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downbeat

The Contemporary Music Magazine

RALPH TOWNER

Acoustic Eclectic

ULTRAVOX

Modern Synth Quartet

OLIVER LAKE

Sax In The Hip Pocket

BOB MOSES

Music's Got To Swing



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Ralph Acoustic Eclectic TOWNER

By Leonard Nowakowski

From the time of his introduction to a wide jazz audience as a member of the Paul Winter Consort, Ralph Towner has grown and evolved musically. Currently a Seattle resident after 13 years in New York, Towner has formed a trio with bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Jerry Granelli, both instructors at Seattle's Cornish Institute of the Allied Arts. Other musical associations include an ongoing duet relationship with guitarist John Abercrombie and a collection of ECM recordings of solo, duet, and group performances. And a group called Oregon.

"When Oregon broke up a couple of years ago, we were out of a record contract, Collin [Walcott] had his first child, and it just seemed a perfect time to cool it after 12 years—and we did, for 14 months, more like a vacation than a split—and then we got back together," said Towner. "By then I had gotten the synthesizer, which added a whole new dimension to the band. Our plan, whatever it was, was to see if the music is still happening and developing. We don't want to push it into a position where it is no longer exciting to play music, where it's not doing anything new.

"We've done two tours in the last year since we've gotten back together. The first was a little tense because we didn't know how well we'd like it; there were a lot of question marks, but it was good. But the second tour was very relaxed, and the music really *did* go to new places."

One of the places Oregon went to in March was Stuttgart, Germany, where, with an ECM deal in-hand, they recorded their first album in over three years. Also they appeared in concert with a chamber ensemble from the Stuttgart Opera Orchestra, performing the music that they wrote for and premiered with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra several years ago. Oregon will return to Europe this summer for a major tour, followed this fall by a stateside one.

The eclectic quartet—Towner (mainly guitars), Collin Walcott (mostly percussion), Glen Moore (basically bass), and Paul McCandless (usually reeds)—deploys a battery of nearly 80 instruments, including one that longtime Oregon fans might not have expected—Towner's Prophet 5 synthesizer, which, he said, "the rest of the group likes because it infuses new life into the music."

The band members combine and interweave the sum total of the musical experiences at their disposal in absorbing sound dialogs. Besides his new synthesizer, Towner plays classical and 12-string guitars, piano, cornet, french horn, and percussion on Oregon's composed pieces. On their collective improvisations, Towner will contribute, as do the others, on any device he can get a sound from. He might use the guitar's body as a bongo drum, or tap with the fingers of both hands on the guitar strings at their harmonics points, producing strange insect sounds. He might also use a matchbook threaded between the strings to achieve a steel drum effect, an idea he got from one of his New York students. In a percussion duel with Collin Walcott's tabla, Towner will use the metal discs of a tambourine as castanets, clapping them together between thumb and forefinger.

It's a good bet, though, that most longtime Oregon fans would

immediately associate the name of Ralph Towner with the guitar. Towner's styles on classical and 12-string guitar are truly unique and can be appreciated fully in a solo concert. Quick, pointed treble runs leap forth between bass-end chords which, when plucked, seem to explode from the instrument, filling the air with booming resonances and reverberations. Accents of crystalline harmonics shine like brilliant facets of a diamond in the sunlight, rushing outward to slow and hang weightlessly, like a stream of wood smoke on a windless fall day.

The guitars are featured on Towner's new multi-track solo release *Blue Sun* (ECM 1-1250), but he said "there's a great amount of variety on the seven songs—an orchestral sound with the synthesizer, a latin thing, some are funkier. . . . I play all my instruments, all the percussion, all three guitars, synthesizer, french horn, cornet. I just got the master yesterday, and I'm totally excited about it; it's really different from all my other albums as a leader—there's a certain advantage to doing it all yourself for the first time. It sounds like a band—it doesn't sound like one person playing all those instruments—but it's very sympathetic somehow, too.

"I altered my plans as I went along. I didn't over-prepare—there were only certain things that I wanted on the album. As the mood would develop in the studio, I'd alter the plan, make something up on the spot. I try to stay very flexible. I've been doing this overdubbing stuff at home for about six years now. In the ECM scheme of things, you have to get everything down pretty much the first time and accept it. *Blue Sun* is mainly first takes with everything. It can be a hindrance except that it ends up being an advantage because it becomes more of a performance situation . . . doesn't get stiff.

"I consciously worked on having the roles changed—not starting by laying down the whole track with the main instrument and then having each other instrument play along with that track in a follow-the-leader fashion—I tried to work for interaction. I played with the overdub as if I was a different player. Sometimes I'd overlap—only play the first instrument to a certain point in the piece, then go back and overdub the second instrument and take the song a little beyond where the first instrument stopped, so the roles change during the course of the piece, so the instruments aren't always following the same track. I think the record came out great. I feel it's very cohesive now."

A musical life often begins with a musical childhood. Ralph Towner's youthful musical interests were aided by his father's trumpet playing, his mother's piano teaching, and a nonrestrictive family environment. Towner, born on March 1, 1940, began playing a trumpet as a child. It had belonged to his father, a machinist who died when Ralph was three. Though he studied trumpet in summer school and later played Glenn Miller and Harry James material in high school dance bands, he began his piano playing "strictly as an improviser. What was difficult for me, and my mother really didn't enforce it, was playing the beginning pieces and learning a technique on piano. I could improvise and imitate George Gershwin tunes, and make naive little imitations of things I had heard on



CHUCK KUHN

records, and they sounded very flashy compared to the beginning piano books. So my talent sort of backfired, in terms of developing a really legitimate piano technique.

"I didn't have the right discipline," Towner continued. "If I had been on the East Coast or in a large city, I would have been tossed into a music academy, and I would have had a standard, strict, academic background. But as it was, I grew up playing Little League baseball, and music was so natural to me that what I was going to do for a living was never even discussed. I was one of five children, and the whole family was always the best on their instruments. It was expected that we'd all be first chairs. I was a musician from birth, and I was treated as a musician. I was never discouraged, and I was allowed to have a great time with music. It was normal to me to be a musician, and I was always a very good artist, so I always drew little campaign posters for school elections and things like that, and then I played sports well enough to be accepted that way. It was just a wonderful childhood. There was never any discouragement."

After graduating from high school, Towner enrolled at the University of Oregon as an art major. "It was a tossup between art and music," Towner recalled, "and the painting definitely lost out after the first three months."

Towner continued college as a composition major, met underclassman and future Oregon mate Glen Moore, and discovered a pianist who proved to be very influential. "I stopped playing brass because I didn't want to be in the marching band in college," Towner said. "I met Glen Moore in my second year of college, in 1959. He was one year behind me. I was starting to mess around with the piano, and Glen played bass, and we got together and started trying to sound like jazz players. Then a real jazz musician came to town and was teaching. He played just like Oscar Peterson, and he played Oscar's records for me. Then he pulled out a Bill Evans record, and I just went through the ceiling. After I heard that, I cloned myself after Bill Evans—all I did was pour over that record, *Explorations* [reissued as half of *Spring Leaves*, Milestone M-47034], and then I managed to get *Sunday At The Village Vanguard* [reissued as half of *The Village Vanguard Sessions*, Milestone M-47002], and both had Scott LaFaro on bass. At that point, I didn't really know what I was doing. I was just imitating. So

that really turned it around for me as far as an organization to my piano playing."

The piano would soon have to share Towner's practice time with the guitar, an instrument he picked up almost by accident. He was buying some music paper in a music store when a fast-talking salesman sold him a classical guitar. Towner was 22.

"The guitar just sounded great," Towner said. "I taught myself a little bit, for about four months, and then I wrote a piece for flute and guitar. It was rhythmically very tricky, but I didn't make it too hard on myself. The flute part was devastating."

Towner hadn't had a performing instrument since giving up brass upon entering college. He performed his piece for flute and guitar at a school concert. "After I played the concert, some professor said, 'You ought to study. I know a really great teacher. He's in Vienna.' And I thought, 'Well, that sounds like a good place to go.'" Towner laughed at the memory. "I definitely wanted to study, and it sounded exotic. My being naive was a tremendous blessing for me, because it was totally impractical. I left Eugene, Oregon on a Greyhound bus with \$400. I ran out of money in June the next year in Vienna, and I had to borrow \$150 to get back."

In 1963 Towner studied in Vienna with the teacher the professor had recommended, Karl Scheit. As a teacher, Scheit was "very European, very formal, and very exact," said Towner. "His specialty was doing editions and arrangements of German music and lute music. As a player, he was nervous, and he wouldn't play that well. He was a great teacher. He was very powerful. He would never praise anybody unless he really liked them. You had to be pretty resilient just to take it. But he had a good humor about him. He still comes to my concerts. It's like I'm the hometown hero in Vienna when I come back there." Towner returned to study with Scheit in 1967, after an incomplete attempt at a master's degree in music theory at the University of Oregon.

Towner followed his instincts to New York in 1968. He began to break into the New York jazz scene as a pianist, not a guitarist. "I was always called to get the leftover gigs that Chick Corea would get, or Hal Galper—he was a great help to me. When I got to New York I just met some good piano players, and

whenever they had an extra gig, they'd throw it my way, so I got known as a piano player."

New York was also the setting for Towner to meet with his future Paul Winter Consort and Oregon colleagues. "Glen Moore had moved to New York City a year before I did. Glen and I played the Woodstock Festival with [the late folksinger] Tim Hardin. Later, Glen was still playing gigs with Tim, Warren Bernhardt, and Jeremy Steig. Through that connection he met Collin Walcott, who played folk drums—a hand drummer. So I met Collin, and we played together with Tim and did a recording. Paul Winter heard about me through another friend, and came and heard me play at an East Side singles' bar. The band I had was Miroslav Vitous on bass, and Airtio Moreira on drums, and Jeremy was playing flute. Paul Winter heard me and hired me, but he needed a bassist and drummer. I said, 'Well, I know two people that are perfect,' so he hired Collin and Glen. Paul McCandless had already joined him."

Towner developed his guitar playing and writing skills within the



TOM COPPI

RALPH TOWNER SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

DIARY—ECM 1032
BATIK—ECM 1121
OLD FRIENDS, NEW FRIENDS—ECM 1153
SOLO CONCERT—ECM 1173
BLUE SUN—ECM 1250

with John Abercrombie

SARGASSO SEA—ECM 1080
FIVE YEARS LATER—ECM 1207

with Solstice

SOLSTICE—ECM 1060
SOUND AND SHADOWS—ECM 1095

with Glen Moore

TRIOS/SOLOS—ECM 1025

with Gary Burton

MATCHBOOK—ECM 1056

with Jan Garbarek

DIS—ECM 1093

with Simon and Bard

TEAR IT UP—Flying Fish 262

with Oregon

OUR FIRST RECORD—Vanguard VSD 79432
MUSIC OF ANOTHER PRESENT ERA—Vanguard VSD 79326

DISTANT HILLS—Vanguard VSD 79341
WINTER LIGHT—Vanguard VSD 79350
IN CONCERT—Vanguard VSD 79358
FRIENDS—Vanguard VSD 79370
TOGETHER—Vanguard VSD 79377
VIOLIN—Vanguard VSD 79397
MOON AND MIND—Vanguard VSD 79419
THE ESSENTIAL OREGON—Vanguard VSD 109/10
OUT OF THE WOODS—Elektra 6E-154
ROOTS IN THE SKY—Elektra 6E-224
IN PERFORMANCE—Elektra 9E-304

with Azimuth

DEPART—ECM 1163

with Weather Report

I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC—Columbia PC 31352

Consort. "I was a professional musician by the time I met Paul Winter," he said, "but what happened with the Consort was a format to actually go and perform concerts and tour with a group that was very compatible with my guitar playing. Rather than just playing Brazilian music, I realized I wanted to do something more compatible with Collin's drumming and the oboe and cello, so I started writing again for that band. I was getting a feel for music that sounded fresh, but more compatible with an acoustic classical guitar."

During Towner's early years in New York, a few benevolent engineers would reserve free studio time for him. "Things were wonderful then," he remembered. "Everyone was creative, and everyone was playing with everyone else. Starting at midnight I would get some free studio time, and I'd dream up things, call up friends, and go in and record. I still have some tapes of that, and one of them was Airtio on drums, and the Brecker Brothers, and Glen on bass. Can you imagine getting the Brecker Brothers to play for free?"

It was during this time that Towner became a candidate for one of the most creative ensembles ever to hit jazz or rock. "We were all friends. We were all in it together at that point. That music was just developing, and jam sessions then—this is about 1970—were places where you got together and tried out new music. We didn't go play standards—everybody knew how to do that. In fact, I was a candidate for Weather Report before it existed. I went over and hung out with Wayne Shorter one day, and he loved the instruments, but there was obviously no place for them because they just weren't loud enough. But we had a great time, and then two years later he gave me a call and I did that Weather Report record. In the studio it was more possible to do something like that."

The Weather Report record was their second album, *I Sing The Body Electric*, and the tune was Wayne Shorter's *The Moors*. "We sat in the studio and tried to figure out how to work out this new piece that he had put together, and no one had seen it, and no one knew what to do, really. We tried all sorts of things, like doubling the melody with guitar and sax, and nothing was working. I started noodling around on 12-string, and they got very excited and went right out of the studio. I was just getting into it, so I sat there alone and played on that tune, and did variations on it. Later it was edited down quite a bit by Joe Zawinul, who was very proud of his editing job. Then they came back in, and we played the second segment where everybody plays, and the two sections were grafted together. Everyone was looking for new sounds and new ideas, and the writing was getting very complex. It was a wonderful time."

Towner received his first 12-string, a Guild, from Paul Winter. Over the years he has developed a style on the instrument that is separate and distinct from the music he plays on the six-string classical guitar. He is aware of the 12-string's limitations. "It's not good for rapid, repeated things like chords, because it takes so long to generate them and most of the excitement is to hear it feed on itself. Basically the technique is so different because it isn't as flexible as the classical. The 12-string sounds great when it starts resonating. It's been used to supply a lot of sound to accompany a singer. It's really a folk instrument."

In an interview with Len Lyons, Towner described his improving guitar technique: "Suppose a housefly was buzzing around the room. I felt previously that I had enough control to snatch it out of mid-air. Now, I feel I can catch the housefly, but by moving slowly." Ralph explained the source of this increase in chops. "I think the older you get, the more calm you get, you know? It's not more dexterity, it's mental attitude. The most improvement I've made is from knowing what I want to present as I'm playing, and being able to think ahead, and just having a better perspective. I'm trying to start to practice more too, just plain physical practice, because I've been slipping lately."

"My sense of timing and scope is broadening as I get older. So I hear someone like Gary Burton, who's able to do unbelievable feats because of his concentration and calm. Playing with him is like playing next to the Hoover Dam. As he's putting his stuff together as a soloist, there's no sense of panic in his playing. That panic falls away as you get older."

"It's just that instead of mentally being one note ahead of where you're playing, you're a whole phrase ahead. Pretty soon you're a whole tune ahead. Pretty soon you're a whole concert ahead. The ultimate aim is to play a concert that runs together like one big piece."



ANDY FREEBERG

RALPH TOWNER'S EQUIPMENT

Ralph Towner plays a Ramirez (Spain) classical (nylon-string) guitar and two Guild 12-strings which were custom-made for him with classical-width fingerboards. "I had one built with the classical neck, and that just felt so great. I need two 12-strings because I use different tunings. While I was there picking the first one up, I noticed Guild had a cutaway model, and I thought it would be nice to have a 12-string to keep in concert tuning. I saw this cutaway they had, a model that they only made in mahogany. I said, 'Can you make me one of those with the classical neck and with rosewood sides and back rather than mahogany? They built that, and it just came out magnificent. They're really special guitars, but they'd be useless for a lot of players. The broad neck would just foul too many people up."

"The cutaway is tuned normally, and the other 12-string is tuned to a minor seventh chord. Just tune your guitar to a minor seventh chord with all the intervals, and you have it. The four inside pairs are tuned to different notes, while the two outside pairs are tuned octave and unison."

In the studio Towner occasionally adds a second classical guitar—an Oribe, built by Jose Oribe of Los Angeles—to his others. He also "seems to have a lifetime supply of Guild strings." On the road the only electronic equipment he carries, in terms of his guitar sound, is a Beyer Dynamic M-160 double-ribbon mic, which he is quite happy with because "it has a very uniform response that's good for the acoustic guitar; it keeps the highs

down so they don't curl your hair."

Lately he has added a Prophet 5 synthesizer to both his live and studio work. "The synthesizer is really a great instrument; it's so personal when you find your own programs; it infuses some new life into the music."

As for brass, he says he "found a nice, unusual little Yamaha cornet that I like; I also have a Couesnon [France] flugelhorn, but I've found that the cornet sort of covers it [what I want to play]. I have an old King french horn that I picked up in a pawn shop about 10 years ago. It's a double horn. A french horn player gave me, I think, a Giardinelli mouthpiece. I had Randall Ulmer [NYC] overhaul the french horn; he put a screw bell on it so I can take it apart so it fits in a special briefcase-sized case for touring. I only use the brass with Oregon, or for overdubs in the studio. Hey, I'm no Wynton Marsalis!"

As for percussion, don't ask. "I carry an assortment of little things from all over that I've picked up over the years—finger cymbals, some plastic hammers from Barcelona [Spain] I got in the street. . . ."

And for his multi-track home recordings? "I've been working on a four-track TEAC machine for about six years. But now I have an eight-track machine by Fostex [the new Fostex A8-LR, eight-channel, multi-track, reel-to-reel, 1/4-inch tape recorder/reproducer] that's nice. I don't have to do much bumping."

Guitar practice for Towner consists of improving weak spots. "I'm always inventing new exercises for whatever ails me. If certain fingers are weak or not functioning, I'll concentrate on those. A regimen would be good, if I had a series of exercises that I'd force myself to go through every day. I hope I can get back to that."

One of Towner's major musical associations has been his ongoing duet relationship with guitarist John Abercrombie. "We came up with the idea to get together in a duo. We had been playing together for a few years before that, doing those loft group things. Oddly enough, I was playing piano and electric piano. It's odd that we had never thought of playing guitar duets together, because we had known each other for several years. There was just a musical compatibility, regardless of what instruments we were playing."

Towner offered some ideas about the reasons behind their compatibility. "We have a similar background, although nobody seems to realize that I have this background in bars and clubs. My role with John is more like that of a keyboard player—that's the way I play the guitar, and that's why it works. Actually, you could compare it more with the Jim Hall and Bill Evans duets, although the music's totally different. I serve as a keyboard and bass player, plus John's a good accompanist also, so we can flip-flop.

"We're just really in accord with each other, as much as two musicians could be. In all these years we've been playing together, there's been no conflict whatever in terms of who's gonna outdo who. We're so far beyond that, we've never had that problem."

Towner seems to enjoy improvisation because of the element of uncertainty. It also keeps things fresh for him and the bands he plays in. "The major interest to the groups that I play with is that we do make things up on the spot. All these little tunes come from these little moments when there's no specific thing to be played, and you'll develop a new thread. Some of them develop into the full-fledged stature of a written piece, where you play the head and then you improvise on them."

Does Towner view improvisation as a risk? "The riskiest business for me would be to be involved in a group that had a set show. It's not a risk if you're not trying to get the ultimate boffo show together. There's a satisfaction to hearing a group that's so prepared that everything works to a 'T.' I think the risk would be to play the same program for so long that your band would break up because they'd get so drug playing the exact same material all the time. Our whole reputation is made on the idea that it's an event where we're literally making something up."

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This Ultravox interview is taken from a segment of *Totally Wired: Artists In Electronic Sound*, a 26-part radio documentary examining the artistic development of electronic music through interviews with the artists. The series is produced by John Diliberto and Kimberly Haas and will be distributed to non-commercial radio stations nationwide this year. *Totally Wired* is funded by grants from Sequential Circuits Inc., Yamaha International Corp., the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

by John Diliberto

Ultravox

As recently as six years ago, the idea of an all-electronic band that could rock out with ferocity and incisiveness was laughable. Synthesizers were appropriate for the spatial excursions of Tangerine Dream, the robotic rhythms of Kraftwerk, and even the pitch-bending solos of Jan Hammer and Keith Emerson. But for punch, drive, and immediacy it was good old drums/bass/guitar, a time-honored tradition for nearly 30 years.

No one's laughing anymore. The electric guitar isn't a relic, yet, but its heroic status is being usurped by the youthful adolescence of the synthesizer. Pop, rock, and even fusion are embracing the new electronic instruments—not as a novelty, but as their future. The record charts are controlled by synthi-pop bands like Berlin, Gary Numan, the Human League, A Flock of Seagulls, and even that inveterate rocker, Neil Young. Synthesizers have oscillated artists like Herbie Hancock from jazz into funk, while Pat Metheny uses a Synclavier guitar synthesizer, and Al DiMeola's forthcoming album laces his guitar into Jan Hammer's all-electronic web. However, six years ago, rock's love affair with high-technology was short-circuited by a back-to-the-roots movement.

The punk explosion of 1976-77 was a time of conflict for many musicians. While the Sex Pistols screamed "Anarchy" and the Ramones sang head-banging anthems to pinheads, standards of creativity were being shaken and new precepts had to be devised. Just as the jazz establishment had to reassess its values in the 1960s to encompass the exploratory genius of Albert Ayler and Ornette Coleman, the rock crew had to recognize that there was more to music than flashy technique and facile production work. The first punks thought they could take the safety pins in their ears and deflate the opus-oriented rockers like ELP, Yes, and Genesis.

Punk forced musicians to re-examine their motives and commitments. Like a mutated fundamentalist religion, its effects were cleansing, but there were some who saw past its limited musical dynamic and self-defeating rhetoric. Punks, like hippies, had to turn 30 eventually. They were still attracted to physical thrust and stripped-down imagery, but sought a broader framework than three chords slashed out in a methedrine frenzy at two minutes a shot. One of the groups who succeeded from the start was Ultravox.

