

# down beat®

THE MAGAZINE OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

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## STEPHANE GRAPPELLI and the Django connection



***CAPTAIN BEEFHEART***  
Method to  
his Madness

***ARNETT COBB***  
Perpetual  
Sax Prowess

***MAL WALDRON***  
Keyboard Stylist  
Re-Enters  
U.S. Scene

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'BLOOD'  
& ULMER  
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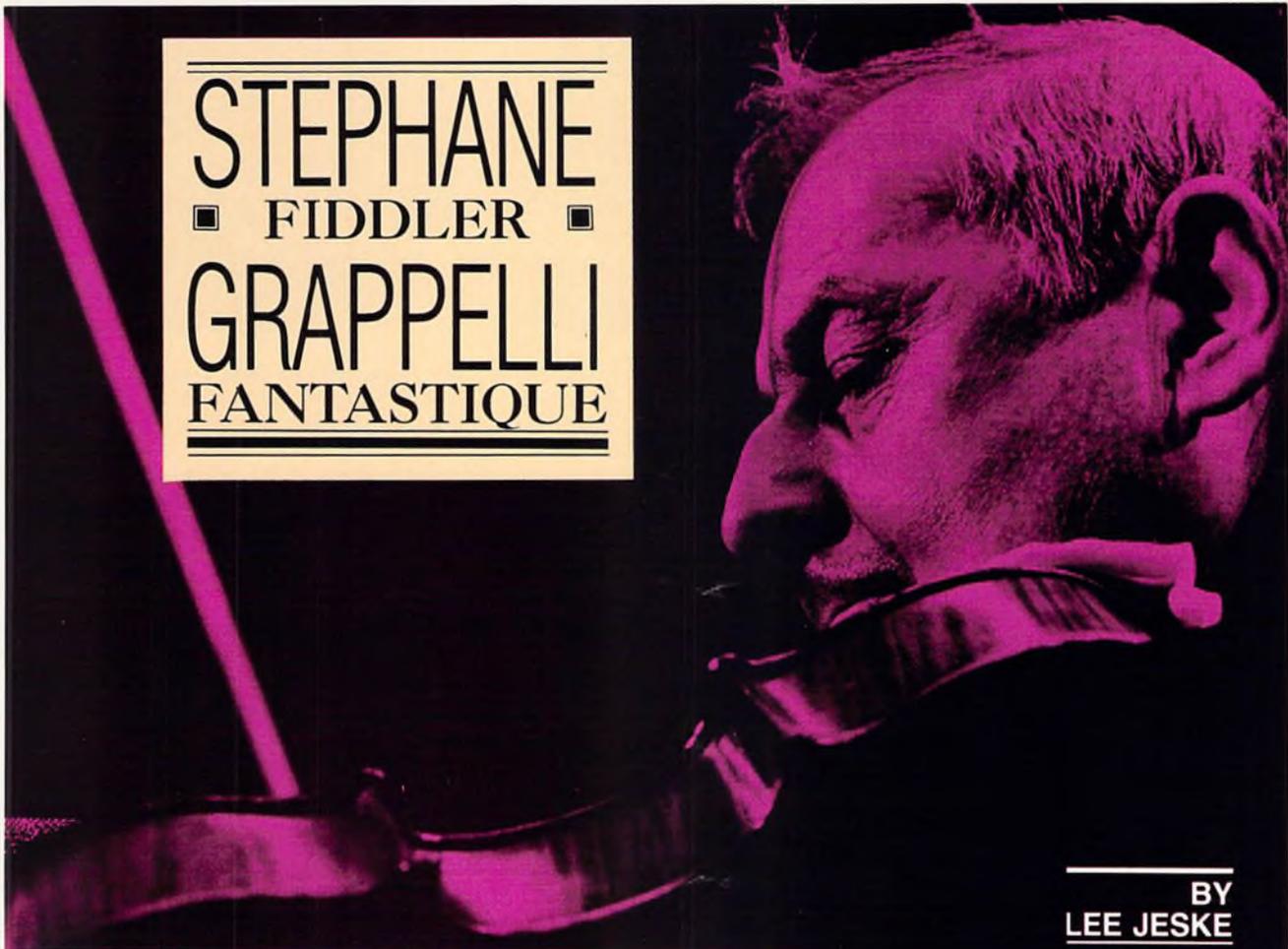


Captain Beefheart



Mal Waldron

Cover photo of Stephane Grappelli by Andy Freeberg/Encore. Cover Design by Bill Linehan.



STEPHANE  
■ FIDDLER ■  
GRAPPELLI  
FANTASTIQUE

BY  
LEE JESKE

Giuseppe C. Pino

**T**he finale of a Carnegie Hall concert in late 1980 features a most peculiar instrumentation: three violins, two mandolins, two guitars and two basses dash through a hectic version of *Tiger Rag* in a peculiar amalgam of jazz and country music—a crazy, swinging hoedown. At first glance, the group looks like any one of a dozen bands—long hair and beards in abundance; yet, a closer look reveals one of the violinists to be a lean, gray-haired gentleman in a flowered shirt. He is the least pushy of the fiddlers, allowing the two younger men to take the longer solos, even elbowing them into the spotlight. As the piece races to its frantic conclusion, the audience bursts into an ovation, stands and cheers, and the eight younger men hug the grandfatherly figure, beaming. The older cat seems to be enjoying it more than anybody. Is this a music teacher presenting his progeny? No, this is Stéphane Grappelli in his 72nd year, doing what he has done for the better part of the last 50 years—playing violin with unbridled joy and exuberance, and delighting in the challenge and talents of other musicians.

The sight of Stéphane Grappelli playing with other violinists, however young, should surprise no one. In the course of his career, Grappelli has performed and recorded with a majority of the jazz violinists. Eddie South, Joe Venuti, Stuff Smith, Svend Asmussen, Ray Nance, Jean-Luc Ponty and Didier Lockwood have all been bow to bow with Grappelli; it would be difficult to find any other player in jazz history as open to potential instrumental rivals. Nor does his gregariousness stop at violinists. Stéphane Grappelli has performed or recorded with Gary Burton, Duke Ellington, Bud Powell, Tal Farlow, Martial Solal, Oscar Peterson, Larry Cor-

yell, Bill Coleman, Benny Goodman, Earl Hines, Philip Catherine, Erroll Garner, Roland Hanna, Kenny Clarke, Paul Simon, Yehudi Menuhin, George Shearing, Oscar Pettiford, Teddy Wilson, Coleman Hawkins, Dicky Wells, Joe Pass, David Grisman, Larry Adler, Elena Duran and Barney Kessel. And, of course, Django Reinhardt, with whom he formed one of the most enchanting and important combinations in 20th century music.

Several days after Grappelli and his quartet shared the Carnegie Hall stage with mandolinist David Grisman's quintet, I knock on the door of Stéphane's hotel room. "One moment, my dear," says the voice inside, with a French accent to rival Chevalier and Boyer in romantic lilt. Stéphane Grappelli tosses back the door and invites me in. On the bed is a black, electric violin which Grappelli premiered at his Carnegie Hall performance. The tables are lined with various toiletries, colognes, teas and biscuits.

Stéphane Grappelli himself is moving in six directions at once—combing his hair, rearranging the chairs, looking at his mail. He is dressed in a plaid shirt, casual. Come to think of it, Grappelli is always dressed casually, whether on- or off-stage. Yet, there is something elegant about him which is quite evident in a moment. He speaks and walks like he plays—with a flowing, legato grace.

"I'm tired right now," he says. "I'm not tired physically, I'm tired morally because, for instance, I always receive my mail too late and not enough of it. I calculated that it takes ten days to receive something from France or from England, and by the time I get it, it's too late. It can take nearly a

## *Part I:* HOT CLUB ORIGINS

month to correspond. It makes me tired, all that."

One would think that the constant travel involved in touring would make him tired: that evening his quartet is going by car to Danbury, Connecticut for a concert, the next day heading to Canada and back to New York before flying to Europe for a string of concerts in Paris and London. No, it's that the mail is late, the phones keep ringing, and there is not enough time to sightsee.

"I've been everywhere, but always so fast. I'm not often in New York and it's a pity, because I love New York. New York is a place like London or Paris where there is a bit of everybody—all kinds of people. And everytime I go to Washington I enjoy it so much because there are so many museums there and I'm very keen about that. At my age, it's the only thing which really interests me. Apart from my music, of course.

"I love to travel. You know, I've been 50 times over the Grand Canyon. I'd love to go there by car and see what is it. Because in a plane you can't see nothing. I intend to use my tourist visa to come back in the spring. It's such a vast country."

Stephane Grappelli's thirst for constant movement and change is insatiable: that he wants to travel to the Grand Canyon by car is remarkable in a musician who spends the better part of the year traveling. That he is experimenting with an electric violin in his 60th year of playing the instrument is also unusual.

Momentarily, the phone stops ringing and the constant swirl that is Stephane Grappelli settles into a chair and begins to talk about his long, astonishing career, beginning shortly after his birth in Paris on January 26, 1908.

"My father was a teacher of philosophy. I still don't know what that means. He was quite a surprising man; I can't



Charles Behrler

"Well, I was very young. By the time I was 14 I was a bit better at the violin and I was playing in tune. My father was a teacher and—you know, a teacher will always be a teacher—he said, 'If you want to play some music, why won't you learn to read the music?' So I learned to read music, and one day I was approached by a neighbor who knew about me. He played violin in the small cinema and he was unable to play. He said, 'Listen, it's not difficult what you have to do. We play some waltzes, we play other little music. Could you do it, just for one night?' So I went there.

"I found a pianist who was very good. As a matter of fact, he was quite an original person himself. He thought he played better than Chopin. Well, I don't want to contradict him, you see, but, in fact, for me at my young age, he impressed me a lot. He had a very good cello, a very lovely violinist and I went there a bit nervous. When they saw me arrive in my short pants, they asked what I'm going to do there. Naturally, I did the best I could. Another time that old man couldn't go there, he sent me, and then they kept me there.

"I was at the cinema for nearly two years—every day, a six hour day. Then I learned to play the violin. I must say, without modesty, I was getting a bit better, because I'd read the music and we were playing some very good music—some Schumann, Mozart, even better—but it all depended on what the film was. The program would last a week, and after three or four days we could play an easy piece by memory.

"Next door to that picture was a little shop with some earphones. And for a little coin you could listen to some music. Of course, in France the accordion is king, but it was usually a new piece of music. I heard *Lady Be Good* for the first time there. Sung in French, which is *diabolique*, but never mind. That tune absolutely hypnotized me."

The telephone rings and Grappelli looks to the sky and sighs. His eyes are blue and shiny and are framed by crow's feet which embellish his sly smile. He speaks fast and in full sentences, but his accent is thick and rich as *creme de marron*. His most commanding facial feature is a square, Gallic nose perfectly placed between two dimpled cheeks. His wispy gray hair seems to cover bits of his head in every direction. He speaks on the phone in rapid French, occasionally looking up with an apologetic shrug. Returning to our discussion, he is reminded of the French version of *Lady Be Good*.

"Ahh, that was so terrible. But, in any case, that didn't affect me, the music affected me. And that was the first place I heard *Tea For Two*. And that sequence of chords was the first time I heard somebody playing the piano with sevenths, minor sevenths and all that. I used to play with some people who did *bom, bom, bom, bom*, like that. But the first time I heard that change of chords, even at that time I was amazed. The first band I heard was when I was about 15. It was Mitchell's Jazz Kings. They were some black artists playing that music and I remember, the first tune I heard was *Stumbling*. And last year I did an album with Martial Solal and I played *Stumbling, Formidable!*"

Grappelli left the cinema when he was 17 to play in dance

**A**s I had no teacher, I had no direction . . . and I tried to copy people playing in the streets. If you want to hear some music, you must go where the musicians are playing—and some were very near, playing in the courtyard, waiting for little coins to drop.

really describe him. He was everything to me, because my mother died when I was three years old. My father had to leave me because he was obliged to go to the war from 1914-'18, and, you know, it was a very difficult time. I knew some places that you can read about in Charles Dickens' stories, I knew that life a little bit. But, fortunately, my father returned safely from the war. And he gave me a violin when I was 12. Not to make a profession of that, because I never had any teacher, but just to amuse myself—or maybe him—I don't know.

"He loved music intensely, you see. Because of him I heard philharmonic orchestras in Paris every Sunday when I was very young. That impressed me, of course, because I always like music. But as I had no teacher I had no direction to take, and I tried to copy the people that were playing in the streets. Because in those days, there was no radio, nothing. Only a few records—some operas and things. This was 1920. If you want to hear some music, you must go to where the musicians are playing. And some were very near us, they were playing in the courtyard waiting for some little coins to drop. Some would play in the courtyard, some played in the streets.

**D**jango Reinhardt was a gypsy; Stephane Grappelli was more formal. Django was illiterate; Stephane was well-read. Django had little mind for money; Stephane is infamously thrifty. Musically they were well-matched: a fluid, elegant violinist and a mercurial guitar genius with a crippled hand.



Juliette Lasserre

bands. He had a hand-crank phonograph and had begun buying the newest records coming out of the States, records by Bix Beiderbecke, Louis Armstrong and Joe Venuti. He first fell in love with Beiderbecke's talents as a pianist on a record called *For No Reason At All*. And he started playing piano himself, because there was little work for a modern violinist.

"I was absolutely amazed by Joe Venuti's ability and his beautiful sonority. But I was most inspired by Louis Armstrong. I was inspired by those people who played modern and not so much melodic. I had met the violinist Michel Warlop in Paris. He was a soloist with an orchestra. He wanted to play jazz, but I must say, he couldn't. He loved that so much, but he had so much technique. He was a great classical violinist, but I don't think he understood the meaning of jazz. Louis Armstrong with two notes could make you cry. Jazz music is that. Technique has not that much to do with it, in my opinion. But Michel Warlop was the first violinist in Paris. We were sharing a small flat in Paris when I was 19 or 20, and I was not playing the violin then. Warlop was making a living with his classical concerts, but me, I was not making a living at all. Only with the piano was I making a living, so for three or four years I gave up the violin.

"We had been engaged together with Gregor and his Gregorians, a 17-piece dance band that was quite well known in Paris. I was the pianist. We were in Nice for five months. One day we were out with Gregor in a club and he said to me, 'Hey, by the way, I heard you could play some music on the violin. Can you do that?' And there was an orchestra there and we were drinking a bit of something and he said, 'Why don't you take his violin and do something?' I said, 'I'm sorry,' but he obliged me and I was a little bit not myself. And I started to play *Dinah* very gauche, because when you go for three years without playing the violin you can't use a trick. The piano you can stay on top of without playing, but the violin is an awful difficult instrument. Then I started to play and, you know, to play an instrument is like swimming, you never really forget. Gregor said to me, 'I would like you to do something on the violin.' We had no microphone, nothing, and he worried me so much about it. Then Warlop gave me one of the violins he got from the Conservatoire when he got first prize. So I got back to the violin and, finally, Gregor decided I would leave the piano and I remained on the violin.

"One year later I had left Gregor; musicians are like that, we like to move somewhere else. I was in a club in

Montparnasse called La Croix du Sud where there were a lot of artists and I was playing saxophone there."

Grappelli's accent is giving me no trouble, but I could swear he said he was playing saxophone in a club.

"Yes, I was playing alto sax. It was a very successful club and I was playing with the chef d'orchestre there, Alain Romans. He still plays piano in Paris, at the Hilton Hotel. He engaged me as a saxophonist and to play the violin for the tango. Django Reinhardt, who was about 20, knew I was playing jazz with the violin; he came to see me and we met there. Two years later we were engaged (Romans and myself) by a bassist called Louis Vola to play in the Claridge Hotel in Paris, and I found Django there. Then I was playing the violin."

Recently, Grappelli has sometimes been reluctant to discuss Reinhardt, preferring to concentrate on his own career. Yet on this chilly, bright day in New York, he openly discussed the partnership which affected the rest of his musical life.

"I met Django when he was playing banjo-guitar, which he played because there was no microphone and he had to be heard. But when we arrived in that hotel—that was 1933 or '32—he was playing the guitar for some reason. And I was playing the violin in that band with Vola. We were playing between five and seven p.m. for tea dancing; people used to go dancing in those days. And there was another orchestra to play the tango, so every 20 minutes we changed. And one day . . . during our pause, the orchestra we were playing with used to disappear behind the curtain where there was a big banquet room . . . Django used to disappear (he was a lazy man, a quiet guy), he used to disappear because there was a nice armchair there where he could sit down with his guitar.

"One day I broke a string and I went behind the curtain with the new string, to put it on, and I tuned up and we started to play together. And we amused ourselves, like Joe Venuti used to do with Eddie Lang. Every day we'd meet when we had a pause, and go together and play. One day his brother came along, Joseph, who was doing something nearby, and he joined us. So Django did a solo and Joseph played rhythm guitar and that's how the Quintet formed. Maybe if I didn't break that string it would never have happened."

By all accounts, there could not have been a more diverse pair than Messrs. Reinhardt and Grappelli. Django was a gypsy, quite literally. He lived in a caravan and liked to make his own time and his own decisions. Grappelli was more formal and more aware of common courtesies. Django was

basically illiterate; Stephane was well-read. Django had little mind for money; Stephane is infamously thrifty. Musically, they were well matched: Stephane Grappelli, the fluid, elegant violinist and Django Reinhardt, the mercurial, guitar genius with the crippled hand. By the time Stephane met Django, Django had fully developed the unique fretting style caused by an accident in 1928.

"He was in bed and he was smoking," says Grappelli about the accident. "He was already about 18, and his young wife was making flowers out of celluloid. Django threw the cigarette in the basket of celluloid and it got inflamed and the flames burst all over the place. He was burned all over his side, his left side burned and his hand. They rushed him to a hospital where he remained for more than one year. One day, the surgeon decided to amputate his hand. He was so terrified that five or six cousins arrived and took him out of the hospital. They pushed the nurse and disappeared. And with God and with some herbs from the old gypsy women, he managed to save his hand. But those two end fingers were irreparably lost.

"Everybody said, 'How can you play the guitar with two fingers?' Well, Django Reinhardt was very strong and both his hands were very big, he had long fingers. He managed to cover all the guitar with two fingers, he had such a big hand and was so strong. He used to curve the guitar; he was obliged to change his guitar, because the guitar was not flat anymore, he was so strong. So he managed to do the melodic line with two fingers and that's why he got that *incroyable* sound which you can't have when you play with four fingers. All his melodic lines were played with those two fingers. But he was so clever, he managed to get the small finger on the E and the next one on the B—that's how he managed that slide. He used those bad fingers. He couldn't do chords with just two fingers.

"Sometimes he was in a bad state. We were in Italy, we had been there for five months in a club in Rome, and we were obliged to stop because his hand was infected as was under his arm. He was obliged to have something done, and we were obliged to leave. We had a lot of accidents like that."

I ask Stephane if Django was as difficult to work with as is often reported. He shakes his head sadly.

"I must say, just because you ask me, he was uneasy. He was not a friend of mine. He told me things which he would never say to his wife, and he didn't treat me like a friend. He treated me more as if I was his cousin or his brother. I was two years older than him, and in that gypsy world when you are older you are more important, because they respect your age. If I was younger than him, it would be different. You know, he was confident with me, because he told me about his private life. He told me, sometimes, what he thought and what he felt. And I said, 'Why do you tell me all that?' He said, 'Oh, you are instructed, you read the newspaper.' He couldn't read, he couldn't sign his name. He took a taxi everywhere he went because he couldn't read the station in the metro. But he was very intelligent, terribly intelligent, and with a gypsy nose, if you see what I mean. He was a very good billiard player and an *incroyable* fisherman."

Soon after Django and Stephane began playing together, French jazz critic and producer Hugues Panassié tried to contract a record date for their unnamed group.

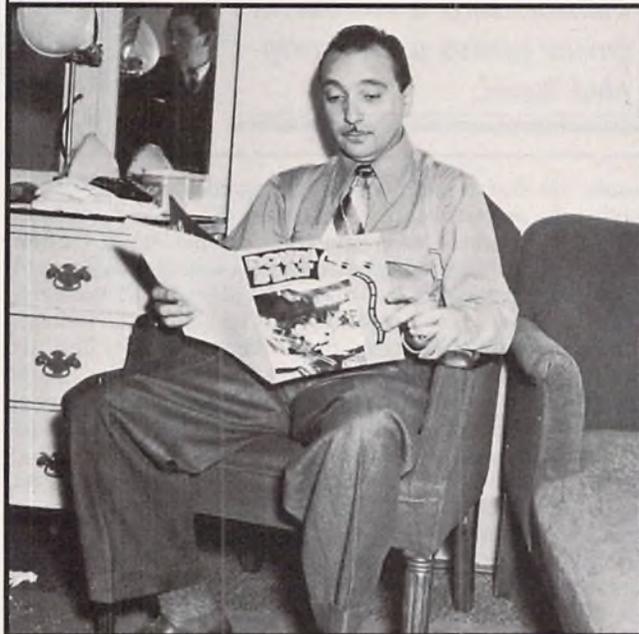
"Nobody wanted us," says Grappelli, "except a young man who said he was going to risk his reputation. In any case, we did the record for nothing; I don't see what he risked. At this time we were four and Django said to me, 'When I play, I've got only Joseph, my brother, and Vola. But when you play, you've got my brother, Vola and me. So I would like to have another guitarist.' I think he had that idea for a long time: he wanted to put his cousin in there because that cousin used to amuse him."

