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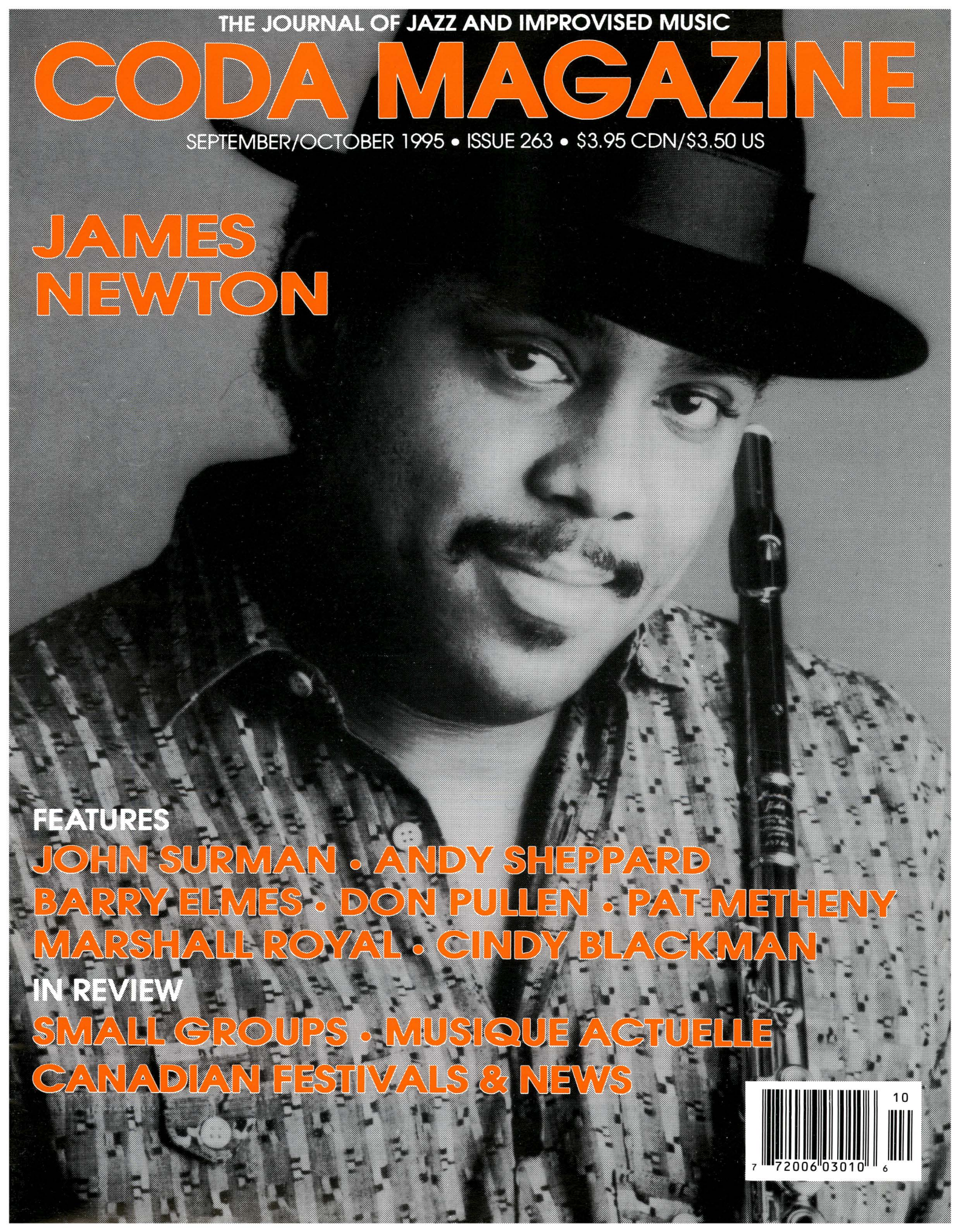

JAMES NEWTON

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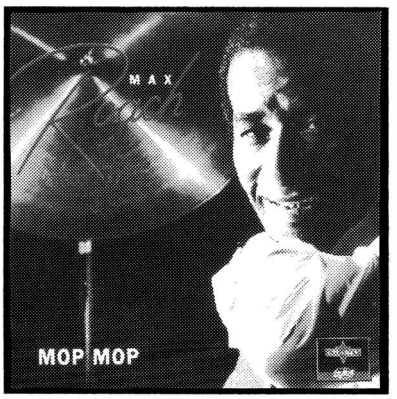

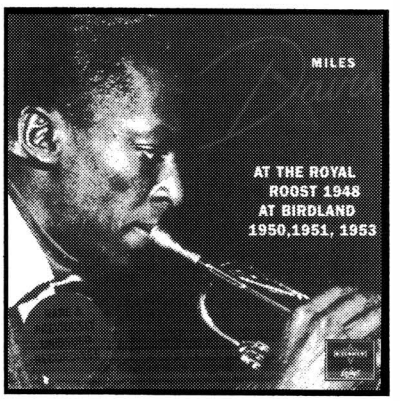

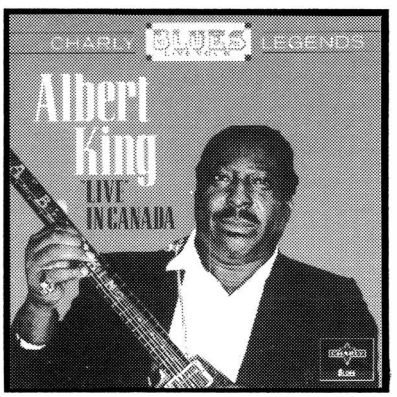

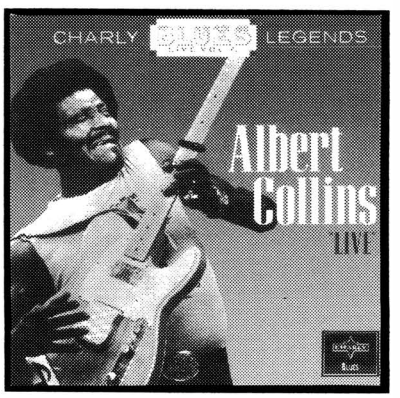

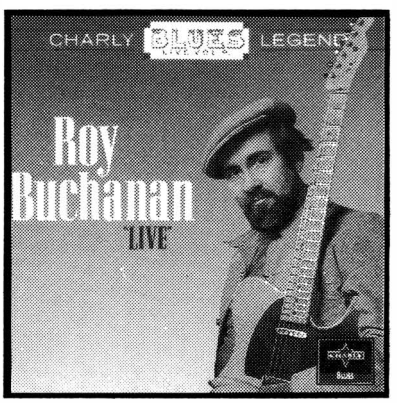

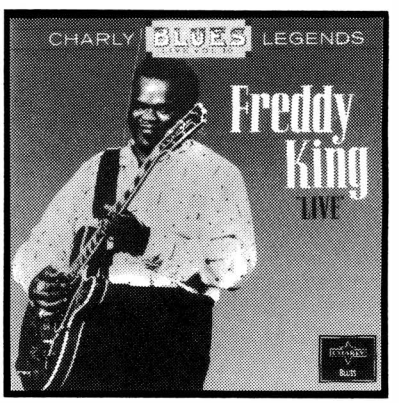

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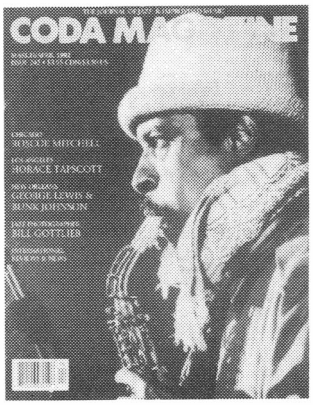

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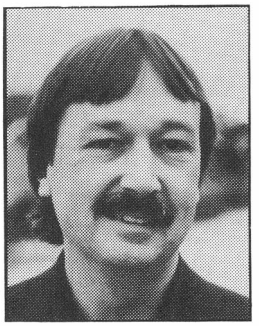
CANADIAN INDEPENDENCE CORNERSTONE



DRUMMER **BARRY ELMES** TALKS WITH BASSIST **STEVE VICKERY**

BARRY ELMES IS TALKING ON THE TELEPHONE WHEN I ARRIVE TO CONDUCT THIS INTERVIEW about Cornerstone, the new artist-run label that he has created with his partners bassist Al Henderson and saxophonist Mike Murley. He welcomes me at the door but excuses himself to continue the business that is a part of his daily work. Endless hours are spent on the phone: trying to put together the logistics of a tour that would take his quintet across the country for ten one-night dates; talking to young musicians who attend lessons with the drummer at two different music faculties, and most importantly now, doing the necessary business of the record label. This year new releases for Cornerstone include a new Time Warp session, a second Barry Elmes Quintet recording featuring guitarist Ed Bickert, a first release from bassist Al Henderson's band, and a new quartet date from Mike Murley. The recordings offer a chance to catch up with new developments by players whose profiles have been steadily rising. Featured performers on the various sessions include trumpeter Kevin Turcotte, bassists Steve Wallace and Jim Vivian, pianists Richard Whiteman and David Restivo, and the multi-reed work of Alex Dean.

Elmes seems happy with the results so far, the label has taken off, and there's even time these days for him to sit and think more about composition, developing a sound that has been in the making for twenty years. Along the way, he has seen the music that he created with Time Warp, and now his own quintet, grow in ways that he wouldn't have imagined before. We sat talking for an hour, and though the phone was temporarily out of his hand, it continued to ring throughout our conversation.

THE THREE OF US, AL HENDERSON, MIKE MURLEY, and myself were on the executive board of Unity records, and I was in charge of setting up a distribution network for independents in Canada, in particular for that label. Unity has about twenty-four artists from all across the country, and I have this little room in my house, that was the Unity office. I was spending sometimes five or six hours every day in there, handling calls from members, doing orders, talking with stores, trying to get something going. I did that for a year, learning all kinds of stuff, but the problem was, if I had any projects of my own they were getting shelved for lack of time.

Musically I had a recording project that I wanted to do. After talking with Al and Mike, we took it one step further. We had all gained experience from the Unity venture. Mike was in charge of PR for the label, Al had been involved with doing the legal stuff, I was doing a lot of the advertising and the accounts, so what we did was start our own company, incorporated it right from the start, and it's grown from there. We're going slowly in that each project is given careful attention, we use our experience answering questions like when's a good time to release, how many recordings should we be releasing at the same time. I've learned a lot about the size of the market for jazz music within Canada, and so you have to pay attention to things that I wouldn't have paid attention to years ago. Things like the fact that there are only so many reviewers of jazz music in the country, I know who they are, and if you release four or five CDs all at once, you're really defeating yourself, because all of them aren't going to be reviewed. You have to pay attention to release dates and pacing. It was a natural thing for us to do, to start our own company, the timing was right.

THE WHOLE LEVEL OF THINKING for us has come full-circle. For years, you see your so-called career starting to take off a bit, you've got some CDs out, all of us have had Juno nominations, we've all had that "industry" attention, as much as you can get in this country. We've all been very fortunate that way. So you would think it shouldn't be that difficult to get a contract with a major label as an artist. The fact of the matter is that it is extremely difficult, and this has less to do with the music than with a variety of other concerns. These are to do with marketing, marketability, age, trends or what the bigger companies decide are the trends. When I say it's come full circle, what I mean is that in hindsight, it has turned out to be much better for us. In our first year of this fledgling company, we've sold about five or six times as much as we sold having a national distributor work for us. It's just phenomenal. The advantage of being independent is that we've got a much smaller thing to deal with, so it gets a lot of attention. We've been able to really spend time on each individual project, we have the time to talk to people about it. Bigger record companies, they can't do that, and they're not willing to, they've got all these other concerns with pop and rock music, they've got their money-making things and that's what gets the attention. We have the advantage of being able to spend time on this alone.

We're not naive, we know there is a limited market for this music, so our goal was to identify it. Who is it in this country that would like to hear this music? That's what we spent our time doing, finding out who they are, where are they, and making sure they have access to our recordings. A larger company won't be able to do that either. They've got this network of stores and most of the stores won't even have a

jazz department, or if they do, it's way too small, but we can get at it another way, and it's worked very well.

MY FEELING IS that this is a very good time for the music, though obviously your viewpoint depends on whether or not you feel you're being successful at the time. I think it's a great time because I'm looking at it from when I first arrived in Toronto in 1973. What I like about it is that now there are all kinds of different bands out there right across the country, not just in Toronto, everywhere. There are actual groups staying together, it's not just this scene where you've got a band leader who puts together a rhythm section for a week in a club; that scene has changed too. We don't have clubs like Bourbon Street anymore, where name players would come in and the local rhythm section would play. That was a great training ground, and for a long time, that was the jazz scene.

There are really good players who have their own music to contribute, over the years there have been a lot of people emerge, a lot more original music is being played. Now in terms of whether the music can be heard, I think there are enough venues though it is very challenging to generate work. You have to find the venues, sometimes you have to make them yourself, but that's the way it's always been. When I came to Toronto, trying to become a jazz drummer, there was more than half a dozen really good players already here who had the work. There was no work for me anyway. So the point is that you have to make your own outlet. Time Warp was one of the first bands playing original music in that period that lasted more than a year. Now we have been together for twelve years and that's a long time for a jazz band, particularly a Canadian jazz band, and there's no reason for us to stop going with it. Now there are other bands like that. All kinds of approaches to the music. You can't go out there every week and do it, but you can find your spots, and there is an audience, and that's the best part. I did a week recently at the Montreal Bistro and it was packed every night. Dave Young and Phil Dwyer have a quartet that played there the week before us, and they had the same thing happen, they did very well. So the people are coming out, and I see new people every time we play. It's a healthy scene as far as I can see.

Can we talk about the absence of jazz and creative music from the larger media outlets like MuchMusic? Their interest seems to be strictly in promoting the corporate pop music scene.

WELL, THAT IS EXACTLY THE CASE. Its funny, maybe I'm not an optimist, or too much of a realist, but I never expected anything else. I didn't expect them at any point to play any jazz, in the same way, I didn't expect them to play any opera, or anything really artistic. I expected it to be an industry vehicle. They're there to push commercial mass-media videos, that's what they do. Now, to my surprise, I have met a few people in that industry locally who have really tried hard to help us. Time Warp made a video a couple of years ago, and when we were doing the shoot, which was not an advertised event, a camera crew from MuchMusic came in. Lance Chilton is the guy's name, and I want to mention it because he's been very helpful in trying to change that narrow definition, trying to open it up. There's endless roadblocks for him but he's tried. He came in with a camera crew, and did a spot about us making this jazz video, which is absurd, and got them to show it on MuchMusic. As small an advance as that was, it was a great thing to do, at least it lets people know there is something else. There's been very little coverage of the music that way.

THERE'S BEEN LITTLE CRACKS in the structure. The first was during the jazz festival, CityTV setting up a stage outside their building, and that had mixed results. On the one hand, that's great, they were filming "live" and feeding it into their video show. It also made obvious the negativity of CityTV to the notion of doing this in the first place. It was obvious someone had got them to do this, but the powers-that-be weren't that thrilled with it. We were playing on stage and the opening of the interview was one of the VJs coming along with a microphone saying - Now, don't change the channel, I'm really sorry, but for the next twenty minutes, believe it or not, we're going to play jazz or something, but don't go away, right after that, we'll show you the new Madonna. (laughs)

That's the intro to it, and then I'm supposed to talk on the mike and be positive and happy like - Oh, its great to be here. It was something, but that's what it takes. It also takes a lot of letters from people who like the music writing to the station to say they want to hear some jazz and see some Canadian jazz artists. That's what it takes, a few people making a big noise. They will listen because it is in their interest to listen, I know their sponsors will listen.

KEVIN TURCOTTE, MIKE MURLEY & AL HENDERSON • PHOTOGRAPH BY VIOLA ANDERSON

On the other hand, I don't have any beefs with the radio scene in this country. It seems to me that at any time of the night or day, I can find jazz on the radio. It wasn't like that a few years ago.

Your quintet brings together the music of Mike Murley and Ed Bickert. Why is it still rare to see young players working alongside established artists? It seems to me that older players are not as well represented on the current scene.

THE THING ABOUT ED BICKERT that sets him apart is that he is probably one of the greatest musicians in the world, period. He is a real player, he could play with anybody under any circumstance and is pretty much willing to do that. I was reluctant to ask him to join the quintet, just because I didn't really want to be turned down, but he really likes playing in this band. The reason he likes it is because the music is fresh for him. Everyone associates Ed with the music of the Ed Bickert Trio, playing lovely jazz standards, and he is a master of that, but he is also a master at doing a variety of other things. My quintet is an opportunity for people to hear him doing other things, playing different kinds of tunes. He plays much more aggressively in my band than he does in certain other instances.

Why aren't other players of his generation working in these contexts? Well, it comes down to it that Ed is one of a kind. Perhaps the others, I'm not entirely comfortable saying this, but perhaps the other players are not as open. A lot of times when players become well-established over the years, they develop their own scene, and they've got it, and that's it. A lot of other factors come into play. There was a time when there was a lot of studio work in town, which is not the case anymore. There is some, but it is largely a lot of synthesizers used for beer commercials. There was a time when the jazz players in this town, guys like Rob McConnell, Guido Basso, you know, great players, these guys did the jazz work as well as all the studio work. They made a lot of money doing it all.

For someone like me who came along at the tail-end of that studio scene, there was no studio work. I wanted to be a jazz player so I had to find ways to eke out a living doing that. The main focus of a lot of these players of Ed's generation wasn't necessarily jazz, even though they were good jazz players. Look at P.J.Perry, he's been playing for a number of years and he's very open to the sound, he's been very active and is a great player, and always has been one. He is a real jazz player, that is his main focus. Ed's main focus has always been jazz, regardless of the amount of studio work he may have done in the past, he has always been a jazz player. It depends on what your focus is, how you perceive what you are, and what you want to do.

I don't have any specific goals in mind, other than to keep doing what I do. I think recording is very important, that's why Time Warp made its first record, back in 1979. Al Henderson and I knew even then, from listening to all these jazz recordings over the years, that our understanding of the music was based on recordings. We couldn't go out and hear a lot of these people, some of them were dead, some of them never came to town. We understood very quickly how important it is to chronicle the developments in the music through the recordings. We thought, well, we've been playing for a number of years, let's document where we are now. Even at that level, I think that it's important to document the music, as you go along, regardless of sales or how much money you lose or make doing this, do it anyway. That's the purpose behind the recording anyway, we're not doing this to increase our income or anything like that, that would be nice if it happened, but realistically, the recording thing is for documenting the state of affairs in your music, so definitely we'll continue with that.

I'd like to keep touring. The problem there is the size of the country and the limit of funds, so you become largely dependent on agencies like the Canada Council touring office. They have been very supportive to me with both bands, Time Warp and the quintet. The quintet went out for a tour in January, clubs mostly, for a string of one nighters, which is what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something different than the annual summer jazz festivals. That's too much like overkill, you just can't do it every year. The touring office helped me with some travel money for that, because without it, its pretty hard to do any touring on a national level.

For this one ten-day tour in January 1995, I started working on it last February, and I'm working on it all the time, the logistics, trying to make it possible to afford hotel rooms, trying to get someone to donate the use of a van to drive us in from the airport, all these things, because if we approached it the way a commercial rock band does, paying big bucks for everything you need along the way, it would be a joke... the cost as opposed to the revenue would be a ratio of about a hundred to one. You just wouldn't be able to go anywhere. Fortunately there is a network of volunteers through all these jazz societies and support people across the country, but the bottom line is you've got to have the money to hop on a plane.

