron.

Before college, jazz clarinet was not a large part of Don Byron's world. Through Donald Harrison, Byron heard about Alvin Baptiste and later John Carter. After entering the New England Conservatory of Music in 1980, Byron expanded his musical terrain.

Hanging out with all the brothers at Wiley's and other black-owned clubs in Boston, Byron would gig with cats from the big band at Berklee College of Music - Jeff Watts, Billy Kilson, Marvin "Smitty" Smith, Donald Harrison, Doug Miller, Tim Williams, Bud Revel, Greg Osby, Walter Beazley, Ron Savage, Mikoto Ozone and Wallace Roney.

BORED BY THE CONSERVATORY'S Woody Herman style big band, Byron sought out jazz studies with Joe Berkowitz and subbed in Gunther Schuller's New England Ragtime Ensemble. But Byron found no real set curriculum for jazz nor any legitimate outlet for "out" players.

"There are guys playing clarinet [in jazz], but they're mostly older white guys from that swing era shit. They're not gonna be that interested in a young black kid anyway much less be interested in the actual music I'm playin'," said Byron.

BYRON DISCOVERED GREATER FREEDOM in his studies with woodwind teacher Joe Allen and in his courses with George Russell. Soon recruited into Hankus Netsky's Klezmer Conservatory Band, Byron took hold of popular Yiddish music full of parody and orchestral charts. To pursue his classical interests in a modernist vein, Byron joined the chamber group Semaphore which played Varese and Messiaen.

"I wanted to play that music in my vibe, not in somebody else's vibe," said Byron.

That statement aptly applies to all of Byron's endeavours from work with John Zorn, Allen Lowe, Mercer Ellington, Marc Ribot, Brandon Ross, Bill Frisell, Hamiet Bluiett, J.D. Parran, Reggie Workman and Living Colour to his own politically and socially tinged Tuskegee and Katz projects.

"I'm interested in what really happens in America to ethnic groups. People are forced to give up part of their ethnic thing to get around or to get by or to get whatever. I'm also interested in knowing why different ethnic groups get into conflict. I document how ethnic groups have been able economically to raise themselves from one level to another. The whole social code of a people. The degree to which one kind of person is considered higher than another or one kind of music is considered higher than another, one life style is higher than another," stated Byron.

THESE INSTITUTIONALIZED KINDS OF RACISM as opposed to the more direct instances of it such as lynching mark us politically, economically, socially and culturally, according to Byron, to such an extent that musicians even encounter these schisms in their work.

"I never had that thing because I was into one kind of music I couldn't be into another kind of music, but I knew that in the whole classical world people were always looking at that as a way to disqualify young black musicians. 'Oh, you play jazz, so you can't play this or you don't wanna do this.' Later in my career when it was already clear what I was doin', people would say, 'You don't wanna do this. You don't wanna play in an orchestra.' Cats were makin' decisions for me about what you like and what you wanna play. Playin' jazz would've just been another excuse not to get to play in the wind ensemble or the orchestra or whatever. I pretty much avoided it even though I was interested in it." □

New York City based writer Robert Hicks, writes a weekly music column for The Villager, and contributes to Coda, Downbeat, Jazziz, Bass Player, Guitar Player and Jazz Critique (Japan). He also reviews dance for Attitude and The Village Voice.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF DON BYRON BY
CORI WELLS BRAUN (PAGE 10) AND
GERARD FUTRICK (PAGE 12)

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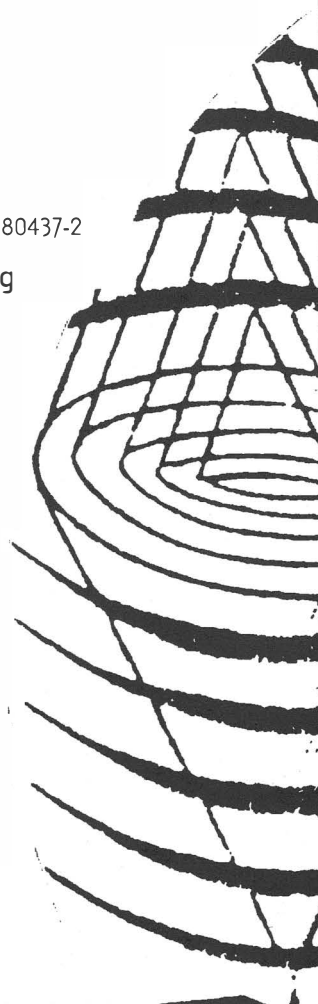
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TERMITES & WHITE ELEPHANTS

CONTEMPORARY RECORDINGS IN REVIEW

BY **BEN RATLIFF**

PHOTOGRAPHS OF TERUMASA HINO AND RALPH PETERSON BY GERARD FUTRICK

A REALLY ALL-INCLUSIVE AESTHETIC THEORY ABOUT THE POPULAR ARTS, WHETHER YOU BELIEVE IN IT OR NOT (AND WHO HAS THE TIME FOR THEM, GENERALLY), IS A GIFT; ONE THAT STAYS TRUE, BY RETROGRADE JUDGMENT, IS A REVELATION. MOST CRITICAL ESSAYS THAT RAISE A TOWER OUT OF A SINGLE IDEA, A PERSONALIZED RULE OF THUMB FOR DETERMINING WHETHER ART IS GOOD OR BAD, TEND TO PASS UNNOTICED. A FEW MAKE A SPLASH AND THEN HAVE A BRIEF SHELF-LIFE: THE FILM CRITIC ANDREW SARRIS' "AUTEUR THEORY," SLOWLY EVOLVED IN THE LATE '50S, OR DWIGHT MACDONALD'S 1960 PARTISAN REVIEW BARNSTORMER "MASSCULT AND MIDCULT", CROWBARRING A DIVISION BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD LITERATURE. BOTH BECAME EARLY-SIXTIES PARLOUR GAMES AND THEN RECEDED INTO INKBLOTS OVER TIME.

MANNY FARBER's 1962 essay "White Elephant Art Vs. Termite Art" has had a much stranger life. Originally published in *Film Culture*, the house organ of the art-film movement, and later included in Farber's one and only book, it's been out of print for at least fifteen years now. But this cranky, imaginative little gem — like the others, a straightforward personal justification for the modes of art he preferred — keeps on resurfacing. Greil Marcus quoted from it in one of the few important essays about punk rock, for *The Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock and Roll*; Francis Davis used it as a point of departure in a 1982 essay about Sun Ra; Terrence Rafferty, the *New Yorker's* film critic, brought it up again recently to identify the reasons why *One False Move*, a new noir-ish movie, is so effective.

So what's it all about? Farber loved "underground" art — not what you're thinking. His underground heroes were mostly competent, unshowy, but occasionally brilliant B-movie film makers like Howard Hawks and William Wellman; he hated "big" movies like *The Graduate* and *The Sweet Smell of Success* (sigh) which concentrated on making their stars flabbily larger-than-life and didn't make tautness or moment-to-moment riskiness a priority. (Farber's other career is

as a painter and art teacher, and he sees all art as canvasses, to which an ignorance of spatial concerns is an artistic insult.) "These ridiculously maltreated films," he wrote in an earlier essay, "sustain their place in the halls of fame simply because they bear the label of ART in every inch of their reelage. Praising these solemn goiters has produced a climate in which the underground picture-maker, with his modest entry and soft-shoe approach, can barely survive. However, any day now, Americans may realize that scrambling after the obvious in art is a losing game. The sharpest work in the last thirty years is to be found by studying the most unlikely, self-destructing, uncompromising, roundabout artists." (By "self-destructing," don't think he's talking about personal problems.)

In other words, a piece of art intended to be a masterpiece — that which he later designated "white elephant" — always goes wrong. But there were other points to his program. "The best examples of termite art appear in places other than films, where the spotlight of culture is nowhere in evidence, so that the craftsman can be ornery, wasteful, stubbornly self-involved, doing go-for-broke art and not caring what comes of it....The three sins of white elephant art (1) frame the action with

an all-over pattern, (2) install every event, character, situation in a frieze of continuities, and (3) treat every inch of the screen and film as a potential area for prizeworthy creativity." His final definition of termite art: "buglike immersion in a small area without point or aim, and, over all, concentration on nailing down one moment without glamorizing it, but forgetting this accomplishment as soon as it has been passed; the feeling that all is expendable, that it can be chopped up and flung down in a different arrangement without ruin."

Jazz critics generally avoid making such divisions, realizing where the art comes from: most jazz takes place in underground locales and is invented without a lot of tainted money. (Big-label electric fusion is the obvious exception.) But I've always found Farber's scheme useful in defining the niggling qualities inherent in the jazz which to my mind seems "good." A yawn of a studio picture can have a lot in common with a big-label jazz "showcase" album — you know, that feeling that a thousand tiny gloved hands are poking you and prodding you. And even low-rent jazz has its white elephants — soloists who think about space in all the wrong ways and end up giving what Farber called "private whirligig performances." Usually, the Farber theory is slanted in favour of "little" productions, but it's my understanding that this bias is ok for Coda. So, thanks to Mr. Farber, here's a view of a freshet of new jazz records.

PER HENRIK WALLIN, *Dolphins, Dolphins, Dolphins* (Dragon DRCD 215). Wallin, the Swedish pianist, has an impatient, excitable motor rumbling in his hands all the time; it might be a problem if he weren't able to keep it down to a steady simmer. What's usually called "cell-like" compositional structure dominates about half this trio record, and the rest is taken up by wry Monk-like behaviour, as in the pleasingly titled *Nu Nu Och Da Nu Gar Da Och Nu*. For an



TERUMASA HINO

to have prevented the too-many-cooks problem incurred by white-elephant producers (cf. Renee Rosnes' Blue Note debut, among a hundred other instances), although the highest number of musicians on any one track is six and the total cast twice that. It's a varied program, moving from Byron's stately solo *Waltz for Ellen* to the all-angles of the quartet *Tuskegee Strutter's Ball*, with Bill Frisell doing some of his best weirdly bracing work, to a quintet accompanied by the poet Sadiq Bey. I wish that Reggie Workman were on more than one ensemble piece, that Frisell were on less than four (he's too synthetic against Byron), and that someone who plays less predictably than Edsel Gomez had been hired as pianist. But most of the time Byron's

abstractionist, his time is unerringly even, which I suppose has to do with classical training. The drummer Kjell Nordeson leaves a lot of space open and adapts sensitively to Wallin, but I'm not so enthusiastic about the overmiked young saxophonist Mats Gustafsson, whose shrill, nervous-driver acidity consistently tries for way-out and usually doesn't go beyond creating disturbances. Wellin's admirably compressed energy throws Gustafsson into relief as a white elephant (even Evan Parker enthusiasts can be white elephants).

GUNTER HAMPEL, *Celestial Glory* (Birth Records 040). I usually find the extended multi-reed dreamscapes of Hampel's Galaxie Dream Band sort of absurd, but on this recording of a '91 concert, *Are You Phoenix* stands up nicely with pretty sonorities. The woodwind trio of Hampel (when he's not on vibes), Mark Whitecage, Thomas Keyserling, and good old New Jersey man Perry Robinson knit up choirish textures, and Jeanne Lee sings in long, long vowels. It's devotional in a way that's not too clumsy; there's some very fine writing in Hampel's occasional short-order tonal columns and set pieces. I can take or leave the four-way scrimmages that fill up most of *By All Means* and *As If It Were A Bridge*, though in the latter altoist Mark Whitecage gets almost two

unaccompanied minutes to demonstrate why he's a termite hero.

RALPH PETERSON FO'TET, *Ornettology* (Blue Note CDP 7 98290 2). Peterson is such an interesting case — his early days as a Blue Note wunderkind escorted him quickly toward white-elephant behaviour, and his two glib bop albums were irritating because his own dangerously frisky drumming promised so much more than its surroundings. But this Fo'tet of canny improvisers has been a wise career move — when he overplays now it's a conscious decision rather than par for the course. The delicate nature of the Don Byron (clarinet) - Bryan Carrott (vibes) frontline encourages close listening, but it's raucous nonetheless. And Peterson's generous, too, though it may not be intended; I don't want to come off like a reductionist, but am I the only person who thinks Byron swings the band? In any case, despite the title you won't hear more than a sliver of Coleman in this record — which is fine given the outbreak of Ornette fever in the New York scene.

DON BYRON, *Tuskegee Experiments* (Elektra Nonesuch 9 79280-2). The major-label debut for a committed termite artist. Byron's freshness is irrepressible, and the generally sentient Arthur Moorhead seems

upper-middle and high register tone, and his subtle vibrato, just rivets me — more so in cooking little squibs than in grandiose Frisell-specialty homages like the version of *Mainstem* herein (who is good at those, anyway). Nevertheless, the sculptured curve of the record remains forced: solo at the opening, then various group permutations, culminating in the dire title piece, ending again with solo clarinet. Byron's too forthright a musician to benefit from this drama — we want to hear him play, not to view him as an actor in a stage production.

TERUMASA HINO, *From the Heart* (Blue Note CDP 7 96688 2). Hino's cropped trumpet lines are lovable — more so than his longer, flowing ones — and he plays with such force and dignity that there's a lot to like here, though you have to make allowances for the predictability of what's going on behind him. Michael Carvin and Michael Formanek make a very sympathetic rhythm section; they know each other's working habits, and are responsible for a lot of the good moments. But the guitarist John Hart solos like he's rolling off a log. (Manny Farber on Stan Getz, in 1957: "Getz turns the sax into a thing that can be easily mastered, like a typewriter.") The pianist Onaje Allan Gumbs is no fascination himself, but it's better that they gave him so much space

CONTEMPORARY RECORDINGS IN REVIEW

over Hart. So: predictable ballads, forceful straight-ahead bop, and the nice wrench-in-the-works of *Lava Dance*, with its melody that doesn't fall into equal measures. But in all — this certainly isn't Hino's fault as a horn player, though maybe as a bandleader — the record sounds like somebody's slicked-up notion of what contemporary jazz should be, not what it can be. That's numbing, especially when at least half the band has something to say.

CECIL TAYLOR, *Looking (Berlin Version)* *Corona* (Free Music Productions FMP CD 31). Well, it is astounding music — as usual, it's both reticent and in-your-face, and any less than all of it at once is not the way to hear it. (A white elephant characteristic.) In the long, oppressive first movement, I miss Taylor's lush chapters: one's always waiting for him to break into two or three minutes that absolutely takes your breath away, and it's much harder to get that when he's underneath the enormously dense leaf-pile of Harald Kimmig's violin, Muneer Abdul Fataah's cello, William Parker's bass, and Tony Oxley's drums. Kimmig is the MVP of this record, really getting his money's worth out of his violin, in step with Taylor at every moment. Most of the time, it seems to be all about stamina. The density of this first movement is kept at the same super-high level for a solid fifty minutes, with just a few small dips into semi-quietude. I know someone who says that the beginnings and endings of Taylor pieces are the best parts: with this epic first section, I'd have to agree. But then come the little termite postcards — the playful second and gorgeous third movements (were they encores) bringing the heart rate down to normal.

