

deebee  
19 AWARDS '81

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CAUGHT: DIZZY'S DREAM BAND

# down beat

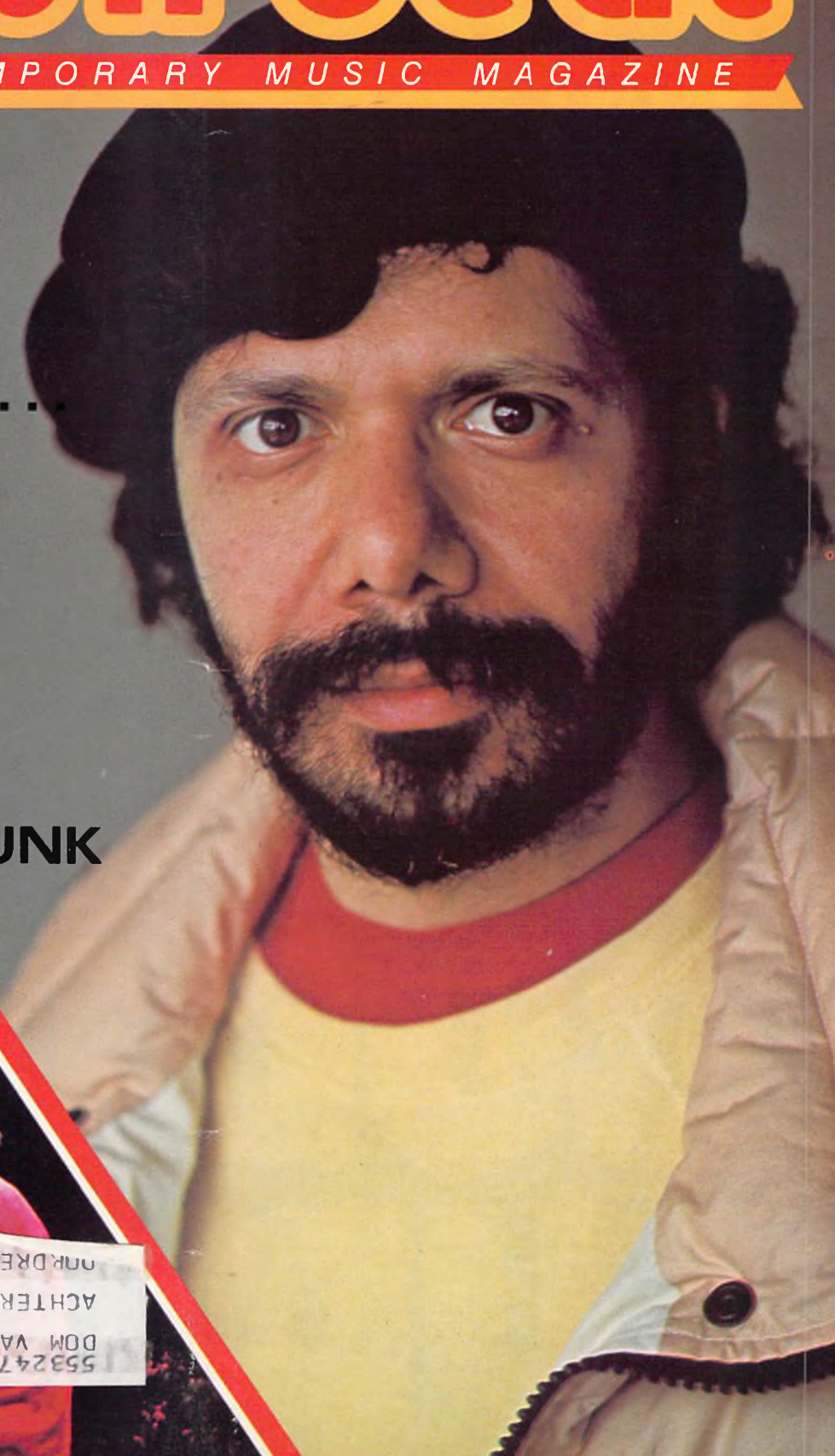
THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC MAGAZINE

**CHICK  
COREA**  
EVOLUTION...

**BUELL  
NEIDLINGER**

**ESSENCE!**

**DEFUNKT**  
**JAZZ-PUNK-FUNK**



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Chick Corea



Defunkt

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# chick corea

BY LEE JESKE

**“**In one sense . . . to be recognized as Chick Corea is very uncomfortable in life. In a way. There's something that's not so comfortable about it. Because when I'm recognized, I'm always recognized for something I've done in the past, and I'm not living in the past—I'm right here, right now. Nothing would make me happier than to be able to get rid of the identity, Chick Corea, and go ahead and just make music cleanly again. But it's part of the game.”

As Chick Corea speaks he mops up a bit of fried egg with a french fry, the breakfast delivered via room service to the Manhattan hotel room overlooking the United Nations Building. Sporting a full beard and a bit beefier than in the past, Corea had, the evening before, opened another tour—easily selling out Carnegie Hall with a line-up of Michael Brecker on tenor sax, Eddie Gomez on bass, Steve Gadd on drums, and Dizzy Gillespie as a special guest.

This debut concert had gone well and Chick is obviously pleased. The first set had been made up of the music from his latest Warner Bros. album, *Three Quartets*, with only Steve Gadd's somewhat busy drum work hindering the acoustic, chamber atmosphere. Eddie Gomez managed to bring out the Bill Evans in Corea's piano work (all acoustic, by the way) and Michael Brecker displayed his tough, hard tone and capable inside/outside solo ability.

The second set, featuring Dizzy, was a surprise. Gil-



DARRYL PITT/ENCORE



lespie, played the entire one-hour set. Rather than taking the obvious route of playing standards (either Chick's or Dizzy's), the quintet played Chick's *Bud Powell*—a memorable line that does its namesake proud—and four Gillespie tunes, including *Con Alma* and the rarely heard *Brother King*. Both Dizzy and Chick dug in and played hard: the trumpeter pure and luscious whether muted or open; the pianist displaying his entire past, flowing from hard bop comping to some free-form solo spots. Underneath was the beating of two latin-tinged hearts.

The audience responded with the *de rigueur* standing ovation and were pleasantly satisfied. Those fans who came to hear Chick play *La Fiesta* or *Spain* left content with the chosen selections. They spent an evening listening to straight-ahead, acoustic quintet music and reacted to it with the same relish that greeted *Return To Forever's* performances.

It should not be surprising to find Chick Corea at the helm of a small jazz group—actually, it shouldn't be surprising to find Chick Corea at the helm of anything—his desire for constant change seems to be insatiable. In the five years since Al DiMeola and Lenny White departed the enormously successful *Return To Forever*, Corea has toured and recorded in a remarkable number of musical situations. There was a tour with Stanley Clarke, Joe Farrell, two trumpets, and two trombones. There was the 13-piece band that incorporated a string quartet and Gayle Moran's vocals. There was the world-wide tour with Herbie Hancock on acoustic grand pianos. There have been several tours with Gary Burton, including one of Japan that ended two weeks before the recent quartet tour. There have been solo piano tours, like the one of Italy that Chick made by car, with his parents in tow. There have been tours with an electric sextet featuring bassist Bunny Brunel. The current acoustic quartet tour is to be followed by a number of concerts with Gary Burton which will lead to a tour by an as yet unformed group that will take Corea to Australia, Europe, Africa, and Israel this summer: is Chick getting soft—nothing new planned past the summer?

"Well, I actually do have one specific commitment for the Summer of '82—a commission which I've accepted from the Lincoln Center Chamber Society to write a chamber work for the '82 season—and perform as well. I'll probably write for somewhere between five and 10 pieces.

"Along that line, I continue to write piano music. Throughout the years I've written these little miniature

pieces called *Children's Songs*, and I've recently completed the collection. I wrote four more and now there's 20. I wrote a piece for piano and flute, a duet that I plan to play some place, somehow. I plan to write some music for myself and Burton with a string quartet, orchestrated. I have various plans to write in that manner until, finally, it makes sense to write for a larger ensemble with the piano.

"I'm trying to break down the barriers, actually, between jazz music and classical music. There's such a rich tradition and a rich esthetic in both areas that I love to operate in. I see no barrier myself, but, in the world, it seems that the way business goes, there are two separate circles. There are certain places where classical musicians perform and play . . . and certain places jazz groups appear, and never the twain shall meet," says Chick, buttering his toast.

Breaking down barriers should be nothing new to Chick Corea—his *Return To Forever* was instrumental in destroying the line between jazz audiences—habitués of small, dark, smoky night clubs—and rock audiences—denizens of the wide-open spaces of concert halls.

**T**he path that led to Chick Corea's unprecedented popularity is familiar. Born Armando Corea in Chelsea, Massachusetts in 1941, the son of a trumpet player, he was re-christened Chick by an aunt who "used to pinch my cheek and call me 'Cheeky, Cheeky, Cheeky.'" (He says now, "Actually, I wouldn't mind if people started calling me Armando. I think it's kind of a romantic name. It's my father's name.")

Corea spent the '60s knocking around in various ensembles—Mongo Santamaria, Willie Bobo, Blue Mitchell, Herbie Mann, and others—before joining Miles Davis in 1968. A couple of years with Miles led to the formation of *Circle*, an experimental group featuring Chick along with Barry Altschul, Dave Holland, and Anthony Braxton. Chick then rejoined the Stan Getz Quartet (with whom he played in the '60s) where his writing began to gain some prominence; in 1972, he formed the first version of *Return To Forever*. Although the band changed personnel frequently during its less-than-five-year career (Flora Purim, Airto, Joe Farrell, and Bill Connors were early members), the band quickly moved from playing the *Village Vanguard* to selling out world tours.

Although many jazz purists blanched at the increased decibel levels of the music, it was generally agreed that RTF's interplay was hypnotic and Corea's composing was many levels above the ordinary. One of the things that separates Chick Corea from many other players who turned on the

**Opening night at Carnegie (from left): Corea, guest Gillespie, Gomez, Brecker, Gadd.**



DARRYL PITT/ENCORE



electronic juice in the early '70s is his ability to perform acoustically in all his various settings and still retain his audience. Although the music he performed at Carnegie Hall with his new quartet sounded like it was emanating from the Village Vanguard, there were 3,000 filled seats (about 25 times the capacity of the Vanguard). When the subject of his enormous popularity is raised, Chick winces.

"Listen," he says firmly, "if two people like you, you're popular. I never give one second of thought to keeping an audience or to getting an audience. I actually started Return To Forever on this premise, which was that I observed there was a collective opinion amongst people that 'audiences' were generally uneducated and needed to be played down to; therefore, the way to 'win' an audience is to lessen something about what you're doing. See, if you're an artist, you can't give them the whole thing, you have to lessen it or you have to water it down or you have to put it on their level. All these cliches.

"The idea didn't sit right with me—I had never observed it to be that way. I had played, just prior to that, with Circle and prior to that with Miles and prior to that with Sarah Vaughan and Stan Getz, and I never observed that in audiences. I had always observed that the better the music was, the better the response was. This was completely opposite to what I was being told. So, I thought, that thing of playing down to audiences is a real result of some kind of disrespect for one another or some kind of other motivation besides art. And I thought, 'I don't agree with that. I'm going to put a band together and not play down to audiences, but make the quality of the music as high as I possibly can.' And it works—in my life it has always worked. I found that the better I play—the more feeling and time I devote to my music, the higher the quality is at the concerts that I perform—the better the people like it.

"Art is a kind of a thing where the most precious thing about art is an individual's freedom to like what he likes and not like what he doesn't like. And that's it, man. So it's no statement about an artist's art how many people like it. All it's a statement about is how many people like it. I, myself, have just gone ahead and done what I like to do."

Judging by Carnegie Hall the evening before, this philosophy has worked for Chick Corea. The audience, which he cultivated over the years with Return To Forever, has stuck by him—perhaps growing themselves in the process. It makes you want to herd together many of the other players who have remained stuck in the mire of fusion music, take them by the hands, and ask them to trust their audience.

"It works for me is all I can say," says Chick. "That particular thing works for me. I'm trying to keep from saying 'Yes, it's a total truth'—but I think it works. I mean, on another level in the world, in a commercial society like we live in, where supposedly ability and professionalism is rewarded, if you have the skill and you do the job better, you get the job. This society isn't that enslaved that people don't have the freedom to think and judge as they please. Someone can look around and say, 'Yeah, that's a good plumbing job.' You know. Or, 'No, it's still leaking.' We're that free. And I think with art, people definitely are, although they're a little inundated and drugged by the boob tube and what's shoved down their throats. Still, if you put something gorgeous in front of them, they respond."

Chick Corea feels that he has been sniped at unfairly by many critics for things ranging from his popularity to his practice of Scientology. It has made him wary of journalists, and, when I mention Scientology—a subject which he used to speak about with some regularity—Chick gets defensive (even that week's *Village Voice* tagged him, in their listings of recommended concerts, "Mr. Scientology").

"I've gone underground with it, man," says Corea. "The importance of the whole thing is not 'being a Scientologist'—I mean, I'm an American, I'm an Italian, I'm a jazz musician—it's a body of philosophy created by L. Ron



JAMES BRICA

Hubbard that's very interesting: I refer to it and read it and it's inspiring. I experience a lot of insight and reward from getting into what Hubbard's into. He's a brilliant man. I feel a little bit like I'm living in an inquisition when people start having opinions about what I should be interested in and what I shouldn't, so I stopped talking about it. The simplicity of it is that L. Ron Hubbard's a great writer, and I read his books and I love it. So I kind of look out for his new releases like I look out for any reissues of Coltrane."

While reluctant to discuss his religious beliefs, Chick Corea is quite eloquent about things he feels are wrong with the music business and the music press. When asked about the spate of reissues that have led to such odd pairings as *The Chick Corea/Bill Evans Sessions* (a reissue of material that each pianist recorded with Stan Getz, separately) or another double-pocket two-fer that lumps together an old Corea session with one by ex-Gillespie pianist Mike Longo, Corea responds:

"It disturbs me a little bit. I mean, my wish is that people who own tapes that I'm on, when they think about reissuing or remixing or re-anything my music, whether I have anything to do with it legally or not—usually the contract is that the record company owns the tapes—would at least call on the phone and say, 'Look, I'm putting this out.' And I could give some good ideas. I could tell them who the bass player really was, for instance. But, at that point, it's not a thing done with feeling, it's a thing done for dollars. So I feel really badly about that."

**T**he only sessions that he does not feel that way about are the innumerable outtakes from Miles Davis sessions, material that's just beginning to see the light of day thanks to Columbia's recent *Circle In The Round* and *Directions* releases.

"With Miles I hope they release everything I've ever done with him. I only remember going into the studio quite often and hardly hearing anything. I have a personal Miles Davis tape collection that I recorded on cassette and small machines as we toured around; that is some of the hottest stuff. Heh, heh. The live stuff really should have been gotten on tape 'cause that's when the band was burning. The band with Dave Holland and DeJohnette and Wayne Shorter, that quintet, developed some really beautiful improvised stuff. We would do two or three pieces that were just strung together, one right after another for a whole concert, and we would make this wonderful, wonderful composition. I have a bunch of tapes and I bootleg 'em a little bit, you know. There are two or three copies made amongst friends."

As to the press, Corea claims to have cut himself off from his reviews. It is a subject which causes him to lean forward in the tub chair and purse his lips.

"I've actually, out of self-survival, taken to not reading music magazines and newspapers and critiques and all of that. I just don't pay much attention to it and just . . . whoever wants to get into it, let them get into it. I mean, who am I going to fight?"



"I feel this way, generally, about music criticism and talking about music. There's a line that I draw in my head about it. On one side of the line, you can say what you like and give your opinion and say who played at the concert and say who's on the record and, you know, interview the musicians and so forth and so on and all of that is fine. Then there's the point where the line gets crossed, where it starts to become a destructive activity which, unfortunately, it has become in most magazines. Under the guise of a voice to support the arts, it turns into a voice to destroy the arts. And, what happens is, you have magazines and newspapers where you have personal vengeance being voiced by the writer—especially in the record review section—and it's turned out to be this game of who can be more prolifically sarcastic and cutting than the next. It actually turns out to be a real destructive thing to music and the arts.

"My basic opinion is that, obviously, the culture and society is not set up in a way to grease the forward movement of the arts. No one walks around and encourages radio stations to have Max Roach festivals or me to take three months and go and compose a piano concerto or gives Keith Jarrett a grant to do what he likes. It's not easy. To have made the decision to spend one's life as a musician is, in a sense, survival-wise speaking, a courageous one. So the least thing we need, as musicians, is to be torn down by people who are supposedly our friends and supporters. What the world needs is music, what the world needs is creation, what the audiences need is to be able to be inspired so that they too will do something positive and good. So I really violently disagree with tearing musicians down and criticizing them in magazines.

"There's a book by Nicholas Slominsky called *The Lexicon Of Musical Invective*, which I highly recommend. What it is is a whole collection of criticisms written in newspapers and magazines by the most famous critics from the time of Beethoven. And the list of musicians whose critiques get included is the likes of Beethoven and Liszt and Chopin. They are taken from the papers of the day and they all get put in there and each review is more scathing than the next. You hear things like Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto* being torn apart poetically; it completely, completely blows the whole idea of criticism in that way. It totally relieved me and I totally recommend the book to anybody who gets upset by reading reviews. It's totally, totally wonderful."

If it was up to Chick Corea, each record review section in each music magazine would be headed with the words: "The words and opinions in this column are the opinions and words of one man. Art, the beauty of art, is each of our abilities to have our own judgment about what we see and listen to. So please read this column with this in mind."

"You see," Chick continues, "the only judgment that's important is the flash reaction—you like it or you don't like it. And it's personal reaction. Who cares to broadcast to the rest of the world your own personal likes and dislikes? Who cares? Who gives a f\*ck# what you like and what you don't like? To have it put on a public page is ill-mannered."

What irks Chick even more is criticism based on popularity. It is well-known that as musicians get more and more popular with the masses, there is a tendency for them to be put down in the popular press. Frequently, this is well-deserved, based on their dilution of their music, but oftentimes it is off-hand and cheap. Chick Corea has not escaped this somewhat illogical approach.

"It's some kind of aberrant behavior," he says, flatly. "I don't know. I get the feeling when people become critical of another's popularity it sort of reeks of something failed inside them. It seems like some old crud of jealousy, jealousy crud of some kind. To put it on a real basic human emotion. It doesn't make any sense."

**Y**et, Chick Corea, due to his wide-ranging projects, has managed to keep his integrity perfectly intact. For those who don't care for the solo work or the electronic work, there's always the brilliant and brittle series of duets with Gary Burton. The two seem to have been born of one musical egg.

"You know," says Chick with a nod, "the chemistry of human relations is really what happens. Put two, or however many, people together and you have a certain brew. And me and Gary being together is just a magical chemistry. It just works. As individuals we're very different from one another, personality-wise, but we've grown to be great friends and have this thing that we do as a duet that we both love. And everytime we do it we both get inspired."

One thing is certain—Chick Corea, who will be 40 years old on June 12th (another subject he doesn't relish: "When I think about age, I think about dying—death," he says with a smirk), won't sit still. He has the luxury of being able to book a tour of Europe for the summer without guaranteeing the instrumentation—acoustic or electric, the tickets will be sold—and he's got his fingers in enough musical pies to keep him busy at his accustomed pace. He speaks of wanting to play more free-form piano music, the fun it might be to have a big band, the desire to write more "classical" music. When asked about the possibility of going in to a small club, like the Village Vanguard, for a lengthy stay he replies, "Yes! Absolutely! It's not a frivolous urge, either, it's a total need. And I plan to do it, actually. I mean, piano trio or something like that. Me and Gomez have been talking about putting a little trio together to do this and that. That's coming up."