I REALLY WISH THAT WE HAD A GOVERNMENT willing to realize the value of jazz artists and the music they produce in this country. I wish they would give the Canada Council enough money so they could continue to adequately support it, because let's face it, it's not a popular music, it's not one that is patronized by wealthy people, you know, we're not talking about theatre, we're not the ballet. It is patronized by lots of people, most of whom don't have very much money, so we need help to reach them. It was said to me by someone in government, well, you get these grants to go out there and tour, you've gone out two or three times now, you must be a hit by now... it's as if I've gone out there several times, and if I can't turn that into a commercial success, they can't continue the funding... that kind of thinking has to change. The motivation is to get some of this art out to the people who would like to hear it, and who deserve to hear it. Nobody is getting rich from this, that's for sure, all we're doing is being able to play in a country that geographically is almost impossible to get across.

Touring is essential. People have to hear you play, they have to hear the compositions, and they have to hear it live. This music is meant to be performed live and meant to be heard live. Recordings are great, and they are important as I've said for documenting what's happening, but really, the live performance is what matters. □

Essays Solo:
improvisation and interpretation

MATS GUSTAFSSON/TEDDY HULTBERG/THOMAS MILLROTH

Almlof Editions • Krukmkargatan 42 • S-117 26 Stockholm • Sweden

A REVIEW BY STEVE VICKERY

Essays Solo, a collection of profiles, quotations, and discographies of improvising artists now active in Europe, is a useful introduction to a music that has for years stood on the fringes of jazz listening circles. The perennial attraction of this music remains in the unexpected, the opportunity for performer and audience to explore new worlds of sound, beyond any arbitrary definitions of style. While this music bears more resemblance to the experimental traditions of theatre and concert music than to any of the currents of today's jazz music, the opening essay frames the theme of improvisation within all traditions: Improvisation is more a notational than a philosophical challenge to tradition. It must inherently exist in all music in which exact notation of every detail is not possible: therefore in all music.

This focus on the nature of improvising in all music systems challenges the prevalent idea of composer as master of the ensemble, a stance that many performers take strong objection to. Joelle Leandre comments: Without us composers are nothing. We bestow them with our powers. It is we who create the music, they do the thinking.

Its thesis is that all musicians must in the act of interpretation effortlessly improvise within a specific framework of pitches and rhythmic structures. Essays Solo presents the artists themselves defining the craft, sometimes in terms beyond the strictly musical, as Marilyn Crispell notes: Music to me is a spiritual expression, and has a healing and transcending power.

It seems almost funny to categorize these artists under a banner of New Music when the tradition that they follow has historic precedent over centuries. The improvisation that forms Derek Bailey's work has been developed over three decades of solo and group play. Essays Solo attempts to unify the false distinction made between free improvisation and improvisation rooted in systems of notation by profiling artists from both schools. This collection of eighteen performers, all of whom fall outside the orthodoxy of jazz tradition, investigates an area where the propulsive rhythms of jazz meet the tonal/harmonic advances of composers like Ligeti, Berio, and Cage. Some have become known on this continent (Crispell, Bailey, Barry Guy, Leandre) and some remain unknown at present to the North American audience (bass clarinetist Tommy Lundberg, multi-instrumentalist Raymond Strid, pianist Kristine Scholz, and percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky, among others).

It seems unusual that the prolific Dutch improvisors escaped notice in this collection, though there is certainly enough diversity in that circle to warrant a separate anthology. Essays Solo has the look of a labour of love; stark graphics by the Swedish artist Pierre Olofsson combine with dramatic black and white photography for a rich design. It offers the reader a fresh vantage point to view this tradition still in progress. Within improvisational music, there is an explicit need to seek new sounds...and to give instrumental technique a personal stamp...The instrumental impulse is a hallmark of this music. One can draw an analogy with the painter trying to find out what the paint wants. □

1995 CANADIAN FESTIVALS
VICTORIAVILLE AND WINNIPEG

FESTIVAL INTERNATIONAL MUSIQUE ACTUELLE VICTORIAVILLE • MAY 18th-22nd • 1995

Twenty-five sets + 1800-word ceiling = no room for lofty theories about whatever musique actuelle's supposed to be. Let's get to it.

The opener looked dubious on paper — Montrealer Charles Papasov's all-bari sax sextet, with Hamiet Bluiett, Jean Derome, Toronto's David Mott, Belgium's Bo van der Werf, and Switzerland's Christian Gavillet, a trickster worth keeping an ear out for. It worked, everyone rising to the challenge, starting with a top-this solo sequence in which the big horn's false high notes were heavily exploited. Most players brought charts. Chief compositional influences: Urban Sax's Gilbert Artman — dense long note chords, walls of sound, overtones complex enough to sound like a shimmering gong — and that great influence on most every reed choir, Julius Hemphill, who'd died after this set had been booked, but to whom it served as unannounced tribute. (Something surely not lost on Bluiett, who's been less than gracious about Hemphill's contributions to the World Saxophone Quartet.)

The next set, trumpeter Pino Minafra's, featured Carlo Actis Dato on bari as well as tenor — so make that seven notable baritonists in one night. Italian jazz has been a well-kept secret from North Americans; Victo (and Vancouver) now aim to change that. Minafra's six-piece Sud Ensemble has much to recommend it. Such as, they nail tricky rhythmic passages, and they play in tune; bassist Daniele Patumi combines dead-on intonation with raunchy bowing. Mediterranean lyricism sings through a lot in Minafra's tunes, and his brass chops are serious and jazz-idiomatic. That said, he's as desperate for laughs as an aging comedian whose career is skidding. He bounds around stage like Jerry Lewis on speed, babbles like an auctioneer through a bullhorn, plays eight notes where three will do. Pino, you needn't strain so. Try decaf.

Compatriot Giancarlo Schiaffini's lyrical solo trombone-plus-electronics relied on familiar strategies — layered digital-delay drones, microtonal weaving around same, multiphonic or black-box timbral distortion. But since every manipulated sound was generated by mouth or lung (or striking the horn's surface), the music never came off as mechanical. Its humanness was underscored by the sounds of the many orifices he echoed, snort to song to fart.

There was a similar lip + machine mix with France's Pierre Bastien, playing simple pocket-trumpet melodies over a host of homemade mechanical instruments. He knew just what his many automated mbiras, machine-bowed strings and music boxes were worth. He didn't wear any one gizmo out, and kept the pieces short and varied: it was a set of miniatures in every best sense.

The quartet Masada seesaws between belaboring and animating John Zorn's unspoken conceit: what would Ornette sound like if he were Jewish? Of the dozen-plus Masada sets I've heard, this was one of the best. Drummer Joey Baron put weird accents in all the wrong places, merci; Greg Cohen kept the bass lines moving, avoiding the endless vamping that can tie Masada down; trumpeter Dave Douglas developed various lyrical motifs; Zorn was of a mind to mimic Ornette, not a problem when you do it this well. For the benefit of punsters, they played past midnight: Zornette at 12.

Baron also sounded fine accompanying the greatest genius on view at Victo XII: Buster Keaton, on screen. Bill Frisell's nifty C&W-laced guitar style lends itself perfectly to Keaton's "Go West" and suburban-frontier short "One Week." Bill's motivic scores didn't get in the way of Buster's fluid moving camera, except the one time he needed a boost. At an uncharacteristic moment late in "Go West," when the pacing flags, the trio — Kermit Driscoll played mostly upright not electric bass — stepped in to raise the energy level. Most enjoyable and satisfying. Another silent film set, by the co-op Metamkine — with Jerome Noetinger's atmospheric electronics — built on the work of photo-kineticists from Muybridge to Brakhage: live manipulation of film from dual projectors: very dark images that gradually gave up their identity; stop-motion studies; contrapuntal or doubled split-screen scenes; hand-colouring; even the melting of film over a projector bulb. Very nice, so why did many folks who cherish weird music balk when confronted with the visual avant-garde?

CARLO ACTIS DATO PHOTOGRAPH BY SYLVAIN LAFLEUR

REVIEWED BY KEVIN WHITEHEAD & RANDAL McILROY

Vancouver's N.O.W. orchestra gets enough ink in these pages, so we'll be brief: the antic Paul Plimley's send-up of the conductor's role was funnier than it was compositional. At the helm, in the mad-doctor role, was a walking rebus: Coate Cooke, in a lab coat, cooking. N.O.W.'s guest composer, guitarist Rene Lussier, kicked off his half of the show with the wonderful "Premier Course," that rarity of rarities, excellent orchestral fusion. The fast first part had a terrific, irresistible beat; later there was an episode of absurdly spare stoptime — two staccato hits in two minutes, the audience majestically quiet — in apparent (but unintended, said Rene) homage to Canadian composer Alison Cameron's infamous "Blank Sheet of Metal."

"Premier Course" was in the running for this Victo's best piece; best set, no contest, was Phil Minton and Veryan Weston. Their stylistic rage (I'd meant to type range) is as extraordinary as Minton's half-man half-goat vocals. They performed a ruthlessly funny sendup of lounge-act sincerity, a portrait of a highway milepost (from a Ho Chi Minh poem), an ode to anarchy (their setting of 19th century propaganda), Kurt Weill's "Mandalay," a Tina Turner cover,... each getting just what it deserved. The pianist is Phil's perfect match, sliding sideways, micro-plausible, macro-surreal. Weston drops beats, changes chords early or late, his sustain pedal and hands contradict each other. We listeners didn't even know where to tap our feet, but they never got lost. Here's hoping Les Disques Victo doesn't realize what bunco this fake-jazz rubbish was, and issues it first thing. (Minton also sang on Bob Ostertag's Say No More project, pretty much as discussed in the May/June '95 Coda.)

Siberia's Sainkho Namtchylak and altoist/bass clarinetist Ned Rothenberg had the unenviable job of following that other duo. This pair is well-matched, too; the setting's linearity tilts Ned away from his usual echoes of E — - P — — -'s corkscrew style (which critics mightn't talk about so much if Ned was more candid about Evan's pervasive influence). Namtchylak and Rothenberg both have overtone-rich timbres — she's got Tuvan throat-singing down — and a keen ear for microtonal variation, and like to improvise in familiar channels. (I couldn't spot the two free improvisations among the more pre-plotted selections.) Each piece had a distinctive character. Ned has also become a fine and original shakuhachi player, neither strictly traditional nor trivializing. That's no easy feat.

As usual these days, tenor David S. Ware's quartet was longer on bluster than substance — can hardly blame them, the critical praise they've gotten for it — but there were five or ten golden minutes in the middle: an unaccompanied Matthew Shipp solo in his best scrabbling-in-place busy-stasis piano style, and Ware's subsequent a capella display of rich overtones, moving from depth-charge low notes to tea-kettle falsetto in seconds. He'll blend circular squeals with staccato tones moving around a lower register, without sounding like he cops Evan Parker.

Best rock show was the closer, by Japan's Tenko, a clear-voiced yodeler whose band struck a killer groove (kudos to New York bassist Kato Hideki), and boasted fine screech-guitar and turntable scratching from Otomo Yoshihide. Otomo's sextet set earlier that day was marred by dumbo profundity (sampled pitchman voice: "Panasonic... Panasonic... Panasonic....") and volume deafening even by the usual standards of the only Victo venue that's a drag, half the floor of the town hockey arena. Are the guys who do sound there actually deaf, or just aspire to it?

Otomo notwithstanding, best turntable solo was Martin Tetreault's — slow and low-rumbling as a glacier, his hand barely moving — during Montreal singer and keyboardist Diane Labrosse's set, which slid between poppy tunes (one with very nice changes) and open-field improvising. A duet section for turntable and her far-flung samples confirmed musique concrete is back, bless it. Worst rock show — and as always at Victo, there was fierce competition for the crown — was by guitarist Marc Ribot's quartet Shrek. They were so boorishly banal, the guitar solos and improvising strategies so limp, you had to wonder if it was supposed to suck, some misguided conceptual thing. (Sadly, the answer seemed to be No.)

Small groups with strings was the year's most obvious motif; there were four sets where more than one player wielded horsehairs. Torontonian John Oswald's diverse show — including his silent solo dance improvisation and a so-so alto solo — ended with a sublime impromptu by his once-a-week, improvise-for-pleasure quintet. Saxophone, David Prentice's heavy-vibrato violin and Tiina Kiik's single-note accordion lines somehow blended so you couldn't tell who played what, a reminder the improviser's most useful skill is the ability to listen. On another, even quieter improvisation, unamplified bassist Marvin Green imposed unity by (throat?) singing in unison with his bowed double stops, a one-man ensemble within Oswald's ensemble. Nice mood at the gig too — a single, dim overhead bulb suspended over the band, who sat in a circle at floor-level.

JOHN OSWALD PHOTOGRAPH BY VID INGELEVICS

The other string sets misfired. Montreal's Robert Marcel Lepage is an excellent clarinetist, but his quintet with four strings never ignited, maybe because his classical cats were ill at ease with even rudimentary improvising strategies. Although Guy Klucevsek has commissioned many new-music pieces for accordion, his own writing for squeezebox (or piano) plus three strings was sweet and unironic, his harmony simple, his melodies as hook-driven as radio pop. He seemed out of place.

Kronos Quartet can play, but took the lowest of low roads. The best thing they played was inoffensive, the rest either relentlessly trivial or as offensively patronizing as David Harrington's love-you-Canadians patter. The audience should have thrown bricks, instead they called 'em back for two encores.

Harrington pooh-poohed a request for their tepid "Purple Haze," as if they had too much integrity for that. Instead they played even more brain-dead dreck: live sweetening for a tape of several Elvis impersonators; a bunch of TV themes strung together and attributed to some alleged composer (instead of Mancini, Steiner, Hagen, DeVol, et al — like, y'know, let's challenge prepostmodern notions of ownership, man). I'd need all 1800 words to do justice to how contemptible this show was: bullshit masquerading as sophistication.

Okay, here's the lofty theory. As ever, "musique actuelle" can be defined only as whatever Victo programmer Michel Levasseur chooses to book. There are no other constants.
Kevin Whitehead

JAZZ WINNIPEG FESTIVAL - JUNE 17th-25th • 1995

Dogged by deficit but still rich in spiritual account, the sixth Jazz Winnipeg Festival was more a cause for understanding rather than celebration. Blame the times; in this city if you want unqualified help you have to be a hockey team.

They didn't get close to top billing, but the reunited duo of Sheila Jordan and Steve Kuhn cracked those secret spaces that distance the magical from the merely great. Jordan said they hadn't performed together for a decade. Empathy endures.

Fair enough, a critic can get treacherously romantic about that sort of thing. Even so, the concert showed how closely they dovetailed. What they share is the art of underplaying. Jordan muted her fabulous resources, the better to find the grace of a song. The scatting in *Everything Happens To Me* grew so naturally from the melody that sometimes she left only a few words for pointers. In *Sail Away*, from Tom Harrell's scrapbook, she rode the thermals easily as an ocean bird, and with as much curiosity for the details.

Kuhn was the festival's most thoughtful player, so handsomely measured in every note; think of Mal Waldron's irreducible drive painted by Bill Evans. His own *Oceans In The Sky* opened a brief but quietly glorious solo spot. The Winnipeg Art Gallery's resident Bosendorfer grand piano has rarely had it so good.

There were a couple of depth charges. *Poem For No. 15*, a half spoken number form Kuhn's art-song portfolio, jarred when the man himself added a near-tuneless vocal. Jordan's loud, autobiographical closing blues was miles away from the prevailing tempo and volume, but her sincerity was never in doubt — after all this time she still seems grateful for the chance to sing jazz — and the crowd didn't hesitate with the standing ovation.

Hearing Jordan, and Jeanne Lee with Jane Bunnett's band a few nights before that, you have to wonder how contemporary jazz singing became a playground for the dress-up gang. Specifically: why are such vital voices sounding from the fringe of the industry?

Lee sat out a few tunes, but her warm, horn-like lines were as much an entry to the music as Bunnett's own precisely passionate soprano saxophone. When she wasn't loving the lyrics, Lee was virtually the third horn to Bunnett and trumpeter Larry Cramer. In the daring but winning solo turn *I Like Your Style* she was the whole band.

Recent recordings don't capture the power of this group on stage. Andrew Cyrille and Kieran Overs were canny in support, and pianist Daryl Grant brought his own keen dynamic sense rather than emulate his recently gone predecessor, Don Pullen (whom Bunnett honoured with a new composition that was both joyous and yearning). Bunnett's playing went to scalding on the slow boil, especially in Cramer's feeling blues, *The Burning Tear*.
The big hopes were on Joe Henderson, who was hitting only a few Canadian

SHEILA JORDAN PHOTOGRAPH BY GERARD FUTRICK

stops this season. He didn't disappoint, but magic was secondary to workmanship.

Masterful workmanship, admittedly. Leading his Brazilian Double Rainbow Quintet through a program drawn from both sides of the equator, Henderson invested so much in his tenor saxophone — wrapping himself so tightly around it, indeed, that it might be a second spine — that he couldn't be blamed for not wasting valuable breath on "Yo, Winnipeg" pleasantries.

Sequencing told a different story. Henderson's concert was programmed adroitly as any rock show, and was almost as slick, moving between ballads and bossas, tossing in *'A' Train* as a ring (one local hooted), using *Lush Life* as the solo feature. That made for a tight show but a rather impersonal one. Fair or not, you have to wonder how different this music might come across in a smaller venue. Henderson's inarguably well-deserved stardom — sometimes the hype is trenchant — probably precludes that option now.

The comparative luxury of extra sets and fewer floodlights paid off well for John Stetch's quartet at the Spotlight Club. Give him time and he'll tell you a story. Beginning with an exquisitely weighted touch, Stetch likes to build his solos from the quietest initial musings to fairly thunderous declamations. The closing *Carpathian Blues* found him building chorus after ascending chorus on an original theme derived from Ukranian tradition: giant steppes. Once again he had his ally in industrious tenor/soprano player Seamus Blake, here making occasional use of delay and wah-wah pedal for drama of his own.

Last year's second-level favourite The catholics returned for some hopping club dates at Windows, and an alfresco free show. It's easy to fall in love with the Australians' boiling rhythms, jiving guitars and tart horn choruses, but there's more to the music. Saxophonist Dandy Evans' lone suite, *Betty's Beat*, was more Ellington than carnival — trombonist James Greening growled a solo to suit — but bassist/leader/main writer Lloyd Swanton also offered gentle alternatives to the tropical knees-up.

This time, the textures were tastier. Michael Rose's pedal steel guitar was stronger in the mix, providing tangy leads and vast slow-motion patterns, and tireless rhythm guitartist Dave Brewer stepped out as well. Elsewhere, guitars pattered like steel drums, a bass became a thumb piano, and Evans rocked the house.

Setting appropriate stages for Winnipeg's resident players is a perennial challenge, if not as hard as keeping the crowds eager for jazz in the other 51 weeks of the year. Besides club dates, this time there were some valuable and generally fitting opening slots. Marilyn Lerner and Kieran Overs opened for Bunnett with a duet show that favoured the former's wise and wiry compositions. Pianist Knut Haugsoen and vibraphonist Stephan Bauer didn't quite thaw all the formalities in their duet, but their quiet intelligence was an apt preface for Jordan and Kuhn. Introducing Henderson, returning son Earl MacDonald's quartet simply didn't have enough time.

