

**BLINDFOLD TEST:
ROBERT CRAY**

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down beat

For Contemporary Musicians

The New, Improved

Al Di Meola

The Fabulous Thunderbirds

*Red-Hot Rhythm
& Blues*

Artie Shaw

*Big Band
Obsession*



Julius Hemphill

Theater Of Sound

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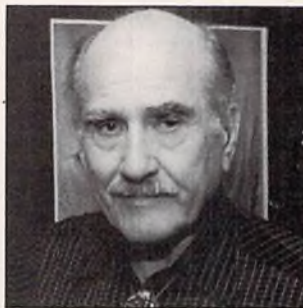
Al Di Meola



Julius Hemphill



Kim Wilson (*Fabulous Thunderbirds*) and friend.



Artie Shaw

down beat

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The New, Improved

Al Di Meola

By Zan Stewart

Al Di Meola has changed. The New Jersey-born guitarist, whose 90 mile-per-hour fireworks with Return to Forever in 1974-76 all but lit up the sky, has opted for more reasonable territory. No longer the mad dasher who engaged in heated acoustical exchanges with John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia in their trio, and whose latin/jazz/fusion CBS LPs were nothing if not highly charged, Di Meola has revealed a new artistic stance with the release of *Soaring Through A Dream*, his third LP for Manhattan Records.

Like *Cielo e Terra*, which preceded it, *Soaring* finds Di Meola exploring compositions that are remarkable not for their density, but for their space. Likewise, the guitarist's solos, instead of here's-everything-I-can-think-of-right-now demonstrations, are essays in economy and relaxation, even as he utilizes state-of-the-art electronics for his performances. Plus there's the addition of a vocalist, Airto Moreira, the spirited percussionist who also sings.

The new Di Meola is certainly one who will please a lot of listeners who found his previous work too frenetic, but he may say goodbye to some former fans, many of whom were heard at a recent Los Angeles concert shouting out requests for old favorites like *Casino*, *Elegant Gypsy*, and *Mediterranean Sundance*.

Di Meola was born July 22, 1954 in Jersey City, New Jersey, and grew up hearing a lot of latin music from radio stations in nearby Manhattan. Acquiring an interest in jazz by listening to such greats as Tal Farlow and Kenny Burrell, and jazz/rock, where his main inspiration was Larry Coryell, he attended the Berklee College of Music. While a student there, a tape on which he played was sent to Chick Corea, who immediately hired Di Meola to replace Bill Connors in RTF. In 1976, RTF suddenly disbanded and, with one solo date, *Land Of The Midnight Sun*, under his belt, Di Meola was out on his own.

The gifted musician fared well as a solo artist. Other CBS dates, like *Splendido Hotel* and *Elegant Gypsy*, sold excellently, and his reputation grew. He had received a Grammy for RTF's

1976 Polydor date, *No Mystery*, and he began to appear prominently in the polls. His trio with McLaughlin and DeLucia, where the guitarists played mostly latin-flavored pieces, toured occasionally between 1980-83.

In support of *Soaring Through A Dream*, Di Meola and his touring crew—Moreira, Phil Markowitz on keyboards, drummer Danny Gottlieb, and bassist Chip Jackson—spent the latter half of 1985 traveling throughout the United States and Europe.

Zan Stewart: What prompted your change in artistic direction?

Al Di Meola: I needed a change. I took off 1984 because I had been on the road, touring, for 10 years, starting with Chick Corea, then my own band and then the trio (McLaughlin, De Lucia). I felt it was a time where I really needed to settle back and listen to what was happening and re-evaluate what I had been doing. After my last tour, I felt that it was the end of an era for me, for that kind of music, your typical fusion conglomeration. I couldn't see it going much further and I knew the record companies didn't feel it had much of a future because they weren't putting much attention into it any more.

ZS: Had your albums been selling?

AD: Yeah. But there was a period when RTF had peaked and the follow-up things were doing so well. *Elegant Gypsy* sold 700,000, *Casino* 500,000—these are worldwide figures but they're still very impressive. Then they went down and down, which was okay because I wanted to change.

In 1984, it was time for me to compose some music in a new direction. I had a desire to write music for a vocalist. Not in the commercial, Top 40 sense, but to incorporate the sound of a voice, to have lyric content, rather than strictly instrumental showcases. That was the idea behind *Soaring Through A Dream*.

ZS: Much of your past music had a denser musical picture with a lot happening, and less space. Had you had enough of that style?

AD: I sure had. Particularly after the [acoustic] trio, where there was *no* space. With that band, it got to the point where I was trying to come up with another spectacular run as fast as I could play it, designed to drive the audience berserk. And you know, I'd come up with something. But the music reached a plateau where it wasn't working. There wasn't anywhere else you could go after that.

We had done it, we had reached the pinnacle, man. I thought if we don't do another record after *Passion, Grace And Fire*, no problem. I had other areas of my emotions that I wanted to explore and reveal in my music, so I feel it's happening now in the best of both worlds. I certainly haven't abandoned the fire in my music, but there's definitely less, because I'm showcasing another side, a quieter side.

ZS: What led you to go this way?



PETER NELMARINKA

AL DI MEOLA'S EQUIPMENT

Al Di Meola's state-of-the-art Synclavier is hooked up to his custom Paul Reed Smith electric guitar. His standard electric is a Guild X-500 SB Jazz Guitar. Both are equipped with Ernie Ball strings. His acoustic is an Ovation fitted with Guild Phosfor-Bronze strings. His favored amps are Peroux. From New Zealand ("One of the most happening amps I know of . . .") with an occasional auxiliary Yamaha amp on stand-by. He adds a Lexicon 200 digital reverb, and follows through with Bag End monitors.

AL DI MEOLA SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader
SOARING THROUGH A DREAM—Manhattan 53011
CIELO E TERRA—Manhattan 53002
SCENARIO—Columbia 38944
TOUR DE FORCE/LIVE—Columbia 38373
ELECTRIC RENDEZVOUS—Columbia 37654
SPLENDIDO HOTEL—Columbia 36270
CASINO—Columbia 35277
ELEGANT GYPSY—Columbia 34461
LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN—Columbia 34074
with Return To Forever
ROMANTIC WARRIOR—Columbia 34076
NO MYSTERY—Polydor 6512

WHERE HAVE I KNOWN YOU BEFORE—Polydor 6509

with John McLaughlin & Paco DeLucia
FRIDAY NIGHT IN SAN FRANCISCO—Columbia 37152
PASSION, GRACE & FIRE—Columbia 38645

with Chick Corea
TOUCHSTONE—Warner Bros. 23699

with Stomu Yamashta
GO—Island 9387
GO TOO—Arista 4138
GO LIVE FROM PARIS—Island 10

AD: For a long time, since before I was with Chick, I have been listening to Brazilian music. And I've always had a love for latin music, because of where I grew up.

ZS: Did anybody at home play?

AD: No, but growing up right outside New York City, the radio's just loaded with different kinds of latin music. There are more salsa bands here than anywhere else in the world. So it's not so much just Brazilian. Though I had started listening to Jobim, Milton Nascimento and recently, in the last few years, Egberto Gismonti. I always liked the underlying burn, this fire that Brazilian music has, but on top were these beautiful, romantic melodies. Whereas fusion had the underlying burn, but on top was burning, too. So you could never really relax with the music; it always took your head off. I no longer try to achieve that effect of blowing someone away as much as I want to enchant them now.

ZS: I like the subtle rhythm aspect.

AD: Me, too; I want rhythm *and* harmony. These new compositions are harmonically more interesting than what I've done in the past. Rhythmically, they're really happening, what with Airto there.

ZS: He's one of the great rhythm players.

AD: And he's singing in a way he's never sung before. It's really his debut as a featured, stand-out singer. In the past, he's always used his voice more as a percussive instrument—more singing from the throat, which I never really liked. Now he's singing from the diaphragm, bringing a lot of air up in the throat. My music needs more of that—a romantic approach.

ZS: How long did it take to make *Soaring Through A Dream*?

AD: Two weeks. It felt very comfortable, especially with the three or four tunes that we had played in the spring, when Airto, Phil, and I went out as a trio.

ZS: You've added quite a few new electronic devices to your presentations, haven't you?

AD: Yes, I'm playing my guitars through the Synclavier, which is a computer interface. With it, I can play sampled sounds or synthesized sounds. And I do that live as well as on the record. I have all these sounds stored in banks. I have eight banks and each floppy disk [that retains the memory for that bank] has eight sounds, so I have a total of 64 sounds available, at any one time.

ZS: So you have to know those 64 sounds in your head?

AD: Basically, I have each different tune on a separate floppy disk. Then I can switch easily between the different sounds and instruments. I may start out on electric guitar, and switch to acoustic in the middle. The music is composed with Synclavier and the specific guitars in mind. These days I'm mainly using a custom-made Paul Reed Smith guitar which has a hexaphonic pick-up. The pick-up ties into the Synclavier, and allows me to make almost any sound imaginable. With the flick of a switch I can go from normal-sounding guitar to making bell sounds or an orchestra. There are millions of possibilities. And I'm just scratching the surface. There's so much further we can go with this stuff, it's frightening.

I just went to visit Chick Corea last night. He was actually composing, not rehearsing with the band, and he's got a new set-up with a Synclavier, Yamaha keyboards, and tv screens all over the place, banks and banks of memory, rhythm machines—he's got the new Linn 9000 which takes samples, one thing is running another thing, MIDI this, MIDI that. You have to have a technician to help you set this stuff up—which I do, when I travel. It takes so much time to program these things. Frankly, I'd rather be spending the time practicing and writing music, but it's all part of what's happening today in music, and it is fascinating.

Any guitar player who hears these sounds coming out of his instrument is going to be knocked out. What might turn him off is the complexity of it. It certainly did me for quite a while. I had to take time off, as if I were going to college, to study and learn how to use it. And I'm still a freshman with these things. I'm one of the few cats that's using it live with the guitar, and I'm happy to be that. It's good to be in on the ground floor.



PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

ZS: Have you seen Pat Metheny?

AD: Yes, I saw him once, and I was pretty impressed, though he wasn't using any samples, so I think I'm the first guy to use samples and synth at the same time. Samples are what really turns me on. I have a lot of different samples. To be able to bend a bell sound, or my voice, make it bend and slide, it's great.

ZS: Are you writing now?

AD: I'm working on three pieces, which will be ready for the next record, to be done early this year. I'm kind of anxious to finish the tour and get to work on the compositions. We started late summer, then had a week off between Europe and the States. In Europe, we played Sweden, Germany, this is a beauty: we went to Hungary, sold out a sports stadium—15,000 people. The place went berserk. It was televised, which means it went to Russia, and it was on radio, so it went to Russia and Czechoslovakia. I've never seen more photographers in my life. It was the first time I had played this deep behind the Iron Curtain. It was funny. They all knew the music. I never signed more albums, too. I don't know how they got them because they're illegal in that country.

We also played Paris, Holland, Austria, pretty much all around Europe. We took the same band as the record. The stateside tour started in San Jose and will end in Florida or Texas.

ZS: Do you have any special memories of RTF?

AD: The first time I went to California with the band, I was 19, and we got an invitation from Stevie Wonder to come down and sit in with him at a rehearsal. Michael Sembello, a big fan of the group, asked me and I asked Chick and the two of us went and jammed. That was like a dream. I remember I was soloing in the RTF fashion, and Stevie's head was going side to side, saying "yeah, yeah." That was like floating on a cloud. I was already blown away just to be with RTF—it was my favorite

band. We had gone from smaller places to . . . we were heading for Madison Square Garden-type places if we had stayed together. It was really big.

ZS: How did the band pull off those fast, intricate pieces? Was there a lot of rehearsal?

AD: No, Chick had the music charted out and we'd each learn our parts and that was it.

ZS: Any particular tours before the latest one that stood out?

AD: The reunion of RTF was definitely a highlight, about two years ago. And then there was the band with Steve Gadd, Jan Hammer, Anthony Jackson, and Mingo Lewis which was a pretty nice tour as well. It was the same group I had used on several albums.

ZS: You once recorded with Les Paul, on *Splendido Hotel*, I believe. What was that like?

AD: That was another dream for me. Les was a major influence, because my parents had his records around when I was a kid. I think that's where I acquired my muting technique, that flattening of the sound I occasionally use, getting a plucking kind of sound that's become a trademark of mine. I knew we were neighbors—we both live in North New Jersey—and in 1977 he came to the Beacon Theater to hear me play. That was a great honor. He invited me over to his house, I took him up on it, and we became friends. I asked him to play on the record and he was, obviously, interested. He hadn't been playing for a while. He'd had arthritis, but he's active again now.

ZS: Do you still feel the influence of people who were once influences, like Burrell and Tal Farlow?

AD: I do, but I don't apply it to my new music. I mainly just listen to older players. Unfortunately, as far as listening goes, I don't do it enough. I'd like to lock myself up in a room and listen to all the new records. When you're working a lot, you don't have time to keep up.

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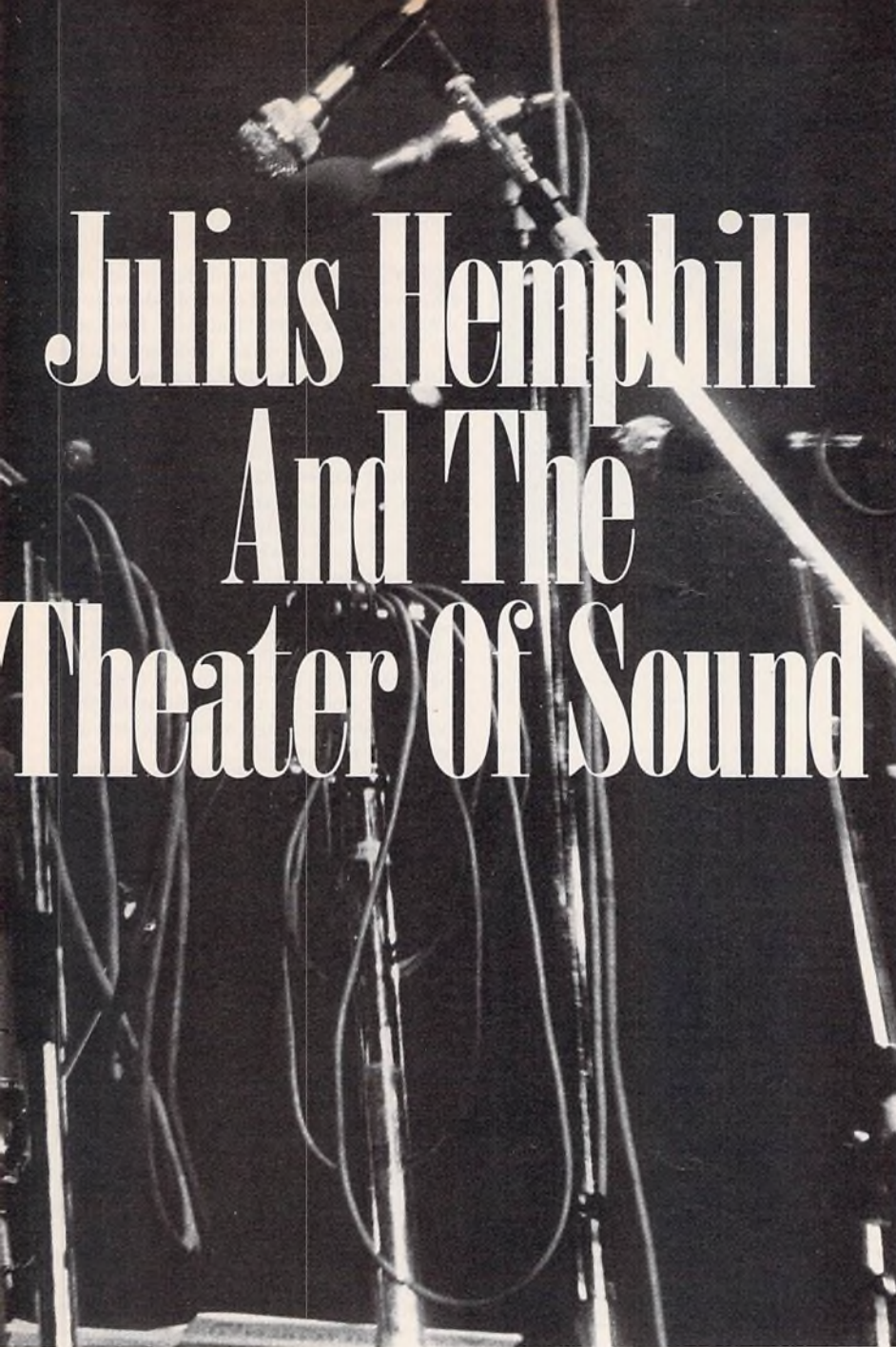
By BILL SHOEMAKER

Annually, the Washington D.C. Jazz Workshop Orchestra sponsors an artist residency that culminates in a concert as part of Add Arts, the city's Labor Day festival. Featuring such underheralded musicians as saxophonist Carl Grubbs and trumpeter Webster Young, the orchestra has become central to grass-roots creative orchestra music in the capitol city; yet, it is the annual residency that is the fulcrum for the orchestra's continued growth. It's a weeklong crash course for all involved that results in some of the most rewarding music to be heard in the federal enclave in any given season.