So Django's cousin Camembert (nicknamed for his fondness for the soft cheese of that name) joined. The first recording session of the Quintet of the Hot Club of France (so

## SELECTED STEPHANE GRAPPELLI DISCOGRAPHY (Part I)

with Django Reinhardt

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|---|--|
| DJANGOLOGIE (Vols. 1-20)—Pathe 16001-16020                    | DJANGO REINHARDT (Vol. 2)—Everest 230 E                            |
| THE IMMORTAL—Reprise 6075                                     | DJANGO REINHARDT (Vol. 3)—Everest 255 E                            |
| FIRST RECORDINGS OF QUINTET—Prestige 7614                     | QUINTET OF THE HOT CLUB OF FRANCE—Angel 36985 E                    |
| JAZZ HOT—Emarcy 26004   | SWING IT LIGHTLY—Columbia KC 31479                                 |
| BEST OF—Capitol TBO 10226                                     | 35-39—GNP Crescendo 9019   |
| AND THE AMERICAN JAZZ GIANTS—Prestige 7633                    | THE VERSATILE GIANT—Inner City 7004                                |
| PARISIAN SWING—GNP Crescendo 9002                             | DJANGO (Vol. 1): QUINTET OF THE HOT CLUB OF FRANCE—Inner City 1104 |
| WITH THE QUINTET OF THE HOT CLUB OF FRANCE—GNP Crescendo 9001 | DJANGO (Vol. 3): COMPOSITIONS—Inner City 1106                      |
| DJANGOLOGY—RCA 2319   |  |
| DJANGO REINHARDT (Vol. 1)—Everest 212 E                       |  |

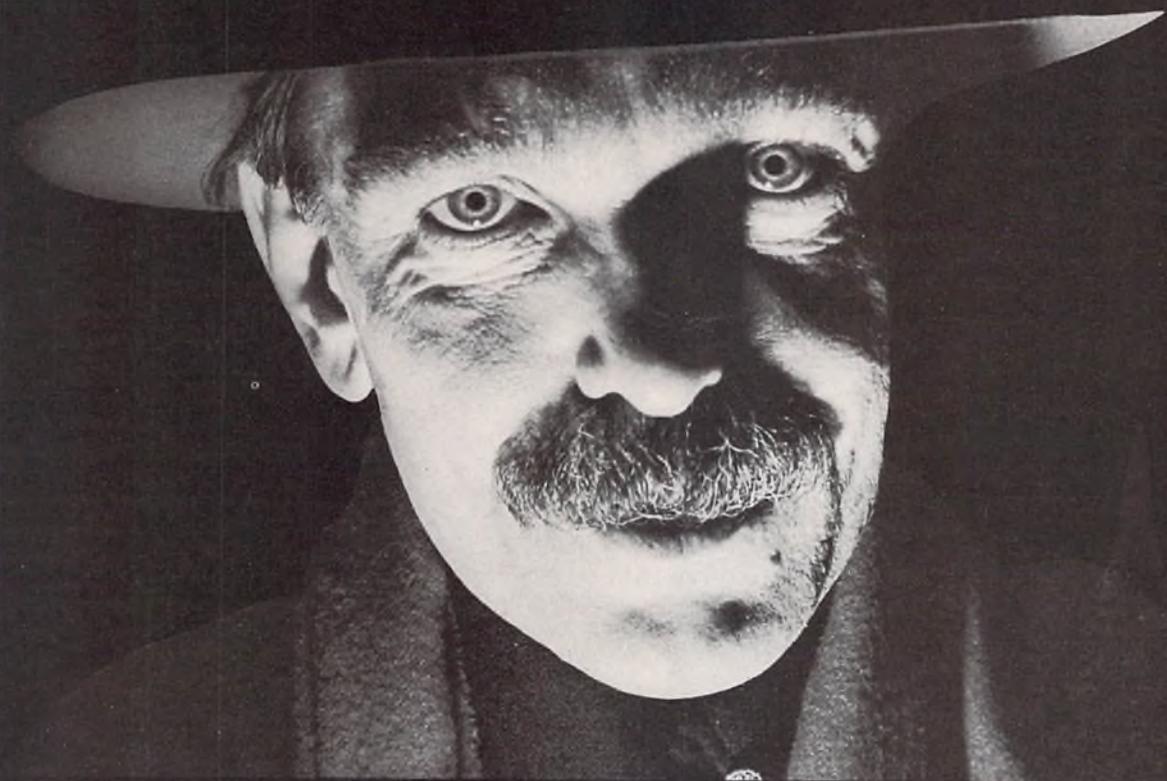


named in tribute to Panassié, who formed an organization called the Hot Club of France some years earlier) got off to quite an inauspicious start. There seems to still be a trace of annoyance in Stephane Grappelli's voice as he thinks back to January of 1934.

"One of the specialities of Django was, he'd disappear. Our first recording was scheduled from nine to 12 in the morning—because the afternoon was reserved for a star, so the beginner must get up. And for Django to get up at seven o'clock in the morning to be there at nine was asking too much. We arrived at nine o'clock and Django was not there. About ten, Charles Delaunay [French jazz critic and discographer] ran to the caravan in his car, picked Django up and got him there at half past ten. We had only one hour and 30 minutes to do *Dinah*, *I Saw Stars*, *Tiger Rag* and *Sweet Sue*. That was all.

"And, of course, there was a little revolution when those records went out, because we played jazz music with instruments that were absolutely contrary to the actual jazz at the time, which was all trumpets, saxophones and all that. We played jazz music like chamber music. And, of course, when the success came, everybody wanted to do a recording with us. We were approached by Brunswick, Odeon, Master's Voice—we did a lot. After the first record, we were doing them like a machine. Do you know that for that first record we did the arrangements on the spot, just improvised the arrangements? And, you know, we used to do what they call today free jazz, because Django and I would improvise

# ★ CAPTAIN ★



# BEEFHEART

By Peter Keepnews

**M**Y MUSIC IS TERRIBLY PERSONAL," Don Van Vliet says, his eyes fixed intently on me. "I think any artist is that way. I think there's a lot of people out there that are kidding about art. I mean, literally *kidding*."

Van Vliet speaks in a soft, slow Southern California drawl that sounds nothing at all like the raw, rasping bellow he usually affects when he's singing under the name Captain Beefheart. But his intensity is the same, and he is every bit as captivating, clever, charming and sometimes exasperatingly difficult to follow in conversation as he is in performance or on record.

One of the most stunningly, shatteringly original figures in rock music—if, indeed, he can even be fit into that category—Van Vliet/Beefheart is also one of the most misunderstood.

Many celebrated figures in so-called new wave have cited Beefheart's music (and especially his epic 1969 double album *Trout Mask Replica*) as an influence, but he himself is not so sure that's a compliment. Finding new wave "the same old tune," he's bothered by the fact that its practitioners stick to what he calls "the mama heart-beat"—the steady, unvarying rhythmic pulse that he's been working subtle variations on, snaking his way around, syncopating sinuously or avoid-

# I THINK AN ARTIST IS ONE WHO KIDS HIMSELF THE MOST GRACEFULLY.

ing altogether for 15 years.

"I think that beat is related to fascism, I really do. It's so fixative, so hypnotic. And they make the stuff so synthesized—to where it's dangerous to the heart, I mean, faster-than-the-heart disco—some of that disco is *dangerous!* It doesn't mean it won't sell! But then again, sugar sells—which I think is extremely dangerous!"

Many listeners associate Beefheart with Frank Zappa, understandably enough, since he has known Zappa for most of his 40 years (Beefheart has had almost no formal education, but when he briefly attended high school in Lancaster, CA, Zappa was a classmate). They have worked together; Zappa's musician-alumni have worked with Beefheart, and Beefheart's awesome *Trout Mask Replica* was released by Zappa's Warner Bros.-distributed Straight label.

Yet the assumption that Beefheart is some kind of Zappa



MARC POKEMPIER

spinoff or discovery is wrong. In fact, Beefheart harbors considerable resentment for his old schoolmate, maintaining that many of the ideas for which Zappa first became known were stolen from a stream-of-consciousness home tape he and Zappa made in the early '60s. Suggesting that Zappa "made it possible" for him to record *Trout Mask*, Beefheart responds:

"It was also me who made it possible for Frank to record 'Suzy Creamcheese, what's got into you?' I said that. I said a lot of those things. My mother was in the room when I did it. We taped 11 and a half hours—an artistic explosion! I wrote *Trout Mask* in eight and a half hours, so you can imagine how much I did at that time. And he was taping me . . . I never thought that he was gonna *play me!*"

No matter who influenced whom, there are similarities between Beefheart and Zappa, both in their outrageous senses of humor and in the bizarre twists and turns of their music. But the differences between them are far more important; taken in its entirety, Beefheart's music doesn't sound any more like Zappa's than it does like anybody else's.

That's the startling (and problematical) thing about Beefheart's music—it *really doesn't sound like anybody else's*. Beefheart himself, with an almost childlike mixture of pride and perversity, refuses even to admit that it has any influences. "My baby won't let me have a baby," is the way he puts it. "The artist in me won't let me do that [take from other sources]. Because I feel that if I turn myself inside out, that's what I want seen. I don't want somebody else hanging from my left ventricle or something."

Egotistical hyperbole? No artist is totally without influences—but Beefheart's art, like that of Pablo Picasso or Thelonious Monk, has absorbed, altered and mixed its influences so that it comes out as something unprecedented, a universe unto itself, a heady musical mixture.

But it is not, as so many seem to think, simply weirdness for weirdness' sake, or a celebration of chaos. A close inspection reveals that there is always a method, however intuitive, to the apparent madness, and that dissonance and cacophony, while certainly important colors in the Beefheart musical palette, are far from being the whole picture.

Even some of his most passionate admirers seem to have missed the point. *Doc At The Radar Station*, Beefheart's latest album (arguably the best of the 11 he has recorded, and the impetus behind his recent U.S. tour), has received almost universally enthusiastic reviews. But a *Trouser Press* reviewer, in the midst of a rave, claimed that "it's a Beefheart trademark that his music sounds like nobody's playing in time or in tune with each other"—a sad misreading of the way this music, which is replete with moments of beautiful unison playing and exquisitely-wrought counterpoint, really works.

Still, it's not hard to see why the Captain's music has eluded so many people (he's never had a hit album, and of his early work, only *Trout Mask* is still in print). Like much of the post-Ornette Coleman free jazz to which it has sometimes been compared—and to which certain elements, especially the unfettered way Beefheart plays soprano saxophone, bear a clear similarity—it may sound abrasive and disjointed at first, but those who make an effort to listen closely find a bracing blend of power and playfulness, very unpredictable but marked by a sense of adventure (and fun) that makes repeated hearings increasingly rewarding. The problem is that many people are unwilling to go beyond that somewhat scary surface.

Beefheart understands this, and why the radio stations don't want to play his records and why he and the record companies have never gotten along. He remains convinced that it doesn't have to be that way:

"I just think my music doesn't fit on the conveyor belt. But I think if they worked a little harder they'd be real surprised, because what I get is people really, really staying with me . . . for years, 15 years. I think *Doc* could be a hit, if exposed enough. Three times they hear my record, they'll buy it. I know that."

There is no way to do justice to Don Van Vliet's music in

words. A new listener should heed these lyrics from *Dirty Blue Gene* (off *Doc*): "If you got ears, you gotta listen!" Still, a few pointers might help.

First, despite all its seeming randomness, the music is meticulously plotted down to the last bent note and twisted meter. Beefheart's Magic Band (currently Jeff Tepper and Richard "Brave Midnight Hat Size" Snyder on guitars, Eric Feldman on keyboards and bass and Robert Williams on drums) is allowed no freedom to improvise: as Beefheart points out, they must be content with that arrangement, because there isn't much money in it, and "as good as they are, I don't think they'd do it unless they wanted to."

Only Beefheart himself, on soprano and harmonica and with his astounding singing/declaiming/screaming voice that spans seven and a half octaves, occasionally deviates from the (unwritten) score, he basically confines his improvisation to the composing process. Most of his songs are conceived quite spontaneously and with little conscious thought, as are the amazing drawings and paintings that occupy as much of his time as his music. After he's whistled or played tunes (usually on the piano) into a tape recorder, he teaches every member of the band exactly how to play his part, apparently through a blend of singing, playing, gestures and cajolery.

Keep this in mind about the music: while it's certainly unusual, it's not really that intimidatingly far-out. His songs do have hooks—you just have to dig a little to find them. Much of what he plays is quite firmly rooted in the blues; hear it in the jangling, whining slide guitars, in his fervid harmonica playing, and in his singing—it's been written often, but bears repeating—at times he sounds almost exactly like Howlin' Wolf. Not like a white guy imitating Wolf, like Wolf himself.

There is always a lot going on in a Beefheart song, but if you can isolate the individual components in your mind, and then put them back together, it begins to make more musical sense. (This is more apparent than ever on *Doc*; the first album Beefheart has produced by himself, it has a clarity to its sound that puts all the elements in sharp focus.)

Then there are the words. Beefheart loves puns and all wordplay. Some of his lyrics are among the funniest in modern music, but it would be a mistake to think of him as only a humorist. He is also an inspired, impassioned, and totally original wordsmith, and much that he writes—unlike most of the pretentious rock "poetry" that surfaced in the wake of Bob Dylan and the Beatles—really is poetry.

Literal meaning is only one ingredient that he uses in putting his lyrics together—the sounds and cadences of the words, the associations they trigger, his aforementioned playfulness, and a plethora of striking, dreamlike images of nature are among the others—but almost never are his lyrics without meaning. When he dabbles in nonsense (*Woe-Is-Uh-Me-Bop*, *Abba Zabba*), it's inspired nonsense with an

underpinning of sense, on the order of Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear.

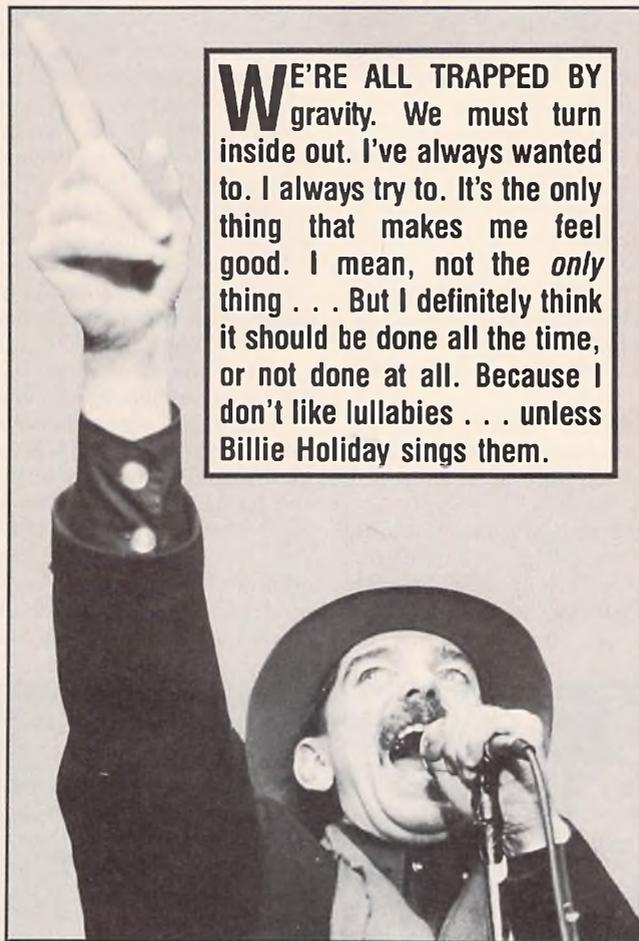
Even his love songs (*Her Eyes Are A Blue Million Miles*) have verbal quirks; he's also written straightforward indictments of war (*Veterans Day Poppy*, *Dachau Blues*) and, repeatedly, of humanity's disregard for the environment and inflated opinion of its place in the natural order (in *Flash Gordon's Ape* he mocks, "It makes me laugh to hear you say how far you come/When you barely know how to use your thumb"). Sometimes there is an alarming streak of misanthropy—in *Wild Llife*, *Grow Fins* and *Clear Spot* he sings of retreating from the human species entirely—but more often his message is one of affirmation; the last words he sings on his current album (concluding *Making Love To A Vampire With A Monkey On My Knee*) are "Death be damned—life."

One song that offers the uninitiated listener a good introduction is *Tropical Hot Dog Night* from his 1978 "comeback" album, *Shiny Beast (Bat Chain Puller)*. Musically, it's among Beefheart's more accessible songs, with its own kind of edge. The arrangement, (trombone and marimba prominently featured against a cymbal-heavy backbeat) suggests a loopy mariachi band. The lyrics, in addition to being festooned with images that are askew but evocative (the night is "like two flamingos in a fruit fight"—a wonderful way to describe a riot of colors), contain two lines which clearly state Beefheart's open-ended artistic philosophy and world view: "The truth has no patterns" and "Everything's wrong at the same time it's right."

Most importantly, they contain a succinct explanation of the impulses behind Beefheart's music: "I'm playin' this music/So the young girls will come out/To meet the monster tonight." The "monster" is the very same "shiny beast of thought" that gives this album its title, and that shows up again in *Dirty Blue Gene*: the creative energy that we all carry inside, which has been suppressed, and which Beefheart (who believes in "turning myself inside out") has set free in himself and wants to set free in his listeners. He becomes even more explicit at the end of the song: his voice dips low to say he wants us not only to see but "also to be the monster tonight." If you got ears, you gotta listen.

Don Van Vliet's life story, as you might imagine, is unusual. Born in Glendale, CA, in 1941, he was a precocious child. As he recalls, he refused from the time he could talk to call his parents by anything but their first names, and at five he decided he'd rather sculpt than go to school (except for that brief stab at high school he never did attend). For many years he studied sculpture with a Portuguese sculptor named Augustonio Rodriguez, and he briefly appeared on a local TV show, sculpting animals at the Griffith Park Zoo while Rodriguez looked on and commented.

At 13, he was offered a scholarship by a local dairy to



**WE'RE ALL TRAPPED BY gravity. We must turn inside out. I've always wanted to. I always try to. It's the only thing that makes me feel good. I mean, not the *only* thing . . . But I definitely think it should be done all the time, or not done at all. Because I don't like lullabies . . . unless Billie Holiday sings them.**

MARC PIKENPNER

study art in Europe, but his parents, who he says thought that all artists were "queer," refused to let him go and moved to the remote Mojave Desert to keep him out of harm's way. (This is the way Beefheart tells it; as much con man as magician, he has largely fostered his own mythology. Both his music and his presence are sufficiently remarkable that I, for one, am willing to believe just about anything he tells me.) With characteristic perversity, Don took a liking to his barren surroundings; he lives today in a trailer in that same desert, with his wife Jan.

His adolescent run-in with Frank Zappa was destined to alter both their lives, but that couldn't have been obvious at the time, because Don didn't become professionally active in music until the mid-'60s. In 1966, not long after he had christened himself Captain Beefheart (because he had "a beef in my heart" about the way the world was going), he assembled the original Magic Band—which included Ry Cooder on guitar—and cut a version of Bo Diddley's *Diddy Wah Diddy* for A&M that became a minor local hit.

That success has never, to this day, been equalled. A&M rejected his album because the songs were "too negative." Later released by Buddah as *Safe As Milk*, that music is positively cheerful to today's ears, and also quite tame compared to what followed. But it didn't sell, and neither did the 1968 album *Strictly Personal*, which showed Beefheart taking more musical chances but was marred by an ill-advised "psychedelic" mixing job done, he says, without his knowledge or consent.

In the trippy days of late '60s rock, Beefheart began acquiring a cult. Some were reached by his musical message; others saw him as the latest manifestation of fashionable freakiness. But nobody could have been fully prepared for *Trout Mask Replica*.

"That's a funny album," Beefheart said in reflective understatement. When I said I found parts of it hard to listen to, his eyes lit up. "Oh, yeah! Me, too! I never listen to it! I had to learn a lot of that stuff for this tour."

*Trout Mask* is a sprawling, frightening, at times hilarious, at times heartbreaking, at times impossibly self-indulgent work. Beefheart's claim that he wrote the four-sided magnum opus in eight and a half hours is believable—it sounds that wild and raw, the ravings of a man between genius and

I t's hard to play my music. I'm a sculptor. I'm doing sound sculptures.

insanity, putting it all on tape.

Once he wrote it, he had to teach it to his band. *Trout Mask* is where Beefheart's music first breaks loose from conventional confines of rhythm, harmony and melody, and it is the first album on which he taught all the musicians how to play everything. The new Magic Band members had even been given bizarre new names by their leader: Zoot Horn Rollo, Rockette Morton, Antennae Jimmy Semens, The Mascara Snake, and—although he is not credited on the album—Drumbo, also known as John French, who has played with Beefheart off and on from the start.

Originally, Beefheart claimed that he had taught these musicians from scratch; now, he says that they knew how to play their instruments, but had told him that they didn't.

Well, nobody but Beefheart could have taught them to play like that; the proof is his current Magic Band, which captures the same timbres and textures as the old band did. That isn't the sound of a band; it's the thoroughly distinctive sound of one man's musical vision, painstakingly transmitted by well-rehearsed musicians.

*Trout Mask*, which also was Beefheart's recorded debut on saxophone (he claims, with a straight face, that he took up the instrument because at the time he smoked long pipes, and he didn't want to take his pipe collection on the road "so I bought an alto"), is flawed, and marred in part by Zappa's obtrusive production, but it served notice that an original had arrived. The following year, Beefheart co-produced *Lick My Decals Off, Baby*, bringing the diverse elements of *Trout Mask* under tighter control and into

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DEBORAH FEINGOLD

*Drawn and wan, Arnett Cobb hobbles to the stage on crutches—but his hearty blowing sparks shouts of "Go!" and "Work!"*

# Arnett Cobb

## SOUL-WRENCHING SAX

By  
**Larry Birnbaum**

I'm from blues country, down in Texas, and the blues has a significance there from years ago, so naturally they brand you with 'wailin' the blues.'" To be sure, Arnett Cleophus Cobb can bawl the lustiest and most muscular tenor saxophone this side of a gutbucket, but he can also caress a ballad with a breathy intimacy unrivaled since the passing of the great Ben Webster.