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DARRYL PITTI/ENCORE

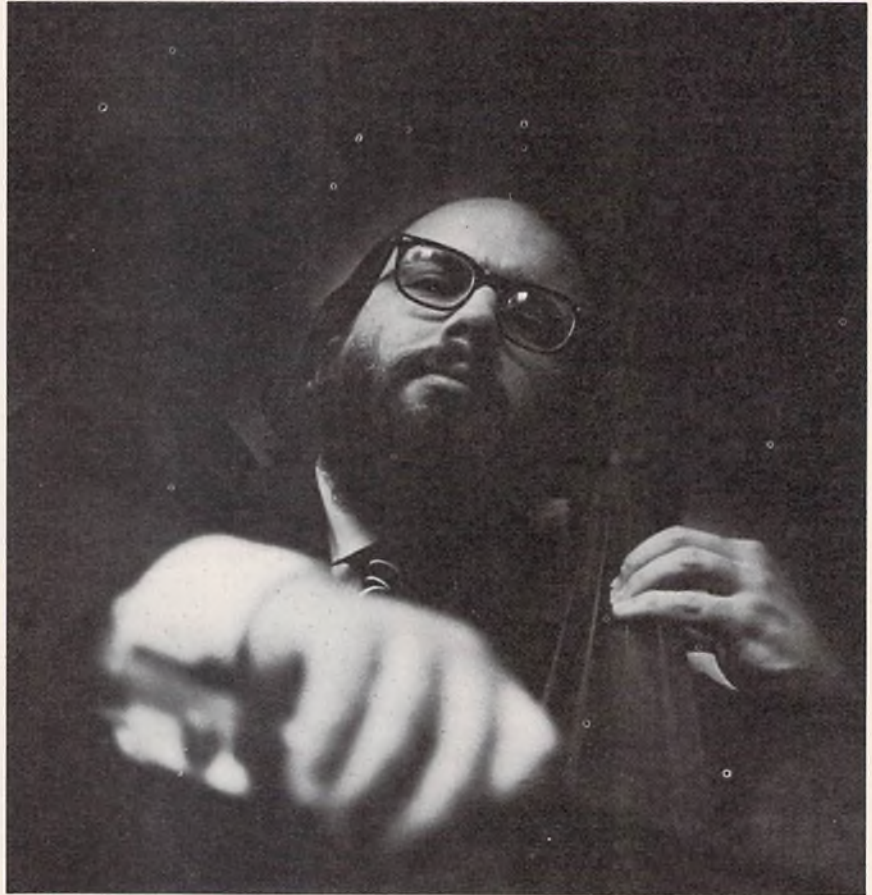


# BUELL

B Y Z A N S T E W A R T

# NEIDLINGER

Whether country pickin' with Buellgrass, exploring new music with Krystall Klear and the Buells, or sitting in with the symphony, Buell Neidlinger covers all basses.



**I**t might seem ironic that Cecil Taylor's former bass player, the same bassist who pushed Jean-Luc Ponty to greater heights on King Kong (the violinist's first work of importance) and again the same bassist who was nominated as 1980's Bluegrass Bass Player Of The Year, spends most of his days and nights working in Los Angeles studios, but that's the hand fate has dealt Buell Neidlinger. Not a bad deal, the record shows—in fact, almost a royal flush.

It is doubtful that there is another musician, let alone a bassist, who is at home in so many diverse musical contexts as Neidlinger, and he's been at the top of the game all the way with names such as Stravinsky, Zappa, Taylor, Cage, Holiday, Webster, and Coleman making up his credit sheet. He's only 45, but he did get a flying start.

His grandfather was an attorney in New York City (Buell's birthplace) for such musical giants as pianist Vladimir Horowitz and conductor Pierre Monteux, and encouraged the youth to play piano, which led to cello studies at age seven with Luigi Silva and Gregor Piatagorsky. Gifted and hardworking, Neidlinger was performing numerous recitals within a few years, and at 12

won a competition that earned him the right to perform as soloist with the New York Philharmonic.

But Neidlinger was not in line for a completely classical career. By 14, he was working casual dates for the Ben Itzhik agency, on string bass, which he studied concurrently with cello. Through Itzhik he learned a most essential professional lesson.

"Ben Itzhik was an opera lover," Buell recalled recently in his home above Hollywood, "and one night my family got tickets for the opera and I called Ben and begged off work, telling him I was sick and could I send a sub? So guess who I run into at the opera? Ben Itzhik, of course. He took me aside and quietly said, 'Kid, you wanna work? You work.' That's kind of stuck with me."

At age 16, Buell was introduced to

Joe Sullivan, the legendary jazz pianist, and society bandleader Lester Lanin, and through their combined forces, Buell started hiring jazz bands to play the country club circuit in Connecticut, where he spent his adolescence. As a teenager, he played bass with masters like trombonist Vic Dickenson, pianists Sullivan and Dick Wellstood, saxophonists Ben Webster and Gene Sedric, and clarinetist Pee Wee Russell. Other jobs included ones with Eubie Blake and an affair at the Stuyvesant Casino with Willie "The Lion" Smith.

"Willie poked me in the stomach on the way to the bandstand," reflects the bassist, "and though we'd never had the courtesy of any former meetings or rehearsals, he hit me with 'No clinkers, boy.' But he was also the guy that hipped me that if you stood next to the pianist's left hand and kept your eyes



open, then you could play with anybody, right then and there."

The mid- to late '50s were an optimum time for jazz musicians in New York City, and Neidlinger had the distinction of working time and again with many of the procreators of jazz. The list of names is seemingly endless but does include Johnny Hodges, Hot Lips Page, Sonny Greer, Rex Stewart, Billie Holiday, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Ben Webster, Gil Evans, Cecil Taylor, and Philly Joe Jones. The bassist has vivid memories of these many associations.

"I met Ben Webster through Rudy Taylor," he begins, "who was an NBC staff drummer who used to help me get bands for the country clubs. Ben came out to Connecticut because he needed the money, and he liked to work. Later, I worked with Ben off and on, but never steady. I've always found it astounding that musicians like Ben weren't, and aren't, considered national treasures, seeing that jazz is one of the few arts that's truly American. But Ben, and his music, has been very beneficial in my life because only the finest musicians and the nicest people seem to love his music, and meeting those people has been wonderful.

"Philly Joe Jones took me on the road a couple of times, in a trio with Kenny Drew working alongside Lenny Bruce, and each time, Philly stranded me. He'd pick up the advance for the week on Wednesday and split back to town. Lenny and Philly were both Dracula freaks [Jones recorded *Blues For Dracula* for Riverside in 1958, the title tune consisting of 12 minutes of the drummer imitating Bela Lugosi] and they'd get into their "Bela" routine for hours. Philly also used to be a straight man for Lenny, and he was on his record *How To Relax With Your Colored Friends*.

"And Billie Holiday, she just sang her heart out. I used to play bass along with her records and eventually I got to work and record with her, making *Lady In Satin* with Ray Ellis' strings. She had a swing that no other singer has come close to, a way of pushing the beat that was incredible. I always felt she was a big inspiration to Bird and his bebop because of the hardness of her swing."

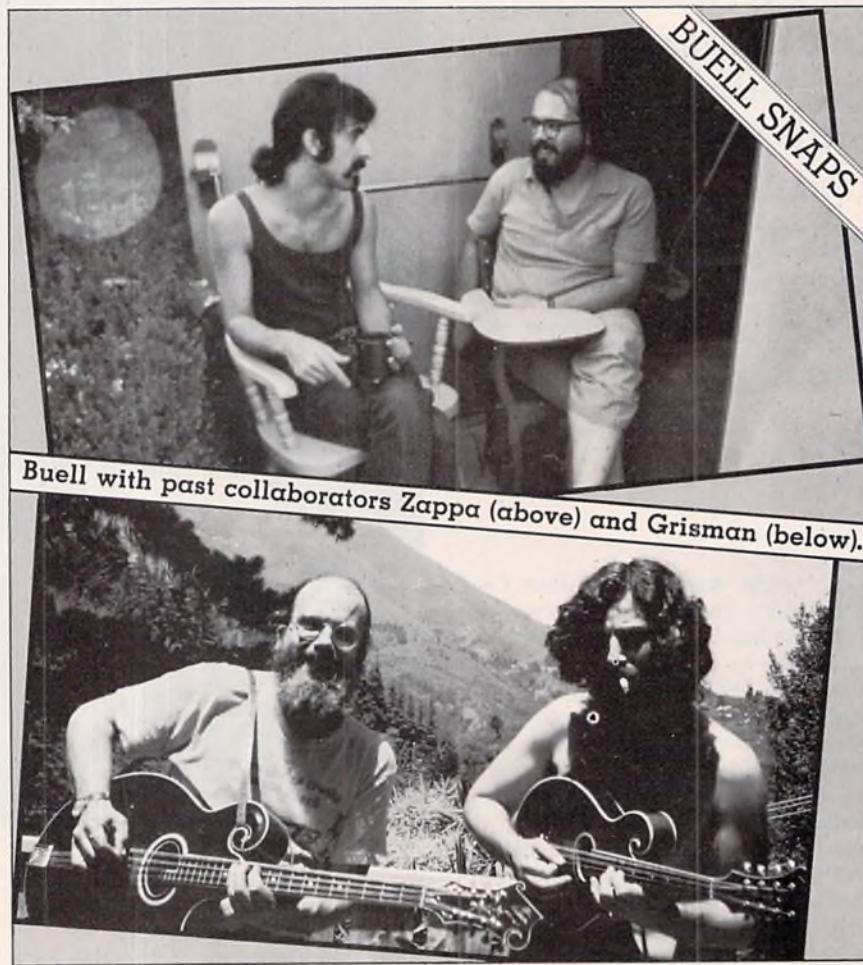
What enabled the bassist to perform with such illustrious artists was his own grasp of the essence of bass playing—employing choice harmonic underpinnings, notes that have real value for the soloist, and delivering them with perfect intonation, impeccable time, and, naturally, a resounding tone. Influenced by Jimmy Blanton and Oscar Pettiford, Buell was fortunate to have been present on numerous occasions in the latter's New York apartment when the luminaries of jazz bass, such as Charles Mingus, Percy Heath,

Paul Chambers, Wilbur Ware, Tommy Potter, et al., hung out all day and played. "Oscar was the king," Neidlinger says with reverence, "and everybody would come around and pay tribute, you know, just play and talk. To my mind, Oscar was the greatest bassist who ever lived. The man was a monster—he had the most beautiful intonation and time. And Paul Chambers, there's never been anyone like him. When he and Oscar and Wilbur Ware were all playing in New York, you just couldn't beat it. And it's never been like that since."

In 1955, the bassist met Cecil Taylor, with whom he played for four years.

night there were Duke, Dizzy, Erroll Garner, Sarah Vaughan, and Miles. Miles just laughed and split. That was the time when Symphony Sid used to play *Of What from Looking Ahead* every night, and before he'd play it, he'd say, 'This is a record by some gentlemen we understand have just escaped from Creedmore,' which is an institution for the criminally insane. And he did that every night for weeks. That was 1959, and between that and the Birdland gigs and other things, that put us right up there. We were doing all right."

Taylor was first recorded in 1955 for Transition, a label formed by Tom



"When I first started rehearsing with him," says Neidlinger, "he started whipping out all these written parts, and I said, 'Man, that's not jazz,' and he said, 'Well, that part may not be jazz, but wait until you get over here,' and that'd be the middle, and there'd be changes. And that sure was jazz."

"At first things were pretty tough, with little work, but after a while the press, especially Nat Hentoff, got behind Cecil and he became the star of modern jazz in New York, at least until Ornette arrived in 1959. Cecil had the accolade of Ellington, which helped get him many Mondays of work at Birdland. In the audience for our first

Wilson, who also produced first albums by Bob Dylan and the Mothers Of Invention. Later when he worked for United Artists, Wilson produced a second Taylor album, *Love For Sale*, and both have been reissued on Blue Note's two-fer, *In Transition*, though reissue producer Michael Cuscuna inaccurately gives bass credits to Chris White, when it is indeed Neidlinger playing the upright. "Some of the bass soloing is, I feel, pretty good—maybe ahead of its time—and I'd just like to get credit for my work," Buell puts in.

The bassist was strongly moved by Taylor's art and wrote in the liners to *Love*, "The first thing that struck me



about his music was that, despite its rhythmic and harmonic complexities, it was clear. I could see it as well as feel it. Best of all, I felt free to express myself, and this freedom returned each time we played."

In 1961, Buell led his first date, *New York City R&B*, for Hentoff's Candid label, using simple, elementary forms, like the blues and rhythm changes. The album wasn't released until 1971, on the Barnaby label, distributed by CBS, with Taylor listed as co-leader. Neidlinger is justifiably angered by this.

"I had *New York City R&B* stolen from me by someone who thought that it wouldn't sell unless Cecil Taylor's name was put on it," he says, "and I lost half of my royalty that way. Also I've heard that it's selling very well in Japan, and that the companion album we recorded that day, with the same cats, Cecil, Clark Terry, Shepp, Billy Higgins, is being given away as a bonus album. [This album never released in U.S.] I have yet to receive any royalties for either album."

After leaving Taylor, Buell worked with reedman Jimmy Giuffre at the Five Spot opposite Ornette and occasionally played the altoist's first set when Charlie Haden came in late.

Shortly after that time, Neidlinger's cabaret card—without which live performance in New York was prohibited—was revoked for unspecified reasons, and he returned to the classical realm, working first with Arthur Fiedler's Boston Pops, followed by stints with the Houston Symphony under Sir John Barbirolli, two years with Leopold Stokowski's American Symphony, and three seasons, 1968-70, with the Boston Symphony and conductor Erich Leinsdorf, during which time he also taught at the New England Conservatory. This period also found him appearing with Igor Stravinsky, John Cage, and other maestros.

Buell's reputation had spread to the West Coast by 1969 and Frank Zappa called him to play the difficult bass part behind Jean-Luc Ponty on *King Kong* and *Music For Violin And Low Budget Orchestra*. As Zappa said, "Buell was the only man I knew who could play the part." While on the coast, the bassist was contacted by Mel Powell, former pianist with Benny Goodman and now a modern classical composer, about joining a new school of the arts, funded by Walt Disney: the California Institute of the Arts, in Valencia. When Buell moved to California in 1970, it was to become the school's resident bassist and bass teacher, but he was dissatisfied right from the start. "There were supposed to have been some real heavies on the staff, like Gregor Piatagorsky on cello," he says, "but they never came." Also,

### BUELL NEIDLINGER'S EQUIPMENT

Neidlinger uses three different acoustic basses in various situations: for jazz studio work, an 1853 August Gemunter, made in Springfield, MA; for background bowing in the studio, an old Italian bass (no date or maker given); for club dates, a 1936 Kay Concert Model. His bow is by Reid Hudson (Vancouver, B.C.) and he uses Roto Sound Supreme strings on each of the instruments.

Electrically, Buell fingers a 1952 Fender Telecaster bass (re-wired in Boston by Jeff "Skunk" Baxter) with Fender strings, or a Hofner hollow body, custom-made, with Dan Armstrong strings. With both he uses a Benson amp, and a pedal board—with volume control, phasers, flanging, and compressing—made by Paul Rivera Associates.

the school never had a fine orchestra, so superior students weren't attracted to the campus. In frustration, Neidlinger recently resigned his professorship to devote his time to studio playing and club work, plus a few students.

His course in bass appeals to many aspiring jazz players, especially those interested in fundamentals. He uses Edouard Nanny's *Complete Book Of String Bass Volume 2*, emphasizing scales—particularly the chromatic—intervals, and intonation. The student rarely gets funky jazz licks from this bearded, quick-witted master, but listen to him for even a few minutes, especially talking about the greats of music, and you can feel the tones pour out as if by osmosis. Still, students like Joel DiBartolo, who works the Tonight Show and is active in L.A.'s jazz scene, and Leon "Boots" Malleson, currently with Ron Carter, attest to the soundness of Neidlinger's methods.

Immediately after arriving in L.A., the bassist entered the studios, working intermittently, until he cut a now out-of-print Van Dyke Parks album that earned him a firm local reputation and

got him a lot of work.

"Yes, I'd have to say that *FDR In Trinidad* off Parks' *Discover America* album is my favorite track. It's got a pungent, popping bass line—not reggae, but certainly flavorful—helped, I'm sure, by the fact that I used a Hofner hollow-bodied electric on the date, made especially for Paul McCartney which he gave to me backstage at the old Paramount Theatre in New York. (A couple of years later, he realized the depth of his mistake and asked for it back, but I refused, so he used me on his *Ram* album, he liked that sound so much.) Anyway Parks had recorded this ditty about FDR in Port au Spain, and Lowell George, who later formed Little Feat, played some fantastic slide guitar. Though the album didn't sell, they played it all over the radio and it made me in this town."

For six years, starting in 1972, Buell was principal bassist of Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra under conductor Neville Marriner, an association "I am extremely proud of because Neville has more releases in the *Schwann Catalog* than any other conductor."

By 1978, Neidlinger really had made it, sharing the NARAS Most Valuable Bassist award with perennial winner Chuck Domanico. After a zillion sessions, among his favorites he remembers Barbra Streisand's *Evergreen* (voted Record of the Year), the Temptations' *Papa Was A Rolling Stone* (another Record of the Year), Dolly Parton ("She's fun to work with"), and composers Maurice Jarre ("That man is a genius"), and Leonard Rosenman ("A great American stylist").

Though cutting a string sweetener behind Rod Stewart's *Do You Think I'm Sexy?* may not match the thrill of setting up Lady Day, it does have its advantages. "It's one of the easiest ways to make money I know of," Neidlinger offers, "but when it gets hard, it's very hard, because your neck is on the block. But I try to do a good job. Sometimes I don't feel like it, but I try anyway. It takes a lot of concentration to play your part over and over without blowing it—if endless takes become necessary or if the music is unplayable—but once it's done, you forget it, and go on to something else."

Another benefit of studio playing is getting to work alongside musical wonders like Ray Brown, another bassist who flabbergasted Neidlinger. "I worked a recent music session with Ray," Buell says, "and on a few cues I didn't have to play, I stood there open-mouthed listening to this truly creative guy play. As an accompanist he doesn't just play the same notes, he thinks of new notes to make it exciting for whoever's playing up there. Ray is another king—and that's not just my

*Continued on page 60*

### BUELL NEIDLINGER SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

#### as a leader

READY FOR THE '90s (Krystall Klear and the Buells)—K2B2 2069

NEW YORK CITY R&B—Barnaby KZ 31035

#### with Cecil Taylor

IN TRANSITION—Blue Note BN-LA 459-H2

LOOKING AHEAD!—Contemporary S-7562

MASTERS OF MODERN PIANO—Verve VE-2-2514

#### with Jean-Luc Ponty

CANTELOPE ISLAND—Blue Note BN-LA 632-H2

#### with Richard Greene

RAMBLIN—Rounder 0110

#### with David Grisman

HOT DAWG—Horizon SP-731

#### with Van Dyke Parks

DISCOVER AMERICA—Warner Bros. BS 2589 (out of print)

#### featured classics

Paul Chihara: GRASS (CONCERTO FOR DOUBLE BASS) with London Symphony Orchestra—Turnabout 34572

Franz Schubert: QUINTET IN A, OP. 114. with Tashi—RCA ARLI-1882



# JAZZ-PUNK-FUNK

# defunkt

BY STEVE BLOOM

The purple tights and checkered t-shirt crowd knows for sure. They meet to the beat every night in sundry rock clubs, discharging a generationful of surgeon general warnings and end-of-the-world nuclear threats. They like their music raw, to the point, fast and, most of all, minus pretention. In their trend-setting outfits and short-cropped, post-shag 'dos, they should be the last to complain about stylistic fakery. Still, they have become a vanguard of sorts: they are the so-called new wave.

As a rule they don't like jazz. Jazz is too mellow (obviously most have not been exposed to bebop), possibly too black and, more recently, has become inundated with all-too-slick studio mechanics who are long on technique, but short on soul and inspiration. Rock & roll, of course, is their main squeeze. And good-old-fashioned dance-your-ass funk finishes a strong second. Thank James White & the Blacks for that.

James White (otherwise known as James Chance,

though his birth record reads James Siegfried) is indeed white. The Blacks is Defunkt. White would like people to believe he's James Brown in paleface, his Blacks the J.B.'s. Two years ago, under the heading James Chance & the Contortions, White made quite a splash on the new wave frontier. While his band churned out chopping, minimalist rock & roll, all 97 pounds of him spat and snarled at audiences, antagonizing them into rages that often culminated in bottle-throwing encores. And when he blew his alto sax, he sounded like Yoko Ono. James was not satisfied.

He decided to consult his friend and fellow avant garde crusader, trombonist Joe Bowie. They had met at the East Village's La Mama Experimental Theatre and occasionally jammed together. Each found out that the other's latest musical brainstorm was to "combine the avant garde with commercial rhythms," Bowie says, recalling the

origins of so-called punk-funk. "He asked me if I'd help him find good enough horn players so that he could do what he wanted to do. I got him his entire band, which turned out to be Defunkt."