ELSIE JO, *Live* (Maya MCD 9201). The vast difference between this one-shot sextet of European improvisers and the Taylor record above is all you need to show how diverse free music can be. Here the musicians (Barry Guy, bass; Irene Schweizer, piano; Evan Parker, soprano and tenor saxophones; Konrad Bauer, trombone; Barre Phillips, bass; Paul Lytton, drums) react far more against each other than with each other; the hair-trigger sensibility is more polite. (Think of an English

dinner party where everyone takes turns asking each other if they'd like more; by contrast the Taylor record is Trimalchio's banquet from the *Satyricon*.) These are tremors rather than explosions, and the group really has dynamism, in the sense that nothing can be predicted; there are constant changes in the atmosphere. Konrad Bauer's baleful, long, low trombone notes are beautiful, but droll too, and same goes for the whole of *Ta'ay (Now)*, the wonderful Schweizer-Parker duo, one of the record's three pieces.

RAPHE MALIK 5TET, *21st Century Texts* (Free Music Productions FMP CD43). A marvellous record, which you might not have expected from Cecil Taylor's and Jimmy Lyons' former associate, since it's the first under the trumpeter's own name and since he's been off the scene for so long. It sounds like a record he's been dying to make. Articulated streams of very worked-out music flow all through the seven pieces; it's one of those great examples of liberated and tight playing creating a tense, agile combination. Here Malik works with the unusual mixture of a

tenor (Glenn Spearman) and a C-melody saxophonist (Brian King Nelson), and the sandwich of timbres is completely compelling. Malik likes to set up situations whereby soloists take turns out front and the two other horns occasionally chime in with unison or counterpoint melody segments, and it's done with such freshness and radiance that you feel as if you've never heard anyone do this before — though it was a staple arrangement of the '60s. Meanwhile, the bassist Larry Roland and the drummer Dennis Warren gallop with great risk. There's a sweetness and a clever dislocation in each given moment of this music, and yet at the end, surprisingly, it all feels as if it hangs together — which is what good termite art is all about. □

Manny Farber's essay "White Elephant Art Vs. Termite Art" is found in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies*, Praeger Publishers, 1971.

BEN RATLIFF is a contributing editor of Option, and has also written for Cadence, Request, and Downbeat. He lives in New York City.

RALPH PETERSON



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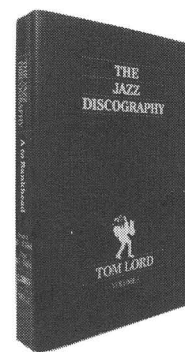
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Their contracts with artists are onerous. As noted in *Hit Men*, the 1990 look inside the Music Business by Frederic Dannen, "The key to understanding why the contracts are so bad is the word 'recoupable'. In a standard agreement, most of the costs of making a record are to be repaid out of the artist's royalties rather than gross receipts. Items that are normally charged to the artists include manufacturing costs, recording-studio time, marketing, touring, packaging - in short, almost everything."

"Under this system, only a superstar who sells millions of albums can make a reasonable return. For the 95 percent of artists who aren't multiplatinum sellers, the outlook isn't so good. The way contracts are structured, the record company can make a profit off an album while the artist's royalty account is still in the red. In fact, this is a frequent occurrence."

Anything which threatens the stability of these arrangements is viewed with less than enthusiasm by these corporations. Earlier this year they held meetings to deal with the threat posed by the decision of the Wherehouse chain to sell used CDs in its stores. All of a sudden this seemed, to the corporations, to herald the demise of their business.

The Wherehouse chain, in a ploy to gain extra sales, had stated it would accept for exchange any CD purchased in its stores. Before long they had got back many more than the allowable percentage they could return to the distributors. The decision was made to sell these CDs in the stores.

That's when everything broke loose. The majors

flexed their muscle - threatened to withdraw their CDs from the chain, cancelled their advertising agreements (worth millions) and even had their artists protesting the chain's actions.

Used CDs, like used lps, are part and parcel of how smaller stores keep their customers happy. Successful artists should have little to worry about. Their recordings rarely show up in used stores. People buy them and keep them. More than 80% of the used CDs are the failures. This particular conflict doesn't affect jazz listeners too much. The Wherehouse chain is not on the shopping list of many jazz fans. Indeed the only chain which really features jazz recordings in the United States is Tower.

Ironically jazz buyers are more likely to find, in used CD bins, the promotional copies which companies supply to their representatives. Major label jazz CDs which had the most hype (and are often only marginally jazz) fill up the bins. Obviously the CD buying community is voting down a heavy percentage of music being hustled to them.

The second agitation point for the major record companies - now that they can see a profit in the reissue of vintage recordings - is the proliferation of unauthorised compilations. Most of this activity takes place in Europe where copyright laws, while varying from country to country, have made all pre 1942 recordings public domain.

The lid came off this topic in May when Barry Hatcher, Sony Music's Director of Special Marketing in the UK, wrote an irate letter to *Jazz Journal*. In part he said "I was appalled to see in *Jazz Records* of the Year 1992 critics poll that the *Louis Armstrong Hot Fives and Sevens* on JSP 312 was listed as one of the jazz reissues of the year. I thought Louis' Hot Fives and Sevens only ever recorded for Columbia?" He went on to say he had withdrawn the Sony reissues of Louis' material. The jazz community had already made its own decision on such reissues through their support of those independents who produced sonically satisfying products. John R.T. Davies and a handful of other sound experts have been able to transfer onto CD vintage musical material far more expertly than the major companies. It is questionable, though, whether the sales of these CDs really affects the business of the majors. Their accessibility to the marketplace is so much greater (more than 90%).

Since May, *Jazz Journal's* letter columns have been full of responses critical of the stance and quality offered by the major companies. In August the copyright question was muddled somewhat by Ken Palmer's lengthy letter. He stated that (at least for the UK) the 50 year copyright term begins with the first issue of the material in the UK and not the original recording date. As a producer of reissues in the past for EMI Palmer has much more inside knowledge than the average reader. He goes on to say "It's a pity that the Director of Special Marketing for Sony doesn't ask himself, and his company, why another make of CD is selected as being a better recording. The answer is quite understandable and straightforward. Sony Columbia have taken the easiest and cheapest way of producing these titles. They've selected old tapes or 78 rpm recordings, and just made a straight copy of them because 'the end result is good enough for jazz collectors!'"

"With the skills and the equipment Columbia own, they could easily outmaster Robert Parker's recordings, but they won't. This may take time and effort, and may cost money, but long term they would be the winners, and create the definitive examples. At the moment, small label productions are superior because they are produced with love and affection by enthusiastic collectors."

"At the end of the day, when small labels have the courage to provide a service to jazz fans and produce all the material that the bigger labels have simply refused to even consider, it is the Columbias and the RCA Victors who should examine themselves and their policies and not start belly-aching because others have shown the initiative to provide legally that which the majors should have done years ago." □

IT HAPPENED IN HALIFAX by SPIKE TAYLOR
The 7th Atlantic Jazz Festival • Halifax, Nova Scotia
July 17-25, 1992

Halifax is not generally seen as a given stopover point along Canada's growing jazz festival circuitry and this is due mostly to geography and timing. The **Atlantic Jazz Festival** is staged rather far from the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto axis and has no convenient concurrency with nearby festivals like the WestCan 'package'. Through wise use of Canada Council touring arrangements, du Maurier Ltd. money and months of pre-planning, the JazzEast Society in Halifax presented the finest and most diverse assemblage of musicians ever brought together in this part of the country, a slate of performers that could stand as a model for the other 'small' festivals dotting the Canadian summer landscape.

Vocalist **Ranee Lee** opened the festival with her stylings on standards and favourites before a packed Commonwealth Ballroom crowd of mostly non-jazz but good-time music lovers. There was a Mainstage feature each of the nine evenings and a Late Night series that began a few hours later in the Hilton's Acadian Room. The first three Late Nights featured the **P.J. Perry Quintet** in the last of their many stops along the summer circuit. The saxophonist sounds much more fiery and loose in the live setting than at any moment during his 1993 Juno award-winning *My Ideal* album. His touring quintet featured drummer Claude Ranger whose hard swinging kept the room rapt and packed for all three nights.

The second night's Mainstage event was crafted especially for this festival. Alto saxophonist **Lee Konitz** made the trip with his pianist of choice Peggy Stern. For the first few tunes they exhibited the art of the piano-saxophone duet, playing off each other's ideas, leaving spaces, putting a strange spin on some familiar material. The two were soon joined onstage by the pick-up rhythm section of drummer Jerry Granelli and bassist Anthony Cox and from here it was the art of the quartet. Then came a special guest, alto saxophonist **Don Palmer** who had studied with Konitz in the sixties and is now a central figure in the Halifax music community. Palmer and Konitz played duets, added the rhythm section, kept it loose and let the music speak through their experience and their love of playing.

Another unique and deliberate aspect of the Atlantic Jazz Festival is the fact that local musicians, as well as the international heavies, get to perform in the

Mainstage setting. The festival's third evening featured the **Down There Saxophone Quartet** and **Toot Sweet**. On the fifth evening, Halifax's new music ensemble **Upstream** performed new works augmented by special guests Jean Derome on alto saxophone and flute and Pierre Cartier on electric bass. Visitors hoping to catch the sounds of the local jazz scene were treated with ear-opening sets from a very talented pool of Maritime jazz and new music artists on the Mainstage and Late Night series, in various clubs in the downtown core and on the free daily outdoor stage on the waterfront.

Perhaps the highlight of the 1993 Atlantic Jazz Festival was the performance by the **Trevor Watts Moire Music Drum Orchestra**. This Orchestra's musical formula is a fairly simple one — the electric bassist and kit drummer lock onto a groove that gets fleshed out by the four percussionists who trade large and small instruments amongst themselves in behind the wail of Watts' singular alto and soprano saxophone voice. The resulting pulse was so deeply affecting that the dancefloor swelled to its perimeters, the audience 'locked in' on their beat of choice. Other-worldly-beat music.

The **Barry Elmes Quintet** also reached the Atlantic to make this summer a coast-to-coast trek. Featuring some of the core players of Toronto's established scene: Ed Bickert, Mike Murley, Kevin Turcotte and Steve Wallace, the quintet delivered a characteristically Toronto-establishment concert with solid musicianship but very little fire. For all of the experience and depth in this group, there was this characteristic lack of originality.

Friday night's Mainstage concert could not have distanced itself further from the Thursday quintet if it had been staged on another planet. **Jerry Granelli's New Works** concert was comprised of open-ended compositions by each of this quintets remarkable voices: trumpeter Kenny Wheeler, trombonist Julian Priester, bassist Anthony Cox, vibraphonist David Friedman and drummer/leader Jerry Granelli. This year's version (Granelli puts one of these evenings together every year) was a bold, searching event that retained a feeling of friendliness through some strange and beautiful sonic territories.

Meanwhile, on the Late Night stage, the trio Evidence opened their first of two nights of their takes on the music of Thelonious Monk. From standards to the more obscure, saxophonist Jean Derome, electric bassist Pierre Cartier and drummer Pierre Tanguay had an infectious amount of fun in the true spirit of Monk's music.

Saturday night's Mainstage was another packed dancefloor affair with Barrence Whitfield and The Savages. They came to get the place rockin', they cranked into their first high speed blues number and never looked back.

The festival's closing night featured a quintet fronted by guitarist **Peter Leitch** but it starred the group's drummer Marvin 'Smitty' Smith. Leitch writes catchy poppish tunes and the rest of the band was comprised of killers: John Hicks on piano, Ray Drummond on bass and a fired-up Gary Bartz on alto and soprano saxes. The crowds came big.

The du Maurier Ltd. Atlantic Jazz Festival will have to work long and hard to top the 1993 edition. But then, it's a hardworking and dedicated bunch who pull off these brilliant smaller festivals out of the way of the overdone and often repetitive festivals of a much less friendly feel.



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INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY GERARD FUTRICK

AT A TIME WHEN MANY OF TODAY'S MOST PROMISING JAZZ PLAYERS SEEM HOPELESSLY TRAPPED ON A POST BOP TREADMILL, A HANDFUL OF YOUNG FIREBRANDS ARE VIGOROUSLY PURSUING A FREER, MUCH RISKIER AVENUE OF EXPRESSION. TENOR SAXOPHONIST ELLERY ESKELIN IS ONE SUCH STOUT HEARTED SOUL. HIS CONTINUING INVOLVEMENT WITH **JOINT VENTURE** - A CO-OPERATIVE WHICH ALSO INCLUDES TRUMPETER PAUL SMOKER, BASSIST DREW GRESS, AND DRUMMER PHIL HAYNES - AND HAYNES' **4 HORNS AND WHAT?** HAS RESULTED IN TWO DISCS APIECE ON ENJA AND OPEN MINDS RESPECTIVELY, WHILE HIS OWN **SETTING THE STANDARD** RECORDED FOR THE CADENCE JAZZ LABEL, CLEARLY ILLUSTRATES HIS ABILITY TO STAMP THE STANDARD SONG FORM WITH HIS OWN UNIQUE THUMB PRINT. A LOOK AT ESKELIN'S MOST RECENT RECORDINGS REVEALS THREE VERY DIFFERENT AND DISTINCT SETTINGS. **FORMS** RETAINS THE TENOR, BASS, AND DRUMS FORMAT WITH GRESS AND HAYNES AGAIN ON BOARD, **PREMONITION** UNFOLDS AS A SUBSTANTIAL SOLO OUTING, AND **FIGURE OF SPEECH** - QUITE POSSIBLY HIS BEST ALBUM TO DATE - FEATURES TUBIST JOE DALEY AND PERCUSSIONIST ARTO TUNCBOYACIYAN. THIS INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED IN ALLENTOWN, PA. WHERE ESKELIN AS A MEMBER OF DRUMMER JOE BARON'S ECLECTIC TRIO BARON DOWN PERFORMED AT OPEN SPACE GALLERY COURTESY OF IMPROVCO. INCIDENTALLY, BARON'S LATEST CD **TONGUE IN GROOVE** CAN BE FOUND ON JMT RECORDS.



GERARD FUTRICK: YOU WERE BORN AND RAISED IN BALTIMORE. WAS THERE A VERY ACTIVE LOCAL SCENE THERE WHEN YOU WERE COMING UP ?

ELLERY ESKELIN: It was fairly active. I don't think it was as active as it had been maybe ten or fifteen years before that. I guess we're talking about when I started playing music when I was ten and that's about 1969. So, by the time I started hitting the clubs in the mid-70's, it was tapering off a little bit. But there was still the Left Bank Jazz Society putting on weekly concerts and at least a half dozen clubs around town. A lot of times I would get to see bands come down from New York. So the scene was good that way.

The tenor saxophone was my first instrument, which I started on when I was ten. I picked up other woodwinds in college and my first few years in New York I played all the saxophones and different woodwinds eventually tapering them off over the last seven or eight years. I feel it makes a stronger statement for me to have one instrument be the single voice for what I want to say as opposed to having another instrument fulfil a certain function. It makes me play tenor different to be able to get everything that I feel out of one instrument. It makes me approach this instrument in a more complete way. I don't know if I can explain it anymore than that, but I feel a lot more solid just playing one instrument. One instrument is enough even though it's taken for granted that woodwind players double a lot. Since tenor was my first instrument I feel that my voice is on this instrument and that the tenor has developed to the point where if I pick up one of the other instruments as a double, it's not at all the same experience. It's not a complete experience. I don't feel that I have a voice on alto or soprano or flute or clarinet and I think for that reason more than any other, I'm just not really interested in playing the other reeds anymore.

WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO TAKE A SHOT AT NEW YORK?

THAT'S SOMETHING IT SEEMS that I always wanted to do and I can't really remember a specific time deciding that that was going to be the move to make. It just seems to me as long as I can remember I knew that that was the destination I wanted to arrive at. So it was more a matter of how than when I would decide to do it.

