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MARK O'CONNOR

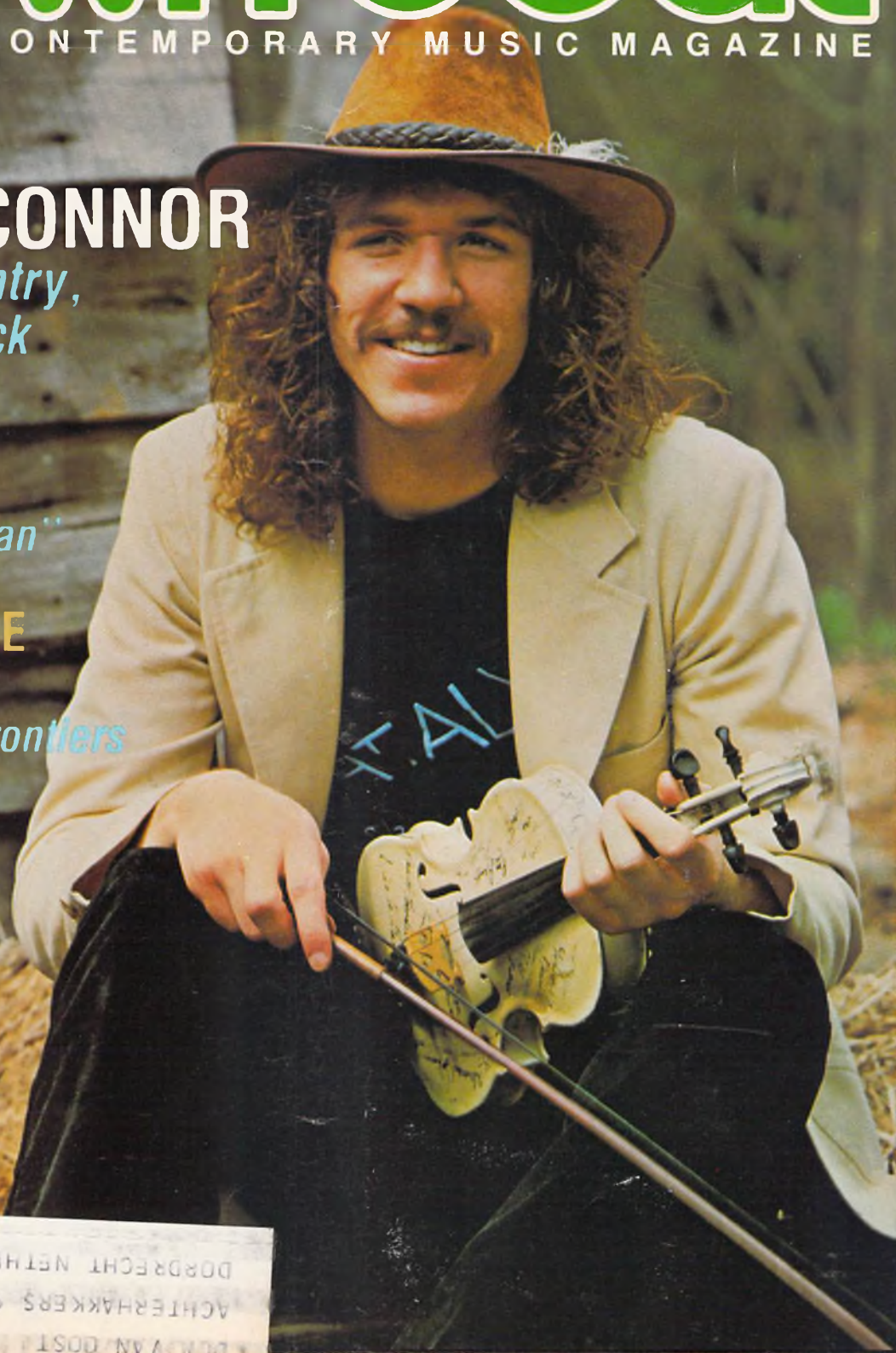
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ART HODES

Still "The Hot Man"

ART ENSEMBLE OF CHICAGO

Expanding jazz frontiers



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MARK O'CONNOR

FROM THE DAWGS TO THE DREGS

BY MITCHELL FELDMAN

MARK O'CONNOR HAS ONLY BEEN a member of the Dregs for a little more than a year, and most of that time has been spent in the studio or touring with the Atlanta-based jazz-rock quintet. Otherwise, the 20-year-old multi-instrumentalist would not be so quick to point out that he's no longer a "dawg."

Obviously, joining the Dregs meant leaving the David Grisman Quintet, so O'Connor is no longer playing dawg music (Grisman's "anti-name name" for his fusing of bluegrass and jazz; see *David Grisman's . . . Jazzgrass*, db, Nov. '79). Yet in Georgia, where football transcends everything, you're either a Dawg (University of Georgia fan) or a Yellow Jacket (Georgia Tech fan), and everyone knows that being a Dawg is not only more glamorous, it's recommended by those who prefer to back a winner.

This is just one of the subtle cultural nuances between O'Connor's native West Coast—where he spent the first 19 years of his life—and the deep South—where he has begun the third chapter in a short, yet remarkable, life story. And the more time O'Connor spends in Georgia, the more acculturated he will become. He has, after all, already captured the hearts of the fiercely loyal followers of the Dregs, fans who are closer to fanatics when it comes to discussing the cream of the contemporary Georgia music crop.

Just 18 months ago O'Connor's meteoric career was on hold, something he was certainly not accustomed to. Born in Mountlake Terrace, Washington in August of 1961, O'Connor is the son of parents whose involvement in music was recreational at best. He started playing guitar when he was six and didn't pick up the violin until he was 11. Six months later, at the encouragement of his mother Marty, O'Connor began performing at bluegrass festivals and entering competitions. When he was invited to participate in the Grand Masters Fiddling Championship at Nashville's Grand Ole Opry in 1975, he won the prestigious competition at the ripe old age of 13. He had previously won the National Junior Fiddle Championship in Weiser, Idaho and recorded his first album with Norman Blake and Charlie Collins in his 12th year.



BILL STEVENS

Fiddling and picking contests are conducted year 'round throughout the United States, and although most take place during the course of a weekend, the competition at Weiser lasts a week and attracts something like 350 entrants annually. The Grand Masters Fiddling Championship is an invitational competition, and those invited to participate are individuals (such as O'Connor) who made their mark in bluegrass music that year. An invitation simply means that one does not have to go through preliminary trials with the majority of the field, and is given free accommodations at the Grand Ole Opry

Hotel. The winner of the Grand Masters is required to return as a judge the following year, and O'Connor judged his first when he was 14.

In 1975 alone, O'Connor placed first in 10 contests either on violin or flat-picking guitar, and by 1981 he had won the Grand National Fiddle Championship three times ('79-81), the Grand Masters Fiddling Championship twice ('75 and '80), the National Guitar Flat-picking Contest twice ('75 and '77), and the National Junior Fiddle Championship four times ('74-77). The age limit was lowered in one contest so O'Connor could play beside adults and rules were

changed in another to exclude winners from competing consecutively to give other musicians a chance to win.

One is tempted to assume that O'Connor's contest wins were awarded by kind-hearted judges who were impressed by his youth, but such is not the case. To assure that judges make objective decisions, a precaution standard to all competitions is taken: all judges are isolated in a room where they cannot view the stage, and the music is piped in, thus insuring that the judges do not know the name, age, or sex of a contestant, and are not influenced by the response of the audience.

Between 1974 and 1981 this "Gretzky of 'grass" was also making records as well as breaking them, releasing seven albums bearing his name in as many years. When the '80s began, O'Connor joined mandolinist David Grisman's internationally acclaimed dawg music quintet in time to tour with legendary jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli, and then, in February of 1981, O'Connor broke his left arm in a serious skiing accident.

"Breaking my arm was like fate," O'Connor said in an interview in Atlanta this past winter. "I lay in the hospital bed and knew someone was trying to tell me something. I'd been a little unhappy in the Grisman band because although I knew the situation when I joined—namely that I'd mostly be playing guitar and that they already had a major fiddle player in Darol Anger—I also knew that I could be better known as a violin player because it's my natural instrument. I could just pick up the violin and wouldn't have to practice at all, but with the guitar I had to work. For one thing, playing the acoustic guitar on-stage drives me crazy. I love to play guitars in the living room, in the studio, or around a campfire, but on-stage it's a lot of work . . . you have to stand there and concentrate rather than feel. Even though I started to play guitar first, the fiddle is my whole musical foundation. I based my guitar playing on my fiddle playing, which is why I sound a little different. Most guitarists, especially acoustic ones, don't play fiddle; I play guitar like a fiddler. Rather than play chromatic lines, I play lines that skip the way a violinist does. So I had been playing guitar for a year-and-a-half straight with maybe one or two tunes a set on violin. At first it was alright, but after a while I began to feel that it was just a gimmick that I played fiddle. It was like 'Okay, time for the National Fiddle Champion to play a song or two.' It wasn't a drag that I was mostly playing guitar with David Grisman, but it was preying on my mind. After much longer it could have been, but I broke my arm before that could happen."

O'Connor's dexterity on both violin

and guitar have to do with the fact that his hands grew while he was playing those instruments and seem to have adapted to them. Unfortunately, O'Connor's long, slim fingers, double joints, and expandable sockets were useless to him while in a cast. Having broken his arm cleanly in two, the only thing he could do was wait to get the cast off and, for therapy, press down on the neck of a bass to make the strings buzz. O'Connor was sidelined but the Grisman ensemble continued to work, although he had a standing offer to return when his arm healed. During that time, however, he realized he wanted to do something different once he recovered. The question was, what?

Steve Morse, lead guitarist and songwriter for the Dregs, recalls that at the time O'Connor broke his arm, the Dregs were looking for a new violinist. "We had played a few gigs with the Grisman Quintet," Morse said, "and Mark and I would meet back at the hotel to jam. I realized he was the best violinist I'd ever heard—he played so in tune and so smooth—and that just stuck in my

MARK O'CONNOR SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

SOPPIN' THE GRAVY—Rounder 0137

ON THE RAMPAGE—Rounder 0118

MARKOLOGY—Rounder 0090

PICKIN' IN THE WIND—Rounder 0068

FOUR-TIME NATIONAL JUNIOR FIDDLE

CHAMP—Rounder 0046

TEXAS JAM SESSION—OMAC-1

IN CONCERT—OMAC-2

with the Dregs

INDUSTRY STANDARD—Arista AL 9588

with David Grisman

QUINTET '80—Warner Bros. BSK 3469

MONDO MANDO—Warner Bros. BSK 3618

STEPHANE GRAPPELLI/DAVID GRISMAN LIVE—

Warner Bros. BSK 3550

mind. When [former Dregs violinist] Allen [Sloan] decided to quit and go to med school, we called Mark."

O'Connor has his own memories of the Dregs. "When I was in high school, and doing a lot of skateboarding, I was being introduced to a bunch of jazz-rock music like Al Di Meola, Pat Metheny, and Jean-Luc Ponty. The Dregs were one of the bands I was into, and as soon as I heard them play on-stage, I said 'Man, this is the best band I've ever heard.' They have everything. Other bands have their individual perfections but this band had it all—country, classical, fusion, the heaviest rock—I just love bass and drums and that was the kick I was looking for. I was a kid who had just gotten out of high school in the Grisman band. Craig Miller, our road manager, was the only other guy who liked electric music, so he and I got together and we were both into the Dregs. Steve and I became good friends and we even talked about doing a duet album together. While my arm was broken we'd talk on the phone about our mutual desire to own a recording studio, and

then one day he called and invited me down to join the band. I called him back a couple of weeks later and accepted. It's funny, when I first heard the Dregs I thought they were in the same category of European fusion bands like U.K. or Brand X. I didn't pay any attention to the 'Dixie.'" (The Dixie Dregs became simply the Dregs two years ago for a variety of reasons, but primarily to notify the record and radio industries that they weren't a Southern boogie band. Now, bassist Andy West says, "The only thing we need to explain is that we're not punk!")

O'Connor continues: "A week after I got out of the cast—a couple of days actually—I was down in Atlanta. I hadn't played in three months—which was the longest I'd ever gone without playing a note—and we had a gig that same week. My arm had atrophied until it was just skin and bone and looked terrible, and I couldn't even lift a fiddle; I had to play it with my elbow in my stomach or resting on my leg. The first gig found me with the usual first-night jitters. It was the first time I'd ever played professionally in an electric band, and then there was the weirdness of taking someone's place. It took me a couple of months before I could carry anything, but I healed really quickly. My doctor had told me I wouldn't be able to bend my arm for about three months and I wouldn't be able to straighten it out or do a push-up for a year. I just took a lot of herbs like comfrey and horsetail root and man, I was doing push-ups two months after the cast was off."

O'Connor has an aversion to reading music, which goes back to the time he was seven and was so intimidated by the music stand he had to pick up flamenco guitar so he wouldn't quit playing. Even though most of the Dregs music is orchestrated, he hasn't had any trouble learning his parts by ear. "Steve usually shows me my parts, and everything runs on the violin fine for me," he explained. "There are anywhere from three to five solos in every tune which everyone alternates, and it's the right combination of orchestration and solos for me. Since the solos are completely up to the artists, you can go nuts or whatever it calls for . . . it's real open. And even though our songs sound like they're in weird time signatures, most of them are in 4/4 but there are a lot of complex rhythms in the Dregs' music which I find challenging."

O'Connor's contribution to *Industry Standard*, the latest Dregs album and by far their most centered, is obvious. I noticed how natural his fiddle sounded, and Morse explained that "almost all Mark's parts were miked acoustically because his bowing is so fluid it sounds better that way." O'Connor added that unlike most rock violinists who started

out as classical musicians, he can get "fuller" sounds compared to the "thin" tone someone with "awesome technique" often gets. The new album, released last March, doesn't flit from style to style as much as previous Dregs albums did. There's the usual country tune—spiced up by O'Connor's natural feel for that genre—but for the most part the album's instrumentals are more consistent in their orientation towards fusion than ever before. There's an acoustic guitar duet on the album too, but producer Eddy Offord brought in an old friend, Steve Howe of Yes, to work with Morse this time around. And, in a conceptual decision that could very well make this Dregs album the band's best seller to date, former Doobie Brother Pat Simmons and Santana's vocalist Alex Ligertwood perform the first two vocals the Dregs have recorded, with the help of Kansas' Steve Walsh in the background. This line of thinking has done wonders for *Industry Standard*, and the Dregs' music in general. Now the obligatory singles are still rock & roll, but the novelty of the vocals enhances what is usually the most mundane part of a Dregs album.

Playing rock & roll or fusion with the Dregs is obviously the realization of one of O'Connor's fantasies; this is underscored by the fact that the first thing he sees climbing out of bed each morning is a life-sized poster of Jimi Hendrix in the pose that probably inspired the "air guitar" movement. But he hasn't abandoned acoustic music entirely. "I just completed my eighth solo album, *False Dawn*, which is totally acoustic except for electric bass on all but two cuts. I play all instruments on all the tracks including some percussion and pipe organ in addition to 18 string instruments. David let me borrow some mandolins for the project, and I like to refer to the sound as 'acoustic rock.' It's a very large step compared to anything else I've done. There are complicated orchestrations and experiments with time, and there's not a lot of improvisation on this one—it's all pretty much arranged. The hardest thing was to make up all the parts and then memorize what to play for each track. The reward is that it's me playing whatever I want to play on whatever instrument I want to play. I took some recording engineering courses while my arm was in the cast, but I needed help on this one so I used Sam Whiteside, who's recorded the Allman Brothers and Sea Level. We worked well together and I'm real proud of it."

O'Connor also deserves to be proud of the fact that he was selected as one of the subjects in a series of PBS television specials entitled *Young Artists In America*. The concept paired an established master with a young prodigy and included Rudolf Serkin with violinist Ida Levin, Beverly Sills with a number of



MARK O'CONNOR'S EQUIPMENT: Mark O'Connor plays electric guitar along with Steve Morse on two Dregs compositions in concert, *Blood Sucking Leeches* and *Rock 'N' Roll Park*. On these tunes he uses a '68 black custom Les Paul. O'Connor likes the Les Paul "because you can crank it up pretty loud and it won't feed back."

Although he owns eight violins, he primarily uses only two—a copy of a Magini which was made in 1850, and the "Infamous White Autographed Fiddle" which is "at least 150 years old" and is tattooed with dozens of autographs of musicians including the late Joe Venuti, Stephane Grappelli, L. Shankar, Jean-Luc Ponty, Yehudi Menuhin, Roy Acuff, Merle Haggard, and John Hartford. He plays the Magini with the Dregs, and the white fiddle in contests.

In addition to these instruments used regularly, O'Connor picked out 13 from his collection of 30 other string instruments for his solo album: a 1961 Martin tenor guitar; a 1918 Martin tenor guitar; a 1963 Fender Precision bass guitar; another Fender Precision customized with a DiMarzio fretless neck; a 1929 Dobro; a handmade Somogyi acoustic guitar; a 1923 Martin/Stewart tiple which he's customized into a "soprano guitar" by replacing the bridge to accommodate six rather than 10 strings; a Mossman Golden Era guitar; a 1945 Herringbone Martin D-28 guitar; a 1924 Gibson K-4 mandocello; a 1972 Givens mandolin; a viola handmade in 1940; and the only 1932 Martin C-2 12-string archtop guitar in existence—"The archtop has a different sound than most 12-strings, because it has an archtop rather than a flattop, so it projects a tonality similar to that of the mandolin family," said Mark.

On the road with the Dregs, O'Connor uses a Castle Instrument Phaser III phase shifter for the violin; a Symmetrix Limiter-Compressor that cuts the distortion on the fiddle when he plays double-stops; a Lexicon PCM 41 digital delay set on different lengths of delay; and an MXR digital delay set on the doubling mode. He plays through a B-4 Ampog head run through two Fender cabinets, and he uses Barcus-Berry pickups and Conquest Audio cables. La Bella, whose strings O'Connor endorses, copies Jager strings for his violins, and he also uses heavy gauge D'Addario strings for all guitars, mandolins, basses, and dobro.

O'Connor uses Fender picks for his electric guitars and custom-made tortoise-shell picks for his acoustic instruments because "they definitely get the best tone for those instruments." He uses Hill resin although he "doesn't keep a lot of resin on the bow—just enough to get a good grab. I don't resin every day." O'Connor has yet to invest thousands of dollars for a custom bow—"the sticks I use might as well be branches off a tree," he said—but he makes sure his bows are strung by a professional.

young opera singers, Gene Kelly and a number of dancers, and Merle Haggard with Mark O'Connor. The program, which was aired April 25, was partially filmed at the old Jimmy Stewart Ranch in Santa Ynez, California, March 7. President and Mrs. Reagan, the hosts for each episode, threw a party for 500 G.O.P. stalwarts, and Haggard and O'Connor provided the music. Scenes from this performance and other footage of O'Connor will be edited into the final version of the documentary. "I found the President to be really friendly and sincere," O'Connor said.