Ultravox was formed by John Foxx in the mid-'70s as a musical companion to the stark, psycho-drama of his lyrics. Through ads in *Melody Maker*, England's music weekly, he enlisted bassist Chris Cross, guitarist Stevie Shears, drummer Warren Cann, and eventually, violinist/synthesist Billy Currie. They were closely modeled after Roxy Music, a British group that cultivated an image of urbane decadence to house their vision of future shock and cultural ennui. Despite the fact that they had already been playing for several years before the emergence of punk, their first LP, *Ultravox!*, appeared after the Sex Pistols' brethren had wreaked their havoc. Ultravox had to grapple with the dilemma of being a technically adroit group trying to break through in an era dominated by the lock-step rhythms and monochordal din of groups like the Damned, the Vibrators, and X-Ray Spex. So Ultravox was marketed as punk, though they bore few similarities to most of the bands that England's youth were gobbing over.

The Roxy Music connection was stronger than the punk influence, however, especially with the production of Brian Eno, who had treated the music of Roxy with tape and electronic manipulations. Eno brought a brooding, ominous presence to *Ultravox!* that enveloped both the alienation of *I Want To Be A Machine* and the manic, Yardbirds' style rave-up of *Saturday Night In The City Of The Dead*.

Today, synthesizers dominate much of the music coming from England, but they were anathema in the early days of punk. Even the tone controls in guitars were ripped out because they represented too much technology. Yet Ultravox came on stage with a synthesizer and, by being out-of-fashion in 1977, they hastened the currently fashionable arrival of synthi-pop hitmakers. With each new album, Ultravox' music became more synthetic. The string-synth sounds of *My Sex* grew into the mechanical percussion of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and the nightmarish electronics of *Dislocation*.

Because Ultravox was too sophisticated for new wave and punk, and had too many jagged edges for progressive music, they were caught between the clash of trends. Their label, Island Records,



dropped them in 1979, and John Foxx and guitarist Robin Simon, who had replaced Shears, left the band. After a lengthy hiatus both contingents released albums. On Foxx' *Metamatic* his lyrics were laid bare across a skeletal electronic structure a la Kraftwerk. Meanwhile, Ultravox brought in guitarist/synthesist/vocalist Midge Ure, a veteran of several British pop groups, and like Foxx', Ultravox' music became predominantly synthesized. Their LP *Vienna* was a lush, stunning record that latched a vague romanticism to hydraulic rhythms and icy, careening melodies. Out went the final vestiges of any punk/new wave sensibilities.

The impact of Ultravox' records were not only in the synthesized sounds, but also in the electronic manner in which their music is recorded. All their producers have mastered the recording studio as another instrument. For them a record isn't simply an idealized reproduction of a live performance. It can also be used to create a surreal or abstracted soundworld that's unrelated to natural acoustic phenomena. Eno placed Ultravox' music in a sonic environment and showed them how to integrate alternative sound sources. For example, on *My Sex* the heartbeat pulse is actually taken from a Phil Collins bass drum track off an earlier Eno session. Steve Lillywhite, the producer of *Ha-Ha-Ha!*, gave them textural depth by recording the drums so they had a fat sound surrounded by resonating space. As Ultravox became more electronic, they brought in Conny Plank, who spent the '70s recording the German electronic groups Kraftwerk, Neu, and Cluster. He gave the electronics a natural feel and understood the psycho-acoustics of recorded sound. On *The Voice*, from *Rage In Eden*, an instrumental bridge crescendos when he throws the feedback-sustained guitar across the stereo spectrum and chokes off the other instruments while the drums pummel on. It's like downshifting from fourth to first gear at 100 mph.

Their latest album, *Quartet*, has George Martin, the Beatles' producer, in the production seat. The result is a more orchestral sound without the classical trappings. As Ultravox' music has grown, they've charted an area of electronic sound that is as distinct from the mechanical rhythms of Kraftwerk and the Human League as it is from the airy textural probes of Jean-Michel Jarre and Tangerine Dream.

Warren Cann and Billy Currie are probably the two most culturally polarized members of Ultravox. Cann has the throwaway good looks of a 1940s B-movie actor. He's pragmatic and direct, with a keener eye towards commercial viability than Currie. Conny Plank described their differences during mix-downs for *Vienna*: Cann wanted a rhythmic mix that would work well on the dance floor, while Currie favored an orchestral blend. Cann's affection for a groove comes from honing his chops on the bar band circuit of his native Canada, where he was born on May 20, 1952. His parents were British emigres, and his first exposure to music was through his father, who played violin in pop bands of the day.

Billy Currie comes from a working class family in Yorkshire, where he was born on April 1, 1950, a date that may account for his constant stream of offhand one-liners. There wasn't much music in his family, but he took violin lessons in school and became an accomplished classical musician with scholarship offers from the Royal Academy before opting for rock.

THE MODERN SYNTH QUARTET: *Ultravox is (from left) Warren Cann, Chris Cross, Midge Ure, and Billy Currie.*

John Diliberto: Billy, when did you start playing?

Billy Currie: I started bangin' around on the guitar when I was about 10. Then I took up the violin when I was 11, because an orchestra came around school with the idea of giving lessons. From there I went to a music college from 15 to 19 years old, just studying the violin and the piano a little bit. You had to have a second instrument, and it was also good for all that stuff like four-part harmony until it just comes out of your ears.

JD: Were you doing anything else?

BC: Yeah! I was writing pieces. I was interested in writing oddly influenced things like Bela Bartok . . . modern music. I was quite knocked out with Stravinsky and that kind of thing. But I was also getting off on free-form music like piano players who could play jazz—organists, sax players, people who were just around. It was a good environment to be in. I could've gone on to the Royal Academy of Music, but I turned that down, which was a difficult decision. Then I got more involved with bands. As a violin player it was very difficult. The Barcus-Berry [pickup] wasn't out then. But I really wanted to do it 'cause I got through all that crap, you know, going on with the violin and all you could hear was howlin' feedback from these little Japanese pickups.

JD: When was this happening?

BC: It was about 1970, '71. I was getting pretty discouraged, as you can imagine, until the Barcus-Berry came along, which was later with the first Ultravox. So before Ultravox I went to play some free-form acoustic music with a group called the Ritual Theatre. I was with them for about three years. It was mostly just free-form, but it was also studying sound, acoustic sound. After that I thought I'd gotten that area completely out of my system. Then I joined up with Ultravox, and that was a definite start to working with electric music.

JD: Was that your first rock experience?

BC: Only in a more studied and organized sense. I mean I had been in rock, sort of jazzy, free-form-influenced groups. I realized after I'd gotten all that out of my system with the Ritual Theatre, that these were natural feelings that I related to. It had just worked itself out, and I had settled what I wanted to put out, what kind of feelings. I could incorporate these cold feelings from 20th century modern composers like Stravinsky, Bartok, Hindemith, whatever. I really related to that feeling, and I had a chance to put this with Ultravox.

JD: Who were some of these free-form musicians that you were playing with and listening to?

BC: Do you know Henry Cow? I knew of them, but I didn't play with them. I knew Dave Stewart of Egg [also Hatfield And The North, National Health, and Bill Bruford], Lindsay Cooper, a bassoon player [with Henry Cow], and I used to like some of the jazz sessions that were going on. Lol Coxhill, Evan Parker—a soprano saxophonist who's brilliant. But that's just taking sounds as far as you can go. I don't denounce that, but I'm just interested now in what you can do with electronics.

JD: All this time you were playing violin and viola with these bands. When did you start playing keyboards?

BC: I took it up again with Ultravox. It just seemed a logical thing to do. It was an interesting way to come to something again, knowing about harmony which you can show and control, organizing things when you're writing with a keyboard. It was interesting to come at it from a simplistic point of view and to be automatically able to relate to people. I couldn't play the piano really. I could just be very simple, and that's the way Ultravox worked, very steady and step-by-step.

JD: How did you get into all this, Warren?

Warren Cann: My influences were the Stones, the Yardbirds, the Pretty Things, the Small Faces, the Beatles. I think a lot of it had to

“You’re going to sound like everyone else who has that particular synthesizer . . . until you learn how to pull your own personality out of the instrument.”

do with the influence that my family had on me, because I listened to American musicians, and a lot of them I liked and appreciated, but there wasn't that magnetism that the British artists had for me. When I left school, I was in one band after another.

JD: What were you playing?

WC: I was playing drums. I didn't start out on any other instrument. I was always playing drums. I always tried to play with people who were better than me, and when I got to be better than them, I would leave and try to find another band. Pretty calculated attitude on my part, but it seemed to work. I did a lot of different types of music because the situation over there is vastly different from what it is here, in that it's an easy proposition for a group to get together and learn a bunch of songs, albeit other people's songs, and go out and work steadily. If you got yourself together, you could become quite experienced in a couple of years because you were playing maybe six nights a week. I did that for a long time, and it was a real grind. But when I look back on it, the foundation that it gave me from playing all sorts of music has definitely given some kind of character to my playing.

JD: What was the original concept of the band?

WC: We were very adamant that it was going to be a British band. At the time, in 1972, everybody seemed to be worshiping the American bands like Little Feat and the Doobie Brothers. The only bands that were doing anything, if they weren't heavy metal like Deep Purple, ended up on the other side of the spectrum, being very pop.

BC: We were fed up with the other bands like Emerson, Lake, and Palmer and the Electric Light Orchestra—the polished kind of tinsel sound. Not so much Yes—I quite respect the work that they put into it. That's why we kind of got caught in the flow of the punk thing, because we were thinking in that direction. We wanted something different, and we were going to hold to our own. We mixed things up a lot. We messed around with classical sounds, but the first album came out

when the punks were very over-the-top with their “We just want three chords” trick and anarchy, anarchy. That did come through over a period of time, but we have come out as sort of innovators of electronics and a style. That's because there was a difference in the classical style we were using. It wasn't polished and romantic and over-the-top classical just for the sake of showing off. The first album had a song like *I Want To Be A Machine* on it, and the way we recorded it was meant to be quite basic and raw.

It was hard to play the synthesizer then. The first one I bought was an ARP Odyssey. It was on the basis of getting a maximum effect immediately, and you didn't have to do much. It gave you a book with all these incredible names like “Chinese gong” or something that sounded very amazing, like you were gonna get this effect immediately. But it was nothing like that at all. To control it was really quite difficult. Eno was very helpful on the first album. He started talking about getting to know a synthesizer, and I was wondering what this guy was on about. I knew about that as soon as I got one—that you have to work in and around it. They're so vast at first, and then they get smaller as you take various roots. Eventually I really narrowed it down to about three or four sounds that I use. Maybe I've narrowed it down too much, but you have to learn to control it, particularly on live work.

I think what you do is get the maximum powerful sound that can communicate and show emotion. That was important to me. My sound involves a warbling, like vibrato on a violin. I think that the reason I did narrow it down so much was a way to get something as powerful as a guitar as soon as possible. That was the influence of the time. Now it's not like that. But I still enjoy chilly string imitation sounds that are very synthetic and cold. I never have been into many synthesizer sounds. I like to choose them carefully before I use them. I'm not into the cosmic-type sounds. You can use the synthesizer very subtly, so you're not sure what it is and you just slip it in.

WC: A lot of electronic music has tended to be very dissonant because for some people it's initially easier to do avant garde things because they don't have the control to do more calculated things. The public still, generally speaking, thinks of electronic music as being a lot of bleeps, burbles, and whooshes. They're gradually becoming more familiar with what is electronic, and beginning to be a little more discerning.

JD: Originally, when electronics first came about, the composers thought that they would liberate music and free the composer from the tempered system and the restrictions of acoustic instruments.

BC: The first example of that was quite off-putting from my point of view. Because one minute you're listening to a violin concerto where they have a cadenza, and the next minute you listen to a guy switch on a tape recorder for 20 minutes. I found that, coming from a classical point-of-view, quite off-putting. I didn't relate to it. I've listened to all sorts of musicians like Alban Berg and Schönberg and those kind of people which was crazy even if you were following a score. Then Varese turns up and just turns on a tape recorder in the middle of where the so-called cadenza would be.

WC: Synthesizers are, as you say, a way of broadening sound horizons for every musician, but on the other hand, they're just like any other instrument. You're going to sound like everyone else who has that particular synthesizer for God knows how long, until you learn how to pull your own personality out of the instrument. It doesn't matter if it's a guitar, drum kit, an ARP, or an OBX.

JD: It seems that the computer synthesizers have a different approach than the keyboard style that you use with synthesizers.

BC: It depends on what you do with them. There are different things you can do with it as a computer. You can do pretty much what you want if you just program it. At the moment I'm thinking of using it to trigger off other instruments from a purely compositional point of view and a rhythmic point of view. You can also write on a screen. You can use it to hear six instruments going while you write the composition. It would be interesting to use it just on a harmonic level and not be too interested in sound. The sound can be something from the old school. You get a particular sound, and you put it on one track in the studio, and you can build up from that the way these floating kind of synthesizer tracks do. You can tell it's been built up from one track to the next because they tend to be slow. Now that the computer has come in, it will affect the variety.

WC: You think about what suits the song. For example, does it suit

very electronic drums, does it suit the Linn, a combination of the two, or purely acoustic? You think about it the same way you think about using real strings or the synthesizer, doing the bass line on a guitar or a Moog or whatever.

BC: It's nice to mix it up and have a synthesizer feel with a plain old violin with all its scratches.

WC: Micro-composers can drive you wild with what they can do, because they're primarily designed for the studio. A micro-composer is basically a computer. It takes a sequence, and depending on what model it is, it has either four or eight voices (or more). It breaks down every note on the keyboard into a number, and with the computer keyboard you program in your gate and control voltages in such a way that you can literally come up with any type of tempo, timing, or phrasing that you want.

BC: The problem is not to get backed into a corner while you're still keeping your originality. We're quite open to keeping the combination of guitar, keyboards, and drums because we like it. If we had a micro-composer triggering a computer doing a textural [imitates a one-note sequencer pattern] and each individual part was changing automatically around five notes because it had been programmed in so that

every chord was different, that's fantastic. If the guitar goes in with it, great. And if natural shit-kicking drums go in with it, fantastic.

WC: For a time in Britain when you suddenly had the birth of a lot of very electronically minded bands and everyone had their first synths and drum machines, electric guitars weren't allowed. You were either on one side of the fence or the other. That kind of attitude is foreign to me. If it sounds good, it doesn't matter whether you're miking up a washing machine or thrashing the living daylight out of a drum kit. With the technology that is available to people now, you get a fair percentage of happy accidents and a fair percentage of godawful noise. It's gonna take people a while to find their feet with these things. But overall it's just a very exciting time. You're not just finding a theoretical concept that people are spouting like 10 years ago, when everyone said electronics were going to change music. It's no longer hypothetical; it's real. It is happening right now. You're getting the same thing that happened 25 years ago when someone strapped an electric pickup on a guitar and it totally changed the face of music. Call it progress or good or bad. It meant the end of the era of the big bands, but everything has its time.

JD: Do you find that the drum machines have influenced your drumming?

WC: No, I find that it's the other way around, because I've never been into technique for its own sake. I admire people with a great deal of technique, but for me it's more important to subjugate that technique to what the song requires. If it does require an explosion of technique, then that person could probably do more justice to it than I could. But I believe in playing what the song requires rather than doing a flashy drum roll. Drums are not a lead instrument. Some people have tried to make them one, and they've pushed the boundaries of percussion in their fields, but that's not for me. I like the power that you get from something that's simple, that you can physically latch onto, and can move you.

When I first started working with drum machines, I was totally frustrated all the time. I'm slightly less frustrated now. Unlike the rest of the group with their keyboard synthesizers, drum machines were in their utter infancy, and the sounds were limp. There was no way the sounds could compare with the power and guts of a good acoustic drum kit. When people first started using drum machines, the initial appeal was that relentless, hypnotic rhythm. But I wanted to do two things: to have sounds that were really gutsy, and to make the machines move and do things. I wanted interesting fill-ins and rhythmic changes, and this was hard to do on machines that had no capability for programming because their original use was augmenting ships' orchestras in cocktail lounges, or playing living room stuff. That's why they had a proliferation of latin-type beats—because of the context in which they were being used.

BC: I can sympathize with him because I remember the problems he went through. If you put one of those drum machines through a huge amplification system, it was like being hit on the head.

WC: It might have been a thunk when it was going through a practice amplifier. The bass drum goes thunk, the snare drum goes whack. Put that through 20,000 watts and your bass drum becomes a long sustained note with nasty harmonics, and the snare drum slices the top of your head off in a very unpleasant way. Because you're under the magnifying glass of all that amplification, you see all its shortcomings. The people who made these things never tested them that way. They were never intended to be used that way. I was bastardizing drum machines in a way manufacturers never dreamed of, and that's why they washed their hands of me. I spent a great deal of time and money with engineers trying to redesign these things to not only make them sound better, but to also make them more flexible. Synthesizers have become pretty much perfected, and they're still making a lot of changes, but they're not as obvious. So where could they turn next with all this technology? Fortunately it was drums. Drums haven't really changed. The most modern drum kit isn't essentially that different from a drum kit 60 years ago, which in itself isn't that different from hollow logs.

JD: With the departure of John Foxx and the addition of Midge Ure, you seemed to move towards a more orchestral sound with *Vienna*.

WC: No, I don't really think so.

BC: Oh, I do. One of the things that I remember from the first



ULTRAVOX' EQUIPMENT

Billy Currie: Currie (pictured above, at left) solos on an ARP Odyssey synthesizer, "the old one because I'm close to superstitious" and a PPG Wave 2.2 synthesizer that "has a good polyphonic sound." He uses the touch-sensitive Yamaha GS-1 synthesizer, which is digital. He also still uses the Yamaha CS-80 ("I really still love that thing"), a Yamaha String Machine, Yamaha Electric Grand Piano, and the Oberheim OB-X. A recent addition is the E-MU Emulator that he uses for storing natural sounds and synthesized sounds from other keyboards. Finally, he hasn't forgotten his Barcus-Berry-equipped violin amid all the hardware.

Midge Ure: Ure (second from left) also uses a PPG Wave 2.2 synthesizer and a Yamaha String Machine, but his main axe is still his Yamaha electric guitar.

Warren Cann: Cann (right) uses the Linn drum computer, a device that uses the sounds of real drums, digitally recorded and playable by pre-programming or using the buttons on the machine, Roland CR-78s, Simmons SDS-3 electronic drums, and two player-activated Simmons SDS-5 drums that are modular units with pads that create bass drum, snare, tom-toms, and hi-hat sounds. There's also the Simmons Clap-Trap. He has a memory system for the Simmons that he uses to synchronize them with the Linn. The core of his percussion unit is still his acoustic Yamaha drums with Paiste and Zildjian cymbals. He runs his system through a Yamaha Echo Unit and two Roland analog echo units, a Yamaha amplifier, and Yamaha p.a. columns for monitoring.

Chris Cross: Cross (second from right) uses Yamaha electric basses and a PPG Wave 2.2 synthesizer.

ULTRAVOX SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

QUARTET—Chrysalis B6V 41394
RAGE IN EDEN—Chrysalis CHR 1338
VIENNA—Chrysalis CHR 1296
THREE INTO ONE—Island ILPS 9614

SYSTEMS OF ROMANCE—Antilles AN 7069
HAI-HAI-HAI!—Island ILPS 9505
ULTRAVOX!—Island ILPS 9449

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ANDY FREEBERG

“There’s a whole new movement happening now in America where groups are exploring the danceable roots of African music, and Jump Up has been right there all along.”

By Bill Milkowski

It is 2 a.m. at Sweet Basil’s, an intimate jazz restaurant in NYC’s Greenwich Village where Oliver Lake and Jump Up have been holding forth all week. The place is packed with tourists and club-hopping party people—the usual Saturday night crowd.

A few lit-up transients drift in from the street and become instantly riveted to the driving reggae-funk groove. Within moments their bodies are moving, lost in the hypnotic pulse of chicken-scratch rhythm guitars and lazy, booming bass. These people don’t know Oliver Lake from Oliver Hardy, they never heard of the World Saxophone Quartet, and what’s more, they probably don’t even like jazz. But they’re digging Jump Up this evening, and so is Lake.

He’s beaming up there on-stage—decked out in his multi-colored band costume—laughing and bouncing to this Caribbean dance music, tossing his dreadlocks from side to side as he sings: “One foot guides the other/I know they know where to go/One foot guides the other/I keep going with the flow.”

It’s just that simple. Or as Tina Weymouth put it in her hit rap single, *Genius Of Love*: “Who needs to think when your feet just go.” There really isn’t too much to ponder over with this rock-steady music, just ride along on the reggae groove. Like Oliver Lake is doing with this party music, seemingly light years away from the tuxedoed formality of the World Saxophone Quartet . . . or is he?

“Some people have asked me how did I get into dealing with reggae, that it’s so far away from the so-called avant garde. I say bullshit! It’s all the same thing. It has the same

OLIVER LAKE

Sax In The Hip Pocket

thread going right through it. The blues is the root of all the reggae stuff and all the so-called avant garde stuff that I've ever been associated with. I never separate the music like that. If there are people who have a problem with me being in WSQ and Jump Up, then that's their problem. It all feels very natural to me."

A week later Lake is back with his World Saxophone Quartet mates, Julius Hemphill and Hamiet Bluiett, with John Purcell substituting for David Murray, playing a concert downtown at the Third Street Music School Settlement. Of course, he doesn't have the opportunity to sing or dance or dress up in party garb when he's blowing with WSQ, but the similarities are there. Lake's playing is adventurous and undeniably blue in both contexts.

"For me, it's been a very natural progression to get into Jump Up," he said some days later in his Brooklyn townhouse. "I know some people think that now that I'm playing this style of music that I just want to make money. But I wanted to make money when I was playing the other styles. I want the World Saxophone Quartet to make tons of money. When I was doing my solo concerts and reciting poetry, I wanted to make money. Nothing has changed in that respect. I have no different feeling playing with Jump Up than doing a solo concert. I still have the same desire to go to the bank whether it's Jump Up, WSQ, or solo. I think it's all commercial music. Maybe the business people hooked up with music and the record industry don't see these things as being commercial. But I still see them that way and still think they can happen."

