

Blindfold Test: Tony Williams

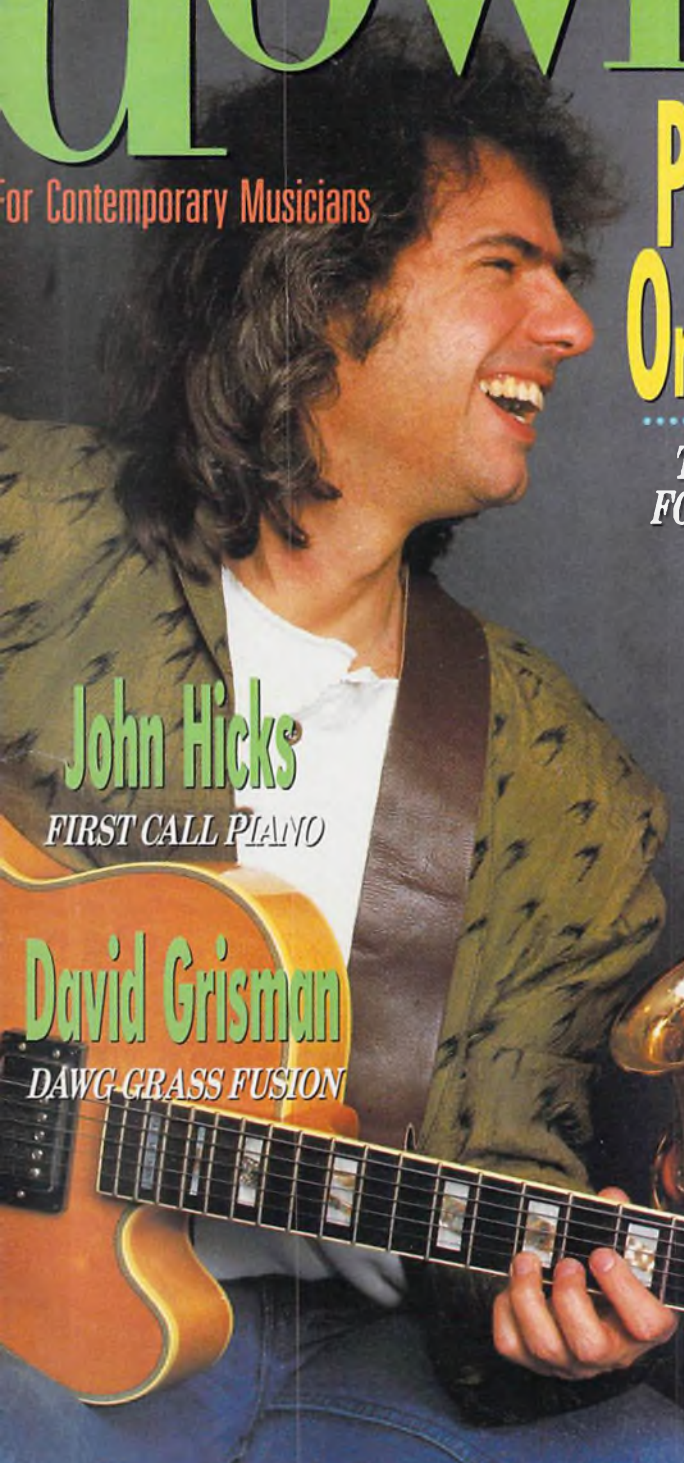
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# down beat

For Contemporary Musicians

## Pat Metheny & Ornette Coleman

TOGETHER AGAIN  
FOR THE FIRST TIME

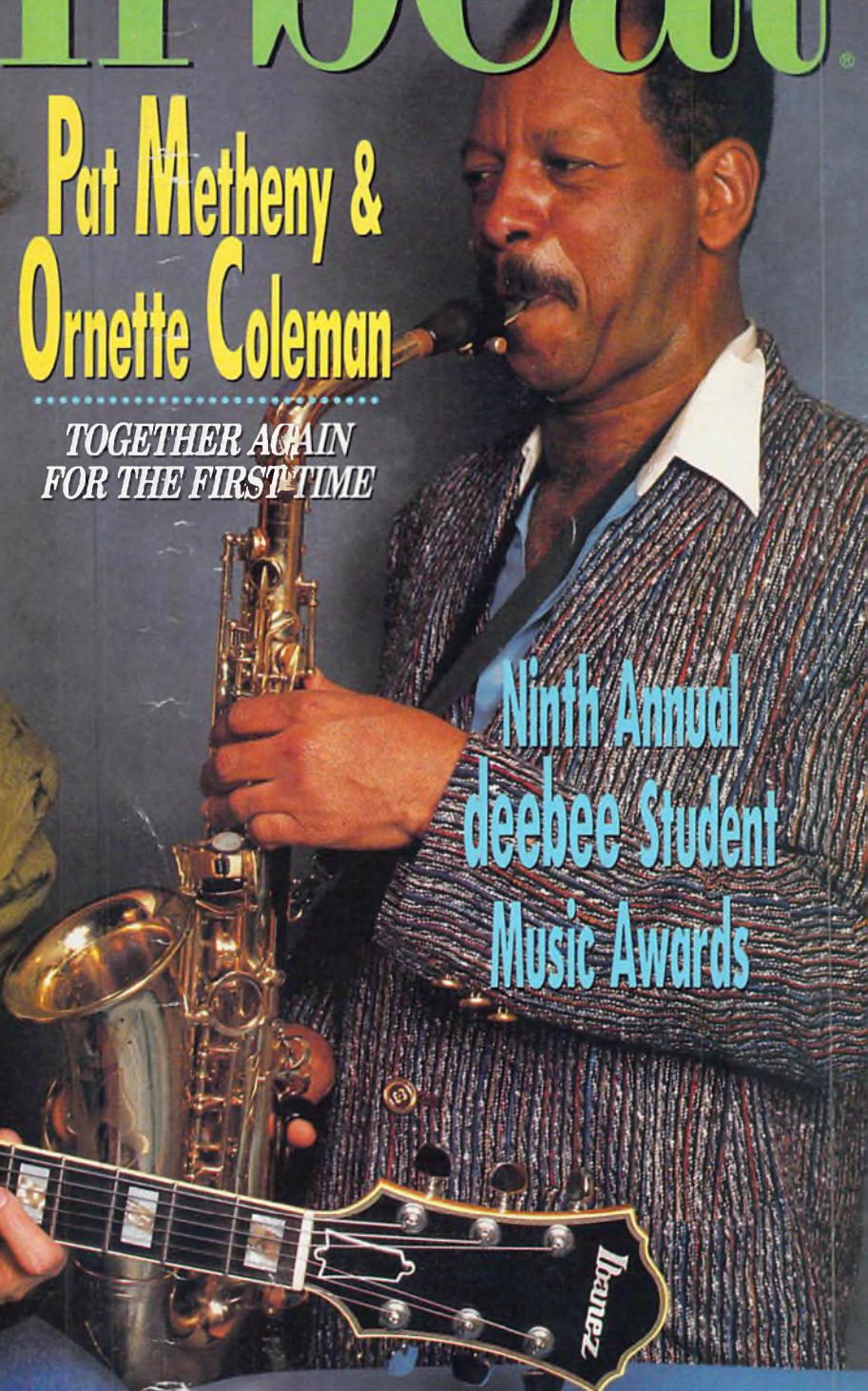


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FIRST CALL PIANO

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DAWG GRASS FUSION



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Ornette Coleman  
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ANDY FREEBERG

# ORNETTE COLEMAN & PAT METHENY

## *Songs Of Innocence And Experience*

By Art Lange

It's not easy to catch a comet by the tail, but every child has dreamed of doing it. No easier than palpably changing the world we live in for the better—yet some are able to do it, through science, through medicine, through poetry, through song. Inspiring one's fellow man to achieve excellence and individuality through the sheer strength and singlemindedness of one's chosen endeavor is no easy task, but as the poet Robert Browning said, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

I had met and talked to Pat Metheny before this particular interview, and knew of his sincerity and openness. Not having met Ornette Coleman before, I was anxious and eager to make

his acquaintance and talk to him about musical topics. But, as I quickly learned, music is not the end result of Coleman's creativity; it is merely the means through which he aspires to inspire his fellow man. His responses to my questions often suggest the same Zen-like riddles that his music articulates so refreshingly.

Ornette Coleman and Pat Metheny came together earlier this year to document *Song X*, an album of sounds that seeks to, as the pair stated, create its own vocabulary, and the result is fully more than the sum of its quite remarkable parts, a mating of the innocence of experience, and the experience of innocence—songs that can't be named, only felt within that nebulous area where inspiration and imagination turn to creativity.



**Art Lange:** Let's start with you, Pat. Where did you first encounter Ornette's music, and how did it effect you?

**Pat Metheny:** One reason why I always felt good about growing up in a fairly isolated town is that there was no way to know what was "happening." I was 11, maybe 12, at the time, and in Lee's Summit, MO, where I grew up there was a TG&Y store—a dime store. They had a very small record collection—these were pretty much the only records available in town—and they had a deal where you could buy three or four records for a dollar. One of Ornette's records happened to be in this batch of records, and I took it home and my instant reaction to it was that I loved it. It completely captured my imagination, and I didn't know that it was "jazz" or what it was. But the nice thing about being a little kid is that you either like something or you don't. Anyway, I responded to it immediately, and started to become a jazz fan about that time through my older brother Mike, who's a trumpet player.

I started to get more of Ornette's records and always liked them; in fact, it's funny because by the time I was 13 I got a subscription to *Down Beat* and started to read that there was some kind of controversy about the way that they were playing, and I couldn't figure out what they were talking about—I couldn't imagine why people would have a problem with the music, why they couldn't just see that these guys were having a blast playing this great music. I also remember that as time went on I'd keep going back to these records, and every time I would hear them they'd sound different—which is something you can't say about too many records—in fact, they *still* sound as *brand new* to me now as they did then.

**AL:** Did hearing his music at such an early, impressionable age affect you differently as you grew older and began developing your own style?

**PM:** Not in specific ways as much as just the general feeling I got from listening to Ornette and the musicians that played with him: they're playing the music that they felt strongest about with this incredible love and joy about it, without worrying about style, or what was current. It seemed very direct to me, and while, obviously, a large part of the music that I've done over the years stylistically is not close at all, there's always that same feeling I try to play with. For one thing, I'm trying to play whatever I'm going to play with the idea of making a melody. To me, Ornette's music is about melody. There's a lot more going on besides that, of course, but it's about singing, and talking, and about the shape of the line—and to me it transcends style. It's really pure, and that, more than anything else, has been the inspiration I've drawn from listening to Ornette's music over the years.

**AL:** You've always played a lot of Ornette's tunes, beginning with *Bright Size Life*, your first album . . .

**PM:** Well, besides all this philosophical stuff, there is also the fact that I just *love* the tunes Ornette writes, and I love the feeling they send up, because they make me want to play something different from what I'd normally play—which is, again, a quality you don't find in many tunes. A lot of tunes are interchangeable, especially in bebop, which is the kind of music I was playing around Kansas City at the time. It was like, when you'd make up a song list of tunes to work on, you'd have blues tunes, *Rhythm*-changes tunes, modal tunes, and then we'd have Ornette tunes, which didn't fit into the normal

definition of a vehicle for a jam session. Plus, to me, you can sing them all, and they've got *hooks*. I was talking to Lyle [Mays] about this just the other night, and he mentioned that in all of Ornette's tunes, the passion is in the notes—anyone could play the tunes and would get at least a chunk of that. It's all there—it's complete.

**AL:** There's an amazing oneness between the two of you on this record, not just in ensemble sound, but in intent, and I think it's because you both are lyrical players, you invent melodies as you improvise instead of playing riffs or soloing on chords.

**Ornette Coleman:** Charlie Parker once said how he learned to play bebop based on minor sevenths—standard changes, C minor 7ths, or whatever, where you're working with A minor 7th or B minor 7th—and then you have two-beat changes, or four-beat changes, and when you have two-beat changes, with only two structures of four steps, if you start on the B side and you go to the A side . . . in other words, that's six whole steps on the one side and six whole steps on the other side—that makes the whole 12 tones. So in all chordal music, there's never been any movement that did not have chords with a whole step—but that whole step always had to lock into a key. Which means that if you take the best fake book in the world and look at all the keys, you'll find that maybe only three or four keys are used in the whole book. So you know what that was, it was ideas placed in a key, not a key placed in ideas.

The guitar is probably the most individual unison sound of all string instruments—I mean, it has a sound of its own no matter how many people play it, and everyone who plays it sounds like an individual unless they're playing clichéd ideas, which has to do with minor thirds and Major thirds. But lots of people play an instrument for position more than for playing what they *hear*, and that has nothing to do with position. Now Pat, he plays from *music*, not from position. When he plays, you don't have to worry about the key or the idea, you just have to worry is what you're playing *something*?

When I was forming Prime Time, the one thing that bothered me was that [in the past] I only played music using two horns and a bass and drums, and I wasn't doing it the best because I was given other things to do. But then James [Blood] Ulmer came to my house one day and studied with me, and started playing a line on the guitar, and I found out that not only does a guitar sound like a full orchestra, but when you play a melody on guitar not only does it sound full, but it also sounds like it's moving the melody to another place—and it just happens to sound like that by the guys playing it. And I said, wait a minute—this is the way I hear the saxophone. I don't ever hear the saxophone in a key, or, if I'm playing an idea or a melody, I never hear that idea or melody on the saxophone—I only hear it because someone had made those melodies sound that way. I take those same notes and play a totally different melody.

So in other words I saw there was a relationship between the alto and the guitar. And when I started rehearsing with Pat, I was playing exactly whatever I'm playing with my band, and it's clear and it's forceful or whatever, and there was not one time when I ever felt inhibited or limited. And what's exciting to me about this session is even though it's only two horns—or two note instruments, everyone else is rhythm—it sounds like a zillion other things coming besides that. I put on a copy of the



tape, and we were playing a song called *Video Games*, and honest to God, I said, "Wait a minute, something is wrong with the tape recorder . . ." [laughs]

**AL:** There's 12 people on that song . . .

**OC:** I said, "I need some batteries." That experience made me realize this idea that I've always had from the day I started to play music: that not only is it alive, but that it's endless and has no ego in it. There's something about creativity that every human being gets an equal share—and feels as intently as anything that you care about. I guess I'm talking about the quality of life. Because the quality of life doesn't tell you that you're doing something to be rewarded, as much as you're doing something that you believe is naturally going to allow you to have this experience with your fellow man. And because of the way we grow up to respect each other, and survive, we have built all of these images for someone to relate to without allowing them to *participate* in them. For instance, right now you can play any type of music you want, and take it to the audience, and if it's something that's *real* they're going to like it. You don't have to sound like me or Pat, but it is this type of playing that makes people know that that's what's important.

**PM:** That *is* important.

**OC:** And the one thing that I respect about Pat—not because he's sitting here—is that he has the kind of insight and humanity that he has, and hasn't looked at his success as something that a person gave him; it's something that he actually made happen, and it's still happening. I think it's amazing to find a person with that kind of quality of humanism who wants not to worry about his success, but worry about how well he achieves what he believes. He has my highest respect as an artist and a human being.

**AL:** Pat, in addition to playing with Ornette now, you previously worked with Sonny Rollins. Did you approach playing with those two saxists differently?

**PM:** Well, they're quite different. This experience with Ornette . . . for me to say it was the high point of my experience as a musician would be an incredible understatement. You know, playing with Sonny was way up there too, because I've admired him so much, but this wasn't just a record date. We spent about three weeks working, eight hours a day, every day, really *hitting* it, and talking, and really getting to know each other musically and personally.

**OC:** The feeling I got when I heard the tape . . . when John Coltrane decided to play from a strictly spiritual side, as on *Ascension*—he played strictly commercial music before that—and also when I first came to New York, my first band—that same spirit was on that tape, and yet it was *today's* experience. That's what is so fantastic about it. I mean, you hear horns, and ideas, but also something is compelling you to realize that there is something else going on besides what you're hearing, that's causing the things that we are doing to happen. You *hear* that. I haven't heard that in *any* musician in the last 20 years.

I mean, what people call "jazz," or they say, "You've got an electric band, you've got this and that"—they can say anything, but it's not what you *have*, it's how you *sound* that's important. Like now, with Prime Time, my band is really into what I'm doing, but sometimes people read so many things and hear so many things that they hold back—and I'm always trying to get my band not to do that. But really, that same quality I've been seeking—the same thing that I heard when I first came to New York in '59, and when I heard Coltrane—is alive right now in '86, and the evidence of that to me is really on this record. Whatever the jazz person needs in this society—which means that you're an individual and you express yourself, whatever it is you feel conviction for—you don't worry about that, you stand on your own. Now that quality to me has been *tamed*. Everybody says, "Well, if I play some minor thirds here and some bebop here, I can get me a gig, and if I put on a green hat and have my ass out, I'll draw some people." [laughter] All of this has just been camouflage, to hide what the person really wants to do. And all of a sudden you realize you can't [hide it], it's either there or it isn't.

That's the one thing that I never really felt bad about. People say, "Well, this guy's still far out," or whatever. At least I realize that they didn't believe I was that way because I wanted them to say that. It's because that's how they felt about what I was doing, and I'm still trying. . . . The thing that I really want to achieve in my lifetime is to inspire people to be individuals. That to me is it.

**AL:** What brought the two of you together in the first place?

**OC:** Well, Charlie Haden told me 10 years ago, "If I can only get you and Pat together; I'd get on my knees." And I said, "Charlie, you know, it's gonna happen." And last year, he said he wanted to get us together, and I said, "You tell Pat we're gonna do it this year." Charlie has been the main person to get Pat and I together. The thing about it is I haven't really played a lot with my band, because of the fact that I don't try to get my band to support me, I try to support them. Therefore, when I do get my band going it's really what it is that I'm actually trying to achieve, and they go with me. I've never felt that I've wanted to just go out and try to survive because I had a name or I played. I only wanted to do things that are worthy of doing. And that's the thing I was really reluctant about in the past. Here's a guy who's very successful, and maybe the feeling wouldn't be right if I tried to call him and say, "Man, I want to do this and I want to do that." You know, I'm not even doing it



ANDY FREEBERG

### ORNETTE COLEMAN'S EQUIPMENT

**Ornette Coleman** says that his alto saxophone is "a Selmer that goes down to a low Concert C," which he plays using either of two mouthpieces—a Berg Larson or a Bundy. His reeds vary from #1½ to #3, but he usually uses a #2½. "I try to find old reeds," he says, "but I have been using Rico standards." His other instruments include a Schilke trumpet and a violin with "a very good sound" given him by a friend a couple of years ago, which he doesn't know the make of.

