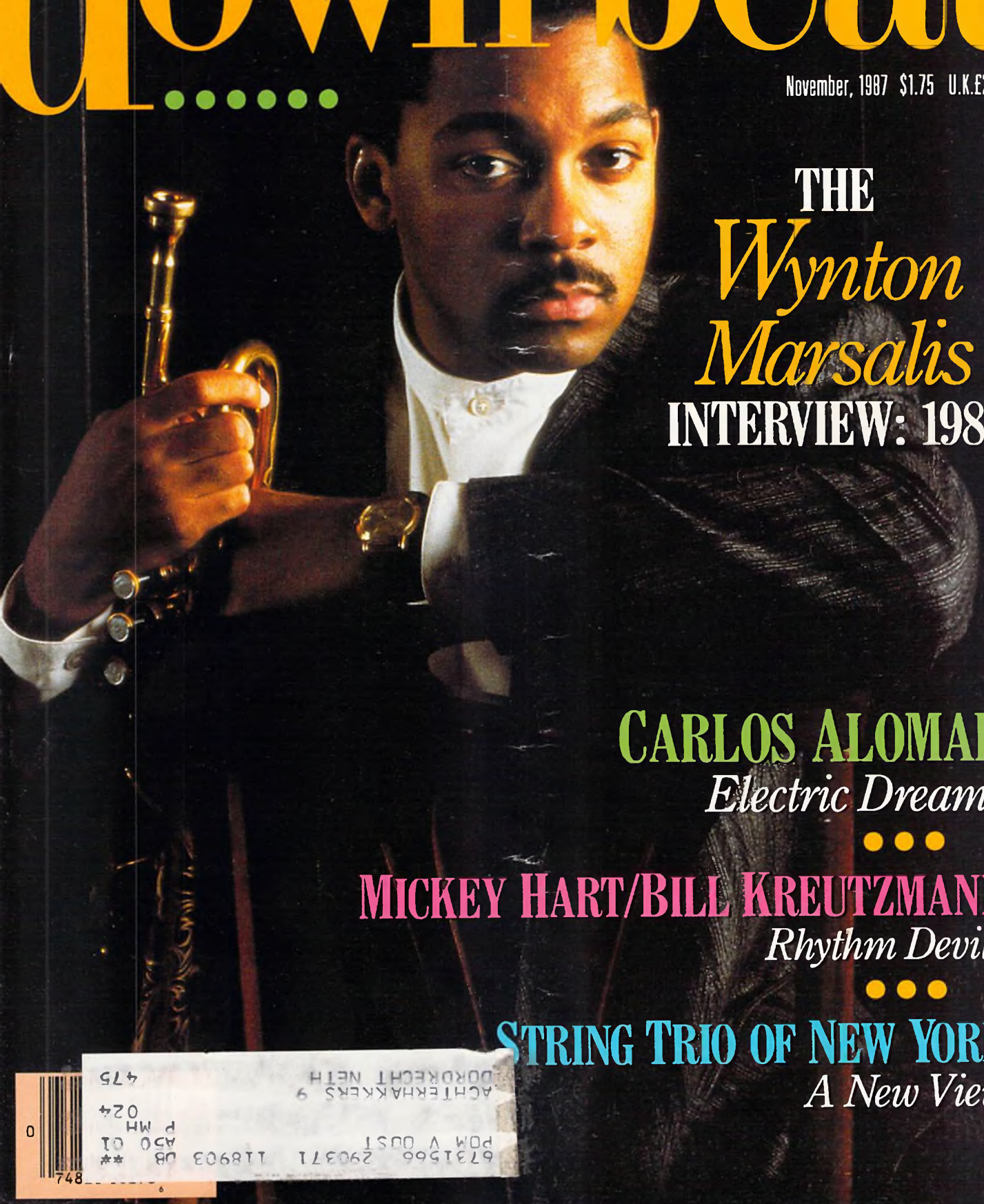


BLINDFOLD TEST: Red Rodney

For Contemporary Musicians

downbeat

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THE
*Wynton
Marsalis*
INTERVIEW: 1987

CARLOS ALOMAR
Electric Dreams



MICKEY HART/BILL KREUTZMANN
Rhythm Devils



STRING TRIO OF NEW YORK
A New View

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LORINDA SULLIVAN

Carlos Alomar



RON DELANY

Mickey Hart/Bill Kreutzmann



ALDO MAURO

String Trio of New York



BILL MILKOWSKI

Jeff Bova

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Cover photograph of Wynton Marsalis by Ken Nahoun.

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For Contemporary Musicians

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*Dynton
Marsalis: 1987*

KEN NAHOUN

By Stanley Crouch

Editor's note: We last interviewed Wynton Marsalis in 1984. Since that time his popularity and notoriety have, if anything, grown and, as can be seen in the following interview, he views his position with the utmost responsibility and seriousness. It is interesting to note that despite—or perhaps because of—his popularity, the trumpeter has become the focal point in a critical controversy waged over questions of innovation vs. imitation. In addressing these questions, and those concerning his success, the importance of knowledge and technical preparation for a career in music, and the role of jazz education, he brings the same carefully considered articulation which identifies his musical creativity.

STANLEY CROUCH: Do you have anything to say before we begin, an opening statement?

WYNTON MARSALIS: Yes. I want to make clear some things I think have been misunderstood. Were I playing the level of horn I aspire to, I don't think I would be giving interviews; I would be making all my statements from the bandstand. But at this point, words allow me more precision and clarity. What I want to do is become a serious menace to the misconceptions that I had when I started playing, and I would like to provide some of the information that I have been fortunate enough to get from masters like Art Blakey, Ron Carter, and Walter Davis Jr. They have too great a regard for what they have done and for the greatness of the jazz tradition to allow someone to function under the illusion that he is playing music when he is destroying it. Even though I was told over and over to learn the standard tunes, to find how to play the chords on the piano, I refused to do so, assuming that that was just some old stuff which had no relevance to me. After all, funk was the basis of my first level of development, and we know the endless succession of great virtuosi that music has produced—none.

In fact, when I want to show young musicians the results of disrespect for tradition, I put on my old records with Art Blakey and hang my head in shame as I listen to the confidence I had in disrespecting the bandstand of that great man. Every time I see Art Blakey now I apologize, then thank him for tolerating such an aberration and continuing to remind me that I was not playing much of anything other than the horn itself—and very little of that, come to think of it. I was just playing scales in whatever key the tune was in. But that was enough to be considered musical in my era.

SC: But it seems to me that you have been steadily developing since I first heard you when you were 18 and with Art Blakey.

WM: Hopefully.

SC: What I find most interesting is that you have much more command of the fact that an improviser has to place his sound in an ensemble, not just play over a background.

WM: Hearing your part in the context of a moving ensemble is something that matures as you sharpen your perception of music. But I'm also concentrating on that, and have been for the last few years. I can hear the bass and the drums with much more clarity now than I used to. In the past, harmony notes, bass parts, and rhythm just flew by me, and I would try to grab onto them in a haphazard fashion. I'm now learning how to integrate my notes with those around me. I can hear where these things fit in the form as well. But that also has a lot to do with being fortunate enough to have Marcus Roberts on piano, Bob Hurst on bass, and Jeff—the Tainish one—Watts on drums. They are so involved in understanding the history—and the legacy—of their instruments that they bring a high level of seriousness to the bandstand. The very fact that you are surrounded by musicians intent on making *music* purifies your own hearing.

It is also important to note that each of them—Marcus, Bob, and Tain—is equipped with the proper level of education and

humility to one day add to the already noble tradition that first took wing in the Crescent City. It still befuddles me that all the drums Jeff Watts is playing has been overlooked. He's isolating aspects of time in fluctuating but cohesive parts, each of which *swings*, and his skill at thematic development through his instrument within the form is *nasty*. But then he is The Tainish One. Marcus Roberts is so superior in true country soul to any other piano player in his 20s that just the *sound* he gets on the instrument dissolves all comparison. He is also very diligent. Marcus Roberts is about studying, about learning more and more harmony and furthering his ability to give the kind of variety to his ensemble playing that Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk, and Wynton Kelly brought to such a high art. And Bob Hurst brings an intelligence of such classic depth to his bass playing that it seems very rare, given how far the quality of acoustic bass playing has sunk over the last 20 years. Bob Hurst knows that Mingus, Paul Chambers, Ray Brown, and Ron Carter helped leave a legacy that only a fool would ignore.

But the thing that makes me really proud of these musicians is that I know from personal experience what type of misconception they've had to fight through to get to a conception that will allow them to attain the degree of musical artistry that we are all presently inspired by. Furthermore, were I even to *consider* jiving, I would have to face the wrath of my own band. Few out here today can boast that.

SC: If they could, we wouldn't be hearing what we're hearing.

WM: Well, at least I didn't say that.

SC: How do you respond to the assertion that you and your musicians are no more than neo-conservatives muddling through a swamp of sentimental nostalgia instead of innovating?

WM: It's my position that very little thorough information regarding the music of John Coltrane, the jazz Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, Monk, or Ornette Coleman is possessed by those who use terms like "nostalgia" and "neo-conservative." Nowhere do I hear these group conceptions being tackled, and nowhere do I hear that level of improvisational authority exhibited within those forms. Are we, therefore, to conclude that the works of these musicians are not strong enough foundations upon which to develop? Or could it be perhaps that this music is just too difficult for those who *know* that it demands staying up all night transcribing the components of albums like *Filles De Kilimanjaro*, *Crescent*, *Mingus Presents Mingus*, and *The Shape Of Jazz To Come*?

All of those albums have one thing in common: the level of conceptual and compositional complexity is exceeded and extended by the improvisation. I'm sure that it's much, much easier to whip up this hasty, fast-food version of innovation than to humble yourself to the musical logics that were thoroughly investigated by these masters. And thus armed with this lack of information, one feels free to relax in the low standards of the status quo. If there is someone among these so-called innovators of today who is playing with the harmonic sophistication of John Coltrane, the rhythmic brilliance and explosiveness of Elvin Jones and Tony Williams—or Billy Higgins or Ed Blackwell, the

melodic, blues-based invention of Ornette Coleman, or the overall conceptual mastery of Charles Mingus, please let me know. I'd like to join his band and bask in the warmth of all this musical knowledge.

SC: *It seems to me that many would prefer to evade the challenges of jazz through transparent eccentricities that sound good in interviews, rather than address the difficulty of meeting the levels of musicianship you've cited.*

WM: That is only a temporary situation, because more and more musicians are at home doing the work of honing, sharpening, and preparing to take the field by addressing the fundamentals of this music—swing, blues, grooves, and at least the same level of technical skill serious musicians had over 40 years ago.

On trumpet you have Wallace Roney, Terence Blanchard, Roy Hargrove, Marlon Jordan. On saxophone, James Carter, Todd Williams, Wes Anderson, Branford, Ralph Moore, Sam Newsome, Gary Thomas. On bass, Reginald Veal, Peter Washington, Christian McBride, Delbert Felix, and Charnet Moffett. On piano, Cyrus Chestnut, Peter Martin, Benny Green, Mulgrew Miller, Kenny Kirkland. On drums, Lewis Nash, Tain, Kenny Washington, Smitty Smith, Winard Harper, and, regardless of how it sounds, my little brother Jason. There are many others but, unfortunately, their names don't come to me right now. As a composer, Elton Heron will soon have to be dealt with, and, from recent conversations, I know Kent Jordan is getting ready to come out here and do some instructing.

SC: *Whom do you refer to as the predecessors who set technical standards?*

WM: Art Tatum. Try that. Then, after that humbling, try Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong, Fats Navarro, Bud Powell, Clark Terry, Sweets Edison, Cootie Williams, Charles Mingus, Ray Brown, Max Roach, Elvin Jones, Sonny Rollins, Coleman Hawkins, Roy Eldridge, and so on. Let me make one thing clear here that is too often overlooked. When the jazz tradition represented a certain level of seriousness, the music was maintained by known and *unknown* virtuosos. Many a musician has told me that he was in some backwater town and some never-heard-of musician came up on the bandstand and reinforced the superiority of knowledge and serious woodshedding.

That is one thing I must say for my father, Alvin Batiste, and the many musicians who taught me in New Orleans. They understood the legacy of the Crescent City; they were lucky enough to have heard Louis Armstrong and were intent upon cracking my teakwood-hard head with musical information. I used to hate to see Alvin Batiste coming up to my house because I knew he would have 10 long pages of music with many notes, each of which he intended for me to thoroughly deal with. One can never be thankful enough for those kinds of concerned influences and examples.

Let me not leave out my mother. I can still hear her voice calling me, "Wynton, bring your skinny behind in here and practice that trumpet, then do your *homework*." Those were the days when I and my partners would get together and brag about who had received the most thorough whipping for some act of stupidity that received no sympathy. In the interest of truth, our bodies were lit up, and with each lick came a greater understanding of the significance of discipline. Once one realizes that his body will remain cool if he does what he's supposed to do, he charges into his tasks with much greater relish.

SC: *What about those people who say that older people should listen to the young?*

WM: They should. They should listen to the young doing what they told them to do.

SC: *In working on a Charlie Parker biography for the last six years, I have come to understand that people like that were responsible for Parker learning how to play. When he didn't know what he was*

doing, they weren't interested in his enthusiasm. They told him to go home and learn or stay home. Today, someone would justify a young Bird's fumbblings with a philosophy whose logic only existed from sentence to sentence, not note to note. In other words, musicians then took their art so seriously that they weren't afraid to call someone into question. Today, however, what Charles McPherson calls "the relativity clause" allows for anything under the banner of self-expression.

WM: Today we have what I like to call the "all music theory," which means that one will claim to be able to play a little pop, a little classical, a little jazz, a little reggae, a little Third World music, a little Brazilian, some ragas, even some music called techno that purports to explain sound by machinery. This produces people who claim to like everything. My question to them is this: Since it takes a long time to learn how to truly appreciate serious art—wherever it comes from—how do they find the time to like *everything*? This actually reflects a deep contempt for the hard work and discipline required of artists from any culture to produce high art.

That's the reason I had to come to the painful realization that I had to stop performing classical music before audiences. I didn't feel like cheating my audience by giving them half-practiced, shoddy performances. I found there simply was not enough time for me to pay respects to both the unarguable greatness of European music or jazz. Every time I would mess up Haydn's concerto, I would have nightmares about him attacking me with a long dagger for publicly mutilating that which he spent long hours structuring for maximum expression. Conversely, I would cringe when imagining the outrage Pops must have felt in heaven when a trumpet lesson he was giving Gabriel was interrupted by the sound of people like myself who were playing with negligible blues feeling and swing. The time I spent bludgeoning Haydn could have been devoted to learning how to swing and reaching a functional appreciation for blues.

SC: *Then you see study of the fundamentals of jazz as something that requires more time than you were able to give when you were performing in both European concert contexts and jazz bands.*

WM: Definitely. Study is the only protection against folly. When you listen to musicians like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Monk, John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Charles Mingus, Billy Higgins, Elvin Jones, Max Roach, and any of the masters, you hear the results of many long hours spent addressing the specific techniques of this music and the thought processes that are evident in the work of all great artists.

SC: *I'm often surprised at how little jazz musicians speak of the conscious thought necessary to create works of art.*

WM: That goes along with the general American conception that even the expression of a modicum of intelligence is elitist. Some people just don't talk about music because they are afraid of being dismissed as too intellectual, which is their business. It doesn't matter if you choose not to talk about thinking if you do think. But if you conclude that thought is foreign to jazz, you will find yourself elevating exuberant ignorance to the level of heroism, as though being uninformed is some sort of bravery, or is a significant departure from the limitations of the norm. But when you listen to Charlie Parker on *Koko*, you can be sure that he's not just feeling his way through the form, he knows every chord and also knows what he can do with every chord to express the entirety of his personality—joy, humor, romance, or whatever he feels. The music of Monk is too perfectly constructed to believe he just sat down and was satisfied with whatever came out of the piano. That level of meticulous craft reflects such a high order of musical intellect that it opens the way for complete emotional expression. The kind of emotion you get from great musicians is the result of the freedom that not having to stumble over fundamentals allows.

SC: *What about those who say jazz is all feeling?*

WYNTON MARSALIS' EQUIPMENT

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JOLIVET/TOMASI: TRUMPET CONCERTI—Columbia 42096
THINK OF ONE—Columbia 388641
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WYNTON MARSALIS—Columbia 37574

with Herbie Hancock

QUARTET—Columbia C2-38275

with Art Blakey

IN SWEDEN—Dominus/Amigo 839
ALBUM OF THE YEAR—Timeless 155
LIVE AT MONTREUX AND NORTHSEA—Timeless 168
STRAIGHT AHEAD—Concord Jazz 168
KEYSTONE 3—Concord Jazz 196

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with various artists

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JAZZ AT THE OPERA HOUSE—Columbia C2-38430
THE YOUNG LIONS—Elektra Musician 60196-1
AMARCORD NINO ROTO—Hannibal 9301

WM: It doesn't matter what anybody says, including you and me. If sufficient thought and study have been put into your music, you will have the freedom to express everything from the most subtle to the most obvious. If you don't put in the time and the necessary study to master the vehicles for your feelings, only obvious emotion will be able to make its way through your ineptitude, and the levels of power and grace that you hear in Ben Webster will never arrive in *your* music. That's why it is so important to learn parts by ear from albums. That puts you directly in contact with the actual spirit of the music, which is what I peeped when I learned Bird's solo on *Embraceable You*. The level of musical thought, instrumental technique, human emotion, and elevated spirituality that he was functioning on is far beyond words. If it wasn't, he wouldn't have needed to play the saxophone; he could have stood up in front of people and *told* them what was happening. But Bird was a musician. People like Martin Luther King have that power in language. When they speak, you know you are in the presence of the sound of greatness expressed through words.

SC: But it seems to me that too many musicians don't contemplate the fact that the term "solo" is dangerous. It makes the uninformed believe that if you remove an improvisation from the environment in which it was played, that you actually understand what was going on, which is that those notes were being fitted into a tempo and into the mobile context of an ensemble.

WM: Definitely. That's why *all* parts should be transcribed.

SC: Though you have greatly benefited from the constructive criticism of the masters you were lucky enough to work with, most younger musicians must study alone or with their peers or in jazz programs. Given your travels, your clinics, and your experience with jazz education, what do you see going on?

WM: Very little in too many instances. Too often we are not taught that the primary function of education is not to prepare you to get a job, but to provide a foundation for a comprehensive development throughout your life. If musicians realized that, they wouldn't be taking funk drumming classes in college. But the music programs are too often geared to following trends. In classical music education, they believe you *should* know in detail what makes the music great. So you are expected to learn Bach's chorales because they are a significant part of the foundation of Western harmony, not because you will end up writing in that style or getting a job playing it. When your education is dominated by the trends that have a high position in the market place, you get young musicians who will talk about Charlie Parker and focus on how much money he made and not how much music he *played*.