It seems only natural, if not overdue, that Julius Hemphill was the 1985 artist in residence. For nearly a decade, the composer/saxophonist has had an excep-

tional winning streak with Washington audiences. He has appeared with the World Saxophone Quartet in such important forums as New Music America: Washington '83 and the inaugural Capitol City Jazz Festival. He has, more importantly, debuted two pivotal aspects of his work in D.C.: in 1979, Hemphill's *Ralph Ellison's Long Tongue*, a daring multi-media piece melding music, theater, and film, premiered at the Corcoran Gallery of Art; and the JAH Band, Hemphill's striking electric ensemble, first publicly performed at d.c. space.

For Hemphill, the residency capped off a summer schedule that included an extensive European tour with the JAH Band. Adding the catalytic guitarist Bill Frisell, who was in the first incarnation of



Julius Hemphill And The Theater Of Sound

the band, to the spark-splaying unit that appeared on the album *Georgia Blue*, Hemphill feels the JAH Band has come into its own, and then some. "I have the sound now that I've been working towards with the JAH Band," Hemphill said during a weekend of preparation for the residency, "one that goes beyond the nature of the instrumentation, which is something that I've been interested in since its inception. We've reached a level of familiarity with the material and each other so that the music has something of a conversational flow to it.

"This is the quality I try to get into my charts. It's a situation where nothing should sound forced. Even though it's scored and there's a great need for precision, the parts should have the feeling of

a head arrangement where everything comes together because it's something the musicians have been playing forever. And can play with."

Hemphill cites this quality as also being the hallmark of the World Saxophone Quartet, down-playing the common critical assertion concerning the conceptual innovation of four saxophonists creating music without a rhythm section. Referring to the halcyon days of St. Louis' Black Artists Group during the early '70s, when Hemphill's talents were first pooled with, among others, WSQ members Hamiet Bluiett and Oliver Lake, Hemphill places the WSQ within the context of his own development: "I had taken part in so many different situations with poets, actors,

and dancers, as well as so many unique musical situations, that the idea of the Quartet didn't seem unusual.

"An audience responds to music, not instrumentation."

* * *

Since his debut album, *'Coon Bid'ness*, brought Hemphill national acclaim in 1975, he has been instrumental in mainstreaming the new and innovative, yet his extremely wide contextual range makes it difficult to generalize about the appeal of his music. Hemphill's music represents an idiosyncratic confluence of numerous aspects of the jazz tradition, aspects that extend far beyond the stylistic evolution of the saxophone, although Hemphill's work is an elucidation of that process as well. As few presently do, Hemphill stands at the crossroads of the saxophone tradition, reaping the benefits of the Parker and Coleman generations of altoists, drawing upon rich Texas roots (including early studies with John Carter), and being in the thick of the Midwestern revolution in jazz during the late '60s and early '70s.

It is, however, in his capacities as composer and organizer that Hemphill's contribution to the eclecticism of the '80s becomes not amorphous, but protean. Though Hemphill has solid grounding in a variety of idioms, he does not compose academic exercises or period pieces, but creates a vivid *mise en scene* with each composition, such as the languid, sultry *Bordertown*, included on the WSQ's recent *Live In Zurich* album. Hemphill's talent in this regard goes a long way in explaining why a discussion of his music can not linger on generalities, but invariably centers on an extramusical element as pivotal as his contextual versatility, idiomatic fluency, and unique affinity for the blues—a sense of theater.

The ability to tell a story through an improvised solo has always been the paradigm of jazz expressionism. The vocal qualities of Hemphill's improvisational style puts him squarely in this narrational mode; compositionally, however, Hemphill does not simply tell a story, he stages it, milking it for the humor, melodrama, and pathos he can. Often in a Hemphill composition there are layers of contrasting emotions; *Steppin'* (recorded on two separate WSQ LPs) is a case in point, as a puckish, strutting *ostinato* lays the foundation for restive thematic material and the WSQ's patented round-table-discussion of collective improvisation. Hemphill's compositions also allow his cohorts to create memorable roles, such as Abdul Wadud's delta griot cello on *The Hard Blues* (included on *'Coon Bid'ness*) and the title song of *Dogon A.D.*, and David Murray's been-down-so-long-it-looks-like-up-to-me tenor on *My First Winter* (from *Live In Zurich*).

Hemphill's theatrical sensibilities are best realized in his own mixed media productions, which have been presented

H. L. LINDENMAIER

in venues ranging from galleries to Ornette Coleman's Prince Street loft. To date, however, only the 1976-77 audiodrama *Roi Boye And The Gotham Minstrels* has been documented on record. A phantasmagorical melding of live and taped materials, augmented visually by rich costuming, *Roi Boye* reflects the cacophony of New York, including the "urban caverns" of the subway system. In his liner essay for the recording, Hemphill points up the relationship between the improvising musician and taped materials in such a way that it can serve as a measure of Hemphill's approach to integrating his music with other elements of a theatrical production.

"The use of prepared tapes in no way hampers the fluidity and creativity of the performer. The relationship between the two entities (performer and tape) is purely a matter of proximity. The dictates of this relationship with the tape are not necessarily any more imposing than the range of considerations a performer may have to transcend at any given performance."

Another consideration Hemphill touches upon in this essay is the development of texts; in retrospect, it was a portentous aside, as it is Hemphill's first reference in any forum to *Long Tongues*.

The D.C. residency also provided Hemphill with the opportunity to organize the initial pre-production phase of his next major project, the overall of *Long Tongues* into a three-act "saxophone opera," tentatively projected to premiere at Kennedy Center in the spring of 1987. Taking the nightclub janitor narrator (played in the '79 Corcoran and Kitchen productions by Malinke Robert Eliot, the former BAG administrator) and setting him in The Bohemian Caverns (the D.C. jazz landmark that never reopened after the damage it sustained during the 1968 riots), Hemphill plans to trace the concurrent post-war development of jazz and American society. The surreal landscape of the original jazz/theater work—the urban ruins of the opening projections; the plexiglass "rack" Eliot used, figuratively and literally, as a springboard for his monologs—will be replaced by a real time and place, requiring, as Hemphill puts it, "historical accuracy, or at least the acknowledgment of dramatic license when we are not factual."

The other significant change in the reshaping of *Long Tongues* is reflected by the title change. "There was some concern expressed by Mr. Ellison and his wife that this piece was about him. What the piece is, and was, is a nod to his perception. The section of Ellison's *The Invisible Man* we made use of is a very long monolog from the central character of the book, in which he describes the death of a friend who's shot on a street corner. We changed references like 'he



JULIUS HEMPHILL'S EQUIPMENT

Julius Hemphill uses a Selmer Mark VI alto, c. 1960, and a modified Conn soprano, c. 1922, both with Lawton 10B mouthpieces and Rico 3 reeds. His flute is a modified Gemeinhardt.

JULIUS HEMPHILL SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

GEORGIA BLUE—Minor Music 003
 FLAT OUT JUMP SUITE—Black Saint 0040
 RAW MATERIALS AND RESIDUALS—Black Saint 0015
 ROI BOYE AND THE GOTHAM MINSTRELS—Sackville 3014/15
 DOGON A.D.—Arista-Freedom 1028
 'COON BID'NESS—Arista-Freedom 1012
 BLUE BOYÉ—Mbari 1000X

with World Saxophone Quartet

LIVE IN ZURICH—Black Saint 0077
 REVUE—Black Saint 0056
 W.S.Q.—Black Saint 0046
 STEPPIN WITH . . .—Black Saint 0027
 POINT OF NO RETURN—Moers Music 1034

with Oliver Lake

BUSTER BEE—Sackville 3018

with Abdul Wadud

LIVE IN NEW YORK—Red 138

with Balkida Carroll

SHADOWS AND REFLECTIONS—Soul Note 1023

with Lester Bowie

FAST LAST!—Muse 5055

with Anthony Braxton

NEW YORK, FALL 1974—Arista 4032

was a man' to 'he was an African.' By changing the pronouns and changing the character of the speaker, the single monolog became a series of monologs: one is reflective; one is sarcastic; one is a sermon; one is a carnival barker; and so on. If we overstepped our bounds it was in altering the monolog, pluralizing it and politicizing it. The essence will remain intact with the new treatment.

"We're dealing with a 25-year period, historically, and probably a 50-year period, musically, because the music always draws upon the past and infers a future. I don't want the piece to just be a string of period pieces—conceivably guitars and synthesizers and prepared tapes could be used. I have a couple of pieces already that may end up in the piece: *Open Air*, perhaps as the overture, and *For Billie*, a ballad for Billie Holiday that I've done

with an orchestra in New York, possibly using a vocalist for the part that [french hornist] John Clark played.

"There's a lot of research to be done, however, before anything is set in concrete. The residency will answer some questions."

After a day of freestyle festivities, the crowd that spilled over old downtown Washington coalesced at Add Arts' center stage on the mall adjacent to the National Museum of American Art to hear Julius Hemphill lead the D.C. Jazz Workshop Orchestra. As the band ripped into the opening chart, a driving funk line basted with neo-New Orleans spices, it was clear that Hemphill's reputation, as a clinician, for being a stickler for detail had been borne out. Hemphill, throughout the week's rehearsals, seemed to have a knack of using a scathing, humor-lined critique to resolve the impasse at hand; comments like "that's supposed to be a bed of flutes, not a bed of nails" got the orchestra members, momentarily, to laugh at themselves, and get down to business.

And they had to get down to business, as Hemphill had a hefty agenda for them. As soon as they settled into the opening peppered groove, Hemphill shifted into a flat-out swinging reading of the blues *C* (which first appeared on Lester Bowie's *Fast Last!*), featuring a Hemphill solo brimming with the facile phrasing and open-throated gusto that makes him a consummate interpreter of the blues. After a reprise of the opening section, Hemphill launched the orchestra into an arrangement of *The Hard Blues* that underscored the boldly accented pulse and voiced the double-time B section with seam-bursting intensity. Hemphill, with these first two pieces, built up to a feverish pitch that probably could not be exceeded; had he, programmatically, painted himself into a corner?

No, as it turned out. He eased up on the pace, with a lilting version of *Border-town*, the svelte *For Billie*, and the equally lyrical ballad *What I Know Now*. Conventional wisdom would dictate a restocking of the fires that blazed early in the program, but Hemphill closed with *Open Air*, the type of solemn unflinching adagio Hemphill plants in concerts and on records that invariably catches the listener off-guard, and leaves him neither warmed or chilled, but mindful. Once again, Hemphill demonstrated his deft employment of catharsis, the common ground between music and theater.

"I started with the idea of providing an hour's entertainment," Hemphill said of the concert, "and taking a concert beyond that—an hour's entertainment—cannot be planned with certainty. You have to be in it to see if the chemistry is there, and if it's there you have to have the right music on hand." db



The Fabulous Thunderbirds

By Larry Birnbaum

D. SHIGLEY

At a time when commercial rock music has grown insufferably bland, synthetic, and sterile, there has been an increasing interest among musicians and listeners in the original rock & roll of the 1950s and '60s, and in its root forms—blues, r&b, jump music, Western Swing, etc. The success of such revivalist bands as the Stray Cats and the Blasters has been purchased at considerable cost to their claims to authenticity, but the still-rising popularity of blues-rock guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan and the re-emergence of first-generation players such as Johnny Winter and Lonnie Mack seem to indicate a sustained demand for the gritty vitality of vintage, Southern-style rock and blues.

The Fabulous Thunderbirds, a rhythm & blues quartet from Austin, Texas, has amassed a large and loyal following in 10 years of nightclub, ballroom, and concert hall appearances across the U.S. and Europe. Blending Chicago blues and Louisiana r&b with a dash of Tex-Mex seasoning, the group transcends mere mimicry as it reinvigorates obscure oldies and animates its own new material in the same mature, musicianly, hell-raising spirit.

Kim Wilson, the Thunderbirds' singer, harmonica player, and principal songsmith, recalls his early efforts at composition. "My guys used to laugh at me when I'd come up with my own tunes," he says. "Not these guys, but the old bands I was in. So I started sayin', 'Here's a Little Milton tune,' and we'd learn it, and six months later I'd tell 'em it was mine. You can't leave the traditional part of it out, not altogether. Where would you be then?"

Having recently returned from a European tour on which they appeared together with such luminaries as Miles Davis, the band members are, as of this writing, awaiting the release of their new album—produced in England by Dave Edmunds—on a label not yet announced. The Thunderbirds' last LP, *T-Bird Rhythm*, was produced by Edmunds' former

partner Nick Lowe; but like the group's two earlier Chrysalis albums and its debut LP on Takoma, it was inadequately promoted and distributed, and soon went out of print.

What little domestic publicity the band has received has emphasized its connection to the Austin music scene, although none of its members is originally from the Texas capital. With the departure of Houston-bred bass player Keith Ferguson, only one Texas T-Bird—Dallas-born guitarist Jimmie Vaughan, the older brother of Stevie Ray Vaughan—remains. Kim Wilson hails from Detroit; drummer Fran Christina and bass player Preston Hubbard are both native Rhode Islanders.

Wilson and Vaughan were both sojourning in Austin when they met and formed the group in 1975. "About the first year or two we stayed in Austin," Wilson recounts, "and then Muddy Waters got us on the road—it was at his suggestion. And he spread our name around all over the place."

In 1979 they recorded *The Fabulous Thunderbirds* in Dallas with producer Denny Bruce. Showcasing Wilson's powerful, Little Walter-inflected harp playing and Vaughan's fluent, Freddy King-influenced guitar work, the album included strong versions of bayou classics such as Slim Harpo's *Scratch My Back* and Jerry McCain's *She's Tuff*, as well as a half-dozen originals. *What's The Word*, released the following year, offered memorable interpretations of Gulf Coast rockers by Juke Boy Bonner, Rockin' Sidney, and Lonnie (Guitar Junior) Brooks, along with compositions by Wilson, Vaughan, and Ferguson.

The band's third album, *Butt Rockin'*, was its first with Fran Christina as a full-time member; three of Christina's former bandmates from Boston's Roomful of Blues made guest appearances, as did guitarist Anson Funderburgh. *Butt Rockin'* again contained material by Slim Harpo and Lonnie Brooks, but gave prominent placement to new songs like *One's Too Many*, co-written by Wilson and Nick Lowe.

Lowe replaced Denny Bruce as producer on the Thunderbirds' final LP for Chrysalis, *T-Bird Rhythm*, in 1982. On this, the group's most satisfying release to date, older tunes predominated—among them Bo Diddley's *Diddy Wah Diddy*,



JUST JAMMIN': Jimmy Vaughan sittin' in at Chicago's Checkerboard Lounge.

D. SHIGLEY



GIMME MY GUITAR: Jimmy borrows Buddy Guy's axe as Guy looks on.

D. SHIGLEY



PICKIN' COTTON: Kim Wilson blows for James Cotton.

D. SHIGLEY



WILD WINTER: Johnny Winter (left) joins the T-Birds.

D. SHIGLEY

Willie Mabon's *Gotta Have Some*, and Dave Bartholomew's hilarious philosophical rap from 1957, *The Monkey*—but the album's most effective track was Wilson's ersatz swamp-rocker *Can't Tear It Up Enuff*. "I tell you, that last album could have sold 300,000 copies if it was handled right. It sold 33,000 in the first three weeks it was out. That was more than the one before it sold the whole time. I mean it was cookin', and that's with no promo or anything," Wilson declares.

After three years without a record label, the Thunderbirds travelled to London at Dave Edmunds' behest to tape a new LP at the Eden and Maison Rouge studios. "It really came out good, man," says Wilson. "It's the best thing we've ever done. We were prepared this time; we had all new material. We've got seven originals on this one plus another one, *Why Get Up?*, that Bill Carter wrote. He's a great songwriter—lives in Austin. The only covers we did were *Wrap It Up* by Sam and Dave and a Rockin' Sidney song called *Tell Me*."