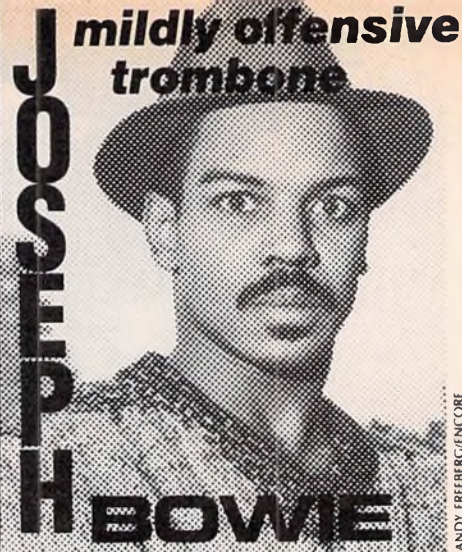
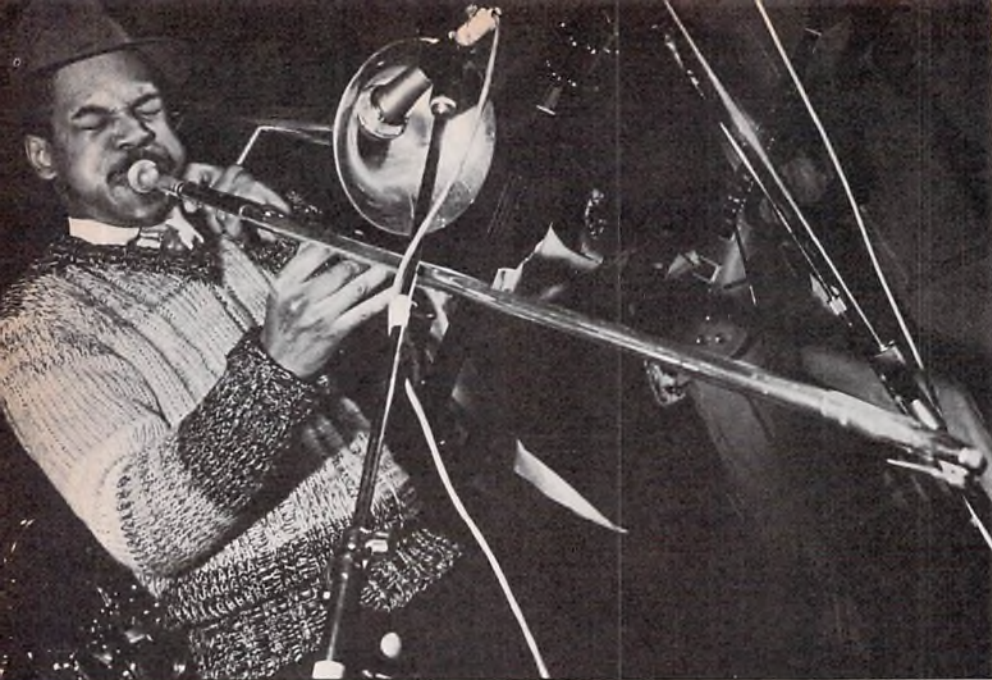
Joe Bowie is a piece of work, too. The younger brother of creative jazz trumpeter exemplar Lester, he traced—until now—in big brother's footsteps. "Discovered" as a teenager by the St. Louis Black Artists Group, he went on to co-found the Human Arts Ensemble (with Bobo Shaw) and the St. Louis Ensemble (with Luther Thomas), both new music projects in the spirit of A.A.C.M. and Lester's cohorts, the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Defunkt is his first serious excursion into commercial music.

"I always knew about r&b and had a good feeling for it," he explains. "So I decided to make something I could work all these dance clubs with."

Both in sound and in style, Defunkt is reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix's Band







ANDY FREEBERG/ENCORE

of Gypsies. Like Hendrix, most of the six group members—all of whom are black—have come over to funk after the fact. Middle brother Byron is straight out of the studio closet—he's written lead sheets and arranged for show biz talents like Jonathan Winters and Sammy Davis Jr. and once was musical director for the Dells—and now handles all the reeds and produced Defunkt's debut release on Hannibal Records. Kelvyn Bell, an experimental guitarist the Bowie's know from home, also appears with the St. Louis Ensemble. The New York aggregation—guitarist Martin Aubert, bassist Melvin Gibbs, and drummer Ronnie Burrage—anchors Defunkt.

On record, Defunkt rides a horizontal line between Joe Bowie's two foremost commercial influences: Hendrix and Brown. The eight tunes are straightforward dance tracks, repetitious, rockish, and funky. In concert, their intent is not as clear: various forms of jazz, rock, and funk are dumped in the shredder, resulting in a ragged, somewhat confused, though not objectionable sound. They funk relentlessly, virtually all night, though not always "on the one" and without guitars there would be little, if any, rock input.

The jazz elements, like precious metals, are neatly tucked away in the horns. White-suited Byron alternates between a grating and tender tenor and is at his best gently rendering a standard like *Time After Time*. Joe is never so gentle. Like his colleague Chance, he puts on a show. Posturing in a tux and what has become his trademark, a porkpie hat, Bowie rarely speaks to the audience other than to scold, sneers as he delivers his mildly offensive lyrics (death and heroin are favorite subjects), and roars arrogantly into his horn

during usually brief, cut-short solos. Joe Bowie—he bad!

How bad is he? I take to his high-rise apartment in the Times Square artist co-operative, where a who's who of jazz luminaries reside, to find out. I also invited Byron to the interview. He and Joe are listening to their record when I arrive. *Strangling Me With Your Love* resounds across the 39th floor pad. Joe offers me coffee. He already appears uncharacteristically cordial. To crack the ice, I ask if he's as insolent as his stage personality suggests—or is it simply a calculated front?

"I am insolent," he says softly. "I have every reason to be because of the nature of the business and the nature of the way I've had to deal with it and been treated. I think I have every reason to be. But in a friendly manner.

"See, I'm very confident," he continues, sipping his coffee. "It's more a confidence than anything else. I feel very comfortable on stage and I know the music's good. Basically, I don't care if you like it or not. I want you to like it, I'm pretty sure you will, but either way that doesn't affect my show."

Joe, Byron, and Lester Bowie were born into a rich musical tradition. Their father taught music in St. Louis high schools for 35 years. Every relative seemed to play one instrument or another and, of course, everyone did time in the church choirs. Lester, who at 39 is three years Byron's elder, was naturally the first of the brothers to take the musical oath. Byron, on the other hand, had to have his knees give out on the University of Missouri gridiron during his sophomore season before he started fingering a clarinet. "I had it so ingrained in me," he recalls, "that it took over everything else."

Joe, who's 27, says he's never had anything else but music on his mind.

But why the 'bone? Blame ol' Mr. Morgan. "He was the music teacher at school," Joe explains. "One day he said to me, 'I have a trumpet and a trombone—which one do you want?' I figured that Lester already played the trumpet, so I took the trombone. I was 11 at the time."

Lester, meanwhile, was already making waves in Chicago, and Byron was busily circulating his name around town, especially over in East St. Louis where the bars don't close 'til dawn. And only four years after he picked up his horn, Lil' Joe was running around with a Top 20 r&b band called the Paramounts. The year was 1968, the sound was Motown and James Brown. "That's when I got my first taste for working dances. It was imbedded in me," he says.

It was also then that the Black Artists Group, which included such heavies as Hamiett Bluiett, Julius Hemphill, and Oliver Lake, began grooming the youngest Bowie. Soon, he would be sitting in with some of the best and brightest free-jazz cats on the planet, making his own waves. With this all happening, it didn't take long for him to say "later" for the Paramounts.

In 1972, Bowie went a giant step further. He not only said "later" to St. Louis, as Lester and now Byron had (both fled to Chicago), but so-long to America. He joined Bobo Shaw, Oliver Lake, Floyd LeFlore, Baikida E. J. Carroll, and other B.A.G. members and settled for 18 months in Paris. "We came in at the tail end of the activity in Europe," he admits, "but we were still able to work a lot. Back in St. Louis we played for one or two people. In Europe, we did TV, radio, and everything."

Byron never flew the coop, so to speak, to Europe as his brothers had, but he's traveled there and well understands its attraction to creative musicians.

"Europeans are better listeners, it's that simple," he says. "They've been involved in art for eons of time which



is why they're able to listen and understand the creative aspects of music better. They sit down with their eyes glued and listen. Musicians need that."

"Imported sounds," Joe adds, "Europeans don't have black music born in Europe." [In a soccer stadium in Rome recently, a capacity crowd refused to let Defunkt offstage.]

"You'll find out all over the world," Byron continues to discourse while tugging at his beard, "the music that was produced by black artists in this country is treasured. It's really a shame that so many of our musicians still have to go somewhere else to make a living. They can go to Europe and live, and people respect them for the amount of sacrifice they put into the music, then they come back home and starve to death."

Joe came back home—this time to New York—and starved, but not to death. He and Shaw reorganized their Human Arts Ensemble, which had recorded two albums on the Freedom label in the early '70s. He also formed the St. Louis Ensemble with fellow Missourian, saxist Luther Thomas. They toured Europe and released a record on the Moers label. When Bowie returned from that jaunt, he knew it was time to make the Big Move.

"The scene was changing drastically," he says about 1978 when disco was already riding into the sunset. "The new wave was beginning to creep in. I suddenly felt the need to add more commercial aspects to my music, to reach more people."

Enter Janos Gat, the force behind the always eclectic Squat Theatre on 23rd St.—Sun Ra would be the first to confirm that—and now Defunkt's coproducer. Gat was so impressed with Bowie when he heard him featured in Lester's 67-piece Sho-Nuff Orchestra that he offered him free use of the theater for experimental and rehearsal purposes. Joe's first experiment was a combo called the New York All-Star Blues Band, with guitarist Left Hand Frank serving as the sparkplug for

## DEFUNKT EQUIPMENT

Joe Bowie plays a Conn Victor trombone with a 12-E Vincent Bach mouthpiece; Byron Bowie blows a Selmer Mark VI tenor saxophone and a Gemeinhardt flute; Martin Aubert plays 14-gauge strings on his Gibson Les Paul through a Kustom Casino Lounge amplifier; Kelvyn Bell uses a Fender amp and either a Gibson 175-D or a Yamaha SG-2000.

some mighty rousing roadhouse sessions. Henry Threadgill, Donald Smith, Phillip Wilson, Amina Claudine Myers, Hemphill, and Byron all made appearances, but it was the first meetings between Aubert, Bell, Gibbs, and Burrage that proved most significant. After five ambitious shows, Bowie decided to pack in the All-Stars.

He explains: "The blues experiment was fun, but I knew I had to go a step further. It was time for me to make something more conducive to people buying records, listening to the radio, and dancing, but that also had an underlying creativity, a different commercial approach. This is when Defunkt started."

After their stint with James White, Defunkt went right out on their own. They headlined Hurrah, Squat, and Squat again, leaving dancers limp in a funk-ed-out daze. Due to their hot gigs, the *Soho Weekly News* raved that 1980 would be the "Year of the Funk." It didn't exactly turn out that way, though Defunkt nonetheless secured a recording contract with Hannibal Records. *Defunkt* (HNBL 1301), their first release [see *db* review, Apr. '81], is an uneven album mostly because of the way Joe's unsophisticated vocal mannerisms contrast with Byron's polished horn arrangements and production. It is, however, strong enough that funk-rockers—in particular Uncle Jam/P-

Funk principle George Clinton—should take notice. In fact, Defunkt opening for the next Parliament-Funkadelic tour is not exactly a far-fetched idea.

Oddly, the Bowies don't react warmly to that proposal. "It could be detrimental in terms of our long-range plans for reaching the white audience," Joe points out. "Once it gets to the white audience, it'll get to the black audience. We know they'll like it."

Byron leans back in his chair, stroking his beard. I smell a rap. "See, there's a lot of latent discrimination that's happening. Once you're known as a jazz group or an r&b group, the moguls at the top of the record companies say, 'You're a jazz group, you're an r&b group, you're this, you're that.' They put you into these categories. We're not into black music, green music, or purple music—we're into music. Period."

"This is what's going to happen with Defunkt," Byron says, leaning forward. "Defunkt is gonna be like disco—not musically, but as far as a marketing bag. No one thought disco was gonna happen. The same thing's gonna happen with new wave. Then the Warners and Columbias are gonna jump on it with millions of dollars."

"Throughout the history of music," Joe dives into the discussion, "new styles have been laid on people and they catch on—eventually. We're forming a music so we can get enough people interested in it to where we can put it on a marketing shelf that can sell a million records. Actually, I think we're very close to it. Our music is combining creative jazz and traditional jazz with the funk, which is a combination that really hasn't been tried much yet." Add to that the rock and I guess it would be more than fair to call Defunkt new wave. And if you don't believe me just ask anyone wearing purple tights or a checkered t-shirt. db

ANDY FREIBERG/ENCORE

## grating and tender tenor



BYRON

BOWIE





# RECORD REVIEWS

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

## SIDNEY BECHET

### GIANTS OF JAZZ—Time-Life STL-J09:

WILD CAT BLUES; KANSAS CITY MAN BLUES; TEXAS MOANER BLUES; I'M A LITTLE BLACKBIRD LOOKING FOR A BLUEBIRD; CAKE WALKING BABIES FROM HOME; SWEETIE DEAR; I FOUND A NEW BABY; LAY YOUR RACKET; MAPLE LEAF RAG; SHAG; BLACKSTICK; WHEN THE SUN SETS DOWN SOUTH; I AM A WOMAN; WHAT A DREAM; REALLY THE BLUES; WEARY BLUES; SUMMERTIME; POUNDING HEART BLUES; INDIAN SUMMER; LONESOME BLUES; BECHET'S STEADY RIDER; FOUR OR FIVE TIMES; SWEET LORRAINE; GIINA BOY; COAL CART BLUES; SHAKE IT AND BREAK IT; OLD MAN BLUES; WILD MAN BLUES; NOBODY KNOWS THE WAY I FEEL DIS MORNIN'; BLUES IN THIRDS; SAVE IT, PRETTY MAMA; STOMPY JONES; EGYPTIAN FANTASY; BLUES IN THE AIR; THE MOOCHE; WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED LOVE?; BLUE HORIZON; SHINE; QUINCY STREET STOMP; BECHET'S FANTASY; SPREADIN' JOY; KANSAS CITY MAN BLUES; SONG OF SONGS; AS-TU LE CAFARD?

**Personnel:** Bechet, soprano saxophone, clarinet; with bands comprising, among others: Henry "Red" Allen, Louis Armstrong, Wild Bill Davison, Sidney deParis, Rex Stewart, trumpet, cornet; Vic Dickenson, J. C. Higginbotham, Charlie Irvis, Sandy Williams, trombone; Mezz Mezzrow, Albert Nicholas, Bob Wilber, clarinet; Ernie Caceres, baritone saxophone; Dave Bowman, Hank Duncan, Meade Lux Lewis, Sammy Price, Willie The Lion Smith, Dick Wellstood, piano; Teddy Bunn, Carmen Mastren, guitar; Wellman Braud, Pops Foster, bass; Danny Alvin, Sid Catlett, Kenny Clarke, Baby Dodds, J. C. Heard, Fred Moore, Zutty Singleton, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The power of Sidney Bechet's artistry and creative genius is of such magnitude that most writers still quail at the prospect of devising new ways to describe its impact. Musical analyses abound, of course, and the best to date is that offered by Bob Wilber and Dick Sudhalter, co-authors of the notes accompanying this Time-Life release. But no one has as yet succeeded in conveying, in words, the emotional strengths that Bechet continued to project throughout his life—a life that ran its course, like those of others who truly matter, inseparable from the music he created.

Bechet's claim to fame lies in much more than his having been the first great jazzman to devote his talents to the saxophone. That he was, to be sure, for prior to his recording debut in 1923, this curious instrument—a bastardized cornet/flute/clarinet—had only been used for functional or novelty effects,



and certainly never as a means of creative expression. Bechet had been playing the straight soprano as a double to his primary choice, the clarinet, since 1919, when he happened across the odd-looking horn in a London instrument-maker's shop. Though its inconsistent intonation must have caused him some initial problems, all had been well under control long before the time of his first recordings. It is important to realize, however, that Bechet, born in 1897, had been a prodigious clarinetist since childhood, and that when he commenced his early romance with the soprano, he was already an acknowledged master of his first, and more demanding, horn.

Only four months before Bechet's earliest recordings, though, Louis Armstrong and Johnny Dodds, two of New Orleans' other great contributions to jazz, also made their first commitments to wax. As stars of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, they established for all time the primacy of the solo voice in a music that heretofore had largely been a matter of collective improvisation. Gifted soloists were not unknown in the formative years of New Orleans jazz, but before the Oliver recordings never had such cohesive dynamism, swing, and individual creativity been heard by so many. In contrast, the New

York recordings of Clarence Williams' Blue Five, despite featuring the now-mature work of a 26-year-old Bechet, were destined to become but appendices to what had already been so explicitly delineated by the Oliver band.

The Williams Blue Five and Red Onion Jazz Babies sides included in this admirably conceived tribute are among the best with Bechet. All of his soon-to-be-totally-realized virtues are already apparent: the self-assured dominance of his sweep (in both solo and ensemble roles), the subtle shades in his control of dynamics, the ingeniousness of his rhythmic sensibilities (on a par with no less than Armstrong's of a few years hence), and the stirring vibrancy of a sound frequently tried but never equalled. Armstrong himself is a bonus on three of these five Williams titles, but even he has a hard time outshining Bechet, in so grand a manner does this unique musician handle his job.

An eight-year leap in recording activities, occasioned primarily by the soprano's long stay in Europe, takes us next to another first: the official, though long uncredited, origin of the New Orleans revival. In 1932, the worst year of the Great Depression, the expatriated New Orleansian was fortunate enough to get a chance to record "that good

MATT STRAUB



old-time music" for RCA Victor, then at the helm of a hard-struck industry. These New Orleans Feetwarmers sides justify any encomium that can be mustered. Fierce, driving, soaring soprano exults throughout, but not to the entire exclusion of Hank Duncan's superlative stride piano, nor of Tommy Ladnier's impassioned Oliverian trumpet. Of different but comparable interest is Bechet's work on the Noble Sissle Swingsters and Grant and Wilson sides, but *What A Dream*, from Bechet's second leader date, does boast an additional virtue in the forthright baritone playing of Ernie Caceres. Ladnier's two autumnal selections owe their existence to session promoter Mezz Mezzrow's insistence that improvised polyphonic jazz be given more of a hearing than was customary in 1938. Along with sponsoring periodic record dates under his own name and authoring a widely read jazzman's autobiography (the first to frankly discuss such previously hushed subjects as drugs and miscegenation), Mezzrow, a sincere but flawed musician, also played a great part in advancing Bechet's latter-day reputation.

With the 1939 recording of *Summertime*, we enter the most fruitful period of Bechet's career. Virtually every performance of his, from here on in, must be considered essential listening, but for reasons of space, an almost puritanical judiciousness had to be invoked in the selection of the remaining titles by the Time-Lifers. Thus, we note the unfortunate omission of anything from his provocative but seldom heard V-Disc date with Vic Dickenson, his controversial Blue Note session with Bunk Johnson, or his extensive blues-based output on Mezzrow's King Jazz label; also missing from this sadly truncated period are any examples of his featured work on either the Eddie Condon or "This Is Jazz" radio shows, while his overwhelmingly documented European oeuvre of the '50s had to be summed up in but a single track, the final one.

But what is included here must be regarded as the *creme-de-la-creme*. The unflinching inspiration at the core of Bechet's genius, while touching even Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, wielded its earliest and most pronounced influence on Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges, and, through them, ultimately the entire community of mainstream jazzmen. Indeed, anyone who can remain unmoved even today by the sway of Bechet's musical presence must truly be beyond the call of jazz itself. —jack sohmer

## STEVE TIBBETTS

**YR**—Frammis 1522-2: *UR; HERE COME THE SPHEXES; TEN YEARS; ONE DAY; THREE PRIMATES; YOU AND I; THE ALIEN LOUNGE; 10 YR DANCE.*

**Personnel:** Steve Tibbetts, guitars, keyboards, mandolin, dobro, sitar, kalimbas, percussion; Marc Anderson, Tim Weinhold, percussion; Robert Hughes, bass; Steve Cochrane, Marcus Wise, tablas.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Yr comes to us like an artifact from a lost civilization. It seems to be rich in detail and

history, yet veiled in mystery and tinged with some vaguely felt exoticism. In fact, it is the creation of Steve Tibbetts, a multi-instrumentalist from Minnesota who is probing the same areas of global synthesis as Don Cherry, Mike Oldfield, and Jade Warrior. Like Oldfield, Tibbetts' music is essentially a one-man production in which the recording studio and magnetic tape become instruments through which all elements are mixed and transformed into an almost mystical creation.

The all-instrumental Yr is Tibbetts' second homemade album and like the first, it is a guitar freak's dream. Tibbetts overdubs acoustic and electric instruments in a Hendrixian mindscape of production wizardry, often combining up to 20 guitars on one track. He layers the sound into breathtaking guitar choirs and intricate superstructures. His solos are twisting, singing journeys that evolve with the sense of spiritual awakening you'd hear in a Coltrane soprano run. After building to an exuberant climax that nears the breaking point, he supplants it with a plaintive acoustic guitar passage that initiates the next trip.

Though Yr consists of eight pieces, they all flow together as one extended composition in which a percussion ensemble provides continuity, color, and propulsion. The two tabla players (one per side) maintain the questing forward motion that marks Indian music, while Marc Anderson plays a variety of instruments that give shape and ambience to the heady atmosphere of Tibbetts' compositions. The effect is one of being carried down a fog-covered tropical river that unveils a new sight at every turn.