A "Manitoba Night" at the art gallery crammed four acts on one bill, which depending on your perspective is either value for money or tokenism. Purely by programming it had to be a drag for Glenn Patscha, whose affectionate stride piano solos were at a disadvantage for coming third on a bill devoted to bands. Trivocals offered its typically smart take on the swinging vocal trio, while Broken Songs, though not wholly convincing, proposed some fractious fun for Margaret Sweatman's words and Glenn Buhr's music, the lot kicked with gusto by a collection of the city's premier jazz/new-thing players. Had to pass on future world star Walle Larsson and his funky alto to hear John Stetch — a schedule conflict at last.
Randal McIlroy

COMPILED BY
JOHN NORRIS

CANADIAN NOTES

JAZZ FESTIVALS MUST BE ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING GROWTH INDUSTRIES.

The **Cornwall** (Ontario) event is the latest to be added to the circuit. Its initial effort is a "spare no expense" affair with Ray Charles (and his orchestra), The Basie and Ellington Orchestras from the U.S. and **The Boss Brass** and **Vic Vogel** from Canada. Added in are other headliners — **Oliver Jones**, Dave Brubeck, Clark Terry — as well as other less prominent names. All this takes place August 12 to 19.

Already been and gone for 1995 is the **Windsor Festival**. Director Hugh Leal produced concerts by Doc Cheatham and Marcus Belgrave/Norris Turney as well as a unique salute to **Don Thompson**'s talents. The June 17 program, recorded by the CBC, featured Don on bass, piano and vibes. Upcoming September 7-9 is the **Guelph Jazz Festival**. To date only **Jane Bunnett** and Ned Rothenberg/Mark Feldman are announced artists. Call (519) 837-1335.

The **Montreal Grapevine** has a new address: 2300 St-Mathieu, #1608, Montreal, Quebec H3H 2J8. Its monthly newsletter offers comprehensive listings of jazz events in the city. Unfortunately jazz still seems to be a hard sell in a city which continues to live off its once a year festival binge in July. The Grapevine reported, for instance, that a quintet date at Lion D'or in May by the James Williams Quintet (with Tom Harrell, Steve Wilson, John Lockwood, Yoron Israel) was poorly attended. Hopefully more people came to Together As One Productions next effort (June 16-17) with **Peter Leitch**, John Hicks, Ray Drummond and Carl Allen.

Calgary is home of a summer festival as well as two jazz organisations - **Jazz Calgary** and the **Classic Jazz Guild Of Calgary**. These organisations sponsor events and are now complemented by ongoing programs at **Kaos Jazz Bar** (718-17th Avenue SW) who were in negotiation for Freddie Hubbard (a July date) and Roy Haynes (late September).

Calgary is also home base for **Jazz Focus Records**. ***Inventions*** is the label's fourth release from pianist Jessica Williams. **Kent Sangster**, a homegrown artist, is featured on his debut CD Adventures.

Jazz educations is big business and many Canadians have membership in the US based International Association Of Jazz Educators, where they made up a separate section of a larger organisation. Now they have formed their own distinct organisation. **Jazz Canada** will be an affiliate of IAJE.

Oscar Peterson was in a Toronto studio in January for a Telarc recording date with Benny Carter, **Lorne Lofsky**, Ray Brown and Lewis Nash. ***The More I See You*** is now out on the street.

The Boss Brass were in Montreal in June for a duMaurier Promotional gig. While there band members participated in a **Justin Time** recording session which featured Oliver Jones with the Orchestra performing **Rick Wilkins** charts. Additional material with a string section was also recorded.

Norman Guilbeault's ***Basso Continuo*** pays tribute to the great bassists of jazz in a new Justin Time CD which was his reward for winning the 1994 duMaurier jazz award at the 1994 Montreal Jazz Festival... Also on Justin Time is a new collaboration between **Paul Bley**, trumpeter **Herbie Spanier** and drummer **Geordie McDonald** — all of whom were part of the Montreal scene of the 1950's.

Each month still more self-produced CDs come on the market featuring Canadian artists. Many receive suitable launches with a one nighter in a local venue. The recent crop includes George Koller and Julie Michaels' bass/voice collaboration ***Singing Naked*** (ZSAN 1002)... Velvet Glove's second CD on Fishhorn Music is entitled ***Coming Out Swinging***. Stacy Rowles, Jane Fair, Jill McCarron, Sherrie Maricle and leader Rosemary Galloway make up the personel... ***Third Accession*** is singer Joe Coughlin's most recent recording. It's on Unity and so, too, is bassist Keiran Over's ***Quartetto*** which features Alex Dean, Brian Dickinson and Ted Warren... Singer Trudy Desmond, back on the scene following an illness, launched her new Koch Jazz CD ***Make Me Rainbows*** in April at the Top O' The Senator. The CBC filmed part of the performance for later showing on their Sunday Arts show. Bill Mays, Neil Swainson and Terry Clarke worked with the singer.

Edmonton based Stony Plain Records has released a new CD by veteran singer Jimmy Witherspoon. Duke Robillard assembled the back-up band, which includes Scott Hamilton, for ***Spoon's Blues***.

The **Vancouver** band Talking Pictures with Ron Samworth guitar, Peggy Lee cello, Bill Clark trumpet and Dylan van der Schyff percussion has recorded ***Ciao Bella*** for the Montreal label **Red Toucan**. Saxophonist Ellery Eskelin with Andrea Parker accordion and Jim Black drums released ***Jazz Trash*** on Vancouver based label **Songlines**.

Back in 1967 Duke Ellington came to Toronto and recorded with the Ron Collier Orchestra. ***North Of The Border*** was issued on Decca and later came out in Europe on MPS Records. Canadian based Attic has now re-issued this music and added a twenty five minute radio discussion between Duke and Ted O'Reilly on CJRT. □

PASSING NOTES

Saxophonist **George James** died January 30... Australian pianist **Jack Allen** February 7... English trombonist **Chris Pyne** April 12... Pianist **Don Pullen** April 22... Australian writer broadcaster **Eric Child** April 23... Drummer **Ray McKinley** May 7... Saxophonist **Marshall Royal** May 7... Pianist **Ron Weatherburn** May 26... The death of clarinetist **Ellis Horne** is also reported.

MYSTERY SCHOOL JAMES NEWTON

INTERVIEWED BY AARON COHEN

"I feel that jazz composition at this point is in a very fruitful and amazing phase," said flutist/composer/freelance arts ambassador James Newton when he began an autumn lecture at the Chicago Cultural Center. Over the course of the next hour, he insightfully discussed the historical progression of African drumming into American gospel and jazz; touched on the enduring innovations of Duke Ellington and Miles Davis; remarked on the modern methods of transposing manuscripts on a computer; and discussed the question of boundaries between notated composition and improvisation. The range of the topics Newton covered was exhaustive, but his articulation throughout was as smoothly logical as his musical ideas have been over the course of his career.

Although he scorns polls and other ranking systems, he is clearly the pre-eminent player on his instrument in jazz today. Using a unique combination of overtones, finger manipulations, and playing while singing, he has created an energetic exploration of pitch that hasn't been heard in almost thirty years. His own compositions range from free-reaching open improvisations to tightly-knit suites. For Newton, inspiration stems from all over, including the musicians he met on a recent trip to South Africa and his own computer experiments. On his ***Suite For Frida Kahlo*** (1994, Audioquest), Latin American influences are added to the palate. But this disc's release was not his reason for the tour that brought him to Chicago

Newton's visit included sitting in with Edward Wilkerson's Shadow Vignettes Orchestra, a duet concert with multiple woodwind instrumentalist Douglas Ewart, and instructing a master class at the Sherwood Music Academy. A few months earlier, he was in town as a member of Jon Jang's Pan Asian Arkestra. That Newton travelled to the mid-West from his California home to appear as a sideman and to teach — instead of leading his own group on a tour — says a great deal about his humility.

During the interview, it becomes clear where his lack of self-importance emanates. Deeply religious, he fondly recalled how his family's church attendance in the rural South created a permanent musical and spiritual impression.

"My first memories were of female voices singing alone in a small church," Newton said. "And I remember chills going up and down my spine from the music — I was about four or five. All the times since then that I've been making music, I've been chasing that feeling. And maybe this year [1994], I understand that feeling better than I ever have up to this point in time, because maybe spirituality and one's relationship to God means a lot more to me now than it did in the past. I'm understanding that I have to make that emphasis that much greater to be more alive, and for the work that I want to do for the rest of my life."

Other early musical influences included his father's Duke Ellington record collection, and blues players Bobby "Blue" Bland, Big Joe Turner, and Jimmy Smith. Meanwhile, Newton's mother was almost strictly a devotee of spiritual and gospel vocalists the Fairfield Four and Sam Cooke. "It really killed her when he left the Soul Stirrers and went pop," Newton says, "but she loved his singing so much she went with it."

Despite the identification of Newton with the flute, it was not his first — or even second — instrument. He tried the trombone at nine ("probably a constant horror show for my parents, I gave it up after six months") and later tried the guitar (Newton always greatly admired JImi Hendrix), bass, electric bass, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, and clarinet. After being struck when hearing the flute accompany the tragic moments of a high school production of Death of a Salesman, Newton began playing by ear before studying more academically.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **RUMIO SATO** (CIRCA 1986)

"I entered junior college when I was eighteen, and basically I couldn't read anything faster than a quarter note," Newton says. "I remember my first flute teacher telling me I would never make it."

While working as a counsellor at a YMCA summer camp just prior to college, Newton was introduced to Eric Dolphy's playing through Charles Mingus' records.

"Mingus was my gateway to the whole tradition of the music," Newton said. "I was reading that Eric was influenced by Art Tatum. Believe it or not, a lot of the faster things I played on the flute were very much influenced by Tatum. I used to try to take certain things that Tatum did with his right hand and try to transform them to the flute. And I still think Eric's playing on *You Don't Know What Love Is* is my favourite piece of music on the instrument. It was like a blueprint for the future because it had all the glissandos, multiphonics, and all these quote-unquote 'modern' techniques, and a really incredible lyricism. He used to say that when he heard a chord, sometimes he heard all 12 notes, and I really understood that."

Roland Kirk also influenced Newton at this time.

"I love Roland Kirk because there were a lot of things in his playing that remind me of my experience in the Black church in the energy that he puts into the music," Newton said. "His inflections that were strongly blues-related sometimes relate to spirituals, which he also recorded. And something spiritual happens in his playing that is so strong that you get transported. And that takes the artist to give a whole lot."

When Newton began performing in a regular jazz group, he learned why, and taught himself how, he had to emulate such force.

"I started singing into the flute to give the flute more power," Newton said. "I remember when I was playing with David Murray, Stanley Crouch, and Bobby Bradford, Stanley would never let me use a microphone. This really forced me to make my sound project. Arthur and David had so much warmth and passion and fire, then I'd come up and sound — as Frank Russell would say — like a fart in a windstorm. And to get the feeling I wanted, I had to give when I play. Some people choose to play reserved, and I guess that's their choice, but I choose not to play reserved. I'd rather give when I play, and when I get done people have the feeling that I gave everything that I have to give."

Released when he was twenty-five, Newton's seminal ***Paseo del Mar*** (1978, India Navigation) album shows the directions he would explore throughout his career. His virtuosity is punctuated with an uncanny ability to create flurries of complex harmonic passages through the flute's seemingly narrow tube. Newton's original compositions reflect a marked Ellington influence, and the presence of a cellist in the quartet is one of the many unconventional instrumentalists that he would eventually employ. Two years after ***Paseo del Mar***, Newton put together a strikingly innovative wind ensemble featuring tuba, bassoon, oboe, English horn, and the great John Carter's clarinet for ***The Mystery School*** (1980, India Navigation). The counterbalance of these instruments' tonalities and his own solo flights on the extended *The Wake* are especially beautiful. On his album of Ellington/Strayhorn compositions, ***The African Flower*** (1985, Blue Note), Newton re-examined the role of improvisation within composition.

"The more I studied Ellington, the more I realized it's good to have players improvising in certain rhythm sections," Newton said. "It gives a whole other feeling to the piece. That's something I used a lot from ***African Flower*** on. Being a lot less strict — but I was never really super-strict, and learning that what's on the page should really be malleable to get at what the music is really trying to say."

"What I thought about [regarding Ellington] is what made the music unique — beyond Ellington's genius — was his way of looking at individuals and what they had to offer," Newton said. "And as far as an orchestrator, no one can compare to Ellington. I've always seen a strong parallel between colour and emotion, and orchestration is colour and emotion. Most of my thinking is along the lines of the individualities of the players and how I can balance certain colours and put them together to get textures to where the emotion and feeling of the music really jumps out at you. It's like creating an atmosphere. The arrangements were like when a great painter takes a canvas and puts all the different colours together for the background and the fine details are provided by each individual artist who participated. I just gave the background for them to do their thing."

As a player, Newton is also conscious of how his use of multiphonics continues to evolve.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **GERARD FUTRICK**

"It seems like each year it [multiphonics] gets more refined and broader and there's more I can do with it now," Newton said. "A lot of it comes from fingerings on the flute, singing, and then when those two are happening simultaneously. And with the third event, back during the ***Mystery School*** days, there were things I could really control and things I was in the process of learning. Now I can control a lot of things. I've been experimenting with putting false fingerings and voice together to create this whole other set of combinations. But a lot of it has to do with the overtone series, and when you use false fingerings, the overtones become a lot more complex because the series isn't pure when it's cut up by those false fingerings. And then I'm using a lot different vowels to open and close the mouth — as a singer would. I think also emotionally I can do a lot more with it now."

A few months after the elections in South Africa brought the African National Congress into power, Newton visited the country along with Jon Jang.

"It was the most moving experience I've ever had in going to a place in all my years as a working musician," Newton said. "And it was a great honour because I was the first person in my mother's and father's family to go back home and honour the ancestors. Everyone kept saying 'welcome home,' and it really felt like home. We gave concerts in galleries, did workshops in the Black townships, and met just incredible young musicians. I feel that South African music is just unbelievably powerful. And I saw this real feeling of a circle. An offshoot of the Fisk Jubilee Singers introduced the African American choral tradition all over South Africa at the turn of the century. And it was embraced and they ran with it. Of course, the indigenous music was mixed with the choral tradition to create this hybrid. Jazz is really popular in the townships and South African music is really popular in the states. A lot is being fed back and forth."

Along with his absorption of South African music, Newton observed how much of an uphill battle will have to be fought to dismantle apartheid's legacy. He remains optimistic about that country's future.

"I feel the sense of community in South Africa has been partially lost over here. I felt so good to be able to be back in the kind of spirit of 'us' rather than 'I,' which is something that we really suffer from in America. I'd like to be able to teach in the townships in '96, and make more permanent connections there; I felt so much love for the people. There's a lot of pain and suffering, but I feel they have one of the greatest people of the Twentieth Century as their leader, and that says a lot. And I have to say that Winnie Mandela is deeply loved and respected across the country, particularly by the youth. Without her, none of it would have happened."

The importance of community activism helped spark the ***Suite for Frida Kahlo*** project. Newton has always been moved by the Mexican painter's work, as well as her political consciousness, and embrace of folk culture. In the late '80s and early '90s, wars between Black and Latino gangs claimed many lives in Los Angeles, and he felt it was important that "instead of doing [songs from the suite] in the quote-unquote 'artsy' institutions, we took them to the 'hood' to bridge growing gaps. Continuing to create wonders with atypical jazz instruments, ***Suite for Frida Kahlo*** 's line-up features bassoons and Newton's long-time compadre, George Lewis.

"I've always loved two trombones. It just kills me when you hear them put together with a flute. The bones have such a great range and are so vocal because of the slides. I love the way the bassoon blends with the other instruments, and I've spent enough time playing classical chamber music to understand how effective it can be as a solo voice, or a voice blending with others. Putting it in that particular context, and then putting a bass clarinet and flute together is rough! Stravinsky knew about that. Then, there's the different players. What more can you say about George Lewis? It's like he re-invented the trombone. Pedro [Eustache] is just a great flute player who plays all the reeds really well. It's just the combination of the individuals and trying to reach for colours that you don't hear too often."

At the time we spoke, Newton put several ongoing projects on various burners. An album he co-led with David Murray in 1992 had been slated for imminent release by DIW. At the University of California-Irvine, he teaches courses in the work of Miles Davis, coaches an improvising ensemble, and teaches a graduate level compositional analysis course that focuses on Bartok, Ellington, Ravel, and Sibelius. Newton also began venturing into electronics through using the computer as a composing tool. His ***Gumbo Ya Ya*** score that was choreographed by Donald MacKayle and performed by the San Francisco Ballet features this new technology.

"The computer enabled me to think and create music in a very non-linear fashion, which was really liberating to me," Newton said. "And it was the first time in a long time that I could approach it in such a free manner that there weren't the cultural problems that usually exist. Like on one of the pieces, I had a dream that I was in Senegal and I heard a drum ensemble while I heard the string section of a symphony orchestra. And the string section was swinging — so you know it was a dream! But it was so clear that I started working on the piece, and it became the foundation for one of the movements of ***Gumbo Ya Ya***. A lot of academic electronic music affected my head, but not my body and heart so much. And I wanted to create music that would be reflective of the African-American experience. So that's what I've been working on."

At the time of our conversation, Newton's disc of electronic-enhanced music, with the working title ***Above Is Above All***, was slated for release on his own label. Newton has plans to turn this company into a "collective for artists to take control of certain projects that they do," similar to the goals of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

And he has not turned away from the instrument he revitalized.

"Solo recording is another thing that I want to do," Newton said. "I have a studio in my house now and the quality is so good that I can do a solo album there. Perhaps after the electronic album is completed, that might be my next project. I know that it's not quote-unquote 'in fashion' now, but so what? It seems like solo albums are book-ends for different points of my life. So I think I'm due for another book-end." □

BRIGHT POINTS IN THE TIGHTER COMPASS

NORTHWOODS IMPROVISERS
FOG AND FIRE
ARC CD07

KEI AKAGI
MIRROR PUZZLE
Audioquest AQ 1028

BRASS ROOTS
LACONDA RIFT
Brass Roots BRCD 101

TWO PLUS
ON THE PORCH
JB Productions JB42643

AFFINITY
PLAYS NINE MODERN JAZZ CLASSICS
Music & Arts CD 834

NEW WINDS
DIGGING IT HARDER FROM AFAR
Victo CD028

RICH HALLEY
UMATILLA VARIATIONS
Nine Winds NWCD 0163

KESHAVAN MASLAK & KATSUYUKI ITAKURA
EXCUSE ME, MR. SATIE
Leo CDLR 199

HANS REICHEL
THE DAWN OF DACHSMAN ... PLUS
FMP CD 60

SMALL GROUP REVIEWS
By Randal McIlroy

Sometimes you just don't want the tangle. The small group recordings pinned this month haven't much obvious common spread, either in attitude or instrumentation. At their best, however, their concentration of resources creates compelling music.

Consider ***Fog & Fire*** by **Northwoods Improvisers**, a trio so in tune with the possibilities of its own tight circle that it defines its own sense of period and place. Predominantly, this is a hard-swinging vibes/bass/drums trio. Mallet man Mike Gilmore's hard and sometimes brittle attack — echo is no opiate for him — affirms the instrument's percussive side in the Balinese gamelan tradition, and drummer Nick Ashton and bassist Mike Johnston are tough and sinewy. Yet the instrumentation and attitude change on several tracks, most dramatically when Gilmore plucks the Chinese cheng. Nor is this cheesy chinoiserie; those uncommon 'bent' notes lend themselves surprisingly well to Western blues-based improvisation, and while I can't vouch for Oriental authenticity, Gilmore's dexterity is undeniable. Touches of bass recorder, zither and assorted percussion offer ringing details.

