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For Contemporary Musicians

# downbeat

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## Kenny G

*Songbird In Flight*

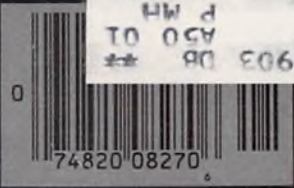
## KITARO

*New Age For Synths?*

## ART FARMER

*In The Tradition*

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MITCHELL SEIDEL

Kenny G



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Kitaro



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Don Byron

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# down beat

For Contemporary Musicians

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# KENNY G

by Stephanie Stein

## SONGBIRD IN FULL FLIGHT

**A**s the new year begins, sax player Kenny G (nee Gorelick) might wonder if he can sustain the roll he's been on through last January. His current album, *Duotones*, has been holding steady on the pop charts for over a year. And although the instrumental hit *Songbird* may have finally flown off, other tracks from this tightly structured record are making their ascent as singles. His melodic solos have been wafting through the air waves on a string of recent recordings by the best of the r&b-based pop musicians: George Benson, Dionne Warwick, Whitney Houston, Aretha Franklin, and Smokey Robinson.

Kenny G is of a new generation of players whose accessible style comes across in his songs—strong melodies with a good groove plus a touch of soul and jazz. Largely a self-taught musician, this 31-year-old native of Seattle's ethnic Central District grew up with the sounds of r&b and the birth of jazz-fusion. He credits Grover Washington, Stanley Turrentine, David Sanborn, and Mike Brecker as influences while he was younger, only exploring *their* real sources later.

The flush of huge commercial success in this past year has finally allowed him to fulfill a couple of long-term dreams—getting his own band of Seattle friends on the road, and having more freedom in the production of his own albums. In this recent conversation, Kenny G shared the experiences that over the last few years have led him to being in an ever-enviable position in the music business—"the right place at the right time." He seems refreshingly nonplussed by all the hooplah, mainly eager to keep playing music, learning, and living.

**Stephanie Stein:** *Although your current album, Duotones, is a huge success, people may still be unfamiliar with your musical background.*

**Kenny G:** I grew up in a black neighborhood in Seattle, and that neighborhood and the schools that I went to were primarily ethnic—Asian, black, and white—and we listened to r&b mainly. I was 10 when I started taking lessons, and I took a few months of lessons in high school. I can't really say I learned anything at the lessons. You learn a few technical things, but nobody can teach you how to solo. That's just whatever you have in you.

Grover Washington was basically the first sax player I ever heard play, and I thought he was the greatest. I couldn't believe the sound he had, it was so beautiful. And his style is r&b based, which is what I love. So that's what I grew up doing. I just practiced and practiced and practiced and listened to Grover Washington.

When I was in high school, I played in the school's big band, but my first *real* gig was with Barry White's Love Unlimited Orchestra. They needed a sax player who could read and solo in a soulful style, and I really was the only person in Seattle that could do both. It was very funny, because I hadn't played professionally before. I didn't know anything about the business world of playing. They said suit and tie—and everybody knows that means dark suit, dark tie. And I came on with the whole bar mitzvah look—plaid jacket, maroon pants, and maroon tie to match, of course. I was a serious dork. When I showed up, the band could not believe it—here was this little tiny kid. But I did a great job—I even got a standing ovation because I had such a long solo. After that, I was a hero at school!

**SS:** *R&b, like jazz, has a tradition of saxophone players who created real signature sounds—Willis Jackson, Junior Walker, King Curtis. Other than Grover, who has influenced you?*

**KG:** Maybe I've been lucky, technically. I've really just always been able to play sax. I've never really worked on my sound. I just play, that's it. I always felt my sound would get better if I just kept playing. I didn't have a plan, like I'm going to play like so-and-so. I practiced four hours a day for 12 or 13 years, hammering away at it. And I loved practicing, but I hadn't done that much listening. I never listened to the older players, really. I heard Mike Brecker with Dreams and I thought he was fantastic, and somebody said, "If you like him you should listen to Coltrane." But that wasn't until I was 20 years old, and I had never really listened to any real jazz until then. So I started listening to a lot of different kinds of things and made myself more aware of other players. Developing the listening-back process was what really helped me. I taped myself, and would study what I did and work on it and pretty soon I began to like what I heard.

But lessons—no. And I never went to music school. I just thought, "Why can't I just listen to this record or just keep playing?" I never wanted to go to Berklee or Juilliard—what was the point, why waste all that time? That's my opinion. I'm not saying that's right for everybody, but I know it was right for me. And I'm also a person that likes to do a lot of different things. I wanted to go bike riding and skiing. I'm not one of these people that lives and breathes music 24 hours a day.

**SS:** *Your work with Jeff Lorber was your first stint with a steady working group. How did you meet?*

**KG:** He called me out of the blue. He had heard of me from people in Portland—the Portland/Seattle area does have a very close-knit musical community. He asked me to come and audition, and at that point I didn't even really know who he was. I ended up playing with him for four years, from '79-82, and I learned so much. I think he was one of the pioneers of fusion—that blend of bebop, funk, and r&b—he had it down. I loved his style. And when you're in a band for four years, you live that style—you really don't do anything else.

I learned a lot of ideas from him, a lot of bebop ideas that I had never really listened to. They were things I could really use and

incorporate with the rest of my playing. He taught me a lot that way.

On the last album I made with Jeff, we co-wrote some of the songs. It made me nervous to *start* writing with someone that is a good writer. I'm not a keyboard player, I don't really know how to write music. I just know what I like; it's the same with my playing. When I started making my own albums, I wrote quite a bit of the material and on this latest record, *Duotones*, I wrote most of the music.

**SS:** *Did the development of your career as a soloist really result from your work with Lorber?*

**KG:** Of course—he really gave me my start. When I first joined Jeff, I was just a kid from Seattle. Four years later I was a pretty experienced musician. I felt good, I felt comfortable and more confident. The last year I was with him, people from the record companies that came to our gigs in L.A. and New York began to recognize me. Lorber's manager came to me and said, "I think it's time for you to do your own record, and Jeff can help you."

I was trying to keep from being too excited, because of course that was something that I'd always wanted. And I'd already been on some of Jeff's albums for Arista. So Jeff and I put a demo together, and Arista went for it. I was a little frustrated because the record was very much a Jeff Lorber album—it really had Jeff's sound. I'm not faulting him for that. He's a good producer who has strong ideas and he wanted to hear it his way.

But later, after listening to the record, and another year of experience, I wanted to hear my own sound, even though I wasn't quite sure what that was. I wanted to have someone else produce the next album, and Jeff could understand that, and I began to go out on my own.

I had Kashif produce my second album, *G-Force*, and it sold almost 200,000 copies! I'm an r&b guy, and Kashif is an r&b producer, and I liked working with him. He actually let Wayne Braithwaite and I do the production work. So I had this whole new experience and I loved it.

But Kashif turned out not to be the right producer for me either. He's more of a vocal producer, and he was hearing hit vocal songs and I was hearing instrumentals. The second album we did together didn't do as well. We had a lot of vocal tunes on the record and I felt like we weren't going in the right direction. I also felt that I couldn't do anything about it. But the record company, the producer, and I were all trying to figure it out together.

**SS:** *So the whole team was really trying to come up with something successful?*



HOLLY ANNE

**KG:** I don't want to sound like that's all my interest was—to sell records. But I wanted to at least sell enough records to keep going. When it came time for the next record, I wasn't even sure if Arista wanted me to do one. Because this wasn't working, trying to get a vocal hit on an instrumental record. There's no blame here—nobody had the answer.

But I wanted to do the next record in a certain way, and Arista agreed to try to work it out. So when we made *Duotones*, we still included some vocal tunes, but I wanted to make sure they fit with the whole vibe of the record. My main concern was to make an album that people could listen to from top to bottom and like it, because that's what I like about a record. And from performing so much, I knew what people liked about my style.

I wouldn't have blamed the record company if they had dropped me because it was shaky. But Arista is very loyal to people that they like. And they liked me—they didn't keep any other instrumental artist on the label except me. And they really wanted to give it one last try. I'm glad that they did, because the album has sold about two million copies. Isn't that crazy?

**SS:** Did the popularity of the album and *Songbird* as a single take you by surprise?

**KG:** Absolutely. This album was a sincere effort to try to just play and *not* be commercial, and look what happened. When I wrote *Songbird*, it wasn't as if I said to myself, "Okay, it's 1987 and it's time for another instrumental hit." I wrote the song, I played it, and I thought it was beautiful. I didn't think it was going to be a hit. I wasn't trying to do that. And nobody thought of it as a single.

Preston Glass and I equally shared the production on the record, and Narada Michael Walden was executive producer. Out of all the people that I worked with, Narada really liked my sax playing. He wasn't trying to make me sound like anybody else and he got great performances out of me.

**SS:** What do you think helps account for the popularity of your particular style these days?

**KG:** Well, the climate for instrumental music is ripe right now. And for me, it was definitely being in the right place at the right time with the right song. But nobody knew that. And I also think part of it is the whole yuppie thing—meaning people who are working really hard in this business-oriented upper demographic period of time. People are looking for ways they can relax. They want their toys—nice car, nice music—sit back, turn on whatever you want to turn on, and that's it.

## KENNY G'S EQUIPMENT

"I really hate some of the mechanics that are involved in music. I don't like putting my horns together and taking them apart, I hate getting them repaired. I feel sorry for people who are continually looking for new reeds and new mouthpieces. It doesn't make you sound any different, everybody simply has a certain sound. The size of your mouth is what it is, whatever you're feeling is what it is. I just love the fact that I can pick up my horn and play it."

"Yamaha has come out with a new wind instrument. A friend of mine named Sai Galina designed it for them, and he's the best wind-synthesizer player. So I'm interested in its possibilities, but I really don't want to fight an instrument. If it requires a computer expert to sit by your side, no thanks."

Kenny's tenor is a Selmer Mark VI, 59,000 Series, with a RIA mouthpiece #5. His alto is a Selmer Mark VI, 75,000 Series, with a Beechler plastic mouthpiece #5; soprano is a Selmer, "which is too old to be a Mark VI. It's a beautiful old horn that I really love." Attached is a Dukoff mouthpiece #8.

All his reeds are LaVoz by Frederick L. Hemke—#3 reed on tenor and alto, and #2½ on soprano.

## KENNY G SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

**as a leader**

*DUOTONES*—Arista 8427

*GRAVITY*—Arista 8282

*G-FORCE*—Arista 8192

*KENNY G*—Arista 8299

**with Jeff Lorber Fusion**

*STEP BY STEP*—Arista 8269

*WIZARD ISLAND*—Arista 8340

If people are using my music for that purpose, I think I'm providing a valuable service. I don't consider myself as "going commercial." It's just the fact that music like mine has *become* commercial.

**SS:** Your music fits most easily under the pop-jazz or fusion heading, which is vague at best. Have you had to grapple with criticism about this?

**KG:** All the time. And sometimes it is a little disappointing to do these jazz festivals. You have to get over the fact that you're not going to get a good soundcheck, and put yourself in the place of the audience. They want to hear Groups A, B, and C. But for the groups it's tough—it's so much easier to play your own show. I don't care—as long as the people out there are getting what they want out of it.

But we've gotten terrible reviews from the purist critics who don't know anything about the style of contemporary jazz we play. I live that, I'm one of the creators of it. So is Lorber—we're the young players who have created something new and different that's still called jazz. And I really think the popularity of jazz festivals these days is because they include contemporary groups like ours. The Playboy Jazz Festival never sold as many tickets as

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MITCHELL SEIDEL



MITCHELL SEIDEL

# Of Outer Space, Nature... And The Synthesizer

# KITARO

by John Diliberto

**T**he healing force of nature transmuted through lush synthesizer arrangements and uplifting melodies. Pseudo-mystical ramblings bathed in maudlin electronic drivel.

Those are the polarities of opinion that surround the music of Kitaro, a Japanese synthesist whose music emerged out of mid-'70s space music. But now Kitaro is an avatar of the New Age and his music has been embraced by that audience with its promise of fantasy and relaxation couched in music that travels the space ways.

Since 1977, Kitaro has been creating atmospheric space operas full of swirling electronic textures, sweet melodies, synthesizer orchestral arrangements, environmental effects, and a rock ambience straight out of Pink Floyd, circa *Ummagumma* and *Meddle*. But Kitaro's space music credentials go back even further than that, to his early-'70s group The Far East Family Band—Japan's answer to the Grateful Dead. The Far East Family Band intoned portentous melodies and pounding trance rhythms on albums like *Nipponjin* and *Parallel World*.

It's difficult coming to grips with Kitaro. Those who discovered his music in the '70s saw it as an alternative to the jabbering of punk and the party fascism of disco. It seemed like the logical extension of '60s psychedelia worked through early progressive-rock. It was the next step forward, but everyone else seemed to take two steps sideways and out. But as the '80s have worn on, Kitaro's music has been embraced by the New Age with all its attendant mystical trappings—and certainly, Kitaro has been a willing party to it.

Speaking with Kitaro, who made his first North American tour this fall, can be difficult. His English is rudimentary, but although a translator is present he often ignores her in trying to convey the meaning of his music. He laughs frequently, but he doesn't understand my incredulity at some of his stories. He relates a tale about seeing a ghost at the Manor Recording Studios in England. When I ask if there were any drugs around, he laughs but launches into four more stories about manor studio ghosts as if they are common knowledge. (For the record, Tom Newman, house engineer when



DAVID B. SUTTON

Kitaro was recording at the Manor, denies any ghostly visitations.)