### PAT METHENY & ORNETTE COLEMAN SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

**Pat Metheny & Ornette Coleman**  
SONG X—Geffen 24096

**Pat Metheny as a leader**

FIRST CIRCLE—ECM 25008-1E  
REJOICING—ECM 1271  
OFFRAMP—ECM 1216  
AS FALLS WICHITA, SO FALLS WICHITA  
FALLS—ECM 1190  
80/81—ECM 1180  
AMERICAN GARAGE—ECM 1155  
NEW CHAUTAUQUA—ECM 1131  
PAT METHENY GROUP—ECM 1114  
WATERCOLORS—ECM 1097  
BRIGHT SIZE LIFE—ECM 1073

**Ornette Coleman as a leader**

OF HUMAN FEELINGS—Antilles 2001  
SOAPSUDS SOAPSUDS—Artist House 6  
BODY META—Artist House 1  
DANCING IN YOUR HEAD—A&M Horizon  
722  
SKIES OF AMERICA—Columbia 31562  
BROKEN SHADOWS—Columbia 38029  
SCIENCE FICTION—Columbia 31061  
CRISIS—Impulse 9187  
FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS—Flying  
Dutchman 123

ORNETTE AT 12—Impulse 9178  
WHO'S CRAZY—Affinity 102  
THE EMPTY FOXHOLE—Blue Note 84246  
LOVE CALL—Blue Note 84356  
NEW YORK IS NOW—Blue Note 84287  
CHAPPAQUA SUITE—Columbia (Japan)  
13-14  
THE GREAT LONDON CONCERT—Arista-  
Freedom 1900  
AT THE GOLDEN CIRCLE VOL. 1—Blue  
Note 84224  
AT THE GOLDEN CIRCLE VOL. 2—Blue  
Note 84225  
ORNETTE ON TENOR—Atlantic 1394  
FREE JAZZ—Atlantic 1364  
THE ART OF THE IMPROVISERS—Atlantic  
1572  
TOWN HALL 1962—ESP 1006  
THIS IS OUR MUSIC—Atlantic 1353  
CHANGE OF THE CENTURY—Atlantic  
1327  
THE SHAPE OF JAZZ TO COME—Atlantic  
1317  
TOMORROW IS THE QUESTION!—Con-  
temporary 7569  
SOMETHING ELSE!—Contemporary 7551





ANDY FREEBERG

## PAT METHENY'S EQUIPMENT

On every track on *Song X*, Pat Metheny used his Roland GR 303 guitar with a custom built-in interface to his Synclavier II, which has polyphonic sampling capabilities. Of late he has also been playing a 42-string Picasso Guitar built specially for him by guitarmaker Linda Manzer. Old standbys in his guitar arsenal include his faithful 1958 Guild 175, three Ibanez Artist Series electric 12-strings each tuned differently, and an Ovation nylon string acoustic. His amps are an Acoustic 134 and two Yamaha G100s. The sound runs from his guitar through an MXR digital delay into the preamp of the Acoustic, into a Lexicon Prime Time, which splits the sound from mono to stereo, then goes through the two Yamahas, each of which triggers an Electro-Voice M15 speaker. His strings of preference are D'Addario's.

with my own band, and I didn't feel right about that. The only thing I felt right about doing was something *musical* that was worthy of doing.

**AL:** And Charlie convinced you . . .

**OC:** Yes, Charlie Haden's something else, and he was right. The thing that was amazing was that when Pat came to New York to start rehearsing, I thought we should use Denardo too, and I'm sure Pat already had the idea for the people he wanted to use. So I said, "Well, let's just try it." So Denardo came over and we rehearsed, and Pat said, "Oh man, we gotta do this," so we went down to Texas [see *db*, Caught, Apr. '86], and believe me, if you heard the stuff we did in Texas with Denardo and Charlie, you wouldn't believe it was Pat. He played more incredibly than I've ever heard. There's no words for it. And that's what you can do from someone *playing with you*. I mean, I always say that Denardo—not because he's my relative . . . well, he's really shy, but that night, what he and Pat did—they were playing *so good*. [laughter]

**PM:** Denardo is really something. That was an aspect of this whole project that I had not anticipated at all. I'd always enjoyed Denardo's playing, in particular with Prime Time, but it's hard to appreciate, in a way, the depth of what his thing is until you play with him . . .

**OC:** That's true.

**PM:** . . . because it's funny, he's got that certain thing drummers have of playing a lot—he's active all the time but he's never in your way. And it's *grooving*, but it's not grooving in the normal way; you can play any tempo, any feel, and it grooves.

**OC:** And that's the thing that I feel about the growth of how jazz evolved, those types of experiences when someone became aware of it. Like lots of critics say, "So-and-so doesn't swing," or "So-and-so can't do this here," because they're comparing yesterday with tomorrow. But the thing about it is that when you hear something that makes you feel good, it doesn't matter what style or what it is, it's still having that same *quality*, and that's the thing I've always tried to avoid making a musician feel. I never told Denardo, "I want you to play *ching-ching-ching*," I never told him how I wanted him to sound so I could sound a certain way. I never told him since he was playing as a kid. That's the same way I realized when you are playing with anyone, if they have something to say, the moment you tell them what to do they can't say that anymore; they feel afraid that they're going to lose their job. I've been

fired many times because the guy didn't tell me what to play, and I thought he wanted me to play what I *could* play and then I found out he didn't. [laughter] He wanted me to play this other thing.

So what I'm saying, with the music that's called jazz, with all the incredible musicians that've played, today there's no image to carry that individual feeling into a mass expression. And there's no reason why: you have maybe 100,000 rock & roll guys—why do you have that, because they're all inspiring? Right? Why couldn't people be inspired to be more creative?

**AL:** Has listening to Ornette over the years—as a saxophonist and composer—influenced you as a guitarist, Pat?

**PM:** On a number of levels, very much so. One thing about guitar playing in jazz is that very few people have transcended the problem of dynamics, and Ornette is a classic example—he never plays any two notes in a row at the same volume. And to me that's what makes it feel so good. He's a major influence in terms of phrasing—and it's difficult to do that on a guitar, and that's what makes the so-called traditional "jazz guitar sound" not that appealing to a lot of listeners. It's very easy for the guitar to become monodynamic, and in listening to Ornette's playing I definitely got a lot of good lessons of how to make the instrument breathe, so that the phrases fall into a natural *musical* way, not the way they happen to lie on the instrument. I think that a lot of what Ornette plays is not saxophone music, it's *music*, and that's a quality that *all* instrumentalists should strive for—to transcend the instrument, and as he says, play ideas and sounds and thoughts rather than a pattern on your instrument.

**AL:** But at the same time, since the saxophone is an instrument that you have to breathe into to get a sound out of, there are certain limits due to its physical nature, which you don't have on a guitar or piano, that helps define its phrasing; it's like you have to stop and take a breath when you talk . . .

**OC:** In the Western world, whether it's American or European music, everyone uses the same 12 notes. And as people have been able to define their sensitivity through those 12 notes, calling it phrasing or dynamics or whatever, to me what they represented is the equivalent of gravity allowing things in the sky to be where they are in relation to the earth. In other words, those notes to me are the true emotional gravity. Which tells me that when you play an instrument, if someone plays a certain note, whether you like it or not, it will move you if the gravity of it is in tune with your emotional state. We are all connected to creation, and we were connected to creation long before finding out we had talent—that came second. We are not creation; we're the talent that's trying to express what creation means, and what effect it has on your nerves, on your emotions. Cyril Scott said that it took Europeans 7,000 years to accept middle C, for them to agree what middle C sounded like, so that the Germans and French and everybody said, "Okay, we're gonna use this as C." And imagine where they were before that [laughter]. Imagine the musicologists who designed the 12 intervals—when you think of the 12 months, and the 12 tribes of Israel, and all that. That's why I love Buckminster Fuller so much. And all of that means just the components that go into the emotions that creativity passes through you. But that doesn't mean that because they are like that they can only be used one way. Notes are like water—they take the shape of whoever's using them. Your C can make someone cry but someone else's C can make someone laugh. That's the beauty of creation, that we all don't have to be on one line to get the same results.

**PM:** Taking that one step further is the fact that it has nothing to do with "style." There's too much talk about style—and it's something that effects us as musicians on such a profound level: that's how you're defined within the musical community, what "style" you play.

**OC:** When America gets to the point that they won't have to use styles to have people express what they do in a category, then the creativeness in *all* popular music is going to grow.

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# DAVID GRISMAN:

By Robin Tolleson

## *Acousticity* And Other Dawg Dreams

After all the music he's been through, David Grisman is still something of a purist. The man who brought the mandolin into the homes of millions who'd written it off as prehistoric; who has adapted his instrument from bluegrass to jazz, funk, and latin music, raking in ire from folk traditionalists along the way; the first and foremost fusion mandolinist of our day—still believes jazz means Lester Young. But the purist isn't complaining too loudly about his new album, *Acousticity*, having a good run up the jazz charts.

*Acousticity* is the first Grisman album to feature a full-time percussionist, and also sports a horn section on a couple of numbers. "I've tried to use the mandolin as a voice for playing lots of different things that I like. And I think if you do something well, people will like it," he says, not fearing change in his music as much as inviting it.

A high school devotee to bluegrass legends like Bill Monroe, Frank Wakefield, Bob Osborne, and Jethro Burns, Grisman not only loves the instrument and the music but is an authority on the history of mandolin in classical music and folk cultures around the world. Grisman was publisher of the *Mandolin World News* for several years and currently contributes to *Frets*.

After attending New York University in the early 1960s, and shuffling around with bands like the Even Dozen Jug Band and Earth Opera, Grisman settled in San Francisco. Seeds of the Grisman Quintet were sown at a jam session at SF's Great American Music Hall in 1974. Violinist Richard Greene, bassist Joe Carroll, mandolinist Todd Phillips, fiddle player Darol Anger, and guitarist Tony Rice joined Grisman, and were enthusiastic about this acoustic chamber music. The progressive bluegrass that became known (from a nickname of Grisman's) as "dawg music" seemed simple, melody-wise, but kept people cued in with unusual twists and flashy turns. "You couldn't just walk out and start playing the material I had," says Grisman, "like you could bluegrass music if you knew that form. So it took awhile to put it together. Everybody kind of volunteered, so it was from that interest that I

formed a band."

The jazz world took notice when Stephane Grappelli and Eddie Gomez joined on for *Hot Dawg* in 1979, and Grappelli joined the quintet again for a live LP in 1981. "There are thousands of violinists all over the world, but I could hear one bar of Stephane Grappelli and know it's Stephane. The guy can play such technically amazing things and still have so much heart and feeling,"

Grisman says, almost reverentially.

Purists should definitely check out Grisman's 1983 release, *Mandolin Abstractions*, recorded with his former mandolin student Andy Statman. The eight "spontaneous compositions" are among the most adventurous Grisman has yet recorded. "The first notes we played in the studio were caught on tape. That's the kind of music we had played together for 10 years. We'd just sit down and start





playing anything, and it always blew our minds, so we decided to try and do that in a studio." Statman? Grisman only refers to him as "probably the most progressive mandolin player in the world."

Grisman recently completed work on a *Twilight Zone* episode called "Welcome To Winfield," putting four instruments down on the soundtrack, and is readying The New David Grisman Quintet. "I like the bluegrass element, but I like to have the jazz element," he says of his new band, which features guitarist Dimitri Vandellos, bassist Kerwin Jones, the jazz world's George Marsh on drums, and fiddler Jim Buchanan.

**Robin Tolleson:** You've obviously been influenced by a lot more than just bluegrass music.

**David Grisman:** Oh yeah. I used to listen to Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley and the Platters and the Five Satins when I was in high school. I like all kinds of music—rock & roll, classical, ethnic music. I used to listen to a lot of Indian music. In the 1960s I got interested in jazz, and now it's a big influence. My son is the expert on contemporary rock. He's in a power trio and he really likes Rush. I can kind of appreciate the rock & roll that's gone into jazz, but the rest of it hasn't gotten beyond Chuck Berry or the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, as far as I'm concerned. They've taken it as far as it can go. It's sort of like bluegrass. There's nothing else you can do with it, so people that are just doing that same old thing don't impress me. In fact they depress me. I don't think there's any point in doing something not as well as it was done 20 years ago. I guess I'm old-fashioned but I'd rather listen to rock & roll from 20 years ago. It was more creative. It's gotten too formulaized.

**RT:** How did you first get interested in playing the mandolin?

**DG:** I met Ralph Rinzler, a real knowledgeable folk musician, folklorist, and mandolin player, in the early '60s. He actually came to my high school English class to give us a demonstration of folk music, and I heard him play mandolin. Some little screw got turned [*laughs*], and it's been like this ever since. He was playing in a group called the Greenbriar Boys, and he actually discovered and was the first guy to record Doc Watson. He was involved with the Friends Of Old-Time Music in New York City, and they'd put on concerts of traditional, white folk music—bluegrass. And so I met all of these people traipsing through his house in Passaic, New Jersey—the Stanley Brothers or Bill Monroe. Three of us who went to the same high school formed a group, and we used to go over and help Ralph work in his backyard, and he'd have tapes playing—like Bill Monroe shows from 1956. One day he drove me down to an outdoor country music park in Rising Sun, Maryland, and



PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

### DAVID GRISMAN'S EQUIPMENT

David Grisman plays a Dawg Model mandolin—a David Grisman model, natch—made by Kentucky Mandolins. "It was designed by a mandolin builder named John Monteleone, and that's the mandolin I used on *Acousticity*," says Grisman. "I've been using it for a couple years now, although I have quite a few mandolins. I have a couple of bowl-back mandolins, the traditional style, but it's a different beast. Different to play, different sound. With that round belly I can't even hold the thing. It requires a whole different touch and attack. I like to fool around with it, but it's like the difference between a harpsichord and a piano. I would call the sound of the bowl-back mandolin thinner. I have a friend named Hugo D'Alton, one of the great classical mandolin players, and he doesn't even consider what I play a

mandolin. So we have a great sort of mutual admiration/debate society happening. He tells me I'm not a mandolin player and I tell him that I sell more records than he does. The bowl-back instrument is more nasal-sounding to me, a different timbre. But the mandolin I play has a rounder, purer sound. It's actually a lot like a piano."

Grisman also plays a mandola on one song on his new album, his composition *Brazilian Breezes*. "It's the same difference as between a violin and a viola," Grisman says. "The mandola is tuned down one-fifth, and it's a little larger instrument. It's also a Dawg Model, made by Kentucky Mandolins. It's called a KH Dawg. There's also a mando-cello, which corresponds to a cello, a whole octave lower than a mandolin, but I don't use that too much."

that's where I first heard Bill Monroe.

**RT:** Were your other friends listening to bluegrass too?

**DG:** These two other friends were, but . . . we were the odd men out. I mean, we started out with the Kingston Trio, but we quickly graduated to more traditional—the real thing, you know.

**RT:** The Kingston Trio being . . .

**DG:** Well, just being more commercial. We got into real folk singers who were sitting on their back porch in Kentucky for 50 years playing the banjo. You know, the sources. People like Clarence "Tom" Ashley, Dock Boggs, and Roscoe Holcomb. I was a purist then. Ralph showed me where a lot of the stuff came from, and I found that more interesting. The real *Tom Dooley* is vastly different from what the Kingston Trio recorded, you know. It's more primitive but it's more real. I've got a good appreciation for roots. And then the instrumental flash of bluegrass sort of drove me crazy. I remember very clearly the first time I heard a bluegrass record. It had immediate impact—the banjo largely. It was a cut on a record called *Mountain Music Bluegrass Style*. It was Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys doing *Whitehouse Blues*, which is *real* fast. It's a folk song

about the assassination of McKinley.

**RT:** Is it the same kind of instrumental flash you hear in jazz?

**DG:** Yeah, although harmonically it's not similar. Vicious tempos, though. In bluegrass you don't improvise as much. Most of the guys usually write a solo—compose it and play it pretty much the same every time. I guess Charlie Parker pretty much played them the same every time too, if you analyze it. You can tell it's Charlie Parker. I don't think there's anything that's really, totally improvised. You can't be in a vacuum. You've played something all your life, and at this moment you're going to improvise; well, it's still going to sound like whomever it is. That means that it's not total spontaneous creativity. It's just the amount of freedom. But you can look at it like one man's improvisation is another man's composition. In other words, it's how dramatic you want to make the differences. I think it just doesn't matter if what you hear is good.

**RT:** Your new record, *Acousticity*, is the first to feature a drummer/percussionist throughout. How did you decide on session ace Hal Blaine?

**DG:** I always loved Hal Blaine's work. He doesn't play stock things. He invents



things that *become* stock. But the way he plays them it's on another level, because he is the creator. He made up things that people play every day. I worked on a session with him years ago, and I just thought he would be real good for it.

**RT:** He did some nice things with percussion when he wasn't on drums.

**DG:** Yeah, he did overdub a lot with that—congas. Actually on the tune *Acousticity* that middle section, which is a mandolin solo with conga drums, was an afterthought. The tune was cut without that, and then we went to Europe for five weeks. During that European tour I had the idea of making a section in the middle where I would play and the audience would clap. When we got back from the tour I said, "Gee, this thing is working out so good it's too bad we couldn't put it on the record." Then I saw a way of doing it, where I opened up the tape and just measured off 33 bars of a click track and inserted that, and then overdubbed over that. I was going to have handclaps, but Hal suggested the congas in there. I've always liked cutting tape. I do my own editing. I like to manipulate music that way rather than overdubbing a lot of times, unless it's planned. On a lot of my albums I've played the rhythm mandolin and then overdubbed the solos. I like the rhythm mandolin. When I've had second mandolin players I've always wanted them to play rhythm, but I always get these hot mandolin players—all they want to do is solo and blow the boss off the stage [laughs].