Drew Gress and I met in about 1979 in college in Maryland and we've been playing together ever since then. Phil Haynes and I met in New York around 1985 or 1986 through Drew. Those have been two of the guys that I have been most intimately involved with musically over the longest period of time.

IS **JOINT VENTURE** A COLLECTIVE UNIT IN WHICH EACH INDIVIDUAL SHARES EQUALLY IN THE DECISIONS OF WHAT IS TO BE PLAYED AND WHAT SHAPE AND DIRECTION THE MUSIC IS GOING TO TAKE?

SETTING THE STANDARD

IT'S NOT TOO DIFFICULT FOR US because we pretty much agree on enough things that it makes it workable. Everybody seems to have enough room. I think one thing that makes that group easier is that everybody also does their own music outside of that. So when we come to Joint Venture we're not looking as individuals to have each and everyone of our own needs fulfilled all the time. It becomes easier for me to go a little farther in one direction or maybe not as far in another. If that was the only group I was doing, I might not feel satisfied, but since we're all doing other things, Joint Venture is a place where we can experiment and bend a little bit more.

WHILE CHECKING OUT THE CREDITS ON ONE OF YOUR CDS I NOTICED THAT YOU WERE INVOLVED WITH THE CORNER STORE SYNDICATE. WHAT EXACTLY IS THE CORNER STORE SYNDICATE?

WELL THAT WAS STARTED a few years ago in an attempt to get a group of musicians together that often rehearsed at Phil Haynes' Corner Store, which was a loft space in Brooklyn that was a converted corner store. It's where he lives and does a lot of rehearsing. A lot of bands rehearsed there. After accumulating enough music and enough groups, we needed a place to play, so we approached the Knitting Factory with the idea of putting on a festival once a year and that's what it's called. So it's a loose organization that was designed to generate the ability for us to have a venue.

It's not as if we have some sort of philosophical views about music; at least for my part, I never approached it that way. This is the third or fourth year that there will be a concert at the Knitting Factory under that name, and it's changed since the beginning. Some new people are coming into it and it's helped. I was in it from the very start and helped get it off the ground. I feel that it served a purpose for me to do that and now I can move on and let some other people come in and use it to get some attention. Basically, there were a lot of bands that weren't getting enough exposure and were not getting their music heard, so it became an opportunity to get something happening that wouldn't normally happen without it.

IT WAS PRETTY MUCH THE BRAIN CHILD OF PHIL HAYNES. Paul Smoker, Drew Gress, Andy Laster, Herb Robertson; they were all core members in the beginning. Now there are probably nine bands at any given time. When they put on a concert, it's three days with three bands a night. Phil's trying to generate it into bringing in more people and making it more of a legitimate festival, where in the beginning it was a rather loosely knit kind of thing.

DO YOU FIND YOURSELF WORKING MORE IN CONCERT SITUATIONS THAN IN CLUBS?

WELL IN NEW YORK IT'S PRETTY MUCH THE KNITTING FACTORY which is a club. When we play in Europe, it's more or less concerts. So it's still an even mix. Although maybe ten years ago it was playing almost all clubs which I miss, because you would get to play sometimes three sets or something like that and you get all night, whereas in a concert situation sometimes you only play one hour or an hour and a half set and that's it. And that's good in other ways. But I miss the club scene for that reason.

DOES YOUR MUSIC HAVE A STRONGER FOLLOWING IN EUROPE THAN IN THE U. S.

OH DEFINITELY, WHICH IS NOT UNUSUAL. You can ask just about any musician these days and they'll probably tell you the same thing. I work much more over there.

WHAT IS YOUR IMPRESSION OF THE CURRENT WAVE OF NEO-CONSERVATISM THAT HAS BEEN SWEEPING THE JAZZ SCENE?

(LAUGHTER) - IN TWENTY WORDS OR LESS? Oh man, how much tape do you have in that machine? I'm ambivalent about it, it's just like anything else, it has good and bad qualities, good and bad effects. I'm not worried about what some people are doing in the neo-conservative vein as much as what kind of opportunities are there for people who are doing something that's different. I'm a live and let live type of person, so I don't think that there's any real legitimacy to one thing as opposed to another. If someone wants to play that music that's fine with me. There are a lot of musicians who are doing something that is indicative of today and the music is continuing to grow. The question is not so much what we think of neo-conservatism as much as what we can do to get this new music out there and keep it viable and keep it growing.

YOU HAVE RECORDED AND WORKED IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS FROM BASS AND DRUMS TO SOLO PERFORMANCE TO SETTINGS WITH TUBA AND PERCUSSION AND DRUMS AND TROMBONE. DO YOU PURPOSELY AVOID UTILIZING A CHORDAL INSTRUMENT SUCH AS PIANO OR GUITAR?

I HAVE BEEN. When I first came to New York, I did a lot of playing in more traditional kinds of settings with piano, bass, drums, and horns in the front line and got into real densely harmonically sophisticated music. Then, all at once I made a break with that music just because my playing was changing and I found that the role I wanted to define for myself as a saxophone player had a great deal more to do with control over, quote/unquote, chordless formats. This is not to say that I have a negative opinion or attitude against pianos or guitars because I love them and in fact have been thinking recently about how to re-incorporate a chord instrument into this music but still retain some of the qualities of what I've been trying to develop on the saxophone. One thing that these different settings have allowed me to do is redefine my role as a member of a group as opposed to what we might think of traditionally as being a front line instrument that takes a solo over top of the accompaniment of the rhythm section. I've really tried to get away from that or turn the tables on that or make that question irrelevant in the music so that I can think of my role differently. So if I can find a way to re-incorporate a piano or guitar in that context I'd be glad to do it because I love chords.

ELLERY ESKELIN

DO YOU MAKE ANY SPECIAL ADJUSTMENTS IN YOUR CONCEPT WHEN PERFORMING IN THESE VARIOUS GROUP CONFIGURATIONS?

EVERYONE IS DEFINITELY VERY DIFFERENT. You don't want to approach playing tenor, bass, and drums as if it's a rhythm section without a piano. It has inherent possibilities that are open to you that you want to take advantage of. I mean there's something different that can happen. So I don't look at these groups as lacking anything. I look at what they are from the ground up. If it's just drums, trombone and tenor, I don't look at that as being a band without a rhythm section. I look at that as what it is as opposed to what it's not. I think that's an important distinction.

WHILE YOU CONTINUE TO PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF THE MUSIC TO THE OUTER EDGES, YOU ALSO SHOW A STRONG AFFECTION FOR THE STANDARD SONG FORM AS WELL AS THE MORE TRADITIONAL JAZZ CLASSICS.

THAT'S MY ROOTS, and I don't think I would ever consciously feel the need to abandon those roots. It's almost related to what I think of the neo-conservative thing. I feel like I have roots in the traditional sense. However, I don't think that there's really such a strong dichotomy between this camp and that camp: among traditional and free jazz. Too much time has passed since 1960 or whatever, to have a problem with free music as opposed to traditional music and I think it's just natural to want to blend those two things to where you're using this blend of history of jazz as a foundation for addressing what you feel is happening today. So I retain my roots. In a general sense I would say that the musicians that I admire most are the musicians that have their own sound and their own personality come through their music. My tastes are a lot broader than just jazz, so it's sometimes misleading if I name half a dozen jazz musicians because these days I'm listening to a lot of other music that is also becoming just as influential on me. But I guess my list of saxophone idols is probably similar to everybody else's in that respect. My mother played Hammond B-3 organ and I grew up playing standards. I didn't even like rock n' roll until I was out of high school. I was backwards from most people of my generation. I have a real strong affection for that and some of my favourite tenor players were people like Sonny Stitt, Gene Ammons, John Coltrane. So I don't feel the need to abandon that in the name of doing something new. I think there's a way to redefine it all. □

ELLERY ESKELIN ON COMPACT DISC

REVIEWED BY MARC CHENARD

ELLERY ESKELIN • *FIGURE OF SPEECH* • Soul Note 121 232-2

JOINT VENTURE • *MIRRORS* • Enja ENJ 7049-2

ELLERY ESKELIN • *PREMONITION* • Prime Source 2010

THESE RELEASES DOCUMENT SOME OF THE LATEST EFFORTS of the highly touted tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin. As per fellow scribe Kevin Whitehead he is nothing less than "the most satisfying under-40 tenorist in New York" (quite high praise to earn from one of the Apple's more astute musical pundits).

Associated for the most part with the Brooklyn-based Corner Store Syndicate collective, Eskelin is clearly forging an individual path, far removed from the Coltrane-clone syndrome that has been far too pervasive since the Master's passing. But no one musician exists without influences and in Eskelin's case, the role model seems to be Archie Shepp, at least to his watershed Impulse years of the mid-60's. On that basis, the younger tenorman speaks with a gritty and coarse sound. More important though is the extreme angularity in his approach,

his staccato attacks emerging from all registers of his horn. Yet, he is very much a traditionalist in that he is a sculptor of single note lines. Only occasionally will he resort to multiphonics, as a way to create sonic diversity, but his style does not really focus on the range of extended techniques that a number of his contemporaries resort to in establishing their own playing styles.

Because of that, his concept is not an overtly innovative one, nor is it ground-breaking per se. However it is individualistic in that it extends the language of the tradition in more subtle ways. That of the tenor hierarchy. In his earlier albums, *Setting Standards* (Cadence Jazz) and *Forms* (Open Minds), the focus is clearly set on the jazz tradition, specifically of its repertoire, as a theme-and-variation proposition lay at the heart of those sessions. While jazz staples were the principal material of the former release, the latter was focused mainly on the very forms generally taken for granted in the music. Aside from two standards (*Be Bop and African Flower*), the rest of the titles are as simple as 3/4 tune, latin, blues and so on. In essence then, this exercise is like spending more time looking at the frames rather than the randomly titled pictures. Whereas an artist like Anthony Braxton offers an alternative coding system in his own work, Eskelin here sets out to "decode" his own, thus offering titles which relate to the primary substance of the music, the forms. In that way, those forms are the very subjects of his playing, rather than mere vehicles for blowing.

With *Figure of Speech*, he takes another step away from the conventional wisdom of jazz playing. This time around, the change occurs at the level of the group's instrumentation. As is the case for most reedmen who enjoy playing in open contexts, the preferred format has always been the trio with just bass and drums. Up to now, he has found two congenial partners in bassist Drew Gress and drummer Phil Haynes, but in this newest trio outing of his, he has chosen tubist Joe Daley and percussionist Arto Tunçboyacıyan, a somewhat ubiquitous musician nowadays, heard here on a reduced kit with cymbals and the middle-eastern baklav drum. Though this is a new

SETTING THE STANDARD

configuration for him, the knowledgeable listener may be reminded of a similar unit (with Daley as well) that Sam Rivers lead in the late 70's. Yet, in the very informative liner notes accompanying this disc, Eskelin states that he has never heard any of the music of that group. Unlike many such texts

finned zone which relies on sheer instinct as a means of creating continuity independently of any connection to specific formal designs. From that, he is able to re-evaluate "the traditional functional hierarchy between melody, accompaniment and time." This he does successfully thanks to this altered instrumentation and to the work of his two partners. Five (not so easy) pieces lasting anywhere between 6 and 16 minutes cover this surface, all of which convincingly show the various ways in which these musicians are able to piece a puzzle that is not really intended to fit perfectly.



which smack of promo blurbs, this one is very much focused on the artist's point of view in defining the concepts behind this recording. In fact, it is a must read for anyone wanting to check out Eskelin. In the booklet he states that he wanted to get away from the customary theme-and-variation strategy, something that is "starting to bore him". Instead, he wants to "purposely set up contradictory things which thwart formal connection" i.e. improvisation does not have to be dependant on composition. Between these two areas there lies a somewhat unde-

finned zone which relies on sheer instinct as a means of creating continuity independently of any connection to specific formal designs. From that, he is able to re-evaluate "the traditional functional hierarchy between melody, accompaniment and time." This he does successfully thanks to this altered instrumentation and to the work of his two partners. Five (not so easy) pieces lasting anywhere between 6 and 16 minutes cover this surface, all of which convincingly show the various ways in which these musicians are able to piece a puzzle that is not really intended to fit perfectly.

SOMEWHAT MORE SNUGGLY FITTING as a group is the quartet **Joint Venture**. In the six years or so since its inception, three recordings document its life history. After an eponymously titled effort in 1987 and **Ways** four years later, **Mirrors** is its most recent effort. Because of a two horn, bass and drum lineup, one might expect something along the lines of a free bop unit, which tackles its own material as a theme bookending harmonically open single or collective improvisations. While this description holds true in the second disc (having not heard the first one), this newest release goes beyond (if not against) the usual scheme of things. The themes, on one hand, do not serve as launching pads for the solo work. Instead, they frequently appear only later on in the performance, somewhat as a change of focus after a number of improvisatory sections. On the other hand, there is a level of simplification in the writing as in the ascending scale which constitutes the initial statement in the opening number *Here at the Bottom of the Sky*. In contrast, *Away* sounds as through-composed as you can get. Elsewhere, there are cuts with many written lines, these surfacing very unpredictably. Once again, Eskelin's notion of contradictory things thwarting formal connection is verified in these performances. As a collective, Eskelin, Gress, Haynes and trumpeter Paul Smoker all chip in their own pieces, the latter's long suite *Star Flowers* (24'10") being the "piece de resistance" of this 72 minute plus disc. Based on their previous recordings, this new one follows the "work in progress" approach which is very much part of the improvised music ethic. And in such music, it is how you get there (i.e. to a creative statement) that is more important than the end result itself.

TO FURTHER APPRECIATE THE TENORMAN'S WORK the solo saxophone disc, **Premonition**, features three open improvisations and three readings of standards, *Body & Soul*, *Off Minor* and a facetious *Besame Mucho* with a chintzy-sounding rhythm box ticking away a whimsical-like latin beat. Setting this concluding musical joke of sorts aside for a minute (if that is its intention), the other five cuts essentially underline Eskelin's two-tiered approach, this time disjuncted from one another. While the improvised selections underline his jagged approach to playing lines, the remaining cuts focus on the shaping of counter melodies. And when one hears him working through the harmonic maze of *Body & Soul*, there is little in common with Coleman Hawkins, save to say a spirit of discovery which exudes with his every breath.