Pinning Kitaro down is like listening to one hand clapping. Tech magazine editors are perplexed by Kitaro's electronic naivete. Even though he's been surrounded by electronics for years and employs sophisticated computer synthesizers like the Kurzweil 250, he expresses the ignorance of an idiot savant. "The synthesizer is electric, but it's a traditional instrument," he says innocently. "A long time ago they wanted a sound so they hit the wood and made a sound. I think it's the same. I need a sound so I'm making a sound."

The problem is, he *is* innocent. Kitaro has a childlike demeanor that is disarming. I looked for guile and found utter guilelessness. "It was like he was presenting his music to us thinking it was nothing," exclaims tabla player Zakir Hussain, who performs on Kitaro's new album, *The Light Of The Spirit*. "He thought it was so little and so humble and we were supposed to be the gods who would make it listenable. It was unbelievable to see a great musician like him do that."

Unbelievable is only one of the criticisms leveled at Kitaro, a musician who often appears to be *too* innocent to be true. I look at him askance when he relates a story about the proof of the healing powers of his music. "The sound has a power for humans,

for nature," he says. "I took two speakers and in front of each speaker I placed a flower. On one side came loud music, on the other side came my music. After one week, the flower in front of my music is bending towards the speaker, the other one is dead. I think it's the same thing for humans."

Nothing humble there. But there must be more to this musician, who had the reputation of a recluse, living until recently at the foot of Mount Fuji.

**K**itaro was born in Japan in February, 1953, at which time his parents named him Masanori Takahashi. He claims that he received the name Kitaro, which means "man of love and joy," as a nickname in high school. Whatever happened to Fats, Lumpy, and Nerd? While his biography would have you believe he grew up on a small country farm with devout Shintoist parents, Kitaro admits that the farm was a sideline and that everyone in Japan belongs to one Eastern religion or another. There's nothing exceptionally spiritual, mystical, or monastic about it.

As a teenager he took up acoustic guitar. "In the beginning of my music life I started the guitar, rhythm guitar, and I just learned chords out of a music book." He was listening to American and British rock & roll like the

Beatles in his teens. By the end of the '60s, he was enthralled by the British progressive-rock movement. "I was listening to a more traditional Japanese feeling," says Kitaro, "and the other side is more British rock, progressive-rock, Pink Floyd, King Crimson."

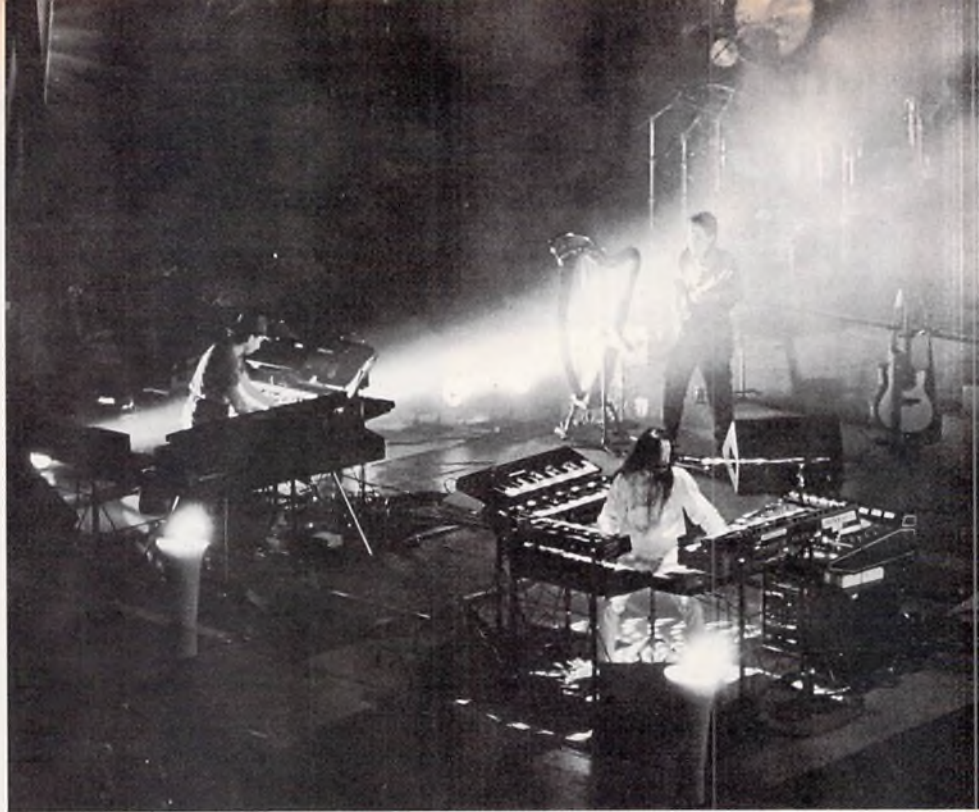
In 1970 he and a group of Japanese hippies formed The Far East Family Band, which also included Fumio Miyashita and Ikira Itoh, two other well-known Japanese "space" musicians. It was with Far East that Kitaro switched to synthesizer. He got a crash course on the instrument when German synthesizer legend Klaus Schulze produced the Far East albums *Nipponjin* and *Parallel World*. "Just watching Klaus compose and perform was a real education to me," recalls Kitaro. "More than the specifics of what he did to the instrument, it was the whole approach to the instrument. His personality had a childlike quality that led to a fresh approach to the use of synthesizer, using the instruments and other equipment in the studio in ways that were totally unconventional. For example, he would take tracks he had built up to a certain point, play them through a Leslie cabinet, mic the cabinet, and re-mix that into the overall piece."

Although laden with psychedelic imagery and titles like *Join Our Mental Phase Sound*, Kitaro believes that The Far East Family Band was more spiritually motivated and disparages the post-Far East work of his contemporaries as being more money-oriented. "I feel that the music the band pursued was more inwardly directed and came more from the soul," he says. "It was a more personal expression. When the time came for me to go solo, it wasn't a dramatic change or departure, but merely a natural progression of the expression of the deep inner self."

His spiritual journey led him to Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the self-styled sex guru and guru to the rich, who was recently deported from the U.S. In the mid-'70s, Rajneesh had an ashram in Poona, India. Kitaro went there, but now downplays his experience with Rajneesh, answering questions about him with a cagey smile. "It's not true that I'm a follower of that religion or belief. I believe it is one of many possible beliefs."

Yet many of Kitaro's early photographs depict him in the orange and red garb of Rajneesh disciples, and he often wore a pendant with the Bhagwan's picture. "Yeah, I know," laughs Kitaro. "It's true at one point I took on the trappings of this belief, but it was not necessarily a body and soul conversion. I wanted to learn music for meditations and dynamic meditation, the chanting, many things. So I had a good time at Poona. Chaitanya Hari Deuter [a German New Age composer] made a lot of meditation music for the ashram, but I didn't stay there so long, just half a year. Afterwards I walked around the country."

Kitaro emerged with a series of solo albums beginning with 1977's *Ten Kai-Astral Trip*, followed by the *From The Full Moon*



**KITARO'S CREW:** (from left) keyboardist Steve Bach, Kitaro, guitarist Jim Behringer, drummer Casey Scheuerll,

*Story, Oasis, and Silk Road*, still his best known recording. Each album unfolded exotic landscapes that owed much to the melodicism of Vangelis, but filtered through Kitaro's own Asian background with reedy melodies, waves and birds, and hand-percussion. It was an inviting texture, a Persian carpet of sound with melodies embroidered by intertwining synthesizers. Each Kitaro record promised a caravan to exotic locales.

Initially available as rare and expensive Japanese imports, Kitaro's entire catalog has been issued on the imported German Kuckuck label, and in America, on Gramavision and Geffen. Geffen in particular exacerbated a feeling of assembly line music by releasing seven recordings with generic covers. It all drew attention to the redundancy of Kitaro's music. The melodies that were once soothing and fresh became painfully familiar at least to those who had followed him for over a decade.

However, there is a hoard of new legions drawn to the pseudo-mysticism of the New Age who embrace Kitaro's music like the Holy Grail. His U.S. tour played to near capacity houses in 3-6,000 seat halls. This is an artist, remember, who has barely nudged the *Billboard* Top 200 Album Charts. And it's a surprisingly older audience comprised of post-hippies, yuppies, and the odd guru scattered in the crowd.

In concert, Kitaro sends a mixed message. At one point someone in a hooded Druid costume comes out to light fires atop two pedestals flanking Kitaro. It's as if he saw *This Is Spinal Tap*, but didn't get the

joke. He sits stage center, dressed in white, surrounded by keyboards, but he plays his melodies almost exclusively on an old Korg monophonic analog synthesizer while he gazes heavenward, his left hand dancing in the air, conjuring the muse.

"His music is sweet and simple, but the technology is *not* sweet or simple," says violinist Steven Kindler. Kindler triggers a Yamaha TX816 rack with his Zeta violin. In addition, there are 15 keyboard synthesizers and electronic drums. But behind Kitaro are three giant Japanese Wadaiko drums, ceremonial instruments that he uses in annual ritual performances at the foot of Mount Fuji, beating on them for hours.

Despite all the synthesizers, Kitaro's music is surprisingly realtime. Only a few connecting sequencer patterns are used and almost nothing is MIDI'd—a revelation in these days when groups like Tangerine Dream mount the stage, hit a key on their computers, and let them drive all of their synthesizers. "I'm using just one sequencer, but not often, only on one or two songs, *Wings* and *Sundance*. It's playing the rhythm line."

"It's a pretty un-MIDI'd tour," agrees keyboardist Steve Bach, one of two other keyboard players with Kitaro. "Everything has its own sound. Nothing in his set-up is MIDI'd. I've got a sequencer running through a Casio FZ-1 Sampler and one of those Yamaha's DMP-7s where the faders move by themselves. But each instrument has its own sound. Some of them don't even have MIDI. They're out of the museum. But they have a very distinctive sound and it's *his* sound."

While Kitaro has three Yamaha DX-7s in



DAVID B. SUTTON

violinist Steven Kindler, keyboardist Brian BecVar.

something into their system or mind. The important thing is for the child to experience it for the first time."

After his New York concert, Kitaro made a pilgrimage to see his forefathers, the venerable Pink Floyd, a band that defined the idea of concept albums. "After the Radio City Music Hall concert, I saw Pink Floyd at Madison Square Garden and they were using many tapes and sequencers," continues Kitaro. "But basically I'm thinking that the live concert means live, so we should play live. Each person has two hands and legs so we're using everything."

Kitaro extends his compositions in performance with long repetitions that hover between trance and boredom. Steve Bach confesses that "the music has less edge" than what he normally plays.

When Kitaro opens up on pieces like *Sundance*, the music can be rhythmically dynamic. Violinist Kindler and guitarist James Behringer in particular get to trade solos like the old Mahavishnu Orchestra. "Every musician has free parts," says Kitaro. "They can play their feelings."

"He's pretty much given me carte blanche as far as my playing is concerned," agrees Kindler—a recording artist in his own right who put in time with the Mahavishnu Orchestra and the Jan Hammer Group in the 1970s. He has several records out on the Global Pacific label. Despite the fact that he's a classical violinist, he's the only one on stage not reading from charts. "There's lots of what he calls obbligato, which is just ad lib to him. The other musicians don't have a great deal of that—the guitarist does the most next to me. It's a little bit difficult for people who are used to stretching out a little bit more like Casey [Scheuerll] and Steve Bach. Steve played with Stanley Clarke and his band with Simon Phillips and Icarus Johnson, so it's a little hard for them." Kitaro has mounted an all-American band for his U.S. tour because his Japanese group couldn't get visas.

Kitaro himself is fairly sedate in concert, content to repeat his simple melodies ad infinitum. One of the few spontaneous moments comes when he plays a santoor, or hammered dulcimer, through a digital delay. "When I play the santoor, that's improvised, and the Japanese drums are improvised."

Except for the percussion and drums, there are no traditional Japanese instruments on stage, at least to see, but you hear the sounds of ancient instruments being plucked through the synthesized orchestrations. They emanate from the Kurzweil 250 and Casio FZ-1 Digital Sampler. "The sampling keyboards have traditional Japanese instruments, the koto, the tsuzumi, an hour glass-shaped drum. I'm multi-sampling. I have koto, shakuhachi, tsuzumi on one keyboard."

Kitaro says he does most of his own sampling on the Casio FZ-1. "With the Japanese sounds, my friends, professional

his own set-up, he plays an ancient Korg 700S and a Roland Vocoder almost exclusively during the concert. And sitting in Steve Bach's set-up is Kitaro's original Mini-Moog, his first synthesizer. "We are using the Mini-Moog for bass sound, synthesizer bass," laughs Kitaro. "My instruments are old analog synthesizers. I'm using Yamahas and Kurzweils and digital synthesizers, but my favorite sounds are from the old Korg synthesizer. The digital sounds are clean and sound real, but I like the analog. I can make an image from these sounds that comes into my head. I can put my mind through all kinds of scenes with analog synthesizers."

That's how Kitaro realizes his music, out of "mental pictures" in his mind. Each album has a thematic story. *Ten Kai-Astral Trip* was his image of a journey to nirvana. *From The Full Moon Story* created in sound his perception of the phenomenological effects of the full moon. "I start with a mental picture—and it really is a picture, not some abstract idea," insists Kitaro. "For that picture there is a sound that goes along with it and that sound is already in my head before I lay one finger on the keyboard. From there I experiment."