In Chicago Arnett enraptured a Jazz Showcase audience with a spellbinding set of hot jump tunes and mellow chestnuts. Drawn and wan, he hobbled to the stage on crutches, but his hearty blowing soon sparked shouts of "Go!" and "Work!" His skill and wit revitalized hackneyed standards like *Bye Bye Blackbird* and *Sweet Georgia Brown* with wry interpolations and unexpected thrusts. Always building, always driving, he ranged from deep pathos to squealing exultation in a cathartic roller coaster of deep-dyed swing.

Cobb's enormous, husky tone, described by critic Larry Kart as "perhaps the darkest, most imposingly rich . . . of them all," is a medium of incredible plasticity, a veritable thesaurus of timbre, with a shade to color every subtle nuance of emotion. "Expression, that's what it is," says Arnett. "Most of the time I'm expressing my feelings, almost trying to talk it out



through the horn. I try to express what I actually feel at the time—if I'm feeling bad. I want you to know that, too."

Nearly forgotten after a crippling automobile accident that confined him

to his hometown of Houston for more than a decade, Arnett began his comeback in 1973 with a New York appearance and the first of several European sojourns. Since then he has toured the

U.S. extensively, performed at three consecutive Newport fests, and has recorded a string of French and American LP's, including the Grammy-nominated *Live At Sandy's* (on Muse).

The sexagenarian Cobb is frail and often bedridden, but his horn still brims with prowess and passion, pouring forth the seminal tenor legacy of the Southwest with the hard-earned facility of a half-century's experience. Drawing on an endless vocabulary of riffs, quotations, honks, burrs, screeches, bends, twists and turnabouts, he fashions masterfully emotive designs that surge with tension and release as they swell inexorably to climactic peaks. His dense, penetrating sonority and astonishingly fluid dynamic modulations can only be suggested on wax, but the vibrant urgency of the unique Cobb attack is more than evident even on his first 78 rpm discs with the Lionel Hampton band.

**B**orn in Houston in 1918, Arnett studied piano with his grandmother, then took up the violin. "They had a program where you got the violin free after 50 weeks of lessons at a dollar a week," he recalls, "so I did that every Saturday. Then I went into the high school band with it, the only fiddler in an 80 piece brass band. I couldn't hear myself and they couldn't hear me, so the instructor offered me a saxophone—he had one horn left, the C-melody sax. I fell heir to the tenor some six months later, when the tenor player in the stage band took ill and they sent for me to take his place. I was very happy to get out of class—I didn't care too much for Latin—so I stuck with it, and I've been on tenor ever since."

Houston in the '30s was throbbing to the locomotive tempos of Count Basie, and young Arnett would batten on the sounds of Lester Young and Herschel Evans when that band made its regular Gulf Coast stopovers. Evans, a chesty-toned Coleman Hawkins disciple, was the inspiration of Cobb's early idol, tenorist Joe Thomas of the Jimmy Lunceford band, whose aggressive, vocalized approach stressed momentum over harmonic facility. "I liked the way Joe Thomas would drive," Cobb reflects. "He was a driver, he didn't play a lot of notes."

At 15, Arnett joined the band of Frank Davis. "We travelled to Louisiana, where he was from, in the summer months when school was out," Cobb remembers, "but we were just reading stock arrangements. Then in '34 I went with Chester Boone, and stayed with him two years." Milton Larkins, a trumpeter in the Boone band, left in 1936 to front his own 16-piece territorial ensemble, recruiting such bluesy luminaries as Eddie "Mr.

Cleanhead" Vinson, Illinois Jacquet and "Wild Bill" Davis, as well as Cobb. Jacquet, then an alto player, was to precede Cobb as Lionel Hampton's lead tenor, and is generally credited with founding the "honking" school which evolved into postwar rhythm and blues. Four years Jacquet's senior, Cobb is often relegated to his fellow Houstonian's shadow, but as he points out, "Illinois started in a dance team with his brother; he wasn't playing the horn then, so I was out before he was."

Arnett remained with the Larkins band for six years, playing successful engagements in Harlem's Apollo theater and at Joe Louis' Rhumboogie club in Chicago. Never recorded—"If it had been," avers Cobb, "you'd have heard a darn good band"—Larkins' outfit leaned heavily on the popular material of Lunceford and Duke Ellington, "although we did do Cedric Haywood's arrangements, which had his own feeling." (Pianist Haywood, a high school classmate of Cobb's who also played with Chester Boone, was succeeded in the Larkins group by Wild Bill Davis and later by Milt Buckner in Lionel Hampton's band. Then Haywood toured with Jacquet, and eventually turned up with Cobb again in Houston.)

The death of Herschel Evans in 1939 brought Cobb an offer from Count Basie, which he reluctantly declined. "I was afraid of it—I didn't think I had enough experience to join that band. I admired them, but I knew myself." In the same year, Lionel Hampton made overtures, but the recently wedded tenorist once more demurred. By late 1942, Hampton had formed a whopingly successful permanent orchestra and Jacquet had gained sufficient notoriety on his newly acquired tenor to jump to the Cab Calloway band. When Hamp again crossed his path at the Rhumboogie in November, Arnett was ready at last and assumed the vacant chair.

Hampton's theme song was *Flying Home*, which he first recorded with the Benny Goodman sextet, then with a pickup group including tenorist Budd Johnson (another Texan), and again with Jacquet and the new big band. The latter version was a colossal smash, and Jacquet's relentlessly propulsive, supercharged solo is cited by pundits from Leonard Feather to Robert Palmer as the model for a whole generation of bawdy-toned, grandstanding hornmen.

Two years later, Hamp recorded a slickly re-arranged *Flying Home* #2 with Cobb as featured soloist (both versions are available on MCA's recent Hampton reissue, *Steppin' Out*). Recapitulating Jacquet's opening chorus, Cobb surpassed the "definitive" version with a coarse-grained, bellicose tone so large it seemed to burst at the

seams. Omitting Illinois' almost delicate asides and riffing, one-note ejaculations, Arnett substituted primal foghorn blasts and huge crescendo moans, concluding with a triumphant falsetto flourish. "Big Red," as the light-complected 240-pound Cobb had been dubbed, was re-christened "The Wild Man of the Tenor Sax."

Hampton was a supreme showman whose motto was "Swing above all else"; his on-stage antics created pandemonium as his band paraded around theater aisles in full cry. "Yeah, we did a lot of walkin'," muses Cobb. "It was just a matter of getting close to the people. You get close to them and they feel like they're a part of it." By the late '40s, Cobb and Jacquet had spawned a host of howling imitators who dispensed with intricate melodic constructions in favor of interminable choruses of deliriously overblown 12 bar blues. Prototypical r&b saxophonists like Paul "Hucklebuck" Williams and Big Jay McNeely vied to produce bizarre tonal effects while writhing on their backs or strutting down tavern countertops—Williams even hired a midget to march along beside him. Altoist "Cleanhead" Vinson sang *Cherry Red Blues* and was thereafter typed as a blues shouter. "At first he didn't want to sing the blues," contends Arnett, "but he did and he had a hit, so he had to stick with it. Now he's better known by his blues singing than he is by the saxophone, although he can play."

**I**n 1947, Cobb assembled his own small combo and recorded a series of singles, including such originals as *Big Red's Blues*, *Dutch Kitchen Bounce* and *When I Grow Too Old To Dream*. "I really hadn't intended to form a band. I just took this job for two weeks to make a little money to tide me over, because I had planned to take a six month vacation. But one thing led to another—the agencies got behind me when they heard about the band—so I kept going and they booked me. The studios were getting ready to go on the (second) recording ban, beginning in January of '48, and I did the last two dates, December 30 and 31, eight sides for Apollo records. I did about 22 sides for Apollo during the time I was with them."

Cobb's abortive vacation plans had been prompted by back pains, and after only seven months on the road, he was sidelined by a spinal operation. "It was Pott's Disease, which is a tubercular condition of the bone, and the doctor said it could only have come from a hard blow. Well, in 1946, during the Christmas holiday, I was on my way to play a show with Hamp at the Apollo. Eddie Barefield, a saxophone player on

# GO!

the staff with ABC studios, was on vacation and he was playing around, having fun, high and feeling good, and he tiptoed up behind me in the snow and hit me with his fist. It knocked the wind out of me. In 15 minutes I had to go on, and I was still gasping for breath during the opening number—that's how hard he hit me."

Arnett reorganized his group in 1950 and resumed touring, strolling the aisles and walking the bar once more, but, as captured on a 1952 Columbia session for Mitch Miller (reissued on Phoenix Jazz as Arnett Cobb And His Mob), his funky repertoire was leavened with modish Latin flavors and crooning torch songs. "I was trying to mix it up," he says. "Instead of getting one-sided, you just keep trying until you hit home some way."

**I**n the meantime, the big bands had faded on the heels of the bebop revolution, and a new "cool" movement regarded the honking extroverts with aloof disdain. Cobb swung hard and with considerable harmonic finesse, but denies ever having played bop. "I was playing Charlie Parker's kind of music in the '30s, because we were playing alike then, when he was with Jay McShann." (In a 1968 *down beat* yearbook feature on Cobb, Eddie Vinson attests that the bands of Larkins and McShann engaged in an after-hours "carving contest" in 1939, which Parker handily won.) Bebop and r&b may have shared common ancestry, but by the early '50s the battle lines were sharply drawn. Lionel Hampton signed up with Alan Freed's package shows, performing under a new musical banner that caused jazz traditionalists and boppers alike no end of consternation. "I've heard rock 'n' roll played the best and you've got to enjoy it," maintains Cobb, "but rock 'n' roll is just a matter of the rhythm they play—that hopped-up beat."

Critical opinion had hardened to the point that even blues-oriented Parker followers like Gene Ammons were contemptuously dismissed. "I remember the time Gene's old man [boogie woogie piano great Albert Ammons] brought him to the Regal theater in Chicago where I was playing with Lionel," notes Cobb. "His old man was wrapped up in him—Gene was his only child and all he lived for—and he pointed to me and said, 'I want you to get a tone like him.' Well, Gene sure followed his old man's advice, because he ended up with a bigger tone than mine—yeah, he surpassed me. Jug was



1947: Arnett leads Booty Wood and Dave Page down the Apollo theater aisle.

*Reminded he still resorts to guttural timbres, Cobb laughs—"At times . . . I get hostile."*

something else."

On April 23, 1956, while motoring through Connecticut with his wife and infant daughter, Cobb was permanently disabled in a freak highway mishap that shattered both his legs. "I was driving and I swallowed my saliva. It hit my windpipe and I gave a cough to kick it out, and that was it, I blacked out. My wife had just turned around to get the baby bottle, and I thought I was raising my hand to touch it so that she would know what was happening to me, but it happened so fast that evidently I never did reach her. The next thing I knew I had hit a tree in a filling station. Thank God I missed the pumps. But we came out of it alright, although I lost my wife in 1970 from the after-effects of that accident."

His bar-walking days were over, but his blowing was unimpaired, and Cobb was performing again only a year later. "I was living in Engelwood, New Jersey, and touring out of New York. I came back to work in June of '57, and I travelled coast to coast in '57 and '58, but after that last trip I had to give it up. I came back to New York in the winter and had to kick my way through the snow on crutches, and I said to myself, 'This is it.' I told my wife that as much as I hated to quit, I just couldn't take it anymore. So I disbanded my group in February of '59, at Pep's ballroom in Philadelphia, and in June I moved back down to Houston.

"In January of 1960, a guy came to see me about managing a club; it was his club, the Club Ebony, but my wife and I managed it. The first attraction he had was Louis Jordan, and I put my own seven-piece band in there and rehearsed them with the same book I had when I was on the road. I also had a 16-piece workshop band on Monday nights—we played mostly Cedric Hay-

wood's arrangements—and it went well for a while, until a new owner came in and we had to get out."

Although he recorded six albums for Prestige in the late '50s, Cobb remained mostly in obscurity during the next decade. "A lot of people didn't know where I was. (Congresswoman) Barbara Jordan and I both went to Phylliss Wheatley high school, and when she was running for office, I was on the stage with her at the school. *Ebony* magazine had followed her and they recognized me; they said, 'People have been asking about you, they didn't know if you were dead or alive.' The next thing I knew, the guy came over and they did an article called 'Where Is Arnett Cobb?'"

**A**rnett continued to play around Houston, health permitting, at venues like the Club la Veek and the Club Hannibal, where, in 1968, *down beat* correspondent Gus Matzorkis stumbled in to find Cobb holding forth with "Cleanhead" Vinson, Cedric Haywood and former Maynard Ferguson altoist Jimmy Ford. "Yes, I remember that," Cobb declares after a pause. "I had a gal singing with me by the name of Joy Ann Tobin, and Gus was impressed with her, too. He said he just came in because he heard the music and he thought he'd look in and have a drink, and he ended up staying the rest of the night." Matzorkis' risibly impressionistic first-person account reflected his amazement at the serendipitous encounter with a musician who "had long since dropped out of sight and mind of the jazz audience."

Cobb's oblivion was not quite total. In France, Lionel Hampton retained a strong following and expatriate keyboardist Milt Buckner had become a

celebrity in his own right. Jean-Marie Monestier of Black and Blue records had contacted Arnett, and after several unsuccessful attempts, finally persuaded him to come to Europe in July of 1973. "I didn't tell them why I had turned it down, I just told them I was busy," confesses Cobb, "but the real reason was my physical condition—I was thinking of how I was going to manage over there. So my mother told me to write them a letter and lay my cards on the table, which I did, and they wrote back and said they already knew, that Milt Buckner had told them six or seven years before. They told me not to worry, that they'd take care of me, so I accepted and it went over real well. They did take care of me, too.

"On that first trip," he continues, "Milt Buckner was on the show—he was the king over there—along with Gatemouth Brown, Helen Humes, Jay McShann and his group, Candy Johnson, and a French bass player, Roland Lobligeois, who played with most of the groups that came out of New York. We toured France, Spain, Germany, Holland, Denmark and Belgium—we played Antwerp quite a few times." Cobb has since returned to Europe three times, twice with Hampton, and plans to go again this summer. "Each time I go back it gets better," he affirms.

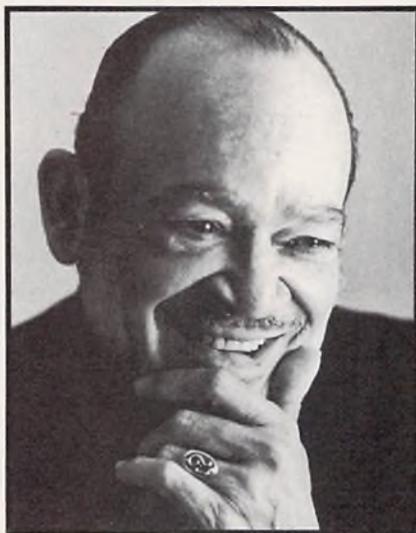
**O**n the eve of his maiden voyage to the Continent, Arnett stopped off in New York for the first time in 14 years to play a midnight show with Illinois Jacquet and his brother (trumpeter Russell Jacquet) for the Grambling College alumni of Long Island. The out-of-the-way event drew inordinate media attention, for the critical tides had turned and the now legendary Cobb was deemed worthy of revivalist veneration. Upon his return to the U.S., he assumed a hectic touring schedule that regularly takes him from the Keystone Korner in San Francisco and Parnell's in Seattle to Sandy's Jazz Revival in suburban Boston and the Village Vanguard in New York. "I still live in Houston but I don't stay there," he says. "I've covered quite a bit of ground."

En route to the Nice jazz festival in 1977, Cobb excited a Newport audience when he appeared as a guest soloist with Sy Oliver's band. The following summer he won standing ovations for his performance in a 50th anniversary tribute to Lionel Hampton at Carnegie Hall, returning to Newport with Hamp the year after. Scheduled again in 1981, the quasi-annual Hampton/Cobb shindig seems to have become a festival fixture.

In the past ten years, a mood of retrospective nostalgia has swept the

jazz community, a trend that bodes well for Cobb's future. "I see it in all my travels, especially among youngsters. I see a whole lot of young faces out there and it's all new to them. They're just coming out of the rock scene and this is something like they've never heard before. They accept old melodies which are brand new to them, but that we've been playing for years."

Cobb still reserves his highest accolades for the giants of the swing era, players who inspired him then and now. "Lester Young's music sounds as fresh today as it did years ago, it's amazing. You didn't have to ask who that saxophone player on the jukebox was, you already knew. The man had an identity, that's the difference. And Johnny Hodges, nobody could play alto sax like Johnny Hodges; they would try, but they never could touch him."



D. SHIGLEY

It was under Hodges' influence that Ben Webster, with whom Arnett is often compared, was transformed from a bellowing "Brute" (his early monicker) into a consummate balladeer. Ben's tonal signature, an audible column of breath that was known as "Webster's whisper," is a Cobb trademark as well. "That's just something I ran into myself," he insists. "Of course, I've always admired Ben—he was a master of ballads. I liked his ballad playing much better than the rougher stuff he did, because when he'd get on that, he'd be drunk." Reminded that he himself still resorts to guttural timbres, Cobb laughs. "At times I do," he allows. "That's when I get hostile."

Ironically, his "hostile" inflections may be reckoned Cobb's most influential contributions to the tenor art, at least among r&b and avant garde devotees. After all, it was Ornette Coleman, another Texan with a strong blues background, who said "The best statements Negroes have made, of what their soul is, have been on the tenor saxophone . . . The tenor's got that thing, that honk, you can get to people

# WORK!

with it." Arnett, on Ornette, remains skeptical. "Don't ask me to express my opinion about that one. He's from Ft. Worth, you know. Here's a guy who said that he plays the first note that comes into his mind, and when he said that, he lost me." A more direct descendant, stylistically if not geographically, was Albert Ayler, whose fulsome distortions Cobb presaged. "He's good," Cobb assents. "I could tell things that he's done and where he's coming from. I don't say I like him totally, but I like him. Yeah, he's got a big tone."

With regard to modernism in general, Arnett is less than sanguine. "I hear the modern music on the radio, and what I find out in listening is that so many of them sound like one another, running the notes and what have you, that you don't even know who's who. They play like they're playing for other musicians; it's like what they call musicians' head-busting; as soon as they see a musician come in the club, they get their biggest thing out. What about the people who paid? The average layman doesn't know one note from another. If he can't feel it and pat his foot and nod his head, then you're not getting anywhere. The people who paid are the ones you've got to satisfy; that's who pays your salary."

An unabashed populist, Arnett practices unobscured communication rather than condescension to woo his listeners. "I read the expressions of the audience. I'm playing but I can see what's going on around me, and they always told me that expressions speak louder than words. This is where I get my inspiration, and this is Lionel Hampton's secret: he studies people, and once he gets you in the palm of his hand, he's got you for the rest of the night and won't let you go." The same might be said for Cobb, whose heartwarming, soul-wrenching music is as wise and earthy as the man himself. **db**

## SELECTED ARNETT COBB DISCOGRAPHY

ARNETT COBB IS BACK—Progressive Records 7037  
LIVE AT SANDY'S—Muse MR 5191  
THE WILD MAN FROM TEXAS—Classic Jazz CJ 102  
ARNETT COBB AND HIS MOB—Phoenix Jazz LP 18  
THE BEST OF ARNETT COBB—Prestige PR 7711  
GO POWER—Prestige PR 7835 (with Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis)  
VERY SAXY—Prestige PR 7790 (with Davis, Coleman Hawkins, Buddy Tate)  
with Lionel Hampton  
STEPPIN' OUT (1942-1944)—MCA-1315

# MAL WALDRON

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL

Accompanist to Billie Holiday, on-the-run composer/arranger for a score of Prestige "new jazz" sessions, solo pianist and internationally acclaimed group leader, Mal Waldron's re-entering the U.S. scene.

**I** went away, and I stayed away, for 10 years," Mal Waldron says of his slow but steady re-entry into the musical activity of the United States, "but in 1975 I started coming back." Waldron, who made key contributions as a piano soloist, composer, accompanist and leader in the decade before his 1965 departure for Europe (he has been a Munich, West Germany resident since '67), kept his return visits modest at first, confining them to one or two short stays per year in his native New York. With the death of his mother over Christmas 1979, however, the pace has quickened. "Now my father, who is 83 years old, is all alone, so I come to the States at least once every two months to take care of his affairs. I'm not always performing on each visit, but this time I came to do a tour, to re-establish myself in the United States."

When we spoke last autumn, Waldron was just completing an itinerary that found him ranging along both coasts, from Santa Cruz to Edmonton in the west and Washington to Cambridge, Massachusetts (where our interview took place before Waldron's appearance at Ryle's) back east. The tour mirrored Waldron's busy existence in Europe: many different playing situations, and, when not solo, always in the company of stellar musicians. There had been a trio with Calvin Hill and Horacee Arnold, which ultimately



Bruce Polonsky

grew to include Charlie Rouse's tenor, at Sweet Basil's in New York; a duo with Cameron Brown in Philadelphia; and something of a dream quartet with Joe Henderson, Herbie Lewis and Freddie Waits at San Francisco's Keystone Korner. Much of the time Waldron performed alone, a perfect situation to foster appreciation of the rich harmonic sense, strength of touch and insistent melodic patterns which have made Waldron an instantly recognizable stylist for a quarter-century.

Waldron arrived at his personal voice through the conjunction of classical piano studies, which began when he was ten, and a teenage encounter with one of jazz's supreme masterpieces. "Coleman Hawkins playing *Body And Soul* really upset me; in fact, I went out and bought a saxophone. I couldn't afford a tenor, but I got an alto with a very hard reed and a big open lathe so I could capture the tenor sound on the alto. I found the Hawkins solo written out in **down beat** and learned it note for note—that's how impressed I was by Hawkins at that time. I had heard lots of jazz piano, but since I had only played classics, I thought of the piano

as a separate thing, much more formalized."

