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*"I'm not a jazz
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ballads. I like to take
a bath in a note."*

—LINDA RONSTADT



An Intimate Conversation with Linda Ronstadt

By Steve Bloom

Linda Ronstadt is into French poodles these days. Basking in the glow of two consecutive platinum albums—filled with orchestrated arrangements of what she calls “American jazz standards”—she would have us believe that her skateboarding days are over. Actually, unlike most rock standard bearers—Mick Jagger, Rod Stewart, Tina Turner—Ronstadt has just been acting her age (39). Rock & roll was never intended for anyone over 30, and perhaps with this in mind, she recruited the legendary arranger Nelson Riddle and recorded *What's New* and then *Lush Life*—both homages to Frank Sinatra in particular and the American song tradition in general.

Ronstadt was always into covering pop classics—*Heat Wave*, *Ooh Ooh Baby*, *Hurt So Bad*—but to some this conversion to a '40s-style “saloon” crooner has been a bit much. For every one of her new fans gained, she's surely lost a Ronstadt diehard who's worn out every track on *Heart Like A Wheel*. We want our idols never to change, and Ronstadt, for better or worse, has definitely changed. In fact, she's not only been busy romanticizing a jazz era long past, but has starred in two operas—*Pirates Of Penzance* and more recently *La Boheme*—since departing from the rock scene.

In conversation, Ronstadt sounds just as you might imagine her—perky, opinionated, bright, self-assured. She laughs often, answers questions directly and honestly (often at great length), and says things like “gee” and “gosh” a lot (she does curse). For whatever the reasons, she had problems remembering song titles and people's names during this interview, causing her at one point to confess, “I think I'm suffering from early brain death.” But Linda Ronstadt's no dummy: her records, regardless of their content, continue to sell. Bringing Nelson Riddle out of semi-retirement (it was her idea to contact him) was nothing but a stroke of genius. And getting out of rock when she did wasn't such a bad idea at all. Could Linda compete with Cyndi Lauper, whom she admires, for the teenage crowd? It's doubtful. But don't count her out of rock yet; in the following interview, Ronstadt gives every indication that she has a few more tricks up her sleeve.

Steve Bloom: I've heard this story that you were turned on to jazz a few years ago by Mick Jagger. Is this true?

Linda Ronstadt: Yeah. It hadn't even occurred to me to sing jazz-type standards until I got a Ben Webster and Charlie Parker album that Mick gave me. We were sitting around listening to it one night and I said, “Gee, that record's so good,”

so he gave it to me. I took it on the road and I used to play it at the end of the shows. The songs just hypnotized me.

SB: What were some of the other jazz influences in your life before then?

LR: My dad gave me a duet album with Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong when I was about eight or nine. He gave my sister a Billie Holiday record and he gave my brother a Django Reinhardt record. Those were really the three records we had from that genre.

SB: Has Ella had a major influence on you?

LR: My favorite singers are always the ones who pay the most respect to the melody—who can riff, but basically are kind of restrained. Ella is really terrific at that—she sings the melody very, very clearly, and then every once in a while she makes an excursion to another planet.

SB: Which other jazz singers have influenced you?

LR: Betty Carter completely slays me. That record with *Just Tell Him I Said Hello* on it just knocks me out. I love the way she sang the melody. That record was a big influence on me.

SB: How about Sarah Vaughan?

LR: I love the things she does from a musician's point-of-view. But if I wanted to learn a tune, I wouldn't study it from Sarah Vaughan. I admire her brilliance, but I don't think I would learn the tune as faithfully as from Betty Carter or Ella.

SB: What about male singers?

LR: I think Louis Armstrong's the best!

SB: Anyone else?

LR: Yeah, my dad. He's got one of those rich, golden-honey voices. He sings a lot of very turn-of-the-century revolutionary stuff in Spanish; I guess you can call it Creole music. Dragged triplets is what comes to mind when I think of that kind of Creole music. He really had a lot of influence on me.

SB: What else did you listen to growing up besides the jazz records?

LR: The rest of the records we had were Mexican records. More often than not we would sing in Spanish; we didn't sing in English that much until we were teenagers and we discovered folk music. We used to get banjos and try to be bluegrass people. Then somebody turned me on to Frank Sinatra and Ray Charles when I was 18.

SB: Who was that?

LR: Actually, J. D. Souther turned me on to Sinatra and a photographer friend turned me on to Ray Charles. I remember going, “Wow, this is great.” J. D. was the one who made me listen to big band stuff. I wasn't even aware that you were allowed to like a big band.

SB: It's hard to believe that you had to be “turned on” to

Sinatra.

LR: When I was 17 I was really into folk music. I mean, everybody was listening to Bob Dylan; that's all anybody would play. But I had a boyfriend who bought that *Only The Lonely* [Sinatra] record. I remember him telling me that it was really good and I went, "Nah, it's not Dylan." Then years later, J. D. told me the same thing.

SB: Sinatra was pretty passe during the '60s.

LR: He was. He represented our parents. And I didn't like those big, orchestrated arrangements—except when I heard Nelson Riddle. To me, he was the only guy who put jazz in an orchestra without losing the integrity of either form. When I would hear those kinds of jazz songs coming out of an orchestra by anyone else but Nelson they would sound kind of dinky.

SB: Where does Ray Charles fit into this puzzle?

LR: It's just that when I listened to him, I began to understand what a big band could do. At some point we began to look at big bands as things that played in Las Vegas and on television shows, and that was something we didn't like. The big band was exploited on tv, made to do so much hack work that it didn't occur to me for a long time to go back and listen to what a big band really could do. But the stuff that was most accessible to me as an artist was the stuff that was in Sinatra's style—and I consider Sinatra a jazz singer too, even though I don't think he can riff and he can't swing like Ray Charles. Somehow I consider him a jazz singer.

SB: Do you consider yourself a jazz singer at this point?

LR: I'm not a jazz singer by any stretch of the imagination. I'm a ballad singer, you know? I've always done ballads on my albums. I *looved* singing those slow, ponderous rock ballads. I really don't like to sing uptempo material very much. It doesn't give me enough long stretches. I like to take a bath in the note.

SB: I guess this explains *What's New*. For a Nelson Riddle record it was almost mysteriously low-key.

LR: We did that on purpose. I wanted the first one to have a mood—a very introspective, concentrating mood. *Only The Lonely* was like that too. The second one [*Lush Life*]—even though it had songs which are basically about sad things on it, like *It Never Entered My Mind*—had a perkier approach.

SB: At first, I thought you were afraid—perhaps even intimidated—of doing uptempo songs with Riddle. Then I heard the three numbers on *Lush Life*, which clearly proved that wasn't the case.

LR: I had recorded uptempo songs for *What's New*, and I thought we did them well, but they just didn't fit. I did a Fats Waller tune and *Falling In Love Again* and that Frank Loesser tune, *Oh Never Will I Marry*, which we actually have had trouble with. We've never been able to get an arrangement for it. It's a great song; I just love it. But when I played them all together they broke the mood, so I didn't use them. We had so many songs for *Lush Life* that we still didn't use *Keeping Out Of Mischief Now*. That's in the can . . . waiting. One of these days it will come out.

SB: Are you planning to record a third album with Riddle?

LR: I had so much fun doing *Lush Life*—we got to hire Marshall Royal [Lionel Hampton's arranger in the '40s and Count Basie's lead alto] and got to use a different kind of drummer for the uptempo songs—that I'd like to try to do some more of those swing songs. I like that *Songs For Swinging Lovers* album [by Sinatra with Riddle]—I listen to it a lot, and I'd like to experiment a little bit with some of those things. But I haven't really sat down and made a list of what the next Nelson album is going to be, so I'm not really sure. Got any ideas?

SB: How about *I've Got You Under My Skin*?

LR: That's *sooo* good.

SB: Let's backtrack a few years to when you decided to record *What's New*. What exactly caused you to make such a radical break from the rock scene? After all, you were considered by many to be the goddess of rock & roll.

LR: This is exactly how it happened: I was working in New

York on *Pirates Of Penzance* [in 1982]. Jerry Wexler [the veteran record producer] invited me out to his house one day. So there we were sitting on the lawn listening to this Mildred Bailey record and I said, "Gee, it would be fun to learn some of these songs." And then I thought: it would be fun to record them. Once we started talking about recording them, Jerry kept saying, "You can do these songs." I kept saying, "No, my phrasing isn't good enough. I don't have enough technique to do this. I'm too sloppy." But Jerry kept saying, "You've got the chops, you can do it." He deserves a lot of the credit for not only encouraging me, but getting me into this sort of music.

SB: Did you ever record any material with Wexler?

LR: Yeah. We went into the studio and made a demo—with Tommy Flanagan [on piano] and a bass player and drummer I can't remember. We did *Someone To Watch Over Me*, *Lover Man*, and my favorite one, *I Don't Stand A Chance With You*. We did them in a hurry, in about an hour-and-a-half. They weren't very good. I did it before the evening performances of *Pirates*, and I was dead tired; I had no voice and my phrasing was terrible. But it was intriguing enough. I remember feeling seduced by the music; in fact, I was completely gone. It was like falling in love and never being able to look at anyone else. I was totally captivated.

SB: When did you get in touch with Nelson Riddle?

LR: Not for awhile. After finishing my run on Broadway, we recorded an album in three days. I just don't work like that—I can do one song a day, but I don't like to do everything in three days. Jerry Wexler is a different kind of producer, he has a different method. I said, "I'd like to rehearse," and he said, "Oh, you don't want to pay the band to rehearse all those days." But I always do that. I needed to sit down, just like I did with my rock & roll records, and figure out which musicians will be good for me. We had more players on this record—sax, trumpet, and Tal Farlow on guitar. They were all really hot players. To tell you the truth, I was more than a little intimidated by them.

SB: Who arranged the session?

LR: Al Cohn. I think he's a real good musician and I liked his arrangements. But I have a particular way of making a record: I rehearse with the band and I have to have a big hand in the arrangements. I can't have somebody say, "Look, here's the arrangement. We're going to cut it like this, then I'm going to mix the record, and you just go home and knit." I just can't do it that way. I like having my hands on the board when we're mixing. If I had been able to work the arrangements out with Al, I think we would have had a lot more success.

SB: It doesn't seem like you were very happy with the session. Was your phrasing any better?

LR: My phrasing wasn't comfortable and I was still very intimidated by the material. I thought that maybe it was just because I couldn't sing it. For example, when we tried to do *What's New*, Jerry said, "You just can't sing this tune. It's not a good tune for you." I was really disappointed. It's hard to explain how a singer feels when they really want to do a tune and they can't—it hurts my feelings and kind of breaks my heart. So I went back to Los Angeles and played this record for Peter [Asher, her manager and producer]. He thought it was awful. And I played it for J. D. and he said, "No, that doesn't cut it." So I ate the cost of it and said that I wanted to re-record these tunes, and everyone just went, "I don't know, I don't know."

I was getting no enthusiasm from anybody. Peter didn't want me to do it—he's not into that kind of American music—and the record company [Elektra Asylum] was going, "Forget it." So then I went to England to do the movie of *Pirates* and then I came back and cut *Get Closer*, because I was really overdue for an album and we had all these tunes ready. But while I was doing it I was eating my heart out for the songs that were on *What's New*. I really was—it was all I could think of. When I was in the tub I'd sing them all the time; it was like I was heartsick for it. Then, while we were doing *Get Closer*, I said, "Maybe we can do just one of these songs on it." At that



BRIAN ARIS

LINDA RONSTADT SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

LUSH LIFE—Asylum 9 60387-1
WHAT'S NEW—Asylum 9 60260
GET CLOSER—Asylum 60185
DON'T CRY NOW—Asylum 5064
PRISONER IN DISGUISE—Asylum 1045
HASTEN DOWN THE WIND—Asylum 1072
LIVING IN THE USA—Asylum 155
SIMPLE DREAMS—Asylum 4E 104

GREATEST HITS—Asylum 6E 106
GREATEST HITS VOL. 2—Asylum 5E 105
RETROSPECTIVE—Capitol 11629
BEGINNINGS—Capitol 16133
HEART LIKE A WHEEL—Capitol 11358
SILK PURSE—Capitol 16131
HAND SOWN—Capitol 16130
LINDA RONSTADT—Capitol 16132

point, I would have sold out my best friend to figure out a way to get into the studio with Nelson.

SB: The suspense is killing me. So how did you finally get in touch with Riddle?

LR: Peter called him and asked if he'd be interested. He said he'd be glad to come over.

SB: That's the whole story?

LR: Well, I honestly didn't know if he was still alive, if he was still working, if he had ever heard of me before, or had heard of me and thought I was horrible. I don't think he knew very much about my singing. He doesn't like rock & roll at all. But he's a professional, so he came down to see if this was anything he could bear to do. When I got Nelson in the studio I said, "Can you just do these three songs with me?" In the back of my mind I thought if I could just get these three things recorded they'd sound so good that I could convince people. But Nelson said, "I don't like to do that. I've turned down almost everybody who's ever asked me to do album cuts; I just do albums." And I said, "God, if you want to do an album with me, let's do it." So we started up. All I needed was one person to be as enthusiastic about the idea as I was. And Nelson became that person.

SB: So you finished *Get Closer* according to the original plan and started working immediately on *What's New*?

LR: We went right into the studio and cut three songs: *What's New*, *Someone To Watch Over Me*, and a third song I can't remember. I knew I could sing *What's New*, and I was right. I played the songs for J. D. and for Andrew Gold, who likes orchestrated music—they both went nuts. I played it for Steve Martin, and he liked it too. They all pushed me to finish the project. So I went back in, I finished the rest of it, and I was never happier singing. I just never had as good a time singing as I did doing that record.

SB: What's it like to work with Nelson Riddle?

LR: He's very sardonic and he's honest; he's very straightforward about stuff. I started talking about these songs and we just had an instant rapport. I pulled out this list of stuff and we ran to the piano in the other room. It was so cute: he brought the original sheet music that he had written his original conductor's notes for Sinatra's *I Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out To*

Dry. We started to play it and I remember it was so freaky to see him cross out Frank's key. He took his pencil and crossed it out very casually, and put my key over the top and started making new notes. It just seemed to me that that piece of music should have been framed and set down in history.

SB: Do you work out the arrangements with Riddle?

LR: We work out the basic arrangements with the rhythm section first so that I can have as much input as possible. Then Nelson comes in and writes the charts. And then the pianist and I come back and rehearse them again with the charts. Then we go in with the orchestra and record it. For *Lush Life* we put it down with the rhythm section and then overdubbed parts of the orchestra. Nelson hadn't worked this way before, but that's the way we've always done it—it's so much more efficient [to overdub]. *What's New* we did all live.

SB: Who picks out the material?

LR: Every once in a while somebody throws in a suggestion, but almost always I find the songs myself. Pete Hamill [the New York-based newspaper columnist and occasional jazz writer] sends me tapes all the time, because he has an incredible record collection. He suggested *It Never Entered My Mind* [on *Lush Life*] to me; I didn't think I could sing it. He also suggested *I'm A Fool To Want You* [also on *Lush Life*]. At first I didn't like it because the bridge dragged too much, so I put the bridge into double-time, and then I liked it better.

SB: Why so many songs from the '20s and '30s?

LR: It's a funny thing, but I have an affinity for anything that was written in the first 20 to 30 years of this century. When I sat down and analyzed the structure of a song like *Bewitched* I just thought: boy, I envy the person who got to sing it when it first rolled out of the writer's pen. I passed over it because I felt that it had been done so much that I didn't know quite what I could've added to it. But, on the other hand, there were songs like *Someone To Watch Over Me* that have been done just as much, maybe more. But I couldn't *not* sing it. It was just too good a song to ignore.

SB: In a review of *Lush Life*, one of your critics asked: "For this she gave up Buddy Holly?" Care to respond?

LR: You don't give up anything, you add to. I don't lose the ability to sing anything that I've ever sung. Frankly, I think I do a much better job on George Gershwin songs than I ever did on a Buddy Holly song. I would rather hear Buddy Holly sing any Buddy Holly song that I ever sang. I feel like I have more of a contribution to make to a Gershwin song than I do to a Buddy Holly song.

SB: I read where you said, "If someone brought me a new Elvis Costello song and put it side by side with something by George Gershwin there'd be no contest." That's really an unfair comparison, don't you think?

LR: It was just the first thing that came to mind. I was asked what I missed about rock & roll, and I thought of *Party Girl* [written by Costello], which was one of those rock ballads that I always liked better than the audience did. But to sing a song like *Skylark*? *Skylark* is just an incredible adventure to sing—I just love it. It is unfair to compare them, though.

SB: What else do you miss about rock & roll?

LR: I used to love to do a song like *Can't Let Go* [from *Mad Love*] on stage. My show was vocally athletic then; at the time, I thought it was the best rock & roll singing I'd ever done. I used to come home and die after the show because that song and *Party Girl* and the rest of the songs from *Mad Love* had a lot of yelling and screaming and were so demanding vocally. The new stuff that I'm doing is really demanding too, but it seems to soothe me at the same time. It feels good for my voice to do it—it's like working out the muscles carefully instead of pounding on them.

SB: Did you really mean it when you told a writer, "I don't care if I never sing *Heat Wave* again"?

LR: Let me explain that. I sang *Heat Wave* and songs like *Silver Threads And Golden Needles* for a lot of years. I think it's amazing that I was able to sing them for 10 years and still like them by

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



JON CHASE

Art Blakey

IN HIS PRIME

By Zan Stewart

The calendar says that Art Blakey is 65, but to hear him wailing away at the drums, he seems like he's in his mid-20s. "Age is a number, and nothing else," he says. "I'm very young. Really, I'm in my prime."

Indeed, Blakey plays today just as he has throughout his 40-year career: with characteristic zeal, ardor, passion, snap, crackle, and a seemingly limitless supply of energy. This very spry sexagenarian says the secret of remaining—mentally and physically—in the springtime of life lies, first and foremost, with pleasing oneself.

"I stay young because I'm doing what I like to do, playing jazz. It's my love and my livelihood. Most people don't do what they want to do for a living, they get bored and it affects their whole being. Me, I'm lucky. I love what I do and I really come to life on that bandstand."

On a Saturday night at Hop Singh's in the beachy L.A. suburb of Marina del

Rey, the evergreen Blakey put his money where his mouth is and offered his Ponce de Leon act one more time. At around 9 p.m., the patriarch of improvised music headed for the stage, followed by his current band of Jazz Messengers—trumpeter Terence Blanchard, altoist Donald Harrison, tenorman Jean Toussaint, bassist Lonnie Plaxico, and pianist Mulgrew Miller.