SC: Were you to organize a jazz curriculum, what would it be?

WM: I haven't thought enough about that in detail to say what an *entire* curriculum would be, but I know what some of it should be. If you were going to get a four-year course in jazz, you would be required to study and play blues all four years. You would learn how King Oliver and all those musicians played blues; how Jelly Roll Morton wrote blues; how Louis Armstrong extended the harmonic and rhythmic implications of blues; how Duke Ellington adapted a lot of Armstrong's conceptions and techniques to the big band and extended the whole textural proposition of Western music; how Kansas City musicians and Lester Young used blues as the foundation upon which a riff-based style was developed at the same time as the rhythm section of Basie, Jo Jones, Freddie Green, and Walter Page taught everybody how to swing a band harder. Then the students would have to address Charlie Parker and the specifics of his harmonic and rhythmic contributions, with the full understanding that they were all fueled by blues. Next, they would have to learn how Thelonious Monk took blues in another direction altogether, reaching back to the very beginnings of the music and refining them through the perspective of infinite sophistication that Duke Ellington provided. Then a student would have to address the lyrical extensions of Lester Young, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, and Monk that Miles Davis brought to his band in the '50s. By this time three years will have passed and the student would have learned that blues is more than eight-, 12-, or 16-bar forms. He or she would know what Duke Ellington knew, that the blues is both a mood and a philosophy toward sound *and* rhythm, which we all recognize when someone is referred to as playing a blues beat. Then students are prepared to deal with the complexities of the later developments of jazz—the rhythmic and melodic extensions of blues in Ornette Coleman; the mature work of Charles Mingus, which uses so many different forms and sounds; the implications of John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison, and Elvin Jones; the harmonic sophistication that Wayne Shorter brought into the Miles Davis band, and the complexities of form, harmony, rhythm, and meter that Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams introduced. I must emphasize here that I am only concerned with musicians who have made contributions based upon addressing *swing*. A number of other figures have been celebrated for approaches that I, at this point, hear as only vaguely related to jazz.

SC: What about fusion?

WM: It's a great concept, like cooking. The question is not whether or not one uses various ingredients to make a meal, but whether the various ingredients are used to the highest degree of crafted succulence. *Afro-Bossa* is an example of supreme fusion. It is Duke Ellington's use of elements from different cultures filtered through his highly refined blues and groove sensibility. The strongest elements of fusion musics should be the grooves, because the grooves in every culture give a true depiction in sound of the vitality of the people. *Afro-Bossa* is a study in the mastery of grooves. Each one is different, each one is precise, and each one has a specific effect on the piece in question. At no point does the music sink down into shallow imitation, like that common sock cymbal beat that is played on ethnic grooves in fusion music.

SC: What I hear in fusion is the same thing I see in videos—there is no aesthetic parallel to the level of technology at work. If those whose music is promoted through videos had one-tenth of the information about music that those who make videos have about film, we might hear something truly innovative.

WM: That is one of the reasons why in interviews those musicians choose to focus on the equipment they're using, not the music they're making. They refer to all these piles of instruments they use to put little sounds on many different tracks to give the music the illusion of the type of depth that comes with thorough knowledge of polyphony. But the question I want answered is to what degree has that music been refined and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 57

Carlos Alomar *By Gene Santoro*

We're sitting in Bogie's, a neighborhood bar in Chelsea not far from Carlos Alomar's loft. The bartender is putting together a Long Island iced tea for Carlos, whose tastes are well-known here—he's a regular. "What's a Long Island iced tea?" I ask naively. So the bartender demonstrates by pouring it all into the goblet before us: gin and vodka, rum and tequila, and a few other alcoholic ingredients precede the dash of cola that colors the concoction into a tealike hue. After an insisted-upon test sip—surprisingly smooth, like the Diddlebock, from a Preston Sturges movie we both laughingly remember—I retreat to my club soda, and turn on the tape.

The current David Bowie/Glass Spider tour is on a brief break, so Carlos is taking advantage of being off from his longtime gig as Bowie's bandleader and musical alter ego to talk about his first solo venture, *Dream Generator*. Like the Long Island iced tea he's sipping, Carlos' instrumental LP is a real mixture of what might seem, at first glance, dissonant elements: rock, funk, c&w, minimalism, ambient sounds. "I'm trying to envision the emotion of a dream sequence, then translate what I feel emotionally into what I want the music to make you see. I wanted it to be an emotional album, I want you to feel like you're in a world somewhere else. I mean, when I get an album, I take it home, turn off the lights, put it on, and say, 'Okay, what are you gonna do? Do something to me, record.' Put my record on, and I gotcha."

Created spontaneously in a month-and-a-half, largely via a new laser synth-guitar pickup called the Photon MIDI System, *Dream Generator* reaches back to the earlier, more experimental days of Alomar's long association with the Thin White Duke, the days of *Low* and *Heroes* and *Lodger*, when ambient innovator Brian Eno was casting his spell over the Bowie camp. "Now remember, we had an experimental period with Bowie, and so Bowie fans understand that we will go through that type of period whenever we want to. So knowing that Bowie's fans and my fans would be tolerant, I decided to do this type of instrumental symphonic album. Of course, if I'd signed with a regular com-

pany, they wouldn't have let me do this, so it was my opportunity to a) stick my finger up at the old companies and b) take advantage of the company that would exploit this music properly. That was the advent of the *Dream*

Generator album."

From the kickoff you can feel this is not going to be another phunkzak mellowness spreader. If the first single, *Insomniac*, is shot through with flickering solo lines and



Generating Electric

flexes its sonic muscles over some driving funk, the title track deals in gentler textures, lazy and slow in coming at first, gathering speed and density as the dream landscape unfurls. *R.E.M.* combines U.S. folk-rock with oriental pentatonics while evoking marimbas and tuned drums of all types, and *Feline Lullaby* ("That little guitar lick is like the cat's tail twitching in its sleep, and those long bends are the way he stretches," says Alomar) drifts in ambient spaces that recall Eno's groundbreaking excursions of over a

decade ago.

And it's all intended to demonstrate a longtime thesis cherished by easygoing Carlos: "No longer does the rhythm guitarist have to be stuck as just that strumming-along, twanging thing in the background. Now he can be an emotional expression of the song, and a gigantic orchestra. So there was another point that I wanted to prove, about what the rhythm guitarist is capable of. See, a lead guitarist with a synthesizer guitar means *nothing*; it's rather ambiguous. I mean, you can play horn lines and sound like a horn on it, but that's crazy. So what? But a rhythm guitar is *unleashed* by this technology in a way that's never been done before, and I'm very proud of being the one to do it."

With his background, it was almost inevitable that he would be the one to do it. Starting with formal training on the viola ("Now everybody'll know it," he laughs), he moved on when "my instructor got tired of me taking my viola and playing [the Herman's Hermits tune] *Mrs. Brown You've Got A Lovely Daughter* on my lap, and finally he said, 'Carlos, get out of my class and get a guitar, okay? You're wasting my time as well as your own.' After that it was mainline guitar all the way. I'm self-taught on guitar—Mel Bay dictionary, just learn every page. That was the one that killed me. I learned the whole Mel Bay dictionary—24 ways of playing a C so you don't have to move your hand around." It was a technique that landed him some major gigs, first playing in Shades of Jade, which boasted Luther Vandross on vocals, then working in the famed Apollo Theater's house band. "That was my claim to fame, when I used to be at the Apollo Theater. I always used to hide my hand from the other guitar players so they couldn't see the way I was constructing my rhythm and lead at the same time; I'd developed this thing with the help of the Mel Bay dictionary where I didn't have to move my hand around as much as the other guitar players did. It was like a jazz musician's thing, where they just change their inversions. I was able to do that, which helped me a lot." Enough so that by the ripe old age of 22 he had recorded or toured with the likes of James Brown, Wilson Pickett, Edwin Starr, Bette Midler, Chuck Jackson, The Main Ingredient, Chuck Berry, and Sesame Street.

Then came the 1973 phone call, the one that, like in the movies, changed the life of the Puerto Rican axeman. RCA staffer Tony Sylvester approached the in-house sessioneer, told him that a British singer/songwriter was coming to New York to produce a Lulu session for a song called *Can You Hear Me?*, asked him if he'd like to do the guitar parts. He agreed, and thus met David Bowie for the first time.

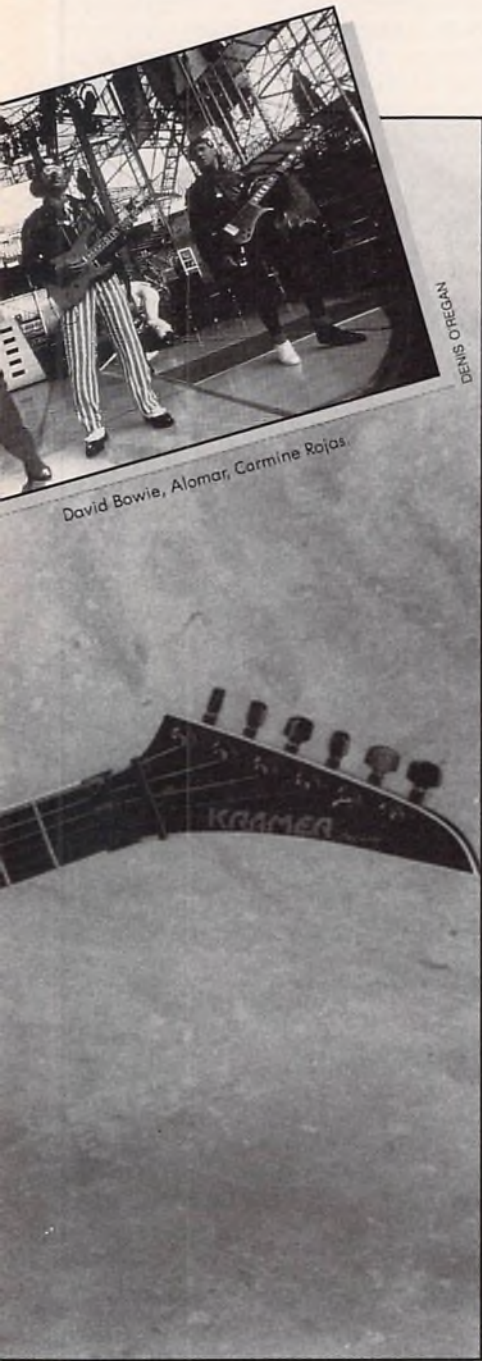
They hit it off well enough so that Carlos brought the emaciated Bowie home for a sumptuous meal, courtesy Robin Clarke Alomar (herself a vocalist with Simple Minds). Done with the wining and dining, Bowie turned to Carlos and asked him if he'd

like to do a tour. Seems like an obvious choice in retrospect, right? But the fact is, established session players don't pick up offers by relative unknowns without taking some care; there's a lot of present and future income and prestige at stake when you cut loose from the world of the heavyweight studio gig for the rock & roll road grind. And at that time Bowie was a cult figure, at best; astonishing as it may seem, it is only with this current tour that he's vaulted from the 10,000-seater venues to arenas.

Which is why Carlos didn't sign on for the Diamond Dogs tour. "See, in New York City, you're either here because you want to get into the studio clique—then you do that and you don't go on the road—or you want to be in New York City because all the rehearsal places are here, the record companies are here, and you want to go on the road. But then once you get on the road it's like you can't get off it. When you're with an established band, people think you're exclusively with them, or that you're always out on the road, which makes it difficult to get and keep those contacts that you need." But as fate would have it, he got a second shot when, halfway through that tour, Bowie started getting ready to go back into the studio to record what would become *Young Americans*, and tapped Alomar again. That LP marked the beginning of the 14-year collaboration that finds Bowie relying on Alomar to get the music and the band in shape while he deals with lyrics and staging. In fact, their first collaboration remains both one of their more celebrated and a demonstration of their working habits.

Seems there was this tune tentatively titled *Foot Stompin'* that Bowie had been doing in concert, but when he tried to lay it down on tape he hated everything about it except the guitar lick. So that's what he kept, tagged it to a I-IV-V blues and put down bass, drum, and guitar tracks with Carlos. Enter John Lennon, who dropped acoustic guitar onto the mix, recording it backwards so it would sound like a keyboard. That's how you get *Fame*. Still, despite the title, Carlos' role remains largely in the background, as he points out: "Please make sure that everybody understands that I wrote the music for the title cut of Bowie's new album (*Never Let You Down*). I'm tired of hearing about *Fame* by John Lennon and David Bowie—what happened to Carlos Alomar?"

Bowie and Alomar became virtually inseparable musically after that, and their approach to music indicates their mutual respect and trust: "David will come in with a riff he's played on the piano and some lyrics, maybe, and we'll work it up from there. There are no rules about how; we experiment all the time." Not that different, in some ways, from what he got used to in his studio days: "Even if the producer has something written out, he needs to hear the vamp *played*, because it'll just say on paper, E, and that means E *anything* [laughs]. So he'll say, 'Okay guys, vamp on E.' So you've got to have three guys lock into this groove, listen to each other, and come up with something



David Bowie, Alomar, Carmine Rojas

DENIS O'REGAN

LORINDA SULLIVAN

Dreams

that'll make the producer say, 'Ah, they've done it again, they've saved my ass' [laughs]. You've got to *create* that; it's not there already."

So it's not that surprising to learn that Carlos' command of their music is so complete Bowie doesn't even show for tour rehearsals until Carlos tells him the band's ready. For this enormously expensive and risky tour, which is outfitted with two stages that leapfrog from venue to venue, Alomar put in months getting the music together at

rehearsal spots like New York's SIR. "It's the rockiest tour we've ever done" is how he sees it.

Nor is it surprising to learn that, although working with Bowie has been his major gig for 14 years now, other people haven't exactly stopped calling him. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger, Yoko Ono, Luther Vandross, Ric Ocasek, Debbie Harry, Iggy Pop, Arcadia, Simple Minds, and Graham Parker all found ways to put his abundant talents to good use.

And while he digs clambering around the top of the rockpile, natch, he's also thinking about his own newborn project. "I wanted to put myself a little off-balance, so that I could do a proper experiment. Remember, when we were doing the Bowie albums back then, everything was from scratch. That's what I wanted to do with this album. I didn't know what I was gonna give Private Music, because I didn't know what I was gonna do. But I knew that I wanted to go back and do the experimental phase. I needed two things with that. First, I needed a concept to work with. I decided on dream imagery and dream scenery. Second, I needed a vehicle for the expression of that concept, and that was the guitar-synthesizer. Now, I've never been known for guitar-synthesizer, nobody's ever heard me play one, so it was the perfect way to throw myself off-balance. And I came up with the Photon Laserbeam pickup. It enabled me to just put the pickup on my guitar—no she-nigans, no space-age guitar to have to learn, none of that ridiculous technology, just a simple pickup that made me MIDI. Then from there I plugged into Macintosh Plus computers, and then from there into about 40 or 50 synthesizers [laughs]. After that, I just played a few things, went to the computer, looked at them, talked to the computer—gave it the finger assignments, the note assignments, told it to turn it upside down, give me more of this, less of that. Every note had an instrument, every string had an instrument. Then I'd hear it back and say, 'Okay, let me play it now.' So it was back to the guitar when all the assignments were done. And when I hit those strings, what I heard is what you hear on *Dream Generator*. I was totally inspired to do the album at that point.

"But first I had to go to the library and do some research on dreams and things associated with dreams. What I really wanted was not the Freudian or Jungian aspect, the interpretation of dreams, but *experiments* in dreams. What cadences are necessary to induce sleep? What happens during dream cycles? What are the different aspects to somnambulism, insomnia, REM, all those kinds of things. I had enough material left over at the end of my research to embody the emotional content of what I felt these dream-visions would be like. That's the way I came up with the concept of the music for *Dream Generator*. I didn't write anything—it was all mind to fingers, fingers to computer, computer to synthesizers. That's why it was an

experiment. And do you know what was so strange? I don't really remember steps A, B, and C; I might remember steps X, Y, and Z. So when I hear this album I'm listening to it the same way you are. I am not attached to it the way you are when you remember each note you play. It was an experiment, and it worked. It proved that, technology being what it is now, the guitar-synthesizer offers a much bigger spectrum of sounds and envelopes than a regular synthesizer does. There are two aspects that I wanted to accomplish with that, similar to what I felt when I first heard Hendrix. The first is, 'Whaddya mean that's a guitar?' I mean, when I first heard Hendrix, that's what I felt, and that's what I wanted people to feel when they hear this—the timpani, the bass guitar, the drums, the keyboards, all this. And the second thing is, 'Whaddya mean that's one musician?' Again, like what I felt with Hendrix—"Whaddya mean that's bass, drums, and a guitar? Sounds like much more." I originally dedicated the album to the rhythm guitarist because of that."

And once his road duty with Bowie is done, he's got plans for *Dream Generator* onstage. "After the Bowie tour I want to take it on the road, because only then will people truly understand what the concept is. For them to see two guitar players walk onstage and then hear an orchestra, then they'll understand. To hear the album is a lie, in a way. The one thing they forget about is that it's just one musician on there. Yes, there are a couple of other people who make cameo appearances. I'd done the original tracks with the drums triggered by the guitar, but then I said, 'Nah, it needs a real drummer.' So I brought in a drummer after the fact. So there are relatively insignificant things happening with other musicians. But the principle remains that it's just one guitar playing it all. A year ago this album would have been technically impossible. I want to take it out in a symphonic situation, not where people are trying to pick people up and order drinks. I want people to sit down, and then once they sit down I've got 'em. I want a total video and audio environment in the concert. I want to take you on a trip."

He pauses for a moment, then adds, "It doesn't matter to me if anybody calls it New Age or anything else—I'm not into handles. We were doing it back in the '70s, did they call it New Age then? I just don't care. I'm already underground—I'm trying *not* to be, without selling out that much. I'm trying to bridge technology with rock & roll in a certain way. I'm not trying to sell out. The album's got contemporary rock, it's got classical stuff, it's got soundtrack material, it's got country & western—whatever. It's something that amazes me—people think that songwriters like me or whoever just come up with *hits*, just write 'em as we see 'em. That's not true. We're not like that, we have to get the song that's in our minds out first, then the next song comes in. I might try to get 20 songs out just so I can pick eight. We have to just take the songs out of our heads." db

CARLOS ALOMAR'S EQUIPMENT

For the Bowie tour, Carlos is carrying his synthed-up guitar and "basically Kramers. This tour, unlike the other ones, is basically a rock & roll tour, and so I need a more biting sound. I have the [stereo] Alembic, which I have on every Bowie tour—that's the only time I use it. I'm not using my [1958 mapleneck] Strat or anything like that, mostly the hot-rod Kramers.