Like previous Kitaro records, his new album *The Light Of The Spirit* also has a unifying concept. "The *Light Of The Spirit* is a story of the human cycle: birth, death, rebirth, death," explains Kitaro. "It's like karma."

I asked him what the mental picture was of the opening track, the symphonic sounding *Mysterious Encounter*.

"*Mysterious Encounter* is like a small child not knowing anything, but then experiencing

## KITARO'S EQUIPMENT

Despite Kitaro's vagueness and professed naivete about his instruments, he's amassed a considerable amount of technology around him. In his home studio he records into an Otari 32-track DTR900 digital tape machine mixed through a Sound Workshop 38 to 32 console with Dolby SR Noise Reduction.

From his first Mini-Moog, which he still uses on records and tours, he's run the gamut of analog and digital synthesizers. He still uses his Korg 700 and 800S synthesizers almost exclusively for his reedy melody lines. He also uses a Roland Vocoder, Roland Jupiter 8, Roland SH-3, and a Prophet 5.

His digital arsenal entails Yamaha DX-7s and DX-5s, the Yamaha Electric Grand Piano, Roland D-50, and for sampling, the Casio FZ-1 and Kurzweil 250. His sequencers include the Yamaha QX-1 and the DMP-7.

In concert he mixes his own synthesizer set-up through a Yamaha PM-1800.

He plays an electric guitar of indeterminate manufacture, and an Ovation acoustic. And then there are the Wadaiko drums—giant ceremonial Japanese instruments of which he uses up to 11 in his ritual performances at the foot of Mount Fuji.

## KITARO SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### as a leader

ASTRAL VOYAGE—Geffen 24082  
FROM THE FULL MOON STORY—Geffen 24083  
OASIS—Kuckuck 053  
SILK ROAD VOLUMES 1&2—Kuckuck 051/052  
IN PERSON DIGITAL—Kuckuck 054  
TUNHUANG—Kuckuck 058  
KI—Kuckuck 057  
SILK ROAD SUITE (LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA)—Kuckuck 065/066  
MILLENIA—Geffen 24084  
ASIA—Geffen 24087  
INDIA—Geffen 24085  
TOWARD THE WEST—Geffen 24094  
SILVER CLOUD—Geffen 24086  
TENKU—Geffen 24112-2  
THE LIGHT OF THE SPIRIT—Geffen 24163

### with The Far East Family Band

PARALLEL WORLD—Mu Land LQ 7002-M  
NIPPONJIN—Vertigo 6370 850

koto and shakuhachi and tsuzumi players, just played and I recorded them. First I record them on the [Sony] PCM, and I pick out the good part." He prefers the less expensive Casio over the Kurzweil because of its ease of programming. The Kurzweil has mostly stock sounds, but the Casio has custom Kitaro sounds. "I don't have Mac-Intosh computer and you need it with the Kurzweil. So I use the Casio FZ-1 because it's easier. It displays the waveform and everything so it's easier for looping. And I think the quality's the same, 16 bits, and the sampling time is almost 30 seconds."

With the samplers, Kitaro is better able to generate his orchestral sound. He's had a couple of his compositions performed and recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra, but these recordings—like the orchestral *Silk Road*—only seem to emphasize the bombast and sweetness of Kitaro's music. "Even before I did the London Symphony Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic, I wanted orchestra sounds," says Kitaro. "I think the next album will be more orchestral sounds. The orchestra has many members, 100. But now I'm recording alone. So I'm enjoying one person making all the orchestral sounds." db



the understated eloquence of  
**ART FARMER**



MITCHELL SEIDEL

By Jeff Levenson

**A**rt Farmer's understated mien speaks volumes. It is an elegant yet unassuming stance that communicates a quiet dignity, sometimes mistaken for shyness, which does not draw much attention to itself. His play so closely aligns with his personal style one ponders the issue of whether a jazz musician's *true* self always comes through his or her instrument.

About this Farmer says, "You can't always be sure that what a person plays reflects that person's temperament. Sometimes the music is so organized and so perfect and the individuals are just the opposite. The music is what they would like to be rather than what they really are deep inside. Some guys play like angels just down from heaven but their personalities aren't like that at all. It can be very disillusioning when you meet them."

Prompting these thoughts is Farmer's latest record, *Something To Live For*, an homage to Billy Strayhorn that finds the flugelhornist and his translucent sound perfectly attuned to the musical sensibilities of the man respectfully known as Duke Ellington's alter-ego.

Last year Steve Lacy and Mal Waldron recognized Strayhorn's genius on a few recorded gems, while Marian McPartland (like Farmer) recently devoted an entire album to him, highlighted by the inclusion of Strayhorn's defiant challenge to death, *Blood Count*. ("It's a very intense piece," acknowledges Farmer, who covered the

tune on his own album, and who cites Johnny Hodges' wrenching performance following Strayhorn's passing as a definitive reading. "You have to jump in there and get from it what you can.") In light of all this recording activity, it appears that Strayhorn is being "rediscovered," a turn of events Farmer considers more than timely.

Twenty-five years ago, while co-leading the Jazztet with tenorist Benny Golson, the flugelhornist sought a creative collaboration with Strayhorn. "He was always one of my favorite composers," he explains, recalling with a smile the countless times he played Strayhorn's classics *Take The "A" Train* and *Chelsea Bridge*. "I don't know anyone who didn't like his music. In the '60s, I wanted him to write an album for me when we were both under contract to Mercury. The contract called for the Jazztet to do two albums a year, then I would do one album under my name and Benny would do one under his name. I wanted Strayhorn to write the music for mine, but at that time he wasn't doing any work outside of Duke's band.

"You know, Duke was his mentor, but it was really like a father and son relationship. Later they became equals. Strayhorn was the kind of guy who was willing to stay in the background. He didn't need the spotlight. He was a very warm, wonderful person."

Farmer's affections for Strayhorn are obvious from the record, in large part because his full-bodied tone has expressive capabilities that allow him to say what he feels. While some players opt for a soft, pliant sound, which sometimes loses definition and falls

shapeless, Farmer can be penetrating and tenderly defiant, especially in his approach to ballads. The sound is warm and woody—embers glowing orange in a darkened room.

"I was able to get *that* sound out of a trumpet," he volunteers, "but I found I could get it without as much effort on a flugelhorn. So I could concentrate my energies in other directions—like being more careful about *what* I wanted to play, choosing the right notes instead of having to concentrate on sound. Flugel has certain limitations that are hard to overcome. It is very easy to play if you stay within a certain range. Once you extend the range, volume, and dynamics, you run into trouble. If you're not willing to put a lot of time into it, you must accept it as a second horn."

Before adopting flugel as his primary horn, Farmer was well established as a trumpeter, earning high marks in the bands of Johnny Otis, Wardell Gray, Benny Carter, and Lionel Hampton in the late '40s through the early '50s, and then Horace Silver and Gerry Mulligan in the years before forming the Jazztet.

He had come to Los Angeles seeking a career in music with his bass-playing twin, Addison. "My family did not encourage me," he allows, "although it had always been a tradition in the family to play music as a hobby. A cousin of my mother played trombone with Earl Hines. I never saw anything of interest that compared with playing music. That's what I really wanted to do, and I never thought about doing anything else other than that. But there were times when I became very disillusioned, wondering whether I would be able to make a living with music. I finally decided that this is what I want to do and the world is going to have to put up with it. If it's good it's good and if it's bad it's bad. The main thing was to play.

"I grew up in Phoenix, which was a cow town at the time. So when I got to L.A., I heard music I had never heard before. Sometimes I couldn't get into the clubs because I was too young. Luckily, I was tall, so I got in often enough. It was great. Earl Hines and Cab Calloway and Dizzy and Bird were presenting a whole new movement in music. Howard McGhee had a group out there, though Dizzy and Bird were the real source. My primary interest at the time was big bands—just to be a part of a big band even if I never took a solo. When I started to take a solo here and there, I became interested in these notes that Diz and Bird were finding. My mind was wide open for new music."

He also opened up to the teachings of fellow musicians. L.A.'s creatively fertile scene allowed him to explore not just bop's possibilities but the attendant attitudes in musical ideology that fostered his development as a player. He learned from each of his associates. "When playing with Horace," Farmer explains, "you had to stay on top of it, you couldn't lay back. Horace is very compelling—driving and forceful. It would make a traffic jam if you lay back. That's the way I felt at the time. I feel completely different now. I might go counter to him. I think there is a time to lay back and a time to push ahead. It depends on what you are feeling at the moment.

"With Mulligan," he continues, referring to the baritonist's piano-less group, "I felt that I would have to be harmonically more defined. I would have to create the harmonic form more clearly in the improvisation than I would have to with Horace, where you have the piano to rely on. If there is nobody there to justify what you are playing harmonically, then it sounds like you are out on a limb. There's nothing under you.

"Now I feel that I would be more free in that situation, without the piano. As time passes, you learn more. The more you learn, the more free you are. The first time I was on the bandstand with Mulligan, after I had worked for Horace, I felt like I didn't have any clothes on. Everything was so sparse, and I missed those fat chords behind me. Now I wouldn't miss them, because if you have those fat



MICHELL SEIDEL



MICHELL SEIDEL

**THE JAZZTET:** (from left) Mickey Tucker, Farmer, Benny Golson, Roy Drummond, Curtis Fuller, (not pictured, Kenny Washington).

chords behind you, you have to respond to them. But if you don't have them, you are free to respond to whatever you want to.

"With Lionel, I got more from the players in the band. I listened to Lionel and admired his playing, but there was still some kind of gap between us that we never crossed. He's not that much older, but he had been around a long time. The best part was there were a lot of kindred souls in that band—Gigi Gryce, Quincy Jones. And we all had the same sense of direction. We were all trying to do the same things in slightly different ways. We had the same values. I would learn by listening to them. When Clifford Brown was in the band, it was complete. *There* was an opportunity to hear a great player.

"I've since learned that being a musician is just a professional thing, a way to make a living. To be an artist and a creative person—that's the goal. You can be a musician all your life and never create anything. But to create something, you have to respond to things in

a positive way—to find the key that unlocks the door to the environment around you. You try to slip into a mood or a groove where things just flow naturally. If it doesn't happen, then you just rely purely on musical instincts and knowledge. But once you do slip into this groove, then things just come out and that's the best kind of circumstance. Whether or not you get there depends on what you know and feel at the moment and what you are responding to."

**F**armer has lived abroad since 1968. Although he returns to the States at least four or five times each year, he regards Vienna as his home. He does not underscore his expatriation in political terms, nor describe it as a gesture of defiance. "My life is very quiet there," he says. "I work in a local club any time I want to, a few times a year. I have a quintet with local guys. I've worked with them for seven or eight years, and we work in Vienna and go on short tours of Germany and Switzerland. Other than that, I might do an occasional radio production with or without the group. I spend a lot of time with my family. If one of the cats comes to town, I'll go out and hear him. Or I will go to a classical concert.

"There is a great musical audience in Vienna. It's not for any one form of music, which is great. The club I play in may have dixieland one night and avant garde another. It is called Jazzland. You don't have to play one kind of music to have an audience. Different people will come for different kinds of music. A lot of guys from the states play there. Before Dexter became a movie star he played there. Ben Webster played there, "Lockjaw" did too—all the guys who came through.

"Here you never know how an audience is going to respond. But

### ART FARMER'S EQUIPMENT


Art Farmer plays a French Besson flugelhorn and #4 mouthpiece. "You can try 10 different #4's," he says, "and each will sound different. A mouthpiece is the thing that connects the musician with the horn. It has to fit just right. You can spend your entire life looking for the perfect mouthpiece. I know guys who do. It's better to spend your time looking for the perfect notes."

### ART FARMER SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Farmer has recorded over 100 albums, as leader and sideman. Most are out-of-print. The following U.S. releases are more readily available.

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>as a leader</b>                               |  | <b>with Wardell Gray</b>                              |
| <i>SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR</i> —Contemporary 14029 | <i>MANHATTAN</i> —Soul Note 1026         | <i>MEMORIAL VOL. 1</i> —OJC 50                        |
| <i>MIRAGE</i> —Soul Note 1046                    | <i>ART FARMER SEPTET</i> —OJC 054        | <i>MEMORIAL VOL. 2</i> —OJC 51                        |
| <i>PORTRAIT OF ART FARMER</i> —OJC 166           | <i>ON THE ROAD</i> —Contemporary 7636    | <i>LIVE IN HOLLYWOOD</i> —Xanadu 146                  |
| <i>ART FARMER QUINTET</i> —OJC 241               | <i>WARM VALLEY</i> —Concord Jazz 212     | <b>with the Jazztet</b>                               |
| <i>TO DUKE WITH LOVE</i> —Inner City 6014        | <i>WORK OF ART</i> —Concord Jazz 179     | <i>BACK TO THE CITY</i> —Contemporary 14020           |
| <i>LIVE AT BOOMER'S</i> —Inner City 6024         | <i>THE SUMMER KNOWS</i> —Inner City 6004 | <i>LIVE AT SWEET BASIL VOL. 2</i> —Contemporary 14034 |
| <b>with Clifford Jordan</b>                      | <i>YOU MAKE ME SMILE</i> —Soul Note 1076 | <b>with Ernie Wilkins</b>                             |
| <b>with Donald Byrd</b>                          | <i>TWO TRUMPETS</i> —OJC 018             | <i>THE TRUMPET ALBUM</i> —Savoy 2237                  |
| <b>with Gigi Gryce</b>                           | <i>WHEN FARMER MET GRyce</i> —OJC 072    | <b>with Bill Evans</b>                                |
|  |  | <i>MODERN ART</i> —Pausa 9025                         |
|  |  | <b>with Lionel Hampton</b>                            |
|  |  | <i>EUROPEAN CONCERT 1953</i> —IAJRC 31                |
|  |  | <b>with Clifford Brown</b>                            |
|  |  | <i>MEMORIAL CONCERT</i> —OJC 017                      |
|  |  | <i>BIG BAND IN PARIS</i> —Prestige 7840               |

over there you can pretty much count on their enthusiasm. It's not that everyone loves jazz, it's just that the people who do love jazz make their presence known and felt. And that feels good." db




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## JOHN CARTER

**DANCE OF THE LOVE GHOSTS**—Gramavision 18-8704-1: *DANCE OF THE LOVE GHOSTS*; *THE SILENT DRUM*; *JOURNEY*; *THE CAPTAIN'S DILEMMA*; *MOON WALTZ*.