Oliver Lake has always been an industrious, enterprising person. Perhaps the influence came from his step-father, who himself was an enterprising, self-employed man. "He was really a hustling kind of person," Lake recalled. "He built a shoe shine parlor for me when I was 14 years old. He actually constructed this building in his backyard for me to shine shoes, and I ran that little business all by myself through high school. So from that I really got into the idea of self-employment and being your own boss. That kind of thing stuck with me over the years. And I'm still self-employed today."

There was a time early on, before he had ever made a serious commitment to music, that young Oliver Lake actually considered becoming a businessman. "I was majoring in biology and thought I would go into business straight away. I always felt that I would be doing my own thing when I got out of school. I wanted to be a millionaire—I still want to be a millionaire."

But his career plans got sidetracked somewhat when he fell in with the likes of Julius Hemphill and Lester Bowie and Philip Wilson. Lake didn't actually get a saxophone until he was 18, though he had initially been attracted to the alto a few years earlier from a Paul Desmond record he happened to hear.

"This friend of mine who used to belong to a record club wanted to get rid of some records he didn't like. He was really into

Sonny Rollins and didn't care too much for Paul Desmond, so he gave it to me. I hadn't heard the alto saxophone before, and I was really taken by the tone of the instrument. Then later, of course, I heard Charlie Parker and got rid of my Paul Desmond records. I'm not putting him down, but I was just more interested in what Sonny Stitt and Charlie Parker and Jackie McLean were doing with the instrument. Especially Jackie. I spent a lot of time copying his stuff off records."

Lake's "sudden interest" in reggae can actually be traced to a cut from his 1978 Arista album, *Life Dance Of Is*. That tune, *Change One*, carries an unmistakable Caribbean pulse, and musical colleagues will attest to the fact that Lake's interest in reggae and other exotic musics goes back well beyond that. But a trip to the Caribbean in 1980 with his wife Gene, who is from Guyana, intensified his interest in reggae and inspired him to finally put together a dance band. Hence, *Jump Up*, which has gone through a number of personnel changes over the past two years. The current lineup features longtime Lake associates Jerome Harris on guitar and Pheeroan Ak Laff on drums, with new members Kim Clarke on bass and Brandon Ross on guitar.

Jump Up is currently the major thrust in Lake's career. The group's second album, *Plug It* (Gramavision) is scheduled for release this month; there are video projects in the works, and a possible tour of Jamaica this summer, as well as a tour of Europe later in the year. But that is far from all that Lake is into these days. There are a number of non-Jump Up musical projects that he's juggling simultaneously: the World Saxophone Quartet is still recording and touring (their latest Black Saint release, *Revue*, is affectionately called "our blues album" by Lake); he's working on a chamber piece for the Kronus String Quartet of San Francisco, which Gramavision may record; he's preparing material for an upcoming album of composed music with Gramavision labelmates Anthony Davis and James Newton; and on April 23 he will premiere a new orchestral work at the Brooklyn Academy of Music as part of its ambitious "Meet The Moderns" series with Lukas Foss conducting the Brooklyn Philharmonic. (Also featured on that program are premieres of new orchestral works by Leroy Jenkins, Anthony Davis, and Keith Jarrett, which the composers will perform with the Brooklyn Philharmonic.)

"I've always been excited about doing different things, rather than being locked into one single thing or being pigeonholed into that attitude of 'You play this music, therefore you cannot do this other thing.' That's always been bullshit to me. I'm very excited to be involved in these different projects. When we had the Black Artists Group back in St. Louis, we were involved in all kinds of projects—music accompanying dancers or poets or plays, visual things, body movement pieces. So for me, it's never really changed. That multi-faceted part of me developed in St. Louis, and I'm still very much involved in it," Lake said.



ANDY FREEBERG

OLIVER LAKE'S EQUIPMENT

Oliver Lake uses a Selmer Mark VI alto saxophone and a Selmer Mark VII tenor saxophone. His soprano sax is a Buford American. He favors Rico and La Voz reeds.

OLIVER LAKE SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

HEAVY SPIRITS—Arista-Freedom AL 1008
NTU: THE POINT FROM WHICH FREEDOM BEGINS—Arista-Freedom AL1024
LIFE DANCE OF IS—Arista-Novus AN3003
SHINE—Arista-Novus AN3010
PASSIN' THRU—Passin' Thru 4237
HOLDING TOGETHER—Black Saint 0009
PROPHET—Black Saint 0044
CLEVONT FITZHUBERT—Black Saint 0054

with *Jump Up*

JUMP UP—Gramavision 8106
PLUG IT—Gramavision 1206

with the *World Saxophone Quartet*

POINT OF NO RETURN—Moers 1034
STEPPIN' WITH THE WORLD SAXOPHONE QUARTET—Black Saint 0027
W.S.Q.—Black Saint 0046
REVUE—Black Saint 0056

with *James Blood Ulmer*

FREE LANCING—Columbia ARC 37493
ARE YOU GLAD TO BE IN AMERICA—Artists House 13

with *Michael Gregory Jackson*

CLARITY—Bija 1000
KARMONIC SUITE—IAI 373857

with *Jerome Cooper*

FOR THE PEOPLE—hat Hut 1R07

with *Julius Hemphill*

BUSTER BEE—Sackville 3018

with *Material*

ONE DOWN—Elektra 9 60206-1

with the *Black Artists Group*

BLACK ARTISTS GROUP IN PARIS, ARIES—BAG 324000

with the *Human Arts Ensemble*

UNDER THE SUN—Universal Justice 73

with *Anthony Braxton*

FALL NEW YORK 1974—Arista 4032

with *Joseph Bowie*

DUETS—Sackville 2010

The Black Artists Group was founded in 1968 by Lake and a group of other like-minded musicians in St. Louis who were inspired by the creative efforts of Chicago's AACM. Included in the ranks were Joseph Bowie, Bobo Shaw, Floyd LeFlore, and Baikida Carroll, all high school chums of Lake's. For a period of four years, they immersed themselves in all manner of creative collaborations with dancers, actors, and poets, producing experimental multi-media projects in St. Louis. Then in 1972, following the lead of high school associate Lester Bowie, who had moved to Chicago and became part of the adventurous Art Ensemble,



ANDY FREEBERG

ble of Chicago, Lake and four members of the BAG left St. Louis for Paris.

"I suddenly felt an urgency about traveling," Lake said. "I had been in some blues bands with Philip Wilson and Lester Bowie that did some traveling around the Midwest backing up well-known singers like Rufus Thomas and Solomon Burke. We even ended up on the West Coast for a while in 1968 or so. That's when Lester moved to Chicago. And after playing around St. Louis with the BAG, I began to feel a need to grow and share what I was doing with people other than those in that Midwest area I had been raised in. I just felt I had to get out and expand—check things out. The Art Ensemble had come back to the States after living in Europe for a while, and they talked quite a bit about Paris. They had been there in that period between '68 and '70 when there was a lot of activity happening in Paris, a lot of American musicians recording and playing around there.

But I got there right at the end of that cycle. Things were just beginning to slow down by the time I arrived in Paris in 1972. But it was still very interesting."

One recording emerged from that period in Lake's career—*Black Artists Group In Paris, Aries* (BAG 324 000, which is distributed by the New Music Distribution Service)—which featured Carroll on trumpet, Joseph Bowie on trombone, Shaw on drums, LeFlore on trumpet, and Lake on reeds and various percussion instruments.

Lake arrived in New York in September of 1974. Three months later he was recording his first solo LP for Arista, *Heavy Spirits*, which included music for Lake's sax backed by three violins (a foreshadowing of his current work with the Kronos String Quartet). By co-founding the World Saxophone Quartet in 1977, Lake became established as a major force in the avant garde movement of the late '70s.

Another highlight in Lake's career happened last year when Jump Up was chosen by the Arts America Program of the International Communications Agency as musical ambassadors, following in the footsteps of previous ambassadors B. B. King (1981), Woody Herman (1980), Sarah Vaughan (1979), Charlie Byrd (1978), and the Mingus Dynasty band (1977). Jump Up did a one-month, six-country tour of Africa, traveling to Swaziland and Malawi in the south, Togo, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast on the east, and Nairobi, Kenya on the west.

"The response was fantastic," he said. "It was the kind of trip that makes you want to return every year. To go 'home' and play our music and get the kind of response we got only gave me more confidence about what I'm doing with Jump Up. There's a whole new movement happening now in England and America where groups are exploring the danceable roots of African music, and Jump Up has been right there all along."

Lake's role as a musical ambassador on that tour was consistent with the philosophy he has had since his days with the Black Artists Group back in St. Louis. "I believe that a creative person, whether it's a musician or an artist or a dancer, has an obligation to share what they do with other people. So I feel an obligation to play music for the people. If I lock myself up in my room and don't play for people because they don't pay me the fee that I'm supposed to get, then I miss what I'm here for. But that doesn't take away from the fact that I want to get paid when I play 'cause I have to support my family and eat and all that. It really gets confusing. You get torn between being a businessman and being a musician.

"In African culture, historically, music was just something that you did rather than something to be pursued. If you sang, you sang. If you danced, you danced. Nobody ever thought of forming music schools or anything; it was just a part of life. That's always been the way of Africa. Only in the Western world has it gotten to the point where music has become something to take and sell. Nowadays you have to get out there and sell yourself—when you blow a note, you gotta get paid for blowing that note. So it gets very frustrating when you start mixing creativity with commercialism like that. At one point I had to ask myself, 'Am I here to play music or to make money?' It's a heavy conflict.

"So that's why I don't really pay any attention when critics talk that shit about so-and-so did this and so-and-so did that and this cat sold out and that cat's trying to do this—that's bullshit! Because in the end, none of those critics are going to help whoever it is they claim sold out when it comes time to pay their rent. They're not gonna do anything but talk and try to make a name for themselves off that musician that they're putting down. I know there are some people who say I sold out with Jump Up, and my desire for making money hasn't gotten any stronger now that I'm doing Jump Up. I had the same strong desire years ago to make a lot of money. None of that has changed." **db**

Surreal
Swing

BOB MOSES

BY HOWARD MANDEL

Bob Moses, self-taught drummer and composer, is a bit too round a peg to fit any square niche neatly. Or maybe it's as he suggests of another much-too-obscure musician, the pianist/composer Andrew Hill, of whose writing Moses says, "It knocks me out. His music is very balanced between in and out. He's in the crack, that's why he's hard to see—that's why he's invisible to some people, unfortunately."

So it is with Moses—he's in the crack. The kind of drummer who can make a routine club date pop with a little more excitement—whether he's with wild Jaco Pastorius, Lee Konitz' sophisticated octet, or guitarist Emily Remler's quartet, Moses has nonetheless been moving furniture to keep bread on the table and rent paid on his Brooklyn apartment. He has worked with Gary Burton, Larry Coryell, Jack DeJohnette (in Compost), and Dave Liebman, among others, but the past falls away as he sits at a card table, his own small, very colorful paintings on the wall, and talks of his most recent compositional project, *When Elephants Dream Of Music*, just released by Gramavision.

Moses' music is impeccably construed to tell surrealistic stories—all in aural technicolor with Moses thumping syncopated movement underneath. Conducting an orchestra from his drum kit was a challenge for the gnome-like, verbal Moses—his nine compositions, though appealingly listenable, are quite idiosyncratic. It took two teams of players to accomplish his lavish scores, one set he calls "drones—and there's nothing derogatory meant by that term," the other, "spirit voices." The drones spent two years in rehearsal. The spirit voices came in at the end.

Since the spirits—who got most of the solo space, which Moses dispenses parsimoniously—include Terumasa Hino, Jim Pepper, Howard Johnson, Barry Rogers, David Friedman, Bill Frisell, Lyle Mays, Steve Swallow, and Nana Vasconcelos, with guest bits by



ELIZABETH J. BAPTISTE

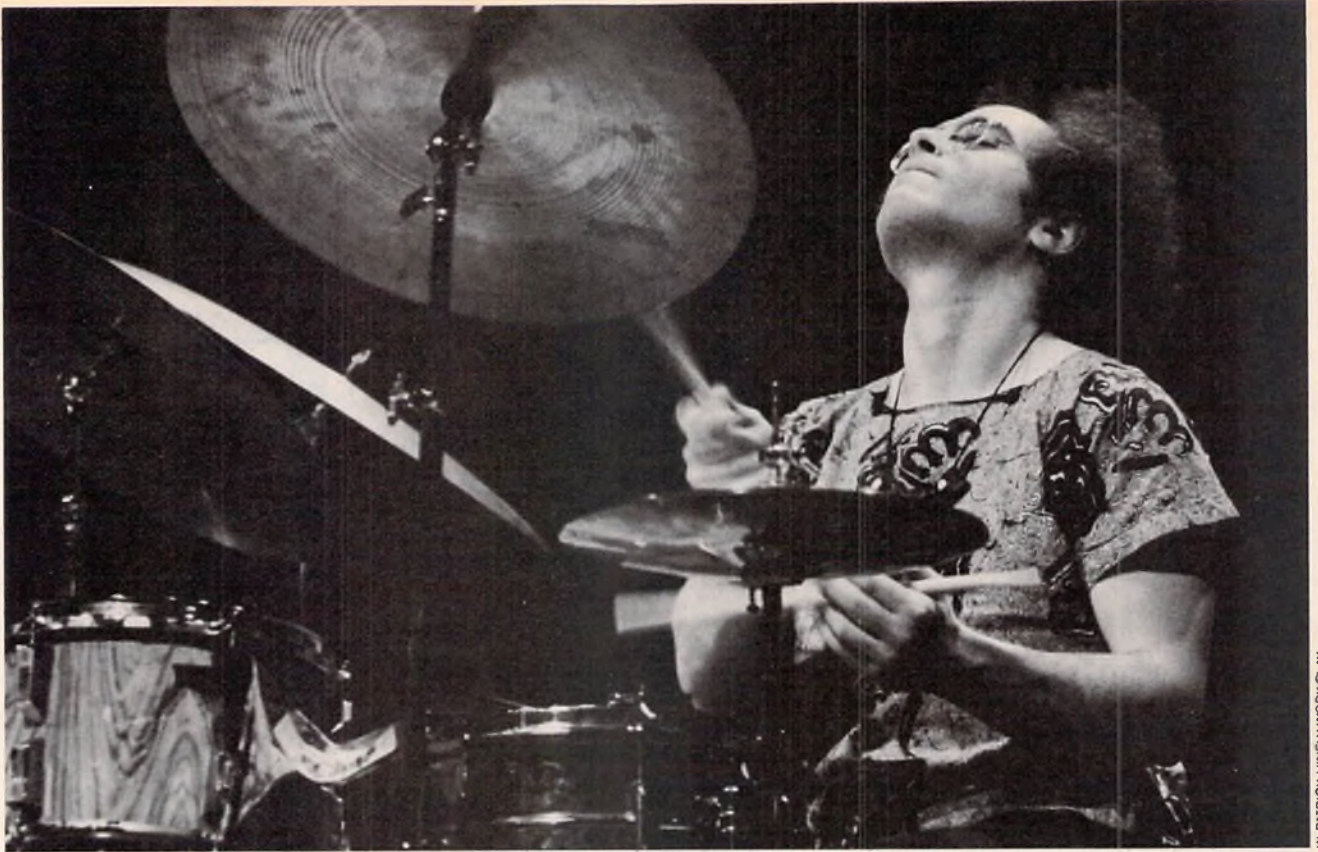
*"Every note
with a
purpose—
that's my
goal."*

Jeremy Steig, Sheila Jordan, and Jeanne Lee, you can predict the sounds range widely, sing of many influences, and are as fresh as tomorrow. What's unsuspected is that Moses could fulfill such promise. But because he's been in the crack doesn't mean he hasn't been thinking and playing. A whole room full of tape equipment, vibes, drums, piano, and other instruments cues one in to his ambitions.

"What's more ambitious than swing?" Bobby asks—he's just too friendly to call him much else. "I don't want not to swing. That's my aesthetic. Everything I do I want to swing. I think music *needs* to swing, no matter how abstract it gets. In fact, the more abstract, the more intellectual it gets, the *more* it needs to swing, because that's a balancing factor. Like, Mingus' music got out at times, but it always swung, which kept it within the realm of the human. Ornette's the same way, and Miles. My stuff is really the blues, and really swings, and if I didn't think it was, I wouldn't put it out on record—that's one of my main criteria for rejecting anything. I'm a harsh judge of myself, and if 30 seconds of a 10-minute tune don't swing, I can't use it."

★ ★ ★
That rap's about par, coming from a drummer—on the other hand, one wonders when listening to the complex, yet natural-sounding parts of his elephants' dreams: What does swing mean to Moses, a native New Yorker, age 35? He's an avant gardist, right? Born of jazz-rock, raised on freedom, now a progressive sideman—alright, where's he get this *swing* thing?

Moses' big band, after all, sounds less like Count Basie's, or Woody Herman's, or Buddy Rich's, than it does like Gil Evans', or Jaco's *Word Of Mouth* orchestra, which Bobby cites as employing some of the best big band jazz writing in years. "I'm into Duke and Mingus and Strayhorn, writing-wise," he claims. "But my concept is sort of in the opposite direction



W. PATRICK HINELY WORK/PLAY

of what's current. Especially among horn players. What bothers me about jazz now is that it's too casually virtuosic. There are too many notes being played. The trend of the soloist, and the string of solos, the endless stretching . . . I think there are very few people who warrant that kind of space, very few. There are about four horn players who knock me out totally: Louis Armstrong, Ben Webster, Johnny Hodges, and Miles—yeah, his new stuff is as good or better than what he did before, and is certainly better than anything else going on now. I think his new band is wonderful—and what they're playing is people's music."

If that term recalls the '60s, consider that Moses retains some of that era's zeitgeist, still. "I'm so tired of playing subdued, non-physical, abstract music for a small audience of elite aficionados who sit there and politely applaud; I want to play some loud, powerful people's music that you can play for your next door neighbors and they'll love it," he says. "I can already see—even with Gramavision that has Oliver Lake's reggae band, Jump Up, on the label, so they're eclectic—that I'm going to be perceived again in the intellectual, artistic music space. But my goal in making this music was to make happy music, like my way of making a hit single. I know there aren't any hit singles here per se, but I had the hope of having that kind of impact. This is totally for the listener—because that's what I like. My taste isn't much different from that of people on the street.

"What I liked even better than jazz-rock—and I was in the first jazz-rock band, the Free Spirits, in the late '60s, as well as with Gary Burton when he was smokin', *burnin'*—but I

loved playing with latin bands, and playing r&b. I like the Wild Tchoupitoulas and the Meters better than I like listening to jazz after 1940. I lose interest in the stream-of-solos thing, unless it's a great, great horn line. Miles with Trane, Cannonball Adderley, Bill Evans, Philly Joe, Paul Chambers—there you could have a great string of solos. Again, when Miles had George Coleman or Wayne, Herbie, Tony, Ron Carter. Rahsaan, there was a great soloist—he used to eat saxophones. But my music is mostly ensemble music; I don't want to depend on the inspiration of the soloists for my music to be great."

* * *

Perhaps some background would put Bobby's sentiments in perspective. "I had a very unusual upbringing," he admits. "I've always been opinionated; my parents tell me they'd give me a rattle and I'd throw it away—'No!'—then they'd give me another one and 'Okay, that one sounds good.' My mother's very musical—she can pick out melodies on the piano by hearing the intervals, since she doesn't know the notes. My father couldn't keep a steady 4/4 if his life depended on it, but he's always had very good taste, and he was a press agent, he helped people—he did things for Billie Holiday, Stan Kenton, for Dizzy. Mingus was close to my father—there's a tune to him on the solo piano album; *Meditations For Moses* is about my father, Richard. Max Roach was another one, and Rahsaan was very close. When I was 12 or 13 years old, I used to sit in with Mingus at the old Jazz Showplace, on the Sunday matinees. I realized even then it was heavy duty—what an experience.

"Mingus led the band *strong*; in fact, I had

to think of Mingus to get as tough as I've gotten over the years. I was frustrated for years because I never got the results from my music I was looking for, and I realized eventually that one reason for that was that I was timid. I thought I wrote great music, but I was still a little sensitive about it, because I am a drummer, and you know, people think a certain way about drummers. Also because being self-taught, I don't know that much technically about music. Players I was dealing with had more technical information than I did, so I was shy of telling them, 'You're not playing it the way I'm hearing it.' Also, you feel like a party-pooper when somebody's soloing and you stop him, 'Why are you soloing that way? That's not the character of the tune.'

"An aspect of Mingus I don't want to emulate is that he could be abusive. But you have to be as tough as you can, you have to demand firmly what you want. Before, I tried to do it friendly, and made suggestions, 'I liked what you did man, it was great, but why don't you just try this idea, just try it . . .' and I'd get 50 percent of what I wanted. What I really meant was 'No, listen man, play it this way. Use this idea, *totally*—don't approach it like you did before.' It took me years to get the confidence where I could say that, but when I was forming this band it became part of the condition; I had to confront people right off the bat and ask if this way of working would bum them out. All the music was written very precisely—every head had dynamics markings on every note—it wasn't going to be enough to play the notes right; I wanted them *shaded*.

"And there was no solo space. Doc Halliday played tenor and soprano saxes for two

years without a solo. The cadre that made the rehearsals—made every rehearsal, learned to play the compositions—they respected and loved the music. The goal was not to get off, but to make some great music. Sometimes the two things coincide, sometimes they don't. Sometimes the best thing you can do to make a composition come out is to lay out. Certainly you're not getting off by laying out. Maybe you have to play something very awkward for you—it doesn't feel as good as screaming out all the notes that are your mood at the moment, but it may be just the thing to make the composition great. And that's it—I'm going for a finished product. I have no stake in improvisation; I only have a stake in sounding good.