**RT:** Rule Number One: Don't blow the boss off the stage.

**DG:** I don't mind. I worked with a second mandolin player for the first four years of my band, up until 1980 or early '81. Mark O'Connor, the guitar player, broke his arm. Mike Marshall was the second mandolin player, so Mike just picked up the guitar and it's been a quartet ever since. I'm planning to take a quintet out this year, but instead of a second mandolin it'll have what I really needed all the time—a good drummer who can play quiet enough for a mandolin to be heard. I don't need a drummer, but it's really having a liberating effect on me.

**RT:** Solidifying the rhythms?

**DG:** Yeah. You know, George Marsh and Hal Blaine are both very melodic drummers, very colorful drummers, but they don't have to really deal with tonality. In the format that I've developed without drums, all the string instruments have to function as rhythm instruments at the same time they're playing chords and notes. With a drummer it's a rhythmic thing. It frees me up and I imagine everybody else. But I think I've developed an acute rhythmic proclivity from not having a drummer, so that a bad drummer would drive me nuts. And there are very few good ones, because rhythm is hard.

**RT:** George Marsh is something of a

surprising choice on drums, because a lot of his playing in the past has been along freer lines.

**DG:** Right. Well, he's developing a new style—Dawg Drums. He and Hal Blaine. My music is essentially a group music. It has a lot of soloing in it, but it's a group sound. So it requires members to be supportive. There's basically only one thing that's going on that people are supposed to be listening to, whether it's the melody or the guitar solo, whatever. In many forms of jazz it's sort of like everybody is soloing, but I arrange my music just to bring out simple songs and melodies, rather than musical anarchy or freedom, whichever you want to call it.

**RT:** Listening to some of your earlier material that doesn't have drums, sometimes I think I hear drums in there anyway.

**DG:** I've gotten a lot of rhythmic patterns from drummers, and the kinds of tunes that I've been writing in recent years people are used to hearing with drums. Eddie Shaughnessy played drums on one track on an album called *Dawg Jazz*. And he told me that he tells his drum students to listen to my records to hear rhythm *without* drums—that you don't need drums to have that rhythm. Drummers aren't the only musicians in the world that are supposed to have good time. It's everybody's responsibility, but I think a lot of groups tend to rely on the drummer. In my group they haven't been able to do that. I've had to get on

peoples' cases at times, and it's tough. It is tough without drums.

**RT:** Are you giving George a hard time now?

**DG:** Yeah, I give everybody a hard time, but George seems to dig it. It's a change. He says those jazz guys just go to the gig and play and nobody ever tells anybody what to do. I don't really give guys a hard time. If they're prone to not wanting to hear things like that then it might be a hard time, but actually it's helping them get into the music. I just have a better understanding of it. If it's something I'm learning from George, he can give me the hard time. I just know where all the accents are, and I think sort of arranging-wise. I can hear what things need and what they don't need.

**RT:** You've got a horn section on a few tunes on *Acousticity*. They mix well with the mandolin on *Nu Monia*.

**DG:** Those horns were an afterthought. I'd cut it with strings, and thought I should balance that with some punchy horns. Pee Wee Ellis didn't have all the arrangements together when we went into the studio, and one of his regular guys was sick, so we were punching in these parts and I never heard it as a whole. I just had to get the parts on tape in the allotted time. I listened to it back and thought there were some gaps in the parts on *Nu Monia* and *Acousticity*. So I lifted off some of the horn licks, sunk them onto a two-track machine, and then re-sunk them back onto the multi-track in other places. You can always use an extra "deeeaaa daaaa."

**RT:** I was surprised to hear you doing a funky thing like *Acousticity*, but then remembered a song of yours from a few years back, *Dawg Funk*.

**DG:** I could have arranged that the same way. In other words, this album isn't a new concept for me. I sort of had it in the back of my mind that I could always do something like this. I like all styles, and I think they all are something a musician could benefit from learning. There's a kind of music from Brazil called *choro*—it's sort of Brazilian Dawg music—that I've been listening to a lot. One of its chief protagonists is a mandolin player named Jaco do Bandolin. It's great music with all these wonderful rhythms and syncopations, but on mandolins and guitars and percussion.

A lot of jazz musicians look at bluegrass and say that's just "boom-chick boom-chick." It's really not just that. There are people that have elevated all that to an art form. And there are bluegrass purists that say jazz is just a bunch of random notes. They're both basically narrow-minded viewpoints. Somebody should be able to play like Wes Montgomery and Lester Flatt and Freddie Green and Laurindo Almeida and Andre Segovia and Jimi Hendrix. I'm naturally attracted to people that are interested in all those things. db

## DAVID GRISMAN SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

ACOUSTICITY—Zebra/Acoustic 6153  
MANDOLIN ABSTRACTIONS—Rounder 0178  
EARLY DAWG—Sugar Hill 3713  
DAWG GRASSIDAWG JAZZ—Warner Bros. 23804-1  
MONDO MANDO—Warner Bros. 53618  
STEPHANE GRAPPELLI/DAVID GRISMAN LIVE—  
Warner Bros. 3550  
QUINTET '80—Warner Bros. 3469  
HOT DAWG—Horizon 731  
THE DAVID GRISMAN QUINTET—Kaleidoscope F-5  
THE DAVID GRISMAN ROUNDER ALBUM—Rounder  
0069

with Muleskinner (Clarence White,  
Richard Greene, Peter Rowan)

MULESKINNER—Warner Bros. 2787

with Old And In The Way  
(Jerry Garcia, Vassar Clements)

OLD AND IN THE WAY—Sugar Hill 3746

with Tony Rice

TONY RICE—Rounder 0085

with Darol Anger

FIDDLISTICS—Kaleidoscope F-8

with Mark O'Connor

MARKOLOGY—Rounder 0090

with James Taylor

GORILLA—Warner Bros. 2866

with the Grateful Dead

AMERICAN BEAUTY—Warner Bros. 46074

with Maria Muldaur

WAITRESS IN A DONUT SHOP—Reprise 2194

with Bonnie Raitt

SWEET FORGIVENESS—Warner Bros. 2990

with Linda Ronstadt

GET CLOSER—Asylum 960185

with Merl Saunders

LIVE AT KEYSTONE—Fantasy 79002

with Dan Fogelberg

HIGH COUNTRY SNOWS—Epic 39616



# John Hicks: FIRST CALL PIANO

By Gene Kalbacher



MITCHELL SEIDEL

**T**he proprietor of the Moonlight Bar turned and snarled, "What do you want?"

Unfazed, the 16-year-old replied, "I'm the piano player with the band."

It's been 28 years since pianist John Hicks, even then a card-carrying member of the Local 197 musicians union, showed up for his first steady-paying gig, a stint with guitarist/vocalist Little Milton's blues band. Almost three decades later, Hicks, now based in Brooklyn, is still playing piano, and still clipping into the blues, but now the question he's more likely to be asked by a club-owner or major jazz artist is: "Where have you been all my life?" or "When are you coming back?"

Since replacing Cedar Walton in Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers in 1964, the soft-spoken pianist has been a pivotal member of bands led by Sonny Rollins, Betty Carter, Woody Herman, and Pharoah Sanders. What's more, he's become a favored sideman with, and recording associate of, such avant-leaning reedmen as Arthur Blythe, Chico Freeman, Ricky Ford, and David Murray. And as a boss in his own right (for most of the compositions are his), Hicks has recorded six albums as a leader and organized his own trio, sextet, and big band.

Managing to keep up with the changes—when he isn't needed to be one step ahead of them—Hicks has displayed equal adeptness as a driving outlet-passer on hard-bop dates, as a pointedly lyrical accompanist for vocalists like Carter and Dionne Warwick, and as a resourceful idea-man on free-floating pieces calling for collective improvisation. After nearly a quarter-century on the scene, Hicks has become, if not a poll-winner and Mr. Super Chops virtuoso, a commanding soloist, accompanist, and leader—a musician whose telephone gets more incoming than outgoing action. The demand for Hicks is illustrated in assessments from his peers.

"You always know when you play with John Hicks," says bassist Ray Drummond, whose association with the pianist began in vocalist Carter's band in 1978, "that there will be a great deal of energy in the rhythm section. In addition to that energy, there's a lyricism that a lot of people are not hip to; he's

one of the great, extremely sensitive ballad players. His influences range from Bud Powell and Ahmad Jamal to Bill Evans, and he's put that all together into his own personal style. His flexibility is a strength, but his greatest strength is his musicality, his ability to be a complete musician. He has drawn from jazz and symphonic sources and just music, period. He hasn't limited himself to any one specific kind of music in pulling together his own personal style. John's an excellent solo piano player also. There are a lot of guys who can play solo piano, but when you stick them in a group, meaning two or more, they're not very effective. And you have the reverse, where a guy is a great duo and trio player but only adequate as a solo player. As a person, he's extremely humble and reticent, but if you're looking for somebody who's a walking musical lexicon, that's him."

Drummer Idris Muhammad, Hicks' frequent partner in concert and on record, cites the pianist's prescient comping powers, a virtue the drummer also recognizes in McCoy Tyner. "John assists the horn player, he senses the direction in which the horn is going," explains Muhammad. "From his left hand in comping, my left hand does the same thing. From working with John, I can just about ESP the direction he's going. Then I can set up a roll for the horn player where he can just go off on a freeway, as far as dynamics and volume are concerned."

Alto saxophonist Blythe, seconding Muhammad's motion, credits Hicks for "bringing a lot of creative input to the music," including the Blythe albums *Illusions* and *Blythe Spirit*. "In accompanying a singer or [horn] soloist, he knows when to lay it in there, how to lead or retard the voice. With his comping and phrasing, he makes things explicit."

It would be a facile oversimplification to state that Hicks has played an ersatz-Tyner to the '70s/'80s generation of post-John Coltrane saxophonists. Somewhat flattered, somewhat flustered by the comparison, Hicks remarks: "I know he's one of my influences, absolutely. Influences—you have them all your life. Let's face it, McCoy came from somebody, too. One thing I don't care for is that it makes me sound derivative. I wouldn't want to consciously *not* be Tyneresque, as I've been called, but I have my own personality as well."



In conversation Hicks' tone of voice is gruff, yet his manner is gentle and mild. But this seeming paradox is reconciled as surely, as seamlessly, as the pianist's music accommodates the disparate strains of Debussy and Powell. In much the same way, country blues and jump music co-existed side-by-side with modern jazz in Hicks' childhood St. Louis; and, in much the same way, the burgeoning talent of the teenage Hicks was nourished by both his minister father and his keyboardist mother, who memorized Scott Joplin piano rolls.

"Most of the horn players who played in the blues bands when I was growing up were really jazz musicians," Hicks points out, recalling the hornmen from the bands of Ike Turner and Chuck Berry, who frequented such nightspots as El Patio and the Mellow Cellar. The St. Louis-based jazz pianists he remembers from the '50s, among them John Rochester, Charlie Fox, and John Chapman, "put their bodies into their playing," drawing deep, dark harmonies from a spare style "with not a whole lot of notes." Adds Hicks, "They got it from Monk, but they were dealing with their own lyricism." Yet Hicks' fondest recollection is not a stylistic or mechanical lesson, but rather the example of his mentor Chapman, for whom he wrote the tune *For John Chapman* on the *John Hicks* album for Theresa Records. "He was pretty flexible," says Hicks. "He played behind singers, he played solo piano. He was called by a lot of people. When Charlie Parker would come to town as a single, he would always ask for John Chapman. John was a great student who loved George Gershwin's music; I would go over to his house two or three times a week."

Hicks hadn't decided on a career in music when he enrolled at Lincoln University in Missouri—his major, in fact, was government—but the influence of his roommate, drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson, disabused him of his major in favor of public service of another sort. Leaving Lincoln, where he "messed around" with the trombone and sang in the concert choir, Hicks moved on to the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he studied for a year-and-a-half. Next step in his musical education was the St. Louis Institute of Music, which he attended for one semester, during which he was introduced to the music of Debussy and Ravel ("People I'm still working on whenever I get the chance").

1963 found Hicks in New York City, bent on the jazz life but without a definite game plan. His first gigs in the city, with trumpeter Kenny Dorham and tenorman Lucky Thompson, afforded him experience, exposure and, perhaps best of all, a pithy bit of advice from Thompson: "*Be prepared!*" Hicks accepted the challenge. "We had these big books with a whole lot of tunes in them," he recalls fondly, "and we'd go around



MITCHELL SEIDEL

**BREAK TIME:** Hicks (left), with Arthur Blythe.

revising the changes in them all the time. There were standard tunes and tunes that were becoming standards by people like Horace Silver and Benny Golson. We did a lot of woodshedding, playing the fast tunes slow and the slow tunes fast. Kiane Zawadi [trombonist in Hicks' current big band] had a way of taking a tune and turning it upside down; he'd start at the left-hand corner, which was at the end of the tune, and play it backwards. These were mental exercises to keep you alert. There was a lot of music to learn, and I tried to keep up with my reading. Of course, when you're in the actual situation, there's always more to learn than you can foresee. But [being on the bandstand] is where your God-given talent is very important, because you have to do it on the spot; you have to hear it and *do it*."

One such "actual situation" presented itself to the pianist when, after first meeting Art Blakey Jr., Hicks was introduced to Blakey Sr., who just happened to need a piano player. In October 1964, Hicks became a Jazz Messenger, joining Lee Morgan, Curtis Fuller, John Gilmore, and Victor Sproles. Then as now, the Blakey book was cumulative, and Hicks was too busy learning tunes ("and trying to play something decent") to stand in awe of his big assignment. The rallying cry of *'S Make It* (Morgan's shorthand for "let's make it" and the title of a Messengers album) energized Hicks, who soon contributed such tunes as *Waltz For Ruth* and *Olympia* to the band's repertoire. Secondarily, the pianist realized, if only indirectly, his fantasy of playing with fellow St. Louis-area native Miles Davis, the occasion being a Messengers gig at Birdland for which the trumpeter sat in.

Hicks' stint with the Messengers lasted two years, after which he teamed up with Betty Carter, though he would return to the Blakey brigade temporarily in 1973. With Carter, his employer from 1966-68 and again from 1975-80, Hicks traveled extensively and experimented with tricky time schemes. "She was starting to mess around with different time signatures," says Hicks, "going back and forth between 4/4 and 3/4, and later on in the '70s we started getting into 5/4 and 7/4—interesting, coming from a singer."

The pianist's next association, 20 months with Woody Herman's barnstorming big band, witnessed his first use of the Rhodes electric piano (a contingency brought about by the rickety acoustic pianos he frequently encountered at Elk's Club dances and the like) and his first orchestral arranging. "I took an occasional solo in the band," he says, "and that was it. So in order to get more playing time, the best thing was to get an arrangement in there." In retrospect, Herman's interpersonal skills as a bandleader, combined with the precision tuning he achieved between the sections, made the most positive impact on the pianist. Remembers Hicks: "Woody would get the trumpets together in a sectional [rehearsal], the 'bones together in a sectional, and the reeds together in a



MITCHELL SEIDEL

**IN THE VANGUARD:** Hicks' home away from home.





MITCHELL SEIDEL

### JOHN HICKS' EQUIPMENT

The Baldwin upright piano in John Hicks' Brooklyn home has been in his family since he and his wife Olympia, who is also a pianist, were teenagers in St. Louis. In Atlanta, Hicks' mother, from whom he took lessons as a youngster, had a player piano and piano rolls with the music of Scott Joplin and Jelly Roll Morton. "She memorized a lot of those piano rolls by playing along with them," Hicks relates. "She also played some classical piano and a little bit in church, but she wasn't the regular organist in our church." The church, whose minister was Hicks' father, had a Wurlitzer organ; the Hicks home was equipped with a Wurlitzer baby grand. Today, Hicks' piano of choice is the Hamburg Steinway D, an over-six-foot model that was made in Germany in the '30s and '40s. "There's just a way they respond to your touch," Hicks says of the piano's sound properties. "That touch gives a sureness to your note choices. There's something about the clarity of the Hamburg Steinway; it's a piano that spurs you on as opposed to turning you off." Unfortunately, his preferred piano is very hard to locate. Most of the pianos he plays in the New York City jazz clubs are Yamaha models, which he finds durable and satisfactory.

### JOHN HICKS SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

#### as a leader

JOHN HICKS—Theresa 119  
 INC. 1—Disc Union 8004  
 SKETCHES OF TOKYO—Disc Union 8006  
 SOME OTHER TIME—Theresa 115  
 HELL'S BELLS—Strata East 8002  
 AFTER THE MORNING—West 54 8004

#### with Arthur Blythe

BLYTHE SPIRIT—Columbia 37427  
 ILLUSIONS—Columbia 36583

#### with Pharoah Sanders

JOURNEY TO THE ONE—Theresa 108/109  
 REJOICE—Theresa 112/13  
 LIVE—Theresa 116

#### with Chico Freeman

SPIRIT SENSITIVE—India Navigation 1045  
 OUTSIDE WITHIN—India Navigation 1042

#### with David Murray

MORNING SONG—Black Saint 0075

#### with Ricky Ford

FLYING COLORS—Muse 5227  
 INTERPRETATIONS—Muse 5275

#### with Betty Carter

AUDIENCE—BetCar 1003

#### with Art Blakey

'S MAKE IT—LimeLight 1022

#### with Lee Morgan

TARU—Blue Note 1031

#### with Hank Mobley

HIGH VOLTAGE—Blue Note 84273

#### with Charles Tolliver

LIVE AT LOODSTRECHT—Strata East  
 19740/41

#### with Peter Lelch

EXHILARATION—Uptown 2724

#### with Hamlet Bluiett

EBU—Soul Note 1088

#### with Ray Drummond

SUSANITA—Nilva 3409

#### with Bill Saxton

BENEATH THE SURFACE—Nilva 3408

Theresa, Hicks points out, including live quartet material with flutist Elise Wood. In the interim Hicks has launched his sextet and big band, which has grown from 13 to 16 and, now, 17 pieces with the addition of tuba player Bill Davis, the pianist's first roommate in New York and a valued friend.