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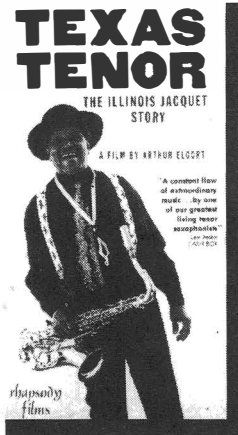
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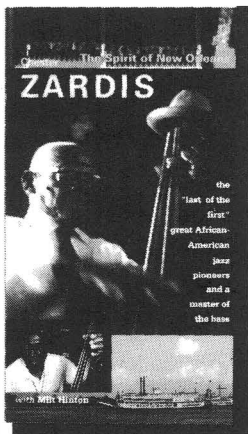
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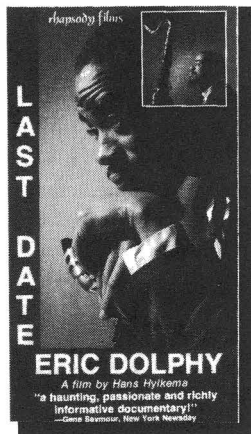
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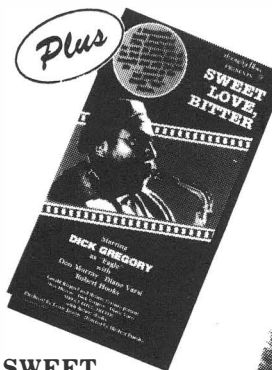
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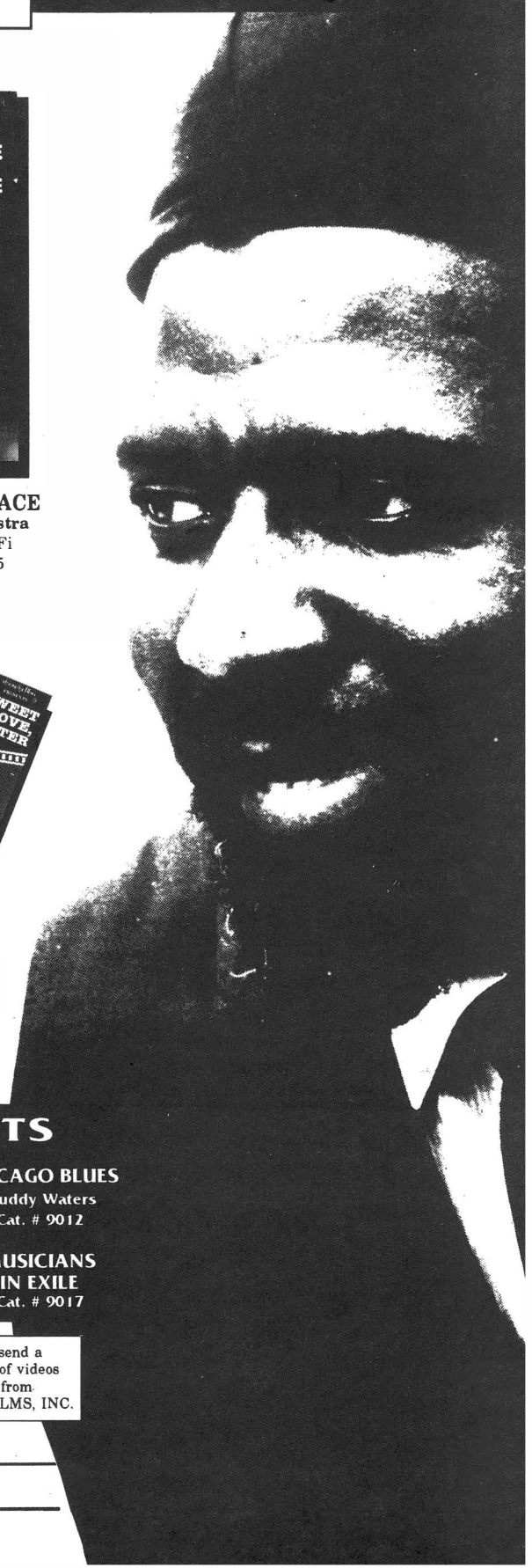
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THE BIG BEAT

DRUMMER ART BLAKEY WAS A MOSTLY SELF-TAUGHT MASTER MUSICIAN WITH A KEEN SENSE OF MUSICAL PROPORTION AND HISTORY. BLAKEY HAD STUDIED WITH PERCUSSIONISTS IN WEST AFRICA, PLAYED IN SWING "ARCHITECT" FLETCHER HENDERSON'S BIG BAND, AND BEEN A MEMBER OF BILLY ECKSTINE'S TRAILBLAZING BEBOP ORCHESTRA BEFORE BECOMING A BANDLEADER IN HIS OWN RIGHT. AS THE JAZZ MESSENGERS' CREATOR AND LEADER FOR MORE THAN 35 YEARS, BLAKEY SHOWED THE WORLD THAT HE ALSO HAD AN UNPARALLELED GENIUS FOR RECOGNIZING AND NURTURING TALENTED YOUNG JAZZ MUSICIANS.

IN 1954, BLAKEY TOLD A BIRDLAND AUDIENCE HIS CREDO: "I'M GOING TO STAY WITH THE YOUNGSTERS...IT KEEPS THE MIND ACTIVE." THIS CREDO SIGNIFIED THE DRUMMER'S COMMITMENT TO A SYMBOLIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HIS YOUNG BANDMATES, A UNIQUE UNION THAT WOULD GIVE THE JAZZ MESSENGERS THE ABILITY TO REMAIN REMARKABLY CLOSE TO THE CUTTING EDGE OF MODERN JAZZ UNTIL THEIR LEADER'S DEATH IN 1990. THE JAZZ MESSENGERS' SYMBIOSIS INVOLVED BLAKEY, AS LEADER AND ELDER, PROVIDING A PRACTICAL SETTING AND A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION FOR HIS APPRENTICES AS THEY LEARNED AND AMENDED THE MODERN JAZZ TRADITION WITH THEIR ALWAYS CONTEMPORARY IMPROVISATIONS AND COMPOSITIONS. BY THIS METHOD, ART BLAKEY AND THE JAZZ MESSENGERS SHAPED THE COURSE OF JAZZ HISTORY, PRODUCING MANY INFLUENTIAL SONGS AND FUTURE BANDLEADERS. ONE MEASURE OF BLAKEY'S GENIUS IS THAT HE USUALLY SUCCEEDED IN MAINTAINING THE GROUP'S HIGH STANDARDS AND IDENTITY DESPITE DOZENS OF CHANGES IN PERSONNEL.

THE 1960 JAZZ MESSENGERS comprised one of the best and, lasting as they did from early 1960 until June, 1961, one of the longest-lived of Art Blakey's many units. The band's main soloists and composers, tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter, trumpeter Lee Morgan, and pianist Bobby Timmons, were held in such high regard by Blakey that he appeared on a total of four recordings led by them while they were still *his* sidemen. These musicians, along with bassist Jymie Merritt, benefitted from the extraordinary empathy that is always a part of great great bands.

A truly emphatic jazz band is usually the product of both good timing and hard work. The 1960 Jazz Messengers were really the

1958 Messengers except with Shorter on tenor sax instead of Benny Golson. Golson, as Blakey's musical director for the 1958 unit, recruited three other players from his Philadelphia hometown to meet his and Blakey's needs. Having worked with the teenaged trumpet phenomenon in Dizzy Gillespie's Orchestra, and written and/or recorded for him on the trumpeter's first albums as a leader for Blue Note, Golson naturally chose Lee Morgan as his front line mate. Timmons, who had worked in Philadelphia clubs and also recorded with Morgan, was the most logical pianist to choose, while Merritt's major attribute was his versatility, having played extensively in R&B and jazz groups (including Golson's) and studied

THE COMPLETE BLUE NOTE RECORDINGS OF ART BLAKEY'S 1960 JAZZ MESSENGERS



REVIEWED
BY ELLIOT BRATTON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
FRANCIS WOLFF

THE JAZZ MESSENGERS • WAYNE SHORTER • LEE MORGAN

classical bass violin. With the exception of the fall, 1959 stint Bobby Timmons had with Cannonball Adderley's Quintet, Blakey, Timmons, Morgan, and Merritt had grown together for more than a year, had even toured in Europe and North Africa, before, on Morgan's recommendation, Shorter became the tenorman who would lead these Jazz Messengers into the sixties.

WAYNE SHORTER was the perfect saxophonist for the 1960 Jazz Messengers in numerous ways. In terms of improvisation, Shorter was already guided by some of the same harmonic and rhythmic principles that were then helping his friend John Coltrane to be hailed as the "New King of the Tenor Sax". Secondly, Shorter's intricate and challenging compositions, inspired at times by social and metaphysical thought, proved timely for both the Blakey band and their increasingly socially- and spiritually-conscious audiences. Lastly, the front line of Shorter and Lee Morgan was one of the greatest tenor/trumpet unions in jazz history. Like the legendary Sonny Rollins/Clifford Brown pairing in the Brown-Roach Quintet, Shorter and Morgan had the ability to follow each other's solos with uncannily complementary or completely contrasting ideas that always seemed to work for the development of the piece. One unexpected dividend of this union was that Shorter, the most prolific and forward-thinking composer in the group, encouraged Morgan to become a much more confident and interesting writer. Together, Morgan and Shorter wrote nearly two-thirds of the songs recorded by this group and, especially during 1961, they pushed against the walls of hard bop and gave these Jazz Messengers an identity formed in part by the "New Thing", as they used the different forms, rhythms, harmonies and tonalities that would so change the jazz mainstream of the 1960s.

The artistry of this historic group can now be fully appreciated due to Mosaic Records' release of **The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Art Blakey's 1960 Jazz Messengers**. Mosaic's 6-CD/10-lp boxed set puts this group's complete Blue Note work in print simultaneously for the first time. Previously, the original Blue Note label's best intentions and the vagaries of its catalogue's subsequent owners left only one-third of the

1960 Messengers' albums in print with any consistency. While the band's first three studio recordings, **The Big Beat**, **A Night In Tunisia**, and **Like Someone In Love**, have been released on compact disc, three of their other albums, **The Freedom Rider** and both volumes of **Meet You At The Jazz Corner Of The World**, had been totally out-of-print for more than a decade. The group's remaining output for Blue Note had even less availability as both **The Witch Doctor** and **Roots And Herbs** were first issued several years after they were recorded and **Pisces** was not issued until the late 1970s, and then only in Japan.

Thankfully, Mosaic Records has more than done the right thing this time around by issuing this comprehensive boxed set which, in most cases, also improves on Blue Note's song programming. This Mosaic set presents the 1960 Jazz Messengers' music in chronological order of recording (except for the two "live" albums), adds five alternate takes (two of them previously unissued anywhere), includes insightful and in-depth session-by-session liner notes by renowned critic Bob Blumenthal, and has a companion booklet illustrated with rare studio and club photographs by Francis Wolff (even the grossly under-photographed Jymie Merritt is represented here). And all CD converts can rest assured—such intangibles as the ambience of a late summer night at Birdland in 1960 and Art Blakey's various exhortations to his soloists have been transferred intact along with a lot of exciting music.

THE 1960 JAZZ MESSENGERS made an auspicious debut with their recording of the classic album **The Big Beat** on March 6th of that year. Originally, **The Big Beat** began with Wayne Shorter's hard bop line, **The Chess Players**: Blakey's patented shuffle beat, Shorter and Morgan declaring the theme with soul and vigour, Timmons contributing his funky trills, and Merritt playing subtly yet deep-in-the-pocket. The opening number let you know immediately that this was a high quality Jazz Messengers' date! Unfortunately, Mosaic's chronological re-programming does this classic recording a disservice by starting the session with the once rejected and less cohesive alternate take of **It's Only A Paper Moon**. While this decision was chronologically correct, Mosaic should have real-

ized that the primary reason their re-programming works on every other session is that these sessions were needlessly divided in the 1960s and '70s. **The Big Beat** was a complete date and was released as such, giving us Timmons' soul standard, **Dat Dere**, Shorter's enduring **Lester Left Town**, and the best version of the Morgan-Blakey arrangement of **Paper Moon**, and other delights which can be found on the first disc (or first and second records) in this set.

THE NEXT TWO SESSIONS, those of August 7th and August 14th, show the best application of Mosaic's re-programming policy. Blue Note had taken apart and reassembled these dates to form the outstanding **A Night In Tunisia** and the less impressive **Like Someone In Love** albums. Now it can be heard that both these August sessions were more well balanced and had two extraordinary performances apiece: **Sleeping Dancer Sleep On** and **Yama** from the 7th; and **Giantis** and **A Night In Tunisia** from the 14th. **Sleeping Dancer** ranks as one of Shorter's best ballads, along with the immortal **Infant Eyes** and **Footprints** he penned later in the decade. **Yama**, a blue spiritual akin to those Coltrane or Max Roach would soon write, provides the first evidence of composer Lee Morgan's growing maturity. Shorter's **Giantis**, while not a great melody, becomes a Jazz Messengers' textbook case of song development due to Blakey's exceptional ability to "conduct" from the drums and his sidemen's immediate responses to his changes in dynamics, accents, etc. The longest studio performance in this boxed set is **A Night In Tunisia**. The 1960 Messengers' rendition stands as one of the all-time best of this oft-recorded Dizzy Gillespie gem, featuring dramatic multiple percussion sections, a cappella solos by both Morgan and Shorter, and enough raw energy to make you think you're listening to it "live".

BECAUSE ART BLAKEY took this edition of the Messengers on an extended tour of Europe and Japan, their next studio recordings were not made until February, 1961. A February 12th session resulted in most of the **Pisces** album and six days later most of **Roots And Herbs** and one song that would end up on **The Freedom Rider**. While being less productive than their two previous studio dates, these sessions still produced two

BOBBY TIMMONS • JYMIE MERRITT • ART BLAKEY

of the most memorable pieces in the Messengers' repertoire: Wayne Shorter's *United* and *Ping Pong*, both recorded with fairly similar results on both dates. Also noteworthy in these sessions are: the sassy trumpet of Morgan followed by the yearning tenor of Shorter on the expertly realized soul jazz piece, *Petty Larceny*; the funky *Roots And Herbs*, with its bass line that Merritt borrowed from Ray Charles' R&B hit, *What'd I Say*; and the exciting work of the late pianist Walter Davis Jr., who replaces Timmons on *Roots* and the second version of *United*.



The next month, Blakey and his men recorded *The Witch Doctor*. Their best session since *The Big Beat*, *The Witch Doctor* is an underexposed classic that features powerful writing and improvisation by the late, great Lee Morgan. Morgan's intense *Afrique* combines a polymetric main theme statement with a declarative blues bridge. Wayne Shorter has the first solo, and it's a show stopper, shocking in its violent honks and groans. Morgan follows him with clarion calls and churning fire, foreshadowing some of his later work with such "new thing"

writers as Joe Henderson and Andrew Hill. After Timmons cools things down to a boil, Blakey enters with an inimitable "talking drums" solo that is amazing in its use of power and control. *The Witch Doctor*, also by Morgan (and presented in two similarly rewarding takes here), is the portrait of a cool magician. The main soloists ably convey the aura of mysterious hipness outlined in the theme. Also contributing to the *The Witch Doctor*'s success are: the infectious groove of Timmons' *A Little Busy*; Shorter's appropriately admonitory *Those Who Sit And Wait*;

and *Lost And Found*, a bright swinger from recently deceased tenor giant Clifford Jordan that gets the typically rousing Messenger treatment.

In May, 1961, when these Jazz Messengers' final recording date took place, the American people's attention was focussed on the plight of the Civil Rights Movement's Freedom Riders as they faced beatings and other forms of terror while desegregating interstate buses in the South. Almost from the beginning of the Civil Rights era, African-

Americans in the performing arts had created works in support of the struggle. While Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln's *Freedom Now Suite* and Charles Mingus' *Fables Of Faubus* were more overtly political statements, Art Blakey's *The Freedom Rider* was no less dedicated to the cause. From the leader's formidable press rolls in the theme of *The Back Sliders* through the horns-and-drums crescendo that ends *Uptight*, *The Freedom Rider* session is filled with determination and hope. The title track is a drum solo piece wherein Blakey displays the passion and sense of form that made him a model for Elvin Jones and other poly-rhythm exponents. Wayne Shorter shows a unique social consciousness with a tough tune named after a tough slogan, *Tell It Like It Is* and, somewhat more romantically, with *El Toro*, named for the bull—a cultural underdog which, like the non-violent desegregationist, was often sacrificed for the crowd. Another noteworthy tune in this outstanding session is Morgan's *Blue Lace*, taken at a bright 6/4 pace, it features one of Timmons' best solos.