* * * * *

Each of the four Thunderbirds was firmly grounded in blues and r&b before joining the band. "We've all worked with all the old cats—all the greats," says Wilson. "That's where we went to school. Between us, you know, we just all think the same way. We all grew up in slightly different backgrounds, different kinds of blues and r&b and stuff, but when we got together it kind of made its own sound. It just happened."

Kim Wilson is a master of the blues harp in the tradition of Little Walter, Jimmy Reed, and Sonny Boy Williamson; besides big-toned blues licks, he can also play popular melodies such as Perez Prado's *Cherry Pink And Apple Blossom White* in the crooning manner of "mouth organist" Larry Adler. His robust, full-bodied singing is reminiscent of Paul Butterfield, who first inspired him to take up the harmonica.

"I listened to Butterfield when I first started," he says, "and then I got turned on to Little Walter, George "Harmonica" Smith, and all those guys. And I played a lot of gigs with George. But we used to play straight blues all the time—millions of bands, the same way. And after a while I couldn't stand doing the same thing 25 times a night, every song. So I said, 'I gotta learn something like bluegrass, bebop, anything.'"

Touring as a sideman with various blues bands, Wilson ultimately made his way to Austin. "I was working in California—I worked out there for a long time. I was playing with Lowell Fulson, who had a guy with him from Austin. We talked and talked, and I went down there finally and I met Jimmie down there, and back and forth a couple of times, and I just moved. In the meantime I had moved to Minneapolis, so I just gave the band I was with a month's notice and split—that was it. Then we started the band."

Although he has been overshadowed by his younger brother's recent rise to stardom, Jimmie Vaughan is arguably the finest and most authentic white blues guitarist of his time. Not as fast or flashy as some of his British and American rivals, he is a masterly technician with a fluid touch and a pungent tone who imbues keening Chicago blues and vamping Louisiana rock with deep, down-home feeling and unflagging good taste.

Growing up in Dallas, Vaughan was exposed to a wide variety of American vernacular music. "All my relatives played country & western and Western Swing, and I was just always around music. I have relatives on my father's side who played with Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey, and on my mother's side they listened to hillbilly music—Western Swing and stuff. And I liked blues on the radio, and rock & roll.

"We listened to Jimmy Reed, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, B. B. King, and Slim Harpo, but mostly the guys from Texas—T-Bone Walker, Gatemouth Brown and all the guys on Duke Records," Vaughan recalls. "I had a few of the Chess albums from Chicago—Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Little Walter—but we had Mercy Baby, Lightnin'

Hopkins, and all them guys from Houston and Dallas. We had everybody livin' around there.

"I started playin' rock & roll, Little Richard and stuff, plus I was heavily influenced by Jerry Lee Lewis. Paul Burlison from the Johnny Burnette trio was one of my favorite guitar players. But I learned how to play blues from Freddy King. See, Freddy lived in Dallas and I saw him more than anybody. I followed him around for years, and I even played rhythm with him for a little while. He was born in Texas, moved up to Chicago and learned how to play from Jimmy Rogers and Eddie Taylor. Then he moved back to Dallas, and that's where I met him, when I was 14.

"So I play more like Freddy King than anybody—I mean, it might not sound like Freddy, but it's the same. And later on we backed up Eddie Taylor for months when he came down to play in Austin, and then we got to play with Jimmy Rogers, so I learned first-hand from the guys who Freddy King learned from, but I already knew Freddy King's stuff."

Like Wilson, Vaughan travelled around the country before finding his way to Austin. "I had been out to California," he says, "but I couldn't get nothin' goin', and I came back to Dallas and got married. I had a job in Dallas—I was a trash man—and I hated it, but I couldn't get a gig in Dallas playin' blues at the time, so I moved to Austin, 'cause I had played down there years before with different bands. Austin was kind of a hippy place, kind of a San Francisco deal, where you could play anything, really. There was a lot of artists and beatniks, and there was a lot of musicians that played blues, so I went down there and started playin' again."

Despite his purist approach, Vaughan, like many of the great bluesmen, is a musician of catholic tastes. "I'm as big of a blues fanatic as anybody," he says, "but I also like all kinds of stuff. My favorite stuff is the blues from Texas and Louisiana, but I listen to bands from England, I listen to hula records

from the '50s, I listen to Hank Williams, I listen to jazz. I even listen to the Clash. I just like music."

Fran Christina served his r&b apprenticeship as the original drummer in Roomful of Blues, and later played Western Swing with Austin's Asleep At The Wheel. Born and raised in Westerly, Rhode Island, Christina joined Roomful at its hornless inception as a Butterfield-style high school band. "It was similar, except that we didn't have a harp player," he concedes, "but actually I thought it was better. I still have some tapes from when we were like 16 years old, and I can't believe it.

"It was the first real band I was in," says Christina of Roomful. "I played pop covers with some guys from high school, but I stopped playing because I wasn't really into the music. But then Duke Robillard came along and said, 'We're startin' a band. I want you to play drums.' So he laid a ton of records on me and I got hooked. I heard Elmore James and Muddy Waters and T-Bone Walker, and then I was hooked."

Christina had left Roomful in 1972 and was living in Nova Scotia when the Thunderbirds first approached him. "The T-Birds were playing on the East Coast," he says, "and their drummer, who had never been out of Texas before, freaked out and left in the middle of the tour. So they talked to a friend of mine who told them about me, but it was hard to get a hold of me because I didn't have a telephone. I had no electricity, no nothin'. So they called the Canadian Mounties, and they rode up one day and said, 'The Thunderbirds want you to meet them in London, Ontario, for a gig next week.' So I hitchhiked to London, Ontario, and we started playing.

"The first night," he continues, "the first song, the first note—we hit it right off. It was like we were playing together for years. But I stayed in Nova Scotia for a while and just did tours with them, and that's when Mike Buck was playing with them in Texas. Finally Asleep At The Wheel called me, and that's what brought me to Texas. I played with Asleep At The Wheel for about 18 months and then the T-Birds called me up and wanted me to finish the album they were in the middle of, *What's The Word*, so I did that."

Bassist Preston Hubbard, another Roomful of Blues alumnus, is from Providence, Rhode Island, the hometown of Ruby Braff, Paul Gonsalves, and Scott Hamilton. "I went to high school with Scott," he says. "We played together for five years in a band called the Hamilton/Bates Blue Flames. We started out doing r&b and we ended up doing jazz standards—the last two years I was playing upright bass."

Hubbard played two stints with Roomful of Blues, beginning in 1976. "I was with Roomful about four years and then I quit," he says. "I moved to Atlanta and played with an r&b band called the Alley Cats. Then I moved to Boston and played in the Memphis Rockabilly Band. Then I rejoined Roomful, and then I joined the T-Birds."

Although he has been a Fabulous Thunderbird for a relatively short time, the lanky, pompadoured Hubbard suits the band's retrospective style, both visually and aurally. Performing at Jimmy's in New Orleans, he alternated on electric and acoustic basses, twirling his white Kay upright as he plucked out buoyant vamps and deft walking lines. Meanwhile, Wilson sang heartily and wailed a blue streak on his harp; Vaughan strummed propulsive chords and picked stinging bent-note clusters, and Christina laid down a house-rocking rhythm foundation. By the time the long set ended, the audience had danced and partied itself to exhaustion.

It seems a shame that a band with a proven crowd-pleasing record as long as the Thunderbirds' should lack for a recording contract, but today's restrictive radio formats and conservative record company policies have sharply limited the exposure of musicians who dare to veer from the middle of the road. Still, the band has high hopes for its latest album. "It's got three or four singles on it, as far as mainstream goes," Wilson says. "But," he allows, "as far as I'm concerned, mainstream is kind of like a piss puddle comin' out of a wino on Sixth Street."

db



D. SHIGLEY

FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS' EQUIPMENT

Kim Wilson says, "I play a Hohner Marine Band harp. I'm not into the new ones too much. I just like the sound you get from wood—the resonance." **Jimmie Vaughan** leans into a Fender Stratocaster. "Right now I'm usin' a '62, but any of 'em, really. It doesn't matter too much. And I use a Fender Twin Reverb amp." Bassist **Preston Hubbard** adds, "I've got a Robin, from Robin Guitars out of Houston. They're great. I never could play anything besides a Fender—usually a '65 Jazz Bass—until I tried the Robin. It's a great bass. And plus they set it up for me at the factory, you know, real comfortable." He also plays a Kay upright, and sends both through a Peavy 200 Series amp. **Fran Christina** has custom designed his own drum kit with help from Philip Samuels. The kit's hardware, however, includes Tama cymbal stands, Yamaha tension casings, Pearl rack-tom hardware, and Sonor pedals; he sports Zildian cymbals as well.

FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

T-BIRD RHYTHM—Chrysalis 1395
BUTT ROCKIN'—Chrysalis 1319
WHAT'S THE WORD—Chrysalis 1287
THE FABULOUS THUNDERBIRDS—Taka
koma 7068

with **Carlos Santana**
HAVANA MOON—Columbia 3B642

ARTIE SHAW'S Big Band Obsession



MITCHELL SEIDEL

"I used to play the clarinet," someone once told Artie Shaw. "But I guess I just didn't have a talent for the instrument."

"Talent?" Shaw said. "How long did you play?"

"About 10 years."

"Around the clock?" he asked. "All 24 hours? Did you live and breathe the clarinet? Did everything in your life come second to the clarinet? Did you learn how not to take a crap if it was going to interrupt your practice? Were you obsessed with the instrument? Did you become familiar with the work of the greatest musicians in the world, do every single thing they did for 10 years—and then another 10 years after that? When you do all that, come back and see me. Then we can talk about talent."

Artie Shaw, at age 75, is one of those maddening, full-speed-ahead fellows who never seems to do anything halfway. His talent is his obsessiveness. And over the years it's carried him through one of the most diverse and circuitous lives imaginable—and always with hypnotic singlemindedness, whether playing the clarinet, absorbing an entire civilization's worth of literature and thought, then

another; or writing, traveling, chopping wood, getting mad, collecting guns, talking, and most recently leading a band.

But obsession tells only half the story. The other half is even more fascinating. It's about a man who became so restless in the face of his own remarkable achievements that he walked away from each of them once they stood accomplished. Most of us would go a considerable distance to protect even one of the various successes Shaw has won for himself—acceptance, fame, money, artistic freedom, beautiful women. But we see such success from a different perspective than Shaw. Much to his horror, he quickly found success trapped him in a bourgeois nightmare of repetition. He was not cut out to be a domesticated celebrity. He was an intellectual vagabond. Repetition was a kind of dishonesty.

The novelty of spectacular achievements wore out fast with Shaw—the musical ones as well as the marital ones. He became one of the greatest clarinetists of all time and married the most desirable women of his generation—Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, Kathleen Winsor, Evelyn Keyes, and almost Betty Grable. Yet he gave up the clarinet and divorced eight

wives.

Another Shaw—George Bernard—seemed to have his number: "There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart's desire. The other is to get it."

* * *

In 1939 Artie Shaw led the most sensational jazz orchestra in the United States. It temporarily eclipsed Benny Goodman. It wasn't only popular; it was an absolutely promethean ensemble. And listening to the band's records today, especially the radio airshots performed before live audiences, the reasons are apparent.

Shaw shot to the top late in 1938 with the unexpected success of *Begin The Beguine*, a tune he insisted on recording at his first RCA Victor session, even though the Cole Porter number was an obscure cast-off that had been dropped from the score of *Jubilee* three years earlier. Then just before the end of the year, 22-year-old drummer Buddy Rich joined Shaw's orchestra, and for the next 11 months the band was on fire.

In the fall of '39, though, Shaw scrapped it all and hibernated in Mexico for the winter. In the spring of 1940, with no regular band under his command, he obliged Victor Records with a quickie session using an ad hoc crew of studio musicians. It produced *Frenesi*, and almost in spite of himself Shaw was back on the hit parade, this time for 19 weeks. Through the rest of the decade Shaw shed bands like a reptile sheds skins. Each probed for something new, went as far as it could go, and then disappeared. Some flirted with impressionism in pieces like *Evensong* and *Suite No. 8*. There was the brittle chamber jazz of the Gramarcy Five with its interplay between celeste and clarinet.

But Shaw could never escape the web of nostalgia in which *Begin The Beguine* and *Frenesi* had netted him. It was one of the things that soured him on the music business. Early in 1950, Shaw folded what he thought would be the last touring big band of his career. He turned to writing and played with an occasional small group. Finally in 1955 he turned his clarinet into a lamp and went off to live happily ever after in Spain. That was

By John McDonough



ROYAL GARDEN BLUES: The King of the Clarinet and band in Artie's garden circa '40.

the end of Artie Shaw the musician, but not Artie Shaw the legend.

That's why in the fall of 1983—nearly 35 years after he broke up his last band, almost 50 years after he put together his first—in a sweeping, utterly unexpected act of self-contradiction one normally expects only in political campaigns, he reversed three decades of exile and announced he was going to form another touring orchestra.

Part of the impetus came from veteran talent agent Willard Alexander, then 75 and one of the founding fathers of the big band boom of the '30s. Alexander (who died in August 1984) had good reason to lure Shaw back into action. His pool of bankable bandleading titans was growing smaller each year. Ellington, Kenton, and Harry James were gone. Basie was not well. And Benny Goodman's disinterest in big bands was almost equal to his distaste for agents.

As for Shaw, he'd opted for a different life entirely. By 1978 he had moved to Newbury Park, California, about halfway between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, where, says he, "I have to go about 35 miles in any direction to get into trouble." Here he would putter about the house and work on his novel, which he's still writing. It's about the life of a white jazz musician from the '20s through the '60s. He says it's something he knows a lot about. No one argues that. It's taken him 1,250 pages to get to 1923.

He also taught seminars at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Here he's in his element. Shaw has been an education junkie all his life. His conversation is hung with an accumulation of literary and philosophical baubles like ornaments on a Christmas tree. He is a natural and stimulating lecturer.

For more than 10 years Alexander tried to prod, coax, and cajole Shaw from his quiet life out of the public eye. Finally, his efforts paid off. "This is the last thing a lot of people ever expected you to do," someone told Shaw back in 1984. "Well you can put me right at the top of the list," he replied with a bemused sense of self-wonderment. "If you'd have asked me five years ago whether I'd do it, I would have thought you were joking. It would have seemed that stupid."

One reason it would have seemed so unlikely is that the former "King of the Clarinet" is today a sovereign without a scepter. When he stopped playing in 1955, he meant it. And there's been no second guessing. So over the years one of the greatest endowments of musicianship in the annals of jazz has rusted with neglect and slid into irretrievable atrophy. Today Shaw insists without regret that it's gone. He has a stock answer for what's become a stock question: "Do you ever play for your own amusement?" "Does Mohammad Ali do road work for his own amusement? People don't realize how much labor it takes to play so much



DONT SHOOT: Artie Shaw with Bing Crosby (left), 1945.



PASSING THE REED: Dick Johnson (left) takes the bait from Artie.

as a presentable middle B, let alone all the other notes. In 1939 there were days when I would play for literally eight or 10 hours at a stretch. It got so I could do anything on the clarinet. When you get good enough to make it sound easy, people think you can do it without any effort."

So why did he return to organize and sometimes lead what some still insist is a "ghost band?" There were two reasons. "It suddenly began to dawn on me that I could have some influence on it," he says. "And I wanted to find out if there was still an audience for it. So I figured let's give it a shot."

* * *
The first job was to find a proxy who could handle the monumental clarinet parts. This was no simple matter. Although the Swing Era was dominated by two virtuoso clarinetists, there was never any confusion as to who was who. Goodman was feverish, hot, and explosive. He became one of the most

imitated musicians in jazz history. Shaw was a lyrical player whose signature was his sound—dense and full in the low and middle registers; tensile and diamond-hard at the high end where it could cut through an entire band like a ray. He was admired more than he was imitated, save for Jerry Wald and Tommy Reynolds, who few remember now. Today Dick Johnson, 56, has become Shaw's own choice to handle the clarinet parts. The question isn't, 'Can he handle them?' The question is, 'Could anybody?' But Johnson is excellent.

Then there's the band itself. Can 17 young musicians who grew up in the '60s, as jazz was taking long, atonal steps into the unknown, phrase and intonate in a way that's compatible with the sleek, streamlined orderliness of swing scores written 40-odd years ago?