Blanchard, the musical director, counted off Wayne Shorter's *Witch Hunt*. As the medium-tempo rippler went from melody to solos, Blakey worked at his kit, providing a whirlwind of rhythm which is the coal that keeps the Messenger's furnace roaring at full blast. As he beat out the time, he struck that familiar pose—eyes lifted skyward, mouth opened wide, a look of ecstasy on his face—that's appeared on numerous Blakey album covers, and one that lovers of this drummer's in-person musical mayhem have seen time and again. It's a

look that means Blakey is happily on his home turf, playing in the band.

The current gathering of Messengers has been together about a-year-and-a-half. Blanchard and Harrison joined three years ago, when Blakey held a public jam session/audition to fill the chairs vacated by Wynton and Branford Marsalis. Toussaint, Plaxico, and Miller ultimately replaced Billy Pierce, Charles Fambrough, and Johnny O'Neal. These fellows, all in their early 20s, have already been associated with many of the greats of jazz: Jack McDuff, Lionel Hampton, Roy Haynes, Woody Shaw, Hank Jones, Dexter Gordon, Johnny Griffin, and on and on. Blakey's knack for finding the young talent hasn't gone sour.

While Art has helmed blowing units with a wealth of talent—Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter, Lee Morgan, Hank Mobley, Kenny Dorham, the Marsalises—the present one goes near the top of the drummer's list of favorites. "It's one of the best bands, if not *the* best, I've ever had," Blakey states unequivocally. "Musically they are something else. I'll leave it to the people to decide if they are the best, but we've been breaking records everywhere we go. We won the Grammy this year [for Best Jazz Group for *New York Scene* on Concord] and that's quite an accomplishment. All my other groups, they were very, very good but they never did get that recognition.

"For example, my band with Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter, Curtis Fuller, Cedar Walton, and Jymie Merritt. We were the first organized jazz band to tour Japan—that was 1960—and you didn't



BERNIE THRAISHER

HE BOPS: Blakey fires up the '50s.



hear a word about it. So it makes me feel proud that these fellows are getting notoriety."

The hard-driving drummer admits that Wynton Marsalis, if not the others, has received his share of the limelight. "Yes, indeed," remarks Blakey with enthusiasm, "ain't Wynton something? He has so much knowledge for a man his age, and very outspoken, too. I don't agree with everything he says but I do with a lot of it. In due time, I imagine he'll spend most of his time playing jazz,

so he can really learn how to play it, 'cause that's what he wants to do. I think he's a great boon for jazz, and it's a lucky thing he came along. I think a lot of him. I'm his number one fan."

Blanchard, who cites Clark Terry, Hubbard, Woody Shaw, Clifford Brown and, above all, Fats Navarro as influences, has had remarkably little trouble filling Marsalis' shoes, both as a zestful, intricate soloist and as a well-equipped composer. His *Oh—By The Way* and *Subterfuge* are regular Messenger features,

as is *Duck Soup* by Harrison, and other tunes by Toussaint, Miller, and Plaxico. It's a Blakey dictum: either you write or you're wrong for the band.

"Everybody writes," he reiterates. "When they come, if they don't write, they have to learn. If they don't learn, they have to go. 'Cause the writing will be here after they're gone." The Blakey Top 10 Composer list would include Thelonious Monk, Horace Silver, Clifford Brown, Shorter, Walter Davis Jr., and altoist Bobby Watson.

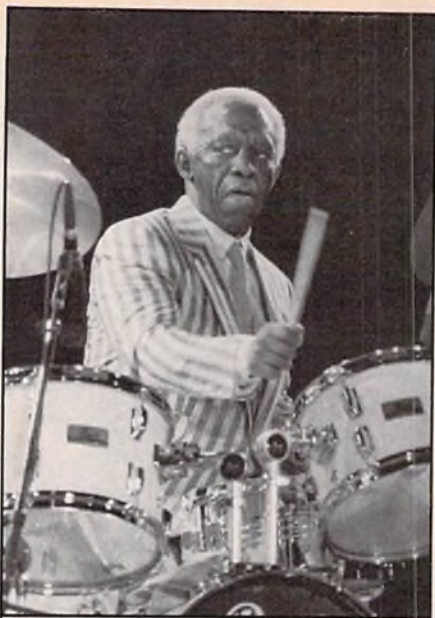
The drummer likes to remind listeners that he feels it's his calling to take young players like Watson, who was a very raw talent when Art hired him in the late '70s, and allow them to blossom under his tutelage. "I look for the new guys, and I just give them a place to hone their art and they grow. They do it themselves. I just give them a chance. All they need is a little guidance, a little direction, and they're gone. When they get big enough, I let them go and get their own thing. Then I find some more."



JUST FRIENDS: from left, Norman Simmons, Benny Carter, Blakey, Dizzy Gillespie, and Mel Lewis.

MITCHELL SEIDEL

The story of the head Messenger began in 1919, when Blakey was born in Pittsburgh, PA. He married at 14, was a father at 15, and to put extra food on the table he played piano in clubs after working long hours in the steel mills. When a



MITCHELL SEIDEL

ART BLAKEY'S EQUIPMENT

These days Art Blakey delivers the jazz message on Pearl drums: 8-inch, 10-inch, and 12-inch rack toms, 14- and 16-inch floor toms, and a 20-inch bass drum. His snare is a customized Greg Kepingler (from Seattle) 5½-inch with a brass shell. Cymbally speaking, A. Zildjian's are on hand: a 21-inch Medium Ride, 21-inch Medium Crash, 20-inch Medium Thin Crash, 18-inch Flat Ride, 20-inch Medium Crash, and Zildjian New Beat 13½-inch hi-hat with a heavy bottom and medium top.

ART BLAKEY SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

with the Jazz Messengers

NEW YORK SCENE—Concord Jazz 256
 IN SWEDEN—Amigo 839
 KEYSTONE 3—Concord Jazz 196
 OH—BY THE WAY—Timeless 165
 STRAIGHT AHEAD—Concord Jazz 168
 IN THIS KORNER—Concord Jazz 68
 LIVE AT MONTREUX AND NORTHSEA—Timeless 150
 REFLECTIONS IN BLUE—Timeless 128
 IN MY PRIME VOL. 1—Timeless 114
 IN MY PRIME VOL. 2—Timeless 118
 THERMO—Milestone 47008
 UGETSU—Riverside Original Jazz Classic 090
 CARAVAN—Riverside Original Jazz Classic 038
 THE WITCHDOCTOR—Blue Note 84258
 ROOTS AND HERBS—Blue Note 84347
 A NIGHT IN TUNISIA—Blue Note 84049
 MOSAIC—Blue Note 84090
 FREE FOR ALL—Blue Note 84170
 BUHAINA'S DELIGHT—Blue Note 84104
 LIKE SOMEONE IN LOVE—Blue Note 84245
 THE FREEDOM RIDER—Blue Note 84156
 THE BIG BEAT—Blue Note 84029
 MOANIN'—Blue Note 84003
 MEET YOU AT THE JAZZ CORNER OF THE WORLD VOL. 1—Blue Note 84054
 MEET YOU AT THE JAZZ CORNER OF THE WORLD VOL. 2—Blue Note 84055
 AT THE CAFE BOHEMIA VOL. 1—Blue Note 81507
 AT THE CAFE BOHEMIA VOL. 2—Blue Note 81508

with Miles Davis

VOLUME 1—Blue Note 1501
 VOLUME 2—Blue Note 1502
 SOMETHIN' ELSE—Blue Note 81595

with Thelonious Monk

SOMETHING IN BLUE—Black Lion 152
 THE MAN I LOVE—Black Lion 197
 THE COMPLETE GENIUS—Blue Note LA579H2
 MONK/TRANE—Milestone 47011
 THELONIOUS MONK—Prestige 24006

with Milt Jackson

ALL-STAR BAGS—Blue Note LA590H2

with Herbie Nichols

THE THIRD WORLD—Blue Note LA485H2

with Horace Silver

THE TRIO SIDES—Blue Note LA474H2
 AND THE JAZZ MESSENGERS—Blue Note 1518

young chap named Erroll Garner took over the piano bench, Blakey became a drummer. "It was either play or don't eat," he said. "It was during the Depression and people did anything they could to survive."

As he gained mastery of his new instrument, Art found employment with Fletcher Henderson's band in 1939, and attracted the attention of another Pittsburgh native, pianist Mary Lou Williams, who hired him in 1940. He was leading his own band in Boston in 1944, when a call came from Billy Eckstine that led to what Blakey calls the greatest musical experience of his life, three years with Eckstine's big band. This phenomenal, groundbreaking ensemble was the first big band to play the new music of bop and boasted an amazing roster. At one time or another, the group featured Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Fats Navarro, Dexter Gordon, Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, and composer/arrangers Tadd Dameron and Gerry Valentine.

Blakey, who was not really a bop drummer when he arrived (but surely was when the band broke up in 1947), describes his first night with Eckstine. "I joined 'B' [as the singer is known] in St. Louis," Art remembers, "and when I got there I was the most amazed fella you've ever seen. That's where I first met Lady Day, Sarah, Bird, Diz, and I thought they were absolutely crazy. I had never seen anybody act like they did. I was there with a shaved head, wire-rimmed glasses, square as all get out.

"When the band opened that night, they scared the hell out of me. There was one number we were playing, and Sarah was singing and I was putting in some kind of shuffle rhythm, trying to be hip. And Bird was directing the band and he comes over to me and says 'Stop.' And I said, 'Are you kidding?' He said, 'No, I'm Charlie Parker and I said stop.' So I stopped and he told the band, 'You all keep going.' Sarah was still singing. He said, 'Tell me what the hell that was that you were doing,' referring to the shuffle beat. I said, 'Bird, I don't know.' So he said, 'Then why are you doin' it?' 'Cause I heard Cozy Cole do that with Cab Calloway.' Bird said, 'That's why he ain't here.' Tore me up. I was so nervous. But by saying that, Bird straightened me right out. It was a beautiful thing to do."

In 1947, Blakey backed Thelonious Monk at the pianist/composer's historic Blue Note sessions, cutting such time-defying standards as 'Round Midnight, In Walked Bud, Off Minor, Well, You Needn't, and Ruby, My Dear. It was said that Blakey was one of the few trapmen who was in harmony with Monk's music. According to Blakey, the empathy went way beyond the recording studio.

"Well, he was my best friend," Blakey says nostalgically, "and when he died, he took a lot of me with him. He had a lot to

do with my career. If it hadn't been for him, I'm not so sure I would have been me. Really, he was responsible. I learned so much playing with him, being with him. We were together almost every day. We argued and fought like hell all the time, but we couldn't stay away from each other. We loved to play with each other. That's the way it was." In an ironic twist, Blakey and bassist Al McKibbin, who was also present on those early Monk sessions, were with the pianist on his last date, 1971's *Something In Blue*.

On the road "63 weeks a year," Blakey finds himself in Europe or Japan (he's been to the latter 47 times) almost as often as he's at home in New York. He recently traveled from London, where he was gigging at Ronnie Scott's Club, to take part in the brouhaha for Blue Note, held at Town Hall (see **db**, Caught, May '85). The white-haired, young-at-heart trap giant enjoyed playing with former associates like Johnny Griffin and Walter Davis Jr.

"Sure, I had fun," he says with a chuckle. "That's my life up there on the bandstand. And that's not unusual that I played with some of the guys that used to be with me. I often travel with some of the old Messengers to San Francisco—we recorded there for Timeless—or Japan, where we also recorded. It's interesting, I take some of the guys who are free. I've used Cedar Walton, Curtis Fuller, and others. We go over, do some concerts and have a ball."

Playing so much of the time is what Blakey likes best. "And if I don't play, I'll be climbing the walls. Sure it's good for me. It's my life, it's my health. If I don't play for four or five days, I start acting silly."

When he's *not* sparking some improvisational combustion, Art can be found at home, spending time with his wife, Ann, their latest creation, Akira, who was born in October, 1984, and some of Art's other 11 children. "My children and I are old friends," he notes, "because we grew up around each other. I have a wonderful family, and a wonderful wife. I'm very rich."

Around the Blakey home, music can usually be heard. "It doesn't have to be jazz, it could be rock or opera," he declares. "Music, period, inspires me. I like any kind of music, any kind, as long as it's presented properly. Each type of music is so important to the people who grew up around it. Take folk music. A lot of people don't like it. A lot of people don't like Japanese music, but to those who grew up with it, learned to love it, it's important to them. I grew up around jazz and spiritual music, so it's important to me. I just express myself in it. That's where my strengths are. It's just like anything. Just find where your strengths are so you can express yourself and be happy. That's all." **db**

ONE NIGHT WITH THE *LATE NIGHT* BAND

By Michael Bourne

“There’s someone taking notes!” he warned.

It was almost 5:30 p.m. as David Letterman greeted the audience before that night’s *Late Night With David Letterman* was taped. And now everyone was looking at me, scribbling away.

“What are you writing?”

“About the band, for **down beat**.”

“Paul, do you know about this?”

Surrounded by keyboards, Paul Shaffer shouted: “Throw him out!” They didn’t. Letterman thanked me for coming. “And what do we have for him, Bill?”

“It’s a new car!” Bill Wendell’s classic announcer’s voice thundered.

I didn’t get the car, but the show was fun.

Late Night is taped in the late afternoon, Monday through Thursday from 5:30 to 6:30. I’d been hanging around the NBC studio since 4 p.m., watching the band rehearse, watching segments being filmed for sketches to come, watching the writers talk with audience members selected for one of the show’s routines (“Ask Mr. Melman”), watching the crew adjust the lights and sound and cameras. Several in the crew have become familiar faces on tv. Letterman delights in pulling people out from behind the scenes and into the spotlight. But other than Letterman’s own, no face is as familiar on the show as Shaffer’s, looking a little nerd-ish with his ever-present smile—yet always with that hipster’s twinkle behind his glasses.

Ever since the late ’50s (when *Late Night* first aired, Letterman often jokes), talk-show stars have featured bandleaders as second bananas: Jack Paar’s Jose Melis, Johnny Carson’s Skitch Henderson and Milton DeLugg and Doc Severinsen (or Tommy Newsom), et al. Shaffer



FRAN VOGEL

THE BAND: From left, Steve Jordan, Marcus Miller subbing for regular bassman Will Lee, Paul Shaffer, Sid McGinnis.

is the first second banana who’s worked before as a comedian. A few years back, he played a rock star who sold his soul in the tv sitcom *A Year At The Top*. (It didn’t last a year.) Meanwhile, he played keyboards with Howard Shore’s band on *Saturday Night Live* and often appeared in sketches—memorably the retarded “dueling” banjoist. Also, he and *Late Night* drummer Steve Jordan joined Steve Cropper and Duck Dunn of Booker T and The MGs fame as the rhythm section behind *SNL*’s John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd as The Blues Brothers.

When a musical director with a comedic bent was wanted for *Late Night*, Shaffer seemed a natural. “They were familiar with the stuff I did on *Saturday Night*,” he said. “They were interested in somebody who could do the comedy, although initially they didn’t just let me do it. I really had to grab it myself.” Grab, he did. Shaffer’s “lounge”-ish patter and by-play with Letterman is as essential to every show as Letterman’s monolog.

Shaffer selected the band, first with guitarist Hiram Bullock (see db, June ’84), bassist Will Lee, and Jordan. Sid



ROCKIN' 30 ROCK: McGinnis, Shaffer, Jordan, guest Chick Corea, and Miller.

McGinnis replaced Bullock last year, but Lee and Jordan play on, now for three-and-a-half years. While the others sometimes can be found jamming around town or on tour with big name acts around the world, Shaffer is there every night. "I haven't taken much time off," he said. "I've subbed out only two or three shows. Leon Pendarvis replaced me." Is he indispensable to the show? "I'm trying to make it look that way," Shaffer said.

Announcer Bill Wendell calls Shaffer "the sex symbol of *Late Night*," but his official title is "Musical Conductor." He composed the show's theme and every show he determines what music they'll play during the breaks, the ins and outs for commercials. "Originally, my idea was to play soul classics," he said. "We've gone over the years a little more towards rock & roll because that turned out to be what the other guys wanted to play. I still

sneak in as much of the soul stuff as I can."

That night they played some Sly Stone funk, but mostly they played music of Chick Corea, the show's musical guest. Chick sat in with the band throughout the show, as have other guests: Dizzy Gillespie, Freddie Hubbard, McCoy Tyner, Toots Thielemans, Paul Butterfield, Junior Wells and Buddy Guy, Robbie Shakespeare and Sly Dunbar, and frequent sitter-in David Sanborn, to name only a sample. They've been called upon to accompany a musical panoply, from Bob Dylan and Carole King to Liberace and legendary Birdland emcee Pee Wee Marquette. They've polka'd with the Schmenge Brothers (SCTV's John Candy and Eugene Levy) and blasted latin-schlock behind the seismic behind of bombshell Iris Chacon. What they do best, though, is boogie. They've rocked "30 Rock" with Sly Stone,

Clarence Clemons, Wayne Cochran, and the band's favorite, James Brown. "None of us have ever gotten over playing with him," Shaffer said, the H almost capitalized in his voice.

* * *

The ability to play *everything* was what Shaffer looked for when selecting his sidemen. "What came into deciding which guys to hire was a lot of knowledge about different artists and different types of music," Shaffer said, "because all these different types of artists come and play with us." And when Letterman needs some musical nonsense (the theme for "Dave's Funhouse," music to herald gags, music to escape gags that bomb), the band is always quick with a lick. "You have to have some show business," Shaffer said, "some Catskills knowledge as well." That night Shaffer played an organ flourish, with a roll of the drums, for the show's "Lucky Number" drawing.



FRAN VOGEL

heard following Chick around. But when played through, complete with Chick's solo and an exchange with drummer Jordan, it was too long for the show. They quickly worked it into three-and-a-half minutes. But by the time they were to play, the show was almost out of time. Vanity blathered too much, and Letterman's interview with someone who'd written a book about Howard Hughes seemed endless. Just before the musical segment, Barry Sand, the producer, told Shaffer to cut it to two-and-a-half minutes. "Chick, on the spur of the moment, was cutting it as he was playing it to make it fit," Shaffer said, "and then they didn't even give him two-and-a-half!" Just before the climax, the *Applause* sign flashed and the monitor turned grey—but the band played on.

That their music is so often off-the-air sometimes frustrates the band, but they still have a good time playing. And the audience was thrilled. (Someone next to me waited a year for tickets.) What shocked me was that Shaffer and the band have no input into what guests play the show. "None at all," Shaffer said. "They tell me who I have to play with and I play with them. Part of the gig is being prepared to play anything."