While Waldron's studies continued, and culminated with a degree in composition from Queens College, his career as a saxophonist came to a quick end. "The piano player was kind of weak in one of the first groups I worked with, so whenever the other horns in the band wanted to play certain tunes I'd have to comp for them. I found myself on the piano half the night, and I could only take saxophone solos on the few tunes the piano player knew. Then I heard Charlie Parker and sold my saxophone."

Keyboard influences proved less intimidating. "Duke Ellington was the first to make a big impression, and then Art Tatum, who I used to listen to at Cafe Society Downtown. After that came Bud Powell, and then Thelonious Monk. Thelonious was the last of my influences, and he made a lasting impression. There were about three of us who loved Monk—me, Randy Weston and Herbie Nichols—and we used to talk about him all of the time. We were the three pianists who grew out of Monk, while all of the rest were

with Bud Powell. This was about 1950, when a lot of people thought Monk couldn't play, but we had heard it from the horse's mouth at Minton's."

Nineteen fifty was also the year of Waldron's first professional job, an off night at Cafe Society with Ike Quebec and Kansas Fields, and his first record date, Quebec's 78 of *Kiss Of Fire* b/w *Tin Tin Deo* "for some company that was unheard of then and unremembered now." What followed is described by Waldron as the "snowball effect" through which young musicians still establish themselves in New York. "From my first job I started meeting musicians in the bands where I was working. They would use me when they got their own gigs, which allowed me to meet more sidemen who would in turn use me when they got gigs." There were also solo jobs at clubs like the Blue Angel, and composing, at first primarily for modern dancers (at the Henry St. Playhouse, and with Alwin Nikolais).

In 1954, Waldron entered into the first historic affiliation of his career, a three-year stint with the Charles Mingus Jazz Workshop. "Mingus used many different approaches, including free music. We recorded *Getting Together* in 1954 for Savoy, and at that time I hadn't heard of anyone playing free. But Mingus told us, 'When we play this tune, we're not going to play any changes, we're just going to play moods. Just follow me, and put your moods in, and we'll build something beautiful.' And we went ahead and did it, and it worked out. He would also use pedal points and scales in place of chords. Those things didn't strike me as strange, because of my classical training. The music was considered 'out,' but in those days you had to strive for identity, which meant being different from anybody else. If you were an 'out' musician, that was your identity for you right there."

Waldron described how Mingus would drive his sidemen to find their own unique voices. "I was copying Bud Powell for a time, and then Horace Silver, but if I did it in the middle of a tune, Mingus would yell at me, 'Stop that! That's Horace Silver!' And he really cooled me out. My ego is very small, so this was no problem for me; it didn't make any difference how the audience felt, because I was trying to get my music together. I think the only musicians who had problems with Mingus had ego problems. For instance, we could be on the bandstand in a crowded club, and Mingus would say, 'You're wrong, don't play that note' to someone in the band. Some people wanted to fight, or to walk off the stand. If I was wrong, I'd just play it again, right."

Jackie McLean, a cohort from the

Mingus band, had a recording contract with Prestige at the time, and began using Waldron on his albums. McLean also spread the word that Waldron could compose and arrange, as well as play piano, to non-writing soloists on the label like Gene Ammons, and by 1957 Waldron was the linchpin in many of the blowing sessions which Prestige conducted at Rudy Van Gelder's Hackensack studios. It is through these recordings, many of which have been issued several times under a variety of different leaders' names, that Waldron is best known to American listeners.

### SELECTED MAL WALDRON DISCOGRAPHY

#### As a leader:

*HARD TALK*—Enja 2050 (with Steve Lacy and Manfred Schoof)

*BLUES FOR LADY DAY*—Arista Freedom 1013 (solo)

*MOODS*—Inner City 3018-2 (solo and sextet with Lacy and Terumasa Hino: 1978)

*THE QUEST*—Prestige 7579 (with Eric Dolphy and Booker Ervin: 1961)

*IMPRESSIONS*—Prestige-New Jazz 8242 (with Addison Farmer and Al "Tootie" Heath)

*SIGNALS*—Arista-Freedom 1042 (solo: 1971)

*ONE-UPSMANSHIP*—Inner City 3010 (with Lacy)

*1st ENCOUNTER*—Catalyst 7906 (with Gary Peacock)

#### With Charles Mingus:

*PASSIONS OF A MAN*—Atlantic 3-600 (includes a reissue of *Pithecanthropus Erectus*—Atlantic 1237)

*CHARLES MINGUS*—Prestige 24010

*JAZZ WORKSHOP*—Savoy SJL 1113

#### With Billie Holiday:

*LADY IN SATIN*—Columbia CS 8048 (Waldron plays on about half the album: 1958)

#### With Jackie McLean:

*CONTOUR*—Prestige P 24076

#### With John Coltrane:

*WHEELIN'*—Prestige 24069 (with Paul Quinichette, Frank Wess, McLean, Bill Hardman)

#### With Abbey Lincoln:

*STRAIGHT AHEAD*—Barnaby Candid KZ 31037 (with Coleman Hawkins, Max Roach, Julian Priester, Booker Little)

#### With Eric Dolphy:

*AT THE FIVE SPOT VOL. 1*—Prestige-New Jazz (1961)

*AT THE FIVE SPOT VOL. 2*—Prestige-New Jazz 7294 (1961)

*GREAT CONCERT OF ERIC DOLPHY*—Prestige 34002 (this is a reissue of the first two Five Spot albums, with Little, Richard Davis, Ed Blackwell)

*AT THE FIVE SPOT VOL. 3: THE MEMORIAL ALBUM*—Prestige-New Jazz 7334 (1961)

*FIRE WALTZ*—Prestige 24085 (reissue of *The Quest*—Prestige-New Jazz 8269)

*STATUS*—Prestige 24070 (reissue of *Here And There*—Prestige 7382: 1960-'61)

"I would get two days', maybe one day's notice," Waldron recalls when asked to describe the typical Prestige session. "They would tell me who was going to be on the date and ask me for, say, four tunes; then I would write with the specific players in mind. I'd write at the piano the day before the session, arrange the music that night, and the next day go to New Jersey and make the record. Sometimes it would take me most of the night and I wouldn't get any sleep.

"I tried to approach it differently than simply using blues and *I Got Rhythm* changes, but the changes I used were always blowable. You could play on them very easily, without any extra effort. I wrote the melodies after the changes, because soloing was the important part for me in those records—and it's still the important part in jazz for me today."

Asked to name instances where the effort by the band was truly extraordinary, Waldron quickly cited *Interplay*, a 1957 date featuring Idrees Sulieman and Webster Young on trumpets, and John Coltrane and Bobby Jaspar on tenors. "I wrote *Soul Eyes* especially for John Coltrane, because I knew his sound, and I figured it would bring that melody out beautifully, which it did." Regarding material under his own name, Waldron prefers the 1960 trio date *Impressions*, and the better known *The Quest* (featuring Eric Dolphy, tenor saxist Booker Ervin and Ron Carter on cello) from the following year. The last, featuring some of the most complex writing of Waldron's career, typifies the seemingly casual approach to recording of the times, and the amazing results that often followed.

"There was no real preparation for *The Quest*. We rehearsed for maybe an hour, then we made the cuts. The caliber of musicians at that time was simply very high. All of the musicians on my dates could read, solo and improvise, and they all had beautiful feeling. They were also fast on the uptake. If something went wrong, they could cover it up and make it work."

Waldron has fond memories of his Prestige years, although he recognizes that the prolific recording activity of most labels during the period was a mixed blessing. "Musically, it was a beautiful place to be. I was able to work with the best musicians, to write for them and hear my music coming back at me. I could see what I wasn't doing right, and I could grow. At one point I was making dates three times a week in New Jersey, two albums a day. When I'd go to the union to collect my checks I would tell them, 'I'll take the ones for the dates on the fourth, the fifth, the seventh and the eighth, but hold the ones for the ninth and the tenth.' It's only looking back that I realize it could

have been better financially, but money was not really that important then."

Around the beginning of Waldron's Prestige affiliation, he got a call to sub for Billie Holiday's pianist in Philadelphia, and ended up staying with Holiday for the last two and a half years of her life. As someone who heard her on a night-to-night basis, he is uniquely qualified to comment on the state of her art at the end. "The voice was going, but the drive, the emotion was still there, strong as ever. And her use of words was very, very strong, which is what had always struck me about Billie. Words had a special quality to them when she said them, which no other singer could create. This was always there."

Vocal accompaniment presented different challenges than the Mingus band or Van Gelder's studio, but Waldron took them in stride. "There were adjustments, but they weren't unexpected, and they helped me develop as an artist. I learned a lot about space from Billie, and about phrasing, and knowing the words to a ballad before you play it." Waldron clearly enjoys the rapport between pianist and singer; shortly after Holiday's death he began an association with Abbey Lincoln which is periodically revived (Lincoln and Waldron worked together in Nancy, France, shortly before

Waldron's October visit to America), and has recorded in Japan with Kimiko Kasai.

Another part of Waldron's experience with Holiday ultimately had a profound effect on his career. "We toured Europe in 1958, but by the end of the year we returned to America, which I think is why Billie died. The pressure of her drug habit, and the police always leaning on her, really drove her up the wall and precipitated her drinking to such excess that she got a liver condition. If she had stayed in Europe she'd probably be alive today. I knew what it was like over there, and during the early '60s I was just waiting for a chance to get back."

Waldron's chance presented itself in 1965 in the person of French director Marcel Carne, who had been impressed with the score the pianist composed for Shirley Clarke's film *The Cool World*. "Carne was doing a film called *Two Bedrooms In Manhattan*, and wanted me to write the music. When he asked if I wanted to do it in New York or Paris, I said 'Paris! Let's go!' Without a doubt."

Waldron has never looked back. In the past 15 years he has become one of the most multifaceted and in-demand musicians in Europe, as well as one of the most popular visitors to Japan. He describes his lifestyle as "fantastic and

very relaxed. On an average day at least one person will call who wants me to do something—either play at a festival for much more money than I could get in the United States, or write for one of the radio big bands which you find in every large German city. Students will come by to see me, and since I began writing a few pieces with lyrics, singers will come to me for tunes. I spend a lot of time on the telephone to other countries, setting up dates; I have an agent in each country, and each one has a block of time to work within. I also go to Japan each year, for two months. I spent a grand total of two months in my apartment last year, and that consisted of two days here, three days there."

One reason for Waldron's busy schedule is his willingness to work in a variety of contexts. "I have several groups," he notes. "The sextet is based in Germany, which is where I live and where the brass players, Manfred Schoof and Hermann Brauer, come from; but Steve Lacy, our saxophonist, is living in Paris, and the rhythm section, Jimmy Woode and Makaya Ntshoko, are based in Switzerland. That's one group. Then there's the quintet, without the trombone; the trio, just me and the rhythm section; duos with Steve Lacy or, lately, Johnny Dyani; and the solos. Whenever I'm free, I'll play other people's music, too—I work with Archie Shepp quite a lot when he comes to Europe—but I always get a few of my tunes in."

Recorded evidence for much of this activity has been hard to come by in the United States, although some of Waldron's work on Enja has been picked up by Inner City. *Moods*, a 1978 double album featuring sextet and solo performances, is the best example in domestic release of Waldron's current scope and strength, yet the full measure of his intensity and dark lyricism can only be gleaned by catching his live performance. Until he is more widely heard in his native home, Waldron recognizes that he will be appreciated less for what he is doing now than for his work 20 years ago with Mingus, Holiday, Coltrane and Dolphy. He claims to always get "a big kick, a big ego boost" when fans recall his classic pre-European work, and laughs at the notion that many musicians would rather focus on their own brand-new thing. "I think that's a younger attitude. My work with Mingus, Billie and the others is very important to me. Those are credits, and I love them all. Mine's an older attitude," Mal Waldron concludes with a laugh, "but then I'm older than most musicians. I'm 55, and with age comes a little bit of sense. Otherwise, if I don't have any sense by now, I've got to give up, right?"

db



Bruce Polonsky

# RECORD

# REVIEWS

\*\*\*\*\* EXCELLENT    \*\* FAIR  
\*\*\*\* VERY GOOD    \* POOR  
\*\*\* GOOD

## McCOY TYNER

4×4—Milestone Records M-55007: *INNER GLIMPSE; MANHA DE CARNAVAL; PARADOX; BACKWARD GLANCE; FORBIDDEN LAND; PANNONICA; I WANNA STAND OVER THERE; THE SEEKER; BLUES IN THE MINOR; STAY AS SWEET AS YOU ARE; IT'S YOU OR NO ONE.*

**Personnel:** Tyner, piano; Cecil McBee, bass; Al Foster, drums; Freddie Hubbard, trumpet and flugelhorn (cuts 1-3); John Abercrombie, electric mandolin (cuts 4, 5); Bobby Hutcherson, vibes (cuts 6-8); Arthur Blythe, alto sax (cuts 9-11).

★ ★ ★ ★

4×4 may not appease all of Tyner's recent critics; it certainly hasn't opened any untamed territory for this seminal pianist. But it does offer some of the variety everyone's been screaming for lately, and is yet another solid addition to Tyner's impressively consistent discography.

Featuring a different guest artist on each of its four sides, this release might very well be the kind of strong outside impetus that will eventually provide the catalyst for Tyner's next major creative/stylistic evolution. But unfortunately, good intentions only produced mixed results this time—results ironically determined more by the performances of the various featured soloists than by the ever powerful pianist and his rock-steady rhythm section of McBee and Foster.

At first glance, Tyner's collaborations with Abercrombie and Blythe seemed to hold the brightest prospects for brave new music: both are solid, relatively young players currently in the process of forming distinctive styles of their own, and neither have worked with Tyner before. But, of the two, only Blythe proved capable of substantially matching Tyner's energy. Even though Abercrombie feeds Tyner some interesting melodic ideas, especially on *Forbidden Land*, the rather weak sound of his electric mandolin and his tendency towards a subtle stylistic perspective leaves him obscured by the pianist's blinding radiance.

Blythe's sparkling alto sound, upper register forays, and clarity and conviction hold up admirably under the force of Tyner's piano and even relegate the pianist to a more demure role than he usually commands. Of all four sides, this one with Blythe most vividly conjures the image of a younger Tyner, the accompanist. Blythe convincingly steals the show on Tyner's fascinating variegated *Blues In The Minor*, and he executes a gripping ballad interpretation of *Stay As Sweet As You Are*. But the real master here, Tyner, has the final say by indelibly stamping his personality on the standard *It's You Or No One*. Here, he moves from one prescribed chord to the next with amazing harmonic ingenuity—utilizing his distinc-



GILL SMITHERMAN

tive "Tyner chord substitutions"—and exploring the hidden melodic possibilities of the tune as only a true veteran can, while Blythe's solo is rather tentative in its approach to the demanding chord changes of the standard.

The young turks aside, Tyner's master contemporaries, Hubbard and Hutcherson, get yet another chance with the pianist. Although playing with only a fraction of the inspiration he is capable of commanding, Hubbard is somewhat disappointing. Of course he is as technically masterful as always, but he seems to struggle to come up with novel ideas on the uptempo numbers, *Inner Glimpse* and *Paradox*, relying instead on his all too familiar stock licks for the majority of his solos. Fortunately Tyner, McBee and Foster come to the rescue with some very punchy and exciting playing. But with his flugelhorn in hand on the well-chosen latin ballad, *Manha De Carnaval*, Hubbard is relaxed and creative, stringing lush phrases together with ease and wit.

Hutcherson's side is another story altogether. For me, the man simply owns jazz vibraphoning, and his side is the strongest, most complete side of the album, combining excellent performance with beautiful compositions. Tyner and Hutcherson interact with immense sensitivity and love for each other's music. There's no sense of rivalry here, just respect and joy. Seemingly spurred on by his old friend, Tyner delivers his most inspired work on the album. Kicking off the side in style, they shape a stunningly unique and moody version of Monk's classic Pan-

nonica. They immediately establish a sense of playful response with one another, extending, developing and complimenting each other's musical ideas. Even Hutcherson's one composition, *I Wanna Stand Over There*, is a nod to Tyner, reflecting his brand of compositional continuity. The side concludes with the sizzling tune, *The Seeker*, which is rapidly becoming one of my favorite Tyner compositions. The propulsive nature of *The Seeker* brings out the best in both leaders: Hutcherson painting long, lovely lines and Tyner utilizing his potent attacks, modal conception and ringing fourths and fifths to excellent effect.

Still, some critics will accuse Tyner of being stuck in the same old groove—although I still maintain that it's a pretty nice groove to be stuck in. For me this album augurs a tantalizing future of more adventurous collaborations and, perhaps, new directions.

—cliff tinder

## STEVE SWALLOW

**HOME (music by Steve Swallow to poems by Robert Creeley)—**

ECM-1-1160: *SOME ECHOES; SHE WAS YOUNG; NOWHERE ONE; COLORS; HOME; IN THE FALL; YOU DIDN'T THINK; ICE CREAM; ECHO; MIDNIGHT.*

**Personnel:** Swallow, bass; Sheila Jordan, voice; Steve Kuhn, piano; David Liebman, saxophones; Lyle Mays, synthesizer; Bob Moses, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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The poems of Robert Creeley are terse, epigrammatic, succinct, often elliptical, and quite stunning in their particular vision and individual tone. Creeley has been characterized as a hip Emily Dickinson, and while that might be stretching a point, it is true that his poems, like Dickinson's, would seem to resist musical settings. They seem to be too fragile, too skeletal, too self-contained to bear the burden of incidental music.

What Steve Swallow, best known as Gary Burton's long-time bassist, has attempted with *Home*, then, is ambitious if not over-reaching. But he has succeeded, gloriously. These are not songs; there are no verses, no choruses, no refrains. The words are sung once through, completely, not repeated or developed or distorted, and the voice is used as an instrument equal to the others—in other words, given a short solo to sing, with syllables that happen to be Creeley's. Swallow obviously respects the integrity of Creeley's creations, and his music manages to add weight and texture to the words without overwhelming their subtle balance, tension, density and emotional direction.

Sheila Jordan's role here is intensely difficult; her parts are incredibly brief, yet she makes the most of them, suggesting a mood or setting a scene within a matter of a few seconds through marvelously meticulous colors and dynamic and tonal shadings. For example, her breathy vibrato echoes the breezy synthesizer motif in *Some Echoes*, yet listen to the way she thickens her voice for her few lines within the bluesy wailing of *You Didn't Think*.

Lyle Mays' synthesizer thickens the ensemble texture with string-like swells—especially on the summer day atmosphere of *Some Echoes*, where Liebman's soprano saxophone buzzes like unseen insects—but elsewhere he is unobtrusive. Given keyboardist Kuhn's rhapsodic touch and sparse filigrees, Liebman's saxophones are especially pungent in this otherwise airy ambience—he sounds better in this concise context than I have ever heard him before.

Swallow's melodies are stately, vivacious, and evocative; his sensitivity to the texts and the emotions they suggest is everywhere apparent. *Home* is a remarkable achievement. —art lange

## JOHNNY MINCE

**SUMMER OF '79**—Monmouth-Evergreen MIES 7090: ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND; ISN'T IT ROMANTIC; PENNIES FROM HEAVEN; POOR BUTTERFLY; WHEN YOU'RE SMILING; IF I COULD BE WITH YOU; COQUETTE; IF I HAD YOU; THE MAN I LOVE.

**Personnel:** Mince, clarinet; Lou Stein, piano; Bob Haggart, bass; Cliff Leeman, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

## PEANUTS HUCKO/HIS PIPED PIPER

**QUINTET**—World Jazz WJLP S-15: RIVERBOAT SHUFFLE; SWEET ONE; LONESOME; SWEET SPIRIT; AVALON; RAGGEDY ANN; MEMORIES OF YOU; EAST

OF THE SUN; PETER'S BLUES; WHEN YOU'RE SMILING.

★ ★ ★

Johnny Mince sat in the reed section of the Tommy Dorsey band in the late '30s and managed to scorch a hole through most of the Clambake Seven ensembles in which he played. His playing today on *Summer Of '79* is cocky, assertive and mostly incendiary. On *When You're Smiling*, *Man I Love* and *Ragtime Band* the effect is wonderfully, furiously swinging. Mince phrases in long, smooth, rolling cadences of eighth notes, and speaks in a hoarse, husky tone with the texture of burlap. There is a convincing sense of spontaneity as he crashes into a third chorus on *Smiling*, almost as if he had decided not to, but suddenly found himself there anyway. Mince's phrasing and sound serve him equally well on five ballads, which are all well paced and frequently emotionally intense. Listen to his chorus following Lou Stein on *If I Had You*, and see if you still think the clarinet has a limited expressive range. Mince and his colleagues have come up with a very good record.

For me, Peanuts Hucko always sounds his best when he swings his hardest. In the early '40s he absorbed better than anyone else the heart and soul of Benny Goodman's small group playing. Goodman's style has turned over several times since then, but Hucko still has every detail, every account, every nuance under complete control. When he unleashes it in one of his showpieces like *Stealin' Apples*, the excitement is heady indeed. Trouble is, it hardly ever happens here. And it should have, too, especially with one of the best pianists in the country, Ross Tompkins, aboard. Only on *When You're Smiling* do we get a shot of what might have been.

Hucko parallels Goodman in another interesting way. I don't think Goodman will ever be remembered for his treatment of ballads. They were (and are) unfailingly pretty, but rarely if ever informed by insight or emotion. Hucko is inclined to bring a similar Goodmanesque blandness to material like *Memories Of You*, *Peter's Blues* and other languid pieces. His tone is warm, supple and smooth. But the long, silky notes seem preoccupied with perfection of form. It's as if Hucko has too much respect for the composers to interject much of himself into the songs, let alone dismantle them in improvisation. There is an undeniable beauty to Hucko's work here, to be sure (particularly on *Lonesome*, a forgotten Sidney Bechet melody of stark simplicity and appeal), but not a sense of adventure or risk. —john mcdonough

## MACK GOLDSBURY

**ANTHROPO-LOGIC**—Muse 5194: ANTHROPOLOGY; RAIN GARDEN; IT'S ONLY A PAPER MOON; BE MY LOVE; CROSSING OVER.

**Personnel:** Goldsbury, tenor saxophone; John Scofield, guitar; Ed Schuller, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

★ ★ ★

# RECORD REVIEWS

This exercise in contemporary bebop offers the urgent, harsh-sounding tenor of Texas-reared Goldsbury in company with an unusual trio of guitarist Scofield, bassist Schuller and drummer Hart. While each of the players is individually effective (and occasionally very effective), there's an unsettled quality to their collective work that prevents this program from gelling the way it should. Too often Goldsbury and Scofield clash, in the sense that their respective sounds and conceptions don't mesh well, the tenorist's gritty, hard-edged nasality of sound and aggressive, almost frenzied attack sitting oddly—and uncomfortably—against the guitarist's more subdued, warmly rounded sound and controlled, thoughtful approach to improvising.