**Personnel:** Carter, clarinet; Terry Jenoure, violin, vocals, simulated masengo; Marty Ehrlich, bass clarinet, flute; Bobby Bradford, cornet; Benny Powell, trombone, bass trombone; Don Preston, synthesizer, electronics; Fred Hopkins, bass; Andrew Cyrille, drums; Ashanti Drummers (Kwasi Badu, master drummer, vocals; Osei Assibey William, kete, vocals; Osei-Tutu Felix, dawuro, vocals).

★★★★★

Regardless of medium, the epic cycle is the form most vulnerable to excess, as exemplified by Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and Richard Wagner's *Ring Of The Nibelung*. Presently, some of America's most gifted black artists are successfully using the epic cycle, such as playwright August Wilson and composer/clarinetist John Carter. As each installment of Carter's *Roots And Folklore: Episodes In The Development Of American Folk Music* is released, it is apparent that this five-suite cycle possesses an insight that matches its scale, and a vitality that overshadows its structure. It promises to be a durable American epic.

The third of the five suites, *Dance Of The Love Ghosts* depicts the deportation of enslaved Africans, whose initial capture brought the second suite, *Castles Of Ghana* (Gramavision 18-8603-1), to its chilling, foreboding conclusion. The spirited, sensuous people portrayed in *Dauwe* (Black Saint 0057), the cycle's first suite, have been all but vanquished. The spiritual alienation that drenches Carter's stirring text for *The Silent Drum*, sung and spoken by Kwasi Badu, Osei Tutu Felix, and Osei Assibey William, and the sexual violence addressed in his lyrics of *The Captain's Dilemma*, rendered in a fear-soaked voice by Terry Jenoure, are now the staples of their existence as they are shipped to the new world.

The compositional devices Carter employs to signify the Africans' transformation from free people to slaves are rich and varied. Riff-like components of the title piece slip in and out like dimming memories, prodding the terse rhythmic fabric underpinning the exhortative solos by Carter and Bobby Bradford, who intriguingly incorporates bugle-call materials. *The Silent Drum* pivots on a subtle cross-fade from the otherworldly mixture of indigenous, Western, and electronic instruments draping the text, to a more jazz-oriented pulse, asserted by Fred Hopkins, and story-filled solos by Marty Ehrlich, Jenoure, Carter, and Andrew

Cyrille. Carter's masterful, serpentine counterpoint on *Moon Waltz* outlines a soundscape full of shadows and reflections that concludes the suite with suspense.

The sterling octet Carter led on *Castles Of Ghana* has been kept intact, with the notable addition of Don Preston, who is consistently engaging, and, on *Moon Waltz*, stunning. His is a considerable feat, as this marks the first occasion Carter has recorded with any keyboard instrument.

*Moon Waltz*, according to Carter's notes, ushers in "(t)he birth of the blues." Undoubtedly, Carter's last two suites will see the blues come of age. —bill shoemaker



## WYNTON MARSALIS

**MARSALIS STANDARD TIME, VOL. 1**—Columbia 40461: *CARAVAN*; *APRIL IN PARIS*; *CHEROKEE*; *GOODBYE*; *NEW ORLEANS*; *SOON ALL WILL KNOW*; *FOGGY DAY*; *THE SONG IS YOU*; *IN THE AFTERGLOW*; *AUTUMN LEAVES*; *CHEROKEE*.

**Personnel:** Marsalis, trumpet; Marcus Roberts, piano; Robert Hurst, bass; Jeff Watts, drums.

★★★★

*The Song Is You* belongs to Bob Hurst's bass, which gathers a drive that dwarfs even solos by Marcus Roberts, Jeff Watts, and Marsalis himself. The opening of *Cherokee* flows along in a loping swing of cross-rhythms shuffled with careful and subtle mastery by drummer Jeff Watts. Marsalis and pianist Roberts seem to grow out of his easy-going drawl. *Memories Of You* belongs to Roberts. Okay, it's a piano solo, and a lovely one.

Mostly, though, *Standard Time* is an ensemble album of well-matched peers. Everyone has his moments in this collection of basic popular classics known to all literate jazz musicians.

Marsalis' penchant for working within established material (from Kern to Coltrane) has been described as "nostalgia." But nothing on this album supports any such notions. Nostalgia is not just a matter of repertoire. It's a spirit and attitude. It's inherent in any artist who takes a those-were-the-days position toward repertoire. And that's just not here. The music is tough, disciplined, and fiercely aspiring.

Wynton particularly seems to have made himself a master of jazz's thousands of improvisatory clichés. Not to play them, though, only to recognize them. And having mastered them, he has become a virtuoso at avoiding them. In so doing, of course, he invents his own clichés—as Eldridge, Gillespie, Edison, and others have done before him. But in his devil-

ishly nimble side-stepping of the expected, he seems shy even of his own emerging vocabulary. Perhaps this is the object of his ultimate aspiration—to transcend all trademarks, his own included, and address every improvisation with absolute freshness.

On the other hand, one must note that not every track on *Standard Time* is up to artistic snuff. The accelerating tempo bit on *Autumn Leaves* is nothing more than an arranging gimmick. Marsalis' brief solo is stiff and staccato as well as at such a rapid tempo. And the closing *Cherokee* is also just a tad too fast to be much more than a display of chops. At one point, he hammers away at one note repeatedly, recalling the way Louis Armstrong used to vamp his way through tempos beyond his reach. But these are minor blemishes on an otherwise stimulating LP.

Of the more basic elements, I would question—with some hesitation—only one thing. Namely, Marsalis' sound. It is, after all, flawless and presumably a given. Nevertheless, its color spectrum is somewhat narrow, what with its polite vibrato. I mention this only because the tradition implicit in the repertoire tends to invite such comparisons. Yet the sheer intelligence and brilliance of most of his playing is so uplifting on its own terms, the trade is a fair one and makes for a wonderful album.

—john mcdonough



## PETER ERSKINE

**TRANSITION**—Passport 88032: *OSAKA CASTLE*; *THE RABBIT IN THE MOON*; *CORAZON*; *LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS*; *TRANSITION*; *SMART SHOPPERS*; *MUSIC PLAYS*; *ORSON WELLES*; *MY FOOLISH HEART*.

**Personnel:** Erskine, drums; John Abercrombie, guitars, guitar-synthesizer; Marc Johnson, acoustic bass; Joe Lovano, tenor, soprano saxophone; Bob Mintzer, tenor saxophone; Kenny Werner, acoustic piano, synthesizers; Don Gralnick, synthesizers (cuts 3, 6); Peter Gordon, french horn (3).

★★★★

Erskine has been showing promise of joining the ranks of great musical drummers, with credits from Kenton to Weather Report, tasty work on a first solo record (Contemporary 14010) in 1982 and recently with Steps Ahead and John Abercrombie's trio. The guy enhances anything he plays on.

Put on headphones, or crank your system to hear the introduction to *Osaka Castle*. The drummer is subtle with his cymbals, but starts kicking halfway through—sounds like acoustic

snare, electronic toms, electronic kick, and one wild cymbal-like effect. The cascading organ and synth lines of *Castle* bear more than a faint resemblance to Weather Report. Abercrombie's guitar-synth acts almost as a soprano sax. What is nicest about the tune is what *isn't* played on it—the spaces—and what Erskine does with those spaces when he takes charge and starts peppering things up, injecting his own rhythmic statements to challenge the others.

Erskine starts *Lions And Tigers And Bears* with a ringing drum flourish, before a sequenced synthesizer line clicks in and gives the drummer a sparring partner for a couple minutes. Man vs Machine, and Man wins, of course. It heats up nicely, like a David Sancious keyboard/drums duet. All acoustic drums on this one, as on the more serious, traditional bebop tune *Transition*. Deep, hollow

piano chords ring low, an arranged horn line chatters in the background, and Erskine smacks his toms and cymbals like Elvin.

John Abercrombie is triggering two sounds here with his guitar-synth—mimicking a trombone and harmonica. Other times when you hear tasty comping behind a solo and think it's keyboard and a few trumpets, it's Abercrombie. On *Smart Shoppers* he sounds like a cello chasing a snake charmer, and takes his best solo of the record—a gem. The only problem with Abercrombie on synth is that the artist's personality, his special stamp, doesn't come through as much. On a guitar he could be playing the same notes as Pat Metheny and it would sound different because of their different styles. Bob Mintzer's tenor solo on *Shoppers*, spurred on by the flamboyant Erskine, is very hot. This tune is a rhythm section's challenge, and these guys have a great time with it,

Erskine's slightly open hi-hat lending anticipation, his press rolls cueing shouts around the band.

*Music Plays* follows a very interesting, undefined course. Erskine's sense of implied time is not Jack DeJohnette's, but he has some great ideas in the cymbal vein, in his snare work, and with off-beat tom blasts. Joe Lovano doesn't seem bothered at all by where time is running—he keeps telling his story with articulation and passion, almost haunting at the end. Things break down, only to rebuild and march like a dirge toward the lovely conclusion.

The horn men are excellent, and the writing and arranging is good, but *anyone* who plays in a rhythm section has got to especially love this record. Erskine, Abercrombie, and Johnson have been working together as a trio and certainly know each other inside and out.

## CONTINENTAL DRIFT AND POP

By Peter Kostakis

**A**frican currents run deep through musics of the Americas, from blues and zydeco to spirituals and samba. For a long time in this century, influences have flowed in the other direction too, as American forms such as jazz, r&b, rock, reggae, and soul have helped shape the new popular musics of Africa. John Storm Roberts' book, *Black Music Of Two Worlds* (William Morrow & Company), charts just how the musical waters came to turn back on themselves and splash on colonial and post-colonial African shores.

Four recent album issues randomly connected below provide insufficient basis for sweeping assertions about the many splendors and exploding contemporary African pop. Not represented, for instance, are Islamic music or Zairean stylings where, Roberts asserts, Cuban rumba influences matured into a pan-African cultural force. These releases from Nigeria, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, while limited geographically, do add to the story developments as surprisingly familiar as they are new. These discs will refresh jaded ears. They will also raise questions.

*Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense* (Mercury 833 525-1 Q-1) is no exception to the politically alive output of Nigerian superstar **Fela Anikulapo Kuti**. Sung in pidgin English to reach the African majority, Fela's lyrics observe and criticize sometimes very specific iniquities of government corruption and inefficiency. His self-styled Afro-beat—built on the communalism of the 30-plus member Egypt 80 orchestra—dances epics of funky grandeur to nonstop athletic grooves. Call-and-response vocals and riff arrangements ride an all-pervasive foundation of hypnotic,

James Brown-on-a-tape-loop ostinati—including dicey guitar rhythms and "laying out" at strategic moments. *Teacher's* cranium-crushing "head," mass-powered by better than a dozen horns, heralds jazzy modal solos from organ and saxophones. Just shy of one-hour playtime, this set's pair of songs—each performed in two versions—very nearly induces levitation.

From South Africa comes the "mbaqanga jive" or "township jive" that Paul Simon popularized for Western ears on *Graceland*. One of Simon's acknowledged sources, the **Boyoyo Boys** play, on *Back In Town* (Rouder 5026), the short, repetitive, bottom-heavy, melodic/rhythmic patterns associated with this style. (Mbaqanga are heavy, doughy cakes presumably as buoyant and puffy as the bass that dominates these songs.) The Boyoyos use no singers (humorous snippets of dialog lead off several tracks). But their saxophonist compensates with a vocal "cry" heard to best advantage on the Ornette-like logically spiralling riffs of *Pulukwani Centre*. The disc lacks the raucous extremes and instrumental colors—accordions, fuzztone bass, and raw vocals—of the topnotch South African anthologies (especially the now hard to find *Soweto Compilation* on Rough Trade 37). But its foursquare groove overpowers, life-affirming in ever-leaping spurts and distinctive in its way as The Meters or Booker T this side of the Atlantic 20 years ago.

The "Zimbabwe Hits" anthology, *Take Cover* (Shanachie 43045), reveals a somewhat musically kindred neighbor to the northeast. Mbaqanga and kwela, street-born songs of the pennywhistle, derive from just across the border. Mainstream Afro-pop style as well as the traditional sound of balafon and thumb piano also are represented among the nine groups. Most startling to me are the Family Singers, with c&w-ish native vocals offset by ringing Sun Session guitars! One cut even seems to merge the interplaying plectrism of Zairean soukous or Nigerian juju with South African mbaqanga. Lyrical subjects range from

memories of the revolutionary war to praises of Jesus. Fresh surprises not duplicated elsewhere run rampant in this diverse collection.