Sometimes they know who they'll be playing with only a day or two in advance. "I don't know how they get their ideas," Shaffer said. "They knew I played a club date with McCoy Tyner once and knew how excited I was about that, but it took two years to get McCoy on the show." Shaffer couldn't think of anyone he's dreamed of playing with that they haven't played with, though. "It's worked out pretty well. I must say we've had an awful lot of great experiences."

Bassist Will Lee is not always so contented. "I remember the time I tried to get Bobby McFerrin on the show," he said, "and they said no. I don't understand it. He can talk. He can sing. He can do anything! And I'm dying to get George Jones on the show. He's a killer!" But other than that one complaint, *Late Night* for Lee is "an easy gig. If a musician ever had to have a regular daily gig, this is ideal. You can do jingles or do records or play live, and the show hardly gets in the way of anything. And it's never a routine 9-to-5—or 4:30-to-6:30. We've done the show over three years, and it's never been boring for a second!" It's no wonder Lee jumps up and down at the opening of every show.

Jordan and McGinnis say much the same. Once the show is through, they're free to do what they want. "I like to write," Jordan said. "That's what I do most of the time when I'm not doing the show." "It's one 'set' a night," McGinnis said. "It pays well, and it doesn't really affect much any other work you have."

And it's fun. "I like playing those old songs," Lee said, "plus I get to play with

the guys. Paul Shaffer is not only funny, he's an amazing keyboard player. He's got great timing and great feeling, and you can't fool him about those old songs. He knows every note!"

"For me," Shaffer said, "the best thing about the gig is that I get to play all of my favorite songs with a great band. I realize that most of my repertoire on this show is the same as it was 20 years ago when I was playing in a Top 40 band or a soul band in high school. The only difference is that now I've got a band that can play them great!"

Will they ever record as a band—The MGs of the '80s? "We've thought about it, yes," said Shaffer, "but nobody's really come up with any happening bread to do it yet." Meanwhile, "this is nice enough. We get to play four days a week, and so far it's okay."

And what does the star feel about the band? When cornered after the show, David Letterman answered with his characteristic understatement: "They're a driving force in American music!" db

THE LATE NIGHT BAND'S EQUIPMENT LIST

Leader **Paul Shaffer** plays "A Yamaha grand piano, Hammond B-3 organ, OB-Xa synthesizer, and I have a Kurzweil (digital sampler and synthesizer) on loan from the Kurzweil company." Guitarist **Sid McGinnis** says "I play a Fender Stratocaster with mainly ESP parts. I built it myself at the ESP plant. Also several Roland attachments—chorus, octaver, flanger, heavy metal, digital delay—and an Ibanez Tube Screamer." **Will Lee** plunks "A Fender Jazz bass. I play four or five different models from 1962 to '83, along with a TC Chorus flanger pedal, Boss attachments, and a Novatone switchboard system." **Steve Jordan**, meanwhile, keeps the beat on "Yamaha drums, an Ames snare, Paiste cymbals: a 22-inch red ride, 16-inch crash, 18-inch black (my Mersey Beat cymbal), and 18-inch hi-hats."

THE LATE NIGHT BAND SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

As prime studio session men, each member of the quartet has recorded plenty. A few of their favorite and most recent recordings are:

Paul Shaffer

"The Weather Girls' *It's Raining Men*—only as a composer—from their LP *Success* (Columbia 38997), and most recently, keyboards on *The Honey Drippers* (Es Paranza 7 902201-B)."

Sid McGinnis

"The second solo album by *Peter Gabriel* (Atlantic 19181), David Lee Roth's *California Girls* (Warner Bros. 25222-1), and Ashford and Simpson's last two albums *High Rise* (Capitol 12282) and *Solid* (Capitol 12366)."

Will Lee

"I sort of liked the way Donald Fagen's *The Nightly* (Warner Bros. 23696-1) worked out, and Peter Wolf's *Lights Out* (EMI 17121). And I liked working with the New York Community Choir, and on Phoebe Snow's *Second Childhood* (Columbia 33952)."

Steve Jordan

"The Blues Brothers' *Briefcase Full Of Blues* (Atlantic 19217) and *Made In America* (Atlantic 16025)—both with Shaffer, too—and three albums with guitarist Steve Khan's *Eyewitness: Eyewitness* (Antilles 1018), *Modern Times* (Japanese Trio 25016), and *Casa Loco* (Antilles 1020)."

(It was 743.)

Mostly, they have to know the music—and the musicians. "In the case of Chick Corea," Shaffer said, "we better know *Spain*. It would have been a drag if everybody had to read it for the first time. We have only about 45 minutes—if that!—to become the guy's band for the evening. So any knowledge we have about the artist comes in awfully handy."

"There was some meat to it because they all knew the music," Chick agreed. Along with *Spain*, they played through breaks with *La Fiesta*, *500 Miles High*, and *Miles' All Blues*. "It was fun," Chick said—but most of the fun was off-the-air. When they rehearsed Chick's feature, *Malaguena*, they worked up an impromptu arrangement. Chick played "a little Yamaha toy," as he called it, a small synthesizer hanging around his neck with a mouth apparatus. While they rehearsed the music, the cameras re-



Henry Threadgill:

MUSIC TO MAKE THE SUN COME UP

By Howard Mandel

MITCHELL SEIDEL

"You can't really talk about one thing without talking about everything. Then you know you're talking a real truth," says Henry Threadgill, the 41-year-old composer, improviser, ensemble leader, multi-reed player, and all-around creative musician—as in Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians—who, wherever he goes, projects an enviable lightness of being.

"I hate to talk just about music. Because if you're really talking about something, it applies in every category, across every line. Then you're talking about something. A real idea. A real generator. Like gold, silver, a mineral, the water, the air. You know you're talking about something, rather than about things, impressions, people, and that whole area. Ideas. Real ideas. There are concrete truths at the bottom, you know."

A very ordinary man works a ho-hum job and leads a hum-drum life. He lives alone and enjoys no satisfying relationships at work or in his personal life.

—from Ilyse Kazar's synopsis of *When Life Is Cheap And Death Is Taken for Granite* (Imaginary Film), libretto by Henry Threadgill ©1980

Perhaps you were wondering, perhaps you aren't sure—yet—whether the art some black musicians forged in the '60s really has any substance, any staying power, any form, any significance. Ornette Coleman, later John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Cecil Taylor, the AACM—it's so much noise to you. Call that jazz? Those cats can't play. Too lazy to learn even the tradition, then they go mess with "classical" concepts. Who do they think they are? Their records don't sell, their proposals stretch grant guidelines. Are they too good for the club hustle?

Have they tried gigging at the Post Office?

Threadgill walks about Manhattan's East Village, where he lives—as he did Chicago, where he was raised—limber and loose of stride, in bright, self-styled clothes, with an alert smile and a ready greeting. He's about to release *Subject To Change*, his third LP on the independent About Time Records, featuring his seven-person sextet. PBS recently aired a documentary on Panama that used his soundtrack. He's adapted Kurt Weill's *Great Hall* from *Silverlake* for 13 pieces, recorded for an A&M anthology being produced by Hal (*That's The Way I Feel Now*) Willner. Of course, he's on about a dozen albums by the now-disbanded trio Air, but Threadgill's always making more music than can be documented on record. Last spring there was his dance music for an ensemble including cornetist Olu Dara and guitarist Jean-Paul Bourelly at the Kitchen's Masked Ball, his concert at Carnegie Recital Hall, his onstage appearance as a musician in the Metropolitan Opera's *Porgy And Bess*, his collaborations with choreographer Christine Rrata Jones, his Live Music/Imagination/Theatre series for his WindString Ensemble. In spring of '84, Threadgill responded to booking agents' indifference by mounting his own monthlong, coast-to-coast U.S. tour for his sextet.

"That's my will," Threadgill admits, not immodestly. He moves so fast he's become virtually invisible; the press doesn't know how to regard or cover such prolific activity, and Threadgill's originality of sound seems to render him "too contemporary" for regular employment in taverns that showcase jazz, though his music is based in gospel, the blues, and parade marches, as well as his serious research into what's beyond. He makes a fair living—that is, he scrapes by ("All musicians live a creative life, believe me; artists, period, I don't know how anybody survives. It calls for a lot of imagination")—but he rejects the misconceptions and limits imposed on his work by the nameless world.

"I became a musician because I loved music as a kid," he explains. "Music is my game. I didn't grow up with any

boundaries on music. I grew up in a ghetto in Chicago, and there was music everywhere. My grandmother took me to churches where there was music, record shops had speakers outside so you walked down the street hearing music, bands played, and still play, at the Maxwell Street flea market. Even at grammar school, teachers played records during rest periods, good music we would cool out and sleep to.

"There was never any talk of this kind of music or that kind of music. I grew up with hillbilly music on the radio, Polish music on the radio, Tchaikovsky, gospel. Radio was exciting; there was Serbian music, Mexican music, stories. We listened to all of it. And I heard music live. I would hear polka bands, then turn around to Muddy Waters or Rosetta Tharp, then go hear a choir from Rumania. We listened to it all, and we heard it in the community.

"As a kid, I wanted to learn how to play all this great music, the way these great people had been doing it. It wasn't in my head to have a Mercedes or \$50,000 a year; I wasn't sophisticated enough to be thinking like that. To grapple with the music was enough. And I haven't really lost that initial thing I came to music with, that interest I have. I don't need anybody to support me in that idea anymore. I can go to the grave with my ideas. I can go on through."

The man forms a belief in the existence, somewhere, of sincere human exchange . . . So he sets out to confirm this faith in the potential for love and understanding. Every subsequent encounter ends in his being abused, his idealism scorned . . . every person and institution he deals with disappoints his faith in humanity.

—from *When Life Is Cheap* . . .

* * * * *

"I learned through trial and error," Threadgill continues. "And some help from some good friends, and years and years in musical institutions. But I didn't get too much out of institutions, I must admit. I'm very grateful to have been able to be there, but I got more outside of them. I went to all the music schools—universities, colleges, conservatories—all around this country, on the university level for 11 years, partly on the G.I. Bill, partly on my own. I was constantly studying at these places, taking every course in music they had to offer. That was my approach; I was never interested in a degree, I was interested in the catalog. That never made any sense to me—do this for four years and you have a degree—because I said 'No doctor would ever operate on me after four years of study; how can you be a musician in four years?'

"And here's something I want to say: it's been put out in some quarters that so-called jazz musicians don't have classical backgrounds. Now, this must be about musicians who are younger than I am, because it's impossible not to have a classical background if you're my age. There was no such thing as a jazz program, or any jazz schools then. I played Prokofiev, Poulenc, and Hindemith sonatas when I was a flute major; when I was a piano major I played Beethoven sonatas, so I don't know what this crap is about only a couple people out there are special, classically trained musicians. It's a lie and a fallacy. Outside school I was in blues bands, but people wouldn't let me sit up with orchestras if I didn't know how to play Mozart and the *Brandenburg Concertos*. They weren't into any tokenism, they wouldn't be passing me on no color basis. I had to deal.

"I started out as a kid with piano, and when I got really interested in playing, I went to saxophone, then clarinet—that was still a very accepted thing to learn, then. I was lucky enough to have a teacher who got me into a big band, a reading band, and taught me what the second tenor part was. Just like in a choir: how does the alto support the soprano? What role are you playing besides just singing your part? In these schools now, everybody knows so much, but only something specific. They don't make mistakes, and that's bad. No mistakes is bad. I'd hate to have learned how to walk without falling; I'd probably not know how to fall, and if I fell I'd kill myself. And

you never learn how to jump out of an airplane if you never fall.

"My first professional experience was traveling with gospel music, church musicians, and evangelists. I was into that for a couple of years, then I came back to the secular community. That's when I started playing with blues bands. That was the first place I could play, and I had to learn to play with them. They taught me. That's some highly sophisticated music—both the emotional basis, and the technical basis, too, because the execution of every note is a highly sophisticated event.

"Howlin' Wolf was my greatest hero, my favorite. I didn't know him personally, but I loved those people. I used to play in the blues sessions on Sunday—jazz sessions on Monday—at the Blue Flame, and everybody would come to the bandstand to play. Most of the AACM cats had that kind of background; Leo Smith came up to Chicago playing with Little Milton; Lester Bowie, John Stubblefield, they know all about this. If you came up in the Midwest, you had that rhythm & blues background; that was the heart of most of your work, and you played at it for long hours.

"But one reason I stayed in that so long was the traditional guys didn't want me to play with them, didn't like the way I played because I wasn't playing bebop the way they were. They said I didn't know what I was doing, and those cats would leave the bandstand, leave you playing by yourself. When that happened, it would make me question my understanding of that music; I wouldn't take the rejection for granted, it had to be looked at. Why? I had to ask. It certainly wasn't about the feeling of what I was playing. What would generally be the case was they manipulated the licks, and I never wanted to do that. I wanted to say something.

"When I was a kid, we used to listen to Sonny Rollins; he didn't sound like he was playing somebody else's licks. Gene Ammons was one of my biggest heroes; I didn't hear Gene Ammons playing no Johnny Hodges licks, or Sonny Rollins licks, or Charlie Parker licks—his stuff was coming out of Gene Ammons. On the street, the guys would be playing those licks, and they were good at it; the reason I wasn't was that I wasn't practicing those licks. I was trying to get through the material, the structures and the forms and the harmonies. To me, it seemed like they were all manipulating the same thing, but I was fishing. At least I knew *where* I was fishing; I had a



KERI PICKETT



KERI PICKETT

HENRY THREADGILL'S EQUIPMENT

"I'm not into *brands*," asserts Henry Threadgill, "although some manufacturers have developed their products pretty well." He is into instruments, owning alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones, a flute, a bass flute, piccolo, a string banjo he found in India—"It has nothing to do with the North American banjo"—and a hubkaphone—an instrument he invented—consisting of a large stand holding several strands of automobile hubcaps which he strikes with mallets, dancing agilely, so it sounds like a cross between vibes and gamelan cymbals.

Threadgill feels "You should not set your instruments up the way somebody else has; you should select equipment based on your physical needs, after getting a good opinion on who makes good instruments. Everybody has different needs, based on their chops, their hands, their own particular physique. Mouthpieces aren't calibrated exactly, anyhow, with mouthpieces and ligatures, you just have to experiment to find what gives you the most efficiency with the least amount of obstruction, the most ease. And there aren't any good reeds coming from any quarter, because nobody seems to be getting good cane.

"I'm getting ready to return to a lot of percussion instruments, myself," Threadgill adds. He's also played the dulcimer-like hackbrett (on Roscoe Mitchell's album *The Maze*), and has a working knowledge of the piano.

HENRY THREADGILL SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader
JUST THE FACTS AND PASS THE BUCKET—About Time 1005
WHEN WAS THAT?—About Time 1004
X-75 VOL. 1—Arista-Novus 3013
with Air
NEW AIR—Black Saint 084
80° BELOW '82—Antilles 1007
AIR MAIL—Black Saint 049
AIR LORE—Arista-Novus 3014
LIVE AIR—Black Saint 034
MONTREUX SUISSE AIR—Arista-Novus 3008
OPEN AIR SUIT—Arista-Novus 3002

AIR TIME—Nessa 12
AIR RAID—India Navigation 1064
AIR SONG—India Navigation 1057
with Roscoe Mitchell
NONAAH—Nessa 9/10
L-R-G/THE MAZE/SII EXAMPLES—Nessa 14/15
with Muhl Richard Abrams
YOUNG AT HEART/WISE IN TIME—Delmark 423
1-QQA + 19—Black Saint 017
with Frank Walton
REALITY—Delmark 436

clear understanding of form. I'd say to myself, if I keep my main pulse on these forms, at least I'll know where I'm at. I'll know what to do at the next juncture. Between here and there I might have some problems, but I'll know what to do when I get there.

"I had my first association with the AACM in Muhl Richard Abrams' Experimental Band in 1962, or '63. I was still playing in the blues places, and working with marching bands, with VFW post bands. I used to make a living playing parades in Chicago, in the summertime; I could play two parades a week and pay my rent and everything else. The jobs would come out of the union, and somebody might give me a big job, like a circus gig for the night. But with the AACM, I was into the circuit I really wanted to be in. I didn't really want to get out of the blues—the blues was good, is still good—but I knew where I wanted to go.

"In the AACM what was happening was an expression of what I was about, and the moment. I knew that it expressed the times, it was all intricately tied up with everything I saw about me: the revolution in America, God is dead, America shooting down its kids, the War, the questioning of traditional philosophies, Coltrane going on to an emotional base of music. I knew where I was supposed to be. I was tied into that moment. I didn't reject that moment. I didn't look back. There was nothing for me to look back to. Look back to what? My life was going on. I'm young."

And so, in the late '60s, Henry Threadgill became who he's still becoming now, who he'd been becoming all along: himself. "I don't try to play what Charlie Parker and them played; they lived through that social period, and I didn't. I learned how to play a lot of what I'm playing by studying that music as I was coming up, but I didn't have the emotional background, I didn't understand the significance of life, to try and express what Charlie Parker and his peers were expressing. They all came out of that same context, they were contemporary, they were expressing that time. It's ridiculous for me to try to play that time. I played the music of Scott Joplin, you know [on *Air Lore*], but I had to transpose it to this moment, still.

"I've always been a composer. Basically, about 90 percent of the music for Air, I wrote it. And that music is *written*—down to the drum parts. There's nothing vague about it. What I was doing with Air was a scaled-down version of what I'm doing now; it had to be done with small instrumentation, so it was a harder job, more complicated, than writing for seven musicians. I'd have to allude to things. Because we only had two hands apiece, and the instruments give up only so many tones at once, I had to devise ways to imply another tone quickly, and shift, and be back in place. Here, I just stick that tone on another instrument. Before, I had to make the implication; now, I can state the fact.

"One thing I've been working towards is a larger, orchestral sound that gets away from the traditional big band sound. I have a very large palette with the sextet. Just with the drums alone, I have 12 pitches: two floor toms, upper toms, snare drum, floor bass drum, and concert base drum—I have two percussionists, that's six tones apiece just on the drums, so that's part of my entire palette. A number of people have asked me if there's been overdubbing on my sextet records, but I'm still trying to accomplish the same thing through other means. I have on my agenda to study electronics, but I haven't finished with acoustics yet.