Yusef Lateef's Arabic ventures of the 50s and the German group Can's ethnological forgeries of the 70s are valid reference points. Like them, Northwoods Improvisers refers just often enough to indigenous sounds to show how improvisation is a traditional communication.

The small setting also suits pianist **Kei Akagi**, who flourishes when he has room to stretch. For him, that means extending style rather than time. He makes a convincing leap beyond the groove in *Virtual Drive-By*, but ***Mirror Puzzle***'s greatest strengths linger inside the tunes. Here he takes his time; Wayne Shorter's mid-tempo *Lester Left Town* opens with a solo blues, while the slow, original *Too Much Remembered* begins with Charles Fambrough's bass soliloquy and rippling piano before tenorist Rick Margitza and drummer Willie Jones III complete the quartet.

The underrated Margitza conveys tenor nobility in Fambrough's ballad, *Bright Eyes*, and his soprano stirs things up a treat. He worked with Akagi in one of Miles' later bands, and the spaciousness reads like a tribute. Appealing in its own right, Mirror Puzzle is potentially even better as a springboard from tradition.

Vancouver band Brass Roots turns more audacious twists in ***Laconda Rift***. The line-up suggests New Orleans marchers, with Brad Muirhead's sousaphone assuming the bass role while horns and percussion take care of most of the rest. Don Powrie's timbale break in the opening *Go Amok* is an early indication that nobody's marching anywhere; scorching reedwork by Graham Ord and Daniel Kane pretty much confirms it. The instrumentation sets you up for that second-line sway, only to cheerfully trip you with, say, guest Katrina Bishop's muezzin vocal that opens the title track, or the furious tenor-drum battle that closes it. Other guest turns by pianist Hugh Fraser and guitarist Tony Wilson show how well the band assimilates outside voices with no loss of band identity.

Two Plus dispenses completely with piano and guitar for ***On The Porch***, a disc decidedly less laid-back than the after-dinner title and cover shot suggest. Altoist Aaron Martin and Brian King Nelson on the now-rare C-melody saxophone go at it with the rough 'n tumble of Booker Ervin and John Handy in the Mingus heyday. There's even a slow, surprising blues that builds in Mingus style, complete with a double-time feature for bassist John Jamyll Jones.

Hard bop is only part of the mix. Porch-bound or not, Two Plus is restless in the best way. Elastic compositions allow Jones and drummer Joseph Livolsito to etch their own detail (a ringing, gong-like bass, tick-tock drums) as the horns brush and snarl. They never lose the groove, but they keep you guessing.

Affinity uses the same kind of instrumental aggregate, with two saxophones (tenorist Rob Sudduth and leader Joe Rosenberg on soprano) and rhythm (drummer Bobby Lurie, bassist Richard Saunders). Something in the horn blend recalls the enduring and astringent partnership of Steve Lacy and Steve Potts, and the sense of a jazz literature, if you will, in Affinity's disc, ***Plays Ornette Coleman's Little Symphony And Eight Other Modern Jazz Classics***, also calls Lacy's leaner bands to mind.

The difference is, this is history on the spin. Monk turns out to be the obvious cover choice in a repertory program that includes Ornette (and not *Lonely Woman*, either), Dolphy and Braxton, none of whom have suffered over-exposure. The common ground turns out to be the spaces between the notes; Affinity's players don't believe in crowding each other, and the benefits begin with Saunder's inquisitive bass movements. The playing throughout is just fine, and Sudduth and Rosenberg have lovely intonation, which is something that shouldn't be taken for granted.

With a cappella saxophone quartets no longer quite so novel by instrumentation alone, the way is cleared for other kinds of woodwind ensembles. Besides masterful playing, **New Winds** has the edge in tonal variety between Robert Dick's flutes, J. D. Parran's clarinets and Ned Rothenberg's saxophones and bass clarinet. Combined, they create some of the most fascinating wind textures this side of the great AACM groups of the 60s, with considerably fewer instruments. In ***Digging it Harder From Afar***, group empathy and the intimate nature of the ensemble play down individual voices for a pulsing, amoebic state; if the title track suggests three didjeridoos with the ants still inside the bark, so be it.

They all play well, and they listen. In *The Rising And The Swell*, they pass the melody gently, like a fresh robin's egg, before the bop horns and slow flute crack the pattern. In *Dovetail*, all three dart around samples of themselves triggered by guest Gerry Hemingway from his drum synthesizer. There's also a blues with a cool flute that wouldn't jar in a Moe Koffman program.

Reed textures likewise thicken the mix in tenorist **Rich Halley**'s band, The Lizard Brothers. ***Umatilla Vibrations*** entwines Halley's tenor with Vini Golia's clarinets, Troy Gruggett's baritone and Rob Blakeslee's trumpet until, once again, a sextet (completed by bassist Phil Sparks and drummer William Thomas) sounds about twice its size.

Halley writes loose-limbed tunes to match, with themes that inspire some productive tangling. Mingus is an influence here too, in the quarreling horns behind the baritone solo in the title piece and the easy/sloppy blues of *Intransigence*. Halley knows when to thin the detail, though, clearing breathing room for Golia's sexy bass clarinet in *Stubble*. He also has fun. *Inequiaterality* - a botanical term - is a droll essay in Monk's style.

Hans Reichel makes his guitars sound like so many unguitarlike objects the well-

HANS REICHEL PHOTOGRAPH BY DAGMAR GEBERS

There's a case to be made for Erik Satie as the Monk of his time - and given Satie's cultivated eccentricities, that case would probably include a starter's pistol and a duck call - with the same affection for insidiously off-centre tunes and occult harmonic logic. Reedman **Keshavan Maslak** (or Kenny Millions, as he'll call himself) and pianist **Katsuyuki Itakura** bill ***Excuse Me, Mr. Satie*** as the first of its kind in offering Satie's music along with extemporaneous commentary, which it isn't, quite, if compared to Vienna Art Orchestra's earlier The Minimalism of Erik Satie, but no matter, this is an unsentimental education.

At first, it's the play between the themes and the variations that holds the ear. *Gnossienes 2* is followed by the circling soprano of *I Like It*, *Gnossienes 3* by the tenor/piano swing of *Excuse Ant*, and so on. That soon gives way to admiration for their general capabilities, and the blues undercurrent in Satie's original melancholia (still, give the duo credit for *not* touching the familiar Gymnopedes). "Excuse me for being boring," they chant on the last track, as Satie himself might have said - needlessly, in both situations.

touching the familiar Gymnopedes). "Excuse me for being boring," they chant on the last track, as Satie himself might have said - needlessly, in both situations.

intentioned critical listener loses himself in games of name-that-source — harp? cello? bass clarinet fed through a meat grinder? It's better just to listen. Reichel's real-time recordings on prepared guitar and the mysterious daxophone in ***The Dawn of Dachsman ... Plus*** combine a luthier's craft with an architectural approach to composition.

This is difficult music only in its unfamiliar tones and textures. Reichel's handbuilt instruments, with their personalized pick-ups, multiple resonating strings and revamped bodies sound like wonderful machines blessed with the uncommon talent for playing themselves. That doesn't play well to the jazz history of virtuosity, but close listening reveals a careful plotting of sounds (helpfully, this reissue of a vinyl edition adds ample contemporary recordings, including some alternate takes). Arguably, it's best to start in the middle of the program with the very still and beautiful *Smoking*, then work in either direction from there. □

A BRITISH POINT OF VIEW

Andy Sheppard & John Surman

BRITISH JAZZ IS CURRENTLY enjoying a mini-renaissance, with musicians like Courtney Pine, Julian Joseph, Jason Rebello and Guy Barker enjoying a high public profile and a popularity that transcends the jazz clubs and specialist mags.

ANDY SHEPPARD

Amongst the foremost of these exciting talents is soprano and tenor saxophonist Andy Sheppard, a thrilling player, who has performed with distinction in an impressively wide range of contexts and with major international artists like Carla Bley, Gil Evans and George Russell.

"I hope my playing's developed, from having played with so many different great musicians," reflects Sheppard modestly. "That's how you learn. And I guess you grow all the time, so you're just a little more sure, although often you feel you're not really happy with the way you're playing. It's a real elusive thing, but the more playing you do, the more experience you get, the more you think, 'I want to play this note here, followed by that note, and I know what I'm doing and why I'm doing it.'

"But I wish I had a year's sabbatical, just to practise the saxophone, and not have to write, because I spend a lot of time writing. And when you're touring it's impossible to practise. I could do with some practice! There's a whole bunch of things I'd like to get under my fingers. When you listen to Michael Brecker you think, 'Shit, I've got to do some practice!'"

Unlike many of his generation of jazzers, Sheppard didn't attend music college. "I would have liked to, but there wasn't a college to go to really, when I started playing. It would have been great, because you would have been able to hang out and play with musicians all the time. That's always a problem: finding people to play with."

Instead Sheppard paid his dues on the road, beginning with Sphere in the late 70s. "That was a great band. We lived together and stayed up all night, listening and playing music. Everybody was totally committed. We never had any money - we had a Ford Transit van, with the wings falling off, full of rust, and we used to travel all over the place, playing in bars.

"It was like a rock 'n' roll thing, but we were playing jazz, which was totally unfashionable. We used to go on European tours, without hotels, and rely on the fact that we'd find some sucker at the gig who'd put us up! But the music was great, although it was rough round the edges, because we were all learning."

Sheppard next worked in Europe with Urban Sax. "We used to do performance art, doing these wacky things. The music was a dawdle - but hanging upside down off church spires was hard!

"The performances were amazing: the whole band was directed by radio, and there'd be helicopters and ambulances, fire engines, foam, fireworks... and I was always the guy they put up the top of these cathedrals!"

Sheppard's own career began to move in 1987 with the release of his self-titled debut album on Antilles, described by one critic as being "dominated by Coltranisms". "I still am!" laughs Sheppard, "Well, not dominated, but he was the major force, so I think his influence is bound to be on any player, not just saxophone players, who's gone after him.

"But I never listen to that album now. It was all right at the time, but it was a long time ago. If I listened to it I would think, 'Oh, I wouldn't have done that now, I wouldn't have played like that.' It's very difficult to listen to your own music, I think."

Sheppard's second Antilles album, ***Introductions In The Dark***, contains the extended track, *Romantic Conversations*. "We were playing it live and I squashed it down to get it on the record. Commercially it was a disaster. It never got any airplay, but it has its moments. I like the beginning, with the Sierra Leonian extravaganza. I thought it was pretty hip to start a jazz record with flutes and bells and crazy African stuff".

Soft From The Inside, also on Antilles, which followed in 1989, was even more widely acclaimed. "There are bits on that which are great, I think. Especially the accidental stuff, like the beginnings of pieces, which are free improvisation. And the theme *Carla, Carla, Carla* is still a

ANDY SHEPPARD PHOTOGRAPH BY GINO SPRIO

favourite tune of mine. It's just a really strong melody.

"That was a great band, because it was so ridiculous: two drummers and a cello, vibes, guitar and percussion. There was so much percussion in that band. A nightmare to mix, but it was a really interesting project. And (Dutch musicians) Han Bennink (drums) and Ernst Reijseger (cello) brought anarchy and humour to it, so it was a wild band."

In addition to leading his own bands, Sheppard has worked with many of the greats, including George Russell, with whom he toured in 1988. "That was the hardest job I've ever had. The first time I went to play with George it was frightening," he admits.

The same year Sheppard toured with Gil Evans. "Fantastic. Gil was amazing. Always working, always arranging. Every moment - on the bus, in the hotel lobby - he was writing some new arrangement for the band. And he was really helpful. He said some nice things to me and it was encouraging."

Sheppard recorded with Gil Evans on ***Rhythm-A-Ning*** (Em Arcy), which includes a version of Jimi Hendrix's *Stone Free*. "Oh, he's fantastic, Jimi Hendrix. As far as I'm concerned he's a jazz musician. He's a great improviser, great player, and wrote some great tunes as well. Every time I hear his music, I think, 'Wow, there's something going on there which is really deep.' Most jazz musicians enjoy and appreciate Hendrix."

Carla Bley and Andy Sheppard are frequent collaborators. "She's great - a major composer. I've been on her big band records, and we're in a trio with Steve Swallow. It's a real special little trio, really, really fantastic, and we've just done a live album, ***Songs with Legs***."

British avant-garde keyboard player Keith Tippett is another sometime partner of Sheppard's. "The album, ***66 Shades Of Lipstick***, and all the gigs I did with him, we'd never talk about what we were going to play, not even, 'What key shall we start in?' That was a real challenge. It was always just totally improvised music."

Since Sheppard has played in every size of line-up imaginable, does he have a preference? "It's great to be out on the road with a big band, because it's so many different personalities, all colliding with each other, and the music feels good, because it's big, and you're giving work to a whole bunch of people.

"I feel really proud about hiring all these people and doing these projects which are financially a nightmare. But I think if you're at all in a position to do it, you should do it. I think it's a real obligation to any successful musician to carry out his fantasies as best as possible.

"I'd always wanted to write for a big band, and in fact I find it easier writing for bigger groups than smaller groups. The hardest thing in the world is to write a simple melody. Sometimes I have to write solo saxophone stuff and it's really hard. I'm writing for an orchestra at the moment and it's so much easier because there's this big canvas and you can chip away at different parts."

Does Sheppard have a standard way of composing? "Every piece has a different story: It may come from a couple of chord changes, or it may come from a riff or a scrap of melody or sometimes I'll work the changes out, then I'll improvise on them, then I'll extract stuff from the improvisation to make the melody. Other times I write straight on a keyboard. I'd love a grand piano to write on, but I don't have one.

"Now I use software as well, like a notator, a kind of tape recorder, so you can tape record your ideas and then loop things."

Sheppard's main band in the 90s has been In-Commotion, whose first, self-titled, album, on Antilles, released in 1991, used Latin rhythms.

"I've always really loved Latin stuff. I think I'd find playing Latin music really frustrating, but using the concept and the grooves to then solo on is fantastic."

Sheppard and In-Commotion then moved to Blue Note for albums like ***Rhythm Method*** and ***Delivery Method***, which included the track *Perambulator*. You wouldn't be trying to tell us anything, would you Andy? "I was writing that music during the birth of my daughter! Maybe there's some people will think, 'Oh, we'll get this record and we can listen to it during labour,' but labour's tough enough - I don't think you want to listen to that! Bits of it are quite gentle and soothing, but what it's all about really is panic!"

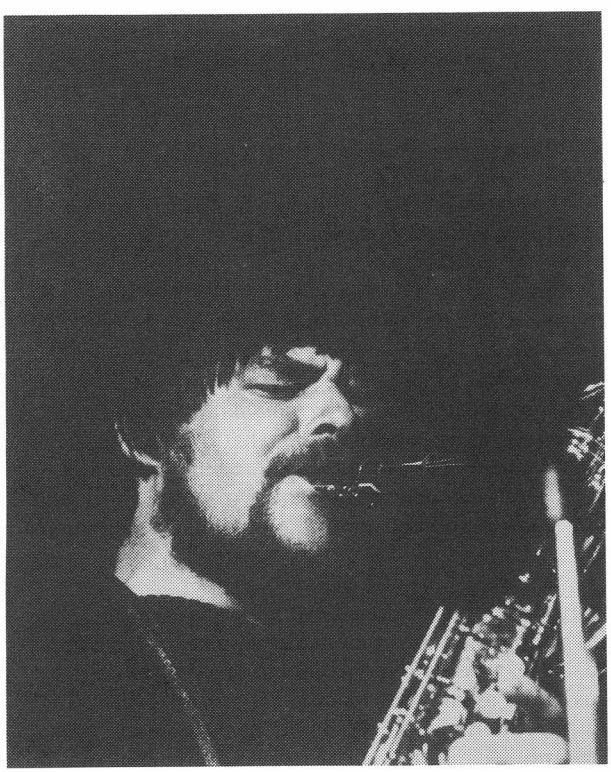
Throughout his career Sheppard has been showered with awards, winning, for example, Best Newcomer and various Best Instrumentalist Awards in influential British jazz magazine, The Wire. "I've always found competitions in music a bit weird, but they're important in as much as they might raise the profile of this kind of music, because if there's an award, then there's press and it means people start becoming aware of jazz musicians. And it's a great honour to get an award of course, but it doesn't mean that you play better or anything."

Sheppard has, intriguingly, achieved greater fame and a more prestigious position in British cultural life than any of the previous generation of British players, such as Don Weller, Evan Parker and Stan Tracey. "I think there was that whole explosion of interest and I was in the right place at the right time - for the first time ever in my life!

"I'm a huge fan of Don Weller and Evan and Stan, and Art Themen as well. They were the people who inspired me to play. When I first started playing they were the guys I was travelling to hear and thinking, 'This is amazing.' And they're still doing it. Don really is still my favourite tenor player of all time. He's a fantastic player, a real booty tenor player.

"And Evan is incredible - a real artist. That's what he does. I'm more of a chameleon. I write for TV and radio plays, so that means I get more exposure. I've just done the music for a three part Peter Sellers TV documentary, and I wrote the music for an Arthur Miller play, for the London Young Vic, so I got to meet him. He's really sharp-still got lots of sound ideas that Mr. McCarthy would still be hounding him for today.

"So it's always been interesting, artistically challenging projects I've been involved in. It's always quite deep stuff. It's not like toothpaste ads - although I'd love to write the music for a toothpaste ad, because I need the money! □



JOHN SURMAN

Baritone and soprano saxophonist John Surman's prestigious, all-star 50th birthday concert in London last year was a well-deserved celebration for a British jazz giant.

And yet, despite the considerable publicity surrounding the event, Surman, ironically, often finds worthwhile work in Britain hard to come by. "If you're playing jazz and you're not an American, it's a ball and chain round your leg," he explains. "You've got to work that much harder to fight through to the top. It's not as glamourous or exciting for people in Birmingham, say, to have John Surman, because I'm English, I'm local.

"Happily they don't have the same prejudices in the rest of Europe, so I'm able to trot along and do my thing over there. But it's disappointing. For example, I've a group of twelve brass players called the Brass Project and I've been very disappointed that we've had so little support for that, because they are some of the finest players in the country. They love what they do and I'm certain that the music is of a terrific standard, but we've had very little opportunity to play, and I think that's sad - not just for me, because I'll do something else, but very sad for the work that the other guys have put into it, and sad for the people who are missing this fabulous music and whose heads are being turned by paler imitations."

As a young musician in the early 60s Surman studied at the London College Of Music. "I had a very good instrument teacher, Wilfred Keeley, who was a wonderful clarinettist, with a very fine attitude to someone like me who was never going to be a great classical clarinet player, but had a feel for the instrument. He got the basics through to me, but a lot of the other old Victorian ideas in music schools were less important."

Surman has become one of the world's most exciting virtuoso baritone saxophonists, credited with expanding the accepted range of the instrument. "Well, that's a funny story. When I was seventeen I looked in a store and saw an alto and a baritone saxophone for the same price, and I thought, 'Boy, with a baritone you can get much more horn for your money!' and that, truly, my hand on my heart, is why I bought it. I had no idea what I was in for, but I've loved it ever since."