For the past six years Hicks has been among the busiest pianists based in New York, a state of affairs he acknowledges with a matter-of-fact ("What can I say?") acceptance. The tall, muscular pianist, at first crediting his success to a "right-place-at-the-right-time" platitude, discusses his ascent only when prodded. Hicks maintains close friendships with several fellow pianists in New York, where piano-duo rooms abound, but he stops short of admitting the existence of a shared character or behavior type common to pianists. "They all have different personalities and backgrounds," he relates. "In group situations, however, I have noticed that the pianists are usually the most knowledgeable about everything that goes on in a band. When there's something in question, usually you check with the piano player."

For his purposes, Hicks has checked out most carefully, and expressed high admiration for, such players as Tommy Flanagan and Red Garland. "We all have listened to Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell, for playing and composing, as role models. Then there are the guys who have expanded and extended that—Barry Harris, Walter Davis Jr. The guys closer to my age and generation are Kenny Barron and Kirk Lightsey. Then there are the younger guys, James Williams and Donald Smith."

When it comes to rhythm section interplay and spurring on soloists, in the manner described by drummer Muhammad, Hicks cites the work of Tyner with Coltrane; Garland and Wynton Kelly with Miles Davis, and the strong empathy between Bill Evans and Philly Joe Jones. As for his own adaptability with sundry rhythm sections and soloists, Hicks is characteristically offhanded: "I try to get into the personality of the person I'm playing with. A lot of it is intuitive. Some people, like Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock, manage to exert a lot more of their own [secondary] influences when they play on other people's records. But I want to find out and get into what the other people are doing when I play on somebody else's date."

It's not surprising, then, given Hicks' artistry, track record, and attitude, that he's so much in demand. Getting gigs hasn't posed a problem for Hicks—but sometimes getting to the gig is another story. Case in point was the pianist's incredible journey to Japan in 1965 with—rather *without*—the Jazz Messengers.

On the eve of the band's departure from Los Angeles, Hicks realized he lacked one negligible item—a passport. So, he hopped the first flight to New York and arranged the passport. Excited about the impending trip, his first off the continent, and having a little time before his return flight to the waiting band in L.A., he spent the entire evening celebrating at Birdland. The next day he took a taxi to the airport, whereupon he reached into his pocket. No ticket. He'd left it at the passport office. Too embarrassed to call his agent, Hicks called his tuba-playing friend Davis, who lent him the taxi fare to retrieve the ticket. Grabbing his ticket at the passport office, he returned to the airport and flew to L.A. He arrived on the coast. No band. They'd left without him. He rushed to the ticket window. No flight. He'd have to fly to San Francisco, then switch for a direct flight to Tokyo. With the help of his cousin in L.A., Hicks got aboard the right plane. He arrived in Tokyo, exhausted, early for the gig but late for the pre-concert celebration thrown for the band. He rushed to the party. No rest. When Hicks entered the room, boss Blakey announced, very ceremoniously: "Ladies and gentlemen, John Hicks, our pianist, has graciously consented to play for you—and don't let him stop!"

Hicks, slightly fazed, could only wince. But it could've been worse. At least Blakey didn't say, "What do you want?" db

sectional. The only people who didn't do a separate sectional were the rhythm section. Each section would have its own separate rehearsal, then they would all come together. Whatever wasn't ironed out in the sectional would be worked out when all the sections got together. I try to do the same thing with my big band today."

In the '70s Hicks taught music courses at Southern Illinois University for a time, augmenting classroom instruction with gigs around St. Louis, before returning to the Blakey and Carter bands. "When I left Betty [around 1980]," Hicks recalls, "all kinds of stuff started happening. There was a backlog of people I'd been promising—or *threatening*—to play with." Through the incantatory tenorman Sanders, with whom he cut several records for Theresa, Hicks was introduced to the company's executives, who signed the pianist and released two trio albums, the most recent being the Bobby Hutcherson-assisted *John Hicks* in 1984. Several albums remain in the can at





## SONNY ROLLINS

**IN STOCKHOLM 1959**—Dragon 73: *St. Thomas; There Will Never Be Another You; Stay As Sweet As You Are; I've Told Every Little Star; How High The Moon; Oleo; Paul's Pal.*  
**Personnel:** Rollins, tenor saxophone; Henry Grimes, bass; Pete La Roca, drums.

★★★★★

**STUTTGART 1963**—Jazz Anthology 5235: *2nd St. Theme; On Green Dolphin Street; Sonnymoon For Two.*  
**Personnel:** Rollins, tenor saxophone; Don Cherry, trumpet; Henry Grimes, bass; Billy Higgins, drums.

★★★★½

**THE SOLO ALBUM**—Milestone 9137: *Soloscope, Part 1, 2.*  
**Personnel:** Rollins, tenor saxophone.

★★★★★

If anyone alive plays as much exuberant tenor saxophone so consistently as Sonny Rollins, let's hear them. A man who's searched himself and his art without pause since the late '40s—though he's occasionally retired to regroup, each time he's re-emerged with energy, focus, and authority intact, swinging as life pours through his horn—Sonny is king, a free if compulsive improviser. By which I mean he can go anywhere he wants with his tenor, but wants—no *must*—go everywhere. Here are two European souvenirs from the past and Sonny's second, more recent report from the New York Museum of Modern Art's Summergarden; while quite different, each presents a master unencumbered by second thoughts or other limitations.

On March 1, '59, Rollins arrived in Sweden, and three days later recorded the only recently released *In Stockholm St. Thomas*, a live-club cut, was previously available as a 45 rpm disc in an edition of only 10, and it's a full-bodied, freely flowing rendition of thematic variations that Rollins tosses off with utter rhythmic control and pungent good humor. The rest of the program is a radio broadcast, with La Roca's bombs sometimes peaking the volume meters and Sonny's briskly spoken introductions retaining the event's immediacy. The performances are spirited examinations of standards which gained their status by harboring endless possibilities for interpretation.

The tenorist often cracks sardonic, either through spurious intonation and mordant comment (*Every Little Star*), or arcane quote

(*Camptown Races* in *St. Thomas*), but he also offers unalloyed sincerity in concentrated application (on *There Will Never Be Another You*, light but still forceful flurrying, and *Oleo*, with fleet change-running), through balladic treatment (the very intimate *Stay As Sweet As You Are*), and with inspired imagination (proposing an alternate melody to *How High The Moon* composed of the few right notes). Rollins absolutely dominates the pace, shape, and dynamics of these performances; though Grimes and La Roca are right with him, one is hard-put to pull attention from the leader to dig them, so compelling is he.

Yet maybe it was all too easy for Sonny; following his trip he announced a sabbatical, and when he returned to action it was with the looser, in some ways more complex combo heard on *Stuttgart 1963*. From the brief *52nd Street Theme* that starts this bootleg-quality document (previously issued as Jazz Connoisseur 106, with similarly flawed sound), one notices Rollins' attempt to break up his own stream of thought with Higgins' sometimes intrusive drumming and Cherry's roughly harmonized, irregularly placed phrases.

Head statements are particularly querulous—whether by design is not clear. The 18-minute *Green Dolphin Street* is dramatic if nowhere so concentrated in its effects as the shorter interpretations of Rollins' previous albums (but remember, this is a concert recording). The 22-minute *Sonnymoon For Two* shows Cherry quickly discarding Rollins' motif in favor of several of his own, and the tenorist working to reassert himself with a pedal-point before launching his own digressions, which tend to determinedly longer, bar-hopping declarations and sour bleatings (let's assume it's the tape—Grimes, for instance, is more felt than heard). The most arresting moments of this venture are those when Cherry and Rollins improvise together, as the trumpeter was doing with Ornette Coleman around this time—but they're far between and not wholly satisfying, as though Rollins didn't quite trust this other voice. *Our Man In Jazz*, recorded in '62 at the Village Gate (available on French RCA 741091/092, coupled with *What's New*), is a better record of Rollins grappling with the Coleman/Coltrane-inspired extensions.

Comparing *The Solo Album* with these discs is not particularly instructive. Just the facts: Rollins plays alone for 56 minutes, stopping to clear the air four times (at seven, 20, 28, and 41 minutes). We hear what seems to be a practice session, with no guideposts despite his quotes—everything from nuggets of calypso to *Pop Goes The Weasel* to *Mr. P.C.* to *All God's Children Got Rhythm* to *Peter And The Wolf* to strains of Stephen Foster to *Frankie And Johnny* to *The Blue Danube*—which are applauded (when recognized) by an audience that stood on 53rd St. for hours last July, eager for free admission to MOMA's sculpture yard. Sonny plays riffs, twists, scales, noises, runs; occasionally he hunkers into a rush of 32nd or 16th notes, as though trying to blow out the web of figures in his head—or is he merely flexing his muscles? Perhaps he's parading his thought processes—yes, abstracting, like so many others who've come to the Museum of

Modern Art in person or in their work, so we can perceive his art without the artifices provided by familiar formal structures (Last time at Summergarden, in '65, with Tommy Flanagan, Bob Cranshaw, Billy Higgins, and Mickey Roker—preserved on Impulse—Rollins also wandered about.)

Now Sonny's tone, his articulation, his dedication to the horn, seems to pull him along, rather than be tugged like a train behind the saxophonist's notion of where to go. Do we, the listeners, get anywhere? Well, to a satisfyingly bluesy, handclapping conclusion. Closer, possibly, to understanding how Sonny Rollins teems with music, what he gets from working with a group (even when, as with his touring band, he rarely lets them drive), why he *sometimes* likes to step forth for unaccompanied codas, but how hard they are to sustain. We get an unmediated sense of his rhythms, and how they motivate his melodies. I'm not sure we get his naked sense of beauty or a glimpse of his soul. Though there's so much Sonny Rollins to choose from on record, despite its shortcomings, there are enough moments of amazement to make *The Solo Album* an invaluable, daring, important addition to his canon. —howard mandel



## ZAWINUL

**DIALECTS**—Columbia 40081: *THE HARVEST; WAITING FOR THE RAIN; ZEEBOP; THE GREAT EMPIRE; CARNAVALITO; 6 A.M./WALKING ON THE NILE; PEACE.*

**Personnel:** Zawinul, synthesizers; Bobby McFerrin, Carl Anderson, Dee Dee Bellson, Allie Silas, voices.

★★★★★

Thomas B. Holmes' *Electronic And Experimental Music* (Scribner Books, 1985) is a commendable and expansive guide to its subject. Yet this knowledgeable writer virtually ignores electronic sound-experimentation in jazz, leaving the reader to wonder why he steers clear of the music. Perhaps Holmes, like many folks, has been so turned off by the blatant misuse of electronic instruments in jazz-rock "fusion" that he can't be bothered to slog through the morass and reach the firm, high ground of Sun Ra, Chick Corea, Josef Zawinul, and the few others who've brought intelligence, feeling, and originality to their applications of synthesizers.

Preeminent synthesist Zawinul is deserving of being carried about in a sedan chair for the remainder of his days. With *Weather Report*



# RECORD REVIEWS

he's often maintained a high level of creativity in working up richly colored sounds that carry emotional weight. He is a purveyor of synthesized music that flows with little electronic pretense—only occasionally does he act the part of slave to technique. His new album, *Dialects*, an all synthesizer (plus voices) work, prominently displays his artistic powers.

Zawinul describes *Dialects* as "a global celebration" made up of his "impressions of the many peoples and places" encountered on journeys. The Mysterious Traveller, bowed before his keyboard controller, making full use of state-of-the-art equipment, takes us to *The Harvest*, an equatorial gathering of crops where the work is hard, repetitious (signified by synthesizer ostinatos), and the proud toilers' communal spirit (ensemble singing) runs high. *Waiting For The Rain* indeed suggests a peculiarly African state of expectation with all its eerie sounds; the come-and-go chants are heard as entreaties to the gods. The songs have the spark of spontaneity even though most of the electronic keyboard parts were carefully plotted by Zawinul.

The sensual *Carnavalito*, a tropical breeze-turns-gale with Manu Dibango-like vocal incantations, commanding orchestral effects, and Afro-Brazilian rhythmic momentum, nearly delivers the ecstatic release of old Zawinul Weather Report triumphs like *Black Market* and, yes, *Birdland*. Happy people dancing, perhaps. *Walking On The Nile* is more static and less striking than *Carnavalito* but still spellbinding for its exotic rendering of daily life along the great river.

Two selections—the frenzied *Zeebop* and a placid stay in the Orient, *The Great Empire*—are somewhat forced in their sentiments, but when synthesizers mostly sound expressive and non-electronic, as they do aplenty in *Dialects*, one needn't worry much about those inevitable not-so-soulful stretches. Someone tell Holmes about this guy Zawinul.

—Frank-john hadley



## DAVID MURRAY

**CHILDREN**—Black Saint 0089: *DAVID—MINGUS; DEATH; ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE; TENSION.*

**Personnel:** Murray, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; James Blood Ulmer, electric guitar (cut 1); Don Pullen, piano (3); Lonnie Plaxico, bass; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

David Murray began recording in earnest a little over 10 years ago, when he first came to

New York from Los Angeles. He was barely 21, and the enormity of his promise was both gratifying and, as his recording opportunities increased, a bit frightening. Murray's stature in the '70s—especially remarkable given the limited exposure of the lofts and the sheer number of new music performers who had descended upon the Apple from the Midwest and the Pacific Coast—resembled the high regard accorded Wynton Marsalis over the past few years. The music public loves both these brilliant young musicians, and so far Murray (and, too, the younger trumpeter) has avoided the burn-out and over-exposure that could easily have affected him.

Murray has persistently grown as an artist who has led some two-score albums in a decade. Sheer resilience has allowed him to meet the adversities of an artistic career and turn them to his favor. His compositions show a maturity in the ability to compress ideas into finely hewn and intricate statements. And his playing style too has undergone a few subtle refinements in phrasing and speed of articulation.

*Children*, recorded during autumn 1984, involves what is essentially a Murray trio, with guitarist James Blood Ulmer and pianist Don Pullen added on one cut each. When the latter is at his most bombastic he tends inadvertently to dominate a session, but here there's quite a bit of balance, and the two Pullen choruses on *All The Things You Are*, a free-time performance, are lyrical in their concentration of sound blocks circling back to refurbish with sparkling effects. Bassist Lonnie Plaxico is strong throughout the album, and his work on this ballad in particular deserves attention for the counterline he interjects as a stabilizing element.

Murray's meeting with Blood is the saxophonist's original, *David-Mingus*, some serious, insinuating arse-kicking funk composed with Blood in mind, with its harmolodic ascending melody that moves in chunks, not linearly. It's of post-hard-bop vintage, driving and serpentine and mindful of its traditions, and Murray muscles through with yelps and powerhouse command with his rhythm-mates in a perfect blend.

*Tension* is the second of the tours de force, and displayed here is Murray's respect for the spiritual impact of Eric Dolphy. Contained in much of Murray's canon, in his phrasing continuum, is that Dolphyish lust for righteous and crazy joy. Murray's comic sense differs; but he articulates rapidly those myriad phrases that have the slightest discernible quality and that thus characterize his style. He is angular, leaping, arabesque (much like George Adams' sense of filigree with a piercing sound); the harmonic yelps make sense as do the hard staccato figures he returns to. Most of all, Murray's rapid phrasing has a precision the music of his generation needs to sustain itself. He's shaping a post-hard-bop language of hardcore acoustic jazz and reaffirms a historical legion of saxophonists in doing so. And on bass clarinet Murray paints *Death* as the ultimate joker; here too the Dolphy influence will affect anyone who picks up that horn. David Murray has fashioned a way to move ahead.

—ron welburn



## ELVIS COSTELLO

**KING OF AMERICA**—Columbia 40173: *BRILLIANT MISTAKE; LOVABLE; OUR LITTLE ANGEL; DON'T LET ME BE MISUNDERSTOOD; GLITTER GULCH; INDOOR FIREWORKS; LITTLE PALACES; I'LL WEAR IT PROUDLY; AMERICAN WITHOUT TEARS; EISENHOWER BLUES; POISONED ROSE; THE BIG LIGHT; JACK OF ALL PARADES; SUIT OF LIGHTS; SLEEP OF THE JUST.*

**Personnel:** Declan Patrick Aloysius MacManus (Costello), acoustic guitar, vocals; James Burton (cuts 3-5, 8, 12), T-Bone Wolk (1, 13), T-Bone Burnett (4, 10), guitar; Jerry Scheff (1-9, 12, 15), Ray Brown (10, 11), Bruce Thomas (14), bass; Mitchell Froom, Hammond organ; Jo-Ei Sonnier, accordion (9); Michael Blair, marimba (4); Tom Canning (10, 11), Steve Nieve (13, 14), piano; Mickey Curry (1, 13), Ron Tutt (3, 5, 9, 12), Jim Keltner (2, 4, 8, 15), Earl Palmer (10, 11), Pete Thomas (14), drums; David Hidalgo, vocals (2).

★ ★ ★ ★

For the past 10 years, Elvis Costello has been one of pop's most prolific songwriters. This, his 11th album since breaking onto the scene in 1977 with *My Aim Is True*, is Costello's love letter to the Colonies. Blues, rockabilly, country laments, and Dylanesque folk tunes are on the menu, and the British singer serves them up with passion and his usual dash of acerbic wit.

And for the occasion, he's changed his name. Goodbye Elvis Costello, hello Declan Patrick Aloysius MacManus (his given name). But rather than alienating record buyers with that hefty handle, Columbia is billing this as "The Costello Show featuring The Attractions and Confederates."

The Attractions, his former band (Bruce and Pete Thomas, Steve Nieve) appear on the rockish *Suit Of Lights*, one of the few tunes on this album that harken back to past works like *Armed Forces* or *This Year's Model*. The pretty rock ballad *Jack Of All Parades* and the clever *Brilliant Mistake* both have that same Costelloish feel. But the rest of *King Of America* is strictly unadorned rock with a definite country flavor, thanks in large part to the presence of legendary session guitarist James Burton.

The former Elvis Presley/Ricky Nelson sideman delivers his precise chicken-picking Telecaster work on the Nashville-styled breakdown *Glitter Gulch* and the driving Sun-styled romp *The Big Light*. Burton also overdubs some tasty dobro fills on *Glitter Gulch* and *Our Little Angel* to give them that unmistakable country feel, reminiscent of Costello's '81 Nashville album, *Almost Blue*.