"Writing is a special thing to me; I haven't been able to write enough, because the vehicles aren't out there. People say 'Oh, it would be nice if you wrote something for orchestra'—well, that's okay. But I don't write music to sit on the shelf; if I can't hear it, there's nothing for me to learn. If I just wrote stuff I completely understand, there would be no reason for me to be writing—I could just be manufacturing music, since I'd know what it's all going to sound like. But writing is a daredevil

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47



MAX ROACH

PLUS FOUR & MORE—EmArcy 195J-39: *IT DON'T MEAN A THING; LOVE LETTERS; MINOR TROUBLE; TUNE UP; RAOUL; THIS TIME THE DREAM'S ON ME; ANTHROPOLOGY.*

Personnel: Roach, drums; Kenny Dorham, trumpet; Sonny Rollins (cuts 1-3), Hank Mobley (4-7), tenor saxophone; Billy Wallace, piano (1-3); George Morrow, bass.

★★★★★

LONG AS YOU'RE LIVING—Enja 4074: *LOTUS BLOSSOM; DRUM CONVERSATION; VILLA; LONG AS YOU'RE LIVING; NIGHT IN TUNISIA.*

Personnel: Roach, drums; Stanley Turrentine, tenor saxophone (1, 3-5); Tommy Turrentine, trumpet (1, 3-5); Julian Priester, trombone (1, 3-5); Bobby Boswell, bass (1, 3-5).

★★★★½

SURVIVORS—Soul Note 1093: *SURVIVORS; THE THIRD EYE; BILLY THE KID; JASME; THE DRUM ALSO WALTZES; SASSY MAX (SELF-PORTRAIT); THE SMOKE THAT THUNDERS.*

Personnel: Roach, multiple percussion set; Guillermo Figueroa, Donald Bauch, violin (1); Louise Schulman, viola (1); Christopher Finckel, cello (1).

★★½

Jazz fans are on a roll. For Max Roach on record, the '80s have been generous, with a Japanese solo disc (Baystate 6021), a fistful of duets including the epochal *Historic Concerts* with Cecil Taylor (Soul Note 1100/1), and a new release from the percussion choir M'Boom (Soul Note 1059) among the vinyl valuables. Of the three LPs to be considered here, *Survivors* is newly recorded while the other music is being issued for the first time.

Max Roach Plus Four & More may look familiar. Its cover photo encores a famous 1956 namesake, which featured Sonny Rollins, Kenny Dorham, and George Morrow, with Ray Bryant in the piano chair. *& More* assembles tracks from four 1957 sessions, half of which dispense with keyboard and substitute Hank Mobley for Rollins. The program stresses re-freshingly arranged and reinterpreted standards. The performance of *Love Letters* qualifies as a masterpiece, without resort to sentimentality, proving that old songs can learn new tricks. Victor Young's original is treated to several tempos and a lay-in/lay-out sectional approach over nine minutes. Rollins and Morrow double-team the theme before a muted Dorham launches the uptempo. Billy Wallace turns Tatumesque backflips on the vintage melody during an a cappella piano spot. (Wallace tempers his chops with solid ideas throughout the three cuts on which he plays: what caused his sad neglect?) Another

chestnut, *It Don't Mean A Thing*, gains from being swung with an urgency that approaches Ronald Shannon Jackson's surrealist concert version; form equals content and the joke works.

Roach's kit functions as musical lever throughout, lifting spirit, distributing stress. Rollins' contributions seem reserved compared to the expansive variations he was to play at the Village Vanguard six months later. But the saxophone colossus makes his presence felt, wedging phrases slyly against intervals. His evil genius of a solo on *Minor Trouble* "worries" a string of single notes unexpectedly before springing harmonic surprises. Dorham forms delicately variable lines, airbrush filigree for *Raoul*, feisty blues choruses for *Anthropology*. Mobley has notable rapport with Dorham's variability. His improvisations (the *Raoul* solo and *Dream's On Me* chases) seemingly complete the trumpeter's thoughts.

The natural rightness and good feeling this music communicates are deep-seated. These just-discovered performances are anything but out-takes or rejects. Recording is monaural but with presence that flatters the drums. Best of all, the price is moderate for an immaculately pressed Japanese import. Nab this.

Long As You're Living poses a riddle from the top by withholding its date of recording. Initially, I mistook this live set for German radio and tv to be a reunion. The Emarcay/Mercury discography (included with *& More*) tells otherwise. The concert may have occurred around the time of a Paris studio date by the same lineup circa March 1960. By October of that year the quintet returned to Chicago for a session that added Abbey Lincoln and Ray Bryant.

The performances conceal their age, as an underappreciated Roach group is caught in top form. *Lotus Blossom* and *Villa*, standout compositions by Kenny Dorham, contain standout performances. Both use stop-time to coax tough solos from the brothers Turrentine. Stanley's blowing carries blues convictions and roots resiliency. Tommy's reach occasionally exceeds his grasp—as if technique were shadowboxing with idea. Still, his swinging solos take more risks than Dorham's while they appeal more directly to emotion. Julian Priester's most personalized moments occur on the title song, where his trombone gets progressively raucous after the initial smears. In similar fashion to *& More*, *Long As You're Living* offers a challenging version of wornout material. *Night In Tunisia* is riffed back to life: Roach sets the pulse with sticks alone; Stanley takes a bluesy stroll into irony off the dangerous bridge; a dotted rhythm for ensemble cues Roach's solo. Monaural sound is good but not equal to *& More*; some ensembles behind soloists sound distant.

Survivors departs from Roach's usual formats to move away from improvisation altogether. Occupying a full side, the eponymous composition alternates Peter Phillips' notated dissonances for string quartet with Roach's improvised fills. The result is hydra-headed, hard-to-warm-to virtuosity: acid staccato bursts, trills, and double-stops from strings versus the never-resolved tension of Sisyphus as the drum master fills in the blanks. The

quartet is prevented from interaction with Roach or one another. Their cartoon expressionistic gestures evoke separateness, desolation, fragmentation, in form and emotion. This leaden experiment reminds us that, musically, exile is *not* a preferred form of survival.

More successful are the unaccompanied drum pieces on side two, a sampler of percussive techniques. Roach whacks concepts of the tuned drum and hand/foot independence into unmistakably personal shapes. From *The Third Eye's* enveloping rimshots to the reverberant skins of *JasMe*, Roach brings to the trap set a composer's penchant for organization and a keyboardist's spectrum of touch. He is plainly recycling past strategies: *JasMe's* pattern, for example, hails back to *Drum Conversation on Long As You're Living*. But these are hardly academic etudes, dry remakes. Dazzling figurations, unceasing sparks, flow from Roach's fingertips and soles. He remains the saint of the moment's notice, the improviser's improviser.

—peter kostakis



CHICK COREA

THE SONG OF SINGING—Blue Note 84353: *TOY ROOM; BALLAD I; RHYMES; FLESH; BALLAD III; NEFERITTI.*

Personnel: Corea, piano; Dave Holland, acoustic bass; Barry Altschul, drums.

★★★★

VOYAGE—ECM 1282: *MALLORCA; DIVERSIONS; STAR ISLAND; FREE FALL; HONG KONG.*

Personnel: Corea, piano; Steve Kujala, flute.

★★★★

It is no secret that the Chick Corea of 1984, when *Voyage* was cut, is not the same as the Corea of 1971, the year in which *The Song Of Singing* was first released. But the juxtaposition of the new album with the digitally remastered audiophile reissue of the earlier work makes a dramatic point, demonstrating that Corea's "voyage" has been away from the avant garde and back toward a lyrical conservatism. If *Voyage* had been released in 1972, we'd say Corea had sold out, beat a retreat. But, nowadays, the new album and the voyage it represents put Corea in the company of classical musicians who have turned from atonality to tonality, painters who have abandoned abstraction for figuration, and architects who have left the school of Mies van der Rohe for Pop Art incarnations of ancient Greece and Rome. Except for the 1981 *Three Quartets* (Warner Bros. 3552), Corea's recent

music, like so much contemporary artistic activity, compels us to admit that the tenets of modernism are relative. We are forced to see the "absolute" value of innovation, serialism, and atonality as elements of one musical vocabulary among many others.

The foregoing paragraph is offered as preamble to those, like myself, who feel a twinge of guilt about the pleasure they find in *Voyage*. Yes, the album is something of a retreat. And yes, it suggests that the trails blazed by Paul Bley and the earlier Corea himself have yielded to well-traveled—albeit serene—country lanes. Let's face it, Corea seems to be saying that the string of European avant gardism is played out.

And so he has turned to the Europe of an earlier period—of Ravel, Poulenc, and even Fauré—in music that bespeaks a Gallic classicism. *Mallorca* evokes the beauty of that Spanish island as any French Impressionist might have, though with the addition of some accented off-beats (in the manner of de Falla rather than Bartok) and flute-borne sighs in the style of Gato Barbieri's film music for *Last Tango In Paris*. *Diversions* is more playful, a complex contrapuntal dialogue between flute and piano that incorporates more recognizably jazz-inflected gestures—bent notes and bluesy rhythmic figures—but that still owes much to European traditions. Indeed, the jazz elements strike one as almost corny, quaint, and endearing, much as the Gershwin-esque passages in Ravel's *Piano Concerto In G* appeal to our historical imagination.

I find that I want to complain about all this. But I can't. The music is just too pretty to argue with. I said practically the same thing when I reviewed Corea's *Lyrical Suite For Sextet* (ECM 1260); but *Voyage* is even prettier and, though equally French, is probably better music because it is less self-conscious, more openly lyrical, and more frankly intended to dispense pleasure.

How about the sterner stuff of *The Song Of Singing*? Does it hold up in this retrograde era? It is more complex, more difficult, more interesting, and displays greater virtuoso facility than *Voyage*. *Toy Room* has a lot of notes, mostly atonal, and Corea, Holland, and Altschul seem capable of elaborating them endlessly. The two ballads each evoke a moody atonality that is all the more poignant for brief incursions of melody. *Rhymes* and *Flesh* are both extraordinary. For me, they are the highlights of the album. In *Rhymes*, tight motivic chords, issued like efficient hammer strokes, develop into a composition of breathtaking economy and power. *Flesh*, in contrast, is voluptuous and aggressive, hard-driven with brilliant bass work from Dave Holland—a perfect foil to the Old World avant gardism of the rest of the album.

This is impressive music and, as a display of structure and technique, quite exciting. Yet, for all that it does, *The Song Of Singing* fails to provoke great engagement. Dazzling, assertive, inventive, it nevertheless sings with little sympathy. *Voyage*, while inventive enough (a term not synonymous with *innovative*), is neither dazzling nor assertive. But, in sepia tones, it glows with—let's admit it—welcome affection.

—alan axelrod

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RECORD REVIEWS



DON PULLEN

DECISIONS—Timeless 205: *TREES AND GRASS AND THANGS*; *HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW*; *MESSAGE URGENT*; *DECISIONS*; *TRIPLE OVER TIME*; *I COULD REALLY FOR YOU*.

Personnel: Pullen, piano; George Adams, tenor saxophone; Cameron Brown, bass; Dannie Richmond, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

EVIDENCE OF THINGS UNSEEN—Black Saint 0080: *EVIDENCE OF THINGS UNSEEN*; *VICTORY DANCE (FOR SHARON)*; *IN THE BEGINNING (FOR NICK)*; *PERSEVERANCE*; *REJOICE*.

Personnel: Pullen, piano.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A WELL KEPT SECRET—Shemp 2701: *GORÉE*; *LAND OF THE PHAROAHS*; *DOUBLE ARC JAKE*; *WELL KEPT SECRET*; *NEWCOMER*.

Personnel: Pullen, piano; Beaver Harris, drums; Hamiet Bluiett, baritone saxophone; Ricky Ford, tenor saxophone; Buster Williams, bass; Francis Haynes, steel drums; Sharon Freeman, french horn, arranger (cut 1); Willie Ruff, Bill Warnick, Greg Williams, french horn (1); Candido, percussion (cut 1).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Don Pullen's mature music is immediately appreciable in *Evidence Of Things Unseen*, his beautifully recorded fourth solo piano album. Here's his left hand, independent and able to parse powerful rhythms, suggest counter-melodies in dark undertones, anchor the most far-reaching extensions. Here's his right, making all the gradations of touch between thunderous crashing and tender petting on the keys, sweeping grand clusters or spinning single notes into close-knit lines. Here are five of his compositions, which sing of the black church, the blues and its popular offshoots, African and Caribbean cultures, contemporary extrapolations. Pullen's used his tools to transform his sources into a personal, adaptable, essentially lyrical idiom during 20 years of persistent creativity.

There's plenty of tradition at his fingertips, yet the pianist treats the past as a way into spontaneous self-expression. His title track, by turns ruminative and rhapsodic, escapes its Gershwin-esque voicings in percussive flight and massive dissonances which retain audible links to his theme. *Victory Dance* comes on like bounding Capetown celebrating efforts that have met with success. *In The Beginning*, with its uniquely drawn motif, is a tour de force; Pullen examines his unusual but expansive material for 18-plus minutes without any lapse of concentration or exhaustion of its possibilities. Swing is everpresent, though the

pulse is not necessarily stated; even his fastest, densest activity refers to the phrase shapes and harmonies with which he began. A modest, becoming blues, *Perseverance*, follows, and *Rejoice*, a reel with a hint of New Orleans, closes the album on a fade. It's over fast, and has been entrancingly clear. *Evidence* beckons one's attention again and again.

Pullen's style stretches without distorting the straightahead format of his quartet with George Adams, Cameron Brown, and Dannie Richmond, as can be heard on *Decisions*, the most recent (recorded in February '84) of the foursome's foreign productions to be distributed stateside. In reedman Adams the pianist has met his match (they worked with Mingus together); on tenor, especially, Adams' grainy, energized slurs complement what Pullen rolls off of his knuckles. Yet for all their lack of inhibitions, they work with songs. *Trees And Grass And Thangs*, the pianist's tune, has a calypso bounce and a natural, easily remembered melody. *His Eye Is On The Sparrow*, a piano/sax duet, is offered with unabashed conviction and reverence for the gospel. Adams' *Message Urgent* reminds me of Coltrane quartet classics; Richmond's breaks separate a brief section of upbeat relief from the compassionate portrayal of conflict and pain which the musicians envision.

Decisions itself moves in big strides and emphasizes the group's perfect balance, comprising Pullen's swirlings, Adams' long phrases, Brown's sliding, solid bottom, and Richmond's punctillious push. Their unanimity, however, is apparent throughout—no less so on Richmond's pretty ballad *Triple Over Time* or Adams' vocalized blues *I Could Really For You*. This is the progressive mainstream, a short step beyond the working band idiom Trane, Monk, and Mingus established (and from which few have turned back); while pungent and edgy, the Adams/Pullen quartet is also professional and polished. Together five years, they've set a high standard for the '80s.

Several editions of Beaver Harris' 360° Music Experience have been documented, though sporadically and not always with the care the drummer's ambitiously conceived endeavors deserve. *A Well Kept Secret*, the first release on Hal Willner's Shemp label, has a horrifyingly handsome Ralph Steadman-illustrated cover, good sound, and substantial contributions from main soloist Pullen, all members of the seemingly larger sextet, and arranger/french horn player Sharon Freeman. She charted *Gorée*, a 17-minute suite named for the tiny isle off Senegal where ships boarded slaves for the New World. Candido's congas and a fanfare of french horns may put you in mind of Trane's *Africa Brass*, but the clashing of Pullen's piano with Francis Haynes' steel drums suggests humans at sea; the rising choir of brass, and reeds set against it, evoke a proud history and the vow to overcome; then there's a conga/piano duet of earth-stomping communion.

Harris and Pullen arranged the rest: *Land Of The Pharaohs*, a warriors' melee; *Double Arc Jake*, wherein the intervals of Pullen's clusters are adopted by Bluiett's bari and Ford's tenor in unison before the piece turns to Trinidadian

breeziness; *Well Kept Secret*, on which the saxes chase each other's choruses, and the rhythm trio limits the length but not originality of its member's breaks; and *Newcomer*, a lilting melody Harris stirs with brushes. Pullen waxes warmly, and Williams exhibits more of his muted solemnity—this track is designed to put off nobody, as though for radio play. Yet it's not a compromise of the elegance and expertise Pullen, Adams, Harris, and the rest—once considered too weird or radical—bring to their richly developed art. Instead, it speaks of a more experienced perspective, from which personal and collaborative efforts can continue to evolve.

—howard mandel



NEWPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL ALL-STARS

NEWPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL ALL-STARS—Concord Jazz 260: *EXACTLY LIKE YOU*; *CENTENNIAL BLUES*; *I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT YOU*; *NOBODY KNOWS YOU WHEN YOU'RE DOWN AND OUT*; *ROSETTA*; *SMILES*; *THE JEEP IS JUMPIN'*; *THE MOOCHE*; *BODY AND SOUL*; *THE MAN I LOVE*; *WHAT'S NEW*; *STRUTTIN' WITH SOME BARBECUE*; *MOTEN SWING*.

Personnel: Warren Vache, cornet, flugelhorn; Scott Hamilton, tenor saxophone; Norris Turney, alto saxophone, clarinet; George Wein, piano, vocal; Slam Stewart, bass; Oliver Jackson, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

As today's most widely respected producer of jazz festivals, both nationally and internationally, George Wein has earned a reputation for quality and consistency of presentation. Of course, he has received his share of criticism from the purist camps for his seemingly perverse mixture of genres in what are purported to be jazz concerts; but, tellingly, when he fronts his own NJF All-Stars there can be no doubt as to where his true allegiance lies.

A mainstreamer to the core, Wein the musician is equally at home in dixieland, swing, or classic bop, and his choice of companions in the various annual editions of his All-Stars invariably reflects this middle-of-the-road flexibility and adaptability. Obviously, Wein likes to surround himself with the best men he can get; and since he can hire virtually any jazzman in the world by merely lifting his phone, it is no small honor to be selected as one of his featured performers.

Here, this accolade is bestowed upon as worthy a crew of well-matched players as any Wein had previously singled out for special exposure. And though each musician here has his own center-stage feature, it is the band's

overall ensemble blend which raises this session far above the typical. Needless to point out, Hamilton and Vache are certainly no strangers to each other's styles, but it is an extra treat to hear ex-Ellingtonian Turney (a Hodges, Carter, and Bigard devotee) mesh so neatly with the more familiar voices of the trumpeter and tenorman. Similarly, the rhythm section, sparked by the irrepressibly humorous Stewart, provides exactly the sort of propulsive underpinning that this kind of music demands.

