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For Contemporary Musicians

JEAN-LUC PONTY

Electronic Original

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

New Blues Blood

SPHERE

Monk And Beyond

TITO PUENTE

Con Gusto

MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD

Revisited

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As a jazz-rock, Ponty has fiddled with the best of 'em—from Zappa to Mahavishnu—and his own albums and live performances have brought him popular and critical success. But recently, his creative muse has told him to "Plug in to synthesizers." Howard Mandel translates.

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Jean-Luc Ponty

RICHARD RYAN



Sphere

ALEX KAYSER



Stevie Ray Vaughan

PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE



Tito Puente

ANNE FISHBEIN/PHOTO RESERVE

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EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Jack Maher

MANAGING EDITOR
Charles Doherty

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Art Lange

EDUCATION EDITOR
Dr. William L. Fowler

ART DIRECTOR
Christopher Garland

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Gloria Baldwin

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
Deborah Kelly

CONTROLLER
Gary W. Edwards

PUBLISHER
Maher Publications

RECORD REVIEWERS: Alan Axelrod, Jon Balleras, Larry Birnbaum, Fred Bouchard, Jim Brinsfield, Owen Cordie, Paul de Barros, Jim Diliberto, R. Bruce Dold, Sam Freedman, Lars Gabel, Michael Goldberg, Elaine Guregian, Frank-John Hadley, Robert Henschen, Lee Jeske, Peter Kostakis, John Litweiler, Howard Mandel, John McDonough, Frankie Nemko, Jim Roberts, Ben Sandmel, Bill Shoemaker, Jack Sohmer, Robin Tolleson, Pete Welding.

CONTRIBUTORS: Jon Balleras, Larry Birnbaum, Bob Blumenthal, Tom Copi, Albert DeGenova, Leonard Feather, Andy Freeberg, Sam Freedman, Steve Kagan, Howard Mandel, John McDonough, Bill Milkowski, Paul Natkin, Herb Nolan, Veryl Oakland, Darryl Pitt, Pete Welding.

CORRESPONDENTS: Albany, NY, Georgia Urban; Atlanta, Dorothy Pearce; Austin, Michael Point; Baltimore, Fred Douglass; Boston, Fred Bouchard; Buffalo, John H. Hunt; Chicago, Jim DeJong; Cincinnati, Bob Nave; Cleveland, C. A. Colombi; Denver, Bob Cataliotti; Detroit, David Wild; Kansas City, Carol Comer; Las Vegas, Brian Sanders; Los Angeles, Zan Stewart; Miami, Jack Sohmer; Milwaukee, Joya Caryl; Minneapolis, Mary Snyder; Montreal, Ron Sweetman; Nashville, Phil Towne; New Orleans, Joel Simpson; New York, Jeff Levenson; Philadelphia, Russell Woessner; Phoenix, Robert Henschen; Pittsburgh, David J. Fabilli; St. Louis, Kevin Martin; San Francisco, J. N. Thomas; Seattle, Joseph R. Murphy; Toronto, Mark Miller; Vancouver, Vern Montgomery; Washington, DC, W. A. Brower; Australia, Eric Myers; Brazil, Christopher Pickard; Finland, Roger Freundlich; Germany, Joachim-Ernst Berendt; Great Britain, Brian Priestley; Italy, Ruggero Stassi; Japan, Shoichi Yui; Netherlands, Jaap Ludeke; Norway, Randi Hultin; Poland, Charles Gans; Senegambia, Oko Draine; Sweden, Lars Lystedt.

EDITORIAL OFFICES:

ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO
EXECUTIVE OFFICE: 222 W. Adams St.,
Chicago, IL 60606.
1-312/346-7811

ADVERTISING SALES OFFICES:

Midwest: John Maher, Sales Manager,
222 W. Adams St., Chicago, IL 60606
1-312/346-7811
East: Bob Olesen,
720 Greenwich St., New York, NY 10014
1-212/243-4786
West: Frank Garlock,
P.O. Box 645C, El Cajon, CA 92022
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BY HOWARD MANDEL

A runway leads in deep perspective from the video screen's surface back to open French windows; there, the violinist performs coolly, though he's apparently floating on wind-blown clouds. Three pretty dancers twirl about a stylized veranda—then their image swivels like a card to reveal Ponty at the keyboards on its reverse. In a succession of trimly tailored garments, dark-eyed Ponty gazes forth directly, intently, his lips set. As the fantasy climaxes, he bears down, fast-fingering the slender neck of his bright blue electric fiddle, pulling out of a final cadenza like a swordsman whose sabre has struck its mark. He follows through to a freeze frame, just as a video-processed Thumbelina pirouettes to a gentle stop. Jean-Luc Ponty stars in one of the first video clips of a jazz-associated artist produced for the U.S. market by a major label (Atlantic).

Oh, there's Herbie Hancock's *Rockit*, a monster vid and single hit since last summer on Columbia, with Mwandishi going techno-funk one step better, aided by Material, Daniel Ponce, and Grandmixer D. ST. But Ponty's *Far From The Beaten Paths* nods to no genre but the one he's created himself, a jazz-rock-classics amalgam. The music is self-produced, and like the new album it's from, *Individual Choice*, nearly a solo effort.

"It's really an incredible promotional vehicle for me," ac-

knowledges the 41-year-old native of France's Normandy, who has lived in Los Angeles since 1973. (He's in New York to begin a cross-country tour in support of his latest album with a sold-out show at the Beacon Theatre.) "It's very difficult for someone like me—although I'm very successful—to expose my music. It's a fight against the music business in general, because I'm not fitting in just one very specific musical category, and so I don't get tremendous radio airplay. How I've won and kept my following has been by playing. I started by touring clubs, moved up to theaters, and because I've been doing that for so many years, and kept the quality of music high, the followers are still there. If I had to count on exposure from the usual channels, I'd be in trouble. But the video clip is a new medium which was offered to me, and I jumped on it. I've experienced that I gain a lot of fans just by the fact that one day they were exposed to my concert, or they saw me on tv, or heard my music on the radio."

Just another crossover for one of the most flexible founders of the electric dimension, the self-confessed former musical snob who has learned to keep an open mind. "When I was a classical musician, nothing but classical music was good to me," Ponty admits. "Then when I discovered jazz, I was still working as a classical musician, and there were musical works by very famous composers, sometimes favorite pieces, that didn't make it for me anymore, rhythmically or harmonically

Jean-Luc Ponty's

* * * * *

ELECTRONIC MUSE



*Perhaps by now
you're seen the tiny
ballerina spin
on the point of
Jean-Luc Ponty's bow.*

or melodically, because they sounded corny.

"After playing jazz a few years, rock started to interest me because of the electric sound of the violin—and I got into it by demand. Rockers were drawing more ideas from classical music than jazz used, too—I'm talking about progressive rock musicians, of course, Zappa and McLaughlin and some Europeans. I still considered jazz superior music, but I discovered there were bright and talented musicians in the rock field as well. But it was by working with Elton John on *Honky Chateau* [MCA 3004] where he called me up . . . I'd never heard of him. That's how I was, a typical jazz musician who lives in his own circle of music. Elton John was already a very big star—which doesn't matter, except that he was also a big *talent*, and the fact that *he* was aware of *me*, a very little-known musician, made me really open my mind. From that time on, I got open to any musicians, any style, to give a chance to whatever I heard—just to see if I'll be moved by it. That's my only criterion."

Since emerging from a musical family, studying at a Paris conservatory as a teenage prodigy, winning a seat in a prestigious symphony orchestra, then being turned on by jazz fiddlers Stephane Grappelli and Stuff Smith, and since his first trip to America in '69, his collaborations with keyboardist George Duke, his tenure with the Mothers Of Invention and the Mahavishnu Orchestra, and his launching of a career as bandleader, releasing 10 albums on Atlantic in eight years and touring regularly, Ponty's criterion has served him well. The fad for fusion—"I hate that word; it

sounds bad to me. At least jazz-rock describes two elements of music that are in my roots and that I use, though it's not enough"—may be over, but Ponty more than survives it—he's moved on.

In fact, the contemporary music most similar, superficially, to Ponty's accomplishments on *Individual Choice* is the work of Philip Glass and other composers using cellular units and repetitive structures. Does he know this rather inaccurately dubbed "minimal" style?

"I know it now," Ponty explains. "I discovered it three years ago. I saw a film recently that Philip Glass scored, *Koyaanisqatsi*, and I loved it; it's fantastic. I must say I was surprised to hear things that I'd done before, without knowing him. Like my album *Cosmic Messenger*, from 1978, where I used repetitive little arpeggios and rhythms, and very simple chords. My intention was to create that hypnotic feel, to induce that kind of meditation where the mind doesn't focus on what's being played or what instrument is playing it. I swear I never heard Glass at that time, and indeed, I did not go so far in that system as the minimalist composers did. What I was doing, and still do, was use not only that, but also have a bass rhythm groove happening with the drums, and usually long lines of melody, slowly moving on top of that."

This description is adequate to suggest *some* of Ponty's music; it doesn't account for the rich layering of voices he's able to command in a recording studio and duplicate on a concert stage. In the past he's used an Echoplex, wah-wah pedals, and phase shifters to modify his sound, but with *Individual Choice*



RICHARD FRYAN

JEAN-LUC PONTY'S EQUIPMENT

"I'm still loyal to Barcus-Berry," Jean-Luc Ponty avows. "I've used those pickups since John Berry showed up at Thee Experience, a rock club in Los Angeles, where he stood out as a well-dressed gentleman among all these '60s long-haired rock freaks. He handed me a pickup out of his pocket and said, 'Try this.' Back in 1969.

"At first I had a transducer that you stuck on the bridge with a paste, but now Barcus-Berry does an entire electric violin. The transducer is the same, but they do a little surgery and put it inside the bridge. Then it goes to a volume control, and then to an output. In this way it's more of an electronic instrument, and the signal is stronger, to trigger an amp or other electronic devices.

"These are standard violins, made in Germany, out of wood—underneath the funny lacquer. Decent violins, then they're sent to Barcus-Berry to have the electronics put in. John just came up with a new transducer, which he just had time to put into my violin before I left on my road tour. This one's even better than before, so it's really great."

Ponty used to plug his violin into everything that was available—Echoplex, wah-wah pedals, phase shifters, etc.—but now he keeps his string sound purer, relying on the current technology that gives him a great electric sound without the gimmicks. On his recent tour and new *Individual Choice* LP, Ponty's purer violin sounds over electronically layered riffs generated by his synthesizers—a Sequential Circuits Prophet 5 and a Roland Vocoder.

JEAN-LUC PONTY SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

INDIVIDUAL CHOICE—Atlantic 80098
MYSTICAL ADVENTURES—Atlantic 19333
CIVILIZED EVIL—Atlantic 16020
A TASTE FOR PASSION—Atlantic 19253
LIVE—Atlantic 19229
COSMIC MESSENGER—Atlantic 19189
COSMIC OCEAN—Atlantic 19110
IMAGINARY VOYAGE—Atlantic 19136
AURORA—Atlantic 19158
UPON THE WINGS OF MUSIC—Atlantic 18138
PONTY/GRAPPELLI—Inner City 1005

SONATA EROTICA—Inner City 1003
OPEN STRINGS—Pausa 7065
SUNDAY WALK—Pausa 7033
CANDELOUPE ISLAND—Blue Note LA632-H2
CRITICS CHOICE—Prestige 7676
ELECTRONIC CONNECTION—Pacific Jazz 20156

with Mahavishnu Orchestra

APOCALYPSE—Columbia 32957
VISIONS OF THE EMERALD BEYOND—Columbia 33411

his concept has evolved due to his involvement with electronic synthesizers.

"Sound, for anyone involved in music, is a big part of your musical personality, and I've noticed that the greatest musicians really know their sound, and how it must be recorded," Ponty advises. "I must say that's why I was very adventurous with electronic devices—I plugged into everything that was invented, and some sounds inspired me to write particular pieces.

"Now, I've done that with violin for many years, but the expanded horizons of synthesizers are quite new for me. I've used keyboards in the past, because that's what gave me the possibility of getting orchestral sounds in my band. It was always very hard for me to find the perfect keyboardist, who would have extensive knowledge of synthesizers and other keyboard instruments, and be a good soloist, like a jazz improviser. So that's why I became involved myself. This idea began long ago—I realized it for the first time in '76, with my album *Imaginary Voyage*. Piano is my second instrument, so rather than impose my ideas on another keyboardist, I did it myself.

"But synthesizers free you even more than keyboards, which all have set sounds—on synthesizers you can create unlimited sounds. Therefore it's like the violin, on which nothing is preset. You have to make your own sound, vibrato, and everything. Considering that, I'm surprised there's not more originality in the synthesizer music that comes from musicians, because it's so open that there *should* be greater innovation.

"I split my life between Los Angeles and Paris—I go back to Europe in my free time, to hook up with my roots and write music. I took a synthesizer with me last time, and a sequencer, and digital tapes, and a new machine—there are several that do this now, but mine's a Prophet 5—on which you can improvise a piece and it enters a digital memory. Thanks to the digital quality, you go to the studio, hook the machine up to a console, and the quality's as good as if you played it again live, unlike tapes or cassettes which have hiss that you can hear every time. I started experimenting, turning the knobs and getting different sounds, and the synthesizer helped me get even further with those space sounds I love.

"At first I was using it as a writing tool, thinking I could hear what I was writing before presenting the music to my band. But hearing the synthesizer, I thought it sounded so interesting, why not put it on the record for a change—I've done so many band albums. That's how the idea of completely solo tracks came about. The fun I had was to oppose the computer-type sounds—which can become a little depressing, they're so mechanical—with the violin, which I kept pure. Electric, but a warm, human sound. I've given up some of the modification of my violin I used to use, because technology has improved, and now I'm able to have a great electric sound without devices that change the phase or the initial signal. When I listen to my older albums, I still like the thicker, biting, aggressive sound—it goes with the guitar so well—but since I can now play the synthesizer myself, I keep the violin purer. Otherwise, there would be no contrast."

So, on *Individual Choice*, the sinuous, pure sound of a classical violin wings in over chattering *Computer Incantations For World Peace*, resounds above the synthesized cathedral chords of *Eulogy To Oscar Romero*, and moves with assurance to the urgent momentum of the title track (which has synthesized vocal-like backing quite close to the choral sonorities of some of Glass' work). These first two songs feature Ponty all alone, while the third adds only a touch of percussion by Rayford Griffin, Ponty's drummer of three years whose extended solo is a rousing highlight of a typical live Ponty show. (Other Ponty band members on his current road trip are guitarist Scott Henderson, bassist Baron Browne, and keyboardist Walter Afanasieff.) *Far From The Beaten Paths* sets Ponty on violin and synth with Griffin and bassist Randy

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SPHERE



Monk And Beyond

BY JEFF
LEVENSON

The press photo shows four impeccably tuxedoed gentlemen, statuesque and utterly refined. In performance their collective presence conveys much the same. Sitting around a conference table in the mid-Manhattan office of their booking agent and manager, Sphere wheels freely through a number of topics, one member invariably picking up the conversation where another leaves off. Through the course of the discussion it becomes apparent that behind their graceful and altogether proper demeanor, as depicted in the photo and on-stage, they are, at heart, guys who enjoy each other and love to play.

"This group takes me back to the days

when I made \$10 a night," declares drummer Ben Riley. "I couldn't wait to get on-stage and play." Buster Williams, Sphere's bassist, agrees: "One of the things about when you're young and full of fire is that you can't wait to get to the gig. As you continue to play, this usually wears off. Now I feel like Ben—I can't wait to get to the gig."