As on his first album, this is a completely self-produced effort, including the cryptic cover art and engineering. But no excuses have to be made for an album that can synthesize several expressions into a unified whole. Even the little hoe-down section on *One Day* seems perfectly in place in the total context. Only Jade Warrior has managed to make music that is this blisteringly electric while still maintaining the pristine purity of acoustic folk and international musics. Seek this album out or it will become a relic rather than the living and vibrant expression it is. —john diliberto

## OREGON

**OREGON IN PERFORMANCE**—Elektra 9E 304: *BUZZBOX; ALONG THE WAY; WANDERLUST; DEER PATH; WATERWHEEL; DRUM SOLO; ARION; FREE PIECE; ICARUS.*

**Personnel:** Ralph Towner, guitar, piano, french horn, flugelhorn; Paul McCandless, oboe, flute, english horn, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Collin Walcott, sitar, tabla, percussion; Glen Moore, bass, violin, flute, piano.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Culled from tapes recorded at Carnegie Hall, in Quebec and in Montreal, this double record album solidly affirms that Oregon was one of the most durable and consistently interesting acoustic fusion groups; regrettably, we hear they've broken up.

Although Ralph Towner and Paul McCandless are at times stunning soloists, this ensemble worked not because of the strength of any individual musical personality but because of its collective, intuitive grasp of musical form and its broad palette of textures and timbres. If they tour no more, they will be missed.

*Deer Path* typifies the group's controlled sonic sophistication. Collin Walcott's delightfully unpredictable sitar runs, glides, hiccups, and squawks are joined by a marvelous collage of dense melodic swells. Plucked guitar and a dash of piano cue a section of aleatory ping-ponging as angular, atonal melodies volley among lead voices, backed by smatterings of tabla and Towner's jazzy guitar chords. Similarly, *Waterwheel's* interest lies in the group's unexpected modulations of mood and color. McCandless' elongated flute lines are supported by busy guitar and tabla rhythms, unexpected cymbal splashes and thick double bass lines. This exoticism segues into an openly textured guitar/tabla passage, then a tabla solo leads the full ensemble into the piece's cyclic theme. Music as inspired incantation.

*Arion*, *Buzzbox*, and *Along The Way* are likewise compelling in their contractions of tension and release, in their intricate commingling of plaintive musical themes, and in their collectively controlled shifts of texture.

*Free Piece* does exactly what its title suggests, as it pushes the group's experimentation with sound as sound into the domain of avant garde conservatory music. McCandless' manic wood flute is backed by randomly plucked strings, otherworldly scratches, and pop bottle-like toots. An ensemble of penny- and train-whistle wails leads into an extraterrestrial choir of violin and woodwind moans, whose harmonics blend into ethereal pipe organ resonances.

Surprise. Craftsmanship. Cultural diversity. Mysticism. Fun and games. Feeling and intelligence. What else is there to ask for?

—jon balleras

## RONNIE MATHEWS

**LEGACY**—Bee Hive 7011: *LEGACY; A CHILD IS BORN; ONCE I LOVED; ICHI BAN; SUICIDE IS PAINLESS (THEME FROM MASH); LOOSE SUITE; FOUR FOR NOTHING.*

**Personnel:** Mathews, piano; Ricky Ford, tenor saxophone; Bill Hardman, trumpet; Walter Booker Jr., bass; Jimmy Cobb, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

*Legacy* is a good but disconcerting album, its achievements undercut by the unfulfilled promise of greater things. Ronnie Mathews' debut album, *Roots, Branches, And Dances*, was more than one of 1979's best releases; it marked his ascension from a career of interruptions and supporting roles to leadership and individuality. And the *Legacy* lineup, featuring cooks Ricky Ford and Bill Hardman, looked to match the manic blowing of *Roots*.

But despite further evidencing the growth of Mathews, *Legacy* falls victim to restraint and several dubious song selections. The



horns work on only five of seven tunes, and work out on fewer still. Two songs recently appeared elsewhere in nearly identical arrangements—*Ichi Ban* as the title cut of a Louis Hayes/Woody Shaw Muse release, also featuring Mathews, and the boppish revision of *Once I Loved* on Hardman's own 1978 album, *Home*. As for *Suicide* (From MASH), Mathews' intriguing prelude—low chords melting into the bass line, single notes rustling above—only emphasizes the tame restraint of the piece.

The best performances, on the other hand, reward the most obscure compositions, *Legacy* and *Four For Nothing*. *Legacy* comes closer than any selection to capturing the tempered tension Mathews seems to have sought here. The group never builds to a fury, but drummer Jimmy Cobb clicks out the controlled drive of last-set-of-the-night jazz, as he did so classically on *Kind Of Blue*. Ford's gliding pace and woody timbre recall Dexter Gordon. The entire group invests in the success of *Four For Nothing*: Cobb simply swinging on bass and hi-hat, Mathews chiming chordal accents, Ford strutting on tenor, and Hardman spiking and pricking with his staccato highs.

Uneven as the quintet vehicles otherwise are, Mathews demonstrates his emerging style and mastery on almost every selection. He draws frequent comparisons to McCoy Tyner, toils in the hard bop fields of Horace Silver, and evokes Ellington or Monk when the song demands, but, make no mistake, he has his own voice. He produces an orchestral largeness without any of the pretense of "third stream," seemingly hitting 10 different notes at once and allowing their sum to air and resound. Listen especially to his deliberate reading of *A Child Is Born* for both the huge sound and his way of bridging thumping, dark chords and pedal points with dancing runs. On *Once I Loved* he uses riffs as a starting, rather than stalling, point, launching melodic extrapolations of the repeated clusters.

It feels almost dastardly not to wildly endorse an album by an unsung talent on a neophyte label, but *Roots, Branches, And Dances* provides a far better introduction to Mathews' work. For those who already own that album, or listeners who know even fine artists don't reach perfection every time out, *Legacy* is worth buying as a "coming attraction" advertisement for this pianist of our future. —sam freedman

## DAVID EARLE JOHNSON

**SKIN DEEP YEAH!**—Jonathan David Earle JDE I: *MARY HAD A LITTLE DUCK*; *SKIN DEEP YEAH!*; *BATUCAUDA SADISCO*; *HAVE YOU BEEN THERE?*; *THE ROSE & THE LILY*; *REBEL TROT*; *U.F. OLDS*; *NIGHTMARES*.

**Personnel:** Johnson, percussion, congas, vocals; Billy McPherson, saxophones, flute, bass, guitar; Bruce Hampton, guitar, vocals; Alan Sloan, violin (cut 6).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

This album righteously exemplifies a favorite motto of David Earle Johnson: When in doubt, go out. He does, in ways so delightfully obscure and off the wall that they emerge as damned intelligent music from someone who retains (despite, or more probably because of, musical schooling) that basic anti-intellectualism often attributed to

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rural southerners. Johnson is one of two white southerners to come along since Mose Allison who has anything distinctively original to say (the other is Bennie Wallace). This is music that sneaks up on you: subtle but tasty solos, jumped rhythms, and simple (often downright weird) lyrics so carefully crafted as to result in an urbanly earthy product.

Though pseudonyms abound on the cover's personnel listings, the basic crew is Johnson and some of Atlanta's best non-mainstream players, including associate producer Billy McPherson, whose work is easily the equal of studio players on either coast, and much more spirited. This is Johnson's first album in the driver's seat; the earlier *Time Is Free* (Vanguard 79401) featured his music in duo with Jan Hammer, whose synthesizer skills even then surpassed his production tastes. *Skin Deep* is a positive step, much more convincing with its down-home sound: the playing, the tunes, and just enough fun-filled silliness make it a southern-fried treat.

The music would least inaccurately be categorized as Cuban & Western (especially *Rose & The Lily*), but there's plenty of real improvisation too, some of the loosest coming from guitarist Hampton on the title tune. His vocals on *Nightmares* rival Beefheart for intensity, but with a more melodic bent akin to Brazilian music. *Mary Had A Little Duck* is a good mood-setting opener; McPherson's energetic flute and sax play straight man to Johnson's smooth and nonsensical vocals. Johnson's loping timbales on *Have You Been There?* lure one into soulful flute and guitar solos from McPherson; it is at once the tightest and most esoteric tune of the lot. Least melodious is *Batucada Sadisco*, unless you enjoy wrestling matches between percussion sections and electric guitars. *U.F. Olds* is most like mainstream jazz, but not without a few bizarre interludes.

*Rebel Trot* is in some ways the most sophisticated tune on the album, featuring violin fills from Dixie Dreg Alan Sloan. It contrasts tellingly with a version of the same tune on Johnson's more recent recording, another duo with Hammer, *Hip Address*, on the German CMP label. Where the *Skin Deep* rendition sidles along with some comfortable elbow room, the version with Hammer is rife with impeccably programmed synthesizers and a driven, compelling tempo. There are quieter moments, too, but the tour-de-force is *Hip Address* itself, the strongest single song to come from a southerner since Allison's *Western Man*. Johnson is less pithy and more descriptive in his lyrics than Mose, but the message comes through just as strongly. Hammer's keyboards and drums are fuel for the fire of Johnson's congas and good-natured, borderline smart-aleck vocals. If there was any doubt before, *Hip Address* proves that Johnson can hold his own (and even outdo) the big city slickers and sound just as heartfelt on record as he does down home.

*Hip Address* has yet to be licensed for the U.S., but anyone wanting to hear Jan Hammer play adult music probably won't mind looking for an import or writing directly to

CMP Records, Postfach 445, 5160 Düren, West Germany. *Skin Deep Yeah!* is available through NMDS (500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012) or via Landslide Records, P.O. Box 723151, Atlanta, GA 30339.

—w. patrick hinely

## BOYD RAEBURN

### EXPERIMENTS IN BIG BAND JAZZ

1945—Musicraft MVS 505: *NIGHT IN TUNISIA; MARCH OF THE BOYDS; I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT YOU; SUMMERTIME; A PRISONER OF LOVE; I WANNA GET MARRIED; I PROMISE YOU; THIS HEART OF MINE; YOU'VE GOT ME CRYING AGAIN; OUT OF NOWHERE; BOYD'S NEST; BLUE PRELUDE.*

**Personnel:** Full personnel not given; soloists probably include Dizzy Gillespie, Tommy Allison, trumpet; Trummy Young, Walter Robinson, trombone; Johnny Bothwell, Joe Megro, Frankie Socolow, saxophone; Don Darcy, Marjorie Woods, vocals.

★ ★ ★

### JEWELS—Savoy SJL 2250:

*TONSILECTOMY; FORGETFUL; RIP VAN WINKLE; YERXA; DALVATORE SALLY; BOYD MEETS STRAVINSKY; I ONLY HAVE EYES FOR YOU; OVER THE RAINBOW; BODY AND SOUL; BLUE ECHOES; LITTLE BOYD BLUE; HEP BOYD'S; MAN WITH A HORN; PRELUDE TO THE DAWN; DUCK WADDLE; LOVE TALES; SOFT AND WARM; THE LADY IS A TRAMP; HOW HIGH THE MOON; TROUBLE IS A MAN; ST. LOUIS BLUES; IT NEVER ENTERED MY MIND; WAIT TIL YOU SEE HER; IT CAN'T BE WRONG; WHEN LOVE COMES.*

**Personnel:** Various combinations of Tommy Allison, Alan Jeffreys, Johnny Napton, Dale Pierce, Carl Groen, Ray Linn, Nelson Shalladay, Frank Beach, Bob Fowler, Conte Candoli, Buddy Colaneri, Norman Faye, Bernie Glow, trumpet; Jack Carmen, Ollie Wilson, Si Zenter, Britt Woodman, Hal Smith, Freddy Zito, Tommy Pederson, Burt Johnson, Milt Bernhart, Leon Cox, Bart Varsalona, trombone; Hal McKusick, Leonard Green, Stuart Anderson, Frank Socolow, Guy McReynolds, Harry Klee, Willie Schwartz, Ralph Lee, Hy Mandel, Boyd Raeburn, Lucky Thompson, Jules Jacobs, Bill Starkey, Ethmer Roden, Lloyd Otto, Al Richman, Buddy DeFranco, Jimmy Giuffre, Jerry Sanfino, Sam Spumberg, Shirley Thompson, reeds; George Handy, Dodo Marmarosa, Hal Schaefer, Ray Rossi, piano; Hayden Causey, Dave Barbour, Tony Rizzi, Steve Jordan, guitar; Ed Mihelich, Harry Babasin, Joe Berise, bass; Jackie Mills, Max Albright, Irv Kluger, drums; Gail Laughton, Loretta Thompson, harp; David Allyn, Ginnie Powell, vocals.

★ ★ ★ ★

Though the longevity of Boyd Raeburn's various big bands was pretty much limited to the World War II years plus a few thereafter, it made a vivid though fleeting mark through its usually strong personnel—

in addition to the many still-familiar names in the above listing, earlier and later unrecorded versions of the band included Oscar Pettiford, Roy Eldridge, Al Killian, Eddie Bert, Mel Lewis, and the fledgling phenomenon Maynard Ferguson—and its adventurous, often surrealistic arrangements. Since Raeburn was a less-than-overpowering musical presence in his own right, this was of necessity an arranger's band; despite a number of more-than-competent soloists, over the years the band's calling card was its wildly imaginative ensemble sound.

Prior to 1945, the Raeburn band used Chicago as home base, venturing out on the road only occasionally. Budd Johnson, Jerry Valentine (both arrangers for Earl Hines' orchestra at the time), and Tadd Dameron contributed heavily to the band's book. Though none of their charts are featured on these two reissues, from the opening notes of the Gillespie-composed and -arranged *Night In Tunisia* on the Musicraft LP—Raeburn's unconventional bass saxophone echoing the familiar bass riff, and trombonist Walter Robinson's burry phrasing of the theme—one can tell this is no ordinary sounding big band. The majority of the Musicraft numbers were arranged by George Williams and are characterized by impressionistic Ellington hues—especially in the lush, curious reed harmonies behind the Hodges-influenced altoist Johnny Bothwell's plaintively soothing bent notes and slides on *Blue Prelude*, and the latter's sweetness and light tone on *I Didn't Know About You* and *Summertime*. Elsewhere, other arrangers added a number of subtle, intriguing touches: the punching muted brass on the otherwise novelty throwaway *I Wanna Get Married* is by Ed Finckel (a self-styled Basieite who was an important part of the Raeburn band's success in the mid-'40s), the razzle-dazzle interlude on an otherwise mellow Johnny Mandel arrangement of *Out Of Nowhere*, and the Basie-like boogie of Milt Kleeb's *Boyd's Nest*. Everything here is not up to these standards, however; too many of these numbers feature the ripe, now dated vocals of Don Darcy, and the muffled sound quality and lack of recording information and personnel listing cause the Musicraft collection to lose points.

The stellar Savoy two-disc set has bright engineering, full personnel listings, good vocals by David Allyn and especially Ginny Powell, and even more adventurous arranging in its favor. Except for the numbers on side four (four of which were Raeburn sides recorded for Atlantic in 1947, and four non-Raeburn sides sung by the band's frequent vocalist David Allyn with the Johnny Richards Orchestra), all of these pieces were recorded in 1945-'46 for Ben Pollack's Jewell label—hence the significance of the album's title. Still, many of these pieces remain jewels some 35 years later—mostly those arranged by George Handy.

Handy's is a truly novel music sensibility, with a foot in both the jazz and classical camps, possibly formed through his studies with Aaron Copland (who, remember, was influenced by jazz during the 1920s). The pieces here with the most nerve and verve are inevitably Handy's—the interaction of



instrumental choirs on *Tonsilectomy*, the bizarre, angular riff and strange voicings prior to Allyn's vocal on *Forgetful*, the dour harmonies and intriguing counterpoint salvaging the chestnut *Temptation*, the pastel colors (flutes and muted brass) and taffy-pulled tempi of *Dalvatore Sally*, the dream-like discontinuity and rich Romantic phrasing interrupted by circus fanfares in *Over The Rainbow*, and the jagged, jigsaw brass interruptions in *Body And Soul's* intro. Surprisingly, *Boyd Meets Stravinsky* is not by Handy but Ed Finckel, though it features a Handy-like nearly atonal theme, a great deal of flash and sizzle in the ensemble writing, a gruff Lucky Thompson solo and a boppish one by Dodo Marmarosa.

Unfortunately, Raeburn and Handy had their differences, musical and personal apparently, and upon Handy's leaving the band in late 1946 the majority of the arranging chores fell to Johnny Richards. Richards revamped the band's sound and expanded the instrumental palette by adding harp, an english horn, and three french horns. For the most part these incidental colors seem an unwarranted intrusion, too sweet and too coy. Hear, for example, the silly *Man With A Horn*, which, with its royal fanfares, harp, and english horn lead, hardly qualifies as jazz at all. *The Lady Is A Tramp* is given a slow, tepid account, and the recasting of *St. Louis Blues* includes rewriting of W.C. Handy's melodies but lacks momentum. The remaining four ballads, by Richards' own orchestra, allow Allyn's warm baritone to bloom in a string-heavy environment just this side of syrup.

Despite the excesses of Richards' tenure with the band, there is a great deal of exciting, evocative music contained in these four sides (six, counting the less highly recommended but worthwhile *Musicraft*). Boyd Raeburn may not have been the most imaginative musician in the world, but he was the conduit through which much fine music passed—music which lives on in these re-releases. —art lange

## TEO MACERO

TEO—American Clavé 1002: *UN POCO DIABLO*; *AM I/ARE YOU*; *ST. LOUIS BLUES*; *LOVE/MATCH POINT*; *OUT OF LONELINESS*; *BLUES FOR AMY*; TEO; *I'LL REMEMBER APRIL*; *HOW LOW THE EARTH*; *MITZI*; *EXPLORATIONS*; *THOU SWELL*.

**Personnel:** Macero, alto, tenor saxophone; Lee Konitz (cuts 2,5), Phil Woods (3,6), John LaPorta (12), alto saxophone; Al Cohn (3,6), tenor saxophone; Pepper Adams (3,6), baritone saxophone; Art Farmer (3,6), trumpet; Frank Rehak (3,6), trombone; Eddie Costa (3,6), vibes; Ralph Casale (4), guitar; Bill Evans (3,6), piano; Patrick Rebillot (4), organ; Lenny Dijay (7-12), accordion; Charles Mingus (7-10), Lou LaBella (7-10), Russ Savakus (4), Jorge Romero (5), Addison Farmer (3,6), Wendell Marshall (12), bass; Ed Shaughnessy (3, 6-12), Frank Hernandez (5), Bill Goodwin (4), drums; Badal Roy (5), tabla; unidentified string section (2).

★ ★ ★ ★

Teo Macero has had a long and important career, but few contemporary jazz listeners have a good appreciation of his contributions, other than as a producer for Miles

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Davis. One problem has been the paucity of available recordings of Macero's music. This exemplary reissue, which brings to light some of Macero's best work from the 1950s, will help to ease that problem.

Macero is usually categorized as a composer/arranger who made some important contributions to the so-called Third Stream in its seminal days. In 1955, he recorded the composition *Sounds Of May*, which startled many listeners with its unique electronic effects—sounds that were well ahead of their time. But as Teo makes clear, Macero was an important innovator in many ways, not only as a composer, arranger, and producer but also as a player.

Perhaps the most revealing cut on Teo is *Explorations*, which is a multi-tracked free improvisation. Macero, on alto and tenor sax, is the only musician. While it does not sound particularly startling to modern ears, it must have been a shock to listeners in 1953 when it was released. The only previous forays into such radical music were Lennie Tristano's famous 1949 recordings; Mingus' *Pithecanthropus Erectus* was three years away and Ornette Coleman was still playing r&b.

In 1953 Macero was working with Charles Mingus in a co-operative known as the Composers' Workshop. There are many similarities in their composing styles and, indeed, they were associated off-and-on throughout Mingus' career. Mingus appears on four selections on this record, in an unusual configuration that includes a second bassist, Lou LaBella, drummer Ed Shaughnessy, accordionist Lenny Dijay, and Macero. These tunes are fascinating and unpredictable, ranging from the furious swing of *Mitzi* to the dirge-like textures of *How Low The Earth*. Macero's sax is cool and angular, and the accordion lends a bizarre carnival touch.

*Am I/Are You* and *Out Of Loneliness* are features for Lee Konitz, who was, of course, a participant in those Tristano free sessions. Konitz's dry, plaintive alto is set against a string section conducted by Macero. Both of these tunes are melancholy mood pieces, but the string writing is far from standard. It's a pity that Macero did not write the string charts for the Bird-with-strings sessions; the music would have been much more exciting.

*St. Louis Blues* and *Blues For Amy* are scored for a more conventional jazz ensemble, a nonet that features Phil Woods. His strong Bird-like solo is a highpoint of Macero's creative arrangement of the W. C. Handy classic. Textures and tempos are carefully controlled, and the overall sound is classically cool. Woods is again prominent on *Blues For Amy*, which sounds quite a bit like a Mingus blues. Squeezed in between *St. Louis Blues* and *Out Of Loneliness* is *Love/Match Point* a unique rockish composition for guitar, organ, bass, and drums that sounds like something from an early Santana album. The wide range of Macero's musical imagination is really quite remarkable.

One unfortunate drawback of this otherwise excellent release is the incomplete and

confusing listing of personnel and dates. An errata slip inserted in the jacket corrects some, but not all, of the mistakes and omissions. With a reissue of this type, it would seem that a clear listing of credits should be a high priority. Since this is a "limited first pressing" perhaps later editions will correct this flaw. What really counts is the music, though, and that speaks for itself.