Turney is featured on *I Didn't Know*, *The Jeep*, *The Mooche*, and *Struttin'*, with the last two played on clarinet; Hamilton on *Nobody Knows You* (both behind and between Wein's vocal choruses), *Body And Soul*, and *The Man I Love*; Vache on *What's New*; and Wein the pianist on *Rosetta*. Oddly enough, the track entitled *Smiles* is not the old pop tune at all, but Trummy Young's *Thru For The Night*, a '40s swing standard based on the changes of *Honkytonk* Rose.

—jack sohmer



HAL RUSSELL NRG ENSEMBLE

CONSERVING NRG—Principally Jazz 02: *RUSTY NAILS*; *BLUE OVER YOU*; *OJN*; *PONTIAC*; *SINE DIE*; *OVERBITE*: *SONG SINGING TO YOU*.

Personnel: Russell, cornet, tenor saxophone, vibes, drums, percussion; Brian Sandstrom, trumpet, guitar, bass, percussion; Chuck Burdolik, alto, tenor saxophone, percussion; Curt Bley, bass; Steve Hunt, vibes, drums, percussion.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Exciting, bold, highly energetic (or NRGetic), most ingeniously structured and organized—this is *ensemble* music, always too uncommon in jazz. Burdolik and Bley have developed their original sources (especially Coltrane, for the saxman, and Ware, for the bassist) naturally and expertly into unprecedented areas where music has no rules; but that's simply home territory for the thoughtful, expansive Hunt. As composers, Russell is a vigorous Romantic lyricist while Sandstrom is his opposite, devoted to detailed, minimalist-oriented structures. These musicians' attitudes might seem disparate, but they're sure not exclusive. What unites them is the vision of their fearless, totally uncompromised leader, an amazingly musical creator. The results have included several years of playing together, a gutsy, aggressive attitude to music in general, a rare love of spontaneity, and a huge book of compositions

to which all (especially Russell) contribute.

Most obviously, their music is joyously original. Indeed, the creation of art should be a joy, but the dogma and received style of the last quarter-century have led far too many musicians to unprecedented and even militant mediocrity, the safety of conventions as self-limiting as sensory deprivation. The NRG Ensemble remembers that the objective of Ornette Coleman's discoveries was directness of communication. In fact, they re-establish the

original meaning of freedom, both figuratively (since they play "free jazz") and literally (since freedom of choice has emancipated their musical personalities).

Terry Martin's liner notes to *Conserving NRG* are a thorough guide to the music and players, so I'll only add some general comments. Bley's *Rusty* begins deceptively as a *mysterioso* Jackie McLeanish theme, before one astonishment after another: vibist Russell's collage of detailed, divergent images; the composer's



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RECORD REVIEWS

Jah Grooves

Armageddon will likely arrive before some Roots Man assumes the late Bob Marley's role as reggae's international spokesman. Since the Wailer's demise Jamaican rock 'n' swing sounds have been confined mainly to the home island and émigré outposts, its subversive words and cataleptic rhythms too incisively exotic for global appeal. (Don't forget how Marley buffed his agitprop to a pop luster after 1976, trading urgency for popularity.) Today leading sonic force Bunny Wailer, dance-for-justice agitators Black Uhuru, vocal dynamos the Mighty Diamonds, and other uncompromising dreadlocks, some to be discussed below, fervently serve the listening needs of Rastafarian brethren and broadminded heathens. Reggae plays on.

Island/Mango Records has long championed the r&b-through-ska derived music. Their recent *Reggae Greats* series—16 albums so far, each featuring a specific performer or roots reggae style—exists to guide bewildered Babylonians as to where to begin the plunge into the riddim. Those who know Jacob Miller from Toots Hibbert will find the releases largely new guises for familiar material.

Reggae Greats: Burning Spear (Mango 9785) collects 12 potent **Burning Spear** (Winston Rodney) songs from his five albums for the label. Spear's primal voice, often bittersweet, always focused, pierces the air as if from the very soul of his restless West Indian people. He dramatizes cadenced Rasta prayers, self-composed ones soaked through by the militant teachings of the storied Marcus Garvey, with help from fine backup singers and topflight groove-makers. The most striking tunes are the three off Spear's 1975 classic *Marcus Garvey* album: *Slavery Days*, *Tradition*, and the title chant crackle with a political and musical trenchancy that the years haven't diminished. And few songs in reggae—or any music—match their emotional resonance. Spear has another compilation, *Harder Than The Best* (Mango 9567), and it's a bit stronger in its song selection than this one.

Another major figure in reggae is England-based radical poet **Linton Kwesi Johnson**. LKJ's *Reggae Greats* (Mango 9786) suffices as an overview of the sophisticated "dub poetry" the University of London graduate creates. (This collection does not include material from his essential *Dread Beat And Blood* debut, the '78 British Virgin release now available on Heartbeat 01.) Midst Dennis Bovell's elegant touch-of-jazz instrumentals (dub), Johnson recites acid-dipped verse reflecting his rage over the racism present in South London. The firebrand wants to jolt black working class listeners into "insohreckshan." Most anyone can be drawn to the music; then beware (!), for LKJ's sober defiance throttles you.

Pablo Moses, more than Johnson and other protest bards, values melody, riffs, and crisp arrangements—though not at the ex-

pense of the words and trance rhythms. The ingenuity and grace of Moses' (and producer/arranger Geoffrey Chung's) songmaking is clearly evident on his *Reggae Greats* (Mango 9790), the consolidation of the excellent *A Song* and spotty *Pave The Way* albums. Wry, rebellious Moses shakes loose moralistic thoughts in an affecting puerile lilt; everything on the album—electric piano, hooks, etc.—sounds just right. Moses' recent *Tension* (Alligator 8311) isn't chock-a-block full of outstanding tunes à la the aforementioned LPs or his previous *In The Future* (Alligator 8303), yet the album is an impressive continuation of Moses' charms and skills. The reggae warrior warns that there's nuclear calamity in the offing, and indeed his expertly shaped music limns uneasy suspense. Sometimes the guitars and all descend on us as missiles would; other times we hear the rich reggae as optimistic in tone.

In marked contrast to Moses' serious reggae is zany *Reggae Greats: Sly And Robbie* (Mango 9787). Drummer **Sly Dunbar** and bassist **Robbie Shakespeare** are the premier rhythm team in the genre (credits with Moses, Wailing Souls, countless more) and world-renowned producers, but their booming, uniform dub here makes for a trying listening experience. "Groucho" Smykle adds tape echo, reverb, and phase effects without a thought to sonic colors, rhythmic drama, anything. Only someone with lungs clogged with ganja smoke could dance to this high-tech sludge.

Reggae Greats: Strictly For Lovers (Mango 9788) showcases 12 exponents of '80s lovers' rock, the euphonious slow or mid-tempo reggae indebted to American sweet soul music. The album affords pleasure even if the Tamlians aren't springtime Chi-Lites, Ruddy Thomas is no Curtis Mayfield, and boy wonder Junior Tucker makes me pine for the wiser falsetto of Stylistic Russell Thompkins. Barry Biggs' *Wide Awake In A Dream*, coddled by his aching singing and wondrous production, is sublime pop music; so's Winston Reedy's title-tells-all *Dim The Lights*. Jamaican heroes Dennis Brown and Ken Boothe each turn in a so-so performance. Further investigation of lovers' rock should lead to the cream of the crop: Gregory Isaacs, Sugar Minott, and the Mighty Diamonds.

The British trio **Aswad**, chart heroes in their homeland, contributed an agreeable tune to *Strictly For Lovers*. After years of personnel changes and shifts in musical direction, founding member Brinsley Forde and manager/producer "Reuben" Campbell have settled on slick pop-reggae with a modicum of Rasta rootsiness. On *Rebel Souls* (Mango 9780) the restrained singing of Forde and Drummie Zeb perfectly suits the formulaic flow of the burnished rhythms—it's junk: Forde's vocals shaky and perfunctory, the lyrics half-baked, the grooves cloying. Ear candy *Gave You My Love* and *I Asked The Question* scrape by on sprightly melodies, but there are nine more songs to cope with, including emotionally vacuous covers of Toots Hibbert's *5446 Was My Number* and

Marvin Gaye's *Mercy Mercy Me*.

Jamaican **InI Kamoze's** *Statement* (Mango 9800), on the other hand, overflows with soulfulness. Kamoze sings moderately tuneful homilies on Jah, Babylon, Rasta pride, and male chauvinism-style love. His rhapsody is sprinkled with saucy voice inflections, mannerisms, and pronunciations—such as the second syllable of "police" articulated as the plural of louse. The skull-driving riddim comes courtesy of Sly and Robbie, aided by guitarist Willie Lindo, synthesizer player Robbie Lyn, and now-coherent sound mixer Smykle. Kamoze's pious sarcasm jangles the nerves if heard frequently, as does the state-of-the-art groove, but he's a holy terror worth turning to on occasion. Believe him when he states "What comes from my heart is no lie."

Don Carlos's *Just A Passing Glance* (RAS 3008) captures his delight over matters of the heart and, especially, the freedom promised him by the Rastafarian faith. The shy dread's sweet crooning, uncomplicated words, and gentle, bubbly tunes reach out to believers and nonbelievers alike. *Zion Train*, *You Are My Sunshine*, and other good cheer numbers further sparkle for the superbly understated riddim fabricated by ex-Wailers and the Roots Radics. *I Just Can't Stop* is the album's sensation; don't second guess yourself for humming along to this tale of a slave on the lam, for imminent liberation is being celebrated. Dreamy Carlos sports a smile, leaving confrontation and anger to others.

Well-respected musician/impresario **Augustus Pablo** has gathered songs by eight artists off his Kingston record labels for *Rockers All-Star Explosion* (Alligator 8310). These minor-league singers have their assorted flaws glaringly exposed when the vocals are bolstered by Pablo's eerie, rough settings. Although Sister Frica, Norris Reid, Delroy Williams, and the rest impress for their Jah-serving sincerity, their offerings are too primitively quaint to appeal to anyone save the committed reggae fan. Album bonus: two eccentric instrumentals featuring melodic-tooter Pablo.

It's ironic that the most popular global advocates of reggae are the integrated British outfit UB40, grand appropriators of a black music idiom akin to now-defunct Scottish soulmen Average White Band. Kansas City's paleface **Blue Riddim Band** may not do much globetrotting, but they did tear up the 1982 Reggae Sunsplash, blanketing Jamaica's Montego Bay with rockin' ska and reggae sounds the skeptical audience quickly took to. *Alive In Jamaica* (Flying Fish 325) documents about half of the spirited performance. The sextet, with guests on harmonica, keyboards, and percussion, kept up a steady don't-look-back pulse as they knowingly handled songs associated with the Silverstones, Bob Andy, and Studio One producer Clement Dodd. "Merdaa!" shouted emcee Clint O'Neil. For a time that summer morning the Riddim posse, er, slayed all within reach of their music.

—frank-john hadley

looped, angled solo line; Sandstrom's dizzying, nasty trumpet in a cut-up (as in William Burroughs) form; an erupting collective improvisation. There's Burdell's beautifully notable alto solo in *OJN* and the Ray Nancelike humor of Russell's trumpet in *Blue*. Contrasting with Russell's nervous energy is Hunt's enormous ease and power. In *Overbite* Hunt's vibes flow straightforwardly despite progressing in alternating tempos; his clarity is accentuated by the ambiguity of the leader's drum poly-rhythms.

Song Singing may be the only Ayler homage ever that's neither imitation nor parody: it's 10 minutes of merrily played folk songs interspersed with delirious solos and decorated with exhilarated screams. There are two important advances in Sandstrom's composing, the rock march *Sine Die* and the train blues *Pontiac*, a showpiece for his hysterically super-charged guitar. Especially in the latter you can hear a dangerously accurate instinct for form gathering wayward, even clashing elements into a unity. He's definitely becoming a composer to reckon with.

How does *Conserving NRG* compare with the earlier *Hal Russell NRG Ensemble* (Nessa 21)? It's just as fine and very different with, besides the above-noted advances, some new instruments added to the Ensemble's arsenal. Get both albums, and may the joy this quintet shares be yours, too. —*John Litweiler*



DAVID LIEBMAN

SWEET FURY—From *Bebop To Now 1002*: *FULL NELSON*; *A DISTANT SONG*; *NADIR*; *SPRING '82*; *MISSING PERSON*; *TENDER MERCIES*; *FEU VERT*; *A PICTURE OF DORIAN GREY*.

Personnel: Liebman, soprano saxophone, flute; Don Thompson, bass (cut 5), piano, vibes; Steve La Spina, bass; Claude Ranger, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

It's tempting but probably incorrect to call this experimental music, for its precepts of tonal and metrical freedom have been around now in jazz for some three decades and the practitioners recorded here have grown to musical maturity in their wake. Further, although some trappings of the New Thing are present—shrill, sometimes gagging reed sonorities, arhythmic percussion sounds, metallic chordal clusters,

plus the abstract values of angularity, dissonance, and surprise—these devices are not used as ends in themselves but as means to a higher level of musical communication. Moreover, the music of David Liebman is not hopelessly ingrown, as is some experimental music, but is predicated on a respect for the listener's powers of perception and concentration. What is conveyed most in this music are the qualities of honesty, sincerity, and integrity—values necessary in any form of successful improvised music.

Consider *Full Nelson*, an extension, in spirit, of Miles Davis' *Half Nelson*. There's nothing conventionally beautiful to listen to here, for this is naked music, music stripped of its pretty qualifiers and polite cadences. What remains is the spirit of come-what-may invention hall-marked by Steve La Spina's taut, fluent solo lines and Claude Ranger's drum solo, which seems to tightly encapsulate all that has gone before. And the aptly titled *A Distant Song* uses languid, flowing time to show that free playing is able to embody more than just one emotion—anger—suggesting a pathos led by Liebman's mournful soprano running the gamut of cries, sobs, and whimpers. *Missing Person* creates ensemble whines and cries which unfold upon themselves, set off with otherworldly trills and moans to convey a sense of loss.

The album's strongest track, however, is

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Tender Mercies. On this, which begins as a flute pastoral, the group flows in a way that transcends technical description. Pianist Don Thompson plays a remarkably impressionistic solo, notable for his intent and control. Held in a delicate balance, this music is a whole unto itself, without any partisan axes to grind. Bassist La Spina replies with notes aptly chosen and carefully articulated. The ensemble ebbs and flows.

Is there any reason not to give this five stars? This is music that demands to be judged on its own exacting terms and which will repay many careful listenings. —*Jon Balleras*



LESTER YOUNG

CARNEGIE BLUES—Verve 825-101: *CARNEGIE BLUES*; *TEA FOR TWO*; *BLUES*; *I GOT RHYTHM*; *LESTER'S BLUES*; *I COVER THE WATERFRONT*; *LESTER GAMBOLS*; *MEDLEY (ROBBINS' NEST, POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS, CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS)*.

Personnel: Cuts 1-4: Buck Clayton, Joe Guy, trumpet; Young, Coleman Hawkins, Illinois Jacquet, saxophone; Ken Kersey, piano; John Collins, guitar; Al McKibbin, bass; J. C. Heard, drums. Cuts 5-7: Young, saxophone; Oscar Peterson, piano; Ellis, guitar; Brown, bass; Heard, drums. Cut 8: Young, Jacquet, Flip Phillips, saxophone; Peterson, piano; Ellis, guitar; Brown, bass; Jo Jones, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

NORMAN GRANZ' JAZZ AT THE PHILHARMONIC: HARTFORD, 1953—Pablo Live 2308-240: *COTTON TAIL*; *AIR MAIL SPECIAL*; *SWINGING ON A STAR*; *THE MAN I LOVE*; *SEVEN COME ELEVEN*; *D.B. BLUES*; *I COVER THE WATERFRONT*; *UP 'N ADAM*.

Personnel: Charlie Shavers, Roy Eldridge, trumpet; Bill Harris, trombone; Young, Ben Webster, Flip Phillips, Benny Carter, Willie Smith, saxophone; Oscar Peterson, piano; Herb Ellis, guitar; Ray Brown, bass; Gene Krupa, J. C. Heard, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

Given the scant attention to record keeping that must have prevailed during the heyday of the Norman Granz JATP roadshows, it's no wonder that confusion still haunts discographers of this lively period and should prove inadvertently befuddling to even Mr. Granz himself.

For example, in his brief note on the Pablo LP, Granz tells us "this album consists entirely of unreleased material" from a Hartford concert. Yet, the three Lester Young quartet numbers he has included are the identical performances he issued 27 years ago on the original 4-

LP box set, *JATP Vol. 16*. And since that material was part of the catalog Granz sold to MGM in 1960 and which subsequently came under the license of Polygram for the present Verve reissue series, the three quartet tracks on the Verve LP are the same as the ones on Pablo, notwithstanding the fact that they've been retitled.

And while we're on the subject of titles, the original *JATP Vol. 16* assigned for no known reason the titles *Lester's Blues to Up 'n Adam* and *Lester Gambols to Lester Leaps In*. The Verve collection, perhaps as a matter of record, uses the old JATP titles, although Bob Porter points out the discrepancy in his album notes. Not so easily explained though is why Granz on the new Pablo album cites *Up 'n Adam* as *D.B. Blues* and gives the *Up 'n Adam* name to *Lester Leaps In*. If all this wasn't confusing enough, the Pablo album gives a date of May 1953; Porter says September 19; and Jepsen's Lester Young discography offers September 23.

All this scholarly gobbledygook is really much ado about three very marginal Young concert set pieces, however. Say what you like about not standing still, forward-looking attitudes and all that; but when Young lost (or set aside) the hollow, piping tenor sound of his Basie days, he bit into the apple of experimentation and lost his lease on the musical Eden into which he was apparently born. His sound here is strong, heavy, and forceful, not unlike the way Bud Freeman has always sounded, save for the suppressed vibrato. Except that for Bud, that sound was the Holy Grail. For Lester it's just a little east of Eden.

What makes the Pablo LP well worth having, however, is the long jam session on *Cotton Tail*, which is quite different indeed from its counterpart on the old *JATP Vol. 16* as well as another performance recorded in Japan (Pablo Live 2620-104). Benny Carter is brilliant in solo and falls into some powerful riffs with Willie Smith. Bill Harris' trombone is a sheer wonder, and you're not likely to find more fiery fours and eights anywhere than the ones Ben Webster and Flip Phillips knock back and forth. If you weren't around in the '50s and have ever wondered why mass audiences came out to hear real jazz then, this album has a lot of the answers, including a fine set by Oscar Peterson and Herb Ellis.