There's no denying the fact that Mark O'Connor has done more in 20 years than most people accomplish in a lifetime, and it's remarkable how level-headed and adjusted he is. Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and he could probably swap stories and feel as though they were talking to a twin. O'Connor is quite candid about the changes he's gone through recently. "A lot of stuff has

happened to me during the past year and much of it is emotional," he said. "That's been the hardest part for me to conquer, but the music is a relief. When I do get to play it, on-stage, I realize this is my natural being, and although I know I'm missing a lot, like books and other things, I don't want to tamper with the natural expression of life that I'm doing right now. I want to keep doing this until I become successful in my mind. I'm not even sure whether that means the fact that many people know my name or that I'm financially well-off, and I don't know when I'll be satisfied or when I'll have had enough. I don't think I'll ever have enough, but then again that's me talking when I'm 20 years old, before I'm burned out. Music is such a big art and it's everywhere and to go around the world and just record and play music would be the greatest. Right now I'm just happy to have had the opportunity to be a member of two of the best instrumental bands in the world." db

The last time I interviewed the Art Ensemble of Chicago was a decade ago, at their Chicago home, a few months after they'd returned to the U.S. from their famous two-year sojourn in Europe ("There Won't Be Any More Music," *Music '72*, the *db* yearbook). That European residence had been a constant round of concert tours and festival gigs spiced with radio and TV appearances, broken by recording albums and three film scores. Moreover, along with other expatriates such as the Anthony Braxton group and the rediscovered Steve Lacy, the Art Ensemble's success seemed to stimulate a new audience for post-Coltrane jazz, whether played by Americans or by the emerging generation of European "outside" musicians. But despite their celebrity status in Europe, the Art Ensemble at the end of 1971 was discovering that jazz in the U.S. was still in its Beatles-era recession, and the group was back to daily rehearsals just like in the '60s. The thrust of that interview, then, was "We'll play if you pay us, but as an established group, we will no longer hustle and scuffle in order to perform."

improvisers with each individual not only self-aware but fully responsive to his mates with a range of styles and repertoire from the earliest kinds of jazz to their most original free space compositions. At first a quartet, the Art Ensemble added multi-percussionist Don Moye in 1970, and with him an increasing concern with world musical styles, especially African percussion concepts. Their music is still among the most fascinating and most exciting in jazz—witness their new *Urban Bushmen* album (ECM-2-1211)—and ever since that two-year interlude in Europe, the jazz world has recognized their unique value (collectively and individually they have captured nearly a dozen *down beat* critics poll honors in a half-dozen categories since '71; last year they won Jazz Group by a wide margin for the second straight time, while their ECM release, *Full Force*, tied for Record Of The Year).

Despite this critical acclaim, the Art Ensemble only played for major events—large concerts, festivals, records, European tours—and through the mid-'70s, the chances to perform as a unit were only sporadic. Meanwhile the five musicians were

ADVENTURES IN THE

THE ART ENSEMBLE OF CHICAGO

URBAN BUSH

BY JOHN LITWEILER

Exactly what the Art Ensemble of Chicago established has proven of paramount importance to the new jazz of the '70s and '80s. To begin at the beginning: 17 years ago this spring the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians was formed by young Chicagoans to cooperatively produce their own concerts. From the start it was clear that these players were expanding the frontiers of jazz, adding a wealth of new instruments for improvisation (including homemade and "found" instruments), creating a chamber jazz idiom that includes unaccompanied solo and rhythm sectionless improvisation, discovering new principles of jazz rhythm (i.e. musical line is the flow of sound *and space*), and expanding on post-Coltrane concepts of instrumental sound in their original long form compositions and improvisations. The Art Ensemble of Chicago's special contribution was its exemplary sense of ensemble playing: a spontaneous, potent group of

not only establishing independent careers, they were also doing it on the principle that had inspired them since the AACM was founded: create your own opportunities to play jazz. As the jazz audience gradually increased in the '70s, the AEC began performing regularly again—and so did the five members on their own. In fact, Bowie, Favors, Jarman, Mitchell, and Moye were so active in 1981 that, for a change, the Art Ensemble reunited only three times, altogether playing less than a month's worth of concerts and club dates. Today's free musicians, more than any others in the 80-odd-year history of jazz, are finding opportunities to perform in a vast variety of musical contexts. In the '50s and '60s the Modern Jazz Quartet persisted intact so many years because the group provided the best opportunities for the individual members' self-realization. Although the AEC stays together, it is now one more aspect of the talents of its members.



TOM COPI

The Art Ensemble of Chicago: (from left) Lester Bowie, Famoudou Don Moye, Malachi Favors Magoustous, Roscoe Mitchell, Joseph Jarman.

Famoudou Don Moye describes, most significantly, how free musicians arrived at the present increase in opportunities to perform original music: "The amount of opportunity depends on the amount of work a person is prepared to put in. Like, if you're willing to travel and take a risk, then there will be more opportunities available, as opposed to staying in one place and trying to do it like that." And what are the risks? "Just going somewhere without work and trying to create work. Not making any money, or just having different problems on the road happen to you—loss or theft of equipment, or like going someplace and people don't pay you, and you end up having to cover all the expenses yourself, or different kinds of things. But everywhere I've been, I've created work."

Moye is one of only two members of the group who still make their homes in Chicago. Originally from upstate New York and Detroit, he first took his risks with the group Detroit Free Jazz, wandering through Europe, and eventually landing in Rome, where he played with Steve Lacy; in 1970 he met and joined the Art Ensemble in Paris. Back in America in 1971, he and Roscoe Mitchell lived for several months in St. Louis "at the BAG [Black Artists Group] building, because they had living quarters, a dance studio, a gallery for artists to exhibit their work in, a concert space, a full kitchen, and everything. We were doing concerts there every day, and then there were gigs going on around town. They had these series of sunrise concerts, which were like play all night, and then everybody goes outside when the sun comes up." BAG was the first musicians' cooperative formed in the AACM's wake, in 1968, by saxman Oliver Lake and others who had witnessed the Chicagoans' success.

Moye resettled in Chicago at the end of 1971, and began a veritable whirlwind of musical activity. "I knew what to ex-

pect—I knew there were a lot of good musical situations available to become involved in, just based on what people in the Art Ensemble had already been talking about." The breadth of Moye's experiences in Chicago alone is amazing: he played percussion duet concerts with Steve McCall, drummed in the AACM big band, with the Pharoahs ("Four or five of the main people are now with Earth, Wind & Fire"), and formed his own percussion ensemble, the Malinke Rhythm Tribe; later he played solo drum concerts, accompanied dancers and poet/actors, and played in clubs with bop, modal, and free groups—a special highlight was an exciting 1978 week with the very original pianist Randy Weston. Moye has for years played with the Sun Drummer ensemble, which ranges from six to 30 percussionists, and performs in schools throughout Chicago's black community: "We made our own drums out of available materials. We had a lot of different families of drums that we used for different occasions—ceremonial drums for certain specific ceremonies, social drums with non-specific functions, and other kinds of drums. The social drums can be played in a lot of contexts, on normal gigs in bands, in jam sessions, on the beach."

Nor was this all for Don Moye. For three months prior to the Art Ensemble's 1975 California tour, he lived and led groups on the Pacific coast, and he did the same thing again in 1977. Another time, he kept a second apartment in New York City, again creating work for himself; in 1979 and 1980 he took vacations in Jamaica and Haiti just to play drums with the local musicians. Because of records, his associations with Chico Freeman and Joseph Jarman have been his best-known, but the many others in his American and European performances constitute a *Who's Who* of the post-Coltrane generations of free musicians. The day we talked, Moye said, "I just got back from a one-month tour of Europe with my own group

[Ari Brown, saxes and piano; Milton Suggs and Essiet Okun Essiet, basses; Bill Brimfield, trumpet]. I have four days off, then the Art Ensemble starts a tour of the States, and we go back to Europe." You can't imagine a busier free-lance career—the enthusiasm of Don Moye's youth has grown into a lifetime of constant adventure in discovering musical circumstances for himself.

☐ **"Most of these places I go, I go broke,"** says trumpeter Lester Bowie, "like when I got to Jamaica. After I got to the hotel, paid, tipped the cats, and everything, I had five bucks. I stayed two years. Nigeria was the same way, except that was really the big time. Now just imagine this scene: I got there at night, paid my 50 bucks to get in the hotel, and I had \$40 left. I woke up and heard all these horns honking; I looked out the window, and I was like in the biggest shantytown I had ever seen in my life. It was the rainy season, it was mud all over, and I didn't know anybody in Lagos, right? I thought that was the end for me, Jack.

"I met Fela Anikilapo Kuti that second day—everyone started telling me, 'Go see Fela.' The cab driver took me right to Fela without his address or anything. He's the biggest pop musician in Nigeria, and he made me his guest of honor for the next three months. He's got a big show with a band and singers, a real big organization; he's a super-millionaire, he's got 27 wives. We made about two or three albums; they have what they call 'Afro-beat'—it's kind of an African rhythm & blues, or like reggae—that's their get-down music."

The Nigerian visit was five winters ago, and he began his stay in Jamaica two or three years after that. "I made all my Art Ensemble gigs while I was living on the island. I just lived in the hills—I was the music man in the area, had students. I was made an honorary member of the union; I could sit in with any band, any hotel, any time I felt like—it seemed like all the musicians just opened up." Bowie played only two gigs in Jamaica; one was his own TV special, "but I was playing all the time. My students were kids from the area, they weren't no hip music students. The trumpet players in Kingston gave me some spare horns, so I had about three more trumpets where I lived. All the kids wanted to blow the horn, and it was unbelievable the music they picked up so quick. Ages all the way from just big enough to walk up and down, up to teenagers. It wasn't about no concept of free jazz—the idea was free, you dig? I'd take them step by step, just play by ear: imitate this sound, do this, do that, and eventually you build that up. I can teach you a song right now just by saying, 'Check this out,' and if you're a musician that's got an ear, you learn it and remember it. That's the fashion I always teach in.

"That 59-piece orchestra was the same way. I'd take my horn and play all the parts—'Okay, here's your part,' go to the next person, 'Here's yours; put them together.' It's simple." Although that Sho Nuff Orchestra played only one New York City concert, in 1979, it was a dream come true. "I called the baddest cats that were available on every instrument. We had [Henry] Threadgill, [Julius] Hemphill, Arthur Blythe, Brax-

ton, Oliver Lake, Roscoe—this was just on alto. The next time I do it, the funds will have to be available. I did that once out of sheer energy, but it took two years off my life," and Bowie laughs. "Organizing a band of that size, to write the music, rehearsals and all took a while. When you got that many cats, you can imagine what rehearsal is like, and you got all of these bizarre personalities having fun—a lot of jokes being told, a lot of beer being drunk—it was quite an experience."

For three years now, Bowie has been touring in Europe and Australia with his group From The Root To The Source: gospel singers Martha and Fontella Bass and David Peaston (for two years Amina Claudine Myers, formerly the group's keyboard player, also sang with them), with Bowie, baritonist Hamiet Bluiett, and a rhythm section. When I telephoned him last January, Bowie was in the midst of renovating his new 15-room home, "one of those big ole Victorian houses in Brooklyn. I'm starting a new group now, the New York Hot Trumpet Quintet. We have our first rehearsals next week, and we hit next Friday and Saturday. We have Olu Dara, Wynton Marsalis, Stanton Davis, and Malachi Thompson. No one has ever imagined how this is gonna sound; I don't even know myself," he laughs.

"I've been doing the same thing my whole life: the dreams I have, I've had for years. I'm very proud of the time I spent in the carnival—that was great knowledge. The stuff I did with Joe Tex, the Art Ensemble, all the situations that I play in, to me, are equal. The spirit of the AACM permeates just about

everything I stand for. Just the whole idea that cats can get together and do something in a town that has nothing to do with culture [Chicago, that is], to come from there to being world-known, is a pretty good accomplishment—and that we're still in communication and we're still very influential on the scene. Because the AACM has totally influenced the music in ways people won't even tell you about—listen to the recent classical shit, you'll find out." (For example, check out works by Vinko Globokar, Primous Fountain III, Gerald Oshita, and Frederic Rzewski.)

☐ **Bassist Malachi Favors** Magoustous is unique in that the Art Ensemble has been his primary medium of music making down through the years. He lives in the same Chicago building as Moye, and plays off and on with AACM groups—including those led by Jarman, Mitchell, and Bowie—in addition to his own quintet which he started last year: "I felt I needed to play more. I also feel that there are plenty of good musicians around Chicago that should have an avenue to the music public, and, well, you know, everybody in the Art Ensemble were doing their things, so I felt I'd better get on the bandwagon." Thus far Favors' quintet—which includes Vandy Harris, one of Chicago's fine young tenormen—has performed several times in the Windy City.

Apart from AACM performances in the '70s and '80s, Favors says, "Very few would hire me because I try to stick to my thing of not playing with an amplifier. I've heard some records with Jimmy Blanton, for example, and I mean it sounds like a drum hitting the strings—you can't get that effect with amplifica-

ART ENSEMBLE OF CHICAGO SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

URBAN BUSHMEN—ECM 2-1211
FULL FORCE—ECM 1-1167
NICE GUYS—ECM 1-1126
KABALABA—AECO 004
LIVE AT MANDEL HALL—Delmark 432/3
LES STANCES A SOPHIE—Nessa 4
PEOPLE IN SORROW—Nessa 3
REESE AND THE SMOOTH ONES—Affinity 22
A JACKSON IN YOUR HOUSE—Affinity 9
THE PARIS SESSION—Arista/Freedom 1903
PHASE ONE—Prestige 10064
WITH FONTELLA BASS—Prestige 10049

Lester Bowie

THE GREAT PRETENDER—ECM 1-1209
DUET (w/ Philip Wilson)—IAI 37.38.54
GETTIN' TO KNOW Y' ALL—MPS 15269
THE 5TH POWER—Black Saint 0020
ROPE-A-DOPE—Muse 5081
FAST LAST—Muse 5055
NUMBERS 1 & 2—Nessa 1

Malachi Favors Magoustous

NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL—AECO 003

Joseph Jarman

SUNBOUND—AECO 002
AS IF IT WERE THE SEASONS—Delmark S-417
SONG FOR—Delmark S-410

Joseph Jarman/ Famoudou Don Moye

EARTH PASSAGE-DENSITY—Black Saint 0052
BLACK PALADINS—Black Saint 0042
THE MAGIC TRIANGLE—Black Saint 0038
EGWU-ANWU—India Navigation 1033

Famoudou Don Moye

SUN PERCUSSION—AECO 001

Roscoe Mitchell

SNURDY MCGURDY AND HER DANCIN'
SHOES—Nessa 20
3X4 EYE—Black Saint 0050
MORE CUTOUTS—Cecma 1003
NEW MUSIC FOR WOODWINDS AND VOICE (w/
Tom Buckner and Gerald Oshita)—1750 Arch
1785
L-R-G/THE MAZE/S.II EXAMPLES—Nessa 14/15
NONAAH—Nessa 9/10
DUETS WITH ANTHONY BRAXTON—Sackville
3016
QUARTET—Sackville 2009
SOLO SAXOPHONE CONCERTS—Sackville 2006
CONGLIPTIOUS—Nessa 2
OLD/QUARTET—Nessa 5
SOUND—Delmark S-408

ART ENSEMBLE OF CHICAGO'S EQUIPMENT

Lester Bowie (pictured, left) plays a Benge trumpet (Claude Gordon model) with Schilke 8A4 mouthpieces; he also plays a Benge flugelhorn and piccolo trumpet.

Joseph Jarman and Roscoe Mitchell (center) play the Buffet family of saxophones and Douglas Ewart bamboo flutes.

Malachi Favors Magoustous plays spruce and maple basses, and prefers gut strings. If you have a good Italian bass for sale, let him know.

Famadou Don Moye (right) plays Sonor drums with Remo FiberSkyn 2 heads; he uses Pro-Mark sticks, Latin Percussion, Paiste cymbals and gongs, and pan drums by Carved Drums Unlimited; he packs it all in R & R equipment cases.



photos by STEVE KACAN

tion. Wilbur Ware, when he was really putting it down, around 1955, and Israel Crosby and Oscar Pettiford, listening to those three in particular, I heard another kind of sound. Not that I haven't heard guys that sound good with amplifiers, but I can always tell that it's electric. I felt working with electricity dampened your program as to your own technique, your ability to do without aid."

Favors points out that the greater share of the Art Ensemble's performances are in Europe. "Those people over there have a better concept because they're better taught; here where the music comes from, the people, the kids don't even know who Charlie Parker was. The audience isn't responsible—it's the media that keeps the people from the music. The people in the media direct what comes through to the audience, and they're not really into culture; I would say the people in the United States are more controlled through the media. We have different music for different purposes, but it just so happens that the sex part of the music—the rock or rhythm & blues—is overdone. Traveling in the States, the response in the colleges and the different places where we play has been tremendous. People are waiting to hear what the artist has to say, and eventually they come around to hearing what's going on in the music, because they start hearing past the initial setting. So if people could hear our music, they would respond.

"If I was doing a concert that calls for things I like to stretch in, I would rather have AACM-type musicians; it's not as easy as people think to play so-called free or "out" music. You can't get up and play with just anybody—I don't care how well they play technically—you've got to find certain musicians who are adapted mentally to the music. I still enjoy playing bop, and plenty of musicians can play it—it doesn't matter who I play with. But when you look at Sun Ra and the AACM, that is a whole other swing in music that came out of Chicago. Now, there are quite a few musicians in New York and all over who can play the music. . . . I'm just here to play, and wherever the music happens to lead me, I'll follow."

Until recently, saxman Joseph Jarman was also a committed Chicagoan. After returning to the U.S. in 1971, he first led a series of groups named Return From Exile, then published his collected poetry in the book *Black Case*, and occasionally returned to his long-time concerns with highly structured improvisation and/or multi-media productions. He was often dissatisfied with his work in this period: "In order to give a concert I would have to do a trillion billion other things that wouldn't have anything to do with the concert. Consequently the concert would be half-assed, and I would be drugged and still feel like I'm trapped in the mire." Eventually, though, he acquired the necessary confidence, a point he illustrates with an example from a performance "that I just purely choreographed and designed the set and made a tape for. You know I think electricity is for irons and refrigerators and TVs and stuff like that—I don't think it's about no serious music—so it was painful for me to just make a tape rather than play the music. But I realized, why should I

be painful to myself by insisting on this dogmatic position that I can't make the damn tape to play with my work?"

In the late '70s Jarman and Moye began giving duet concerts, and then touring Europe with groups that they coled. With their 1978 double album *Egwu-Anwu* Jarman says, "That's when I started to discover something. But it's just recently, I would even say in the last year, that I began really to feel like it's really happening. Because just recently I had two extraordinary, satisfying events, as well as just very nice for the people too—two concerts, my large ensemble at the [Chicago] Underground Festival, and the other one was the trio concert at the [Chicago] Filmmakers. I had more control over the first one than I did the second one—in the second one I almost spaced a couple of times." With these two performances, particularly his compositions for the festival ensemble, does Jarman feel he's exploring compositional/improvisational territories that he'd discovered and then abandoned in the '60s? "Yes, in a way that's exactly what I'm doing, and it's cool, now, it's cool. It had not been for what seemed like millions and millions of light years. I mean, I've come through the tunnel."