One senses that the personalities of the group's members are very much reflected in the music they make, singularly and together. Pianist Kenny Barron is introspective. He says, with precision, exactly what he means, and he probes the nuances of a question much the same way he pianistically approaches

the underpinnings of a melody. Williams, sounding authoritative and periodically emerging as overall spokesperson for the group, appears bold and self-assured. Riley is given to displays of honest good humor and boyish enthusiasm. Like his wispy cymbal work, his comments color the proceedings in timely fashion. And tenor saxist Charlie Rouse says little, yet commands respect as the group's seasoned veteran and resident sage.

When Sphere released its first record, *Four In One*, in August 1982, most jazz enthusiasts heralded the group's arrival, not only because four top-notch musicians were banding together, but be-



SPHERE: (from left) Ben Riley, Charlie Rouse, Kenny Barron, and Buster Williams.

cause they declared themselves committed to the repertory of Thelonious Sphere Monk. Particularly relevant was the fact that Rouse and Riley had been long-term members of Monk's group and that they knew the master's angular melodies and rhythmic sleights-of-hand better than most. What is now confirmed with the release of their second album, *Flight Path*, is that the group's identity is not strictly reliant on Monk's challenging oeuvre. Though the members have developed, like most serious jazz players, an aesthetic and sense of musicianship that owe much, overall, to Monk and his music, they remain their own men.

Barron, Riley, and Williams have been a working trio for years and had, in fact, comprised three-fourths of Ron Carter's quartet in the late '70s. They've long established a meaningful rapport among themselves and a solid reputation as one of New York's finer rhythm sections. When Rouse, as Williams explains, "descended from heaven and fit in perfectly," Sphere was born.

Rouse was Monk's hornman from 1959 through 1970, and although his vitae details associations with Tadd Dameron, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, and Duke Ellington, it was his decade-long tour of duty and his near-instinctive affinity for Monk's music which brought him recognition. "Monk's music is stylized," Rouse emphasizes, "but you can't let that block you. You can still express yourself within the format of the music. That's what we've done with Sphere. We play Monk's format, but then we do whatever we do."

"It can intimidate you if you let it," admits Barron, who must have learned a bit about Monk from a former employer, Dizzy Gillespie. "For instance, with me playing the same instrument, I might be intimidated into trying to emulate him. But that's not the thing to do. You just do what you always do; you play the way you always play. There's no reason to change anything. You're playing his music, but you're not playing like him. You're bringing to the music your own personal experiences and your own interpretations."

Monk's music evokes parallels with a great, unformed sculpture which lies abeyantly within a giant block of granite, and awaits the caring hands of a craftsman who will chip away the excess stone until nothing but the sparest and barest essentials remain. Monk left exposed just the right notes and just the right silences in order to say what needs to be said. He did so while embracing an important operational axiom for artists; that is, strive for basic, unadorned truth.

"With Thelonious I first became aware of space and using simplicity," acknowledges Riley, whose four-year association with Monk starting in 1964 succeeded his work with Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis and Johnny Griffin. "When I joined 'T,' I was playing somewhere between Roy Haynes and Max Roach, but while playing with

him, my whole style changed. He made me think of the music in another direction, so I stopped emulating those other drummers, and I became more involved with what I was doing and how I wanted to approach the music. I knew that I didn't need to play as much as I was playing."

"One thing I heard Dizzy say," interjects Barron, "is that the older you get, the more you learn what *not* to play. When you're young, you want to play everything you know at every moment."

Riley continues: "The thing you learn with guys like Thelonious and Dizzy is how to make the flower grow. Without saying a word, they teach you that you don't have to rush in there and do everything. You find ways to make it open."

Perhaps the most notable sound characteristic of Sphere, as an ensemble, is its use of space and dynamics. One hears four strong instrumentalists who, while

allowing themselves ample soloing opportunities, preserve the group's balance by alternately manning and then relinquishing the reins as circumstances dictate. They are particularly attuned to one another's stylings. "When you play with four guys," explains Riley, "there's always one whose beat is going to be stronger on certain tunes than on others. The idea is to stay with that beat. If you really listen to each other, like we do, you know that someone is on it. You realize that there's nothing you have to force."

Within the group, Barron and Williams are especially mindful of providing space for each other, having played the duo circuit, together, for so long. Williams, whose piano mates have included Mary Lou Williams, Hank Jones, and McCoy Tyner, feels strongly about the benefits of duo gigs. "They are good for bass players," he maintains. "You have to develop your time independent of a drummer, and you have to play in such a way that the piano player has total freedom. When Kenny and I play duo, I don't want him to miss the drummer. I don't want it to sound like a trio minus the drummer. And," he adds with an eye on Riley, "it helps you develop your appreciation of the drummer."

Unlike the more accessible and structural components of music, the ability to play empathetically with one's mates—as evidenced with Sphere—comes hard and is learned primarily through working together. When a group is conceived as an *ensemble*, as opposed to a rhythm section fronting a hornman, the total group sound is paramount. Sphere's members enjoy their capacity for interacting with and listening to each other.

"The thing that makes music any good at all," concedes Williams, "is the musicianship of the players. The music can have as much expression as the individual person playing it."

"Definitely," Rouse chimes in. "Musicians can command attention with their music. They have the power."

Williams continues: "You can take a tune like *Eronel* [included in Sphere's album, *Four In One*], which has swing built in it, but if you give it to the wrong guys, even it won't swing. Or, you can take the silliest tune, that's seemingly empty, and give it to the right guys, and that tune will have some substance."

"Like Coltrane and *My Favorite Things*?" the bassist is asked. "Exactly," he agrees, and then offers a follow-up. "How about Miles with *Bye Bye Blackbird*?"

The subtleties of expression invested in the reading of a particular tune are fairly difficult to communicate and almost impossible to teach. That's why, for instance, Williams can cite Miles' version of *Blackbird* in exemplary contrast to the inane and clichéd covers one fre-

SPHERE'S EQUIPMENT

Kenny Barron says, "My preferences are Steinway and Yamaha pianos, especially old Steinways."

Charlie Rouse plays a Selmer tenor saxophone and uses Rico Royal, medium-hard reeds. Additionally, he owns a Gemeinhardt flute which he is starting to play again.

Buster Williams says, "My bass is a Hawks Panormo. Panormo was an Italian who went to England during the war and made some basses for a company named Hawks. My pickup is a Barcus-Berry, the one built into the bridge. My amp is a Univox. The strings I use are La Bella; they're a black string called Deep Talking, the 7710 series."

Ben Riley's drums are all Yamahas, except his six-inch-deep snare, "made by a friend of mine, Richie Goldberg." The rest of the set consists of a 20-inch bass drum; 9 x 14 and 12 x 14 rack tom toms; and 14 x 14 and 16 x 16 floor toms. On the left he uses a 20-inch, flat-top A. Zildjian ("It's called the crash, but I don't use it as a crash."); on the right his ride is an old 18-inch K. Zildjian; his hi-hats are 14-inch A. Zildjian New Beats; and he also uses an A. Zildjian China Boy swish. "I used to use Slingerland 3A sticks, but they're hard to find, so I now use anything that comes close."

SPHERE SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as Sphere

FOUR IN ONE—Elektra Musician 60166-1
FLIGHT PATH—Elektra Musician 1-60313

Kenny Barron as leader

SUNSET TO DAWN—Muse 5018
PERUVIAN BLUE—Muse 5044
LUCIFER—Muse 5070
GOLDEN LOTUS—Muse 5220
AT THE PIANO—Xanadu 188
INNOCENCE—Wolf 1203

Charlie Rouse as leader

YEAH—Epic 16012
BOSSA NOVA BACCHANAL—Blue Note 4119
TAKIN' CARE OF BUSINESS—Jazzland 919
MOMENT'S NOTICE—Storyville 4079
TWO IS ONE—Strata-East 19747
WE PAID OUR DUES—Epic 16018

Buster Williams as leader

HEARTBEAT—Muse 5171
PINNACLE—Muse 5080
CRYSTAL REFLECTION—Muse 5101
DREAMS COME TRUE—Buddah 5728
TOKUDO—Denon YX7531-ND

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STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN

New Blues Blood



DOUBLE TROUBLE: (from left) Tommy Shannon, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Chris Layton.

By Michael Point

The sound is both primal and futuristic, as echoes of the past and previews of the future cut through the auditorium with compelling power. The guitar solos are literal torrents of gut-wrenching, mood-elevating energy, each one highly personalized and undeniably blue. Stevie Ray Vaughan, the newly anointed successor in the long line of Texas blues guitar heroes, is back at home and in the process of celebrating his birthday by doing what he likes best, playing the blues. The Austin audience, true believers all, is up and bouncing in every direction, reveling in both the flood of Texas blues emanating from Vaughan's guitar and the knowledge that their home-town hero is now taking his message to the world at large. Mean-

while, Stevie Ray rages on, bending strings and notes in every direction, all the while keeping the pressure on both the music and the audience. Bassist Tommy Shannon and drummer Chris Layton, who make up the totality of his compact and muscular band Double Trouble, race along with Vaughan's feverish guitar runs, clearing the trails that he blazes through split seconds later. It's not exactly your standard birthday party fare, but for the birthday boy himself, wringing still more blues from his battered Stratocaster, it is simply business as usual.

It has, indeed, been a very eventful year for 29-year-old Vaughan. After 20 years of playing guitar, and a decade-plus of heavy gigging in the no-holds-barred world of Texas blues joints, he has been

suddenly proclaimed an "overnight sensation." His name and picture have become familiar to those in the media, but more importantly his music has at last been set free from the territorial boundaries of Texas and loosed upon the music world at large. A star-studded chain-of-events that involved some of the best ears in the business propelled Vaughan to his present position, but no matter how adept at recognizing talent his boosters were, they could only appreciate it when they found it. They couldn't create the talent itself.

A case could possibly be made for the talent being in his blood, since his brother Jimmy holds down the guitar spot in another of Texas' proudest blues exports, the Fabulous Thunderbirds. But just as Stevie Ray's post-Hendrix blues stylings differ from his brother's razor-sharp Slim Harpo licks, there is more than a little difference in the roads they have traveled. Stevie Ray was born in Dallas and followed the traditional route for Texas musicians, winding up in Austin; in his case the immigration date was New Year's Eve in 1972. After a series of on-again/off-again bands, which included present bassist Shannon and a cast of others, Stevie Ray hooked up with what may be the last great unrecorded blues band in the state, the Cobras.

Vaughan grew out of the band after a few years (and an unreleased California recording date) and started up his own Triple Threat Revue, featuring fellow guitarist W. C. Clark and vocalist Lou Ann Barton. This was a band capable of amazing performances and consistent bickering between the three principals; as Stevie Ray recalls, "Everybody wanted to be the leader, usually all at the same time." Eventually Double Trouble was condensed from this unit, and the present day saga of Stevie Ray Vaughan was off and running.

While playing through a succession of bands, Vaughan assimilated the blues influences he most admires (Buddy Guy, Albert Collins, Freddie King, Howlin' Wolf and his guitarist Hubert Sumlin being at the top of the list) but also brought Django Reinhardt, George

PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

Jones and, above all, Jimi Hendrix into his own personal style. In the process Vaughan had assembled a veritable encyclopedia of superb blues licks, but they were only jumping-off points for the blues method that came from his own head and flying fingers. Everyone who watched him burn cramped clubs to the ground all across Texas knew there was something extraordinary happening. They just didn't know that the rest of the world would soon be able to witness the same incendiary virtuosity.

Vaughan's manager, Chesley Millikin, is a long-time veteran of the music wars, having served time in the Rolling Stones organization during one of their more chaotic periods, before ending up in the considerably calmer atmosphere of Austin. While by no means out of the music business, Millikin was nevertheless involved in other pursuits—a race track nine miles from Austin, named Manor Downs, being one of the most prominent. Arguably the catalyst for the quantum jump in Vaughan's career was this very race track, with more than a little help from Millikin's Stones connection.

Stevie Ray describes the events that transpired in his usual easy-going manner, "Mick Jagger and [girlfriend/model] Jerry Hall are both interested in horses, and they came down to see Manor Downs and look at horses and visit with Chesley. While they were there, they saw a video clip that we'd made, and the next thing we know they've rented a club in New York [Danceteria] during its off-hours for us to play a showcase gig in. We weren't really expecting too much to happen, but it sounded like it would be fun no matter what came off, so we went up there, and they told us to play a short 30- to 45-minute set. Well, we did, but every time we got ready to quit they'd all yell for more, so we kept playing until we ended up doing a 2-hour-and-45-minute set."

The word spread fast from the showcase and netted Vaughan some pretty heavy national media attention, but soon he was back in Texas blowing away the local blues joint patrons again. Meanwhile, ace r&b producer Jerry Wexler entered the picture during a visit to Austin on behalf of one of his record projects, Lou Ann Barton. Wexler was already aware of Vaughan's reputation, but after seeing him live on his home turf, he was impressed enough to give promoter Claude Nobs a trans-Atlantic phone call, which resulted in Stevie Ray being booked into the 1982 Montreux Festival in Switzerland.

The Montreux Festival provided Vaughan and Double Trouble with another excellent opportunity to impress the movers and shakers of the music scene, and once again they made the most of it. After overwhelming the festival audience with his patented blues



ANNE FISHEIN/PHOTO RESERVE

CHICAGOFEST JAM: Stevie Ray Vaughan (right) with Buddy Guy.

barrage, Stevie Ray met and jammed with Jackson Browne, a secret but fervent blues lover in his own right. Browne was suitably impressed, and offered Stevie Ray free usage of his California recording studio (he was later so amazed that he threw in free recording tape as well). Nearly all the pieces for Vaughan's emergence as a major record act had then fallen into place, but one additional personality was yet to come aboard.

John Hammond, whose 50 years of unfailing accuracy in recognizing unique musical talent is a music business legend, entered the scene after hearing a tape of Stevie Ray's Montreux appearance. Hammond's almost mythical status as the discoverer of talents ranging from Billie Holiday to Bruce Springsteen (including another young Texas guitar phenom named Charlie Christian) meant that when he offered to produce Stevie Ray, there was little time lost in getting a positive reply back to him.

In short order Stevie Ray and the band were in California laying down the instrumental tracks. Like the man himself and the music he plays, the recording session was a typically straightforward, no frills affair.

"It wasn't anything very complicated," Vaughan says, "we just set up and played like we would under any other circumstances. We weren't interested in having strings or horns or background choirs getting in the way of the music, so we just plugged in and did it. Almost everything on the album is a first or second take, and the only overdubbing that we did came when I got a little carried away on *Testify* and broke a string. We asked the engineers to roll back the tape to where it happened, and we just jumped back in again and finished it off. The whole thing just took a couple of days to get down the way we wanted it."

After a trip back to Austin to add the

vocal tracks, the rough mix of *Texas Flood* was taken to New York for Hammond's input and stamp of approval. Hammond's participation in the final product was both minimal and significant. Stevie Ray explains, "Mr. Hammond's part in the album came during the final mixing and mastering. He was mainly protecting our sound from being turned into something it really wasn't. He was concerned that the record come across just like we played, and since it's so easy to overdo things when you have all those knobs in front of you, he acted as the final judge of just what was necessary and what was in the way. After all, with the people he's worked with and the things he's accomplished, you have to trust his musical judgment a lot. I was just proud he was interested in me and the album, so he was a sort of steady force and a sort of inspiration, too."