The Verve JATP collection is centered entirely on Lester, especially the immediate post-war period right after he left the Army late in 1945. The never-before-released *Carnegie Blues* from May 1946 gives us a Prez as pure and unspoiled as the one who played the Spirituals To Swing and Benny Goodman Carnegie Hall concerts in 1938. Excerpted Young solos from jam sessions on *Blues* and *I Got Rhythm* (also previously unissued) are equally magnificent, although the complete performance contexts are apparently lost. Granz caught Lester at the height of his powers in wonderfully open-ended showcases during this period (a gorgeous *I Found A New Baby* is on *The Rarest Concerts*, Verve 815 149-1), and they're performances to be treasured. The same can't be said for a 1957 medley, which is at best anticlimactic.

—*John McDonough*



M'BOOM

COLLAGE—Soul Note 1059: *CIRCLES*; *IT'S TIME*; *JAMAICAN SUN*; *STREET DANCE*; *MR. SEVEN*; *A QUIET PLACE*.

Personnel: Max Roach, drums, bass drum, concert snare drum, vibraphone, marimba; Joe Chambers, marimba, vibraphone, bass marimba, xylophone; Roy Brooks, steel drums, musical saw, concert tom toms, percussion; Warren Smith, drums, timpani, vibraphone, bass marimba; Ray Mantilla, congas, timbales, bongos, xylophone, percussion; Kenyatte Abdur-Rahman; drums, xylophone, percussion; Fred King, timpani, vibraphone, percussion; Freddie Waits, percussion, drums, bass marimba; Eli Fountain, vibraphone, xylophone, drums, percussion; Eddie Allen, percussion.

★ ★ ★

CLARKE/CYRILLE/ GRAVES/MOYE

PIECES OF TIME—Soul Note 1078: *LAURENT*; *NIBALDI ISLE*; *NO. 11*; *ENERGY CYCLES*; *DRUM SONG FOR LEADBELLY*; *PIECES OF TIME (PERSONAL STATEMENTS)*.

Personnel: Kenny Clarke, drums, bendir, voice, percussion; Andrew Cyrille, drums, balafon, talking drum, voice, percussion; Milford Graves, drums, bongos, darabukka, mrdanga, water pan, voice, percussion; Famoudou Don Moye, sun percussion (drums, timpani, balafon, pan bass drum, talking drum, bamboo horn, conch shells, etc.).

★ ★ ★ ★

PIERRE FAVRE ENSEMBLE

SINGING DRUMS—ECM 1272: *RAIN FOREST*; *CARNEVAL OF THE FOUR*; *METAL BIRDS*; *EDGE OF THE WING*; *PRISM*; *FROG SONGS*; *BEYOND THE BLUE*.

Personnel: Favre, drums, gongs, tuned gongs, crotales, bowed cymbals; Paul Motian, drums, gongs, crotales, calabasses, rod-brushes; Fredy Studer, drums, gongs, log drums, bowed cymbals; Nana Vasconcelos, berimbau, voice, tympani, conga, water pot, shakers, bells.

★ ★ ★

Percussion's ritualistic imprint on world music is felt in the work of these ensembles. Yet, only *Pieces Of Time* and *Singing Drums* attempt to convey an overt sense of ritual to the listener. On *Collage*, a concert aura prevails. Because of its size and the assumption of front-line functions by vibraphones and other melodic percussives, the immediate impact of M'Boom's program stems from its orchestral

proportions and close-order precision. This precludes, however, the intimate, otherworldly atmosphere that is the strong suit of the two quartets.

The case that less is more centers around the quartets' elastic interaction; particularly on Milford Graves' *Energy Cycles*, form and content are performer-generated. Individuality is more ably asserted; Nana Vasconcelos' Amazonic hues give Pierre Favre's varied compositions a programmatic cohesion. There are compositional implications, as well. A third of *Pieces Of Time* is in two- and three-minute segments, promoting the concision evident on Kenny Clarke's *Laurent* and Andrew Cyrille's *Drum Song For Leadbelly*, both scored exclusively for traps. Structurally, much of *Singing Drums* is compact, whether Favre draws on folk materials, as on the aptly named *Carnaval Of The Four*, or a more abstract premise, as on the ethereal *Beyond The Blue*.

Both *Collage* and *Pieces Of Time* benefit from drawing, compositionally, from most or all of their respective performers. Famoudou Don Moye's *Nibaldi Isle*, a vivid color study, counterbalances the traps showcases. *Circles*, penned by Joe Chambers, an accomplished keyboardist as well as a percussionist, opens *Collage* with a fine integration of thematic development and shifting timbres. The lingering impression, however, is that *Collage* and *Singing Drums* are works of design, while *Pieces Of Time* reflects a deeper communion, an intensity of purpose that the other programs do not broach, in large part.

On Max Roach's riveting *It's Time*, originally scored for orchestra and chorus, M'Boom demonstrates that it can deliver a forceful performance—when the material requires one. M'Boom is essentially a composer and arranger's forum whose agenda, in no small part, is to establish that percussion instruments can assume any compositional function. Theory and practice cohere best with the heroic proportions of *It's Time*, rather than on a casual piece such as Roach's *Street Dance*. On the latter, timpani adhere to a vamp figure, a concert snare, severed from the trap set, keeps the meter crisp, while chimes and xylophone give the sunny, laidback theme harmonic sparkle, resulting in a piece that is synchronized rather than organic.

Overall, the creative terrain staked out by these percussive ensembles is vast, exotic, and inhabitable. —bill shoemaker

WEATHER REPORT

SPORTIN' LIFE—Columbia 39908: *CORNER POCKET; INDISCRETIONS; HOT CARGO; CONFIANCS; PEARL ON THE HALF-SHELL; WHAT'S GOING ON; FACE ON THE BARROOM FLOOR; ICE-PICK WILLY*

Personnel: Zawinul, keyboards; Wayne Shorter, soprano, tenor saxophone; Victor Bailey, bass, vocals (cut 4); Omar Hakim, drums, vocals (4); Mino Cinelu, percussion, vocals (4), bass, acoustic guitar (4); Bobby McFerrin (1, 3, 5, 8), Carl Anderson, Dee Dee Bellson, Alfie Silas (1, 3, 8), vocals.

★ ★ ★ ★

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has been that the group is too formulaic and Zawinul-dominated. Certainly the first three albums since Jaco's departure bear this out—1982's *Weather Report*, '83's *Procession*, and '84's *Domino Theory*.

The band was in a transitional period through these albums. Youngsters Hakim, Bailey, and percussionist Jose Rossy (who has since departed) were in the process of assimilating into the group, so it was only natural (more efficient) that Zawinul take control. I don't know if Shorter saw it that way, but that is what happened.

Shorter's relative obscurity during this transitional period remains a mystery. Those albums were formulaic and Zawinul-dominated. But that argument falls apart with *Sportin' Life*. Shorter's contributions are indeed felt on this 14th Weather Report LP, the group's finest since Jaco went on to bigger (as in big band) things. Not only did he contribute two of the album's eight compositions—the melancholy *Face On The Barroom Floor* and the funky Caribbean-flavored *Pearl On The Half-Shell*—but you can actually hear his horn. This time out he's not buried beneath an avalanche of high-tech toys.

Though *Pearl* sounds a bit reminiscent of Azymuth, Shorter does open up and blow with authority on tenor. And his sublime soprano playing on *Face* is right up front where it belongs, with Zawinul supplying a soft and subtle cushion behind him. Zawinul also plays sparingly on the cinematic *Indiscretions*, allowing Shorter's soulful tenor to once again have its say.

The sidemen have more than a pedestrian role here. Bailey gets to strut on *What's Going On*, a touching tribute to the late, great Marvin Gaye, while Hakim bashes and crashes with impunity on *Ice-Pick Willy*. These two have grown together in this band. They've proven themselves, and now that they no longer have to worry about "making the cut" they can open up and be themselves, which they do here.

Newcomer Mino Cinelu adds a lot to this band. Not only does he fill the all-important percussion chair (following in the footsteps of Airta, Alex Acuna, Robert Thomas, and Rossy) but he's a talented multi-instrumentalist as well. *Confians* is a virtual one-man show of his abilities, in which the former-Miles percussionist sings his own composition and accompanies himself on acoustic guitar and overdubbed bass lines. The naive, engaging quality of this lilting melody fits right in with Zawinul's penchant for folk music, and Cinelu sings it with heartfelt sincerity. You can bet that he wouldn't have gotten away with such sweet sentiments in Miles' group.

Hot Cargo is an exotic oddity. With its techno-pulse backbeat, cowbell and conga fills, subliminal steel drum sounds, and happy-time polka harmonies between Shorter's tenor and Zawinul's accordion-like synth, it sounds like Bill Laswell meets Tito Puente and Eddie Blazonczyk in the Caribbean. *Corner Pocket*, the album's ear-grabbing opener, follows in the tradition of such radio-play offerings as *Birdland* or, more recently, *Db Waltz*. Dig the crazy Martian-scat intro by the Weather Report Choir (McFerrin, Anderson, Bellson, and Silas). That group of energized vocalists returns for the

supercharged closer, *Ice-Pick Willy*, in which everybody gets off, particularly Shorter on tenor.

For the first time in a long time, Weather Report sounds like a band. Of course, *Mysterious Traveller* holdouts may not care for the funk-and-vocals direction the group has taken of late. But that was more than a decade ago and the revolving door of personnel has spun several times since then. This current combination clicks for me. I hope it lasts a while longer before the door spins again.

—bill milkowski



JOE PASS/ J. J. JOHNSON

WE'LL BE TOGETHER AGAIN—Pablo 2310-911: *WAVE; WE'LL BE TOGETHER AGAIN; NAKED AS A JAYBIRD; BLUE BOSSA; LIMEHOUSE BLUES; HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON; BUD'S BLUES; NATURE BOY; SOLAR; WHEN LIGHTS ARE LOW.*

Personnel: Pass, guitar; Johnson, trombone.

★ ★ ★ ★

ED BICKERT/ ROB McCONNELL

MUTUAL STREET—Innovation 0009: *ROYAL GARDEN BLUES; WRAP YOUR TROUBLES IN DREAMS; IMAGINATION/WHAT IS THERE TO SAY; I'LL BE AROUND; APRIL IN PARIS; STRANGE MUSIC; EVERYWHERE; OPEN COUNTRY; SWEET AND LOVELY; MAYBE YOU'LL BE THERE.*

Personnel: Bickert, guitar; McConnell, valve trombone.

★ ★ ★ ★

Certain musicians develop the ability to play as a one-man band. They integrate rhythm, melody, and harmony in a manner such that the listener fills in the missing parts and instruments. They may play single-line or polyphonic instruments, but the result is the same—a complete picture.

These records each pair a one-man band with a conversational partner. The similarities are obvious—trombonist/arranger meets consummate guitarist in an album of intimate duets. But the one-man band musician plays a different instrument on each album. This, plus different concepts of swing and ensemble structure, makes these albums less similar than their instrumentation would indicate.

Pass is the one-man band on *Together Again*. He blends walking bass lines, walking chords, arpeggios, single streams of notes,

call-and-response lines and chords, and broad as well as subtle rhythmic variations. He alternates melody statements with Johnson, who blows as if he's in front of a full rhythm section. But the trombonist sounds more rounded—rounded tone, rounded phrases—than usual. He ducks behind Pass occasionally and offers sketchy background passages, but not nearly so many as McConnell.

McConnell, by virtue of his flowing saxophone-like sonorities, continuously connected phrases delineating the chord changes, and fuller background counterpoint, becomes the one-man band on his album. The ensemble melody passages lean more toward trombone lead with chordal accompaniment. When Bickert solos, he's more direct than Pass and involves mostly single lines and sparsely placed chords.

Both groups swing, with Bickert/McConnell feeling time in a Swing Era vein and Pass/Johnson breaking it up more boppishly. Pass and Johnson quote the blues—form (*Bud's Blues*, *Naked As A Jaybird*), tone (especially Johnson's), scales, emotional presence (Johnson again). They're more urban; Bickert and McConnell are more *Open Country*. The outstanding cuts include *Nature Boy*, where Johnson's muted trombone creates a spell-binding minor mood; *When Lights Are Low*, with its fine easy-going swing; *Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams*, where McConnell suggests that he's the Bobby Hackett of the valve trombone; and *I'll Be Around*, with its bubbling near-up-tempo. These are mature musicians in relaxed conversation. We're lucky to feel included in their intimacy.

—owen cordle

GIORGIO GASLINI

SCHUMANN REFLECTIONS—Soul Note 1120: *VON FREMDEN LÄNDERN UND MENSCHEN*; *KURIOSE GESCHICHTE*; *HASCHE-MANN*; *SCHUMANN REFLECTIONS (I)*; *BITTENDES KIND*; *GLÜCKES GENUS*; *WICHTIGE BEGEBENHEIT*; *SCHUMANN REFLECTIONS (II)*; *TRÄUMEREI*; *AM KAMIN*; *Ritter Vom Steckenpferd*; *SCHUMANN REFLECTIONS (III—LULLABY)*; *FAST ZU ERNST*; *FÜRCHTENMACHEN*; *KIND IN EINSCHLUMMERN*; *SCHUMANN REFLECTIONS (IV)*; *DER DICHTER SPRICHT*.
Personnel: Gaslini, piano; Pero Leveratto, bass; Paolo Pellegatti, drums, percussion.

★ ★ ★

A short time ago it was accepted as an absolute truth that something modern had to be something new. An artist's legitimating task was to divorce himself from the past and create wholly in the present, with an eye toward securing a niche in the future. The enactment of such willed amnesia is no longer a prerequisite of modern art, which nowadays very often acknowledges, incorporates, and transforms the past. There is a danger of simple conservatism and imitation in this, of course, but there is also an opportunity for depth and invention. Giorgio Gaslini's *Schumann Reflections* is a fascinating example of the latter.

The "reflections" consist of four movements that do not embody the music of Robert Schu-

mann (1810-56) in any obvious way, do not include anything like overt quotations or even evocations of mood. Indeed, it is at first difficult to determine just how the *Reflections* reflect Schumann's *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes From Childhood*). Gaslini's four movements are interleaved among the 13 Schumann piano miniatures, which the classically trained Italian plays more or less straightforwardly, and the relationship seems one of merely casual juxtaposition.

But I say "more or less" straightforwardly because Gaslini's Schumann is subtly transformed from the very beginning, even before it is "reflected" in his own music. *Von Fremden Ländern Und Menschen* (*From Foreign Lands*), *Kuriose Geschichte* (*Funny Story*), and *Hasche-Mann* (*Catch Me If You Can*), the first three pieces in *Kinderszenen*, are played not for the gentle lyricism that performers customarily exploit, but for their rhythmic tensions. Gaslini plays them impressively, but analytically, with very deliberate accents on the offbeats that expose Schumann's characteristic style of syncopation as it is boldly and paradoxically set against his equally characteristic tendency to four-square meter. While the *Reflections* make little obvious use of Schumann's melodic material or even emotional tenor, they do penetrate to and explore his metrical structure. It is this that lies at the heart of the *Reflections*.

Of course, the Schumann pieces can stand on their own, and have done so for about 150 years now. More to the point, we do not need to hear the *Kinderszenen* to enjoy Gaslini's music, which is finely wrought, skillfully setting atonality against tonality as well as combining almost minimalist metrical structures with straight-ahead jazz. Like Martial Solal, another European pianist under-recognized in the U.S., Gaslini commands many musical vocabularies, from the classics to jazz to New Music. We do not need the Schumann, but its interwoven presence with the Gaslini develops into a cumulative revelation through which we discover not only a fine new jazz work, but also hear the *Kinderszenen* warhorse as if for the first time—less as the vehicle of sentimental musical narrative than as a brilliant structure of concrete musical elements.

To be sure, the Schumann of *Kinderszenen* is not the Beethoven of the late sonatas any more than Gaslini is as memorable here as, say, Monk at his best. Yet the Italian composer/pianist offers us a fascinating musical experience, an essay in relativity, our perception of any given part shaping the next even as that part alters our perception of what came before it. Each stage of the experience is whole in itself yet also a portion of a greater whole, and the totality amounts to a modest but highly effective reflection on what it means to make music.

—alan axelrod

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RECORD REVIEWS

A Jump Primer

"They have a new expression along old Harlem way," announced Fats Waller in the opening line of his 1937 hit, *The Joint Is Jumpin'*. Within a year or two, there was a proliferation of songs with the word "jump" in the title. These were usually riffing, bouncing swing tunes in the manner of Count Basie's

One O'Clock Jump or *Jumpin' At The Woodside*. Jimmy Rushing sang on Basie's version of *Do You Want To Jump, Children?*, using "jump" interchangeably with "swing," "stomp," and "jive." By the early 1940s, however, jump had become synonymous with the swing-style adaptation of boogie woogie and blues material, exemplified in Jay McShann's 1942 recording of *The Jumpin' Blues*, which featured vocalist Walter Brown and a young

CRITICS' CHOICE

Art Lange

NEW RELEASE: John Renbourn/Stefan Grossman, *Live . . . In Concert* (Shanachie). Two of the best acoustic guitar fingerpickers around sizzle and slide through solo and duo rags, reels, blues, and folk laments.

OLD FAVORITE: Sonny Criss, *Sonny's Dream* (Prestige). A dream showcase for the late, underrated, soulful saxist; pianist Horace Tapscott's '67 tenet charts, subtitled "Birth Of The New Cool," added a muscular sinew to the suave compulsion of Miles' cool conception.

RARA AVIS: Golden Palominos, *Omaha* (Celluloid). Leave it to producer/bassist/mastermind Bill Laswell to out-psychedelicize the '60s San Francisco sound; Moby Grape's original is given the full studio treatment and comes out like Marvin Hagler: marvelous, menacing, and mean.

SCENE: New releases from the expanding Sony library of video jazz cassettes catch Johnny Griffin wailing at the Vanguard and Art Blakey romping at the Smithsonian.

Larry Birnbaum

NEW RELEASE: Wild Jimmy Spruill, *The Hard Grind Bluesman* (Krazy Kat). Although based in NYC, the career of this Carolina-born studio guitarist remains almost totally obscure; much of the material on these reissued 1956-64 sessions is mediocre, but Spruill's solos are simply devastating.

OLD FAVORITE: Mongo Santamaria, *Yambu* (Fantasy). Mongo's '58 debut LP as a bandleader features Willie Bobo, Francisco Aguabela, Carlos Vidal, and Modesto Duran in a rivetingly intense display of Afro-Cuban percussion prowess.

RARA AVIS: Joe Zawinul Trio, *To You With Love* (Strand). Moaning loudly, the pianist leads his unidentified sidemen through a sprightly set of standards, clearly revealing his early stylistic debts to Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, Horace Silver, et al.