There were certainly fine Jarman performances in the '70s—my favorites were very free, informal, loosely structured duet concerts with saxophonists Oliver Lake and Wallace McMillan—but three events of major importance to jazz of the '80s were those 1981 ensemble and trio concerts and the fine quintet he played with at the 1982 Chicago Jazz Fair (Kalaparush, tenor sax and clarinet; Rafael Garrett, bass; Adegoke Steve Colson, piano; Reggie Nicholson, drums). The lyricism and ecstasy and sudden wit that alternate in Jarman's art have never been better revealed than in his current alto and tenor sax performances. "What I'm dealing with now is really like a world music form. Because we find that this power is within every culture, in some more subtle than others, and also in every form, and in some forms more powerful than others. We discover the same energy source that's behind the whole thing, and we also discover a fantastic interest in trying to manipulate these entities."

"Really, it's an exciting period in music, with all these different forces coming together," says saxophonist Roscoe Mitchell. "The ideas that were interesting in the '60s now have become realized, and they can be used. It's very interesting to see which direction guys are going in right now. I think people should really just fulfill their desires in music."

When we talked, Mitchell was in California rehearsing his *Variations And Sketches From Bamboo*, which first emerged 10 years ago as a solo inspired by a bamboo flute that Rafael Garrett had made for him. From a series of solo flute pieces it grew into a trio work (for flute, guitar, and piano), then, as he taught a class of youthful musicians in Austria, into *Sketches From Bamboo*; in its next manifestation the *Bamboo* series became a large orchestra piece, and in 1981 evolved into a chamber orchestra work and also *Variations From Bamboo*

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HODES' BLUES: STILL ART AFTER ALL THESE YEARS BY SAM FREEDMAN



Photo by Steve Kagan

SOMETIME IN 1920 OR 1921 Art Hodes tendered his resignation as a billing clerk for Sears, Roebuck & Co. of Chicago. The precise date remains a matter of doubt, not only because of the passage of time, but also because there were so many other retirements. Hodes had sharpened pencils, stuffed envelopes, trudged with pushcart through the Loop, even attempted his father's trade of tinsmithing, and few of the employes had lasted even the one week of his tenure at Sears. The only significance of the clerking position among the many is that, from the afternoon of its termination, Art Hodes has worked at nothing but the playing and propagating of music. He is, now, 78 years old.

He has outlived his wife, his friends, his influences; he has survived attack by modernists and captivity by traditionalists. His middle years, true, were rich ones—as pianist, radio host, magazine publisher, barnstorming jazz educator, and Emmy-winning television producer—yet his most recent achievements have proven, perhaps, the sweetest, for he earned them by more than mere longevity. In 1977 *Selections From The Gutter* (University of California Press), an anthology of articles from his now-defunct magazine, the *Jazz Record*, appeared. In 1978 at age 74, he performed for the first time at the Newport Jazz Festival; in 1981 he played solo piano in the rechristened Kool Jazz Festival. For the first time in his life, he has a club—two, actually: the Mayfair Regent in Chicago and Hanratty's in New York—where, unaccompanied, he can perform his beloved blues, standards, and spirituals. "You don't have to tell jokes, you don't have to dance," he says. "Someone comes up to me and asks, 'Can you play *The Second Time Around*?' and I'm able to say, 'I don't even know the first time around.'" He talks excitedly of writing his autobiography, tentatively titled *Hot Man*, about recording an album of blues for Muse. Whatever the subject, vitality and growth tincture the words of a man who refused to be embalmed in his past.

"Playing is becoming so meaningful," he says. "I find myself involved in so

many things, reaching for what I like to do. I practice everyday to a certain extent, but not beyond the point you should. You don't want to leave your music in the practice ward.

"There's an excitement that I continue to have, and it's so tremendous. The gift is that at my age I'm not doing the Preservation Hall thing: 'Come listen to what used to be.' It ain't that at all. This is what seems to amaze my listeners: 'Listen to that man, how old he is!' The thing is, I'm a happening, not a has-been."

Art Hodes happened in Kiev, Russia, in 1903 or 1904. His parents moved to America when he was six months old, settling in the estuary of ethnicity that was Chicago's West Side. Theirs was not the safest neighborhood—"It was a job trying to go to school without getting hit over the head with a sandbag," Hodes once said—but it offered him the stimulus of the street and the freedom to roam. The invitations to discovery came from sources as removed as Hodes' father, an agnostic Jew who never steered his son into religious conformity, and Al Capone, who opened nocturnal Chicago to all willing to pay. Together, all the forces conspired to lead little Art Hodes to jazz.

His musical training began in Hull House, Jane Addams' famous settlement house, where Hodes sang in the choir, developing his ear by singing soprano, tenor, and alto parts on alternating days. At home his mother played some piano, and he played the crystal set, tuning in the Coon-Saunders Orchestra. He met a friend, a trumpeter from New Orleans named Wingy Manone, with whom he lived after leaving home at 17. Manone played the first Louis Armstrong record Hodes ever heard—the collective improvisation baffled him, but Armstrong "knocked me out"—and soon made cranking the Victrola the roommates' first chore of each morning. Most importantly, Manone brought Hodes to the "Black Belt" of the near South Side. Shepherded there once, Hodes never bothered waiting for a chaperone again.

It was amazing, the South Side: where you heard blues in a barbecue joint and gospel in a sanctified church two doors away; where you met pianist Jimmy Yancey in a record store; where you spotted Bessie Smith's name on a theater marquee and went in to hear the Empress; where "you heard more music made accidentally—young men walking to work, calling or whistling to each other—than you hear today on purpose." Hodes continued visiting and listening until he dared to play.

"I'll always remember sitting down in this place to play the blues," Hodes says, "and hearing laughter. The people weren't rude; they were just open. But the day came when it ceased." He recalls: "I remember the place. I was the

only white there. Came up to hear the piano player. There was a dice game around the side, and food being eaten. And the piano player got me to sit down and play, and suddenly everything got quiet. The dice game had stopped. There was no noise. I had created this silence. And then I became aware."

Hodes' ghetto lessons rounded a developing style, bringing to his natural swing both powerful, two-handed rhythm and a sense of narrative. He pieced together the jigsaw in his 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. stints at a gangster-operated saloon called the Rainbow Gardens. Hodes' first inclination had been to recreate the rhythm he heard in his head by whacking his foot against the side of the piano. Management persuaded him to find another method, under the threat of bondage at the ankles, and Hodes began using his left hand as the percussive force in his music, not only by playing, but by opening doors and picking up pencils left-handed until he became ambidextrous. It was only 1925 and Hodes was only 21, but he had a reputation: "the hot man," as they said at the musicians' union. Translated, it meant, great swinger, but don't give him any society gigs.

Hodes hardly needed them. Rainbow Gardens was paying him \$125 a week, more than four times what his father earned, and Hodes could count among his jamming and chatting companions Armstrong, Johnny and Baby Dodds, Jimmy Noone, Meade Lux Lewis, Muggsy Spanier, Pee Wee Russell, Big Bill Broonzy, Pinetop Smith, and the "Austin High Gang" of Gene Krupa, Bud Freeman, and Eddie Condon. "Chicago was a real mother," Hodes wrote decades later. "There was a time when Chicago came on with a real come on."

BY THE LATE 1930S THE ENTREATY had proven just another tease. Jobs withered in the Depression. The jailing of Capone stilled some of the illegal nightlife and the growing racial meanness of Chicago made the South Side a less accessible avocation. In 1938 Hodes packed his new bride, the former Thelma Johnson, off to New York and the first of his several regenerations.

There he caught up with the early jazz masters before they died. He performed duets opposite Willie "The Lion" Smith; he listened to Fats Waller in Greenwich Village, watching him glide, singing and laughing, immune to a rhythm section that let time unravel; he carried James P. Johnson in his eight-piece band of 1940 "just so I could listen to him, just to be around him. He did things that I could never understand." Hodes found a home in Childs Restaurant in upper Manhattan, near Columbia University. For the first set he complied with the owner's moratorium on

jazz; after 10, he played nothing but, attracting among his listeners a Columbia student named Ralph J. Gleason.

More than performance informed Hodes' life, but never more than music. He hosted the Metropolitan Revue radio show until Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia fired him for announcing record labels on non-profit WNYC. In 1943 Hodes began publishing *Jazz Record* magazine, which, until its demise in 1947, gave jazz musicians possibly their first forum to write directly to their audience.

But through the mid-1940s, as Hodes hung on the styles of jazz' early masters, the next generation was being baptized in Minton's up in Harlem. And when the beboppers hit 52nd Street—"Swing Street," Hodes' street—it was no time to be known as a "moldy fig." The arrival of bop set off a war that—fought, no doubt, by players, but largely fanned by the mercenary rantings of critics—pit traditionalists against modernists and left no sanctuary for individualistic noncombatants. Hodes' memories of the time are wide-ranging, of subjective accuracy, but deeply felt and uncharacteristically angry.

"The handful of writers who really wrecked this whole scene put a lot of people out of work, shortened their lives. This was a time when their own people wouldn't see Broonzy or Leadbelly, when you saw your name never appearing in the polls while players who came to listen to you were getting acclaim, being named tops. You're not getting the work; it kills you. So little Jimmy Noone—what meaning he had to the people who listened to him—he went down with hardly anything. This is the sad part. It happened to so many players.

"There were times when I couldn't get work. I had times like that before I was married, but I could sweat through those. But then you had responsibilities and you had to produce so much bread so the family could live, and there's no work. There was no desire to do anything but play, and we starved it out. I mean, I took jobs I wouldn't take today—how many times I went out to Staten Island to play jobs that were meaningless."

Many were worse. Hodes was being posed for jazz' wax museum: dixieland revival bands. There were the same bands, the same books, the same one chorus for him. One evening with the Eddie Condon band he heard two horn players conversing during his solo. It was laughter in the blues joint, but worse—there was no sincerity in the bandstand kibitzing, only a reflection of the boredom Hodes, too, felt. In 1950 Hodes reversed his 1938 journey, returning to Chicago, and finding the same redemption New York once had proffered.

ALTHOUGH HE ARRIVED ON the strength of an engagement at the Blue Note with an all-star band, Hodes found a new and perhaps greater fulfillment in teaching and television. Watching the jazz heritage die man by man, watching the rise of rock & roll, he came to believe, as he later wrote, "If you don't do something about this music you believe in, the very next time you look around it may have been here and gone."

Hodes toured schools in the Northeast and Midwest with an assembly program about jazz. One winter in the 1960s he gave his 55-minute assembly to more than 100,000 students at 80 schools in Wisconsin. His listeners in the New York suburb of Scarsdale included Dick Wellstood and Dick Hyman, later to become pianists, and Bob Wilber, now a master of woodwinds. Hodes always has had ambivalent feelings about jazz education—likening it to "the rich kid who sees a poor kid climbing a tree and says, 'I'm gonna have my tutor teach me that tomorrow'"—and considered his role one of simply exposing youngsters to the music that had so captivated him in youth. In the many photographs of Hodes, he never looks more serene than in one of him at the piano, surrounded by black youngsters, aglow; he is frozen there, defying race, age, fashion.

Plain Ol' Blues, Hodes' television documentary, carried his message to the entire Public Broadcasting Service system. He won a Chicago Emmy for the show and, on its reputation, embarked on a 36-state, 100,000-mile concert tour with Barney Bigard, Eddie Condon, and Wild Bill Davison, among others. But the tour's end left him dining on a paltry diet. The 1960s were a terrible time commercially for any genre of jazz, and Hodes had to compromise his range for many jobs. The cocktail lounges wanted ballads or blues, but nothing as frisky as *Ballin' The Jack*. The dixieland groups had no room for a caress of *Misty*. The entire "trad" scene—although it was virtually the only scene open to Hodes—began to disgust him.

"There's this thing going on in Davenport, Iowa, with Bix's name [the Bix Beiderbecke Memorial Festival] and my point is that if Bix were here and heard it, he'd throw up," Hodes says. "Banjo, tuba, two-beat, oom-pah, oom-pah, oom-pah. This isn't what we stood for. The thing has gotten out of hand both ways, from the left and the right. I mean, it's completely away.

"These resurrection bands—antiques. Preston Jackson was taking care of boilers and heating schools around Chicago and couldn't be found anywhere until someone died in the Preservation Hall band and they discovered



Hodes at home in the Mayfair Regent.

STEVE KACAN

ART HODES SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| JUST THE TWO OF US—Muse MR 5279 | BALLIN' THE JACK—Fat Cat's Jazz 148 |
| SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME—Muse MR 5252 | ART FOR ART'S SAKE—Jazzology 46 |
| HODES' ART—Delmark DS 213 | AND HIS ALL-STARS—Jazzology 20 |
| FRIAR'S INN REVISITED—Delmark DS 215 | DOWN HOME BLUES—Jazzology 74 |
| BUCKET'S GOT A HOLE IN IT—Delmark DS 211 | ECHOES OF CHICAGO—Jazzology 79 |
| ALL-STAR STOMPERS—Delmark DS 209 | HOME COOKIN'—Jazzology 58 |
| THE ART OF HODES—Euphonic 1207 | THE HOT THREE—Monmouth Evergreen 7091 |
| I REMEMBER BESSIE—Euphonic 1213 | FUNKY PIANO—Blue Note B-6502 |
| WHEN MUSIC WAS MUSIC—Euphonic 1218 | SITTIN' IN—Blue Note B-6508 |

Jackson was originally from New Orleans. Now he's playing again and making all this bread; but if he jumps around, someone tells him to sit down, this is Preservation Hall, take it easy, it's preserved. It's such a far cry."

But Hodes lasted until his "rediscovery" intact and unbowed: too "moldy" for some modernists, too "black" for some dixiecrats, too proud to change. His style and book had matured into full ones. He could draw Thelonious Monk into a club to listen, be hailed as a major influence by Horace Silver. Hodes' own favorites grew to include Junior Mance, an unrepentant bopper. His selections ranged from the staple of blues to the spiritual *Just A Closer Walk With Thee*, to what a surprised Dan Morgenstern once heard: Herbie Hancock's *Watermelon Man* rendered on electric piano.

It is hard to identify the formal start of the "rediscovery," a term implying Hodes ever had been away. Perhaps it was the 1978 Newport date, or possibly the engagement at Hanratty's that Wellstood, the house pianist, helped secure for the man he once had watched in a school assembly. The Mayfair Regent job provided exposure and freedom.

And a 1981 profile by Whitney Balliett in *The New Yorker* represented the ultimate critical anointment. There are still slights: a *Chicago* magazine story that listed Hodes in a roundup of "cocktail pianists." And the death of Thelma Hodes in late 1979, after three years of cancer, saddened, drained, numbed Hodes. But in certain ways her death freed him, or at least drove him again to the bedrock of his artistry: the blues.

"The whole problem with this life is that you miss people. You lose a Bronzy, a Leadbelly, or a Leroy Carr. You lose them. Suddenly there's no Pee Wee Russell or Bix or Muggsy Spanier. The same with family. There's an effect you have when you sit back to play that draws on you. You can hardly play about it.

"If you play the blues, it's for real. There's a depth to it that you don't lose just because you can come into Hanratty's and eat a steak. Big deal. I was written up in *Chicago* about playing 'the rich man's blues' because I'm in the Mayfair Regent. It has no bearing. The depth of the music hasn't left. And I have no intention of it ever leaving. When I sit down to play the blues, it is the blues."

db

RECORD REVIEWS

★★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★★ VERY GOOD
★★★ GOOD
★★ FAIR
★ POOR

JOHN SURMAN

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF SIMON SIMON—ECM-1-1193:

NESTOR'S SAGA; THE BUCCANEERS; KENTISH HUNTING; THE PILGRIM'S WAY; WITHIN THE HALLS OF NEPTUNE; PHOENIX AND THE FIRE; FIDE ET AMORE; MERRY PRANKS; A FITTING EPITAPH.

Personnel: Surman, soprano, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet, synthesizer; Jack DeJohnette, drums, congas, electric piano.

★★★★★

Unrestrained delight! John Surman's stunning *Adventures Of Simon Simon* shatters through several stylistic barriers in the most progressively swingful of fashions—and goes right to the heart of modern musical artistry. Teamed with Jack DeJohnette in a superlative duo format, the British reed player/synthesist has unveiled a brilliant and sundry canvas of musical temperaments, ranging from delicate to furious.

Nestor's Saga opens with a rich yet liquid synthesizer ostinato, framed in the minor mode, that is soon complimented by Surman's lucid melodicism on bass clarinet. Surman's blowing is reflective, long-lined, and lyrical, seemingly effortless in its delivery. The reedman's soprano then creeps in with more angular statements that, along with DeJohnette's propulsive trap rhythms, develop in impetuous and climactic counterpoint with the other voices. DeJohnette's accompaniment throughout this set is magnificent, and incites Surman's playing like hosing a fire with gasoline. In *Phoenix*, the pair unleash a scorching soprano/drums interplay that builds ruthlessly in excitement—achieved by the hornman's sinuous, rapid-fire inventions and bracing exhibitions of circular breathing, against DeJohnette's furious syncopations punctuated with thundering tom-tom rolls.

Surman's chops are impressive for many reasons. He dispenses vibrato in a sparse, judicious fashion, and combined with his frequent long-lined phrasing (often-times via circular breathing), makes for a wistfully organic horn quality. Yet more striking is his poignantly swinging rhythmic sense, and the keen ability to spin a theme or motif with dramatic inventiveness while retaining its melodic identity.

In *Kentish Hunting* the traditional English folk melody is delivered on soprano, underpinned by a marvelous bari sax choir blowing a predominantly single note ostinato in 3/4. The melody is stated and thereafter fluidly embellished upon and restated (respectively) at varying lengths, in loose sequence. The embellishments cause the folk tune to fall at successively different metrical points (in relation to the ostinato), resulting in a charmingly novel syncopation, or more accurately, metrical "staggering." This sequence continues until the melody returns to its original



position in remarkable symmetry.

The sonic quality of this disc is noteworthy, and engineer Jan Eric Kongshaug has seemingly miked DeJohnette's bass drum a shade louder than normal to provide a heavier bottom end for the duo project.

Record reviewers shouldn't be paid to critique music this wonderful—*Adventures* is a consummate achievement.

—stephen mamula

AL DI MEOLA

ELECTRIC RENDEZVOUS—Columbia FC 37654: *GOD BIRD CHANGE*; *ELECTRIC RENDEZVOUS*; *PASSION, GRACE & FIRE*; *CRUISIN'*; *BLACK CAT SHUFFLE*; *RITMO DE LA NOCHE*; *SOMALIA*; *JEWEL INSIDE A DREAM*.

Personnel: Di Meola, guitars; Jan Hammer, keyboards; Steve Gadd, drums; Anthony Jackson, bass; Mingo Lewis, percussion; Philippe Saisse, keyboards (cut 5); Paco De Lucia, guitar (3).

★★★★★

Some familiar faces rejoin Di Meola for this album . . . Hammer, Gadd, Jackson, Lewis, and De Lucia all played together five years ago on *Elegant Gypsy*. Their rapport is intact, and many of the leader's musical ideas continue apace.

One cut that is more familiar in name than in style is Mingo Lewis' opening *God Bird Change*. The Tubes covered it in 1977 when Lewis interned with those mad rock doctors for a while. Back then *God Bird Change* was a stranger animal, especially given The Tubes'

penchant for offbeat synthesizer textures and techno theatrics. This time, Mingo's piece has metamorphosed into a more cleanly produced, streamlined fusion boogie, with a healthy combination of guitar and synthesizer soloing and strong percussive support. Di Meola should be credited for his long relationship with Lewis, a good man on the skins and an underrated composer.