For those who find this album hard to locate, it can be obtained from New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012.  
—jim roberts

## MUSIC FOR OBOE

**MUSIC FOR OBOE—CRI SD 423:** LA BOCCA DELLA VERITA (George Rochberg); DIAPHONIC SUITE NO. 1 (Ruth Crawford Seeger); RHAPSODY, (Ralph Shapey); TRIO (Gunther Schuller); WAVE CANON (Joseph Julian); WORK (Lawrence Singer).  
**Personnel:** James Ostryniec, oboe; Charles Wuorinen, piano; Noah Chaves, viola; David Bakwgard, horn.

★ ★ ★

The oboe has been a staple of chamber music for centuries, and its slightly dry, bittersweet quality lends a poetic allure to the most astringent atonal compositions. Nevertheless, even in the contemporary idiom, the instrument responds well only to sympathetic writing—and not all of the pieces in this compilation offer a congenial setting for the oboe.

For example, George Rochberg's *La Bocca Della Verita* (1959) lacks a lyrical impulse, and therefore, despite its polish and symmetrical phrasing, it seems shapeless, inchoate, mere form in search of content. In contrast, Ruth Crawford Seeger's *Diaphonic Suite No. 1* (1930) for solo oboe manages to convey an impression of spontaneity with long, arching lines.

Like the Rochberg piece, Ralph Shapey's *Rhapsody* (1957) is written for oboe and piano. But here, rather than complementing each other, the musicians play in jarringly different styles: the jagged, tumbling piano chords seem to bear no relation to the more placid oboe part, which is dominated by long notes. Since the music for oboe would be uninteresting by itself, the work is less a duet than a keyboard solo with woodwind obligato.

Comparing Gunther Schuller's 1948 trio with Lawrence Singer's *Work* (1968) highlights the contrast between generations of American composers. Schuller's gently lugubrious piece illustrates his skill at manipulating ensemble textures and showcases the instruments' sonorities in a quasi-tonal framework. Singer's *Work*, on the other hand, features abrasive multiphonics and jazzy squawks and squeals that recall the music of Ornette Coleman, Roscoe Mitchell, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago.

Another force from outside the classical tradition—Indian music—permeates Joseph Julian's *Wave Canon* (1977). But the influence is not as overt as in, say, the work of Terry Riley or Alan Hovhaness; it is subtle,

spicing this exotic piece with a distinctly non-Western flavor.

A canon in five parts, with Ostryniec playing live along with four parts on pre-recorded tape, *Wave Canon* uses quarter tones which give the oboe an especially piquant aura. Particularly compelling is the opening of the piece, in which the oboes drip over each other like colors running on a canvas. If there is a flaw in *Wave Canon*, it is only the lack of timbral contrast; a silvery flute tone among the reedy oboes might have worked wonders.

Ostryniec is to be commended for delivering accomplished performances in these widely divergent styles. Similarly, Charles Wuorinen, a well-known composer himself, provides sympathetic support, and Noah Chaves and David Bakkegard blend smoothly with Ostryniec in the Schuller trio.  
—joel rothstein

## BUSTER WILLIAMS

**HEARTBEAT—Muse 5171:** I FALL IN LOVE TOO EASILY; TOKU-DO; SHADOWS; PYGMY LULLABY; RUBY P'GONIA; VERONICA.

**Personnel:** Williams, bass; Kenny Barron, Jimmie Rowles (4), piano; Ben Riley, Billy Hart (3-5), drums; Gayle Dixon, violin (3, 4); Pat Dixon, cello (3, 4); Suzanne Klewan, vocal (4).

★ ★ ★ ½

**DREAMS COME TRUE—(Buddah 5728):** WHEN THE SKY IS CLEAR; BETCIA BY GOLLY, WOW!; AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'; SEASCAPE; SO FALLS THE PAST; DREAMS COME TRUE.

**Personnel:** Williams, bass, piccolo bass; Eddie Henderson, trumpet, flugelhorn; Hank Crawford, alto saxophone; Hubert Laws, flute; Kenny Barron, acoustic piano; Onaje Allen Gumbs, electric piano; Ben Riley, Billy Hart, drums; Nobu, percussion; John Blake, Lloyd Carter, Valerie Collymore, Akua Dixon, Gayle Dixon, Eddie Drennon, Carl Ector, Clarissa Howell, Ulysses Kirksey, Ronald Lipscomb, Melvyn Roundtree, George Taylor, strings; Terri Gonzalez, Curtis Rance King Jr., Darryl S. Tookes, vocals.

★ ★ ★

Common denominator and focal point of both of these sets is the resounding, resourceful bass work of young veteran Williams, one of the instrument's noblest performers, although scarcely as well known as his ample talents would warrant.

Despite the presence of a number of strong voices—notably pianists Barron and Rowles—on the more interesting *Heartbeat* set, which consists largely of trio performances, the bassist easily dominates the proceedings. His big rounded tone and perfect intonation through every register of his instruments buttress on all but boundless melodic fertility. His solos are beautifully constructed, thoroughly (and always) musical statements of great thoughtfulness and individuality that, as indicated by his extended improvisation on the opening ballad *I Fall In Love* and the closing bass solo



# RECORD REVIEWS

improvisation Veronica, proceed with the linear flow and clarity characteristic of a topnotch reed player. He never wants for interesting ideas that engage the listener, yet never engages in virtuosic display.

A more conventional rhythmic approach characterizes his classic-styled bebop line Toku-Do, a marvelously integrated trio performance that owes its success to the unforced, perfectly empathetic interplay of Barron, Williams, and Riley. Much the same is true of Ruby P'Gonia, a still compelling neobop line Williams first composed and recorded more than a decade ago as a regular member of the jazz Crusaders, which elicits spirited, totally engaged work from the three. Barron really digs in on this piece. Rowles' haunting Pygmy Lullabye is given a ravishing performance, the composer at the keyboard, a graceful, lyrical presence, and vocalist Klewan adds greatly to the piece's effectiveness in both her wordless and sung-text portions, the whole underscored with some spare, dirgelike string parts.

Williams is equally conversant with the so-called European music traditions that bulk so large in international jazz these days; yet, as is indicated by his *Shadows*, a dark and arresting work of sober lyricism, his handling of these conventions, for all the gravity and thoughtful control of its sculpting, is always warmly and satisfyingly emotional at core. More than any other piece in this interesting recital, *Shadows* reveals his mastery as a bassist of uncommon taste and sensitivity. His playing during Barron's solo here indicates perfectly his conception of the role of the bassist: he's no mere accompanist in the conventional sense, but an equal partner, commenting on, amplifying, and countering Barron's statement with his own commentary, making for a totality far greater than just the sum of those two parts. Marvelous.

The Buddah set, *Dreams Come True*, is something of a mixed bag, melding pop-jazz confections (*When The Sky Is Clear* and the title piece, both of which utilize vocalists) with modern mainstream jazz (*Seascape*, *So Falls The Past*), more interesting fare (the inappositely titled *Betcha By Golly, Wow!*), and even throwing in a breezy, easily swinging trio performance of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, with Williams (on piccolo bass) and Barron soloing with plenty of infectious spirit. The totality is oddly effective. Its very eclecticism flies handsomely in the face of many current crossover efforts that surround the jazz soloist with production values designed to broaden his popularity.

However, a recording so varied in its programming as this may have great difficulty in finding an audience, for there's not enough of any one approach to appeal to fans of the various idioms that are here explored—and quite well, too. Still, these reservations noted, there's quite a lot of meat in this set, and the performances succeed handsomely in their multiple goals, which credit all involved: featured soloist Williams, the other players, arranger-conductor Onaje, and producer Vic Chirumbolo. —pete welding

## BIG TWIST

### BIG TWIST & THE MELLOW

**FELLOWS**—Flying Fish FF 229: (*It Would Be*) *You & Me*; *Who's Cheatin' Who*; *Till The Morning Comes*; *Slave For Love*; (*That's The Sound Of A*) *Happy Man*; *Turn Back The Hands Of Time*; *Nobody Wants To Lose*; *The Sweet Sound Of Rhythm & Blues*; *Here In This City*; *Children's Blues*.

**Personnel:** Big Twist, vocals; Pete Special, guitar; Terry Ogolini, tenor saxophone; Bob Pina, keyboards; Tim Caron, bass; Melvin Crisp, drums; Ron Friedman, trumpet; Mike Halpin, trombone; Corky Siegel, harmonica; Ruben Alvarez, percussion; the Jessie Dixon Singers, background vocals.

★ ★

## EDDY CLEARWATER

### THE CHIEF—Rooster Blues Records

R2615: *Find You A Job*; *Blues For Breakfast*; *Blue, Blue, Blue Over You*; *One Day At A Time*; *I Wouldn't Lay My Guitar Down*; *Chills*; *Bad Dream*; *I'm Tore Up*; *Lazy Woman*; *Blues For A Living*.

**Personnel:** Clearwater, guitar, vocals; Lurie Bell, guitar; Carey Bell, harmonica; Lafayette Leake, piano; Abb Locke, tenor saxophone; Chuck Smith, baritone saxophone; Joe Harrington, bass; Casey Jones, drums; Leroy Brown, vocal, maracas.

★ ★ ★ ½

## LITTLE WILLIE ANDERSON

**SWINGING THE BLUES**—Blues Over Blues B.O.B. 2701: *Come Here Mama*; *Willie's Women Blues*; *Lester Leaps In*; *Everything Gonna Be Alright*; *Late Night*; *69th Street Bounce*; *Looking For You Baby*; *Been Around*; *West Side Baby*; *Big Fat Mama*.

**Personnel:** Anderson, vocals, harmonica; Robert Jr. Lockwood, Sammy Lawhorn, guitar; Jimmy Lee Robinson, guitar, bass; Willie Black, bass; Fred Below, drums; Pete Haskin, alto saxophone (cut 3).

★ ★ ★

## THE JELLY ROLL KINGS

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**Personnel:** Frank Frost, organ, piano, harmonica, vocals; Jack Johnson, guitar, vocals; Sam Carr, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Only 10 years ago, numbers of outstanding unknown bluesmen could still be found performing in the obscurity of ghetto clubs and roadhouses. Today, thanks to pioneering labels like Delmark and Alligator and publi-



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cations like *Living Blues*, such discoveries have become increasingly rare—as in gold mining, the digging gets deeper as the nuggets get smaller. Four recent independent releases document the state of contemporary blues in formats ranging from stark purism to flagrant commerciality.

Of the four, only *Rockin' The Juke Joint Down* truly succeeds as a showcase for neglected musicians, and those artists hold forth not in Chicago but in Clarksdale, Mississippi. The three Chicago LPs suffer variously from over- and under-production, but their main drawback is the quality of the talent itself. Most of the featured players are well known to local enthusiasts, having been passed over until now in favor of more dynamic and inventive stylists.

Big Twist, a large man who claims to have authored *The Twist* during his early tenure with Hank Ballard, is a Carbondale-based bandleader who appears regularly in the Chicago area with a group recruited from southern Illinois campuses. Essentially a straightforward bar band, the Mellow Fellows could hardly merit a recorded exposition with their staple repertoire of recycled pub fare. Consequently, Flying Fish Records, principally a folk outlet, has fashioned the band's debut offering in a rankly commercial mold, pandering a slick, watered-down facsimile of pre-disco r&b to a putative radio market.

Twist's bluff baritone suggests a cross between Albert King and Barry White, but any stirrings of creativity are thoroughly stifled in the hodgepodge of jejune material and hackneyed brass/choral charts. The cover version of Tyrone Davis' *Turn Back The Hands Of Time* reveals one source of Twist's inspiration, sadly robotized, however, into formula anonymity. Bonnie Koloc's tender *Children's Blues* is Twist's most effective vehicle by far; for once the band is restrained and supportive as Twist delivers the touching lyric with evident sincerity.

Eddie Clearwater is another familiar Chicago bluesman who gained a reputation as a Chuck Berry imitator in the early '60s. His versatility extends to gospel, r&b, and country musics, but his affable showmanship tends to overshadow his routine musical gifts. The fledgling Rooster Blues label is a joint Anglo-American venture whose stateside proprietors, Jim and Amy O'Neal of *Living Blues*, are as knowledgeable a production team as any in the industry. For *The Chief*, they have supplied Eddy with a team of crack blues hands, including his cousins Carey and Lurrie Bell, but the glossily engineered results prove more facile than imaginative. Unusually for a blues recording, this session actually seems over-rehearsed, achieving the polished rigidity of a studio set rather than the supple momentum of a tight working band.

Clearwater proffers a series of transparently re-written classics in a bright but faceless modern style. His compositions replicate tunes by Magic Sam, Otis Rush, and Junior Wells, among others, but nowhere does he approach the intensity of the originals. A pair of token rockers, the Berry-

esque *I Wouldn't Lay My Guitar Down* and the Tequila-ish *Lazy Woman* (no relation to the Bo Diddley tune of the same name), are more congenial but no less derivative. As a vocalist, Eddy is amiable but undistinguished, and his guitar work, while solid, is far from unique, leaving Carey Bell's superlative harp fills and a resonant baritone sax solo by Chuck Smith as the album's instrumental highlights.

Although many collectors consider the '50s the "golden age" of Chicago blues, the surviving practitioners of that era can rarely rekindle the ineffable spark that ignited the stirring sessions of yore. Little Willie Anderson, a protege of harmonica genius Walter Jacobs, modeled himself so closely after his idol that he was once dubbed Little Walter Jr. Anderson has been making a comeback in local clubs, but the endless choruses of shopworn Walter licks that can shake a tavern crowd sound flat and listless in the studio. Poorly rehearsed and indifferently mixed, *Swinging The Blues* relies largely on the strength of a solid rhythm section led by drummer Freddie Below, for Anderson's hoarse, inarticulate singing and imitative harp work have none of the sparkling immediacy that marked Walter's immortal sides.

The funeral of bluesman Lee Jackson occasioned the presence of guitar wizard Robert Jr. Lockwood, who incongruously flashes his Charlie Christian-inflected licks to counterpoint an otherwise lackluster set of "generic" blues. Except for his expansion on Walter's brilliant *I Just Want To Make Love To You* solo (with Muddy Waters), Willie's hand-me-down instrumentals are nearly as tedious as his crude, lecherous vocals. Former Muddy sideman Sammy Lawhorn provides a few guitar hot spots, but for the most part, the Denver-based production bogs down in the sort of bromidic rehash that Chicagoans take for granted.

"Harmonica" Frank Frost, esteemed for his early Sun and Jewel recordings, currently performs in the taverns and roadhouses of the Mississippi delta with partners Big Jack Johnson and Little Sam Carr. With Frost doubling on keyboards, the Jelly Roll Kings have the ingenuous vitality of a three-headed one man band, tailoring their rollicking downhome rhythms to a native audience that cares as little for academic purity as for the latest market trends. Chicago aficionado Michael Franks discovered the trio on a blues-hunting expedition down Highway 61, bringing them to Memphis for the initial presentation of his Earwig label. No studio spice was necessary, for the Kings cook with their own brand of gas, simmering rock, pop, and c&w influences into the basic broth of authentic delta funk to create a piping hot southern gumbo.

"Sittin' on my slop jar, waiting for my bowels to move," is the unappetizing but hilarious refrain of the long-suppressed *Slop Jar Blues*, an outhouse classic frequently cited by Dizzy Gillespie. Having thus engaged the listener's attention, the Jelly Roll Kings proceed with a driving selection of instrumental and vocal burners, featuring Johnson's indefatigable gutbucket guitar over

Frost's Sonny Boy-styled harmonica and Carr's mule-kicking drums. Frost's gruff vocals contrast with Johnson's more expressive higher pitch, but neither aspire to clever lyricism, preferring the passionate rendition of trustworthy cliches. As a keyboardist, Frost makes up in rhythmic zeal what he lacks in more orthodox technique; indeed, the percussive aspect dominates the playing of all three musicians. Frost's rolling piano theme, *Soul Love*, recalls Floyd Cramer with its rich c&w flavor, but the Farfisa organ is Frank's real "drivin' wheel," rocking relentlessly through such propulsive stompers as *Have Mercy Baby*, *Honeydrippin' Boogie*, and *Sunshine Twist*, the latter a delightfully rocked-out instrumental version of *You Are My Sunshine*. —Larry Birnbaum

## AIR

**LIVE AIR**—Black Saint BSR 0034: *EULOGY FOR CHARLES CLARKE; PORTRAIT OF LEO SMITH; KEEP RIGHT ON PLAYING; THIRU THE MIRROR OVER THE WATER; BE EVER OUT.*

**Personnel:** Fred Hopkins, bass; Steve McCall, drums, percussion; Henry Threadgill, alto saxophone, percussion.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

This is vintage Air, recorded in 1977 less than a month before *Air Time*, their initial U.S. release. For recent *Airopiles*, who've heard only the raucous ragtime of *Air Lore* or the wry witicism of *Open Air Suite*, this album offers yet another avatar.

Side one is mainly Threadgill's flute, beginning with a dramatic, elegiac piece dedicated to the late AACM bassist Charles Clarke. Threadgill spins out angular oriental lines, and the overall image is of a wind-blown bluff; the wind itself is Hopkins hovering just behind with tense, delicate vibrato bowing, while drummer McCall touches down here and there like the occasional shaft of sunlight glancing off the rocks. Most of the 10-plus minutes is a counterbalancing of these elements, with Hopkins' bow carrying the melody—no bawling here, just gentle tears. The listener is startled when Threadgill lets out with a moment of his angular, Ornetteish alto, but the contrast ingeniously serves to define the piece as a lament.

*Portrait Of Leo* has more of Threadgill's flute, with McCall coming and going through the piece like a millipede scurrying down a corridor, innumerable tiny triphammers fading into the distance. When the rhythm section becomes a bit strident, Threadgill gathers them under his flute, smoothing them out as one might do to wrinkles in a sheet; but this levelling is only an auditory mirage, and it quickly dissolves into yet another of the continuously changing forms.

Great expectations are met in *Keep Right On Playing*. Threadgill delivers the dreamfully contemplative opening statement on alto, but he and Hopkins are in McCall's hands this time—*Keep Right On Playing* is an excerpt from a percussion suite—as the drummer dictates the length and direction of



# RECORD REVIEWS

intervals between theme statements. First he is tympanic, carrying them through the first three movements with luxuriant mallet work, then in the fourth he pulls a seamless switch and emerges on sticks flashing off cymbals with the piquance that has become McCall's signature. Threadgill reaches for some grainy tenor-like alto blowing in the cadenza, McCall again kicking him into higher gears.

As always, the set closer is overtly lyrical. *Be Ever Out* is true to this dictum at the outset, but then evolves into a shifting light show; the comings and goings, however, are firmly grounded in the trio's collective sensibilities. Threadgill once again teases with some ripping alto runs, but in the tasteful tradition of the masters, he takes some and leaves some—in this case, leaving the listener wanting more.

A triadic approach is the glue of this trio; perhaps the years playing Joplin rags, or working the pork chop circuit account for this. *Live Air* is yet another discourse on frame analysis; these three know that intuition can define a musical context without lapsing either into repetitive form or excess baggage. McCall is an astute and gentle giant, Hopkins possesses a timbre mellowed well beyond his years (he may be to the new music what Chambers was to the Coltrane era), and Threadgill's wry and ever-tasteful compositions have melded into *Air*: an insinuation of diaphonous forms, forms that change and stay the same, and stay the same and change.

—brent staples

## BENNIE WALLACE

**LIVE AT THE PUBLIC THEATER**—Inner City IC 3034: *BROADSIDE*; *IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD*; *BLUE MONK*; *HEAD*.  
**Personnel:** Wallace, tenor saxophone; Eddie Gomez, bass; Dannie Richmond, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

## FRANCO AMBROSETTI/ BENNIE WALLACE

**CLOSE ENCOUNTER**—Inner City IC 3026: *CLOSE ENCOUNTER*; *NAPOLEAN BLOWN APART*; *SAD STORY OF A PHOTOGRAPHER*; *MORNING SONG OF A SPRING FLOWER*; *RHUMBA ORGIASTIC*.  
**Personnel:** Ambrosetti, trumpet, flugelhorn; Wallace, tenor, soprano saxophone; George Gruntz, piano; Mike Richmond, bass; Bob Moses, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

If you haven't heard of Bennie Wallace yet, I predict you'll be hearing a lot about him in the years to come. Wallace is a young, 33-year-old tenorist from Tennessee who some might glibly classify as a Scott Hamilton-with-a-modernist-bent. In other words, Wallace wears his sources on his shirt sleeve: bits of Ben Webster, Johnny Hodges, Don Byas, John Coltrane, and Sonny Rollins are audible in the newcomer's tone and attack. But through the sheer strength and imagination of his playing, Wallace is able to transcend his influences, as did the late Eric

Dolphy—with whom Wallace shares a just-in-front-of-the-beat momentum and an ear for chromatic abandon. Add to this a ferocious drive, an improvisational presence which includes timbral, in addition to thematic and rhythmic, variance within a single solo, and all the chops you could ask for, and you have an instrumental voice to reckon with. Which is precisely where Wallace stands at this juncture.