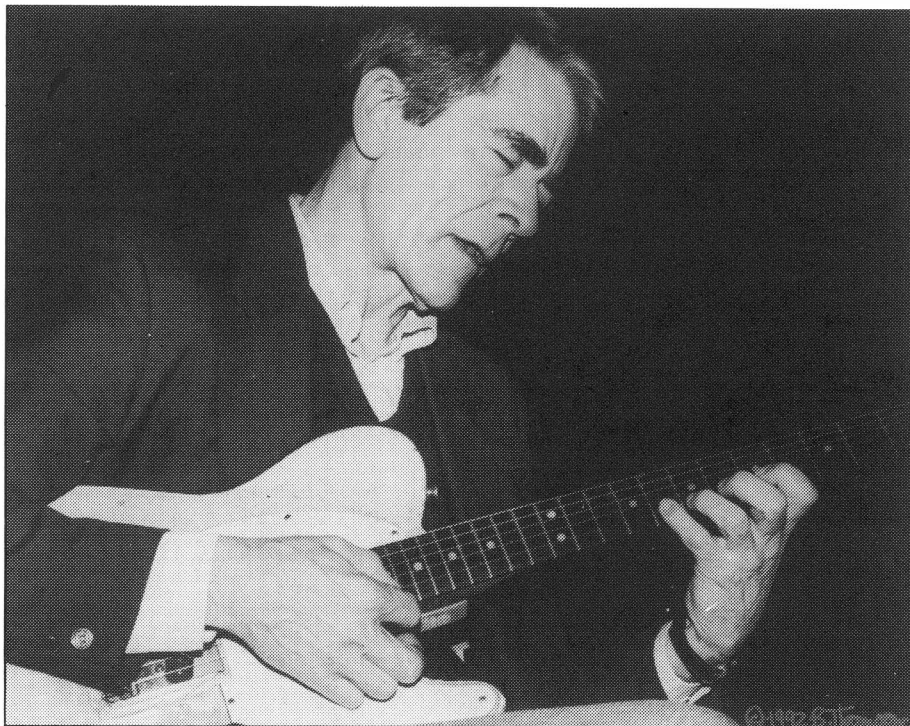
ART BLAKEY, along with such other jazz legends as Fats Waller, Dizzy Gillespie, and Rahsaan Roland Kirk, had the rare ability to make a studio recording so vital that it seemed "live" to the listener. Since *The Freedom Rider* session was a prime example of this phenomenon, it is only fitting Mosaic chose to follow it with the September, 1960 Birdland performance found on *Meet You At The Jazz Corner Of The World, Volumes 1 & 2*. Uncharacteristically, these albums include only one song apiece from the primary writers, Shorter and Morgan. Nevertheless, both volumes contain high spirited improvisations and interesting songs. The 1960 Messengers' main soloists are the stars of these live sets: Morgan takes particularly mature solos on *'Round Midnight* and Hank Mobley's intriguing *High Modes*; Shorter is a dead ringer for Coltrane on *The Breeze And I* and full of verve on *These Are The Things I Love*; Timmons is unusually energetic throughout. With Blakey, Morgan, and Timmons gone, it seems that those who heard this edition of the Jazz Messengers in person were exceedingly lucky. This Mosaic set allows us to share some of that good fortune, to imagine the smoke, the sweat, the chatter, and the big beat cutting through it all. □

CANADIAN MUSICIANS

CD REVIEWS BY
JAMES ROZZI

ED BICKERT
PHOTOGRAPH BY BARRY THOMSON

SEVERAL RELEASES
FEATURING CANADIAN
ARTISTS RUN THE GAMUT
FROM AUTHENTIC MODERN
FARE TO STARTLING NEW
FORMS.



With the blistering heat generated by a typical band of the bebop persuasion, heady coolness is an unsuspecting attribute of its practitioners (Miles Davis aside). **THE JUNIOR MANCE QUINTET: HERE 'TIS** (Sackville SKCD2-3050), the latest by Dizzy's 1950s pianist, is near chamber jazz: calm, cool, and collected. Aplomb replaces high emotion here as Mance's light, Flanaganesque touch finds no foil among flautist Bill McBurnie, guitarist Reg Schwager, bassist Kieran Overs, and drummer Norman Marshall Villeneuve. Well-rehearsed, at times prosaic, the dynamic level of this group never surpasses mezzoforte; no tempo nears vivace.

An all-Gillespie review is the order for the day, beginning with the blues title track, accomplished with an omnipresent back beat. *Woody 'n You* is handled nicely as a bossa. The medium groove rhythm changes of *Ow* are blown over with finesse by Schwager (one of many excellent Canadian guitarists from this lot of CDs), bassist Overs, and flutist McBurnie (who unfortunately feels the need to employ an electronic octave doubling device throughout), eventually succumbing to a relaxed exchange with drummer Villeneuve.

Mance's talents particularly come into focus on the two trio cuts, *I Waited for You*, and *Con Alma*, both ballads. The warm sound drawn from his piano has always been a principal attribute, but his lines are of comparable

beauty. Following *Tour de Force*, *Tin Tin Deo*, and *Blue 'N' Boogie*, the solo piano closer of *A Night in Tunisia* becomes the obvious highlight of the set. Only in the hands of a truly sensitive musician can the original, exotic intent of this composition be masterfully shaped by a slow rubato.

Blistering heat never has been an emission from a typical Desmond encounter, so naturally, **PAUL DESMOND QUARTET: LIKE SOMEONE IN LOVE** (Telarchive CD-83319) finds the ex-Brubeck alto saxophonist in a typically relaxed mode. This is not to say that no chemical reaction occurs. Placing guitarist Ed Bickert, bassist Don Thompson, and drummer Jerry Fuller together with this late, great king of dry wit has proven results (as heard on a mid-70s double album on the Horizon label). Recorded live in 1975 at the same Bourbon Street Jazz Club in Toronto, one of Desmond's few recordings from the 1970s again yields an excellent blowing session.

The leisurely flow of notes, the consistency of tone throughout the registers of his horn, and the occasional offhand quotes (including a bit of Rimsky-Korsakov), are discreetly self-serving for an extremely talented player who never allowed an ounce of showiness to permeate a style of playing that could only be described as the purest of pure, the coolest of cool. The melody was everything, but one has to listen actively and look beyond the more obvious curves to hear and appreciate.

In much the same vein as his recordings with Jim Hall, this quartet consists of the highest degree of professionalism. Perhaps the best known of these Canadian sidemen, Ed Bickert is a complete guitarist who always provides the optimum backing for a soloist. Providing only a subtle cushion for the melody, his chords are subtly outlined with just the right notes. Bassist Thompson has a superb feel for time, alternating two and four-beat patterns throughout the head to create interest, and then walking up a storm throughout the choruses. Fuller, as tasteful as the rest, is particularly impressive with his unique multiple bounce technique on snare. All are first rate soloists.

With a set comprised mainly of medium swingers (*Just Squeeze Me*; *Tangerine*; *Like Someone in Love*; *Things Ain't What They Used to Be*), one Latin (*Meditation*), and one ballad (Django Reinhardt's *Nuages*), Desmond's latest is a truly welcomed addition to his discography.

Yet another Canadian guitarist of merit, a consummate bop player living in the U.S., presents his latest in **PETER LEITCH: FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE** (Concord Jazz CCD-4535). The title refers to Leitch's option to expand his horizons from the basic trio or quartet of his previous outings to include two fine saxophonists: the dark-toned altoist Gary Bartz who is featured throughout, and multi-reedman Jed Levy (soprano, tenor, and alto flute), who solos only occasionally on tenor.

Presenting himself on record as an ensemble player with a larger group does give added insight into a man who seems to live, eat, and sleep with his guitar. Adding impeccability to virtuosity are the members of a stalwart working rhythm section: John Hicks on piano, Ray Drummond on bass, and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith. Their incredible fluidity and uncanny ability to translate thought into music does not forsake the emotional aspects of the music. Yes, at times they play a lot of notes. But simply put, here are six professionals who know their instruments, know their minds, and through years of practice have melded the two.

As per repertoire, covers of Tadd Dameron's *If You Could See Me Now* (quartet), Dizzy Gillespie's *Con Alma* (sextet), and Thelonious Monk's *Ruby My Dear* (trio) denote the homage Leitch chooses to pay to jazz's finest hour. *Somewhere in the Night* (quartet) and *Embraceable You* (solo guitar) are given pensive treatment. Four well-crafted originals (written for sextet) round out this set: the medium-up tribute to pianists *For Elmo, Sonny and Freddie*; an eloquent ballad in the form of *Elda*; a medium-grooved *91-1*; and *A Blues For Ivan Simmons*, a romping minor riff finally allowing "Smitty" his say via several flashy exchanges.

A well-devised vocal offering comes by way of **TRUDY DESMOND: TAILOR MADE** (The Jazz Alliance TJA-10015). As many interpreters of standards tend to compensate for their lack of blues and gospel inflections by adding over abundant nuance or hyperbole, Desmond is one of the few who keeps things simple and honest by relying on her crystalline voice, excellent pitch, good tone quality, and perfect diction to elicit the emotions at hand.

With all due respect to Desmond who obviously fronts this group, the instrumentalists are as much to blame as she for a superb recording. In addition to his usual impeccable pianisms (his many solos are outstanding), Roger Kellaway penned these 12 arrangements with a great deal of thought and humour. For example, *Goody, Goody* summons a forsaken's vengeance as a slow and sultry 12/8 blues. The snare drum rudiments of a quasi-march accompany Desmond while she sings, "I'll go my way *By Myself...*" With the lyrics, "half step behind" on *I'm Shadowing You*, Kellaway modulates a semitone.

Far more subtle than cutesy, Kellaway's arrangements also include an abundance of

blowing room for several key soloists. Known primarily as one of Woody Herman's favourite lead trombone players, Jim Pugh makes a rare appearance outside of the jingle studios with an extraordinary display of bop chops on the jazz waltz *Make Someone Happy*. Trumpeter Randy Brecker stretches out nicely on *I See Your Face Before Me*, *I Guess I'll Hang My Tears out to Dry*, and the uptempo *People Will Say We're in Love*. Underrated guitarist Gene Bertoncini adds his sophisticated chordal sense throughout, soloing aggressively on the medium groove *I Thought About You*. Drummer Terry Clarke and bassist Bob Cranshaw round out the excellent rhythm section on this scintillating vocal session.

While obviously steeped in the traditions of Tin Pan Alley and the jazz standards that comprised the bulk of the aforementioned releases, Montreal pianist **JOHN STETCH: RECTANGLE MAN** (Terra Nova Records TND 9004) is more adventurous music, both rhythmically and harmonically.

This all-Stetch set provides positive extension to this continent's finest idiomatic composers. A solid program of basic song forms (blues, jazz waltz, ballads) and more experimental formats (odd meters, odd forms) maintain underlying continuity with Stetch's thoughtful choices of rich and introspective harmonies.

His playing, while showing a measure of restraint, is generally solid and angular (hence the title?). Toronto saxophonist Mike Murley uses his colourful tenor and soprano to advantage on the ballads, but seems to hold back on most uptempo fare. (With such an obvious debt to the fiery tenors of the 1960s, one expects to hear him abandon his conservatism for some hardcore blowing.) Bassist Jim Vivian, another young Toronto Turk, solos beautifully on several cuts and accompanies solidly. Interestingly, the two drummers who split the book provide the most satisfying performances here. Ever driving with taste and ample chops, Dave Laing and Ted Warren (both from Montreal) are percussive melodists who provide much of the inspiration behind this dynamic release.

Another set of originals, by drummer **BRUCE NIELSEN: BETWEEN THE LINES** (Unity UTY 127), blanches by comparison. Whereas Stetch and company embrace creativity by avoiding the road more travelled, Nielsen's release hits upon a number of clichés, both compositional and improvisational, which detract from the spontaneity necessary for a truly successful recording.

Avoiding the cerebral in favour of gut level appeal, Nielsen's release is a straight ahead post-bop outing favouring swing, ballad, and Latin grooves (nothing wrong here). But there are few surprises from this competent group of musicians (Ross Taggart-piano; Bill Runge-soprano & tenor saxophones; Ken Lister-bass) who often seem to rely upon stockpiles of preconceived patterns to turn a solo.

From the opening blues, *Three Steps Up*, to the *Maiden Voyage*-ish *Ocean Song*, to the medium-up *Think Twice*, and the lengthy *A Year in the Life Suite*, the basic ingredient necessary for true inspiration, that of knowing and feeling comfortable with one's own identity, seems more the issue than any deficiency in musicianship. Only the 14-minute *Lindsay's Peace* comes closest to what could have been: an evocative series of emotions that winds its way from a slow and free piano intro through various stages of subtle and heated emotion, spurred on by the enthusiastic drumming of the leader. Creditable high energy and a rambunctious spirit garner kudos for this developing group.

Should truth be a priority in art? School children are taught that one of the benefits to studying art is its accurate representation of the time of its origin. Perhaps the government should mandate a footnote to this effect on all bop revival CDs: "Warning: This CD contains explicit material alluding to a bygone era. It does not appropriately reflect the condition of the country or its residents at the time of its copyright."

Several musicians from Quebec have taken this question of fidelity into their own hands. **LES GRANULES: AU ROYANNE DU SILENCIEUX** (Distribution Ambiances Magnétiques Etcetera AM018 CD), featuring Jean Derome and René Lussier is a mechanical pot-pourri of prearranged and improvised sounds with lyrics. **ROBERT M. LEPAGE: ADIEU LEONARDO!** (Distribution Ambiances Magnétiques Etcetera AM024CD), featuring Robert M. Lepage, Michel F. Côté, Jean Derome, Bernard Gagnon, Mario Légaré, Serge Léoine, and René Lussier, is based more on acoustic sounds with new age sentiments. Using a combination of acoustic instruments (voice, flutes, clarinets, alto sax, piano, percussion), with electronic (synthesizers, bass, organ, tape), a specific genre is born to white, urban Canadians as rap is to black, urban Statesiders. At times confronting, is it appropriate representation? Ask yourself this: "Is it at times confronting to read a newspaper?" One's answer may indicate why so many musicians are so insistent on reclaiming the past. □

SAY NO TO BEIGE

KATE HAMMETT-VAUGHAN

THERE IS AN AXIOM IN ARTISTIC CIRCLES THAT ONE HAS TO BECOME WELL-KNOWN FAR AWAY BEFORE BEING APPRECIATED AT HOME. NOT SO WITH KATE HAMMETT-VAUGHAN. SHE GETS STANDING-ROOM-ONLY CROWDS IN VANCOUVER. TAKE THE NIGHT THE LINE-UP AT THE GLASS SLIPPER EXTENDED INTO THE STREET: ENTHUSIASTS WERE TURNED AWAY THE NIGHT SHE PERFORMED WITH HER QUARTET AND GARBO'S HAT.

GARBO'S HAT HAS AN UNUSUAL INSTRUMENTATION, WITH KATE HAMMETT-VAUGHAN, VOICE; PAUL BLANEY, BASS; & GRAHAM ORD, REEDS AND FLUTE. THE REPERTOIRE IS AN ECLECTIC MELANGE OF ABSTRACT VOICINGS AND DE-CONSTRUCTED STANDARDS. THE **KATE HAMMETT-VAUGHAN QUARTET** IS A JAZZ STANDARDS GROUP WITH HAMMETT-VAUGHAN, VOICE; MILES BLACK, PIANO; MILES HILL, BASS; AND THE LEGENDARY CLAUDE RANGER ON DRUMS.