Throughout *King Of America*, Costello . . . er, um, MacManus . . . relies on upright bass and

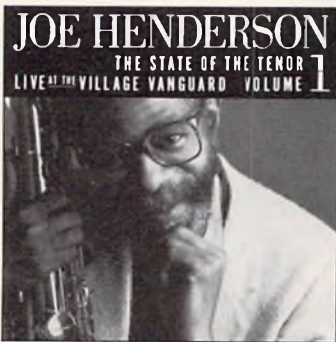


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# RECORD REVIEWS

drums with brushes to affect a more intimate, more subdued setting. Nothing here is so revved up as *Radio Radio*, so rockin' as *Peace, Love And Understanding*, so driving as *Pump It Up*, so funky as *Everyday I Write The Book*, or soulful as *The Only Flame In Town*. Yet, this album is charged with emotion.

*Little Palaces* is a chillingly dramatic showcase for a passionate voice. *I'll Wear It Proudly* is another stripped-down affair that has the singer delivering his poetic verse with uncommon urgency against a lone acoustic guitar, minimal backbeat, and haunting Hammond organ (a la early Dylan).

The man gets downright gruff and gritty on the raunchy *Eisenhower Blues*, and he has a stab at the Animals' '65 hit *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*, done up here with marimba and sparse backing. *American Without Tears* is his nod to Cajun music, featuring the buoyant French accordion playing of Jo-El Sonnier. And *Poisoned Rose* is a good old-fashioned country lament, while *Lovable* is a souped-up rockabilly romp with simple 4/4 backbeat, walking bassline, and Everly Brothers harmony vocals by MacManus and David Hidalgo of Los Lobos.

There's a lot to like here and it's mostly derived from American traditions. Whether it's blues, rockabilly, honky-tonk, country, folk, or Cajun, MacManus wears it well. The knock-kneed punk of 10 years ago is long gone. Sure, he spread some joy while he was around, but now that he's put that persona to rest, Mr. MacManus can get on to tapping some deeper emotions, as he does so successfully on *King Of America*. —bill milkowski

*Encyclopedia Of Jazz*, Leonard Feather calls Wallington "a charter member of the bop inner circle."

By the time of this recording (September 9, 1955), these facts had had a decade or so to sink in, and Wallington was leading a young band of second-generation beboppers. McLean, of course, came from Bird, and his own acerbic tone and delayed phrasing were just beginning to appear. One comes away from this record thinking how technically adept and emotionally charged he was at age 23. *Bohemia After Dark*, bassist Oscar Pettiford's theme, offers his best solo. Byrd, also 23, came out of Fats Navarro, and had his time and most of his ideas together at this session. He's less dynamic than McLean, but certainly fluent, as well as responsive to moments of spontaneous counterpoint with the altoist. Check McLean's *Minor March* for Byrd's best solo. Chambers, 20, takes several bowed or plucked solos notable for their booming tone and seriousness. Taylor, then a combination of Roach and Blakey, handles everything expertly—uptempo performances (plenty here), solos (flashing mercurial snare figures on McLean's *Snakes*), and ensemble interplay.

Wallington takes a deliberate, horn-like single-line approach to his solos. It was the style of the day: not much left hand. It seems less barbed and more intellectual than Powell's approach. Wallington is the most mature soloist here, although McLean has the emotional edge. *Sweet Blanche*, the only Wallington tune on the album, is a good functional line and set of changes like the other tunes. If you consider Diz and Bird a five-star band, three-and-a-half is about right for this band's set of previously unissued takes, especially when we've had 40 years to dig and refine bebop. —owen cordle



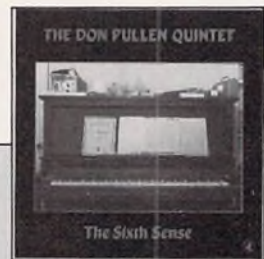
## GEORGE WALLINGTON

**QUINTET AT THE CAFE BOHEMIA**—Progressive 7001: *SNAKES*; *MINOR MARCH*; *JAY MAC'S CRIB*; *THE PECK*; *BOHEMIA AFTER DARK*; *JOHNNY ONE NOTE*; *SWEET BLANCHE*; *THE PECK*.

**Personnel:** Wallington, piano; Donald Byrd, trumpet; Jackie McLean, alto saxophone; Paul Chambers, bass; Art Taylor, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

George Wallington shows up regularly in the history books when the subject is bebop. In his autobiography, *To Be Or Not To Bop*, Dizzy Gillespie cites Wallington's unobtrusive comping—he avoided leading chords—and Bud Powell-like solo style. In *Jazz Masters Of The Forties*, author Ira Gitler suggests that Wallington initially developed his style before he heard Powell. (Wallington first heard Powell in 1944, after Wallington had become a member of Gillespie's band at the Onyx.) In his



## DON PULLEN

**THE SIXTH SENSE**—Black Saint 0088: *THE SIXTH SENSE*; *IN THE BEGINNING*; *TALES FROM THE BRIGHT SIDE*; *GRATITUDE*; *ALL IS WELL*.

**Personnel:** Pullen, piano; Olu Dara, trumpet; Donald Harrison, alto saxophone; Fred Hopkins, bass; Bobby Bartle, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Records that are so good you want to play them over and over again are rare. But that's not so bad; it makes the pleasure of hearing a recording such as *The Sixth Sense* twice as keen.

Don Pullen once said, "It's the artist's job to teach the public. The only way to do that is to do the things they can relate to. If you can do that artistically, then the level of the music



doesn't suffer at all." This pragmatic approach emphatically does not mean that Pullen plays down to listeners. It does mean that on these tunes, composed by Pullen and Frank Dean, there is a balance between the experimental and the familiar. Even the freest tune, *In The Beginning*, has an appealing rhythmic propulsion. Drummer Bobby Battle's time is infallible and bassist Fred Hopkins' lines balloon forth, never getting tangled up in the complexity.

Pullen ventures further out on this recording than he did with his quartet with George Adams. On recordings such as *Don't Lose Control* or *Earth Beams* Adams sometimes could give the impression that he was tweaking the listener's ear. Donald Harrison doesn't have that lighthearted side, and his intensity colors the mood of this album. Harrison has a fertile imagination; listen to the rainstorm of lines on *In The Beginning*. On the ballad *Gratitude* the edge to his sound adds to the poignancy of the emotion.

Both as leader and soloist, Pullen's own powers have continued to grow. On the title track he's all over the keyboard, smashing into clusters of notes in the high register, then leaping down and bounding back as if from a springboard for another flurry. What's even more amazing than his technique is his self-control: after building up to an incredible level of excitement, he suddenly cuts out and returns to comping.

In fact, it's attention to pacing and variety that makes this recording so successful. These players are all capable of longer solos, more introspective self-expression, sure, but they are wise enough to keep from indulging the urge to rattle on. And it's just that mystery of what else they have up their sleeves that will keep their audience wanting more.

—elaine guregian



## BUCKWHEAT ZYDECO

**WAITIN' FOR MY YA YA**—Rounder 2051: *MY FEET CAN'T FAIL ME NOW*; *someone else is STEPPIN' IN*; *LACHE PAS LA PATATE*; *WARM AND TENDER LOVE*; *WALKIN' TO NEW ORLEANS*; *YA YA*; *YOUR MAN IS HOME TONIGHT*; *TEE NAH NAH*; *THINK IT OVER ONE MORE TIME*; *BUCK'S STEP-UP*

**Personnel:** Stanley "Buckwheat" Dural Jr., accordion, piano, Elko keyboard, vocals; Calvin Landry, trumpet; Jimmy Reed, guitar; Lee Allen Zeno, bass guitar; Elijah Cudges, rubboard; Nat Jolivet, drums.



Stanley "Buckwheat" Dural Jr. just might be the person who makes "zydeco" a household word outside of South Louisiana—but he won't

do it with this record. At its most basic, zydeco is a hybrid of two distinct styles: Cajun music and blues. Dural, a former Clifton Chenier sideman, wants to open it up to even more influences. Listening to this album, you can hear New Orleans r&b, Memphis soul, Texas swing, reggae, even New Wave rock. Dural's got a great batch of ingredients. He just hasn't found the recipe.

The problem is manifold. First (and worst), there's tempo. Why are so many of these tunes played at such a frenzied pace? The Dirty

Dozen Brass Band's *My Feet Can't Fail Me Now* works as a high-velocity vamp, but the r&b tunes such as *Warm And Tender Love* and *Think It Over One More Time* never find a groove. They skitter past like the Roadrunner on uppers. *Lache Pas La Patate* could be the first punk two-step ever recorded. Ya Ya searches for a reggae feel, but it's far too nervous. Second, the band is sloppy. The rhythm section is frequently ragged—maybe the high-speed tempos unnerved them. Intonation is erratic throughout, hitting bottom on



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# RECORD REVIEWS

*Warm And Tender Love.* Calvin Landry's trumpet, the featured instrument, is flat. The hokey keyboard backing it (I assume it's the Elko) doesn't help. Third, the band has no distinctive soloist. Several of the tunes have no solos at all; others are broken up only by short, rhythmic accordion interludes. This puts too much pressure on the vocals. Dural is a warm, engaging singer, but he needs help. Fourth, the production is less than flattering. Dural's voice is awash in reverb, but most everything else sounds thin and distant. If you crank the volume WAY UP, it's not as bad—but all the

watts in the world won't help the rinky-dink drum sound. I'm sure that producer Scott Billington cares about this music, so I can only wonder what went wrong.

Okay, now that I've gotten that out of my system, let me explain the three stars. There are some very fine things here, too. *Walkin' To New Orleans* is slow enough (mercifully) to get in the pocket, and Dural's tick-tock accordion is strangely compelling. There's a decent solo, too, by Landry. *Your Man Is Home Tonight*, with its spoken intro, is smooth and soulful. Best of all is *Tee Nah Nah*, which rolls and tumbles

along in a joyous New Orleans r&b groove. (It's amazing how cheery a song about adultery and deception can sound.) On these tunes, it's obvious just how much potential Dural's music has. Let's hope his next album works out better.

—jim roberts

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### MILT HINTON

**THE JUDGE'S DECISION**—Exposure 6231910: *THE JUDGE'S DECISION; WHEN JEN; MONA'S FEELING LONELY; DIGA-DIGA-DOO; INDIANA; HOW HIGH THE MOON; TRICOTISM; IN A MINUTE.*

**Personnel:** Hinton, bass; Sam Furnace, alto, soprano saxophone; Mike Walters, tenor, soprano saxophone; Jay D'Amico, piano; Kevin Norton, drums.

★ ★ ★

### REGGIE JOHNSON

**FIRST EDITION**—Jeremiah Robinson 19000: *EVERYTHING I LOVE; SUMMERSONG; LAVERNE WALK; CLOSE ENOUGH FOR LOVE; FLASHBACK; WHO CARES; PASSOS; BALLOONS.*

**Personnel:** Johnson, bass; Danny Hayes, trumpet, flugelhorn; Bill Kirchner, soprano, alto, tenor saxophone, flute, clarinet; Marc Cohen, piano; Terri Lynn Carrington, drums; Ronnie Wells, vocals (cuts 1, 4, 8).

★ ★ ★ ★

Despite advances in solo playing, the bass remains, first of all, a supporting instrument. Ray Brown said it best in a **down beat** interview with Gene Lees 25 years ago: "The greatest assets a bass player can have are good time, good intonation, and a big sound." Johnson and Hinton possess each of these qualities, plus a team spirit. They have chosen relatively unknown players for these albums—another indication of their supporting role.

Johnson's *First Edition*, his debut as a leader, has the edge because of the greater musical maturity of his teammates. This is basically a modern mainstream session, and no one gets wrapped-up in imitation. Don Sickler's arrangements set things up just right for tight thematic solos all around. The trumpet/soprano counterpoint on Fred Hersch's *Summersong* and Art Farmer's *Flashback* is particularly attractive, with Kirchner remembering Steve Lacy and Jane Ira Bloom in his solos. Hayes maneuvers the melodic angles like a smoothed-out Woody Shaw or Freddie Hubbard.

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The rhythm section is very hip. Cohen with his Evans-Jarrett-light Tyner continuum, Johnson with his combination of spread-foot low register and speedy and delicate upper register, and Miss Carrington with her snappy battery and fiery chatter. In solo, each connects with the rhythms of the tune. Check the leader's outing on Fritz Pauer's *Passos* for an example. Miss Wells' three performances are a nice diversion. Dinah Washington is in there somewhere. This is a soulful lady.

Johnson has solid credits, beginning with Archie Shepp's *Fire Music* in the '60s. Hinton, of course, goes back 30 more years. He plays basic, no-frills bass in which tone, the linear logic of walking lines, and the rhythmic buoyancy of fill figures reign supreme. He and the rhythm section present no problem on this album, but the horn players sound awkward and jerky at times. They're basically good saxophonists, though, each full of Trane-ish substitutions and twists. This comes through strongly on *Diga-Diga-Doo*, where they swarm on soprano and Hinton burns in the background. D'Amico often calls on the blues when he solos (fine block chords and funky licks everywhere), and Norton comes from the Swing Era. Hinton fits well with them.

This album covers a lot of traditional bass territory, including the plucked ballad portrait *Mona's Feeling Lonely*; the lovely bowed melody on *How High The Moon*; drumsticks tapping the bass strings on *Indiana*; and the whirling uptempo walk through Furnace's *In A Minute*. The judge's job is to uphold the law, something this Judge still does firmly after 55 years of professional experience.

—owen cordle

to strain a bit on the staccato phrasing of the title cut, but cooks mightily on a simple riff piece such as *Harlem Speaks*. And although *Ring Dem Bells* gets a little chaotic with Hall blasting over the band, it manages to evoke the loud, wild abandon of hot music of the pre-swing period.

Meanwhile, back to the original product. Between 1941 and 1947 the **Duke Ellington** band recorded extensively for three non-

commercial transcription companies, which distributed the sides exclusively to subscribing radio stations. Some of the material was issued on V-Discs during the war, but otherwise these records were not available to the public. In the years since, the 1941 Standard sides and the 1946-47 Capitol sessions have come out on LPs. The 1943-45 World Transcriptions, however, have had only spotty exposure. But that will soon end. Circle Re-

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## Ellington Update

A year or so ago Geffen Records brought out *The Cotton Club* soundtrack album (GHS 24062 E), which was a mostly Ellington program from the '20s recreated by Bob Wilber with loving care and a flawless ear for detail. *Hot And Bothered* (Doctor Jazz 40029) is perhaps **Mercer Ellington's** answer to Wilber; five of the nine selections heard here were also on *The Cotton Club* LP. As an exercise in repertory playing, *Hot And Bothered* is sloppy and uninformed. The rhythm section, down to its high-hat triplets, is decidedly modern and has no relation to the Ellington rhythm section of the '20s. And Kenny Burrell's electric guitar on *East St. Louis Toodle-oo* and the loping vamp of *Echoes Of Harlem* is downright jarring.

On the other hand, unlike *The Cotton Club*, in which the music felt frozen in its own perfection and preserved under glass, *Hot And Bothered* has a life of its own, however erratic, and authenticity be damned! Trumpeter Barrie Lee Hall has a mountainous plunger sound and brings convincing passion to *The Mooche*, *East St. Louis Toodle-oo*, and *Echoes Of Harlem*. The band seems

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# RECORD REVIEWS

ords has now issued the first two of nine volumes (1943, Vol. 1 and Vol. 2, Circle 101 and 102) that will embrace the complete World sessions, including alternates, false starts, and breakdowns. In 1943 there were still vestiges of the '30s band in Ellington performances. *Rockin' In Rhythm* was still played at a relaxed, medium-fast pace. Trombonist Joe Nanton and trumpeter Wallace Jones brought an earlier sensibility to *Mood Indigo*. But *Mainstem* (two takes, with Johnny Hodges sounding fresh both times), *C Jam Blues*, *Three Cent Stomp*, and *Blue Skies* were thoroughly contemporary with the early- and mid-'40s. And Rex Stewart's cornet oozes through *Boy Meets Horn* like a creeping pool of tar, considerably slowed down from the original 1938 record. There seems little sense in including breakdowns, but if they are to be used it would be fun to let some of the conversations play out a bit more rather than cut them off so abruptly. The sound is excellent and the music relaxed and ripe.

The collected Ellington performances on *Pacific Northwest Tour 1952* (Folkways 2968) were recorded by Wally Heider during three dance dates. They have a lot of the at-ease qualities of the famous Fargo, ND, one-night-stand a dozen years before (available on Book-of-the-Month Club Records). The performances seem to start as dots, then grow like a series of expanding concentric circles. Ellington will strike a note as if to make sure the piano works. A couple of more notes begin to melt into a phrase. Then the rhythm section, as if awakening to some light stimulation, enters in like a letter slid furtively under the door. (When Louie Bellson replaced Sonny Greer a year before these recordings, it was one of the landmark changes in the band's evolution.) After a few minutes of this sketch work, the lines get more specific and familiar. Maybe they fill out as a horn soloist saunters in. Finally they shape into a known cue. That's when the band appears. The lights suddenly flash, the colors and shadows pop on. The ingenious thing is how this orchestra conceals its precision.

There are some fine solo turns along the way. Willie Smith (in Johnny Hodges' chair) dares to play *Tea For Two* without a hint of bopishness. Gonsalves and Hamilton complete each other's sentences on *It Don't Mean A Thing. How High The Moon* is a family jam session. And *C Jam Blues* and *Now's The Time* lean up against one another very cleverly. Even the old expected stand-bys seem to yield enough freshness to make still another performance of *Sophisticated Lady* or *Mood Indigo* welcome. This isn't essential Ellington, but established partisans won't be disappointed.

The *All-Star Road Band Vol. 2* on Doctor Jazz (2X-40012) was recorded under similarly informal circumstances, 12 years later in 1964. This was the peak period of the orchestra's '60s years, personnel-wise. But still it's a little disappointing. There are not many surprises here. The only new twists are a spirited *Happy Go Lucky Local* and some unex-

pected Harry Carney baritone on *Guitar Amour*. Still, the shortfalls may not be entirely the fault of the music. Granted, a couple of *Satin Doll's* are a couple too many. Granted, what is labeled *Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue* contains only the *Diminuendo* portion. And granted, not much is added to set pieces like *Things Ain't What They Used To Be* (Johnny Hodges' showcase) and *Do Nothing Til You Hear From Me* (ditto for Lawrence Brown).