*Live At The Public Theater* is his second album for Inner City, and it retains the trio format which proved to be so felicitous on the first release. This time around the drummer is Dannie Richmond, who brings a controlled, concise pulse and measured tread to the proceedings. Bassist extraordinaire Eddie Gomez is a perfect partner, able to match the saxophonist stride-for-stride when the tempo soars, and flexible enough to provide a supple harmonic base in addition to expressive solo statements.

The four performances show nary a sign of weakness. *Broadside* consists of a simple head built around a repetitious, near-funk, motif which Wallace milks for all it's worth, his gruff bottom notes and tough, sputtered line sounding like Jimmy Forrest on overdrive. Richmond sounds like a pointillistic Jack DeJohnette until he glides the band into the 4/4 blues, and Gomez' solo drops the tempo to half-time with handfuls of doublestops ripe for the plucking. *In A Sentimental Mood* is in the Webster/Hodges

tradition, with breathy, bent-note theme phrasing by the saxophonist and an unaccompanied cadenza, saucy and sassy, in a Rollinsish mold. *Blue Monk* features some surrealistic substitute notes in the melody which out-Monk Monk. Richmond's uncluttered punctuation is especially noteworthy, as it allows Wallace all the space he needs to bellow his orgiastic flurries and hoarse, gargoyle shouts. *Head*, like *Broadside* a Wallace original, alternates an ascending and descending spiral line and receives Wallace's most Byas-ed playing of the date as well as a hypnotic Richmond solo built around a recurring six-note pattern.

*Close Encounter*, in which Wallace is a featured member of the Franco Ambrosetti Quintet, is not as viscerally exciting as the live recording, but uses its added instrumental colors and more variegated compositions to seduce the listener. The group has the togetherness of a typical Jazz Messengers' aggregation, and can catch fire, especially when Wallace is handy to light the fuse. However, their fervor is tempered by a relaxed, cool quality reminiscent of Miles Davis' ensemble from the mid-'60s. This dichotomy is evident on the title tune, with its slightly acid harmonies giving way to Ambrosetti's Davis-derived style—brisk, brusque tone and ice-water-in-the-veins phrasing. Both Wallace and pianist Gruntz, however, have gutsier voices than their Davis counterparts Shorter and Hancock, respect-

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tively, and the saxophonist displays his leather-lunged attack most fluently.

*Napoleon Blown Apart* is an attractive waltz with curious accents, featuring facile flugelhorn from Ambrosetti and Wallace's nothing-special soprano. There's no comparison between his work on this cut, and that on Gruntz' *Morning Song*, where he negotiates a torturous refrain with aplomb. Ambrosetti, meanwhile, displays his penchant for double-time flurries in the trumpet's mellow middle register. *Rhumba Orgiastica*, by Gruntz' fellow European keyboarder Joachim Kuhn, prompts the pianist's best solo, a fill-in-the-cracks ramble, and characteristic outings from the other hands.

While Wallace's own album is a better showcase for his considerable talents, and thus a more suitable introduction, the Ambrosetti date is a thoroughly engaging, somewhat more suave experience. In either event, Wallace is a voice who demands to be heard. —art lange

## SUN RA and his ARKESTRA

**THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SUN**—Sweet Earth SER-1003: *SPACE FLING; FLAMINGO; SPACE IS THE PLACE; THE SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET; MANHATTAN COCKTAIL.*

**Personnel:** Sun Ra, acoustic, electric piano; John Gilmore, Marshal Allen, James Jacson, Elo Omoe, Danny Davis, Danny Thompson, reeds; Walter Miller, Michael Ray, Eddie Gale, trumpet; Tony Bethel, Robin Eubanks, trombone; Vincent Chancey, french horn; Oscar Brown Jr., Bob Cunningham, Ben "Jereeboo" Henderson, bass; Dale Williams, guitar; Artaukatune, Luqman Ali, William Goffigan, Eddie Thomas, percussion; June Tyson, vocals.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**STRANGE CELESTIAL ROAD**—Rounder Records 3035: *CELESTIAL ROAD; SAY; I'LL WAIT FOR YOU.*

**Personnel:** Sun Ra, acoustic, electric piano; John Gilmore, Marshal Allen, Elo Omoe, James Jacson, Danny Thompson, Kenny Williams, Hutch Jones, Sylvester Baton, Noel Scott, reeds; Michael Ray, Curt Pulliam, Walter Miller, trumpet; Craig Harris, Tony Bethel, trombone; Harry Wilson, Damon Choice, vibes; Vincent Chancy, french horn; Richard Williams, Steve Clarke, bass; Skeeter McFarland, Tony Richardson, guitar; Luqman Ali, Reg McDonald, Artaukatune, percussion.

★ ★ ½

**OF MYTHIC WORLDS**—Philly Jazz 1007: *MAYAN TEMPLES; OVER THE RAINBOW; INSIDE THE BLUES; INTRINSIC ENERGIES; OF MYTHIC WORLDS.*

**Personnel:** Sun Ra, acoustic, electric piano; John Gilmore, tenor sax; Marshal Allen, alto sax; unnamed others.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Over the last quarter-century there has been a voice in modern music that has persisted. While record companies put the energy and

fire of numerous experimenters on the back burner, the sounds and systems of Sun Ra were continually projected and documented on his series of self-produced records. Ra's compositions became mythic stories, experimenting with the limitations of big band arrangements, poetry, and piano styles. Over this quarter-century Sun Ra has released dozens of discs; many have become classics in the shadows of the modern avant garde jungle, as sounds of the city and the people, dreams of a composer and performer.

These three recent Sun Ra releases will please those who have known the strength and beauty of Ra and his Arkestra, and perhaps open the ears of many who have never listened.

*The Other Side Of The Sun* is to date the most balanced, well recorded, and profoundly beautiful session. Section voicings within the big band are constructed with numerous systems in mind. Themes are stated in traditional ways (trumpets on top, trombones and tenors together), but the nature of the orchestration changes within the tune. Alto lines soar above the trumpets and flutes; sections experiment with playing in different tonalities or extremely wide chord voicings, only to snap back into the head.

*Space Fling*, with its uptempo show band intro, opens side one. Ra is on the Rhodes piano, toying with a funky blues line in twisting thirds and occasional clusters of minor seconds and large swatches of notes. Band members leap in, structuring their solos as if they were sections of a symphony, suspended on the line of supreme order and chaos—balancing and flying.

*Flamingo* is a rare and moving ballad. The harmonic design is similar to Ra's record *Nothing Is* (ESP 5, 1966). Ra is on the acoustic piano presenting chords that have their roots in Brahms' *Ballads* Opus 39, Bartok's *Seven Sketches*, and Bud Powell's *Time Waits*, from his prolific Blue Note period. The big band becomes a chamber orchestra; they whisper and cry, floating amid the logical and sensitive melody. The tension between musical forces is epic and moving, and the work of reedman John Gilmore finds its varied sources in Coleman Hawkins and the modern French composer Varesé.

*Space Is The Place*, a funky vocal track which has been in Ra's repertoire for years, is an underground hit, with its trance-like lines and spatial vocals. The version on this date is much shorter and more compact than usual. Vocal lines by June Tyson have matured and developed; her sound is very sensual and playful, but strong.

*Strange Celestial Road* is much more rockish and electronically conceived. Ra moves between several electronic keyboards and sound generators, with a funky electronic bassline. The mood is playful, as we cruise on a rocket ship toward celestial freedom, but the sound is repetitious and thick.

It is interesting to hear Sun Ra's interpretation of electronic pop fusion funk, but not for all the 45 minutes here, and the harmonic restrictions placed on the Arkestra by

three chord vamp lines hold the group down. The sound of Ra on acoustic piano is far more lyrical—an excellent example of Sun Ra on acoustic piano is his release *Solo Piano, Volume One*, produced by Paul Bley on the Improvising Artists label.

*Of Mythic Worlds* is a live release featuring Sun Ra and the Arkestra in a more spontaneous and diverse setting. A brief but fiery orchestral prelude provides an introduction for Ra's acoustic treatment of the standard *Over The Rainbow*. The neo-romantic first statement develops into a bouncy swing version of the composition—the piano sound is hot and well recorded. *Of Mythic Worlds* is a more balanced effort that includes subtler acoustic passages, and massive rolling percussive sections.

Sun Ra and his Arkestra are musical prophets. They have mastered almost every "earthly" form of Western musical expression, branching into Eastern modes and African systems. Their combination of theater, dance, and sound communicates with the audience on both spiritual and musical levels. The land and people are wonderful—on the other side of the sun.

—bradley parker-sparrow

## CLAUDE WILLIAMSON

**HOLOGRAPHY**—Interplay IP 7708: *ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE; THE WAY WE WERE; I LOVE YOU; ISN'T IT ROMANTIC; THE ROADRUNNER; SOMEDAY MY PRINCE WILL COME; SURE THING; COLLARD GREEN & BLACK-EYE PEA; MY ROMANCE; BLUES-HAMP'S LEGACY.*

**Personnel:** Williamson, piano.

★ ★ ★

**NEW DEPARTURE**—Interplay IP 7717:

*CLEOPATRA'S DREAM; DUSK IN SAND; 29 GREENE STREET; FILTHY McNASTY; SONORA; BLUES LIMITED.*

**Personnel:** Williamson, piano; Sam Jones, bass; Roy Haynes, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

**LA FIESTA**—Interplay IP 7727: *LA FIESTA;*

*THE LOVE OF A CHILD; FIRST TRIP; IN YOUR OWN QUIET PLACE; NICA'S DREAM; BLACK FOREST.*

**Personnel:** Williamson, piano; Sam Jones, bass; Roy Haynes, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Judging from these releases, Claude Williamson is one of those players who needs exactly the right vehicle to function effectively. Material here by Williamson's apparent favorites—Powell and Silver—elicits informed, committed, and sensitive playing, while songs by other equally interesting composers—Kern and Gershwin—lead him into perfunctory, glib performances.

This split in Williamson's conception is especially apparent on the first of these releases, *Holography*; a solo piano outing. *The Way We Were*—a serviceable enough pop tune—is rendered in rococo flutters; first rate dinner music, while *Isn't It Romantic* and *My Romance* make one wonder whether this release shouldn't have been



# RECORD REVIEWS

titled *Embroidery* rather than *Holography*.

Yet, some successful performances can be found here. *I Love You*, done over a dissonant pedal point, features velocity runs bowing in Powell's direction. Williamson's own *Roadrunner* is a tour de force, again revealing his effective use of pedal points and bopish runs.

The tone of *New Departures* is considerably more driving and inspired than *Holography*. Perhaps the presence of two consummate rhythm players, Sam Jones and Roy Haynes, had more than a little to do with kicking along Williamson's playing and turning his penchant for the merely decorative into precise, functional swinging.

On Bud Powell's majestic *Cleopatra's Dream*, for example, Williamson's lines seem fresh, risky, and free from circumlocution. Haynes' shadow boxing brushwork and well-aimed bass drum accents further enhance the authenticity of the performance. Another composition by Powell, *Dusk In Sandi* (a melancholy ballad) is treated respectfully and economically. A snappy *Filthy McNasty* pays tribute to the soul-cum-funk movement of the '50s, as do two Williamson originals—*29 Greene Street* and *Blues Limited*—all of which suggest that Williamson has indeed found his vehicles on this release.

*La Fiesta*, the most recent of these disks, again finds Williamson in the inspiring company of Jones and Haynes. Although the pianist still tends at times to verge toward the saccharine (e.g. the plethora of trills and broken chords on his *The Love Of A Child*), with his cohorts' solid support, he nonetheless gets off a punchy, playful *La Fiesta* and introduces a welcome change in mood and rhythm on Keith Jarrett's *In Your Own Quiet Place*. Hampton Hawes' *Black Forest* moves from slow rock to a medium float to a solid medium walk, propelled, again, by the powerhouse rhythm section. For such workable blends of material and interpretation, Williamson merits attention, and if and when Williamson can consistently define his own true voice and purpose, he may become formidable. —jon balleras

## RONALD SHANNON JACKSON AND THE DECODING SOCIETY

**EYE ON YOU**—About Time AT-1003:

*Sortie*; *Nightwhistlers*; *Apache Love Cry*; *Shaman*; *Eastern Voices/Western Dreams*; *Dancers Of Joy*; *Arising*; *Orange Birthday*; *Theme For A Prince*; *Eye On You*; *Ballet De Omphalos*.

**Personnel:** Jackson, drums; Byard Lancaster, alto, soprano saxophone; Charles Brackeen, tenor, soprano saxophone; Billy Bang, violin; Bern Nix, electric guitar; Vernon Reid, electric, acoustic guitar; Melvin Gibbs, electric bass; Erasto Vasconcelos, percussion.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

When it comes to rhythm, even the most iconoclastic of musicians can be superstitious. Revolution occurs in jazz when enough players march to the beat of a

different drum, but the insurgents don't always march in step. Over the last 20 years, Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor have employed only a select handful of drummers each, and only one drummer—the galvanic Ronald Shannon Jackson—has danced and sparred with both.

With the Cecil Taylor Unit, Jackson choked up on his sticks for earthshaking, out-of-the-ballpark might, providing weight and balance for the pianist's leaping ballets across the keyboard, and added muscle for his assault-and-batteries upon it. And his frank, insistent use of primal two-beat and shuffle rhythms encouraged winning and hitherto unsuspected barrelhouse tendencies in the great pianist. As the power source in Coleman's *Prime Time*, Jackson was even more fiercely percussive, although he relied more on intuition and less on brute force. Often he was Coleman's melodic echo, repeating one of the saxophonist's sing-song phrases inflection for inflection on the snare, and then punctuating it with a lashing cymbal exclamation—joyfully marking the bar line Coleman had just bravely ignored. Together, Jackson and Coleman unearthed indigenous jazz rhythms that played upon the body like the simultaneously bracing and relaxing rhythms of late-'70s funk or new wave rock&roll.

Jackson promises to be a strong force for unity in the still-emerging music of the '80s. On his first record as a bandleader, he has picked up the loose threads of funk, free jazz, new wave, trance music, and Coleman's theories of harmolodics, and gathered them all together in a bright and intricate bow of rhythm and dissonance. Jackson solos only once here—a tossing, thrashing break in *Shaman*—but it could be said in praise of him what has often been said in dispraise of free drummers generally: that he is "soloing" continuously, no matter who else is playing. The drummer's indomitable will is everywhere upon this striking music. The voices of the saxophonists and the string players rise like vapors from the steaming cauldron he gleefully stirs.

Jackson's 11 compositions are expansive miniatures which generate much of their tension by crowding the greatest possible movement within the smallest allowable space—most clock in at around four minutes and *Apache Love Cry*, the longest, develops an exhilarating diversity of dynamics and emotions in just over six. After a decade-and-a-half of rambling 40-minute saxophone solos, brevity really is a virtue in and of itself, and it's a pleasure to hear improvisations as concise and drawn-to-scale as Lancaster's on *Sortie* and Brackeen's on *Prince*. Elsewhere, however, both saxophonists seem uncharacteristically circumspect, inhibited by more than just lack of space. Neither is willing to loosen up to Jackson's earthy rhythms and swing from the heels as Coleman and Taylor and Blood Ulmer all have done, and so the record lacks a crucial second dimension. But this is essentially ensemble music, and as band members, Brackeen and Lancaster perform with diligence and genuine enthusiasm, especially when they are called upon to riff the heads of pieces like *Sortie* and *Dancers*

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Of Joy in clashing alto/tenor union, or to improvise simultaneously, as on Prince and the title track.

It is in the gliding, humorous solos of violinist Bang, the to-and-fro pacing of bassist Gibbs, and the swelling interplay between the leader and the smoldering, vibrato-heavy, string-bending guitarist Nix that this music comes closest to birthing a new idiom, comes most fully and most frighteningly kicking and screaming to life. If one didn't already know better, this record—and recent ones like it by Coleman, Ulmer, and to a much lesser degree, Defunkt—might lead one to believe that a synthesis of jazz wisdom and rock&roll exuberance was an exciting prospect and a real possibility. I do know better—as an esthetic casualty of the '60s, I know all too well. But when I hear Ronald Shannon Jackson, like a happy fool I still believe.

—francis davis

## ANDY STATMAN

**FLATBUSH WALTZ**—Rounder Records

0116: *FLATBUSH WALTZ*; *CHINA*; *AWAY YOU GO*; *EAST WIND BLUES*; *ANCESTRAL STEPPES*; *FANFARE*; *MEDITATION SIGNAL*; *BARBARA IN THE MORNING*; *BATS AND BELZ*; *TWILIGHT BLUE*.

**Personnel:** Statman, mandolin; John Carlini, electric guitar; Marty Confurius, bass; Dom Um Romao, percussion; Frank Clayton, drums; Evan Stover, violin (cuts 1-3,5,6); Kenny Kosek, violin (1-3,6), Matt Glaser, violin (2,3,6); Marty Laster, viola (2,3,6); Abby Newton, cello (3); Russ Barenberg, guitar (2,6); Bob Jones, guitar (1); Roger Mason, electric bass (6); Barry Lazarowitz, drums, triangle (3,6); Zev Feldman, def (5); Ellen Green, vocals (4).

★ ★ ★ ★

## THE TIM WARE GROUP

**THE TIM WARE GROUP**—Kaleidoscope Records F-13: *SAHARA STRUT*; *BOSSA DE BOMBA*; *TURKISH TANGO*; *SPIRAL MOONS*; *ON THE WING AND UNDER THE WEATHER*; *ENDLESS*; *SEABORNE CLOUDS*; *MANDOLIN VII*.

**Personnel:** Ware, mandolin, guitar (2,5,7); Bob Alekno, guitar, mandolin (2,6); John Tenney, violin; Sharon O'Connor, cello; Ken Miller, bass; David Grisman, mandolin (4); Darol Anger, mandola (4); Mike Marshall, mando-cello (4).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

## THE TONY RICE UNIT

**MAR WEST**—Rounder Records 0125: *MAR WEST*; *NARDIS*; *WALTZ FOR INDIRA*; *NEON TETRA*; *IS THAT SO*; *WHOA BABY*; *EVERY DAY I WAKE UP WITH THE BLUES*; *MAR EAST*; *UNTITLED AS OF YET*.

**Personnel:** Rice, guitar; Richard Greene, violin; Todd Phillips, bass; Sam Bush, mandolin (1,3,5-8); Mike Marshall, mandolin (2,4).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Since the mid-'70s, David Grisman and a small circle of friends have fused seemingly diverse elements from jazz, rock, folk, and classical music into a new type of acoustic music. Drawing its roots from bluegrass and the small group jazz bands of violinist Stephane Grappelli and guitarist Django Reinhardt in the '30s, this hybrid has been called "dawg" music, "avant garde bluegrass," or "string band jazz." But call it what you will, it is richly melodic, understatedly elegant, sensuously sweet, and exuberantly propulsive.

One of the brightest of the unheralded mandolin voices, Andy Statman is pushing the mandolin even beyond the frontier pioneered by Grisman. Statman's *Flatbush Waltz* is a testament to his wide range of interests and influences—it's virtually a musical resume. (Statman has recorded avant garde bluegrass, folk, ethnic, and classical music.) The title track combines an introduction which blends elements of African and Turkish music with a theme based on klezmer, the instrumental music of Eastern European Jews. Other originals, such as *China*, a four-part suite, and *Ancestral Steppes*, are aural travelogues through the Far East and Central Asia. Over the carefully structured, lush impressionistic background, Statman's alternately breezy and plaintive mandolin evokes both real and imagined memories. In a jazz context, the tender ballad, *Barbara In The Morning*, features sensitively bluesy mandolin, and *Twilight Blue* progresses from a free Albert Ayler-type rave-up to a beautiful, easily swinging ballad.

Unlike Statman's solo virtuosity, on its debut album the Tim Ware Group forges a more coherent ensemble sound which is almost like chamber jazz. Ware balances and equalizes the lead and solo space among the members of his quintet with great sensitivity. This is best exhibited on *Seaborne Clouds*, where the mandolin only adds background textures while the other instruments move through sections of lead, duet, and contrapuntal roles in this exquisite reel. On the more exotic originals, like *Sahara Strut* and *Turkish Tango*, the group exactly evokes a breath of foreign perfume, but the vignettes are not as mesmerizing as those of Statman. From a mandolinist's viewpoint, the highlight of this album is *Spiral Moons*, where Grisman and two members of his group, Darol Anger and Mike Marshall, join Ware for a quartet of various-sized mandolins. Ware and Grisman share the melody; their notes coalesce like the warp and woof of a finely woven Oriental rug.

The only non-mandolinist of the three leaders surveyed here, Tony Rice established himself as a major bluegrass guitarist with J.D. Crowe and the New South and later with Grisman. On *Mar West*, The Tony Rice Unit once again proves to be a hotbed of electricity and ideas. The title track and *Untitled As Of Yet* bristle with energy. Rice's guitar pyrotechnics are balanced by Sam Bush's rapid-fire mandolin attack and violinist Richard Greene's soaring flights of abandon. But while Statman loses continuity when he

changes directions, and Ware's music occasionally suffers from sameness, Rice changes pace royally with the *3/4 Waltz For Indira*, and a blues, Miles Davis' *Nardis*. The latter is a lovingly restrained tune; Rice and Greene handle the subdued colors with aplomb.