SCENE: Bayou-soul accordionist Buckwheat Zydeco and his IIs Sont Partis Band rocking the house down at Biddy Mulligan's in Chicago.

Bill Shoemaker

NEW RELEASE: Daniel Lentz, *Missa Umbrarum* (New Albion). A haunting "mass of shadows" scored for "eight voices with wine glasses and 118 sonic shadows," these sounds draw upon early as well as new music to convey composer Lentz' creative fervor.

OLD FAVORITE: Roscoe Mitchell, *Nonaah* (Nessa). A two-disc tour de force that includes nearly 50 minutes of solo saxophone, a saxophone quartet version of the title piece, plus duos and trios with Braxton, Abrams, Lewis, and Favors, this is Mitchell's most confrontative and satisfying album.

RARA AVIS: Booker Ervin, *The In Between* (Blue Note). This quintet date with trumpeter Richard Williams and pianist Bobby Few is an often-overlooked gem in the tenorman's discography. Hopefully, Blue Note's revival will result in its reissue.

SCENE: Though the competition is constantly improving, Art Cromwell's *Out In The Afternoon* on WPFW remains the most engaging, well-informed forum for new jazz releases, reissues, and rarities in the Capitol City.

Don Palmer

NEW RELEASE: Geri Allen, *The Printmakers* (Minor Music). Allen is a pianist whose abstractions are free enough from the post-Tyner syndrome to incorporate simple blues and Clintonesque funk chords. The music is dense yet light and swinging.

OLD FAVORITE: Augustus Pablo, *King Tubby Meets Rockers Uptown* (Message). This new release is actually an American issue of older material; Pablo's Eastern melodica melodies echoing funk vamps and shimmering keyboards still sound fresh.

RARA AVIS: Max Roach, *We Insist: Freedom Now Suite* (Amigo). This hard-to-get LP once reissued by Columbia featured Abbey Lincoln at her best, accompanied by Max, Olatunji, Booker Little, Coleman Hawkins. The music is searing, topical, still ahead of its time.

SCENE: Henry Threadgill's big band at The Kitchen's Masked Ball in NYC included violin, two drummers, guitar, bass, and horns playing, yup, dance music. Kind of r&b, calypsos, and sweet slow drags with humorous harmonic twists and scorching solos.

alto saxophonist named Charlie Parker.

A month after that session, the wartime recording ban was imposed; when it was lifted the following year, Parker's revolutionary bebop style emerged full-fledged. But no such clear-cut line had marked the dawning of the jump era, which was to continue through the early years of "rhythm & blues" until the characteristic jump style—with its shuffle rhythms, walking bass lines, shouted vocals, and honking saxophones—was appropriated in bastardized form by white teenagers and rechristened "rock & roll."

Cab Calloway had popularized jiving lyrics and jitterbug dancing in the early '30s. In 1936, Count Basie recorded Clarence Smith's eponymous *Boogie Woogie* (originally *Pinetop's Boogie Woogie*) in a combo setting. Two years later, the appearance of boogie piano masters Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson, and Meade "Lux" Lewis at John Hammond's first "From Spirituals To Swing" concert touched off a nationwide boogie craze that lasted well into the postwar period. Basie re-recorded *Boogie Woogie* with his full band, and Tommy Dorsey followed suit to score one of the biggest hits of his career.

Another of the performers at Hammond's Carnegie Hall affair was the original blues shouter, Big Joe Turner. Turner, accompanied by Pete Johnson, had made his vinyl debut earlier that year with *Cherry Red* and *Roll 'Em, Pete*. Also in 1938, Slim Gaillard and Slam Stewart cut *Flat Foot Floogie*, the first and most successful in a long string of Gaillard jive novelties, and singer/saxophonist **Louis Jordan**, who came to epitomize the jump sound, waxed his first recordings as a bandleader.

Jordan, despite his enormous popularity among both blacks and whites throughout the '40s, was nearly forgotten in the ensuing years and had only begun to attract new interest by the time of his death in 1975. A "greatest hits" collection remained in print, but the bulk of his considerable output was unavailable until the early 1980s, when a spate of reissue LPs began to flow from Europe.

Look Out! . . . It's Louis Jordan And The Tympani Five (British Charly 1948) is perhaps the best of the recent Jordan releases. Compiler Cliff White has made an excellent selection that spans Jordan's decade-and-a-half tenure with the Decca label while avoiding the well-known hits of the immediate postwar years. *Keep A Knockin'*, from 1939, probably inspired Little Richard's rocked-out 1957 version, although the song itself had been recorded previously by James "Boodle It" Wiggins and by Lil Johnson. Jordan's much-copied *Ain't That Just Like A Woman*, from 1946, offers the revelation of Carl Hogan's guitar introduction, clearly the source of Chuck Berry's immortal preamble to *Johnny B. Goode*; but this motif, too, had earlier antecedents. The remainder of the album leans heavily on boogie and comedy material, arranged for Jordan's Tympani Five, whose five- or six-man roster varied considerably through the years. An unabashed

entertainer in the Calloway mold, Jordan, like other jump artists, was anathema to "progressive" jazz critics. Rock pundits of the '60s had never heard his music, but Fats Domino, Bill Haley, and Ray Charles remembered him well, as did the modern bluesmen of Chicago and the Deep South.

Vibraphonist **Lionel Hampton** achieved respectability on the concert stage with the Benny Goodman Quartet, but as a band-leader has long been renowned as much for showmanship as musicianship. Many of his early big band sides for Decca have been reissued by MCA, but a new collection, *Leapin' With Lionel* (British Affinity 1000), focuses more specifically on Hampton's contributions to the development of r&b and rock. The album contains both the 1942 and '44 renditions of Hampton's theme song, *Flying Home*, which served as the launching pad for the "honking" tenor saxophone style. Illinois Jacquet's percussive, one-note riffing on the former version, and Arnett Cobb's urgent, grainy-toned moaning on the latter paved the way for a generation of histrionic r&b wailers, and for the distorted timbres of the 1960s avant garde. Both versions of the influential *Hamp's Boogie Woogie* are also presented: *No. 1*, a big-band pastiche of Albert Ammons devices, features pianist Milt Buckner; *No. 2* features Ammons himself. Hampton's jazzier side is showcased on two of his classic compositions, *Red Top* and *Midnight Sun*, but boogie and novelty numbers predominate, among them an arrangement of the Johnny Lee Wills western-swing hit, *Rag Mop*, in which Hamp's horn section mimics a steel guitar.

After leaving Hampton in 1943, **Illinois Jacquet** played with the Calloway and Basie bands before forming his own combo. He made records for Savoy, Aladdin, and Mercury, but gained his greatest fame on stage with various Jazz At The Philharmonic ensembles. His screeching high notes evoked public adulation as well as critical scorn, and in his later career Jacquet adopted a more orthodox approach. *Illinois Jacquet And His Tenor Sax* (Aladdin 803) is a French facsimile of the original Aladdin LP, drawn from 1945 and '47 sessions. Among Jacquet's sidemen are Miles Davis, Fats Navarro, J. J. Johnson, Leo Parker, and trumpeter Russell Jacquet, the saxophonist's brother, who contributes a bluesy vocal on *Throw It Out Of Your Mind Baby*. Besides an extended version of *Flying Home*, the album includes such frenzied sides as *Blow Illinois Blow* and *Sahara Heat*, but in less frantic moments, Jacquet's style more nearly resembles later soul-jazz than r&b or rock & roll.

Pianist **Buddy Johnson** first recorded with a small combo in 1939. In 1944 he expanded his ensemble to 14 pieces, and on the strength of his simple, bluesy charts was able to maintain a full complement of musicians until the late '50s, long after most big bands had folded. *Fine Brown Frame* (MCA 1356) covers Johnson's 1944-52 heyday on the Decca label. *Walk 'Em*, with its medium-tempo shuffle beat, became Johnson's best

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RECORD REVIEWS

known theme, and was followed by such similar arrangements as *Li'l Dog, Shake 'Em Up*, and *Shufflin' And Rollin'*, all three featuring Purvis Henson's Jacquet-inspired tenor saxophone. Johnson was also a gifted composer of ballads; here, his sister Ella sings the classic *Since I Fell For You* in a detached, yet moving style, and Arthur Prysock croons *Ever Since The One I Love's Been Gone* in a dulcet baritone. Buddy himself vocalizes on the bouncy *Fine Brown Frame*, which later became a hit for Nellie Lutcher.

Jump music was not the exclusive preserve of blacks; indeed, the biggest hit of the boogie era was probably Will Bradley's *Beat Me Daddy, Eight To The Bar* in 1940. Trombonist Bradley led his band jointly with drummer Ray McKinley; their pianist was **Freddy Slack**, a white boogie specialist who accompanied T-Bone Walker on some of the blues guitarist's early recordings. Having formed his own band in 1942, Slack had a huge success with *Cow Cow Boogie*, which featured 17-year-old singer Ella Mae Morse. The song is not based on pianist Charles "Cow Cow" Davenport's late-'20s original; instead, lyricist Don Raye (who also wrote *Beat Me Daddy* and *Down The Road Apiece* for Bradley) fashioned an elaborate pun on the title, applying "hep" lingo to the western tale of a "swing half-breed." *Behind The Eight-Beat* (Pausa 9027) includes *Cow Cow Boogie* and other of Slack's band sides for Capitol, along with later combo sessions produced by Dave Dexter. Among the Capitol tracks is *House Of Blue Lights*, another Slack/Raye/Morse collaboration, which was subsequently recorded in garbled form by Chuck Berry.

On the heels of *Flat Foot Floogie*, Slim and Slam recorded *Tutti Frutti*, possibly the ancestor of Little Richard's greatly altered version. In any case, Richard never again sang quite such inane lyrics, while **Slim Gaillard** made a career out of them, strongly influencing such musically inclined humorists as Stan Freberg and Steve Allen. *Cement Mixer* (Folklyric 9038) is drawn from the period 1945-49, during which Gaillard, having parted with Slam Stewart, teamed up with bassist Bam Brown. A fine singer and pianist a la Nat King Cole, Gaillard imbues even such absurd compositions as *When Banana Skins Are Falling* and *The Hogan Song* with a relaxed sense of swing.

Helen Humes replaced Billie Holiday in Count Basie's band, where she handled the pop and ballad vocals while Jimmy Rushing sang the blues. From 1944-56 she recorded blues, boogies, ballads, torch songs, pop standards, and novelties for various labels with such ensembles as the Leonard Feather Hiptet, the Bill Doggett Octet, Roy Milton's Band, Dexter Gordon's Orchestra, and Gerald Wiggins' Orchestra. The song that established Humes in the r&b field, *Be-Baba-Leba*, is the title track of a reissue album on the Swedish Whiskey, Women, And . . . label (KM-701). Recorded in 1945, it was successfully covered by Lionel Hampton as *Hey! Ba-Ba-Re-Bop* (included on Hampton's

Affinity LP), which was in turn covered by the Glenn Miller Orchestra. Also from 1945 is *Voo-It*, a title appropriated from the Gaillard lexicon, the melody of which was duplicated on Louis Jordan's best-seller, *Choo Choo Ch'Boogie*, the following year. Humes resumed her career as a jazz singer in later years, performing until her death in 1981.

Hadda Brooks, the first artist to record for the Modern label, was known primarily as a boogie pianist, although she was an excellent singer as well. Classically trained, she waxed such keyboard hybrids as *Grieg's Concerto Boogie In A Minor* and *Humoresque Boogie*. Little remembered today, Brooks recorded prolifically in the late '40s and appeared in several films. *Queen Of The Boogie* (Dutch Oldie Blues 2826), is thus far the only available long-playing sample of her material. Brooks' earliest session features an unctuous alto saxophonist, and her percussive, Ammons-inflected piano work is heard to best advantage on later trio dates.

Recorded in late 1944, **Cecil Gant's** *Wonder* was the first big crossover hit by a black artist on an independent Los Angeles label. Although its success catalyzed the entire postwar r&b explosion, the song itself was a sentimental pop ballad, which probably accounted for its unusually broad appeal. "Pvt. Cecil Gant, The G.I. Sing-Sation," as he was billed, admired the crooning of Bing Crosby, but was primarily influenced by his fellow Nashvillean, blues singer, and pianist Leroy Carr. Gant recorded a great many sides for a succession of labels until his untimely death in 1951, but was never able to match his initial triumph. *Rock The Boogie* (British Crazy Kat 7413), is one of several recent Gant reissues. It offers mostly boogie and blues numbers recorded for Gilt Edge and other small West Coast labels before Gant's return to Nashville in 1947. Uptempo instrumentals such as *Cecil Boogie*, *Hogan's Alley*, and *Rock The Boogie* display his rhythmic keyboard mastery, while such blues sides as *Long Distance* and *Little Baby You're Running Wild* demonstrate his influence on Delta bluesmen like Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf.

Also on Crazy Kat is *Stomping Room Only* (KK 7419), a collection of bandleader **Tiny Bradshaw's** early '50s recordings. An ingratiating vocalist, Bradshaw sang with Horace Henderson's Collegians in the late '20s; in 1934 he formed his own band and was billed as the "Super Cab Calloway." But by the time these records were cut, he had scaled back his big band and was performing in a hard-swinging style similar to Buddy Johnson's. Of particular interest is Bradshaw's original 1951 rendition of *The Train Kept A-Rollin'*, a reworked adaptation of **Freddy Slack's** *Cow Cow Boogie*. The song was later covered in frenetic rockabilly fashion by Johnny Burnette, and became an acid-rock standard in the late '60s after a psychedelic treatment by the Yardbirds.

Pianist and singer **Joe Liggin**s made his first records for L.A.'s Exclusive label in 1945, including *The Honeydripper*, one of the prototypes (along with Roy Milton's *R.M. Blues*)

of the postwar r&b combo sound. Later, he switched to Specialty Records and cut another best-seller, *Pink Champagne*. Inspired by Joe's good fortune, his brother Jimmy took up the guitar, formed his own band, and was also signed by Specialty, but enjoyed only modest success. *Saturday Night Boogie Woogie Man* (British Specialty 5020), combines the best-known material of both Liggins brothers on a single LP. Side one, featuring Joe Liggins, includes the original *Pink Champagne* plus re-recordings of Joe's earlier Exclusive hits. Side two, with Jimmy Liggins, contains *Drunk*, Jimmy's biggest seller, as well as *Cadillac Boogie*, the admitted model for Jackie Brenston's 1951 hit, *Rocket 88*, which is often cited as the first rock & roll record.

Amos Milburn's hard-driving boogies embodied what was later known as the rock & roll beat, but on his mellow 1950 hit, *Let's Rock Awhile*, his lyrics specifically contrast leisurely "rock" dancing with uptempo boogie, jitterbug, and jump styles. The Houston-born pianist was a fixture on the r&b charts in the late '40s and early '50s; his triplet piano style was adopted by Little Willie Littlefield, who in turn deeply influenced Fats Domino. Milburn's red-hot 1946 rendition of *Down The Road Apiece* far surpasses the Will Bradley original and clearly forms the basis for Milburn's trademark hit, *Chicken Shack Boogie*, recorded the following year with tenor saxophonist Maxwell Davis' powerhouse combo. Milburn was also a master of the slow, jazzy blues style made popular by Charles Brown, but instead of unrequited love he most often sang about alcohol, following up his number one hit, *Bad Bad Whiskey*, with *Good Good Whiskey* and *One Scotch, One Bourbon, One Beer*. These and other Milburn hits can be found on *Let's Have A Party* (French Pathe Marconi 1546711), a reissue of the original Aladdin LP.

Trumpeter and bandleader **Dave Bartholomew** wrote, arranged, produced, and performed on Fats Domino's landmark Imperial records, as well as those of Smiley Lewis and others. Bartholomew himself had a fair-sized hit in 1949 with *Country Boy*, on the Deluxe label, but none of his later sides was nearly as successful. *Jump Children* (Pathe Marconi 1546601) contains previously issued and unissued material from Bartholomew's Imperial sessions, much of it recorded between takes on other artists' dates. *Country Gal* and *Country Boy Goes Home*, both from 1949, are variations on the *Country Boy* theme, the former offering a fine example of Bartholomew's aggressive, Louis Armstrong-based trumpet work. Other early tracks include *Carnival Day*, a Professor Longhair-style Mardi Gras anthem, and *Little Girl Sing Ding A Ling*, a ribald novelty later popularized by Chuck Berry. The title track, an accelerated 1954 adaptation of *Do You Want To Jump, Children?*, manifestly "rocks" in the modern sense. The irresistibly driving *Can't Take It No More*, featuring a brilliant guitar solo by Justin Adams, was recorded in 1957 but never released—inexplicably, for it

exemplifies New Orleans rock & roll at its zenith.

The advent of the twist in 1960 marked the end of the jitterbug era, which had reached its climax in the post-Presley "golden age" of rock & roll. In the ensuing decade, young whites adopted rock music as their own, truncating and distorting its history to suit their generational conceits.

The older jump style and its leading practi-

tioners were consigned to virtual oblivion until the mid-1970s, when the first European reissues began to appear. The '80s have witnessed something of a jump revival, culminating in the Honeydrippers' hit, *Good Rockin' At Midnight*, but the pioneers of jump, despite their enormous impact on the development of popular music, remain largely unknown and unsung to this day.

—Larry Birnbaum





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the time I was finished singing them. The problem is you can only sing a song so many times with the same arrangement, and you can't change the song too much because it will cease to be what it is. You can only get so much mileage out of them.

SB: Are you saying you're finished with rock & roll?

LR: I'll only come out with another rock & roll album if I'm walking down the street one day and bump into 10 songs that I really *have* to sing, which very well may happen in the next three months. I really love rock & roll. I have a jukebox in my kitchen that's got only rock & roll on it—except for a couple of Sinatra songs. When I come home at the end of the day and I'm tired and I'm kind of bummed, you know, I punch up *Soul Man* on the box. It makes me feel good.

SB: Which rock groups and singers have you been listening to lately?

LR: Well, my very favorite band is Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers. I just love them. And I love all these girl singers that are out—Cyndi Lauper and Annie Lenox [of the Eurythmics] and that girl guitar player who sings in telegram . . . she's a real sparse singer . . . Chrissie Hynde [of the Pretenders]. I think those girls are real hot stylists. Cyndi Lauper is the one that really kills me. People have paid a lot of attention to her orange hair and stuff like that, which is cute, but I don't think they realize how good a singer she is. I saw her live, and she has staggering technique. And lots of heart.