By the mid-60s Surman was gigging and recording with the heaviest hitters on the British scene, including Mike Gibbs and Chris McGregor, and by the end of the decade had formed the Trio, with the American drummer and bassist Stu Martin and Barre Phillips. What did he enjoy about that format? "The simplest and most obvious answer is the freedom of it. Why it worked is partly to do with the era, because you had that open thing in the 60s. I'm sure a lot of it was over the top and perhaps more interesting to play than it was to listen to, but nonetheless I was in there with it and that was the time for it!"

In 1968 Surman won the Best Soloist Award at the Montreux International Jazz Festival. "I don't think you wake up in the morning and think you're any better for it, we all know that, but it's always nice to get recognition and anything that can help in this very competitive business is welcome."

Ever since, Surman has worked extensively in Europe, in a bewildering array of line-ups and formats, and has worked on several prestigious commissions, including the scores for several ballets. "I'll tell you, there are very few musicians who work as hard as the average dancer. They work and work and work. Of course they have a short span and their careers are over, because they're like sport people - they go out through injury.

"The rhythm of dance gets to me, and there's a certain sense of theatre about it that I like too."

Much of Surman's music has also shown folk and church music influences. "I didn't grow up in a jazz environment. I grew up in an environment where all those things were present. Growing up in the 50s, radio didn't broadcast non-stop music in those days, so you picked up bits and pieces as you went along.

JOHN SURMAN PHOTOGRAPH BY GERARD FUTRICK

A British Point Of View By Trevor Hodgett

"Even now I would listen to some folk music, for example to some of the Irish bands. Going back ten years or so, the Bothy Band and Planxty were favourites and I think Katherine Tickell from Northumbria is a wonderful player. I still like the licks and melodies of folk music.

"As regards church music, I'm not especially religious - I think we all get down on our knees from time to time, in a dangerous situation - but there's a lot of power in some of the great music, like Verdi's 'Requiem', and I suppose that's got something to do with its appeal for me."

Throughout his career he has veered between being a leader and being a band member. Is there anything he particularly likes about being a leader? "Not much! It has responsibilities which you have to take care of. From that point of view I like to have bands where I'm a member, where the other guys are equal to me. That's my philosophy of doing it."

One of Surman's career highlights was working with Gil Evans, with whom he toured in the mid-80s. "A wonderful human being and an experience that I feel warm thinking about. He was terrific. You woke up in the morning and you thought, 'Oh, another gig tonight with Gil's band - yeah!' He was absolutely the best.

"One reason I enjoyed working with him so much was because he was never a leader. Maybe a cheerleader, there to get people going!"

Since the 70s Surman has formed a formidable on-off partnership with singer Karin Krog. "I think the voice is the most difficult instrument of all. You can't press a key and get an F, you've got to pitch it. And also the personal quality and sound of the voice, which is what we all want to emulate as saxophone players."

Another regular collaborator of Surman's has been Jack de Johnette. "Oh, Jack's great. He's a good all-round musician, he likes to play some piano and synthesizer, and that makes it more than just a drums and saxophone - although he's got to be one of the best drummers of all time. I like to play with people who can surprise me."

With Krog, Johnette and in other contexts Surman uses electronics extensively. "For me it's curiosity. That's the starting point of it all and the fact that you can get different kinds of sounds and textures with it. It's nice to be able to use it when you want to and not to use it from time to time.

"I find that working with the particular group that you've been listening to tonight (in the Guinness Spot, Belfast, Northern Ireland) with John (Taylor-piano), John (Marshall-drums) and Chris (Laurence-bass), we're basically playing a music which moves so quickly that the electronics would frequently get in the way. The electronics — when I'm playing them at any rate — take a bit longer to evolve. It's a slower process. In this context I don't miss them, but it's nice to get back to them - and then after a while it's nice to do this sort of thing."

During his dazzling career Surman has recorded dozens of albums. Any favourites? "There's a question where you're going to get a totally evasive answer that says, 'I don't know!' I love and hate them all. What I enjoy most of all about the records I've done with other people is listening to the other people, not me, but I don't really listen to the records."

So if not himself, who does Surman enjoy listening to, on a quiet evening at home with his feet up? "I'll have to give you a frank and honest answer: my house burnt down a few months ago so I haven't had a home, and quite a lot of the record collection went. So frankly I've been listening to the radio and picking up all sorts of things. I'm eclectic. I'll listen to anything that grabs my fancy for that moment.

"But also, I've been writing a lot in the last month and when I'm writing I find it hard to listen. I've got to try and think, 'What's in my head?' If I keep listening I think, 'Wow, that's music, that's the way to do.' Sometimes you've got to clear that away and find out for yourself what you want to do. So that's what I've been doing recently!" □

ART DECO

COMPACT DISC REVIEWS BY JAMES KEAST

CHARLIE HADEN • The Montreal Tapes with Paul Bley and Paul Motian • *Verve 523 259-2*
CHARLIE HADEN • The Montreal Tapes with Don Cherry and Ed Blackwell • *Verve 523 260-2*
CHRISTIAN McBRIDE • Gettin' To It • *Verve 314 523 989-2*
MARK WHITFIELD • True Blue • *Verve 314 523 591-2*
GEOFF KEEZER • Trio • *Sackville SKCD2-2039*
AL HENDERSON QUARTET • Dinosaur Dig • *Cornerstone CRST CD103*
ERROL PARKER TENTET • Remembering Billy Strayhorn • *Sahara 1016*
WENDELL HARRISON & THE CLARINET ENSEMBLE • Rush and Hustle • *WenHa WCD230*
THE CATHOLICS • Simple • *Terra Nova TND-9009*
YANNICK RIEU • Sweet Geom • *Victo CD030*
D. D. JACKSON • Peace-Song • *Justin Time JUST 72-2*

In 1989, the Montreal Jazz Festival held a series of eight tribute concerts to the work of bassist **Charlie Haden**. This series tried to represent the extensive ground that Haden had covered in his career, including evenings with Joe Henderson, Pat Metheny, Egberto Gismonti, and the Liberation Orchestra. Some of these evenings are finally making their appearance on CD, under the umbrella title ***The Montreal Tapes***; all the evenings were recorded and Verve has plans to release the majority of them.

One of the last evenings in the series featured pianist Paul Bley and drummer Paul Motian. Haden was only 18 when he first played in Bley's quartet in 1957, and his associations with Motian go back almost as far. The familiarity with each other only enhances the interaction on this evening, which covered a significant amount of the work of Ornette Coleman. The playing is lithe and lyrical, Motian's sweet touch combined with the probing of Paul Bley is beautifully fused by the glue of Haden's lines.

Bley explores the musical possibilities of the moment, testing the waters in different directions before choosing a particular path, and thus opens the infinite options of improvisation for the listener. His playing reveals his thought process, and when he finally takes the plunge in the midst of myriad possibilities, we are assured of that choice — it makes sense in the face of all the options. Motian and Haden both play off Bley, taking some beautiful solo opportunities, but this night showcases no individual talents, but rather the beautiful sound of the trio machine firing all cylinders at once.

Different again was the third evening of the series, featuring the scorching trumpet of Don Cherry and the powerful rhythms of Ed Blackwell. As the Bley/Motian evening was sparse, this one was hard-hitting, even raging at points. Again the work of Coleman was highlighted this evening, for obvious reasons, but the change in approach to this disc reveals a different side of Charles Haden. Simply

CHARLIE HADEN & DON CHERRY PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER DANSON

by changing the two elements against which he is working, his playing moves from being a solidifying force to become a defiant one, pushing against his sonic compatriots, challenging each of them, as they push back, fueling the race to take the music further and further.

For this task, Cherry and Blackwell are beautifully suited. Blackwell especially provides some excellent solos and the complexity of his backgrounds flesh out this sparse line-up. Unlike the previous disc as well, Haden's bass is loud enough in the mix — each fat note can be heard against the Cherry's singing trumpet. Both these discs are fabulous as individual recordings. When taken in the context they were recorded, as mirrors of Haden's remarkable career, they are all the more revealing.

For his first solo album, ***Gettin' To It*** bassist **Christian McBride** has accumulated the best young musicians he could find to contribute. Joshua Redman on tenor, Roy Hargrove on trumpet, Steve Turre on trombone, Cyrus Chestnut on piano and Lewis Nash on drums all meld fabulously to put together a beautiful collection focused on McBride's own compositions.

For the most part, the selections are very straight ahead, concentrating on the harmony and swing of hard bop, melodic tunes that sing and bounce with joy. From the scorching pace of *In A Hurry* to the laid-back *Sitting On A Cloud* each contribution is beautifully balanced and recorded. The playing across the board is top-notch, especially some catchy interplay amongst the rhythm section on *Too Close For Comfort* and the sheer tenderness and competence of McBride's bowing technique. His work throughout recalls Paul Chambers in its strength and sensitivity.

One particular highlight that will test the quality of your stereo system is a three-bass proposition on the tune *Splanky* which features Ray Brown and Milt Hinton in opposite stereo channels, with McBride plunked in the middle. Even with a list of solo order and the knowledge of who's who, the tune melds into a wonderfully chaotic harmonic mess. McBride has waited a long time to record this first album, and has had a long career already playing with the cream of the jazz crop — that experience and knowledge has been distilled into this fabulous first.

Guitarist **Mark Whitfield**'s debut ***True Blue*** comes with much the same pedigree, guest appearances by the scene's best and brightest, including Kenny Kirkland on piano, Rodney Whitaker on bass, Branford Marsalis on sax, Nicholas Payton on trumpet and Jeff Tain Watts on drums. Almost half of the album's compositions were penned by the leader, and it has been competently captured for CD.

The album however, is a little flat. The playing is solid throughout, but moments of true fire, when the musicians stand behind their efforts with complete spiritual investment are rare. There are a few, but not enough to sustain a full listening through the albums 13 tracks. Whitfield's approach varies little in the course of the album; very straightforward blues, lots of tandem playing with the various sidemen, and the requisite solos — after a short time, the listener has largely heard what Whitfield has to offer. There are very few surprises along the way.

The neat line-up of pianist **Geoff Keezer**'s new album ***Trio*** automatically makes it an interesting listen, featuring Steve Nelson on vibraphone and Neil Swainson on bass. Recorded live in performance at the Montreal Bistro in Toronto, this excellent album highlights the harmonic interaction between rhythm section instruments, without a drummer. That freedom allows each player to flesh out the percussive elements of their respective instrument, and the interplay between them makes for fabulous listening.

The role of each in a traditional rhythm section is usurped by the presence of the others — the end result is an open ended opportunity to trade rhythmic and melodic considerations and for each to play off the other. The ringing tone of Steve Nelson takes prominence on this night, even the slightest hit of the vibraphone hums with life, nicely balanced by the wandering bass lines of Swainson and the always interesting improvisational jumps of Keezer.

The program of six tunes traverses both familiar standards *(Epistrophy, Sophisticated Lady)* and original compositions by Swainson and Nelson. By keeping the song list short, there is sufficient time (five of six selections exceed ten minutes) for each player to flesh out his own musical contribution. I would certainly recommend this album to anyone.

It begins like a rock album. ***Dinosaur Dig***, by the **Al Henderson** Quartet, starts with the leader's driving bass tones on Mingus that would not sound out of place as a beginning anthem on MuchMusic, but the aural fantasy ride that these 11 original compositions traverse covers every musical and emotional spectrum along the way. This album ranges far, from the straight ahead opener to the sensuous lines of *Andalusian Landscape* which opens with tenor saxman Alex Dean on an oboe, (he also plays alto and bass clarinet on the album).

Throughout this recording, the band which includes Richard Whiteman on piano and Barry Romberg on drums, shows its chops and ability to tackle any style, from the tuneful ballad *Mary's Tune* to the scorching battle *Cat And Mouse*. There is no time to relax here, each tune is economically structured, each musician has to make the most of their allotted time, and they certainly do.

As a listener, each new track is an adventure in hearing these excellent musicians whip through another style, another approach, and show a different side of their personalities. To a certain extent, the album is aptly named — many of the tunes recall familiar standards or styles of play, but if anything, the Al Henderson quartet examines the value of the past, seeking to smooth its mistakes.

Remembering Billy Strayhorn, the new album by the **Errol Parker** Tentet, is certainly an unusual tribute to the seminal jazz composer, but in a strange way, it is extremely appropriate. It contains none of Strayhorn's compositions; the only track on the album not composed by the drummer/leader is a rearrangement of Monk's *Straight No Chaser* but to celebrate a brilliant musician whose lasting contribution was his compositions by compos-

ART DECO

AL HENDERSON • ERROL PARKER • WENDELL HARRISON • THE CATHOLICS • YANNICK RIEU • D.D. JACKSON

ing as well, is an extension of Strayhorn's gift. Rather than playing what he had already composed, Parker is extending the language of the music and doing it quite beautifully.

The tentet works more as a larger small ensemble, rather than an Ellingtonian-style band. It manages to not sound cluttered, although repeated listenings reveal more and more intimate and juicy sonic details. The album features a legion of saxophones, and two trumpets, but no piano; guitarist Cary De Nigris provides the chordal foundation.

But the true centre of the album is the constantly interesting rhythmic interplay of Parker himself. His familiarity with both swing-band tradition and African rhythms translates well in this constantly changing environment, where arrangements are tight, but not strictured. Although some Buddy Rich can be heard in his playing, Francis Davis correctly points out in the liner notes that it is Art Blakey whom Parker most closely resembles, both as a leader with a loving, but firm hand, and primarily as an excellent drummer at the centre of a large group.

Wendell Harrison is doing his part for raising the profile of under-heard instruments with his Clarinet Ensemble. Their new album, ***Rush And Hustle*** features six Harrison originals, and a line-up of seven clarinetists, including James Carter on double B flat contra bass clarinet. Backing the ensemble is a range of percussionists, making this an interestingly textured, orchestral sounding work. The arrangements are tight, yet the sambas and bossa novas that are scattered throughout the album make it swing delightfully to the ear.

One of the most delightful things about this excellent album is the textured sound of the bass clarinets that are featured. The sumptuous lower registers hum and vibrate through the core of the central nervous system, registering on a physical level in balance to the sweepingly lyrical higher range instruments, which sing through each song. *Pamela's Holiday* is a particularly beautiful mid-tempo composition that flows eloquently through its different phases; each fleshed out musical idea follows a lovely path through its seven minute length. An absolute must for clarinet fans, and recommended for any jazz listener unfamiliar with such an ensemble's potential.

The new release by **The catholics**, entitled ***Simple*** is a difficult one to get a grip on. Its schizophrenic approach in sounds makes for hot and cold listening, and unfortunately ends up as an album of a few good songs, rather than a really good album. Some of the highlights include *Gumboot*, where the ensemble's groove oriented approach finally meshes with excellent horn arrangements, and some truly inspired playing. Unfortunately, there are also moments on this CD where not all the cylinders are firing at once. Their combination of latin oriented percussion, and fusion influenced horn section don't always mesh. For every song that is a excellent example of togetherness in ensemble playing, there is another that just doesn't fly.

One of the problems seems to be conflict between fusion and traditional jazz oriented sounds. When combined with the congas and timbales of Sammila Sithole, too often the songs come across as scattered, as if the various players are unsure what approach each wants to take. In other instances, they are too tentative, unwilling to push the envelope to a range of truly outside sounds. Yet when it all comes together, it is a beautiful experience, especially the gritty Latin and African sounds of *Good Morning, Freedom Fighter*. While the good moments are very good, they make the down time seem more disappointing — there are unfortunately only a few glimpses of this ensemble's potential on this recording.

Sweet Geom, only the second release by Montreal's **Yannick Rieu**, is an excellent recording, caught in performance at the Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville with Frédérick Alarie on bass and drummer Paul Léger. It is above all a balanced recording, highlighting not only the excellent interplay and understanding between the groups members, but also balance within each player's sound and approach. Each phrase, each moment, each note is well thought out, and each risk is a well-calculated one.

The playing by Leger and Alarie is beautifully stated; the former's light interplay balances the solidly melodic sounds of the latter. The tenor sax of Rieu is the central element to the performance; he combines the melodic simplicity of Sonny Rollins with the exploration (without the frantic edginess) of Albert Ayler. Leger and Alarie defer to him in their choices, not out of a sense that he is grandstanding, but rather for the sake of the songs, three of which Rieu composed. The forth is a beautiful take on *Freedom Suite*, the Sonny Rollins composition inspired by the American civil rights movement. Rieu tackles his own epic marvellously with the four-part title tune, which sweeps through almost half of this hour-long disc.

Peace-Song is the scorching debut by Ottawa born pianist **D.D. Jackson**, and as such, it is certainly a call to attention. Featuring the tenor playing of David Murray, John Geggie on bass, and Jean Martin on drums, these nine original songs combine Johnson's searing jazz chops with a lyrical compositional style and classical piano training. Although it traverses fairly familiar ground, it never rests on the laurels of being one of the most touted young pianists around. Each track is filled with little compositional surprises, embracing, but not being bound the by the tradition in which the players follow.

It is the turns toward the unexpected, just as the listener settles in, that jolt the ear to attention — an excellent solo turn on piano, in one instance in an impossibly high range, or a surprising rhythmic jump, all speak to the fact that Jackson's debut is indeed a call to attention. It's an impressively interesting debut. □

JAMES KEAST is a freelance writer and editor residing in Toronto.

DON PULLEN

A MEMORIAL CELEBRATION AND SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS BY
JANE BUNNETT & LARRY CRAMER

On Sunday June 11th a memorial Celebration was held at St. Peter's Church in New York City for Don Pullen. The church was filled with friends, family and musicians who had gathered to honour and give thanks for having known Don's great creative spirit.

Don was a true original. Looking around the church at the many personalities and diverse crowd it was beautiful to see the worlds that Don had influenced and drawn from. It was a privilege to have been one of his friends and to have had the opportunity to work and record with him as much as we did. All about the church were people that had come to know him in a unique way and we all felt special because of that.

The celebration was thoughtfully organised by a committee headed by Kunle Mwanga who was the personal manager of Ed Blackwell for years preceding his passing and included the Pullen family (children and relatives), Mingus Dynasty, Howard Johnson's Tuba Ensemble, Abbey Lincoln, Amira Baraka, John Hicks, Hamiet Bluiett, Amina Claudine Myers, Jana Haimsohn, Cameron Brown, Andrew Cyrille, D.D. Jackson, African Brazilian Connection, Garth Fagan Dance Company, David Murray, Milford Graves and Gerry Allen among many others.

The evening was filled with beautiful tributes to this great person who had touched so many in so many different ways. Among the many musical tributes three of his own compositions were performed. *Big Alice* (Don's hit which was first recorded on his classic Solo Album on Sackville) by Howard Johnson's Tuba Ensemble; *Jana's Delight* (recorded by Don's Trio on New Beginnings for Blue Note) was performed by Geri Allen, and *Double Arc Jake* played by myself, Cameron Brown, D.D. Jackson and Andrew Cyrille.

For many including his family and ourselves it's difficult to accept his passing as it feels like he's just "out on the road" again, playing his music to his many audiences abroad.

Don was a strong advocate of Human Rights and was always fighting for truth and fairness in all areas of life. There are so many good memories of our times spent with Don, in so many varied settings: his electrifying performance at the Havana Jazz Festival in 1990 (with African bells tied to his ankles) has the Cubans still excited today. His humility at our "locked out" performance at Toronto's East 85th Street club in 1989 was a cementing force in our musical relationship.