From the crazy quilt approach of Andy Statman to the crackling energy of Tony Rice and the luxuriant mellowness of Tim Ware, these three albums are outstanding examples of the wide parameters of this new acoustic hybrid.

—randy savicky

## LENNIE TRISTANO

**REQUIEM**—Atlantic SD 2-7003; *LINE UP*; *REQUIEM*; *TURKISH MAMBO*; *EAST THIRTY-SECOND*; *THESE FOOLISH THINGS*; *YOU GO TO MY HEAD*; *IF I HAD YOU*; *(I DON'T STAND A)* *GHOST OF A CHANGE*; *ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE*; *BECOMING*; *C MINOR COMPLEX*; *YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS*; *DELIBERATION*; *SCENE AND VARIATIONS*; *CAROL, TANIA, BUD*; *LOVE LINES*; *G MINOR COMPLEX*.

**Personnel:** Tristano, piano; Peter Ind, bass (cuts 1,4); Jeff Morton, drums (1,4); Lee Konitz, alto saxophone (5-9); Gene Ramey, bass (5-9); Art Taylor, drums (5-9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

This two-record set represents Tristano's last outings for this label, two sessions spanning 1955 to 1962. They come at a time when his reputation is at its highest in decades. Were it re-released while he was alive, it may have precipitated a return to public activity. Tristano was a bit of a visionary and as such he seemed to accept ultimate posthumous acceptance.

The title track is Tristano's solo tribute to Charlie Parker. Although Tristano was among the first to offer a modern, cooler alternative to bop, he loved Bird's music. The piece is double-tracked and contains two motives, first a Schumann-like dirge that subsequently gives way to a slow blues. Tristano's music was not blues-based but Bird's was and so he leaves the ball in Bird's yard.

The first four pieces are from the summer of 1955 and are all examples of multi-tracking, for which Tristano drew heavy criticism. The important point is that he did it not to disguise a technical deficiency, but to extend the rhythmic and linear boundaries of the music. *Turkish Mambo* and *East Thirty-Second* are both driving, compelling pieces that give the lie to the notion that Tristano's music was academic and emotionally cold. They both swing like crazy and the tape layering gives his propulsive piano the effect of a whole band.

The remaining five tracks are taken from a live date featuring Konitz and a couple of unlikely Tristanites: Ramey and Taylor. Standard tunes were always fodder for Tristano's recompositional efforts, and the reharmonizations in this case were very impressionistic. Konitz is in fine form, and his lines on *These Foolish Things* and *All*



# RECORD REVIEWS

The Things You Are are both lovely and vital.

The second LP is solo Tristano with no overdubbing. It's ironic that these recordings again drew cries of "fake!" at the time, a tribute to his incredible dexterity. Although most of the titles are attributed to Tristano, five of the pieces are thoroughly reworked standards. *C Minor Complex* features galloping lead and bass lines racing around one another. There's a sly, almost subliminal paraphrase of Rachmaninoff's *Prelude In C Sharp Minor* that goes whizzing by, revealing the source of the piece.

The three miniatures in *Scene And Variation* are portraits of Tristano's children, and are all based on *Melancholy Baby*. *Carol* is winsome and thoughtful. *Tania* is darker yet playful. *Bud* races around in the lower registers, rather aimlessly at times, though the music ultimately resolves itself through an alleviation of the accumulated tension. *C Minor Complex* is a stripped down and rebuilt *You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To*, and it (like all the other solo pieces) gives a clear, unadorned look at Tristano's conception of structural modification and variation. The bass is steady and functional, walking through and around the changes at the same time, while the right hand is free to embroider single-note and chordal baroqueisms.

These days the main artery of Tristano's teachings is represented by Konitz, tenor saxophonist Warne Marsh, and pianist Sal Mosca. Cecil Taylor and Anthony Braxton, a generation or two removed, have carried aspects of the doctrine to a freer, less tradition-bound plane. This Atlantic two-fer is quite simply the best, most essential Tristano material currently available. It should be required listening for all "modernists."  
—kirk silsbee

## WAXING ON . . .

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**JIMMY NOONE/EARL HINES: AT THE APEX CLUB, 1928 (Jazz Heritage Vol. 14/MCA 1313) ★ ★ ★ ★ ★**  
**SIDNEY BECHET: BLACKSTICK, 1931-1938 (Jazz Heritage Vol. 31/MCA 1330) ★ ★ ★ ★**  
**KING OLIVER: DIXIE SYNCOPATORS, 1926-1928 (Jazz Heritage Vol. 10/MCA 1309) ★ ★ ★**  
**FLETCHER HENDERSON: FIRST IMPRESSIONS, 1924-1931 (Jazz Heritage Vol. 11/MCA 1310) ★ ★ ★ ★**

**FLETCHER HENDERSON: SWING'S THE THING, 1931-1934 (Jazz Heritage Vol. 19/MCA 1318) ★ ★ ★ ★ ★**  
**LOUIS ARMSTRONG: THE SIDEMAN, 1924-1927 (Jazz Heritage Vol. 2/MCA 1301) ★ ★ ★**  
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MCA Records (once upon a time, Decca) has released 34 single LPs and in one sweeping move restored a huge volume of historic jazz, some of it significant and much still a pleasure to listen to. Many of the albums (which list at relatively low budget prices) will be familiar as repackagings of the old Decca Jazz Heritage series of the late '60s, with liner notes edited, paraphrased, and re-lylined by Alain Gerber. These include Armstrong's *The Sideman*, four Lunceford volumes, the King Oliver album, the two Hendersons, the Earl Hines Big Band LP, the Hines/Noone set, and several others. In a few cases, however, there have been programming changes; most importantly, a lot of new material has been added on volumes by Johnny Dodds, Lunceford, Pete Johnson and a wealth of early piano masters, and most significantly, Louis Armstrong.

All these records reveal a number of stories about the drama and development of early jazz. One of them concerns the fate that came to that generation of New Orleans jazzmen who took the music outside the Delta and put it before a national audience. The three principle clarinetists of that anointed group—Johnny Dodds, Jimmy Noone, and Sidney Bechet—are represented with one LP each. Dodds played Watson to Noone and Bechet's elegant *Sherlock Holmes*. He was the most primitive of the group, the most deficient in technique, yet probably the most frequently recorded during the first years of jazz recording, when the music was still wet with its folkish origins. What strikes one most about his playing is his tone—broad, lyrical, and wildly passionate. But his attack was elementary and often

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clumsy. This is especially apparent on the various trio sides that occupy side one of *The Spirit Of New Orleans: 1926-1927*. Dodds pushes hard. His playing has great power and drive, but little sense of drama, of how to build to a climax. His lines are constructed largely of pounding quarter notes played directly on top of the beat and broken by frequent palpitating whole notes bent into shimmering wails. In the upper register they often become shrill. His best work comes through at slower tempos in the chalumeau range of his horn, such as his solo on *Melancholy*, where he manages to make a fairly good showing against Louis Armstrong. In the middle range his vibrato is intense and hot. He invigorates the ensembles on *Come On And Stomp*. But his eighth-note passages tend to be stiff and rigid, without legato flow. Yet one mustn't be too hard on this pioneer. First, these are not among his best records, and second, although his work has not worn well (notwithstanding the fact that he continues to influence those few clarinetists who try for an old-fashioned Preservation Hall sound), he was, after all, a founding father of the music. As with all inventors, it falls to others to perfect.

One of the perfectors was Jimmy Noone, who was perhaps the most perfect of all the New Orleans clarinetists. The fact that Dodds and Noone were contemporaries from New Orleans, yet took such vastly different approaches to the clarinet, traces to the class distinctions blacks made among themselves, especially in New Orleans. Dodds was an instinctive, self-taught folk artist who came up from the lower elements of Negro society. Noone had a lighter complexion, a distinctly bourgeois outlook, and a respect for (as well as an endorsement of) musicianship at the highest level. The recordings on the *Apex Club* LP are the definitive work of his career, and in terms of tone and facility, if not conception, the clarinet playing on them sets a standard that any player in 1981 might aspire to. His light staccato phrasing, with its flawless triplets and flurrying arpeggios, is a full 10 years ahead of its time in its ability to swing. All that is lacking in Noone's tripping strings of smooth eighth notes is the legato, pulsating quality that finally lifted jazz off its feet in the '30s and sent it soaring. This is perhaps a consequence of his classical training, for he is not bound to this rat-ta-tat attack, as he demonstrates in his driving final chorus of *I Know That You Know*. His intonation is the work of a trained master, without any of the raspiness or shrillness common in '20s clarinet playing. In the low register, especially, it is worthy of Mozart: listen to *Apex Blues*. Noone's band played highly arranged pieces of no special distinction, so little need be said of his sidemen, save for one: Earl Hines. *My Monday Date* is a tour de force for both Noone, whose gliding solo strikes a remarkable balance between drive and restraint, and Hines, with his bashing right-handed octaves that point the first fingers toward the piano's ultimate horn-like jazz destiny. Putting aside some of the lesser aspects of the band as a whole, the work of

Noone and Hines on these records is among the few early jazz landmarks that are still worth hearing today for musical as well as historical purposes. (Note on the sound: The annoying screech that appears at several points in *Oh Sister* is evidently from the master. I thought it might have been a damaged groove in the LP until I found the same flaw in the original Decca issue, DL9235.)

Of the great New Orleans clarinets, both Dodds and Noone begat descendants; Sidney Bechet, by and large, did not. Along with Pee Wee Russell, Monk, and a few others, he stands off by himself, admired, praised, but rarely imitated. Bechet was a virtuoso—aside from Louis Armstrong, perhaps the first in jazz. And he invested his virtuosity wholly in the New Orleans spirit. Whereas Noone embraced elements of New Orleans music selectively, Bechet personified it and brought to it a polish and emotional range that has never been surpassed. A master of clarinet and soprano sax, his approach was interchangeable on both. It was so powerful, it dominated any ensemble. Half the performances on *Blackstick*, 1931-1938 are cases in point. They are big band charts by the Noble Sissle orchestra, which provided Bechet with a living during the depression. While the band's charts and voicings change with the times (from 1931 to 1936), Bechet plays as if he couldn't care less what his accompaniment was. Indeed, it makes no difference: he is uniformly and consistently superb, virtually a separate center of gravity on every track. The two sessions on side two are with small groups (one supporting singer Trixie Smith), neither one especially good. But Bechet plays to his usual standards. The Trixie Smith numbers are all slow blues, and Bechet steals every bar he plays. There's better Bechet available from this period, mostly on RCA, but this is only because of the better ensembles, and in some cases better material. His work here, though often set pieces, is spectacular. Bechet was the first great dramatist of jazz.

The second was probably Louis Armstrong, who was three years younger than Bechet and hit his creative stride in the late '20s rather than earlier in the decade. Armstrong made his first records during his Chicago period, then went to New York in 1924 and '25. *Young Louis, The Side Man* picks things up at that point during Armstrong's tenure with the Fletcher Henderson band. Though the band has little to recommend it at this early date save for Armstrong, there are glimpses of an emerging orchestral style peeking through the do-whack-a-do doings, due to Henderson's desire to be the black Paul Whiteman. Armstrong's opening, for example, on *When You Do What You Do* (an arranged passage) would be echoed 10 years later by Bunny Berigan in Horace Henderson's *Dear Old Southland* chart for Benny Goodman. As for Armstrong, he had yet to break through the slamming quarter-note attack that marked the playing of Dodds and other early New Orleans soloists. His playing has enormous ripping power, but more strength than grace. Listen to the two

Ersine Tate showpieces to hear how Louis could dominate a band—a perfect case study of the tail wagging the dog! But the meat of the LP is in the Chicago-made small group sides starting with *Drop That Sack*, which is actually the Hot Five under Lil Armstrong's name. He is at the threshold of maturity as a soloist here. The Washboard Wizzards sides show a measure of restraint which seems to permit more rhythmic flexibility, as on his solo after the washboard breaks in *Blues Stampede*. The Dodds' Black Bottom Stompers are lively, but exceptional only during Louis' solo on *Wild Man Blues* (alternates of *Wild Man* and *Melancholy* appear on the Dodds LP). Dodds is at his clumsiest on *New Orleans Stomp*, and Barney Bigard's burping tenor is quaint. But Earl Hines (in his first recorded work with Armstrong) and Louis provide consistent strength to the ensembles, carrying nearly everyone else on their backs. Overall, this is marginal Armstrong, useful in filling in historic gaps but not his prime work of the period.

Armstrong's future was soon to be tied up in a big band, but in 1926 his original mentor, Joe Oliver, had already reached that point. Oliver, we are told, was a major force in the flowering of the New Orleans movement. But by the time he first recorded, in 1923, the bloom was already off the rose. The ensemble style of the old New Orleans band had been overthrown by the growing power and range of a few soloists. By the middle '20s Oliver had enlarged his band and began playing arrangements. His Dixie Syncopators were the house band at the Plantation Club in Chicago during the time these records were made. I must admit, as the years go by, it becomes increasingly hard to relate to Oliver in any musical way. His career was in its twilight when jazz recording began. What followed was not a story of growth but decline. The records on the "Papa Joe" LP are a very satisfactory blend of New Orleans and big band styles, something Henderson never achieved—or perhaps never sought—probably because he had few New Orleans players. Everybody swings hard on *Wa Wa*, and Oliver gets off his best solo of the program, which is clear and powerful but not remarkable. *I'm Watchin' The Clock* is curiously ironic, as Oliver, who had been the idol of Louis Armstrong in 1922, finally shows the clear influence of his greatest pupil. But perhaps his most significant legacy was his plunger technique. On *Jackass Blues* and *Sugar Foot* one hears the inspiration of Bubber Miley and the first incarnation of the Ellington sound.

All these records really are part of, if not jazz's pre-history, at least its ancient history. MCA does not have the key Armstrong performances of 1927-1933 that helped bring jazz into its modern age, but it does have two fine Fletcher Henderson albums which provide that link and carry us from antiquity to modernity. The *First Impressions* collection begins during Armstrong's residency, and again, his scorching trumpet is all that brings distinction to the commonplace Henderson band. When he leaves we are left with a typical hot band of the '20s, in which



the emergence of Coleman Hawkins is the key point of interest. The jerky spitball phrasing begins to smooth out into the more airy swing of *Hop Off* (1928). Then between '28 and '31 something happens and the modern era begins to be born. The rhythm section gets the lumps out and starts to purr with a propelling pulsation. Soloists seem to be ready. Compare Henderson's 1931 *Sugar Foot* with Oliver's 1926 version. The trombone choruses Benny Morton plays are three of my favorite in all jazz, full of warmth, relaxation, and swing. As jazz moves into the modern age, so does the blues. The interplay between Hawkins and Bobby Stark is superb on *Just Blues*.

In Henderson's *Swing's The Thing* collection the big jazz band reaches the peak of its form. We are now at the doorstep of the Benny Goodman revolution, which would not have been possible without many of the charts heard here in their initial performances: *Big John's Special*, *Down South Camp Meetin'*, and *Wrappin' It Up*. Ben Webster, Red Allen, and Buster Bailey are the main soloists, and the jazz rhythm section was as good as it would get until Count Basie came along. It's a pleasure to see these cuts in print again. They are a total delight, and highly recommended.

This brings us back to Louis Armstrong and the nine MCA LPs covering Louis' Decca years from 1935 to 1958. Armstrong made a few of his greatest and most of his worst records during the Decca period. In between lie many performances that can be called typical, which in Armstrong's case is a word of general praise, not opprobrium. Six records concentrate on Louis during the 1935-45 period, and include nearly everything made through the spring of 1938. Three others include selections from the 1950s.

*Back In New York* covers Armstrong's first four Decca sessions, and is quite good. Great changes separate the Louis of 1927 from the sleek master craftsman of 1935. To trace that change one must consult the vital Columbia and Victor sides, the formative masterpieces of Louis at his most creative period. They tell a tale of explosive development, growth, and change. I mention that because the Decca years covered in this series are just the opposite. They are years of stability and produce the kind of perfection that comes of an artist who has answered all the important questions and is content with his answers. Among those responsible for this leveling-out process was Joe Glaser, who, as the Decca years began, took over complete management of Louis' professional and musical life. As chief A&R man, contractor, booker, and advisor, he helped Armstrong complete the transition from New Orleans jazzman to popular troubador. With his reputation made, history has tended to overlook many of the Deccas, even though they produced much of great value. Generally Armstrong's tone, technique, singing, and extraordinary power as a melodist made him at home with pop songs, even bad ones. Only the most extreme attempts to commercialize Armstrong defeated his artistry. His bands were not big bands in the sense of

Henderson, Goodman, or Basie. They were show bands designed to back up his singing and playing. They were good but not important units. What was important was Armstrong's playing—much of which, as heard on *Back In New York* is sheer magistry; *Falling in Love*, *My Lucky Star* and *I'm In The Mood For Love* are sterling examples. One expects a great performance from material like *Solitude*; the surprises occur when Armstrong turns lesser pieces like *Shoe Shine Boy* into equally profound works.

*Swing That Music* is drawn from six Armstrong sessions from 1936 to '38, and of the MCA Armstrongs, is perhaps the pick of the litter. The trumpet work is spectacular and utterly compelling. On *Struttin With Some Barbecue* and *Jubilee* he offers two of the all-time classic case studies in how to use high notes to build a phrase of bone-chilling power. The title track was undoubtedly created as a showcase for all of Louis' devices. Although somewhat of a set piece, it is stunningly effective nevertheless. The juxtaposition of his judo-chop high notes in relation to the band's brass section part during the last of four choruses is heart-stopping. Other cuts are nearly as marvelous, including a refurbished version of *Mahogany Hall Stomp* and a movie tune called *Skeleton In The Closet* in which Louis plays an inspired solo on a very uninspired song.

*Satchmo's Collectors Items* (not the same as the Decca album DL8327) picks up some items missed on previous sessions, and generally has a left-over quality about it. *Putting All My Eggs In One Basket* is a great song, but Louis never quite sinks his teeth into it's potential. Other items are below average tunes, which Louis gives satisfactory if unexceptional treatments. A second version of *Swing That Music* is red hot and explosive, and contains differences significant enough to suggest it wasn't as set a set piece as one might assume. There are also five duets with the Mills Brothers vocal group. They are all refreshingly charming, and particularly complimentary to Louis' vocals. His horn work is smooth and flawless, but favors restraint over majesty. An alternate take of *Nellie Gray* is a hair slower, and Louis' playing a bit more relaxed. Overall, the Armstrong on this LP is good but not quite memorable.

In spite of a few masterful flourishes on *Satchmo's Discoveries*, this installment of the series is among the least satisfying. Four tunes are Hawaiian-style pop items with little jazz feeling. Lionel Hampton, only three days before his first records with the Benny Goodman Quartet, lends some ringing chords to the backgrounds on his vibes. Louis is in excellent form on his own *Heart Full Of Rhythm*, 16 bars on *Once In A While*, and a masterful restatement of *Sunny Side Of The Street*, taken at a more brisk, flowing tempo than the original 1934 performance. *Sun Showers* is a weak tune, but gets an ennobling treatment. Others are routine or worse.

*Satchmo Forever* opens with an alternate of *Old Man Moses* sans trumpet and not as

good as the primary version (on *Back In New York*). There are three pieces from 1941 by Louis and "his Hot Seven," but they are totally lacking in any small group jazz feel. Another small group, however, assembled in May of 1940 turned out some of the finest Armstrong of the Decca years, and one of the takes (*Down In Honky Tonk Town*) is heard here. In it Armstrong was matched with Sidney Bechet in their first session since the Clarence Williams Blue Fives of the middle '20s. Hearing these two giants at the height of their powers (along with Zutty Singleton and an excellent septet) is a mellow satisfaction. On side two there is penetrating trumpet against a fine Benny Carter chart of *Among My Souvenirs*. The last three numbers are from the 1944-45 period. Although Louis' style had changed little in 10 years, it still sounds remarkably comfortable with middle '40s band textures, particularly on *Groovin'* (which also happened to be Dexter Gordon's first record date).

The main strength of *Louis With Guest Stars* is that it contains the balance of the Armstrong-Bechet session, one of the crown jewels of the Decca library. Beyond that there are ad hoc meetings with the Mills Brothers, the Lyn Murray Choir, Billie Holiday, and Ella Fitzgerald.

Louis returned to Decca in 1949 after a three-year hiatus and began turning out the most blatantly commercial sides of his career (some of it's collected on *Satchmo Serenades*). Gordon Jenkins and Sy Oliver wrapped him in strings and lush brass choirs and generally treated him like Bing Crosby or Eddie Fisher. Not much came of it musically, with a few notable exceptions. One was *I Get Ideas*, which inspired Louis to one of his most spectacular trumpet solos. *La Vie en Rose* and *Ramona* were also remarkably well-served. *Blueberry Hill*, Louis' biggest hit before *Hello Dolly*, is also heard, along with *Dark Eyes* in a good treatment by his working All-Star group.