"Don't think that question didn't occur to me before we tried to put this band together," Shaw says. "But I was amazed. They play charts like *Lover Come Back*,

Back Bay Shuffle, and *Traffic Jam* as if they were written yesterday. And the main reason they sound so fresh is that I haven't forced old-fashioned phrasing on the scores. Our phrasing is more legato, with greater detail. We've added crescendos. We've run phrases together where it seemed right.

"Remember, in my day brass men were having trouble playing high B. Today anyone can hit high E. That's a fourth higher. So when you've got these kind of capabilities at your disposal, why not take advantage of them? I'm not interested in playing carbon copies of old records. And I'm even less interested in telling a soloist how to play his chorus. That's his business. You may hear a tenor soloist on *Begin The Beguine* play harmonies and chords out of Adderley or Coltrane. That's fine. When the score says 'solo/ad lib,' that means 'Let's hear what you've got to say.'"

But is it that simple? Swing Era ensemble writing, especially reed soli by such writers as Benny Carter, Fletcher Henderson, and Shaw himself (*Rose Room*) were ensemble projections of swing improvisation. Charts don't change. Today wouldn't soloist and score be radically out of register?

"No," says Shaw. "If they were valid scores then, they are valid today. More important, the map is not the territory. The notes are not the music. Mozart is interpreted differently today than he was 200 years ago. A score is like a veil between the musician and the music. When you penetrate that veil—by playing a score so many times it becomes a part of your subconscious—then you're at the threshold of the music. I think this process tends to bring score and improvisation into a kind of balance. The musicians influence the score through their interpretation. And the score influences the musicians in the way they improvise on its framework.

"A more immediate problem," Shaw continues, "was the balance within the ensembles, especially the reeds. I told the second alto to outblow the first alto. I don't want to hear a lead and four accompaniments. I want to hear a chord. Remember, the lead is higher and your ear perceives it immediately. The tenors have to blow even harder to come into balance and create a chord.

"It's the same in the trumpet section. If the lead is playing B above the staff, the next is playing an A or G, and the next an E or D, those are going to be necessarily softer than the high one. They have to play harder. This is counter to everything these guys have been taught, which didn't surprise me. I believe a great deal of today's teaching concentrates on the individual. Musicians are trained as soloists, not ensemble players. But it's not difficult to get what you want if you know what you want and how to get it."

Of course, Shaw is concerned not only

with technique, but the band's repertoire as well. "People talk about Copland's *Billy The Kid* as America's classical music. But it's not—it's European. I think the '20s, '30s, and '40s produced a monumental body of American work, and its potential wasn't being fully explored as music. Men like Kern, Gershwin, Porter, Rodgers, Arlen and so on. They have created the main body of American classical music. When I discovered that, it became my hallmark. Just because I'm a little tired of *Begin The Beguine* doesn't mean it isn't still a fine piece of music. You can't get any better. Look at the potential within *Stardust* or *Body And Soul* for altered chords and variations. Look what Armstrong and Tatum did with them. This is great music full of dark corners of potential waiting to be illuminated by jazz artists. Can anyone seriously argue that *Born In The USA* or *Material Girl* have that kind of content? We've given 14-year-olds the economic clout to dictate our culture. The results are appalling."

And that's one of the reasons Shaw has taken to the road again. Despite his Non-Stop Flight from 1938 and its nostalgic trappings, Shaw remains intensely proud of the music he created then. He is convinced it transcends sentiment and deserves to be heard today.

He has a right to be proud. It was among the best. There were many bands playing in those years before the war, and some of them probably reached larger audiences than Shaw—commercial bands like Kay Kyser, Hal Kemp, Sammy Kaye, Guy Lombardo, and others. But try to find *their* records of that period in record stores today. You can't.

Yet, every record Artie Shaw ever made for Victor is still available (*The Complete Artie Shaw, Vols. 1-8*, RCA Records). Add to that the volumes of frequently electrifying live broadcast performances (*The Uncollected Artie Shaw*, on various Hindsight records, the *Melody*

And Madness series on Phontastic) and the current four-record set covering Shaw's work from 1938-54 (*Artie Shaw: A Legacy, Book-of-the-Month Club Records*), and an astounding fact becomes apparent. There are more Artie Shaw records in print today than there were at the height of his popularity. And more are on the way—he recorded his current band in November 1984.

"I think there's a basic reason why it's lasted," Shaw insists. "And this is not speculation. I am convinced of this. This is the one thing on earth I cling to as reality. It's personal integrity. If I do what I firmly believe in—what my deepest inner voices tell me is right—then something good will come of it, assuming I have the skill to carry it out. The best records I ever made were the best records I could make. Kay Kyser and Lombardo were never interested in making good records. They wanted to make money. But whenever I have made a total effort to please myself, the result has been lasting."

Someone once asked Shaw if he realized that the chorus he played on *Stardust* in 1940 was a classic. "I knew it the minute I played it," he said. If that sounds arrogant, Shaw makes no apologies. "If you're not a little arrogant about what you do as an artist," he recently told musicologist Loren Schoenberg, "how can you presume that you have something to say to the world that it will support you for?"

But Shaw has no pipe dreams about bringing the big bands back. The only question is whether there's a large enough audience for the Artie Shaw Orchestra in 1986 to let it survive and grow. There's no question the Shaw band possesses one of the half-dozen or so greatest and most varied "books" in music. Four years ago during the New York Kool Jazz Festival—18 months before Shaw took up his baton—the Buddy Rich band tore up Carnegie Hall with Shaw's 1939 arrangement of *The Carioca*. The audience practically had to be peeled off the ceiling. The new Shaw band plays that, as well as rarely heard works by Gene Roland, Johnny Mandel, Tadd Dameron, and George Russell written for the 1946 and '49 orchestras.

Still, Shaw negates mere nostalgia. "I don't want this to be my 1939 band or my 1945 band," says he. "It is a composite of all my bands, but with its own identity too. We'll play old charts as we hear them now. I've been amazed at their musicality and durability. And the conviction that these guys play this music with matches and maybe supersedes the original. I wouldn't have thought that possible.

"If the band survives, if an audience shows that it should survive, I'm going to make it into an instrument that I can be very proud of. I don't play the clarinet, but I *do* play a band. That's my instrument." db

ARTIE SHAW SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- THE COMPLETE ARTIE SHAW VOL. 1—RCA Bluebird 2-5517
- THE COMPLETE ARTIE SHAW VOL. 2—RCA Bluebird 2-5533
- THE COMPLETE ARTIE SHAW VOL. 3—RCA Bluebird 2-5556
- THE COMPLETE ARTIE SHAW VOL. 4—RCA Bluebird 2-5572
- THE COMPLETE ARTIE SHAW VOL. 5—RCA Bluebird 2-5576
- THE COMPLETE ARTIE SHAW VOL. 6—RCA Bluebird 2-5579
- THE COMPLETE ARTIE SHAW VOL. 7—RCA Bluebird 2-5580
- A LEGACY—Book Of The Month Club 71-7715
- THE UNCOLLECTED . . . —Hindsight 139
- THE UNCOLLECTED VOL. 2—Hindsight 140
- THE UNCOLLECTED VOL. 3—Hindsight 148
- THE UNCOLLECTED VOL. 4—Hindsight 149
- THE UNCOLLECTED VOL. 5—Hindsight 176
- ARTIE SHAW VOL. 1—Phontastic 7609
- ARTIE SHAW VOL. 2—Phontastic 7613
- ARTIE SHAW VOL. 3—Phontastic 7627
- ARTIE SHAW VOL. 4—Phontastic 7628
- ARTIE SHAW VOL. 5—Phontastic 7637



STEVIE WONDER

IN SQUARE CIRCLE—Tomla 6134TL: *PART-TIME LOVER*; *I LOVE YOU TOO MUCH*; *WHEREABOUTS*; *STRANGER ON THE SHORE OF LOVE*; *NEVER IN YOUR SUN*; *SPIRITUAL WALKERS*; *LAND OF LA LA*; *GO HOME*; *OVERJOYED*; *IT'S WRONG (APARTHEID)*.

Personnel: Wonder, vocals, drums, synthesizers, percussion, piano, harpsichord, accordion, harmonica, vocoder, cora; Edwin Birdsong, CS80 synthesizer (cut 6); Larry Gittens, trumpet (6, 8); Bob Malach, saxophone (6, 8); Ben Bridges, Rick Zunigar, guitar (7); Earl Klugh, acoustic guitar (9); Paul Riser, string arrangement (9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Mr. Hooks has done it again. *Something* on this record is bound to grab you, no matter what your musical preferences might be. A certain chordal progression, a peculiar harmony, a riff, a lick, a sound, a cascading crescendo—*something* will stick in your memory. And when you least expect it—BAM!—it'll crop up in your mind and you'll find yourself humming along to yet another of the countless irresistible songs the man has concocted over the years. Steveland Morris is truly the Svengali of pop music.

With Little Stevie's coming of age at the end of the '60s, he began finding his own voice. 1971's *Where I'm Coming From* showed an artist in the making and 1972's *Music Of My Mind* revealed a revolutionary, fully realized genius in full flight. Stevie developed a whole new vocabulary in the '70s (neo-Motown?) and he's been mining that gold ever since, embellishing here and there along the way. Consequently, nothing on this album strikes the fresh chord that *Music Of My Mind* or *Talking Book* did a decade or more ago. At 34, the multi-millionaire Wonderman is some distance from the street and from such fresh new faces as Run D.M.C., the Fatboys, and Sheila E, who have emerged as streetbeat heroes. Yet his music is still undeniably satisfying and, at its best, inspiring.

Part-Time Lover is the most accessible cut of the lot. A savvy composer, Wonder often aims for the black/white crossover radio market, and he's scored another bull's-eye with this one. The tune is all over the airwaves and young kids are diggin' on it, although older listeners will hear the unmistakable riff from the Supreme's *My World Is Empty Without You* behind Stevie's irrepressible vocals.

Ah—the voice! A national treasure. When all else fails and hooks falter, the Wonder voice takes command. The urgent yelps, falsetto leaps, spinetangling octave jumps, and fluid sax-like phrasing can turn even mild pop fare

like *Stranger On The Shore Of Love* and *Never In The Sun* into triumphs.

On the grittier, funky side of Steveland is the explosive *Go Home* (which recalls the throw-down sound of *You Haven't Done Nothin'*) and the scorching *Spiritual Walkers*, about street-corner evangelists. *Land Of La La* is an upbeat ode to Los Angeles, telling the tale of hard times and shattered dreams in the big city. It's sort of a West Coast version of Stevie's menacing ode to New York, *Living For The City*.

Like fellow pop-master Paul McCartney, Stevie is a sap for a love ballad. And his love ballads are often quite sappy. *Overjoyed* oozes with lush strings. Earl Klugh's gentle acoustic guitar, and (yes) the sound of birdies tweeting, crickets chirping, leaves crunching, and pebbles dropping into ponds. A little sticky, though the melody is one of those memorable ones that may ultimately gain standard status, a la *You Are The Sunshine Of My Life*. The man does have a knack. *Whereabouts* is more bittersweet in the vein of *All In Love Is Fair* or *Too Shy To Say*.

Perhaps his most inspired and inspiring work on the album is the festive, anthemic *It's Wrong*, Stevie's musical statement against South Africa's apartheid system. Propelled by a battery of percussion and a chorus of chanters doing call-and-response cadence with Mr. Wonder, the piece builds to an ecstatic peak as Stevie sings: "You know apartheid's wrong/Like slavery was wrong/Like the holocaust was wrong." Food for thought with a beat.

Add this one to your archives. Like all Stevie Wonder albums, it will probably sound good five, 10, 15 years from now, or forever.

—bill milkowski



BILL DIXON

COLLECTION—Cadence 1024/25: *WHEN WINTER COMES/1976*; *WEBERN WORK/STUDY/1973-74*; *TRACINGS II/1974-75*; *THE LONG WALK/1974-75*; *MOMENTI/1975*; *STANZA/1975*; *I SEE YOUR FANCY FOOTWORK—I/1973-74*; *I SEE YOUR FANCY FOOTWORK—2/1973-74*; *I SEE YOUR FANCY FOOTWORK—3/1973-74*; *MOAIC/CA. 1970-71*; *ALBERT AYLER/CA. 1970-71*; *SUMMERDANCE FOR JUDITH DUNN—PT. ONE/1971*; *TRACINGS/1974*; *THE LONG LINE/1973-74*; *SWIRLS/1974-75*; *REQUIEM FOR BOOKER LITTLE/1975-76*; *MASQUES I/1975-76*.

Personnel: Dixon, trumpet, voice; William R. Dixon 2nd, whistling, voice (cuts 7-9); David Moss, percussion (7-9); Lawrence Cook, percussion (7-9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In the 24-page booklet accompanying this

boxed two-record set, Dixon writes about sundry subjects—teaching, aesthetics, criticism. He recalls his participation as a sideman on Cecil Taylor's *Conquistador* (Blue Note 84260) 20 years ago: "No Topsy syndrome here . . . There is no 'making up things as one goes along.' There is a discipline here," he continues, "that requires intelligence and the consistent and systematic working of an intellect. There is the idea of systematic practice . . . a lifetime of practice."

These words also suggest the integrity and frequent austerity of Bill Dixon's works for solo trumpet that *Collection* culls from over a seven-year period. By word and example, Dixon decries the easy path into rock and electronics taken by "major innovative musicians" as well as another voguish halfway approach—the "ability to play a little 'outside.'" His commitment is absolute—toward building a body of work using rarely heard sounds and combinations from the extended vocabulary of his instrument.

If the artist carries great responsibility according to the Dixon view, so does the audience. Dixon does not expect his music to communicate unless a listener "has gone to considerable pains to be both versed in the vernacular of the work . . . and, through his own [the listener's] efforts at making himself receptive." Listeners must "do their homework" and become well-informed. Not everyone will care to make the effort of moving away from conventional trumpet technique, the reassurance of the swinging four or a backbeat. But they will miss uncommon beauty and an uncompromised wholeness of expression.

Dixon intends these solo performances to be "orchestral," or self-contained, in the sense of being independent of a rhythm section for emotional completeness; in this they succeed. A progressive ebb and flow of ideas takes place throughout *Collection*. The pieces lack the structural unity or chordal familiarity of "songs." Rather, each selection seems to log a search in progress.

Collection brings Dixon's concepts off the drawing board and into our ears. Some pieces fit under the heading of ultra-dense miniatures (*Webern, Momenti, Mosaic, Albert Ayler, Tracings II*). In *Webern*, for instance, a tangle of pinched fragments in the upper register is filtered through echoplex, and the resulting brevity (crammed with meaning) hints of the *Bagatelles* of Anton Webern. Other selections are unhurried ballad-like expositions (*When Winter Comes, Stanza, The Long Line, Requiem*). The reverb sparingly used by Dixon reinforces the meditative, unsentimentally lyrical pacing and articulation in these pieces.

Not all these works use trumpet alone. Two percussionists provide contrast on *Summerdance*, eliciting some forceful counterlines from Dixon. Another change of pace, the 15-minute *Fancy Footwork* features peaks of intensity relieved by calmness. The series is an intriguing incorporation of the trumpet's outer reaches with footsteps, whistling, singing, and clips of conversation. Treble screams and guttural blats pulsate through echoplex. After the headiest of Dixon's sustained blasts, he audibly "whews," whistling a sing-songy line as his son, William, scat sings. Seldom has musical

RECORD REVIEWS

B. B. And Cray, Johnny And Stevie Ray

The blues is a lot like baseball. Both are vital strands of the American cultural fabric, woven tightly into our national mythology. Both look back to an earlier Golden Age when the legendary exploits of heroes like Robert Johnson and Babe Ruth shaped the future. Early baseball games were played in pastures; now they take place on plastic rugs under city lights, but the essence of the game remains the same. The blues has come in from the fields to downtown bars and concert halls, changing its sound but retaining its basic emotional message of suffering and redemption.

One musician who has been masterful in adapting to the changing face of the blues is **B. B. King**. Born 60 years ago in rural Mississippi, King has frequently (and rightfully) been cited as the most influential urban blues musician in the history of the music. The jacket of his latest album, *Six Silver Strings* (MCA 5616), proclaims it as "B. B. King's 50th Album" (B. B. says it's more like his 60th), and it's too bad it isn't better. Although indisputably "modern" in sound, the album's heavy-handed, synthesized arrangements do little more than obscure B. B.'s strong vocals and pithy, eloquent guitar fills. *Into The Night*, from the movie of the same name, is forgettable fluff; *In The Midnight Hour* is just not a good tune for B. B.'s style; and a hokey version of *Big Boss Man* grafted onto a *Billie Jean* riff is plain awful. B. B. King's contribution to the blues is as deep and wide as the Mississippi River, but this album isn't much more than a sandbar along the way.