In Australia, witnessing and accompanying him in one of the most heroic performances to this day. (The day before our concert the three of us were rushing to the beach, Don accidently caught two of his fingers in a taxi-cab door) Don did not cancel the show! Also on that same trip was his sincere friendship with a jazz volunteer's four year old son. This friendship was clinched when Don asked the child if he wanted to take his hand on first meeting at the airport and lead him to the van.

There were always intense and enlightening moments in his company. Musically he demanded the utmost. As a friend there were happy carefree times too, from lying around on the beach at Bondi to driving around with him to the clubs in his Lincoln in N.Y.C. He was *really* with you. It's not hard to imagine the incredible camaraderie that must have existed with the Don Pullen/George Adams Quartet.

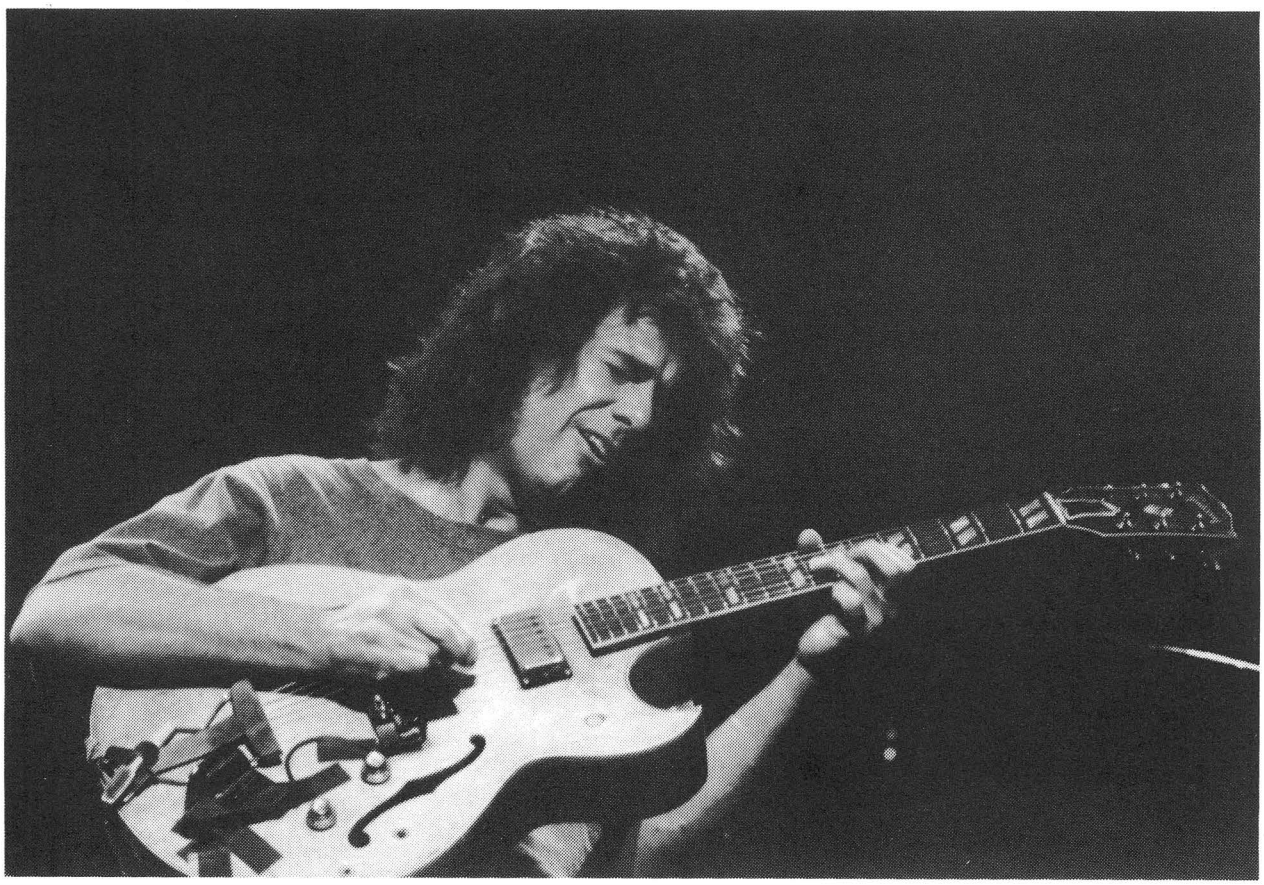
Don was a fierce fighter and a generous and great friend until the end. To all that knew and loved him we must remember the ideals that he reached for and continue our lives with the same kindness, passion and honesty that he did. □

If any readers would like to make a contribution in Don's memory, for the education of his younger children you can send donations to **Don Pullen's Children's Educational Fund, 530 Canal Street, New York, NY 10013, U.S.A.**

PAT METHENY

AN ARTICLE BY
DAVE McELFRESH

ZERO TOLERANCE FOR SILENCE



Guitarist/composer Pat Metheny is the most difficult jazz figure to define in many decades. Both the popjazz and hardcore jazz crowds approve of him, yet both agree that he too frequently spends too much time in the other camp. After developing an appealing signature guitar style copied by dozens of lesser players, Metheny temporarily shed his romantic image and coaxed the under-recorded Ornette Coleman into the studio for ***Song X***, a tough-skinned session of near-telepathic improvised dialogue. The guitarist, having left the ECM label, presented the abrasive tape to the head of Geffen Records as a possible first release — not a move conducive to being signed by the giant company, but an admitted test of categorisation flexibility he required of a future label.

While agreeing with Wynton Marsalis that most new players were sorely missing an education in jazz roots, he then dismissed the trumpeter and his disciples for their un-adventurous neo-traditionalism. His most recent foray into new terrain, ***Zero Tolerance For Silence***, is a disc of grating guitar overdubs that no doubt will sell even fewer copies than ***Song X***, its potential audience lying even further out on the fringe than Coleman's (the cover blurb was written by the guitarist from the thrash-rock band Sonic Youth). Predictably unpredictable, he has since followed up with the almost overly-pleasant ***We Live Here***, where the hiphop sampling may pull in an entirely new crowd of fans with no jazz background at all. Yet neither disc wanders outside the realm of jazz.

Not that Metheny is merely an extremist, the middle ground being no less familiar to the guitarist. He has played and recorded with every major mainstream figure in jazz, from Sonny Rollins, Jack DeJohnette and Jim Hall to Joe Henderson, Billy Higgins and Dewey Redman. Nor does he limit his jazz style to American influences. His regular implementation of Brazilian influences over the past two decades has made him the most consistent stateside representative of that country's music since the bossa nova era. Metheny seems to need to do it all, and has the ability to do so without a preference.

Unlike George Benson and Wes Montgomery, two admitted mentors, Metheny does not succumb to their awkward flip-

PHOTOGRAPH BY **LAURENCE M. SVIRCHEV** (MARCH 1995)

flopping between pop cover versions and jazz in an attempt to balance financial needs with artistic expression. His more accessible discs are no less complex in terms of composition or playing than his least popular projects. And, oddly, his diversity has not developed in the usual fashion: he has not "matured" from simple forms of music into more complex ones, having recorded both sophisticated jazz and popular jazz from the beginning. In fact, his earliest recordings stand as some of his least accessible discs. From the beginning, there has been a sincerity evident in every direction of his output that showcases Metheny as a an obsessively detailed jazzman. It may be the only categorisation that consistently fits the guitarist.

It seems that, if he has to do it all, he also has to do so rather quickly. In twenty years of recordings released in his name, he has not only covered all of the above-mentioned terrain in as many discs — winning eight Grammy awards in the process — but has also found time to write a score for a Canadian ballet company; contribute soundtracks to the movies **Twice In A Lifetime**, **The Silent Alarm** and **The Falcon And The Snowman**; record (and often tour) as a sideman for Joni Mitchell, Michael Brecker, Milton Nascimento, Bruce Hornsby, Gary Burton, Jack DeJohnette, Bob Moses, Gary Thomas, Trilok Gurtu, Abbey Lincoln, Joshua Redman and Metheny Group drummer Paul Wertico; appear on minimalist composer Steve Reich's ***Electric Counterpoint*** as well as the Hendrix tribute ***Stone Free***; record a duet disc with John Scofield; tour with a number of Metheny-led bands; and produce releases by brother Mike, Lyle Mays and Noa, a singer from Israel.

His ubiquitous presence in the jazz world won him over seventy major awards during the '80s alone. Tonight Show host Jay Leno's jaw dropped when Metheny mentioned in passing that his schedule kept him in motion to the extent that he literally had no home. Something very intense is driving the guitarist whom his bassist Steve Rodby once defined as "compulsively productive," a state quite at odds with the pace of his sleepy hometown of Lee's Summit, Missouri.

Years ago, a friend of this writer, having given up his jazz record store job in Kansas City for a furniture company position, told how he had been asked to deliver furniture to a Metheny residence in the nearby community of Lee's Summit. While unloading the dining room set, he queried the elderly couple about their famous son. They spoke of how a 14 year-old Pat had hurried home from school, practiced until the jazz clubs in Kansas City opened, sat in with the bands until closing time, caught a few hours of sleep and started all over again.

He was shown Metheny's now-unoccupied room where, over the bed, was an entire shelf of folders filled with jazz compositions written while in high school. Nonetheless, my friend left the residence with the impression that Metheny's parents, very involved in classical music, continued to consider their son's output "no better than pop music."

Be it deliberately or unintentionally, a very young Metheny began a unique musical development quite at odds with his parents' tastes. Prior to his teenage years he located an Ornette Coleman album in a drugstore cutout bin and found the playing attractively outrageous, to this day holding to his initial impression that Coleman is the most melodic improviser in jazz. His family was un-approving of his developing tastes, as is obvious from a comment Metheny made after his collaboration with Coleman two decades later. He made mention in 1987 that, after hearing the album, "my mother... practically didn't speak to me."

He was also at odds with another family musical tradition: Metheny's grandfather, father and older brother Mike played the trumpet, which a young Pat had dropped after giving the instrument a try. When ten or eleven, he gravitated toward the guitar which he described as "my parents' worst nightmare."

The love affair with the guitar resulted in Metheny enroling in the University of Miami's music program. Only eighteen, he was a student for a single semester before being asked to join the faculty. Bootleg audiotapes can still be found of the amazing young guitarist jamming in dormitory rooms.

During his university stay, Metheny became friends with the late Jaco Pastorius, the two of them making their first major foray into the jazz world on a 1974 recording with pianist Paul Bley. Metheny and the monster bass player remained together for the guitarist's 1976 ECM debut ***Bright Size Life*** and a tour behind Joni Mitchell. The tune *Jaco* on the bestselling 1978 ***Pat Metheny Group*** album remains one of his most well-known tunes, and a near-psychic tribute to a jazz figure yet to become famous. Metheny, who supplied a very heartfelt eulogy at the bassist's funeral in 1987, contributed significantly to the development of Pastorius' career years before Weather Report brought him his greatest fame. Metheny's relationship with Pastorius was the first of many ties with a more accepting family found in the jazz world, preceding his present 18-year association with keyboardist Lyle Mays, and a multitude of other personal associations he continues to honour as of paramount importance. Even now, at a point in his career where he could easily dismiss touring in support of a release in his own name, he welcomes playing the role of sideman for fellow musicians of personal significance, as was the case several years ago when he backed tenorman Joshua Redman.

Metheny has been no less faithful to his Midwestern roots and its variety of folk musics, ironically becoming the quintessential American jazz guitarist on the German jazz label, ECM. The title cut of ***American Garage*** is a tribute to neighbourhood rock bands built around guitar cliches, and ***First Circle***'s *Forward March* playfully parodies the unintentional cacophony of school marching bands. ***80/81***'s *Two Folk Songs* incorporates an acoustic guitar vamp straight from the folk clubs prevalent during his childhood. ***American Garage***'s *(Cross The) Heartland* is a nod toward the Midwest that, along with *Travels* from 1983's release of the same name, best depicts Metheny's incorporation of country music influence. Although not obvious to fans outside Missouri, *River Quay* from ***Watercolors*** and ***Bright Size Life***'s *Unity Village* refer to areas of Kansas City. For years, his holiday visits to the area were marked by year-end concerts at the Jewish Community Center where, after three hours of playing, he would mention that all the music presented had been composed for that evening's performance.

PAT METHENY ZERO TOLERANCE FOR SILENCE

Unlike jazz that conjures up images of downtown Manhattan, Metheny's music has regularly incorporated a spaciousness reminiscent of fellow Kansas Citian Count Basie. In fact, a case can be made for Metheny continuing the heritage of bands like Basie's, where the music, known for a paradoxically accessible complexity built on elements born of rural music, gathered both those who came to dance and jazz aficionados listening for the music's deeper dimensions. No surprise then that Metheny's first duet outing would be 1984's ***Rejoicing***, recorded with bassist and best friend Charlie Haden, a musician who unapologetically parades his folk music roots (he backed Woody's son, Arlo Guthrie, at one point in his career) in his jazz playing.

And no surprise that if Metheny's music was to ever gravitate outside of the states for influence, he would single out Brazil. Like his own music, the bossa nova movement of the '60s had provided a delicate balance of compositional intricacy interesting to musicians, and a blatant melodicism attractive to less analytical music fans. Brazilian percussionist Nana Vasconcelos, who joined Metheny and keyboardist Lyle Mays from 1980 to 1983, showed the guitarist how to add greater dimension to the obvious. A number of Brazilian percussionists and background vocalists have graced most of the later Metheny Group discs.

As Metheny's incorporation of Brazilian influences continued throughout the '80s, so did his use of new technology. Metheny was regularly featured in the guitar magazines, heralding the advantages of the synclavier and a variety of new guitar synthesizers. Interviews relating to 1986's ***Song X*** centred on Metheny's preparation in the studio and experimentation with possibilities only recently available on the guitar. A television interview showed him cranking barnyard animal sounds from his instrument as proof of how radical was his new found potential. The following year, almost as if hoping to court failure, ***Still Life (Talking)***'s *Last Train Home* centred on the very outdated and unpopular sound of the sitar, a new effect Metheny had built into a guitar. Typical of Metheny's golden touch in every market, the song nonetheless became a significant hit in the adult music radio market. But the first synthetic effect Metheny incorporated — soon to become a signature sound — was a trumpet-like tone, as if this were a means of compromising with his family for having rejected their musical expectations of him.

Metheny has regularly returned to his family of jazz cohorts over the ensuing years, recording with figures who have previously been of personal importance earlier in his career. Jack DeJohnette, present on Metheny's adventurous ***80/81*** album, released an underrated disc in 1990 entitled ***Parallel Realities***, with the famed guitarist reverently playing a supportive role. Reaching back further into his past, Metheny loaned his talents that same year to a GRP disc, ***Reunion***, by Gary Burton. The vibraphonist had been Metheny's first connection with the big time, having allowed an 18 year-old Metheny to accompany him onstage at a 1973 Wichita jazz festival. The guitarist had cornered Burton backstage, insisting that he had memorised his catalogue of tunes and was prepared to accompany him onstage without rehearsal. The successful stint led to Metheny's presence on three Burton ECM albums and the guitarist's connection with the label. Burton states in the liner notes of ***Reunion*** that, as a result of watching the grown Metheny's prowess in the studio more than fifteen years after their first recording, he felt the teacher had become the student.

Two years later, Metheny was most explicit about a reliance on his jazz family. With the release of ***Secret Story***, he un-characteristically allowed a personal reference regarding the recording being a tribute to a Brazilian woman with whom he had parted ways. He stated in an interview that he wanted the contributions of longtime friends — Lyle Mays, Charlie Haden and brother Mike in particular — since the musicians could contribute to a story with which they were familiar.

The following year's ***Zero Tolerance For Silence*** presents a full-strength Metheny who, though remaining impersonal, is returning with a vengeance. ***Zero*** combines the dissonance of his Ornette Coleman session with the overdubbed guitar-layering of his Steve Reich project to create an assault that dwarfs the viciousness of anything current in the realm of heavy metal or thrash music. Appearing only several months later was ***I Can See Your House From Here***, a superb duel with John Scofield, pitting Metheny against another monster guitar personality with whom he had long wanted to record but was unable to due to contractual problems. The results are reminiscent of ***Song X*** in portraying his ability to record as an equal partner, but remain at a conversational level of interaction quite unlike the subjectivity of ***Story***.

This year's ***We Live Here***, released as a Pat Metheny Group project, is still no return to the intimacy of ***Secret Story***. Preferring to revert to his long held affinity for roots, the guitarist stated in his newsletter that he "wanted to look at how it felt to me right now in America." Having put his technical fluency to use in a new way, he had amassed a sizeable collection of percussion samples during his constant travelling. Throughout, ***We Live Here*** relies on drum sampling and hiphop rhythms.

While one might be inclined to criticize the newest Metheny Group release for a reliance on trademark effects — familiar chord progressions used to end songs, anticipated modulations and predictable keyboard pacing of a solo — it is easy to forget that the guitarist and his band created the well-defined domain to which they return. Redundant or not, if the degree of creativity on ***We Live Here*** were a watermark level defining their future, listeners would presently be unable to find another contemporary jazz group anywhere near matching their improvising and compositional skills. Metheny even in a lull is still no match for his peers. What the guitarist states regarding his lack of home life could also be said about his musical directions: "When I think of where I live, I think of the whole world, the world in which I'm constantly in motion." Home is definitely no longer Lee's Summit, Missouri, and family has become whomever will take him on his own terms. □

MUSIQUE ACTUELLE

A DIARY OF NEW MUSIC BY DAVID LEE

LEO RECORDS

EVAN PARKER • 50th Birthday Concert • *Leo Records CD LR 212/213*

VLADIMIR REZITSKY • Hot Sounds from the Arctic • *Leo Records CD LR 218*

BRAXTON/PARKER/RUTHERFORD • Trio (London) 1993 • *Leo Records CD LR 197*

WHEREAS IN THEIR OWN TIMES Charlie Parker or Ornette Coleman more or less exploded into the jazz world, John Coltrane moved gradually onto centre stage, and the same can be said of Evan Parker. On tenor and soprano saxophone, he is as clearly the major stylist of his generation as Coltrane was thirty years ago; in fact perhaps more clearly. Coltrane could count Sonny Rollins and Albert Ayler among his peers; perhaps he excelled them only in that his influence reached beyond the "jazz" audience, and although that hasn't happened to Evan Parker, his playing is singular in his time for the extent of its influence.

Although many of us in North America have been long aware of Parker's playing as central to the "British scene," it seemed easier twenty years ago to categorize that scene as something outside of jazz. Jazz was still more readily identifiable as an essentially Black American art form; now that the mainstream of that form has become so intentionally derivative, jazz music can only be fully understood if its definition is broadened to include Parker and his community, rather than narrowed to exclude them.

Parker's liner notes to ***50th Birthday Concert*** are a valuable description of his development within the English and European music scene, and some of his comments are equally relevant to the other CDs in this review, notably the warmth with which he addresses producer Leo Feigin and his "enthusiasm that no matter how long you've lived in England remains resolutely and magnificently Russian."