The double-set *Sounds Of Soweto* (Capitol 46698), an anthology of 10 groups singing predominantly in English, has its own surprise: a "chic" post-mbaqanga South Africa in which the selections combine imported funk, latter-day r&b, reggae, and in one case a George Benson-inspired guitar spot, with local mbaqanga, kwela, and the occasional Zulu chant. Some of the electro-pop connects: Johnny Clegg and Savuka's Zulu rock fusion and Rex Rabanye's hymnal *O Nketsana*—a series of warm embellishments on a churchy melody by craftily voiced synths and native percussion. Yet, drum machines and related synthetic sounds cause most of these popular hybrids (the African pop forms mentioned so far all are hybrids in one way or another) to be less identifiably ethnic than my comfort allows. Gone are the manic three-minute miniatures of mbaqanga. Here, the longer cuts take aim at new dance markets; the "Hey, let's party" vocals are pure showbiz; smooth synth lines supplant pesky scratching guitars; and a cooler bass booms more meekly than mbaqanga bass, which seemingly fills and animates everything surrounding it.

Electronics per se are not to blame, but the way they are used is. Nigeria's King Sunny Ade, the pioneer who modernized juju into techro-pop tailored for mass consumption, took pains to humanize his electronics through the addition of tribalized talking drums. *Sounds Of Soweto's* processed drumbeats and stilted Lionel Ritchie impressions lack appeal in comparison. Go for the previously mentioned Rough Trade compilation or the excellent *The Indestructible Beat Of Soweto* (Shanachie 43033) for a hearty welcome to the incredible "indigenous" sounds of South Africa: like Fela, the Boyoyo Boys, and the Zimbabwe artists, accepting of currents from the *other* continent, but not swamped by them in the way that Capitol's collection would fool you into believing. **db**

Scofield, Swallow, and Nussbaum have also achieved this type of interaction lately, but it's rare indeed. *Transition* says a lot for Erskine's musicality. —robin tolleson



## LAST EXIT

**LAST EXIT**—Enemy 88561-8176-1: *Discharge; Backwater; Catch As Catch Can; Red Light; Enemy Within; Crackin'; Pig Freedom; Voice Of A Skin Hanger; Zulu Butter.*

**Personnel:** Sonny Sharrock, guitar; Peter Brötzmann, tenor saxophone; Bill Laswell, six-string bass; Ronald Shannon Jackson, drums, voice.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**THE NOISE OF TROUBLE/LIVE IN TOKYO**—Enemy 88561-8178-1: *Straw Dogs; You Got Me Rockin'; Take Cover; Ma Rainey; Crack Butter; Pig Cheese; Panzer Be-Bop; Base Metal; Blind Willie; Needles-Balls; Civil War Test; Help Me Mo, I'm Blind.*

**Personnel:** Sonny Sharrock, guitar; Peter Brötzmann, tenor, baritone saxophone, tarogato; Bill Laswell, six-string bass; Ronald Shannon Jackson, drums, vocals; Akira Sakata, alto saxophone, clarinet; Herbie Hancock, piano (cut 12).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## JEAN-PAUL BOURELLE

**JUNGLE COWBOY**—JMT 870 009: *Love Line; Tryin' To Get Over; Drifter; Hope You Find Your Way; Jungle Cowboy; No Time To Share; Can't Get Enough; Parade; Mother Earth; Groove With Me.*

**Personnel:** Bourelly, guitar, vocals; Freddie Cash, bass, vocals; Kevin "K-Dog" Johnson, drums, vocals; Julius Hemphill, alto saxophone; Greg Carmouche, percussion, vocals; Kelvyn Bell, guitar, vocals; Carl Bourelly, synthesizer, vocals; Alyson Williams, vocals (4); Andrew Cyrille, drums (9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

All too infrequently a new release comes along that is a great piece of music, standing apart from the crowd. And then there are albums, such as these two by Last Exit, that are more than great music—they are pivotal recordings which toll the bell on this decade and ring in the next.

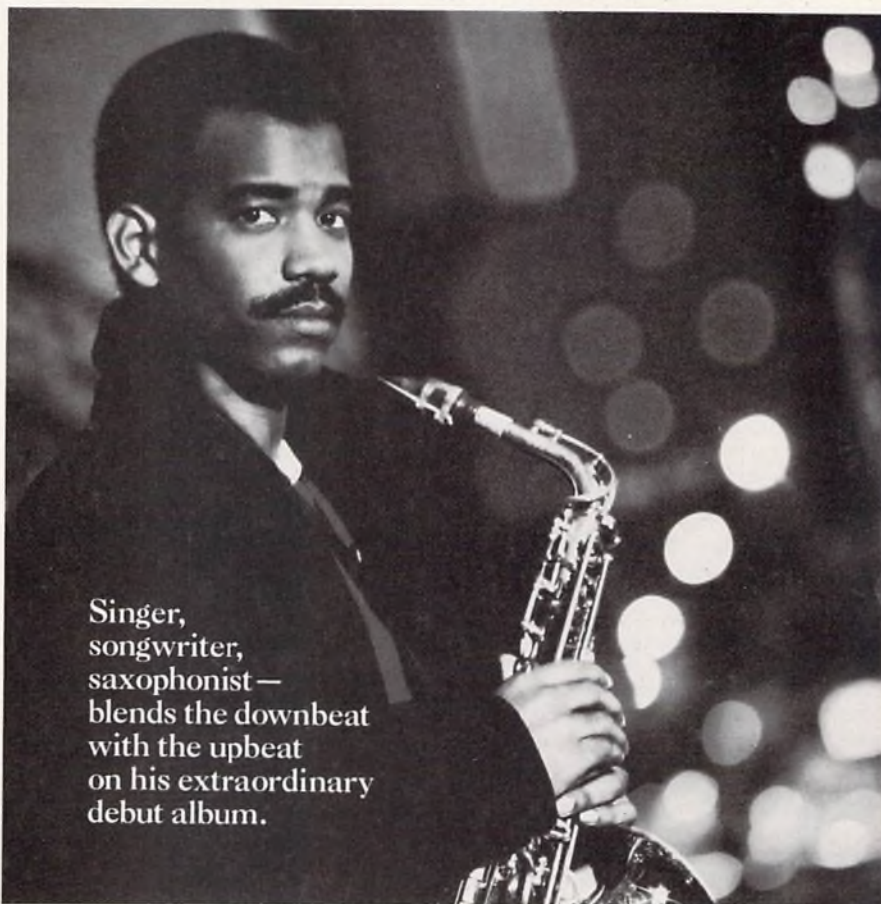
By dismissing the pan-culturalism of the '80s, Last Exit has it their way, merging a double vision of the free vistas of avant garde jazz, with heavy-metal's lascivious gaze into a singularly unique form simultaneously crude and complex. Among their resources are cer-

tain conventional ways of dramatizing thematic content by means of formal juxtapositions. For example, on the mini-suite on side one of the *Noise Of Trouble* LP (recorded in Tokyo), the ensemble segues an intense, furiously paced original, *Straw Dogs*, into Jimmy Reed's *You Got Me Rockin'*. The original compositions throw invention into reverse by quoting their doubles. *Take Cover* is *Straw Dogs'* mirror. The left becomes right—but here, there is none of the post-modernist distance of stylized referents where quotations are merely recreated. Rather, this doppelganger tactic serves to

reinforce an intent that stresses the modernist credo of angst as meaning. This is not a new point, at least as regards aesthetics, but the reintroduction of this type of strategy emphasizes their means of entry to the avant garde tradition.

With both records—and particularly the Paris studio date—Last Exit holds two sets of trump cards. On the one hand a tumescent sonic envelope of blatantly sensuous effects (Sharrock's mumbling robo-guitarisms; Laswell's ghoulish modal bass lines), on the other, an unfurling of a grand moral attitude: the

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resurrection of the avant garde, shielded by a mask of sneering nihilistic titles. Every aspect of the music throws into high relief this congruent duality, where the ultimate goal is not so much the distinction between hero and villain but the blurred shamanisms of the magician and charlatan.

Last Exit is Sonny Sharrock's return to recording after a hiatus of 15 years. Here he fulfills all the promise he showed but never quite delivered on his earlier outings with Pharoah Sanders, Don Cherry, and his own efforts as a leader on the now defunct Vortex label. In the company of this band he turns in his most assured and direct performance on record.

Peter Brötzmann, the German saxophonist, probably has more name recognition in the U.S. than an audience familiar with his music.

Until now he has been an infrequent visitor to these shores. What listeners will discover is a mature major talent by anyone's standards. His playing springs full force out of the enigmatic legacy of Albert Ayler, adding an edgy presence to the inner dynamics of the band.

Laswell and Shannon Jackson are having their best year yet. On James Blood Ulmer's recent *America: Do You Remember The Love* (Blue Note 85136), they are a sensitive and supportive backdrop to the guitarist's musings. However great their contributions, though, they nevertheless functioned as a straight rhythm team. With this crew, the roles are less distinct, all hands are upon the oars—and for that, this is the greater effort.

Were it not for the Last Exit albums and Ulmer's latest record, Jean-Paul Bourelly's debut may have had more impact. Bourelly has

been garnering a lot of press lately with his cohorts Vernon Reid and Kelvyn Bell in the Black Rock aggregate out of New York City. *Jungle Cowboy* is a slice of street life in the here-and-now—grunge rock dredging up a narrow perspective with a mighty tip of the hat in Jimi Hendrix's direction. Of particular disinterest are Bourelly's misogynist lyrics. Great rock often embodies a distrust of the opposite sex, and Mr. Bourelly never rises above his myopic exhortations. The playing is wonderfully musical though; there's no question of good chops or solid groove, but what's here is pretty typical of the bar bands found along 2nd Avenue in New York's Lower East Side.

Summarily, these three albums define contemporary music. One band zeros in on what it is; the other has a power and vision that telescopes over the horizon. —*James Brinsfield*

## BIG BAND BASH

By Owen Cordle

**W**hile the latest batch of big band records signals no new trends, it does show a growing dichotomy between concert bands and bands from the dance band tradition. Musical complexity versus swing is the issue at heart.

Indeed, reflecting on *Reflections In Blue* (Black Saint 0101), **Sun Ra** has said, "I want people to know that I can play the blues, that I can swing." Consequently, this is a more accessible record than some of his spaced-out efforts. Certain charts (*Ra's State Street Chicago* and the standards *Yesterdays*, *Say It Isn't So*, and *I Dream Too Much*) reflect Fletcher Henderson. *Ra's* jostling piano echoes Waller, Basie, and Erroll Garner. But there's enough outside pull to keep you guessing whether he'll go straight or divert into an avant garde orbit. The underrated John Gilmore blows Hawk-like yet post-Coltrane solos to further boost this set. Recommended despite an occasional school band sound from the ensemble.

Sammy Nestico's arrangements spell B-a-s-i-e (and Basie spells s-w-i-n-g) to a generation or two of high school and college bands. Nestico is the chief composer and arranger for *Fancy Pants* (Pablo 2310-920). **Count Basie's** last studio album. Recorded in '83, it's a typical latter-day set: nice but nothing to get sentimental over. The band sounds a little tired on side one, livelier on two. The Boss' piano registers its matchless plink power and placement throughout with no diminution in timing or wit even though the end was near.

The late Pepper Adams was still in strong, blustery form when he recorded *Suite Mingus* (Justin Time 15) in March '86 with Montreal trumpeter and flugelhornist **Denny Christianson's** big band. None of the locals can approach the baritone saxophonist as a soloist, but the ensemble

cooks with warm across-instrumental-lines voicings, a sterling lead trumpeter (Roger Walls), sleek saxophones, and shades of Thad Jones-meets-Gil Evans in the writing of Alf Clausen, Kim Richmond, and Curt Berg. The rhythm feels good throughout, too.

Unfortunately, another Canadian big band, led by Winnipeg keyboardist **Ron Paley**, plays jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none on *Rocks And Swings* (Foresight 2). The band attempts mainstream jazz, Swing Era vocals, latin-jazz, New Age, and synthesizer-enhanced jazz-rock. The electronic sound neutralizes the horns at times, making the ensemble blend one dimensional. The writing, mostly originals by Paley, is ... pale.

In the mother country, pianist **Stan Tracey's** orchestra, heard on *Genesis* (Steam 114), recalls the late Kenny Clarke/Francy Boland Big Band. Tracey guides the band with Ellington-like thumps and Monk-like dissonances. The horns dig into the ensemble passages with the bite and swagger of the Duke's men at their hungriest. The tunes, by Tracey, form a suite. This is no ephemeral harmony floating on blue mists; it's the broad stroke of big band color and rhythms. Most impressive.

Ditto **Terry Gibbs' Dream Band** on *The Sundown Sessions, Volume Two* (Contemporary 7652), recorded in 1959. Charts by Bill Holman, Al Cohn, Manny Albam, Lennie Niehaus, Med Flory, and Marty Paich; solos by Gibbs, Conte Candoli, and Bill Perkins (among others equally hip); strategic vibes accents by Gibbs; smooth drums by Mel Lewis; a reeds-versus-brass sound startlingly fresh—it all adds up to a dream, one great contemporary record.

Candoli and Perkins appear 27 years later on *The Tonight Show Band, Vol. II* (Amherst 3312), led by **Doc Severinsen**. This is a band with audacious chops (Catch Ernie Watts' tenor solo on *Jumpin' At The Woodside*—so brazen and dazzling it's laughable.) Severinsen's tone—the quintessential lead trumpet sound—waxes both romantic and cutting on these revisions of

classic Swing Era arrangements. This may be the best-equipped working big band in the world, starting with Severinsen at the top and reaching through the horns to drummer Ed Shaughnessy, who is also superlative here.