Familiarity creeps more stealthily into the pattern that Di Meola sets for the balance of side one. There's an abundance of flashy jazz-rock on *Electric Rendezvous*, a piece that effectively matches production precision with at least a modicum of passion from its players—particularly Hammer, who has always done well alongside quick-draw guitarists (check his recent LP with Journey's Neal Schon). Also to be expected from Di Meola at this point is the almost obligatory Spanish guitar duel with sidekick Paco De Lucia, *Passion, Grace & Fire*, a speedy duet that is both furious and fine, but not very surprising.

If this fusion and flamenco format begins to sound all too familiar, side two departs into a zippy Jeff Beck bag with Hammer's simple but carefree rocker *Cruisin'* and Saisse's *Black Cat Shuffle*. Even the latinesque *Ritmo De La Noche* sounds fresher, less glossy. And the slower-paced finishing tracks, *Somalia* and *Jewel Inside A Dream*, develop a very effective dialog between acoustic guitars and electronic keyboards reminiscent of segments from Hammer's *First Seven Days* period.

Portions of *Electric Rendezvous* approach what has to be considered predictable terrain for Di Meola, and some bolder stylistic depar-

ture might prove inspirational in the future. But for now, this has all the polished, professional makings of a hit album, and there are enough good things happening creatively to warrant at least four stars. —*robert henschen*

SHELLY MANNE

AT THE BLACK HAWK, VOL. 1—

Contemporary S7577: *SUMMERTIME*; *OUR DELIGHT*; *POINCIANA*; *BLUE DANIEL*; *A GEM FROM TIFFANY*.

Personnel: *Manne*, drums; *Joe Gordon*, trumpet; *Richie Kamuca*, tenor saxophone; *Victor Feldman*, piano; *Monty Budwig*, bass.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

AT THE BLACK HAWK, VOL. 2—

Contemporary S7578: *STEP LIGHTLY*; *WHAT'S NEW*; *VAMP'S BLUES*; *A GEM FROM TIFFANY*.

Personnel: Same as volume one.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

AT THE BLACK HAWK, VOL. 3—

Contemporary S7579: *I AM IN LOVE*; *WHISPER NOT*; *BLACK HAWK BLUES*.

Personnel: Same as volume one.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

These three sides (a fourth and final volume is due for reissue this summer) were taped on September 22, 23, and 24, 1959, at San Francisco's now-defunct Black Hawk club under the direction of Lester Koenig, Contemporary's founder and guiding light. Koenig performed an invaluable service to jazz and jazz listeners by documenting many of the musicians playing in Los Angeles (and New York, too) from the '50s until his untimely death in 1977. His son John has taken over the label and is actively recording new artists as well as reissuing items such as this Manne set, which is typical of the quality upon which Contemporary's excellent reputation has been based.

The five artists play extensively (no cut, save *Tiffany*, the theme, is under eight-and-a-half minutes) and with intensity, feeling, and thought on a tasteful variety of material. Manne is superb throughout, revealing Jo Jones and Max Roach influences with his drive and musicality, feeding the band both rhythmically and melodically, pushing hard to brazen crescendos, then dropping back down to whisper levels, leading by supporting rather than dominating. Gordon, a trumpet wizard who died in 1963 at the age of 35, is also stunning, brandishing an energized, shimmering sound not unlike Clifford Brown's. His unflinching creativity continually enlivens the performances.

Kamuca, whom illness claimed in 1977 when he was 47, is more low-keyed than Gordon, developing his solos with subtle rhythmic interplay, using a light yet expansive tone and a supple technique on several first-rate outings. Feldman, whose handsome linear ease reminds one of Tommy Flanagan, is most expressive, offering percussive accompaniment and delivering penetrating solos. Budwig's walking bass provides an ever steady buoyancy to the proceedings.

Volume 1's *Summertime* finds Gordon,

Harmon mute in, reading the line with a husky luminance, while Feldman, in his choruses, plays more than one melody note at a time, working through some parallel thirds and robust block chording. A fast take of Tadd Dameron's *Delight—Poinciana* is also up-tempo—features the Lester Young-influenced Kamuca loose-tongued and quick-fingered as Manne tosses out zesty snare and tom-tom statements, while on Frank Rosolino's *Daniel*, it is Gordon who exhibits the snap and bite as Kamuca stretches out many of his notes.

Benny Golson's medium charmer, *Lightly*, opens Volume 2. Here Gordon is chameleonic, playing phrases of striking beauty, then cooking hard with funky lines that use few notes. Feldman plays rolling, 10-fingered passages, artfully changing the inside melody notes. *What's New* is taken at an uncharacteristic medium-up, and Charlie Mariano's *Vamp's Blues* features a relaxed Kamuca, two blistering double-timed choruses from Gordon, and a smooth solo from the bassist Budwig.

Love is the gem of Volume 3. Kamuca's foggy-toned, fluent solo leads to Gordon's three choruses, where, after Feldman reenters after a brief layout, the trumpeter cuts loose with stabbing, syncopated phrases, underwritten by the leader's crisp tom-toms. Golson's evergreen, *Whisper*, is another treat as Feldman displays the naturally funky style that made him fit in perfectly with Cannonball's band. The closing *Blues* goes lazily along until Gordon demands double-time and Manne supports with whirring press rolls and assorted kit chatter. Later Feldman creates tension by working a double-time with half-timed, locked-hands phrasing.

As a bonus to the excellent playing, there's the clean sound which makes this 20-year-old music seem as if it was recorded yesterday. —*zan stewart*

BENNY WALLACE

PLAYS MONK—Enja 3091: *SKIPPY*; *ASK ME NOW*; *EVIDENCE*; *'ROUND MIDNIGHT*; *STRAIGHT, NO CHASER*; *PRELUDE*; *UGLY BEAUTY*; *VARIATION ON A THEME (TRINKLE TINKLE)*.

Personnel: *Wallace*, tenor saxophone; *Jimmy Knepper*, trombone (cuts 2, 3, 5, 7); *Eddie Gomez*, bass; *Dannie Richmond*, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Young saxist Benny Wallace is not the first hornman to present an entire program of Monk-derived interpretations and variations (credit to Steve Lacy, who certainly deserves it), but the timing of this issue (recorded March '81) is, sadly, apropos if fortuitous. Slowly, throughout and after his own playing career ended, Monk's compositions entered the standard repertoire. And the aspirant to the jazz tradition can't just learn Monk's notes—as Dewey Redman recently told me, a player must control all the structural nuances of Monk's music, beyond running the basic changes.

Wallace and his expert colleagues (drawn from the Mingus circle) are up to this task.

Though they don't claim the familiar *Evidence*, *'Round Midnight*, *Straight, No Chaser*, and *Trinkle Tinkle* as irrevocably their own, forever, these renditions are more than imitations of old, familiar performances; the trio and quartet arrangements add something personal and new. Wallace, on *Skippy*, simply gobbles up the changes like a kid gorging on peanut butter; Gomez sticks to him so closely one might think they are attached. Knepper shadows, then foreshadows Wallace mournfully on *Ask Me Now*—the trombonist's own lucid statements are gracefully accented by deep Gomez and lightly brushing Richmond so that they are a complete trio.

On *Evidence* they stride with conviction, Knepper reaching bop conclusions, Gomez thoroughly sturdy in and out of a tautly hung solo; Wallace is all over his horn, explaining even while the 'bone and bass lay the *Evidence* on him. Gomez bows somber overtones which Wallace meets like a ghost on the stairs to introduce *'Round Midnight*; of course, the classic melody is tenderly addressed, as Wallace proves he whispers as well as blows hard, and finds some unpredictable angles at that.

From the squeaks in the second head chorus on, Wallace twists *Straight, No Chaser*. The song is strong enough to withstand that, and Wallace's skill lines up the odd harmonies of Monk with the wide intervals Dolphy delineated. In his minute-and-a-half *Prelude* Wallace, with only the bass beside him, improvises as though he's within his horn, tapping pent-up breath in just the right amount for his intended gesture. The waltz *Ugly Beauty* continues apace: sort of slow, very noble. Engineer David Baker's lovely balance offers Gomez, in all aspects of his instrumental mastery, clear presence at no one's expense. Wallace's articulation liberties are pretty as a dueling scar. His squawk placements and phrase lengths and swift wiggles in his "variation" on *Trinkle*, unaccompanied, display chops, thought, and daring.

So Benny Wallace develops, as a saxist, as a leader, as a jazzman. After focusing such respect on Monk, Wallace will undoubtedly move on to distill his own essence through composition: his tenor talent is writ large. But as a memorial set, *Plays Monk* is a success: one can almost hear Thelonious comping and stomping in the background. —*howard mandel*

MARIO PAVONE

SHODO—Alacra 1004: *SHODO*; *FAVORS*; *1638*; *HEADS FIRST*; *PASSAGE*; *DOUBLE*; *MOPS*.

Personnel: *Pavone*, bass; *Bobby Naughton*, marimba (cuts 1, 2, 4, 5, 7); *Emmett Spencer (3)*, *Pheeroan ak Laff*, drums; *Peter McEachern*, trombone; *George Alford*, trumpet, flugelhorn; *Nick Makros*, tenor saxophone, flute; *Phil Buettner*, Bb, bass clarinet, soprano saxophone, flute.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Shodo in Japanese means "art of the brush" or calligraphy, and there is much deft handiwork on this unusual album, especially from

the core trio. Composer Pavone has, for example, reversed the usual horn/rhythm relationship on the title track: the horn chorale provides sheets of sustained tones on which the trio scribble intriguing messages. Pavone's own reedy, shakuhachi-like exclamations contrast pleasantly with Naughton's plunking rosewood marimba. Two of the strongest tracks conceptually are *Heads* and *Double*, where the balance of horn writing, crisp execution, and solo slots fall just so. Naughton is nutty and nice on *Heads* and *Shodo* especially. The horns remain beasts of burden here: where kept in line they carry things off, but where allowed to roam they bleat and scabble (as on *Mops* and *1638*). Alford's Harmon mute and McEachern's plunger add rich colors to *Double*. Buettner does get a nice mournful bass clarinet bit on *Heads*.

The trio perks cockily on two pace-changers: *Favors* favors the snub, bluesy, walking side of Malachi of the Art Ensemble—an underrated treasure—while *Passage* is a neat snippet that stands whole. Both tracks recall the less oblique, headstrong writing of Pavone's 1979 debut, *Digit*, which added Mark Whitecage on reeds to this trio.

Pavone himself is a more than capable bassist with rich sound and a variable approach that adapts itself to each texture he hears. He was worked and recorded with a wide array of modernists including Paul Bley, Eddie Gomez, Perry Robinson, Roswell Rudd, and Bill Dixon. Pavone's tight association with malletman Naughton includes co-founding with him and trumpeter Leo Smith the Creative Musicians Improvisors Forum in 1977, an AACM-style brotherhood, and their mutual sensitivity with Laff (an artist with the brushes) is apparent throughout here. So, to get clinical, three stars for a solid, workmanlike performance (albeit a little under-rehearsed and tentative) and a little extra for daring charts exploring unheard textures.

—fred bouchard

DICK WELLSTOOD

LIVE AT HANRATTY'S—Chaz Jazz CJ
 108: JINGLE BELLS; CHA CHA FOR CHARLIE; LOOKING AT YOU/YOU'VE BEEN A GOOD OLD WAGON; I WISH I WERE TWINS; GEE BABY, AIN'T I GOOD TO YOU; QUINCY STREET STOMP; BARBARA SONG; HOW COULD I BE BLUE; GEORGIA CABIN/GHOST OF THE BLUES; AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'; DEED I DO/GEORGIA ON MY MIND/DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU; I'M PUTTING ALL MY EGGS IN ONE BASKET; RUNNIN' WILD; SO IN LOVE; EVERYBODY LOVES MY BABY; A PRETTY GIRL IS LIKE A MELODY; CORNET CHOP SUEY; MY SHINING HOUR.

Personnel: Wellstood, piano.

★ ★ ★ ½

The Philadelphia Phillies' great mound ace, Steve Carlton, is nicknamed "Lefty" thanks to a sizzingly fast and accurate left arm; the damn thing almost never falters. Dick Wellstood's left hand is Cy Young Award material, too. For Wellstood is one of a handful of pianists who can stride themselves into a frenzy. Along with Ralph Sutton, Dick Hyman, Brooks Kerr, and a few others, Wellstood keeps the flame of such glorious striders of the past—Fats Waller, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Donald Lambert, Luckey Roberts to name but a few—aglow (only Joe

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Turner survives as an original practitioner, still playing in a Paris nightclub).

Yet there is more to Wellstood than supercharged stride, and it is all in evidence in this varied and sensational double-album. He is a fine blues player, an elegant interpreter of ballads, and a wildly unpredictable purveyor of standard tunes (playing *Jingle Bells* with a quirky, mysterious air, for example). He interpolates assorted quotes with a wry sense of humor that is a trademark of the always rumbled, always grumpy Wellstood—a man who once dedicated a performance at a children's concert to W. C. Fields, "whose feelings on children are well known."

The choice of tunes here—and there are nearly two dozen of them—is excellent. It is a canny mixture of less-often heard standards (though the required *Ain't Misbehavin'* is included) and jazz and blues tidbits. Basically, this is an album of one of our finest solo pianists, playing on a piano of his own choosing in a relaxed club atmosphere that inspires him to various heights without causing him to reach for flashy effects. It swings mightily and packs an inordinate amount of joy into each side.

The only problem (and the reason for the withholding of that final fragment of a star) is in the recording itself. Chaz Jazz has been putting out fine (if hard to find—they are a mail-order company only) selection of swing albums centered around pianists. What they are lacking, here, is an attention to detail. The club noise during the album is atrocious—when you can make out the words and sentences of the patrons present during the numbers, something is wrong—the piano comes through loud and clear, but so does everybody else. Also, the cover is full of annoying errors—including an absolute scrambling of Dan Morgenstern's fine liner notes, and listing such great composers as Fats Willer, Andy Crazaf, and Sidney Brecht (the great soprano saxophonist, of course, and no relation to Bertolt, who is represented on this album as well). The album is available from Chaz Jazz, Box 565, North Hampton, NH 03862.

—lee jeske

THE BLASTERS

THE BLASTERS—Slash SR-109: *MARIE MARIE*; *NO OTHER GIRL*; *I'M SHAKIN'*; *BORDER RADIO*; *AMERICAN MUSIC*; *SO LONG BABY GOODBYE*; *HOLLYWOOD BED*; *NEVER NO MORE BLUES*; *THIS IS IT*; *HIGHWAY 61*; *I LOVE YOU SO*; *STOP THE CLOCK*.

Personnel: Phil Alvin, vocals, guitar, harmonica; Dave Alvin, guitar; John Bazz, bass; Bill Bateman, drums; Gene Taylor, piano; Lee Allen, Steve Berlin, saxophones.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The story of Slash Records' emergence amidst L.A.'s volatile "new rock" scene is an interesting tale too long to adequately investigate here. Suffice to say that Slash has been a rarified record label specializing in punk as sung by such as the Germs, X, and the Gun Club—sort of the hat Hut of experimental rock.

A name like the Blasters might hint at more of the same, but this group is different than anything else on the Slash label—not punk, not new wave, not new-fashioned. And though the group also avoids calling their music rockabilly, that's reasonably close to what the Blasters are all about. Writer/guitarist Dave Alvin has explained that "... the whole thing behind the Blasters is not playing up nostalgia. We want to take traditional American musics and make them viable again. We figured if we took the music we really loved... country, blues, rockabilly... and put all the energy that the Sex Pistols put into their music, it would be just as modern today as it was in 1950. We're playing music that has the energy that punk has brought in, with the voice of George Jones or Lightnin' Hopkins."

Much of the group's on-stage energy is transformed into *The Blasters* debut LP, a quick-hitting combination of youthful pluck and timeless rock values. Cuts like the excellent *I'm Shakin'* show that the boys have done serious homework on pre-rock pioneers such as Little Willie John. In fact, the use of tenor saxman Lee Allen is a stroke of genius; Allen developed a familiar playing style in the '50s that was surpassed in rock circles only by King Curtis, and Allen was the slower, bluesy player heard on sessions with Little Richard and Fats Domino. More than a hint of that New Orleans sound has slipped into Blasters originals like *Marie Marie* and *No Other Girl*.

The quality and authentic feel of those originals are the critical factors here. Seven of these 12 songs were penned in the '80s, yet sound like vintage rockers from the days of Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis. But again, the intensity is fervent, the musicianship so schooled in fundamentals, that the time frame seems irrelevant. The Blasters somehow transcend the decades and, unlike most other rockabilly revivalists, they completely avoid coming close to "camp."

—robert henschen

GENE AMMONS

GENE AMMONS—Prestige P-24098:

AMMON JOY; *GROOVE BLUES*; *THE REAL MCCOY*; *THAT'S ALL*; *IT MIGHT AS WELL BE SPRING*; *CHEEK TO CHEEK*; *JUG HANDLE*; *BLUE HYMN*.

Personnel: Ammons, tenor saxophone; Jerome Richardson, flute (cuts 1-4, 6-8); Pepper Adams, baritone saxophone (1-4); John Coltrane, alto saxophone (1-3, 5); Paul Quinichette, tenor saxophone (1-3); Mal Waldron, piano; George Joyner, bass; Art Taylor, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

IN SWEDEN—Enja 3093: *BILLIE'S BOUNCE*; *THERE IS NO GREATER LOVE*; *POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS*; *LOVER MAN*; *AHUS JAZZ*.

Personnel: Ammons, tenor saxophone; Horace Parlan, piano; Red Mitchell, bass; Ed Jones, drums.

★ ★ ★

One of several yardsticks conventionally used to measure the worth of any given

artist's stature is the relative extent of his influence over others pursuing similar paths of expression. This criterion often works exceedingly well in the world of jazz. It is obviously valid in the case of an Armstrong, a Young, or a Parker; but serious students of the music frequently go beyond the aura of heroic momentum to recognize, often on equal terms, the value of others whose influence was not so widespread. Thus, for example, the twin paradoxes of Beiderbecke and Monk will continue to loom forever as nagging reminders of this critical tool's vulnerability; for despite the unarguably lasting value of these two particular musicians' contributions to the art, comparatively few of their descendants have opted for similar lines of investigation.

More often than not, those musicians whom fate has decreed to be cited as "influences" were those who either enjoyed greater visibility or whose styles were both compelling and accessible, and therefore encouraging of assimilation. In the '50s, on tenor sax, there were more than a few such role models, and one of them was the young Gene Ammons. To be sure, he had some tough competition among his peers, but Gene also had something else going for him that few of the others could claim. He had a genuine feel for the old-time blues, a sensitivity no doubt inherited from his father, famed boogie woogie pianist Albert Ammons, but also one that he was able to adapt to the then-burgeoning

synthesis of Parkerian bop and classic Basie-rooted swing.