"I have a new Casio that won't be introduced for another two years in America, and amazingly enough it's got even better tracking than the Photon. But if you use the Photon with the hyper-speed system, there's no comparison. The hyper-speed system is a cartridge that you put into the convertor that allows you to change all your strings to B strings or E strings, and then you just tell the convertor, 'Make them the regular guitar strings.' Of course, what that means is that you have to have a sample library of all your real guitar sounds—which I do have."

Then, too, there's an enormous rack full of goodies. "A lot of synthesizers and multi-effects," he parries good-naturedly when asked for some details, then obliges. "A few Yamaha MT-4 controllers, the sequential Prophet VS Super-Jupiter JX, Yamaha TZ-802s, also FBO1s, about five Akai samplers—I like to blend digital things with natural instruments, that's the secret of this sound—a couple of Yamaha mixers, a TC electronic rack, which is a multi-effects thing, Rocktron overdrive, four SBX-90s, one Rev 7, a 31-band equalizer, an Akai 612 for small samples, an Oberheim Matrix 6R, and of course the Macintosh Plus computer handling the whole thing. It's a big toy, and I love it. I like to stick to the rack-mounted stuff: I don't really want to get involved with the keyboards. It's a lot easier for me to interpret things as a guitarist, rather than a keyboard synthesizer player. Amps are two Roland JC-120s with 12-inch Electro-Voice speakers."

To record *Dream Generator*, Alomar used everything but the kitchen sink. The Photon MIDI convertor went into a Mac Plus Total Music 1.14, which then led into a Kurzweil 250, a Yamaha DX7, an Oberheim OBB, a Prophet 5, an Emulator 11 Plus, PPG Wave 2.3 with Waveform, Akai 5900 sampler, Prophet 200, Oberheim Matrix 6R, FBO1, Akai 612. Guitars used included his Kramer Pacer, Strat, Alembic, and Guitarman axes.

CARLOS ALOMAR SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

DREAM GENERATOR—Private Music 2019-1-P

with David Bowie

NEVER LET ME DOWN—EMI/America 17267

SCARY MONSTERS—RCA 1-3647

LODGER—RCA 1-3254

STAGE—RCA 2-2913

HEROES—RCA 1-3857

LOW—RCA 1-3856

STATION TO STATION—RCA 1-1327

CHANGESONEBOWIE—RCA 1-1732

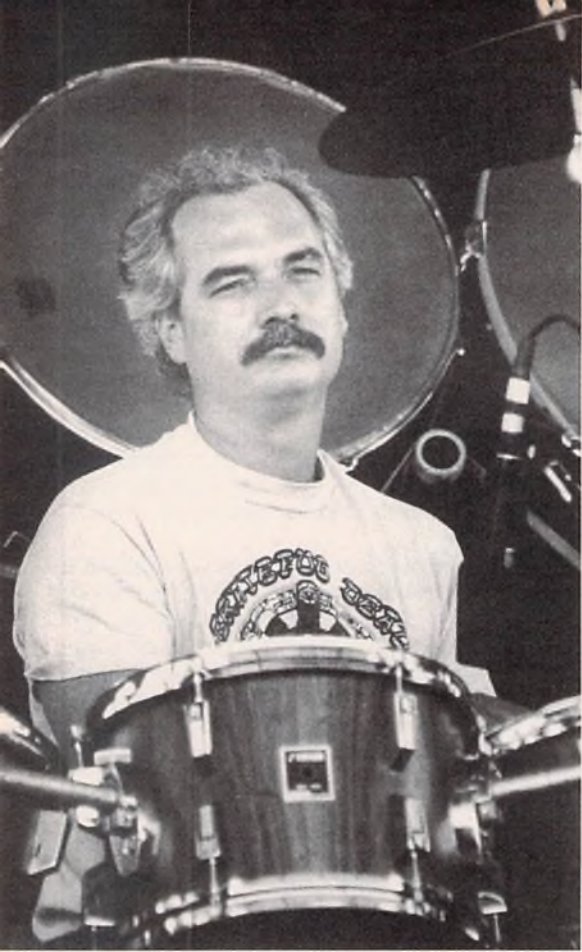
YOUNG AMERICANS—RCA 1-0998

with Mick Jagger

SHE'S THE BOSS—Columbia 39940

with Arcadia

SO RED THE ROSE—Capitol 12428



Bill Kreutzmann / Mickey Hart

Rhythm Devils

By Chris Vaughan

RON DELANY

At the heart of the incomparable ritual that is a Grateful Dead concert is a four-armed percussive explosion, notated simply in the argot of thousands of wildly appreciative Deadheads as "DRUMS!" Pounding the trap set is the pulse of the Dead, Bill Kreutzmann. Playing off and around him on a profusion of instruments gathered from the corners of the globe is Mickey Hart. Together, they are the Rhythm Devils.

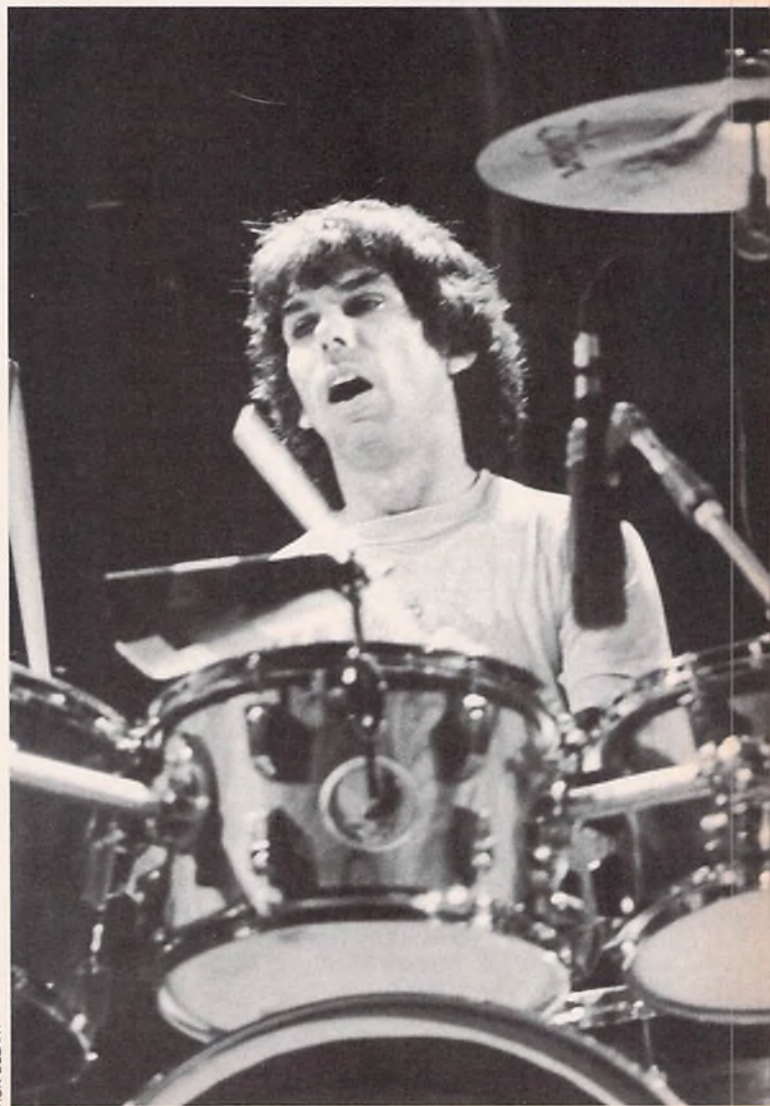
Others, notably Dead bassist Phil Lesh and Brazilian percussionist Airtó Moreira, have shared that title as participants in the "River Music" soundtrack project for the film *Apocalypse Now*. But the ones keeping alive the tradition of thematic improvisational percussion, show after show, are the dervishes on the risers behind Lesh, guitarists Jerry Garcia and Bob Weir, and organist Brent Mydland.

The imaginative polyrhythms of Kreutzmann and Hart often emerge in the midst of the Dead's complex music, lifting off during open-ended jams or taking the band in a new direction at the segues that connect most Dead tunes (Dead sets are unplanned, with successive songs emerging from "whoever plays the strongest idea, or plays the same idea more than once," according to Kreutzmann). Midway through the second set, however, the only element of the show reflecting any planning at all places the solo spotlight on the Rhythm Devils.

"We'll just say something something like '1906 earthquake' or 'UFOs—they're landing!' and then go play whatever we think it sounds like," says Kreutzmann, 40, the mellow Californian.

"Of course, it doesn't ever sound like what we thought it was going to, but at least we think we know what we're doing," says Hart, 43, the energetic Long Islander.

Disparate in appearance and style, they share a spiritual kinship which goes beyond their firm commitment to the benign



RON DELANY

anarchism of the Grateful Dead. They are drumming fiends thriving in an environment where the beat is free.

The Dead have moved away from the heavy emphasis on irregular time signatures and ad-libbed modalities which marked such early compositions as *Dark Star*, *The Eleven*, and *Alligator* (a two-hour version of which marked Hart's initiation into the band). But that doesn't mean there aren't some pretty unusual sounds emanating from the erstwhile acidhead aggregation, now in their 22nd year together. Frenetic outbursts such as *The Other One* and assorted manic musical trips inserted in more conventional material continue to enliven Dead concerts, which cover an extensive repertoire embracing blues, ballads, rock, r&b, folk, calypso, and the scarcely definable experiments in aural cataclysm which emerged from the mid-'60s Acid Tests.

"We're more into song structure now," Hart says. "We're a dance band, primarily. We were an experimental band, [so] we experimented. Now we're a dance band again, just playing simple songs, with simple chord changes. The idea is to play simply well."

That places renewed emphasis on the solid fills of Kreutzmann, who sets the beat for the notorious gyrations of the Deadheads. He is content with his low public profile, taking satisfaction in playing "the freest role—the one people dance to." In spite of his quiet demeanor and less musically adventurous part, however, Kreutzmann is the one who yearns for a return to the mind-bending, free-form music of the Dead's early years.

"Sometimes in '73 we'd play a jazz music show. That doesn't happen enough now," he says earnestly. "I would like to do more free music. I really do miss that, just getting up on the drum set and firing—where you stop being a straightahead, rock & roll backbeat drummer. No syncopation—you just play flow."

It could happen again, anytime, Hart says. "When the spirit is free that's what happens. Nobody is really planning on it or plotting it. When everybody's up, like they are now, it's getting to a place where we might see more of those extended, crazy-ass jams. But where it's at now is more subtle things."

The absence of bizarre musical experiments may have something to do with the cleaner lifestyle practiced by many in the band these days. "We don't get as stoned as we used to—we don't kiss the sky any more," says Hart. Kreutzmann won't so much as down two beers before a show. Hart, a former judo instructor, berates himself for no longer running 16 miles a day. But he still covers three to five, and slashes at the drums with martial enthusiasm.

Intense and analytical, even as he disdains the over-intellectualization of music, Hart quotes Sufi and Bruce Lee in the course of an interview following a San Francisco performance by Ondekoza, the Japanese "demon drummer" troupe. His passion for World Music has been reflected in the repertoire of the Dead, but many of the delicate instruments he incorporates are overwhelmed by the inherent volume of the rock milieu. So he pursues various projects on his own, recording and promoting every sound from the fragile oud of Hamza El-din to the thunderous taiko of Ondekoza.

“World Music, original music, is my specialty. The older musics were for prayer—for transformation, actually. And that's what the Grateful Dead does best—transform. The Grateful Dead is not necessarily into music, we're in the transformation business. It just happens we're in a rock & roll band, but the Grateful Dead has some kind of link to archaic humanity. Grateful Dead is body music. It's soul. Like Bruce Lee said, 'Don't think. Feel!'"

That credo reveals considerable distance traveled since his days playing with a dozen out-of-tune saxophones in an Air Force big band ("The only time in my life I stopped loving playing music"). Joining the Dead and coming under the tutelage of Ravi Shankar's tabla player, Alla Rakha, turned him in new directions emphasizing tonal complexity and exploration. His musical search has a spiritual side: "If I have any God, it's certainly sound. It's vibration."

Deadheads aren't the only ones who see it—or more

accurately, hear it—that way. In traditional societies, music, particularly percussion, plays an essential role in rites of passage—birth, coming of age, wedlock, death. Dead concerts notwithstanding, that has diminished in modern industrial society. Most Westerners, says Hart, have lost touch with meaningful musical traditions "because they aren't exposed to it, because it's not a commercial thing." But he sees hope: "They're not so disconnected from their past not to know when it feels good. When they hear it, they know it."

Problem is, they mostly don't hear it. Relegated to odd hours on weak-wattage radio stations, ethnic music needs a cultural bridge to connect to the mainstream. Enter the Dead, who largely through Hart have introduced thousands of rock-oriented concertgoers to musicians such as Baba Olatunji and his Drums of Passion. "Olatunji was the one who turned me on to talking drums. He was a big influence on me. Now here I am almost 30 years later, playing with him and producing him. It's full-circle. I really enjoy this."

Hart repaid his inspirational debt to the master of variable-pitch percussion by arranging for the Drums of Passion to open for the Dead's 1985 New Year's Eve show at the Oakland Coliseum. He played again with Olatunji in February, enticing Garcia and Carlos Santana to join them in a concert staged to benefit World Music in Schools, a pet project which introduces children to non-Western cultures through music. In addition to African and native American rhythms, the children study the gamelan, an Indonesian orchestral ritual involving the entire community. In gamelan, everyone plays a role, and all, from musicians and dancers to those who care for the instruments, are treated as equals. The same is true of the Grateful Dead, where after 19 years in the band's extended family a roadie like Ramrod, who takes care of Hart's boggling array of instruments, can say, "We're all the same here."

The ethos of the gamelan may be easier to project than its delicate sound. "You can't compete with Grateful Dead music. It's so damn loud," says Hart. "The delicate instruments just get lost." But advances in sound technology—the Dead have never scrimped on equipment, to the point where spending on the public address system "nearly ate the band" in the mid-'70s—were slowly allowing subtler sounds to be incorporated into the music.

BILL KREUTZMANN/MICKEY HART'S EQUIPMENT

Bill Kreutzmann uses a Yamaha floor set (24-inch bass, 18-inch floor tom, 14-, 13-, and 12-inch rack toms) and Zildjian cymbals (14-inch rock high-hat, 20-inch ping ride, 18-inch medium crashes, 20- and 22-inch ping ride, 20-inch mini cup ride, 14-inch bottom rock high-hat). He prefers Sonor bass pedals, a Rogers hi-hat, and six 16-inch Rototoms. His timbales are made by Latin Percussion. His sticks are 56-57 gram Regal models, made by Calato.

Mickey Hart uses a Remo drum set and Zildjian cymbals. His rack was created by Greg Volker. His drum room at the Dead's San Rafael studio is crammed with hundreds of percussion instruments from around the world, but to reproduce their sounds he uses a PCM 20 Digital Effects Processor, an Eventide Signal Processor (900 series), and a TC 2290 Dynamic Digital Delay and Effects Control Processor from t.c. electronics. It's all run on a Yamaha PM 1800 series power supply.

The rack toms are mic'ed with Sennheiser 421s, the snare unders are picked up with SM56s, and the snare overs are captured by Neumanns. The cymbals and hi-hats are mic'ed with SM56s and AKG 414s. The Rhythm Devils use Milab vocal mics. The public address system, named the best in America two years running, is by Ultra Sound.

BILL KREUTZMANN/MICKEY HART SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

with the Grateful Dead
IN THE DARK—Arista 8452
GO TO HEAVEN—Arista 8332
TERRAPIN STATION—Arista 8329
SHAKEDOWN STREET—Arista 8321
DEAD SET—Arista 2-8112
BEST OF (SKELETONS)—Warner Bros. 2764
BEST OF (LONG STRANGE TRIP)—Warner Bros. 2-3091
AMERICAN BEAUTY—Warner Bros. 1893
WORKINGMAN'S DEAD—Warner Bros. 1869

LIVE/DEAD—Warner Bros. 2-1830
AOXOMOXOA—Warner Bros. 1790
ANTHEM OF THE SUN—Warner Bros. 1749
THE GREATFUL DEAD—Warner Bros. 1689
EUROPE '72—Warner Bros. 3-2668
HISTORY OF... VOL. 1—Warner Bros. 2721

with the Rhythm Devils
PLAY RIVER MUSIC—Passport 9844

Mickey Hart
DAFOS—Reference 12
YAMANTAKA—Celestial Harmonies 003



RON DELANY

PLAYING IN THE BAND: From left, Phil Lesh, Kreutzmann, Hart, Bob Weir, Jerry Garcia (not pictured, Brent Mydland).

The capture of gamelan tones on floppy discs activated by striking drum pads now allows for clear, high-volume reproduction of resonances previously difficult to amplify accurately.

Kreutzmann has begun experimenting with another means of amplifying percussion effects. Mounting Sennheiser 421 mics on a 180-degree swivel inside the cavity of his tom-toms and fastening sound-deadening hydraulic double heads to the bottom, he shuts out sound bleed from other instruments and captures the attack report more cleanly. He controls the degree of resonance through remote adjustment of the swivel. "They sound great, man. They sound like cannons," he enthuses during a relaxed conversation at his idyllic Mendocino County retreat. "They just have a real unique, big sound to 'em. Basically, they're pickups, they're triggers. Then you can run 'em into any effects you want, and get any sound. You can do all that without having to use Simmons, once you have the right way of picking up the drum."

Kreutzmann picked up the drums as a child, bopping out a beat for his mother, a Stanford University dance student. Growing up, he disdained the school band ("too lame") and threw himself into rock & roll, cutting his teeth on Elvin Jones. He ended up "faking teaching drums" at the same Palo Alto music store where Garcia gave guitar lessons. The Grateful Dead just fell together from there. "Pure luck," he calls it.

In those days, there was plenty of partying and little serious contemplation of what it all meant. His dedication to the drums has since grown. Today, he says, "I psych up before gigs for a couple of days. I visualize playing, I visualize my drums, I sing songs to myself. . . ."

The second-set drum duet with Hart remains his primary thrill—"Oh boy, are you kidding? All the room in the world to play anything that comes to my mind. . . ."—but improvising within the structure of the Dead's dance tunes is his bread and butter: "You play for the music you're playing in—real clean, simple fills, and don't cover the vocals. Play the music, play the songs, and pretty soon the music's playing you."