To scores of improvising musicians from what until recently were "Soviet bloc" countries, Feigin's enthusiasm is the only thing that's gained them any exposure in the West. With ***Hot Sounds from the Arctic*** Feigin introduces us to alto saxophonist Vladimir Rezitsky of Archangelsk, a city which looks to be about 1000 kilometres (600 miles) north of Moscow. In jazz terms, if you think Edmonton is sub-arctic, try going another 800 miles north. In these isolated circumstances Rezitsky has been essential in creating an improvised music scene. The personal energy described in Feigin's and Ken Hyder's liner notes is confirmed in the variety of music on these five tracks. Like the best regional players, he and his associates in Jazz Group Archangelsk (I remember their Leo lp of some years ago as one of the better examples of crazy East European eclecticism) are much more interested in contributing to a group dy-

EVAN PARKER & BARRY GUY • PHOTOGRAPH BY BILL SMITH • VANCOUVER - JUNE 30TH/1995

namic than in drawing attention to their own hot licks, and the result is that on this CD all of the improvisation works, the only concession to "composition" being a bowed riff by bassist Nikolai Klishin that enters to focus and climax both the quintet of *Voices* and the large group of *Planet Rezitsky*. Besides Rezitsky and the Archangelsk musicians, these tracks feature other musicians from here and there, including Tim Hodgkinson and Ken Hyder, vocalist Sainkho Namchylak, Vladimir Tarasov, Roberto Bellatella and Valentina Ponomareva.

East European eclecticism being what it is, Leo wouldn't be a Russian if his interests stopped at the border, and so his label has always featured jazz musicians from different parts of the world.

As artists mature they tend to become more specialized; more focused on specific areas of interest. In improvised music, this can mean that we more or less gratefully leave behind the ad hoc combinations of our youth and get on to what we see as the work at hand. The days of Emanem and Company records are over, and one tends to identify Evan Parker and Paul Rutherford for their small groups, and their work with the London Jazz Composers Orchestra, and Anthony Braxton with his various composed projects. So the two saxophones and trombone configuration of ***Trio (London) 1993*** comes as something of a surprise, and the beauty of the music on it even more of a delight. There are no liner notes to provide a context so there is no temptation to analyse the proceedings accordingly. Time also tends to make musicians more stylized but there is no sign here of one player going off on a tangent here, blissfully unaware of his mates as they try to work around him; rather it is evinced how, if a talent for group dynamics and the art of concession is practised, that talent too grows with age. All three of these players are dominant stylists on their own, and the way they focus their styles like sunlight through a lens to create a distinct group music is astonishing.

The notes for ***50th Birthday Concert*** provide extensive context and another worthwhile quote from Evan Parker.

"Once again there is a friendship which goes beyond the music; a friendship tempered in the forge of the musician's life, in which only those who live it feel the full heat but in which many innocent onlookers are often accidentally burnt and even incautious bystanders may be scorched."

Which nicely sums up not only the strength of the bonds that make a band a *band* — and the Schlippenbach/Lovens and Guy/Lytton trios here are each as singular an entity as any of their members — but the subtle barriers that otherwise friendly and sociable ensembles put up between themselves and the outside world. Barriers that can be as gentle as a rule against sitting in, and that can be comprehended, if not bridged, by understanding the question, if you want to play with us, why weren't you at our last five gigs? The personal dynamic of musician interaction is an unmapped frontier that deserves serious jazz analysis, and the warmth of Parker's notes explains a little bit of its importance in building the quarter-century-long relationships that are still flowering on this 2-CD set and ***Trio (London) 1993***.

UNPLEASANT MUSIC

KANG TAE HWAN & SAINKHO NAMTCHYLAK • Live • *Free Improvisation Network CD-9301*

DAVID S. WARE • Cryptology • *Homestead HMS220-2*

CHARLES GAYLE • Unto I AM • *Victo cd 032*

ART SHOULD MAKE US FEEL something, but it doesn't owe us a good time. Indeed it's precisely when art is most disturbing that it can answer our needs the most — which are not to be cheered, uplifted or "inspired" so much as to hear an echo to our own loneliness.

Lately I had in my CD player — it's a long story, but I was playing with a group and our repertoire included a song from it — ***The Best of Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé***. I was finished with it, but sitting down to work one night I thought:

Hey, why not relax and instead of listening to improvised music while I work, enjoy the slick, Las Vegas-virtuoso vocal stylings of this famous duo?

I overestimated myself. After 20 seconds of this smarmy, superficial pap I tore the CD out of the player and rammed it back into its plastic box. "Jeezus," I said to myself, "that music might be fun to play, but it sure is hell to listen to."

Fun to play, hell to listen to. But how many times have I heard straight musicians say that about improvised music? I shrugged and put on a George Grawe CD. It was sensitive, dynamic, humorous, and I'll be writing about it in a future review.

Which is to say that there are times when, if one's music is reviewed under the "unpleasant" heading, it can be taken as a compliment.

Indeed, I recommend two of the records in this review wholeheartedly, although the first time I played tenor saxophonist David S. Ware's ***Cryptology*** I turned it off halfway through the second track. I was busy doing something else, and the music on this CD made it impossible to concentrate.

It took me a few days before I could come back to the music on its own terms. An hour of extremely *intense* free jazz, varying in density — the ensemble opens up for solos — but not particularly in tempo. Considering that at least half the band have played with Cecil Taylor, it would be easy to categorize this music accordingly. But in fact, only drummer Whit Dickey brings the Units to mind, in the way that he plays not so much rhythm but pulses of sound against the polyrhythms of the other players, much as Andrew Cyrille did with Taylor. William Parker's presence contributes not so much to a "Unit sound," but to a realization that no matter how strong the personalities he's matched with, he remains very much himself. Few

MUSIQUE ACTUELLE

A NEW MUSIC DIARY

American bassists with a sound as broad as Parker's have escaped the influence of Charlie Haden, but Parker's tone is pre-Haden, recalling an era when, just to be heard, playing jazz bass required a good deal of sheer physical strength, and his playing, supportive as it is, has that bullishness that bassists traditionally needed in order to stay in the ring with much louder instruments. Matthew Shipp's voicings are so different from Taylor's that not even a pianistic comparison will hold water. In any event, intensity on this level can only come from deep within the players, it's very hard to maintain it the way this group does, and it's impossible to imitate.

I have heard enough *about* Charles Gayle to think that ***Unto I AM*** might not be the best introduction to his work. His sensibility, deriving very much from post-Ayler jazz, is so fixed and so intense that, at least on this recording, it negates the whole idea of having an emotional range, despite Gayle's broad instrumental palette — he plays not only tenor saxophone but bass clarinet, piano and drums. It is hard to listen to the music without wishing for sympathetic accompanists to expand the sound, not only with rhythm and timbre, but to provide the level of sympathy, both musical and personal, that Gayle's music cries out for. He is certainly a hell of a tenor player.

Keep saying to yourself: "***Kang Tae Hwan & Sainkho Namtchylak: Live*** is *not* a Leo record." That's what I do, because who else but Leo would issue a duet by a Korean saxophonist and a Russian singer of Mongolian extraction? In fact, ***Live*** is put out by Free Improvisation Network in Japan. It is among other things, a noteworthy document of regional improvised music, as the notes emphasize that alto saxophonist Kang Tae Twan has difficulty finding fellow improvisers in his native Korea (the musicians he plays with are usually Japanese), and that vocalist Sainkho Namtchylak, although living in Europe, began her career doing Mongolian folk songs and has been searching for her identity as an Asian improviser; according to the notes, the idea that she might be the first in her field plainly upsets her, and admittedly, being alone in a collaborative medium can't be much fun.

However, much of this record *is* fun, from the delicate and lyrical opening track to the use of polyphonics by both voice and saxophone in the last track.

The closest thing to which I can relate Namtchylak's singing is sound poetry, which makes me wish I knew more about other vocal musics which use, for example, the sinuses as much as Namtchylak seems to. Extreme vocal effects, with their direct links to humans in distress, can themselves be disturbing, and some of the duets between Namtchylak's hoarse vocalizations and Kang's extended rhythmic patterns are simultaneously grating and extremely moving.

Kang's alto at times brings to mind Anthony Braxton: the sharp edge to his tone, the use of circular breathing and the bounce he can bring to the lower registers, as if he's tongued the air inside his horn into a ball that he can slam dunk or dribble at will. His circular breathing is intense and exhausting; his tonal range is subtle and personal; his solo piece is stately and lyrical.

Brought together for this performance, specifically to make this recording, I'm not sure that the duo's music represents "the crystallization of the Asian mentality" as the notes claim, but it seems certain that if they can keep circulating their music, these are two artists that Western listeners, and players, will have to reckon with in years to come.

In any event, beauty does not presuppose pleasantness; there are many beautiful moments in the Ware and Kang Tae Hwan/Namtchylak CDs, but I guarantee you won't hear them played during the intermission at your local jazz club; there are not too many concerts where they wouldn't completely overshadow the music onstage, and not too many "more pleasant" musics that wouldn't seem simply insipid by comparison. □

THE VIRTUAL LEADER

MARSHALL ROYAL

AN ARTICLE BY PHILLIP ATTEBERRY

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN AUDAIN

When and if the definitive history of jazz is ever written, Marshall Royal's place in it will be substantial. Casual observers know him as the long time lead alto for Count Basie, though genuine connoisseurs are aware of his other associations, from Curtis Moseby's Blue Blowers to Doc Severinson's Tonight Show band. Royal's central contribution to jazz, however, has been as a "ghost" leader. He organized and ran Lionel Hampton's first band from 1940 to 1942 (thereby establishing one of the most enduring personalities in jazz) and for many years functioned as Count Basie's "first lieutenant," a position which not only placed him at the centre of the band's development during its most productive years but made him, in Leonard Feather's words, its "virtual leader."

Royal defines himself through his heritage. "Two of my great-grandparents were born of slave mothers and white fathers. One of my great-grandmothers was part Susquehannah Indian. They were no strangers to trouble — knew all about the blues before anyone got around to playing it. But they survived, and my parents inherited those survival traits."

Royal's father was born in Sherman, Texas. "His two great loves," remembers Royal, "were music and freedom, and even though he knew little or nothing of jazz as a boy (the music of New Orleans had not yet worked its way across the Texas prairie), he loved it when he heard it because jazz is free."

As a boy, Royal's father learned music from a teacher at Kidd-Key College, a girls' school in Sherman. "Father cooked and cleaned for the students, then studied music after work. He learned string, reed, and brass instruments as well as the rudiments of theory and arranging. Ultimately, he became proficient enough to teach others, and still later he organized the area's first professional band. Near the turn of the century, he led that band out of Texas, playing his way first to Canada and then to the West Coast. In fact, he was in San Francisco when the great earthquake of 1904 hit."

During the early part of these travels, especially in his wanderings through Louisiana, Royal's father encountered jazz. "It's not that he had never heard of jazz before, but not until he travelled outside of Texas did he recognize its possibilities. From then on, father was a jazz man, not that he always played it, but it was in his blood. The idea of creating and expressing himself in unlimited ways had taken hold."

Upon returning, Royal's father was greeted as a celebrity. He continued to perform locally and became the area's only music teacher. Kidd-Key College is now gone, but "Music Street," named in honour of Royal's father, still runs through Sherman.

Royal's mother was from nearby Dennison, Texas. "Before her marriage," Royal reminisces, "mother was a school teacher. Her father, in fact, founded the first school for coloured children in north Texas. Mother not only loved music but played accomplished piano. It was no surprise, therefore, that she and my father eventually found each other. They were married in 1910.

"Even though father had done well for himself, he did not want to raise a family in Texas. Though not as racially polarized as other southern states, coloured people still suffered serious social and educational disadvantages. When he found out, therefore, that his first child was on the way, he rented half a box car from a freight train, loaded the family's belongings (including my mother's piano) and, together with grandmother and uncle Ernest (after whom my younger brother was later named), left Sherman for California. On his earlier visit, father had been impressed with California's liberal racial attitudes and diverse economic opportunities. 'This is a place,' he thought, 'where I can give my children the advantages they deserve.'

"At this time (which was near the beginning of 1912), father, mother, and uncle Ernest (who was a fine reed man) had a trio called "The Three Royals." They planned to take their time going west, stopping periodically along the way to rustle up jobs and accumulate money. While laying over in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, they were particularly well received and found the region to be musically virgin territory. Opportunities for lessons and jobs were so plentiful that father vacated the boxcar, rented a house, and settled in for what he thought would be a year or so, though it turned out to be five. I was born in December of 1912, and my family didn't complete its journey to California until 1917, where I was reared, went to school, and received a better education than I could have hoped for in Texas or Oklahoma."

Royal insists that he never aspired to anything except music. "As a kid I liked athletics, especially boxing, but music was

the only thing I took seriously. It filled our home every day. Father, mother, and uncle Ernest were not only good musicians, but experienced, capable teachers who taught me well. I started violin lessons at age seven and continued them for ten years. By age fourteen, I was playing regularly with father's orchestras. During that time, father and Uncle Ernest were also teaching me theory, transposition, chord structures and, most of all, a love for jazz. Father didn't force me into jazz, but I inherited his love of its freedom.

"That accounts, in part, for my taking up reeds in high school. Both the saxophone and clarinet were fashionable in jazz, and I longed to become part of that scene. Because my musical training had been thorough and my practice habits well developed, I quickly developed competence on both saxophone and clarinet."

Ironically, Royal's first big break — with the Duke Ellington orchestra — put him back on the violin. "Ellington came west in 1929 for some movie appearances and needed someone to fill in on the violin. Though still in high school, I auditioned and got the job. I was with him when he made his first movie, Check and Double Check, with Amos and Andy. I wasn't good enough to last, however, for Ray Nance took the job shortly afterward. In retrospect, though, it worked out for the best. Father had a stroke about that time, and mother needed me at home. And I was better off pursuing reeds than the violin because job opportunities were more plentiful. But my brief stint with Ellington was important. I got to see, from the inside, what a first rate jazz orchestra is like, how it is run, what makes it work, what holds it together. I also met the music close up. Remember it was 1929. People didn't have record players and radios. You couldn't buy a bunch of albums and listen to them a hundred times. The only real way to know the music was to hear it from inside the orchestra.

"I was also much influenced by Johnny Hodges. He had joined Ellington shortly before me and outplayed any sax player I had ever heard. At that time, really good sax players were rare. Sidney Bechet and Benny Carter were deservedly well known, but neither of them swung like Johnny Hodges or had the purity of tone. Listening to Hodges every night gave me a better idea of how an alto sax should be approached. If nothing else, my short stint with Ellington made me aware of how little I knew in comparison to the musical giants of the day, and that was healthy."

Royal ultimately left home in late 1929 to join Curtis Moseby's Blue Blowers, whose home base was San Francisco. The next year, he joined Les Hite at Sebastian's Cotton Club in Culver City, where he was stationed most of the decade. Sebastian's was one of the most efficiently run clubs on the west coast and paid its musicians well above the depression era norm. One of Royal's closest friends during these years was Art Tatum.

"When Art came west in 1936, he was already a sensation, but he and I had two things in common — we were both young and trying to decide what to do with our careers. Art needed a friend in those days. Though he was sociable by nature, he was out of his element on the west coast. He didn't know anybody; he was away from his familiar haunts, and with such poor eyesight he found getting around and meeting people difficult. I think that's part of the reason he didn't stay on the west coast. I became such good friends with him because, when necessary, I was willing to be his eyes. We spent a lot of time talking about who and what we wanted to be — and why — the big questions that always preoccupy young people of ambition. Our careers ultimately took different directions, but our friendship never ceased. We reminded one another of our youth, of those years when our impressions were most intense and our possibilities most expansive."

Royal also met Lionel Hampton at Sebastian's Cotton Club and in 1940, put together Hampton's first band. It was to be the first of many that Royal would assemble over the next thirty years, and he attributes his organizational skills to his father. "Ever since I can remember, father led an orchestra. He lined up jobs, called rehearsals, managed people and logistics — he was an organized person. I suppose watching him all those years helped me develop similar skills, though I never thought of myself as an organizer until I met Lionel Hampton.

"Lionel wanted his own band more than anything. And he was a great band leader, a wonderful showman who could attract and entertain a crowd. But his off-stage personality was like his personality on-stage, full of enthusiasm and energy but without discipline. He lived by impulse. He was a great front man but no business man. That's why I put the 1940 band together and ran it for two years. I handled the bookings, lined up transportation, accommodations, collected the money, paid the musicians, floated guys loans when they needed them, attended to all the nuts and bolts details that go into keeping a band on the road. I found the job rewarding and interesting and would have kept at it had I not gone to the navy in 1942."

Royal was assigned to an entertainment division and led a successful navy dance band until the war ended and his troubles began. "My career stagnated after the war. I had hoped to settle in Los Angeles and work in the studios, but they wouldn't use coloured musicians if they could find white ones, so work was sporadic. I got plenty tired of seeing musicians with less ability get jobs ahead of me because of their skin colour, so I went on the road with Eddie Heywood. Eddie's was as much a pop band as a jazz band, so the work

was not challenging, but it was steady and paid well."

Not until 1951 did Royal link up with Count Basie, who was looking to reassemble a big band after economic conditions had forced him to tour for a year with a septet.

"Basie and Lionel Hampton were as different as two people can be. Basie was an intelligent man with steady judgment. He would have been perfectly capable of running the band but chose not to. He designated a "first lieutenant" and removed himself from all the but most important decisions. It was his way of developing a mystique with his men. He became more legend than boss, and by doing so maintained considerable discipline.

"Discipline has always been a problem for big bands on the road. Men keep long, odd hours, spend most of their time cramped on busses, and are lonely for their wives or girlfriends. Over time, that's a formula for trouble. The best antidote is a leader who sets the example, and Basie did. His temperament was restrained, his words sparse, but they meant something, sort of like his piano playing.

"The Lionel Hampton bands always had more discipline problems because Lionel was a less disciplined person. That is not to say he was a bad person. In fact he was extraordinarily generous and forgiving, but his exuberance knew no bounds. He lived high and had fun wherever he went, and many of his sidemen did the same, sometimes to the detriment of the music.

"Late in 1950, Basie approached me about playing alto sax in his new band and functioning as 'first lieutenant.' He offered me the job because of my experience with Lionel Hampton and because I had run a navy band for three years. He was clear from the beginning that he wanted someone to take care of the daily details, right down to handling rehearsals and calling charts during performances. So that's what I did."

In the 1960's, Basie came under fire from jazz critics for becoming too commercial, especially with such tepid albums as ***Pop! Goes The Basie*** and ***Hits From The 50's and 60's***. Royal, who was instrumental in commercializing the band's image, explains. "Nobody wanted to change the soul of the Basie band. The goal was to preserve it. But economic trends were against us. Bookings were fewer; musician's wages were higher, and travelling expenses were astronomical. Solvency was our first priority. The critics forget that those pop albums were financially successful and kept us on the road and in front of the public. I'm a pragmatist rather than a purist. If you have a product worth preserving — and the Basie band was certainly that — you think about preservation first and the critics second.

At eighty-two, Royal, who, having spent much of the eighties in Doc Severinson's Tonight Show band, is travelling more, though he is not comfortable with today's jazz scene. "Jazz has lost focus," he insists. "CD technology is wonderful, but we have all been so inundated by so many recordings that we can't possibly digest them. At best we can hear a little of this and a little of that, but we can't judge the whole picture. This explosion of sounds and styles and musical statements is causing us to lose our feel for what's worthwhile and what's not, largely because we can no longer agree upon the criteria. Is something good because it's original? Because it's traditional? Because it's simple or complex or dissonant or melodic? Because people can dance to it — or because they can't? Because it's in 4/4 time or 7/4 time or 21/4 time? I see so many young musicians searching in so many directions without first defining for themselves what good music is. If you don't have an idea of what it is, how do you know when you've found it?