By coupling this natural propensity for basic blues expression with a sound that, in its breadth, rivaled even those of Hawkins and Webster, Ammons soon achieved a mark that many could envy. He so successfully combined the most accessible attributes of his own models—Young and Parker—that he became, in effect, the most accessible model of all. The influence of his sound is, even today, inescapable. It pervades the sonority of virtually all contemporary tenormen who want to be heard over the clamor of electrified rhythm sections, just as it persists in the less noisy ambiances of more intimate gatherings. It has been cultivated just as equally by former Getzians as it has been by younger, pragmatically inclined Coltranists eager to find work. In short, Ammons established a practical methodology that still functions exceedingly well in a wide variety of musical circumstances, and one that continues to exert a strong influence, albeit less directly, on contemporary players.

Fifteen crucial years may separate the recording dates of these two albums, but few will be able to note any marked deterioration of Ammons' most commendable qualities. His sound and intonation remain impeccable, his forthrightness undiminished, and the logic of his phrasing as four-square as ever. With Ammons, it should be understood, there are rarely any surprises. His lines have

always followed rather conventional boundaries, so it is only when he falters from this accustomed level of consistency that we can detect a momentary danger.

And he does get in trouble a few times over the course of these six sides, but not so noticeably that it should deter anyone from savoring his more favorable aspects, and these are many. The Prestige reissue, which dates back to January 1958, features, along with Ammons, not only the biting baritone of Adams, but also what amounts to a veritable feast of Coltrane alto. The latter's contributions are alone worth the price of the album, for not only do they complement his widely recorded tenor work of the time, but they also bring into clearer relief the true origin of his unique sound. Richardson, always fluent but rarely inventive, appears on all but one of the tracks, while Quinichette is heard in solo only twice. The rhythm, appropriately bop-pish and blue, is handled in customary fashion with only a few slips from grace here and there.

Recorded live on July 14, 1973 at the Ahus Jazz Festival in Sweden, the Enja release reveals not so much the pathos or "new wisdom" one might ordinarily expect of one who had undergone the horrors of long-term imprisonment, but rather an apathy seemingly born of resignation. Ammons' sound, though still intact from earlier times, nevertheless lacks the compelling intensity that had so highly commended it before,

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RECORD REVIEWS

while his strain of ideational material appears to now be largely a matter of recalled mannerism and habit. A pretentious overdependence on style now supplants whatever creativity might have been there in the first place. But this is not to fault the overall effectiveness of this one encapsulated festival set, for there are many virtues to behold, not in the least those bestowed by Powellian pianist Parlan.

Despite his pervasive sway over literally hundreds of acknowledged jazz saxophonists the world over, Gene Ammons can hardly be considered among the ranks of truly important players. An exceptional performer, yes. An indispensable cog, no.

—jack sohmer

JOSEPH JARMAN/ DON MOYE

EARTH PASSAGE—DENSITY—(Black

Saint BSR 0052): ZULU VILLAGE
(HOMMAGE; SUMMONING THE ELDERS;
CHILDREN'S SUN CELEBRATION);
HAPPINESS IS; JAWARA; SUN SPOTS.

Personnel: Jarman, tenor, alto, soprano saxophone, piccolo, flutes, alto, bass clarinet; Moye, sun percussion (earth drums, traps, cowbell, chimes, bells, triangle); Craig Harris, trombone, bamboo flute, didjeridu, cowbell, voice; Rafael Garrett, bass, clarinet, flutes, conch, panpipes.

★ ★ ★

LESTER BOWIE

THE GREAT PRETENDER—(ECM 1

1209): THE GREAT PRETENDER; IT'S HOWDY DOODY TIME; DOOM?; WHEN THE MOON COMES OVER THE MOUNTAIN; RIOS NEGROES; ROSE DROP; OH, HOW THE GHOST SINGS.

Personnel: Bowie, trumpet; Donald Smith, piano, organ; Fred Williams, bass, electric bass; Philip Wilson, drums; Hamiet Bluiett, baritone saxophone (cut 1); Fontella Bass, David Peaston, voices (1).

★ ★ ★ ★

The ongoing vitality of the Art Ensemble of Chicago depends, in considerable measure, on the solo careers of its members. These activities afford the listener a head-on perspective of individual AEC members that the Ensemble's collective identity sometimes obscures. Both Lester Bowie's debut as a leader for ECM and Joseph Jarman and Famoudou Don Moye's second co-op outing for Black Saint delineate the unique qualities each member brings to the AEC, though it is *The Great Pretender* that has the edge in terms of program cohesion and cogency.

The merits of *Earth Passage—Density* are leavened by its uneven material. Whereas *Zulu Village* is a well-conceived confluence of African percussion, bass, and flutes, and *Happiness Is* is a taut, straightahead vehicle for the album's most inspired solos, *Jawara* is an undramatic head on a somewhat lumbering ostinato, and *Sun Spots* reiterates the formula with more panache. Whether this

program is the result of hit-and-run recording on the road or a thin book for a touring group, it lacks some of the warmth and power of Jarman and Moye's earlier collaborations.

The program does allow the musicians a free hand and, for the most part, they rise to the occasion. The leaders turn in characteristically exciting performances: Jarman's brawny tenor on *Happiness Is* and Moye's splashy traps on *Sun Spots* are high points. The seldom heard Rafael Garrett, who performed in John Coltrane's last aggregations, has a gritty, swinging arco bass solo on *Happiness Is*, but, at times, lacks the large sound necessary to pry himself into the front line. Except for stretching a few good ideas too far on his unaccompanied solo on *Jawara*, Craig Harris, as on recordings with Sun Ra and Dollar Brand, asserts himself as a very promising trombonist.

On *The Great Pretender* Lester Bowie turns a potential mob of stylistic approaches—including '50s do-wop, TV themes, free form electric music, and latin-infused jazz—into a palatable whole. Though there are elements of satire and nostalgia inherent in both the selection and presentation of much of the program, this is not a novelty item. Pure, rambunctious, torch-carrying Bowie is to be found everywhere—yes, even on *It's Howdy Doody Time*.

The Great Pretender is disappointing only in that Hamiet Bluiett performs only on the title piece, where his impressive range and rugged bluesiness converge for a rousing solo. Especially on *Rios Negroes*, whose bright latin bounce Bowie uses for a cunning succession of growls and mewlings, and the subterranean shadows of *Oh, How The Ghost Sings*, Bluiett's presence would have provided even richer icing on the cake.

Otherwise, the album is a fine showcase for Bowie, the great pretender to Dizzy's throne. The importance of Bowie's amalgamated style does not lie with its expert culling of sources, but in its ability to harness the no-wave mania of *Doom?* as effortlessly as it creates the chiaroscuro of *Rose Drops*. At several points during *Rios Negroes* and the title piece, Bowie's unique syntax forwards a caliber of optimistic resolve that has rarely been heard since Lee Morgan's death.

—bill shoemaker

GROVER WASHINGTON JR.

COME MORNING—Elektra 5E-562; EAST RIVER DRIVE; COME MORNING; BE MINE (TONIGHT); REACHING OUT; JAMMING; LITTLE BLACK SAMBA; MAKING LOVE TO YOU; I'M ALL YOURS.

Personnel: Washington, soprano, alto, tenor saxophone; Ralph MacDonald, congas, percussion; Steve Gadd, drums; Marcus Miller, bass; Richard Tee, Fender Rhodes; Eric Gale, guitar; Paul Griffin, synthesizers; Grady Tate, vocals.

★ ★ ★

Commercial? Yes. Trite? No. Appropriately titled, this album sets a "cool summer morning, grass still wet with dew, lover laying next to you" mood. Grover takes no chances;

neither stepping forward or back, he offers another collection of easy-listening jazz-funk. Though there are no surprises, Grover's sincerity and his natural, almost whimsical saxophone interpretations make his refreshingly lyrical phrasing a pleasure to listen to.

The production collaboration of Washington and MacDonald, as on the previous *Wine-light* album, proves to be a fine pairing. Their sense of "just enough" never drowns Grover's saxophone in strings or synthesizers. From the audiophile point of view, the recording is excellent—very clean, with each instrumental voice (and human voice) clear and unmuddled.

Behind Grover are some of the hottest chops available (Gadd, Miller, Tee, Gale), but no one solos except the saxophonist. The band, all fine soloists and technicians themselves, prove that "less is more" and offer a lesson in tasteful playing. MacDonald's percussion work exemplifies the role of percussion as "the spice that makes the gourmet dish complete"; it is simple, uncluttered, and in the right places at the right times.

Some may call this music vinyl Valium, and depending on personal taste, the album may become monotonous. Similarities in mood, texture, and tonality often make some of the tunes seem to blend together. Bob Marley's *Jamming* offers Grover's alto a chance to move with the sensuality of reggae, making this cut stand out from the sameness. *Jamming's* repetitive chord and bass pattern is led by the sax into a swing section with walking bass for a welcomed change of pace. *Reaching Out*, though typical, distinguishes itself with an interesting gentle movement in the verse to an emphatic sensation in the bridge.

Two vocals by Grady Tate break up the instrumental atmosphere. His deep, silky-smooth voice complements Washington's unique sax sound, and *Be Mine (Tonight)* follows closely on the heels of *Just The Two Of Us* with similar commercial appeal. *Be Mine* features Grover on a funky alto jam where he seems most comfortable. *Little Black Samba* is Tate's other feature; however, the lyric itself is lacking both melodically and poetically. On this cut Washington picks up his tenor for the first and only time on this LP and lays down an energetic and quite

interesting piece of funk.

Grover Washington Jr. has found his niche, and though some are offended by his commercial ventures, no one can deny his musical abilities (or those of the musicians behind him). He creates mood music, soothing and pastoral, tinged with urban funk, done with taste and quality. —albert de genova

FRED FRITH

SPEECHLESS—Ralph Records FF 8106:
KICK THE CAN (PART ONE); CARNIVAL ON WALL ST.; AHEAD IN THE SAND; LAUGHING MATTER; ESPERANZA; WOMEN SPEAK TO MEN; MEN SPEAK TO WOMEN; A SPIT IN THE OCEAN; NAVAJO; BALANCE; SAVING GRACE; SPEECHLESS; CONVERSATIONS WITH WHITE ARC; DOMAINE DE PLANOUSSET; KICK THE CAN (PART TWO).

Personnel: Frith, guitar, violin, mellotron, bass, keyboards, drums, voice; Guigou Chenevier, drums, tenor saxophone, voice; Margot Mathieu, soprano, tenor saxophone, voice; Ferdinand Richard, bass, guimbarde, voice; Jo Thirion, organ, harmonium; Tina Curren, recorders, tapes, bass; Roger Kent Parsons, bagpipes; Asha, Storm, vocals; Bill Laswell, bass; Fred Maher, drums; Steve Buchanan, snake saxophone; George Cartwright, alto saxophone; Mars William, baritone saxophone.

★ ★ ★ ★

THE MUFFINS

185—Random Radar Records RRR-010:
ANGLE DANCE; ANTIDOTE TO DRYDOCK; ZOOM RESUME; HORSEBONES; SUBDUCTION; DREAM BEAT; UNDER DALI'S WING; THESE CASTLE CHILDREN; QUEENSIDE; STREET DOGS.

Personnel: Tom Scott, flutes, soprano, alto saxophone, Bb, alto clarinet; Dave Newhouse, piano, organ, soprano, alto, baritone saxophone, Bb, bass clarinet; Paul Sears, drums, percussion, saxophone, vocals; Billy Swan, guitar, bass, vocals, tenor saxophone; Fred Frith, prepared piano, guitar, violin; Dave Golub, clarinet, voice; George Daoust, voice.

★ ★ ★ ½

MATERIAL

MEMORY SERVES—Elektra Musician E1-600042: *MEMORY SERVES; DISAPPEARING; UPRIVER; METAL TEST; CONFORM TO THE RHYTHM; UNAUTHORIZED; SQUARE DANCE; SILENT LAND.*

Personnel: Bill Laswell, bass; Michael Beinhorn, synthesizers, tapes, radio, guitar, drums, voice; Sonny Sharrock, guitar; Fred Frith, guitar, violin, xylophone; Henry Threadgill, alto saxophone; George Lewis, trombone; Olu Dara, cornet; Billy Bang, violin; Charles K. Noyes, drums, percussion, bells; Fred Maher, drums, percussion, guitar.

★ ★ ★ ★

CURLEW

CURLEW—Landslide Records LD-1004:
PANTHER BURN; THE BEAR; BITTER THUMBS; THE VICTIM; THE HARDWOOD; SPORTS; BRUNO; BUT GET IT; RUDDERS; BINOCULARS; THE OLE MISS SONG.

Personnel: Bill Bacon, drums, percussion, gamelan; George Cartwright, alto, tenor, soprano saxophone, flute; Tom Cora, cello, indingiti; Bill Laswell, bass; Nicky Skopelitis, guitar.

★ ★ ½

It's a hip cliché these days to lament the '70s as an empty decade devoid of cultural value or musical interest. It appears that many people were content to sleepwalk through those years bemoaning the state of rock, distressed by disco, and kicked in the ass by punk/new wave. But many musicians in jazz, rock's avant garde, and so-called "new music" were continuing with the adventurous spirit that so many think was intrinsic to the late '60s only. They made music that was challenging, innovative, insightful, and that still holds up over the years. Now the generation that grew up listening to this music is ready to make their own statements, and rather than turning their backs on the past as the new wave has done, they are taking the '70s artists into the '80s with them musically and physically. In fact, in New York there is a whole scene being spawned around this occurrence that is evidenced by the incestuous



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nature of many of the musicians. All of the albums here share some personnel with the dominant links being bassist Bill Laswell and guitarist Fred Frith.

Frith is one of those '70s creative artists who came from the iconoclastic group Henry Cow, a band that wedded the more jagged sensibilities of Bartok with Ornette Coleman, swathed in complex electric rock structures and free improvisation. *Speechless* is his most recent solo outing and is divided by the personnel on two sides: one featuring the French anarchistic group Etron Fou LeLouban and the other with a host of New York players including Laswell, Fred Maher, and George Cartwright, who all may be members of Material, Curlew, or the Dance depending on which day you catch them.

Like his previous record, *Gravity* (Ralph Records 8057), this is a seamless travelog through electrified ethnic music. There's nothing overt here; the hint of a Greek dance, a Middle Eastern dervish, and street sounds from New York that sound like they could just as well be from Delhi. Live tracks are altered and merged with studio recordings which are then re-altered with creative tape editing into expansive collages of songs within songs. It's sometimes difficult to tell whether you're going forwards or backwards, but you know you're there. Frith can create an intensity akin to Hendrix without ever playing a conventional lick.

Frith also plays and produces the Muffins' record with what he calls "anti-jazz production." Perhaps this is Frith's way of diffusing any fusion tag that might be placed on *185*. The band's doubling horn lines call the World Saxophone Quartet to mind, and there is a ferocious electricity here tied to a demonic rhythm section that never holds on to a time signature for long. Riffing horns downshift two gears, then jump into overdrive creating a blur of overtones around them. *These Castle Children* punctures a tortured Frith guitar solo with precision horn charts.

Material is centered around bassist Bill Laswell and synthesist Michael Beinhorn with several satellite members. In terms of drawing several disparate elements together into a new and unified expression, *Memory Serves* is the most successful LP here. With Frith and Sonny Sharrock on guitars and a host of jazz' finest improvisers, this album roars with an electrical kineticism. Punk-jazz, jazz-funk, and the new fusion have all been coined to describe this music, though it goes well beyond those monikers. Material takes the rhythms of Miles Davis from his electric period and fattens them up with the aggression of the new wave. Add to this Laswell's growling bass tones and you have the core of Material's sound. Michael Beinhorn is a non-keyboard-oriented electronic musician who uses his synthesizers to form an ambience of thick textures and cross-cut rhythms, and uses found sounds and tape manipulations to further bend time and content. He provides the corners and alleyways that the soloists must contend with. On *Square Dance* the horns leap through his rhythmic counterpoints of staccato synthesizer and tape loops with Frith's careening guitar. *Disappearing* contains an Olu Dara cornet solo that is ice cold in its intensity of subtly blown overtones skirting the edges of Beinhorn's electronic drone. In fact, the guest soloists seem to have a ball filling in the spaces left by Material's textures. Only

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Five Years Later ECM 1-1207

☼ The title (*Five Years Later*) of the new ECM recording from guitarists John Abercrombie and Ralph Towner refers to the number of years since their first (and only) collaboration, *Sargasso Sea*. A wait worthwhile, for, as Bob Palmer wrote in the *New York Times*, "... something special happens when they play together."

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Threadgill seems a bit restricted by the insistent rhythms of *Unauthorized*, as he gets stuck riffing where the piece cries for someone to fly.

Bill Laswell has learned the lesson of fusion bassists and has forsaken their treble-mongering techniques for an earthy, cavernous style. With the band Curlew he steps up front more with his technique, however, because it's needed here. Curlew is the least studio-oriented recording here, and perhaps suffers by comparison with its less busy sound. Curlew is more of a jam band using simple heads reminiscent of Ornette to launch solos. Drummer Bacon's rhythms form a fluid pulse that pushes the main soloists—saxophonist Cartwright and guitarist Skopelitis—but they seem reluctant to move at times. Skopelitis never merges his sound with the more acoustic Cartwright and cellist Tom Cora, while Cartwright runs out of ideas a little too quickly on longer tracks like *Panther Burn*. But there is a spontaneity and directness to this music that gives it a raw appeal.

These artists clearly represent the endless possibilities of the '80s. The only way anyone could sleep through these musical developments is if they were catatonic.

—john diliberto

DOLO COKER

ALL ALONE—Xanadu 178: *REFLECTIONS; SINE AND COSINE; JUST YOU; CABIN IN THE SKY; ALL ALONE; THE THINGS YOU NEVER SAID; SPECTRUM; TRY A LITTLE TENDERNESS.*

Personnel: Coker, piano.

★ ★ ★

CEDAR WALTON

PIANO SOLOS—Clean Cuts CC 704: *SUNDAY SUITE IN FOUR MOVEMENTS; 30° TO THE WIND; OVER THE RAINBOW; CLOCKWISE; CEDAR'S BLUES; I'LL LET YOU KNOW.*

Personnel: Walton, piano.

★ ★ ★ ★

Although Dolo Coker has paid dues with such major bop players as Clifford Brown, Philly Joe Jones, Sonny Stitt, and Dexter Gordon, judging from this, his first solo album, his stylistic roots run deeper through the soil of jazz piano, passing through Teddy Wilson's urbane, balanced swing bass designs and even drawing nourishment from Fats Waller's stride patterns. And, like Wilson, Coker is a consummate gentleman pianist. *Cabin In The Sky*, for example, well expresses his poised, genteel posture. Thoughtful bass lines, careful inner voice leading, and gliding swing bass patterns all point up Coker's ingrained sense of keyboard decorum.

Coker's main aesthetic strategy, as on the extemporaneous *Just You*, is to balance evenly measured left hand figures against skittery right hand lines whose contours seem drawn from an equal mixture of Tatum and Powell. Coker's *Reflections*, in contrast, features majestic keyboard architecture as

relaxed chordal lines are supported by gliding bass figures.

Two other originals deserve mention. *Sine And Cosine* alternates happy strains of pure stride with ferocious lines rattled off in the spirit of Bud himself. *All Alone*, a slow blues built on a bass melody in bluesy triplets, is a welcome offshoot from Coker's at times overly poised approach.