The completed *Texas Flood* (Epic 38734) gave music critics a severe testing of their store of superlatives, as it was almost universally received with astounding praise. A five-star *down beat* review by Jim Roberts called it a "uniformly excellent album" and talked about Stevie Ray's ability to go "way beyond the usual limits of the blues to explore concepts that are strikingly original." The only difference in the rest of the reviews was that many writers got so excited that they went even further and resorted to phrases like "blues guitar messiah," "the greatest guitar talent on the horizon," and "the voice of the blues in the '80s."

It was, however, another album that initially brought Vaughan's guitar work to major critical attention, as well as creating the first big conflict/controversy of his budding career as an international act. This was, of course, the David Bowie album *Let's Dance* (EMI-America 17093),



ANNE FISHER/PHOTO RESERVE

on which Stevie Ray's gutsy guitar lines created yet another successful context for Bowie's ever-changing musical persona. When the news of Vaughan's participation on the album's sessions drifted back to Texas, there were quite a few of the Vaughan faithful walking around shaking their heads at the prospect of his raw blues energy being channeled through the frequently style-over-substance nature of Bowie's music. The resultant product, while definitely not a blues album, made a lot of Bowie fans out of the blues faithful and undoubtedly created no small number of Stevie Ray Vaughan fans amongst the enormous Bowie constituency.

What the existence of the two albums also established was that Stevie wanted to be out playing his own music and in essence promoting his own album. Not too surprisingly, Bowie and his management were concerned with their own similar affairs. After the initial offer of having Double Trouble serve as the opening act on the six-month Bowie world tour was withdrawn, Stevie Ray faced the decision of accompanying Bowie or setting out on his own. It didn't take long to make up his mind, and in retrospect the decision for the two artists to go their separate ways was one that was both logically self-evident and mutually beneficial. Vaughan has little to say on the subject to this day. He states, "I guess things could've been worked out somehow, but I certainly don't regret it at all. Anytime I have a choice between playing my own music with Double Trouble and playing somebody else's music with another band, I'm going to choose what I'm most attached to already. I just care more about my music and this band than anything else."

Vaughan is more talkative about his work on the Bowie album itself. He says, "I really enjoyed doing the album. I overdubbed my parts, and it was a lot of fun putting guitar licks over what they had already assembled. Some of the tracks were almost complete, while others didn't have the horn parts yet or just had the basic backing tracks. Bowie had this old 45 rpm record from the early '50s, and he just said he wanted something like it but to let go and be myself, too. I just sort of cranked it all up and went for it, and everybody seemed satisfied with what came out. Of course it was also real interesting to hear how it all finally sounded after they finished mixing it. So, I'm still happy I did it in the first place, and I'm happy that my playing on it helped the album's sound in some way."

Vaughan and Double Trouble hit the road in the second half of 1983, taking *Texas Flood* to fans across North America and invariably drawing the same, if not even wilder, critical raves for their live

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN'S EQUIPMENT

Of his equipment Stevie Ray Vaughan says. "I really don't have very fancy stuff, nothing real exotic or anything. After all, I'm just a blues player, anyway. I use the same 1959 [Fender] Strat [ocaster] I've had for years [and it looks it], although I've got a '57, a '61, a '62, and a '64 now, which I may eventually get around to. My '59 has been through a lot though, and it's been good to me, so I'm staying with it for now. I use a Fender medium pick, and usually La Bella strings, although I use GHS sometimes. I string the guitar in a .013-.016-.019-.028-.038-.058 [gauge] progression and play through a couple of Fender Vibraverb amps that have a few miles on them, too. Like I said, nothing fancy [except his Earth III strap], but it all works out just the way I want it."

show as the album itself had engendered. The situations were varied, from smaller venue headlining to large arena opening slots for Men At Work and the Moody Blues. The procedure was always the same, however, as Stevie and company simply came out blazing and didn't let up until their time ran out. The album held its own against the corporate rock fashion-plates that dominate the sales charts, and even managed to go gold in Canada, once again demonstrating the universal appeal of not only the blues, but of soulful virtuosity in general.

And that brings us to 1984. The introductions are out of the way now, the conflicts and controversies consigned to the past, and the creative decks cleared for action. He enters the studios in January, and expectations are quite high, since he's no longer just a mysterious stranger from Texas. The scores of critics who raved over his every note will now be watching closely for any missteps. Vaughan's attitude towards the increased critical attention is characteristically succinct. "I don't know any other way to play, so it's not going to change what I'm doing or how I sound. Besides, they've got to listen to it to criticize it, so at least I know the music will get heard."

John Hammond firmly believes Vaughan will be a certifiable blues superstar and that his influence and popularity will grow exponentially throughout the '80s. Whatever the extent of his commercial success, Vaughan's unbending attitude towards keeping his musical individuality intact assures that he will indeed leave a mark on modern blues. His is the new blood the blues has to have to maintain the vitality and viability essential to the continuation of the form. Vaughan is another of music's "new traditionalists (blues division)"—true to the historical tradition of the music and its masters, but also quite determined to put his own style and sound in the repertoire of the future "young turks" of the blues guitar.

Vaughan is aware of his talents and opportunities, but he views the whole situation with an up-front honesty that, like his music, is neither naive nor calculated, but instead straight to the heart of the matter. "I'm really just another Texas blues guitarist," he says, "but I think I've got something a little different, maybe even something special, to say with my music. I expect to get better at what I do—I'd think any musician would want to—so I'll be able to express myself even better in my music. It really comes down to the fact that we're going to keep playing our hearts out. We hope we can get a lot of people to listen, but if they don't, well, we're still going to go all-out anyway."

There's a pause, a chuckle, and then a resigned confession, "You know, I just love to play the blues. What else is there to say?"

db



By Larry Birnbaum

El Rey—the King. Tito Puente has been billed as the King of Mambo, the King of Salsa, the King of the Timbales, the King of Latin Music. But after more than 30 years at the pinnacle of his profession, the *Newyoric*an percussionist and bandleader is unimpressed with royalty. "I don't like titles," he says. "If you're called the king of something—the King of Boogaloo or the King of Rock—once that music dies, then the king dies, too. Now they call me the King of Latin-American Music, but I don't really go for it, because people expect you to give them more than they anticipate. You're supposed to be the king, to be great all the time, and they expect to see you at your peak. Nobody can cut you; you're supposed to make everybody feel like you're the top man. It really puts you under pressure. I'd rather just be called Tito Puente and his Orchestra, period. No 'salsa' word, no other title."

Whether or not he chooses to wear it, *El Rey* has earned his crown. Born and raised in NYC's Spanish Harlem, educated at the Juilliard School of Music, Puente won recognition as an arranger and sideman before rising to stardom with his own band in the late '40s. Having helped to inaugurate the mambo craze, he rode its crest through the following decade, appealing to Latinos and Anglos alike with innovative compositions and jazzy adaptations of the latest Cuban sounds. Rock music had altered dancers' steps and listeners' tastes by the 1960s, but Puente's core audience remained loyal until his career was rejuvenated, ironically, by latin-rocker Carlos Santana, who covered two of his early tunes. Young Latinos returned to their roots, and to Puente's music, in the '70s, but the bandleader bridled when the style he had pioneered was renamed "salsa."

Although he still maintains his brassy orchestra for latin dance engagements, Puente, in the '80s, has been increasingly occupied with his Latin Jazz Ensemble, a stellar aggregation that includes such bi-cultural adepts as trumpeter/percussionist Jerry Gonzalez and Argentine pianist Jorge Dalto. Puente himself has been involved with latin jazz since he sat in with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie while still an apprentice in Machito's orchestra; later he performed with Stan Kenton, recorded with Woody Herman, and arranged for Count Basie. With his present combo he has appeared at clubs, colleges, and festivals throughout the U.S. and Europe, introducing latin jazz to new audiences and opening doors for his talented sidemen, several of whom lead their own bands.

Since the departure of Cuban-born violin prodigy Alfredo De La Fe, Puente's group has largely abandoned its discursive funk-fusion tendencies in favor of a contemporary "Cu-bop" approach that more accurately reflects its leader's personality.

TIMBALES TITAN

TITO PUENTE

With a repertoire that ranges from Puente's classic *Picadillo* to Coltrane's *Equinox* and the Drifters' *On Broadway*, the Latin Jazz Ensemble demands versatility as well as virtuosity from its members. Fortunately, *El Rey* is admirably served by a court that, besides Gonzalez and Dalto, includes saxophonist Mario Rivera, known for his work with Mongo Santamaria and others; percussionist Johnny Rodriguez, leader of the popular salsa band *Tipica '73*; and bassist Bobby Rodriguez, a 20-year veteran of the Machito orchestra. Each of the musicians can breeze through tortuous jazz changes while juggling intricate, rapidly shifting Afro-Cuban rhythmic patterns. Their collective impact suggests a rocket-propelled version of Horace Silver's old sextet.

Puente, at 60, is still the greatest *timbalero* of them all. By his account, the timbales—a pair of tuned, open-bottomed drums, played from standing position with untapered sticks—are descended from a French instrument. By all accounts, Puente established the timbales as the percussive powerhouse of the modern latin orchestra, capable of thundering over the brassiest crescendos. His commanding sense of rhythm is evident, not only in his brilliant solo work, but throughout the music that he writes, arranges, and performs. An outstanding and highly original vibraphonist, he introduced the vibes into latin music in the late '40s, later using them to create a series of rhythmic tone poems with Far Eastern colorations. "My fans would say, 'Here comes Tito with his venetian blinds,'" he laughs. "They didn't know what it was."

Although no one in his immediate family played an instrument (his father was a foreman in a razor blade factory), Ernest Anthony Puente Jr. began his musical education at the age of seven. "I was always banging on cans and boxes," says 'Ernestito,' "so my parents' friends told them, 'Why don't you put him to studying?'" His first instrument was the piano, however; he also sang in a street-corner quartet and attended dancing classes. After five years of piano instruction, he began taking weekly trap drum lessons at the New York School of Music. "I had my basic reading already, and I learned how to read rudimental drumming," he says. "I was turning into a reading musician."

Meanwhile, he started playing weekend gigs near his home at 110th Street and Fifth Avenue. "My father used to take me to the dances," he recalls. "At midnight I was already falling asleep." He adopted the timbales to work with the latin bands; although he was influenced by Humberto Morales, New York's pre-eminent *timbalero* at the time, he based his style primarily on that of Montesino, who played in the neighborhood with a group called the Happy Boys.

At 15 he dropped out of Central Commercial High School to take a winter job with a band in Miami Beach. "They called it a rhumba band at the time," says Tito. "They had the American society band, and the relief band was the rhumba band—a latin band of about seven or eight musicians. You had to play all the standard rhumbas of the time—not the Cuban-type rhumbas, but the Arthur Murray-type rhumbas, like Xavier Cugat used to play. And we had to play tangos and waltzes and paso dobles—all kinds of Latin-American rhythms." It was a short hop to Cuba by plane, and young Puente traveled there often. "I picked up a lot of music, listened a lot to the radio, and met a lot of musicians," he says.

Back in Manhattan, Puente played with pianist Noro Morales, Humberto's brother, at the Stork Club, then joined the orchestra of Jose Curbelo, later New York's first mambo king. He briefly became a member of Machito's Afro-Cubans in 1941, but spent the next three years in the navy aboard the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Santee. "It was an escort carrier, a small one," he says, "and we didn't have the complement of men to have an official orchestra, so we used to pick the musicians as they came on board. I stayed on for a long, long time, because I was more or less leading the band then." During this period Puente also taught himself to play the saxophone.

Upon his discharge he used the G.I. Bill to enroll at Juilliard, where he studied composition and orchestration under Professor Richard Benda, an exponent of the Schillinger system. Soon Puente's compositions and arrangements were being played by the leading latin bandleaders of the day: Machito, Jose Curbelo, Pupi Campo, Frank Marti, Miguelito Valdez, and Marcelino Guerra. Again he performed as a sideman with Machito and Curbelo, and served as musical director of Campo's band. In 1949 he formed his own orchestra, the Picadilly Boys, so dubbed by Frederico Pagani, the promoter at Max Hyman's famed Palladium Ballroom. "That was a name that came out of his hat," says Puente. "He was the one that invented all the bands and all the dances and all the gimmicks that went with it."

The word "mambo" had originally referred to a coda section that was appended to the traditional danzon by the Cuban orchestra, Arcaño y sus Maravillas. Arcaño's mambos of the early '40s were delicate, classically shaded pieces for violins and flute, but it was Cuban expatriate Perez Prado, with his bombastic brass arrangements, who first captured the non-Latin public with *Mambo #5* in 1948. Strongly influenced by Machito's progressive harmonies, Puente's band, with a shrill brass section modeled after Stan Kenton's, was even more danceably percussive. His early hits on the fledgling Tico label—among them, *Ran Kan Kan*, *Abaniquito*, *El Yoyo*, and *Picadillo*—electrified dancers across America and catapulted Puente into the front rank of latin bandleaders.

Through the '50s and early '60s, Puente was a fixture at the Palladium Ballroom, the "Home of the Mambo," overshadowing his chief competitors, Machito and Tito Rodriguez. A dispute over top billing led to a bitter falling out with vocalist Rodriguez, and their celebrated rivalry ultimately became the subject of a popular song by Miguelito Valdes. With the help of Mongo Santamaria, his conga player for seven years, Puente



RICK LEE

TITO PUENTE SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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| as a leader | | with Celia Cruz | |
| <i>ON BROADWAY</i> —Concord Jazz Picante 207 | <i>TITO PUENTE NOW</i> —GNP Crescendo 2048 | <i>ALGO ESPECIAL PARA RECORDAR</i> —Fania 1304 | <i>ALMA CON ALMA</i> —Tico 1221 |
| <i>THE MANY MOODS OF TITO</i> —Arcaro 2-510 | <i>DANCE MANIA</i> —Carino 1-5017 | <i>QUIMBO QUIMBUMBIA</i> —Tico 1193 | <i>CUBA Y PUERTO RICO SONG</i> —Tico 1136 |
| <i>PUENTE IN PERCUSSION</i> —Tico 1011 | <i>NO HAY MEJOR</i> —Tico 1401 | with La Lupe | |
| <i>DANCE MANIA OF THE '80s</i> —Tico 1439 | <i>C'EST MAGNIFIQUE</i> —Tico 1440 | <i>HOMENAJE A RAFAEL HERNANDEZ</i> —Tico 1131 | <i>TU Y YO</i> —Tico 1125 |
| with Latin Jazz Ensemble | | with Benny More | |
| <i>LIVE AT MONTREUX '80</i> —Latin Percussion 474 | | <i>HOMENAJE A BENY</i> —Tico 1425 | |

Tito Puente has released scores of albums over the years. His prolific output on Tico and RCA from the '50s has long been out of print, and many of the classic LPs from those days are certified collectables today. Additionally, much of his current output, as represented above, is difficult to find stateside other than in specialty stores. Ipanema Records (Box 49452, Austin, TX 78765) is a reliable source for mail-ordering Puente discs; write for their free catalog that lists hundreds of available albums of Latin-American music.

TITO PUENTE'S EQUIPMENT

Tito Puente's setup is basically a Latin Percussion show: "I use the Latin Percussion timbales with their stock calf-skin heads [although he has, on occasion, been seen with either the standard Remo coated Ambassador heads, or Remo's FiberSkyn 2's], the Tito Puente model, and sometimes all four models at once [12-inch through Thunder Timbs]—you can imagine how I must have to move around that! I either go down to the lumber yard and pick out my own dowels and sand them down to 13 inches, or else I use LP's sticks. I also use LP claves, maracas, shekere, cow bells—the cha-cha bell, the mambo bell—whatever; they're all made very well, actually. My suspended cymbal is 16-inch A. Zildjian medium [on an LP stand]. I have five vibes at home—a new Yamaha, a Deagan electronic, a Deagan Aurora concert model, a Musser concert model . . . but there's no jobs [for the vibes]! I also have a Yamaha marimba with the low F—a beautiful instrument!"