That contagious enthusiasm extends to his reverence for "the spirit of the drum," to which he refers frequently. Indian artifacts share space on his walls with a sketch of Einstein, intermingling science and spirit in true Grateful Dead fashion. The years have mellowed the rawness of spirit and sound, but creativity remains the musical litmus test: "When you say someone's drumming is nice, it's really their ideas. Ninety percent of people can have the chops, but where do they fit in? Where do they help the music? My sensibilities about music are about ensemble playing."

Kreutzmann plays in another band, Go Ahead, with Mydland and Santana vocalist Alex Ligertwood, which he describes as "not the Grateful Dead—and it doesn't want to be."

Playing as the sole drummer in an alternative format is "good for me," he says, but he is more modest about that endeavor than his Dead duets with Hart.

"To be frank, we're the best two-drummer team in the business," he says. Hart agrees, as they have from the very start. Part of it must be playing together all these years, but Hart says their rapport was immediate. From the night they met, "we just fit," he recalls, telling a tale of rapping out rhythms on car hoods up and down San Francisco, all night long. The brothers in beat have hypnotized one another, measured each other's pulse before going on ("Mine is faster," says Hart), and generally cultivated an attitude that the sound is "ours, not his or mine."

There are some divisions, however. Though both are credited on some of the various soundtrack projects outside the Dead, Kreutzmann gives Hart all the credit for television's *Twilight Zone* soundtrack. He is content to know that his backbeat is the rock on which the Dead's new Top 10 album, *In The Dark*, is built. After recording the album onstage but without an audience, Kreutzmann predicted the album—the band's first "studio" effort in seven years and the last under their current contract for Arista—had "the potential of throwing a real big monkey wrench" into the commercial apparatus that demands conformity from popular music. And sure enough, *In The Dark* has made an unprecedented crash onto the pop charts, thrusting the Dead into an unaccustomed national spotlight.

Previous Dead albums have generally failed to capture the energy of the band's live performances, which are routinely recorded by the hundreds of Dead-sanctioned tapers for trading within the ever-growing Deadhead subculture. The band's storied drawing power has not until this year translated into the kind of popularity that sells albums. Kreutzmann laughs at the notion of becoming a rock star—"Ah, drum solos don't sell records"—but he sees great possibilities growing out of popular acceptance. A summer tour with Bob Dylan packed huge stadiums, where the Dead's vaunted ability to project quality sound throughout a large space was tested. Hart, for one, loves filling up big spaces with his sound. "It's power," he says. "Got to move some air."

The Dead may soon be moving air on the other side of the globe. A decade after their daring—and financially ruinous—trip to Egypt to play at the pyramids, there are serious plans for a spring '88 tour of Asia. If it comes off, the wild scene sure to follow the Grateful Dead to the Great Wall promises to revolutionize intercultural contacts. But it's likely that even after the tie-dyed devotees have been forgotten, the sound will live on. Kreutzmann is as philosophical about potential bureaucratic snags which could derail the trip as he is about the Dead's long years out of the mainstream spotlight: "The spirit of the drum sometimes sits back and waits," he says.

These days, it appears, the spirit of the drum is ready. And its henchmen, the Rhythm Devils, are willing and able. **db**

By Kevin Whitehead

String Trio Of J

Strings are a neglected family among jazz instruments. When the music gets loud, acoustic basses disappear. In mainstream settings, the guitar is still suspect, except when used in narrowly defined ways. And despite the best efforts of Stuff Smith, Eddie South, Joe Venuti, Stephane Grappelli, Claude Williams, Ray Nance, Bernie Charles, Jean-Luc Ponty, Leroy Jenkins, John Blake, Billy Bang, and many more, critics insist there's no violin tradition in jazz.

A DECADE OF

The invisibility of strings in jazz—they're heard but not seen, if you will—surely explains the relative obscurity of the String Trio of New York: guitarist James Emery, bassist John Lindberg, and violinist Charles Burnham.

It's easier to think of why they should be acclaimed than why they aren't. The jazz world prizes cohesive working groups; the Trio has been together for a decade, with one personnel change. (Burnham replaced Billy Bang last year.) In an era when New Acoustic Music is the rage—Nashville cats play *Miles' Mode*—this acoustic trio spans jazz and folk forms with embarrassing ease. Like fashionable all-saxophone or all-percussion groups, they focus on a single family of instruments and explore its full expressive range.

The String Trio isn't unknown by any means; they have five albums (with Billy Bang) on Black Saint. They play 60 or so concerts a year, here and abroad. (This summer, they played a United States Information Agency goodwill tour that took them to India, Israel, Morocco, and Tunisia.) They've played in some 40 states, and done four consecutive annual tours of the West Coast. But they didn't register a blip in the '87 db Critics Poll, collectively or individually.

If anything, the Trio's low profile shows how difficult it can be to play music that is, as critics love to label it, beyond category. But Emery, Lindberg, and Burnham aren't moping; they're too busy trying to drum up employment. "We actually work a lot more than other groups which are better known than us," John Lindberg says. "If we were sitting around without work, as well as with a lack of recognition, that would hurt. The fact that we work softens it."

The String Trio of New York was a band before it was a concept. Emery, Lindberg, and Bang didn't get together because the idea of a string trio seemed profound or viable; they sat down to play one day in the summer of 1977 and liked what they heard. "It was a natural combination



ALCO MAURO

New York

PERSISTENCE

that worked, right away," Lindberg recalls. "That was the moment, I think, we really decided to be a group." They played a private party, that same night, for a zany Park Avenue host who turned out to be comedian Bill Murray. But their first formal gig wasn't till the following February.

Commentators have rightly made much of the String Trio's antecedents. Pops Foster wrote in his autobiography about turn-of-the-century bands with the same lineup. ("String trios would get a whole lot of jobs around New Orleans where they wanted soft music.") The South was studded with rural black string bands and bluegrass units. Grappelli and Django Reinhardt had their Hot Club quintet. But the Trio didn't come across the Pops Foster tidbit until they'd been together for years, and Emery and Lindberg never paid much attention to stringy ancestors and cousins—before or after 1977. (Grappelli influenced Burnham, but we'll get to that in a minute.)

The Trio of course know that analogous groups exist. And so their music sounds both informed by other string ensembles, and apart from them. If the ensemble texture sounds bluegrassy, the sophisticated pretty harmonics don't. If the rhythms swing, the ensemble texture sounds like mountain music. If the trio free improvise, the cool ensemble colors may suggest non-ferocious chamber music. And yet none of it quite sounds like any of the above. Evocations of specific styles—like the bottleneck-guitar moan of *Texas Koto Blues* on *Natural Balance*—are rare.

That John Lindberg could be at home in any chamber-like group seems odd; with characteristic dry understatement, he admits he "pounds the shit out of the bass." Born in Michigan in 1959, he wasn't yet 20 when he began turning up on vinyl; he and Emery recorded with the Human Arts Ensemble in 1978. Before long, he caught critical ears via two enduring live sets on Hat Hut: Anthony Braxton's *Performance 9/1/79*, and a whirlwind trio date with altoist Jimmy Lyons and drummer

Sunny Murray, *Jump Up/What To Do About*. He's proud of both.

Musically, Lindberg had grown up fast. The year the String Trio was founded, he'd begun studying with David Izenzon, that unsung revolutionary whose work on Ornette's 1965 *Golden Circle* Blue Notes is a high point in bass history. "I went to study with him at the suggestion of Ed Blackwell; I was living right up the street from David, on East Third. When I met him I was 17. He told me to get serious, leave the Lower East Side and go to the Manhattan School of Music, but I just wanted to play, and we were very much at odds. I didn't study with him that long; it just came to the point where he said, 'Look, you aren't going to do what I want to teach you anyway, so let's forget this and just be friends.'" As a friend, John became one of a team of volunteers working with Izenzon's brain-damaged son.

"As far as direct technical things go, his influence on me was never that big. But in terms of conceptual outlooks on music and the instrument, on what the role of the bass could be in any given situation, he was a huge influence. Emotionally and spiritually, the hookup was a big inspiration. To me, he and Gary Peacock were the most revolutionary bassists of the '60s, as far as changing what the bass can do to underpin an ensemble, and what it can do as a solo instrument. They both had such a great, raw, acoustic kind of approach—David with a bow, that was really his thing; Gary with that physicality so overlooked by bassists in the '80s."

Overlooked by other bassists, he means. Lindberg can be nimble and precise; with the Trio, he often is. But he also possesses—or is possessed by—a messy, raunchy attack reminiscent of Peacock with Albert Ayler. He exploits the absence of frets on the bass for superb vocal-like effects, especially when he's bowing. John's arco is more piercing, sweeter than his late mentor's—Izenzon died in 1979—but the radical attitude is definitely there.

Lindberg has made almost a dozen LPs as leader or co-leader, from his solo-bass debut to an orchestral jazz suite for 11 players. He's also part of another co-op trio, based in Europe, with trumpeter Heinz Becker and multi-reedist Louis Slacvis; they have an album coming up on FMP.

James Emery, who talks in a mid-western drawl (he's from Ohio; see his Profile in the May '83 db), will also be recording for FMP soon: a solo album. Since leaving Leroy Jenkins' avant-blues band Sting! last year, solo concerts have been his other major preoccupation. Emery can do amazing things with flangers and ring modulators, both sonically and visually; he twists the dials with the side of his foot. But Emery—who's played blues, jazz, free music, weird rock, and duets with new music flutist Robert Dick, like a proper Lower East Side guitarist—is playing strictly acoustic these days.

"There's just something about not playing

through wires that really appeals to me. If the sound is right under my hands, right under my fingers, it enables me to play more of what I'm capable of." Other new musicians favor acoustic, of course, but Emery's style is refreshingly free of the Derek Bailey mannerisms that were de rigueur when he came up a decade ago. He has a solid, chunky attack on acoustic (and soprano) guitar—he attacks the strings as hard as any country flatpicker.

Unlike "specialty choirs" eager to prove they can do it all—to prove that trumpets can sound like chording piano (or a string quartet like Hendrix)—the String Trio of New York never strains to sound like something they aren't. The string tradition is so broad, they don't have to rail against prejudice and tight strictures the way tuba octets do. Most of the time—some groaning arco work aside—they play their instruments according to custom, trusting in their natural blend.

That unself-consciousness makes the String Trio's mature music most appealing. (To these ears, the group hit its stride with their third LP, *Common Goal*. But Lindberg and Emery especially like their second, *Area Code 212*—a title which curiously echoes the name of a Nashville band.) They don't want to codify their conception. "We've never tried to force the music in a particular way, once we had established our basic area of direction," Emery says.

And yet it was a crisis of direction that caused Emery and Lindberg to ask Billy Bang to resign from the trio. The parting was reasonably amicable, and for that reason the surviving members would rather not talk about it, lest they stir up trouble now. Pressed, Lindberg says the split was over "creative, personal, and logistical differences. We wanted to work the band more than Billy wanted to work it, so it became necessary to get someone else.

"Musically, there were big differences also. The concept of the group has always been a very open one, in the sense that it's a collective. We've always tried to play compositions by all three members, in equal amounts. Whatever people brought in, we played, to the best of our abilities—until Billy became more traditional-minded, musically; traditional in the sense of wanting to play more straightahead, 'in the tradition.' If you listen to our records, his tunes are the ones that follow that line of thought. I guess the problem came when it became uncomfortable for him to play other things as well."

Emery's friend Leroy Jenkins filled the gap temporarily. When James began asking around about possible replacements, he kept hearing about Charles Burnham. Charles was the first and only prospect Emery and Lindberg bothered to audition.

Previous to joining the trio, Burnham gained exposure playing with James Blood Ulmer; he's on Blood's pleasingly crude CBS swan song, 1983's *Odyssey*. But his Hendrixian wah-wah electric work on that album bears little resemblance to his acoustic playing with the String Trio. Like Bang, he has a distinctly woody tone, albeit a more nasal one.



ALDO MAJURO



ALDO MAJURO



ALDO MAJURO

Billy Bang is by many criteria the finest violinist in improvised music; his richly singing sound, buoyant swing, and lack of schmaltz contributed much to the Trio's charm. Replacing Billy Bang in the String Trio of New York must be like replacing Kenny Clarke in the MJQ.

Well, if Connie Kay can do it, so can Charles Burnham. In truth, he doesn't worry about filling big shoes, saved from self-doubt by lucky ignorance. "I had met Billy a long time ago on the Lower East Side, and we played a bit together, but I doubt he remembers it. I knew he'd been playing with this group, but I had never heard them. I think I'd heard one cut from one of Billy's records."

Burnham's new fellows made no attempt to educate him further; they just threw him some sheet music and let him find his own place. By all reports, it's worked just fine. Lindberg says, "One reason the group had to change is that it had gotten stagnant creatively—we had really done all we could do with those three people. When Charles came in he brought a very refreshing outlook on the same music."

Burnham's refreshing all right; in conversation, he can be impolitely funny and erudite at the same time. His crazy-quilt background set him up perfectly for the Trio. Born in Brooklyn in 1950, he studied classical violin from age seven, going on to New York's High School of Music and Art. There he played harp and sang in a blues band, before deciding to bring his violin to the group.

After school, he took up music professionally. In those psychedelic days, he experimented with various musics, from American folk to Carnatic Indian. "It turned out after a while that the most appealing was really jazz—I liked the rhythm a little better. The two guys who made the biggest impression on me were Eddie South and Grappelli—Grappelli because he could swing so good on violin, South because he had such beautiful technique. He makes the violin really sing."

Burnham left New York in the '70s. Here the story gets strange—he played old standards with a New Orleans-style piano player in Hawaii; later he became the toast of the Italian reggae scene. A reggae violinist? "I had long hair at the time, so it seemed like a good idea."

In his travels hither and yon, he turned up on a few odd LPs, about which he's vague—a latin date with Bobby Paunetta; a reggae

album with Barbara Paige for Epiphany; a double-set of karmic "religious hokum music" with friends in New York. In 1983, he came home, looking for work. While staying with drummer Doug Hammond, his host got a call from chum Blood Ulmer, who happened to mention that he was looking for a violinist. That was Burnham's first big break. Joining the String Trio last year was his second.

As a composer, like his predecessor he's the group's traditionalist; his tunes have pretty melodies, underpinned by recurring chords or drones. Even so, he's developed a belated taste for free improvisation, and wants the Trio to do more of it. Emery, by contrast, tends to write pieces in which each player improvises over different structures, not always harmonic changes. "They can be ostinatos, which are no big deal but very effective; or rhythmic elements in which the choice of pitches is left up to the individual; or coloristic sequences where the texture created by the instruments is the main feature. The written information can be detailed, so that it sounds the same every time, or pretty open, to lead to different results every night."

Lindberg says his writing is "suite-oriented: I like to set up situations that are constantly evolving from beginning to end, a sequence of areas of departure." He likes the way the trio makes "thinly written" structures take on deep structure in performance. Ideally, improvisations affect how the written material is played, affecting the "speed, energy, and emotion" of the interpretation.

All of which means the music evolves organically, instinctively. But boundary-free music is hard to sell in a pigeonhole world. It's unlikely they'll crack New Acoustic circles as long as they record for an Italian jazz label. Still, they notice a shift in their audiences. When the group was founded, there was a healthy live-performance scene for free jazz. Nowadays, they're booked into museums, art centers, and universities as much as jazz venues; they're becoming more appealing to "new music" people than "jazz" people.

The musicians are prepared to play the arts game—like the Kronos String Quartet or ROVA, they've set up a not-for-profit corporation to qualify for public and private grants; they write proposals, and hustle for work, like that USIA tour. They worry about

structuring their live sets to slide in free improvisations without alienating novice listeners. If you don't educate younger listeners about the pleasures of free music, believes Burnham, there'll be precious few customers left to play for when he turns 60. "We'll be like dinosaurs—a history lesson."

The Trio talk about "communication" and "bringing the music to the people." But unlike many musicians who talk that talk, they're not announcing a sell-out. Burnham says, "Nobody is under the illusion that we're going to turn into rock & roll stars if we can only make a rap record." They have discussed playing electric, sometimes—but Lindberg grumbles he's not about to take up bass guitar.

Musically, the Trio will continue to keep their options open; it's worked well enough so far. "I don't have any concept about what the group should sound like," sophomore Charles Burnham says. "But I do have a concept of how much money we should be making." db

STRING TRIO OF NEW YORK'S EQUIPMENT

In the Trio, **James Emery** plays a Takamini E9 guitar with a custom set of extra-heavy D'Addario strings, and a Bruko soprano guitar with D'Addario medium strings.

John Lindberg has three basses—one in the U.S., one in Western Europe, and one in East Germany. In order, they are a Juzek from the '50s, "an old German bass," and a plywood Schuster. His bow was a gift from David Izenzon. He prefers Spirocore steel orchestra strings.

Charles Burnham plays a 1956 Eric Heinrich Roth violin "with a bow" and Pirastro gold-plated strings. Elsewhere, he uses Zeta electric violins.

STRING TRIO OF NEW YORK SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

NATURAL BALANCE—Black Saint 0098
REBIRTH OF A FEELING—Black Saint 0088
COMMON GOAL—Black Saint 0058
AREA CODE 212—Black Saint 0048
FIRST STRING—Black Saint 0031

James Emery as a leader

ARTLIFE—Lumina 007
with Leroy Jenkins' Sting!
URBAN BLUES—Black Saint 0083
with Leo Smith

HUMAN RIGHTS—Kabell/Gramm 24
with the Human Arts Ensemble
JUNK TRAP—Black Saint 0021
LIVE, VOL. 2—Circle 23578/12

John Lindberg as a leader

TRILOGY OF WORKS FOR ELEVEN INSTRUMENTALISTS—Black Saint 0082
THE EAST SIDE SUITE—Sound Aspects 001
GIVE AND TAKE—Black Saint 0072
DIMENSION 5—Black Saint 0062
COMIN' & GOIN'—Leo 104

with Billy Bang

DUO—Anima 1BL-36
with Hugh Ragin
TEAM WORK—Cecma 1004

with Marty Ehrlich

UNISON—Cecma 1006
with Anthony Braxton

6 DUETS—Cecma 1005
PERFORMANCE 9/1179—hat Art 2019
with Jimmy Lyons/Sunny Murray
JUMP UP/WHAT TO DO ABOUT—hat Art 2028

with the Human Arts Ensemble

JUNK TRAP—Black Saint 0021
LIVE, VOL. 1—Circle 23578/9
Charles Burnham with James Blood Ulmer
LIVE AT THE CARAVAN OF DREAMS—Caravan of Dreams 85004
ODYSSEY—Columbia 38900

record reviews

★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★ VERY GOOD ★★ GOOD ★ FAIR ★ POOR



CECIL TAYLOR

FOR OLIM—Soul Note 1150: *OLIM*; *GLOSSALALIA—PART FOUR*; *MIRROR AND WATER GAZING*; *LIVING*; *FOR THE DEATH*; *FOR THE RABBIT*; *FOR THE WATER DOG*; *THE QUESTION*.