"That's another thing; jazz music is inextricably associated with improvisation, and to me, what's important about jazz is not whether you're making it up, but how it feels, how it sounds. Does it swing? Is it in tune? Are the notes that you're playing meaningful? Does it sound like you're putting your heart in it? People judge music for its spontaneous factor; it may be that totally improvised stuff is the best thing you've ever heard, but it doesn't guarantee it. I mean, I understand that some people improvise more than others, that some music is set up for improvisation, while some music, like classical music, is 100 percent planned. But what I'm saying is that wherever it is on the spectrum, whether it's 100 percent planned or purely improvised, has nothing to do with if it sounds great, or whether it moves you. And I believe, actually, that most people are going to get a higher rate of success when the music is less improvised, because there are so few great improvisers."

That said, why bring in a cadre of spirit voices at all? What could Moses expect from soloists, after he'd spent two years of rigorous rehearsal with his dear drones?

"I'd gotten the music to the level where it sounded pretty tight, the compositions sounded right," he remembers. "And we did a couple gigs as preparation for the recording date. But it occurred to me that it sounded too tight—even dictatorial. Everyone was scared to make a note without looking at me. So I thought, 'Okay, this was the hard part—what I've accomplished in two years is to get everybody disciplined to play the stuff short. Now I'll get the people I consider my favorite improvisers, to bring the spirit out.'

"Terumasa Hino plays really meaningfully—he's got that thing of trying to make every note count, and he won't just play a lot of technical bull. Frisell on guitar, I could trust him. Lyle Mays brought in incredible stuff on synthesizer; Jim Pepper, who's not good at playing disciplined things, is good at being spontaneous. So are Barry Rogers, Dave Friedman, Sheila, all the rest. So basically what I had was a very tight structure of four- and five-minute tunes, no room for stretching, and then I'd have people freely wandering through—like putting characters in a pre-conceived landscape that they'd spontaneously react to. I told them to be like

children and enjoy the environment. And I feel really proud; the sessions, six or seven hours for two days, were the most efficient and the best feeling I've ever been at in my life. We made enough music for almost two albums, and it was a great party.

"We did it at Vanguard studios, and the configuration there really helped; they put me on risers with the orchestra facing me, so we could have eye contact. That was something I'd never had in a club—I was always behind everyone, which left lag time of eight to 16 bars before the whole band could pick up on my directions. 'Section A!' I'd yell at the tenor sax player, and he'd pass it along to the alto player . . . and I'd hate that extra time. Every note with a purpose—that's my goal. And I feel really good about the album. I feel proud that my vibes set it up; I felt no resentment between people who'd been rehearsing two years and people who came in with little reading responsibility but got all the solos. I think both my albums have been blessed."

So let's suppose that this blessed Moses album, with cuts like *Tune For Miles* (which Bobby describes as "written for two rhythm sections, one going forwards and one back. It has a three-bar phrase that is A-B-C and another that starts at the same place going C-B-A, so they overlap, and if you try to dance to it, it will screw you right into the floor") and *Lava Flow* (which starts with Swallow's loping sidekick bass, and over nine taut minutes troops prehistoric creatures through

a volcanic desert—Hino refers to *Surrey With The Fringe On Top* and there are wordless, melting vocals by Bemshi Shearer) reaches the people it's meant for: everyone, anyone. What then? Could Moses tour a big band?

"Nowadays you don't need a big band to get a big sound—not since the invention of the amplifier," he reminds me. "But the fact of it is, that's been my problem in the past—all my conceptions have been large. I like large. Now, I'm working on my small group conception, because I'd like to have a band that could work and still have a big sound. I have to find people who could make the commitment, maybe for relatively little bread until we get going, but who could do really powerful, fully composed, big sounding music. Five or six pieces.

"I've got people in mind: a saxophonist who plays electric bass clarinet and synthesizer and who would bring an arranger's touch to what I write, which I want, to help me polish raw ideas. Whatever guitarist I have will have pedals and effects. I want a percussionist, and a bassist, and a singer—in fact, the more people who sing, the better. I want people who can dance, who aren't afraid to move their bodies. It will be very visual, and high energy. I want to feel after every set like we're all completely wasted.

"Maybe it won't be at a jazz club—it probably won't be at some gigantic rock hall, either. There's got to be something in between. I saw a Pat Metheny concert [Pat produced *Elephants Dream*], and I liked that level of popularity he's reached, that's in-between dealing with a club or stadium audience. Hey, I want my band to be listenable, too—in the sense that people don't have to dance. I don't know if it would be super successful, but that's not necessarily my goal, anyway. It would be nice to make some bread—it's been a while—but I'd feel successful just to make a living doing my own music and to feel like enough people came out to each gig that it paid for itself."

Oh, yeah—Bobby Moses swings. "People love the way I play," he recognizes, rightly. "When I unleash it, when I do what I do, people go insane—and not just musicians. Which is exactly the point I've never been able to prove because I've never gotten the chance. But I instinctively feel that I can do my music—even if it's not totally commercial, and it's going to be a little far out, because I'm a little far out, granted—and still average folks are going to dig it.

"I really believe it. I have to maneuver myself into a position where I get the chance, and it will take work and thought and strategy, but I'm going to keep trying, until it gets to be too much of a drag, then I'll head for the jungle for a while." Just before *When Elephants Dream Of Music's* issuance, Moses took a sabbatical, to cool out in Brazil. He got his strength up, took a good dose of samba rhythms into his dancing self, and is undoubtedly ready to roll. It's a challenge—a worthwhile one—for a round peg coming out of a crack, to force the corners off a square niche. But no more difficult than devising the music that elephants dream. **db**

BOB MOSES' EQUIPMENT

Bob Moses uses Sonor drums and A. Zildjian cymbals. His drums are a basic Sonor set: 6½ × 14 chrome snare drum, 14 × 14 floor tom, and an 8 × 12 rack tom on a 14 × 22 bass drum. His Zildjian array includes a 22-inch Flat Top ride (mounted far right), a 22-inch Mini Cup ride (mounted near right), and a 20-inch medium ride (mounted left) with 14-inch New Beat hi-hats. For heads he prefers Remo, usually Ambassadors, and for sticks it's Regal, usually 5A wood-tips.

BOB MOSES SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

WHEN ELEPHANTS DREAM OF MUSIC—Gramavision 8203

FAMILY—Kama Sutra 1003

BITTERSWEET IN THE OZONE—Mozone 001

with Gary Burton

LOFTY FAKE ANAGRAM—RCA 3901

IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST—Polydor 6503

RING—ECM 1051

DREAMS SO REAL—ECM 1072

with Larry Coryell

LADY CORYELL—Vanguard VSD-6509

THE FREE SPIRITS—ABC 593

with Steve Kuhn

LIVE IN NEW YORK—ECM 1213

PLAYGROUND—ECM 1159

NON-FICTION—ECM 1124

with Pat Metheny

BRIGHT SIZE LIFE—ECM 073

with Steve Swallow

HOME—ECM 1160

with Dave Liebman

DRUM ODE—ECM 1046

with Open Sky

OPEN SKY—PM 001

SPIRIT IN THE SKY—PM 003

with Gunter Hampel

BALLET SYMPHONY NO. 5 & 6—Birth 003

PRINCE

1999—Warner Bros. 23720-1F: 1999; *LITTLE RED CORVETTE*; *DELIRIOUS*; *LET'S PRETEND WE'RE MARRIED*; *D.M.S.R.*; *AUTOMATIC*; *SOMETHING IN THE WATER*; *FREE*; *LADY CAB DRIVER*; *ALL THE CRITICS LOVE U IN NEW YORK*; *INTERNATIONAL LOVER*.

Personnel: Prince, various instruments, vocals; Dez Dickerson, guitar (cut 2); Lisa Coleman, Dez Dickerson, J.J., Vanity, Wendy, vocals.

★★★★★

Though he simply calls himself Prince, there is nothing simple about this musical wunderkind who has been causing critics to scramble for superlatives since the release of his breakthrough album, *Dirty Mind*, three years ago. A young man from Minneapolis, Prince just may be, with the exception of Rick James, the most talented pop musician to emerge since Stevie Wonder came of age in the early '70s.

Consider Prince's multi-faceted abilities: on his fifth album, 1999, he plays nearly all the instruments (bass, drums, drum machine, lead and rhythm guitars, synthesizers, keyboards), sings all lead vocals and most background vocals, wrote all the songs as well as producing the whole thing. Of course Prince as one-man-band would mean nothing if he didn't deliver the musical goods; he does. Where other artists who have tried this approach (Paul McCartney for one) usually come up with sterile, antiseptic music that sounds like one guy made it, Prince's record sounds like the work of a brainy, gutsy, inspired band.

On his last two albums—*Dirty Mind* and *Controversy*—Prince came off like the Hugh Hefner of rock & roll, focusing on sexual politics, singing about such controversial subjects as incest, oral love, and bisexuality. Here he's toned down the subject matter somewhat. The songs are more lyrically conventional, dealing with male/female love and sensuality on the one hand, and the need to escape the stress of modern times on the other. For Prince, one manages to survive the pressures of day-to-day living by that age-old release: the party. Yet because Prince won't let himself (or us) forget the troubles of the world, he sets up the party action of 1999 within the context of a world about to cave in on itself.

The title track, in which Prince sings of dreaming about Judgment Day, lays everything right on the line: "War is all around us/ My mind says prepare to fight/So if I gotta die/ I'm gonna listen to my body tonight/Cuz they say 2000 zero, zero party over/Oops out of time/So tonight I'm gonna party like it's 1999." In other words, Prince thinks it's a pretty good idea to have fun right to the bitter end. He spends most of these four sides showing us how.

Prince's gorgeous voice, an ice-melting tenor that is equally believable when it slides up to a falsetto, reminds one of John Lennon's voice in its flexibility, Sly Stone's in its funkiness, Little Richard's in its manic abandon, and Bruce Springsteen's in its sincerity. Add a bit of Smokey Robinson and maybe you get



DIANE COLE

the idea. This record is jammed with brilliant vocals, from the lead on *Little Red Corvette* to the cracked falsetto of *Free*. But 1999 is about more than just great singing. Treating the recording studio as just another tool, Prince uses echo and delay, multi-tracking and other electronic manipulations to mold his sound. The emphasis on synthesizers and drum machines, giving this entire album a distinctly modern, almost futuristic quality, is impressive. Here Prince is able to combine the emotional vulnerability of soul and the bravado of rock with electronics. His victory is his ability to make music that never sounds alienating or merely mechanical. The human being is always clearly at the center of this party.

Over four sides Prince is able to cover a lot of musical ground, from the rock & roll of 1999 and *Little Red Corvette* to the dance-funk of *D.M.S.R.*, from the new wave-styled robot-rock of *Automatic* and *Something In The Water* to the gospel-like ballad *Free*. Along the way Prince shows off some terse hard rock guitar, a fluid keyboard style, and a wide range of synthesizer tones and textures. Taken as a whole, 1999 is testament to Prince's commitment to pushing the pop song form to the limit. —michael goldberg

TONY WILLIAMS

ONCE IN A LIFETIME—Verve VE2-2541:

EMERGENCY; *A FAMOUS BLUES*; *WHERE*; *BIG NICK*; *SANGRIA FOR THREE*; *BEYOND GAMES*; *VIA THE SPECTRUM ROAD*; *SPECTRUM*; *VUELTA ABAJO*; *VASHKAR*; *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN—THEM*; *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN—US*; *SOMETHING SPIRITUAL*.

Personnel: Williams, drums, vocals; John McLaughlin, guitar, vocal (cut 2); Larry Young, organ; Jack Bruce, bass (9).

★★★★★

Some 15 years after the advent of what was

then termed jazz-rock fusion, that idiom, artistically moribund only a short while ago, has taken on new life. In the recent light of "harmolodic funk" and its congeners, a retrospective glance at the original fusion phenomenon would seem in order. The first incarnation of the Tony Williams Lifetime, featuring organist Larry Young (later known as Khalid Yasin) and a then-obscurer guitarist named John McLaughlin, recorded two volatile and decidedly uneven albums for the Polydor label—both long out-of-print—before disbanding in 1970. Handsomely annotated by James Isaacs, *Once In A Lifetime* combines all of the first Lifetime set, *Emergency*, and more than half of the second, *Turn It Over*, in an ample (nearly 90-minute) two-fer package. By turns enthralling and appalling, sublime and ridiculous, the Williams trio embodied the contradictory impulses of its turbulent era. The dualities of earthiness and spiritualism, commerciality and art-for-art's-sake, have seldom been so jarringly juxtaposed. Judging from the latest neo-fusion offerings, those conflicts, so brilliantly resolved in the heyday of Ellington and Basie, remain painfully unsettled in contemporary music.

Williams, a former child prodigy, was a seasoned veteran at 23 when he split from Miles Davis' band to form his own group in 1969. He enlisted Young, a soul-jazz organist who had come under the vanguard influence of John Coltrane, and invited McLaughlin, whom he had heard only on record, to fly over from England to join him. Immediately upon arriving in New York, McLaughlin was pressed into service on Davis' epochal *In A Silent Way* album, but declined Miles' offer of tenure to perform with Williams instead.

Recorded three months later, *Emergency* is a triumph of energy over engineering; despite the miserable sound quality, the band carries the day through sheer exuberance. Owing, most likely, to the ear-splitting

volume of the studio performance—evident from the loudly buzzing amplifiers—the top and bottom frequencies have been sheared off, leaving only a muddy and conspicuously bass-less mid-range. At its best, as on the torrid title track, *Lifetime* is a three-headed monster, with Williams driving relentlessly while McLaughlin ignites a metallic firestorm over Young's quivering keyboard undulations. At its worst, as on the turgid *Beyond Games*, the group wallows in sappy psychedelia unworthy of a garage band, as Williams intones his hippy-dippy lyrics with sophomoric self-assurance. Williams' crackling duets with the fleet and soulful organist are among *Emergency's* highlights; in the absence of McLaughlin's overamplified distortions, Young's dense improvisations sound positively restful.

The remaining selections, from *Turn It Over*, are interspersed with the *Emergency* material. Only slightly better recorded, these tracks are distinguished by an increased melodic emphasis and a marked inclination toward the hard-rock sounds of Cream and Jimi Hendrix. Jack Bruce's bass is heard on a single tune, *Vuelta Abajo*, but never penetrates beneath the mid-range clutter. McLaughlin mutters tripped-out nonsense in tandem with Williams on *A Famous Blues*, but it is Young who makes the most effective contribution with a sprinting version of Coltrane's *Big Nick*.

Williams' drumming is consistently superb, his crisp cymbal work far jazzier than the funk-rock backbeat of later fusioners. His compositional talents are less admirable; *Lifetime's* original tunes are merely elementary figures, the improvisatory potential of which is exhausted long before the musicians cease their undaunted floundering. Yet despite its obvious weaknesses, *Once In A Lifetime* has more than historical significance. In those passages when the three players lock into the same hypnotic groove, the band achieves an electrifying intensity that transcends the boundaries of time and genre.

—Larry Birnbaum

SONNY ROLLINS

REEL LIFE—Milestone M-9108; *REEL LIFE*; *McGHEE*; *ROSITA'S BEST FRIEND*; *SONNY SIDE UP*; *MY LITTLE BROWN BOOK*; *BEST WISHES*; *SOLO REPRISE*.

Personnel: Rollins, tenor saxophone; Bobby Broom, electric guitar; Yoshiaki Masuo, acoustic, electric guitar; Bob Cranshaw, electric bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

★ ★ ★

Perhaps Sonny Rollins' gift is also his curse. He is a musician of talents so vast he can bring substance to almost any album or group of accompanists without ever totally exploiting his abilities or approaching his limits. One can look at almost all of Rollins' recorded output of the 1970s and '80s in that light, and *Reel Life* does little to dispute the diagnosis. For years Rollins has been making albums such as this, laying his lusty voice atop an electric—but never threateningly or challengingly so—rhythm section and, by dint of the pleasure and confidence of his

performance, raising the dismissable to the listenable, even infectious.

On occasions, like the disc *Easy Living*, Rollins has appeared pregnant with the consummate work of his latest era, but he never has delivered. He justified himself in an acoustic context and with the choicest company on the Milestone Jazzstars tour and album, but the gathering of Rollins, McCoy Tyner, Ron Carter, and Al Foster proved never to be repeated. It is initially surprising, but on afterthought not surprising at all, that argu-

ably Rollins' best playing since then took place on the Rolling Stones' *Tattoo You*; there, for once, Rollins faced something new—new rules, strange conventions, a jarring musical culture shock for one who, admittedly, had listened to little rock & roll. But Rollins never has risked as much on his own projects—he and his wife, Lucille, produced *Reel Life*—and so, again, he has served something more than a confection but far less than a banquet.

A selection like *Rosita's Best Friend* is

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RECORD REVIEWS

typical. Rollins, the master of Caribbean influences, adopts a latin accent and the result is every bit as pleasing as, say, *Don't Stop The Carnival*. Rollins remains a master of doing a lot with something as little as a riff—handling it, spinning it, reshuffling it, peppering one note, sliding across octaves and keys. He still captivates. But the moment he lays out, the inspiration vanishes, and a vamp carries on where a song was. The same holds true for *Reel Life*, as Rollins swaggers, almost cantankerously, like the Old Man telling the kids a thing or two. But Rollins' musical children are neither the wonderkind of the great Miles Davis bands nor even the equivalent of the current Davis aggregation, which displays a certain excitement in scrambling to stay with their genius leader. No one plays poorly with Rollins on this album, but only Jack DeJohnette, the drummer and hardly a jazz youngster, plays noticeably well. On a hiatus from his own chamberlike conceptions, DeJohnette is plucky and funky without being simplistic. He pounds and kicks the band, but the band doesn't kick back nearly enough.

It is disappointing in a way to say that *My Little Brown Book* is the highlight of the album, because it well should be. From the first bar it is a statement more direct than anything else on *Reel Life*. Rollins struts, yet allows a hint of vulnerability. Bobby Broom chimes his obligatos to the tenor, and Bob Cranshaw handles his electric bass with lovely restraint. But one wishes Rollins would excel in unexpected as well as expected ways. It is true he long ago vindicated a life, a reputation, in jazz. It is also true he paid a psychological price from the pressure of matching strides with his contemporaries John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman. But if for nothing more than ego, Rollins should scale the summit again for those of us too young to have witnessed his great, early ascensions. —sam freedman

HERBIE HANCOCK

QUARTET—Columbia C2 38275: *WELL, YOU NEEDN'T*; *ROUND MIDNIGHT*; *CLEAR WAYS*; *A QUICK SKETCH*; *THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE*; *PARADE*; *THE SORCERER*; *PEE WEE*; *I FALL IN LOVE TOO EASILY*.

Personnel: Hancock, piano; Wynton Marsalis, trumpet; Ron Carter, bass; Tony Williams, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

There is a standard formula for records like *Quartet*. Supersessions ÷ Superstars = Superficial Music.

Fortunately Herbie Hancock did not follow the formula here. Instead, he collaborated with Ron Carter, Tony Williams, and Wynton Marsalis on an equation that produced a solid album with just one minor disappointment.

The interplay among the four musicians on this two-record set is uncanny. These are busy players dedicated to filling their parts with notes. Yet, with so many sounds coming from four different directions, Hancock, Carter, Williams, and Marsalis still manage to listen intently to each other. Marsalis ends his

Well, You Needn't solo on a wrinkled note. Right away Hancock grabs the funny, ruffled tone and translates it for piano. Behind Hancock's solo, Williams follows, leads, coaxes, and forces. Long known for his attention to tonal textures, Williams outdoes himself on *Quartet*. He can make a song seem to gallop, canter, or trot—while never changing pace. He does it with sounds. The cymbal can be a soft breeze or a hurricane. The snare can punctuate Marsalis' notes or fall in with Carter's bass line. The bass drum can pound insistently or flop like a flat tire on hot asphalt.

By far the best cut on the album is Carter's *A Quick Sketch*. At over 16 minutes it is not quick. And, with its detailed solos it is no sketch. Carter, like all great bassists, knows the value of a catchy motif. His three-note figure propels the song and the soloists, and grips the listener's attention throughout with a mysterious air, which is maintained in the solos. Hancock's piano acts awfully suspicious with secretive phrases and damped tones. Marsalis' trumpet echoes eerily. Ghostly notes and sudden lines dart from darkened doorways to cross mean streets of ominous drum rolls and bass glissandos.

The album's lone shortcoming surfaces on *I Fall In Love Too Easily*. Marsalis' stance is just too aggressive to be convincing—anybody that strong could never fall in love too easily. But, that's okay. Marsalis is only 21—youth can make the mistakes which time corrects. For now, it is better to err on the side of saying too much, too forcefully, rather than saying nothing at all. —cliff radel

JOHN McLAUGHLIN

MUSIC SPOKEN HERE—Warner Bros.

23723-1: *ASPAN*; *BLUES FOR L.W.*; *THE TRANSLATORS*; *HONKY TONK HAVEN*; *VIENE CLAREANDO*; *DAVID*; *NEGATIVE IONS*; *BRISE DE COEUR*; *ORO*.

Personnel: McLaughlin, acoustic, electric guitar; Katia Lebeque, Synclavier, piano; Francis Couturier, electric piano, synthesizer; Jean-Paul Cleo, bass; Tommy Campbell, drums.

★ ★ ★

It has been too long since John McLaughlin, one of the icons of the guitar, has released a truly significant album—since the last Shakti album in 1977, to be exact. Like the interceding records since then, *Music Spoken Here* is another in a series of competent, workmanlike recordings that maintain McLaughlin's reputation as a virtuoso who plays with conviction. Unfortunately his choice of landscapes has been two-dimensional at best. Innovation is only a minor criteria for excellence, yet McLaughlin seems to flounder without new territories to explore. Since that creative period of the Mahavishnu Orchestra and Shakti, McLaughlin has been searching for a new vehicle and marking time with a lot of rentals. His last two electric albums were pallid exercises, and his acoustic work with Al DiMeola and Paco De Lucia has been exciting, but not quite memorable.