LAUREN DEUTSCH

ON-STAGE: (from left) Tito Puente, Mario Rivera, and Jerry Gonzalez, all part of the Latin Jazz Ensemble.

maintained his ascendancy by importing the latest Cuban compositions, quickly adopting the cha-cha when that dance was introduced from Havana in the mid-'50s. He recorded prolifically for Tico before switching to RCA in the late '50s; between the two companies he eventually made 88 LPs, of which the best known is probably *Dance Mania* from 1958 (now available on Carino).

With Santamaria, Willie Bobo, and Armando Peraza, among others, Puente recorded a series of percussion albums—*Puente In Percussion* for Tico, and *Top Percussion* and *Tambo* for RCA—that are still among the finest exercises in Afro-Cuban drumming ever produced. “We could never play that way again,” he says. “It was an inspiration that developed right there in the studio. There were no charts; we just looked at each other and played, and that’s the way it came out—beautiful. It’s very difficult to do a percussion album, because you have to catch yourself in the mood—technically and mentally and physically inspired—to be able to play that way. People that have those albums, they’ll never let them go.”

Puente also performed at jazz clubs like Birdland and the Royal Roost, and recorded crossover albums like *Puente Goes Jazz* and *Night Beat*, both featuring Doc Severinsen on trumpet. “I was always trying to find a marriage between latin music and jazz,” he says. “I was trying to play jazz but not lose the Latin-American authenticity. I’ve been involved with jazz all my life, really, and I’ve always found that a latin band can play jazz better than a jazz band can play latin, because they can’t get that authenticity. It’s the syncopation that’s involved. You have to fit into a clave beat—those two little sticks. Everybody has to play within that clave; if one musician is not playing in clave, it disturbs your hearing. Of course, some of the latin musicians can’t play jazz, because you have to know your chord changes and know the tunes and all that. The typical latin music is more of a rhythmic thing; it’s not really an expressive thing harmonically or melodically, as jazz is.”

Latin music was incorporated into many early rock & roll songs, but after the twist changed national dancing habits, the tide turned in the opposite direction, and latin artists embraced the Anglicized lyrics and bastardized rhythms of the boogaloo and shing-a-ling. “Some of us didn’t want to do it,” says Puente, “because it was really nothing new—it was just blues played with an afterbeat—and it wasn’t our bag.” While other orchestras compromised or disbanded, Puente’s stuck to tradition, more or less, and survived. Once again with Tico, he continued his hectic recording schedule, often backing well-known vocalists like Santos Colon, Vincentico Valdez, and the extroverted La Lupe. A long string of albums paired him with *La Reina*—the queen of Cuban song, Celia Cruz; they were recently reunited on a Fania LP, and still perform together occasionally.

Puente’s career received an unexpected boost when Santana recorded *Oye Como Va* in 1970. “He just added organ, drums, and guitar,” says Tito, “because that was the style at that time. When I did the original one many years ago, we decided to give the tune a nice Cuban taste, so we brought Pupi Legarreta, a great violinist, into the studio, and Johnny Pacheco is the one that played the flute. I had the parts written for the trombones or whatever, and Pupi and Pacheco just faked it along; we put the chorus on, and that was it. But it wasn’t a hit, really. Santana was the one that made a hit out of it, and I would say that Santana is mostly responsible for the upsurge today of latin music. He has an audience 10 times bigger than ours, and he hits more places than we do.” Santana also recorded Puente’s frenetic *Pa Los Rumberos*, and Tito reciprocated with a cover of the guitarist’s *Batuca*. Sometimes when we had these college dances, I would play some of his other tunes,” says Puente, “but it didn’t go over, because I didn’t have his instrumentation.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 61

ZOOT SIMS

SUDDENLY IT'S SPRING—Pablo 2310-898: BRAHAM'S . . . I THINK; I CAN'T GET STARTED; MACGUFFIE'S BLUES; IN THE MIDDLE OF A KISS; SO LONG; NEVER LET ME GO; SUDDENLY IT'S SPRING.

Personnel: Sims, tenor, soprano saxophone; Jimmy Rowles, piano; George Mraz, bass; Akira Tana, drums.

★★★★

Though at one time a highly valued gift among jazzmen of all persuasions, melodic improvisation—or creative paraphrase, if you will—has, over the last two decades at least, become merely a cause for occasional celebration. In actuality, pure melodicism—that ability on the part of the soloist to impart to his improvised material a recurring touchstone of faint memorability—has always been a prized rarity, for seldom has any generation in jazz history provided us with more than a rigorously selected handful of truly worthwhile spontaneous melodists.

But Zoot Sims is certainly one of them, for he had been quick, from his earliest recorded utterances on, to prove his desire to assume the responsibilities of linear creativity. And in the 40 years since, he has done nothing if not hone these basic, intuitive skills to the point of perfection. Though not necessarily a composer in the formal sense, Zoot has always displayed a gift for spur-of-the-moment turns of phrase that enhance the original melodic intent of his material, rather than obscure it entirely as in the manner of so many other jazzmen.

On this latest Pablo release Zoot is once again in his happiest setting—an uncomplicated one-horn-and-rhythm format in which he can play attractive but long neglected compositions of meaningful import. The first named is a case in point, for not only is it the only one upon which Zoot plays his soprano, but it is also something of an oddity in jazz repertoire. Enigmatically titled, it is (I think!) an adaptation of Brahms' *Lullaby*, a familiar enough theme, but one which naggingly eludes this stranger in alien lands. Zoot's approach to it is simply magnificent, what with the subtle tango melding into a bluesy medium swing four and Zoot's luscious Hodges-like sonority on top.

Tenor is the horn he uses on the remainder of the tunes and, though none of the tempos chosen exceeds a moderate conservatism, interest is maintained through the melodic interplay of the principals and the sensitive underpinning of Akira Tana, who does a masterful job on brushes throughout. *I Can't Get Started* is especially notable for its inclusion of the verse—rarely if ever heard. Other highlights include Rowles' Monk-like work on *MacGuffie's Blues*, the Mraz/Tana spot on *In The Middle Of A Kiss*, and the overall spirit of mid-'30s jubilation apparent on *Suddenly It's Spring*.

In fact, the only problem connected with this album is one that has nothing at all to do with listener enjoyment. Someone goofed by calling the 1936 Walter Donaldson/Harold Adamson composition *So Long* instead of referring to it by its full and proper name, *It's Been So*



Keith Jarrett
Standards, Vol. 1
Gary Peacock
Jack DeJohnette



Long. Unfortunately, the result of this casual reference was that on the label, Woody Guthrie is listed as composer, presumably because he had once written a tune called *So Long*. So, whatever royalties accrue from the sale and play of this particular selection should be applied to the estates of Messrs. Donaldson and Adamson, and not to the estate of Mr. Guthrie. Sorry, Arlo. —jack sohmer



OLIVER LAKE & JUMP UP

PLUG IT—Gramavision 8206: TRICKLE DOWN THEORY; PLUG IT; TONE CLONE; BREATH OF LIFE; GO FOR IT; BE THE ONE; STRATOSPHERE; NO MORE WARS.

Personnel: Lake, saxophones, flute, vocals; Jerome Harris, bass, electric guitar, vocals; Pheeroan Ak Laff, drums, vocals; Brandon Ross, electric guitar, vocals; Darrel Mixon, Billy Grant (cut 2), electric bass; Geri Allen, keyboards; Steve Thornton, Marcelo Salazar, percussion; Michael Gregory, harmonica; Leon Pendarvis, synthesizer; Clarice Taylor, Sybil Thomas, background vocal.

★★★★

Many jazz aficionados who value saxophonist Oliver Lake's trenchant contributions to the iconoclastic World Saxophone Quartet and his bold headlining albums for Black Saint and other labels undoubtedly find *Jump Up*, Lake's reggae-funk group, an abomination. Lake himself has no qualms about the commercial music venture, no understanding of the damning term "sell out." As he's reiterated in interviews, the blues is the root of all the music he plays, whether in a reggae-funk setting or midst a collective improvising maelstrom. He considers all his endeavors commercial, meaning he quixotically expects respectable financial reward for esoteric and exoteric sounds. He also feels a duty to share his creativity with the people—dance music is just another way of reaching out.

Jump Up goes about its merry business by

singing jokey bromides and letting Lake take lustrous solos over the snappy Afro-Caribbean rhythmic pulsations. The bandleader goes "outside" in his solo on *Trickle Down Theory*, making this party-hearty dance burner an immensely interesting brew of free and funk; Lake's witty lyrics about Reaganomics applying to a love situation hold interest as well. His no-holds-barred alto or soprano work in *Tone Clone* and *Breath Of Life* stamps competent yet anonymous funk with a distinctive mark. He performs well on *Be The One*, too, but can't save it from the dust bin; horribly mannered vocals (by composer Brandon Ross?), especially vacant lyrics, and a marshmallow melody give it throwaway status. A lone indiscretion.

Particularly engaging as indicators of *Jump Up*'s present mightiness are the treatments of gifted drummer Pheeroan Ak Laff's two compositions, *Stratosphere* and *No More Wars*. The first song features Lake's blue-hued reading of the winsome melody, his marvelous solos, and a gently throbbing bass in the Jamaican mold. The latter is one of the few anti-military songs since the Tet Offensive to invite repeated playings. Lake's flute soothes, the singers ask for peace and joy, and somehow it fails to sound gushy or preachy. Like the bulk of the album, the song has an uplifting poignancy—largely due to Lake.

—frank-john hadley

KEITH JARRETT

STANDARDS, VOL. 1—ECM 1255: MEANING OF THE BLUES; ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE; IT NEVER ENTERED MY MIND; THE MASQUERADE IS OVER; GOD BLESS THE CHILD.

Personnel: Jarrett, piano; Gary Peacock, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

★★★★ 1/2

It could be 1966 again, when Jarrett and DeJohnette were sidemen in Charles Lloyd's quartet. But that sentiment fails to account for the drumming heartbeat of anticipation and

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excitement this music produces. A different sense of loss prevails when the music ends: will he do it again? Amid the totally improvised solo concerts, pseudo-classical orchestral pieces, and European art-jazz, will Keith Jarrett play this kind of mainstream trio jazz again?

Who knows? But this record is his best in a long time. The approach extends the trio concept initiated by pianist Bill Evans, bassist Scott LaFaro, and drummer Paul Motian circa 1960. Jarrett guides, but Peacock and DeJohnette are free to follow their own instincts in pursuing the collective goal. And Jarrett leaves plenty of room for their explorations.

The pianist accumulates fragments into longer lines, punctuating with sparsely placed chords. Only *God Bless The Child* receives a different transport—funky, gospel chords and a semi-rock beat. The strength of Jarrett's lines can be measured in terms of momentum, resolution, continuity, direction, and time, and he is absolutely unassailable in these areas. The sparse chords remind us of Evans: the perfect imagery of romanticism that allows the listener to complete the picture—and to be seduced by his own imagination. I think this is the best kind of art.

Peacock sets a standard of artistry on the bass—resilient tone, rangy lines, root notes, and inside notes (especially notable on *It Never Entered My Mind*), speed, walk. He's as close to LaFaro as anyone is likely to get. That's a compliment. DeJohnette deserves accolades, too, for his brush and stick fires. He doesn't let Jarrett get complacent.

The only detraction from a perfect record is Jarrett's moaning and humming over his piano lines. Embarrassing stuff, but filter it out and dig the music, which is tough and strong.

—owen cordle

PAQUITO D'RIVERA

LIVE AT KEYSTONE KORNER—Columbia 38899: *HAVANA/NEW YORK; SONG FOR MAURA; RED ON RED; DEJA VU; ZANAITH; ESTAMOS AHI.*

Personnel: D'Rivera, alto saxophone; Claudio Roditi, trumpet, valve trombone; Carlos Franzetti, keyboards; Steve Bailey, acoustic, electric bass; Ignacio Berroa, drums; Daniel Ponce, congas, percussion.

★ ★ ★ ★

DANIEL PONCE

NEW YORK NOW—Celluloid 5005: *INVACION DE; AFRICA CONTEMPORANEA; BASTA DE CUENTOS; ODIE; COJELLO SUAVE; SIBONEY; SOLO PARA TI.*

Personnel: (not identified by instrument), Ponce; Paquito D'Rivera; Jose "Chi Chi" Trapaga; Joe De Jesus; Orlando "Puntilla" Rios; Alberto Morgan; Olufemi Mitchell; Michael Beinhorn; Bill Laswell; Alex Rodriguez; Ignacio Berroa; Oscar Gonzalez; Regino Tellechea; Nelson Rodriguez; Francisco Rigores.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Two brilliant instrumentalists, saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera and percussionist Daniel

Ponce, both recently arrived from Cuba, represent nearly opposite, though mutually compatible, approaches to Cuban-American musical relations. D'Rivera is a lifelong jazz devotee whose Americanized style brought him into frequent conflict with Cuban authorities. Ponce, although he has recorded as a sideman in a variety of contexts, is revealed on his solo debut as a dyed-in-the-wool Afro-Cuban traditionalist. Ironically, D'Rivera, a musical rebel in his homeland, is a mainstreamer by U.S. standards, seldom straying from the hard-bop canon, while Ponce, master of a centuries-old cultural heritage, is embraced by the American avant garde.

Live At Keystone Korner, D'Rivera's third Columbia LP, presents his regular touring band, including Ponce, with the addition of Brazilian trumpeter Claudio Roditi. Roditi, a disciple of Lee Morgan and Freddie Hubbard, is a perfect foil for D'Rivera, whose virtuosic flights on alto sax often call to mind early Wayne Shorter. Argentine pianist Carlos Franzetti is similarly bebop-minded, while Carolina-born bassist Steve Bailey manages to sound positively South American. Ponce, on congas, is largely overshadowed by his fellow *Marielista*, Ignacio Berroa, who keeps an inflexibly rushed beat on trap drums.

D'Rivera possesses a marvelously pure and incisive tone, a quicksilver facility, and a sure command of the post-Parker idiom. His lusty lyricism sparkles on the Chucho Valdes ballad, *Zanaith*, in sharp contrast to the ploddingly banal rendition recently recorded by his former colleagues in Irakeré. His prowess is most effectively showcased on challenging tunes like his own *Havana/New York*, a salsa-tinged recreation of the old Blue Note sound, and Franzetti's boppish *Deja Vu*. Elsewhere D'Rivera is less impressive, for he seemingly lacks the ability to transcend weaker material in the manner of a Sonny Rollins, and merely decorates the melodic line, albeit prettily, without substantially altering it.

Despite synthesizer effects and other contemporary touches, Ponce's *New York Now* is firmly rooted in Afro-Cuban religious ritual, and is similar in part to recordings by Cuban folkloric groups like Los Papines and Conjunto Guaguanco Matancera. Ponce demonstrates his mastery of Cuban cult liturgy and street song, and also incorporates the sacred, double-headed bata drums into hybrid "new wave" rhythms that have emerged on that island during the past decade. With expressionistic vocals dubbed over bata syncopations, *Africa Contemporanea* is eerily reminiscent of Varese's *Poeme Electronique*, and Ernesto Lecuona's standard, *Siboney*, is radically abstracted with the assistance of D'Rivera, but these experiments are, to American ears, no more exotic-sounding than the most venerable folk chants.