Personnel: Taylor, piano.

★★★★

The problem with Cecil Taylor is not that he's hard to listen to, but that people find it hard to listen. You can't hear his music with half an ear—it requires attention, because he's made up his own rules. Taylor is the greatest pianist after Tatum, but where Tatum dazzled with mastery of conventional technique, Taylor began again (even if one can still hear the early influences—Brubeck and Tristano—he later renounced). Cecil didn't ignore jazz tradition and technique, but subsumed them into a personal language.

Taylor's working method is no secret; he often starts with a tiny kernel of musical information, expanding it and transforming it, distilling it into a new kernel and starting the process again. It's a simple process really—theme and variation, call and response—and once you know to listen for it everything falls into place.

He begins this solo recital with (and will refer back to) wobbling thirds, the piano's basic blue interval. But while the blues is back of *For Olim*, you wouldn't mistake *Olim* for, say, *Spoonful*. Modulating thirds are *Olim*'s building blocks; they don't have the effect of defining minor chords, but nonetheless offer evidence that his tonal palette, like his dirty timbres and improvised-variation structures, owe far more to Afro-American than high European sources.

His shifting tonal centers—often mislabeled atonal—are disorienting, defamiliarizing. Blocky dissonances create a psychological perception that Taylor plays louder and with more unrelieved intensity than he does. In fact he exploits the instrument's dynamic range as much as any piano virtuoso—whispered notes share space with slammed bass clusters.

For many, Taylor's unorthodox ear masks the lyricism lurking in his lines. On *Glossalalia*, dissonant arpeggios rippling up the keyboard suggest a parody of Euromanticism. But Taylor is no post-modernist, critiquing others' art. His art is self-referential; its operating principles can't be inferred from anyone else's music (which is why listening with half an ear doesn't work). He remains a constructionist in a deconstructionist age.

This has all been said before, so why bother? Because at a time when New Agers turn the 88s into a music box, a bracingly physical pianist becomes more valuable than ever. Be-

sides, if Ornette can be vindicated at last, can't Taylor's fans hope for the same?

—kevin whitehead



YELLOWJACKETS

FOUR CORNERS—MCA 5994: *OUT OF TOWN*; *WILDLIFE*; *SIGHTSEEING*; *OPEN ROAD*; *MILE HIGH*; *PAST PORTS*; *POSTCARDS*; *ROOM WITH A VIEW*; *GENEVA*.

Personnel: Russell Ferrante, acoustic piano, synthesizers; Jimmy Haslip, bass; Marc Russo, soprano, alto saxophone; William Kennedy, drums, percussion; Alex Acuna, percussion; Bill Gable, cello, percussion (cut 2), vocals (2, 3); Gary Barlough, Synclavier programming; Brenda Russell, Alex Acuna, Diana Acuna, Jimmy Haslip, vocals (2).

★★★★

In basketball terms, *Four Corners* refers to the ball control/stall tactic some college teams used to employ when they had the lead and wanted to run time off the clock. That is apparently *not* what Yellowjackets had in mind in naming their new record, because they sure aren't stalling. They've gotten a good outlet pass at around midcourt, and they're dribbling in for the dunk.

With Weather Report on the shelf and Weather Update not yet a serious contender, Yellowjackets could be set for a run atop jazz popularity polls. *Four Corners* proves a lot about the group's musical capacity. For those times when Spyro Gyra is just too controlled, and yet you don't think you can handle James Blood Ulmer, Yellowjackets will give you something to chew on without making you gag. Of course, some people gag easier than others, and other people like to gag.

Russell Ferrante's synth voicings below Mark Russo's melodies, and Jimmy Haslip's walking, gurgling bass lines shoot *Out Of Town* right along in a massive wall of sound, big as WR's *Birdland* and grooving just as hard. Crank this up in your headphones and listen to new drummer William Kennedy slam those skins. Losing drummer Rickey Lawson from the band could have meant trouble, but Kennedy is poise and precision, with a musical ear that his sticks don't betray.

Mile High is an infectious shuffle that will have heads bobbing at jazz shows for years to come. Yellowjackets actually started out more r&b-based in 1981, behind the guitar playing of Robben Ford. They've branched out into other areas—showing flashes of bop, with latins and ballads. To these ears, their last record, *Shades*, leaned too much in the David San-

born r&b direction (Russo is great in the role, I admit). Ferrante has taken over more of the melodic responsibility here, with Russo being mixed better into the band's sound. Ferrante manages some great voice combinations, mixes of acoustic piano and synthesized log drums and marimbas, like on *Sightseeing*.

Wildlife continues in the World Music vein that they explored on *Shades*. Guest percussionist Alex Acuna creates some fancy, forward-leaning rhythms with Kennedy. The bells, claps, and Portugese choruses in the middle of the song only add spirit—and this stuff is pumped up. Russo's soprano sax tone not only says Shorter in that setting, but the same kind of sensitivity is there too, and that makes it work.

Past Ports feels remarkably free—it's implied time in parts, and yes, this could actually be called "stretching out." It's interesting watching the evolution of Yellowjackets. The commitment seems to be there, the chops certainly are, and from what *Four Corners* says, so is the passion.

—robin tolleson



MODERN JAZZ QUARTET

THREE WINDOWS—Atlantic 81761-1: *THREE WINDOWS*; *KANSAS CITY BREAKS*; *ENCOUNTERING CAGNES*; *DIANGO*; *A DAY IN DUBROVNIK*.

Personnel: John Lewis, piano; Milt Jackson, vibraharp; Percy Heath, bass; Connie Kay, drums, percussion; New York Chamber Orchestra.

★★★★

Recording once again on the Atlantic label with producer Nesuhi Ertegun, the Modern Jazz Quartet sounds as polished as ever. The apparent effortlessness of their meshing together is still noteworthy, though now that the group is in its 35th year, it's easy to take their fluidity for granted.

Pianist John Lewis wrote every tune on the album; *Three Windows*, *A Day In Dubrovnik*, and *Django* are all new arrangements of earlier works. Lewis often integrates classical techniques into his compositions. His grasp of the language is firm; listening to the contrapuntal writing in the title track leaves no doubt of that. In fact, not a misplaced note—written or played—can be heard on this recording. But not even Bach wanted to write such straightforward stuff; his fugues are famous for their surprising melodic twists and harmonic by-passes.

One big hangup is the use of strings. The New York Chamber Orchestra's backup is suave but faceless, and it's hard to know who to blame for the blandness. Maybe it's intrinsic to string groups playing jazz. Things go better on the more thinly scored tunes, like *Django*, a new version of the tune that the MJQ first recorded over 20 years ago. With less string clutter, Milt Jackson's and Lewis' solos can show through (to say cut through would be too strong; these musicians never force) unimpeded.

Kansas City Breaks has the sheen of a movie score, with its buoyant string parts and sparkling vibes solos. No doubt about it, these musicians know how to back each other; the changes slip into place with nary a sign of strain. If you like your jazz sleek and elegant, *Three Windows* may fit the bill. If you prefer it somewhat rougher around the edges, better look elsewhere.

—elaine guregian



CRAIG HARRIS/ TAILGATERS TALES

SHELTER—JMT 870 008: *AFRICANS UNITE; SHELTER SUITE (SHELTER/SUBWAY SCENARIOS/SEA OF SWOLLEN HANDS/THREE HOTS AND A COT/ SHELTER (REPRISE)/BAGS AND RAGS); COOTIE; REMINISCING; SOUND SKETCHES.*

Personnel: Harris, trombone, djiridoo; Edward E.J. Allen, trumpet; Don Byron, clarinet, bass clarinet; Anthony Cox, bass; Pheeroan akLaff, drums; Rod Williams, piano (cut 1); Tunde Samuel, vocals (1, 2).

★ ★ ★ ½

STEVE TURRE

VIEWPOINT—Stash 270: *LAMENT; IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD; ALL BLUES (FLAMENCO SKETCHES); VIEWPOINT; MERCURY; MIDNIGHT MONTUNO (DESCARGA); WHO'S KIDDIN'?* (TAILGATE).

Personnel: Turre, trombone, conch shells; Jon Faddis, trumpet (cuts 2-7); Haywood Henry, clarinet (7); Mulgrew Miller, piano (2-7); Akua Dixon, cello (2, 3, 5); Peter Washington, bass (1-5); Andy Gonzales, electric bass (7); Bob Stewart, tuba (7); Idris Muhammed, drums; Jerry Gonzales, congas (3, 6); Manny Oquendo, timbales (6); Charlie Santiago, guiro (6).

★ ★ ★ ★

Scoring first and second in 1987's **db** Critics

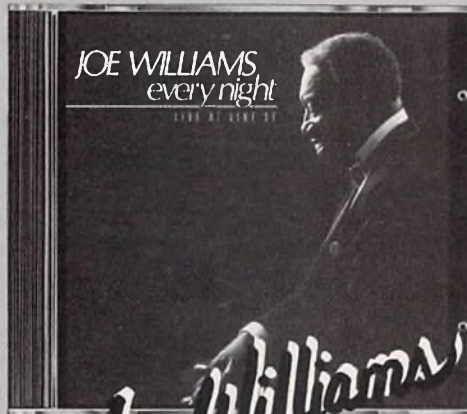
Poll as Trombonists Deserving Wider Recognition, Turre and Harris boast big sounds, superb technique, agility in all registers, and impressive versatility.

Turre's first album proclaims his Afro-Latin roots. Sampling the varied contexts in which the trombone plays a major role, he demonstrates his own range in the process. There's balladry, hard-bop, hot salsa, dixieland—and yet the session avoids the facelessness of many similar smorgasbords. The *Kiddin'* Ory

tribute (with the venerable Haywood Henry) is shamelessly but not fatally corny. Turre's splendid arrangement of *Sentimental Mood* is true to Duke's spirit without aping his sound; Steve's sensitive reading makes him sound like a proper Ellingtonian in his own right.

Both trombonists also double on ethnic instruments. Turre's conch shells are showcased on a jungle walk through *All Blues* (which drifts in and out of *Flamenco Sketches*). He plays articulate, wide-ranging, pretty melodies—not

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the sad farts beachcombers coax from shells. His high notes sound strikingly like his trombone; he plays past the limits of an instrument, to attain a personal sound.

In the rush to praise, let's not neglect the band. Faddis' heat and adaptability are seldom better displayed—hear his witty cup-mute talking on *Sentimental Mood*. Akua Dixon's cello, fastidiously tidy but not timid or prim, happily recalls the Ron Carter/Dolphy meetings; Dixon's a TDWR, too.

On his fourth outing, Craig Harris doesn't always keep different genres separate; his *Suite* for the homeless intelligently draws on several influences. On the opening movement *Shelter*, Craig's authentic growling on djiridoo suggests reverberations in a subway tunnel—and urban blacks' links with displaced aborigines—while *Subway's* Spanish tinge hints at another ethnic group hard hit by hard times. These subtle associations work better than the

obvious pan-Africanisms on Craig's blatant bid for heavy rotation, the vampy *Africans Unite*. Even with its echoes of former employers Ibrahim and Ra, it plays like Harris' *We Are The World*. That Tunde Samuel's singing faintly resembles Sammy Davis Jr.'s doesn't help.

Again, the band mustn't be overlooked. The two-brass-and-clarinet voicings are appealingly fresh—lighter than the Messengers' horn choirs, and free of dixieland overtones. On *Cootie*, the trio substitutes urban shouts for jungle effects. Don Byron emerges as a major clarinetist, technically precise yet adventurously spirited. Anthony Cox, as usual, invests interminable bass ostinati with feeling—as on the oozy/angular *Sketches*.

The lively variety of each album is an extension of its leader's catholic tastes. Harris embodies the history of his horn; a solo may move from tailgate days, through the liquid grace of Brown and Tizol, to the exacting staccato of

A FRESH BREEZE

By Bill Shoemaker

Nine Winds has made the transition from the self-produced label of a single artist to a competitive cooperative label representing a sizable slice of Los Angeles' creative music community. Originally the vehicle for woodwind player and composer Vinny Golia's post-Coleman eclecticism, the label's roster has steadily grown outward from Golia's circle of colleagues. Now, with over 20 titles in the catalog—and how many U.S. artist-produced labels can you name with comparable or larger catalogs?—Nine Winds has a continuity in its artists from release to release, but nothing that resembles a homogenous house sound. Everything from new acoustic fusion to old-fashioned avant garde fission can be heard in this sampling of recent releases, which possess a refreshing consistency in quality.

Vinny Golia's Large Ensemble includes such Nine Winds regulars as drummer Alex Cline, trombonist John Rapson, and pianist Wayne Peet, as well as sterling soloists such as altoist Tim Berne and bassist Roberto Miguel Miranda. The L.A. Lakers wished they had a bench as deep as Golia, who can also call on the likes of saxophonists Wynell Montgomery and Steve Fowler, trumpeter John Fumo, and trombonists Doug Wintz and Michael Vlatkovich to step in and stoke the pace. It's "showtime" on *Facts Of Their Own Lives* (NW 0120), a two-disc club set, as Golia and his cohorts run and gun through Golia's blowing vehicles, while rendering his more architectural statements with thoughtful deliberation. *Facts . . .* is slightly more cogent than the VGLE's substantial debut, *Compositions For Large Ensemble* (NW 0110); this second installment documents a limber working unit, while its

predecessor, in comparison, had an edge of one-time-only-event formality. *Facts . . .* confirms that Golia's is one of the most satisfying and creative orchestras in the U.S.

Of the recent releases by members of the VGLE, it is **John Rapson's Bu Wah** (NW 0118) that is closest in style and spirit to *Facts . . .* Rapson's writing lies along a Mingus-to-Threadgill axis; his use of idiomatic vernacular is pungent, seemingly sardonic one moment, naive the next; his voicings, buttressed by Bill Roper's tuba, Ken Filano's bass, and his own trombone multiphonics, have dark, gripping underpinnings; his work has an evocative, idiosyncratic, vignette-like quality. Rapson has some tales to tell, tales about heros (his *Mingus In F-Tone* portrays the bassist's volatility within an almost dialectical structure that climaxes with a clarion solo from Fumo), children (*Clara Pearl* is a lithe ballad for his daughter that ends with double-edged drama), and rituals (*Church Drone: Nothin' But The Blood* is testimony to the power of root music). And Rapson has the players to put their own spin on the story, as his little big band is rounded out by Golia, Fowler, Cline (in a percussion guest spot), and drummer Tom Lackner. Rapson is arriving.

With the release of their third album, *Window On The Lake* (NW 0122), **Quartet Music**—Alex Cline, his guitarist brother Nels, violinist Jeff Gauthier, and VGLE bassist Eric von Essen—solidifies a unique niche in new acoustic fusion. With equal parts of dawg music wit, continental jazz sophistication (with von Essen adding a Thielemann-like wistfulness on harmonica), and proto-fusion connoisseurship (echoes of Pentangle seep through Nels' picking and Alex's solo on *Circular Thoughts*), Quartet Music is eclectic without being merely decorous, capable of delicacies without wimpishness. Still, they apply intensity at will in short tactical bursts; the intensity of Nels Cline, which is sometimes overwrought in electric contexts, is at its most searing in this

acoustic setting. With Gauthier's singing violin as the pivot, the quartet gives the stylistically wide-ranging program—written mostly by von Essen—a relaxed cohesiveness, though the music is as often provocative as it is soothing.

Trumpeter **John Fumo's** *After The Fact* (NW 0116) attempts to galvanize various electric fusion materials and strategies with inconsistent results. With members of Julius Hemphill's JAH Band (Nels Cline and electric bassist Steubig), Chris Mancinelli's megaforce drumming, and Wayne Peet's palette of keyboard colors, Fumo storms through a program of originals incorporating latin, rock, and jazz materials; occasionally, their hybrid brand of intensity is dazzling, but, more often than not, it is merely bombastic. *After The Fact* is exemplary of a recording on which powerful musicianship does not translate into powerful music. The Hubbard-like brawn and incisiveness Fumo has shown in previous outings is often transmogrified into showband bravado, especially when fronting cliché-ridden charts as *Pink Leather Attitude*, vehicles that could easily be accommodated by Maynard Ferguson or Chuck Mangione. Fumo is more effective in coloristic settings such as the closing duet, *Red Flowers*, where his effectively

understated lyricism cuts through Peet's hovering washes.

There is a lingering perception that duets—as well as solos—have reached a conceptual saturation point; that the context is simply not the refreshing alternative it was 10 to 15 years ago, but an established staple of the consumer's diet. The combination of creative and market forces which brought duos to the fore are now more likely to catalyze in creating events and projects of a larger scale. To be cogent and competitive, duos today must be fastidious in their projection of empathetic chemistry. Such is the duo of woodwind player **Steve Adams** and bassist **Ken Filano** on *Hiding Out* (NW 0121). As implied by the title, theirs is an almost private music, a dialog that culls the depths of their musicianship. Which is not to say Adams and Filano's is an entirely original music. Adams slipknots phrases with a nod to Lacy on soprano, while his alto has a Braxton-like arid attack. Filano extends a LaFaro-to-Holland lineage with fingerbusting flurries of notes and a bold arco technique. Still, whether they vent their virtuosity or contemplate a crystalline concept, they have the requisite compatibility with the context, the material, and each other.

Free jazz, unreconstructed by the Midwestern structuralism that flourished in the '70s and the neo-classicism that defines the '80s, occasionally seems like an endangered genre; yet, when an album like pianist **Richard Grossman's** *One . . . Two . . . Three . . . Four . . .* (NW 0119) is released, it suggests that while free jazz exponents may be few and far between, they are a tenacious lot. Like Grossman's first release—*Solo Piano Improvisations* (Tango 001)—this collection reveals the pianist to have multiple methodologies to mine the unexpected. He can be bluesy and spiky in a Bleyish manner, but without the melancholy. He arpeggiates with Taylorish angularity, but without the penchant for cataclysm. There is an impetus toward fragmentation in much of his work, but none of the aleatory aloofness associated with mid-century experimentalism. In a word, variety, vitally forwarded in a solo, and duets, a trio, and a quartet with Golia (whose impassioned Dolphyesque bass clarinet graces his duet with Grossman), Filano, and Alex Cline. Grossman (who led the New Music Quintet in the mid '60s after Philadelphia beginnings with Lee Morgan, Odean Pope, Jimmy Garrison, et al) is an important addition to the Nine Winds roster. **db**

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George Lewis and Ray Anderson. Like Turre, he does it all. Harris works hard to synthesize his influences into something new—but Turre's efforts in this case are more consistent.