Oddly, Cedar Walton's *Piano Solos* is his first unaccompanied piano release. It's a reminder of his killer technique, but more than that, of his marvelously clear tone, precise articulation, and sharp sense of space and dynamics.

Walton's magnum opus here is his *Sunday Suite In Four Movements*. Beginning with an infectious, off-center bass pattern, the vamp is punctuated by whip-crackling chords. Elongated, dancing arpeggios give way to haunting harmonic structures suspended darkly over a pedal point, followed by criss-crossing, halting treble designs, all concluding, logically, in a reprise of the *Suite's* opening theme. Some substantial composing and playing indeed.

In fact, Walton's power of invention brightens every track. On *30° To The Wind* light bounces of fluttery chords are peppered with fresh blues phrases. *Clockwise*, a waltz both busy and pensive, is at once serious and flippant. The medium tempo *I'll Let You Know* is yet another object lesson in perfectly articulated, self-propelled invention.

Most impressively, Walton's considerable technique never distracts from his substance. His playing, free from mannerism, is a telling reminder that the best style just may be no style at all.

—jon balleras

ROSS TRAUT

ROSS TRAUT—Headfirst Records

HF9709: *C'MON UP; WHISPER; GO FOR IT; 213; TONAL AREAS; BIRD ROAD; A THOUSAND HEARTS; TROUT STREAM; SOLITARY WARRIOR; GREEN SNEAKERS.*

Personnel: Trout, guitar; Cliff Carter, keyboards; Larry Ball (cuts 1, 2), Steve Rodby (3, 4, 6-9), Mark Egan (5), electric bass; Kenny Crutchfield (1, 2), Wayne Stewart (3, 4, 6, 9, 10), Danny Gottlieb (5, 8), drums; Myra Casales (4, 6, 9), Raphael Cruz (5), percussion; Gip Noble, piano (2).

★ ★ ★ ½

VAN MANAKAS

LOVE SONGS—Rounder Records 3063:

EMBERS OF EMOTION; A LION IN LOVE; JOVANA; MAGNETIC NORTH; BA SAFAH; REFUGEE; OPEN "E".

Personnel: Manakas, guitars; Mario Parent, piano; Mike Richmond, bass; Bob Moses, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Young guitarists Traut and Manakas display fine melodic sense and wide-ranging technique on these two releases. While they offer little to be alarmed or startled about, both of these records are homogenous musical statements, and should please those sectors of the contemporary jazz market at which they are aimed.

Traut is honing his sword for album-oriented rock radio, and Larry Carlton or Lee Ritenour would probably be delighted to have his material. The opening *C'mon Up* has a southern boogie touch, boasting a pleasant pop-jazz hook and a clear, fluid solo from the guitarist. As a matter of fact, almost all of Traut's tunes have instrumental hooks that are easily hummable. One of this album's faults is its predictability—play the head twice, then a guitar solo, maybe a keyboard solo, back to the head, and let's keep all the songs at around four minutes. But if the performances are predictable, they're predictably good. Traut gives especially good reading to Cliff Carter's *213*, a tune that merges a disarming blues melody and a funky groove. *Solitary Warrior*, also Carter's, makes use of Hendrix-like distortion and a Far East guitar sound to churn out the record's hardest rock.

Traut was a schoolmate of Pat Metheny's at the U. of Miami, and displays a guitar tone and compositional bent remarkably like Metheny's on several cuts here. Metheny drummer Danny Gottlieb makes his presence felt on two of those tunes, joined by bassists Steve Rodby and Mark Egan. Gottlieb is light-handed as usual, but packs a lot of punch, as shown at the end of side one.

Traut plays it pretty much by the rules with his effect devices. He bathes his guitar in reverb on the ECMish settings, adopts a biting blues tone in the tightly arranged funk, and finds a metallic edge for the heavy rock attempts. As a leader he is confident, and always commands the forefront. Traut has obviously listened to a lot of music. And as he grows (he's nearing his mid-20s) and continues to disseminate it all, we should hear a lot more from him in many areas of jazz and rock.

Van Manakas' *Love Songs* start cooking with the Mediterranean-flavored *Embers Of Emotion*. Manakas, like Traut, explores many genres of music, and is convincing in all. Manakas' music is quite a bit more understated than Traut's, however, and leaves more room for the improvisation this band loves. There is some Metheny in a couple tunes here as well as moments that remind me of Vince Guaraldi's wonderful music for the *Peanuts* TV specials. Childlike in simplicity, and lovely.

Acoustic pianist Mario Parent is adept at accompanying Manakas, and shows his soloing skill on the swing chorus of *Jovana* with a sharply timed and conceived effort. *Ba Safah* begins and ends in free-form, with Manakas on acoustic guitar, and is filled with optimistic-sounding flourishes. Drummer Moses is at his best in the free sections, and has a tendency to liberate any situation. He is as melodic and polyrhythmic as any drummer, but he plays like no other. He grows on you. Bassist Mike Richmond has the ears and hands to be the perfect foil for Moses. He is equally strong playing an integrated melodic pattern on the acoustic funk tune *Open "E"*, or a two-note ostinato line on the dirge *Refugee*. Each player has a large role in carrying this music, taking it somewhere special. They listen to each other extremely well, and are able to create strong currents, moving waves of emotion. Nowhere is the subtlety and sureness with which Manakas plays more evident than on *Refugee*. His solos never lose a sense of purpose in the face of Moses' bombastic rolls, and his shrill cries end the song powerfully. Manakas passes up

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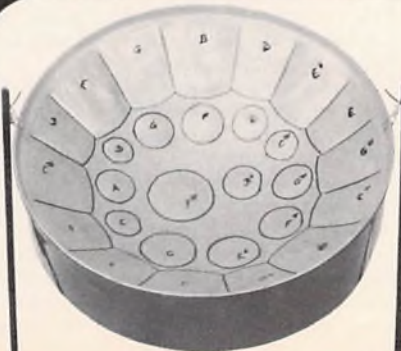
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RECORD REVIEWS

special effects in favor of the barest amplified sound from his guitar. His playing, like this record, is very honest, and unfolds a little more with each listening.

—robin tolleson

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ALRIGHT AGAIN!—Rounder 2028:

FROSTY; STROLLIN' WITH BONES; GIVE ME TIME TO EXPLAIN; BABY TAKE IT EASY; SOMETIMES I SLIP; I FEEL ALRIGHT AGAIN; ALLIGATOR BOOGALOO; DOLLAR GOT THE BLUES; HONEY IN THE BE-BO; GATE WALKS TO BOARD.

Personnel: Brown, vocals, guitar, violin (cut 4); Larry Sieberth, piano; David Fender, Hammond organ, piano; Red Lane, rhythm guitar; Myron Dove, bass; Lloyd Herrman, drums; Bill Samuel, alto, tenor saxophone; Alvin Tyler, tenor saxophone; Joe Sunseri, baritone saxophone; Stanton Davis Jr., trumpet; Jim McMillen, trombone.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ALBERT COLLINS

FROZEN ALIVE!—Alligator 4725:

FROSTY; ANGEL OF MERCY; I GOT THAT FEELING; CALDONIA; THINGS I USED TO DO; GOT A MIND TO TRAVEL; COLD CUTS.

Personnel: Collins, vocals, guitar; Marvin Jackson, guitar; A. C. Reed, tenor saxophone; Allen Batts, organ; Johnny B. Gayden, bass; Casey Jones, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The blues may have been born in the Delta and electrified in Chicago, but many of its greatest artists have come from Texas. The Lone Star State has its own unmistakable blues sound, instantly recognizable in such diverse players as T-Bone Walker, Buddy Tate, Charlie Christian, Arnett Cobb, and the Fabulous Thunderbirds.

Both Clarence Gatemouth Brown and Albert Collins are masters of Texas blues. Gatemouth was actually born in Louisiana, but he grew up in Texas, where he absorbed the sound of T-Bone Walker's guitar at an early age. Following the trail blazed by T-Bone, Brown had a string of classic r&b hits in the 1950s. Albert Collins, eight years younger than Gatemouth, grew up listening to both Walker and Brown. Collins forged his own unique sound, combining the Texas influence with the hard beat and basic sound of the early Chicago bands.

Gatemouth Brown's jazz-inflected style was slipping from popularity when Albert Collins had his first great success with *Frosty*. Raw and exciting, *Frosty* catapulted Collins to guitar-hero status (if not international fame) in the early '60s. Like T-Bone Walker's *Stormy Monday*, *Frosty* captures the essence of the Texas blues sound, so it is not altogether surprising that *Frosty* is the first cut on both these albums. Played back to back, these two versions don't even sound like the same tune. Collins sticks close to the earthy directness of his original single. His band lays down a powerful groove and steps back,

giving Albert plenty of room to develop his stinging, percussive guitar solo. This is straight, no-frills blues, played by a small electric band. Gatemouth Brown takes a much different approach. His version sets his piquant, fluid guitar against a swinging big band backdrop. Gatemouth's guitar carries on an exciting dialog with the riffing horns, and he even drops in a couple of idiosyncratic vocal verses.

Each *Frosty* sets the tone for the album that follows. *Frozen Alive!*, recorded live in March 1981, captures the raw energy of a performance by Albert Collins & the Icebreakers. The material sticks close to basic blues except for *Cold Cuts*, which showcases the popping funk bass of Johnny B. Gayden. Collins likes his blues basic and straightforward; Gatemouth prefers his a little more complex. His style blends elements of blues, jazz, cajun, and country music into a unique form of big band r&b. At the age of 58, he is as vital and unconventional as he was in the '50s, and *Alright Again!* is probably his finest album ever. The arrangements (by hornmen Samuel, Sunseri, McMillen, and Davis) are clean and well-structured, and there is an air of obvious delight to the whole project. The band really swings, supporting and stimulating Gatemouth's fervent vocals and guitar.

Although both these fine bluesmen had to scratch to survive in the 1970s, they continued to develop and refine their art. That is evident here, and the convincing strength of these two albums is proof of the resilience of the Texas blues tradition.

—jim roberts

WEATHER REPORT

WEATHER REPORT—Columbia FC 37616: *VOLCANO FOR HIRE; CURRENT AFFAIRS; N.Y.C. (PART ONE: 41ST PARALLEL, PART TWO: THE DANCE, PART THREE: CRAZY ABOUT JAZZ); DARA FACTOR ONE; PIPELINE; SPEECHLESS; DARA FACTOR TWO.*

Personnel: Zawinul, synthesizers, electric keyboards, piano, clay drum, drum computer, percussion; Wayne Shorter, tenor, soprano saxophone; Jaco Pastorius, bass guitar, percussion, voice; Peter Erskine, drums, drum computer, claves; Robert Thomas Jr., percussion.

★ ★ ★ ½

With this 11th album from Weather Report, a question arises: is it fair to compare it, say, to their first, totally revolutionary recording? Or even to pit this new one against *Black Market* or *8:30*? It must surely be kept in mind that at the group's inception the music they were offering turned the jazz world around. Now, more than a decade later, Weather Report is no longer unique.

Recognizing that they have already made their major impact and have no need to keep proving and re-proving themselves, the listener might do well to accept *Weather Report* entirely on its own merits. Their consistently high standard of musicianship and composition is maintained. Out of seven tracks, six are written wholly or partially by Josef Zawinul (referred to only as Zawinul in the liner information). Therefore, the general tone of the whole thing is most decidedly

familiar—there's no way anyone could confuse this with any other group utilizing similar instrumentation and format.

Also, much emphasis is placed on the multifarious electronic instruments. (Although it is most delightful to hear Zawinul playing acoustic piano a couple of times; for example, on *Dara Factor One*, there is some sensitive interplay between it and Shorter's soprano.) It is true that the bulk of the work here seems to be handled by Zawinul and Peter Erskine. Jaco Pastorius has one stunning, guitaristic solo on *Speechless*, and Shorter pops in and out with some organic sounds. But for my money, I would have welcomed more Shorter and Pastorius. Their contributions have usually been delicate color changes which, for the most part, are missed in this latest album.

Good, intelligent use is made of the computerized and synthesized accoutrements, as always. In the final analysis, dyed-in-the-wool Weather Report fans will want to add this to their collection. For those just tuning in, they might do well to check out some of the earlier albums—not for comparison purposes, but simply to put the 1982 version in its proper perspective.

—frankie nemko-graham

JOE THOMAS

RAW MEAT—Uptown UP 27.01: *DON'T BLAME ME; EXACTLY LIKE YOU; BODY AND SOUL; HONEY; CHARMAINE; RAW MEAT; MEDLEY (THE LADY IN THE CORNER, TEA FOR TWO).*

Personnel: Thomas, tenor saxophone, vocal (cut 4); Jimmy Rowles, piano, vocals (4, 7); Walter Booker, bass; Akira Tana, drums.

★ ★ ★

EDDIE JOHNSON

INDIAN SUMMER—Nessa N-22: *SELF PORTRAIT (OF THE BEAN); INDIAN SUMMER; THE CHOICE; BLUE STAR; SPLANKY; MISTY THURSDAY; MY BABY JUST CARES FOR ME.*

Personnel: Johnson, tenor saxophone; Paul Serrano, trumpet; John Young, piano; Eddie de Haas, bass; George Hughes, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

HAROLD ASHBY

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Progressive PRO 7040: *CANDY; QUICKIE; THERE IS NO GREATER LOVE; DAINTY; OVER THE RAINBOW; PLEADING; DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES; COUS COUS.*

Personnel: Ashby, tenor saxophone; Don Friedman, piano; George Mraz, bass; Ronnie Bedford, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

Eddie Johnson is a Hawk-billed knife. Harold Ashby is Kansas City silk. Joe Thomas plays "slide" saxophone. You get the picture that they belong in the classic lineage of Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, and, well, Joe Thomas.

Thomas was a principal soloist with the Jimmie Lunceford band from 1933 until the leader's death in 1947. Then he and pianist/arranger Eddie Wilcox took over the band, leading it until 1949. Thomas now lives in Kansas City. His album *Raw Meat* has an

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RECORD REVIEWS

elusive quality, very slippery and pliant. Thomas phrases far behind the beat. Frequently his notes, owing to a swooning attack and a pulpy tone, hover between pitches. There are lots of slow tempos, just right for the engulfing vibrato and sinuous, molded shapes of sound he prefers. But he can cook—searingly on the title cut, gingerly on *Exactly Like You* and *Charmaine*.

Rowles' keyboard accompaniment is cryptic, darkly comic (particularly on his *Lady In The Corner* vocal), and mercurial. He, too, lounges behind the beat. This leaves most of the momentum in the firm hands of Booker Tana is unobtrusive and perhaps a little too far in the background. A couple of interesting sidelights: Thomas' sly vocal on *Honey* (Rowles also sings here) sounds exactly like his tenor style. And, after hearing this record, you might discover where Von Freeman, the fine, elastic-toned Chicago tenor man, came from. Altogether, a nice, clouds-floating-by album.

Eddie Johnson recently retired from service as a computer engineer with the city of Chicago, where he was raised. During the 1940s he worked with the bands of Coleman Hawkins, Cootie Williams, and Louis Jordan. The feeling on his *Indian Summer* album is as if Hawk and trumpeter Howard McGhee were meeting the Miles Davis rhythm section of 1961 (Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers, and Jimmy Cobb). Young, de Haas, and Hughes buoy Johnson's husky, rhapsodic solos. Serrano, a bopper, is laidback for the occasion.

Johnson's tenor swoops and slashes through the changes, bites off phrases, and growls into vibrato-rich held notes. Sometimes, as on the boppish reworking of *My Baby Just Cares For Me*, he momentarily swaps Hawk for Prez, but everywhere he is fun to hear and stimulating to the senses. The tunes are a good mix, ranging from Benny Carter's tender *Blue Star* to the Mingus-out-of-Ellington *Misty Thursday* by Duke Jordan. Young occasionally dives into a swimming-arpeggios, cocktail-piano bag, but when he skips and swirls and dances as he does on *The Choice*, he is fine indeed. Bassist de Haas solos melodically and unhurriedly. Hughes maintains a sturdy pulse and encouraging commentary. Serrano's lean and patient trumpet playing unselfishly highlights the leader's architecture—the album was recorded at his studio, by the way.

Harold Ashby, originally from Kansas City, occupied a tenor chair in the Duke Ellington band from 1968 until 1974. He is descended from Ben Webster, but he has a few surprises of his own. These are a plaintive, exotic upper-register cry, a faster and often gurgling vibrato, and a fussier approach to fast tempos. His ballads revere Webster's weeping, silken, slurring phrasing. Few saxophonists are truly playing Ben these days, and I'm glad there is Ashby—for himself and for the memory of Webster.

The rhythm section is streamlined and the most modern of the three reviewed here. Friedman essays healthy funk, Bill Evansish-chords, flashing bop, and clean expertise. He definitely moves you. Mraz grabs his brand of Scott LaFaro and slugs a lot per gulp. A beautiful walker, too. Bedford swings more

than many better-known drummers. His cymbal shots appear in all the meaningful places. *Pleading*, a slow blues, is an event for tenor preaching. The faster blues, *Quickie* and *Dainty*, illustrate how well the rhythm section clicks. The ballads are full of tenor grace. Cous Cous shows off the band's agility.

The ratings are debatable. Thomas' is for his originality. Johnson's is for group integrity. Ashby scores with his sensuousness, intelligence, and swing. Also, thanks to the liner note writers—Robert Sunenblick, Neil Tesser, and Gus Matzorkis—for the vital facts and more.

—owen cordle

CHARLIE MORROW/ GREG VELEZ

HORIZONTAL VERTICAL BAND/
DIRECT TO DISC—Other Media 5681:
SIDE A; SIDE B.

Personnel: Morrow, ek tara, C trumpet, Mexican ocarinas, bells, whistle, jews harp, chanting voice, megaphone, feet; Velez, bodhran, kanjira, pandeiro, bell, jews harp.

★ ★

DAVID MOSS

TERRAIN—Cornpride 007: TERRAIN 1-7;
PHRASE; TALK; TONGUE; NICHE.

Personnel: Moss, voice, drums, cymbals, gongs, triangles, bells, bicycle horns, flexitones, temple blocks, steel drums, pot covers, plastic, pods, whoopers, ratchets, metal pieces, corrugahorn, Chinese zither, hammer dulcimer, singing tubes, timpani, koriko, rocks, water, wood, toys, Bertola sound sculptures.

★ ★

TOSHINORI KONDO/ PAUL LOVENS

THE LAST SUPPER—Po Torch PTR/JWD
9: THE LAST SUPPER.

Personnel: Kondo, trumpet, mutes; Lovens, drums, cymbals, percussion, sither, Säge.

★ ★ ★

For some, the difference between music and sound art merely comprises a semantical issue; for others, there are distinctions as to forum, intent and purpose, process, result, and evaluation. To oversimplify, sound art is the output of artists working with sound, musicians incorporating verbal and conceptual art, and various combinations thereof. Whether the criteria for successful sound art will become as hotly contested as the criteria for good music has yet to be seen; but sound art continues to provoke discussion in art and music circles alike.

These three recordings present well-versed percussionists in settings that graph gray areas between music and sound art. The two performances by Charlie Morrow and Greg Velez are conceptually hinged to a post-modern sense of primitive ritual. The real-time and overdubbed solos of David Moss

fuse form and content. Though *The Last Supper* can be construed as having an episodic structure, it is subsumed by the improvisational abilities of Paul Lovens and Toshinori Kondo. Sensibilities aside, each percussionist displays a working familiarity with the additive principles of non-Western music, and a penchant to advance musical materials through the shifting of instrumental colors.