A far better example of authentic blues feeling in a contemporary setting is *False Accusations* (Hightone 8005) by the **Robert Cray Band**. Cray's first Hightone album, *Bad Influence*, helped him to win an unprecedented four W.C. Handy Awards last year—and *False Accusations* is even better. The band's playing is tighter and more sharply focused, and the production is cleaner. Cray's music works because he understands his heritage so well: he has distilled his influences down and blended them into his own sound. As a vocalist, his taut, emotional style draws heavily on the intensity of Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, and other '60s r&b singers; as a guitarist, he's out of T-Bone Walker by way of Steve Cropper and Buddy Guy. Cray's tunes (and the ones written for him by Dennis Walker) are funky and clever, and the sparse arrangements allow the music to speak for itself. Not surprisingly, at least one Cray tune is rapidly becoming a blues standard—*Phone Booth*—and I'll be surprised if more of his tunes aren't picked up by blues bands around the world. Listen to Robert Cray—he's got something to say, and



he's saying it well.

If Robert Cray is the finest new voice of what Robert Palmer has called "Deep Blues," then the reigning hero of rocked-up blues is **Stevie Ray Vaughan**. *Soul To Soul* (Epic 40036) is Vaughan's third release, and it is a solid if unspectacular continuation of his earlier work. Vaughan has added a keyboard player to his band and polished up his vocals, but guitar playing is what his music is all about. That's clear at once on *Say What!*, the blistering instrumental that opens the album, and especially on Vaughan's latest tribute to Jimi Hendrix—an updated version of the incredible *Come On* from *Electric Ladyland*. As he has done before, Vaughan shows that he can take Hendrix material and add something of his own to it—not an easy trick. All in all, this is Vaughan's most polished effort yet, although it's a bit disappointing in its lack of original ideas.

One of Vaughan's more notorious blues-rock forefathers is **Johnny Winter**, whose comeback continues on *Serious Business* (Alligator 4742). Like last year's well-received *Guitar Slinger*, this new album features an excellent young band anchored by bassist Johnny B. Gayden and drummer Casey Jones from the Albert Collins band. Winter remains something of a caricature, though, playing guitar as if he were paid by the note and gargling his way through salacious lyrics on tunes like *Master Mechanic* ("You tell me you need your front end aligned/Don't panic, I'm a master mechanic"). There's a certain charm to stuff like that, and Winter exudes enough energy to light a small city—but a little more restraint would make his music a lot better. Like a fastball pitcher who has trouble finding the plate, Winter needs to work on his control if he's going to make it to the Hall of Fame. —jim roberts

experimentation sounded so *friendly*, so human in scale.

Drawn from tapes made by the artist, these recordings do suffer from intermittent (if surmountable) "ghosts" and pressing noise. *Collection* was produced in a limited edition of 500 signed and numbered copies and can be ordered from: Cadence Building, Redwood, NY 13679. The set prominently features the composer's cover art and drawings, and it marks the first American issue of Bill Dixon's music in 19 years. —peter kostakis



EARL COLEMAN

STARDUST—Slosh 243: *I HEAR A RHAPSODY; SERENADE IN BLUE; STAR EYES; STAR DUST; GOOD-BYE; I SURRENDER DEAR; THE GYPSY; THIS TIME THE DREAM'S ON ME; THE THINGS WE DID LAST SUMMER; FLAMINGO.*

Personnel: Coleman, vocals; Jerry Dodgion, reeds; Tom Harrell, trumpet; Michael Abene, piano; George Duvivier, bass; Walter Bolden, drums.

★ ★

EARL COLEMAN RETURNS—Original Jazz Classics 187 (Prestige 7045): *SAFETY IN NUMBERS; REMINISCING; SOCIAL CALL; IT'S YOU OR NO ONE; COME RAIN OR COME SHINE; NO LOVE, NO NOTHING.*

Personnel: Coleman, vocals; Art Farmer, trumpet; Gigi Gryce, alto saxophone; Hank Jones, piano; Oscar Pettiford, Wendell Marshall, bass; Shadow Wilson, Wilbert Hogan, drums.

★ ★ ★

Among "purists" there prevails a notion that jazz and the vocalist are finally not quite compatible, as if the necessity of communicating in words inhibits creative spontaneity, the fullness of invention. I could cite such performers as Eddie Jefferson and Sarah Vaughan as absolute refutation of this notion, but its validity or lack thereof is not my point. What counts is that the purist's opinion demonstrates that the relationship between jazz and the vocal instrument, though of long standing, is very iffy. And if it's seen as tenuous even in the case of a Jefferson or a Vaughan, what about in that of an out-and-out *ballad* singer like Earl Coleman?

It is true that he's been singing with jazz bands and groups of all kinds since 1939—with Ellington, Jay McShann, Earl Hines, Gene Ammons, Charlie Parker. In the '50s he was stricken with chronic bronchitis, which kept

him out of action for a time, but when he returned, it was with the likes of Fats Navarro, Art Farmer, and Sonny Rollins. Yet Coleman is a ballad singer, who certainly thrives in a jazz context, but who, nevertheless, is not fully a jazz player. He sings a fine line between blues and laidback small-combo improvisation on the one hand, and good pop balladeering on the other.

That Coleman is a baritone may be sufficient reason to call to mind Al Hibbler. Comparison becomes inevitable when one listens to a number like *I Hear A Rhapsody* (on the *Stardust* album), which features vowels identical to those that make Hibbler sound, at uncanny moments, anachronistically like Anthony Newley. But Hibbler divided his career between jazz and pop, and little of the one got into the other. As a jazz singer, he's far more inventive than Coleman and, what is more, his invention is always wry, ingratiating even while it is distancing.

Not so Coleman. As a straightforward ballad man backed by jazz ensembles, he has staked out for himself a perilously narrow territory. What he has to offer, in the absence of ample jazz invention and wit, is the voice itself—a rare combination of deep, almost unctuous resonance and a foggy veiled sound that verges on tearful plaintiveness. It's all fashioned with the kind of craft that, musical preferences notwithstanding, virtually everyone admires in, say, vintage Frank Sinatra.

But is it enough to sustain one's interest through an entire album, let alone two? Not quite my interest, I'm afraid. Of the two, the *Earl Coleman Returns* reissue invites the more sustained attention because of the excellent performances by fine sidemen. Their engaging restraint is the perfect foil to Coleman's unabashed pop lyricism. *Stardust*, in contrast, lacks such a foil. The sidemen are fine, but the arrangements by Michael Abene offer the singer no opposition and, therefore, the listener no relief.

—alan axelrod



MICROSCOPIC SEPTET

LET'S FLIP!—Osmosis 6003: *THE LOBSTER PARADE; SECOND AVENUE; WHY NOT?; LET'S FLIP!; LAZLO'S LAMENT; BOO BOO COMING; JOHNNY COME LATELY.*

Personnel: Phillip Johnston, soprano saxophone; Don Davis, alto saxophone; Danny Nigro, tenor saxophone; Dave Sewelson, baritone saxophone; Joel Forrester, piano; David Hofstra, bass; Richard Dworkin, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

From their lineup, you might expect the Septet

to sound like WSQ plus rhythm, but this band's sax quartet is more like the Four Breukers. New York's Microscopics—recorded in Rotterdam, by the way—share Dutch bandleader Willem B.'s penchant for hopalong sax riffs, dance-academy latin steps, r&b tenor solos, and prankish interpolations. (Pet Clark's *My Love*, slightly streamlined, segues into *Hey Jude* on a *Lobster rumba*.) Like Breuker's *Kollektief* the Septet boasts an arresting saxophone section—led by a hot-oil soprano—whose sound is thick as frosting and zippy as Pepper. The foursome's intonation is so precise, even the homiest and most harmonium-pure voicings

sound gorgeous.

But while the Septet's music helps map the slow globalization of new jazz, Breuker's is but one influence operating here, and the Micros' humor is not Breuker broad or manic. (The tango-'til-you-chuckle *Lazlo's Lament* is closer to the relative composure of Carla Bley's band.) As those quotes on *Lobster Parade* suggest, the Scopics refract radio pop from several eras: Forrester's and Johnston's catchy rolling-riff tunes place us somewhere between Kansas City, a lounge, and a sock hop. This is a band that plays pretty and hot.

Not surprisingly, those saxes sound as slinky

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RECORD REVIEWS

Minimal Music

Composers Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass have been disowning the term "minimalism" for years as an inaccurate and limiting description of their music. Initially, minimalism reacted against the abstractions of serialism and conservative neo-classicists. Non-Western techniques and new technologies were applied with the precision of an electron microscope and the sublime passion of Zen, looking deeper into sound and structure.

Now, nearly 20 years after Terry Riley's minimalist manifesto, *In C*, the original composers and many of their disciples have popped out the other side, with more expansive structures and formats. But like a shirt turned inside-out, the threads of the underlying pattern are still apparent.

Terry Riley was always the most enigmatic of the original composers. He's dropped out of sight for years at a time. More recently he abandoned his solo-keyboard-and-delay format for, variously, vocal performances, piano works, and on *Cadenza On The Night Plain* (Gramavision 18-7014-1/2), a string quartet. Admittedly, I think Riley is best behind an electronic keyboard sans vocals. But *Cadenza* defied my prejudices with its austere panoramas and a sensitive performance by the Kronos String Quartet.

Riley reveals new facets running a gamut of expressions: jaunty, pointillistic, baroque, swinging, and yes, even cyclical. And that's only on *Mythic Birds Waltz*. He is still composing vast landscapes of interior worlds, but there's a wryness and mood-shifting deftness that would be out of place in his keyboard performances. Meanwhile, *Cadenza On The Night Plain* opens with the long sinuously bending lines that Riley has appropriated from Indian ragas and quickly moves through jagged anguish, reflection, and then methodical construction with marches and hoedowns populating this mythic western painting. *Cadenza* is barely recognizable as Riley's work. His writing is fluid, but the imprimatur of cyclical evolution, the inner directed spiral, is gone.

Steve Reich, on the other hand, retains all the signposts of his earlier work, as well as some of Riley's. *The Desert Music* (Nonesuch 79101-1) opens each side with a clockwork pulse that pays homage to Riley's *In C*. Scored for orchestra and choir and conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, Reich's additive processes are apparent as he builds his lines note by note, making them longer and more convoluted. The interlocked patterns are uncanny in their centrifugal logic, but they lack the momentum that has marked his work since *Drumming*. There are problems with the text, too, lifted from poems by William Carlos Williams. Reich uses them to comment on his own musical process and overstates the obvious. "It's a principle of music to repeat the theme. Repeat and re-

peat again . . ." repeats the choir, in an overlapping canon. Compared to his mesmerizing vocal writing on *Tehillim*, the chorus here sounds forced.

Phillip Glass has been more prolific—and more popular—than either Reich or Riley. The soundtrack recording to *Mishima* (Nonesuch 79113-1) is a Glass sampler, an assortment of styles including scoring for string quartet on 1934 (with Kronos), his patented keyboard dervishes on *November 25*, and orchestral writing throughout. There's even some rock & roll on *Osamu's Theme*, with a conventional rhythm section and a guitar solo that sounds like Duane Eddy playing a koto. Glass adapts his heroic brand of cyclical music to dramatic film scoring techniques. But unlike *Koyannisqatsi*, where music and visual image were equal, here music is subservient to director Paul Schrader's narrative. Only *Runaway Horses*, the longest track at nine minutes, builds that relentless momentum in which the music has its own life.

Mikel Rouse's anti-nuclear treatise, *A Walk In The Woods* (Club Soda Music 002) recalls the energy of early Philip Glass with a more developed sense of harmony and counterpoint. Rouse composes in overlapping cycles, churning wheels of melodic development acting independently, but all headed for the same destination. His synthesizer lines buzz urgently underneath while a quartet of reed instruments and strings shift the motifs through different voicings on *Friendship '84*. *Winter In Wyoming* paints a desolate landscape with a lone violin searching the air, its shadow reflected in the grumbling bass.

John Adams is seeking his own voice in contemporary music. His *Harmonielehre* (Nonesuch 79115-1) is an intriguing but frustrating fence-walk between the so-called new romanticism of George Rochberg and David Del Tredici and minimalism. *Harmonielehre*, like many minimalist pieces, begins with a pulse. However, this pulse is of Mahlerish proportions, with the full San Francisco Symphony under conductor Edo DeWaart announcing its arrival with a thundering, air-clearing fanfare. Repetition and cycles are the work's sub-text. The opening barrage is masterfully transmuted through different emerging themes before turning into a Debussy-like melancholy of sweeping strings. The taut telegraph cycles at the close of "Part One," punctuated by rolling drums and percussion present exciting possibilities, but the symphonic washes of strings are tepid and lacking in distinction or conviction.

Aaron Copland once opined about this music "Minimalism: the name says its value, doesn't it?" To me, "minimal" never meant less—it meant deeper, richer, and more intense. These composers, spanning two generations from Riley to Rouse are beginning to channel this music into newer and possibly even more exciting directions. But they're still only beginning. —john diliberto

apart as they do when blended. The reedfolk take tuneful, accessible solos on plain chords, playing with taste and imagination (and without a whiff of commercial pandering), and making it sound easy. I half expect New York producers to lure them into the studios, to spell some exhausted vets.

It's easy to lose sight of the rhythm section in this crowd. If the saxophonists are going to skid over a stiff cha-cha beat, somebody has to play it straight; like any good straightmen, Forrester, Hofstra, and Dworkin rely on self-effacing perfect timing. Their contribution's pivotal on Strayhorn's *Johnny Come Lately* (aka *Stomp*), recast by Johnston to sound thoroughly Microscopic. He's placed it under a Glass, you might say: the dissection of a melody exposes minimalist piano ripples, and an endlessly tumbling stop-time break. On the latter (and through *Second Avenue's* twisting syncopations), sax trio and rhythm trio interlock in one snugly efficient riffing machine—a well-timed reminder that it takes more than four bright saxes to illuminate this Magnified Seven. —kevin whitehead

BUDDY DE FRANCO/ JOHN DENMAN

BUDDY DE FRANCO PRESENTS JOHN DENMAN—Lud 101: *WHIRLIGIG; CLOSE ENOUGH FOR LOVE; THE LOVELY YEARS; DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE; UNAUTHORIZED TOUCHING; LOVER MAN; CAPRICCIO; BUT NOT FOR ME; MAR DESCANCADO.*

Personnel: De Franco, Denman, clarinet; Keith Greko, piano, harpsichord; Paula Fan, harpsichord; Phil Pearce, bass; Jim Bastin, drums.

★★★★★

CLARINET SUMMIT

CLARINET SUMMIT VOLUME 2—India Navigation 1067: *MOOD INDIGO; NIGHT MIST BLUE; WALTZ A MINUTE; CREOLE LOVE CALL; SOLO AND BALLAD FOR FOUR CLARINETS; SATIN DOLL; CLARIFAVORS.*

Personnel: Jimmy Hamilton, John Carter, Alvin Batiste, clarinet; David Murray, bass clarinet.

★★★½

LICORICE FACTORY

LICORICE FACTORY—Jazzmania 41206: *AZURE; A GOODMAN'S HARD TO FIND; BAG-DAD; YOU NEEDED ME; DANDELION WINE; LAUREL & HARDY MEET THE THREE STOOGES; DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO MISS NEW ORLEANS; ALWAYS ON MY MIND; STOLEN MOMENTS.*

Personnel: Perry Robinson, clarinet; Mark Whitecage, alto clarinet; Mike Morgenstern, bass clarinet; Dave Lalama, piano; Michael Fleming, bass; Walter Perkins, drums.