—Kevin Whitehead



LARRY CARLTON

LAST NITE—MCA 5866: *SO WHAT*; *DON'T GIVE IT UP*; *THE B.P. BLUES*; *ALL BLUES*; *LAST NITE*; *EMOTIONS WOUND US SO*.

Personnel: Carlton, electric guitar; Terry Trotter, keyboards; Abraham Laboriel, bass; John Robinson, Rick Marotta (4), drums; Alex Acuña, percussion; Jerry Hey, Gary Grant, trumpet; Mark Russo, saxophone.

★ ★ ½

DISCOVERY—MCA 42003: *HELLO TOMORROW*; *THOSE EYES*; *KNOCK ON WOOD*; *DISCOVERY*; *MY HOME AWAY FROM HOME*; *MARCH OF THE JAZZ ANGELS*; *MINUTE BY MINUTE*; *A PLACE FOR SKIPPER*; *HER FAVORITE SONG*.

Personnel: Carlton, acoustic guitar, synthesized acoustic guitar (cut 9), vocals (7); Terry Trotter, Michael McDonald (7), keyboards; John Peña, bass; Rick Marotta, drums; Michael Fisher, percussion; Kirk Whalum, saxophone; Jerry Hey, Gary Grant, trumpet; Larry Williams, woodwinds; David Pack, Michele Pillar, vocals (7); Marc Hugenberger, David Garfield, Diego Schaff, synthesizer programming.

★ ★ ★ ½

Larry Carlton spent most of the '70s ensconced in Los Angeles recording studios where he supplied guitar parts for countless hundreds of albums. When he looks back upon his work as a Gibson-wielding marionette, he must perceive it all as an indistinct blur—Steely Dan sessions blending with Neil Diamond's and so forth. No matter, because these days Carlton's his own man, enjoying an ongoing professional relationship with MCA Records that allows him to play what he wants with whom he wants. When Carlton's seen smiling on the cover of his newest album, he is not radiating a read-my-resume self-contentedness, but rather the humble satisfaction he

derives from his burgeoning solo career, his happy family life, and his religion. MCA smiles too; last year's *Alone/But Never Alone* topped the *Billboard* jazz chart, and the two recent albums discussed below have been selling well.

A pop-jazz gesture of good will, *Discovery* is inviting for the considerable presence of his acoustic guitar. Carlton goes about his playing in the civilized manner one expects of him, giving conciseness and clarity of expression to well-wrought melodies that seldom bog down in sentiment. He makes judicious use of space and lets meticulously constructed phrases set cheery moods. His sound is relaxed—but not too relaxed—and he can generate unassuming warmth at will. *Those Eyes* is one of several engaging originals; Carlton's fanciful guitar possesses generous outreach, and his song arrangement throws off a winning chordal glow. *My Home Away From Home*, another of his compositions, makes a deeper impression for his balancing of delight and staidness. On the debut side, Michael McDonald's *Minute By Minute* suffocates the listener for all its forced conviviality, and a version of Eddie Floyd and Steve Cropper's *Knock On Wood* gives polite offense until Carlton finally decides to tousle his hair and dig in.

Last Nite, which was recorded at North Hollywood's Baked Potato club in early 1986, has electric guitarist Carlton and his band following a markedly different stylistic course



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than that traveled on *Discovery*. In concert, an aggressive and sweaty Larry Carlton handles a mixed bag of material—blues, jazz, rock, rock-jazz fusion. He doesn't manifest epiphanies, mind you, but he does convey conviction when sounding out Miles Davis' *All Blues* and stacking up decent lines of tense notes in Miles' *So What*; the other concert participants, however, lack his "feel" for blues and jazz. The forays into rock and fusion, *Don't Give It Up* and the title song respectively, are entertaining. Unfortunately, Carlton's production ploy of grafting studio-recorded horns onto dry sections of the "live" tapes drops a star off the record's rating.

—frank-john hadley



STEVE KUHN

LIFE'S MAGIC—BlackHawk 522-1 D: *LITTLE OLD LADY*; *TWO BY TWO*; *JITTERBUG WALTZ*; *ULLA*; *TRANCE*; *YESTERDAY'S GARDENIAS*; *MR. CALYPSO KUHN*.

Personnel: Kuhn, piano; Ron Carter, bass; Al Foster, drums.

★★★★★

MOSTLY BALLADS—New World 351: *BODY AND SOUL*; *EMILY*; *LONELY TOWN*; *AIREGIN*; *TENNESSEE WALTZ*; *DANNY BOY*; *'ROUND MIDNIGHT*; *YESTERDAY'S GARDENIAS*; *DON'T EXPLAIN*; *HOW HIGH THE MOON*; *LOVER MAN*; *TWO FOR THE ROAD*.

Personnel: Kuhn, piano; Harvey Swartz, bass (cuts 1-2, 5, 8-9, 12).

★★★★★

"A line will take us hours maybe," wrote William Butler Yeats, "yet if it does not seem a moment's thought/Our stitching and unstitching has been for nought." Yeats' lines and the lines of an improviser like Steve Kuhn—the intense pianist who first came to attention in the small groups of John Coltrane, Kenny Dorham, Stan Getz, and Art Farmer, later with his own groups and Shelia Jordan—share pointed similarities. Kuhn's turns and crochets, his stitching and unstitching, do indeed seem a moment's thought, and it's this conception, of a moment's notice, that marks him as a first-rate improviser, one whose concepts spring full-blown, an instant's act, one, seemingly, in a complete vision.

Savor this pianist's languid, wistful stitches on *Body And Soul*, his measured space laced with trenchant voicing, well supported by bassist Harvie Swartz, who appears on six of the *Mostly Ballads* selections. Like his contemporary Paul Bley, Kuhn lingers to savor high, bell-like notes, notes which knot the measured

thread of improvisation. Also included in this pianist's *Anatomy Of Melancholy* is carefully orchestrated pathos, in the form of a crafty exploration of the nooks and crannies of *'Round Midnight*, an etude in staticism, cunningly balanced by *Lover Man*, seen through a similar glass darkly with the brooding despair and the distilled essence of melody that Billie Holiday infused into this lyric vehicle.

Uptempo vehicles, like Sonny Rollins' finger twisting *Airegin*, sustain pulsing momentum as melodic tangent is twisted precariously

against melodic tangent displaying Kuhn's formidable bop chops—as do the pianist's Powellian phrases on the bop anthem *How High The Moon*. Many fine inventions here, with finely crafted depth and resonance.

When joined on *Life's Magic* by bassist Ron Carter and drummer Al Foster, Kuhn's tack becomes even more pithy. His slow bounce *Two By Two*, for example, captures the ebb and flow of the quintessential jazz piano trio, using side-slipping rhythms, stop times, surprising kicks, and sudden fall-offs as its tightly

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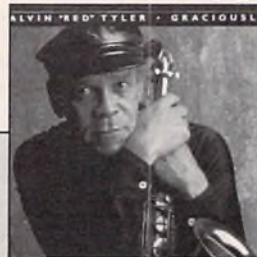
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stitched lines snap with energy. There's also a taut, halting *Jitterbug Waltz*. Carter solos on Fats Waller's classic in throbbing, crafty phrases, with a tone so big that you could take a bite out of it. Al Foster contributes his extensive vocabulary of cymbal and brush sounds in this long, intricate, completely sustained performance. There's also a Kuhn signature tune, his aptly titled *Trance*, that floats along punctuated by sharp, eccentric rhythmic interludes.

Foster's brushes crack, engendering high-tension rolls, rattles, pings, and clangs—all musical—as Kuhn maintains the swelling groove.

The jazz musician, notes Stanley Crouch, "is an artist in danger." One might add that he's one whose instant act, his stitching and unstitching of a stolen moment, determine his success or failure. We have here some finely spun threads and intricate stitching indeed.

—jon balleras



ALVIN "RED" TYLER

GRACIOUSLY—Rounder 2061: *COUNT 'EM; CUTIE PIE; GRACIOUSLY; HERE'S THAT RAINY DAY; IF MY SHOES HOLD OUT; GREYSTOKE; LIKE SO MANY OTHERS; DREAMSVILLE.*

Personnel: Tyler, tenor saxophone; Clyde Kerr Jr. (cuts 1-3, 5-7), trumpet, flugelhorn, tambourine; Steve Masakowski, electric guitar (1-5, 7), seven-string guitar (8); David Torkanowsky (1-7), piano; James Singleton, bass; Johnny Vidacovich, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

For all the ink New Orleans emigres get, good musicians who elect not to leave attract little more attention than talented homebodies in Portland or Peoria. Till recently, outside of NOLA those who knew Red Tyler at all knew him from some classic Fats Domino dates, or a few elusive early-'60s sides by the AFO Executives—a band with an intriguing hard-bop/hard-pop one-two punch.

Then 1986 brought the splendid *Heritage* (Rounder 2047), a very pretty post-bop set; this follow-up is just about nearly almost as good. (I miss the Germaine Bazzle and Johnny Adams vocals for contrast.) But as before Tyler's lustrous tenor sound is a prime asset. His tone has mellowed; it's taken on that pleasing patina granted to saxophonists who survive past a certain age. (He'd just turned 61.) Tyler's sound has less yakety fat than it used to, but it's laced with smoke, nicely complimented by the tart heat of Clyde Kerr Jr.'s trumpet.

In New Orleans, it's said, Tyler's famous for knowing a million tunes; it figures that his writing prompts *deja entendu*. *Like So Many Others* and *Count 'Em* are built from familiar-sounding snippets—recognizable but not quite placeable phrases. *Greystoke* sounds very much like a Brubeck/Desmond waltz; *Shoes*, with a shuffling r&b feel, is the only tune that pays explicit homage to hometown second-line strutting.

Torkanowsky, Singleton, and Vidacovich are a highly compatible rhythm section. Comping, Masakowsky slinks right into the fold, and he's a good straightahead soloist. On first hearing, you might miss the quintet's local tinge: Singleton's a walker, not a mambo man, and Vidacovich doesn't parade the press rolls.

But the way the tunes and the improvisors drift between 2/4 and 4/4 (*Cutie Pie*) or duple and triple meter (*Greystoke*, *Count 'Em*) reflect a musical environment where Afro-latin poly-rhythms are common. Tyler's crew is in touch with local roots, but doesn't strain for effect—which makes this almost nearly just about as good a slice of the city's mainstream scene as you could ask for.

—kevin whitehead

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Waxing On

NEW BLUES

BIG TWIST AND THE MELLOW FELLOWS: *LIVE FROM CHICAGO! BIGGER THAN LIFE!* (Alligator 4755) ★★★★★

W.C. CLARK BLUES REVIEW: *SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY* (Drippin' 1001) ★★

ANGELA STREHLI BAND: *SOUL SHAKE* (Antone's 0006) ★★★

THE LLOYD JONES STRUGGLE: *THE LLOYD JONES STRUGGLE* (Criminal 33-05) ★★★★★½

LITTLE CHARLIE AND THE NIGHTCATS: *ALL THE WAY CRAZY* (Alligator 4753) ★★★

RON THOMPSON AND THE RESISTORS: *RESISTER TWISTER* (Blind Pig 2487) ★★★★★

LUTHER ALLISON: *SERIOUS* (Blind Pig 2287) ★★½

LUTHER ALLISON: *HERE I COME* (Encore! 133) ★★½

EDDIE CLEARWATER: *FLIMDOOZIE* (Rooster Blues 2622) ★★★★★½

HUBERT SUMLIN: *HUBERT SUMLIN'S BLUES PARTY* (Black Top 1036) ★★½

JAMES COTTON: *TAKE ME BACK* (Blind Pig 2587) ★★½

KOKO TAYLOR AND HER BLUES MACHINE: *LIVE FROM CHICAGO—AN AUDIENCE WITH THE QUEEN* (Alligator 4754) ★★★★★

SNOOKS EAGLIN: *BABY, YOU CAN GET YOUR GUN* (Black Top 1037) ★★★★★

DAVID DEE: *SHEER PLEASURE* (Edge 003) ★★★★★

ROOMFUL OF BLUES: *LIVE AT LUPO'S HEARTBREAK HOTEL* (Varrick 024) ★★★★★½

H-BOMB FERGUSON: *LIFE IS HARD* (Savoy Jazz 1176) ★★★

ETTA JAMES/EDDIE "CLEANHEAD" VINSON: *THE LATE SHOW* (Fantasy 9655) ★★★

CHARLES BROWN: *ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD* (Blue Side 60007-1) ★★★

ERWIN HELFER: *CHICAGO PIANO* (Red Beans 010) ★★★★★

The current blues revival is in full swing; not since the late '60s have the blues received so much attention. But in the '60s the blues were more narrowly construed, and performers who deviated too far from 12-bar conventions were discounted, at least by self-styled purists. Today, a typical "blues" album may contain more soul music than blues, not to mention heavy infusions of jazz and rock. This conflation of blues and vintage soul styles, long accepted by black audiences, has recently been embraced by white fans as well, with ironic conse-

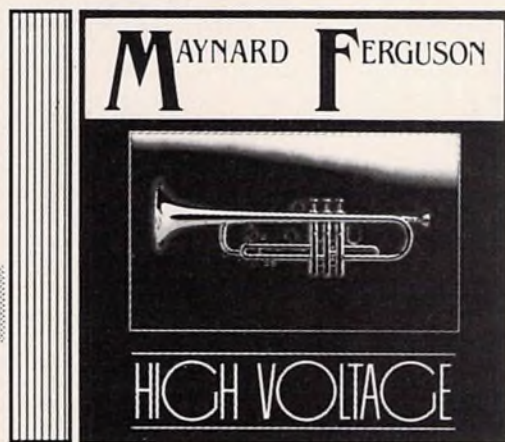
quences. As bluesmen once turned to soul music out of economic necessity, soul singers now take up the blues—in name if not in fact—for the mostly white college market provides a certain commercial viability to any music that can be shoehorned under the blues heading.

Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows

was one of the first modern campus-style soul-blues bands. Since its formation in the early '70s the group, now based in Chicago, has grown steadily in popularity on the strength of its slick, punchy horn charts and its leader's gruffly ingratiating baritone. *Live From Chicago! Bigger Than Life!*, the band's fourth and perhaps best album, virtually defines the contemporary party-blues mainstream—sort of a cross between the *Saturday Night Live* band and the soundtrack to a beer commercial. The material, almost evenly divided between originals and cover songs, is strongly skewed toward soul; the only 12-bar tune is James Taylor's *Steamroller Blues*. Larry "Big Twist" Nolan looks and sings like an affable grizzly bear but conveys none of the pathos and little of the emotional conviction one usually associates with the blues. The nine instrumentalists, however, play with polished buoyancy on solidly crafted arrangements by guitarist Pete Special and guest tenor saxophonist Gene "Daddy G" Barge, with excellent solo work by Special, keyboardist Sid Wingfield, and tenor saxophonist Terry Ogolini.

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tin, Texas, is similarly constituted (black leader, mostly white sidemen) and takes an even more soul-oriented approach on its debut LP, *Something For Everybody*. Again there is but a single more-or-less genuine blues; the rest of the album consists of '70s-style soul originals, complete with vapid lyrics, synthesizer fills, and a sappy background chorus. Clark, who as a bass player accompanied both Jimmie and Stevie Ray Vaughan, switched to guitar when he formed his own band in 1975, but the emphasis here is on his mellow, gospel-inflected vocals.

Clark and vocalist Angela Strehli were once partners in a group called Southern Feeling; today she fronts her own Austin-based **Angela Strehli Band**, whose first full-length LP, *Soul Shake*, oscillates between r&b and '50s-style Chicago blues. The musicians—including guitarist Denny Freeman, bassist Pat Whitefield, and drummer George Rains, respective veterans of Jimmie Vaughan's Storm, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, and Doug Sahm's band—are polished, versatile, and hard-rocking, but Strehli's pop-flavored singing is better suited to soul and rock than to the gutbucket material of J. B. Hutto, John Brim, and Elmore James.

The **Lloyd Jones Struggle** is from Portland, Oregon—the center of the lively and innovative Pacific Northwest blues scene. Lloyd "Have Mercy" Jones is considerably younger than Big Twist or W. C. Clark, but although he too fronts a brassy white band, his sound is much bluesier. On the group's eponymous first album, Jones sings and plays guitar with a lean and hungry edge while his sidemen lay down a taut, sinewy groove. Jones apprenticed behind such blues-harp masters as Big Walter Horton, George Smith, and Charlie Musselwhite, but as a leader his tastes run from country-flavored soul to bottleneck Delta blues.

Northern California's **Little Charlie and the Nightcats** has evolved over the past dozen years from a Chicago-style blues combo to an eclectic party band that mixes blues with rockabilly, jazz, and pre-soul r&b. Although the group's sound on its first album, *All The Way Crazy*, is hot and tight, and the musicianship of its four members is outstanding, its style is less an integrated fusion than a conglomerate of second-hand licks and half-assimilated idioms. Rick Estrin's harmonica work is superb if unoriginal, but his jiving vocals display more ego than emotion. Little Charlie Baty's guitar playing is truly virtuosic, especially when he turns his nimble hand to jazz and Western Swing, but his flashy blues stylings sometimes baldly imitate Magic Sam and Buddy Guy.

An alumnus of John Lee Hooker's Coast-to-Coast Blues Band, **Ron Thompson** is a San Francisco Bay-area guitarist and singer who combines slide-guitar blues with rockabilly to achieve a potent, well-integrated boogie blend. Accompanied by three different drummers and not fewer than four bass players, Thompson is in full control on his self-produced second album, *Resister Twister*. In both standard and open guitar tunings, he's got technique to burn, and his singing, though unspectacular, is refreshingly natural. He works up a formidable head of steam on uptempo instrumental showpieces like *Pedal*

To The Metal and *Resister Twister*, and his soaring adaptation of *Swing Down Chariot* is magnificent, whatever its genre.

Arkansas-born, Chicago-bred singer-guitarist **Luther Allison** emerged from the same West Side environs at about the same time as his friend and occasional bandmate Magic Sam, but after a promising debut album seemed to lose his direction. Though poorly represented on wax, he has maintained an active national and international touring schedule through the last two decades, and is now based in Europe. Two French recordings—one on its original Encore! label, the other leased to San Francisco's Blind Pig Records—show Allison and his mostly white European and American sidemen veering sharply toward hard rock. The idea of a black bluesman imitating the Rolling Stones sounds like the premise of a Monty Python routine, but as the title of his Blind Pig album suggests, Allison is perfectly *Serious*. His high, grainy voice and keening, Albert King-style guitar work are strong and effective on rootsier songs; on his Stones-influenced material, however, he can't compare with the real thing. *Here I Come*, on Encore!, is even more rock-oriented, copping motifs from Cream and the Standells. Nonetheless, Allison's singing is natural and heartfelt, and his lyrics convincingly portray the frustrations of an expatriate bluesman's life on the road.