American modernists like Bill Laswell, on bass, and Michael Beinhorn, on synthesizer, are featured on several selections, but the rhythmic core of Ponce's ensemble is composed of recent Cuban emigres like percussionist Orlando "Puntilla" Rios. Ponce verbally throws down the gauntlet to U.S. latin percussionists, and as he demonstrates on the a cappella *Solo Para Ti*, he is a formidable

congero indeed. His American rivals, however, are scarcely inferior, either in technique or creativity, and Ponce's future progress will necessarily depend on collaboration rather than competition.

—larry birnbaum

GRIFFITH PARK BAND

IN CONCERT—Elektra Musician 60262-2: *WHY WAIT; GUERNICA; HAPPY TIMES; OCTOBER BALLAD; I MEAN YOU; HERE'S THAT RAINY DAY.*
Personnel: Freddie Hubbard, trumpet, flugelhorn; Joe Henderson, tenor saxophone; Chick Corea, piano; Stanley Clarke, bass; Lenny White, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

FREDDIE HUBBARD

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC—Fantasy F-9626: *BIRD LIKE; SKY DIVE; THE INTREPID FOX.*
Personnel: Hubbard, trumpet, flugelhorn; Henderson, tenor saxophone; Billy Childs, piano; Larry Klein, bass; Steve Houghton, drums; Bobby Hutcherson, vibraphone (cuts 1,2).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

As front lines go these days, Freddie Hubbard and Joe Henderson make a fine pair of one-eyed jacks, with that glad eye out for the improvisational feint and dart, and a blind eye to tight ensemble efforts of their past individual (Blakey, Silver) and collective (Jazz Communicators) bands. If there are any two to redefine the state-of-the-art for the classic two-horn front line, these guys are the ones. On these live dates they play clipped and quick on the sketchy heads but let all hell break loose on long solos. When they play pretty, it's intense, and when they stretch, they make it. Tunes on these live San Francisco dates run 12-20 minutes, and creative troughs on them are rare. The longest need a side each: Clarke's *Why Wait* sounds like a mature version of Miles' *Jean Pierre*; White's *Guernica* is a seething Picassoesque Armageddon. Joe dances everywhere with a light foot, agile wit, and febrile mind. Freddie is playing with all the brash intensity of a young man liberated, better than he's sounded in years. It's great to hear these guys hitting their stride on some fiercely creative extended jamming.

One measure of their great playing is how effortlessly they carry the rhythm sections. As good as Chick Corea plays (and he seems, in his elfin way, to peek in everywhere at once), he is—except for his wispy *October Ballad* intro and a *salsa picante Guernica* romp—in his best role comping for the horns. Ditto Stanley Clarke and Lenny White, who is dead right on his squib when he says the day belongs to Freddie and Joe. That day—April 3, 1982 at the Circle Star Theatre—was committed to a working tape so exciting that Elektra let it loose.

The other date across San Francisco at Keystone Korner was with Hubbard's working rhythm section, who are sturdy but not exciting. Billy Childs comps alertly, his solos are workmanlike, and his incessant chording under Hutcherson's (chronically) undermined

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vibes is gratuitous. The general flow of the rhythm is a little lumpy, like gravy with more flour than juice. But the meat-and-potatoes men out front (catch Joe on *Bird Like* and Freddie skydiving) still make it a platter fit for famished ears.
—fred bouchard

GEORGE ADAMS/ DANNIE RICHMOND

GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT—Soul Note 1057: *MORE SIGHTINGS*; *DON'T TAKE YOUR LOVE FROM ME*; *SYMPHONY FOR FIVE*; *PRAYER FOR A JITTER BUG*; *DREAM OF THE RISING SUN*; *RIPOFF*.

Personnel: Adams, tenor saxophone, flute; Richmond, drums; Jimmy Knepper, trombone; Hugh Lawson, piano; Mike Richmond, bass.

★ ★ ★ ½

It's not surprising that portions of this release are indebted to Charlie Mingus, since all members of this quintet except bassist Mike Richmond have worked with Mingus, and three of them, Richmond, Knepper, and Adams, were

seminal Mingus sidemen. Although the ensemble is by no means a Mingus repertory company like Mingus Dynasty, on several tracks here the group appears to strive to capture the form, content, and spirit of Mingus' music.

Consider Hugh Lawson's *Prayer For A Jitterbug*, one of the album's highlights. A haunting legato call-and-response between the horns slides into a walking four. Pianist Lawson solos in clipped, bright phrases, and tenorist Adams responds with uninhibited blowing. Knepper assumes his usual direct stance and wails with his marvelously expressive tone and dynamic shadings. Bassist Richmond solos and self-accompanies himself with soft grunts, groans, and sing-a-long passages, seasoning his fluent lines with a pleasant, plucked section. But the most compelling aspect of *Prayer* is its out chorus, in which Knepper and Adams thematically transform the head, bending and twisting the motifs of the theme in the best tradition of the musical mind of Charlie Mingus.

Richmond's *Symphony For Five*, the album's most ambitious piece, is a nearly coherent compositional attempt evocative of Mingus' extended pieces. After a free, moderately cha-

otic opening punctuated with wails and groans from the horns, a longish drum solo leads into an a cappella trombone interlude, to which Adams adds an intertwining tenor line. A haunting, ascending piano figure leads into a rhapsodic piano section, reminiscent of the way Mingus himself played piano. As the work goes on, the horns intone a soft legato strain over castanet effects, bringing portions of Mingus' *Tijuana Moods* into mind. Rising to triple forte frenzy, the horns meld into a delicate piano section followed by a quiet flute coda in which Adams simultaneously sings and plays.

Other tracks, however, are less satisfactory. *Don't Take Your Love From Me* is Adams' vehicle, done out in a smoochy, romantic treatment. Pointedly silken passages lead into an irrelevant, squeaky coda in which the tenorist inexplicably pulls all the stops of saxophone effects, including grunts, groans, and cries. *Dream Of The Rising Sun* and *Rip-Off* are funk beat tunes, played with competent musicianship but lacking in any real musical content.

But *More Sightings* is the real teaser. A legato head is punched up with bright 16th-note phrases which kick into Adams' frantically free solo and Knepper's high-voltage sweeps.

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tantalizing us with the kind of viable music that could have been on all tracks of this nearly consistent, nearly exciting release.

—jon balleras

AL DI MEOLA

SCENARIO—Columbia 38944: *MATA HARI*; *AFRICAN NIGHT*; *ISLAND DREAMER*; *SCENARIO*; *SEQUENCER*; *CACHACA*; *HYPNOTIC CONVICTION*; *CALLIOPE*; *SCOUNDREL*.

Personnel: Di Meola, electric, acoustic guitar, Roland guitar synthesizer, mandocello, Hawaiian chordophone, Fairlight CMI, drums (cut 6); Jan Hammer, keyboards, Fairlight CMI, Linn, Roland drum machine, bass, Moog bass; Phil Collins, drums (3); Bill Bruford, Simmons electric drums (8); Tony Levin, electric stick bass (8).

★ ★ ½

I haven't been following Di Meola that closely since reviewing his *Splendido Hotel* album for **db** in 1980. I saw his *Tour de Force* band play live, and know of his acoustic exploits with McLaughlin, De Lucia, and Morse. But I came to this record pretty fresh.

Much of *Scenario* is disappointing. Al is playing fine—if anything he's not trying to play as fast as he can all the time, which is good news. But the tunes, penned by Di Meola and Jan Hammer, are not the strongest to grace a Di Meola record. And they suffer from lack of inspirational support from bass and drums. Tony Levin, the only true bassist on the record, plays on only one cut, and although drummers Bill Bruford and Phil Collins appear on the album, seven of the nine tracks are drummed by the Linn box, programmed by Hammer. Remember the rhythm section, guys?

Talented Genesis skinsman Collins escapes without really becoming integrated into the music on *Island Dreamer*. A drum machine, sounding like one of the programs on his *Face Value* LP, plays the first half of the song, leading up to a bashing Collins drum entrance. His drumming, apart from being poorly mixed, is nothing spectacular. An average song, a fade out, Phil's through, "Thanks chaps." What a waste!

The tone starting the next tune is very much like something off Genesis' *Trick Of The Tale* album, and to hear Di Meola's acoustic guitar added works well. His soloing is nicely re-

strained. If anything, his accompaniment, his comping tends to be a bit frantic, but you're paying for that intensity with Di Meola.

Sequencer is some choice Di Meola rock & roll flash, and a solo that very well combines passion with strong-handed technical expertise. *Cachaca* is very nice—Di Meola makes an attempt to play drums along with the Linn. The tunes with Linn only, *African Night* and *Hypnotic Conviction* among them, sound sleepy about mid-way through. There's no experimental drum lick or bass run to boost the soloists into the heavens. The drum sounds of the Linn are of course very nice, but to do albums spending hours programming it just doesn't make sense to this reviewer. What would Di Meola classics like *Race With Devil On Spanish Highway* have been with a Linn instead of Lenny White? Or *Elegant Gypsy Suite* with a box instead of Gadd?

Calliope features drummer Bruford on his Simmons electronic kit, which sounds a lot like a real kit. I wish I could say more about Bruford's visit. This piece allows him none of the real interesting stuff he's been doing with King Crimson, but a chance to play too many fills again. Actually the second half of the tune

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heats up in a Crimson-ish dance beat, only to have Di Meola play a variation of something like *Mediterranean Sundance* over the top of it. *Scoundrel* is sort of a nice balls-out rock & roll tune, that also misses a drummer badly. Even Hammer would have sounded nice flailing away on this one.

—robin tolleson

AUGUSTUS PABLO

EARTH'S RIGHTFUL RULER—Message 1005: *EARTH'S RIGHTFUL RULER; KING ALPHA AND QUEEN OMEGA; JAH LOVE ENDURETH; RASTAFARI TRADITION; ZION HILL; JAVA; LIGHTNING AND THUNDER; ISRAEL SCHOOL YARD; CITY OF DAVID; MUSICAL CHANGES.*

Personnel: Pablo, melodica, piano, organ, steel strings; Junior Dan, Errol "Flabba" Holt, Jah Bunny, Robbie Shakespear, bass; Albert Malawi, Style Scott, Carlton Santa Davis, Leroy "Horse-mouth" Wallace, drums; Fazal Prendergast, Bingi Bunny, rhythm guitar; Earl "Chinna" Smith, lead guitar; Teo Benjamin, Garth Swaby, Sidney Wolfe, Ras Menilikyo, percussion; Delroy Williams, Norris Reid, Hugh Mundell, Maxie Lynch, vocal harmony.

★ ★ ★ ½

KING DAVID'S MELODY—Alligator 8307: *KING DAVID'S MELODY; ZION HIGH; MR. BASSIE; WEST ABYSSINIA; ISRAEL IN HARMONY; ROCKERS MOOD; SUFFERERS TROD; REVELATION TIME; SELFISH YOUTHS; CORNER STONE DUB; KENT ROAD.*

Personnel: Pablo, melodica, piano, organ, xylophone, string synthesizer; Robbie Shakespear, Junior Dan, Leroy "Heptone" Sibbles, Michael Taylor, Bunny Jeffery, Fazal Prendergast, bass; Albert Malawi, Horsemouth Wallace, Benbow Creary, "Mr. Rhythm Box," drums; Fazal Prendergast, Clive Jeffery, rhythm guitar; Earl "Chinna" Smith, lead guitar; Teo Benjamin, percussion.

★ ★ ★ ½

Brazilian pop star Gilberto Gil's cover of Bob Marley's *No Woman No Cry* illustrates the international imprint of reggae. Close to home, an adopted reggae beat pulsates in music from the Police, Jump Up, and other groups. There's little doubt that the most familiar brand of Jamaican reggae stateside is rife with song lyrics and singers. "Dub," with its stress placed on instrumental sounds, is remote from American ears. Whether dub is Kingston elevator muzak or Rasta soundtrack to the sublime depends on individual taste. For me, the output of Augustus Pablo represented on these discs falls somewhere between. Gentle, frequently colorful, sad, and soulful, it doesn't always break loose from predictability.

Pablo nevertheless brings discriminating sense to a musical form that can try the lone listener's attention span even if it coaxes the feet to dance. He principally plays the melodica, a plastic, breath-blown keyboard, in a style so relaxedly economical it's mystic; the Third World answer to Toots Thielemans. For variety Pablo employs echo and multi-tracking studio effects common to dub production.

Quite unlike the run-of-the-mill dubs, however, are his arrangements of parts and instruments combined to produce pleasing, radiant colors. The title song of *Earth's Rightful Ruler*,

which jostles xylophone and cuica (the hiccupping friction drum) against slide guitar, is but one example of Pablo's penchant for creative scoring. For another there's *Lightning And Thunder*, where simultaneous bird calls, variations for melodica, and commentary from puckering slide guitar conspire in wondrous polyphony. A tromboning synthesizer ghostily tailgates Pablo's line on melodica on the processional *King David's Melody*. Elsewhere, delicate pentatonics versus scratchy comping (*Musical Changes*) bring to mind gamelan at a lost Stax session.

Sameness of sound afflicts a number of these minor-key, medium-tempo tracks. Despite the presence of creative bass lines such as the brooding triplets of *Zion High*, reggae rhythms grow stale in large doses and sometimes weigh down the best of Pablo's transcendent designs. (Maybe these are snobbish standards by which to judge avowedly "spiritually oriented" music, but what if Pablo went back to the mixing board to rescue lost opportunities for counterpoint here and improvisational development there: would the end result still be reggae?) The reservations of this armchair producer notwithstanding, the wise melodies and luminously detailed arrangements of Augustus Pablo usually carry the day. At their best they transform a limited musical landscape into the wide cosmos.

While both releases have their points, the Message LP takes more risks, even though it contains spoken and sung vocal embellishments on about half the selections. These touches range from Rastafarian pulpit raps to *Java's* insouciant chorus chanting "Can you dig it!" Unfortunately, several Jamaican singles selected for release on *King David's Melody* are marred by poor mixes in which melodica and bass get buried. With a little polishing of sound quality, one first-rate album could be culled with material from both collections. Meanwhile, may Augustus Pablo reign as the composer/instrumentalist Jah will want around on His Judgment Day.

—peter kostakis

JAMES BOOKER

CLASSIFIED—Rouner 2036: *ALL AROUND THE WORLD; ONE FOR THE HIGHWAY; KING OF THE ROAD; PROFESSOR LONGHAIR MEDLEY; BALD HEAD/TIPITINA; BABY FACE; SWEDISH RHAPSODY; LAWDY MISS CLAWDY; ANGEL EYES; HOUND DOG; IF YOU'RE LONELY; THREE KEYS.*

Personnel: Booker, piano, vocals; Red Tyler, tenor saxophone (cuts 2, 5, 8, 11); James Singleton, bass (2, 5, 8, 9, 11); John Vidacovich, drums (2, 5, 8, 9, 11).

★ ★ ★ ½

James Booker, New Orleans' eccentric piano genius, is an accomplished r&b session veteran who's deeply rooted in the city's Caribbean tradition. Booker is also adept at jazz, gospel, and the classics, and he blends and moves between these genres in unique, unpredictable fashion. His considerable keyboard skills are matched by passionate vocals and a twisted sense of humor. Rouner Records captured this multi-talent at full strength on Booker's first American album, *New Orleans*

Piano Prince—Live! But Classified, unfortunately, is a disappointing follow-up which could well make new listeners find Booker boring.