WHILE MANY MUSICIANS STAY WITHIN A DEFINED, and perhaps comfortable style, Hammett-Vaughan is an explorer. However, she had never presented the whole range of her music in one evening, and naturally there was discussion about which band to present first. Some felt the eclectic music might drive some of the audience out.

Ms. Hammett-Vaughan knows her audiences from years working the restaurant trade, from her experimental work in the *New Orchestra Workshop*, and as an organizer of the "Jazz at the Gallery" series at the *grunt gallery*.

She went with her instincts, putting Garbo's Hat first. After introducing Blaney and Ord, she explained that the music of Garbo's Hat might be difficult for some, unlike anything they had ever heard before. So she wanted the audience to hear it while their ears, and hers, were still fresh.

The explanation worked like a charm. Faces that have only seen Ms. Hammett-Vaughan perform at a restaurant may have been puzzled by an edgy piece like *New Directions*, but they broke into broad smiles at *Burglar Bop*. The room remained just as crowded for the standards Quartet. The evening was a triumph.

Kate Hammett-Vaughan is a major influence on the Vancouver jazz scene and is branching into a wider audience through her recording with Garbo's Hat, selections on a CBC recording of Canadian jazz vocalists, and a planned standards CD. Her improvisational vocal work dances with the aplomb of someone who has no place to fall; she is certainly the finest jazz standards singer in Canada. In the following interview, she expresses evocative opinions about her own work and the state of the jazz art.



WHAT ARE YOU UP TO THESE DAYS?

I'M UP TO MY NECK IN PAINT! My new motto in life is "Say no to beige". I'm gradually ridding myself of all the beige in my house and in my life: no beige music, no beige art.

Essentially these days I've got a standards group, and Garbo's Hat. Garbo's Hat has a new CD on the Word of Mouth label. I've got a bank loan, but I don't think artists should have to pay to put out their music. You work hard to develop your art and there should be people out there to put up money for you to record your music, or do your paintings or whatever. I fully believe in patronizing the arts. My house is full of art by friends, they buy my recordings and come

WE ARE LIVING IN THE POST-MODERN AGE, WHERE NOTHING IS PURE ANY MORE. FOR ME TO BE TRUE TO MYSELF AS A CREATIVE ARTIST, I CAN'T JUST LATCH ON TO ONE PART OF THE MUSIC'S HISTORY AND SAY THIS IS WHAT I WANT.

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAURENCE M. SVIRCHEV

out to my concerts. But that's the same six dollars being passed around and around. So I'm looking for backers for this project to help me pay off the loan. I feel strongly enough about the project that if it doesn't happen that I find investors, I'll pay for it myself. Can I afford not to do it?

We're all in the business of audience education and development. I want to make it clear that jazz is accessible to people on many levels. Even something as rigorous as Cecil Taylor's music, if you are in the right mind-space for it, can be deemed accessible. But we live in a society that is geared to the average rather than the exceptional, which makes it really difficult for people to create, play, and sell creative music.

HALF OF THE STUFF THAT GETS MARKETED

as 'jazz' is pretty safe, middle of the road, and a lot of that stuff I wouldn't call jazz. You can go to the jazz section in Record Store X and see the Yellowjackets, for example. The people in the band can play; they are great technicians, but it doesn't sound like jazz to me. Harry Connick Jr's records are out of a kind of swing, big band tradition, the early Sinatra thing. I think he sounds great! I enjoy listening to his music. But it's not jazz, even though it has some of its elements, like swing. But jazz is expanding, and the list of ingredients expands with it; so jazz now is not necessarily what it used to be. For people to jump on that retro bandwagon seems like a rather safe thing to do.

Just singing a standard does not make it jazz; what makes it jazz is how you sing it. If someone puts on a long black dress, wears a gardenia and sings *God Bless the Child* like a pop singer, I don't care what she looks like, she is still a pop singer, and not a jazz singer. They are just grabbing hold of a cultural icon. It doesn't necessarily have anything to do with jazz. Now-a-days image is sold rather than the actual sound of the music. That's why some people are so successful. They get slicked-up, marketed, and people buy their records.

I heard this singer Nnena Freelon on Columbia records. She's the new big thing jazz singer they are pushing. She's got a beautiful sound. But in the first two bars of the first tune, I said to myself, "Retro! Sounds like Sarah Vaughan in the 50's." Freelon's got chops galore, but if I want to hear that sound, I'm going to listen to my Sarah Vaughan records! That makes me fear for the future of jazz music in the marketplace. In the scheme of trying to sell this music, I find it disappointing to hear that record label executives are crying out for standards singers. I mean, that's great news to people who sing jazz standards, but it has to be jazz!

But when we're talking about the marketing of jazz, you think, there's all this great stuff happening for Shirley Horn, Abbey Lincoln, Carmen McRae and Betty Carter. They have contracts now, major distribution with big companies, and are finally recording a record a year.

It's so exciting to see this, but then the new people they are recording don't play jazz as far as I can tell. They have these really lush string arrangements or something that just makes it not swing. Even on Shirley Horn's latest record, *Here's to Life*, she sounds like the incredibly beautiful, sensitive ballad singer that she is. But Shirley also has something else: she is a hard swinging pianist and singer. She's got that idiosyncratic phrasing like Billie had. It doesn't matter how many times you listen to her, you don't know what is coming next. For me that is miraculous. To hear that side of her music erased and have it replaced with lush string arrangements and endless ballads may sell more records but doesn't do her a great service as a jazz artist.

I'm really looking forward to hearing some new people who, in the standards repertoire, are coming out and saying "I want to sing jazz; not necessarily a pretty sound or doing something really retro; I want to make a statement that sounds like me, and I don't believe that singing songs of the 30s, 40s, 50s need be a retro kind of thing."

JAZZ HAS TO DO WITH MANY DIFFERENT INFLUENCES and musical commitments. A jazz singer can sound like a million different things, but the most important thing is that there has to be a natural thing coming from both ears and heart. If it doesn't, then the music is not going to have the depth that jazz requires.

The word jazz is applied to so many things it is difficult to call yourself a jazz musician because people want to put that in a box. They will say to you that if you are a jazz singer, then you must sing like Carmen McRae or Sarah Vaughan. I have absolutely no qualms about calling either of those women jazz singers - they are the cream of the crop. But I also think of Jeanne Lee as a jazz singer. She doesn't do what Sarah Vaughan normally did. Jay Clayton is a jazz singer. If I had never heard her sing a standard, which she does, and had just heard her singing original music and improvising, I'd still call her a jazz singer.

I'm still a work in progress as far as my standards singing is concerned. I definitely had a retro approach for a lot of years. My work with Garbo's Hat and other groups has helped me to loosen up interpretations of standard tunes. I want to pay tribute to that tradition because it's a music that I love. I'm working in a group with piano, bass,

drums, the singer up front. This particular standards group started with Miles Hill and Miles Black in some restaurant work. They had such a great hard swinging feel together. We did some trio work putting together a repertoire, and it was so much fun.

What I'm hoping will eventually happen with this project is that it will get looser and looser. I don't want to take it out, I don't want to start de-constructing those tunes in that context. I have Garbo's Hat to de-construct standards in, and we do that with glee! Most importantly, I want to sound like me on those tunes. I don't want to sing a tune and have somebody say, "Oh I heard Sarah Vaughan singing that tune just like that!" I'm trying hard to establish a contemporary sound of my own, incorporating all the influences.

With my mainstream group with Miles Hill, Miles Black, and Claude Ranger, it's been wonderful for us to get to know each other and feel the swing and communication happening, and the music still has the "sound of jazz." We're working out of a tradition.

WE ARE LIVING in the post-modern age, where nothing is pure anymore. For me to be true to myself as a creative artist, I can't just latch on to one part of the music's history and say this is what I want. I've listened to so much music over the years that for me to swing it only one way or do the same tune at the same tempo all the time is not true to my impulses as an artist nor fair to the musicians I'm playing with.



In the North American musical tradition, the jazz standards repertoire is unique. In classical musical, you have a repertoire that is played the way it was written. In jazz standards, you have the chord changes, which are mutilated at will; the melody gets played with as well. You get a constant stretching and moving around, all within the framework of the tune. Just to lock myself into one mode of interpretation doesn't seem fair to the art form.

I do feel that a lot of young people playing mainstream jazz are playing it in a slavish, kissing-the-feet-of-the-masters kind of way. That doesn't excite me at all. I'm in favour of people finding their own voice. Maybe that is a function of my not being able to make the sound Betty Carter makes. Maybe if I could make that sound, I'd want to sound just like her. But I'm stuck with my own instrument and have to try to find my own mode of expression.

GARBO'S HAT IS BEST DESCRIBED as what Earshot Magazine called us: in the inside/outside camp. We're walking a line. It seems like a contradiction in terms to be in a camp that is inside and outside, but that's what we do. We play music that goes back and forth between stuff that is very melodic, with familiar harmonic structures, but it can just as easily become pretty stretched out.

The instrumentation was a come-by-chance thing. Paul, Graham, and I have played together in various groups over the dozen or so years that I have been playing music in Vancouver. Graham and Paul playing together goes back even further than that.

It happened at a closing party for a *New Orchestra Workshop* series at the French Cultural Centre in 1988 that people were just getting up and playing together. There had just been this big blow-out with two drummers and everybody was kind of burned-out by the intensity of the music; Paul Blaney and I got up and played Ellington's *In My Solitude*, just as a duo. I think that was the first time I had done a piece with just a bass player. It was a nice space and we had a good time playing it. Graham Ord came up and said, "That was great! You guys want to be in a band? Can I join your group?" We said yes and made a date at the *grunt gallery* series.

Our first gig was primarily playing standards. Eventually we started rehearsing and working on collaborative, original compositions, as well as bringing pieces that we had written individually. As time has gone on, the focus has become more original work.

We never play a concert that is just original music, we always like to do at least one or two standards. Our new recording is called *Face The Music* because we do that great Irving Berlin tune *Face The Music And Dance*; we also recorded Matt Dennis' *Angel Eyes*.

It's a nice way for us to acknowledge our roots as jazz musicians, but that format also gives us a chance to explore that music in a different way. The way I sing standards with Garbo's Hat is quite a bit more stretched out and adventurous than the way I sing with my mainstream group. Although I feel equally challenged in both contexts, each is a different thing. Each sounds different to me in my head and when I sing it, but it doesn't feel any different in my heart: it is all music.

It's really been an organic process: by and large, a group that has played together over a long period of time has a sense of communication within that group, no matter what the genre of music, and is going to make higher quality music than a group just thrown together on the stand, who don't really know each other's idiosyncrasies. We have a highly developed sense of communication that comes from playing together for a long time.

We are not working in a prescribed format where you play the intro, play the head a couple of times, everybody solos, you play the head out, play the coda, and you are gone.

GARBO'S HAT IS DIFFERENT, and has evolved without the confines of pre-determined musical format. The music is distinctly us with no kind of box around it. I think of it as jazz because it has those certain qualities associated with jazz: communication, swing, improvisation. Paul Blaney has got such a deep groove. Even though it ventures into the territories of "new" music, it still swings.

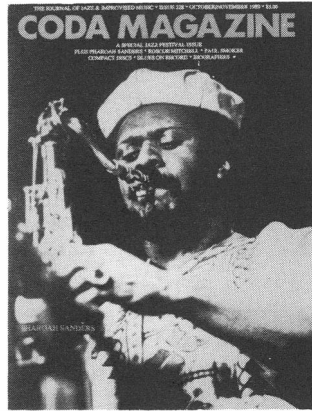
I'm trying to extend my vocabulary as a vocalist. If I'm not singing words as such, I have to find something else beside "la-la-la." I've been influenced notably by Jay Clayton and Jeanne Lee. I want to be able to incorporate my sound and my expression into the sound of the group. Garbo's Hat is a cooperative group, a sound-unit where I meld my sound with the sounds that Paul Blaney and Graham Ord create.

I've been experimenting with writing music to poetry, for example to John Sobol's poems. I have a couple of pieces of transliterations of Rimbaud's poems, a section of a Robert Frost poem. I'm not a lyricist myself and don't have a talent in that regard, so I use other people's words and write music that I think fits the mood of the poem. I'm not a technically trained musician: I sing more from my ear and heart than from what I learned from a book. For that reason, my compositions have a unique quality because they are more about mood and expression.

I had an interesting thing happen recently where we were talking to a CBC producer about possibly doing a recording. The producer of the show we were submitted for said, "Oh no, it's too avant-garde for this show, so why not record it for Two New Hours, the new music show?" Then we were told by the new music show that we weren't avant-garde enough! At this point there is no room for Garbo's Hat on the CBC! □

THE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE BY LAURENCE M. SVIRCHEV, WHO IS THE VANCOUVER CORRESPONDENT FOR CODA MAGAZINE.

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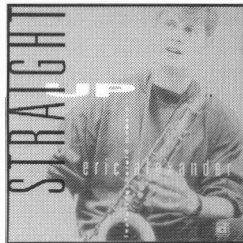
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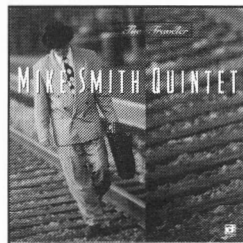
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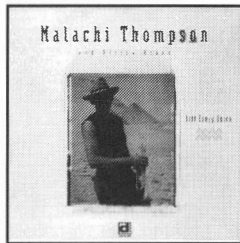
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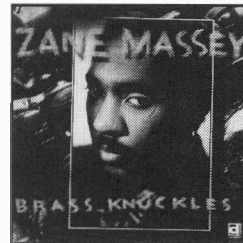
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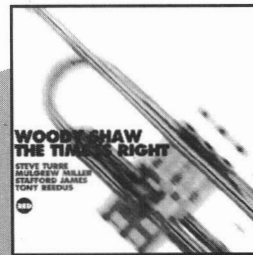
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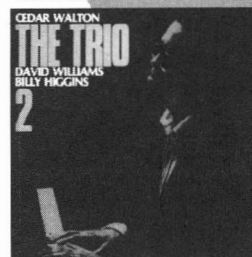
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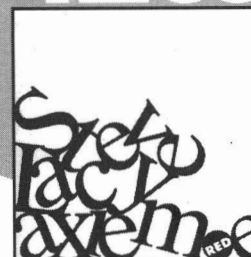
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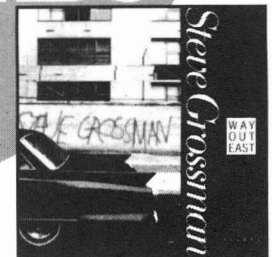
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CANADIAN NOTES

DU MAURIER LTD. INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL VANCOUVER