Schuller and Hart generally work well with Goldsbury's filibustering, where the drummer's polyrhythmic intensity is appropriate and exciting, but Scofield, a gentler spirit, requires a different rhythmic emphasis, one more responsive to the greater subtlety of his playing. Sad to say, he only occasionally gets it. When he's up front, the rhythmic matrix is much too dense and, hence, distracting. Still, he manages to play consistently well throughout the recital, with an easy, unforced pulsation, a plentitude of well-conceived ideas and a knowing economy of expression—qualities Goldsbury would do well to cultivate in his own playing.

Despite the occasional flashes of interest scattered through this LP, the music never really coheres into a unified, organic whole. No one seems to have given any great thought to arrangements, solo routines, further takes, or any of the things that result in tight, well-conceived performances. Consequently, the whole session has the catch-as-catch-can quality of just another flawed blowing date. The rating is primarily for the scattered moments of brilliance and excitement from the individual players.

—pete welding

## SONNY ROLLINS

**LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT**—Milestone M-9098: *LITTLE LU; THE DREAM THAT WE FELL OUT OF; STRODE RODE; THE VERY THOUGHT OF YOU; CARESS; DOUBLE FEATURE.*

**Personnel:** Rollins, tenor sax; Lyricon; George Duke, pianos; Stanley Clarke, electric bass; Al Foster, drums; Bill Summers, percussion.

★ ★ ★

With each new record from Theodore Walter Rollins—saxist, seeker, survivor, (and my occasional personal nominee for master of the universe)—there comes the temptation to find epiphanies. It's a result of the man's extraordinary legacy. Most often, one listens, then looks for supportive evidence, and finally leaps, using the album as a springboard for new insights about a new stage in Rollins' career.

But in recent years, the albums haven't borne the burden of such admittedly high-handed presumption: *Love At First Sight* is

no exception, proving no worse, and only a little better, than its predecessors. Actually, this is the major cause for some disappointment: Rollins' latest LP only partially reflects the renewed vigor and cohesion he has demonstrated in live performance over the last couple years.

Those qualities are certainly present on *Little Lu*: the most recent addition to the tenorist's sizable repertoire of calypso-flavored tunes, it neatly responds to the slap-shot attack and hurdy-gurdy phrasing Rollins currently favors. It's among the

catchiest lines he's penned in years, yielding a buoyant, flavorful solo; nonetheless, the track really belongs to George Duke, who remains a fine pianist despite the electronic excesses with which he's been known to cloud this fact. The song also features Stanley Clarke disguising two choruses of a remarkably lame bass line as a "solo"—don't wait for something to happen, because nothing does.

Clarke contributes far more to *Double Feature*, a bass-tenor duet; his jumpy beat and strummed chords make this off-kilter

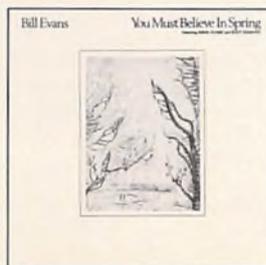


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blues mildly memorable. *The Very Thought Of You* (which also features a stripped-down instrumentation—no drums or percussion) comes off even better. With Clarke and Duke supplying a comfortably traditional backing, Rollins handles the lovely melody without sentiment, working into a section of sustained flurrying; the result is a solo that builds a subtle tension with the song's pretty lyricism. In contrast is Clarke's composition *Dream*, on which Rollins' double-tracked tenor winds its obbligato around a drifty Lyricon line; here, he never quite escapes the tune's cloying prettiness.

The key to the album, however, is the remake of *Strode Rode*, which Rollins first recorded in 1956, and which remains one of his most enduring compositions. On the new version, Rollins has made some small but important changes that only help crystallize the changes he himself has undergone. He's raised the song's pitch a full step, and the flatted 5th that once adorned the ninth bar of the A section has been raised to a natural; the tempo has also been reduced from its original ferocity to a more relaxed lope.

All this (despite Rollins' most spirited outing of the date) serve to make the song, once slightly menacing and wholly exhilarating, into something softer, smoother, a bit cuddly: more of a teddy bear than a tiger. As usual, Al Foster rides herd with his customary mix of traditional stick work, modern sensibilities, and timeless ebullience. In effect, he fully embodies the approach to which Rollins aspires and all but attains.

—neil tessier

## LESTER YOUNG

**GIANTS OF JAZZ**—Time-Life STL-113:  
*SHOE SHINE BOY; LADY BE GOOD; HE AIN'T GOT RHYTHM; I'VE FOUND A NEW BABY; A SAILBOAT IN THE MOONLIGHT; TIME OUT; GEORGIANNA; WHEN YOU'RE SMILING* (take 3); *WHEN YOU'RE SMILING* (take 4); *BACK IN YOUR OWN BACK YARD; WAY DOWN YONDER IN NEW ORLEANS; THEM THERE EYES; I WANT A LITTLE GIRL* (take 1); *I WANT A LITTLE GIRL* (take 2); *DARK RAPTURE; JIVE AT FIVE; I AIN'T GOT NOBODY; TAXI WAR DANCE; UPRIGHT ORGAN BLUES; DICKIE'S DREAM; LESTER LEAPS IN; I LEFT MY BABY; TICKLE-TOE; EASY DOES IT; LET ME SEE; BLOW TOP; FIVE O'CLOCK WHISTLE; BROADWAY; BEAUTIFUL EYES; ALL OF ME; JUST JIVIN' AROUND; I CAN'T GET STARTED; AFTERNOON OF A BASIE-ITE; SOMETIMES I'M HAPPY; THREE LITTLE WORDS; LESTER LEAPS AGAIN; DESTINATION K.C.; EXERCISE IN SWING; D.B. BLUES; FINE AND MELLOW.*

**Personnel:** Young, tenor sax and clarinet; Count Basie and his orchestra; Teddy Wilson's small groups; Sam Price, Nat "King" Cole, Johnny Guarnieri, pianos; Billie Holiday, Jimmy Rushing, Helen Humes, Una Mae Carlisle, vocals.

★ ★ ★ ★

There is currently a greater discrepancy between the amount of available written information on and the stature of Lester Young than is the case for any other jazz musician. The pleasant surprise of this recent Time-Life *Giants Of Jazz* offering is the 52 page booklet included with the three record set, half Young biography and half commentary on the album's recordings. In short, the most thorough piece of writing on the life and music of Lester Young available to the public. Particularly interesting are the efforts of biographer John McDonough to document the foggy years before and after Young's first stay with the Basie band. Lester's Army ordeal is written about in some detail, aided by the official Army court-martial papers (published complete in *down beat*, 1/81).

The strength of the recordings chosen here is that they present Pres in several different dimensions. To better illustrate his ability as improviser, the set offers alternate takes of *When You're Smiling* (with Billie Holiday) and *I Want A Little Girl* (Kansas City 6). Young's talents as a soloist have tended to overshadow the fact that he provided the finest backing for vocalists in the 1930s and '40s of any tenor saxophonist. In *I Left My Baby* (no solo) he backs Jimmy Rushing, and Billie Holiday is the beneficiary on *A Sailboat In The Moonlight*, one of Young's favorites from his own recordings.

Pres' ballad style is demonstrated in *I Can't Get Started*, sometimes thought of as the beginning of his post-war sound (due to the smokier tone he employs here), although it was recorded in 1942.

One is puzzled by certain selections, however—primarily the choice of the December 1957 studio version of *Fine And Mellow* over the television soundtrack version from *The Sound Of Jazz*, recorded a few days later. The difference between the sometimes sterile atmosphere of studio recordings and the vitality of the "live" performance has seldom been more pronounced. Nat Hentoff has referred to the soundtrack solo as "the sparest, purest blues chorus I have ever heard." The soundtrack version is the last great recorded performance of Pres and Billie Holiday together and is highly recommended. It can be found on *Billie Holiday, Volume II* (Everest Records, FS310).

The shortage of post-World War II material in the album (only *Fine And Mellow* and *D.B. Blues*) does little to counter the erroneous idea that Young said all he had to say prior to his military time. While the Time-Life *Jazz Giants* series is a positive contribution on the whole, a chief drawback has been a virtual cutoff of examples by the giants after the mid '40s. Missing from this period of Young's is a radio broadcast of *These Foolish Things* (1946), arguably the best ballad by Pres on record, and the gorgeous solitude of *No Eyes Blues* (1947).

The pre-war selections are largely on target. Exceptions include the two recordings taken from the Kansas City 7 session of 1944. *Lester Leaps Again* and *Destination K.C.*, which combined do not match the haunting beauty of another 1944 piece,

Midnight Symphony, recorded as part of the movie short *Jammin' The Blues* soundtrack shortly before Lester entered the Army. As Harry Lim, producer of the Kansas City 7 date is quoted in the booklet, "Lester played well . . . but I always had a feeling that he really didn't enjoy this as much as he'd enjoyed the dates he made under his own name."

Somehow *Beautiful Eyes* from the Una Mae Carlisle date of 1941 turns up on this album, rather than *I Never Knew*, done five months earlier at a rehearsal with Benny Goodman. That was a peak Young performance, and includes one of Lester's first musical "sons"—Charlie Christian.

Also absent is *Roseland Shuffle* from the first studio session of the Basie orchestra. A fine example of the rapport between Pres and the Count is missed, as they passed the solo back and forth through most of that version.

The booklet herein is indispensable, the selection of recordings is both a treat and a disappointment, but best of all, Pres is Pres.

—doug long

## BUS BOYS

### MINIMUM WAGE ROCK 'N' ROLL—

Arista AB 4280: DR. DOCTOR; MINIMUM WAGE; DID YOU SEE ME; THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD; JOHNNY SOUL'D OUT; KKK; ANGGIE; D-DAY; TELL THE COACH; WE STAND UNITED; RESPECT.

**Personnel:** Brian O'Neal, vocals, keyboards; Kevin O'Neal, vocals, bass; Gus Lounderman, vocals; Victor Johnson, vocals, guitar; Michael Jones, vocals, synthesizers; Steve Felix, drums.

★ ★

## DEFUNKT

DEFUNKT—Hannibal HNBL 1301: MAKE THEM DANCE; STRANGLING ME WITH YOUR LOVE; IN THE GOOD TIMES; BLUES; DEFUNKT; THERMONUCLEAR SWEAT; MELVIN'S TUNE; WE ALL DANCE TOGETHER.

**Personnel:** Joe Bowie, vocals, trombone; Martin Aubert, Kelvyn Bell, guitars; Byron Bonnie, sax, flute; Ronnie Burrage, drums; Martin Fischer, synthesizers; Melvin Gibbs, bass; Ted Daniel, trumpet; Charles "Bobo" Shaw, percussion, background vocals; Clarise Taylor, Michael Riesman, Janos Gat, background vocals.

★ ★ ★ ½

The recent punk funk phenomenon, combining elements of r&b, jazz and new wave rock, represents an inchoate attempt (or rather, several diverse attempts) to create a new fusion music for the '80s that is both commercially and artistically viable. For over a decade, black and white pop musics have been effectively segregated, but lately an ironic double-crossover has occurred, as whites embrace the primal funk of James Brown and blacks tune in to the psychedelic blues of Jimi Hendrix (a black musician whose early audiences were as nearly all white as Brown's were all black).

The Bus Boys, from Los Angeles, and Defunkt, out of New York, are black bands who regularly appear in white venues; each is led by a pair of brothers and both share a predilection for heavy-metal guitars. There, however, the comparison ends, for the two groups are otherwise at opposite poles. The Bus Boys sing cute ditties of racial role reversal over a mainstream rock 'n' roll beat, shuffling onstage in their restaurant flunky costumes while crooning in Beach Boys' harmony. Defunkt brings a veiled, post-Ornette sensibility to its backbone-jolting dance tempos, injecting sardonic poetry almost subliminally amid the party patter. The smirky blandness of the Bus Boys has catapulted them into the limelight; the mordant subtlety of Defunkt has so far consigned them to obscurity, proving again that biting wit can be a hot commodity, as long as it has no teeth.

"I bet you never heard music like this by spades," offers Bus Boys' lead singer Brian O'Neal, although he might find some takers among fans of George Clinton's P-Funk mob. Still, Clinton's black hippie music has rarely strayed from basic boogie rhythms, and never made good its promise of interracial appeal. The Bus Boys, by contrast, have adopted white rock music whole hog, from the Beatles and Kinks to Led Zeppelin and even the Ramones, although their vaunted new wave disposition is limited to a few mild power-pop chords. Nodding occasionally to black rockers like Hendrix and Chuck Berry, Brian and brother Kevin O'Neal have patched together an eclectic hodgepodge of familiar licks and tuneful hooks, none of which would pack much impact without the impertinent lyrical accompaniment.

*There Goes The Neighborhood* is a clever refrain (it seems "the whites are moving in"), but like many of the Bus Boys' songs, it reads better than it plays. *Johnny Soul'd Out* ("he's into rock 'n' roll and he's given up the rhythm & blues") seems inadvertently confessional, but the ultimate in self-deprecation is KKK ("Wanna join the Ku Klux Klan, play in a rock 'n' roll band"). Elsewhere the Bus Boys stick to safer potential broadcast fare like *Tell The Coach*, a gentle spoof of the "White Shadow" TV series, and *Anggie*, a typical adolescent sexual plea. Their minstrel stage antics are sorely missed, particularly when Brian sings "the next thing I knew he was acting like this," cueing an invisible routine; but on the whole, *Minimum Wage Rock 'N' Roll* successfully demonstrates that blacks can play mediocre rock music as capably, or as incapably, as whites.

Defunkt is the brainchild of the Bowie brothers, trombonist Joe and saxist Byron, whose best known sibling is trumpeter Lester Bowie of the Art Ensemble. Longtime proponents of tempoless "outside" music, the St. Louis-bred Bowies jumped on the backbeat bandwagon after Joe appeared with James Chance's "no-wave" Contorsions, and joined such jazz-based neo-funkers as James "Blood" Ulmer on New York's punk-rock circuit.

On the surface, *Defunkt* smacks of avant-postapostasy with its thumping disco drums,



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funk-riffing horns and party-hearty lyrics, but closer inspection reveals a bitter parody that penetrates the escapist glamour of black dance music to reveal the bleak reality underneath. So surreptitious is Defunkt's satiric dagger that discophiles may waggle their booties in oblivious abandon, unaware of the mocking exhortations to "do the dance of death."

Indeed, death is the leitmotif in this disco inferno, creeping up inevitably behind the facade of "get up, get down" trivialities. In *The Good Times*, for example, lampoons the fashionable Chic genre with slick guitar riffs and horn flourishes as Joe Bowie chants his recipe for "high living:" "get works for a dollar . . . tie your arm with your shoestrings . . . watch yourself dissolving in the hallway of an apartment building . . ." Similarly, tunes like *Make Them Dance* and *Strangling Me With Your Love* cop figures from James Brown, the Ohio Players, et al., while Bowie undermines the merriment with caustic surrealism. The music is a shade hipper than generic funk, with jagged metallic guitars and piercing, yet idiomatic r&b horn solos by the Bowies and trumpeter Ted Daniel over Ronnie Burrage's slightly forced rhythms. If the Bus Boys are intent on merging with the pop mainstream, Defunkt seems bent on subverting it.

—larry birnbaum

## THE DUKES OF DIXIELAND

**NEW ORLEANS JAZZ**—Sandcastle Records SCR 1044: *WOLVERINE BLUES*; *SECOND LINE*; *YES SIR THAT'S MY BABY*; *SENSATION RAG*; *BOGALUSA STRUT*; *STUDS LONGAN*; *I FOUND A NEW BABY*; *WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN*.

**Personnel:** Frank Trampani, trumpet; Otis Bazzoon, clarinet; Bob O'Rourke, trombone; Phamous Lambert, piano, vocals; Al Bernard, bass; Ernest Elly, drums.

★

The formula is simple and long-standing: a few chestnuts of the standard repertoire (in this case, *Wolverine Blues*, *Sensation Rag*, *When The Saints*), some glittering ensemble polyphony for texture, flashy instrumental breaks to show off chops, and a healthy dose of musical hi-jinks (snappy, with-it arrangements, musical quotes in solos). Never mind that the rhythms are not idiomatic, that the solos are usually garish in tone and contain jarring intrusions of misplaced songs for quotational material (such as *Blue Skies*, *Softly As In A Morning Sunrise*, and that perennial dixieland favorite *All God's Chillun Got Rhythm*), that the solos are swing era inspired (especially the Harry James-isms of trumpeter Trampani) and cliché ridden, that the arrangements are insipid or worse, cornball (did I really hear the fanfare from *Star Wars* in the out-chorus of *Wolverine Blues*? Jelly Roll Morton must be spinning in his grave). Never mind all that. We're having fun!

Unfortunately, fun doesn't equal integrity, or soul. This is dixieland muzak better suited to a shopping mall than Storyville.

—art lange

## LARRY CORYELL

**STANDING OVATION**—Arista Novus 3024: *Discotexas*; Excerpt from "A Lark Descending," by Vaughan Williams; *Ravel: Wonderful Wolfgang*; *Piano Improvisation*; *Sweet Shuffle*; *Moon*; *Park It Where You Want It*; *Spiritual Dance*.

**Personnel:** Coryell, acoustic six and 12 string guitars, piano (cut 5); Dr. L. Subramaniam, violin, tambura (9).

★ ★ ★

Since etching a mark in jazz guitar history almost 11 years ago with his classic *Spaces* LP (Vanguard) Larry Coryell has diligently pursued an assortment of musical projects—with varying degrees of artistic success. In both the *Spaces* set (with McLaughlin, Cobham, Corea and Vitous), and the remarkable *Restful Mind* date recorded in 1975 (with Oregon's Towner, Moore and Walcott), clearly focused and sustaining formal concepts abounded, which, as in any art form, aided greatly in the albums' respective esthetic triumphs. Conversely, however, Coryell has had other recorded efforts that did not bear stylistic continuity and imaginative compositional substance, which is predominantly the case with *Standing Ovation*.

As of late, the guitarist has abandoned his electric ensemble bag in favor of a duo and solo acoustic mold, this disc being the fifth of such attempts. Although just recently released, *Ovation* was recorded in Stuttgart, West Germany in March, 1978, five months before the more disciplined and probing *European Impressions* (on Arista's vinyl almost two years now).

About a third of the tracks here are cast in a rather derivative r&b framework, which does not most effectively complement Coryell's swing oriented, fire eating pyrotechnics—like putting a Cadillac engine in a Corvair.

There are two notable exceptions, however. *Moon* outlines a lush and graceful series of arpeggiated harmonics in the minor mode. Layered on top is a brief melody, followed by a wistfully introspective sequence of the guitarist's fluidly linear, as well as sharply defined, chordal inventions.

An increasingly unique Coryell trademark, especially within the acoustic setting, has been his dexterous and novel execution of harmonics. In addition to a purely ornamental function, the guitarist often utilizes them to the extent of sketching complete melodic thoughts (as in the aforementioned tune) via unorthodox guitar tunings.

The most impressive track here is *Spiritual Dance*, featuring Indian violinist Dr. L. Subramaniam (*Profile*, *down beat* 11/80). It opens with a meditatively droning tambura. Coryell's pleasingly serene 12-string creeps in shortly after, a la Ralph Towner. The violinist soon follows, and after some hypothetically relaxed interplay between the two, a vivacious theme unfolds and allows the incisive exchanges to continue at a

quickened tempo. Subramaniam, much like his brother L. Shankar, has a bleating, serpentine phrasing and spotless technique. His brilliant improvisatory skills, as well, furnish a refreshing compatibility with Coryell's explosiveness.

It is just this kind of focused and imaginative approach concerning musical direction that should permeate, rather than be subordinate in the efforts of this remarkable guitarist.

—stephen mamula

## TRISTANO'S DISCIPLES

### LENNIE TRISTANO MEMORIAL

**CONCERT**—Jazz Records JR 3: record one: *INSPIRATION*; *THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER LENNIE*; *KING OF BONGO BONG*; *LENNIE*; *OUT OF LINE*; *CHANGES*; *SOUND POEM*; *FLAMINGO*; *WHAT'S NEW*; *STELLA BY STARLIGHT*; record two: *YOU'D BE SO NICE TO COME HOME TO*; *YESTERDAYS*; *CONFIRMATION*; *YOU DO KNOW WHAT LOVE IS*; *STELLA BY COINCIDENCE*; *WHO KNOWS*; *TRISTANO*; *AS A SUMMER FALLS*; *WINTER SPRINGS*; record three: *ABLUTION*; *YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS*; *TWO NOT ONE*; *LENNIE'S PENNIES/EAST 32ND ST.*; *SUITE FOR LENNIE (ONE, TWO, THREE)*; record four: *AMONG FRIENDS*; *LENNIE'S PENNIES*; *CONFLUENCE*; *I LOVE YOU*; *TRILOGY*; *I SHOULD CARE*; record five: *THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER YOU*; *HOW DEEP IS THE OCEAN*; *EMBRACEABLE YOU*; *DAY BY DAY*; *I'LL NEVER STOP LOVING YOU*; *TAKE ONE*; *THIS CRAZY FEELING*; *ALL OF ME*; *PARADISE FOUND*; *OOBALA BABALA*. **Personnel:** Liz Gorrill, piano, voice (1-3,6,7,38-40); Fran Canisius, flute (4-7); Lloyd Lifton, piano (8-10); Murray Wall, bass (8-10); Sheila Jordan, voice (11-13); Harold Danko, piano (11-13); Cameron Brown, bass (11-13); Lou Grassi, drums (11-13); Virg Dzurinko, piano (14-16); Larry Meyer, guitar (17-18); Lenny Popkin, tenor sax (19-22); Peter Scattaretico, drums (19-22,29-31); Stan Fortuna, bass (19-22); Sal Mosca, piano (23-25); Nomi Rosen, flute (26-28); Connie Crothers, piano (28); Warne Marsh, tenor sax (29-31); Eddie Gomez, bass (29-31); Lynn Anderson, voice (32-37); Max Roach, drums (41). Recorded Jan. 2, 1979.