Recently McLaughlin moved to France and has been trying a new format that allows

him to play acoustic guitar, and still gives him the drive and textures of an electric group. On *Music Spoken Here* all of the possibilities have not been revealed. It features the core group of McLaughlin's last LP, *Belo Horizonte*, an album that veered dangerously towards middle-of-the-road background music. Except for two token all-electric tracks, *Music Spoken Here* is a more conceptually pointed exploration of McLaughlin's new electro-acoustic merger.

Unlike the best McLaughlin ensembles, the excitement here isn't in the interaction among the musicians but in McLaughlin's ability to create an intricate sound world with only his guitar. The keyboardists seem out of their element, never milking the orchestral textures that McLaughlin has written, nor challenging him in solos or accompaniment. On *Aspan* they run off scales with a pedestrian precision, but McLaughlin takes those same scales and unlocks their inner dynamics with subtle shifts of timing and intonation in the midst of his fastest runs. He changes gears imperceptibly and seems to distort time on *David*, with flurries of notes shifting against tense, sustained synthesizer chords. *Negative Ions* comes closest to his best energy playing. Campbell forms a churning tunnel with a symmetrical display of rimshots and cymbal rides while McLaughlin tears recklessly down the middle.

McLaughlin has suffered a lot of undeserved flak for his sheerly virtuosic performances and those of his groups, at the expense of overlooking his ability to bring us into a new environment of sound, whether it was the electric subterranean darkness of the Tony Williams Lifetime, the demonic mysticism of Mahavishnu, or Shakti's exotic acoustic labyrinths. His recent work has failed to transport us as totally or convincingly. Music is spoken here; but where are we? —john diliberto

BAIKIDA CARROLL

SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS—Soul Note SN 1023: *KAKI*; *JAHI SUNDANCE LAKE*; *LEFT JAB*; *PYRAMIDS*; *AT ROI*.

Personnel: Carroll, trumpet, flugelhorn; Julius Hemphill, alto, tenor saxophone; Anthony Davis, piano; Dave Holland, bass; Pheeroan Ak Laff, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

After debuting with a risky double-record solo effort about three years ago, Baikida Carroll has returned in the classic five-piece ensemble with a wide-ranging set of compositions that may not be spectacular, but suit the strengths of the impressive sidemen on his first group date as a leader.

Actually Carroll shares prominence with Julius Hemphill, his more widely known counterpart from the Black Artists Group out of St. Louis and one of Carroll's strong supporters. Hemphill makes the most out of *Shadows And Reflections*. He is astonishingly fluid in tone and conception from the brisk, open-ended *Pyramids* to the pleasantly herky-jerky *At Roi* (the head is strongly mindful of Eddie Harris' classic *Freedom Jazz Dance*) and the lazy-day ballad, *Jahi*

Sundance Lake.

Carroll may dismay some listeners who revel in the crisp, metallic tone that is acclaimed in many popular trumpeters—his sound is thicker than most, creating a closer harmonic parallel with the saxophone and grayer colors in improvisation. His best moment comes on *Pyramids*, when he sprints ahead of the already furious pace set by Holland and Ak Laff, tattooing slightly blunt yet well-defined lines, and returning to play off his rhythm section with a keen sense of spacing.

Nevertheless, the stimulation from Carroll is limited: he is frugal with the quirks and brief concepts that create the unexpected on trumpet; his flugelhorn is warm and attractive but undistinguished. By contrast, Hemphill thrives on Carroll's compositions, offering a fountain of quips and flourishes on *Left Jab* (perhaps pushing Carroll into his best inventiveness), a compact melancholy on *Jahi*, and a zero-based approach to each of the other compositions. Anthony Davis deftly handles each chordal task and plays with an understated virtuosity on *Jahi* as well.

It's unlikely that Carroll will be widely acclaimed as a trumpeter, in part because of self-limitations and in part because the traditional appeal of the instrument is in another direction. Yet he shows enough promise as a modern composer with a vigorous consid-

eration for hard bop that *Shadows And Reflections*, while falling short of extensive praise, holds promise. —r. bruce dold

JOHN LEWIS

KANSAS CITY BREAKS—Finesse FW-38187:

DJANGO; SACHA'S MARCH; LYONHEAD; WINTER TALE; VALERIA; D & E; KANSAS CITY BREAKS; MILANO.

Personnel: Lewis, piano; Marc Johnson, bass; Howard Collins, guitar; Shelly Manne, drums; Frank Wess, flute; Joe Kennedy Jr., violin.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

John Lewis must by now be regarded as somewhat of a national treasure. Though the mainstay of the long-lived (almost 25 years) Modern Jazz Quartet, in recent years Lewis' interests have been many and varied. During his tenure as a teacher at New York's City College, he organized a student ensemble comprising this unusual instrumentation, and was so taken with the textural possibilities he eventually formed this group.

Very little need be said about the musicians appearing with him on *Kansas City Breaks*, although mention should be made of Joe Kennedy Jr., whose name and reputation seem to be well-kept secrets. His violin may put one in mind of such jazz greats as Stuff

Smith and Ray Nance. His solos are a delight and a reminder that this instrument has a very firm place in jazz. *Lyonhead*, in particular, gives ample opportunity for some adventurous and titillating out-of-tempo counterpoint between Kennedy and Lewis, with Manne's sleek drumming holding it all together.

The writing, of course, is typically Lewis. There is great beauty in *Valeria* (from a 1962 Lewis film score), with the violin lending a majestic air; the blues are represented in the nine-minute long *D & E*, which is essentially a feature for the phenomenal talents of bassist Marc Johnson. In this, also, Lewis brings out his humorous, whimsical side, with conversational exchanges between the instruments.

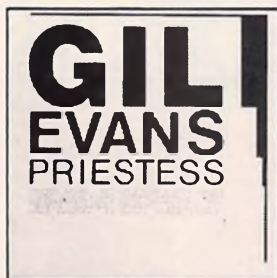
Winter Tale, on the other hand, has a distinctly gypsy flavor, with Kennedy introducing the moody theme and the violin and piano weaving in and out of each other while Wess' flute chases them in the background. *Django* is one of Lewis' most famous compositions; here it takes on a new countenance, with Collins and Kennedy sensitively interpreting the classic theme.

Although shades of MJQ are abundantly evident (how could they not be?), nevertheless, this is a progressive and evolving Lewis. The music in *Kansas City Breaks* swings a lot and makes some new statements. This pro-

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vides an excellent example of how tradition and innovation can coexist and is a testament to the durability of such masters as John Lewis. —frankie nemko

JIMMY JOHNSON

NORTH/SOUTH—Delmark 647: *COUNTRY PREACHER*; *CAN'T GO NO FURTHER*; *TRACK TO RUN*; *WALKING ON THIN ICE*; *TALKING 'BOUT CHICAGO*; *A WOMAN AIN'T SUPPOSED TO BE HARD*; *I CAN'T SURVIVE*; *SANG A SONG IN HEAVEN*; *DEAD OR ALIVE*.

Personnel: Johnson, guitar, vocals; Carl P. Snyder, keyboards; Larry Exum, bass; Ike Davis, drums; Larry Burton (cuts 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9), Criss Johnson (2, 5, 8), guitar; Eddie Lusk Jr., organ (2, 3, 6, 9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Jimmy Johnson's *North/South*, his second Delmark album, is a fine one, offering the listener a spirited, immensely satisfying sampling of just what's best about contemporary blues. As a singer he's more than competent in his projection of strong, unfeigned emotion (although from time to time his vocals are placed a bit too far back in the overall sound mix for my tastes), and he's a vigorous, non-nonsense guitarist who displays taste and invention every time out. Best of all, he's a fine songwriter whose compositions—the focus

of any blues recording, after all—just keep getting better and better, more solidly constructed and finely tuned with each of his record outings. All nine of the album's compositions are his.

If every song were of the quality of *Country Preacher* or *Talking 'Bout Chicago*, *North/South* would be a major candidate for blues album of the year. In *Country Preacher*, easily the finest piece on the set, Johnson updates the familiar conceit of the blues singer as secular preacher with a strong, well-written set of lyrics that develop the subject succinctly and imaginatively ("I'm just like the country preacher, and the tavern is my church," he sings forcefully, "when it comes to raising souls, you know I've got the magic touch"), giving us the contemporary equivalent of, say, Bessie Smith's 1927 *Preachin' The Blues*. His *Talking 'Bout Chicago* is almost as effective lyrically, and further illustrates Johnson's ability to dip into the deep wellspring of traditional expression and find appealing new ways of expressing timeless verities. Others of his songs—*A Woman Ain't Supposed To Be Hard* and *I Can't Survive* are good examples—offer interesting themes, but the lyrics just miss their best, most trenchant expression.

The band work is exemplary, moving forward with plenty of focused, biting energy, easy rhythmic power, and tight ensemble

playing, all in a very contemporary-sounding vein. The addition of several instrumentalists to the band's four-player nucleus helps quite a bit. The production values are, blessedly, first rate, with a lustrous recorded sound that gives a great deal of punch to the band's work. Kudos to Johnson, his bandmen, and Delmark's Steve Tomashofsky for a stunning set that reaffirms the power and beauty of Chicago blues. —pete welding

AIR

AIR SONG—India Navigation IN 1057:

UNTITLED TANGO; *GREAT BODY OF THE RIDDLE OR WHERE WERE THE DODGE BOYS WHEN MY CLAY STARTED TO SLIDE*; *DANCE OF THE BEAST*; *AIR SONG*.

Personnel: Henry Threadgill, alto, baritone, tenor saxophone, flute; Fred Hopkins, bass; Steve McCall, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

This is an early Air effort (previously issued in '75 in Japan) and quite a good one. Threadgill, Hopkins, and McCall form an equilateral triangle of swinging intensity—when one begins to strut into the outer hinterlands, at least one other is nailing things down with a solid boot, and this is what makes their music so unique and accessible.

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Air Song opens with the trio in its strongest métier: taking a rusty musical form—in this case the tango—and turning it into a swaggering romp, with tongue-not-quite-in-cheek. McCall and Hopkins are unrelenting in their swing, in the classic sense, and composer Threadgill chops off staccato tenor phrases with feverish intensity. Hopkins takes a sly, roundabout bass solo, and the thing just tangoes along nicely—never losing the latin tinge it starts off with.

Great Body . . . , a stentorian, dirge-like theme, follows, with Threadgill switching to baritone. Threadgill has a heavy, croaky baritone sound, and this whole thing is rather thick and starchy though, typically, it does rev up, with McCall absolutely fiery. I prefer Threadgill on alto or flute myself, but, on this album, he uses a different horn on each composition (all his, by the way).

On side two—*Dance* and *Air Song*—he uses alto and flute, respectively. *Dance* has the reedman ranging far outside over Hopkins' absolute muscle and McCall's wire-brush windstorm. *Air Song*, the closer, is a peaceful, airy piece—Threadgill's clear, strong flute, Hopkins' bowed bass, and McCall's spacious drum work giving it an impressionistic and haunting chamber-like quality. Interplay is the hallmark of chamber music, and *Air's* interplay is at all times telepathic and exciting.

So a commendable album—even if not up to *Air Lore*, a true classic, or the band's other later, more solidified, work. —lee jeske

ROLAND HANNA

GERSHWIN CARMICHAEL CATS—CTI 9008:

STARDUST; SKYLARK; THEME FROM CATS (MEMORY); THE NEARNESS OF YOU; OH BESS, OH WHERE'S MY BESS; EMBRACEABLE YOU.

Personnel: Hanna, piano; Larry Coryell (cuts 1, 2, 5), David Spinozza (3, 4), guitar; Chet Baker, trumpet (2); Ronnie Cuber, soprano saxophone (3); Kermit Moore, cello (3); Don Sebesky, synthesizer (3); Mike Mandel, synthesizer programming (3); Gary King, electric bass (1, 3, 5); Rufus Reid (2), George Mraz (4), Mike Richmond (6), bass; Jimmy Madison (1, 2, 5), Peter Erskine (3), drums; Sammy Figueroa, percussion (1, 3); Vincent Taylor, steel drums (1, 3).

★ ★ ★ ★

A cheery warmth blankets the playing of Roland Hanna. Hand him a good tune, and he will make it smile. Give him a great one, and it will beam.

Hanna picked six greats for *Gershwin Carmichael Cats*. Five are proven standards. One, *Theme From Cats (Memory)*, is headed in that direction. Each selection employed a different instrumentation—the largest group

was a nonet; the smallest a duo, with a sextet, quintet, quartet, and trio in between. This spirit of variety also extended to the songs' interpretations. Hanna and his distinguished sidemen went for the unexpected every time.

On *Stardust* the pianist approached Hoagy Carmichael's classic from two different directions. First, although the cut lasts nine minutes, it never goes beyond the verse, which is rich enough and strong enough to be a work unto itself. Just to make sure, Hanna took different direction number two and tackled the song from a highly rhythmic, latin perspective. Keeping ad-libs to a minimum and using an overgrown rhythm section of piano, bass, drums, guitar, percussion, and steel drums, Hanna came up with a rendition that's less a display of improvisational prowess than a demonstration of the universal applicability of Carmichael's masterpiece. Hanna picked up the tempo somewhat for the traditionally ballad-paced *Sky-lark*. Nevertheless, the pace is still unhurried enough for Chet Baker's trumpet to fill up the song with those puffy cumulus clouds he calls notes.

Side two gets off to a slow start, artistically speaking, with *Theme From Cats (Memory)*. Vincent Taylor's steel drums gave this nonet arrangement a pronounced Caribbean feel. Unfortunately, no one in the stellar group of

ular reeds. T.M.



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Hanna, Don Sebesky, Ronnie Cuber, Peter Erskine, et al., felt very adventuresome. So, everybody stuck to Andrew Lloyd Webber's stirring melody and turned this number into four minutes of high-priced, high-class muzak.

The album's last three pieces make up for (*Memory*). For *The Nearness Of You*, the pianist mimicked the padding walk of George Mraz' bass and the fluid movement of Carmichael's melody. The result is a counter-melody that mirrors the meter of the composer's original theme. On Gershwin's *Bess* and *Embraceable You*, Hanna used the same lighthearted touch Bill Evans employed whenever he came near a waltz. And yet, these are not puff pieces. Hanna sounds lighthearted, not light-headed. He and his three cohorts gave *Bess* a cymbal-crashing Broadway finish. The piano/bass duet of *Embraceable You* features thematic variations highlighted by repeated excerpts from the melody's bridge and a chime-like refrain. The latter, a unison venture, signals an end to a fine song and an equally fine album.

—cliff radel

that recalls Tim Buckley.

Michael Gregory Jackson may be an eclectic's eclectic, but his world is not hermetic, only refined. He defies easy categorization—although one senses an affinity with such Brazilians as Gismonti, Nascimento, and even Jobim—but his music is highly accessible. In the end, one is simply happy to be able to confirm that Jackson remains one of contemporary music's few genuine poets.

—lars gabel

ILLINOIS JACQUET

THE COOL RAGE—Verve VE 2-2544: *PORT OF RICO; LEAN BABY; SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY; THE COOL RAGE; BLUES IN THE NIGHT; FAT MAN BOOGIE; WHAT'S THE RIFF; WHERE ARE YOU; SWINGIN' HOME; BLUESITIS; BOOT 'EM UP; SAPH; JACQUET'S DILEMMA; TALK OF THE TOWN; HEADS; BLUE NOCTURNE; I WROTE THIS FOR THE KID; PASTEL; THE KID & THE BRUTE; ALL OF ME; JUST A SITTIN' & ROCKIN'; MEAN TO ME; WRAP YOUR TROUBLES IN DREAMS; THE FLUKE; NO SWEAT; NITE OUT; FLYIN' HOME.*

Personnel: Jacquet, Count Hastings (cuts 9-11), Ben Webster (17, 19), tenor saxophone; Ernie Henry (9-11), Earl Warren (9-11), alto saxophone; Leo Parker (12-13), Cecil Payne (9-11, 14-16), baritone saxophone; Russell Jacquet (9-16), Joe Newman, Elmon Wright, Lamar Wright Jr. (9-11), trumpet; Matthew Gee (9-16), Henry Coker (9-11), trombone; Freddie Green (1-4, 9-11), Joe Sinacore (5-8), John Collins (21-23), Oscar Moore (18), Kenny Burrell (24-27), guitar; Hank Jones (1-4, 21-23), Sir Charles Thompson (5-8), Johnny Acea (8-17, 19), Carl Perkins (18, 20), piano; Count Basie (1, 2, 4), Hank Jones (5-8), Wild Bill Davis (24-27), organ; Ray Brown (1-4), Al Lucas (4-17, 19), Red Callendar (18, 20), Gene Ramey (21-23), bass; Jimmy Crawford (1-4), Shadow Wilson (4-11, 14-16), Osie Johnson (12, 13, 17, 19), Johnny Williams (25-27), J. C. Heard (18, 20), Art Blakey (21-23), drums; Chano Pozo (12-13, 17, 19), conga.

★ ★ ½

DEWEY REDMAN

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES—ECM-1-1225:
THREN; LOVE IS; TURN OVER BABY; JOIE DE VIVRE; COMBINATIONS; DEWEY SQUARE.

Personnel: Redman, tenor saxophone; Charles Eubanks, piano; Mark Helias, bass; Ed Blackwell, drums.

★ ★ ★

Reviewing these records by Dewey Redman and Illinois Jacquet together is more of a conceit than any serious attempt to relate their styles. Nevertheless, both are underrated Texas tenor saxophonists—Redman is from Forth Worth, Jacquet from Houston—whose swashbuckling, extroverted styles got them branded early by the jazz establishment as players in "bad taste." Just as Jacquet's above-and-below-the-staff caterwauling turned off the critics (and turned on the Jazz at the Philharmonic crowds) in the '40s, so Redman's growling through the horn in Ornette's late '60s band earned him an "angry avant garde" reputation. Furthermore, both players eventually repudiated, or at

MICHAEL GREGORY JACKSON

COWBOYS, CARTOONS & ASSORTED CANDY

... —Enja 4026: *COWBOYS, CARTOONS & ASSORTED CANDY; THE WAY WE USED TO BE; THIS LIFE, A ROAD; WHERE I COME FROM; AMERICAN DREAM; IT'S JUST A FLESH WOUND; STEEL YOUR HEART; SHARE MY LOVE; MR. COOL.*

Personnel: Jackson, vocals, electric, acoustic guitar.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Michael Gregory Jackson has done it again. The guitarist, composer, arranger, and vocalist who in the late 1970s recorded *Gifts* and *Heart & Center* for Arista/Novus and in the process proved himself to be one of the most lyrical musicians working today, has managed to record another singularly personal and arresting album.

Cowboys represents a concentration of efforts compared with the two previous releases. *Gifts* and *Heart & Center* overflowed with exceptional passages of fresh instrumental, melodic, and harmonic structures, but they also contained much that was more clever than satisfying. The many montages would come and go for their own sake; vocals were broken off and reintroduced in an ambitious kaleidoscope of sounds that was creative, but self-consciously so.

Cowboys, on the other hand, is a fully integrated album. Using a smaller canvas, Jackson here allows his compositions and vocals to take their time to unfold into rich solo guitar filigree work and moving songs. This balance between ambition and inspiration comes to finest expression on *The Way We Used to Be* and *American Dream*. On the former, Jackson's daring, darting vocal is so serene yet intense that one is hard-put naming a contemporary vocalist of similar grace and power. And on *American Dream*, supported by beautiful guitar obbligati, his singing takes on an intimate, dreamlike quality

least refined, their Texas accents.

The Cool Rage, culled from four previous Verves (8084, 8085, 8086, 8065) and unissued cuts from 1958 with Wild Bill Davis, recalls Jacquet in four situations: powder-blue tenor/organ combo, big band, his well-known octet, and various small combos. Some of the old hits, like *Port Of Rico*, sound fatuous today, but the ballads are a nice surprise. *Somewhere Along The Way* features a sleepy-lidded and seductive Jacquet, languid and gossipy, chuffing and slurring through an only slightly decorated melody, slowing to "wow" a note there, bite one off here, then coming to rest on a furry, flatted fifth. But for all his authority, when Jacquet pairs up for two blues jams with Ben Webster, it's clear who's the individual stylist. Jacquet is a combination of Lester's piping neuter and cross-cadence phrasing with Hawkins' growling arpeggios. Still, it's frustrating that no album consolidates his considerable achievement, especially this batch of old 78s. The curious listener would do better with the late '60s Prestige reissue.

Likewise, Dewey Redman has made more exciting albums than *The Struggle Continues*, which lacks the dark intensity of his Impulse sides. Nor does Redman play the musette here, only tenor, on this often implausibly light-hearted collection of two free-boppers, one ballad, a pointless gutbucket blues, one "free" piece, and an appropriately selected Bird tune, *Dewey Square*. Redman's style is subtle and modest, more intellectual than emotional. With Ornette's discontinuity and Pharoah's prayerful wail, Redman's condensed strings of clipped-off phrases don't have an immediately grabby follow-through, which makes for a hard-to-follow story line. But the restful, spiritual ballad, *Love Is*, and bumblebee-intense *Combinations* have some of the old energy. Ed Blackwell's needling snare drum, Mark Helias' driving 4/4 bass, and Charles Eubanks' crisp piano often seem to lead the band more than Redman does. I would have preferred to hear this Texas tenorman swaggering a bit more on his first ECM outing. Good taste, after all, only gets you in the door.

—paul debarros

CECIL TAYLOR

GARDEN—hot Art 1993/94: *ÉLÉL*; *GARDEN II*; *GARDEN I*; *STEPPING ON STARS*; *INTRODUCTION TO Z*; *DRIVER SAYS*; *PEMMICAN*; *POINTS*.

Personnel: Taylor, piano.