Reviewed by KEVIN WHITEHEAD

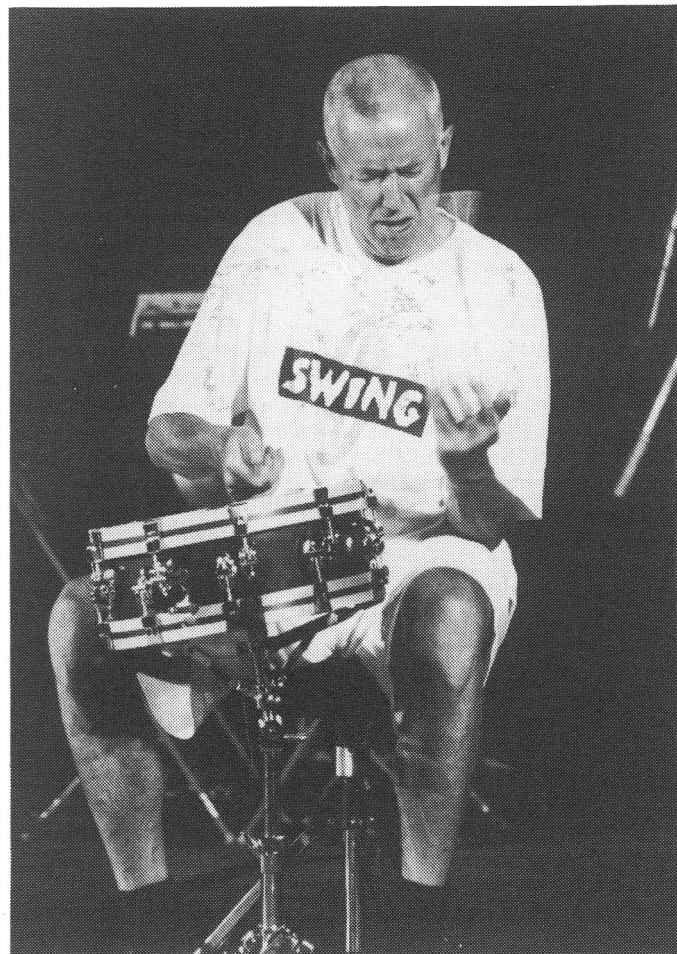
OPTIMISTS CLAIM ONLY LACK OF EXPOSURE KEEPS NEW MUSIC FROM FINDING AN AUDIENCE: IF AM RADIO PLAYED ORNETTE, THE MASSES WOULD LEARN TO LOVE HIM. ALWAYS SOUNDED LIKE A WISHFUL CROCK TO ME—YET BY THE END OF THIS YEAR'S 10-DAY VANCOUVER FESTIVAL, LOCALS APPEARED READY TO ELECT HAN BENNINK MAYOR. WITH SO MUCH (NEW) MUSIC FREE TO THE PUBLIC (INCLUDING TWO DAY-LONG MARATHONS ON THREE STAGES AT THE OLD EXPO SITE), FOLKS HAVE DEVELOPED A TASTE FOR THE UNORTHODOX.

Well, sure, you'll say, who could resist Han Bennink? Only those who don't hear him. The co-op Clusone Trio played across Canada this summer, but couldn't rustle up enough decent gigs in the States to make a side trip worthwhile. In North America, if you want to hear European improvisers, head to Canada—to some town that starts with a V.

You can't talk about what makes this festival crackle without talking about mastermind/artistic director **Ken Pickering**. Pickering goes to lots of festivals, scouting for talent and good ideas. Amsterdam's October Meeting '91 capitalized on throwing together musicians who don't normally play together. Good idea, he'll take it. (**Steve Lacy** and **Horace Tapscott** first duetted there; Pickering booked a reunion.) At Victoriaville '92, he heard that Bennink told Myra Melford to call him for a gig sometime; Pickering scheduled a duo. (Vancouver also reprised **Jean Derome's** musical travelogues from last year's Victo; then Derome and **Rene Lussier** played duo.) Not that Vanc's perfect. One New York musician, jet-lagged from a just-ended European tour, played three gigs/six sets (and at least two rehearsals) in 26 hours, almost immediately upon arrival. No one should have to face that—not for Vancouver's typically modest pay. And doesn't common sense dictate that dimwits who can't pronounce musicians' names shouldn't be allowed to emcee shows?

Vancouver books big stars and modern boppers—Sonny Rollins, Betty Carter, Charlie Haden; Bobby Watson, Mulgrew Miller, Terence Blanchard—and, this year, a lot of the Brooklynites associated/formerly associated with the self-help Corner Store Syndicate. Ringleader-drummer Phil Haynes and the increasingly formidable bassist Drew Gress anchored Joint Venture (with trumpeter Paul Smoker and tenorist Ellery Eskelin), and Smoker's trio, and Eskelin's. New York electric bassist Jerome Harris and saxists Andy Laster, Thomas Chapin and Ned Rothenberg also fronted bands and, save Rothenberg, worked as sidefolk (with Rollins, Melford and Harris, respectively). But this New Yorker was more interested in musicians he can't often catch at home: Europeans, Canadians—and one Australian.

Begin with Bennink. Avant-garde? Han swings with the irresistible force of Jo Jones or early idol Kenny Clarke. With **Clusone Trio**, he'll play just snare with brushes for a third of a set, and never sound constrained. He's a master entertainer too, of course. He often begins a set playing junk he's found backstage: an eight-foot-long cardboard box, for example. His mix of virtuosity and slapstick is matched by Clusone cellist **Ernst Reijseger**. (More on him in a minute.) Every band of nuts needs an anchor—someone to ground the lightning; Clusone's John Entwistle is imperturbable reedman **Michael Moore**, who pretends not to notice



the clowning. The Amsterdam-based Californian is less flashy and well-known than his mates, but if there's a modern clarinetist with a prettier tone, I've yet to hear her. His alto can get as touchingly lyrical as Paul Desmond's. (He'd also accompany Reijseger's solos, tooting Basie chords on melodica.) Moore knows a zillion tunes, and the trio can drift through half of them in their long, semi-organized suites. A typical set might include Berlin's *Cheek to Cheek*, Strayhorn's *Something to Live For*, Hefti's *Girl Talk* and Michael's ballad *Debby Warden*, which ought to be a standard.

Bennink duetted with **Myra Melford** and **Paul Plimley**, each pianist zeroing in on a different aspect of Han's style. Vanc's jolly Plimley matched his whimsy, playing or alluding to *Beautiful Dreamer*, *'A' Train* and *Green Chimneys* among other tunes. Myra—mindful that Han's been known to sandbag improvising partners—came out slugging. She pummeled the keyboard for the first two-thirds of the set, setting the pace until Han unwittingly let a stick fly,

which struck a listener up front. (Han, horror-stricken, apologized profusely; his victim roared laughing.) The duo never got their concentration back, but in a way that was lucky for Melford. Trying to outblow Bennink is perilous; sooner or later he'll wear you down.

Do folks who laugh when Reijseger puts his cello over his knee and strums it like a guitar notice he knows more four-string chords than Eddie Condon? He plays its shoulders like an African drum; he squeaks a fricative hand along its back, sounding like a cueca. He walks bass lines. He's also been known to play it with a bow. His solo set's encore was the festival's most perverse pleasure. He fingered note-perfect Bach with his left hand, scraping the horsehairs noisily over the strings.

He also contributed to the most sublime set I caught. Reijseger has replaced Hank Roberts in the string trio **Arcado**; Ernst and violinist Mark Feldman are a perfect fit, oddball humorists and technical wizards. (Feldman's bowed harmonics sound

VANCOUVER • WINNIPEG • MONTREAL

uncannily like Zamfir's pan pipes.) Their Entwistle is bassist Mark Dresser. Arcado played acoustic at the churchy Vancouver East Cultural Centre; the audience all but stopped breathing. Yeah, two-thirds of them are hilarious, but the set was rapturously beautiful.

The find of the festival—new to the eyes if not the ears (he'd recorded for Emanem)—was Sydney's bop altoist **Bernie McGann**, in trio with bassist Lloyd Swanton and drummer John Pochee. The vintage Sonny Rollins trio is their obvious role model—long, fierce, farflung improvisations are the rule; McGann boasts a large vocabulary of cries, pops, smears and vocalizations, though his ballad playing also bears traces of Desmond's dry-martini tone. They played a fair amount of Monk, perhaps the most-covered composer this year. As P.J. Perry observed to Bill Smith, who passed it on, the most amazing thing about McGann is his impossible timing; he'll start some outlandish quote or convoluted phrase 14 and 1/2 bars into a chorus and you'll think, he can't possibly squeeze it all in. He does, with nonchalance.

By contrast, **Mulgrew Miller's** boppy quintet (Wallace Roney, Steve Nelson, Tony Reedus, and a bassist whose name I heard as Richie Goods) was longer on polish but short on conceptual daring: the old strings of solos one more time. They're safe where McGann is fearless.

Georg Grawe's 11-strong GrubenKlangOrchester was a puzzle. Improvising on piano, Grawe will roll off long lines that make Tristano sound terse. But his GrubenKlang charts are constructed of short, discrete episodes that don't build momentum or give soloists much elbow room. (You couldn't tell what a fine bassist Dieter Manderscheid is.) Given unusually generous blowing space on one piece, sardonic trombonist Radu Malfatti editorialized, moving his slide a lot but hardly making a sound: lots of effort, small return.

The Orchester spawned two spin-off gigs. An improvising quartet was nominally fronted by the Evan Parker-inspired but underwhelming tenor and soprano saxophonist **John Butcher**, consistently upstaged by drummer Gerry Hemingway, cellist Marcio Mattos, and Grawe, spinning those long lines. Better was the ad hoc trio of the GrubenKlang brass.

in which the sung note overshadows the blown one, for an airy, eerie texture). Improvising, they respected silence as much as sound: musical quietism. Their spontaneous interplay was more interesting than the long (if equally spacious) Malfatti piece comprising their second set. If memory serves, the Lacy/Tapscott duet lacked the spark of their two

influences. *Multidimensional*, for Miles, was an Ellingtonian "wailing interval" for altoist Steve Potts; at times the other three horns softly riffed behind, as on a Buck Clayton jam session. Four-horn voicings never sounded too saxophony; the brass voice gave them a different tang. Lacy's unhurried cadences fit the cavernous acoustics too.



QUICKIES: —Who could anticipate five years ago **Randy Weston** would become a top draw? His solo piano set showed why: personal charm, clean percussive attack, the momentum of a river. He cut **Abdullah Ibrahim**, who coasted through his solos. • **Glenn Horiuchi** makes Asian roots as explicit as Weston does African ones, countering his heavy (and long) political messages about wartime internment of Japanese in California, with a buoyant style mixing Asian harmonies and rhythms with Monk and the barrelhouse. He knows the piano's a stringed instrument, and is attentive to the nuances of attack. • **Joe McPhee** did two things he usually doesn't: played with a loud drummer (Donald Robinson—in trio with bassist Lisle Ellis) and brought his tenor sax on the road along with soprano and valve trombone. It was a double blessing. The drums pumped him up, and tenor let him unleash a gritty side to complement his lyrical soprano. Joe makes fun of the tenor sax as testosterone pump, but it was good to hear him blasting. • **Barry Guy's** solo bass set was equally notable for his dazzling technique (what other bassist uses wire brushes better than most drummers?) and for his eagerness to demystify improvisation, explaining everything from the conception behind a piece to why he was wearing shorts. Nifty trio with **Marilyn Crispell** and Hemingway too. (They recorded.) • Having woodshedded mightily of late, **Wayne Horvitz** swung hard (sic) during his jazz piano set, with fellow Seattleites Michael Bisio and Bob Meyer on rhythm. • Suggestion for Hans Koch, reeds, Martin Schutz, cellos, Fredy Studer, drums: shut off those loud tapes, quit trying to be Anthrax, and just blow.

Dapper neo-tailgater Malfatti—part James Bond, part Turk Murphy—is a virtuoso of mutes. He'll stick anything in there: plastic, styrofoam, an aluminium pie-plate (nice buzz). He'll bang a mute on the bell or rattle one inside; he'll slide a pixie mute in and out of a harmon. Trumpeter Horst Grabosch had a half-dozen mutes of his own; tubists aren't known for using them, but Melvin Poore had a pie-plate and a couple of inserts too (though his signature is multiphonics

October Meeting sets. However Lacy's suite *Vespers*—performed Sunday afternoon in the big stone St. Andrew's-Wesley Church—was very impressive. A seven-song meditation on death—words by Bulgarian poet/vice-pres Blaga Dimitrova, dedicatees including Getz, Mingus, John Carter and Keith Haring—was performed by Lacy's usual sextet plus Ricky Ford on tenor and Tom Varner on french horn. You could look at it as a summing up, a nod to enduring

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURENCE M. SVIRCHEV

Competing late night gigs—the Pitt Gallery downtown vs. the new Glass Slipper, near the old one, miles away—kept me from hearing as many locals as I'd like. 'Old' favourites Plimley, clarinetist **Francois Houle** and bassist **Clyde Reed** made the strongest impression. Clyde's quartet (Daniel Kane, saxes, guitarist Ron Samworth, drummer Dylan van der Schyffe) concentrates on tunes by west coast (mostly local) composers—Plimley and Claude Ranger among them—reminding us that shared repertoire builds a regional style as much as a shared playing vocabulary. (And Dylan's continued growth confirms how good players spawn other ones by example—with his tough sound and alert, ever-changing comping, he's stamped with Ranger esthetic.)

Though musicians are supposed to test their mettle in the Apple, the still-stretching Houle's career suggests the benefits of developing outside the spotlight. He's free to explore and assimilate as he sees fit, this season digging into the style and repertoire of Jimmy Giuffrè's recently reevaluated trio (*Ictus, Jesus Maria*). Houle's 4—Dylan, bassist Paul Blaney, guitarist Tony Wilson—became his + 4 with the addition of cellist Peggy Lee, whose legit tone, very unjazzy, makes for effective contrast. Two Houle-Melford collaborations didn't quite gel. On a nonet, the writing sounded thin—small band writing overstretched—but Myra's solos were ferocious again.

If Francois is still sprouting, Plimley sounds more and more full grown—even if he acts like a hyperactive kid on stage. Solo, in duet, in saxophonist **Coat Cooke's** quintet, on his own late-night gig with McPhee and Ellis among others sitting in, Paul keeps getting stronger, more assured, more varied and surprising—Cecil Taylor is now just one more source/resource at his command. As with Han Bennink, personality and vision are inseparable. The funny, enthusiastic, uninhibited Mr. Plimley loves to play, and it shows.

JAZZ WINNIPEG FESTIVAL

Reviewed by **RANDAL McILROY**

IF WE NEED A LIVING SYMBOL FOR THE 4TH ANNUAL JAZZ WINNIPEG FESTIVAL THEN IT SHOULD BE ALI HOURAND, THE HIRSUTE BASSIST OF THE ASTOUNDING EUROPEAN TRIO, AFTER ALL. IN THE COURSE OF ONE OF HIS SPIDERY, SCRABBLING, BASS SOLOS DURING THE BAND'S SET AT THE LOCAL CLUB CAJUN JOE'S, THE SOFT SPOKEN HOURAND PAUSED FOR ONE SECOND TO SNAP "FUCKING THING!" AT HIS INSTRUMENT, MUCH TO THE PUNTERS' SCANDALISED AMUSEMENT.

Turns out that Hourand was rattled by a rogue bass amplifier. Nonetheless, it was a fitting summation of the struggle between man and instrument—almost a dance of death in this case—that makes the best jazz so vital, and that makes festivals like this such a valuable risk.

The Jazz Winnipeg Festival, which took place across a week in June in a spray of locations, is still young and fairly unformed by Canadian standards. This year marked the first festival produced under the artistic direction of long-serving employee **David Sherman**, who was up against not only the expected budget constraints but also the imprint of original executive producer Neal Kimelman. Like Kimelman, Sherman has to sell jazz to a populace that tends to support it only sporadically at the clubs, and reacts with excitement only to the wattage of Marsalis-sized stars; essentially, this is still a guitar town.