Booker's performance, while always deft and sophisticated, comes really alive only on the solo r&b tunes *Hound Dog* and *All Around The World*. The latter features intricate, rhythmic gospel-funk piano which climaxes in an adventurous solo. The *Professor Longhair Medley* (a tribute to Booker's blues-rhumba mentor), floridly classical *Swedish Rhapsody*, and grandiose cocktail jazz of *Angel Eyes* all display Booker's prodigious chops; it's a mechanical display, though, lifeless variety for variety's sake. Booker is notoriously temperamental, and perhaps he just wasn't in the mood. He's certainly capable of far more peppy and personable performances.

The same applies for the album's five band cuts. Backed by r&b sax veteran Red Tyler and a fine young rhythm section, Booker walks disinterestedly through some chestnuts and a cutesy version of *Baby Face*. Tyler is excellent throughout, especially on *Lawdy Miss Clawdy*, and the rhythm team is always precise, but the sound quality here is atrocious. Each band member sounds like he was playing in a different room, and the mix on John Vidacovich's drums would be perfect for a stadium concert with Journey. Given today's technology, even budget products can easily sound better than this.

Such technical problems would be forgivable, though, if the set had a strong groove. Booker's "r&b review," featuring Tyler and other studio vets, performs regularly in New Orleans, to wildly appreciative crowds. Why not simply record several nights, and cull an album from the best cuts? This would also inspire Booker's oddball wit—he's been known to introduce himself as Eartha Kitt—and his eclectic musical quotations. Rouner Records has been very active in New Orleans lately; let's hope that this stiff studio effort is not their last fling with such a great talent as James Booker.

—ben sandmel

LEE KONITZ TERZET

DOVETAIL—Sunnyside 1003: *I WANT TO BE HAPPY; THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES; COUNTER-POINT; DOVETAIL; SWEET GEORGIA BROWN; ALONE TOGETHER; CHEROKEE; PENTHOUSE SERENADE.*

Personnel: Konitz, soprano, alto, tenor saxophone, vocal; Harold Danko, piano; Jay Leonhart, bass.

★ ★ ★ ½

According to my dictionary, a "terzetto" is "a short musical composition, piece, or movement for three performers." On this LP we've got eight terzettos, then (if a nearly 10-minute piece fits the definition), performed by reedman Lee Konitz, pianist Harold Danko, and bassist Jay Leonhart. The idea was for the players to interact closely on a number of familiar pieces and a couple of improvised originals. The three are thoughtful, brainy players, and this LP is like a martini that's never seen a drop of vermouth—it's dry as a bone

and slowly sneaks up on you.

Take the opening number, *I Want To Be Happy*. Vincent Youmans' simple melody is given a spacy, floating rendition that one keeps expecting to fall into a groove. It never does. The piece stays slightly off-kilter throughout—it's Third Stream music and, at times, quite edgy. However, the three men interact quite nicely; once you get used to the unflowing quality, the number develops beautifully. And so on through such ditties as *Sweet Georgia Brown*—the only piece that comes in swinging, thanks to Leonhart's walking bass—and *Cherokee*—if you can imagine a Chopinesque *Cherokee*. Konitz is relaxed and reflective throughout, perhaps *too* relaxed and reflective at times—one occasionally wants to yell, "Get on with it!" when the music becomes too precious, too brittle. Most often, however, this is an album that is thoughtful, adventurous, and lovely.

There are also flashes of Konitz' dry humor. One assumes that the rendition of *Penthouse Serenade*, with the saxophonist croaking out the melody in "dah-dah-dahs," is a joke—a laugh at the expense of the dozens of instrumentalists who put down their horns to sing, most frequently at the expense of the listener. It's funny, indeed.

Then there's a seven-and-a-half minute foray called *Dovetail*—an effort for these three gentlemen to join the avant garde. If it's a joke, it's not especially funny; if it's meant seriously, it's an unlistenable tract of noodling and knocking that, at its best, sounds like the out-takes from an *Amityville Horror* soundtrack. It mars an otherwise successful ethereal three-way chat between elegant, sophisticated—if sometimes laconic—musical soulmates.

—lee jeske

MICHEL PETRUCCIANI

MICHEL PETRUCCIANI—Owl 025: *HOMMAGE A ENELRAM ATSENG; DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES; CHRISTMAS DREAMS; JUSTE UN MOMENT; GATTITO; CHEROKEE.*

Personnel: Petrucciani, piano; J. F. Jenny-Clark, bass; Aldo Romano, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

TOOT SWEET—Owl 028: *I HEAR A RHAPSODY; TO ERLINDA; 'ROUND MIDNIGHT; LOVER MAN; ODE; LOVELEE.*

Personnel: Petrucciani, piano; Lee Konitz, alto saxophone.

★ ★ ★

ORACLE'S DESTINY—Owl 032: *ORACLE'S DESTINY; BIG SUR/BIG ON; AMALGAME; IT'S WHAT I AM DOING WHEN I MISS YOU; MIKE PEE.*

Personnel: Petrucciani, piano.

★ ★ ½

Much fuss has been made over pianist Michel Petrucciani since he appeared on the U.S. jazz scene a couple of years ago. In part because of his unusual appearance due to a bone disease and, of course, because of his obvious ability. However, on playing these three recordings, I am left with the feeling that not a small part of the profuse praise is somewhat unwarranted. True, in the trio set, Petrucciani

displays a maturity far beyond his tender years (at this writing he is 20). However, comparing him to Art Tatum, Bill Evans, and Keith Jarrett, as has been done in the press, seems unfair and may leave the potential listener with an anticipation that is not fulfilled.

On the duo album Petrucciani is relaxed and competent as a partner; however, this is mainly Konitz' gig, with not much opportunity for Petrucciani to experiment or explore. He has one or two solid and expansive solos, and this

listener was left with the feeling of wanting more.

More, then, is available in the solo album. Petrucciani's work here is extremely expressive. All the compositions are his own, with the exception of one by drummer Aldo Romano. The music is beautiful, but overall it lacks variety; the pieces are all exceedingly similar in character, tempo, and mood.

The most impressive of the three is definitely the earliest of his recordings. Jenny-Clark and

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Romano are superlative teammates and inspire the pianist to greater heights. The material, too, is varied and intense, giving one an opportunity to experience the many facets of the pianist's talent. Once again, there are Petrucciani originals, *Hommage A Enelram Atseinig* and *Juste Un Moment*, both uptempo and cooking all the way through. Romano's *Gattito* is a good vehicle for Petrucciani's penchant for long right-hand runs and also makes a good case for the efficiency and expertise of European rhythm sections.

Petrucciani is inventive and technically competent. Something is as yet lacking—maybe that certain quality that distinguishes those who play from their heart and not so much from their head. Or, maybe it's still a little too early in his career to be making these kinds of decisions.

—frankie nemko

horsepower for those Johnny-one-note climaxes. These qualities are the principal attractions of this modest but nicely handled record. Some simple charts hold things together and fire some pretty good solos as well—McShann on *Tearing Hair*, for example, or Thomas on *Jumpin' Joe*. The other horns contribute enthusiastic support and solo work but are not of the first rank. Trumpeter Johnny Grimes has a small China-doll sound but lacks the gifts for phrasing that made that sound an asset on Buck Clayton. Dicky Harris' trombone is smooth and flowing. He works out a particularly appealing solo in *If I Could Be With You*. The rhythm section is everything one would want (bassist George Duvivier was in the original group) but sounds boxed-in and lacks presence. This is a problem of engineering, however, not musicianship.

McShann shines in the presence of Canadian soprano saxophonist Jim Galloway, and vice versa, on *Thou Swell*. And both shine in the presence of a superior repertoire of popular songs that give this album a polish and elegance without forcing the players to turn in their credentials as jazz artists.

Most interesting of all, it breaks a typecasting for McShann that has clung to him since his first recordings for Decca in 1942. He is a blues pianist, it is true, but he is a player of far broader talents as well, and this album italicizes that fact in a lineup of songs that includes not one blues, 12-bar or otherwise. It's not a matter of McShann trimming his stride sails for a cruise through Tin Pan Alley. It's only a reminder that McShann can enhance titles such as *Thou Swell*, *Sweet Sue*, *Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams*, and a rollicking *Humoresque* with his own basic strengths as much as he can *Hooties Blues*. Like the song says, 'Tain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.'

Galloway's soprano work is superb from first to last. His warm sound never becomes simplifying on the ballads, and his swing is polished and powerful when the tempo rises. This is jazz on a small scale that seeks no new paths or directions. But it has the qualities that come from within real artistry and that we know will endure.

—john mcdonough

JOE THOMAS/ JAY McSHANN

BLOWN' IN FROM K.C.—Uptown 27.12: *RAW MEAT; TEARING HAIR; WHAT'S YOUR STORY, MORNING GLORY; STAR MIST; JUMPIN' JOE; DOG FOOD; IF I COULD BE WITH YOU; BACKSTAGE AT THE APOLLO.*

Personnel: Thomas, tenor saxophone; McShann, piano; Johnny Grimes, trumpet; Dicky Harris, trombone; Haywood Henry, baritone saxophone; George Duvivier, bass; Oliver Jackson (cuts 1, 2, 5, 6), Jackie Williams (3, 4, 7, 8), drums.

★ ★ ★

JIM GALLOWAY/ JAY McSHANN

THOU SWELL—Sackville 4011: *THOU SWELL; SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME; WRAP YOUR TROUBLES IN DREAMS; BLACK BUTTERFLY; SWEET SUE; I'VE GOT THE WORLD ON A STRING; JUST A GIGOLO; HUMORESQUE; I ONLY HAVE EYES FOR YOU.*

Personnel: Galloway, soprano saxophone; McShann, piano; Don Thompson, bass; Terry Clarke, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

GLENN BRANCA

SYMPHONY NO. 3 (GLORIA)—Neutral N-4: *SYMPHONY No. 3 (GLORIA).*

Personnel: Craig Bromberg, Margaret DeWys, Barbara Ess, Michael Gira, Axel Gros, Jeffrey Glenn, Amanda Linn, Thurston Moore, Lee Ronaldo, Arleen Schloss, Dan Witz, specially made keyboards; Stephan Wischerth, drums.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

This is pretty portentous music for someone who was formerly in a group called the Theoretical Girls, during New York's no wave movement of the late '70s. With the Girls, Branca threw strangled electric guitar sounds over choppy, disconnected rock rhythms. But the Theoretical Girls never caught a wave because the surf was never up for the no wave. So Branca took a few pages from Philip Glass' minimalism, as well as the decibel-shaking, mind-splitting music of avant gardist



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Although both these LPs feature K.C. pianist Jay McShann, *Blown' In From K.C.* is really a Joe Thomas show all the way. Thomas, in case reminders are required, was the principal tenor for 15 years with the Jimmy Lunceford Orchestra, a black band of the '30s often honored for its precision but whose critical standing has dropped off considerably in the last decade or so, as the commercial gimmickry that made it successful in its own time comes home to roost. After the final breakup of Lunceford's orchestra in 1949, Thomas formed a small group that, eschewing bebop, walked the line between Harlem swing and r&b. It is the nucleus of this group that is reunited here, with McShann joining in as honored guest.

Thomas is an original of the Coleman Hawkins generation. He plays in the macho romantic tenor tradition, full of uncluttered passion and, when the occasion demands, lots of

Maryanne Amacher. He emerged with a sonic attack that is like being immersed in a hurricane.

With *Symphony No. 3* (1 and 2 seemed to have escaped recording), Branca reaches back past the new music of minimalism and aligns himself with the post-serialist texture music of Penderecki and Ligeti. There were hints of this on his last recording, *The Ascension* (99 Records 99-01), with four electric guitars forcing short, picked fragments through a wash of high-volume overtones.

Now he's gone a step further and come up with some heady music theory to embody his concept. The record is subtitled "Music for the first 127 intervals of the harmonic series," and Branca talks about difference tones and the "logical geometric symmetry of the harmonic series." It all boils down to this—if you make your own string instruments, turn them up to merciless volume, and repeat patterns long enough, all sorts of incredible, psycho-acoustic effects are audible. LaMonte Young discovered as much in his *Theatre Of Eternal Music*.

Both sides of *Symphony No. 3* begin with a crescendo, then drone off into the cosmic void. Instrumentation isn't given on the record, perhaps because there are few recognizable instrumental sounds in the music. Metal dominates with guitars and "six keyboards" that sound like pianos being bowed instead of struck. Like Ligeti's *Atmospheres* this music sounds electronic with small, dynamic moments taking place within a larger, taut, and tense framework. Only Steve Wischerth's drums surge through with a sense of triumph and uplift that Branca's religious titles apparently aspire to.

Branca has yet to acquire the scope of his precursors or new music contemporaries in composing large scale works, but *Symphony No. 3* succeeds in establishing the details of sound and perspective within the self-limited dynamic of scorched-metal drones.

—John Diliberto

JIMMY GIUFFRE

DRAGONFLY—Soul Note 1058: *DRAGONFLY*; *COOL*; *IN BETWEEN*; *MOONLIGHT*; *J To J*; *SAD TRUTH*; *STELLA BY STARLIGHT*; *SQUIRRELS*.

Personnel: Giuffre, flute, bass flute, soprano, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Bob Nieske, electric bass; Peter Levin, Rhodes electric piano, Oberheim, Moog synthesizer; Randy Kaye, percussion, marimba.

★ ★ ★ ★

It's time to throw away your preconceptions of Jimmy Giuffre, if you haven't heard the arranger and multi-instrumentalist in a while. Giuffre, he of the intellectual cool and the composer behind the Four Brothers, has gone electric.

The new direction of *Dragonfly* shouldn't be that startling to anyone who has closely followed Giuffre's career. Beyond his Woody Herman experience, Giuffre took part in some unique trios ('50s Contemporary dates with Shelly Manne as leader and with Shorty Rogers are a personal favorite; they included some stunningly futuristic exercises in free

improvisation that included drums as a melodic instrument). Yet the dynamics of *Dragonfly* are likely to catch even longtime Giuffre fans at least a little by surprise. First, there is the tone on saxes—it's more sinewy, aided by a slight electric echo that might be unsettling to fans of Giuffre's usually spare, dry tone.

Giuffre plays off his sidemen much like he used open spacing on past recordings, melding the electronically homogenized trio nearly into one polyphonic foil. It is a strangely bot-

tomless group, since Bob Nieske has a particularly light and vapory touch. For the most part, the ensemble is well attuned to Giuffre (longtime colleague Randy Kaye is sympathetic to the moods of the electronics, sometimes shattering the sublime with chimes or shimmering along with cymbals). But it has its weak moments, especially floundering through a vapid *Stella By Starlight*.

Although Giuffre isn't using the baritone saxophone, he has added the spectral bass

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flute to his arsenal, using his accompaniment to richly envelop the instrument on two mystical tone poems, *Sad Truth* and *Moonlight*. They are topped only by *Cool*, a loping blues that most successfully blends the old and new Giuffrè.

Give credit to a past master for working in a bold new direction. Like Lee Konitz, Giuffrè has shown that labeling those who were once ensconced in the West Coast style can be a mistake.