As director of New York's New Wilderness Foundation, Charlie Morrow's activities have merited close attention in *Artnews'* recent survey of sound art. His collaboration with Greg Velez, a member of composer Steve Reich's ensemble, centers about self-styled rites that employ chanting, dancing, and a wide array of ethnic instruments. While Morrow is a versatile performer and Velez is an able percussionist, their work takes too few dramatic and virtuosic risks, resulting in an earthy, ambient music of minimal emotional impact. In avoiding shamanistic bombast, Morrow and Velez have invoked somewhat somnolent spirits to speak through the ebb and flow of annunciatory statements, modulating pulses, and almost-pregnant silences. Perhaps more so than usual, the visual and participatory elements of live performances are critically missing, leaving one the impression that to reinforce the communion inherent in ritual, Morrow and Velez may find video tape to be the best medium to document their work.

David Moss has performed with leading members of the avant garde of several disciplines, ranging from trumpeter Bill Dixon to dancer/choreographer Kenneth King. A strongly rudimented percussionist and a limber vocalist, Moss' live performances and overdubbed assemblages are multi-tiered works that inundate the ear with information. The pieces included on *Terrain* either have a discernable point of departure, as with the syncopated kernel of *Phrase*, or take shape and gain momentum in unforeseen ways, as is the case with the vocalless investigations of timbre and dynamics peppered through the *Terrain* series. Though Moss can generate interesting percussion collages, his approach to vocalese is nerve-racking, which the overdubbing compounds. In consort with equally provocative choreography or visuals, *Terrain* would be an integral part of an engrossing event; on its own, it fails to transcend its novelty.

The tart asymmetries of Paul Lovens' percussion has been an essential ingredient of many pivotal aggregations of the European avant garde, including Globe Unity Orchestra and the Alexander von Schlippenbach Quartet. Stylistically, Lovens builds a fluctuating foundation that is a beguiling mixture of aleatory play and brainy ciphers. His groundswells and vignettes of microscopic detail are time-proven foils that Toshinori Kondo, a relative newcomer, responds to but does not maximize on *The Last Supper*. Kondo's command of the trumpet's mouthpiece, valves, and mutes is evident, but his ideas here tend to be conveyed in monosyllabic spurts. Though newcomers may find more immediate pleasure with Lovens' duet with trombonist Paul Rutherford (Po Torch PTR/JWD 3) or Lovens' encounter with trom-

bonist Gunter Christmann and bassist Maarten Altena (PTR/JWD 7), the strongly spiced courses of *The Last Supper* will satisfy the enthusiast. —bill shoemaker

ALIVE!

CALL IT JAZZ—Redwood Records RR 8484; *WILLING; CALL IT JAZZ; SHOW ME THE WAY; STEP BY STEP; WILD WOMEN DON'T GET THE BLUES; GREETING SONG; LOVING YOU; GOLDEN RIVER DREAM; TOO BAD; HEAVEN IS IN YOUR MIND.*

Personnel: Barbara Borden, drums; Carolyn Brandy, congas, small percussion; Rhiannon, vocals; Janet Small, acoustic, electric piano, vocals; Susanne Vincenza, bass, vocals.

★ ★ ★ ★

When the all-female group Alive! made a recent appearance at a local club, I was not moved to go and see them. I hadn't heard their album yet, and even though good things were being said about them, there was something about that reverse segregation that bothered me (as a woman, but not a militant feminist). However, now that I've listened to this live recording, I could kick myself.

As Duke Ellington eloquently intoned eons ago: "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing," and I'll add that it doesn't matter who's playing it. Alive! is a superb example of five individuals fitting together like a Rubik's cube. And it probably took as long to perfect their puzzle, in terms of refining and refinishing. This is an extremely well-integrated unit; even though it would at first appear to be dominated by singer Rhiannon, it is obvious that her voice more often than not simply represents another instrument.

The voice is remarkably flexible; Rhiannon possesses a great range of emotions as well as technical facility. She can bring an entirely different quality to every song, varying her timbre and intonation. Vocalese is used sporadically and effectively; mostly she delivers well-constructed lyrics. Six of the 10 compositions are by members of Alive! The remaining four are by other singers, notably Mary Watkins and Gil Scott-Heron. Ida Cox' *Wild Women Don't Get The Blues* sounds as if it was a show-stopper at the Great American Music Hall, where this was recorded.

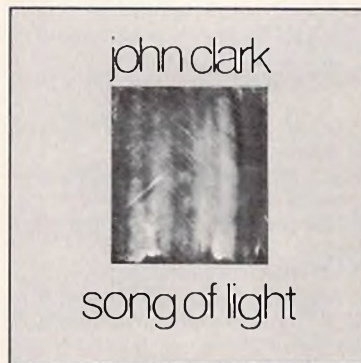
Now and again there is a feeling of the '50s, in that many of the songs are poetry set to music. This is most noticeable on the title track, where Rhiannon displays her unique wordless facility, and Small's acoustic piano is quite boppish. The '50s mood pops up again on *Loving You*, which has a hint of the old Annie Ross classic *Twisted*.

All the instrumentalists deserve credit: Susanne Vincenza, who appears rather small and fragile in a photo on the cover, nevertheless packs a hefty punch on her upright bass. Barbara Borden's expertise at the drums is a force to be reckoned with. Carolyn Brandy, in a couple of latin-tinged numbers, offers strong competition to Brazilians in her handling of the percussion. Another formidable woman is involved: Helen Keane, who guided the career of the late Bill Evans, is the producer. Several of the stars awarded must be shared with her. —frankie nemko-graham

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STU GOLDBERG: *VARIATIONS BY GOLDBERG (Pausa 7095)* ★ ★ ★ ★

ROBERT GRIFFIN: *STRETCH THE STRIKE (Spud)* ★

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JACK REILLY: *TRIBUTES (Carousel CLP 1002)* ★ ★ ★ ★

ANTONELLO SALIS: *ORANGE JUICE/NICE FOOD (hat Hut 1R 10)* ★ ★ ★ ½

FRANK SULLIVAN: *FIRST IMPRESSIONS (Revelation 34)* ★ ★ ½

MIKE TAYLOR: *WHY NOT NOW... (Disques L'Enclume)* ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

ERIC WATSON: *BULL'S BLOOD (Owl 023)* ★ ★ ★

This crop of ivory-ticklers is a diverse and restless lot. If the dozen players represented here are any indication, there seems to be a leaning toward a more muscular school of playing. Stride piano seems to be in vogue—many players sprinkle it throughout their performances—and the jagged, off-beat rhythms of Thelonious Monk seem to have been widely absorbed. On opposite ends of the spectrum, the influences of the lyric romantic Bill Evans, and the percussive firebrand Cecil Taylor, are very evident, sometimes in the most unexpected places. There also seems to be a general trend toward using European classical techniques and modes. Actually, the 12 pianists here (dealt with alphabetically) can't really be categorized at all—they are as eclectic and individual as their remarkable instrument allows.

Rene Bottlang is a Swiss pianist who tends to range from blithe pixieness to wandering self-absorption. He has formidable control, nailed down by a riveting sense of time. His left hand is quite strong (in a decidedly Monkian way), and when he is not keeping time, his implied rhythm is; the music surges rather nicely. At its best, this album is refined and slightly wry—*Le Fossoyeur* (composed by Georges Brassens) features a hurdy-gurdy quality that is enlivened by a stabbing bass and an occasional lightning arpeggio. At its worst, such as on the original *Mon Amour*, things get bogged down in a solemn, dour mood that becomes too self-serious and dense. Still,

Bottlang's encompassing sense of swing remains in the forefront. This is an album whose high spots far outweigh the moments of pianistic driftwood. If Bottlang had crafted some of his pieces into shorter presentations, he would have produced an album of much higher quality; the six lengthy tunes here suffer mostly from having been allowed to continue for too long.

John Coates is something of a cult figure—sort of the sage of Delaware Water Gap. His technical prowess has had folks raving for years—they'd return from the Dear Head Inn, where he holds forth, with all the breathlessness of people who stumble into Smalltown, USA and discover a culinary genius working in a corner bar and grill. The past few years have seen Coates emerge from his Pennsylvania nest to take on the world—he has toured Japan (where this album was recorded) and has even played a gig or two in New York City. Certainly, Omnisound has been releasing his recorded output with regularity. Coates is a consistently pleasing pianist, though rarely a surprising one. He is an intelligent, controlled improviser—his light right hand is countered by a firm, sometimes staid, left. At times he'll toss in some splashes of block chords or some upper-octave frilly patterns but, all in all, this album seems to be lacking much warmth and humor. His original pieces—*Nameless* and *Encouragement* are two—are, for the most part, rather faceless and stilted; his treatment of standards such as *Willow Weep For Me* is somewhat predict-



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able. However, what keeps this album afloat is, simply, Coates' braininess. He never becomes cliched or insipid—he just never really catches fire.

Connie Crothers is a protege of Lennie Tristano whose playing, at times, evokes fleeting glimpses of the master—the long, powerful walking bass and the steam-powered, twisting single-note treble—though she is lacking his inventiveness and his ability to spin compositional magic. At her worst—and this double-album contains a good portion of her worst—she is heavy-handed and mossy with a thudding sense of time. The music displays little direction—there are times when it is little but heavy, dissonant, rather ugly pounding; other times it is elliptical, spare, and meandering. Crothers is at her best when she's doing a Tristano imitation, and when that happens—on *I'm Getting Sentimental Over You*, for example—this album is listenable. Most of the time, though, that is not the case. It should also be pointed out that Crothers sings, and if there is a more grating, out-of-tune version of *You Don't Know What Love Is* on record, I will be shocked and horrified. Crothers seems to mistake physical power—pounding—for emotional power. The most curious thing about this set is that it was recorded live, and each performance is met with, literally, shrieks and howls of delight from the audience. I, too, shrieked and howled, but for decidedly different reasons.

Franco D'Andrea is a prodigious Italian pianist who has also absorbed Lennie Tristano, but has fashioned a highly personal, delightful style. His compositions—there are four here—are built on simple patterns which are stretched and reshaped as they keep returning. D'Andrea can employ a two-fisted, boppish attack, or he can whisper and become gentle, almost teasing, as he does on *Bluesprint*. His enormous technique is kept at bay—he doesn't let it overwhelm his taste. At times, he appears to be rushing himself, like a man whose ideas are coming too quickly for his fingers, but he is a most resourceful and complete solo player. His rhythms rise and dip, and he can easily play different rhythms in the treble and bass; in his *No Idea Of Time* he uses a halting stride pattern that is pure delight. At times the pieces seem to stray but, for the most part, D'Andrea is a pianist worth seeking out. If you do, you'll find an original, totally modern set of solo piano.

Stu Goldberg is another pianist with a breathtaking technique as well as, thankfully, good taste. His is an effective, technically brilliant, classical approach which avoids banality and soupy pretention. The music can be elegiac without being maudlin, and there is an urgency which keeps everything buoyant. When he does unleash his physical abilities—as he does on *Core Of The Apple*—he is capable of chromatic cascades that fairly explode from the keys; on his all-out *Donna Lee* he displays a right hand that has to be the fastest this side of Oscar Peterson. Yet Goldberg retains his musicality and there are no senseless mad gallops. The music seems to flow from him naturally, without sounding contrived. Warning: if bombast is not your cup of tea—bombast in a Rachmaninoffian

sense—you might be less than enchanted with Goldberg's variations. His is a dense style, but there are occasional clearings in the forest. This is a dazzler of an album; though, I must admit, I go in for quirkier, less finely polished talents.

Robert Griffin is a hodge-podge pianist; there's some boogie woogie here (second- or third-rate), a nod to the late Vince Guaraldi (though Guaraldi's enchanting touch and sense-of-humor are missing), a Satie-ish exercise which mixes nervous upper-treble fragments with boogie bits in the bass, and a good deal of rather simplistic noodling. Griffin has a predilection for the upper register, and he likes to pound out rather grandiose chords, but he seems to be hampered by a style that is both unfocused and untrained. He is also hampered by an out-of-tune piano. Boogie woogie is a style that lends itself to fireworks, but Griffin's attempts here are limp and wet; still, they are the best things on the album.

Mike Longo is one of a number of journeyman pianists who have labored for years in the jazz field without breaking any new ground or reaping any substantial reward. Best known for his years with Dizzy Gillespie (before the trumpeter stopped using a pianist), Longo is a pleasant, unmannered pianist with a warm, soulful quality. This live album features lightly swinging, no-nonsense performances of eight jazz standards. He never strays far from the melody, and although one or two tracks are nothing more than just ordinary—'Round *Midnight*, for example—most of the album is entertaining and to the point. Longo's strong suit is a left hand that never flags—it is like the lapping sea. The insistent bass propels things along quite nicely at all points, but is most effective on such out-and-out swingers as *They Can't Take That Away From Me*. All in all, an album for those who like their solo piano without the fancy trimmings.

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Jack Reilly is another pianist who's been out there without attracting much critical attention. It's a pity, because on the evidence of Tributes, Reilly is quite an exceptional talent. Each selection on this LP (save the standard *Someone To Watch Over Me*) is an original dedicated to a musical great in either the jazz (Sims, Konitz, Coltrane, Webster) or classical (Webern, Bernstein, Schönberg, Berg) realm. This, naturally, points up Reilly's treading of the thin line that separates the two musics but, on this album anyway, he is much more firmly entrenched in the jazz end of things. Reilly has a heavy touch—he is a grandiose player who doesn't bash your head around. He is, at times, lilting and cantabile—such as on the Bernstein tribute, *Suffering*—and, at other times, jaunty and operatic. There's a touch of locked-hands block chording, a bit of a thumping single-note bass line, and a lot of big, orchestral passages. The showpiece of the album is the 10-minute, two-part *In Memoriam*/Ben Webster which eschews the gentle, balladeer qualities of the tenor giant and points to the gutsy, hell-bent side that earned him the nickname "Brute." This piece is an absolute romp—there is a definite early '30s feel to it, and several passages recall the great era of Ellington's jungle band. This is a majestic album by a pianist with a sure, firm touch and a hint of whimsy. Unfortunately, there's a somewhat airy, empty sound to the recording

which, while not obscuring the pianist's power, diminishes it just a bit.

If you can make it through the first several minutes of Antonello Salis' *Orange Juice/Nice Food*, you are in for a treat. Perhaps you'd be better off if you just skipped the first few minutes, where the pianist drags a Coca-Cola can across the strings of a perfectly good grand piano. Why are so many pianists taking refuge inside their instruments? However, once Salis puts his Coke can aside, he displays a startling bouillabaisse of different piano styles. If he starts out with a feathery, melodic touch, reminiscent of Keith Jarrett, sit tight—there are some percussive Cecil Taylor forays round the bend, to be followed by the headiest two-fisted stride this side of Jaki Byard. This apparently non-stop performance is a roller-coaster ride—Salis has a fierce technical command of the instrument and, at times, it sounds as if there are two or three sets of hands involved. The music is extremely unpredictable and, at times, one wishes that Salis would focus in on one style for more than a minute or two, but it seems as if he can't help himself. There's never a dull moment—if you don't like the funky rubato bit near the end, perhaps you'll go for the pounding of the piano's frame to follow. One thing that Salis has to be given credit for is a magician's keen sense of tension and surprise. As for the title of the album, there is no explanation. It is par for the course.

I hope I'm not denigrating Frank Sullivan's abilities by saying that the world is filled with Frank Sullivans—that is, pianists who have a light, bebop style and spend their lives in local Holiday Inns. In Sullivan's case it is the Oak Tree Restaurant of the Gainesville, Florida branch of the hotel chain, where this album was recorded. Sullivan's style hearkens back to Wynton Kelly and Red Garland; the bass is used mainly to punctuate gently flowing single-note runs in the treble. Sullivan is a fluid, alive player, but he's not particularly commanding. This is middle-of-the-road "no frills" piano—no Coke cans in the guts, no tours de force, no chances taken. There's nothing bad about the tracks here (mostly standards) except that they're lackluster and perfunctory. I like the pianist more on uptempos; his *Lady Bird* seems to be more highly charged than his ballad performances. This album could also stand the extra lift a rhythm section would have offered. There is nothing distasteful here, just nothing to write home about.

Mike Taylor is somebody to write home about. This is an aggressive album, a rollicking down-home concoction of blues, stride, gospel, and boogie woogie. There is nothing namby-pamby here; this is unaffected, enchanting, out-and-out swing highlighted by a pile-driving left hand. Taylor avoids getting bogged down in his own pyrotechnics—he may be lacking in subtlety, but he's never overblown or corny. An American living in Canada, he displays some of the best blues/jazz solo piano north of Jay McShann. He uses a ferocious march tempo for *I'll Remember April*; thick, block-chording and trilling on *Ain't Misbehavin'*; and pulls out whatever stops are left for the closer, his rip-snorting *Mama's Blues*. Perhaps his rumbling, octaval explosions in *Stella By Starlight* are uncalled for, but it doesn't matter. Taylor is an ideal solo pianist—one never misses the bass or the drums—and *Why Not Now . . .* is a perfectly good question.

Eric Watson is a different story; his style is lean and muscular, and there is something ominous and threatening about this album. He commands attention with fast, staccato bass notes, has an immensely percussive style, and a penchant for thick, dissonant clusters. He can also be haunting and elegiac, as on *Bullet Hole*, which begins with two women discussing a (what else?) bullet hole in a skylight. There is also something overbearing and humorless here, something cold and calculating. The music doesn't particularly swing, and Watson seems to be closer to European classical music than jazz. He goes in for a rather stiff, stentorian style that, after awhile, becomes annoying. This album is best taken in small doses. Some of the titles of the original compositions—*Lop It Off*, *The Knife Against The Wave*, *Bull's Blood*—point very well to the eerie quality of the music they contain. It should be pointed out that about half the selections here were composed for a dance company and, perhaps, that explains the stiff, overly plotted quality of the album. Is it jazz? I don't really know, but I suspect that somebody with an interest in 20th century classical music will be more comfortable with Eric Watson and *Bull's Blood*.

—lee jeske

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Blindfold Test: **GEORGE SHEARING**

BY FRED BOUCHARD

FEW AMERICAN JAZZ LISTENERS from the '50s and '60s can be unfamiliar with the silky, elegant quintet blend of George Shearing's music. During Capitol Records' heyday—even with a stable full of superstars like Nat "King" Cole, Frank Sinatra, and Peggy Lee—Shearing's piano

was a hot property. Even in more commercial outings, the English-born pianist has always shown consummate taste and refined jazz chops, and employed superb sidemen, like guitarists Chuck Wayne and Joe Pass, vibists Cal Tjader and Gary Burton.

Shearing's recent revival has found him touring far and wide, wintering at New York City's Cafe Carlyle, con-

certizing with symphony orchestras, and recording in various settings for Concord Jazz Records. Having vowed never to regroup his quintet ("I spent its last few years on automatic pilot.") Shearing recently succumbed to a tour offer from Frank Sinatra he couldn't refuse. Shearing's done a number of Blindfold Tests over the years, but this is his first in over a decade.