It was a creative and commercial hit, all the same. Certainly there were ringers, with **Sonny Rollins** drawing the historians—publicity for the tenorist's concert suggested, rather grimly, the last chance to see a living legend before he became metabolically challenged, as it were—and **Al Di Meola** and **Mike Stern** appealing to the guitar crowd. The impact of the formal concerts (seven in all) was as diverse as the "Nations United" worldbeat theme was thin. But there was a variety, with all manner of bedevilling choices—North American versus the rest of the world, visitors versus homeboys, tradition versus extrapolation, concert halls versus clubs. For the listener, a catholic approach was not only advised but essential.

flute and **Rob van Den Broek** on piano.

Coltrane is their biggest inspiration. His *Alabama* was the first track played, and no sooner had Dudek set lips to his tenor's mouthpiece than that sound was back. The biggest distinction, however, was the absence of drums, which encouraged a more subtle play with dynamics as well as a European sensibility that was easier to feel than define.

The long pieces flowed intuitively, quietening for Hourand's bass explorations and Van Den Broek's ruminative pianisms (heard to fine effect on Cajun Joe's house piano; earlier that day, he allegedly made a reluctant debut on electric keyboard for the lunchtime gig). Though dependably excellent, Dudek had more to say away from the Trane track, finding his voice on soprano (lithe, non-metallic) and flute (cool), and also impressing back on the tenor when he played the blues.

Weaving between the inside and the outside, *After All* just could be the conduit the public needs to step away from the popular traditions.

Canadian drummer **Barry Elmes'** band stayed inside, but found much to explore. Beyond being consistently engaging and frequently exciting, the music offered the interesting contrast of hip young tenor **Mike Murley** riding the groove while the very wonderful **Ed Bickert** turned up the heat. Bickert may make it look easy, but this time it never sounded that way. Trenchant on the traps, Elmes offered a few of his own sly tunes along with some standards, including an opening *Without A Song* that compared favourably with the Rollins/Jim Hall take.

Pianist **Lorraine Desmarais'** band held the crowd at a distance, with the conventional tunes fairly suffocating in formality despite capable playing. Only trumpeter **Tiger Okoshi** tried to break through; significantly, he was the only one who actually said anything to the audience.

Certainly Rollins drew as strongly as organisers hoped, with some 4,500 at the Walker Theatre evidently ready for the standing ovation even before Rollins and his quintet played a note. On his own, Rollins often gave good weight in return, with heroically long tenor solos that said plenty for his lungs—but less for his ears, alas. As a bandleader, Rollins thought like a soloist, leaving little room for anyone except rugged trombonist **Clifton Anderson**, and often stepping over what few solos he allowed the others. Percussionist **Victor See Yeun** contributed thickly to the revamped calypsos but got in the way on ballads. Guitarist **Jerome Harris** was often inaudible, and apart from his **Bill Frisellisms** on *Tennessee Waltz* had little part in the plan. What becomes a legend most? More than this.

The guitarists came off better. **Di Meola's** first set with his **World Sinfonia Trio** of second guitarist **Chris Carrington** and percussionist/singer **Arto Tunboyacyan** offered dense acoustic guitar runs, sometimes amended with synthesizer interfacing, aerated by Tunboyacyan's hybrid kit and wordless voicings. Like **Trilok Gurtu** in **John McLaughlin's** trio, the percussionist paraded versatility in ways that always served the music. Other bookings prevented hearing **Mike Stern's** trio, but word has it the ex-Miles man tore the roof off the Winnipeg Art Gallery, with his gone boss' *Jean-Pierre* saved as the closer.

After All played only the one night, prefaced by a free outdoor concert that lunchtime. A shame they didn't have a residency through the week, considering how much promise of evolution was heard in the music of Hourand, **Gerd Dudek** on saxes and

CANADIAN NOTES

By vivid contrast, Winnipeg's Roy-Lerner Group sought to welcome listeners even when the music was turning in on itself. Pianist **Marilyn Lerner** writes great tunes—*Mis Overboard* shows what can be done with a salsa piano line without actually playing salsa—and **Larry Roy** is a cool, searching, guitarist. This time they sounded better than ever, thanks to the new rhythm section of bassist Rene Worst and drummer Terry Clarke. During the week, Clarke was also behind the kit for the terrifyingly good pianist Glenn Patscha, a homeboy who's been studying down in New Orleans with Ellis Marsalis. Only 22, and locals are already joking about breaking his wrists to thin the competition. You'll be hearing from him.

Come to that, this festival amplified the strengths of many of the city's players, although logistics have mostly put an end to the earlier practice of matching local rhythm sections with touring soloists. It was a good week for singers especially. On Friday night alone, Cajun Joe's offered shows by Marcie Campbell, whose deceptively unstylized approach is well served by her lean backup of electric bass guitars, and Jennifer Hanson, a promising singer still navigating the transition to jazz from rock (she used to sing backups on tour with Glass Tiger). Meanwhile, over at the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre, Lianne Fournier returned with Trivocals, a vehicle for the entwining voices of Fournier, Kris Purdy and Karen Marklinger. Catching Campbell and Hanson meant missing Trivocals—as well as rai star Khaled; it was not a night to be bound to one body—but the following week on her own, Fournier charmed with her fine soprano scatting and nicely crafted originals.

There was more, too, of course, from the good news over P.J. Perry to the satellite events (blues nights, a free outdoor concert, a gospel cruise), but you get the idea. Things are happening here, in an atmosphere of experimentation and hope.

FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE JAZZ DE MONTREAL • Reviewed by ANNIE LANDREVILLE

FOR ITS 14TH ANNUAL EDITION, THE FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL DE JAZZ DE MONTREAL (FIJM) RAN FOR TEN DAYS UNDER BLISTERING HEAT CONDITIONS. IF YOU WERE SEARCHING FOR A MUSICAL OUTDOOR EVENT UNDER FRIENDLY, ALBEIT HEATED CLIMES, MONTREAL'S DOWNTOWN WAS THE PLACE TO BE. AND, AS PER FESTIVAL ESTIMATES, MORE THAN 1.4 MILLION MUSICAL TOURISTS WOULD SURELY AGREE TO THAT. CONSTANTLY GROWING, THIS EVENT KNOWN AS "ONE-OF-THE-BIGGEST-JAZZ-FESTIVALS-IN-THE-WORLD" OFFERED A LOT OF "BEYOND JAZZ" OUTDOOR CONCERTS, BE THEY BLUES AND GOSPEL, WORLD-BEAT, DANCE, OR ZYDECO...AND WITH THIS YEAR'S THEME BEING THE CAT, FELINES OF ALL KINDS WERE PROWLING ON STAGES AND T-SHIRTS ALIKE.

For those who have criticized the festival for not presenting more avant-garde improvisers and not giving an indoor venue to the local musicians, the organizers killed two birds with one stone in the multimedia room of the Contemporary Art Museum, where they presented some of the finest contemporary local musicians. Guitarist **Tim Brady** opened this series with a solo concert, which didn't mean he was alone on the stage. In his performance he used three guitars and tapes, making the music more accessible with a dose of irony and a good sense of humour.

In the same series, was saxophonist **Jean Derome's** project *Les Dangereux Zhome*, first presented last year at Victo. Like a good wine, the musical concept had aged well. Fresh from a recent European tour as an opening act for Al di Meola, **Icarus**, a quartet combining the acoustic and electric sounds of Stephane Allard, violin; Marc Villemure, guitar; Eric Longworth, cello and Pierre Tanguay, drums, etched a kind of futuristic music, which integrated progressive rock and jazz elements with blues and improvised music.

Excluding those psycho cats, some pedigree ones were haunting the principal concert halls of the Place des Arts. The **Charlie Haden Quartet West** was there to tell us some wild and sensuous musical tales. Saxophonist **Ernie Watts**, the more cat-like of the band, charmed us especially in the second part of the

concert, when he blew long improvisations, intense and hard-driving throughout. Now there's one cat who shouldn't be missed.

Conversely, one cat who should be put to sleep rather than scratching us with his has-been alley cat sound was **Gato Barbieri**. (By the way, gato means cat in Spanish and "gater" means rotten in French). Preceding the Barbieri debacle was **Johnny Griffin**, whose tune *The Cat* was this year's theme for the festival. Both shows were marred by sound problems, while Griffin seemed not to mind, Barbieri made a scene about it, with the result that a lot of people fled the hall, as I did, right in the middle of the second tune, with euthanasic ideas in mind...

The "jazz dans la nuit" series presented some of the more exotic and refined felines invited this year. **Rabih Abou-Khalil** a Lebanese musician now living in Germany is a virtuosic oud player and composer. Traditional rhythms mixed with the improvisations of tubist, **Bob Stewart**, an harmonicist Howard Levy, (an amazing player) and a lot of percussionists. Together, this band offered us a journey of unusual sounds and feelings. Indeed one of the most interesting discoveries of this year's festival. This was Rabih Abou-Khalil's first time in North America, and I hope it will not be the last one for this cat. In a conversation, he told me he was attracted to jazz by the name of the pianist on the first record he bought, and what better name than Thelonious Monk.

Right Brain Patrol, the newest band of bassist Marc Johnson, is a trio with Turkish percussionist Arto Tunçboyacıyan (thank God I'm not on the radio!) and New York guitarist Ben Monder. This band presented the tunes from their debut album, juxtaposing those melodies with a lot of long and inventive improvisations, which explore complex multi-cultural rhythms and vocal effects. An unusual trio, it allows three really distinct personalities to emerge, so that everyone can express his musical identity, a perfect synthesis of visceral and intellectual impulses.

In this same series, the wily French cool cat **Barney Wilen** (remember Escalator to the Scaffold?) brought us some ballads, with that patented saxophone sound he always had. It was a languorous purring night music... And last, but surely not least, was one of the true giants of the piano; **Randy Weston**, with saxophonist Talib Kibwe and percussionist Neil Clark, who presented a concert in truly African spirit. Without a doubt this was one generous and powerful evening.

Lacking in the festival was the presence of catwomen. The exceptions however are noteworthy. A gorgeous (and rare) solo concert by pianist **Gerry Allen** was the only one to give the stage to a woman as an instrumentalist (Yet there were many singers featured throughout including Betty Carter and Dee Dee Bridgewater). Interestingly enough, this year's winner of the jazz festival's competition was the Ottawa-based group Chelsea Bridge. This quartet was also awarded the prize for best original work, *The Hills of Loch Katherin*, by its singer **Teena Palmer**, an extraordinary vocalist.

The FIJM will celebrate its 15th year next summer. It might be old for a cat, but for an event like that, it just means that it's now really an institution. The organisers are planning a special anniversary edition that will celebrate its growth over the years. Purr...fect. □

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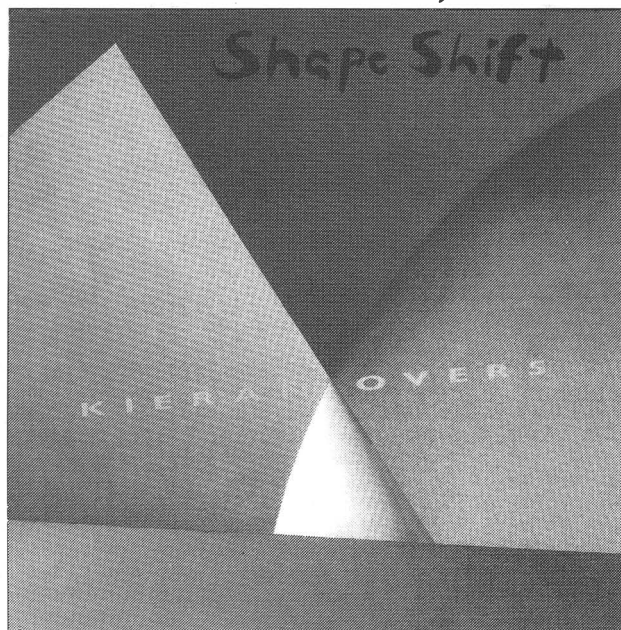
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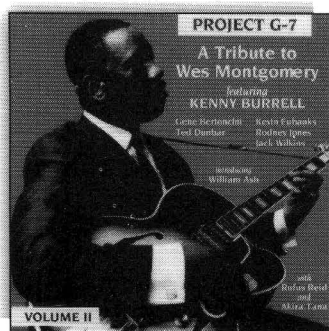
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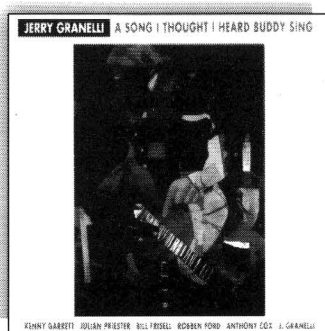
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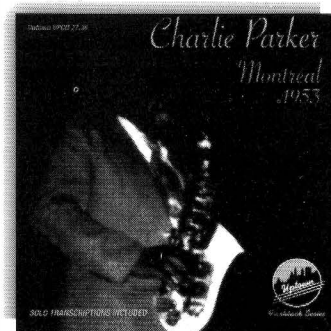
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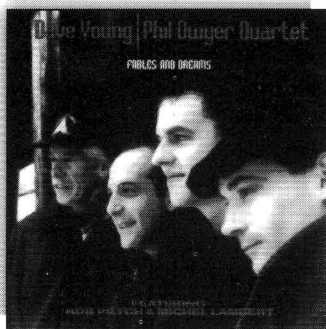


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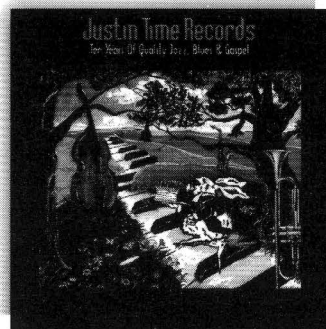


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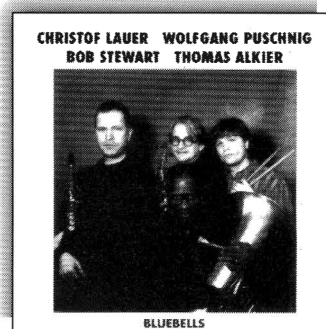


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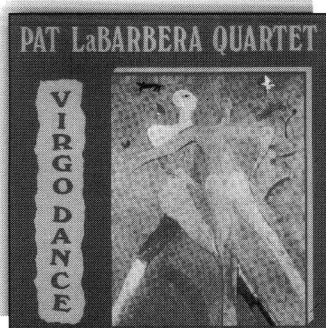
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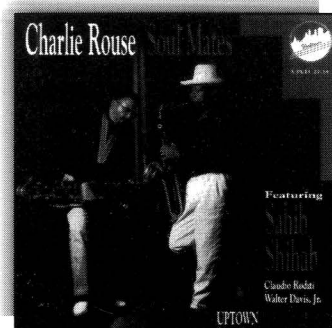


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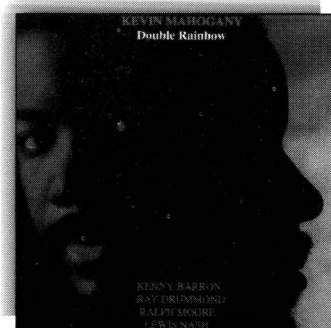


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