—r. bruce dold

GOLDEN PALOMINOS

GOLDEN PALOMINOS—OAO Celluloid 5002: *CLEAN PLATE; HOT SEAT; UNDER THE CAP; MONDAY NIGHT; COOKOUT; I.D.; TWO SIDED FIST.*

Personnel: Anton Fier, drums; Arto Lindsay (cuts 2-5), Fred Frith (1, 6, 7), Nicky Skopelitis (4, 6), guitar; Bill Laswell, Jamaaladeen Tacuma (1, 7), electric bass; Michael Beinhorn (2, 5), piano, synthesizer; John Zorn (1-4, 6, 7), alto saxophone, clarinets, game calls; M. E. Miller (2), Thi-Linh Le (4), Lindsay (1, 3, 4, 6, 7), vocals; Miller (2, 4), Laswell (5), turntables; Roger Trilling (5), records; David Moss (1, 3, 7), percussion.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

JAMAALADEEN TACUMA

SHOWSTOPPER—Gramavision 8301: *SUNK IN THE FUNK; RHYTHM BOX; FROM ME TO YOU; ANIMATED CREATION; THE BIRD OF PARADISE; SHOWSTOPPER; TACUMA SONG; FROM THE LAND OF SAND; SOPHISTICATED US.*

Personnel: Tacuma, electric bass; Rick Iannaccone (1-4), James Blood Ulmer (9), guitar; Anthony McClary (1-4), Cornell Rochester (6, 8), Daryl Burgee (8, 9), Ron Hoverton (1-4, 8), drums, percussion; James R. Watkins (1-4), Julius Hemphill (7), alto saxophone; Olu Dara (6), cornet; Chuck Hammer (9), guitar synthesizer; Denise Alston (8), gong; Anthony Davis (5), piano; Kathleen Thomas, Nina Wilkerson, Cynthia Shoats, violin (5); Aaron Henderson, cello (5); Ann Sullivan, harp (5); Wilhelmina Wiggins Fernandez (5), Barbara Walker (7), vocals.

★ ★ ★

The second half of the '70s and now the '80s found a group of artists from various medias working under a new aesthetic—for lack of a better word, I've borrowed the Italian critic/philosopher Achille Bonito Oliva's term *trans-avantgarde* to describe and categorize this trend. The trans-avantgarde works with new synthetic tools and materials while avoiding subjectivity, which is no longer considered an autobiographical private symptom, but remains responsive to retrieving and re-inventing styles and methodologies from the past and present.

In contemporary music, artists representing a wide range of stylistic diversity—from Ronald Shannon Jackson to Public Image Ltd.—inexorably intertwine their message in a bewildering, anxious mean music whose roots

draw upon an exhausted history of the avant garde. Some of these artists are successful, joining their personal vision of the future intuitively to the lessons of the past. And some aren't, relying on earlier values such as sheer virtuosity to get over.

Jamaaladeen Tacuma's first album as a leader is a cultural memory bank of contemporary American music, displaying a myriad of sources and references. The trouble is that no chances are taken, as Tacuma covers musical ground already well-trodden by himself and his peers. Perhaps his intent is to invite a re-evaluation of archetypes—house-band funk, sensual r&b, chamber music jazz, no wave fusion—but in the end his eclecticism grafted

upon these forms adds nothing to their history except the rigor of fidelity and citation. We've heard this music played before; Tacuma and company add nothing new. There seems to be no motive here other than a degree of competence in the various musical contexts without much intensity. Too bad. Perhaps Tacuma's fate is that of the gifted sideman able to glide into any musical form, where all-encompassing chops take on such a panoramic view that his own future is devoid of the single-mindedness of those artists possessing a narrow burning personal vision.

As for the Palominos, this album is a masterpiece. Their relentless funk-noise-dance context is so myopically determined as to con-

critics' choice

Art Lange

NEW RELEASE: Vienna Art Orchestra, *From No Time To Rag Time* (hat Hut). Composer/arranger Mathias Rüegg's notated/improvised variations on old and new themes by Braxton, Joplin, Ornette, Bud Powell, and others sing wildly and affectionately of the music's continual present.

OLD FAVORITE: Ran Blake, *The Blue Potato And Other Outrages . . .* (Milestone). Intense, gripping solo piano pop and jazz standards given ironic imagery and haunting presence through Blake's intellectual and emotional variations.

RARA AVIS: The Surf Raiders, *Raiders Of The Lost Surf* (Surfway). As original as their title, perhaps, but this CA garage band's high-voltage hedonism heralds the return of the First Wave. Hang 10.

SCENE: The stunning ex-Fairport Convention guitarist Richard Thompson and a seven-piece band (including two saxes and accordion) holding court at Tut's in Chicago.

Charles Doherty

NEW RELEASE: X, *More Fun In The New World* (Elektra). Semi-hardcore, true-to-the-source state-of-the-rock from (gasp!) Southern Cal. Exene and John Doe are the Gracie and Marty of the '80s.

OLD FAVORITE: Captain Beefheart And The Magic Band, *Lick My Decals Off, Baby* (Straight). Don's first self-produced LP is still his best. How about bitin' the ole B's again, Mr. WV?

RARA AVIS: Culture Club, *Colour By Numbers* (Virgin/Epic). Boy George—a rare bird indeed, and looking as icky as ever—goes Motown. So bury the jacket but dig the wax.

SCENE: *Friday Night Videos* (NBC-TV). How else can an old head-banger in cable tv-deprived Chicago keep up on the scene when two-day-old Megan Ann Doherty needs a rockin'?

Peter Kostakis

NEW RELEASE: Lee Konitz Terzet, *Dovetail* (Sunnyside). Idiosyncratic pokes "sans batterie" at Sweet Georgia Brown and Cherokee, among the chestnuts (and two originals) set to wobble.

OLD FAVORITE: Various Artists, *Soweto Compilation* (Rough Trade import). Raw, dionysiac, mostly electrified street rhythms from South Africa arrayed for ensembles of voices, guitars, accordions, percussion, and fuzz-tone bass. The resulting Ur-jazz also surprisingly evokes early rock!

RARA AVIS: Milton Nascimento and Lô Borges, *Clube da Esquina* (EMI Brasil import). The flamenco, samba, multi-ethnic, and pop influences cause no end of dancing, humming, dark reverie.

SCENE: A contrabassist had on goggles; the white Leadbelly in windbreaker strummed alongside his dog—just two "snaps" from the Loop after Chicago licensed street musicians.

Frankie Nemko

NEW RELEASE: Nana Simopoulos, *Pandora's Blues* (Banana S Records). First time out for this singularly talented singer/guitarist/composer, who has chosen the pick of the crop to accompany her: reedman Ray Pizzi, bassist Charlie Haden, drummer Billy Higgins, pianist Tom Garvin, and guitarist Joe Diorio. A new star!

OLD FAVORITE: Santana, *Caravanserai* (Columbia). Recorded in 1972, this was the first album in which Santana successfully combined the latin-jazz elements that later caught on not only with his group, but others in that genre.

RARA AVIS: Swami Kriya Ramananda, *Hymn To A New Age* (Satsanga Fellowship). Totally relaxing music played by the Swami on bass flute, gongs, and synthesizer. Takes you away from the raucous sounds of the world.

SCENE: Sunday afternoons with Moacir Santos' 10-piece Brazilian-jazz ensemble playing latin exotica under a giant rubber tree in the garden of the Comeback Inn in Venice, CA.

stitute a beach head on the funk outposts of the transavantgarde. Surely these fellows are not as mean as the bitter, dirty, funk 12-inchers coming out of New York City. No, the Palomino approach is to recombine shivering funk electricity with no wave experimentation, whose result is determined by their technological abuse. An all-star cast of no wave heroes, Palominos Frith, Fier, Lindsay, Laswell, Zorn, and Tacuma run rampant through an obsession of sensorial levels. The new force is tension, whose inspiration comes from the scratchy sound and gritty feel of the artificial landscape of the American city.

Especial moments come to mind, such as Fred Frith pledging musical allegiance to guitar masters come and gone. On *Clean Plate* he sounds gargantuan Bo Diddley thunder-burger sonics riding over the low bass wumps of Jamaaladeen and neck-popping hawmps of Laswell. Or the jungle chants of Thi-Linh Le answered by John Zorn's brontosaurus saxophones and clarinets on a *Monday Night*. There's not a cliché in sight during this almost one hour of non-stop funk. The collective noise of guitars, synthesizers, horns, and drums are the terrain of convergent sounds criss-crossing each other incessantly in a contamination of geometric motifs.

The Golden Palominos have put out an enormously important and satisfying album. Important, for this is as far as anyone has gotten in the fusion of funk and post-avant experimentation. And satisfying, for their refusal to slide on the little things—no fillers, no half-hearted ditties.

—jim brinsfield

JEAN-LUC PONTY

INDIVIDUAL CHOICE—Atlantic 80098-1: *COMPUTER INCANTATIONS FOR WORLD PEACE; FAR FROM BEATEN PATHS; IN SPIRITUAL LOVE; EULOGY TO OSCAR ROMERO; NOSTALGIA; INDIVIDUAL CHOICE; IN SPITE OF ALL.*

Personnel: Ponty, violin, synthesizers, rhythm computer, organ; Randy Jackson, bass (cuts 2, 7); Rayford Griffin, drums (2, 6, 7); George Duke, Minimoog (3); Allan Holdsworth, guitar (5, 7).

★ ★ ★

MICHAEL ZENTNER

PRESENT TIME—Red MZ One: *PARTS; THE SEARCH; CLICHE; THE JONESTOWN SHUFFLE; CHAPTER VII; A PIECE OF ODD; THE CASE OF THE STOLEN RIFF; TEARS AND SPHERES.*

Personnel: Zentner, violin, guitar, vocals, harmonica; Bill Bacon, Kenwood Dennard, Steve Moses, drums; Carla Bley, C melody saxophone; Daavid Allen, Peter Blevgad, Lisa Herman, vocals; George Bishop, tenor, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Alan Braufman, clarinet, alto saxophone; Fred Frith, piano, percussion, vocals, electric bow; Dan Gandel, vibes; John Greaves, bass, vocals; Percy Jones, Hansford Rowe, bass; Frank Wyatt, recorder; Vaunette Yanaginuma, harp.

★ ★ ★ ★

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violinists trying to find fresh ground in the old electro-fusion turf. Ponty, of course, has been at it for years, squeezing gorgeous melodies out of his electronically enhanced violin and sending them across a propulsive rhythmic field. The music hasn't changed that much, but the rhythms have been de-emphasized in favor of a complex array of ostinato melodic patterns. Oh yeah—on *Individual Choice* he's also gotten rid of his band, and those patterns are rendered by Ponty hooking up some synthesizers and sequencers. He sacrifices the lightning rhythmic interplay that has been his hallmark in favor of a relentless technical precision. A lack of vitality is evident when compared to the only two tracks that have a conventional rhythm section, *Far From Beaten Paths* and *In Spite Of All*. Griffin and Jackson take two compositionally weak tracks and give them a sense of power that is otherwise absent.

But the synthesizers work when Ponty uses them as an intimate chamber ensemble on the sombre *Nostalgia*. The pristine, isolated atmosphere allows guest guitarist Allan Holdsworth to stretch out in a lovely, slurring solo, followed by Ponty's own, echo-delayed lyricism. The fragile poignancy of Ponty's violin contrasts against the perfect attack of the sequencers.

Michael Zentner is a young musician from Washington, DC. His influences are reflected by the members of England's and New York's mutant jazz and rock communities who appear on his first album. Zentner has crafted his meticulous compositions to fit their styles; hence, there are lots of rhythmic changes, whimsical side-effects (the *Naked City* tv theme), and blowing space over odd meters. Music, in other words, that would fit comfortably in the repertoires of the Carla Bley Band, Gong, Henry Cow, or Brand X.

Zentner's inventive compositions and the exuberant playing prevent this album from being simply derivative. The various rhythm sections navigate the quirky changes with confident ease. For example, on *The Search*, Percy Jones pulls out all the stops in a bass solo etched sharply against a zombie choral dirge.

Zentner doesn't have the expressive range of Ponty on violin, but he extracts more colors from his ensemble's palette, especially the bright vibes work of Dan Gandel. It took Zentner three years to find a company to put out *Present Time*. Hopefully, future times will not ignore this emerging artist. —john diliberto

Coming in
the February issue
of down beat:
McCoy Tyner,
Bill Bruford,
and more.

1 JAY HOGGARD. *PLEASANT MEMORIES* (from *THE YOUNG LIONS*, Elektra Musician). Hoggard, marimba, balafon.

I think that was Jay Hoggard, and obviously a live concert. I liked the first part of the piece, compositionally, with the African xylophone. I found when it moved into . . . when he was playing vibes, I would have liked to hear a little bit more contrast between the short sounds of the African xylophone and maybe some longer sounds on the vibes.

I didn't feel a complete unity throughout the whole piece; I felt like each individual section was strong, but that the transition didn't seem like there was a thread going through it. Within the context of the live concert, it may have had a totally different effect. We're extracting this; I don't know what came before or what came afterward. His playing is definitely emotive, and ultimately that's what people respond to.

I would listen to that again, so I'd give it three or three-and-a-half stars.

2 MILT JACKSON. *BACK TO THE APPLE* (from *MILT JACKSON + COUNT BASIE + THE BIG BAND, VOL. 2*, Pablo). Jackson, vibes; Count Basie, piano.

That's different; first of all it's an unusual combination. You rarely hear vibes as a soloist out front with a big band. Lionel Hampton, of course, has a big band, and has been doing it for years. But in this particular kind of style, the only other person I've heard that really did that at the time was Terry Gibbs. This sounded like a young Milt Jackson.

Even listening to this recording it brings up a real problem about playing this instrument, in that it's very hard to project on it, and it's difficult playing with a band roaring like that. It was clearly done where there wasn't much isolation, so at times the vibes just got swamped. Which is, in fact, what happens when you hear a lot of vibes players play loud, both in a big band or even in smaller groups. So, he was fading in and out, even on this recording.

It was a real good time feel. I think I know who it is; is it the Basie band? I'd give that three-and-a-half stars.

3 BOBBY HUTCHERSON. *GOTCHA* (from *SOLO/QUARTET*, Contemporary). Hutcherson, all instruments.

That was Bobby Hutcherson. It's nice that he used all those mallet instruments that most people aren't even aware of—bass marimba, boo-bams, bells, vibes, and marimba—and he really painted himself a nice picture to play on top of. It really projects a nice feel. The recording job is real good. Compositionally, I didn't

Dave Samuels

By LEONARD FEATHER

Though he has been critically acclaimed as one of the most inventive of the new mallet artists who emerged during the '70s, Dave Samuels has yet to establish an ongoing group of his own. Our encounter, in fact, took place when he was in Hollywood as guest soloist with Spyro Gyra, with whom he has recorded (*City Kids*, MCA 5431).

Born in Chicago Oct. 9, 1948, Samuels began playing drums around town during his high school years before switching to mallet instruments. He taught two-and-a-half years at Berklee, moved to New York in 1974, then joined Gerry Mulligan's sextet for a stay that lasted through three albums and four European tours.

Other notable associations have included Frank Zappa, Timepiece, and most important, starting in 1977, Double Image, for which he joined forces with fellow



malleeteer David Friedman and recorded albums including their eponymous debut LP (*Inner City 3013*) and *Dawn* (ECM 1146). Samuels also has been active as a lecturer and clinician. This was his first Blindfold Test; he was given no information about the records played.

really see the reason for the peel-off right before the last statement of the head, where he kind of peels it down to the boo-bam and marimba, then adds bass marimba and then builds it back up and then repeats the head once again, playing on top of it. That I could have done without, just from a structure standpoint.

But, real smooth; gave himself a very smooth ride. I wish there were more writers, orchestrators, and arrangers that could hear this to hear what kind of a network they could make up. Four stars!

4 MIKE MAINIERI. *INSTANT GARLIC* (from *FREE SMILES*, Arista). Mainieri, vibes, composer; Warren Bernhardt, keyboards.

Interesting. The head was played well. Playing in that kind of format is difficult. I felt like after the head there was just no space; it was kind of cluttered. It had a little bit more of a contour in terms of the soloing that went on. It's hard for vibes to accompany piano, unless the voicings are done right; it sounds out of context. It sounded like an electric vibe that was being played, and didn't seem to blend when he was comping when the piano player was playing.