★ ★

Some musicians take charge from the moment they start to play. Cecil Taylor is one such performer. His jumpy, percussive energy allows him to step outside tonal boundaries in his music, but the best moments happen when he draws on tradition. He suggests styles instead of quoting patterns, hinting and then pulling away. Like Stravinsky or Ives, he treats styles as discrete entities with individual characters. In the new context older styles take on fresh meaning.

Unfortunately, authority can't substitute for content, and content is what's lacking on this

recording. Charles Ives wrote, "In two separate pieces of music in which the notes are almost identical, one can be of substance with little manner, and the other can be of manner with little substance." The latter is the closer to the truth in this case. Taylor begins forcefully, but the impact dissipates. It's like trying to make one can of paint do the job of two; by thinning it you not only lose the intensity of the color, you also start seeing the seams and imperfections of the object underneath.

Except for a slow, wailing opening vocal chant similar to those performed by Buddhist monks, the music revolves around a short, dense ostinato figure. It isn't a simple drone-like repetition of minimalist ilk. It defies expectations of regularity, at least for a while. Tone clusters and a punchy rhythm give it a distinctive character. But given all the repetition it's subjected to—four record sides' worth—it's understandable that it becomes predictable.

Lack of contrast is the major failing of the recording. A certain amount of conflict is needed in order for the music to achieve some depth. It's not just a cosmetic consideration. Making the melodies or harmonies sound blatantly altered is an obvious solution, but changes in harmonic rhythm (the speed of chord changes) or voicing, for example, would create a subtle differentiation in keeping with the monochromatic nature of the music.

—elaine guregian

JUDY CARMICHAEL

TWO HANDED STRIDE—Progressive 7065:

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS; *VIPER'S SONG*; *JA-DA*; *HONEYSUCKLE ROSE*; *AIN'T MISBEHAVIN'*; *HANDFUL OF KEYS*; *I AIN'T GOT NOBODY*; *ANYTHING FOR YOU*.

Personnel: Carmichael, piano; Marshall Royal, alto saxophone; Fred Green, guitar; Red Callender, bass; Harold Jones, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

MARTY GROSZ

I HOPE GABRIEL LIKES MY MUSIC—Aviva

6004: *SERENADE TO A WEALTHY WIDOW*; *JUNK MAN*; *MY LUCKY STAR*; *CACTUS CHARLIE*; *WHEN DAY IS DONE*; *YOU CALL IT MADNESS*; *I HOPE GABRIEL LIKES MY MUSIC*; *LONESOME ME*; *MY OLD GAL*; *CALIFORNIA HERE I COME*.

Personnel: Grosz, guitar, vocals; Jimmy Maxwell, trumpet; Bobby Pring, trombone; Leroy Parkins, Dick Meldonian, reeds; Dick Wellstood, piano; Pete Compo, Jack Six, bass; Fred Stoll, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

Here are a couple of totally charming, critics-be-damned throwbacks that manage to achieve a delightful life of their own without becoming scale-model reproductions of some original idea reduced to repertory.

A real stride pianist has to be able to throw around plenty of slam-bang abandon, but still keep enough control over all that energy to hold in proper balance all the things that are typically happening in any given two- or four-bar interlude. So I guess that makes

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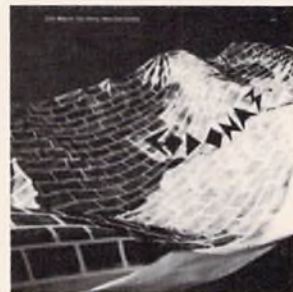
Collin Walcott, Don Cherry and Nana Vasconcelos

The musicians (Collin Walcott, Don Cherry, Nana Vasconcelos) and the instruments they play (sitar, tabla, pocket trumpet, berimbau, hammered dulcimer, dossal, gouni and many others) invoke the musical visions anyone interested in "new music" would expect: the totally unexpected. *Stereo Review* called their last album a "surrealistic collage of postcards from exotic places."



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RECORD REVIEWS

young Judy Carmichael a real stride pianist. She's got the feeling.

Players who walk along well-beaten musical paths such as stride are always faced with the necessity of competing with the pathfinders. Since Fats Waller—whose spirit and compositions dominate this LP—virtually paved the highway of stride piano, one might ask what a 28-year-old newcomer can contribute to such a fully explored area of jazz history. I would say nothing more or nothing less than Itzhak Perlman or Andre Watts contribute to the well-worn realms of Beethoven and Rachmaninoff. They perform the music; they renew its legitimacy; they extend traditions too valuable to lose into contemporary life. That's quite enough, and if the world would be diminished without the likes of Perlman and Watts, the same should be true of jazz (allowing for the fact that jazz is an art of performance and style more than literature).

Carmichael has enough of that whomping recklessness in her touch to keep the mostly Wallerish repertoire moving with a hard-swinging lift. Her strong left hand dominates the rhythm section, practically obliterating Freddie Green, who is nearly lost amidst all the two-beat. Marshall Royal's alto is clean and clear, with a lovely fat tone that fits right into this pre-bebop world.

Like Carmichael, Marty Grosz and his Blue Angels hark back to a time when jazz and Tin Pan Alley were as tight with one another as two beats in a bar. (One cannot seriously study jazz of the '30s without becoming something of an expert on the American popular song.) So without trying for any of the broad stylistic gimmicks of the '30s dance bands, the Blue Angels have produced an LP full of the spirit of that period. It's dated, but wonderfully and charmingly so. And it is—paradoxically—fresh too, because it bypasses the obvious '30s standards for such seldom-heard period items as *Junk Man* (with a quote from *Gimme A Pigfoot* in the intro), *My Lucky Star*, *Wealthy Widow* (as modernistic in its time as art deco), and the title track, *Gabriel*, which Chu Berry, Roy Eldridge, Goodman, and Krupa incinerated in a 1936 record. They don't write songs like these any more—that's neither a lament nor a putdown; it's a fact—and because they don't, this album takes on a somewhat distant and very singular identity of its own.

The musicians assembled are pro's, all. Marty Grosz puts a buoyant spring in the rhythm section's step; Jimmy Maxwell is a powerful lead horn; and so on. But this is more a small band ensemble, less a setting for any one principal soloist, although Dick Wellstood's *California Here I Come* is such an attractive abstraction of that nearly forgotten number that it comes close to swallowing the album. Or maybe it just reminds me of Joe Bushkin's classic Commodore version with Pee Wee, Freeman, and Hackett. In any case, the music swings lightly, not hard. It is what music of the '30s was designed to be—dance music. For the audience with a sensitive ear for such things, the Blue Angels should be a welcome treat.

—John McDonough

DAMERONIA

TO TADD WITH LOVE—Uptown UP 27.11:

PHILLY J.J.; SOULTRANE; SID'S DELIGHT; ON A MISTY NIGHT; FONTAINEBLEAU; THE SCENE IS CLEAN.

Personnel: Philly Joe Jones, drums; Johnny Coles, trumpet, flugelhorn; Donald Sickler, trumpet (cuts 1, 2, 4); Britt Woodman, trombone; Frank Wess, alto saxophone; Cecil Payne, baritone saxophone; Charles Davis, tenor saxophone; Walter Davis Jr., piano; Larry Ridley, bass.

★ ★ ★ ★

MINGUS DYNASTY

REINCARNATION—Soul Note SN 1042:

REINCARNATION OF A LOVE BIRD; EAST COASTING; WEDNESDAY NIGHT PRAYER MEETING; DUKE ELLINGTON'S SOUND OF LOVE; JUMP MONK; ECCLESIASTICS.

Personnel: Richard Williams, trumpet; Jimmy Knepper, trombone; Ricky Ford, tenor saxophone; Sir Roland Hanna, piano; Reggie Johnson, bass; Kenny Washington, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

The idea of a repertory band devoted to the work of one figure pivotal to the development of jazz should cause one to focus on the distinctions between traditions and institu-



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tions. As jazz is a populist art form, traditions should, of course, be encouraged; but an institutionalizing of the music, which occurs when a repertory band regresses to mere banner-waving, should be avoided at all costs. The task of the repertory band, then, is something of a tightrope walk, as it must be true to the spirit, if not the letter, of the music without the static postures of the revivalist and the academian. "Make it new" should be the rule of thumb applied to repertory bands, a standard adhered to on both the debut of Dameronia and, at last, by Mingus Dynasty on their third offering.

As the sweet singability of Tadd Dameron's compositions has been trivialized in motion picture and television scores, and does evoke the deep eruptive emotions found in Mingus' work, Dameron's compositions present an uncommon challenge in a repertory setting. The music requires a brawny edge that does not stiffen either the melodic impetus or the close-order arrangements—here provided by Philly Joe Jones' patented pulse and the transcriptions of musical director Don Sickler and John Oddo (only *Soultrane*,

which adapts Dameron's piano part from the quartet recording with Coltrane, is not based on the original arrangement). Dameronia also features the sophisticated soloists necessary to point up the subtleties of the arrangements, particularly Frank Wess, who lovingly caresses *Soultrane* and bolts through *On A Misty Night*, and Johnny Coles, whose intricate yet smoothly swinging lines highlight the popping *Philly J.J.* and the buoyant *Sid's Delight*. This project would have suffered terribly if it had been rushed to completion the way the first Mingus Dynasty album apparently was, but, fortunately, painstaking patience and care is evident in every note.

Jimmy Knepper's nuance-filled arrangements, the articulate rhythmic propulsion, and the fine jelling of solo voices on such seldom-heard pieces as the ebullient *Jump Monk* and war-horses like *Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting*, make *Reincarnation* the most engaging Mingus Dynasty release to date. More so than on their other recordings, the Dynasty focuses upon the small compositional devices Mingus milked emotional

critics' choice

Art Lange

NEW RELEASE: Jerry Gonzalez & The Fort Apache Band, *The River Is Wide* (Enja). The eight-man percussion section kicks this 12-piece band through hot *neuvorican* jazz paces.

OLD FAVORITE: T-Bone Walker, *Classics Of Modern Blues* (Blue Note). Texas swing jump band shuffle blues and slow moaners from the '50s, often copied, never equaled.

RARA AVIS: Mike Bloomfield/AI Kooper, *The Live Adventures Of Bloomfield And Kooper* (Columbia). Bloomfield's best blues guitar playing on record.

SCENE: Jay McShann and Ralph Sutton's stride pianos in tandem at Rick's in Chicago.

Charles Doherty

NEW RELEASE: Dewey Redman Quartet, *The Struggle Continues* (ECM). Smooth tenor sax stylings with a harmolodic edge and Ed Blackwell kicking things along.

OLD FAVORITE: Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Electric Ladyland* (Reprise). On rainy days, I still dream away. . . .

RARA AVIS: Oak Ridge Boys, *American Made* (MCA). So sue me, but Duane Allen's the best damn singer around, and the other Boys are right behind.

SCENE: Sons and father back-to-back—Wynton and Branford Marsalis on Saturday and Ellis on Sunday at Joe Segal's Jazz Showcase in Chicago.

Lee Jeske

NEW RELEASE: Sonny Rollins, *Reel Life* (Milestone). The best LP from these quarters in a decade.

OLD FAVORITE: Rahsaan Roland Kirk/AI Hibbler, *A Meeting Of The Times* (Atlantic). One of the original In The Tradition-alists and a unique Ellingtonian team up with a classic combustion.

RARA AVIS: Leon Redbone, *From Branch To Branch* (Emerald City). The old-time crooner's most accomplished of his several excellent albums.

SCENE: "A Tribute To Al Haig"—six glorious pianists (Barry Harris, Cedar Walton, Dick Katz, Walter Bishop Jr., Monty Alexander, Horace Mabern) together one afternoon at NYC's Village Gate.

A. James Liska

NEW RELEASE: Jimmy Mosher, *A Chick From Chelsea* (Discovery). The Bostonian Bird-watcher comes up swinging on this great, straight-ahead LP.

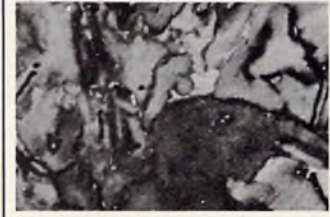
OLD FAVORITE: Miles Davis, *Kind Of Blue* (Columbia). I keep this classic next to the turntable.

RARA AVIS: Jacques Brel, *Enregistrement Public Amsterdam* (Barclay). A fascination for lilting melody, dramatic rendering, and the sound of the French language.

SCENE: The talk around L.A. has been of Seventh Avenue—headed by drummer Mike Stephans with Tom Garvin on piano, John Patitucci on bass, Justo Almarino on saxes, and Bob Ojeda on cornet/flugelhorn. **db**

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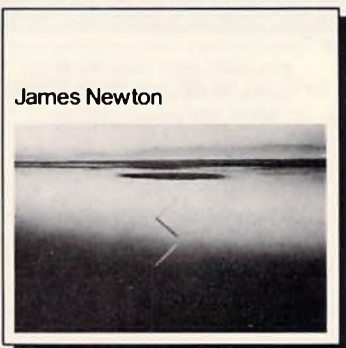
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WEBSTER COLLEGE

RECORD REVIEWS

detail from, such as the sensual pauses sprinkled throughout *Duke Ellington's Sound Of Love*. Also unlike previous Dynasty albums, the individual contributions on *Reincarnation* are never less than exceptional: Knepper and Richard Williams reassert themselves as top-drawer brassmen; Ricky Ford's bluesy swagger and incisive power has matured into a tenor aesthetic particularly pertinent to the new mainstream of the '80s; always the master craftsman, Roland Hanna ably assists Reggie Johnson and Kenny Washington in their tasteful side-stepping of a Mingus/Richmond simulation. Best of all, *Reincarnation* is a very unpretentious set. This lack of pretense in "keeping the music alive" is this edition of the Dynasty's gift to Mingus and his music.

—bill shoemaker

ROBERT DiDOMENICA

THE SOLO PIANO MUSIC—GM 2001/2:

SONATA AFTER ESSAYS FOR PIANO (I. PROLOGUE, II. EMERSON, III. HAWTHORNE, IV. THE ALCOTTS, V. THOREAU, VI. EPILOGUE); IMPROVISATIONS; ELEVEN SHORT PIECES; FOUR MOVEMENTS FOR PIANO; SONATINA FOR PIANO.
Personnel: Leona DiDomenica, piano; Linda Gabriele, mezzo-soprano (cut III); David Ripley, baritone (III); Ellen Morris, flute (V).

★ ★ ★

This two-record set gathers a sampling of the fluid, somber piano music of composer Robert DiDomenica, for many years a faculty member at New England Conservatory and during the '60s occasional flutist in the Third Stream outings of the Modern Jazz Quartet and John Lewis' Orchestra USA. Though the composer avows certain influences from jazz (one swift, unsyncopated short piece entitled *Charlie Parker*, a brief paraphrase of *Sophisticated Lady* at the end of one *Improvisation* and a two-fisted Gershwin-esque "quasi-blues" grounding another), these touchstones are veiled at best, for DiDomenica moves more among the craggy specifiers of Ives, Riegger, and Brahms than amid the quicksilver spirits of black classical music. All in all, this corpus of dreamy, craftsmanlike piano pieces is none too exciting, though there are moments of drama and beauty. Some of the meandering, post-Romantic feel of the pieces may be attributable in part to their performances, legato and leisurely, by DiDomenica's wife Leona, for whom all the pieces were written and to whom they are dedicated.

The main work is the half-hour *Sonata* (1977), based on philosophical precepts from Ives' writings and those literary figures whose names also entitle *Concord Sonata* and *Three-Page Sonata* by America's ur-composer. This complex work, self-conscious and imponderable without a trot, is leavened at climactic points with "off-stage" flute during eerie *ppp* night music, voices weighted with guilt (from *A Scarlet Letter*) as luminous arpeggios rise, a deft toccata on Beethoven's *Fifth*, and pre-taped piano tremolos in the finale as the piano sounds (for a familiar reference) like Monk stuck on the

second four bars of *Just A Gigolo*. This is essentially tight-lipped, unsmiling music, however, thorny and dense as Ives without the master's headlong extroversion, manic surprise, and devilish daring. Yet under the russet pall of a brooding Yankee austerity, DiDomenica captures some felicitous sounds (like the opening pages of the *Prologue*) and develops his own intimate logic and narrative powers.

The four earlier pieces take up one-half side each, and in the main do not carry the momentum of the *Sonata*; some seem bitty and diffuse etudes and sketches. The *Improvisations* (1974) are rambling *intermezzi* that show much less wit and sparkle than off-the-cuff gems we hear in clubs, but the *Eleven Short Pieces* (1973) have moments of melodic richness (first and last) and gracefully turned conceits (numbers seven and eight). The two remaining works have an engaging freshness about them, especially the playful *Presto* and knockout fadeaway *Fuga* taking out *Four Movements* (1959). The *Sonatina* (1958) gets some springy, *cantabile* lines going, too. Never mind the jazz references; if you want to try something different from bop, Keith Jarrett, and George Winston that's serious, pick up this from GM, 167 Dudley Street, Newton 02158 MA.

—fred bouchard

MARIAN McPARTLAND

PERSONAL CHOICE—Concord Jazz CJ-202: I

HEAR A RHAPSODY; MEDITATION; IN YOUR OWN SWEET WAY; A SLEEPIN' BEE; I'M OLD FASHIONED; WHEN THE SUN COMES OUT; TRICOTISM; MELANCHOLY MOOD.

Personnel: McPartland, piano; Steve La Spina, bass; Jake Hanna, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

In this, her fifth album for the Concord label, McPartland shows how she can integrate her vast scope of experience into just a little over 30 minutes of music. For instance, she'll take an extremely simple melody like Jobim's *Meditation* and embellish it with such sensitivity so as not to lose its inherent simplicity, yet extract a vibrant new language from it. A rarely heard Harold Arlen/Ted Koehler song, *When The Sun Comes Out*, is an unusual choice, handled exquisitely.

Then, again, on the tried and true old standards, her penchant for single-note phrases can take the tune off into the nether realms, often coming back to land on a heavy, punctuated chord. Her adventurous spirit has been coming out more and more of late, and this is nowhere more evident than on the tricky and challenging Oscar Pettiford composition *Tricotism*. There is a hint of the Tristano school here, but only in the minor mode the tune takes at first, and not necessarily in McPartland's interpretation. This was my personal favorite, since I could feel a real sense of progression taking place.

McPartland is a great solo artist, as has been heard in previous albums; however, put together with two such empathetic associates, there are times in this set when the three sound like a single instrument. It would be pedantic to use such phrases as "tuned in,"

because it goes much deeper than that. Listen for this quality especially on *I'm Old Fashioned* and at times in *Tricotism*. In the former, Jake Hanna shows how effective brushes can be, keeping the drumwork ever so subtle.

Steve LaSpina is perfect for McPartland also; he's in the class of the Torffs and Pedersens. You can tell he really *listens*, doesn't just play. He has a great solo in *Sleepin' Bee*, and of course is featured in the Pettiford tune. He's straightforward, no-nonsense, and extremely pliable in this trio setting. —frankie nemko

VIENNA ART ORCHESTRA

SUITE FOR THE GREEN EIGHTIES—hat Art 1991/92: *HALUK, PLADOYER FOR SIR MAJOR MOLL; NANAN N'Z GANG; BLUE FOR TWO; SUITE FOR THE GREEN EIGHTIES.*

Personnel: Lauren Newton, voice; Karl Fian, trumpet; Herbert Joos, flugelhorn, baritone-horn, double trumpet, alpenhorn; Christian Radovan, trombone; Billy Fuchs, tuba; Harry Sokal, tenor, soprano saxophone, flute; Wolfgang Puschnig, alto saxophone, piccolo, flute, bass clarinet; Ingo Morgana, tenor saxophone; Woody Schabata, marimba, tablas, vibes; Uli Scherer, pianos, melodica; Jurgen Wuchner, bass; Wolfgang Reisinger, Janusz Stefanski, drums, percussion; Mathias Rüegg, leader, composer, arranger.

★ ★ ★ ★

BERLIN JAZZ WORKSHOP ORCHESTRA

SIB LANGIS—SAJ-30: *SING SING; MASGNAL; UNWUCHT; WORKING LEG; TUMBLING; DAS LIED VOM MUTTERSEELENALLEINSCHWEIN; TERCÜME ETNE; I DRINK NO INK.*

Personnel: Hermann Süß, Bernhard Mergner, trumpet, flugelhorn; Thomas Wiedermann, trombone; Friedemann Graef, soprano, baritone saxophone; Michel Mast, soprano, tenor saxophone; Otto Jansen, soprano, alto, tenor saxophone; Bernhard Arndt, piano; Thomas Wegel, bass; Stefan Thimm, Albrecht Riermeier, drums, percussion.

★ ★ ★

The Vienna Art Orchestra brings a new gleam to the tradition-encrusted genre of the big band with this release. Their music isn't embedded in typical big band traits; instead, experimentation forms another layer of an aggregate of styles.

Players offer avant garde, sometimes witty solos between full band pre-composed sections. The contrast between the accordion-bright timbre of the thickly scored full band and the darting lines, say, of trombonist Christian Radovan, assures interest. Although the listener may be taken aback, the musicians have clearly planned ahead. Particularly in the long *Suite For The Green Eighties*, each section leads logically to the next.

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among them — lies not just in the musicians' inventiveness but also in the thoroughness with which they realize their ideas into sound. In the *Suite* saxophonist Ingo Morgana unfolds line after flowing line as if from an inexhaustible bolt of fabric. He shapes his solo with the kind of purposefulness John Coltrane brought to *Impressions*, sustaining intensity throughout, communicating with unflagging drive. Drummer/percussionists Wolfgang Reisinger and Janusz Stefanski deserve special mention for the many ways they find to make solo and full band sections alike swing. Uli Scherer's piano also makes a valuable contribution.