But the way music is recorded has a lot to do with the way it's heard and felt. The earlier *All-Star Road Band* release (Doctor Jazz 2X-39137) didn't have any fresher material on it than this one. But it was one of the half-dozen or so finest examples of big band recording in 25 years. The manner of the

recording gave a third dimension to the matter. The process made ordinary Ellington extraordinary—or more accurately, it gave us everything that was extraordinary in the reciprocities between the band and its audience. This album fails to capture that electricity.

Another Doctor Jazz release (40030), *Happy Reunion*, is a bit more interesting. Here are two studio sessions of small band Ellingtonia—four septet numbers from 1957 and five quartets from 1958, the latter featuring Paul Gonsalves. The septets are wonderful indeed. Ellington participated in relatively few small band dates during these years; CBS' *Spaceman* album and the *Back To Back/Side By Side* sessions on Verve come to mind. But there wasn't much more. Clark Terry and Johnny Hodges sound particularly

## CRITICS' CHOICE

### Art Lange

**NEW RELEASE:** Lee Wiley, *Sings The Songs Of Gershwin & Porter* (Audiophile). It's hard to say why these 1939-40 performances are so haunting—unless it has something to do with the singer's simplicity, sincerity, intimacy, and style. Sympathetic, understated accompaniment by members of the Condon crew and others, plus some of the greatest samples from the Great American Songbook, doesn't hurt, either.

**OLD FAVORITE:** George Russell, *Stratuspunk* (Riverside/Original Jazz Classics). In 1960 Russell's writing for an adventurous sextet of soloists was on the cutting edge of the new music; by avoiding the experimental excesses of the time, his lean, sharp scores swing with an intelligent urgency today, newly reissued.

**RARA AVIS:** Cliff Edwards (Ukulele Ike), *I'm A Bear In A Lady's Boudoir* (Yazoo). A mega-star in the Roaring '20s but only a footnote (he was the voice of Jiminy Cricket) today, Edwards' scatsinging and flashy, "hot" attitude give this entertaining program of novelty tunes and standards a jazzy tinge.

**SCENE:** With quirky lead singer Syd Straw providing the spark, and special guest bassist/vocalist Jack Bruce fanning the flames, an all-star version of Anton Fier's Golden Palominos all but burned a hole through the stage at Cabaret Metro in Chicago.

### Frank-John Hadley

**NEW RELEASE:** Various Artists, *Genuine Houserockin' Music* (Alligator). Dandy budget-priced sampler has 10 bluesmen and one blues queen singing and/or playing from the gut. Supreme houserockin': Hound Dog Taylor's *Don't Blame Me*.

**OLD FAVORITE:** Tiny Grimes, *Profoundly Blue* (Muse). Guitarist Grimes, he of four-string fame, is ably assisted by saxophonist Houston Person and pianist Harold Mabern in an early 1973 session.

**RARA AVIS:** Space Case, *Space Case 3* (Ode). This New Zealand quintet proves good modern jazz is to be heard in the SW Pacific. A 1985 release. Write Morris Records, 38 Willis St., Wellington, NZ.

**SCENE:** Cambridge's handsome Nightstage serves area music lovers well for its uncommonly fine, eclectic bookings: Asleep at the Wheel, Gary Burton Group, Lowell Fulson, Tito Puente, etc.

### Owen Cordle

**NEW RELEASE:** Alvin "Red" Tyler, *Heritage* (Rounder). An adult prodigy, the legendary r&b sessionman from those New Orleans hits of the '50s proves that the Marsalises aren't the only modernists coming from the Crescent City today. Shades of the Blue Note '60s and beyond, from the leader's tenor and Clyde Kerr Jr.'s trumpet.

**OLD FAVORITE:** Gene Ammons/Sonny Stitt, *Boss Tenors* (Verve). This inspired blowing session from '61 catches the late saxists swapping licks and stories about Bird, Prez, and the development of soul, with a wool-and-wire match of tones.

**RARA AVIS:** Kenny Clarke/Francy Boland Big Band, *All Smiles* (MPS). Europe's premier big band circa '68, now defunct, shines brilliantly in this set of standards arranged by Boland, goosed and tickled by the late drummers Clarke and Kenny Clare, sent soaring by trumpeter Benny Bailey, and complemented by hip solos all over the place.

**SCENE:** George Wein's Newport All-Stars fell prey to poor promotion at North Carolina Central University in Durham, NC, but cooked with good music and resilient attitudes despite poor attendance. Harold Ashby's weeping-and-wailing tenor was outstanding.



# GO FOR WHATCHA KNOW

fresh here. And Sam Woodyard takes a superbly organized brush solo on *Play The Blues And Go* that's among the best you're ever going to hear, from him or anybody. The old Jo Jones influence is there, and the way he sets his ideas against the unceasing bass pulse is truly absorbing. The quartet tracks, with two takes each of *In A Mellotone* and *Happy Reunion*, are all Gonsalves, as is the long interval sequence on the blues that had become the centerpiece of *Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue*. Out of context it stands very nicely as a long uptempo blues, although it's clear that since the *Live At Newport* album came out in November 1956, the solo had developed a fairly set line of attack and sequence of riffs. The version on *All-Star Road Band Vol. 1* is a good deal better.

Norman Granz has put out a couple of fresh mid-'60s Ellington concerts; among them, *The Stockholm Concert 1966* with Ella Fitzgerald (Pablo 2308-242) is dominated by Ella, but she and Hodges share a stomping *Frustration* and *Duke's Place* that are delights. And the band's reeds, with Carney's baritone so prominent, help bring out the best in *Something To Live For*. Sadly, though, Ellington insisted on playing *Cottontail* so fast for so many years that it had disintegrated into a senseless showpiece by now, a worthless, breathless exercise in empty speed. The other titles were regular parts of Ella's repertoire of the period, performed with her accustomed craft and verve.

A second Pablo set, *Harlem* (2308-245), gives us the fifth issued recording in 35 years of one of Ellington's proudest achievements, a kind of concerto grosso for jazz band originally commissioned by the NBC Symphony. This version of *A Tone Parallel To Harlem* comes closest to the original recording on the Columbia *Ellington Uptown* LP. Ellington scholar Jerry Valburn brought out a rejected alternate take from that 1951 CBS session in 1981. Two subsequent recordings were more along the lines of the original commission. One was by the Cincinnati Symphony (Decca 710176); the other by the Ellington band augmented by strings (Reprise 6154). This latest version from 1964 is well worth having, because although the band is essentially the same as on the excellent *Symphonic Ellington* issue, this one is without the string backdrop. It is therefore a welcome and truly comparable performance to the two original Columbia sessions, although the latter remains the definitive one.

Ellington emphasizes the program music aspects of the piece in his introduction, mentioning "our civil rights demands" almost as an afterthought with tongue in cheek. In 1964 it was almost obligatory for any specifically black music to associate itself with the movement, but clearly Ellington seems to resist any politicizing of his music.

Save for a thick, intense Cootie Williams blast at *Caravan* and a jaunty *All Of Me* by Hodges, the balance of the album is a reworking of familiar and below-par Gonsalves pieces and routine program standards.

—john mcdonough



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# RECORD REVIEWS

## WAXING ON

### Tenors Inside & Out

**BEN WEBSTER:** *LIVE AT THE HAARLEMSE*

*JAZZ CLUB (Cot 11)* ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

**GENE AMMONS:** *NIGHT LIGHTS (Prestige 7682)*

★ ★ ★

**STANLEY TURRENTINE:** *ZT's BLUES (Blue Note*

*84424)* ★ ★ ★ ★

**ARNETT COBB:** *KEEP ON PUSHIN' (Bee Hive*

*7017)* ★ ★ ★ ½

**FRANK FOSTER/FRANK WESS:** *FRANKLY*

*SPEAKING (Concord Jazz 276)* ★ ★ ★ ★

**THE BILL PERKINS QUARTET:** *JOURNEY TO THE*

*EAST (Contemporary 14011)* ★ ★ ★

**THE FRASER MacPHERSON QUINTET:** *JAZZ*

*PROSE (Concord Jazz 269)* ★ ★ ★

**WARNE MARSH:** *STARS HIGHS (Criss Cross Jazz*

*1002)* ★ ★ ★ ★

**CHARLES DAVIS:** *SUPER 80 (Nilva 3410)*

★ ★ ½

**THE NAT DIXON QUARTET:** *ROSE COLOURED*

*(Sax-Rack 022)* ★ ★

**STEVE GROSSMAN:** *WAY OUT EAST (Red 176)*

★ ★ ★ ½

**BOB BERG:** *STEPPIN' (Red 178)* ★ ★ ★ ★

**JOHN STUBBLEFIELD:** *CONFESSIN' (Soul Note*

*1095)* ★ ★ ★ ★

**FRANK LOWE:** *DECISION IN PARADISE (Soul Note*

*1082)* ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

**WILBER MORRIS:** *WILBERFORCE (DIW*

*8001/8002)* ★ ★ ★ ★

**DEWEY REDMAN/ED BLACKWELL:** *IN WILLISAU*

*(Black Saint 93)* ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Some jazz critic with questionable insight once opined that the most serious statements made by black men in America were for many years made on the tenor saxophone. While the instrument's range and variety do indeed suggest the human voice, and its major innovators from Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young through John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins have been as serious with their musical messages as artists come, one might argue that other voices—trumpeters, drummers, pianists, composers—also spoke volumes, for and of the people who were listening. Nowadays, perhaps the guitar has the hold on the greatest number of bright young players, of whatever race or sex; the most active saxists must be multi-reed players, composers, bandleaders, veritable conceptualists to gain our notice. But as in the past, a sax player's job is to find his (until very recently, seldom her) own voice, then free it to comment with conviction, at will.

**Ben Webster**, for instance, groaned like a not quite awake grizzly bear, ready to swallow up little Goldilocks with his shoulder-to-gut-shrugging sighs and assertive, often doleful, romanticism. His '72 date (about 18 months before his death) with Catalonian pianist Tete Montoliu (a frequent collaborator during the tenorist's later European years), bassist Rob Langereis, and drummer Tony Inzalaco, is mostly ballads—*For All We Know*, *How Long Has This Been Going On?*, *In A Mellotone*, and

*Stardust*, with one uptempo *Sunday*—and while he recasts the melodies, Webster squeezes their basic stories. Doesn't he say, er, play "Come on over here," in the middle of explaining, "We may never meet again"? And how could anyone so addressed resist? The sound quality of this Dutch LP, distributed by NorthCountry (Cadence Bldg., Redwood, NY 13679), is rough in spots, the tag ends somewhat arbitrary, and there's been a lot of Webster reissued lately, but anyone wanting a lesson in forceful persuasion might turn here. Of course, there's no faking such a big, sad sound.

**Gene Ammons** had one, too, grainy and with a bit of a snort on the uptake, blown from the belly with a pass 'round his heart. A previously unissued session of Nat Cole-related material, *Night Lights* was cut in February of '70, a year after Jug's return from jail for pot possession, and one's reaction to it might depend on an appetite for *Nature Boy*, which gets melodramatic duet in- and out-choruses (Ammons over Wynton Kelly's piano), and *The Christmas Song* (closing out side two). Drummer Rudy Collins ("Not our first choice," producer Bob Porter notes tactfully) mars the title track by rushing, and selects a peculiar tattoo for *Nature Boy*. *Calypto Blues* is in the mode of previous Ammons hits, with congero "Pucho" Brown joining the rhythm section (George Duvivier on bass is, as usual, fine). Ammons affected a certain gruffness, biting his notes off, inserting bleats and barks, but one can't deny his authority on *Lush Life*, where he floats blue phrases with feet firm on earth. *Sweet Lorraine* is also solid.

According to Porter, **Stanley Turrentine** listened to Jug record *Night Lights*; probably they had a mutual admiration society, as Mr. T. shares one of Ammons' strongest characteristics: the grainy bluesiness that makes even a clichéd riff stand like a stark declaration. Guitarist Grant Green sparked Turrentine on *ZT's Blues*, an old new issue, in the Blue Note archives since September '61; pianist Tommy Flanagan, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Art Taylor were also on hand for this very tasteful set. After the titular opener, Turrentine got pretty personal on *More Than You Know*, then fired up *The Lamp Is Low*, with Green applying his short-clipped fingering, Flanagan rolling single-note runs elegantly, Mr. P.C. bowing his solo, and Taylor dropping a bomb to bring them all back. Turrentine is absolutely confident on the changes of *The Way You Look Tonight*; in fact, none of the repertoire, including *For Heaven's Sake*, *I Wish I Knew*, and Mario Lanza's success, *Be My Love*, gives the tenorist pause. Which makes one wonder why he clings so close to such mundane material today.

**Arnett Cobb** clings to his Texas swagger and the kind of dramatic structure he's used since the '40s. With his sweetly generous, maybe foolish, tone, his confessional feel for the blues, his belief in his own performance, and his long experience at sucking audiences into the bell of his horn, Cobb is quite the entertainer. *Keep On Pushin'*, Cobb's '84 recording with pianist Junior Mance, dependable (now, lamentably, gone) George Duvivier, and drummer Panama Francis, becomes an old-fashioned hoot, a barely contained studio

jam, a good-time jazz party record when trumpeter Joe Newman and trombonist Al Grey sit in on the title tune (tricky minor head; who's that growling?) and *Indiana* (the chase choruses). When *Stardust* gets boggy, Cobb saves Mance, and, in a brief *Deep River*, he takes the gospel way out. Satisfying, swinging, fun.

You get all that, and more—sophistication—from **Frank Foster** and **Frank Wess** on *Frankly Speaking*, which features the superior rhythm trio of pianist Kenny Barron, bassist Rufus Reid, and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith. The Franks were (while together with Basie from '53 to '64) and are men of many talents—both composers and arrangers, Wess an adept flutist, Foster an original soprano saxist—and their individual styles are distinct: Wess airy, proper, and sparing with ornate curlicues, Foster more rugged, throaty, and likely to stretch for his notions. There are three tenor "battles"—Foster's *An' All Such Stuff As 'Dat* and *Blues Backstage*, and Neal Hefti's signature piece for the *Two Franks*—really just demonstrations of how they work together, in close harmony and contrasting, rather than cutting, solo shots. With the flute, soprano (*This Is All I Ask*) and arrangements, though, Foster and Wess create a context seemingly larger than a quintet, more variegated than a blowing session.

Variety of program is a real strength of **Bill Perkins'** *Journey To The East*—though the California reeds and woods player (he plays flute on *Mendocino Nights*), member of Doc Severinsen's *Tonight Show* orchestra, and inventor of a patented sax-synth interface, also has a warm, supple, pure high, throbbing low sound that's a plus. But pianist Frank Strazzeri's *From The Hip* and title song, Strayhorn's *Blood Count*, *I'm An Old Cowhand*, *Moose The Mooche*, *Invitation*, Cole Porter's *All Through The Night* and the other tunes performed by this quartet (Joel Di Bartolo, bass; Peter Donald, drums) lend more thematic distinction to the format than Perkins' improvisations supply. He plays well within the songs, and within the sound, pushing the parameters of neither. This is a mannerly disc.

Canadian tenorist **Fraser MacPherson**, live on *Jazz Prose* with guitarist Ed Bickert, pianist Dave McKenna, bassist Steve Wallace, and drummer Jake Hanna, wafts casual, lyrical lines on familiar material—*You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To*, *On A Slow Boat To China*, *It Could Happen To You*, *There Is No Greater Love*, and other such chestnuts. MacPherson's dignified swing is consistent; he treats the ballad *Darn That Dream* very tenderly, and on side two, after features for Bickert and McKenna, the tempi perk up. There's a lightness to the whole affair.

Regarding lightness, brightness, and grace, few currently active tenor players compare with **Warne Marsh**. On *Star Highs*, in the company of pianist Hank Jones, bassist George Mraz, and drummer Mel Lewis, Marsh coolly and thoughtfully transfigures *Star Eyes* and *'S Wonderful (Victory Ball)*, interprets *Moose The Mooche* and three more tunes, finding strange twists ("progressions of diminished chords based on the chords of those standards... the chromatic and lightning fast change of keys through extensive transposition of a musical



phrase . . . it appears the tonal center is floating," claims liner writer J. Bernlef) that are subtle and his alone. The supporting trio helps, for sure, but they don't change the form; Marsh rethinks the linear approach as Monk rethought the piano, with stubborn (if less obvious) idiosyncrasy, and he deserves to be heard by any tenor aficionado.

**Charles Davis**, a hard-working, New York-area tenorist, taped *Super 80* with pianist Gene Adler, bassist Walter Booker, and drummer Michael Carvin back in '82; Alvin Queen released it on Nilva recently. Davis has a brawny style and a loose approach to intonation, which on the slow *Chelsea Bridge* results in vibrato-heavy sensuality. He's got several characteristic figures, too, which become tedious over the album's course. The head of his vaguely calypso *Mother Pearl*, *Sister Ruth* is catchy; *Super 80* is a less memorable original, with a Blue Note-school modal phrase that releases into another calypso-like rhythm. *Blue Gene's* is the pianist's tune, merry hard-bop; Carvin takes an energetic break with brushes. *Hi Fly* and *Una Mas* round out the program. I bet this is a fun bar or club band.

*Rose Coloured*, tenor and alto (on the title tune and *Love Won't Let Me Wait*) saxist **Nat Dixon's** second production on his own Sax-Rack Records (the first was *Up Front*), employs the leader's working quartet (Kalid Moss, piano; Larry Johnson, drums; Mervin Bronson, bass), and a conga player named Cuba. Dixon wrapped his horns in reverb, maybe in imitation of the pop-jazz, urban contemporary radio sound, but to me he should be closer, up-front in the mix. He likes to build solos over vamps to a strangled scream, a la Pharoah Sanders, but this play's not exciting—it's more like he's hanging on for dear life than gripped by fervor. Dixon's group, however, has an easy rhythmic feel (except on Moss' *King Of Hearts*, which gets out of hand) and *Nat's Blues* is the right idea; maybe his next will get it all together.