Shaughnessy comes from the same take-charge school of percussion as **Louie Bellson**, whose *Louie Bellson And His Jazz Orchestra* (Musicmasters 20120A) showcases the leader in six big band charts and four combo performances. The New York big band and sextet and this most musical of drummers swing excitingly throughout. The band numbers are time-honored tunes (*It Don't Mean A Thing, Flyin' Home*, *Fascinating Rhythm*, et. al.) scored in time-honored fashion (section-vs.-section voicings, hot riffs and solos, climactic drum breaks, and powerful accents). The combo performances are easier-going. Tenor saxophonist Ted Nash impresses in both with a Texas-sized, updated swing-bop approach.

**Erroll Parker**, best known as a pianist with bi-tonal inclinations, plays a different brand of drums and leads a rugged band on *Erroll Parker Tentet Live At Wollman Auditorium* (Sahara 1014). This is the wild card in this batch of records—a semi-avant garde trip with corkscrew unison passages, recurrent cluster-chords, polyphonic drums, simultaneous soloists, and an African approach to rhythm. At times, Parker's colorfully independent drum line recalls a free-jazz Chico Hamilton. Steve Coleman on alto and Wallace Roney on trumpet are the best soloists. The tunes include *Three Blind Mice*, *Chega De Saudade*, and four originals by Parker. An odd and interesting record, but take it in small doses to avoid an overload of density.

**The Either/Orchestra**, an 11-piece band from Boston, also produces some curious effects on *Dial E* (Accurate 2222). The premise behind this band is humor: Spike Jones meets Monk at the circus. The soloists show more spirit than polish—several sound immature—but the lumpy, drunken ensemble passages shed new light on Monk (*Brilliant Corners*), Rollins

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## JANE IRA BLOOM

**MODERN DRAMA**—Columbia 40755: *OVERSTARS*; *CAGNEY*; *MORE THAN SINATRA*; *NFL*; *MODERN DRAMA*; *STRANGE AND COMPLETELY*; *VARO*; *THE RACE (FOR SHIRLEY MULDOWNEY)*; *RAPTURE OF THE FLAT*.  
**Personnel:** Bloom, soprano saxophone, electronics, alto saxophone; Fred Hersch, piano, organ; Ratzon Harris, bass, electric bass; Tom Rainey, drums; David Friedman, vibes, marimba, percussion (cuts 1, 2, 4); Sidro Bobadilla, percussion (1, 7); Andy Seligson, tuba (4).

★ ★ ★ ½

Ever maturing as a stylist, Jane Ira Bloom sports one of the most attractive soprano sounds this side of Mr. Lacy. So why does she bother with the motion-activated, timbre-distorting "gizmo" her old bassist Kent McLagan invented? Attaching electronic hardware to Bloom's soprano is like putting a mustache on the Mona Lisa.

Lest skeptics accuse CBS, we'd better note that Bloom's been plugging in for years. And

her unadorned horn does sing sweetly as ever on the tender slow ballads *More Than Sinatra* and *Strange And Completely*. Both display her signature strokes to best advantage: cleanly scant vibrato, a liquid sonority, and lines that unfold at a sensibly leisurely pace.

Even when the gizmo summons harmonizer and delay effects (the jungle shimmer *Overstars*), Bloom clears through the undergrowth to play a lean, twisting solo in her eloquent, personal style. Her lines never fail to dance—witness her tribute to hooper Jimmy Cagney, where she sparingly dabs effects onto her natural soprano. (She regularly works with dancers—and the gizmo itself lets Bloom link movement and sound.) Her style sings through the treatments—but on record the effects add little more than a mod veneer. However light her touch and admirable her taste, electronics rarely intensify her lyricism and expressive powers.

Even so, Bloom gets to have it both ways. Where the gizmo distracts, clever writing saves her. The contrast between long soprano notes and crashing drums produces *Modern Drama*: mock-echoplex repetitions make *Overstars* sound more processed than it actually is. Where the writing is foolish, her saxophones save her—her fat, rude shrieks disrupt boilerplate doo-wop and boogie-woogie back-grounds on *Rapture*. Only *NFL*'s zany marching band bit really falls flat—Shepp did it better 20 years ago—but it's brief.

A final objection: circuitry creates a distracting gap between the leader and her (mostly longtime) sidfolk. She again employs pianist

Fred Hersch—also playing token organ and scrambled/sampled piano—but I miss the intimate sound of resonating brass and wood they get in their duo work. The warming fire of Bloom's soprano deserves the setting of a cozy hearth, not some trendy plastic fireplace.  
 —kevin whitehead



## SPYRO GYRA

**STORIES WITHOUT WORDS**—MCA 42046: *CAYO HUESO*; *SERPENTINE SHELLEY*; *DEL CORAZON*; *EARLY LIGHT*; *NU SUNGO*; *CHRYSALIS*; *JOY RIDE*; *PYRAMID*.

**Personnel:** Jay Beckenstein, saxophones; Dave Samuels, vibes, marimba; Tom Schuman, keyboards; Julio Fernandez, guitars; Roberto Vally, bass; Manolo Badrena, percussion; Richie Morales, drums.

★ ★ ½

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

(Doxy), and Rahsaan Roland Kirk (*Lady's Blues*) as well as tunes by tenor saxophonist and leader Russ Gershon. Funny, but not quite up to the circus.

The street scene yields to academia in the style of another Boston band, **Orange Then Blue**. Its *Music For Jazz Orchestra* (GM Recordings 3006D), although not quite Third Stream, is strictly concert fare. The fragile woodwind voices, dynamic massed brass, tricky polyphonic lines, and shifting meters all point to intellectual concerns, but this ultra-modern writing (by keyboard man Bruce Barth, reedmen Adam Kolker and Matt Darriau, drummer George Schuller, and trumpeter Roy Okutani) is imaginative even if swinging takes a back seat. Good ensemble playing, respectable solos (and more from guest clarinetist John LaPorta), and studious thematic development dominate.

Flugelhornist Ed Sarath's **Iowa City Jazz Orchestra** veers even closer to the Third Stream on *Fifth Fall* (ICI 001)—shades of Copland and Stravinsky as well as the late Messrs. Gary McFarland, Kenton, and Monk. The leader's compositions and arrangements offer written and improvised counterpoint, moods ranging from placidness to rip-roaring cacophony, and variations on top of variations. There's lots of complexity but little blues feeling.

In Finland, swing's the thing, according to **Espoo Big Band Plays Erik Lindstrom** (Rytmi-Musiikki 204). The band, led by Martti Lappalainen, usually plays more modern jazz, but these tunes by Lindstrom hark back to Basie, Goodman, early Kenton, and pre-rock Quincy Jones. The soloists, including guests Markku Johansson (trumpet and flugelhorn) and Antti Sarpila (clarinet), stay in perfect character for these MOR Swing Era charts. A little romance, some hot stuff, nice rhythm section; the universal language remains viable.

Certain American popular songs remain viable, too, and the **Bad Little Big Band** has chosen 10 of them (plus two originals by pianist/leader Richard Iacona) for *A Long Way To Go* (Morningside 520781). Seven of the 12 performances include vocals by Madeline Kole. The 12-piece band has a ring of maturity, from soloists (especially alto saxophonist Ken Peplowski on *Blue Skies* and flugelhornist Glenn Drewes on several others) to Iacona's arrangements (which suggest Mulligan-meets-Kenton). Overall, fairly tame stuff but well played and sung.

There's nothing constricting about trumpeter **Dave Stahl's Anaconda** (Abee Cake 1001), which is part Maynard Ferguson, part Woody Herman (the swinging jazz-rock Herd of the early '70s). The high notes and brassy charts (arranged by Alan Downey and Dick

Lowell, most prominently) tell you this is a trumpet player's band, and the rock rhythms tell you the emphasis is on today. Clean, punching ensemble work dominates, with hip solos strategically placed. Good record.

A lot of the concert bands in this collection owe a debt to Stan Kenton, but none more than **Mark Masters' Jazz Composers Orchestra**. But its *Silver Threads Among The Blues* (Sea Breeze 2033) isn't the neophonic Kenton, it's the jazziest Kenton. The charts are by former Kentonites Lennie Niehaus, Don Piestrup, Ken Hanna, and Bill Russo. Trumpeter Les Lovitt and ex-Kenton trombonist Dick Shearer stand out as soloists, but the moody ensemble work is the compelling part of this album.

Finally, the **Bob Florence Limited Edition's Trash Can City** (Trend 545): power, dynamics, counterpoint, stomp, abstraction, bebop, subtle DX7 colors, memories of Nick Ceroli (the band's late drummer), the voice as an instrument (on *Jewels*, sung by Julie Andrews), and seven tunes by Florence. *The Babbling Brook*, a tribute to Bob Brookmeyer (with the DX7 imitating his valve trombone), and *Jewels* show the unusual colors of this band. Others, such as the title cut, show its ability with more basic matters. The tunes aren't quite as strong as on *Magic Time* (Trend 536), an earlier Florence album, but this is still one of the top records in this batch. db



Beckenstein's baby seems to be in a rut. If you like Spyro Gyra, maybe you don't demand much change from them. Rest assured they are traveling the same course that has won a legion of fans for their commercial, instrumental, cross-cultural jazz.

Hearing Beckenstein's *Cayo Hueso*, it's easy to understand why the saxman likes playing with Samuels. Dave is busy on the tune providing a rumbling but static melodic foil for the saxophone with his marimba and effects. Beckenstein opens up a bit on the fade out, and shows some soul, but they do a quick fade. Schuman's *Serpentine Shelly* is one of the slicker, more energetic pieces on the record. After the head, Samuels solos over a bare drum-and-conga track. The band should open it up more like that. They've got a fine drummer and percussionist now, and shouldn't hide them. Badrena slaps the congas hot and nasty while Morales lays a smoldering funk track. New bassist Roberto Vally shows resourcefulness, and a sense of digging-in where you don't expect him to.

Spyro Gyra sometimes forces it—like on the ever-shifting *Early Light*, where it sounds like the desired end is to see how many grooves they can combine into one tune. Badrena kicks some spark into things with *Nu Sungo*, although it too seems practically homogenized

by the production. It's a cool, loping salsa kind of beat, with some Jackson Five guitar over the top, and 'Nolo overdubbed a couple times. Nothing earth-shattering, but Badrena's work certainly sounds more spontaneous and fun than most everything else.

Samuels gets extra points for putting a nice ending on *Chrysalis*, with some quality changes, rather than fading out. Once Jeremy Wall's *Joy Ride* gets past the head to the solos, the rhythm section does some nice layering and cutting while things build up, and Fernandez gets to stretch a bit. Why do I feel like I've heard all these heads before on a previous album? In a word, this music is "comfortable." You don't hear a lot of chances being taken musically. There's more concern with playing it right, I think, than with stretching the limits of the tunes or one's ability. Combine that with highly arranged music, and you've got an album that doesn't sound particularly inspired.

The rhythm track on *Pyramid* is a darting cat-and-mouse game. This is as close to playing "out" as they get, and it's an avenue they should continue to explore. Spyro Gyra has always played a lot of groove music, but they don't quite groove as hard as, say, the Yellowjackets, anymore. Spyro Gyra could use some kind of kick in the butt. It's halftime, and they need the Gipper speech. —robin tolleson



## HAMIET BLUIETT

**THE CLARINET FAMILY**—Black Saint 0097: *SUB-JUMP*; *FOR MACHO*; *NIOKA*; *PAPER WORKS*; *RUN AWAY*; *TO BE THERE*; *SOLO BASS IMPROVISATION No. 1*; *RIVER NIGER*; *SONG FOR MAMA*.

**Personnel:** Bluiett, E<sup>b</sup> alto clarinet; Dwight Andrews, E<sup>b</sup> soprano, B<sup>b</sup> soprano clarinet; Don Byron, soprano, bass clarinet; Buddy Collette, soprano, alto clarinet; John Purcell, Gene Ghee, soprano, bass clarinet; J. D. Parran, E<sup>b</sup> soprano, B<sup>b</sup> soprano, E<sup>b</sup> alto, EE<sup>b</sup> contralto clarinet; Sir "Kidd" Jordan, BB<sup>b</sup> contrabass clarinet; Fred Hopkins, bass; Ronnie Burrage, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hamiet Bluiett's virtuosity as a baritone saxo-

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phonist is nothing less than history-making. Virtually inventing a vocabulary for an ultra-high register on the baritone saxophone, Bluiett has permanently expanded the options for the instrument. His fat, blues-drenched baritone is the cornerstone of the World Saxophone Quartet, an ensemble recently elevated to the exclusive pantheon of Martin Williams' *Smithsonian Collection Of Classic Jazz*. Yet, setting aside his groundbreaking solo recital *Birthingright* (India Navigation 1030), his discography as a leader, albeit populated with satisfying sessions, is less than epochal. There is, then, an irony to *The Clarinet Family*—the jewel of Bluiett's recordings as a leader to date—as he forgoes the baritone altogether.

*The Clarinet Family* epitomizes jazz's impetus in the '80s to make advanced compositional ideas emote with the sensual immediacy of indigo velvet and flesh, and to provide the hipshakingest holler a subtle, crafted subtext of cultural and historical self-consciousness.