Armstrong's All-Stars of the 1950s recorded most of their best work for Columbia with George Avakian producing. But, though spottier, there were also notable performances for Decca too, which seemed generally content to make definitive studio versions of his standard concert items. Many were features for his colleagues: Trummy Young is heard on a routine *Margie* for example, and Earl Hines is routine but delightful on *Fine And Dandy*. *Struttin With Some Barbecue* and *Basin Street* are well done ensemble pieces taken at moderate relaxed tempos (*Barbecue* tended to get faster as the years went by). *Tenderly* and *Never Walk Alone* are ringing examples of what Louis can do to a song simply by playing it exactly as written. *Frog-I-More Rag* is a lively left-over from the "Autobiography" sessions of early 1957.

Armstrong finally ended his Decca years with one of his most inconsequential of albums, *Louis And The Good Book*, a catch-all of gospel numbers dressed up in phoney, pseudo-choir arrangements. Sy Oliver can be blamed for that. Only those after a complete Armstrong collection should seek out this one.

—john mcDonough



# Blindfold Test: JAMES NEWTON

BY LEONARD FEATHER

ON HEARING A WOMAN flutist play incidental music for the play *Death Of A Salesman*, James Newton was fascinated by the sound. In due course he disposed of his saxes and bass clarinet, and developed swiftly into one of the most formidable, versatile flutists in contem-

porary music, equally at ease in a classical, bebop, or free jazz context.

Winner of the 1979 **down beat** Critics Poll in the flute TDWR category, Newton has accumulated an impressive discography, including sessions as leader (or co-leader with pianist Anthony Davis) on *India Navigation* and *Moers Music*, and sideman appearances with, among others, Arthur

Blythe (in *Lenox Avenue Breakdown* on Columbia). His latest and perhaps most provocative release is *The Mystery School*, in which his own extended compositions are played by a wind quintet without rhythm section. Newton has also been experimenting with a more jazz-oriented combo featuring the extraordinary koto soloist Allan Iwohara. This was his first Blindfold Test.



ANDY FREEBERG/ENCORE

## 1. YUSEF LATEEF. *NILE VALLEY BLUES* (from *REEVALUATIONS: THE IMPULSE YEARS*, Impulse). Lateef, flute, tambourine, composer; Hugh Lawson, piano; Roy Brooks, drums. Recorded 1966.

That one stopped me. I'm not exactly sure who that was. I have a feeling it was something that was done perhaps in the late '50s, by the style of the flute playing. I thought that the way the flutist used his voice in relation to the flute was very nice, and the drumming was very beautiful. So if I had to harbor a guess, I'd think it would be very early Yusef Lateef.

I'm not sure about the pianist; I just liked the way the drums and percussion worked together in that piece, the whole emotion that was created, I thought it was very effective. And the flutist, I liked the phrasing very much. I guess if I'd have to rate it stars, three or three-and-a-half. [Later] I have the greatest amount of respect for Yusef's work.

## 2. SAM RIVERS. *INVOLUTION* (from *INVOLUTION*, Blue Note). Rivers, flute, composer; James Spaulding, flute; Steve Ellington, drums; Cecil McBee, bass.

Again, the first thing that caught my ear was the drummer. I'm not sure who it was, but I loved very much what he was playing because it really created a very strong atmosphere for the flutist to work in. And I think that was probably Sam Rivers and James Spaulding.

Sam's playing is very identifiable from the very beginning, because his approach to modes and scales is very unique. So his lines stick out immediately. And that's one of the reasons I also have a very great respect for him, because his approach is original. Something else that struck me right away is that the feeling of the piece is very African-influenced: the approach not only of the drums and the bass, but also the approach of the two flutes together. I like the way the line with the two flutes worked. And James Spaulding sounded nice on that, but Sam just really sticks out in that piece. Four stars.

## 3. SAM MOST. *YOU ARE ALWAYS THE ONE* (from *FROM THE ATTIC OF MY MIND*, Xanadu). Most, flute, composer; Kenny Barron, piano; George Mraz, bass; Walter Bolden, drums.

That was Sam Most, and if I'm correct that was Kenny Barron playing piano. His solo was so strong, it made me forget some of the things that were previously played. I really loved Kenny's solo. The phrasing was just absolutely fantastic. He has really a very beautiful feel for the standard—which slips my mind at the moment; even though I've played that tune before, I can't think of the title. But Kenny stuck out in my mind most of all.

I guess I'd rate that three stars, and for Kenny Barron's solo four or four-and-a-half because I really loved it. It was nice the way he also used the pedal at one point in the solo, something that was really unexpected. I recognized George Mraz on bass, but I wasn't sure who the drummer was.

## 4. ERIC DOLPHY. *GAZZELLONI* (from *OUT TO LUNCH*, Blue Note). Dolphy, flute, composer; Freddie Hubbard, trumpet; Bobby Hutcherson, vibes; Richard Davis, bass; Anthony Williams, drums.

Five stars times a million for Eric Dolphy! Him and Frank Wess are the two most influential flute players as far as my style is concerned. Eric was a master in the true sense of the word as far as his approach to the instrument; his tone is just incredible. And the originality is very striking. Eric stands out like Frank Wess stands out, like Hubert Laws stands out.

The band was Tony Williams on drums—the things that he did in the '60s are just marvelous. I wish some of the things he was doing then I'd hear more of to a degree today. It was also Bobby Hutcherson on vibes, I believe Richard Davis on bass, Freddie Hubbard on trumpet.

Really, not enough can ever be said about what Eric did as far as the flute is concerned. So I would say that is the most striking thing that I've heard by far. And that composition was Gazzelloni, written for Severino Gazzelloni, the Italian flutist. I understand that Eric studied with him for a while.

## 5. FRANK WESS. *MISHAWAKA* (from *THE AWARD WINNER*, Mainstream). Wess, tenor saxophone, flute; Henry Coker, trombone.

Flutists in the earlier days are much harder to pick out because their styles weren't as distinctive as they are now. If you listen to

James Moody now, or Frank Wess, they really stick out amazingly. But back in that time I think the flute was very new in jazz and still developing.

But the thing that's very important about this record and other records is the lesson of phrasing and articulation. That's extremely important for flutists my age or younger, or older ones just studying now, because that's really one of the keys to the music of today and tomorrow. But in recordings like this, their tone and other things weren't quite as developed as it would be now. If I made a guess I would probably think it might have been that *Two Franks* album: Frank Foster on tenor and Frank Wess playing flute. The trombone player I'm not exactly sure about, but I liked his phrasing and his use of glissandos, his sense of humor, and the surprises in his playing.

The changes of that tune seemed to be based on *Donna Lee*, because they even had part of the tune, using one of the chromatic things and then it went somewhere else. I would rate it four-and-a-half stars. [Later] I would say that out of all the living flute players right now, Frank Wess is my favorite.

## 6. JOE FARRELL. *SWEET RITA SUITE* (from *SONIC TEXT*, Contemporary). Farrell, flute; George Cables, piano, composer; Freddie Hubbard, trumpet; Tony Dumas, bass; Peter Erskine, drums.

Very nice . . . I thought right away that was Hubert Laws. It seemed like it might have been one of the dates that Hubert did in the late '60s with Chick Corea, Joe Chambers, and Ron Carter . . . perhaps. Was that Woody Shaw on trumpet? I guess I would rate that four-and-a-half stars because I liked it a lot. It just seemed like it was one of Chick Corea's tunes because of the harmonic thing . . . but I might be wrong. And the low register on the flute was very rich, so that's what made me think of Hubert. His command of the instrument is really awesome. I have a very great respect for Hubert as a player. I think he was really good for the flute in jazz, because he made people stop and think, and say "Hey, I really have to put more time on that instrument to play it well." [Later] Joe Farrell? I'm really surprised. I guess a lot of people are influenced by Hubert. db



# Profile:

## Charles McPherson

BY MARTY WISCKOL

**T**o many, alto saxist Charles McPherson is one of those jazzmen who's been heard on a couple of records, impressed the listener at the moment, then drifted to the periphery of memory. Two Charles Mingus albums, *Mingus At Monterey* and *My Favorite Quintet* (both still in print), are probably responsible for McPherson's first widespread exposure and his position as a "what-ever-happened-to?"—but to San Diegans, McPherson is their international jazzman-in-residence.

At times, the 41-year-old McPherson has been shrugged aside as another Charlie Parker imitator, a purveyor of an old-fashioned style called bebop. But the altoman provides the substance of harmonic craftsmanship, in addition to strong rhythmic and melodic development, to prove bop is a still-valid form. His latest Xanadu record, *Free Bop!*, clearly shows not only that the wings he flies with are distinctly his own but also that his brand of bop has not stagnated, but remains fresh-sounding today.

McPherson's first memories of jazz begin with his hearing big bands from Kansas City play in his hometown of Joplin, Missouri. He was "three or four" when his parents took him to the park to hear these groups. "I liked the sound, but I especially liked the way the instruments looked. I guess the visual thing might have been the first thing that attracted me—shiny, gold-looking instruments."

He got his first alto 10 years later, when he was living in Detroit. His full-time involvement with jazz began at the same time.

"I really wanted to play, and I really loved to play. Some things people know right away they want to do because there's a passion involved. There're practical things people do because they want to make a living. But music is more passionate to me, it has nothing to do with being practical."

McPherson played in the school band and liked Johnny Hodges, but it didn't take long for the magic of Charlie Parker to enrapture him. "Some little hipster in class told me about

Charlie Parker: 'You gotta check Bird out.' When I first heard him, I recognized how good it was." The song was *Tico Tico* from Parker's *South Of The Border* series on Mercury records.

By age 15, McPherson was hanging outside clubs, listening. "Detroit had a real fertile music scene in the early '50s, people like Elvin Jones, Pepper Adams, Barry Harris, Paul Chambers, Tommy Flanagan." He listened particularly to Barry Harris as the pianist lived in the neighborhood and tutored the young altoman in the language of bebop: "That's when I really got into it." Harris and McPherson have been frequent collaborators, a relationship which continues to this day.



RALPH PENNELL

"At about 19 I went to New York. This trumpet player I played with in my neighborhood, Lonnie Hillyer, we went together. There was a jam session every afternoon near where we were staying in the Village. For one of these sessions, Mingus came down. At the time Eric Dolphy and Ted Curson were going to quit his band to start their own group and Yusef Lateef, who's from Detroit, said 'Well, there's two young guys in town who aren't working anywhere and they'd be glad to work with you.' Mingus came down and heard us and played with us. He liked us and he hired us. That was real lucky because we'd only been in town a month and we were already working with a big name group. We were very fortunate."

"It was a strenuous gig. Working for Mingus was a very challenging situa-

tion because he was a very complex personality type—one way one day, another way another day, very intense, very honest . . . painfully honest. Sometimes it was frightening: my first night on the gig, because he didn't get all his money from the club owner, he proceeded to take apart a Steinway grand piano with his hands—the insides, the guts, he commenced to plucking steel strings out."

McPherson's association with Mingus extended, on and off, from 1960 to 1972 and resulted in many recordings and major performances (e.g. Monterey Jazz Festival and Carnegie Hall). In 1965, McPherson formed his first group and cut the first of his over 20 LPs as leader (*Bebop Revisited* for Prestige).

At the time, in terms of his own musical development, he was primarily thinking about being a "virtuoso, trying to be a really excellent instrumentalist." Maybe he came off sounding like Charlie Parker but that wasn't his intent. "I was listening to Bird but I wasn't really that conscious of that [his influence]. The thing about alto players is that they sort of get stuck with that because they play alto. Actually tenor players and everyone else, from 1940 on, were and are playing extensions and variations and aspects of Charlie Parker."

In 1978 McPherson went to San Diego. "My mother lived out here and I wanted to get away from New York, that whole rat race. I liked it and I ended up staying out here. That's what everyone does, right? I was surprised that there was a very fertile music scene here. I can see that in a couple years, it's going to be a very developed jazz scene."

Indeed, Charles McPherson has a hand in this development. In addition to his offerings at clubs and the experience he allows his young sidemen, he is currently teaching a class in the ever-expanding jazz program at San Diego State University. Called "Small Jazz Ensemble Concept Bebop" the class features McPherson lecturing, demonstrating, and presenting arrangements, compositions, and solos for analysis.

"Teaching has a way of reaffirming your own knowledge. Just by having to verbalize what you know makes you know it better. And it's nice to have another way to express my musical self and have another way to have bucks come in. I don't have to play smoky bars all the time, so if I want to work on composing or something, I have that opportunity. It sharpens my compositional prowess also because I can write out little things and bring them to class and hear how they sound."

But San Diego is now home base and it is there that he has carved out his



current niche. He is listening to everyone from Stravinsky to the Commodores—"trying to develop melodic lines that are simple yet have depth"—and generally concentrating on composition as never before.

And, of course, he continues his "pursuit of virtuosity." **db**

## Jessica Williams

BY J. N. THOMAS

**"T**he music's there, and needs people to carry it on. A lot of people miss out on the whole thing. They get their fake books and open up to a Wayne Shorter tune and play it like they were dissecting a frog. When you're playing, you're talking about freedom. You're talking about unarmored life: opening up all your emotions and being naked—on the stage."

The conversation of pianist/composer Jessica Williams is seasoned with the concepts of the psychiatric philosopher Wilhelm Reich, and in Reich's spirit, Williams is a thoroughly independent individual: willful, nervous, eccentric, outspoken, radical.

Born in Baltimore in 1948, Williams began to "hang around" her grandmother's piano while still very young. Two years of private lessons led to her entering the Peabody Conservatory at the age of nine. There she studied with the highly respected Richard Aitken, whom she still credits as a major influence.

"He knew I wasn't going to be a classical pianist," she says, "because I'd always improvise on the written material. He brought in Dave Brubeck's *Time Out* album, with *Take Five* on it. That was the first jazz I heard."

Williams learned many of Brubeck's pieces note for note, following up with studies of pianists like Art Tatum, Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans, Cecil Taylor, McCoy Tyner, and Chick Corea. Not limiting herself to pianists, however, she listened avidly to Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Charles Mingus.

"Richard Aitken left Peabody in my seventh year, and another teacher came in who didn't want to hear about improvisation. So I quit." Subsequently Williams played the Hammond B-3 organ in various tenor/organ groups for seven or eight years, working first around Baltimore and later in Philadelphia, "basically shit gigs."

In 1976 she walked into a rock & roll session at Adelphi Records unannounced, played piano during a break,

and got a recording contract. Her first album, the partly electric, partly acoustic *Portal Of Antrim* was followed in 1978 by the all acoustic double-set, *Portraits*. In March of 1980 another largely electric session, *Rivers Of Memory*, appeared on Clean Cuts, a label distributed by Adelphi. In 1979, between the solo *Portraits* and electric *Rivers* sessions, Williams recorded a set for Clean Cuts which was announced for a 1980 Spring release, but has not yet appeared. Without exactly disowning the first three LPs, Williams describes this soon to be released set as "the highest, the best thing I've done."

The album has the Reichian title *Organomic Music*.

Williams arrived in San Francisco in 1978, unknown and broke. Within a year she was performing solo as well as leading bands that included some of the area's finest musicians: her 11-piece Liberation Army, for example, featured trumpeter Eddie Henderson and altoist Vince Wallace. It was during this time she forsook electronics and began to perform exclusively on acoustic piano.

"My idea about how I want myself to sound is to be able to sound like everything I've heard, and the only cat I've heard that does that is Jaki Byard.



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TOM COPI

The local critical reaction to her performances has been strong from the very beginning. Prominent writers like Conrad Silvert and Frank Kofsky have dusted off their superlatives, and phrases like "extraordinarily gifted" have made the rounds. By June, 1979, San Francisco Examiner critic Philip Elwood was calling her the "queen of S.F. jazz," and describing her septet as "21st Century Mingus."

But praise is one thing, work is another, and fulfillment is something else again. In her own words, "characterologically incapable" of accepting the usual boring bread-and-butter jobs, Williams today is taking each day as it comes. "For me nothing is foreseeable. Now I'm getting crazy because I'm telling you the way it is. This [gestures] is what I wake up to tomorrow. I have a bed to sleep in and food to eat. I don't work much, except at Keystone Korner. I haven't had an instrument in five or six years.

"See, I don't view what I'm doing as a business—it's not a business. For one thing, I'm not making any f\*c#ing money. I doubt if I'll ever be able to even buy a dress for the rest of my life—this one was given to me tonight—so it's not a business.

"I don't know what it is. Maybe it's a mission, and maybe it's just a pastime. Maybe it's a hobby. Maybe it's a mental disease. But it's certainly not a business, and I'm not approaching it that way. I'm approaching it as how much music I can get on this planet before I stop playing." She reconsidered: "Before something stops me." **db**

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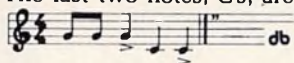


Armando Anthony Corea Jr. rolls on. Don't be surprised at anything he does, or, if one night you're watching the late, late show and somebody pops up in a commercial trying to sell you *Chick Corea Plays Italian Party Hits*. It's in the can somewhere.

"You know, I remember being in the recording studio with Lionel Hampton years and years ago with Richard Davis and I don't remember who else and we recorded a whole bunch of Italian tunes. Like 25 Italian tunes. Hamp kept throwing the music in front of us. Hamp'd throw this music up in front of me and say, 'What do you think of that?' And I'd look and I'd change a few chords and every time he'd see me change a chord he'd say, 'Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, change it, change it.' I don't know what it was for, and I don't know what ever happened to it. Hahahaha."

Chick Corea pushes the last piece of toast into his mouth and gets prepared for an evening concert in New Jersey and a 200-mile drive to Boston for another concert with Dizzy as guest. How does one end this interview? I ask Chick.

"Da-da-da, da-da. Two eighth notes, G-G, and then the third note, G, is a quarter note. The last two notes, Cs, are quarter notes. It's in 4/4 time.



DARRYL PITTECORE

### CHICK COREA SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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MY SPANISH HEART—Polydor 9003  
SONG OF SINGING—Blue Note 84353  
PIANO IMPROVISATIONS VOL. 1&2—ECM 1014 and 1020  
THE LEPRECHAUN—Polydor 6062  
INNER SPACE—Atlantic 2-305  
FRIENDS—Polydor 6062  
CIRCLING IN—Blue Note LA472-H2  
CHICK COREA—Blue Note LA395-11  
THE ROMANTIC WARRIOR—Columbia PC 34076  
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opinion either. He's a dictionary of bass playing. He can slap the bass like Wellman Braud or Pops Foster; he can imitate anybody perfectly because he knows all the styles that came before him."

Outside the studio, Buell relaxes by playing chamber music at home with friends, and by working jazz dates with Marty Krystall, the marvelous saxophonist and co-leader of Krystall Klear, a superb acoustic jazz band that is one of the most exciting and provocative on the West Coast.

"I met Marty years ago," Buell says, "and I've always thought he was sensational. He plays fresh and with vitality. When he breathes air into his horn, out comes a musical result. Too, he has the depth of tradition in his playing, so that you hear both Ben Webster and John Coltrane, but with an individual sound. He's been unknown for too long and I'm sure many people will love his work once they discover him."

The band also features Peter Erskine, who's been drumming with Weather Report for a while, and Jerry Peters, a seasoned pianist and producer, and the gentlemen play a broad assortment of 20th century vehicles, from such jazz classics as Ellington's *Jumpin' Punkins* and Mingus' *Fables Of Faubus* to scintillating originals by the leaders. They recently released *Ready For The '90s* on their K2B2 label, and are preparing to re-enter the studio soon. Upcoming appearances include some club dates in Los Angeles and this year's Telluride (Colorado) Jazz Festival.

Neidlinger's recent re-interest in bluegrass stems from a mid-'70s Seatrain date he produced for Warner Bros., and that band's fiddler, Richard Greene, got Buell involved. They worked with Bill Monroe, the king of bluegrass, and the Great American String Band, where the bassist met mandolinist David Grisman, with whom he recorded. He also played on, and co-produced, Greene's *Ramblin' date*, where Ornette's tune and some Ellingtonia are intermixed with music by Stephen Foster and Monroe. Under the name "Buellgrass," (coined by San Francisco guitarist Jerry Garcia) Neidlinger and friends—featuring Greene and Andy Statman, whom Buell calls "the Thelonious Monk of the mandolin"—worked the celebrated Ojai Festivals in 1980, the same year *Frets Magazine* nominated him for Bluegrass Bassist Of The Year. The group so charmed attendees in that lovely rural California clime that Buellgrass is scheduled to appear at an August jazz festival there, produced by

former db editor Gene Lees.

It's difficult to say where you'll next hear Buell Neidlinger—whether as a searing bassist with Krystall Klear, or as a purveyor of American string music with Buellgrass, or perhaps re-establishing himself in the symphonic realm—but with such an auspicious past and such a redoubtable musician, it will certainly be at the heart of the matter. **db**

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