★★★

It might be said that Buddy De Franco is, quite simply, the best jazz clarinetist who has ever lived. But that assertion, however tempting to

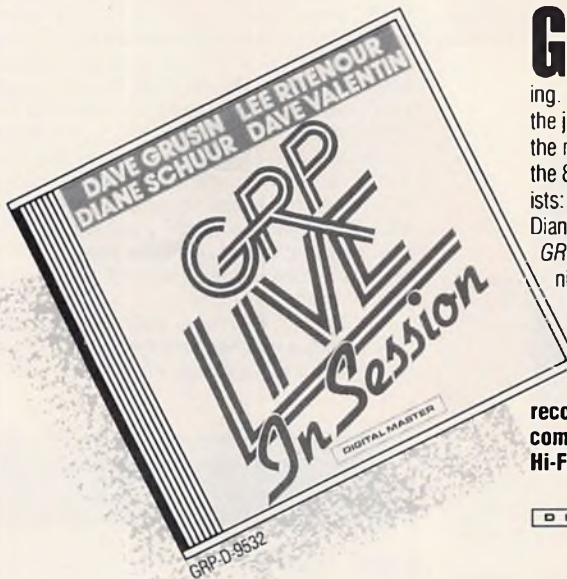
support, would just not be true. To align oneself to that belief would be to ignore the very essence of jazz sensibility: that there are gradient levels of behavior in operation that affect all players at different times, and that, because of these variables, no one musician can always be "the best." In other words, even one's own "best" performance ultimately depends on the simultaneity of many favorable factors and, as any musician knows, the likelihood of this occurring on a consistent basis is extremely slight. So, the better players are those who have built up such an impressive reserve of abilities that they can overcome the risk of variable behaviors even to the point of successfully maintaining an image of unflagging consistency.

Although few may have heard of them, it is certain that even De Franco must have had his bad days, days when the only things he could think of playing were ideas and patterns he would summon up from his vast reserve so as to fill the void of a momentarily diminished imagination caused by any number of physical or mental distractions. But the day captured on this latest release of his was certainly not one of those hypothetical problem days, because, for presumably the first time in his recording career, he was paired with a clarinetist of equal dimensions. Denman, a renowned British virtuoso with impressive symphonic and solo credentials, turns out to also be a longtime devotee of the De Franco approach to jazz improvisation, and his collaboration with the American master is nothing short of brilliant. Together, they present mirror images of the same conception, which is to say that they both display faultless execution, perfect intonation, warm sonority, sophisticated control of extended harmonies, and rhythmic freedom. This record is highly recommended to all lovers of well-played clarinet. The best De Franco? Who knows? Let's wait to see what he does next.

Clarinet Summit Volume 2 is a continuation of the same Public Theater concert that gave us an album last year and, as such, seems to consist largely of second choices. This is not to say that its release is either unwarranted or unwelcome, for there is much of beauty here to be savored. The shorter selections, as pleasant as they are, offer too little for comment beyond their attractive voicings and the opportunity to hear more of Hamilton's still lovely tone. Rather, it is the almost 13-minute Carter Solo and the over 16-minute Batiste *Clarifavors* (presumably an encore, for an 11-minute version was included on the earlier release) which demand most of the listener's time. Carter, whose "best" performance this seems to be to date, and Batiste both favor the fast flurry, wide interval skip, dog-whistle range approach that has come to represent the last ditch effort of the avant garde.

Licorice Factory, though its members attempt no such lofty heights of questionable virtuosity as Carter and Batiste, finds itself equally quagmired in the flabby ooze of Robinson's lead voice. Whitecage is comfortably boppish and in control of himself; Morgenstern is thoughtful and appropriate in his moments; but Robinson, an irrepressible idiosyncratic, seems to insist on perpetrating quirks of into-

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RECORD REVIEWS

nation that would raise even our beloved Pee Wee Russell from the grave. On the credit side, however, it must be mentioned that, with the exception of their tasteless parodizing of dixieland on *Do You Know What It Means*, the arrangements were well-conceived. Especial plaudits, moreover, go to Whitecage for his sensitive treatment of Willie Nelson's *Always On My Mind*. —jack sohmer



BEN SIDRAN

ON THE COOL SIDE—Magenta 0204: *MITSUBISHI BOY*; *LOVER MAN PART 1*; *LOVER MAN PART 2*; *BROWN EYES*; *ON THE COOL SIDE*; *OLD HOAGY*; *HEAT WAVE*; *UP A LAZY RIVER*.

Personnel: Sidran, Yamaha DX7, Fender Rhodes, LinnDrum, Prophet, vocals; Billy Peterson, bass, arranger (cuts 2, 3); Ricky Peterson, keyboards; Howard Arthur, guitar (1, 4); Paul Peterson, LinnDrum program (2, 3); R. Peterson (4), Steve Miller (5), Patty Peterson (7), Mac Rebennack (8), vocals.

★

DAVE FRISHBERG

LIVE AT VINE STREET—Fantasy 9638: *YOU WOULD RATHER HAVE THE BLUES*; *ZANZIBAR*; *ONE HORSE TOWN*; *EL CAJON*; *THE DEAR DEPARTED PAST*; *JOHNNY HODGES MEDLEY (WANDERLUST/SQUATTY ROO/ DAYDREAM/ I GOT IT BAD/ I'M BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT/ DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE/ PASSION FLOWER/ I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT YOU/ STAR-CROSSED LOVERS/ HODGE PODGE)*; *THE SPORTS PAGE*; *LONG DADDY GREEN*; *ELOISE*; *BLIZZARD OF LIES*.

Personnel: Frishberg, piano, vocals.

★★★★★

Who's writing songs worth singing these days? Who's writing songs worth remembering these days? Dave Frishberg is. Ben Sidran isn't. Neither one of these guys is much of a singer, as pianist/singer/songwriters go, but Frishberg at least communicates real personality, humor, humanity, and joy. Sidran—for all his ability as a writer, PBS radio critic, and marketing genius—communicates as songwriter and singer little but the grim facelessness of computer age music and tele-marketed talent.

Frishberg is in close touch with his past; the lovingly kaleidoscopic Hodges medley, lyrics as loaded with appreciations of '55 Bel Airs and the '67 Mets as raisins in a mince pie. Sidran not only denies history, he negates it:

Mitsubishi Boy is a bleak, impersonal glance at Japanese corporate opportunism, while the memory of Hoagy Carmichael is ill-served not only by the Savannah-via-Hollywood song bearing his name, but by an exceptionally dreary rendition of *Up A Lazy River* with Dr. John droning along. Frishberg clearly loves such important things in life as words (*Zanzibar*), puns (Johnny Mandel's tribute to Al Cohn becomes an ill-fated tryst in *El Cajon*), internal rhyme (*My Attorney Bernie*), issues (wry commentary on the space race and Wall Street crop up in songs like *The Sports Page*), conceits (*Long Daddy Green* is an extended metaphor decrying the lure of lucre), people (*Eloise* and her sheepish suitor are realer than real). Sidran, on the contrary, is into shtick and pseudo-sass: the heat in *Heat Wave* is micro-wave, the love in *Lover Man* of ersatz soap opera variety.

Frishberg is a loner, a poet; Sidran's well-connected, a macher. Frishberg uses his narrative genius in his Woody Allen-esque search

for truth; Sidran has the clinical coolness and moral distance of a camera. Some would call it hip and contemporary; I call it impersonal and throwaway.

Who's playing more piano? Neither one of these guys is going to cop instrumental awards, but there's little doubt as to who's showing more stuff at the keyboard. Listen to Frishberg's playful, occasionally surrealistic fills behind the astronaut chorus on *Sports Page*, and the nice carpet of chords he lays for himself on *Blizzard Of Lies*. And his nine-minute *Hodges Medley* is as quirky and bright, tasteful and lyrical as Jimmy Rowles. Sidran contents himself with some fairly glib throw-aways on *Lover Man* and *Lazy River*, leaning on studio pros for laying flesh and color on the clever charts.

Last but not least, what impact do these two have on other singers? Who's singing Frishberg? Blossom Dearie. Susannah McCorkle, and others on the witty cabaret circuit. Who's singing Sidran besides Ben? —fred bouchard

CRITICS' CHOICE

Art Lange

NEW RELEASE: Ben Webster, *The Complete Ben Webster On EmArcy* (PolyGram). Whether hot & bothered backing Johnny Otis' r&b extravaganza or warm & winsome on jazz ballads, the Brute's tenor is of epic proportion. This two-fer has Reissue Of The Year written all over it.

OLD FAVORITE: Aretha Franklin, *The Best Of . . .* (Atlantic). Newly reissued, the Queen of Soul's pipes are guaranteed to lift you out of your chair and put the boogaloo glide back in your stride. "Whaaaaat you want . . ."

RARA AVIS: Tina Brooks, *The Complete Blue Note Recordings* (Mosaic). Shamefully neglected—even for a music with a history of neglected artists—Brooks' tenor and quintet concepts stood outside the crowd, and today they remain revelatory and still sound exciting.

SCENE: British folk renegades Martin Carthy and John Kirkpatrick plying their age-old, up-to-date craft of ballads, jigs, and blarney, at Holstein's in Chicago.

Bill Shoemaker

NEW RELEASE: Geri Allen, *Home Grown* (Minor Music). Ms. Allen has quickly asserted herself in the forefront of new pianists, and this engaging solo set may prove to be a pivot point in her career.

OLD FAVORITE: Anthony Braxton, *Trio & Duet* (Sackville). A kaleidoscopic trio with trumpeter Leo Smith and synthesist Richard Teitelbaum, plus an in-the-tradition duo with bassist Dave Holland, comprise what is arguably Braxton's best pre-Arista album.

RARA AVIS: Voice, *Voice* (Ogun). This '76 recording presents the intriguing English avant-a capella quartet (Julie Tippetts, Maggie Nicols, Phil Minton, Brian Eley) inspired by African breezes, singing wood, and phonetic phenomena.

SCENE: The World Saxophone Quartet (David Murray, Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, Hamiet Bluiett) raising the roof at d.c. space, Washington DC.

Gene Santoro

NEW RELEASE: Various Artists, *New Africa 2/Hard Cell/Beat Freaks* (Celluloid). This three-disc set samples generous cuts from Celluloid's provocative and diverse catalog of artists, including Fela, Toure Kunda, Manu Dibango, Golden Palominos, Material, and the Last Poets. Turns you on to the sound of some different drummers.

OLD FAVORITE: Otis Redding, *Best Of . . .* (Atco). That full-throated voice, matched in its swoops and melisma by the Stax/Volt horns and Booker T and the MGs, could make grown men weep and women do almost whatever it asked. *Try A Little Tenderness*—two LPs worth.

RARA AVIS: Muddy Waters, *McKinley Morganfield AKA Muddy Waters* (Chess). Replaced by the single LP reissue, this double-set captures the champ of electric blues over a broader range of musical peaks, and hits hard and heavy with relentless backbeats, twined guitars, sobbing harp, and deep blues voice. If you want to learn how to play rock & roll, you can start right here.

SCENE: James Brown packed the Lone Star (NYC) stage with Maceo and the boys, and smoked the over-capacity crowd with patented hot-and-funky vamps. Every rhythm section should have to study *Cold Sweat*.

Holiday For Collectors

We celebrate **Billie Holiday** for the depth of emotion she expressed honestly in her music, and yet for an artist who even in her weakest moments performed with genuine originality and integrity, clichés cluster to her records like moths around a flame. One can easily conjure the mental picture of a council of dour-faced squares, terrified of the higher truths Holiday espoused in her art, conspiring to disarm her potency by spreading nasty rumors about her. "Don't listen to her later records," people purporting to love Holiday will tell you. "She couldn't sing at all in the last seven years of her life." I guess you can't inject so much real passion into a song without scaring the pants off of some people.

If *Billie Holiday On Verve, 1946-59* (PolyGram OOMJ 3480/9), the 10-record set that contains all of her recordings for Norman Granz, achieves nothing else, it will at least dispel that offensive rumor. These are not the dissipated remnants of a life of excesses and addictions. Rather, Holiday's collected Clef, Mercury, Verve, and MGM recordings signify a new peak for the woman who taught the world that the interaction and feeling of jazz musicians was the ultimate key to interpreting the great American song lyric.

The virtues of this period and the PolyGram box in particular are many. For the only time in her career, she didn't have to sing every song—good, bad, or banal—that came down the pike to her, and her supporting cast (Charlie Shavers, Tony Scott, Ben Webster, Paul Quinichette, Sweets Edison, Jimmy Rowles, et al) was as good as any of her accompanists from the '30s, with the exception of Lester Young. The deservedly famous Japanese reproductions and pressings improve on the already excellent original recording quality. Lastly, in addition to four newly unearthed tracks there are rarities such as a revealing alternate take of *Autumn In New York*, wherein she sings a completely different melody in the last eight bars.

Holiday may display less power than she did 20 years previously, but only because she needs less. In the blues, for example, she drops bread crumbs for us to follow the trail of her development. Over the years she performed dozens of variations on a theme that label-copy typists called either *Billie's Blues*, *I Love My Man*, or *Fine And Mellow*. While she swings with youthful exuberance on her first recording of the piece in 1936, the two concert versions from 1956 are the more convincing. These are dark, multilayered works in which the subtlest of gestures and the most miniscule nuances take on tremendous meaning.

In addition to the 10 records, the box contains a 36-page booklet (including discography) and prints of four original

David Stone Martin cover drawings. Only nitpickers could find something to gripe about in the set as a whole (though the producers should have engaged the still-active Martin to design the box front). No, my complaints are not directed at PolyGram, but rather at labels that don't keep their Billie Holiday records in print. CBS, any time it wanted, could either import or reissue the complete Holiday set that its own Japanese

affiliate released 10 years ago. But CBS chooses not to, reminding us that Lady Day's battles are still being fought. It hardly matters. *Billie Holiday On Verve 1946-59* is essential music by the most haunting and hypnotic voice—indeed, *sound*—in all of recorded music. When she sings, you'll recall a line from *Much Ado About Nothing*: "Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?"

—will friedwald



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RECORD REVIEWS

Old-School Fusion For The '80s

As we've passed the halfway point of the 1980s, now seems a good time to consider the future of the hottest music of the past two decades: fusion. Of course, every kind of music on the market today is a hybrid of some kind, fusing various elements from divergent cultures into one mix. Reggae seems to be permeating nearly every form of music from pop to rock to jazz. Indian violinists L. Shankar and L. Subramaniam continue to merge Eastern classical forms with Western structures. King Sunny Adé blends rock guitars to the traditional juju beat of Nigeria. Bill Laswell brings streetwise beat box appeal to the music of Herbie Hancock, Fela Kuti, Sly & Robbie. It's *all* fusion.

But what I'm dealing with here is neither hip-hop nor juju, not reggae or raga. I'm referring specifically to old-school fusion. Is the music produced by such jazz-rock pioneers as Lifetime, Free Spirits, Dreams, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Eleventh House, and Return To Forever still valid today? Is there a new audience for high-energy music full of rock crunch and laden with triplets? Are there any new bands carrying on in that spirit? Is it true that what goes around comes around?

A look at six new releases would indicate that the basic formula of fusion is still very much alive today; that is, combining the crunch of Jimi Hendrix with the harmonic sophistication of John Coltrane. But a closer look reveals that the face of fusion in the mid-'80s is hardly the same animal that came charging out of the gate in the late-'60s. Today's stuff is tame compared to the savage, sprawling, ear-splitting, jam-oriented affairs produced nearly two decades ago by the likes of Tony Williams, John McLaughlin, Larry Coryell, and Billy Cobham.

Take *Emergency*, for instance. That 1969 free-for-all between Williams, McLaughlin, and organist Larry Young is positively primal compared to McLaughlin's latest edition of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, or any of the other fusion offerings being produced today, for that matter. The recording quality is abysmal by today's digital standards and the session seems so steeped in psychedelia and sheer reckless abandon that it nearly flies off the handle at times. Yet for all its garage band raunch and metallic maelstrom, there's a certain compelling quality there, a sense of exuberance and daring that seems to be lacking in today's fusion music.

Or take Mahavishnu's landmark *The Inner Mounting Flame*. That 1971 session between McLaughlin, Cobham, bassist Rick Laird, violinist Jerry Goodman, and keyboardist Jan Hammer is so intense, so inspired that the music seems to take on a life of its own apart from the individual players involved. You can almost see them levitating around

the studio as they burn through *Awakening*. Whew!

Using these two albums as a standard, how do these recent fusion offerings stack up? Not too well, thank you. For the six albums reviewed, I applied the following criteria:

- Do the guitars crunch? (fuzz, distortion, sustain all vital)
- Do the drums crack like thunder? (double bass drum optional)
- Is there a prevalence of triplets and long strings of 16th notes?
- Is there a prevalence of intricate unison and harmony lines?
- Are the solos fast, intense, reckless, screaming?
- Do the pieces have a loose, organic quality?
- Would fans of hardcore rock dig it?
- Would Leonard Feather hate it?