Two of the album's three major pieces—J. D. Parran's *Sub-Jump* and Bluiett's Ellington tribute *To Be There*—evoke the era when the clarinet was a senior partner of jazz reed instruments; while the material and orchestral devices employed on Don Byron's *For Macho* are solidly in the Hispanic tradition of Machito, to whom the piece is dedicated, just the timbres of eight wailing clarinets are enough to trigger associations with the golden era.

Reconstituting aspects of Johnny Dodds' anguished-joyousness (to permutate Williams' term), Don Redman's vaulting solo-transcription-charts, and Barney Bigard's descriptive acumen on such programmatic Ellington classics as *Harlem Air Shaft*, Bluiett and Parran provide compelling settings for inspired improvisations, as does Byron.

The remainder of the program is not implicitly "minor," except in terms of scale or complexity of design. Bluiett's *Nioka* smolders with a romantic intensity that is

further attenuated in the vamp of his *Paper Works*, which receives a more cogent reading than it did on the WSQ's *Live At The Brooklyn Academy Of Music* (Black Saint 0096). Preambled by the bold technique and deep colors of Fred Hopkins' *Solo Bass Improvisation No. 1*, Sir Kidd Jordan's *River Niger* has a crisp pentatonic theme that segues into a riveting collective statement, capped by a powerful Ronnie Burrage solo; Bluiett's concluding *Song For Mama*, a spiritedly read lyric, is an afterword that gives a suite-like gravity to Hopkins' and Jordan's pieces.

Even this impressive compositional output would be hollow without the bracing work of these eight sterling clarinetists. Their round of solos on *To Be There*, alone, comprises a licorice-stick lexicon for the blues. To appropriate the last line of Quincy Troupe's accompanying poem, Bluiett and his colleagues "show us the glory, stomping, all the way home."

—bill shoemaker

## POWER TRIOS

By Jim Roberts

**W**hat's the most important instrument in a piano trio? The piano, right? Think again. . . .

Although it's obvious that you can't have a piano trio without a piano, consider this: the role played by the bass is often the key element in shaping the sound of a piano trio. The bass player's tone, note choices, rhythmic feel, and overall concept have a profound effect on how the pianist and drummer approach the music. Change the bass player, and you've got a completely different group.

Don't believe it? Listen to *Illusions* (Blue Note 46994), the debut album by Brazilian pianist **Eliane Elias**. The album's eight cuts feature two different piano trios, one with Stanley Clarke on bass and Lenny White on drums, the other with Eddie Gomez on bass and either Steve Gadd or Al Foster on drums. Clarke's bass playing is busy and overbearing, making Elias sound tentative and withdrawn (an impression that's reinforced by the mix, which puts the piano well behind the bass and drums). With Gomez, Elias becomes a different musician. Her touch is still light, but it sounds elegant instead of hesitant. On tunes like *Illusions* (with Gadd on drums) and *Iberia* (with Foster), her playing is smooth and romantic without becoming sentimental. Gomez nudges her along, playing long tones, double-stop chords, and occasional quick fills that keep the music moving without dominating it.

Gomez also makes a key contribution to **Smith Dobson's** *Smithsonian* (Night Music 7001). Dobson is a good San Francisco Bay Area pianist (and sometimes vocalist) who has worked with many noted soloists, including the late Art Pepper. He

has a brisk, no-nonsense style, and Gomez and Steve Gadd encourage him to attack the material by providing precise backing and short, well-constructed solos.

Another good pianist who plays even better with the right bassist on hand is **Enrico Pieranunzi**, whose album *Deep Down* (Soul Note 1121) is boosted immeasurably by the presence of Marc Johnson. Although Johnson plays with a huge sound and displays impeccable intonation, he brings a lot more than excellent technique to the music. Pieranunzi is an unabashed admirer of Bill Evans—with all of the good and bad tendencies that implies—but Johnson (who played with Evans for two years) seems to have all the right countermoves. When Pieranunzi becomes introverted, Johnson is brash; when Pieranunzi gets over-excited, Johnson stays cool. Johnson also constructs solos that really say something.

Charlie Haden plays a similar role on **Fred Hersch's** *Sarabande* (Sunnyside 1024). Hersch starts out lyrical and Evansesque on *I Have Dreamed*, then turns puckish on Ornette Coleman's *Enfant*, where he couples together angular runs which lead to a central bass solo. The solo is vintage Haden: a few well-chosen notes, a punchy double-stop chord, then some jagged phrases that become a question-and-answer session with the piano. The polarity established by the opening tunes continues throughout the album, with Haden providing firm, placid accompaniment on the standards and jousting with the piano on the abstract pieces. (Drummer Joey Baron, who's also on the Pieranunzi album, does a superb job of reading Haden's approach and adjusting his parts accordingly.)

Sometimes, of course, even a great bassist might not be ideal for a particular piano trio. That seems to be the case on *The Target* (Storyville 4140), an album by the young Danish pianist **Niels Lan Doky**. Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen is the bass player—the perfect choice, right?

A fellow Dane, a superb technician, and someone who ought to know nearly everything about piano trio playing after 15 years with Oscar Peterson. Unfortunately, this record is colorless and uninspired (even with Jack DeJohnette rumbling and flashing on drums). NHØP's playing is part of the problem—it's so even it sounds mechanical—but Lan Doky's unfocused compositions also have to share the blame.

Similar problems plague **Art Monroe's** *I Never Dreamed* (V.S.O.P. 44). Monroe is a D.C.-area pianist and music educator who plays more-than-competent bebop but falters when he tries to be elegant and impressionistic. His original tunes, like those of Lan Doky, are decidedly unmemorable, and bassist Paul Langosch plays accurately but without much enthusiasm—maybe he'd done too many takes.

Energy is not a problem for Chicago pianist **Willie Pickens**. His debut album, *It's About Time* (Southport 0008), reveals a pianist with such an abundance of ideas that he frequently overwhelms his rhythm section. Pickens' approach is straight out of the Art Tatum book—with a nod to Thelonious Monk—and can be breathtaking in its complexity. At other times, like on his rococo version of *Paper Moon*, it's just too much for the tune to support. Two bassists, Dan Shapera and Larry Gray, alternate on the album, and they both do a fine job of laying down a thick, bluesy bottom—when they can keep up.

Perhaps the finest Chicago bassist on the scene today is Rufus Reid. (I should say Chicago-style bassist, since Reid is originally from California, but musically he epitomizes the Chicago approach to bass: deep, solid, rhythmically impeccable.) His playing fits perfectly when **Ray Bryant** plays *Basie And Ellington* (EmArcy 832 235-1). Bryant's triumphant comeback album after seven years without a record. Bryant takes various approaches to the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



## BOBBY HUTCHERSON

**IN THE VANGUARD**—Landmark 1513: *LITTLE NILES; ESTATE; WELL, YOU NEEDN'T; SOMEDAY MY PRINCE WILL COME; WITCHCRAFT; I WANNA STAND OVER THERE.*

**Personnel:** Hutcherson, vibes, marimba; Kenny Barron, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Al Foster, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

**DIALOGUE**—Blue Note 84198: *CATTA; IDLE WHILE; LES NOIRS MARCHENT; DIALOGUE; GHETTO LIGHTS.*

**Personnel:** Hutcherson, vibes, marimba; Freddie Hubbard, trumpet; Sam Rivers, tenor, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet, flute; Andrew Hill, piano; Richard Davis, bass; Joe Chambers, drums.

★ ★ ★

Bobby Hutcherson emerged in the mid-'60s as a unique force in the New Jazz—a mallet instrument player, and one equally effective delivering a relaxed, unassuming blues or delving into unorthodox structures. His impact on the evolution of his instrument's jazz vocabulary has been gently, consistently asserted throughout the 22-year span between *Dialogue*, his 1965 debut, and *In The Vanguard*, the first live date issued under his sole leadership. His is the mark of a master craftsman rather than that of the abyss-leaping innovator; Walt Dickerson and Earl Griffith may have been the most conceptually original vibists to record in the '60s, and Gary Burton the most technically endowed, but Hutcherson was—and remains—the strongest of his generation. His strength initially derived from his successful coming-to-terms with the spectre of Milt Jackson at an early age; and from this, Hutcherson has championed the vibraharp's—and the marimba's—unique expressive and functional versatility in a rapidly evolving idiom throughout his lengthy discography.

*Dialogue* is an uneven program, given its significance, on a couple of counts. The concepts of collective improvisation espoused on Joe Chambers' *Dialogue* and Andrew Hill's *Les Noirs Marchent* are prototypical of the more idiosyncratically structured approaches utilized by the major exponents of the AACM. Yet, *Les Noirs Marchent*, which has Braxtonian premonitions in its clipped martial phrasing, suffers from uncharacteristically two-dimensional support from Hill and Chambers' signal press rolls, devices that constrain rather than cohere the intertwining lines of Hutcherson, Freddie Hubbard, and Sam Rivers (whose flute is ghost-like in the mix). Chambers' piece is a deeper investigation of intra-ensemble relationships, but its severely fragmented struc-

ture, coming on the heels of *Les Noirs Marchent*, makes for turgid sequencing.

Of the more traditionally-oriented compositions, only Chambers' mid-tempo waltz, *Idle While*, is an unqualified success, ripe with pungent solos by Hubbard, Hutcherson, and Richard Davis. Hill's 8/8 mambo, *Catta*, cooks with Caribbean spices, but Rivers' tenor solo has the half-formed bearing of a first take. *Ghetto Lights*, Hill's languid blues closer, has an unusual turnaround that the soloists—save Rivers, whose simmering soprano solo is his best statement of the set—do not fully exploit. Still, *Dialogue* is a first effort that has survived the test of time.

*In The Vanguard* is a loaded title; Hutcherson fronts a MJQ configuration—two-thirds of which collaborate in Sphere, initially the official Monk repertory band—in a program chock full of chestnuts by Miles, Monk, Randy Weston, et al. However, there is nothing conservative—neo or otherwise, if that means safe, pat, or predictable—about the performances; classicist, perhaps, if that means running-and-gunning through uptempo numbers and thought-

ful lyricism on ballads; revisionist, maybe, if that means arrangements with burnished surfaces—Al Foster's rhythmic flourishes on *Someday My Prince Will Come*, Kenny Barron's distilled voicings on *Well, You Needn't*—and solos that can be heard as commentaries on traditions; but, certainly fluent, vigorous, and resonant.

If there is an innovative element, it is the subtlety and versatility afforded by Hutcherson's side-by-side placement of his axes. Dickerson has used the physical relationship of the two instruments to prod his creativity, but Hutcherson takes a more utilitarian tact and creates the semblance of a one-man front-line. The timbral variety effected by switching instruments in the course of a composition further underlines Hutcherson's idiomatic mastery. Whether racing through labyrinthine chromatic lines on the marimba or letting a delicately arpeggiated vibraharp phrase hover over the rhythm section, Hutcherson asserts himself not only as a preeminent mallet instrument player, but also as an improviser in the vanguard of his generation. —bill shoemaker

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32

tunes, from evoking the sound of the entire Basie band on *Teddy The Toad* to sketching out the outlines of *Prelude To A Kiss*. Mostly, though, this is a superb album of blues, from *Swingin' The Blues* to *Mood Indigo*, and Reid's powerful bass lines give the music depth and swing.

Another interesting version of *Mood Indigo* turns up on *Shining Hour* (Reservoir 102), an album featuring the guitar/piano/bass trio of **Joe Puma, Hod O'Brien, and Red Mitchell**. Without drums, Mitchell has to hold down the groove at all times, a job that's especially demanding here because both Puma and O'Brien tend to be reserved. Mitchell's more than up to the job, and his bass seems to be everywhere in the music without being busy. To keep the sound full, he makes maximum use of the bass' capabilities: he likes to slide into and out of notes, and on the unusual waltz-time version of *Mood Indigo* he plays firm double-stop chords and long, elastic pedal tones.

Maybe there's something about Duke Ellington that brings out the best in a bass player. On **Toshiko Akiyoshi's** recent trio album *Interlude* (Concord Jazz 324), bassist Dennis Irwin has his finest moments on *Solitude*. First, Akiyoshi states the melody and Irwin responds; then they reverse roles; then Akiyoshi plays a thoughtful solo before more call-and-response in the final chorus. It's a well-balanced dialog that evokes memories of the Ellington/Blanton duets—and the finest cut on an album that is otherwise uneven and sometimes heavy-handed.

The piano trio traces its origin to the rhythm sections of the early big bands, and there are still a few trios around carrying on the noble tradition established by Earl Hines, Teddy Wilson, and Count Basie. One

fine "classic" trio can be heard on the recent **Eddie Higgins** album *By Request* (Statiras 8079). The drummer is Bobby Rosengarden and the bassist is Milt Hinton, whose playing is the epitome of swing: every note well-chosen and precisely placed. Ten of the 11 tunes on the album are well-worn standards (thus the title), but Higgins, Hinton, and Rosengarden find some new twists—like suddenly switching *St. Louis Blues* from boogie-woogie to rumba (and back), or doing *Indiana* as a samba.

**John Bunch's** *The Best Thing For You* (Concord Jazz 328) also features swinging standards (and some bebop) in a classic trio setting. Bunch doesn't always have something new to say about these tunes, but when he does—especially on *Emily and Jitterbug Waltz*—his ideas are buoyant and refreshing. Bassist Phil Flanigan is a younger version of Hinton, always steady and supportive, and his solos are nicely understated.