★ ★ ★

During his life, Lennie Tristano was called a cult figure, a witch doctor, a father confessor, and was even compared to the hypnotist Svengali. Perhaps Tristano purposely exploited his posture as a mythic blind prophet; perhaps the force of his music alone inspired his followers' admiration. Whatever the reason, his music and personality were intense, innovative and charismatic enough to attract a hearty grouping of students, followers and fellow musicians (plus a noisy, indiscriminate audience) to pay Town Hall tribute to his memory and carry on, in some sense, his musical directions.

The first side of this five-record set is given over to the fluid piano and vocal improvising of Liz Gorrill, a student of Tristano's whose career he once helped promote.

# RECORD REVIEWS

Gorrill, who can't escape interjecting Gee-whiz-here-I-am-playing-for-Lennie-while-he's-up-there-in-bebop-heaven sighs into her spoken introductions, nevertheless scats in bell-like phrases through the intro to *Inspiration*, and her longish vocal lines meld into legato, single-note lines at the keyboard. Breathless, harmonically sophisticated lines they are. A brief walking bass section reminiscent of Tristano's *Take One* leads into free contrapuntal invention. This controlled meandering kicks this Tristano Tribute off to an auspicious start.

But *There Will Never Be Another Lennie* raises the first of several interesting copyright questions connected with this package. Why did Tristano and his followers feel it important or justified to retitle and copyright standard tunes under their own names? Not content to quit while ahead, Gorrill sings Don Redman's silly *King Of Bongo Bong*, a favorite of Tristano's and, she tells us, "of mine, too."

Fran Canisius, a flutist and another of Tristano's students, just about makes it through two miniatures: *Lennie* and *Out Of Line*. This player's tone is thin, squeaky at times, evoking Tristano's spirit, perhaps, but certainly not his substance. Joined by Gorrill, the pair venture into fleeting, floating impressionism. *Changes* glances at what Tristano meant by "intuitive" music. *Sound Poem*, conceived in free verse no doubt, features lots of keyboard scampering and pouncing and some annoyingly shrill flute tones.

Pianist Lloyd Lifton and bassist Murray Wall mellow out the first side. On *Flamingo* a pleasing bass-led melody is backed by Lifton's Shearingesque chordal punctuations, which lead into extended piano/bass interplay. *What's New* is a poised but somewhat calculated performance. Finally, *Stella By Starlight* (one of the concert's several anthems) opens in a light, block-chorded swing with walking bass, yet another augmentation of one of Tristano's most serviceable piano designs.

Sheila Jordan, who also studied once with Tristano, is easily one of this concert's most promising performers. But her portion of this memorial is spoiled by an echo-ridden sound system which blurs her scatting and makes her vocalise on the technically challenging *Confirmation* quite unintelligible. The PA system likewise garbles Jordan's wild, low register sweeps on *You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To*. A dirge-like *Yesterdays*, replete with Jordan's expressive moans, gets similarly muddled by sloppy amplification. There would have been much more to say about Jordan's performance if more of it had been audible.

Virg Dzurinko, a student of Connie Crothers, who in turn was a student of Tristano himself, continues some Tristanoites' penchant for bastardizing popular song titles then claiming them as their own. So Dzurinko first takes on *You Do [sic] Know What Love Is*. After a roundabout introduction in blues licks, she freely improvises on the changes, then finally states the melody in careful, parallel chords. *Stella By Coincidence* (really!) features more taut, original

cadences and carefully assembled contrapuntal passages.

Larry Meyer, a guitarist, presents two originals. *Tristano*, an etude in upper fret runs, arpeggios and tremolos, is remotely reminiscent of Tristano's own, allegedly speeded-up piano tapes. In contrast, *As Summer Falls*, *Winter Springs*, a lushly chorded ballad, is in pure repose, featuring lightweight curlicue runs alternating with sensuous chordal passages.

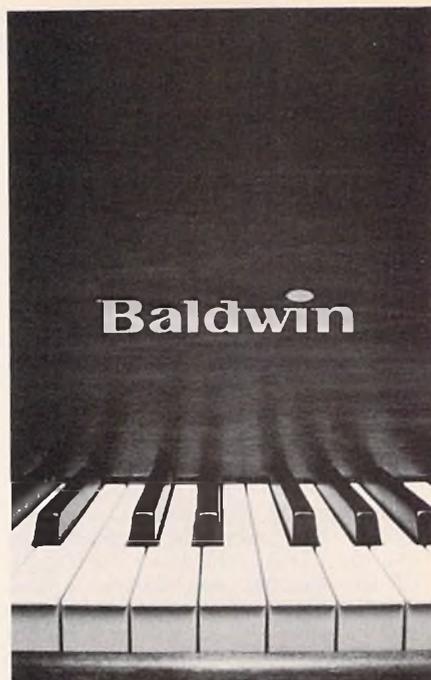
The next disc in this set moves closer to the spirit of Tristano's small group playing. A trio comprising Larry Popkin, tenor sax, Peter Scattaretico, drums, and Stan Fortuna, bass, runs through Tristano's *Ablution* in his typically winding, stream-of-consciousness style of group playing. Popkin's clean lines and the group's continuous intertwining make this performance the most evocative tribute to Tristano yet offered at this concert. On *You Don't Know*, Popkin alternates dark, pea-soup lines with airy, upper register timbres in nearly virtuosic playing. Unfortunately, Scattaretico is so ineptly miked that his drum kicks sound soggy and obtusive. Yet the remainder of the trio's selections once again capture the feel of Tristano's small group work. *Two Not One*, *Lennie's Pennies* (another concert anthem) and *East 32nd Street* all flow along in the spirit of Tristano's harmonically daring lines and extended thematic development.

Sal Mosca, one of Tristano's most persistent students and, perhaps, his immediate heir, presents his tripartite *Suite For Lennie*. *One*, a rich ballad, is graced by Mosca's effortless invention and tripping lines, punctuated by gutsy bass figures. *Two* also calls upon high velocity bass figures and adds breakneck, two-handed passages. *Three*, a light ballad, contrasts fragile right hand lines with walking bass chordal designs. Here's the spirit of Tristano absorbed and rethought into a personal musical statement.

Flutist Nomi Rosen opens the next portion of this concert. Using either a pre-recorded tape or a very large Echoplex, she fiddles around with extended, sequencer-like textures on *Among Friends*, losing the whole point of Tristano's melodic and rhythmic fluidity in the process. Joined briefly by Connie Crothers, Rosen runs through yet another *Lennie's Pennies*, well armed with a stockpile of bebop licks.

The climax to all this comes when Warne Marsh, a bona fide, first-rate disciple and musical companion of Tristano, takes—almost seizes—the stand. Backed by Eddie Gomez and drummer Scattaretico, Marsh romps through *I Should Care* and *I Love You*. The group is hallmarked by Marsh's expansive, web-like designs and Gomez' well-aged tone and rhythmically intricate soloing. Even Scattaretico, while clattery, helps rather than hinders the flow.

The high point of the trio's set, though, comes on Marsh's *Trilogy*. Opening a capella in a crystalline, altoish tone, Marsh roams through the full range of his instrument, playing off Gomez' taut, walking background. Tristano would have been pleased.



## John Williams' Accompanist

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The first part in the last record in this collection is given over to a generally dull collection of solo voice miniatures by Lynn Anderson. Her one-chorus versions of standards like *There Will Never Be Another You* and *Day By Day* cry out for some kind of instrumental backing to support her fragile, literal readings. But Anderson comes alive when she scats along with a tape of Charlie Parker's solo on *Embraceable You*, creating a unique voice-doubling effect as she negotiates Bird's tricky double time passages. Anderson duplicates a similar effect as she sings along with Tristano's own *Take One*, a carefree, bouncy line.

To conclude the concert, Liz Gorrill returns. The meandering dissonances of *This Crazy Feeling* lead into a touching *All Of Me*: beautiful note choices, a fresh reharmonization, all climaxing in a collage of eerie groans and growls. As a kind of afterthought, Max Roach (who played at Tristano's studio in the early '50s), a year and a day after this concert recorded a drum solo for Tristano, a crisp, carefully developed work, as Tristano might have wished it.

—Jon Balleras

## JOANNE BRACKEEN

**ANCIENT DYNASTY**—Columbia JC 36593: *ANCIENT DYNASTY*; *REMEMBERING*; *BEAGLE'S BOOGIE*; *PIN DRUM SONG*—*CELEBRATION*.

**Personnel:** Brackeen, piano; Joe Henderson, tenor saxophone; Eddie Gomez, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

## GLEN HALL

**THE BOOK OF THE HEART**—Sonora SA-101: *ORCHID OPENING DOWNWARDS*; *KITAB AL QUALB (THE BOOK OF THE HEART)*; *EL BORRADO*; *FOR MARIANNE*; *BLUE SEVEN*; *IRIS*.

**Personnel:** Hall, tenor and soprano saxophones, bass clarinet and percussion; Joanne Brackeen, piano; Billy Hart, drums and wood block; Cecil McBee, bass; Joshua Breakstone, guitar (cut 4).

★ ★ ★

## JOE HENDERSON

**MIRROR, MIRROR**—Pausa 7075: *MIRROR*, *MIRROR*; *CANDLELIGHT*; *KEYSTONE*; *JOE'S BOLERO*; *WHAT'S NEW*; *BLUES FOR LIEBESTRAUM*.

**Personnel:** Henderson, tenor saxophone; Chick Corea, piano; Ron Carter, bass; Billy Higgins, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

Joanne Brackeen is a cerebral player—there is little in what she does, musically, that is readily apparent even to experienced ears. This is a problem in a live setting, where tastes and attention spans can vary. Her rigidly cascading lines and clashing harmonies flew right over the heads of Monterey fest fans this year; it was sad to see Jimmy Lyons shoo her off stage after only a few numbers. But frankly, this music is not for casual, desensitized audiences. Brackeen is

not one to shake her booty in order to hold your attention. She demands (and her music requires) patience from the listener.

With records there is an opportunity to relisten. Initially, *Ancient Dynasty* sounds overly structured, tedious. Upon closer inspection, however, I find the group interaction to be of an extraordinarily high level. Granted, Brackeen's compositions are lacklustre (and sometimes downright unattractive—*Pin Drum Song*) and her solos are still lacking in contrast. Her Tynesque fourth chords in the left hand and rhythmically ambiguous sheets-of-sound in the right become tiring after a while. But there are plenty of high spots on the album.

*Beagle's Boogie* is a marvelous exercise in thrashing, dissonant funk, and Henderson executes his ideas with a true veteran's sense of how space and dynamics should work for a soloist and not against. Yet, the taunting give and take accompaniment from Brackeen combined with the throbbing, exuberant percussion work of DeJohnette are just as responsible for the success of this LP as Henderson. Gomez' bass is a bit too far back in the mix, but it's refreshing to hear Eddie venturing into the deeper, darker, unknown regions of his instrument.

As an accompanist, Brackeen's imperfections aren't as obvious. She's a suitable foil for Glen Hall, who's not the swinging-est sax man on the scene, but a sensuous player just the same. On *Book Of The Heart* he explores so many different styles of contemporary jazz that his identity as a soloist and leader is somewhat vague. *Blue Seven* may be a little too noodlesville for some, and Hall's tenor sounds frenzied and unorganized at faster tempi (as on *Kitab*). But when he has a chance to think things out, he comes across as a subtle, emotional player capable of conveying a lot of feeling with just a few notes (*Iris*).

Brackeen makes better use of space on this date, and Hart's cymbal work throughout is exquisite. I still cringe when a jazz bassist bows during a solo as McBee does on *Orchid*, but then most classical double bassists don't walk all that convincingly, either. Overall, *Book Of The Heart* is an ambitious project, if too deliberately experimental. It all goes by quickly, too: there's less than 36 minutes of music on this disc.

Henderson's record—his return to leadership—succeeds in areas that Brackeen's doesn't (such as range of dynamics). Yet, except for Joe's *Bolero*, the album lacks some of the fire of the pianist's date. For the most part, Henderson plays prettier on his own session than on Brackeen's, sounding very much like he did on his early Blue Note records. But even when his approach is low key, his array of ideas is stunning.

Corea, Carter and Higgins provide sympathetic support throughout, but don't really ignite until *Keystone*, Carter's goofy Monkish blues, and the aforementioned *Bolero*. Here Henderson employs one of his favorite effects: a shrieking wail that enchants and distresses simultaneously. The same device in the hands of a less discriminating player usually grates on the nerves. *Mirror, Mirror* shows that Corea is still

capable of writing legitimate jazz songs and not just the Mickey Mouse tripe which has plagued so many of his recent efforts. His solo work with this group is also first rate. Whatever the engineers did for Carter's sound is an improvement over the thin whining tone we've become accustomed to on his recordings in recent years.

It's good to hear a superb improviser like Joe Henderson back in this format again. Another straightahead session is forthcoming from Contemporary that will include Corea, Richard Davis and Tony Williams.

—Arthur Moorhead

## JACK BRUCE AND FRIENDS

**I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO THIS—**

EPIC JE 36827: *HIT AND RUN*; *RUNNING BACK*; *FACELIFT 318*; *IN THIS WAY*; *MICKEY THE FIDDLER*; *DANCING ON AIR*; *LIVIN' WITHOUT JA*; *WIND AND THE SEA*; *OUT TO LUNCH*; *BIRD ALONE*.

**Personnel:** Bruce, bass, harmonica, vocals; Clem Clempson, electric and acoustic guitars; Billy Cobham, drums, percussion; David Sancious, keyboards, guitar (cuts 7,9).

★ ★ ★ ★

As a bassist, vocalist and songwriter, Jack Bruce's influence has been felt in rock, jazz and blues, and fusions of each. His earliest and widest acclaim came as he helped power the trio Cream, writing and singing several hits before joining Tony Williams' Lifetime in that band's pioneering days. The '70s saw Bruce form another power trio (West, Bruce and Laing) as well as collaborate with Carla Bley, Larry Coryell and John McLaughlin, and record several solo projects. *I've Always Wanted To Do This*, the 1980 offering from Bruce and Friends, features one of the finest bands he's ever assembled.

Bruce again collaborates with his longtime lyricist Pete Brown, and the results range from the raw power of *Livin' Without Ja* and restrained satire of *Facelift 318*, to the light European feeling of *Dancing On Air*. On the latter, the lightness is altered on the bridge via Cobham's double (or is it triple?) bass drums, and the section provides subtle but full support for solos by keyboardist Sancious, then guitarist Clempson. Clempson's solos throughout the album are fluid and articulate, all the while retaining a blues-rock edge. His rhythm playing and comping is equally inventive, making use of muting, distortion and a light strumming touch.

The hands of David Sancious are felt shaping this music. Notable are his two compositions: the sophisticated pop of *Running Back*, with its Doobie Brother-ish chorus, and the syncopated and melodic *In This Way*. Sancious rarely uses the synthesizers to reproduce the sound of another instrument, but finds sounds unique to each keyboard, thus adding a human touch and personality that many synthesists lack.

# RECORD REVIEWS

Cobham is quite supportive on this project, proving his worth with strong rock grooves rather than exploiting his technical prowess. Cobham is certainly one of the most powerful trappers around, and when the power is called for he turns it on. Bruce's tribute to Charlie Parker, *Bird Alone*, is a rather curious tune that alternates between a painstakingly slow pace and a furiously fast one. It is during the furious part that Cobham gets a chance to turn loose, and he does, but of course we knew he could. It is the way he has adapted himself to the whole of Bruce's music, the straight-ahead rock as well as the more complex, that makes his performance here a fine one.

*Bird Alone* finds Bruce doubling the quick instrumental melody on bass, also creating lovely melody of his own during the more spacious parts. His tone is superlative, highlighted by trebly slides and tantalizing excursions to the top frets. Bruce's style is to be heavily involved in a tune melodically, while managing to maintain a huge bottom end.

Jack's voice is very expressive, and he molds it easily into the different characters for which his songs call. He is soft and almost breathless on Cobham's 6/8 ballad *Wind And The Sea*, then becomes dirty and growling on the bluesy *Out To Lunch*. Bruce's delivery was influencing vocalists 15 years ago, and he still does it better than most.

*I've Always Wanted To Do This*, like Bruce's other solo releases over the past ten years, is a loose collection of tunes, no two of which are alike. Bruce is an understated performer whose music doesn't beat a listener over the head with commercial hooks, or try to confuse, confound or astound, as much as it simply tries to entertain. And it has the quality to do that.

—robin tolleson

## STEVE REICH

OCTET—MUSIC FOR A LARGE  
ENSEMBLE—VIOLIN PHASE—ECM  
1-1168.

**Personnel:** Reich, Nurit Tilles, Edmund Nieman, Larry Karush, piano; Russ Hartenburg, Glen Valez, Gary Schall, Richard Schwarz, marimbas; Bob Becker, David Van Tieghem, xylophones; James Priess, vibraphone; Jay Clayton, Elizabeth Arnold, voices; Shem Guibbory, Robert Chausov, violins; Ruth Siegler, Claire Bergman, violas; Chris Finckel, Michael Finckel, celli; Lewis Paer, Judith Sugarman, basses; Richard Cohen, clarinet; Ed Joffe, Vincent Gnojek, soprano saxophones; Douglas Hedwig, Marshall Farr, James Hamlin, James Dooley, trumpets; Virgil Blackwell, clarinet, bass clarinet; Mort Silver, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Steve Reich's music presents an interesting dichotomy between feeling and technique. Reich's main concept in writing is based on revealing the processes of his music, and using those processes as the basis of his

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# RECORD REVIEWS

sound rather than hiding them as part of the music's mystery. He never speaks of his music as being anything more than an expression of his processes. To put it more simply, there is an element of technique-for-technique's sake in Reich's work.

Conversely, on a purely audio/sensual level, Reich's music is spiritually elevating and emotional. There are few composers working in non-improvised Western music who have the ability to transport one to areas of thought and feeling that are crystalline in shape, and mystically beckoning.

Reich's second ECM recording shows the furthest evolution of his music to date and also reprises one of his earliest works, *Violin Phase*, which is now 13 years old. Originally available on the deleted Columbia Masterworks record *Its Gonna Rain/Violin Phase*, it illustrates Reich's early studies of repeating patterns that gradually go in and out of phase with each other. Shem Guibbory is the violinist here who plays against pre-recorded tapes of himself in the manner of a canon. As the piece progresses, one quickly loses track of which violin is playing in real

time and which ones are taped. Guibbory creates a more enticing environment than his predecessor in the work's recording, Paul Zukovsky, and succeeds in breathing life into music that is primitive when compared to the other works on this album.

Reich's move from these taped works to a brief fling with electronics (*Four Organs*), then percussion (*Drumming*), and finally the full array of Western orchestral instrumentation has meant a stunning increase in melodic interest and color. Reich has also moved away from the Escher-like quality of his earlier works. There's a clearer forward motion in his music with series of evolutions and phases.

*Octet*, is a piece in which there are no more than eight instruments playing at a time, but with a lot of doubling and switching so it often seems harmonically richer than eight pieces. It seems to begin in mid-stride with geometrically designed patterns turning and lacing in and out of each other, providing subtly shifting counterpoints and interlocking rhythms that would be brilliant in a kaleidoscope. Densities are skillfully juxtaposed, with flute and piccolo dances played off against grumbling bass clarinet ostinatos.

*Music For A Large Ensemble* is Reich's largest work to date and is a clear extension of his last (first) ECM recording, *Music For 18 Musicians*. Its beginning recalls the gamelan music of Bali and harkens to the interfacing cog patterns of *Drumming*. As the full ensemble slowly enters, the full development of Reich's music is revealed. Patterns are phased from foreground to background and eased from one instrumental grouping to another as new sequences are introduced. Scanning horn lines illuminate the terrain like a searchlight. The wistfully sustained strings form a poignant counterpoint to the intricacy of the woodwinds, percussion and pianos. The inner-directed mandala quality of Reich's music always makes his sudden endings all the more shocking. This music seems like it must have to go on forever. Repeated listenings only reveal more facets to get lost in.

—john diliberto

Byard Lancaster probably got the idea that this album could be heard as a sampler of musical trends of the '70s because it starts with James Brownish funk and winds up with the sort of free-form lyrical music normally associated with saxist Lancaster. One suspects, however, that only a studio musician could successfully realize such a project. Lancaster's playing is too personal, of course, to be merely representative, but *Documentation* (recorded in 1979 over a period of nine months and put together from six different sessions) does bring us up-to-date on all the facets of this under-documented Philadelphia, who mostly stayed in his hometown.

An apparent coltage industry product, *Documentation* has a generally raw recording quality that actually helps the two funk tracks, *Rib Crib* and *Philly Funk*: they come across with all the immediacy and infectiousness characteristics of a gutsy garage band. But the rest of the album, consisting of duets and solos that naturally need a more intimate and sophisticated production technique, suffers badly.

While it is refreshing to meet Lancaster's incisive tone in an aggressive environment of street funk, it is, not surprisingly, still his ametric music with his instrumental command and wealth of emotional range that carries the album.