The fusion movement more or less fizzled out around 1976 with the breakup of Return To Forever, the foremost exponent of fusion music at the time. RTF guitarist **Al Di Meola** carried on valiantly in that vein for some years, but one man does not a movement make. And now he too has jumped ship. Di Meola has put aside his blazing rock chops, packed away his Les Paul, and gotten rid of his Marshall stacks in favor of a softer, more soothing sound. His two most recent releases, the esoteric *Cielo e Terra* (Manhattan 53002) and the melodious, Brazilian-influenced *Soaring Through A Dream* (Manhattan 53011) show the man in a radically different light. No longer content to flaunt his lightning speed, Di Meola has settled into the more mature role of composer. His acoustic guitar and fat-bodied Guild give a warmer sound than he's opted for in his fusion heyday, and the guitar lines figure less prominently than on past albums. He seems more interested in melody and textures, and he's exploring both in earnest with the Synclavier digital guitar. The music is mellow and beautiful and lyrical—and so, neither album qualifies as a candidate for true fusion consideration.

But **Kazumi Watanabe's** *Mobo Club* (Gramavision 8506-1) certainly does. The premiere Japanese electric guitarist has put together a decidedly more intense, crunchier LP here than his last two releases, the reggae-flavored *Mobo I* and *Mobo II* sessions (Gramavision 8404 and 8406, respectively), featuring Sly & Robbie as rhythm instigators. While guitarists like Di Meola and Pat Metheny are using the latest digital technology to create entrancing tones and soft textures, Watanabe is going out to lunch with the stuff. Using the Roland GR-707, he seems intent on expanding the celestial guitar vocabulary created by Hendrix in the late '60s and expanded on by McLaughlin in the early-'70s. His *Fu-Ren*, leading off side one of *Mobo Club*, reaches the same dizzying heights of intensity as *The Inner Mounting Flame*. Kazumi pulls out all the stops and launches into some stratospheric solos on this seven-minute romp, building to an ec-

static crescendo as Greg Lee's bass and Shuichi Murakami's drums rumble behind him. *Kyosei Seppun* and *Kiken-Ga-Ippai* both feature the kind of frenzied, furious chops that guitar heroes are made of. And the funky vamp of Σ provides a good springboard for the kind of insane solo that would make Eddie Van Halen devotees drop their jaws. In the classic mold of old-school fusion, Watanabe's album seems more geared toward open-ended jamming and improvisation rather than being blatantly aimed at radio play, as some of his mid-'70s crossover albums for Inner City tended to be.

The same can be said of **Robbie Krieger's** latest. This self-titled LP (Cafe 730) by the ex-Doors guitarist is clearly a renegade product. You needn't go any further than the 15-minute cut *Noisul* to realize that. No signs of overt commercialism here. The cuts are overly long, the solos are maniacal, developing gradually and building to peaks of energy (just like in the good old days). Everything about this curious disc defies the current desire for radio play. More than any of the other albums reviewed here, *Robbie Krieger* captures the spirit and essence of those early jazz-rock fusion days.

Now that can be good or bad. Good if you enjoy expansive solos with lots of grunge. Bad if you wait for melodic hooks to come along every 12 bars. Ain't no hooks here. The recording quality is also quite raunchy by 24-track digital standards. This session was recorded live at the Variety Arts Theatre in Los Angeles with nothing more than a Studer A-80 tape recorder and an MS stereo microphone. Strangely, there was no audience. Just Krieger, drummer Bruce Gary, ex-Zappa bassist Arthur Barrow, synthesist Don Preston (a charter member of the Mothers Of Invention) and the mic. The result is a wildly unrestrained blowing session for all involved. *Bag Lady* is a melancholy blues that gives Krieger plenty of room to run flowing scalar lines that sustain and buzz with distortion. *Reggae Funk* sounds right out of Mahavishnu's *Birds Of Fire* with all its hyper-drive unison lines, and *Bass Line Street* is full of the tricky triplets that helped define the genre. But the centerpiece is the sprawling *Noisul*, full of fuzz-inflected flailing, wacky synth screams, and assorted sonic mayhem.

Billy Cobham is a savvy composer who knows all about hooks and is well-acquainted with crunchpower. He melds the two successfully on *Warning*, his well-crafted debut on GRP 9528. Cobham strikes a nostalgic chord with *Stratus*, a memorable cut from his 1973 solo debut, *Spectrum*. On the original, the father of fuscoid double bass drum thumping was accompanied by fellow Mahavishnu-mate Jan Hammer on keyboards and the late Tommy Bolin on guitar. Here Gerry Etkins reprises the keyboard role with the advantage of having access to hipper synthesizers than were available circa 1973. This hot remake crackles with energy, bite, and intensity. And the crystalline digital recording quality allows it to sizzle all the more.

Throughout, *Warning* is a crisply executed, tightly arranged affair that flaunts Cobham's penchant for melodic hooks as well as his considerable drum prowess. Behind the hooks, it packs a wallop. *The Dancer* features the Mr. T of drummers bashing mightily behind a catchy synth melody. The crack of the snare is quintessential Cobham. The double bass thumping on the tag is his calling card. Nobody propels a band quite like this guy. *Mozaik* features the Cobham bombast in full force, cracking the snare, laying on the funk, and covering the kit with quick-wristed fills. *Go For It!* is high-flying fusion sparked by Dean Brown's fuzz-inflected guitar lines. *Unknown Jeromes* borders on the edge of fuzak, but Cobham redeems himself with *Red & Yellow Cabriolet*, an engaging melody that has radioplay potential. But, of course, that don't make it fusion.

Like Cobham, **Jean-Luc Ponty's** music seems to be more about craft than spirituality. Granted, he's a proven pro with monstrous chops, but something's missing on his latest release, *Fables* (Atlantic 81276-1)—that element of daring and reckless abandon that borders on catharsis. Tunes like the rocky *Infinite Pursuit*, the African-influenced *Elephants In Love*, and the techno-funk of *Plastic Idols* seem too calculated to shock, surprise, or inspire listeners as *Emergency* did and still does to this day. Given his strict classical background, it's understood that Ponty is a perfectionist, a stickler for discipline, and an exacting arranger. This rather controlled approach seems at odds with the looser nature of fusion's earliest pioneers. Consequently, *Fables* is the polar opposite of Krieger's communal jam. Only one tune fills the fusion bill—*Cat Tales*. It's intense, full of the tricky time signatures that Ponty has been fond of for years, and it's got the crunch factor. Score one for the Flying Frenchman, anyway.

A representative of the neo-fusion movement is Miles alumnus **Bill Evans**, currently a member of the new Mahavishnu Orchestra. For his solo debut on Elektra/Musician, *Living In The Crest Of A Wave*, the talented saxophonist took a more ethereal, textural approach. But on his recent release, *The Alternative Man* (Blue Note 85111), he approaches the crunch factor on a few tunes. Evans is not above using drum machines (whereas Cobham won't go near 'em), and he features several high-flying fusion guest star guitar solos on this ambitious new album. Hiram Bullock offers some heavy metal appeal with his wired solo on *Let The Juice Loose!*, a hot romp with big drums by Danny Gottlieb and booming bass by Marcus Miller. Sid McGinnis' screaming guitar solo on *JoJo* gives that tune a biting edge. And the scorching guitar work by Jeff Golub on the highly energized title cut certainly qualifies it as fusion fare. But the ersatz reggae of *The Path Of Least Resistance* doesn't make the grade. And the evocative, textural nature of *The Cry In Her Eyes* makes it sound like an out-take from Evans' first album. John

McLaughlin's presence on this album does not lend the fusion sensibility one might expect. His acoustic guitar work on *Survival Of The Fittest* and *Flight Of The Falcon*, though breathtakingly beautiful, is far from fusionesque in the original Mahavishnu sense. And the jazzy *Miles Away*, with drummer Al Foster and bassist Miller, is hardly a good candidate for the fusion Hot 100. Journey fans wouldn't dig it.

Speaking of Journey, hot-shot rock guitar hero Neil Schon from that mega-platinum band makes a cameo appearance on **Jeff Berlin's** *Champion* (Passport 88004). Berlin, who played bass in bands led by fusion greats Allan Holdsworth and Bill Bruford, also calls on the services of Journey drummer Steve Smith, Rush drummer Neil Peart, former Dregs keyboardist T Lavitz, and current Jean-Luc Ponty guitarist Scott Henderson for this all-star outing. Suffice it to say, *Champion* leans more toward the rock side of jazz-rock than the jazz side, although Berlin and company are more than able to make the changes on *Donna Lee*, *Giant Steps*, or a Bach fugue, if so inclined. What's interesting here is the relative degree of freedom that guitarist Henderson has on every cut as opposed to his work on Ponty's album. Released from the reigns of the maestro, Henderson breaks loose with some incredible playing that frequently bears the stamp of Holdsworth himself. On *Mother Lode*, his playing is legato and lyrical. On the challenging *Marabi*, he matches Bird-like unison lines with Berlin's bass before all hell breaks loose, launching him into a hyper-drive wang bar solo that screams with intensity. This tune is the single best example of powerhouse, all-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38



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RECORD REVIEWS

out wailing fusion on the album. 20,000 Prayers is a more mellow offering, reminiscent of a Steve Swallow composition, though Berlin does get to flaunt his impressive chops by navigating his way through a myriad of chord changes in nimble fashion. Midway through the piece, the pace kicks into double-time and Berlin breaks into some flurries of triplets. *Subway Music*, featuring Schon's sizzling metal guitar lines, and the anthemic title cut are strictly upbeat rock fare with vocals upfront. All told, about half of *Champion* falls into the unadulterated fusion category, and that half is coming out of groups like Brand X and Holdsworth's I.O.U. rather than out of Lifetime or Mahavishnu.

Other artists are expanding upon the traditions of jazz-rock fusion today: guitarist Kevin Eubanks (check out *Sundance* on GRP Records), drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson & The Decoding Society (listen to last year's *Decode Yourself* on Island Records), guitarist James Blood Ulmer (currently shopping around for a label), guitarist Vernon Reid (who performs apart from the Decoding Society with a band called Living Color), and

master himself, McLaughlin (whose second album with the newest edition of the Mahavishnu Orchestra is due out soon). All are

at least making an effort to bring the music forward into the '80s. Check them out if you dig the crunch. —bill milkowski

NEW RELEASES

(Record Companies: For listing in the monthly New Releases column, send two copies of each new release to Art Lange, db, 222 W. Adams, Chicago, IL 60606.)

CONCORD JAZZ

Benny Carter, all alto this time around, plus Joe Wilder and Scott Hamilton among the guests, A GENTLEMAN AND HIS MUSIC. **Ed Bickert**, guitarist swings with the help of Canadian cohorts, I WISHED ON THE MOON. **Carlos Barbosa-Lima**, acoustic guitarist in classical arrangements of Faure, Satie, Ravel, Villa-Lobos, and others, IMPRESSIONS.

Poncho Sanchez, spicy collection of cookin' latin grooves, EL CONGUERO. **Tito Puente**, timbales titan tries some curious chestnuts (*Take Five, Lullaby Of Birdland*) and lush latin tunes, MAMBO DIABLO. **Maxine Sullivan**, ever-fresh veteran vocalist assisted by Scott Hamilton's quintet sings standards, UPTOWN. **Larry Coryell/Emily Remler**, touring two-some intertwine their guitars, TOGETHER. **Laurindo Almeida/Charlie Byrd**, duel acoustic guitars tackle TANGOS. **Monty Alexander Trio**, propulsive pianist plus Ray Brown's bass and Frank Gant's drums, FULL STEAM AHEAD.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40

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JAZZ AIDS

JAMEY AEBERSOLD

1 BOOKER T. AND THE MGs.

CHICKEN POX (from MELTING POT, Stax). Booker T. Jones, organ; Steve Cropper, guitar; Donald "Duck" Dunn, bass; Al Jackson, drums.

Sounds like Steve Cropper to me—Steve Cropper and Booker T. and the MGs. That's nasty. He's one of my favorites, 'cause he's so clean and simple, straight to it. I don't know the name of the song, though. It has that Meters sound to it, that Meters groove. I'd like to do something like this; it's funky. That's the most I've ever heard Steve play on a song, actually. He's usually playing nice chords and accents here and there, and very simple. Shows a lot of discipline. I think it's great for other musicians to follow somebody like him, to learn to be tasty with the guitar. He's funky, man.

2 STEVE KHAN. AUXILIARY POLICE (from

EYEWITNESS, Island). Khan, guitar; Anthony Jackson, bass; Steve Jordan, drums; Manolo Badrena, percussion.

I have no idea who this is. It reminds me a little bit of Weather Report. It's got that Sting sound to it also. It's got that Police feel the way the drums are playing, and the bass. It sounds like it could be that trio. When he played that solo with the phase shifter on it that sounded pretty cool. But this particular song doesn't do much for me.

3 THE CRUSADERS. THE WELL'S GONE

DRY (from SOUTHERN COMFORT, Blue Thumb). Larry Carlton, guitar, composer; Wayne Henderson, trombone; Wilton Felder, tenor saxophone; Joe Sample, keyboards; Stix Hooper, drums.

There's a New Orleans flavor to it a little bit. It's got that Crusaders sound, with Larry Carlton. He's a funky man, too. I always dug his style. Clean. In the early '70s when they started having some hits on the radio, I used to listen to a lot of his stuff, 'cause he was funky, real sassy.

4 MILES DAVIS. KATIA (from YOU'RE

UNDER ARREST, Columbia). Davis, trumpet, synthesizer; John McLaughlin, guitar; Daryl Jones, bass; Robert Irving III, synthesizers; Vince Wilburn, Jr., electronic drums; Steve Thornton, percussion.

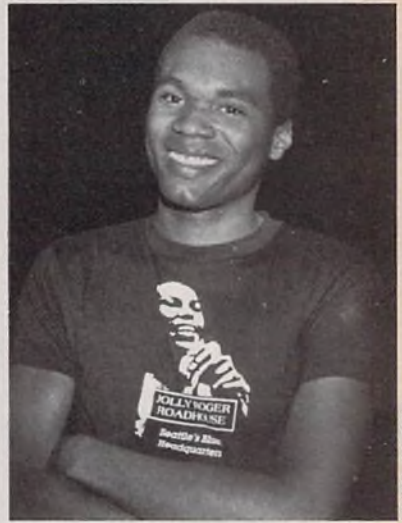
It sounds like something John McLaughlin would be doing with some kind of effects pedals. Sounds like McLaughlin, yeah. This is something recent, right? It's got a latin feel to it like it could be Carlos Santana's band. It's got some different curves on there. I don't know who the trumpet player might be, unless it's Freddie [Hubbard] or somebody. I had a

Robert Cray

By ROBIN TOLLESON

Is Robert Cray a bluesman on the verge of something big? If reaction to his third album and recent tours in England and the States are any barometer, bright days are on the horizon for the 32-year-old guitarist/vocalist. *False Accusations* (Hightone 8005) is number one on British independent record charts, and a Top 20 pop album to boot.

The Robert Cray Band started in 1974 in Eugene, OR, with bassist Richard Cousins and harmonica player Curtis Salgado. Caught in concert by John Belushi in 1977, Cray got a bit role in the movie *Animal House*. At last year's National Blues Awards ceremony in Memphis, Cray won an unprecedented four first-place awards, including Contemporary Artist of the Year, Contemporary Album of the Year (*Bad Influence*, Hightone 8001), Song of the Year, and Single of the Year for *Phone Booth*. Cray's profile continues to grow stateside thanks to appearances with John Lee Hooker, Stevie Ray Vaughan,



LAUREN DEUTSCH

James Cotton, Bonnie Raitt, and others.

The guitarist recently released an album titled *Showdown* (Alligator 4743), with fellow bluesers Albert Collins and Johnny Copeland. This was his first Blindfold Test. He declined to give star ratings, and was given no advance information about selections played.

couple John McLaughlin records back in the '70s—one album called *Spaces* with McLaughlin and Larry Coryell, and a couple of *Emergency* records with Tony Williams that he's on. But it's been a long time. Usually John plays a whole lot, a whole lot, and you've got to listen to it several times. But this was pretty interesting. It didn't floor me but it was cool. I like my guitar playing a little bit slower than that. Something I can bite into instead of running after.

5 LITTLE FEAT. ROCKET IN MY POCKET

(from TIME LOVES A HERO, Warner Bros.). Lowell George, guitar; Paul Barrere, bass; Bill Payne, keyboards; Ritchie Hayward, drums.

Is this Little Feat? He's a bad boy, or was—Lowell George. He played a great slide, and he could do a great Howlin' Wolf voice too. I like the stuff that I heard by him. Richard [Cousins, Cray's bassist] had a bunch of his records around the house when we roomed together in Tacoma. He's a good writer, too. I haven't played slide in a long time—as a matter of fact I'd be embarrassed to pick one up. I'd have to spend some time with it. When I first started getting back into blues at the end of high school, Richard and I used to sit out on the porch in the summertime, whip out the box guitars and play bottleneck. I was

trying to learn how to play some Robert Johnson things, and Tampa Red was real smooth on slide guitar—he was a country blues man, probably one of the cleanest slide players.