The Berlin Jazz Workshop Orchestra stands on the brink of the Vienna group's success. Technical shortcomings don't help, but neither do they fully account for the near-miss, since the playing is mostly of high caliber. The problem is that the players don't take their experimental ideas firmly in hand. Instead of playing a functional role, sound experiments degenerate into decoration. The oily saxophone lines of *Tercüme Etne* and the captivatingly sensual modal *Das Lied Vom Mutterseelenalleinschwein* are appealing, but they exhaust the group's capacity for timbral experiments.

The Berlin group would do well to model their explorations after those of Lauren Newton, singer with the Vienna Art Orchestra, who takes the role of instrumentalist rather than chanteuse. Now, scatting is nothing new in jazz, but with a classical twist it takes on a new character. Newton's style here falls somewhere between scatting and *sprechstimme*, a Schönbergian hybrid of speech and singing that was eagerly taken up by avant garde composers who recognized its expressive capabilities. Even in a foreign language, Newton makes an impact, because the rhetoric isn't the message. She makes her voice part of the experimentation of the group, and she makes the technique her own.

—elaine guregian

CHICK COREA

TRIO MUSIC—ECM-2-1232: *TRIO IMPROVISATION 1; 2; 3; DUET IMPROVISATION 1; 2; TRIO IMPROVISATION 4; 5; SLIPPERY WHEN WET; RHYTHM-A-NING; 'ROUND MIDNIGHT; ERONEL; THINK OF ONE; LITTLE ROOTIE TOOTIE; REFLECTIONS; HACKENSACK.*

Personnel: Corea, piano; Miroslav Vitous, bass; Roy Haynes, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AGAIN AND AGAIN—Elektra Musician 9: *QUINTET #3; WALTZE; AGAIN AND AGAIN; 1-2-1234; DIDDLE DIDDLE; TWANG.*

Personnel: Corea, Rhodes electric piano, Minimoog, Hohner Duo, OB-Xa, Yamaha CS-1, Prime Time digital delay, cowbell, Chinese cymbal, Steve Kujala, flutes, soprano, tenor saxophone; Carlos Benavent, electric bass; Don Alias, percussion; Tom Brechtlein, drums.

★ ★

In the bestiary of jazz pianists, Jimmy Rowles is The Lizard, Roland Hanna is Sir Elf, and Chick Corea is The Chameleon. Or is it The

Leprechaun? In the quarter-century since Corea came out of Boston and hit the road with Mongo Santamaria (and thus cultivated latin fringes), he has worn more musical hats than Monk wore cranial ones—some fit well; some had better been left on the rack. The protean performer who (with Zawinul) introduced electric piano with Miles Davis has worked equally well with such diverse saxophonists as Stan Getz and Anthony Braxton; he blew fierce and strong with Woody Shaw and Joe Farrell (late '60s), wild and loose with Circle (1970), Spanish and daring with Return To Forever.

Corea's slick band of itinerant *jongleurs* recorded *Again And Again* while touring South Africa, so it's subtitled *The Jo'burg Sessions*. Side one whirls a lacy confection of svelte flute lines and a potpourri of keyboard capers. *Quintet* is lightweight and glib—nothing much happening in the solos and memorabilia departments. *Waltze* stamps its tiny foot and gets up a head of fluff to take you on a Bolling/Rampal *piqueur*. The title tune is short and sweet. Side two gets kinky and nasty, but there's not much to stick to the ribs, just willful effects and cat's-cradle with soprano and keys. *Diddle* might make a good soundtrack for a Pac-Man game (and *Twang* for Dungeons and Dragons); like *Quintet*, if it weren't for the sticky vampires, it'd roll off your plate like plastic tacos. One problem is that Corea's material is wearing thin, more texture than substance; unlike many early tunes that have worked their way into standard rep (*Matrix*, *Tones For Joan's Bones*, *Señor Mouse*), Corea's compositions today seem mainly either largely-written opuses or disposable nonentities.

Trio Music is an entirely different matter: all four sides of this reunion of an historic session dance with wild abandon. Fourteen years have passed since these three guys sculpted a landmark of collective improvisational music, *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs* (Solid State/UA). Disc one furthers the spontaneity, and disc two holds seven spell-binding Monk variations. The improvisations are informed with a wealth of Bartok-inspired harmonies, dance segments, and mallet work (*Trio 2* reminds me of *Sonata For Two Pianos And Percussion*, *Trio 3* of *Allegro Barbaro*). Vitous bows aplenty—luscious trills, grand glisses, pungent, occasionally sentimental cello-range lines filled with consanguinely Eastern European *sforzando* dance rhythms. The ESP between the two and among the three is electrifying, as if the magic among them has remained untapped and undiminished all these years. The way they manage time is often elemental and fragmentary but wonderfully cohesive.

As for Monk, Corea pays homage in no-trump, weaving crazy-quilt patterns of tart melody, minor ninths, spaced-out arpeggios, tritone crawls, stratospheric trills, until you half-picture Monk grinning over his shoulder. Corea states that these tracks were recorded before Monk died, and are not intended as a memorial but as "renditions of . . . classic music of the 20th century." One doesn't get the feeling that it is Chick "doing" Monk (except maybe on the wide-eyed *Reflec-*

tions); he's simply Chick in Monk's karakul beanie, wearing it with pride, affection, and irreverent good humor. From the side-opening unisons on *Rhythm* and *Rootie*, Vitous is ripe with vim and bounce, relishing Monk's pirouettes as much as Bartok's folk dancing. Haynes finds his cheerful kick-ass groove even more cleanly than he did with Monk himself and Johnny Griffin in that classic quartet at the Five Spot; his exchanges and ears here are wonderful. What really knocks me out is that the reckless jollity and potent presence of Monk's early Riverside and Blue Note sides are uncannily well captured.

—fred bouchard

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JAKI BYARD: *To Them-To Us* (Soul Note 1025) ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BOB NELOMS: *Pretty Music* (India Navigation IN 1050) ★ ★ ★ ★

WAYNE PEET: *Down-In/Ness* (9 Winds NWO 111) ★ ★ ★ ★

SERGEY KURYOKHIN: *The Ways Of Freedom* (Leo LR 107) ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

KEITH TIPPETT: *Mujician* (FMP JAJ 37) ★ ★ ★

ARNOLD KLOS: *Story Line* (Daybreak D-004) ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

BILL DOBBINS: *Dedications* (Omnisound Jazz N-1036) ★ ★ ★ ★

CHUCK MAROHNIC: *Permutations* (SteepleChase SCS 1050) ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

MITCHEL FORMAN: *Childhood Dreams* (Soul Note SN 1050) ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

TETE MONTOLIU: *Songs For Love* (Enja 2040) ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Anyone who doubts that we are in the welcome midst of a solo acoustic piano renaissance should consider the releases herein. While not all are entirely aesthetically successful, they share a probing vitality and a happily obsessive fascination with exploring the resources of what remains the grandest instrument in the keyboard family.

It has been said that the secret of genius is cruelty. **Jaki Byard's** *To Them-To Us* gives substance to this aphorism and in the process reaffirms Byard's all-encompassing sense of the scope of jazz piano history. How many players, for example, would be daring enough to follow the New Orleans Rhythm Kings' *Tin Roof Blues* with Chuck Mangione's *Land Of Make Believe*? And Byard plays the N.O.R.K. classic with a rare understanding of its place in the tradition of jazz literature. As for cruelty, only a pianist like Byard could sense that this piece has enough resilience to withstand his jarring, high-tension chordal punctuations. *Ode To Billy Joe* gets a broad refurbishing, replete with disquieting seconds and cagey chordal clusters. On *Solitude* Byard rattles off startling, brittle arpeggios, every note of which suggests shattering glass. *Caravan*, a nod in Art Tatum's direction,

creates the illusion that everything is exploding from the keyboard at once. *To Them-To Us*, a two-part piece "dedicated to artists living and dead," opens with a haunting, blues-tinged section, then moves into a series of quick, nearly aleatory material; *BL + WH = 88*, ostensibly a study in modality, could also serve as an object lesson in coherent outside playing. This is the work of a compelling, important pianist.

Judging from *Pretty Music*, **Bob Neloms** is decidedly a short-form pianist. Of these 10 pieces, only one runs over seven minutes, and the rest are shorter. The point is moot, though, for Neloms' playing proves the adage that less is indeed more, as the self-imposed formal constraints heighten his powers of invention. On *This Is How I Feel About You* his facile, full-bodied conception rises to the fore. *A Flat Blues* reveals Neloms' grasp of blues idioms while mixing in stride and boogie styles. Other unseemly yet viable stylistic mixes occur on *Bobby's Bossa Nova* and *Non Sense*. The former, a quasi-Brazilian piece, joins latin allusions with jazzy walking 10ths. *Non Sense*, Neloms' most tonally adventurous composition, punctuates a Monkish head with palms-on-the-keyboard crashes, then moves into a misterioso bass interlude. Rounding out this confident set of performances is *I Thought About You*, done partially in stride and replete with Tatum-like runs and punchy chords.

That **Wayne Peet** has learned much from the first wave of the avant garde pianists—Paul Bley and Cecil Taylor especially—is evidenced by *Down-In/Ness*. Like the early avant garde players, Peet has redefined the nature and function of acoustic piano in his own often expansive, often idiosyncratic terms. *Every Day*, for example, is a creaky, otherworldly etude exploring chiming, plucked strings, hand-hewn, single-note descending glissandi, and deliberately hammered bass notes. But the clue to Peet's intent appears on *Plea & Angel*. A carefree, tonally loose melodic line bounces happily over a swinging bass line, suggesting that Peet's use of atonality merely ices the rhythmic substructure of his keyboard designs. *The White Light* clinches this point. Peet's monumental left hand patterns not only support his treble improvisations, they become this tune's identity. More than the technical devices of the avant garde, Peet has assimilated their sense of freedom and of the validity and necessity of musical exploration. Combine these qualities with this pianist's relentless rhythmic momentum and the result is provocative.

Recorded in Leningrad, **Sergey Kuryokhin's** *The Ways Of Freedom* is interesting not so much as a musical statement as, perhaps, a cry for liberation from a politically and artistically repressive regime. As for Kuryokhin's music, it covers little ground that wasn't well-trod by the first wave of American experimental pianists. *Archipelago* typifies Kuryokhin's frantic approach. Booming bass swells pit against scraped treble strings, suggesting glass shattering. Granted, Kuryokhin is endowed with rapid-fire technique which creates the sensation that he is physically

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assaulting the piano; but to what musical end? Overall, his playing lacks melodic and harmonic coherence, for it's held together only by textural and sonic devices: near synthesizer pings, chirps, and bass drum effects. At best, this is a culturally and politically significant recording, one which illustrates the proposition that mixing politics and music can, at times, result simply in uninteresting music.

Perusing **Kelth Tippett's** *Mujician* is another reminder that the avant garde is capable of tedious self-indulgence. Recorded in performance in a Berlin club, this release affirms that musical effects, no matter how cunningly calculated, do not in themselves make music. *All Time, All Time*, for example, is a relentless barrage of angry keyboard rumblings. Tippett's a strong-minded conceptualist here bent on exploring monochromatic, monorhythmic utterances. But his ideas are stated and restated ad nauseum, and never expanded, developed, or reshaped; there's not a hint of dramatic relief. Perhaps this pianist's music is most sympathetically understood as made up of purely emotive statements, as pianistic ritual, as music for a film perhaps. At any rate, the tricks in Tippett's musical bag have received fresher and defter slights of hand from other delves into the musically arcane.

Arnold Klos' debt to Bill Evans is evidenced by *Story Line*, a release containing

felt emulation of Evans' style. On the latter's haunting *Time Remembered*, Klos evokes Evans' feeling, but the content of the piece is uniquely Klos'; he approaches the piece with heavily arpeggiated runs and fluttery chordal structures—quite unlike Evans' subtle nuances of touch and phrasing. *Turn Out The Stars*, another Evans original, boasts eloquent right hand lines and rich voicings, drawn from the imagination of Klos, not Evans. *Solar*, a sketchy minor blues, draws out Klos' most inspired inventions. Beginning in rubato, he slips into a medium tempo, then slides into a compelling walking bass line. There's lots of substance here and little bravura. Bill Evans, we can speculate, would've been gladdened.

Bill Dobbins, who teaches at the Eastman School of Music, gives us his *Dedications*, a collection of mostly original pieces in commemoration of just about everyone from J. S. Bach to Cecil Taylor. Although Dobbins' impulse is well intentioned, the result of this musical name (and lick) dropping often verges on the antiseptic and self-indulgent. The problem, partially, is that Dobbins can't quit while he's ahead. *Ballad*, dedicated to John Coates Jr., is ponderous, and *Centrifuge*, modeled on Bill Evans' harmonic practice, succeeds only in making a potentially interesting concept monotonous. In fairness, Dobbins' two-part invention, *Yardbird Conversation*, based on the *Yardbird Suite*

changes, develops some genuine musical interest. There's also *Bart*, Dobbins' happily disheveled tribute to Thelonious Monk. But these pieces, alas, are atypical. It might not be a bad idea if Dobbins dedicated his next album to himself.

Chuck Marohnic, Director of Jazz Studies at Arizona State University, like Dobbins believes the sophomoric adage that those who can, do, while those who can't, teach. Consider Marohnic's *Pills For Nils*, a foot-patting excursion through keyboard blues styles from barrelhouse to Tatum. Marohnic captures the idiom of blues piano, reshaping stock blues devices into his own unique statements. Equally successful are three tributes to seminal jazz pianists. *Melodious Think* gives an informed impression of Monk's feeling, capturing the jarring surprise of his playing. *The Privilege*, in homage to Bill Evans, is similarly derivative as Marohnic replicates Evans' floating melodic lines. Finally, *Springtime* is distilled Keith Jarrett, without mannerisms or redundancy. Throughout, Marohnic's playing is marked by his clarity of voicing and musical purpose. His respect for both tradition and his own vision may just place him near the forefront of contemporary pianists.

On first hearing, **Mitchel Forman's** *Childhood Dreams* again seem heavily indebted to postures used by Keith Jarrett, for pieces like *Lost Numbers* use Jarrett's characteristic devices of repetitious triadic chordal structures and prominent descending bass lines. *Anthem*, similarly, borrows Jarrett's churning vamp figures and rhythmically vital melodic lines. At this point the similarity between these players stops. *Max & Poony*, for example, uses harmonic structures much more conventionally jazzy than Jarrett's and lacks his frantic energy. Indeed, if it's necessary to track down the sources of Forman's conception, one prime candidate would be Denny Zeitlin's early programmatic pieces. Forman's *Cartoons* unerringly evokes a kid's Saturday afternoon at the movies, while *Hospitality Creek's* ominous bass rumblings set the same mood as Zeitlin's *Children Don't Go Near The Water*. In all, a promising, not terribly forceful collection.

Songs For Love reveals that **Tete Montoliu's** reputation has been justly earned. He's thoroughly in command of his instrument; he possesses consummate good taste; his lines are agile but not glib. *Songs* find Montoliu addressing a mixture of standards, jazz tunes, and originals. *Here's That Rainy Day* receives yet another reharmonization. *Django* gets a bluesy treatment and says just enough to make its point. *Autumn In New York* is remarkable for Montoliu's clarity of touch, tone, and voice-leading. Happily, Montoliu never abuses his powers of invention and never allows his virtuosity to override his sense of decorum. Also present are two originals. *Two Catalan Songs* are pristine, direct, folk-like pieces, elegant in their simplicity. *Gentofte 4349* is an unabashed finger-buster, packed with electric ideas, all of which, incidentally, have some relation to each other, again confirming the integrity of Montoliu's musical thought. —jon balleras

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1 ENRICO RAVA. 'ROUND MIDNIGHT (from *QUARTET*, ECM). Rava, trumpet; Roswell Rudd, trombone.

That's not a type of music that does anything for me. I keep waiting for the song to begin. Just two guys enjoying playing together before the gig starts. Two stars. It reminds me a little of a Don Cherry thing, but it's not out enough.

2 ROB McCONNELL & THE BOSS BRASS. LOUISIANA (from *LIVE IN DIGITAL*, Dark Orchid). McConnell, trombone, arranger.

Nice chart! Lots of humor to it. The trombone sounds like a cross between Bob Brookmeyer and Rich Mattison. I suspect that's the band from Canada—Rob McConnell's. He's a marvelous writer. Four stars.

3 HAL CROOK. JO-VAL (from *HELLO HEAVEN*, Omniscend). Crook, trombone, composer; Phil Woods, alto saxophone; Bill Goodwin, drums.

I really do like that tune, but I don't care for the trombone player—sounds sloppy. The drums are good, but too close, with a mic on each skin. I like the alto player, too. Nice tune. Three stars. That tight drum sound became popular with the Beatles; they ought to try spreading the drums through the whole spectrum, like we did for Alan Dawson on our *Outrageous* album: very effective. Everybody's so separated it sounds like they haven't met yet.

4 DUKE ELLINGTON. WORK SONG (from *1944 CARNEGIE HALL CONCERTS*, Prestige). Tricky Sam Nanton, trombone.

What a writer Duke was! What can you say? I love that! The colors, imagination, warmth! Great pathos and range of emotion. There are no writers like that any more. The trombone player was beautiful—either Tyree Glenn or Lawrence Brown. What he's doing there takes an awful lot of skill. Five stars. That's music!

5 VINKO GLOBOKAR. SEQUENZA (from *AVANT GARDE SERIES*, DG). Luciano Berio, composer; Globokar, solo trombone.

I heard Globokar play that in Montreux, 1975 at the Brass Conference. I know what it takes to play that piece. Incredible! I know there's a great deal of humor going on there, but I hear only pain, frustration, and hatred. The technical side of me knows how difficult that is to do, but the aesthetic side of me says, "Who cares?" Five stars for performance, one for aesthetics. The Ellington plunger thing we just heard had humor, too, but the emotional range was incredible.

6 CY TOUFF. PREZ-ENCE (from *OCTET & QUINTET*, Pacific Jazz). Touff, bass trumpet; Richie Kamuca, tenor saxophone.

Sounds like Al Cohn and Bob Brookmeyer, and I love that slightly stuffy Lester Young sound. Hmm, the way he plays those little double 16ths, it sound more like Richie Kamuca. That's not Brookmeyer, either; sounds

Phil Wilson

By FRED BOUCHARD

Sackbuttry and jazz education are well served by that amiable, youthful trombonist Phillips Elder Wilson Jr., born and bred in Belmont, MA. A globetrotter with Woody Herman ('62-65), the Dorseys ('66-67), and NORAD ('68-70) big bands, Wilson continues his peripatetic ways conducting clinics worldwide from Banff to Bergen. Yet his Boston roots are long: he has taught trombone and composition at Berklee College since 1965 (except '74-76 heading the jazz program at New England Conservatory) and co-founded Boston Sackbut Week (an annual trombonium since '73) that raises brass consciousness with guests, workshops, and frolics like the mass blaring of *The Star Spangled Banner* on Opening Day at Fenway Park.

Among Wilson's composer/arranger credits (Clark Terry, Herb Pomeroy, Marian McPartland, Woody Herman) are Buddy Rich's hit of *Mercy, Mercy, Mercy* and conducting his own *The Earth's Children* with the Boston Symphony. Recordings on his own *Outrageous* label—and *Four Leaf*, *Famous Door*, *ASI*, *Free Form*, and a new duo with Japanese wunderkind pi-



anist Makoto Ozone on *Mainstream Sound*—exhibit a broad, burly, witty style, as warm and personable as the man.

Wilson, in his first *Blindfold Test*, was given no information before or, in most cases, after listening. "I don't listen to much of what's 'hip' these days, and I like it that way," avowed Wilson. "No names, no retakes. As Louis once said: 'Let it rub.'"

a little like Vic [Dickenson] the way he bent around that F, but it's a valve trombone. Richie's lyricism lends itself well to that Prez bag, but the rhythm sounds like they're going to sleep. Three stars. I dunno, Stu Williamson, Bob Enevoldsen? [Later] Cy Touff, huh? The sound similarity makes sense—Cy used big-bore trumpet, Vic used to use small-bore trombone, and they're both "old" players.

anger) or to lean on a phrase now and then or change pace, but if I sat and listened to it for two hours, I'd be asleep. Again—it's a five for performance but three overall, because it has a wider emotional range than the Globokar.

7 SLIDE HAMPTON. CON ALMA (from *WORLD OF TROMBONES*, West 54). Hampton, trombone, arranger, leader.

I like the arrangement very much, but I felt that it was labored. The rhythm section was trying to lift the heaviness of the [nine] trombones off the ground and was losing. The chart has beautiful colorations and lines, and for that, three stars. But the performance didn't happen to come off, perhaps fighting studio time and under-rehearsal.

9 RAUL DE SOUZA. AT THE CONCERT (from *DON'T ASK MY NEIGHBORS*, Capitol). De Souza, trombone.

Sounds like an easy listening station. Very nice trombone player, but the string machine is milquetoast. Two stars. If you're going to make a commercial record for an instrument that badly needs one, the rhythm section could at least generate a pulse, some excitement, to help sell it. Those guys sound like they're half in the bag, or they haven't met yet. That pisses me off—make it one star!

8 ALBERT MANGELSDORFF. TROMBONELINESS (from *TROMBONELINESS*, Sackville). Mangelsdorff, solo trombone.

The squeaks sound like Stuart Dempster, but those jazz lines really must be Albert Mangelsdorff. What he's done is to revolutionize modern trombone with multiphonics, and I really admire him for that. For practitioners of the multiphonic art, he is the state of the art. I have fun using them as coloration (as Vic Dickenson uses growls to connote humor or

10 JIMMIE LUNCEFORD. WHITE HEAT (from *LUNCEFORD SPECIAL*, Columbia). Trummy Young, trombone; Joe Thomas, tenor saxophone; unidentified trumpet.

That's fun! You sit here and laugh and carry on! That's what music's all about! Damn! That trombone player's cryin' and you're cryin' with him! You know how he's feeling: he has to play that tempo and doesn't really want to. That tenor player might be Hawk; the trumpeter sounds like Cat Anderson. Good Lord, what range! There're problems with it, but who cares? That feels good! Where's the fun gone to? I miss it! Four stars. db

James Emery

The guitarist's sound speaks warmly and sensitively in a variety of new music settings.