The absolute focus and perfect pitch of Lancaster's alto sax is particularly in evidence on *Imperial Police's* arresting opening montage of contrasted sounds, and on *Mary Ann*, a free-form poem that actually reminds one more of the '60s than the '70s. Lancaster's flute, one of the two or three best in jazz today, is a perfect obligato voice behind Joan Hansom's emotional authority on the ballad "Sweetness", and a thrillingly alive solo voice on *Crockett And I*.

Of Lancaster's fellow players one notices in particular Youseff Yancy. Yancy's solo effort, *Blue Nature*, with a blaring trumpet and dubbed in echo- or multi-tracking, quickly builds to one of the most promising cuts, only to fade out inexplicably after two and a half minutes.

One can easily sympathize with Byard Lancaster for wanting to have some documentation, or any musical statement of his activity, released. Even with poor production values he clearly continues to be a major instrumentalist. We should not have to wait another decade for a follow-up.

—Iars gabel

## BYARD LANCASTER

### DOCUMENTATION: THE END OF A

DECADE—Bellows T 801: *RIB CRIB*; *MARY ANN*; *PHILLY FUNK*; "SWEETNESS"; *A BIRD'S EYE VIEW (OF THE WORLD)*; *BLUE NATURE*; *IMPERIAL POLICE*; *CROCKETT AND I*; *BROTHERMAN*.

**Personnel:** Lancaster, alto and soprano saxophones, flute, bass clarinet; Youseff Yancy, flugelhorn, trumpet, theremin (cuts 1.4,6); Michael Ray, trumpet (1); Rick Davis, tenor saxophone (1); Emmett Simmons, baritone saxophone (1); Alfie Pollitt, electric piano (1); Richard "Deacon" Daniels, synthesizer (1); Michael Davis, guitar (1.3); Bobby Byrd, bass (1.3); Edward Crockett, bass (8); Chuck Lee, drums (1.3); David Eyges, cello (5); Keno Speller, conga (7); Joan Hansom, vocals (4).

★ ★ ★ ½

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# RECORD REVIEWS

**GERRY MULLIGAN AND HIS ORCHESTRA:** *WALK ON THE WATER* (DRG SL 5194) ★ ★ ★ ★  
**THE STEVE SPIEGL BAND:** *HOT* (Sorcerer KM 4230) ★ ★ ½  
**COUNT BASIE AND HIS ORCHESTRA:** *ON THE ROAD* (Pablo Today D2312112) ★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
**MAYNARD FERGUSON:** *It's My Time* (Columbia JC 36766) ★  
**MEL LEWIS AND THE JAZZ ORCHESTRA:** *NATURALLY* (Telarc DG 10044) ★ ★ ★ ★  
**BOB BROOKMEYER WITH MEL LEWIS AND THE JAZZ ORCHESTRA:** *BOB BROOKMEYER COMPOSER AND ARRANGER* (Gryphon G912) ★ ★ ★ ½

The question of whether or not big bands have died has been bandied about for close to 40 years now. Ever since World War II dealt a lethal blow to the economic viability of doing one-nighters with 13-plus musicians and instruments, pundits have been ringing the death knell for the jazz orchestra; yet all across the land big bands still thrive.

In 1965, Thad Jones and Mel Lewis formed what would quickly become the prototype for many big bands to come: their Jazz Orchestra began as a rehearsal band, a chance for studio musicians to get together once a week at the Village Vanguard and blow for whomever wandered in. New York City being the haven for studio work that it is, soon there were more able applicants for the Monday night job than spots in the band or room on the Vanguard stage. What gave the Jones/Lewis ensemble its strength was the fact that none of the players were counting on the band for their daily bread; the onus of traveling was removed as was the pressure of constant rehearsals. Before long the band was the talk of the jazz world, and concert and album dates followed naturally.

The point was that if like-minded studio players got together for the hell of it under some sort of able direction, great things could happen. There was no need to worry about one-nighters, the band could become a home base for players who spent the lion's share of their time doing TV, radio or bar mitzvahs. From this concept comes the Austin-Moro Big Band from Detroit, Rob McConnell and the Boss Brass from Toronto, the Steve Spiegl Band from Southern California, the David Chesky Band from New York (where Mel Lewis still helms the Jazz Orchestra), and Louie Bellson and Explosion from Los Angeles.

The old method of climbing into the bus and schlepping from town to town is still practiced by seasoned veterans such as Maynard Ferguson and Count Basie (though it is rare for the leaders to see the inside of a Greyhound). Both bands are paradigms—Basie of polished, demonic swing, with a heavy blues emphasis, and Ferguson of flashy, thumping fusion. Recently Gerry Mulligan, a big band leader in the early '60s, has tried to shepherd a young group, with varying degrees of success. Basie has survived through persistent professionalism;

  
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# RECORD REVIEWS

Ferguson has survived by rolling with the trends of the day and accruing an audience of young music students—but it is rough going for Mulligan who is trying to build an audience for his orchestra in these troubled times.

One thing that becomes obvious after one listens to a number of big band LPs is that there is a tendency towards sameness, a general lack of subtlety and tonal contrast, and a lack of personal sounds and visions. Soloists, charts and instrumentation are almost interchangeable from band to band. There is a trend toward building the band around the ride cymbal and trumpet section, letting dynamics suffer for loud brashness.

**The Austin-Moro Band** is 12-year Detroit veterans who try here for a goulash—one Ferguson hit (*Rocky*), one Ellington anthem (*'A' Train*), two sappy standards (*Who Can I Turn To* and *What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life*) and three originals. The band transcends its material and the perfunctory inclusion of brazen rock guitar and synthesizer solos, thanks to some very nifty arranging, especially by Jeff Steinberg. The band is full of spit and spunk, and possesses a fine, rough-and-tumble tenor soloist named George F. Benson. The other soloists are unexceptional, but the solos are wisely brief (oddly, the two leaders, reed men both, don't solo, arrange or compose anything here). The band has zest, and I'm sure if they were trying to be less eclectic on their premier recording, this would be a much more impressive debut (available from

Locust Records; 3875 Lone Pine No. 101; W. Bloomfield, MI 48033).

**The Bellson Explosion** is aptly named. Made up of West Coast veterans, the band sounds like the Grambling Marching Band sitting down. There is lots of good hard steamin', but the album remains on one annoyingly high dynamic level throughout. Part of the problem with all-star aggregations is that everybody has an ego, so Bellson allows just nine solos, each from a different player. Despite the presence of Conte Candoli, Ted Nash, Don Menza and Ross Tompkins, only Pete Christlieb gets mileage out of his brief tenor turn on *Picture IV*. The sound on this direct-to-disc recording is crisp and sharp, and the charts are slick and lean, but *Note Smoking* is like fireworks without any colors (from Discwasher Records; 1407 N. Providence Rd.; Columbia, MO 65201).

**The David Chesky Band** is another toothless roar, this time in the fusion vein. The charts are carefully considered modern ditties, and Chesky knows how to use the whole band on his own compositions and arrangements. The result, however, is somewhat ponderous. The players solo to varying effect: the Brecker Brothers turn in their standard pre-fab fusion solos, while Michal Urbaniak, Roger Rosenburg and Mauricio Smith float above the sometimes plodding electric din. The album is not offensive, it just tends to waffle in its limited spectrum.

**Rob McConnell and his Boss Brass** is different. Featuring some of Canada's best

known players (Ed Bickert, Don Thompson, Marty Morell, Sam Noto), the 22-piece outfit is quite commanding. The band charges in with *You Took Advantage Of Me* and proceeds to give us rich textures, solos that range from Moe Koffman's gritty, bluesy alto to Bickert's clear, precise guitar, intriguing counter-melodies, and a piston-like rhythm section. The reed section is used to fine advantage (especially on a willowy *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*) and there is the right balance of space and clutter. The main problem with *Present Perfect* is the length of tunes. Lasting from six minutes to nearly ten, the half dozen charts are just too long. The soloists tend to fizzle before their solos do, and the numbers just don't sustain interest. If these pieces were trimmed and a couple of other's added, McConnell's *Boss Brass* (and reeds and rhythm, etc.) would be a swing machine to contend with the very best.

Any showcase for the talents of **Gerry Mulligan** is noteworthy, but for those who get dewy-eyed at the mention of his Concert Jazz Band of 20 years past, having him at the helm of a big band is a welcome delight. Mulligan's lilting baritone and soprano tones, and terse, lyrical improvisations are even more effective when floating on a cushion of flutes and flugelhorn. The ensemble voicings here (notably on the original title tune) weave a lush broadloom of sound. The emphasis however, is not on the band, but on the leader. Mulligan does most of the soloing, arranging and writing, and one can't help wishing he had paid more careful attention to the orchestra, concentrating on ensembles rather than his own improvisations, which are always swinging and joyful, though his spectacular arrangement of *I'm Getting Sentimental Over You* is the album's highlight. Other soloists include the overly-romantic Mitchell Forman on piano and the briskly attacking Tom Harrell on trumpet and flugelhorn. This band is a gentle, easy tonic to the brass blasts of most of the other ensembles discussed here, and one hopes that they beat the odds and stay together.

**The Steve Spiegel Band** is basically a gleaming, smack-you-over-the-head fusion group, slick, well-rehearsed and faceless. The charts are typical and bookish, like those played by any self-respecting college ensemble. Sometimes the tunes (all originals) here are over-arranged and sometimes under-arranged. If one was to put this album in the Chesky cover, and vice-versa, no one would know the difference. There is the perfunctory latin-tempo, etc., etc. Spiegel's soloists are brief and Oscar Brashear manages to sneak in a number of good trumpet licks, but they do not transcend the facile quality of the whole project. Liner notes inform us that these charts are available for purchase and I have no doubt that your big band can play them exactly the same. Hot? Lukewarm is more like it.

**Count Basie** is a marvel. After the departure of Jimmy Forrest and Al Grey a couple of years back, the Basie band slipped into a brief period of malaise. But, as he's been doing since Hector was a pup, Basie bounced back. This set, digitally recorded at

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# RECORD REVIEWS

Montreux in 1979, is an up-lifting, steaming, celebration of the swingiest band in the land. The ten charts here thunder by like that proverbial 2:19 train. The band purrs: the rhythm section breathes, the soloists sting; it's pure heaven. Kenny Hing has filled the first tenor chair admirably; his style is tough and aggressive, and he does the forefathers of that section—Young, Evans, Tate, Jacquet, Foster, Wess, Davis, Forrest—proud. The other outstanding soloist is the redoubtable plunger—bone master Bootie Wood. If one doesn't mind two Lou Rawls-style vocals from Denis Roland, this is a powerhouse LP from the powerhouse band. One note: the sleeve incorrectly identifies Keeter Betts and Mickey Roker in John Clayton's bass and Butch Miles' drum chairs. Also, why is this the only album of the nine that doesn't list the soloists?

**Maynard Ferguson** is the king of the obvious. This album is another showcase for his steely trumpet tone, virtuosic technique and total lack of taste—a pulsing, throbbing collection, enough to make Robert Young edgy. It is a loud, boring muscle-flex from the man who makes Muhammad Ali look like the Coy Wonder (the address of "Fanadicts For Ferguson" is duly listed on the sleeve). There is, however, one redeeming cut on the album (hence the star) and that's *Everybody Loves The Blues*, a taut, powerful arrangement by Nick Lane that is a salute to Basie and a chance for Mike Migliore, on alto sax, to take the album's best solo, quoting *Jumpin' With Symphony Sid*. *Blue Monk* and others. Otherwise *It's My Time* is pitifully par for the course. It makes you shout, "Take it off!"

In direct contrast is **Mel Lewis and the Jazz Orchestra's** digitally recorded *Naturally*. This is, in effect, the last album marked by Thad Jones, who left for Europe after assembling the tunes to be used here.

His mark is always welcome. Here is a band that foregoes the day-glo for rich pastels. The reeds are the basis, not the brass, and everything is rich and cushy. Mel Lewis is an exquisite big band drummer, unassuming but there. The originals, like *Que Pasa Bossa* (an odd title, mixing Spanish and Portugese) and *Cherry Juice*, are memorable and bear those lovely Jones touches, as does Thad's re-working of *Easy Living*, with its characteristic splays of flute work.

In finding a replacement for the composing and arranging talents of Thad Jones, you couldn't do much better than **Bob Brookmeyer**. Brookmeyer knows the hues of a large ensemble and, while his pieces are somewhat more adventurous than Thad's, they have a similar tendency towards lush expressiveness. The first side of this Gryphon LP features three of Brookmeyer's originals plus his arrangements of *Skylark*. Although this live recording is somewhat dim (the band sounds as if it's in an airshaft), the pieces come across as strong additions to the band's book. *First Love Song* is a pretty, melancholy piece, *Hello And Goodbye* is a solid, swinging blues romp, and *Ding Dong Ding* is somewhere in between. The soloists, especially Jim McNeely at the piano, are loose and effective, and the band is clearly

in its element. The second side features *Elco*, a longwinded 16-minute showcase for Clark Terry, Brookmeyer's former partner and special guest for this date. Terry plays nicely but the work is somewhat stiff and dull. The finale, *The Fun Club*, features Terry and Brookmeyer recapturing the freewheeling spirit of their quintet, ably backed by the Orchestra. But this is Brookmeyer's date, and not Mel's.

It is encouraging to see that the Jazz Orchestra will continue to feed its book. Bob

Brookmeyer's talents should do the band proud. However, one can't help thinking back to the days of Jon Faddis, Butter Jackson, Pepper Adams, Jerry Dodgion, Billy Harper, Roland Hanna, Richard Davis, Cecil Bridgewater, et al. While the soloists here are eager and capable, this is no longer a band of individual strengths, but one of a certain state of mind and unity. Without the original version of this band, big bands would be a lot closer to extinction than they are at present.

—lee jeske



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# Blindfold Test:

Dexter Gordon

BY BOB PORTER

DEXTER KEITH GORDON (born February 27, 1923, in Los Angeles) studied clarinet, alto and tenor sax, and joined Lionel Hampton in December, 1940.

Further experience came with the big bands of Louis Armstrong and

Billy Eckstine. Free-lancing through the 1940s in both New York and California, Dex was among the first bebop tenor sax stylists.

His 1950s were spent around L.A.; in 1960 he renewed activity, and moved to Europe in 1962, eventually settling in Copenhagen. Although Gordon returned

to the U.S. for brief tours, not until his 1976 engagement at NYC's Village Vanguard did he catalyze the modern jazz revival of the late '70s.

Dexter currently leads a quartet; his latest LP, *Gotham City*, is on Columbia Records. He had no information about the records played.



## 1. SONNY CRISS. *BLUE SUNSET* (from *I'LL CATCH THE SUN*, Prestige). Criss, alto sax; Hampton Hawes, piano; Monty Budwig, bass; Shelly Manne, drums.

Sonny Criss. After two notes I could tell, because of his sound, and that's very important. He's my home boy, he's also from Memphis. You can readily hear the blues—like Hank Crawford—whatever they play, it comes out the blues. That's a good four stars.

Sonny was one of our very best talents on alto, but his career never really got together. He had a highly developed ego and that made it difficult to deal with him. Even as a kid, he could play the whole thing.

I didn't recognize anyone else. The piano player was very nice—crisp and unpretentious.

BP: The piano player was Hampton Hawes.

DG: I knew him when he was 16 and had just started coming out—jamming. I showed him how to play A minor into D<sup>7</sup> on the bridge of *I Got Rhythm*. After that he was cool. He took that and went.

## 2. RICKY FORD. *TAKE THE COLTRANE* (from *FLYING COLORS*, Muse). Ford, tenor sax; John Hicks, piano; Walter Booker, bass; Jimmy Cobb, drums.

That was hip: I loved that! Right down my alley. I don't recognize anyone, but I should. I've heard that tune before, but I can't call it. Certainly four stars.

The tenor player was beautiful. This guy was playing like Hank Mobley, but with a bigger sound and more fire. Not copying, you know, but working nicely, comfortably in that style. Whoever it is must be from New Jersey . . . Newark. It was a beautiful rhythm section, but I don't know who they were.

## 3. SONNY ROLLINS. *TENOR MADNESS* (from *TENOR MADNESS*, Prestige). Rollins, John Coltrane, tenor saxes; Red Garland, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Philly Joe Jones, drums.

I recorded that tune . . . *Tenor Madness*. That was a very special encounter. The tenor players are two of my favorite sons and I would recommend that all young tenor players listen to this.

Both these guys are superb. They have similar backgrounds, yet there is something different about each one. Everything they play means something. I'm especially attracted to Trane because he sings on the horn. That's very essential. Not to say that Rollins doesn't, but Trane is into singing.

The rhythm section was beautiful. The time didn't move . . . no upsurge. Extraordinary. Garland. I'm sure that was [George] Duvivier and A.T. [Art Taylor]. Five stars. I'd recommend that to my son, Benji.

## 4. WARDELL GRAY. *HEY THERE* (from *THE FOREMOST*, Onyx). Gray, tenor sax; Tate Houston, baritone sax; Gene Phipps, trumpet; Norman Simmons, piano; Victor Sproles, bass; Vernell Fournier, drums. Recorded, 1955.

*Hey There*. The player was very familiar, but I couldn't really pin it down until the later stages. There were elements of Rollins, some Dexter, some Harold Land. It was Teddy Edwards.

When this was done one of the major criticisms I had of Teddy involved his intonation. He could always play, but there was always that one factor. I've heard him recently, and it's much better. I think the trouble was in the horn he was using.

Three stars. Nice tune, nice band (but I don't know who they were).

BP: The tenor player was Wardell Gray.

DG: Wardell? That's the biggest sound I ever heard Wardell get!

## 5. GENE AMMONS. *JUG'S BLUE* (from *UP TIGHT*, Prestige). Ammons, tenor sax; Walter Bishop Jr., piano; Art Davis, bass; Art Taylor, drums; Ray Baretto, conga.

Obviously, my old sectionmate Gene Ammons. Red Garland. I think it was Duvivier. Possibly Osie Johnson.

Jug used to come into New York from Chicago just to record. He'd be on parole and couldn't stay, so he'd work all night in Chicago, get on the plane, do the date, and go back to Chicago. This sounded like one of those dates.

It was authentic but not inspired. Strictly a jukebox type of endeavor. Jug always did that very well. His playing was directed toward the public. His thing was never artistic in an esoteric sense. As far as communicating to an audience, he had the

rare ability to do that always. He'd play—whooo—and touch everybody! Three stars.

## 6. CECIL McBEE SEXTET. *UNDERCURRENT* (from *COMPASSION*, Inner City). Chico Freeman, soprano sax; Joe Gardner, trumpet; Dennis Moorman, piano; McBee, bass; Steve McCall, drums; Famoudou Don Moye, percussion.

I don't know who it was. The first couple of choruses made sense, but after that they went out and I really lost interest. I don't mind if someone goes out if there is some basic musicality to what they do. They go out, but you know that they know what they are doing and that they will come back to one, wherever that may be.

I'm not too prejudiced against freedom or avant garde. When a Shepp or Ornette or Trane go out, you hear that there is something there and they know what they are doing. I can't really rate this. I just lost interest.

## 7. BEN WEBSTER. *MACK THE KNIFE* (from *SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE MONMARTRE*, Black Lion). Webster, tenor sax; Kenny Drew, piano; Niels Henning Ørsted Pederson, bass; Alex Riel, drums.

Party music! After the first two notes, I knew who that was—the same with Kenny Drew. This is a quality you cannot contrive—that individual stamp. These people we have been listening to have a conception in their mind about music, about sound, and they project that voice. When people asked Duke Ellington why he kept the band so long, he'd say, "I love all those voices." When Cootie Williams came back, after being away 20 years, people asked Duke why he hired Cootie and Duke said, "I missed his voice."

It's the same with these people. Kenny Drew. Ben Webster, one of my heroes, dear friend, namesake to my son. Niels Henning, another of my sons. I don't know if that was Alex on drums.

Ben was the first tenor player I heard, in 1936 during assembly in junior high school. They were playing *Truckin'* by Ellington on the speakers, which was the first thing Ben recorded with Duke. That was incredible. I still hear it and still feel it, still get the goose pimples. Ben Webster was some kind of tenorist. Five stars. db

# Profile:



YASUHISA YONEDA

## Janice Robinson

BY YUSEF A. SALAAM

**"S**ome people have told me that I'd never make it as a jazz musician because I'm a woman instrumentalist—a trombonist. I've proven myself but my parents still try to discourage me from this life and suggest that I return home to teach music.

"I don't find it harder finding gigs than my male counterparts. Although I teach privately on the side, I basically make my living as a musician just like many men musicians do. Discipline and hard work doesn't have a sex gender. I don't rely on my feminine sexuality to get over. I like to believe that I'm a good musician, and that I'm a vital organ to whatever body of music that I'm contributing to."

Bringing vitality to music is natural for Janice Robinson. After graduating from high school in 1969, the young trombonist moved from her native Clairton, Pennsylvania to New York. There she attended Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York.

"I've been playing the trombone since I was 12 years old. A trombonist named Harold Bettes from Pittsburgh used to play in nightclubs in Clairton occasionally. He was my most profound influence musically at that time."

During her college days, Robinson wasn't committed to any particular genre of music. "I just wanted to play all kinds of music—

pop, blues, rock 'n' roll—you name it." Her attitude changed when Thad Jones and Mel Lewis came to Eastman and conducted a jazz seminar for the school's ensemble, of which Janice was a member. "They showed such intense dedication to their music. They brought other musicians with them that showed the same spirit. I was so impressed that I decided to develop as an improvising musician."

Since then, Robinson has racked up an impressive list of credits. She has performed for television programs, concerts, festivals, and in the pit band of *Ain't Misbehavin'*. She also has recorded with Frank Foster (*Manhattan Fever* and *Shiny Stockings*), Clark Terry (*Live At The Wichita Jazz Festival*), Thad Jones and Mel Lewis (*Suite For Pops*) and Slide Hampton (*World Of Trombones*).