But then I'm eighty-two years old. I came of age in a simpler world. Life and music contained more coherent parameters. Good and bad were easier to determine, musically and otherwise. I liked it better then, but I suppose every person who's ever made it to eighty-two would say the same thing."

As we go to press we have heard that Marshall Royal died on May 7th.

PHOTOGRAPHS
MARSHALL ROYAL (Top Left) by Dan Audain
MARSHALL ROYAL & JIMMY CLEVELAND by Ray Avery Photo

MYTH AND REALITY
CINDY BLACKMAN

BEFORE HE PASSED INTO ANOTHER PLANE, THAT MYSTERIOUS MUSICAL GENIUS and self-styled philosopher Sun Ra posed the riddle: "If you are not a Myth, whose Reality are you? If you are not a Reality, whose Myth are you?" One answer, implied by the juxtaposition of the two questions, is that you are nothing if not a Myth and a Reality. Of course, Sun Ra believed that "nothing is" yet he realized that nothing is not recognized by mankind. On this material plane, Myth and Reality are the only qualities of being men know and value. One wonders, now, whether that architect of avant garde jazz was delving into phenomenology or offering a critique of the American jazz industry when he posed his riddle. Indeed, Sun Ra once told me that he considered himself the music's "most successful failure" because he had done everything the "wrong" way — starting an orchestra in the 1950s, producing and distributing most of his own records, wearing outrageous costumes, etc.— yet instead of the critical and financial ruin others had predicted, 30 years of leading his Arkestra had made him both internationally acclaimed and more fiscally solvent than when he started out. The keys to Sun Ra's success appear to have been threefold: his music, his choice of musicians, and his ability to establish himself as (forgive the unintentional pun) an unforgettable "star" personality, viz., a Myth and a Reality for both jazz audiences and critics. Which brings us to a current jazz artist whose career has also gone against the grain of the American jazz industry: Cindy Blackman.

A female drummer, composer, and bandleader of the same remarkable generation that produced such 1980s "young lions" as the Marsalis Brothers and the Eubanks cousins, Ms. Blackman has yet to receive her due recognition and rewards. In an era when most young musicians are promoted based on an odd blend of talent, image, and the caprice of critics and producers, this young veteran of the drums has focused on enriching her skills, earning respect from her peers, and conversing and playing with many of the older musicians whose works she loves. Ms. Blackman's approach had once been, and arguably still should be, the standard approach to achieving success in this industry. Unfortunately, the scene has changed.

In her quest for excellence, Ms. Blackman has performed internationally with such stylistically diverse bandleaders as Don Pullen and Al Grey. She has also met the demands of the drum chair in both Joe Henderson's trio and Sam Rivers' big band with equal aplomb. While with Jackie McLean's group in 1986 and trumpeter Wallace Roney's 1987-91 quintet, Cindy Blackman established herself as a writer to be reckoned with as well. She contributed songs to Roney's early MUSE albums, including *Verses* (on which her teenage idol, Tony Williams, played drums), *Intuition* and *Obsession*. The fact that her credentials surpass those of the young, predominantly male musicians who have gotten major label contracts and much hype during the 1990s points to another impediment to Ms. Blackman's progress. The combination of her gender and choice of instrument are at odds with what the industry prefers in a jazz personality.

When Cindy Blackman first emerged on the New York scene in the early 1980s, there were several other young, talented female jazz instrumentalists making their way into its mainstream clubs for jam sessions and as accompanists on older musicians' gigs. Saxophonists Fostina Dixon and Sue Terry, bassists Melissa Slocum and Kim Clarke, pianist Esther Blue, and drummer Teri Lynne Carrington all played with an intensity and proficiency that seemed to foreshadow promising careers. Yet none of these women has been able to record even as frequently as Ms. Blackman has and, like her, they have all been unable to secure significant work as bandleaders in New York's clubs. Speaking of club owner prejudice, Ms. Blackman says that "for the most part it hasn't been men, it's been women. There's been a vibe there. It's like they put you under a magnifying glass to find something to complain about... But I don't like to concentrate on the negativity, because when I think about that it hampers my progress."

One reason why Cindy Blackman can remain so gracious in her approach to a jazz scene which is obviously sexist is that she has had the moral support, counsel, and encouragement of several jazz luminaries. This connection to the cream of New York jazz's past has enabled her to remain optimistic about her future, even in the face of 12 years of virtual neglect from its male-dominated press and club management. Ms. Blackman found friends and advisers in such drum legends as Art Blakey, Art Taylor, Jimmy Cobb, Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, Billy Higgins and Ed Blackwell. Cobb, Jones, and Blakey even bestowed cymbals from their drum kits — truly prized possessions — on her as tokens of their esteem. Once, when talking to Elvin Jones between sets, he demonstrated certain rudiments and flams on his drums for her. Then he said, "Do you play these? These are good to play." She also remembers talking with Blakey and Taylor "countless times" before their deaths, and that "not all the stories were pretty or glamorous, either." They often advised her "to be careful of this, or if this happens then watch out for that." For her, their knowledge "linked me to the attitude that people once had — it's like passing down history through the family, like your mother saying that 'so-and-so was an American Indian and this is how he dealt with it.' " Another person she conversed with in this regard is the trailblazing female trombonist/composer/arranger Melba Liston who, she notes respectfully, "has a lot of courage".

Courage is an asset which all of the women who have persevered in playing this music have in great supply. For them, an attack may even come from a male colleague who is insecure because

they are not playing the "acceptable female role" of singer or piano accompanist. Cindy Blackman relates the following. "I went to the [Village] Vanguard to hear a particular group play. And the drummer — whose name I won't mention — I was asking him about drumming and about his kit. He said, 'Wait a minute. Are you a drummer?' I said 'Yeah.' He said, 'Girls aren't supposed to play drums! What are you doin' playing the drums? You're a woman!' I was really hurt, so afterwards I went over to Art's [Blakey's] place on Bleecker Street. Art said, 'You can always tell the maturity of a person by the way they deal with you. You obviously approached him in a reasonable fashion, in a professional fashion. But he didn't respond to you in that way. Obviously, there's something lacking in him. You know what, it could be the same thing that shows up in his playing, that makes him not a great drummer.' "

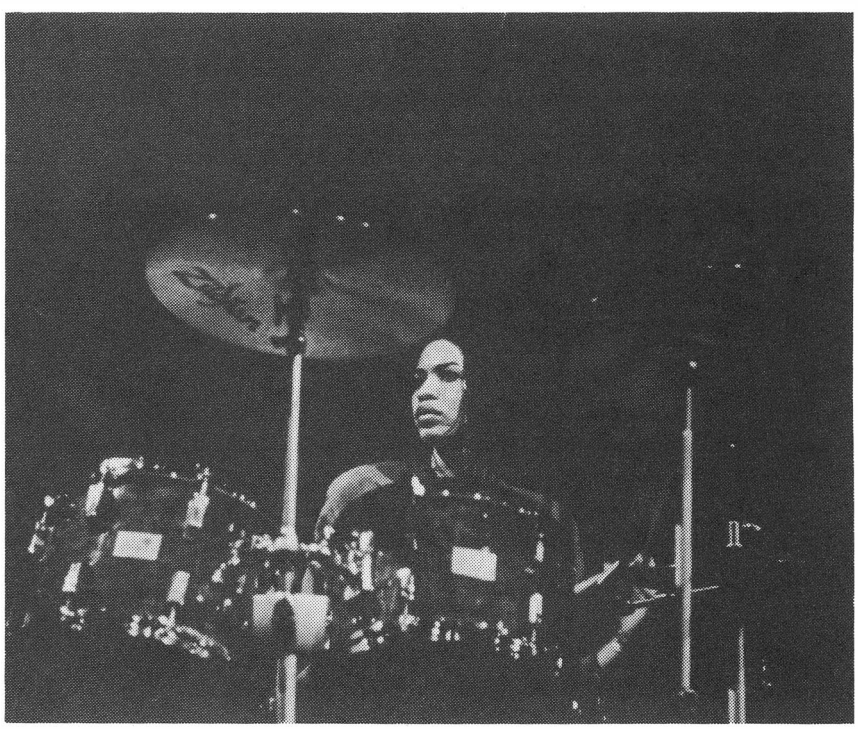
The industry's bias against drummers of both genders has also run deep during the past decade, as many established trapsmen were denied contracts by major American labels. It should be a mark of shame for the jazz executives at these labels that such international legends as Max Roach and Elvin Jones have had to rely on European producers to sustain their recording careers. It is equally reprehensible that no American company would sign the late Art Blakey and his jazz Messengers at the end of his career, forcing him to turn to a foreign label that was poorly distributed in the U.S. for the group's last releases. Moreover, of the drummers who came on the scene with Ms. Blackman, only she and Ralph Peterson Jr. have been able to record as bandleaders with any regularity, and Peterson resorted to self-production (under Blue Note's auspices) to ensure this kind of exposure.

Cindy Blackman was fortunate to develop a relationship with MUSE, a small, New York-based label which has nurtured many young, straight-ahead artists and also provided a necessary outlet for the work of such older bandleaders as Shirley Scott, Houston Person and James Spaulding. One of the young leaders MUSE had the foresight to record in the mid-1980s was Wallace Roney, the trumpeter whose close association with Ms. Blackman led to her own debut with the label. She credits him with both encouraging her composing and bringing the fruits of this involvement to the attention of his producers. "Before working with Wallace," she explains, "I thought, 'This is cute. It's fun writing songs.' But he heard something in my tunes. 'Are you serious?' I asked. 'Yeah, I'm serious,' he said. Otherwise, I don't think I would've let anyone hear anything I wrote."

Since 1987, Ms. Blackman has recorded four albums for MUSE: ***Arcane*** (MCD 5341); ***Code Red*** (MCD 5365); ***Telepathy*** (MCD 5437); and a yet untitled project, recorded earlier this year, which will feature the talents of 1960s legends Kenny Barron, Gary Bartz and Ron Carter. Her debut as a leader, Arcane, was a fine album bolstered by the writing and improvisations of guest artists Joe Henderson, Larry Willis and Buster Williams. Code Red, recorded in 1990, was dedicated to her recently deceased friend and mentor Art Blakey, and included much more of Ms. Blackman's writing. The emphasis in Code Red was on a hard bop sound that occasionally veered into the densities and energy of the new thing, reminding one of the early 1960s efforts of Blakey's jazz Messengers and the Miles Davis Quintet. Appropriately, she gathered former Messengers Roney and Lonnie Plaxico, '60s veteran Barron and the daring altoist Steve Coleman for this effort.

For Telepathy, her '94 release, Cindy Blackman was able to record with her own working group for the first time. The players here had months to familiarize themselves with both the leader's compositions and each other in the U.S. and European performances which preceded this recording. Joined by pianist Jacky Terrasson, tenor and soprano saxophonist Antoine Roney (Wallace's younger brother), and bassist Clarence Seay (pronounced See), Ms. Blackman succeeded in creating an album dominated by her musical vision, by that compositional and improvisational imprint Ornette Coleman has appropriately called a "unison". Her particular unison includes an almost cinematic mixture of fire and subtlety, adventure and coolness, romance and subterfuge.

Telepathy starts with part one of a three-part drum-piano conversation cycle, *Reves Electriques* (trans.: Electric Dreams). Originally written as a drum feature requested of her by bandleader Al Grey. *Reves Electriques* signifies different moods which develop over the course of both the album and an imagined day, serving a narrative function similar to that of the brief drum pieces Tony Williams interspersed throughout his



PHOTOGRAPH BY **GERARD FUTRICK**

1988 Blue Note release, ***Angel Street***. From there, the Blackman Quartet performs *Spank*, a composition laden with adventure and intrigue. The melody line of *Spank* rises so smoothly from the introductory piano vamp it seems like it was freely improvised — but it wasn't. Like *Reves Electriques*, *Spank* also leaves plenty of room for the drums and drum-piano conversation, repeating the use of a recurring piano vamp for dramatic effect.

Pianist Jacky Terrasson shows how much he has absorbed the 1960s improvisational style of Herbie Hancock on the title track, *Telepathy* and on *Persuasion*, two of Blackman's endothermic cookers (the reaction created within the listener is more cerebral than physical). Both these tunes are reminiscent of such Wayne Shorter pieces as *Pinocchio* and *Dolores*, which were written for that very influential Miles Davis Quintet of 1964-68. The remaining Blackman originals, *Jardin Secret* and *Missing You,* are in a new direction. The romantic suspense of *Jardin* is made memorable by Terrasson's unique use of space, rhythm and dynamics and Blackman's concurrently deft cymbal work. Here, and on *Missing You*, her ability to make the cymbals whisper, softly tick-tock or splash is in surprising contrast to the crashes and brighter colours she summons from them on the title track. *Missing You* is a poignant ballad which, with its hushed tones, leaves the impression of a long sigh of yearning. Here tenorman Antoine Roney sounds like Ben Webster talking in his sleep through his horn. Like *Rooster Ben*, Roney can convey both virility and fragility, his sometimes biting tone arcing sadly away like a knife disappearing in the darkness.

The remaining pieces on Telepathy are two jazz standards, Monk's *Well, You Needn't* and Miles' *Tune Up*, plus Terrasson's charming piano trio piece, *Club House*. On these, the players are more reverential, with Roney going into his pre-Giant Steps Coltrane bag on *Tune Up*, Terrasson nodding to Monk and Ahmad Jamal, Seay staying unobtrusively in-the-pocket on bass a la Sam Jones, and the leader showing off her considerable hard bop drumming skills.

Telepathy stands as Cindy Blackman's best release to date, yet she has been disappointed by the criticism generated by the revealing, high-fashion photos of her on the CD's front and back covers. "If I were Janet Jackson or Madonna or Paula Abdul, they would say: [snaps her fingers for emphasis] 'You go, girl! That's great! ' But because I play jazz, people say, 'Oh, what's she doing? She doesn't have any clothes on!' It's so stupid. I think that vibe confines the music." And Ms. Blackman is well aware that fashion statements have been another way of expressing "hipness" for many jazz personalities of the past, from Coleman Hawkins to Albert Ayler. "I like fashion, " she adds, "I don't think it projects any kind of bad image on the music or myself. I mean, Miles Davis was into fashion — he was always lookin' good! Billie Holiday, look at the way she presented herself: she always looked beautiful, even when she was involved in some things that were negative."

Perhaps equally controversial in some circles is Ms. Blackman's becoming rock star Lenny Kravitz's regular drummer. While she has yet to record with him, she hopes to do so and defends her association with Kravitz. "Lenny grew up being exposed to a lot of different music also. He used to hang out with Miles." In her own interest she adds, "I like expressing myself in different ways. And this way is a natural way for me because I heard it... I grew up with it." While growing up in northern Ohio and central Connecticut, she was exposed to everything from jazz to Classical to rock and R&B through various family members. Her father liked jazz, particularly drummers like Max Roach and Philly Joe Jones, and an uncle sang and played vibes in Ohio's jazz clubs. Her mother had classical violin training and her grandmother, now 88, still plays gospel piano in church. Her older brother and sister listened to everyone from Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles, and Sly & the Family Stone to John Coltrane and Miles Davis, while her younger sister was a fan of the late 1960s/ early 1970s Motown sound. With such a background, one wonders how she can remain so focused a jazz artist and feel comfortable with one foot in the pop scene. "I think that, as a musician, you should always stay abreast of everything that is going on," she explains. "But, I think pop musicians need to stay in tune with and check out what jazz musicians are doing, because that's the more advanced music."

PHOTOGRAPH BY **LAURENCE M. SVIRCHEV**

Another reason for her dedication to jazz was an epiphany she had just three years after she had gotten her first drum kit. "I think I was 16 and Tony Williams was doing a clinic with a bass player. I didn't even understand what he was doing... but his intensity was so incredible, his command of the drums, and he was so advanced! The sound that he had on the drums was sooo great! I said, 'That's the direction drumming should be in! That's my direction now. That's what I'm striving for. That's It! I just heard it. Okay, now I'm on track!' Tony has the same kind of drive that Art Blakey had. He's got the kind of looseness that Elvin has — but in his Tony Williams way. He's intelligent like Max Roach. He's got slickness like Philly Joe. He's got that hipness like Roy Haynes. He's cool like Jimmy Cobb and feels good while he's playing like Billy Higgins. He's got all of it!"

While she feels "fortunate because we became friends," Ms. Blackman realizes that her musical linkage to Tony Williams has been one of deepest inspiration. "Tony was the first great drummer that I saw... When I heard him, I didn't know where it all came from at the time. I still had a lot of studying to do. But then, when I started hearing all these other things, I said, 'Ah, so Tony is an amalgamation of all those guys.' He just took something from each of them and made it his own thing. And now he's the innovator! He made a tremendous impression on me."

Although Tony Williams has been an archetypical drummer for her, what will Cindy Blackman become? To return to Sun Ra, one implication of his riddle is that, in order to be a Reality or a Myth or even both, you must know yourself and your own significance. When asked what meaning she would like to have for jazz audiences of the future, Ms. Blackman said she wishes they would see her as: "A compilation of all the drummers she loves, plus herself... and that she took things to a different place." To these ears, Cindy Blackman has already become the best female jazz drummer ever and one of the best composers of her generation. Who knows, but some insightful film director may request a score for a hip romance or thriller from her and be very pleasantly surprised: For the American jazz industry, this notion and her wish for the future may sound like "impossible dreams". Yet, this female jazz bandleader has already led four albums and written for several others, performed on three continents, done advertisements for Sonor drums and Zildjian cymbals, and appeared in the documentary motion picture, "A jazz Messenger", rehearsing Blakey's jazz Messengers — one of the most famous bands of any size in the world. And those who scoff at her ambitions would do well to remember that she was so close to the legendary Buhaina that some referred to her as his "daughter". Cindy Blackman also plays the drums with his sense of antiphony, commanding and urging her soloists on to greater heights. She remembers Blakey telling her about the "call and response in the rhythms of Africa... that that's where the blues came from. This shows the strength of the African-American, to be stripped of everything — family, name, title — and start at absolute zero, with nothing to work with, yet to be able to create blues and jazz. And I always left his house feeling proud of who I am and of the people who came before me." And on such days she was the whirlwind, nothing could stop her. □

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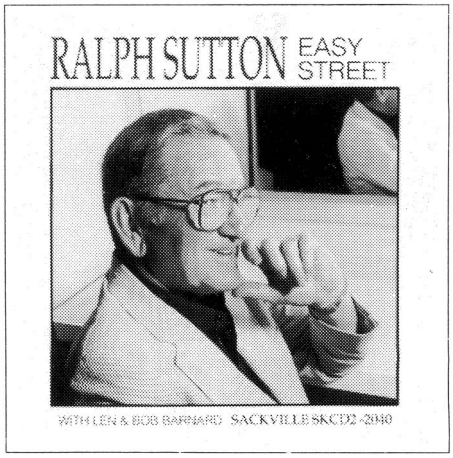

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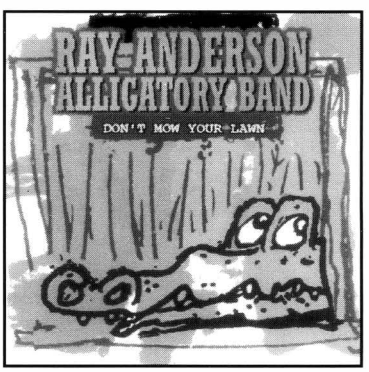

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