Although his recording career dates back some 30 years, Chicagoan **Eddy Clearwater** has been slow to achieve recognition, probably because his talents are just middling. On Clearwater's first Rooster Blues LP, *The Chief*, producer Jim O'Neal provided him with a top-notch session combo; on *Flimdoozie* he goes a step further, enlisting Otis Rush to help out with the guitar leads. Harmonica whiz James "Sugar Blue" Whiting is also featured on a couple of tasty spots, and the remaining band members—all crack blues hands—take up much of whatever slack remains, leaving Clearwater largely free to concentrate on his amiable back-alley vocals. Besides an obligatory tip-of-the-hat to his youthful idol, Chuck Berry, he does play a pair of Rush-style guitar solos under Otis' watchful eye, but these pale beside the naive brilliance of the similarly cast *A-Minor Cha-Cha* that Eddy recorded in the mid-'50s. Rush himself is in fine form, though, and the album as a whole cooks with genuine Chicago fire.

Hubert Sumlin achieved semi-legendary status as Howlin' Wolf's longtime guitarist, but in fact he is a player of limited ability whose contributions to Wolf's primal recordings were relatively minor. *Hubert Sumlin's Blues Party* is his first U.S. LP, but even here he's little more than a sideman on his own session. Recorded in Boston for New Orleans' Black Top label, *Blues Party* draws most of its personnel from Rhode Island's Roomful Of Blues, adding ex-Muddy Waters harpist Jerry Portnoy and Louisiana soul singer Mighty Sam McClain. Sumlin is overshadowed by just about everybody, especially Roomful's guitarist Ronnie Earl, who conceived and co-produced the album. Hubert sings on only two tracks, and his guitar solos reveal a sparse, idiosyncratic style antithetical to Roomful's spit and polish, suggesting he'd be better served in a looser, more compatible context.

James Cotton's *Take Me Back* is Blind Pig's new release of a 1980 recording that was originally issued only in Canada. Unlike his most recent work for Alligator—which features his youthful, funk-oriented seven-piece touring band—this album is cast in a retrospective vein, re-creating hits by Little Walter, Guitar Slim, Howlin' Wolf, and Elmore James. The players—guitarists Sammy Lawhorn and John Primer, pianist Pinetop Perkins, bassist Bob Anderson, and drummer Sam Lay—could hardly be better chosen, but the session is strangely listless, especially when compared to the half-album's worth of similar material on Alligator's *High Compression*. Cotton is in poor voice but his harp sounds great; unfortunately, he sings a lot but plays very little, leaving many of the solos to the formidable Lawhorn, who all but steals the show.

Koko Taylor is the indisputable queen of Chicago blues; on her latest Alligator release, *Live From Chicago—An Audience With The Queen*, she and her Blues Machine are captured in a live show at Fitzgerald's in Berwyn, Illinois. Always at her best in front of a crowd, Taylor gives a stirring performance, even if her patented sandpaper growl occasionally fails her. Her backup quartet is exceptionally tight, with two fiery young guitarists, Michael "Mr. Dynamite" Robinson and Eddie King, who can turn on a dime from deep-dyed blues to psychedelic funk. Taylor demonstrates her own versatility on the country-soul ballad *I'd Rather Go Blind* but sticks mainly to the blues, relying on passion and sincerity rather than clever stylings to get her message across.

Snooks Eaglin's *Baby, You Can Get Your Gun!* is a delightful session that teams the former Professor Longhair guitarist with Crescent City saxophonist David Lastie and members of Fats Domino's band and Roomful Of Blues. Blind from the age of two, Eaglin first recorded as a folk singer, although he has always been a multifaceted artist with a broad and eccentric repertoire. Here he is in his element, ranging from blues to hard funk to surf music (!), but he shines most brightly on New Orleans r&b gems like Earl King's *Baby, You Can Get Your Gun!* and Smiley Lewis' *That Certain Door*. Eaglin's Ray Charles-inspired singing radiates warmth and dry wit, and his guitar playing is a marvel of sly, earthy sophistication.

What all of the foregoing records have in common is that they are directed at a mainly white audience. **David Dee's** *Sheer Pleasure*, on the Los Angeles-based Edge label, is the exception—a contemporary blues album geared for black radio. The formula is similar to Big Twist's or W. C. Clark's—gospel-soul for the most part, with a strong flavoring of blues—but the sleek charts and smoothly layered mix mark this as a "commercial" product. Typical of such productions, it was recorded partly in Detroit (Dee's presumptive hometown), partly in Muscle Shoals, and partly in Nashville; typical, too, are the multiple keyboards, female chorus, and burnished horns. And yet it works; *Sheer Pleasure* is an excellent example of modern soul-blues, with catchy if derivative melodic hooks and elaborate arrangements that envelop Dee's ardent vocals and piquant guitar like a silken cocoon.

Although it is certainly a party band—a brassy one at that—and its audience is pre-

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dominantly white, **Roomful Of Blues** is in a class by itself. Rather than concocting a hodge-podge of blues-related styles, Roomful sticks fairly close to the swing-rooted jump blues of the '40s and '50s—the true ancestor of rock & roll. *Live At Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel* is Roomful's strongest album yet, capturing a peak performance at a favorite haunt with greater fidelity than the group's previous studio recordings. The five-man horn section roars and glistens on vintage instrumentals like *Gator's Groove* and *House Of Joy*; the big band treatment also proves congenial on Howlin' Wolf and Fats Domino material, where it provides a powerfully surging backdrop for

Ronnie Earl's remarkable guitar work. Roomful alleviates its chronic vocal shortcomings by platooning tenor saxophonist Greg Piccolo, pianist Ron Levy, and featured guest Curtis Salgado as singers, but the band's forte is still its precise and passionate ensemble playing.

Those critics who believe that revivalist bands like Roomful are necessarily inferior to their original models ought to check out *Life Is Hard*, a compilation of previously issued and never-before-released material from the brief, early '50s heyday of **Robert "H-Bomb" Ferguson**. Ferguson was an unabashed imitator of Wynonie Harris, the most popular jump-blues shouter of his day, and the music

here is altogether representative of its genre. Taken singly, these tracks offer fine examples of pre-Elvis rock & roll, but the cumulative impact of the simple, stock arrangements, with their generic horn riffs and shuffling backbeat rhythms, is numbingly tedious. Ferguson's singing, while wholly derivative, is powerful and expressive, and there is some estimable tenor sax honking by Count Hastings and Purvis Henson. But half of this album was issued on the 1980 two-fer *The Shouters* (Savoy 2244), where it was combined with selections by four other vocalists to make a more diverse and comprehensive package.

Another jump-era veteran, singer/saxophonist **Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson**, is featured along with vocalist **Etta James** on *The Late Show*, recorded live last year at Marla's Memory Lane Supper Club in Los Angeles. Vinson's rich but now-quavering voice is heard on two blues and part of a ballad, but the bulk of the album belongs to James, whose long career as a pop and r&b singer has amply prepared her for her current role as a cabaret diva. Accompanied by guitarist Shuggie Otis, she swoops and glides through blues, jazz, and gospel tunes with aplomb, although her cute vocal mannerisms often prove distracting. The band, including organist Jack McDuff and tenor saxophonist Red Holloway, is excellent, but Vinson's alto sax is virtually absent.

With its eerie minor piano triplets and languid guitar, **Charles Brown's** 1945 smash, *Driftin' Blues*, changed the course of post-war pop music. But though his influence was widely disseminated by such intermediaries as Fats Domino and Ray Charles, Brown himself endured long years of obscurity before his recent, gradual resurgence. The Los Angeles-based singer and pianist displays his undiminished talents on *One More For The Road* with an exemplary combo that includes Billy Butler on guitar and Harold Ousley on tenor sax. Brown's style is no less laidback than before, but his repertoire is more eclectic, drawing on sources as disparate as Sinatra and Patsy Cline. He makes every song his own to the extent that all his borrowed standards tend to sound alike, although they do allow him to show off his jazzy keyboard technique and effortlessly natural singing. Only a few of his trademark blues are included, but these remain his most distinctive and compelling vehicles.

Pianist **Erwin Helfer** studied at the feet of blues, boogie, ragtime, and traditional jazz masters in Chicago and New Orleans, and was Mama Yancey's regular accompanist in her later years. His latest record, *Chicago Piano*, is a solo album, capturing Helfer as he continues to evolve from blues and boogies to more sophisticated material. His inventive, carefully crafted adaptations of standards like *Honeysuckle Rose* and *Take The "A" Train* incorporate barrelhouse rhythms, and his original boogies contain complex, jazzy interpolations. His interpretations are delightfully thought-provoking, dense with ideas and insights, so much so that his hands can't always keep up with his imagination. Still, Helfer is not only an invaluable catalytic presence on the Chicago scene, but a noteworthy musician in his own right who merits national attention.

—Larry Birnbaum



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Medium-sized, straightahead, urbanized, slightly brazen, and fair-to-middling would characterize this grab-bag of both-coast (nay, even trans-Pacific!) bands. The ProJazz bunch hail from Nippon via New York (in one case, Red Bank, NJ, via Tokyo), the Mintzer Big Band's second DMP as well as the *Saturday Night Live* guys blow your way direct from The Apple, while the Soundwings of Patrick Williams waft in from L.A.—and the terms hot vs. cool still apply. Or should I say involved vs. blase? I hear a glib unreality in much of the jazz out West, and more of street smarts and true blues and—dare I say it?—real creativity back in New York and points East. There, I've done it—more arrogant Northeast snobbery. But check Randy Brecker's contrasting role, for example, with the Mintzer vs. Williams Big Bands. Would he and Ronnie Cuber have played as torrid and lean in L.A. as they do on this Blue Note set? Would there even have been a gig for them?

Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers (*New Year's Eve At Sweet Basil*, ProJazz CDJ 624, 47:58) must have been on their 3 a.m. set with this somewhat lackluster, taper-off performance. Papa Bu kicks the kids' butts, as usual, but they do sound up past their bedtimes, with ensembles a bit fried and frenzied, solos a bit hasty and scatty. The tunes are just so-so, ex-bassist Charles Fambrough's *Little Man* being a pleasant modal blues that draws well from Terence Blanchard's trumpet. Donald Harrison scores honors for a soulful rendition of a Billy Eckstine ballad. Elsewhere, Jean Toussaint's tenor sounds honky and hoarse, and new kid trombonist from K.C., Tim Williams, sounds beleaguered. Horns are recorded echoey, and the rhythm sounds uneven, with swishy cymbals, wonky balance. Crowd noise, no deterrent on a big night, was mixed out. Maybe you hadda be there.

Ronnie Cuber plays the baritone saxophone, and carries on that pinched, throaty, soulful growl of Pepper Adams. His quartet with Lonnie Smith on organ, Ronnie Burrage on drums, and Randy Brecker on trumpet (*Live At The Blue Note*, ProJazz CDJ 629, 48:22) recalls one he'd worked with George Benson in the '60s. This is heads-up, down-home, easy-sailing jazz, the real roadhouse article, with nice little surprises from the rhythm team and solid solos from both horns consistently.

A pair of other Cuber-led dates—ostensibly reunions with Dave Sanborn (*Two Brothers*, ProJazz CDJ 623, 43:22) and George Benson (*Passion Fruit*, ProJazz CDJ 616, 38:35)—are questionably titled items that feature the guest stars on about one-and-a-half tracks per disc. No kidding. They might even have been dubbed in, or had a taxi waiting. If you reviewed albums on the basis of title tracks, we'd have some four-star items here. Though Cuber and the boys blow bravely on the 80 percent filler, especially the "Sanborn" date, smart shoppers will know they've been had.

Michel Camilo starts strong with his rolling salsa-styled piano (*Why Not?*, ProJazz CDJ



Tom Scott

613, 40:45), but doesn't keep up the pace of the first two strong tunes with Lew Soloff and especially altoist Chris Hunter, a saucy post-Sanborn-styled Englishman, who (like Soloff) plays with Gil Evans. Camilo plays hard Latino classically-trained piano with hard-to-spot background, like Bobby Enriquez, but the liners say nothing. Three tracks with rhythm only spin out too long, and the fourth with horns is kinda lightweight.

The **Manhattan Jazz Quintet** is a success story that could only have happened these days in Japan. Here are five more-than-competent mainstainers who emerged from the bowels of Manhattan studios as first-call players, coming together at the call of pianist/arranger Dave Matthews to blow some straightahead, unself-conscious bebop for the jaded, overstimulated, and too-serious audiences in Japan. Well, bingo! They got down with some simple, unfettered blowing charts and lo-and-behold, they've racked up big numbers on the jazz charts in Nippon.

The quintet consists of Lew Soloff, lead trumpeter for Blood, Sweat & Tears, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, and Gil Evans big bands; George Young, a sturdy and versatile multi-reed player who plays only tenor in this band; Steve Gadd, the Mr. Clean of fusion and jazz-rock drummers; and, on bass, first Charnett Moffatt (son of avant garde drummer Charles Moffatt and a burning player since his early teens), later Eddie Gomez, the wizard bassist for years with the late pianist Bill Evans, more recently with Steps Ahead. Leader Dave Matthews—a decent pianist in Creed Taylor's CTI stable and a fine arranger for such diverse singers as James Brown, Frank Sinatra, and Paul McCartney—told the band's strange success story to Leonard Feather in *Jazz Times* (July, '87); the quintet's first date won *Swing Journal's* Gold Disc award, its second won the

Best CD award; its third won the magazine's readers poll for both LP and CD. Matthews himself has raked in producer's awards, recorded a trio date, and the Tokyo Union Band recorded his Basie-esque charts.

Now these albums, or rather CDs—an intimate *Autumn Leaves* (ProJazz CDJ 625, 46:21), a bolder and throatier *My Funny Valentine* (ProJazz CDJ 615, 48:22), and an occasionally wild and woolly *Live!* (in Tokyo, of course, ProJazz CDJ 637, 69:44)—are nothing to write back to Peoria about if you're in The Apple, maybe, but they were apparently something to take brush to parchment over if you were in Tokyo writing back to Hokkaido. Soloff and Young play tough enough to incite riots in a zen monastery. Jazz needs all the friends it can get around the globe, goodness knows, so we can thank the Japanese for loving this solid band of studio cats and the red-blooded, albeit slightly recidivist, bebop they diligently expound. Maybe those of us, too, who, like the Japanese audience that this band was assembled for, are in need of something less "somber" and "self-conscious", may turn to the quintet's honest hard-bop instead of exploitative heavy-metal or rap, or some of the less conscientious or more prissy stuff reviewed right here.

Dave Matthews spun out a trio side, *Blue In Green* (ProJazz CDJ 630, 43:58), as an offshoot to the successes of the quintet. Six standards and a pretty original ballad are competently and briskly played. Mike Moore picks nice bass notes, and Dave Weckl stirs the soup. Matthews takes no chances, spins out no exquisite lyrical lines we haven't heard better from, say, Red Garland 20 years ago, and seems determinedly MOR.

Bob Mintzer's Big Band (*Camouflage*, DMP CD-456, 60:06) brings new meaning to music in the round. The whole 13-piece band circles one mic and blows at it and each other with exciting results. No-nonsense ensembles face off with precision and punch, occasionally wry humor poking through (a Flintstone-y *Mr. Fone Bones* and dizzy flute/bone exchanges on the title track). You get a chance to contrast Randy Brecker's peppery trumpet style with Marvin Stamm's more zaftig and romantic lilt. Tenorman Mintzer may play hard and dour on a ballad, then rounder and looser at uptempo; he pens all: one maybe for tv news (*One Man Band*) and another in Thad Jones-ville (chirrupy flute line, bright dynamic builds, sassy pace). The band hits hard and sticks to your ribs.

Take a (short station) break with **The Saturday Night Live Band** (*Live From New York*, ProJazz CDJ 621, 42:16), a cracking tentet who keep it reeal tight and sassy over 10 tracks made for end credits and voice-overs. A few solos rise above the perfunctory—specially the chunky trombone of Tom Malone and his feisty arrangements—but it's mostly automatic overdrive background funk for these somewhat anonymous cats. Hey, at least they're soloing, even if it gets lost in real air time on audiences waving furiously to Aunt Martha or cuts to commercials. Tempos are nearly all up and lathered in backbeat. Basically, it's as stale and crude as the show itself nowadays.

Fat budgets produce cotton candy for **Tom**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 59

1 JACK WALRATH. *MEAT*

(from *MASTER OF SUSPENSE*, Blue

Note). Walrath, trumpet, composer; Kenny Garrett, alto saxophone; Carter Jefferson, tenor saxophone; James Williams, piano; Anthony Cox, bass; Ronnie Burrage, drums.

I can't recognize the trumpeter by his style or sound. The head is beautifully done. I like the drummer very much. He's got the whole thing together. There are so many different influences in the soloists. I'm sorry I don't know who it is. I have a young friend named Jack Walrath, and it sounded somewhat like him. He used to write for my band. This writing didn't sound like him, but the playing did. Jack is like a chameleon. I could hear all of his influences, if it's him. Four stars. They're world-class players, whoever they are.

2 CLIFFORD BROWN. *EASY*

LIVING (from *25 YEARS*, Blue Note).

Brown, trumpet; John Lewis, piano; Percy Heath, bass; Art Blakey, drums; recorded in 1953.

Clifford Brown. The recording doesn't capture his sound. There's only a few hints of his sound, but it's his notes, his way of playing. This was made in 1952-53. You can tell the way rhythm sections played the changes then from the way they play today. He recorded this with strings, too. Clifford was the greatest lyrical player yet. If I can give 10 stars he gets them all.

3 WYNTON MARSALIS.

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS

CHILD (from *CARNIVAL*, CBS Masterworks). Marsalis, cornet; Eastman Wind Ensemble.

It's a very pretty sound. I don't know who it is. Synthesized strings. When you first put it on, I thought it was Miles from the Gil Evans period. It's beautiful. Five stars.

MB: It's the young trumpet sensation.

RR: That was Wynton? That's the warmest sound I've ever heard from him. He's given us all a big boost when he speaks and when he plays. He's captured the imagination of the audience and at so young an age, and he's growing all the time. He's so identifiable I'm surprised I didn't identify him.

4 LESTER BOWIE/BRASS FANTASY. *CRAZY*

(from *AVANT POP*, ECM). Bowie, trumpet; Steve Turre, arranger.

I like it. It's different. It's provocative. It's entertaining. Four stars. For a minute I was going to say it sounds like people from the big band era. If they're young people they're doing a very good job of playing music from that era. I like the trumpets. It's a small big

RED RODNEY

by Michael Bourne

"In growing older one grows less foolish and more wise." So read the fortune that came with the Chinese take-out trumpeter Red Rodney and I ordered during this Blindfold Test. "I hope so," laughed Red.