1. GEORGE RUSSELL. CONCERTO FOR BILLY THE KID (from THE JAZZ WORKSHOP, RCA). Russell, composer; Bill Evans, piano.

First of all, I love it. Marvelous. Five stars. Since I'm so busy traveling these days, my listening chops are down, so I've no idea who it is. The pianist is an interesting mix of bop players, with wonderful weaving lines. Who is it?

Really? Bill Evans surprises me a bit, not from the technical standpoint—Bill always had that covered—but because of the mix between the straightahead Tommy Flanagan and the more complex Lennie Tristano. George Russell does not surprise me, because of the complexity of the chart.

2. RAY CHARLES/CLEO LAINE. CRAB MAN, HONEY MAN, STRAWBERRY WOMAN (from PORGY & BESS, RCA). Charles, vocal, celeste, electric piano; Laine, vocal.

I hope you play me something I can criticize. That's Ray, of course. I thought I knew who the girl was... Morgana [King] or Cleo. It is Cleo? That's a marvelous match between those two. Porgy & Bess has been set so many times it'd be difficult to conceive of any fresh presentation, yet here's one. It's completely fresh.

My only adverse comment is that after all their soulful singing, when Cleo says "strawberries" there's not that same conviction in her speaking voice. I miss that deep soul on "straw-ber-ries!" but I miss nothing in the singing and musicianship. Four stars.

3. GARY BURTON. THE RAIN BEFORE IT FALLS (from SEVEN SONGS FOR QUARTET AND CHAMBER ORCHESTRA, ECM). Burton, vibes; Mike Gibbs, composer.

You'd have to listen to that a dozen times before you can absorb it. My first impression was: What's Bags doing playing *Send In The Clowns*? It was those Bags-like grace notes that Cal and Gary have adopted. Is it Gary?

I wonder why people listen for the quintet and *Lullaby Of Birdland* when they listen to me. I guess Gary might wonder why I'd look for straightahead when he's so marvelous at creativity and individuality. For that, give it

three stars. Try to hear the album Gary did for me, the quintet with woodwinds, called *Out Of The Woods*. Here the orchestra is good, but the composition doesn't quite hang together; at least on first listening.

4. HORACE SILVER. NICA'S DREAM (from HORACE-SCOPE, Blue Note). Silver, piano, composer.

Of course, that's Horace Silver's *Nica's Dream*. Lovely tune, well played. That's Horace's group, but I don't know who's in it. Horace is always so well-disciplined and organized. Five stars. With the quintet I recorded lots of his tunes: *Room 608*, *The Outlaw*, *Senor Blues*.

5. TAL FARLOW. YESTERDAYS (from TAL, Verve). Farlow, guitar; Eddie Costa, piano; Vinnie Burke, bass.

Was that Chuck Wayne? It's all too frantic for my taste, a very uncomfortable feeling. The bassist was nice and clean, and the pianist had control. I don't like that tune at that tempo; in fact, I don't like that tempo unless it's played very lightly. I believe that to get the most relaxed effect, one cannot play fast and loud, but fast or loud. Two stars.

6. MEADE LUX LEWIS. MADAME VOD'S CELESTE BLUES (from THE PIANO BLUES ARTISTRY OF MEADE LUX LEWIS, Riverside). Lewis, celeste.

While the gas lasts, it's great. After a time some of the inventiveness and real blues feel fades, primarily because there's no relief from the limited tone color. Pity it's so long. Four stars. Who is it?

I almost said Meade Lux Lewis. I love him and know he did a lot on celeste, but I've never heard him be that inventive. 1961! What I know of him dates from the '30s, like *Honky Tonk Train* and *Yancey Special*, which have a few phrases constantly repeated. He was really playing here!

7. FRED ASTAIRE. CHANGE PARTNERS (from THE FRED ASTAIRE STORY, DRG). Astaire, vocal; Oscar Peterson, piano.

That was Fred Astaire. Fred has introduced

more great songs and gentlemanliness than anybody. It's not jazz; it is class. I know Oscar Peterson did an album with Fred, but I don't think this is it. It's too slow for this song; there's too much space between phrases. Three stars.

8. JAMES WILLIAMS. I HEAR A RHAPSODY (from IMAGES, Concord). Williams, piano; Bill Pierce, tenor saxophone.

I'm probably getting old, but I have to say two stars because it doesn't make me feel happy. There's no smile in the tenor's sound. The rubato in the piano introduction signifies that we were going to establish this firstly, if not primarily, as a ballad, but there was too much tittling and repetition, and the melody—one I love—was all but obliterated. George Bernard Shaw said we're always down on what we're not up on. Maybe there's something here I'm not up on. I say, if you're going to play a ballad, play a ballad; if you're going to play jazz, play jazz.

9. MEREDITH d'AMBROSIO. LAZY AFTERNOON (from ANOTHER TIME, Shiah). d'Ambrosio, piano, vocal.

Is that June Christy? That little fast vibrato at the end of her long notes makes me believe it was Christy backed by a very fine accompanist. Chris Connor, then, as a June Christy copier? No? Well, that laidback personality reminds me of Anita O'Day. No? How about Shirley Horn? Jeri Southern?

That's wonderful! If that vibrato went, she'd sound nearly totally original. She's obviously not the world's greatest salesman, but that's not at all what she's aiming at. For her taste and presentation, five stars.

10. MARIAN MCPARTLAND. STEPPLECHASE (from AT THE LONDON HOUSE, Argo). McPartland, piano.

That's Marian, isn't it? Something in the phrasing gave it away. Let's give this baby four stars. She plays very well, especially for a British woman. Ha-ha! That's early, for Marian has really stretched out and deepened considerably. She has more spirit and inventiveness now, and gets better every time I hear her. **db**

Profile:

Adrian Belew

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

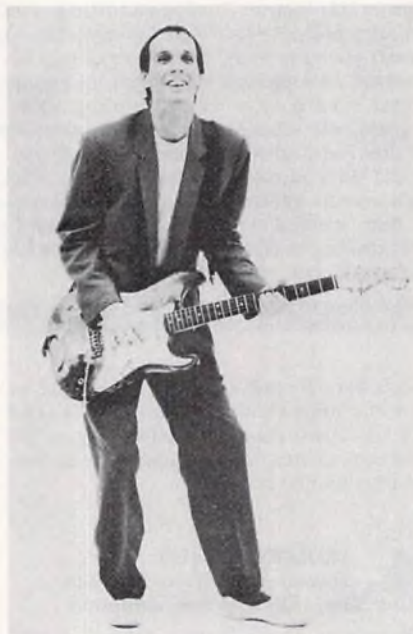
Question: What do Herbie Hancock, Frank Zappa, Talking Heads, Tom Tom Club, King Crimson, and Yellow Magic Orchestra have in common?

Answer: Adrian Belew.

Within the past two years this lanky guitarist from Cincinnati has popped up on more albums than some of the most ubiquitous sessionmen in the business. It seems that everybody wants that sound, those unearthly roars and untamed wails that have become Belew's trademark. In fact, he has a whole array of uncanny "animal noises" that he achieves on his Fender Stratocaster by manipulating the volume knob with the help of an MXR compressor, a flanger, a fuzztone, and a slide. And what's more, Belew does things to his guitar that would make an instrument maker wince. Besides laying on the tremolo bar like a sadist, he has devised a means of getting another kind of vibrato/feedback effect by literally bending the wooden neck of his instrument. It's an odd sight, watching this inspired original grab the head with his left hand and force that neck to bend until you think it might snap right off. But Belew's got it all under control. His eccentric guitar mutation is really more of a science with him than just mere hijinks onstage. By completely re-thinking the basic principles of the guitar, Belew has meticulously evolved a style of playing that is virtually impossible to copy. And that's why he's such a hot property these days.

As he said, "I had learned all the Jeff Beck licks and all the traditional great guitar licks of the '60s. But mid-way through the '70s I began feeling that I wanted to develop my own voice on guitar, so the first thing I had to do was eschew all those old habits and stop getting the same sounds as other guitarists. So I stopped playing guitar altogether for two years and started playing drums in Holiday Inn bands." A more unlikely way to develop a new guitar style seems impossible, but his time away from all the rote blues riffs allowed Belew to listen to sounds and get new inspirations.

"Playing drums was fun; I could play any kind of music and it didn't hurt my psyche. So when I came back to guitar in the middle '70s, I bought a Strat and started working on changing all my old



MASANOSHI SUKITA

habits, trying to find new ways of doing things. I was intent on trying to get sounds that I didn't think you could get out of the guitar—mostly sirens, car horns, animal noises, and other sounds I heard in the air."

He began incorporating the "elephant guitar" (which can be heard on *Elephant Talk* on King Crimson's *Discipline* [Warner Bros. 3629] or on Tom Tom Club's *L' Elephant*) and the "rhinoceros guitar" (which charges through a few tunes on Belew's debut solo album on Island Records, *Lone Rhino*, ILPS 9675) into the act while still playing in cover bands around Midwestern venues. He began experimenting with backwards tapes around 1975, trying to recreate that effect live onstage. "By 1977 I really felt like I was making some ground," he said. "I was doing a few things that I hadn't heard other people do. And that's it. All you need is that kind of momentum... start knowing that you're doing something there that belongs to you more than anyone else."

Around this time Belew was playing in a Nashville-based group called *Sweetheart*, which is when Frank Zappa stepped into the picture. Belew auditioned and later joined the Zappa group for his *Sheik Yerbouti* tour, also performing on the album (Zappa Records 1501). But his role with Zappa was quite different than what he would eventually grow into. "I was the only musician in his band who didn't read. I learned everything by rote and consequently ended up doing a lot of the theatrical things in the band... costume

changes and things like that. Musically, I just had to work a lot extra with Frank. We would rehearse all week, then on weekends I would go up and spend a lot of time at his house. We'd work very closely on things that I might not understand or things that might be coming up next, and he would make cassette tapes for me or play music for me that he thought I should know about."

After recording *Sheik Yerbouti* and finishing up a European tour, Belew was offered a job with David Bowie, which he jumped at. His role would change drastically in this band. "It was the first time ever in my life that I wasn't a singer and guitarist, I was just the guitarist. And that was the emphasis, for me to be a lead guitarist. My role with Bowie then was very different than with Zappa. I was doing a lot of soloing and lots of sound effects, whereas in Frank's band I played rhythm guitar and did a lot of singing and visual things."

After recording the *Lodger* album with Bowie, Belew returned to Illinois to be with his wife and two children. "I just kind of sat around there for a while, waiting for David to call. But he never did, so I started working in the studio with Christy Bley, Rich Denhart, and Bill Janson [who all appear on Belew's debut album]. We eventually formed a band called *Gaga* and went out on the road for about a year. We had no drummer; I put all the drums on tape in the studio, and we would play live to taped drums. It was interesting and really worked very well. I had been pretty skeptical about it, but it did work very well."

The group started opening for Robert Fripp's *League of Gentlemen*. "We came to New York and opened for them on two dates, and that's when David Byrne and Jerry Harrison from the Talking Heads came by and asked me to play on their album being produced by Brian Eno, *Remain in Light* [Sire 6095]. So I stayed an extra day in New York and recorded the album, then drove 20 hours back to Illinois."

Not long after that, the Talking Heads called him up and invited him on their tour. Again, he jumped at the chance. "It kind of coincided with the *Gaga* band feeling like it had gone as far as it could go. We had been trying for two years to get a record label interested in the songs I was writing, but to no avail." So Belew went out with Talking Heads, which led to Fripp's reforming King Crimson, which led to guest spots on solo LPs by David Byrne (*The Catherine Wheel*, Sire 3645), Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz (*Tom Tom Club*, Sire 3628), Jerry Harrison (*The Red And The Black*, Sire 3631), Herbie Hancock (*Magic Windows*, Columbia 37387)... all leading up to his debut LP, in which he expands on his concept of re-inventing the electric guitar.

"Everything that happened to me was very fortunate, but also very accidental," he said. "I mean, I accidentally got with Zappa and Talking Heads, and all the time my main interest was really my own material, thinking that someone was gonna have to do it and that it was gonna be me."

While in the Bahamas with Tina Weymouth and Chris Frantz, recording the Tom Tom Club LP, Belew met Chris Blackwell, who offered him a chance to record his original material with Island Records. He gathered the people from the old Gaga band and returned to the Bahamas last August to record *Lone Rhino*. There are more projects in the works, including sessions with Joe Cocker and Robert Palmer, not to mention an upcoming album with King Crimson. But for the moment the biggest thing in Belew's rather busy life is his own album.

"I don't think that at this point in my life I want to be in one thing only," he said. "I don't really consider myself a guitarist, I consider myself more than that. I want to be a producer, writer, singer, instrumentalist, whatever . . . maybe even make films some day. I don't believe in limiting myself."

Keep your ears open for Adrian Belew. He's constantly exploring alternative techniques and will no doubt come up with something new that will expand the boundaries of guitar even further than he already has. "I've been working with new tunings," he confides, "which totally changes my whole outlook on the guitar once again and puts me back to square root one. Basically, I tune the high E string down to a C note, so if you play the open strings you have at the very end a B and a C, which is very dissonant. It creates these very unique chords . . . very haunting. I like that sound." db

John Clark

BY LEE JESKE

When John Clark was in college people used "to come by my room in the dormitory and say, 'Wow, look at this guy playing french horn jazz. Ha-ha-ha.' I guess it was kind of a novelty. Now they take it a little more seriously because I can play a little bit. But they still say, 'Wow, that's really interesting. I've never seen a french horn played that way before.'"

It's a good bet that most people haven't seen a french horn played in a jazz context. It's still a miscellaneous instrument, and most people don't realize that it can be played with a flowing elegance that is ideally suited to jazz. That's because, with a few exceptions, most leaders don't actually write for the

instrument—they don't hear it in their conception of what jazz should sound like. And that's because there are so few players out there trying to broaden the instrument's scope. And that's because the thing is so damned hard to play.

John Clark is one of a handful of young, resourceful french horn players (Peter Gordon and Tom Varner are two others) who are out to change things. Sure, there have been other players who have worked on the curved instrument in the jazz realm—Julius Watkins, David Amram, and Gunther Schuller, for example—but their participation has generally been in a role where they have provided accents and only occasional solos. Clark, on the other hand, already has two albums out as a leader and, while the vagaries of the business keep him working mostly in the studios he is, by all means, a jazz french horn player.

Clark was born in Brooklyn in 1944. He grew up in Rochester, New York where, at the age of seven, he took his first piano lessons, which led to his first trumpet lessons in grade school. "I didn't know from the french horn until the fifth grade," he says in his cramped Manhattan apartment. "Of course there were 26 trumpets in the school band and no french horns, tubas, or trombones. So I got a french horn. I also taught myself guitar and bass, because I liked rock & roll—Elvis, Chuck Berry, and all that.

"I didn't start hearing jazz until college. At first I was resistant to it, but I had a roommate who had a stack of jazz records that he played all the time. The one record that first broke through was [trumpeter] Jonah Jones, of all things, because I could really hear what he was doing. Then [snapping his fingers] all of a sudden, I could really hear what was going on in all those jazz records. Then I started listening to Miles and I was listening to Miles all the time."

During his stint at the University of

Rochester, Clark played in various ensembles—school orchestras, lounge acts around town, etc. By this time, he says, "I loved the french horn; I don't know exactly why." After graduation he faced the possibility of being drafted into the armed services. It was Vietnam War time and he didn't relish the thought. So when a friend of his called and said, "They need a french horn here—come down tomorrow," he went down and took the gig—four years with the Coast Guard, playing in the band, of course. "It was a drag," he says, "but it was better than getting killed. And it was very, very easy; we didn't have to hardly do anything."

The Coast Guard provided Clark with the opportunity to play tuba and glockenspiel as well as french horn, take private lessons with a member of the Boston Symphony, and do some writing and arranging. Upon his discharge in 1971, he enrolled in the New England Conservatory with his sights set on eventually joining a symphony orchestra.

"After I was at the Conservatory for a while, doing a lot of chamber music and symphony and stuff like that, I was really exposed to jazz and other musicians and what was happening. And playing a lot—every night playing all-night sessions, and all day long, too. That's when I decided I really didn't want to play classical music at all. I was studying with Gunther Schuller, Ran Blake, Jaki Byard, and George Russell, and the four of them really turned my head around."

Gunther Schuller had been down that road himself—straddling the jazz and classical fields as a french hornist—and Clark looked to him for advice. "I think, probably, he wanted to say something like, 'Don't abandon the classical music,' but he knew just where I was at. He was beautiful, he said, 'Straight ahead.' He knew what it was like and he knew how I felt and he supported me. Ran,



Jaki, George, they all gave me lots of support and encouragement and chances to play, so that made it a lot easier. Then one day, one of my conductor friends said, 'How are you going to make a living at this?' I said, 'I don't know.' I didn't have any idea. In fact, I never thought of it."

After completing a master's program at the NEC and knocking around Boston for another year, Clark came south to New York City with a Boston band that had a six-week club engagement. Shortly after arriving he got a day job playing in a brass band at the Great Adventure amusement park in New Jersey, and settled in Manhattan.

He soon got a call from Gil Evans, one of the few composers who actually write with the french horn in mind. Gil was putting together one of his itinerant big bands, and John gladly signed on; the relationship continues to this day, though Evans only sporadically puts bands together. But Clark calls working with Evans, "My greatest musical experience ever. Unqualified."

Clark started free-lancing around New York—doing Broadway shows and any jazz gig he could get. Eventually, he

began getting more and more studio jobs, which began giving him more and more opportunities to explore jazz. Although the car jingles and pop productions were his bread and butter, John could be found touring with Carla Bley, working with Leroy Jenkins' Mixed Quintet, and doing the odd job as a leader whenever the opportunity afforded itself.

The studio money also allowed him to self-produce his first album, *Song Of Light* (Hidden Meaning Records). A tour of Europe with Carla Bley led to John's signing with ECM, a union which produced his second album, *Faces* (ECM 1-1176). "I was supposed to do another album with ECM, but things are very slow now. The last time I spoke to Manfred [Eicher], he said he couldn't really say when it would be. He said, 'If you do get another really good offer, take it.' But, of course, nobody's really making any great offers."

So Clark continues to work mainly in the studios. He has been heard on albums by Diana Ross, Pink Floyd, Ashford and Simpson, and others. He has been involved with more radio jingles than he cares to remember. Just a few

days before we speak, he was in the studios with Billy Joel. But there are still the jazz projects—currently he is working on a funkier, more electronic approach, utilizing guitarist Ryo Kawasaki. He also co-leads a band, when they can find anybody who'll book them, with tubaist Roy Stewart—a combination that is a little too esoteric for your normal club owner or record executive. He is considering producing his third album himself, an idea that he doesn't relish but will pursue if nobody else will sign him.

If Clark had his way he'd be playing his french horn in clubs and concerts, like a trumpet player or saxophonist of comparable talent. But he plays a miscellaneous instrument and must settle for the miscellaneous gig. Which is why he's in the studios every afternoon and why, on this particular afternoon, he must cut the conversation short. It's time to head uptown and play french horn not for Gil Evans or Carla Bley or Leroy Jenkins, but for the company that tells you, if you've got the time, they've got the beer.

Jazzwise, John Clark's got the time, he's just got a funny axe. **db**

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