**Steve Grossman's** *Way Out East* is a knowing glance back at a milestone, Sonny Rollins' Contemporary LP, *Way Out West*. Juni Booth, bass, and Joe Chambers, drums, lift and prod Grossman, who's dedicated himself to the full-bodied, hard-edged, ceaselessly flowing manner of Rollins' maturity. None of *West's* repertoire is attempted, but *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Green Dolphin Street*, *I'll Remember April*, *There Will Never Be Another You*, *Four*, *This Time The Dream's On Me*—you get the idea. Grossman plays well; I haven't heard another young tenorist come so close to appropriating Rollins' vitality. Why bother? To learn, and move on? The tenorist tries that on his only composition represented, *Taurus People*, which veers from Rollins' favorite changes toward *Giant Steps*. Assume the real Steve Grossman will step forth when ready.

The real **Bob Berg**—he's the guy with Miles now—may be heard on *Steppin'*, live-from-Perugia, December '82, fronting a tight trio of Italians (Danilo Rea, piano; Enzo Pietropaoli, bass; Roberto Gatto, drums). Berg has his debts to Rollins and Trane, and Bird, too, but he rips through the scales so fast he can't help but arrive at himself. As caught here, his sound's a bit raunchy, including occasional false highs and bottoming out, but forgive him

that and enjoy his blues. If Berg's a little relentless, this too shall pass; he's got his own way of riding the top of hard rhythm, of negotiating challenges he sets for himself (three songs are his, *Terrestris* is by former partner Tom Harrell, and there's *The Secret Life Of Plants*). The sidemen are hot—had to be, to keep up—and though it's concert sound quality, the recording's not bad. In fact, *Steppin'* is a keeper.

**John Stubblefield**, a widely respected, Arkansas-born, AACM-initiated but utterly professional musician, has in *Confessin'* the kind of jazz album some of these other leaders

might have hocked their teeth for. From the start of his *Spiral Dance* you hear the well-limned melodies, the soulful, self-assured stance, fresh, ready harmonies with brassman Cecil Bridgewater, ingenious support from pianist Mulgrew Miller, bassist Rufus Reid, and drummer Eddie Gladden, that harken to the late '60s but identify Stubblefield as a man of this moment. Strayhorn's *Blood Count* gets a heartwrenching reading—listen to the horn's sob, rise, and gentle, tragic comedown. It's Reid's arrangement, but an ensemble triumph, with Stubblefield at the head. His soprano's good (on *More Fun*, *Dusk To Dawn*, Miller's

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# RECORD REVIEWS

*Whisper*, and *Confessin'*); his tenor's even better.

**Frank Lowe** is one tenor-player-in-progress—a probably endless process, a goal in itself. His sax sound, hard and dark or relaxed and intentionally fuzzy at the edges, is but one fascinating aspect of *Decision In Paradise*; there are also the contributions of pocket trumpeter Don Cherry, trombonist Grachan Moncur III, pianist Geri Allen, young bassist Charnette Moffett, and *pere* Charles Moffett on drums. The cast is indicative of Lowe's intention to learn from and be inspired by, rather than to dominate, those with whom he plays; together they make every track special. *Decision* recalls the power of Moncur's Blue Note compositions (his burry 'bone's a pleasure to hear again), and Lowe gets next to Shepp's old notions; on *Cherryco* Lowe tangles with Cherry up high for a brilliant moment; on *Lowe-ologie* (Monk on uppers) Lowe odd-hops against Charnette's walk and Charles' cymbals; *You Dig!* is a square four with Allen hiply referring to Teddy Wilson and Earl Hines; *Dues And Dont's* has a sing-song theme, a contrasting B section and a free time break, rather like an Ornette piece. These, too, are arbitrary characterizations; there's more than one phrase can say. My guess is Lowe took some pains with this album, and when he next stands alone, blowing *I'll Whistle Your Name* (a song by Lawrence "Butch" Morris) natural as a fellow on the

corner, he can be proud.

Among the younger tenorists, David Murray has been cited for his ambition, adventurousness, freedom on the horn, blues, r&b, and gospel background, and considerable achievements, including leadership of a quartet, octet, string ensemble, big band, participation in the World Saxophone Quartet, solo outings, and daring special events. With bassist **Wilber Morris** on the trio LP *Wilberforce* (Dennis Charles drums), it's just Murray out front, without his own songs. Morris' compositions—four stretch over four sides, with *P.C.O.P.* played twice and a *West Indian Folk Song* credited to Charles—are hummable tunes, open to free exploration. Right down David's alley. He takes them apart phrase by phrase, and finds each piece as flexibly useful as their maker might have hoped, possibly more than he even imagined. It's Murray's rhythmic certainty that saves his wildest flings of gesture from flying out of orbit, and his vocalization on the saxophone, like a prophet speaking in tongues, that keep him exciting. Morris also abjurs a "classic" bass sound for closer, woody effects, and Charles is an open, unobtrusive drummer. Again, concert sound (from February, '83) and applause, but an eminently listenable, likeable double-album.

Finally, for rhythmic certainty and bluesy, Texas-tenor roots, for long-lined development and logical narrative, dry humor, indepen-

dence of thought (and action) let us confer some praise on **Dewey Redman**. Somehow he's reached his greatest powers almost unnoticed, but for the place he's held with Ornette, with Keith Jarrett, with Old And New Dreams, whereas Dewey's made some dynamite music under his own name—his Impulse albums were perhaps that label's most overlooked, the *Fantasys* are worth finding, and *The Struggle Continues* on ECM should have been a new beginning. On *In Willisau* Redman and the great drummer Ed Blackwell confer like the longtime friends they are, allowing us to listen to what seems like an intimate dialog. Not that they have secrets to hide, but rather what they have to say is strong, sometimes acerbic, not always polite. That's life—both Redman and Blackwell are gentle men, but they're artists, too, and don't back off from truth. Yes, Dewey's musette (on *We Hope*) is exotic, but what he says on the tenor ought to be common knowledge; while complex, it's a musician's story, meant to be shared. So lend an ear to one of the premiere contemporary tenor players—and don't forget to listen to those drums.

—howard mandel

## 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

**Various Artists**, inc. Tania Maria, Cal Tjader, Monty Alexander, and Tito Puente among others, provide a sampling of THE SOUND OF PICANTE. **Jeannie/Jimmy Cheatham**, husband and wife piano/vocals/bass trombone duo get down and dirty on the blues, MIDNIGHT MAMA. **Ruby Braff/Scott Hamilton**, articulate cornetist and fledgling tenorman compare notes, A SAILBOAT IN THE MOONLIGHT. **Terence Blanchard/Donald Harrison**, fiery quintet attacks a variety of tunes in a mode Blakey made famous, DEDICATIONS.

### ROUNDER

**Solomon Burke**, popular '60s soul singer testifies with fresh '80s fervor, A CHANGE IS GONNA COME. **Marclia Ball**, road warrior on the "crawfish circuit" (down Louisiana way) brings her honky-tonk talents to 10 tunes, HOT TAMALE BABY. **Irma Thomas**, Queen of Crescent City soul mixes new tunes with her standard sound, THE NEW RULES. **The Night-hawks**, hard-workin' r&b bar band reveals more of their roots, HARD LIVING.

### MCA/ZEBRA

**Larry Carlton**, switches to acoustic guitar with electric backing in lyrical outing, ALONE/BUT NEVER ALONE. **John Jarvis**, pianist writes most of his own material, assisted by a few

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# CD REVIEWS

## Compact Discs Are Here To Stay

Even the wildest industry expectations proved conservative—compact disc sales are skyrocketing. Fifteen million CDs were sold last year in the U.S. alone, and in '86 the figure should double. Those listeners waiting for a better offering before considering the purchase of a player might well think again. With popular new releases routinely offered on CD, more eclectic works and older treasures from the vaults are appearing by the dozen.

In jazz this year Fantasy Records released nearly 50 of their early Prestige and Riverside sessions—Monk and Trane, early Miles, Rollins, Evans, and Adderley. Then came some of the Savoy two-fers: Bird, Dizzy, and Trane again. Verve/EmArcy continues to reissue its marvels, and PolyGram Special Imports stocks the kind of mainstream and avant garde jazz one would only have expected to be available years from now, like David Murray, Don Pullen, the World Saxophone Quartet, Cecil Taylor, George Adams, and Max Roach. The pop, rock, blues, and r&b catalogs, too, are now padded with more than the chart-topping 100. Along with new recordings are immaculate reissues of Elvis, Aretha, James Brown, Sam Cooke, and nearly the entire Motown catalog. Classical, which has long had the best offering, continues to release older treasures and newer, more unusual works.

Before you jump into the CD ocean, however, there are a few things you should know.

### All Discs Are Not Created Equal

At the system's advent, quality fluctuated widely. The apparent shrillness of many discs, due to the unforgiving clarity of the digital medium, inappropriate miking techniques, and/or poor filters in the CD players themselves, showed that the digital-equals-perfection equation was premature at best. And while classical labels toiled to establish high standards, only a handful of other companies even bothered to try. Whether from ignorance or opportunism, some label's discs actually pale in comparison to their LP counterparts. Yet a growing number of CDs revealed the kind of playback quality which lured one back into record stores to begin replacing older, favorite LPs and venture into the new.

By now even the worst offenders have started cleaning up their acts, and with cheaper and more advanced players, the vast majority of CDs are more often

worth their expense. But there are still considerations to make note of when purchasing, so let's begin at the beginning.

### How Digital Works

Analog playback has problems: even the most diehard audiophile has to admit as much. LPs have never been able to contain the entire recorded signal from a master tape, since the stereo grooves are incapable of holding certain simultaneous low frequencies—a bass and drum, for instance—without detrimental manipulation by a cutting engineer. Even the dynamics from soft to loud and back again overly tax on LP, so it, too, is collapsed to make the program inscribable. Then there's surface noise and degradation caused by the diamond needle coursing along the vinyl grooves. And anyone who's compared an original master to an LP pressing knows well what's lost along the way.

Digital recording and mastering, on the other hand, is the first playback medium which can offer the entire recorded signal, from the highest notes of a piccolo to the thud of a bass drum. As composer Steve Reich declares, "Compact discs are phenomenal. The sound quality is fantastic, and I don't think it's metallic, and I don't think it's hard." Says Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, "It's so like what you hear in playback when you're recording. It's the same sort of quality, same presence of sound."

Digital accomplishes these marvels by abandoning analog techniques altogether. As a computer-based system, a digital recorder samples sound waves rather than mimics them. 41,100 times each second, the computer assigns a binary number, a one or zero, which represents the tonal and dynamic character of the sound wave at that instant. Each additional 1/44,100th-of-a-second another one or zero is rendered and stored. What results is a number stream literally in the billions. (Sonny Rollins' three-second opening phrase to *St. Thomas*, for example, is the result of over 1,323,000 independent samples.)

Unlike copies of analog recordings, which lose definition and add hiss with each subsequent generation, a digital tape can be copied endlessly without change. Since all that's being copied are immutable numbers, a listener will get virtually an exact reproduction of a digital master tape. For the first time, what an artist on a digital recording hears in the control room will be exactly what the rest of us hear at home on a compact disc.

All this accounts for the added frequencies, dynamic, and lack of tape hiss on an all-digital effort. On an analog-to-



digital transfer, the tape hiss is still there, but with it comes a greater depth of stereo image and the entire recorded signal from the master—all for the first time. Then, since only a laser beam ever “touches” the disc, there is no surface noise. Add to this the potential playing time of 70 or more minutes, and behold—the digital revolution.

#### What to Look For

Naturally then, digital playback via a compact disc is the ideal format for a digital recording. With analog transfers the quality varies most, not because of problems in the process, but because of ways some labels cut corners. Ideally only an original master should be used for the transfer, one which is not itself a copy and which certainly has not been equalized to compensate for the deficiencies of an analog pressing. Yet some releases have used such EQ'ed copies with results clearly not worth the consumer expense. Other potential problems result from an older recording's possibly deteriorated master, so a simple transfer might yield the greater clarity, but also the drop-outs (where the tape's oxide has actually flaked off, and along with it the musical program) and frightful tape hiss.

RCA, with its Sam Cooke and Elvis series, spent literally hundreds of hours cleaning up the older tapes—even editing in moments from backup copies to replace the drop-outs. PolyGram has meticulously done the same. The results, as so many CDs from these labels will attest, are stunning. On *Charlie Parker: Bird/The Savoy Recordings*, Savoy actually went back to acetates from 1945 for their digital remasters, and for the first time the bass and drum on *The Master Takes* assert themselves with phenomenal presence. Bird's sax *never* sounded so good on LP. Joe Gastwirt's work on the Riverside and Prestige recordings from the middle to late '50s is nothing short of brilliant. More and more companies are following the standards set by these labels.

#### Starting a Collection

When buying compact discs, by no means restrict your pleasure to all-digital recordings. State-of-the-art analog has nothing to apologize for, nor do many properly remastered older issues. Seek out the work of the best engineers and labels. Also learn the few codes which labels employ to inform the consumer of the recording process. Any all-digital recording will proudly boast as much; it's the others that require close reading. London Records uses ADRM (for Analog/Digital Re-Mastering), signaling that the original analog master tapes were enhanced by digital re-editing. Many other labels have adopted the SPARS

code, which indicates how a given recording was made, edited, and mastered. DDD is digital all down the line; ADD is an analog recording, mixed digitally and, since the compact disc is a digital playback medium, digitally encoded; AAD is an analog recording and mix with digital encoding for playback.

#### Recommended Listing:

##### POP/ROCK/SOUL

- James Brown: *The CD Of JB (Sex Machine And Other Soul Classics)*, Polydor 825 714-2 (AAD)
- Ry Cooder: *Bop Till You Drop*, Warner Bros. 03358-2 (DDD)
- Donald Fagen: *The Nightfly*, Warner Bros. 23696-2 (DDD)
- Peter Gabriel: *Security*, Geffen 2011-2 (DDD)
- Sade: *Promise, Portrait* RK40263 (AAD)
- Talking Heads: *Little Creatures*, Sire 25305-2 (ADD)
- The Temptations: *17 Greatest Hits (Compact Command Performances)*, Gordy GCD 06125 GD (AAD)

##### JAZZ

- Chet Baker Quartet: *No Problem*, SteepleChase SCCD-31131 (AAD)
- Basie Big Band, Pablo J33J 20048 (AAD)
- Clifford Brown and Max Roach: *At Basin Street*, EmArcy 814 648-2 (Mono AAD)
- John Coltrane: *Soultrane*, Prestige VDJ-1502 (Mono AAD)
- Chick Corea and Gary Burton: *In Concert, Zurich*, ECM 1182-2 (AAD)
- Miles Davis: *In A Silent Way*, CBS/Sony Import (AAD)
- Duke Ellington: *The Ellington Suites*, Pablo J33J 20008 (AAD)
- Art Farmer Quintet: *Mirage*, Soul Note SN 1046 CD (AAD)
- Stan Getz: *Jazz Samba Encore! With Luiz Bonfá*, Verve 823 613-2 (AAD)
- Dizzy Gillespie: *Dee Gee Days*, Savoy ZD 70517 (Mono AAD)
- Charlie Haden/Carla Bley: *The Ballad Of The Fallen*, ECM 23794-2 (DDD)
- Billie Holiday: *Songs For Distingué Lovers*, Verve 815 055-2 (AAD)
- Bobby Hutcherson: *Good Bait*, Landmark VDJ-1020 (ADD)
- M'Boom: *Collage*, Soul Note SN 1059 CD (AAD)
- Pat Metheny Group: *First Circle*, ECM 25008-2 (AAD)
- Glenn Miller Orchestra: *In The Digital Mood*, GRP GRP-D-9502 (DDD)
- Modern Jazz Quartet: *Live At The Lighthouse*, Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab MFCD 827 (AAD)
- Thelonious Monk Septet: *Monk's Music*, Riverside VDJ-1516 (Mono AAD)
- Charlie Parker: *Bird/The Savoy Recordings (Master Takes)*, Savoy ZD70737 (Mono AAD)
- Sonny Rollins: *Tenor Madness*, Prestige VDJ-1514 (Mono AAD)
- Archie Shepp and Horace Parlan: *Goin' Home*, SteepleChase SCCD-31079 (AAD)
- Sarah Vaughan: *Crazy And Mixed Up*, Pablo 3112-11 (AAD)
- Kazumi Watanabe: *Mobo II*, Gramvision GRCD 8406 (AAD)
- Weather Report: *Domino Theory*, Columbia CK 39147 (AAD)
- Joe Williams: *Nothin' But The Blues*, Delos D/CD 4001 (DDD)
- The World Saxophone Quartet: *Steppin' With*, Black Saint BSR 0027 CD (AAD)
- One Night With Blue Note: *Volume I*, Blue Note CDP 7 46147 2 (DDD)
- Sampler: *Jazz Like You've Never Heard It Before*, Polygram 819 344-2 (AAD) —gerald seligman



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# BLINDFOLD TEST

**1 ELVIN JONES.** *BRITE PIECE* (from *MERRY-GO-ROUND*, Blue Note). Jones, drums; Dave Liebman, saxophone, composer; Jan Hammer, piano; Don Alias, percussion; Gene Perla, bass.

I liked the arrangement. It had a nice groove. Exciting. I couldn't tell you who it is, but I liked it. The soprano sax player was really good. I was going to say when I was listening to it at first, I could tell that a saxophone player wrote the song. It wasn't a keyboard player's song. The drummer sounded like he listened to Elvin a lot. I don't know if it's Elvin or not, but I'd say it's not. It sounded like Elvin, but certain things he did sounded like somebody who had *listened* to Elvin.

**2 GROUP 87.** *SUBLIME FELINE* (from *GROUP 87*, Columbia). Terry Bozzio, drums; other personnel as guessed.

The first song we listened to, I didn't like the way the drums were mixed, no matter who it was. It sounded like the drums were in another room. It had that sound of distance that really bothers me, and when you've got such a great drummer—you know, any drummer—but when it's Elvin Jones or somebody like that you want to hear all the stuff he plays, and it sounded like he was way in the back. But that's the difference with this track here. This sounds like a drummer's record. That's not trumpet, is it? Is it Mark Isham? Would this be that group that they had before Missing Persons, with Pat O'Hearn on bass and Peter Maunu on guitar? I don't know who the drummer is, but I heard that trumpet sound and knew it was those guys. I like the drummer's playing a lot. Yeah, a nice sound to it. I like the arrangements of the sounds—the way they'd come in and go out.