Not a great recording job, either. I'm not quite sure who it is. And that doesn't change the music, doesn't make it any better or any worse. I would have liked to hear the whole record to see what other kinds of spectrums they cover. But just

from this piece by itself, I'd say a little under four, three-and-a-half.

5 RED NORVO. *CONGO BLUES* (from *RED NORVO'S FABULOUS JAM SESSION*, Spotlite). Norvo, vibes; Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet; Charlie Parker, alto saxophone; Flip Phillips, tenor saxophone; Teddy Wilson, piano; Slam Stewart, bass; J. C. Heard, drums. Rec. 1945.

Where did you get that record? Is that a reissue? It had a lot of variety in terms of the rhythm section feel for something of that period. I was pretty surprised. Also the arrangement was nice; it didn't really get into a heavy swing, four-block swing, until the piano solo. The alto and trumpet solos were a little bit different, too.

The vibes player sounds like either Red Norvo or Lionel Hampton. The alto sounds Bird-like, but not. The trumpet doesn't sound like Diz. The piano sounds like a young Oscar Peterson, Art Tatum-ish. And the tenor sounds Lester Young-ish. But I'm not conversant enough with that era to be able to tell. I'm assuming a certain period of time here, and would say it's proficient improvising. I'd rate that three-plus, or four-minus.

LF: What would you have given five stars if I had played it?

DS: The Jim Hall and Bill Evans album; an early Keith Jarrett album called *Life Between The Exit Signs*; anything by Art Tatum; Milt Jackson with the Modern Jazz Quartet; and *Move* by the Red Norvo Trio. db

Michel Petrucciani

Surmounting physical difficulties, the pianist creates his own brand of musical impressionism influenced by the classics and Bill Evans.

BY LESLIE GOURSE

Last fall Michel Petrucciani was playing the piano and composing music in his head. Not simply imagining the music, but actually writing and playing it silently, as he lay in a cast in Big Sur, California, waiting for a badly fractured leg to heal. Doctors told him that by January he could sit at the piano again and resume playing for the international crowds that have taken the music of this young French pianist with a whimsical, richly colored melodic palette to their hearts.

Let's get it over with—talking about his physical frailties—because Petrucciani would very much like everyone to stop it. He was born in Orange, France, on Dec. 28, 1962, with a rare ailment called “glass bones” in the vernacular but scientifically known as osteogenesis imperfecta, a calcium deficiency. He has had scores of fractures—as many as 160, according to one accounting—has grown to be about three feet tall, weighs about 50 pounds, has to be carried on and off stages, and has powerful, long-fingered hands.

On-stage he wears theatrical outfits—hats, dark glasses, flowing shirts, and silk scarves. Since his legs cannot reach the piano pedals, his family devised an extender that he can work with his feet. But he plays with such ease that audiences lose a sense of his handicap. He sometimes forgets it, too. He toured Europe and Japan in the summer of '83, after his Kool/NY Jazz Festival debut, without a scratch, then forgot to fasten his seat belt in California. His leg broke when his wife braked their car hard to avoid an accident.

“I just get so tired of hearing people say the guy is three feet tall, weighs 50 pounds; the guy got 2,000 breaks, and plays like a mother. . . . I'm like anyone else,” says Petrucciani. “I'm different, but I'm a normal musician. I'm doing that as much as I can. I think people should progress more. I try to progress. I practice in my head. I'm not done work-



HYOU VIELZ

ing. I'm always keeping busy and always different, always new. Like Bill Evans. I can play 2,000 times the same song, and it will be fresh.”

In 1983 the cultural office of the Italian government voted him the Best European Jazz Musician. In 1982 he won the Prix Django Reinhardt as French Jazz Musician of the Year. He's one of the few European jazz musicians who can pack a European club as large as the New Morning in Paris with wildly enthusiastic crowds. They pay a steep entrance fee to hear him, despite hard times for the franc. American musicians have loved playing with him for years.

He's a fast and powerful technician with a whimsical imagination that produces long and lovely, fresh melodic lines in his own compositions and rejuvenates standards. He has a heavier touch and a less melancholy sensibility than Bill Evans, whom Michel calls “a god on earth.” But the influence is clear. And one can hear the influence of Debussy, too, in the abstractions and open, kinetic joyousness in Michel's work.

“You have it right,” he says “I really love Debussy first [among classical composers], and then Bartok, Ravel, Mozart, J. S. Bach, all very beautiful. The contemporaries are really close to jazz. What I'm doing is close to that. I think I hear it in Bill Evans' music, too. What I love about Debussy is his harmony, those beautiful chords. He plays in the minor scale in a way that sounds happy.”

Michel's paternal grandfather, a tailor, migrated from Sicily to France, where his musical son, Tony, a guitar player, married a Frenchwoman, Anne, and raised three musical sons—Philippe, 26, a guitarist; Louis, 25, a bassist; and Michel,

who began by playing drums “and having a good time.” He still has his drum set and plays it occasionally.

“The first time I heard jazz was Duke Ellington. I was age four. I remember seeing him on tv with his big band. I remember that big black piano in front. It was beautiful. He was conducting all these people. I asked my father if I could play piano. I didn't know what a piano was, but I wanted one.

“We had no money. My mother encouraged us as much as she could, so she bought me a toy piano. I broke it, because it didn't sound like a real piano. I wanted to make myself understand that I was serious. I said, ‘Now can I have a real piano?’”

One month later his father, who also had a job at a nearby military base, brought home a piano left behind by British soldiers—“guys who got drunk and poured beer in the keys, but the piano sounded real.” When Michel's playing improved, by age seven, the local doctor sold Michel's father a better piano—“one that the stars played on” in an annual Orange festival.

Soon Michel was playing gigs within a two-hour distance of his home. By age 10 he first heard Bill Evans on the record *Montreux II* (CTI 6004) with Eddie Gomez on bass and Marty Morell on drums. “Evans is the father of all—Chick Corea, Keith Jarett. And I like Paul Bley. But Evans' music is behind everything you can think of.”

Michel achieved such local fame that when Clark Terry was looking for a pianist for a date in Montalimar, Michel was presented. “Terry looked at me and played a weird song on trumpet that you

CONTINUED ON PAGE 59

Jackson, a trio joined by guitarist Allan Holdsworth on the album's last cut, *In Spite Of All*. Ponty duets with Holdsworth on *Nostalgia*, and with keyboardist George Duke on *In Spiritual Love*. "What I would like to do in the future," Ponty claims, "is develop this avenue of working alone, with synthesizer technology, and besides that do albums with musicians who inspire me, people of George's and Allan's caliber, and just play. No heavy productions, just play.

"I love to organize sounds and use structure, the way I experimented when I played classical music in the symphony orchestra. And I still love to improvise, because that's the kick I got out of playing jazz, and I let the guys in the band improvise, too. My melodic concept is rooted deeply in my early years of playing in Europe, but my rhythmic concept has totally changed since I've been living in the U.S.

"Of course, I have to keep up as a violinist, and that involves practicing every day because the technique is so demanding—I say that I feel morally good if I've practiced at least an hour a day. I'm a bandleader, so that takes some time daily, and writing music takes a lot of time, and I want to listen broadly, to be informed. I don't live like an ostrich—but I've found my style. My inspiration nowadays comes from what I experience in my everyday life, from social events, the world's political scene, the search for the meaning of life. The threat of nuclear war is of great concern to me. So I don't think so much about musical technique and forms and structures—it just kind of flows pretty naturally now. My music is very opposite to the events that are happening in the world, because it's kind of an ideal of another, purer world that I feel in myself and like to express in my music. It's my heart that speaks through my music—and though I might give a feeling of peace and even

happiness at times, as a human being I'm very saddened by what's going on in the world.

"Going back to Phil Glass and his kind of music—Ransom Wilson, a classical flutist, heard an album of mine a couple of years ago and contacted me in L.A., wanting to do some sort of collaboration. So I'm going to write some music for him—Steve Reich wrote a flute piece with four overdubs for him. I never intended to hook up with classical music again, but I'm going to take the challenge—why not? I take a lot of chances in life, anyway.

"Is this returning to my roots? I don't know. I'm like a Bohemian now. I'm not rooted in Los Angeles, and I don't feel 100 percent French anymore; I love to go to places where I can just be with simple and real people, who don't try to impress or play a role. I feel so international and universal in terms of music that I feel at home anywhere, or if you like, I have no roots anywhere.

"But when my mother died last year, and I went to her burial and the local organist played some music, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe the quality of the choices of music he played in a small town like that. And I remembered—it was like a flashback into my childhood—I saw myself going to church and hearing very meditative music. Chords, rich chords, and melodies—music by Oliver Messiaen, and other composers of that sort. There's a part of that in me, and it seems classical music is returning to that. The listeners and a lot of musicians are tired of being forced to use the 12-tone, serial system—that's not a freedom anymore. If they are accepting melodies again, why not?"

And if synthesizers offer this violinist a way to organize sounds, why not? If it takes a video clip to expose his music which sings of his heart, same Gaelic shrug. To his legion of listeners, and perhaps new viewers, anything's valid that keeps the muse dancing on the point of Jean-Luc Ponty's bow. db

PUENTE

continued from page 29

Puente was somewhat taken aback when a new generation of "salsa" musicians returned to the traditional Cuban combo styles of the '40s and '50s. "That word 'salsa' is really a gimmick to give the music a commercial name," he says, "and it has done well with that title. But I don't know what's happening now; a lot of the bands are sounding like the old bands used to sound when I had my *conjunto*. But they tell me they love that sound. Machito and I, we were trying to expand our music, make it more progressive. But actually, how progressive can you get from an authentic cultural type of music like Cuban music? If you get too progressive, you lose your authenticity.

"There's a band now from Cuba called Irakeré," he continues, "and they play very modern. Sometimes they sound like Weather Report, or they sound like a jazz band. They're all cultured Cuban musicians, and they know the roots of the music, but I wouldn't call what they play typical Cuban music."

Queried about modern African music, he responds, "I've heard a lot of African bands, and not one has moved me. They sound calypso to me sometimes, or they sound reggae, but they never sound latin. I find that African drumming is very basic; it's not as syncopated as the music from the Caribbean area or Brazil. The African rhythms have become like old-fashioned, really, but you should learn their basic roots and develop from there."

Noting the increased enrollment of Latin-American students nationwide at colleges where he performs, Puente stresses formal musical education as well as folkloric knowledge and dance band experience as vital for aspiring latin percussionists. Four years ago, he endowed his Tito Puente Scholarship Fund at Juilliard. "I find that latin percussion instruments have been utilized for many, many years, but have

never demanded respect," he says. "Like in Cuba or in Puerto Rico, if you played a drum, you were considered a street musician. But if you played the piano or violin or flute, you were conservatory, and you got status. So I started this fund to give acknowledgment to our latin percussionists in the United States. This gives a young latin percussionist an incentive to learn how to read music, so that when you go into a recording studio, you know what you're doing. It's not only what you learn in the streets—you've really got to go and study."

Three years ago, the Latin Jazz Ensemble was organized, at the behest of Latin Percussion Inc., the instrument company. "They wanted Patato, Johnny Rodriguez, and myself to do some seminars and workshops in Japan and Europe, and then I suggested that we add a pianist and a bass player, and that's where it all started. It was called the Latin Percussion Jazz Ensemble then." The ensemble has since toured Japan once and Europe four times, and has appeared at festivals from Monterey to Montreux. "We find that the jazz festivals need a group like mine," Tito says, "because we give them a latin tinge. We give them a little salsa and make the Latin people happy, and we play good jazz also, with the latin influence. We don't come in with the typical latin thing." At Montreux the group recorded a live album for Latin Percussion. Tito's latest LP, *On Broadway*, is on the Concord Jazz Picante label.

Puente sees a rosy future for latin music, whether in pure form or as an ingredient in other contemporary genres. "It's a little sauce in there," he says. "That's the real meaning of the word 'salsa'—spaghetti sauce, tomato sauce. It's the condiment that you put in there. People can't always pinpoint it, but they feel it—they know it's there. Right now it's getting very big in Europe, because it's good, exciting music. And we're not faking it, we're really playing it. We're giving it from our heart and soul. We're laying it down, and the people are eating it up. And that's good." db

Trower has had his style at least since the mid-'60s, when he played with Procol Harum. His searing guitar licks blended well with Gary Brooker's haunting piano and vocal work and Matthew Fisher's fine organ work to produce the sound that was uniquely Procol Harum.

Only when he went on his own did he begin to hear the envious derisions of the critics. He may well admire Hendrix, but perhaps Hendrix admired him, too.

Trower's newest effort, *Back It Up*, goes back to his style of the early '70s with good basic rock and some gut-wrenching blues.

Kurt Harding San Antonio, TX

Nominative case

My nomination for "Most Negative" article to appear in your fine magazine during 1983: "The Lone Crusaders," by A. James Liska (db, Nov. '83). It earned a

"No Stars" rating. HmMMM! Dennis Hendley Milwaukee

Electric mud

Re: Critics/Readers Polls.

Creating the categories of Acoustic and Electric Jazz Group is rather confusing. When does an acoustic group become electric? Is Arthur Blythe's guitar band an electric group because of electric guitar (and electric pickup on cello)? Is Carla Bley's band electric because of Steve Swallow on electric bass? Was Benny Goodman's sextet electric because of Charlie Christian (on electric guitar)? While I believe an additional category provides space for more outstanding groups to be recognized, the simple dichotomy of acoustic/electric does not seem to be simply defined.

George Scotton Burlington, VT
To answer your queries, George, in our thinking Blythe's guitar band is electric (differentiating it from his acoustic In The Tradition

group), while Bley and Goodman are acoustic. We felt that these handles on the categories would give the poll voters an empirical basis to decide on groups—i.e., do they or don't they plug in—rather than using some artificial "stylistic" tag—i.e. fusion, jazz-rock. . . . Since you weren't alone in your dilemma, we feel an elaboration is in order. Merely counting up the truly electric (and not just amplified acoustic) instruments settles the question for most bands: a sextet with sax, trumpet, drums (all miked), Rhodes piano, electric bass, and electric guitar is most likely electric, whereas one with sax, trumpet, drums, a miked piano, an acoustic bass with pickup, and electric guitar is probably acoustic. When a band falls into the gray area, we tend to focus on the "electric" nature of the leader's and other main soloists' axes and playing styles. Thus Blood Ulmer's electric guitar pushes the three-horn front line of his Are You Glad To Be In America? band into electric land, but Ralph Towner's amp and synth do not substantially change the acoustic aspects of Oregon. Hope this helps. —Ed.

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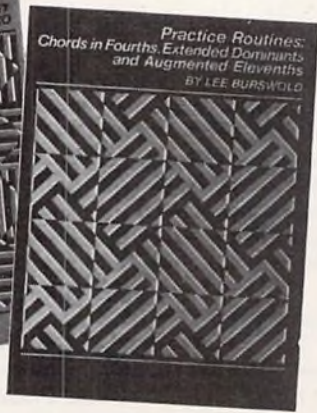


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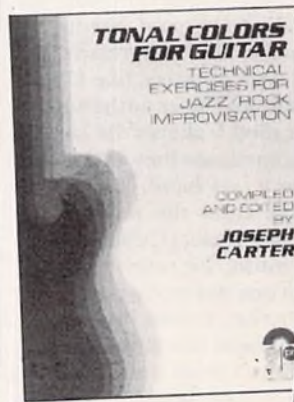
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