SB: What did you think of Tina Turner's comeback?

LR: I was just delighted. Tina was the girl we all idolized. She is the standard for American female rock & roll; everybody who's ever sang a rock & roll note has to pay a courtesy to Tina Turner. People always say, "How can you sing rock & roll after you're 30?" This just makes me laugh, because no music has

anything to do with age—it has to do with culture, period. And as the culture matures, the form will undulate and expand and contract and bend.

SB: It seems like you're not quite sure of which direction to go next.

LR: I'm in the studio right now with J. D. Souther, you know—we're doing duets together. I haven't exactly abandoned that. I think the record company would like me to make rock & roll records, because it understands them. They are very patient when I come to them and say I'd like to make a record in Spanish and I'd like to do this and I'd like to do that.

SB: A record in Spanish?

LR: Yeah. I've always wanted to make one, but when I say that to the record company, they very rightly say that a Spanish record would have a limited audience. I did *Blue Bayou* in Spanish. I was trying to appease myself, but it didn't work. I want to get Paraquayan harp and a good guitarron player and just make a Mexican record. And I don't care if English-speaking people don't buy it, I really don't. All the Mexican songs I love are from the '20s—they're just gorgeous. I wouldn't do the Mexican Tin Pan Alley stuff or what are considered the classic latin songs that people put on their records. Who's that guy with the suntan and the pretty voice?

SB: Julio Iglesias?

LR: Oh, yeah. He's got a good voice and everything, but that's not where I'm aiming.

SB: You're not concerned with record sales?

LR: Nah. I never think of that, and I don't think you can, really. I mean, you have to consider it only to the extent that it would be silly for me to try to make an album of Scottish lullabies or something. My instincts are generally pretty sound. But, again, my instincts are not based on what I think is going to sell. They only are based on what I would like to express. db

THREADGILL

continued from page 28

experience, you always have to go further; that's what every great writer did. There's not a great writer who ever existed who didn't keep taking chances. Beethoven took those chances, Duke Ellington, Alban Berg. That's why they remain great composers, and that's how they kept opening up new harmonies, new forms, new concepts. Because if they only kept voicing things the way they were voiced, not stretching out the binary and ternary forms, we wouldn't even be talking about them today.

"I compose through the laws of nature. There are ways to compose that have to do with the way that life exists biologically and metaphysically. There are laws that are operating, like the laws that make the sun come out, that bring the rain. I observe the laws of acoustics, for instance, and I submit it all to my heart and my head. I don't just subscribe to a methodology. I think my approach is in line with that of people I've been fond of and studied with, like Muhal—and that's not coincidence, that's the actual fact of the transference of information.

"Of course, there are things that are notated and some things that aren't. This music we're playing comes from an improvisational base, but so does classical music; all the great composers were improvisers who could play, who could sit down and make up music on the spot. Collective improvisation, though, that's what the AACM was about, and we're still with that. But that's not all—evolution has gone on.

"One thing that happened when the music changed from the last period to the present is the shared repertoire disappeared, and a new collective repertoire did not take its place. The community of musicians in New York, they don't know my compositions. Even if they might have heard something, liked it or disliked it on record, most of them don't know how

to play it. You have to understand the makeup of the *piece* and what the improvisation involves, if you're going to play *80° Below*, or a Haydn piece, or *Donna Lee*. And I don't just work in the traditional improvisational methods that occur in traditional jazz. There are no limits to improvisation; if you're going to put a limitation on improvisation, you might as well forget about it. Charlie Parker would never have gotten to where he did if he'd accepted a premise of limits, or Coltrane. What Ornette did was beautiful, too, opening up the whole arena again. Even though a lot of people—even some musicians—haven't caught up with that yet.

"You know, Blood Ulmer told me something he said Ornette used to tell him. He said that jazz is the teacher, and blues is the preacher. And I said, 'Yeah, but time is the reaper.' You can't stop it. There is a destiny that is in the genes and molecular structure of things, that has to happen. I'm really excited right now, because I find I'm stretching again; I feel like if I work I'm going to be able to peel off another layer of skin. It's extreme, but my life has been extreme, and I love it. Ever since I was a kid, I've been interested in change, and the extremism of it. Change is good. It can hurt, but it's still good, because it's evolution. My greatest fear is the fear of not being able to go along with change, of becoming stylistic and set. There are a lot of people who don't believe in evolution, who would like to see things remain the same. And those are the people who don't want to see our music become accessible and strong, and turned over the way pop music is turned over. Because this music makes people think."

Unfailing he persists in his mission, convinced that island of goodness lies somewhere amid the corruption. In a final conflict his unyielding belief meets up with some hardcore human malevolence. The world does not conform to his interior reality. He vaporizes out of the world as we know it, but continues eternally in his mind's quest after its own truth.

—from *When Life Is Cheap* . . . db

1 DAVID FRIESEN. *AMBER SKIES* (from *AMBER SKIES*, Palo Alto). Friesen, Oregon bass; Chick Corea, piano; Joe Henderson, tenor saxophone; Paul Motian, drums.

That's definitely Chick, with either Stanley [Clarke] and Airtio or Eddie [Gomez] and Joe Farrell on *Friends*. I had difficulty distinguishing the bass player; it's hard to tell when a tune has strong accents like that. It sounds like he was recorded electrically, almost like it was not an acoustic bass. If it was not acoustic bass, somebody was trying to make electric sound like acoustic, and if it was acoustic, somebody was playing it with lots of pickups and amplification. Chick played a very nice solo, good tune and arrangement, interesting form; good use of overdub on bass solo. I give it three-and-a-half stars.

2 DAVE HOLLAND. *SONNET* (from *LIFE CYCLE*, ECM). Holland, cello.

That's Dave Holland playing cello. ECM gave me the record and I listened to the other side. I can also tell Manfred [Eicher]'s recording style: classical cellists should get such an incredible recording! You really hear the cello in the present: his mic set-up brings out all the tones, top and bottom. I liked the music and the great feeling; it's a great achievement for a bassist to get the cello under control. The only thing I would do differently is leave some spaces; I miss the sense of motive, space, phrase. Because Dave was able as a bassist to achieve such fine things on the cello in such a lovely manner, four stars.

3 DUKE ELLINGTON/RAY BROWN. *PITTER PATTER PANTHER* (from *ONE FOR BLANTON*, Pablo). Ellington, piano; Brown, acoustic bass.

It was Ray Brown, maybe with Duke. I thought of Jimmy Blanton for a minute, but I realized he didn't record this with Duke, then Ray's attack told me. Jimmy played a slower, more melodic approach. It was "old style;" my musical tastes lie elsewhere. Three stars.

4 MODERN JAZZ QUARTET. *SKETCH* (from *THIRD STREAM MUSIC*, Atlantic). Personnel as guessed. Rec. 1960.

That was the MJQ, who set the standard in the '50s and '60s. As an ensemble together so long they stand alone as having a distinguished style and a special atmosphere and essence to their music. You know them by one note from Milt Jackson—maybe the greatest vibist ever—and one note from John Lewis. Everyone plays his instrument perfectly: Connie Kay on drums and Percy Heath

Miroslav Vitous

By FRED BOUCHARD

The busy Czech bassist had only an hour to spare—what with rehearsing Tom McKinley's *Golden Petals* (a double concerto for bass and bass clarinet) for its premiere with *Musica Viva* at New England Conservatory (where both teach), planning a new tour with trio-mates Chick Corea and Roy Haynes, drafting new curricula at NEC's Jazz Department (which he heads), composing his own bass concerto, and organizing his first solo album for ECM.

So we sipped Pilsener Urquell in his new Boston-area home and rattled off what might be the shortest Blindfold Test in history: 63 minutes flat. Miroslav was thinking just a little faster than he spoke, identified many of the artists with no



prompting or advance info, selected a narrower range of rating than most, and took especial delight in his big-toned forbears on acoustic bass. This was his first Blindfold Test, and he took to the medium as he does to an Olympic pool.

on bass. I love Percy's playing—beautiful, faithful accompaniment, a nice musical touch. I love the way they get into so many different things. But I am of a different generation. Three-and-a-half stars.

5 SHEILA JORDAN/HARVIE SWARTZ. *LAZY AFTERNOON* (from *OLD TIME FEELING*, Palo Alto). Personnel as guessed.

That was Sheila and Harvie. I thought she was Morgana King at first, because of the highs, but she didn't have those lows. I never heard her sing with lyrics before, just wordless things years ago with George Russell. It's an unusual and beautiful duet. Harvie painted some nice pictures on bass to go along with the words. It's new, it had a lot of space, and nice feeling to it. Three-and-a-half.

6 KIP HANRAHAN. *TWO* (from *DESIRE DEVELOPS AN EDGE*, American Clave). Steve Swallow, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, electric bass; Ricky Ford, tenor saxophone.

It sounded like a multi-instrumentalist doing many things. One thing that got in the way were the two, sometimes three, basses. It would have been better if each had left more room for the other, because they were clashing together somehow. The saxophonist likes Wayne Shorter. Two-and-a-half.

7 ALADAR PEGE. *ELVESTETTEM* (from *WINTER ROSE*, Enja). Pege, acoustic bass.

I have no idea who it was because there were no distinguishing characteristics to his playing. Between the two motif statements he brings out every trick in the

book, enough for eight individual songs. I'd rather hear more musical development of one idea, but he deserves credit for having great knowledge of the instrument. Two-and-a-half.

8 OLD AND NEW DREAMS. *SONG OF THE WHALES* (from *OLD AND NEW DREAMS*, ECM). Personnel as guessed.

There was so much bass at the beginning. I couldn't be sure who it was, but Don Cherry announced his name with his first three notes on trumpet: "Don Cher-ry!" Then I knew it was Charlie Haden on bass, Dewey Redman, and Ed Blackwell. It's nice to hear the music of long ago when they were with Ornette return, as it is to hear really creative music alive and thriving. Three-and-a-half.

9 BILL EVANS TRIO. *NARDIS* (from *SPRING LEAVES*, Milestone). Personnel as guessed. Rec. 1961.

I used to live by this music: I know it upside-down, inside-out. It's Bill Evans with Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian. It could be the most incredible trio of all time; the communication between the musicians—as far as dynamic balance, interplay, and sensitivity are concerned—make it one of the major ensembles. They broke down the traditional roles and communicated directly and intensely—bass no longer just kept time, piano no longer just played melody—pure music! The Ornette Coleman Quartet also played the same way on different music. Five stars for Scott, a major innovator on the bass. db

Kenny Kirkland

Playing piano with Wynton Marsalis is only one stop on the young Kirkland's busy road to success.

BY LESLIE GOURSE

Pianist Kenny Kirkland flew to Japan to perform with drummer Grady Tate, bassist Eddie Gomez, and guitarist Jim Hall last November. Since then Kenny has been home only for the major, turn-of-the-year holidays. He calls in to home base regularly from all over the world. At 28, he's regarded as one of the best and probably one of the best-paid, free-lance club/concert/recording jazz pianists in the country. And in that class, he's probably the youngest.

There was no madness in his method. Success just seemed to take him along, as he began poking around in the music world in the 1970s, trying to find the most practical route to take. He had made up his mind only to try to play piano in all styles—funk, classical, latin, rhythm & blues, and jazz—as correctly as he possibly could. In his mid-20s, he fell in with trumpeter Terumasa Hino and toured Japan several times. There, in 1981, he met Wynton Marsalis, who was touring with V.S.O.P. Wynton and Kenny had a friend in common: Wynton's brother Branford, who had told Wynton about Kenny's playing. And Kenny, of course, knew about Wynton because *everyone* in the music world knew about the *wunderkind* by then. Wynton had started his first album (Columbia 37574) with personnel from V.S.O.P. In Japan, he asked Kirkland to finish the album when the two young musicians returned to New York. "I felt as if I had known him a long time immediately," Kenny remembers.

The record was very successful. Kenny played complex music with the clean, clear, smooth touch he had always admired in his jazz piano idols; he had enough force to stand on his own as an impressive young musician next to the powerful trumpeter. And on Wynton's second album, *Think Of One* (Columbia 38641), the group included some of Kirkland's exciting, original compositions, notably *Fuschia*, on which he shines as a soloist, the full force of his tight, swift facility on display. Kenny picks Wynton's



MITCHELL SEIDEL

third album as leader, *Hot House Flowers* (Columbia 39530), as an especial favorite, though Kenny doesn't solo much on it. "So I don't have much opportunity to mess up," he says, with his engaging, persistent smile.

Round-faced and soft-spoken, Kirkland is the easygoing type of person that anybody would like to take home for a friendly dinner—but when he gets up on the bandstand, he dominates. His poise pervades his flowing performances, too. His intense, complex figures just seem to happen; his mastery is a refreshing surprise, in part because he's so young. Filled with youthful energy, he personifies the cutting edge of the state of the art of jazz piano.

Kirkland was the third of four children in the family of a Transit Authority worker and his wife in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. When Kenny was six, the family bought a piano and started him on lessons. He managed to dodge the piano fairly well until he was 13; then it began to rivet his attention. He took classical lessons and practiced—and on the side picked up rhythm & blues from the radio and bought records by James Brown, Sly Stone, and the Temptations. They constituted his blues influence, since he heard no gospel in the Catholic church that his family attended. As a teenager, he heard pianist Larry Willis, who was playing electric piano with Blood, Sweat and Tears. And, soon afterwards, Kenny went to a concert to hear pianist Kenny Barron and his saxist brother Bill. "Kenny Barron was a revelation, so smooth and flowing. I liked his style, his ideas. I wanted to play like that—smooth and clean and clear, very complex and yet I could hear every note," Kenny recalls.

Around that time, too, Kirkland recalls that he heard Herbie Hancock's *Head Hunters*. "That was called jazz in those days," Kirkland recalls with a

chuckle, though he thought it was funk. In any case, that record sent him back to the drawing board, so to speak, to listen to Wynton Kelly. Hearing the relationship between Hancock and Kelly, Kenny Kirkland was inspired to listen to Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, Ahmad Jamal, Hampton Hawes, Bill Evans—and Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, and JoAnne Brackeen—and much more of Kenny Barron. "I tried to learn something from everyone. I'm still listening to them and trying to learn. I still study them."

He also heard *Bitches Brew* by Miles Davis and some late John Coltrane records but couldn't grasp them by taste or theory until years later. And in retrospect Kirkland believes that Willis, Barron, and Hancock, in that order, had the most to do with attracting him to jazz. "I come out of the later pianists and from them went back to study the older ones. I love Hank Jones, for example, and think he must have influenced Kenny Barron, too. They have the same smooth way of playing."

After Catholic public schools, Kirkland attended the Manhattan School of Music, majored for a year-and-a-half in classical piano performance, then switched to classical theory and composition at the end of his second year. "I wasn't playing so much at that time and really started listening to jazz," he recalls. Fumbling around for a way to make a living in music, he decided to become a teacher. But after graduating, he moved into a loft at Eighth Avenue and 30th Street in Manhattan, where musicians came to jam all night—Victor Bailey (the bassist with Weather Report), trumpeter Wallace Roney, and Branford Marsalis. Kenny's friend, Buddy Williams, the drummer for *Saturday Night Live*, told violinist Michal Urbaniak about Kenny. Michal called him and asked if he played synthesizer. "I had never even touched a synthesizer, but I wanted to do the gig. So I told him 'Yeah,' and I got the gig somehow."

In 1977, he made his first European tour with Urbaniak's group, visiting Norway, Sweden, Finland, Holland, Italy, Germany, France, England. Back in New York City, he kept being recommended for jobs, playing with Angela Bofill, and also with Don Alias, a percussionist with Stone Alliance, from 1979-81. Alias had earlier played with Terumasa Hino, who was looking for a pianist. And then Kenny, recommended by Alias, found himself playing with Hino, in Japan—where he met Wynton.

Kenny's notoriety has increased ever since then, certainly in large part because

of the wide exposure of Wynton's group as well as Kenny's artistry. For several years now people have been urging Kenny to make his own record as leader—a venture he didn't feel ready for until this year. Now there's no time to make the record. This spring, after cutting a fourth album with Wynton, Kirkland went to Barbados with Branford, drummer Omar Hakim, and Miles' bassist, Darryl Jones, to back up Sting. Then Kenny flew to New York City for two weekends—long flights—to make records in studios. He returned to Barbados, planning to spend the summer shuttling back and forth between Wynton and Sting—plus tour Japan for a short time with Hino (“a sweet cat and an even better musician,” says Kenny).

Even when Kirkland is theoretically home in Queens, he usually isn't. That is, he's out all day in recording studios. He has made 30 to 40 records with such people as Urbaniak, Miroslav Vitous, Brian Torff, Angela Bofill, Billy Harper, John Scofield, Chico Hamilton, Chico Freeman, Dave Liebman, Dewey Redman, Carla Bley—“she's bad, I admire her”—and Wynton. Most of Kenny's

albums he calls “unimportant” because he doesn't like what he has done on them—a chronic state of mind for him. He's not self-disparaging, just self-propelled, hoping the next thing he does will please him more, until he gets to the level he wants to play at and never expects to reach.

The price of playing professionally everyday is that he has little time to practice. For performances, he must do his job to the best of his abilities. He'd like to practice Bach preludes and fugues more, because they're good for the fingers, and do scales in 10ths and thirds and sixths, and contrary motions, and etudes. “When I practice, a lot of things can go through my head. Nothing bothers me. I can work things out. In performance, it's more difficult to take chances,” he says. He would also like to listen more to Stravinsky, Bartok, Schönberg, Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms—“I love them; I don't love everyone, just them.

“I'm open to all kinds of music. Wynton could be more open to other musics”—and the trumpeter objects somewhat to Kenny's catholic tastes. “But

Wynton is a serious musician of the highest caliber. You can hear it when he plays. I haven't played with anyone who is as proficient on his instrument as Wynton is. He's so into music, into jazz, so serious. He plays good piano, too.”

For Kenny's own record, he'll use some latin rhythms, some straightahead pieces, and perhaps a couple of standards. “Just doing two standards is hard enough for me. I don't come out of that. Standards have been around a long time, but don't forget they're new to us. And I've been asked to do trio albums, but there are so many great trio albums. I don't want to try to match that. I would rather do some of my own things, with non-traditional changes and rhythms. I'll probably use some synthesizers, but it will mainly be an acoustic, jazz album.”

Wynton advises him to seek out more press coverage. “But I don't care about that; I don't want to be a star. I just want to be secure financially. I'm worried about the future all the time. After 20 years, sometimes guys have to take little gigs. The music is fun. But I don't want to get bitter. I don't want that to happen to me.” db

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