**3 PHILLY JOE JONES.** *GONE* (from *SHOWCASE*, Riverside). Jones, drums, arranger; Pepper Adams, baritone saxophone; Bill Barron, tenor saxophone; Julian Priester, trombone; Jimmy Garrison, bass; Charles Coker, piano.

Yeah, that's *Gone* from Miles' *Porgy And Bess* album. It's Philly Joe. I can hear it. Nobody plays like Philly Joe. I used to listen to Philly Joe night and day. That's Pepper Adams. The other saxophone player, was it Hank Mobley? Was it the saxophone player's arrangement? It's a good vehicle for Philly Joe, but hearing it I longed to hear the original one with the big band. And there are some things he could have done to make the arrangement have a little more thrust at the end, because it kind of got flat. At the end of

## Tony Williams

By ROBIN TOLLESON

A couple hours after drummer extraordinaire Tony Williams did his first-ever Blindfold Test, he called me and suggested as a lark that I should come back up to his San Anselmo, CA, house and "test" him on some Shostakovich, Brahms, or Mahler. Over the past 10 years Williams has probably listened to the classics as much as anything else, and I had neglected to put any classical artists in his test.

Williams had a turnaround in his thinking in 1979; realizing he hadn't written a single tune on his *Joy Of Flying* (Columbia 45705) album, he began studying composition with Dr. Robert Greenberg, a teacher at the University of California at Berkeley. The fruits of those years of beating the books can be heard on *Foreign Intrigue* (Blue Note 85119)—an acoustic jazz album spiced with occasional electronic drums—on which he wrote all the songs.

*Foreign Intrigue* bows to some of the artists Williams was listening to at the age of nine—Art Blakey and the Jazz Mes-



MICHELE CLEMENTS

sengers, Philly Joe Jones, and Max Roach. In the past year Tony has increased his visibility, appearing on records by Yoko Ono, George Cables, L. Subramaniam, Public Image Ltd. (Johnny Lydon), joining Miles, Herbie, and Ron on the Artists United Against Apartheid *Sun City* album, and recording again with guitarist Allan Holdsworth. Williams is studying voice in the Bay Area, and claims to be writing more pop-oriented material these days.

He was given no information on any of the selections, and chose not to give star ratings.

that arrangement it would sound better if someone was up an octave or something. If somebody had maybe been up high at the end of it it wouldn't have sounded so flat. It was anti-climactic at the end when it's supposed to sound really big. And you don't need 15 pieces to do that. But I always like the way Philly Joe Jones plays.

**4 RUSH.** *LIMELIGHT* (from *MOVING PICTURES*, Mercury). Neil Peart, drums, percussion; Geddy Lee, bass, vocals; Alex Lifeson, guitars.

This is the first one that I've really liked. It feels good. Even though it's in seven [7/4 time] and it goes into three over here, the feeling of it—they feel real relaxed, and it just feels nice. I get a real emotional feeling from it. It's the first one I've felt that with. I don't know who it is though. It goes through the changes in the time, and he's playing across the meter in three. Yeah, I liked that a lot. Who's the vocalist? I thought it was a female voice. It sounds kind of like the girl in Heart, doesn't it? Whew, no offense Geddy. Yeah, he sounds good. I liked the bass playing and the bass sound. The groove of the thing was good, and that's the drums and the bass.

**5 CHICK COREA.** *NITE SPRITE* (from *LEPRECHAUN*, Polydor). Corea, keyboards, composer; Steve Gadd, drums; others as guessed.

I know who the bass player is—Anthony Jackson. Is it a drummer's record? That's Chick. It's got to be Chick's band. Is that Joe Farrell? It doesn't sound like Lenny [White]. It's not Billy Cobham? At least the sound of it is good. The electric records, the tracks you played, they sound like everybody's playing in the same room together. Even on the Philly Joe Jones record, you couldn't hear his cymbal playing. That's part of his style. That should have been really up front, because that's what holds bands together—the drummer's cymbals. They keep the drummer in the back, they keep the cymbals down, and it takes away some of the magic for me. It's not that I want the drums to be loud, it's just if I was the producer and not a drummer I'd be saying that. So, who was playing drums?

RT: Steve Gadd.

TW: Steve Gadd. Yeah, it sounded—sounded good, you know. I'm just jaded. There are a lot of things that I don't listen to because they don't excite me. I have to have a real good feeling just to listen to things. But I heard Chick's latest electric band a couple months ago and liked it.

db



## Michel Camilo

An effervescent keyboard player with a hot tune to his credit, Camilo brings a touch of the Dominican Republic to Big Apple jazz.

BY JEFF POTTER

"There is nothing more important for me than having fun when I play," keyboardist Michael Camilo explains. "After all, I come from a country where things are not easy, and I always had to struggle to play what I wanted to—and often lose a lot of money as well."

Highly schooled, from conservatories to clubs, Camilo's composing and playing talents span classical and jazz. But it is the man's absolute zest and the music's shimmering air of celebration that lingers most with listeners. A fiery, uplifting blend of jazz, funk, and latin rhythms, Michel's music recently aroused New York's Blue Note crowd into the kind of quick, bursting cheers normally reserved for strikeouts when Dwight Gooden pitches for the Mets.

"I was like a pioneer of jazz in the

Dominican Republic," Camilo says proudly. "Now that I have left the country, people are keeping the tradition. It's a whole new school and I feel that I had something to do with it. I never really played 'Latin' latin music down there. I was considered a rebel because I was always playing this American music. I had a group of friends who grew up with me and we all liked to play jazz. We would listen to records and transcribe things because we had no access to lead sheets. And you couldn't just find any record you wanted, like you can here. When I started visiting the States, I would pick up a lot of records and sheet music—whatever I could find to bring back home and study."

Now, word-of-mouth buzz between New York musicians commonly includes Camilo's name due to his rising reputation as the leader of his own bands and key member of altoist Paquito D'Rivera's group. Enthusiastic New York-area jazz djs have given his much-requested composition, *Why Not?*, religious airplay, earning the boisterous tune a "jazz hit" status. Last year's joint Carnegie Hall concert with Tania Maria was a walloping success, and followers have grown to SRO capacity for his club gigs. Despite his local stature, recognition comes in roundabout ways and, ironically, it has taken the Land of the Rising Sun to make Americans see the light regarding this 31-year-old New Yorker. Camilo's LP *Why Not?* (Electric Bird K28P-6371), is a Japanese import and therefore difficult to find at an average neighborhood record

store, though the album hit number nine on Japanese jazz charts.

As a four-year-old, Michel was attracted to a colorful accordion lying about his home. He picked it up and surprised his parents, playing the instrument by ear. By age five he wrote his first tune, and since that day he hasn't stopped. Michel's parents were supportive of his art but preferred that he did not make a career in music. "In my country,

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there is a social idea that musicians are not professionals. It's the old concept that they are just bohemians. That's why I didn't go professional when I was very young. But I kept on learning. When I was nine, I entered the National Conservatory to study piano."

While pursuing piano, Camilo also followed his percussion interests. The Dominican National Symphony offered him a percussion position, and at age 15 he joined as the youngest member of the orchestra. "At that time," he recalls, "I started listening to jazz very heavily, because American jazz was broadcast on the radio. There was a big festival when our orchestra opened the national theatre in Santo Domingo. There was an American symphony orchestra invited to come over and create a double orchestra to play special works. In the American percussion section was a great player, Gordon Gottlieb. We became very good friends. I played my jazz thing for him and we hung out together. He was the first one to encourage me to get heavy on it and explore it further.

"He invited me to New York, and that was my first encounter with the city. Gordon is the one that laid music on me like Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, and others. I couldn't get those newer records back home. Up until that time, my idols were players like Oscar Peterson and McCoy Tyner. Gordon took me to the record store, and I had a pile of McCoy Tyner records under one arm and a pile of Oscar Peterson records under the other. Gordon told me, 'Wait a minute! You put back half of those and I'll give you the new things. You take them back home and get into it.' He started opening up my head, and I began growing from then."

Studying at Juilliard, Mannes, and privately, Michel divided his time between piano, composition, arranging (with Don Sebesky), orchestration, and conducting, while uptown trips to jam sessions kept his jazz chops in shape. It was via the group French Toast that Camilo got his first major exposure to the elite jazz musician circles. The band, led by french horn player Peter Gordon, was comprised of top session players. *Why Not?*, which has become Michel's signature tune, was included in the French Toast repertoire and became a highlight of the group's performances. The band's first album, *French Toast* (Electric Bird K28P-6302), featured a lineup of Gordon, Michel, Lew Soloff, Anthony Jackson, Steve Gadd, Dave Weckl, Gordon Gottlieb, Sammy Figueroa, and Jerry Dodgion. The Electric Bird crew was impressed with Michel, and plans



ARTHUR L. COHEN

were laid for a solo disc.

Over the years, *Why Not?* has gained a momentum of its own, as other artists have clamored to record it, including Paquito D'Rivera and Dave Tofani. A vocal version by Manhattan Transfer won a 1983 Grammy for Best Jazz Vocal Performance which cited special credit to the composer. In some jazz circles, *Why Not?* has become somewhat of a new standard; an anthem for the movement of positive-thinking young lions carrying on the jazz tradition. "That title is important to me," Michel explains. "It's sort of a philosophy of life for me. The tune is happy because I want it to be a celebration—a celebration about an attitude towards life: 'Why not do this or do that? You can do it!' When I wrote it, I was in an important point of personal realization in my career."

Composing and arranging television themes kept Michel financially afloat while he played his own music in the jazz clubs. As he circulated the scene, Paquito, also a Latin-rooted (Cuban) jazzman, eventually heard the spreading word about Michel. "Paquito is a mentor and also like a brother. When he first was interested in contacting me, he thought that I was so busy playing the Broadway show *Dancin'* at that time that I wouldn't be able to travel with his group. At the same time, I got a last minute call to sub on piano at the Montreal Jazz Festival with the Tito Puente Percussion Ensemble. It just so happened that Paquito was playing in the same festival that day. He saw me and said, 'Oh! So you *can* travel?' He heard me that evening and right away he called me when we came back to New York." Since then, the two have enjoyed an ongoing mutually inspiring partnership—including appearances on the saxist's two most recent albums, *Explo-*

*sion* (Columbia 40156) and *Why Not?* (Columbia 39548)—and Paquito has given Michel's writing, arranging, and playing a generous share of the spotlight.

Michel's approach to the piano is marked by a crisp, staccato attack that manages to retain a fat sound due to his deep harmonic knowledge. "I always felt that the piano is a percussive instrument as well as a lyrical one," he stresses. "I go for that extra limit of percussive quality that can be achieved. I grew up in my teens in the middle of a symphony, hearing orchestral textures. It comes across in my playing because I hear orchestral timbres and maybe that's why I have a big sound in my piano playing. I consciously do not play electronic keyboards in soloing. That's because I believe there is still much more to say on the piano. The touch is so important to me, and having 88 keys is important to me as opposed to single-hand soloing, which happened a lot during the fusion times."

Rarely does a performance go by when pianists do not crowd Michel to inquire on his two-handed technique of soloing in chords and octaves. The technique itself resembles latin comping styles or the chord soloing of Erroll Garner or George Shearing. With his unique attack, Michel transforms the technique into a sound of his own, especially in eye-opening passages that send his hands in parallel flight across the keys. The approach is a natural result of his composing style, but tackling the technique's physical challenge evolved from classical training; Michel had long grappled with the notorious fast octave passage in the third movement of Beethoven's *Waldstein Sonata*. "That passage is almost unplayable," Camilo chuckles. "Most pianists don't play it right, but I found the formula. It's all about placement in the body. A lot of players are surprised to find that I spread my fingers out straight when I do my fast passages."

Ultimately, discussing technique does not interest Michel as much as the end result—"the heart. There are people who have made a career out of being depressing. My music is not about that. I'm about getting the most of life: *joie de vivre!* And I hope it will always stay like that. I basically had it made in the Dominican Republic. I already had a lifetime membership in the symphony orchestra, and I used to play a lot of the recording dates and shows. But there's more to life than just money. I feel I have a lot to say and I just needed the chance to say it. That chance just started this year with my record." Michel is a man who will make the most of that chance—and why not? db



When you think of rock & roll, rhythm & blues, they're using the same notes but they say, "We're playing this, we're playing that." But in Europe years ago it was just what your name was. If your name was Jim, it was go and listen to Jim—not Jim play the blues, it was just Jim doing what he's doing. If that was the case in America, we'd all be a lot better. For instance, I never heard anyone say "white music," but I hear everyone say "black music"—and I was black before there was music. That's kind of a drag, and has nothing to do with music.

So what I'm saying is that those styles limit even the person who created the concept. And if the people involved in creative expression had the position that the people in NASA have, in their technology, all this other shit would be outdated. When you think of the shuttle *Challenger*, it was a shame, those people went up and something happened, but technology is not restricting them. They don't call it style, they call it progress. Here, you take Robert Johnson and someone else who's playing blues, and they're gonna say, "Well, this is a new style," maybe that guy didn't have style then—that was *him*. Someone took that and stylized it and made someone else imitate it and someone kept that alive . . . in fact, I think that that's one of the most inhuman things to do, to stop growth because you want someone else to be remembered. I was telling someone the other day that Mozart is more alive than some people who are playing who *are* alive, and yet when you saw the movie *Amadeus*, you think he's dead. But Mozart is the most-played composer in the Western world who is deceased—and that's just because of a style, not him. And when it comes to classical music, there are many performers and composers that deserve notice for what they're doing. The point is we are all victims of the past trying to eliminate the future. And you can't do that.

**AL:** As long as we brought up technology and growth, the advances in instruments have changed the way people *think* about what they do besides obviously affecting *what* they do. How much guitar synthesizer did you play on this album?

**PM:** The entire record.

**OC:** And it doesn't even sound that way.

**PM:** When we started rehearsing I had all of my guitars there—I had, what 10 guitars?—and I played each one, and I kept coming back to the guitar synthesizer, because the blend was . . .

**OC:** It was a marriage . . .

**PM:** . . . it just fit. Actually, the technology is becoming so sophisticated, it's becoming *less* technological, it's just becoming *good*. It's still more complicated than I would like, but there used to be so many wires and you'd have to patch 19 things together and play it. Now it's much more manageable.

**OC:** When I said I played the tape and thought that something's wrong with my batteries, it was actually the first time that I'd heard a melody played in a non-tempered design and a tempered design at the same time. And it has affected your environment. See, what technology has done for me is taken a film of space and let us know what space really is. It has made me realize that space is a container, like you put water in a jar. We're in this space right now; maybe when you go outside you're going to feel different. That's another space. *That's* what technology does: it starts making you aware of the *quality* of space which you're actually in. And when Pat was playing, it blew me away, in that it was the most *perfect* sound of that melody to trigger off something that makes you think of what you're *not* thinking about to think about what you *are* thinking about [*laughter*].

**AL:** And if you had played that same melody with different settings resulting in different textures and sounds, it would make you think about something different . . .

**OC:** Right, exactly.

**PM:** I'm convinced more and more that the guitar synthesizer

is bringing along a situation where *everything* is possible as an improviser. This technology is not only making it possible, but it's so much more *fun* to have this range to choose from as opposed to just having one sound; now you've got *any* sound, and you can apply everything you've learned to that particular sound—if what you've got to play is strong enough to support that sound. That's where it gets tricky.

**AL:** Does this interest you in getting a saxophone synthesizer?

**OC:** The way I've always believed in the expression of sound is whatever tool would allow you to be more natural is the best way to achieve anything. Look at the horn itself: it's a technical thing; it's no different from anything else—it's just an extension. For instance, I went out to Bell Laboratories when the first man landed on the moon, 1969, and met the guy who first invented something like a musical synthesizer. It was Emmanuel Ghent, and he had already worked with various programming, so when I played my horn through his machine it sounded like 1,000 saxophones at once. And I wanted so bad to bring that room back to the bandstand [*laughter*]. But we're talking hundreds of thousands of dollars, or I would've had that then. But economics doesn't move at the same level as intelligence and technology. So to answer your question, there's only three elements that human beings need technically: light, heat, and motion. I believe that music has all three of those in it, so *anything* that can project that has got to be good.

**AL:** What do you think you'll each take away from an experience like this one?

**OC:** I think it has reassured me that I'm on the right path, and that is to try to enlighten others to take that path out. Creative music has a very spiritual image to it, and it has allowed me to understand that success is everything that you *are*, more than what it is you've accomplished.

**PM:** Well, for me this has been pretty amazing on a number of different levels. For instance, when I was a kid I used to have this dream all the time, where I'm just lying on my back and look up and see this incredible sky. And I'd forgotten about it years ago. But we were into the rehearsing, playing *hard* every day, and during the sessions I couldn't even go to sleep—I don't think I slept but three hours during the three days that we were recording. I would try to go to sleep and just hear everything that we played. But then I started to have these dreams again, *exactly* like when I was a kid—and this feeling that you used to have as a child, of *everything* being possible.

It's funny, because so much has happened to me in a relatively short period of time, and so quickly—things that I never anticipated. I feel good, I don't have any bad feeling about it, but the fact is it's been pretty hectic the last 10 years. And this experience has been especially valuable in that it made me stop for a minute, because this has been very difficult for me. I think it's been difficult for all of us, not in a bad way, because the goals we set for ourselves were very high. I don't think Ornette or I wanted to do just a record date. Ornette said he wanted us to try and come up with a vocabulary that was unique to this particular experience. There are some moments on the record where we came very close to doing that.

Afterwards it was like a whole new ballgame for me. After the project was over I went home and sat down to write a couple of tunes and see how things would come out, and the first day I sat there with the guitar, playing notes, and listening so closely, adding C and G, taking notes out, adding E, and after about *eight hours* I realized I had come up with a C chord! Everything has a completely different meaning to me musically now. It was a very stimulating and exciting and inspiring experience—also as you can imagine, very humbling, in the sense that during the three-and-a-half to four weeks we worked together, I never heard Ornette play anything less than brilliant, and I also never heard him play one note that was false.

This isn't a question where I can just come up with a glib answer, because what I'm taking away from this experience is something I'm going to be working on for the rest of my life. db