6 JEFF BECK. 'CAUSE WE'VE ENDED AS

LOVERS (from BLOW BY BLOW, Epic). Beck, guitar; Max Middleton, keyboards; Phil Chenn, bass; Richard Bailey, drums.

This is Jeff Beck. I like this song; it's a Stevie Wonder tune. I had friends that were really big Yardbirds fans, and I remember hearing *Heart Full Of Soul* when that came out, but I guess I became familiar more with the guy afterwards. I can detect a lot of blues influence, especially Buddy Guy. I can really hear Buddy Guy in him. There's some stuff I heard, like the crazy kind of stuff he did—what's that album that he had Rod Stewart singing on, *Truth*? A lot of that crazy kind of style, just wild, abrupt little things where he'd go way up and just be playing on the pickups, brushing across the strings, muffling the strings and brushing across with the treble on all the way. Buddy Guy would do things like that, and I know he's listened to a lot of those people. He does a lot of flashy things, which impresses me and impressed me when I was younger too. He does not hold back. db

Terri Lyne Carrington

In the often chauvinistic realm of jazz, this gifted 20-year-old drummer has already gained the respect of her colleagues—and she's only just begun.

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

When she was eight years old, Terri Lyne Carrington's father would take her around to most of the jam sessions happening in the Boston area. Encouraged by the likes of Nat Adderley and many of the local musicians, little Terri Lyne would not only observe, she'd participate. No problem. She'd been playing drums since she was five.

By the time she was 10, she was sitting in with masters at nightclubs like the Jazz Workshop, Sandy's Jazz Revival, and the Pall Mall. "All the great musicians who came through town—Dizzy, Clark Terry, Oscar Peterson, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Joe Williams, Betty Carter, Illinois Jacquet—everybody would ask me to sit in. Drummers too. Elvin Jones, Roy Haynes, Philly Joe Jones, Max Roach, Art Blakey—they all would ask me to sit in on their drums with their groups."

Word spread about this little drummer girl from Medford, Mass. "A lot of times the attitude was, 'Oh, what a cute little girl! I can't believe she can swing and keep time!' And I actually had some feel like a real drummer at 10, 11, 12 years old. I think it was that potential that these great musicians saw in me. I think they felt that some day I was going to be on a very high level, so they all encouraged me."

By age 12 Carrington was awarded a full scholarship to the Berklee College of Music, where she continued her studies with Keith Copeland and Alan Dawson. By 13 she had already performed *professionally* with such illustrious jazz stars as Helen Humes, Junior Cook, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, and Joe Williams. And by 16 she cut her first album with an elite crew of sidemen—Kenny Barron on piano, Buster Williams on bass, George Coleman on saxophone.

With this kind of upbringing, the expectations for this child prodigy were naturally quite high. So high, in fact, that



RICHARD BROWN

it might have created undue pressure on the evolving young artist. But now, a mature, hip woman of 20, Terri Lyne takes it in stride. She knows who she is, she knows what she's got, and she knows what she wants. And with her talent and determination, she'll no doubt get it.

"I'm getting kind of tired of hearing about the prodigy thing," she says over lunch at Sweet Basil's in Greenwich Village. "I just hate that expectation thing, so I want to try and leave that behind. I'm just a young musician and I'm here in New York just like everybody else—trying to play, trying to do some new things."

Recently, Terri Lyne had the opportunity to showcase her talents as drummer and composer in a special recital at Symphony Space in Manhattan. The program featured eight of her own compositions, highlighting the great diversity of her musical tastes. From the blazing up-tempo bop of *For Those Who Know* (performed with guitarist Kevin Eubanks and bassist Rufus Reid) to the lush brushes-ballad *I Love You Aunt Annie* (with altoist Steve Coleman, tenorist Greg Osby, baritone player John Purcell, and bassist Reid) to the reggae-flavored *Message True . . . Pray For Peace*, she covered a lot of musical territory. Add the funky blues fusion of *They Can Feel It*, the avant-rap of Steve Coleman's *Change The Guard*, and the African-inflected *I Feel It*, co-written by vocalist Diane Reeves, and you have a regular musical smorgasbord. The show's host, Ira Gitler, called Terri Lyne a keeper of the flame, though she's

more than just that. She's her own woman, creating music that goes outside the boundaries of the straight-ahead jazz she was weaned on. In a word, the music of Terri Lyne Carrington is "fresh."

"My roots are in jazz, but there's so much more music that I want to be a part of. I mean, I'm only 20 years old. I dig Prince. There'd be something wrong with me if I didn't. I also listen to people like Bob Marley, Joan Armatrading, Grace Jones, Sweet Honey In The Rock, King Sunny Adé, Brazilian music, and other things as well as all the jazz I've been listening to for the past 15 years. So I'm just expanding in so many different directions with music now. I feel like a child discovering a bunch of toys under the Christmas tree. There's just so much out there, so much good music. And I feel fortunate not to be locked in as far as my listening habits go. I don't want to become stagnant. I want to keep growing. For the past 10 years, all I've been playing is straight-ahead, so naturally that's what I'm best at. But I'm starting to explore other areas of music now, and it's exciting."

Let any jazz purists get the idea that she's deserting the cause, Terri Lyne has this message for you: "I've been a straight-ahead jazz drummer for the past 13 years. That's what a lot of people perceive me as. That's such a big part of me, I'll never give that up. I feel a responsibility to that music. Some of the greatest drummers in the world have sat me down and told me, 'You have a responsibility, you just can't go off and do this or that.' And that's hard. It's not easy feeling that responsibility. I used to go through this trip where I'd wonder if, down the road, say, five or 10 years from now, if I decided to do something commercial, would I be selling out? I used to think, 'Oh, I can't let down all these great musicians who have such faith in me.' But now I don't trip about that. My number one responsibility is to my creator, then to myself. So I will continue to do what I feel in my heart. That's most important. And I will never sell out my heart—ever."

Whereas her first album, recorded on a small private label four years ago, included mostly standards like *St. Thomas*, *What Is This Thing Called Love?*, and *Seven Steps To Heaven*, her next project is likely to include mainly originals and some Simmons electric drums to boot. "That first album was Terri Lyne the drummer at 16. The next one will be more of a personal statement. It'll be Terri Lyne the drummer *and composer* at 20. I just like the idea of documenting my progress along the way. Then after that, who knows? I can see myself getting into all

kinds of things, including producing. There's a lot of young musicians out there who have personal statements to make and have some things happening musically but they're not given the opportunity. And it's a shame."

As for being a woman in a male-dominated game, Terri Lyne got her rude awakening a couple of years ago while touring Europe with Clark Terry's band. "This is something I'm just waking up to," she says. "When I was younger I was naïve. But when I went to Europe I came back very disappointed and hurt and angry because I found a big sexist vibe over there, and a racist vibe too. I think at that point I really woke up. And ever since then I started being more aware of what's going on around me. Before, I was numb. The same thing was happening but I just didn't see it, that's all. Now I really see it for what it is. I took off the rose-colored glasses and came to a lot of realizations."

Today Terri Lyne feels she can back herself up with her playing. "It used to bother me when people would say, 'Well, she's good . . . for a girl!' But when my fellow musicians started telling me, 'You're a good drummer,' that's when I began to overcome that. Now I do think, at least I hope, that I'm respected amongst most of the musicians."

"The fact is, I am a woman. God put me here as a woman, and I want that to enhance my playing. Being a woman gives me a certain sensitivity that men have to work harder on developing. And I want to use that to work for me. You know, I have to work hard at getting the same physical strength as a man to play the instrument. But there's something else that I have special about me just in being a woman that men don't have. Somebody said to me once, 'You play so good you should've been a man.' But part of my playing comes from the fact that I'm a woman. That's a big part of it. I wouldn't have it any other way."

Sure, she's bound to hear comments like, "Oh, let's see the girl play drums." Even Marian McPartland still gets backhanded compliments from fans to the tune of, "You swing so hard for a woman." But Terri Lyne's not going to let it bother her. She's at peace with herself and has nothing to prove to anyone.

"I can't get all angry by talk like that because if I'm thinking about that, I'm not thinking about the music. That's the bottom line. No one cares if you're nine or 90, girl or boy or whatever. The question is, can you play? You have to have a certain respect for the music before you can let any of those things interfere—like how you look on stage or who you're

trying to impress in the audience and all that. None of that matters to me. The music is the bottom line." **db**

United Front

Improvisation and a sense of multi-cultural awareness inspire this Bay Area quintet to work with words and deeds.

BY BRIAN AUERBACH

African-American creative music is distinguished by its collective structure. A balance is built on the unique foundation of ensemble improvisation and the soloist feeding off the ensemble. This living artform opens channels of self-expression and draws the listener into a

special relationship where energy is exchanged and transformed. The nature of the music/entertainment industry makes it difficult for many musicians to work in this most effective setting.

The continuum of the music's history is starred with groups who have made special commitments to a *collective* experience. These artists—ranging from Duke Ellington's orchestra to, more recently, Cecil Taylor's Unit, Ornette Coleman's ensembles, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and Steve Lacy's groups—have put long-range development of a *sound* before short-term economic gains. The priority is artistic development.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, United Front has, over the past decade, concentrated their energies to develop and evolve a music that reflects a commitment to artistic integrity and cultural sophistication. The Bay Area is not what one might call a hot-bed of creative African-American music. Musicians here, as in so many parts of the States, extend the collective to include business and production arrangements, taking personal responsibility for exposure to the

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PROFILE

community, locally or otherwise.

United Front has produced two albums on their own RPM label (*Path With A Heart* and *Ohm: Unit Of Resistance*), in addition to their countless performances. They have completed three successful tours of Europe during the summers of 1979, '82, and '85. The latest tour took them through Germany, Austria, and Yugoslavia. Yet except for work in St. Louis in 1982, United Front has yet to play in the United States outside of California.

The seed that grew into United Front was planted in 1974 when George Sams, trumpet player from St. Louis, came together with Lewis Jordan, alto saxophonist from Chicago, to form Brujería (with Carl Hoffman, drums; Joe McKinley, bass; Richard Wood, alto sax, flute, and guitar; and Artemesia Lee, cello). The writer Ntozake Shange, a Bay Area resident at the time, wanted to add music to her performances and a wind trio of Sams, Jordan, and Bruce Ackley on soprano sax resulted. When the work with Ntozake ended, the group became a regular working unit called Sound Clinic. After Sound Clinic dissolved Ackley went on to join the Rova Saxophone Quartet, and Lewis and George began playing as a duo (which is when I first encountered them, playing at a neighborhood library). Later they added bassist Mark Izu and drummer Carl Hoffman, and United Front was established. In 1980 Hoffman was replaced by Anthony Brown and the current core group was complete. Last year after experimenting with different pianists, Rudy Mwongozi (formerly of Rasul Sidik's Now Artet) joined.

Each member of the group is a gifted composer/instrumentalist. They could easily rely on original material, but United Front feels differently. A standard set is balanced between their own works and compositions of Eric Dolphy, Archie Shepp, Sam Rivers, and Cal Massey. George Sams calls these "the contemporary musics we were listening to when we came into the music. This music had a great impact on us as individuals and on the times in general. It is important to keep this music alive through fresh encounters. Dolphy, Shepp, Rivers and others are great treasures whose compositions are vital to the life of the music."

Blended with these musical resources is the poetry of African-Americans. "There is a certain spirit contained in these works that is timeless, whether it be Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, or Paul Laurence Dunbar," says Anthony Brown. "It wasn't a conscious choice to



UNITED FRONT: Mark Izu, Lewis Jordan, Anthony Brown, George Sams (not pictured, Rudy Mwongozi).

select political works, but it fits right in with the music. It just happened that poetry that is really strong and to the point is oft-times political. It makes sense considering the times we are in. Words go right to the heart of the matter, which is what we try to do with the music. So it fits right in."

"It's been our experience from way back," says Lewis Jordan, "that there is something about bringing words into this musical context that gives a little extra to it, a little magic, 'cause people aren't used to it. They aren't expecting it. We always like to come from a different angle. We have a feeling that if you take it from a different perspective, catch people off-guard, it opens them up in a way that makes them more receptive, so you can get more ideas across, and also it breaks down barriers." Mark Izu adds, "Some people have rigid ideas about musicians, stereotypes, and the words break that down, especially in this country. A lot of people we play for are not necessarily into jazz. We'll play at benefits with a lot of things happening and we'll bring in the words and it acts, like Lewis says, to take people off-guard. They start listening and they get into it. They stop thinking, 'This is jazz,' but rather, 'This is music.' Then we can take them where we want to."

In performance Lewis Jordan is the voice of United Front. In a recent recital I attended he moved skillfully from Langston Hughes' poem *Landlord* to a country blues on guitar to a staging of a preacher's sermon (with the band harmonizing, challenging). Collectively, the band is an energetic mass of well-organized openness. The collective endeavor has effectively removed star-oriented self-consciousness. The leadership role moves in accordance with the time. With a rhythm section like Izu, Brown, and Mwongozi it would be hard for the Sams/

Jordan frontline to stray too far, even if they wanted to.

What goes in to make this interaction come out? Izu believes, "In terms of creative process, each person brings in material, then the group takes it and develops it." Sams says, "We don't purposely say let's do this or that—it is open for the individual and then the group shapes it into a whole." Rudy Mwongozi, as the new member, states, "With this group there is economy of statement. We cut the fat off. Jazz works best without too many preconceived notions. It is better to just let the music happen. As for my role, piano suggests building blocks—in this case harmonic buildings." Izu adds, "Our forte is ensemble playing, collective improvisation." Now Anthony Brown: "Extension and continuation of the tradition, bringing yourself into it and letting yourself then meld into a group context. There is also the World Music perspective, especially being here in the Bay Area. It is important to be open to all possible elements and not be afraid to include these diverse elements."

These diverse elements give United Front a special edge. Mwongozi brings wide-ranging experience with various ensembles and performance groups. His percussive style, firmly rooted in the African-American tradition, introduces a new openness and moveability. He is the person who brings interesting, unusual road maps on an auto trip. Rock-solid bassist Izu is of Japanese ancestry. His long-term study of Asian music enables him to incorporate these influences, not just compositionally but instrumentally. He can be heard on sheng, a Chinese mouth organ, using it not just as an affect but as an equal element within the ensemble. Brown, of mixed African-American and Japanese parentage, has done extensive world travel, first as a member of an army family, then

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during his own time in the service. His direct experiences with other cultures, including time in Japan and Greece, has profoundly informed his playing. He has studied at Rutgers State University in New Jersey, preparing an M.A. thesis on the history of the drum kit.

Saxist Jordan was inspired by the developments in the '60s in Chicago by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). He was also a radio producer for a number of years. Besides his endeavors with United Front, Lewis is involved with performance art groups Music-At-Large and SoundSeen, which also features Mark Izu. He also performs with poet Q. R. Hand, Jr.

Trumpeter Sams is a music educator as well as performer (he has an album under his own name, *Nomadic Winds*, hat Hut 3506), and his interactions with the Black Artists Group (BAG) of St. Louis deeply influenced him. BAG was an organization that worked to make African-American culture a reality for young people who might not have had the opportunity to explore it elsewhere. It was through BAG that George had the chance to study the music from a contemporary point of view, taught by living, working, struggling artists whose contemporary vision helped shape the music as we know it today.

United Front has survived through a shared vision, creating a multi-cultural blend rooted in the African-American experience. Not only are these men musicians, but they are also cultural workers, whose individual commitments do not overshadow or eliminate the necessity to reach out to their communities—it is not just about work, it is about reaching as many people as possible in as many situations as possible.

All is not sweetness and light of course. The group suffers a quarantine of sorts in their home base. Mwongozi calls it "being pigeonholed into local artists." But conditions are improving for the band. They are the subject of a feature-length documentary called *Outside In Sight* by Bay Area filmmakers Greg Chapnick and Sharon Wood. During their recent European tour the group recorded two LPs—one, recorded for Oral Traditions of Austria, is called *Hues*, and features the poetry of Langston Hughes. Their current nine-city tour of the States is partially funded by the NEA. United Front is also the recipient of a California Arts Council touring grant which begins in the summer of 1986. These new opportunities stateside will enable them to reach new audiences and continue to shape new perspectives. Which, for United Front, is the lifeblood of their art. db