BY LEE JESKE

"I think it's just as important to develop as a person and work on yourself as it is for you to work on your music and develop that. The two go hand-in-hand—you're going to be playing who you are, hopefully, and if you're out of kilter, that's the way your music is going to come out. It's a reflection of you as a person."

James Emery speaks those words in the living room of his Manhattan apartment, and really believes them. For Emery seems to be a warm and genial person—quick with a smile and a kind word—and those qualities definitely surface in his music. He wields his guitar with a delicacy and softness that other young plectrists seem to shun. This is not to say the music is without bite—not at all—but that it's infused with a certain warmth that makes Emery unique and helps make the String Trio Of New York one of the more buoyant of modern ensembles.

Emery was born in Youngstown, Ohio in 1951, but spent his formative years in Cleveland. There he took lessons on the family pump organ before switching to guitar at age 12. He took classical lessons, receiving "a very thorough background in theory and harmony" which he soon put to use in Cleveland blues bars.

"After the classical lessons," he says, "I was able to jump seriously into blues, which was my main concern at that time. I played in a lot of after-hours joints—with a harmonica player named Mr. Stress, with Robert 'Junior' Lockwood, and, for a long time, with a guy who was a relative of Howlin' Wolf. This would be six nights a week, six or eight hours a night, for two or three years.

"My first year out of high school, I started teaching at a music store that was owned by Bill DeArango. I didn't know, at the time, about his reputation as a guitarist and that he played with Dizzy Gillespie. And I wasn't to find out for a year or so. But he turned me on to Lester Young, and I really liked what Lester Young was doing, so I learned a bunch of his solos from old Count Basie records. And Bill would do things like give me the changes to *Cherokee* or *The Song Is You*, stuff like that, and I'd play the changes while he soloed



ANDY FREEBERG

over it. Lester Young led me to Bird, and I just freaked out at that point and went deeply into Bird and Bud and Monk. I also liked what Wes Montgomery was doing a lot, and John McLaughlin with Miles. So I was learning a lot of music at the time. And teaching at the store, and gigging a lot—I started playing jazz gigs after I learned a lot more about it and was able to move into that circuit. At that point I was *only* listening to jazz, and studying Bird and Monk led me into Dolphy, Ornette, Coltrane, people like that, and I became very interested in what they were doing, which, in turn, led to more modern musicians who were an outgrowth of that school—like the AACM people. I guess that kind of led me to New York."

This was in 1973, and Emery stayed in Brooklyn with "a friend of a friend" and shortly after arriving saw an ad in the newspaper touting lessons with violinist Leroy Jenkins. He knew of Jenkins' work, called him up, and signed on for lessons which were "actually more of a playing kind of thing—we'd get together and play and look at his music. After two or three lessons, we just decided to forego the formalities and just get together and play."

Jenkins gave Emery his first chance to appear on record (*For Players Only*, JCOA 1010) and helped him find an apartment (the one above his). James also started teaching at the Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, and this led to his hooking up with the Human Arts Ensemble (led by the redoubtable Charles "Bobo" Shaw) and Anthony Braxton.

Workwise, things began heating up in 1977. That's when the String Trio Of New York first made its appearance. The first gig was as a quartet—violinist Billy Bang and bassists John Lindberg and Ed Schuller were the

other members—but Schuller dropped out, and the band premiered as a trio at a series at La Mama, an experimental theater. There's something about the three personalities and musical styles of Messrs. Bang, Lindberg, and Emery that just fits—the interplay of the acoustic instruments and their unique blend of jazz and classical and folk music and hoedown gives the band an indelible identity. Their work is documented on three Black Saint LPs—*First String* (BS 031), *Area Code 212* (BS 046), and *Common Goal* (BS 058).

In 1978 Emery added work with Anthony Braxton—both as part of his Creative Music Orchestra and as one-third of a trio, with trombonist Ray Anderson—and the Human Arts Ensemble—mainly European tours. The next year he began a musical relationship with flutist Robert Dick, performing with some people would call contemporary classical music, but what Emery prefers to term "just modern music." That year Emery also began playing his first solo concerts.

"Then 1980 comes along," says James, continuing the chronology, "and I form my first group. It's an ensemble with Anderson, Dick, and on reeds, J. D. Parran. I've recently added Thurman Barker to the group, too, playing percussion. That's been going pretty well. We haven't worked a lot, but we've made some serious headway."

And that's not all: there's his participation in Jenkins' entry into the jazz/funk sweepstakes—Sting!, recent duet work with synthesizer virtuoso Richard Teitelbaum, and a James Emery Quartet too (Barker, bassist Mark Helias, and reedman Marty Ehrlich round out *that* group). And, to boot, James teaches guitar in private schools during the afternoon. He also composes—including large ensemble pieces for up to 25 players, and woodwind quintets. He admits, though, that the String Trio is particularly close to his heart at the moment. He is also, on the day we speak, eagerly awaiting the imminent release of *Artlife* (Lumina 007), his first album as a leader.

One thing that sets Emery apart is his adaptability. He will use an electric guitar (Gibson ES-345 stereo), classical guitar (Ramirez), or even something as esoteric as a soprano guitar (made by an East German outfit called Brúko) depending on the situation. He also dabbles in homemade electronic gizmos.

"What I'm really trying to do," he says, "is keep something going all the time. I find that no one project is going to work all the time. My main goal is to try and work as much as possible. I also like to present different sides of myself. I'm interested in all kinds of music—I just think it pays to study anything you can use, regardless of which school of thought it comes from. If you can use it, check it out. It's going to increase your understanding and knowledge of music." **db**

Barbara Donald

The underrated trumpeter brings the lessons of the '60s avant garde into the '80s mainstream.

BY PAUL DEBARROS

During the late '60s and early '70s, Barbara Donald and her husband, alto saxophonist Sonny Simmons, recorded some of the most convincing improvised music on the turbulent avant garde scene. *Burning Spirits* (Contemporary 7625/6), featuring Cecil McBee and Richard Davis, and *Manhattan Egos* (Arhoolie 8003) still stand as landmarks of the blazing group energy and creative daring of the period. Though often misunderstood by critics and audiences at the time, Simmons and Donald were pushing the limits of jazz past bebop harmonies, in the same way Miles, Ornette, and Coltrane were. During his intense late period, Coltrane invited Donald to sit in one night at the It Club in Los Angeles, which she describes as "quite an experience." (I'm sure it was: she had just given birth to her second child two weeks earlier.) Ross Russell, in his biography of Charlie Parker, also chronicles Donald as an important heir to the bebop tradition. And Lester Bowie, the Art Ensemble of Chicago trumpet wizard who used to jam with Donald and Simmons at Johnny Sims' Workshop in Los Angeles, acknowledges her as a direct influence on his fat-toned, burbling style.

Despite such illustrious credentials, Donald faded into obscurity during the '70s and didn't resurface until 1979 when she left Simmons, struck out for Washington state (where old friend saxophonist Bert Wilson had moved), and began to rebuild her career. It hasn't been easy. As she said to Sally Placksin, in the new encyclopedia *American Women In Jazz*, "A lot of women that play have been killed off." Donald is a survivor.

A rugged-looking woman with a scowl of concentration on her face, Donald was born in Minneapolis. Her parents were amateur musicians—her father a trumpet player and her mother a singer. She grew up listening to Harry James, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, and "a lot of dixieland." She took up cornet at nine and from the start, encountered sexual stereotyping. "The teacher tried to push the flute on me," she says. "Girls weren't supposed to have enough breath to play brass instruments. But I got a big tone

out of the trumpet the minute I picked it up."

When she was 13, her parents moved to Encino, in California's San Fernando Valley. "They wouldn't let girls in the Birmingham High School dance band," says Donald. "So I got the good players from all the schools and formed my own band. I'd go downtown and buy stock arrangements, and we'd practice in my garage. When we got out of high school, all the players went off with the big bands—the trumpets went with Kenton, the trombones with Buddy Rich—but at that time women weren't even allowed to audition."

With the big bands and studios closed to her, Donald went on the road with a rhythm & blues band. "We went to New Jersey. The guys were quite a bit older, and all they wanted to do was party. I said I want to *learn*. I'd get on the subway and go to Birdland; Art Blakey was there, and Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter, Cedar Walton. Monk was at the Five Spot; Coltrane was at the Vanguard. There was so much music, I could hardly wait to get out of that r&b gig and get over to the city."

But soon Donald was back in L.A., on a frustrating hotel gig, touring the South with the Chuck Cabot band. She sang as well as played trumpet. Then she started to meet L.A. jazz players like Dexter Gordon and Bennie Harris, trumpeter and composer of *Ornithology*. Harris took her under his wing. "Bennie was very abused, wasn't working, kind of worn out. He introduced me to people who taught me a lot. He'd write out patterns for me to practice in the car, one after another. He even took me over to Donna Lee's house, the original Donna Lee. That was Bennie's girlfriend."

Around 1963 Harris sent Donald to see Sonny Simmons, who was working on an extended form of melodic improvisation in San Diego. "Sonny worked me to death. His tunes were very hard. Each one had its own structures, in hard keys, with very hard chords. If you really listen to our old records, you can hear we are playing on changes—we just weren't playing patterns or licks on them. That was what he stressed—play your own melodies, stay on top of the beat, go through your intervals. He wouldn't show me any music, just shout 'Play it!'—these ridiculously hard tunes. And I was so scared, I played it! All of a sudden, it just came out."

Over the next 10 years Barbara Donald and Sonny Simmons criss-crossed the country between gigs in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles, living a turbulent, hand-to-mouth existence in the musical underground. They married, had two children (Donald already had one other child, by a brief first marriage), and recorded albums for Contemporary, Arhoolie, and ESP. They also started the first Woodstock Jazz Festival in 1966, where, among others, Eddie Gomez and Sonny Murray played. But neither the

albums nor a notice in the *Playboy* Jazz Poll brought them much recognition. "I remember after *Music Of The Spheres* (ESP 1043) came out and my name was in the polls, it was irritating, because I didn't even have enough money to buy the magazine."

In 1973, when their daughter, Raisa, was born (after whom Donald named one of her prettiest tunes, *Raisa's Dream*) their careers ground to a halt. For five years they lived in troubled retirement in San Jose. A business class at San Jose City College, however, led her to the school's music department, where a young musician encouraged her to start playing again. They started a jazz club, which became a regular stop for musicians in San Francisco. When Elvin Jones called in '78 and asked Donald and Simmons to go with him to Europe for two weeks, and Sonny declined, she decided maybe it was time to set out on her own.



Since moving to the Puget Sound area, Donald has worked locally at clubs and festivals with shifting personnel, including former Woody Shaw saxophonist Carter Jefferson (in Seattle teaching at the Cornish Institute), tenor saxophonist Gary Hammon, and pianist Peggy Stern. She has recorded two albums—a somewhat hurried but nevertheless energetic and appealing one for Cadence Jazz Records, *Olympia Live* (CJR 1011), and another, cleaner, studio project for the Seattle-based independent, Audio Daddio (due out in August).

Though she is playing more mainstream material, her raw, emotional style is still very much in evidence. The classic Spanish tone, greased and knotty phrases, blasts and chatters and moans now course over changes instead of Simmons' more abstruse structures. But just when you think she is "only" an intuitive avant gardist, she dives for a sunken melody, or tears off an athletic phrase that leaves one's jaw hanging. A master of a music that enshrines individuality, Donald has what scores of better technicians lack: a mature, personal style. "It's

PROFILE

funny," she muses, "since I went back to playing a few standards, now I'm being labeled an 'inside' musician. But I never made a conscious choice to play 'inside' or 'outside'—the outside is just an extension of the inside; it's all improvised music. When it comes to improvising, you have to forget the patterns you've practiced, anyway, and create your own melodies. You have to play from feeling. That's what attracted me and Sonny."

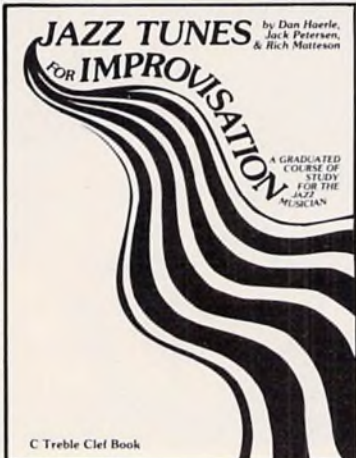
Last summer, an astonished crowd at the Bellevue Jazz Festival, a locally sponsored Seattle area event, got a measure of the feeling Donald was talking about, when Simmons came up for a brief stay. "Something magic came over us. Sonny was very ritualistic. We had literally gone through hell together, trying to survive for years with two children. We got blasted apart by life. That festival was a reunion. Those people out

there—without necessarily being schooled in jazz—got the feeling and the energy. That was always what we were about."

After the Bellevue gig, Donald went to New York—this time, without Sonny. There she renewed old connections, and played a gig with the Studio We band in Tompkins Square. But she realized what every musician does in New York: you need a stake to survive the first few months. She's working toward that, now. If things go right the next time around, perhaps she will begin to get some of the recognition she deserves. But she's still a single parent with two kids, and, she's still stuck with the label "avant garde." She may be a legend, but that doesn't pay the bills.

"I'm going back to New York this summer," she says, undaunted. "I want to work. I've been fighting to play all my life. I don't know if things will change or not. But I'm going to just keep playing." db

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TT: It's like the guy who's a great golfer, and all of a sudden there's a tournament, and he chokes on every putt. He's just nervous. It's pretty much stage fright. I blew a couple of jobs from stage fright years ago, but I keep saying that I was at the wrong place at the time. You never hear a kid get stage fright with one chord in the key of E or just strumming a few F chords. The reason for real stage fright is they're asking him to do something a little above what he's ready for. And let's face it, when you're new, it's not too comforting to look around the room and find 50 unfamiliar faces if you blow a few notes. It's different with me now. If I blow a couple of notes, all the faces are friends that have been waiting for me to blow, and they're kidding and say, "Oh, you've finally come around. . . ." We have a good time. But let me blow three or more that day, I'm in trouble. That doesn't have to do with the red light syndrome. It has to do with "I'm not good enough that day on that project."

WF: How do players break into studio performer ranks?

TT: They have to be pretty dynamite-type players, and they have to be heard, and somebody has to have faith and like them. In my day, years ago, Bob Bain and Bobby Gibbons heard me playing. These were established guitar players at the time. And when things got busy and somebody said, "Hey, I can't get Barney Kessel, Howard Roberts, or Al Hendrickson. Who do I get?" "Well, there's this guy I just heard, Tom Tedesco," they'd say. "He seems to read pretty good. We got together and I heard him play." Or somebody else said, "He's at the Lighthouse with a trio, sounds good in jazz, and Rod McKuen says that Tedesco was accompanying him." The guy answers, "Let's take a crack at him because there's nobody else." This is how you get started.

WF: What do you suggest for new players at this time?

TT: Same situation, no different. If I hear an excellent player and just then a leader comes to me and says, "Gee, you can't make it. Have you heard any new rockers (or sight readers, or whatever the occasion might warrant)?" That's when the new player's name will come out. You have to be around plus you can't be just a player. There has to be something outstanding about you. In the old days when a bunch of us started making it, there was Howard Roberts known for his chord style, Barney his jazz and chord style, and Bill Pitman with his six-string bass guitar. Billy Strange was a country player. They hired me for my gut string and reading. You have to have some strong points for them to say, "He's the one I really want."

WF: How many styles must a studio musician master?

TT: It all depends upon if he wants to be an all-around studio player or a specialist. I know many specialists, like James Burton, who specializes only in James Burton style. He plays and he does great. They hire him for that. They don't ask him to play bebop tunes. They call people like Larry McNeely for five-string banjo. Robben Ford is a great player not known for his reading. So they're not going to call him for sight reading. They're

going to call him for a Robben Ford style. If you want to be a Tom Tedesco or a Dennis Budimir, that's different. Last week was a perfect example. I got called to do three different *Love Boat* segments. They were cruising all around the Mediterranean, I guess, so the first time they stopped in Egypt. Billy Goldenberg was hired to do the score for the Egypt portion. Well, he hired me, and I played oud and bouzouki on a few of the things, interpreting a kind of Egyptian music. The following few days the boat got to Greece, and they called Arnie Kane to do the score. He called me. I did all this bouzouki stuff, and that I felt was pretty tough, but we pulled it off. This past few days Ben Lazzaroni was called to the Italian stuff because the boat had hit Italy. I was called for mandolin. So this was a situation where Dennis, Tim, Mitch, Tommy, any of these players, could have been called in because they are all versatile enough. You wouldn't call in . . . I won't say your bebopper, I won't say your rocker, and I won't say your country guy, but you know what I'm talking about.

WF: Did you master music for each country?

TT: No, no. What I do is just kind of gimmick it around, just get close. But I'm sure not going to use a big acoustic guitar when I'm playing music from Greece. My bouzouki is there handling it, and I've heard enough of that stuff to kind of mimic it.

WF: What equipment must a fretted instrument player have for studio work?

TT: Well, it depends on what deal you're in. I know guys who have gotten along with just an electric guitar, who don't even fool with rhythm. I remember David T. Walker had a hot new record. They asked him to play a rhythm guitar, and he wouldn't even bother. I remember Jay Graydon. We used to do some things together. He hated 12-string guitar, so when he became successful enough, he'd just look up and say, "I don't play 12-string guitar."

If I were a new studio player, a legit all-around guy, I'd want in my wardrobe of guitars: electric guitar, acoustic guitar, a mandolin, a banjo, a gut-string guitar, maybe a 12-string guitar, a bunch of pedals, and anything after that I'd figure where I was gonna borrow it. My method wasn't that, though. My method was—this is going back 30 years—when I finally got my first call for mandolin, I bought my mandolin. When I got my first call for banjo, I went out and bought one. Every time I acquired these instruments, it was from getting a call for them. In fact, my first call for guitar was about a year ago. So I bought one. It was for a movie, *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*.

WF: Basically, what do studio performers earn?

TT: Well, I can tell you that of the guys I know, the big, front line-type players make between \$100,000 and \$250,000. I'm talking about guitar players because we have double situations where we make a lot more money because we play a variety of instruments. I'm not talking about a studio violin player. There's no way he makes that kind of money. He works a basic skill, while we'll play three or four instruments, making double scale and so forth.

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rehearsals with Midge was that he mastered, in a powerful way, the synth, the way he would play a guitar. He turned me on to the Yamaha string machine, which I wasn't into then. I was more into my cold, cold European Elka sound, a really cheap, mucky sound. I love it. He hit the strings so it just went [imitates powerchord], and it just took the top of your head off. He played it like a guitar. On the track *Astradyne*, on *Vienna*, Midge came up with the string melody, which is an orchestral-sounding thing. But it relates to what we put to it with the kicking bass and drums from our field going back to the influence of a German band, Neu.

WC: We always felt that whatever we were doing, it was very important to have emotional content. If it was a track that was guitar-dominated and very aggressive, we thought that what it was meant to do, it should do well. It seemed to be the prevailing attitude among the musicians and press in this country at the time that electronics had to intrinsically be very cold, chilly, unfeeling stuff. When we did do that, we did it deliberately.

BC: I think we did expand a bit on the classical influence when John departed. He was wanting to minimize things.

WC: We were quite conscious of that at the time, and although it didn't deflect or influence us in any way what we were writing, we were aware of it. One example though, where we did do something because of that is when we signed with Chrysalis and the first record that we did was *Sleepwalker*. Aside from acoustic drums, everything on the record was synthetic. Yet, everyone had been thinking at the time that if it's synthesizers, it has to be medium tempo, plodding, or fairly dirgy. Yet here was a track that was incredibly up, smash-bang exciting stuff because we thought that that was an important point to make, that you could do that.

JD: When I spoke with Conny Plank [producer of *Systems Of Romance*, *Vienna*, and *Rage In Eden*], he mentioned that in mix-downs you often wanted a more orchestral mix while Warren tended towards a dance-floor mix.

BC: On *Vienna* it was me and Warren doing most of the mixing. I

think it was just different areas that we would look at. I've been proved wrong on some things. On the song *Vienna* I thought that the drum machines were far too loud. Warren always does things very weighty and physical so he'd get as much power out of them as possible. What Conny probably meant was that at that particular time I thought he was going a little bit over the top. But a thing like *Mr. X* is something that hits you low. It's not heady stuff like Kraftwerk or pop-y light stuff like Depeche Mode. Warren brought a depth to Ultravox that we used to argue about a little bit.

JD: The strings on *Visions In Blue* sound very real.

BC: They're from the GS-1. I like them. Especially the bass-y cello sounds. I went to Hamburg before recording the album, and Yamaha let me program some sounds in.

JD: Do you prefer programming your own sounds in over using the pre-sets?

BC: To be very honest, the pre-sets on the GS-1 are very boring. I told the people at Yamaha that I didn't like the string sounds, so I had them changed so I could have a more immediate attack and more sustain, which they let me do. It's got a full-size keyboard and a graphic equalizer over the whole thing, but there's only so much you can do with the sound. Whereas the PPG has such incredible shapes and forms in the sounds themselves that you can spend literally hours trying to get the sound just right. All the knobs affect it so drastically, and you can see what the sounds are made of and what types of sine waves are in them. But the GS-1, because it has such a large keyboard and a lovely touch-sensitivity that I go for, the sounds do tend to be limiting.

JD: How are you using the Emulator?

BC: We put sounds into it, like vocals. Or we do something like hire a Synclavier for a day, and put those sounds into it. It's a bit of a cheat actually. It has its drawbacks. It will only give a two-second signal, and then it winds around again like a tape-loop. So on the vocal things that we use in our live show there is a glitch when the thing goes around and starts again. I'm totally knocked out with the idea of it, though. You can put any sound into it. You can cough into it or slap something hard like a metal sheet and put that in and it comes up chromatically on the keyboard. It's all really quite exciting. db

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