"After Thad and Mel's seminar I stopped spreading myself so thin and began concentrating on and practicing improvising music. I started listening intensely to J.J. Johnson, Slide Hampton, John Coltrane and Charlie Parker. I drew from them musically, but I was equally interested in the devotion and spirit that these musicians exhibited toward the music."

Janice's first job was with the Clark Terry Band. "Here, I was able to see serious musicians who were secure enough in themselves to help me out and give me tips that have, until today, been the foundation of my musical growth."

"In 1976, I toured Europe with the Gil Evans Orchestra. My eyes and ears were bulging. I was trying to take in everything musically and scenically. That same year I worked on a Broadway production of *Guys And Dolls*. My contacts broadened and I

began to get calls from guys like Sam Rivers, whom I worked with during Newport '76."

Her work with Slide Hampton, including the Boston Globe Festival, led to a position as lead player and organizer of the trombone section of New York City's Collective Black Artist Ensemble. Janice is the only female member. Warm applause is always the rule when she gives up articulate, spirited solos during the C.B.A. Ensemble's concert season at Town Hall.

With the emergence of "women's liberation," Janice has frequently participated in women oriented concerts such as the First Annual Women's Jazz Festival in Kansas City in 1978. "Pianist Sharon Freeman and I formed the Sharon Freeman-Janice Robinson Quintet and worked at various colleges for awhile. We also played in "A Salute to Women in Jazz" in New York City. That experience gave me a chance to play some of the stuff that I've written.

"A lot of the women oriented music is valid. But some of it is just pure commercialism. I like what Cobi Narita is doing here in the city as far as her women oriented concerts are concerned. Men musicians have always had a profound effect on me. I don't see them as a challenge to me or me a challenge to them. I like to work with musicians—male or female."

When asked whether her decision to start her own group, the Janice Robinson Quintet (usually Buster Williams on bass, Kenny Kirkland, piano, Allen Nelson, drums, and saxophonist Ron Bridgewater) is premature, she replies: "I've paid some dues and New Yorkers, musicians and non-musicians, know by now that I'm serious. You grow tired of expressing other people's thoughts and ideas. I want to play some of my own compositions, and the quintet gives me the chance to do just that." **db**

## Marshall Vente

BY JON BALLERAS

**A**s Marshall Vente, leader, arranger, and pianist of Project 9 lounges in an easy chair with nearly the same feline poise with which he addresses a keyboard, he speculates on the attraction of his two-year-old nonet: "In Chicago, there seems to be a large continuum, with fusion bands on one end and a swing-dixie thing on the other. So when you come in with a space in the middle—a Parker to 1975 type thing, Clifford Brown to Hancock to Coltrane—it attracts other musicians. And probably it has something to do with Project 9's age group. Most of the band grew up on '60s and '70s type music. The players like it. I like it. We're definitely one of the few bands that are doing it in Chicago, anyway."

Project 9 found its particular niche in Chicago's jazz scene at a loose, out of the way neighborhood bar, the North Branch Saloon, the perfect place to fine tune charts and break in new band members. The band also has appeared regularly at Orphan's, the Lincoln Avenue club that is stomping grounds of Chicago jazz regulars Joe Daley and Bobby Lewis. Gigs with a trio (and

sometimes a quartet) of various personnel fill in Vente's calendar.

In keeping with Vente's deliberate turn of mind, his plans for the group, now two years old, went through some apparent forethought. "For about three years I was saying that jazz in Chicago was a big ripoff," he recalls. "Nobody got rich but those who sold drinks. I stayed away from the Lincoln Avenue circuit for three years—very coldly. But it really didn't get me anywhere and it certainly didn't advance my music as much as I have in the last two years. I wanted a big band, but I wanted a small band, too. I started listening to groups that were working along those lines. The Miles Davis Nonet, obviously, but also Charles McPherson and Dave Matthews. But when the Lee Konitz band hit, that was the catalyst. I just had to do it then."

Gathering session players, pit band members, jobbers and teachers, Marshall stuck to his original nonet scheme, penning charts on such jazz standards as *Dewey Square*, *Au Privave* (both with Supersax styled sax soli) to *Monk* (*Brilliant Corners*, *In Walked Bud*), to Miles (a crackling *Seven Steps To Heaven*) to Hancock at his most impressionistic (*I Have A Dream*, *Toys*). "The Project 9 book is planned to have a little of everything I like," comments Marshall not without a touch of self-satisfaction. And since Project 9 placed in the last down beat International Jazz Critics Poll big band TDWR category, he indeed does have some cause for satisfaction.

A schooled, post-Bill Evanish pianist, but essentially a self-taught arranger, Marshall's clear on how he's developed his craft. "Working with a steady instrumentation is wonderful," he reflects. "I've defined my concepts and learned what can sound good in certain situations. Three years ago I was listening to records. And I went through the Dave Baker book [*Arranging And Composing For The Small Ensemble*, db Music Workshop Books, 1973] and I got things from Russ Garcia's *Professional Arranger*

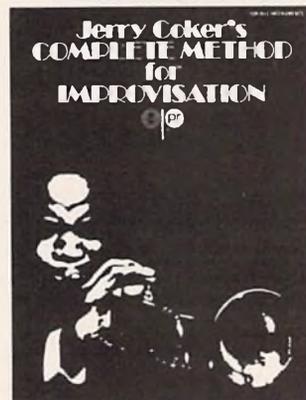
And Composer—you know, contrasts, goals to reach. If scored correctly, a voicing should just jump out at you." And some of Marshall's writing does just that, judging from the band's crisp tuttiis on *Moment's Notice* or the clever background twists behind the Project's newest and tenth member, vocalist Angie Jarre.

But writing a well made chart and keeping a band together are two different matters. As one leader sagely noted, "never forget, it's the music business," a lesson which Marshall has absorbed. "Part of any business," he stresses, "is getting the public relations happening—letting the people know you're alive. I'm not begging them to come out; but I'm saying, 'Hey, I'm Marshall Vente; we play jazz and we're here.' To book club jobs, you have to knock on doors. And once is not enough. I'll contact a person, let him know I'm alive, let them know what the next event is, drop him a postcard. Right now I probably have 25 events that might occur. But it's always the constant hammering. When something opens up, maybe they'll let you know. Radio stations help. There're three or four stations that regularly play our tapes. People come to our gigs from hearing the band on radio. Eventually we plan to produce our own album to sell on the stands. We've been in the studio twice working on it."

As for the future of Vente's love labor, any way he looks at it, nothing seems to be lost. "First," he says, "we want to develop as individuals by playing jazz—not gigs at the Blue Max or jobbing dates. And you always have the possibility that the band won't go anywhere. But you also have all sorts of other possibilities, like a whole tree full of branches. Maybe Project 9 as a unit won't go anywhere. Maybe I'll continue on as an arranger for a larger group. Maybe one of the guys will become one of the next major saxophone players of the decade. Who knows? Maybe nothing. But," adds Marshall pragmatically, "you've got to try." db



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clearer focus without totally losing a manic edge. It contained some of Beefheart's most lighthearted music as well as some of his most serious, and included two sublime, pristine guitar pieces that marked a new facet of Beefheart's development as a composer. A more accessible album than its predecessor (and, in my opinion, a better one), still *Lick* enjoyed nil sales.

Then, strangely (or perhaps, in retrospect, not that strangely), Beefheart released on Warner/Reprise a couple of less adventurous, more overtly "commercial" albums. *The Spotlight Kid*, which emphasized the blues roots of Beefheart's music, and *Clear Spot*, a collection of concise r&b oriented selections, seemed to his devoted fans like sellouts. With the passage of time, they sound a lot better: conservative, maybe, but true to aspects of Beefheart's musical personality, and really full of good songs. Neither one made a dent in the marketplace, and in '73 Warners let Beefheart go.

What happened next is a little fuzzy, and Beefheart's own recollections shed little light, but he then signed with Mercury and released two LPs in '74. They were somewhat sad attempts to leap into the commercial mainstream. Who was making these decisions? Beefheart was working with an outside producer (the first time he wasn't at all involved in production since *Trout Mask*), but he was still doing most of the writing, and the band on *Unconditionally Guaranteed* is basically the one he'd been using since 1969.

*Unconditionally Guaranteed* and the subsequent *Blue Jeans And Moon Beams* (recorded with a studio band after the remaining Magic Band members left under vague circumstances which have left Beefheart quite bitter) are Beefheart at his worst. He is in good voice on both albums, but the music doesn't fit him; quite simply, he's trying to be

something he's not. Possibly he walked through *Blue Jeans* because he owed Mercury a record and was eager to get out of his contract. He claims today that both albums would have sounded fine if they hadn't been so poorly mixed, but he's wrong. The music is trite and uninspired; his heart isn't in it. He even seems to acknowledge this on *Guaranteed's* opening, *Upon The My Oh My*, when he sings: "Tell me, Captain, how does it feel/To be driven away from your own steering wheel?"

Both albums went nowhere, and it was hardly surprising when Mercury and Beefheart parted company. It was surprising, however, when he and feud-mate Zappa teamed up for a tour and an album in '75. Zappa, at the height of his popularity, helped raise his old friend's visibility and income by featuring Beefheart in his group, but after the tour it appeared Don Van Vliet would lapse back into obscurity and lack of outlet in the Mojave desert.

Instead, Beefheart put together a new band. When *Shiny Beast* came out in 1978, it was a revelation for those who cared—a new band that played with all the intensity and nuance of the old one, an album with all the power of *Clear Spot* but which took far more chances, and a new contract with Warner Bros. Unfortunately, not too many cared, and Warners, caught up in the great record industry slump of 1979, dropped Beefheart before his album had a chance to gather momentum. Once again, Beefheart was commercially down, but not artistically out; he went back into the studio and came out with the astonishing *Doc At The Radar Station*.

It's almost certainly his most intense album yet, with less of the old playfulness, but plenty of power. The sound of the band has been altered by the addition of synthesizer and mellotron. (Beefheart says that the technology of such instruments is "ecology if it's used correctly. I'm trying to eke out of that instrument what I want.") His compositions are

*continued on page 64*

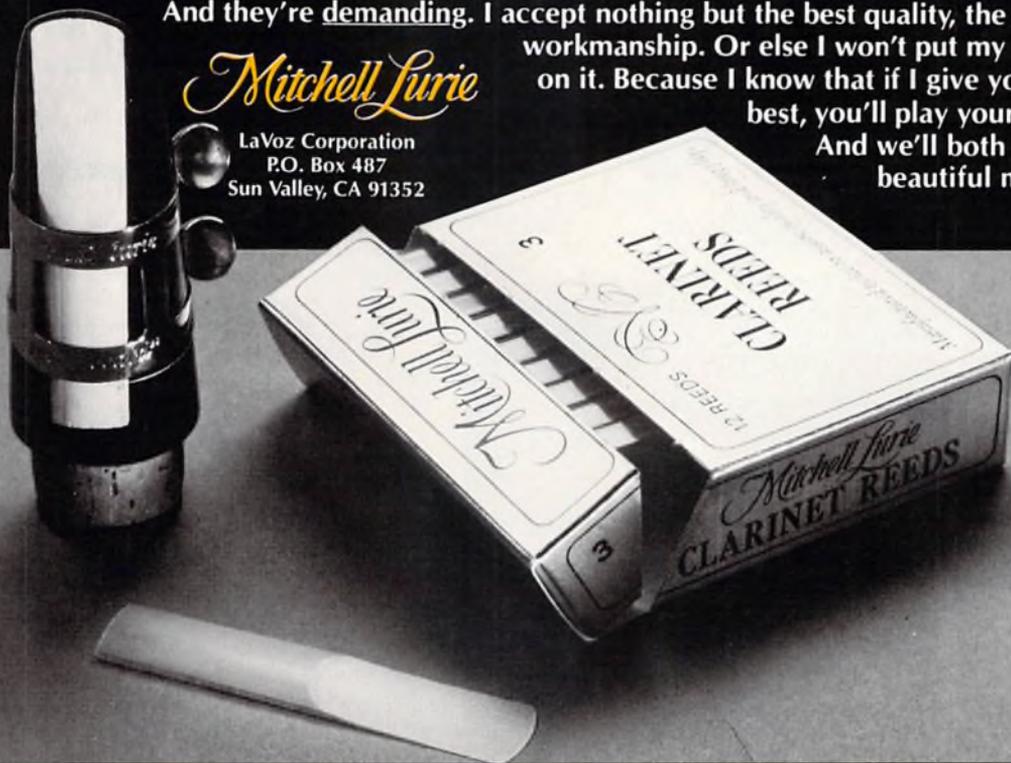
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## BEEFHEART

continued from page 63

tougher, somehow, and his musical range is broader.

But record business vagaries have victimized Beefheart again. Doc was recorded for the British-based Virgin label, which at the time had a U.S. distribution deal with Atlantic. A few weeks after Doc's release, that deal ended, leaving the album in catalogue limbo.

This fazes Beefheart, but only slightly. Content with the way his tour had been going, he talked eagerly about music, about art and about how much fun he was having—rather than be bothered by business, he was encouraged by his appearance on *Saturday Night Live*, packed houses everywhere and favorable press notices.

"I read my reviews occasionally," he allowed, "I think it's very nice of them to even try to explain an artist. I think it's really gallant. Brave.

"I like painting the most. Van Gogh—whew! I mean, really, talk about nerve! I've tried to trace [paintings], but I can't do it. It always goes off in another vein.

"It's the same with music. I couldn't copy anyone if I wanted to. The music just comes out of me. It always has.

"I hope it doesn't quit."

db

### CAPTAIN BEEFHEART DISCOGRAPHY

|  |  |
|--|--|
| TROUT MASK REPLICA—Straight STS 1055 (1969)                  | 5077 (recorded 1967, released 1970)                            |
| SHINY BEAST (BAT CHAIN PULLER)—Warner/Virgin BSK 3256 (1978) | THE SPOTLIGHT KID—Warner/Reprise MS 2050 (1972)                |
| DOC AT THE RADAR STATION—Virgin/Atlantic VA 13148 (1980)     | CLEAR SPOT—Warner/Reprise MS 2115 (1972)                       |
| <b>with Frank Zappa</b>                                      | UNCONDITIONALLY GUARANTEED—Mercury/Virgin SRM-1-709 (1974)     |
| BONGO FURY—DiscReet DS 2234 (1975)                           | BLUEJEANS AND MOONBEAMS—Mercury/Virgin SRM-1-1018 (1974)       |
| <b>out of print</b>  | <b>Singles</b>   |
| SAFE AS MILK—Buddah BDS 5001 (1967)                          | DIDDY WAH DIDDY b/w WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE FOOLING—A&M (1966) |
| STRICTLY PERSONAL—Blue Thumb SI (1968)                       | MOON CHILD b/w FRYING PAN—A&M 916 (1966)                       |
| LICK MY DECALS OFF, BABY—Straight/Reprise RS 6420 (1970)     |  |
| MIRROR MAN—Buddah BDS  |  |

## GRAPPELLI

continued from page 18

sometimes, and we didn't know what to do."

The first records were indeed a success. Although the Quintet only lasted for about five years, their recorded output is astonishing. Not only were they successful as a group, but they were also sought out by visiting American musicians. Dicky Wells, Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter, Eddie South and others would record with Django's guitar and Grappelli's violin or piano.

"We were the house band, like a stockpot. Everybody used to go to Paris in those days."

The Parisian nightlife between world wars is legendary. Stars like Josephine Baker dazzled audiences, and clubs like Bricktop's made Paris before World War II truly gay. Grappelli's eyes twinkle at his reminiscences.

"Bricktop was one of the queens of Paris, of the nightclubs. She had such an incredible clientele. I met Cole Porter there. I met George Gershwin, even the Prince of Wales used to go there. I don't know why she'd want us there. I used to accompany Mabel Mercer at the piano, and that was the only time I'd sit down, because in those days we played from ten o'clock to five o'clock in the morning. No microphone, but as it was small and filled with elegant people, it was possible

to play. I played with the Quintet for a half an hour and then I'd accompany Mabel Mercer or Bricktop.

"One night there Cole Porter said, 'Did you hear the news? They're going to hang a woman tomorrow!' I don't know if it's true or not. 'A woman is condemned to die.' And Bricktop, very distractedly, said, 'Oh, I don't think she'll be able to eat tomorrow.' So, the day after, Cole Porter came with the tune and the words, 'Miss Otis regrets that she's unable to lunch today.' Bricktop said that.

"One morning Bricktop said, 'Oh, you know that guy you like so much? He's here.' Louis Armstrong was doing a concert at the Salle Pleyel and Bricktop said, 'I know where he is; I'll telephone him and we'll have a drink somewhere.'

"So Armstrong arrived and with Bricktop we went practically next door to Rue Pigalle in Montmartre to get something to eat. And I will never forget, we were in a table of four—Armstrong, Bricktop, I was there and Django—and we drank and ate something. Then, Bricktop said to him, 'Oh sing something, baby.' So Django went to get his guitar and they played together for three or four hours, Armstrong singing and Django playing. I'll never forget that evening as long as I live."

Grappelli tells his story so that you feel the dazzling few hours when two of the most original voices in jazz joined before a private, small audience. But alas, working with Django Reinhardt was not always such a pleasure.

"Django was intelligent, but he was a simple man and terribly childish sometimes. He used to amuse himself with nothing much. And he was an open character, you see—he loved a good laugh. He loved when we used to go to the pictures, and when there was a

comic film he was on the floor laughing. He liked that kind of life.

"Sometimes I was a bit annoyed with him because he was not there. We were engaged in 1938 for our first concert in England. We were part of the bill at the Palladium and the first night Django Reinhardt was not there. Of course, I told him off later, because I was up there completely alone with those three guys there, who were not up to standard, you see. They were ordinary musicians, you must admit that. Those poor guys would just boom, boom and finito. I preferred to play alone with Django. He was disturbed, too, with the other musicians we had. He told me. But he said, 'You know, family is family.'"

Another incident in England caused a rift in the relationship between Reinhardt and Grappelli. As Grappelli remembers it:

"We did a concert in London at Cambridge Circus. The presenter asked me about Django and about how we formed, to have material to introduce us. It was a packed house and the announcer announced, 'The Quintet of the Hot Club of France with Stephane Grappelli.' And I was there smiling, you know, as I must do on-stage. Nothing happened. I said, 'What's the matter? Come on!' And Django was sitting there with a long face. That was his childish side.

"I played alone, I don't care. I was used to playing alone when I was doing the courtyards in France; I don't mind. I started alone. Anything. So the boys didn't know what to do, they followed me and, of course, Django was mad. And I said to Django, 'Django, don't do that again to me.'

"But he was like that. He was not a bad fellow, but there was always that little tinge of jealousy, which I hated. On the contrary, all my life I've tried to

introduce people to people."

For the most part, the Quintet of the Hot Club of France dissolved with the outbreak of the war. Stephane remained in London, while Django and the rest of the band returned to France.

Grappelli looks at his watch and suggests lunch. As we walk down Seventh Avenue, he smiles at some people and sticks a little, pink tongue out at others—women with strange hair styles or other silly-looking New Yorkers. He is as energetic as septuagenarian as I've ever met.

Inside the Carnegie Deli, Stephane talks non-stop: extolling the virtues of Jewish cooking (he orders chicken soup with kreplach and chopped liver, which he calls for as 'pate'), describing the slapstick situation of trying to hide liquor from a sodden, overweight English guitarist, discussing the virtues of *King Of The Gypsies*, a film in which he appeared. A girl shyly approaches and requests an autograph, something Stephane attributes to his televised appearance with the Boston Pops.

We dodge the traffic back to the warm confines of the hotel to discuss the war years, Django's death and Stephane Grappelli's career as a solo artist. All to be found in next month's down beat. **db**

## CHORDS *continued from page 8*

ing, and if their music has any real impact, modern music may never need reawakening again. Their music is furthest from the conventions inherent in all popular forms, as much in the feeling which characterizes the musical ideas as in the manner of their development, which is irreducible to a formal form or plan. The concept of form itself is freed from the impersonal constraints of a preordained scheme, giving way to a flowing, mobile form of expressiveness, which demands a perfect and instantaneous technique. The inventions deduce themselves from each other, according to a course which at times avoids returns and symmetries; the constant evolution of the thematic ideas sets aside all the symmetry in the architecture of the form... Weather Report's music causes us to rethink all aspects of music creation, and in doing this they have brought about a radical, if not always spectacular, revolution. Their music retains a "power of seduction" which is at once mysterious and spellbinding and seems to be prompted by that "desire to go always further." And they have never left any doubt that they first had to dream their revolution in order to build it.

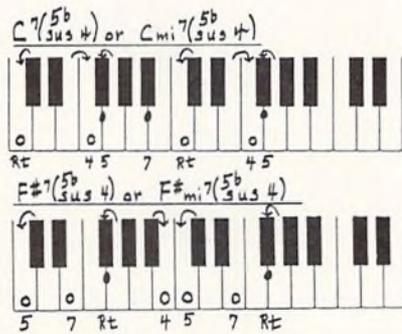
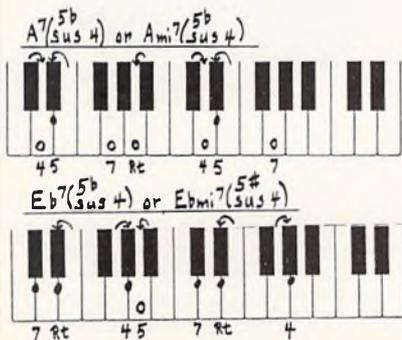
Don Archer

Des Moines, IA

## HOW TO

*continued from page 56*

- 18). To reach dominant sevenths (or minor sevenths) with suspended fourths and flatted fifths, contract any adjacent pair of notes and lower the component beneath them. It will be the root:



The next installment of this article will explore chords larger than sevenths.