"This is the happiest time of my life," said Red, who is just turning 60. When still a teenager, Red was a trumpet prodigy on the road with the big bands, especially Woody Herman's. Soon after he settled in New York he was working with Charlie Parker. During this summer's "Classical Jazz" Festival at Lincoln Center, he joined Hank Jones, Percy Heath, Roy Haynes, and Charles McPherson, among other all-stars remembering Bird.

Though he struggled with life and the law in his middle years, his return to jazz in 1978 was triumphant. Red teamed with multi-instrumentalist Ira Sullivan for several years, and now plays with a quintet of musicians half his age, including his longtime pianist Garry Dial. This summer he brought along Australian multi-instrumentalist James Morrison for memorable gigs at the Jazz Showcase



MITCHELL SEIDEL

in Chicago and the Village Vanguard in New York.

Always one of the straightest-ahead players, Red is nonetheless musically forward-looking. He's recorded with the quintet, and also something new with synthesizers, a band he calls Red Alert. "I'm lucky to be here," said Red. "I didn't think I'd get past 40, and here I am at 60 playing jazz with these great young musicians!"

This was his first Blindfold Test. He was given no information about the recordings.

6 TRUMPET SUMMIT. *THE*

CHAMP (from *THE TRUMPET SUMMIT*, Pablo). Oscar Peterson, piano; trumpets as guessed.

Oscar Peterson. He's awesome. [Just as Dizzy Gillespie's solo began . . .] Our musical father. Dizzy is responsible for my playing, though I never tried to play like him. I don't think I could. He introduced me to Charlie Parker. All of us owe Dizzy a great deal. He's certainly "The Champ."

[As Clark Terry's solo began . . .] Clark Terry, a beautiful and unique player. He didn't play two bars and I knew who it was. That's the mark of distinction, the mark of greatness. These guys are heroes. Look what they've given us. Without a Dizzy Gillespie or a Clark Terry there wouldn't be a me, and without those that followed, me included, there wouldn't be some of the younger players. I've been lucky to be listed in their company, and only now do I feel I deserve it.

[As Freddie Hubbard's solo began . . .] This is my favorite trumpet player. Freddie can do it all. I love his sound. The trumpet is like a toy in his hands. Even the records he made years ago that were called crap—he played beautifully on that crap! Freddie Hubbard can do more than any trumpet player alive. For all of them 100 stars. These are my idols, my loved ones, my family. db

band—there's no reeds! Is that Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy? I've never heard them. Is it them? You can never judge a book by its cover. My first impression of Lester Bowie with the doctor's coat and playing those little half-valve things, I said, "Here's another fraud coming around and capturing the new young jazz critics who know nothing!" And then I heard him play and I said, "No, he's a real showman, he can really play!" I'm glad to be able to hear this. Let me apologize to Lester Bowie for what I thought before I heard him. This was great!

5 BENNY CARTER. *MORE*

THAN YOU KNOW (from *GIANTS OF JAZZ*, Time/Life). Carter, trumpet; recorded in 1939.

Is that Doc Cheatham? That style of playing, the vibrato—this has to be the 1930s. That's the way they played back then, and he did it exceptionally well. That's why I think it's Doc Cheatham. He was the leading first trumpeter. Today he's my idol. I want to live to be his age and play that great. He hasn't lost any chops—maybe he's gained some. I'm not sure it's Doc, but whoever it is I'll give him five stars.

MB: He's someone inspired by Doc. Benny Carter.

RR: Alright! Benny is unique.

JEFF BOVA

HIS MASTERY OF MIDI HAS MADE THIS SYNTHESIST ONE OF THE MOST IN-DEMAND SESSION PLAYERS TODAY.

By Bill Milkowski

It's cramped in Jeff Bova's midtown Manhattan studio. Just enough room for him, his \$60,000 rig, and maybe a visitor. This is Bova's sonic laboratory, where he concocts new sounds and pieces together sequencer parts for whatever projects he might be engaged in. And these days it seems like he's always engaged. From Cyndi Lauper's *True Colors* to Robert Palmer's *Riptide* to Yoko Ono's *Starpeace* and upcoming albums by Herbie Hancock, Bootsy Collins, Earth, Wind & Fire, Ryuichi Sakamoto . . . ad infinitum. The boy does keep busy.

Bova is a talented keyboard player, to be sure. But it's not chops alone that's been getting him all the gigs. It's his ears and his ability to deliver appropriate sounds. Ask him to program a particular sound into his synthesizer—anything, say, a *green* sound or a *fluffy* sound or a *scary* or *mean* or *prickly* sound—and he'll play trial-and-error with the knobs and switches until the producer yells out, "That's it!"

It's a valuable knack to have in these digital-MIDI days. Bova calls it a paint-by-numbers approach to making records, and it's made him one of the most highly sought-after sessionmen in Manhattan. But does Bova consider himself to be a synthesist or a keyboard player?

"To make a living, I've found myself floating in the middle there," he laughs. "I would like to make use of my musical background, but I find that I can't use all of it doing these pop sessions. So I try to keep a balance between both. I put a lot of time into both. I played classical music on trumpet all through my high school and college years. I played organ in jazz bands. Now I'm playing synths on pop and dance music sessions. I'm sort of a mutt, in a way."

Bova grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut, graduating from high school in 1971. He studied trumpet, following in his father's footsteps, but was encouraged by Dad to also study piano along with it. "I wasn't too crazy about taking classical lessons," he recalls. "I guess I was really more interested in playing in high school cover bands, doing tunes by Deep Purple, the Young Rascals, Electric Light Orchestra."

In his last year of high school, Bova began taking lessons with the late John Mehegan, a revered teacher who had developed a unique system for analyzing the styles of jazz pian-



BILL MILKOWSKI

ists. "He was really amazing," says Bova. "He could help you learn to play in the style of all the great jazz pianists—Bud Powell, Bill Evans, whomever. He had housewives playing Bill Evans' *Waltz For Debbie*. He just had a knack for grabbing a person's style, and it helped me out quite a bit."

Bova enrolled at the Berklee College of Music as a trumpet major but left after six months. He switched to the Manhattan School of the Arts and also switched his field of study to composition. He left school in the middle of his second year when he landed a record deal in 1975 with his fusion band, Flying Island. "It was a five piece instrumental band—kind of classical-jazz-rock. Very Bartok-influenced. The Chick Corea approach to jazz-rock. We did two albums for Vanguard, and that's when I began working with my first real synthesizer, an ARP 2600, which is the one Herbie Hancock was using at the time with his *Headhunters* band. Before that, I was strictly a piano, Fender Rhodes, and Hammond C3 man, but when I got that ARP thrown in front of me, I had to get it together real quick."

One interesting project around that time—his first as a synth session man—was a Vanguard album with Elvin Jones and James Moody. But soon after that jazz date, Bova found himself knee-deep into a funk bag with Change, an Atlantic Records r&b ensemble that featured vocalist Luther Vandross. He toured with Change in '80-'81, opening up for Rick James during the latter's popular *Street Songs* phase.

"I did two records with Change and it really helped me get a start in that end of the business," says Bova. "Before that, I was just sort of floundering around New York doing jingles. But after playing with Change for a while I got labeled as a funk player. I was

trying to break into the rock scene, but it was very hard. Everybody would say, 'Sure, he plays great funk, but he can't play rock & roll.' So I had difficulty with that for a while, until Dan Hartman asked me to play on his first solo album, *It Hurts To Be In Love*. That's what helped me break the black/white barrier. From then on white players started using me, because I had gotten Dan's stamp of approval. Suddenly, I was okay for rock & roll, so I started getting more session work."

One important connection he made during this flurry of session activity was with Bill Laswell, who recruited Bova for Nona Hendryx's touring band. That led to a steady gig with Herbie Hancock's *Rock-It* band. Laswell and Bova have had an ongoing relationship ever since, working together on various projects in the past couple of years.

For the latest Laswell production, Ryuichi Sakamoto's *Neo Geo*, Bova acted as a kind of arranger, coloring and enhancing music that the Japanese keyboardist had recorded in Tokyo and sent over to New York. "Basically, I didn't play on this album at all. I played with the pre-sequenced parts that Sakamoto did in Japan. Bill and Sakamoto had created a kind of sonic blueprint on the Fairlight, then Sakamoto injected his parts with the NEC computer. Then when Bill brought the tapes back to the States he directed where the sound should go, how it should get recorded—which is where I came in. All the MIDI data was there, available to play with. I just had to enhance it using my rig. It leaves open a lot of range for creativity. You have to think of it from an orchestration point of view. It's about creating colors with different tools. You have to be intuitive about it. Try and see what's gonna make it. A little more blue here, a little green here, a little icing on top—whatever someone's language is in the

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studio. And I've gotten fast enough with my rig that I can load up patches and start getting signals routed and begin shaping the sound as the producer speaks. He explains where he wants it to go, and I find a way to deliver the goods."

Bova has gotten so adept with his sound processing MIDI rig that he has become, in effect, a producer in his own right. "You end up making the record for people a lot of times," he explains. "Like the Cyndi Lauper album [*True Colors*], for instance. Me and Jimmy Bralower basically put that one together. In certain respects, you could call us producers of that session. What happened was, Cyndi was producing it herself and she had a lot of trouble. Out of 10 tunes they worked on at the Power Station they kept only two.

"We went back in and took the original tracks and sequenced them up, tweaked up the arrangements and re-cut the whole record, basically. She did the basic tracks in January and February, then in March and April we went in and cut eight tunes. We'd start the session at 7 p.m., get the tape in hand, get an idea of where the tune was going, sequence it in the studio so that by two or three in the morning we'd have a complete arrangement all set up for her—bass, keyboard parts, drums, percussion, guitar parts, and everything. Cyndi did give us arranging credits on the album, but in certain respects you could say that we produced it."

During his struggle on the Lauper project, Bova was also involved with playing synth parts on David Lee Roth's *Eat 'Em And Smile*, produced by Ted Templeman, and Billy Joel's *The Bridge*, produced by Phil Ramone. It was an exhausting period for him at the Power Station. "I camped out there for about a month," he laughs. "I was going from floor to floor, day and night. I'd do an afternoon on Cyndi's album, a night with Billy's album, then spend the next day on David Lee Roth's album."

It's Bova's mastery over technology that has put him in this coveted position. "My effects rack was born out of doing jingles, because I'd get on a session and have these problems with the engineers. Jingle engineers are just oriented toward knocking something out very quickly. And to get them to patch an effect is usually asking too much of them. They don't have the time. So I just got into patching things myself. Then if they didn't want to have an effect printed to tape I'd either take it off or talk them into leaving it, if it meant something musically. Acoustically, you want to be able to place a sound in a recording in its own special place, so that it doesn't eat up all the rest of the sound that's going on around it. A lot of times you can come up with a real big, fat synth pad, and that will eat everything up. So you have to find a way to craft a part to sit in the track

properly. And to do that, you gotta work with the sound, finding just the right delay line or reverb or whatever it takes to enhance without calling undue attention to itself."

It's a phenomenon of the digital MIDI age. Musicians are taking more responsibility for creating their own sounds rather than relying blindly on the ears of the engineer. "Ten years ago no one cared," says Bova. "The prevailing attitude was, 'Leave it to the engineer.' But now I consider it part of my job to place a sound on tape as close as possible to what it actually should be. Otherwise, you're at the mercy of the engineer."

"For every great engineer there are 10 guys who can print sound to tape at the right level and that's it. They have no vision of where to take it. Jason Cosaro, on the other hand, is an engineer [at the Power Station] who can take it from where you're coming from and create a classic sound with it. Like the horn sounds on Robert Palmer's *Addicted To Love*. That's all synth, but it was arrived at by the two of us working together to create that unique sound. Part of it is the fact that I was using breath controllers plugged to the DX7 and TX816 MIDI rack, which helped give the authentic horn effect. But part of it also had to do with a few effects laid underneath it and on top of it that had nothing whatsoever to do with a horn sound."

"And now other producers will ask me, 'Hey, can you get that sound here—the one you got on *Addicted To Love*?' And I have to explain that you don't get a sound like that by simply pushing a button. Jason and I worked for hours using a mic'ed room sound and a direct line, not to mention all the trial-and-error we did with effects. That's why it's great to work with someone like Jason. He's got that extra creativity that can take a recording to another place."

Bova's main tools are his Kurzweil 250 sampling keyboard, Yamaha DX7, a Fender Rhodes Chroma, and an Oberheim OBX. These synths are routed through his very elaborate MIDI rack, the heart of his rig. "The brain of my whole system is my sequencer rack. I use a Linn sequencer, the one out of the Linn 9000 drum machine. It's a 32-track MIDI recorder. My workhorse sequencer is the Yamaha TX816 MIDI rack. Each of the eight modules in this unit is a separate DX7 brain. Then I have a Super Jupiter MKS-80 brain, which is more like an analog synth. All the MIDI signals are routed through the JL Cooper MIDI switching box [MSB-1620], which has 16 ins and 20 outs, so you can have up to 16 master keyboards and 20 slaves being driven off it."

"Then I have a Yamaha MEP4 data processor, which is designed to turn a DX7 into a master keyboard that can transmit on different MIDI channels or actually change MIDI data. I use it to lower the velocity output on the Kurzweil when I'm using patches that were intended for the DX7,

which has a lower velocity output than the Kurzweil.

"I also have two Yamaha MV-800 submixers—one for the TX816 and the other as a master mixer with 16 inputs, eight of which are taken up by the TX816 and two by the Super Jupiter and then the other six by the effect returns, which come in from the effects rack."

Bova's effects rack includes some rather eccentric hardware. Like the Ursa Major Space Station (SST 282). "It's one of the early multi-tap digital reverbs. A lot of guys at the Power Station use this. It's a quirky, unique box for getting different sounds. I've not seen anybody use it in their rig, but they're great for getting a great trashy drum sound. It has a space-repeat function which really widens out a drum sound and enhances everything."

He's also got a Syntovox Vocoder (model 222), two Lexicon PCM 42 digital delays and a Lexicon PCM 70, a T.C. Electronics Spatial Expander Stereo Chorus/Flanger 1210 and a T.C. Electronics Dynamic Digital Delay, an Orban Stereo Equalizer (model 674A), and a Dynachord Leslie Simulator (CLS 222). Yet another oddity is his Ashley keyboard processor, which allows him to get some authentic power chord guitar sounds on his synths. "I've used it as an overdrive unit for the guitar stuff on the Herbie tour, where I had to recreate the guitar parts from the *Sound-System* album. What I did was, I used a Rhodes Chroma and enhanced it with the Ashley and then routed it into the Space Station to create the ambience of playing your guitar in a large room. And I also added some chorus."

Those raunchy guitar sounds can also be heard on Lauper's *True Colors* album. "There's a couple of spots where I use some guitar sounds there—power chords and solo parts," says Bova. "That was the first time I actually got it on tape and had it come out on a record. But I like to leave guitar playing to guitar players whenever possible."

Bova brings all his MIDI prowess to bear on his latest project, playing synths for The Distance, the powerhouse band recently put together by bassist Bernard Edwards, drummer Tony Thompson, and guitarist Eddie Martinez. He'll no doubt carry his entire MIDI rig on the road with him when that band gets ready to tour, though he admits, "One day I'd like to just go out and do a gig where I'm playing a Hammond B3 again. Just get a bunch of Leslies and a big old B3 and call it a day—no MIDI, no hook-ups. Just for the sake of getting down to my real roots. I always loved that Hammond sound—Jon Lord's playing on Deep Purple's *Hush* album, Brian Auger's playing on his *Trinity* album. And that sound is coming back. Huey Lewis & The News, Crowded House, The Golden Palominos, Paul Shaffer with the Letterman band—they all use it." db

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expanded since its beginnings 20 years ago? Which virtuosi has it produced who can stand up to the virtuosi produced by jazz such as those we have been speaking of? I don't deny that electronic instruments are fascinating, but I still want to know which fusion musicians have developed them to the degree that Louis Armstrong developed the trumpet 20 years after Buddy Bolden opened the way, to the degree that Coleman Hawkins developed the saxophone, that so many acoustic bassists and drummers developed their instruments? Where are they? But I would also like to say that I intend to investigate them myself, though I don't know if I'll come up with anything the public will ever hear. As a matter of fact, Marcus Roberts has a whole studio full of equipment.

SC: Do you have anything to say, in conclusion, to young musicians?

WM: Work on your sound. Understand that the control and the production of expressive sound is the highest aspect of music. Study the noble level of thematic development in Louis Armstrong, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk. Know that all musicians have to have good sounds, no matter what instrument they play. Louis Armstrong, Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster, Fats Navarro, Clifford Brown. Bass players check out Ray Brown, the living master of the sound of the bass. Piano players, listen to Duke Ellington, Monk, Count Basie, Tommy Flanagan, Wynton Kelly. Drummers listen to the majesty of the sound Max Roach gets, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Billy Higgins, Roy Haynes. Learn grooves, learn tempos. Study harmony through Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn, Monk, Bird, Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie, Wayne Shorter. Learn how to hear

your place in a band when you're improvising.

Don't be afraid to read books about this music. Read Albert Murray's *Stomping The Blues*, Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz*, *The Jazz Tradition* by Martin Williams, *Satchmo*, *My Life In New Orleans*, *Treat It Gentle* by Sidney Bechet, Ellington's *Music Is My Mistress*, *African Rhythm And African Sensibility*, Ralph Ellison's essays in *Shadow And Act* and *Going To The Territory*, Mark Gridley's book, even though it co-signs some bull when he starts justifying fusion, *Jazzmen*, especially the essay by Roger Pryor Dodge, where he calls into question the suspect level of jazz criticism, a problem he recognized 50 years ago and that still plagues us today, and definitely *To Be Or Not To Bop*, because Dizzy Gillespie chose not to obscure historical substance by only talking about feeling. He discusses the kinds of chords they used to invent bebop and what they were working on rhythmically, leaving no doubt how thorough musicians like him, Charlie Parker, and Monk were. They believed that the tremendous love and respect they had for this music could only be truly expressed through the mastery of their craft.

Remember this: *swing*. A few years ago I had the honor of playing with Sonny Rollins, and I saw him stand people up on their chairs by smoking through some *Rhythm* changes at the Beacon Theater in New York. I knew then that when somebody who can play that much horn unleashes the highest level of knowledge and fire and swing, that the purity of the music will touch listeners with the deep love and respect that it takes to become a master of that stature. And regardless of how many obstacles you might have, know that if you are serious, you are not alone. As Bob Hurst says, "Soon All Will Know." db

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