The verities of the swing tradition and the excitement of post-bop playing are merged beautifully on *By George: George Cables Plays The Music Of George Gershwin* (Contemporary 14030). With controlled yet muscular backing by John Heard on bass, Cables starts off suave and elegant on *Bess* and *My Man's Gone Now*, uncoils a Tatum-esque *Embraceable You*, and ends triumphantly with a latin version of *A Foggy Day*. The album's finest tune, though, is *I Got Rhythm*, a song that's probably been played as many times (and in as many weird versions) as the national anthem. Cables gets at the essence of the tune by arranging the head as a piano-and-bass call with a drum response, then giving drummer Ralph Penland a solo spot in the center of the arrangement. It's a simple idea—the song is about *rhythm*, isn't it?—and it works perfectly. db



## CLIFFORD JORDAN

**ROYAL BALLADS**—Criss Cross Jazz 1025: *LUSH LIFE*; *PANNONICA*; *ROYAL BLUES*; *LITTLE GIRL BLUE*; *ARMANDO*; *DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE*.

**Personnel:** Jordan, tenor saxophone; Kevin O'Connell, piano; Ed Howard, bass; Vernell Fournier, drums.

★ ★ ★

**DR. CHICAGO**—Bee Hive 7018: *DR. CHICAGO*; *SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR*; *ZOMBI*; *TOUCH LOVE*; *IF I HAD YOU*; *BEBOR*.

**Personnel:** Jordan, tenor saxophone; Red Rodney, flugelhorn (cut 2), trumpet (4); Jaki Byard, piano; Ed Howard, bass (1-4, 6); Vernel Fournier, drums (1-4, 6).

★ ★ ★ ½

Clifford Jordan's background is substantial. In his earlier years he played with Johnny Griffin, Horace Silver, Kenny Dorham, and Charles Mingus. Later times found him in the company of Cedar Walton, Sonny Stitt, and Ahmad Jamal. He also did service aboard Billy Taylor's Jazzmobile. And, expectedly, Jordan's talents are also substantial. He favors a full, breathy tone, with a touch of Coleman Hawkins' creakiness in the lower register. The upper register of his tonal spectrum is well-supported, with a hint of Charlie Parker's metallic edge. Like Sonny Rollins and Ben Webster before him, he's an unabashed thematic improviser, one who's not adverse to quoting himself verbatim, one whose inventions are pointed but not always unpredictable.

*Royal Ballads* finds Jordan with his working band as they wend their way through six confident pieces. There's a fluent *Lush Life* in which Jordan goes through some deftly twisted inventions, aided by pianist Kevin O'Connell's thoughtful phrases and drummer Vernell Fournier's kinky accents. There's also a lightly swinging *Pannonica*, and what the tune lacks in surprise it makes up in full-throated ease. The same is equally true of *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*, which features side-slipping rhythmic intensity but lacks originality. On *Little Girl Blue*, Jordan's tone bulges as he milks this ballad from the realms of sentiment in to the domain of flat-out sentimentality. Lapses of tasty like these notwithstanding, this is an unpretentious release. It obviously makes no major contributions to small group playing, but it confidently gets to where it is going.

Jordan's *Dr. Chicago* is a more satisfying release. Largely because of the presence of pianist Jaki Byard and, on two tracks, trumpeter/flugelhornist Red Rodney. Together

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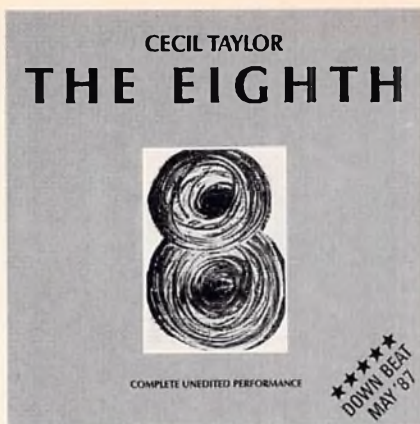
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these two players add considerable substance to Jordan's work. There's a shirtsleeves-rolled-up blues, *Dr. Chicago*, and a delightful arrangement by Melba Liston of an Ellington/Strayhorn piece, *Something To Live For*, that tingles as Jordan and Rodney's lines verge together—a bittersweet, moving performance. There's also a brassy *Love Touch*, a Jazz Messengerish, fanfare-like piece which confirms Rodney's status as a minor master of the trumpet. It's unfortunate that Rodney couldn't have put in an appearance on all of the tracks here. We're also favored with a tenor/piano duet on *If I Had You*: a dusty, consciously retrogressive rendering of this tune, and a piece of considerable smoke-tinged depth. A skitterish *Bebop* rounds things out, taken at a fast, taut tempo. For touches like these this is a release worth listening to. —*jon balleras*

Waxing On

DOWNTOWN  
SOUND

Few musical communities (or even states of mind) have proved so independent and prolific in the mid-'80s as geographically expansive Loisaida New York. Ambition and the cost of living in or near Manhattan have combined to prompt experimentalists on the edge of jazz, fresh pop-rock, and improvisation towards self-productions, which are frequently licensed for European manufacture, distribution, and re-importation into the U.S. Such limited-access albums used to be valuable calling cards for artists seeking record labels closer to home. Lately they've become raw material for post-production.

Prime example: keyboardist/composer **Wayne Horvitz** has edited his *Dinner At Eight* (on the West Berlin label Dossier 7514) and *The President* (Dossier 7528) into a single major American label LP, *This New Generation* (Elektra/Musician 9 60759-1). The original albums depict, through restrained, wistful melodies, an urban life of measured substance and small change: a radiator knocks out rhythm, tires squeal in the street below, and sax figures lie static as wallpaper designs. Playing a DX-7 keyboard and RX-11 drum machine, with wry and mannerly assists from Elliott Sharp (guitars, bass), Doug Wieselmann (clarinet, tenor sax), and Joey Peters (electronic drums) and Chris Brown (gazamba, wing) on *Dinner*—guitarist Bill Frisell, percussionist Bobby Previte, and bassist Dave Hofstra on the rockier *President*—Horvitz creates deceptively casual songs acreep with nostalgia and foreboding. Not "jazz" in the sense of solos swinging over changes, Horvitz's music nonetheless takes imaginative adventures with harmony and combo colors.

Composer/producer/multi-instrumentalist/

bandleader **Elliott Sharp**, recently signed by SST, has developed a unique and imposing body of work. *Carbon* (on his own Zoar [15] label, with Leslie Dalaba, trumpet, on two cuts; David Linton, electric talking drums, metal percussion; Mark Miller, snare, toms, conga; Charles K. Noyes, bass drums, bowed cymbal, snare; Sharp on guitars, bass, reeds, bass-tubinet, and 'bone) sounds like an industrial plant run amok. Textures, not riffs or phrases in any version of usual song structures, are the building blocks. Slam-bang rhythms crunch repeated motifs for their juiciest overtones. There are occasional pauses and shifts of gears; sometimes Joujouka-like reeds spin through the mix.

But the throb is unrelenting on *Carbon: Six Songs/Marco Polo's Argali* (Dossier 7508) as well. Sharp employs a trio, then a sextet with two trombones. Wordless muttering and heavy guitar lead lines seep through fantastically processed percussion on side one; the side-two-long *Argali* is based, in tunings as well as rhythms, on the Fibonacci number series. Though that series is evident in structures of nature, most listeners will never have heard anything like what Sharp does with it. His ensemble handles the difficult material with aplomb. And after *Argali*, Sharp's *Fractal* (Dossier 7515), posed in shorter forms, is more easily digestible. Sharp's tape manipulations and extremely metallic results are at once high-tech and determinedly primitive; his sounds associate in an organic but radically unconventional way, allowing a multitude of variations.

Sharp and Horvitz often lend themselves to others' projects, in varying degrees of involvement, as does composer/saxist/lower east side catalyst John Zorn. Zorn's mouthpiece pops, honks, and squeals threaten to overwhelm composer/reed virtuoso **Ned Rothenberg** on the latter's three-part suite *Kakeai*, from *Trespass* (Lumina 11). But Rothenberg's less flashy, earnest control is incisive, and he strives to establish a sense of purposeful shape in the improv. Circular breathing, multiphonics, high register and fillibration expertise, and a full dynamic range are among Rothenberg's remarkable skills; he uses them to fashion distinctively somber and sensitive, haunting and gentle solos on alto sax and bass clarinet throughout the rest of his album. The r&b-based *Slapstick* should be accessible to everyone.

Rothenberg, Sharp, and percussionist Samm Bennett comprise the trio **Semantles**, in an eponymous debut (on Rift 9). This LP is gregarious; on compositions Rothenberg penned for side one, the trio dances on the edge of exuberance, rarely slipping into sheer frenzy. Bennett is a funky, imaginative rhythmist; neither Rothenberg, on alto and tenor, bass clarinet and prepared bamboo flute, nor Sharp, on double-neck guitar-bass, vocal, and violinoid, compromise their usual styles, yet interests (especially regarding overtones) match like fish and chips. More aggressively raucous on side two, but lots of hummable dervish-blues.

**Samm Bennett's** solo *Metafunctional* (Igloo 020) is solidly satisfying. He's attentive to pitch as well as rhythm, pitting bass drum against wood blocks or tuned bongos, toms

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against bells and cymbals, rolls and sharp accents against a steady heart throb. One presumes Bennett is well educated in African and Caribbean traditions, since he approximates an entire troupe of Yoruba percussionists, limbs independent and patterns interdependent. His program is thoughtfully paced, most tracks three or four minutes long, samba whistle added for *On The Beach*, time broken on *Lovers Of Secrets*, side two starting at a light gallop.

Still, solo drums offer limited melodic content, and Bennett enlists Hahn Rowe on guitar and violin for *Chop Socky* (Dossier 7178) by his quartet **Bosho** with percussionists Kumiko Kimoto and Yuval Gabey. Rowe's leads and stretched tones are simple and effective; the action ticks on beneath him, and his modesty is becoming. Electronic percussion and kitchenware blend smoothly with regular skin, wood, and metal drums—there are innumerable layers to the mix, and they twine in climax, suggesting a stripped-down Sunny Adé, an arena rock band, Western Swing, and a Chinese opera.

Percussionist/guitarist/studio whiz **David Fulton** credits Sharp and Horvitz, Robert Previte, and David Hofstra with musical assistance on *Like Chignik* (Dossier 7519). Peculiar timbres and fragments of repetitive rhythms, strung together linearly in non-cyclical forms, dominate this disc, subtitled *Pt. 1: Semi-Trilogy*, but all sounds exist against a backdrop of

silence, rather than in a dense sonic field like Sharp's. Dripping water, synthesized bird chirps, snare patterns against ominous rumbling, banjo and wildly distorted guitar are links in the chain Fulton unfurls. Inexplicably, their effect is calming.

In part two, *Don't Ask* (Dossier 7535), Fulton's attempt to permutate one sound into another is abetted by bassists Chris Vine and Glenn Jubilee, and trombonist Jim Fryer (though, as in part one, each player's role is beside the point). The links seem to become longer, stronger, and more evident. Or am I just getting used to Fulton's icea? The sonic palette is broad as electronic glints bleep above flicker-thumbed bass licks, waves pulse as they must sound to highly sensitive ears underwater. Fulton's method is mysterious—is he systematic, or somehow depending on his ears? Do the elements first come together in the mix? A melody, from tapped harmonics, emerges at the end of side two, but until part three's released, it won't be clear where this semi-trilogy is headed.

There are more than twice this many downtown improvisers and new-edge bands represented on small independent labels (Dossier Records are available from Prizenallee 47B, D-1000 Berlin 65, West Germany—inquiries to 29 Park Row, NYC NY 10038 in the U.S.; most others can be obtained from the New Music Distribution Service), and I'll review more next month.

—howard mandel

## New Releases

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

**CHESS/MCA:** Ramsey Lewis, *The Greatest Hits*. Various Artists, *The Best Of Chess Rhythm & Blues*. Various Artists, *The Best Of Chess Blues*. Various Artists, *The Best Of Chess Rock & Roll*. Various Artists, *The Best Of Chess Jazz*. Albert Lee, *Gagged But Not Bound*. Robert Greenidge/Michael Utley, *Jubilee*. Billy Joe Walker Jr., *Treehouse*. Jerry Douglas, *Changing Channels*.

**ATLANTIC/ISLAND:** Maxine Sullivan, *Together*. Jeff Beal, *Liberation*. Ahmad Jamal, *Crystal*. Power Tools, *Strange Meeting*.

**DISCOVERY/TREND:** Gordon Brisker Big Band, *New Beginning*. Frank Strazzeri, *Kat Dancin'*. Clare Fischer, *Plays By And With Himself*. Lorez Alexandria, *Dear To My Heart*.

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**CONCORD JAZZ:** John Bunch Trio, *The Best Thing For You*. Tito Puente, *Un Poco Loco*. Woody Herman & His Big Band, *Woody's Gold Star*. Marcos Silva & Intersection, *Here We Go!* Bruce Forman Quartet, *There Are Times*. Dan Barrett Octet, *Strictly Instrumental*.

**INDEPENDENTS:** Lionel Hampton, *One Of A Kind* (Glad-Hamp). Lionel Hampton/Dexter Gordon, *Midnight Blues* (Glad-Hamp). Roger Kellaway/Red Mitchell, *Fifty*

*Fifty* (Stash). Mike Rienzi Quartet, *A Beautiful Friendship* (Stash). Gene Bertoncini/Michael Moore, *Strollin'* (Stash). Steve Fowler, *Captured* (Eclipse). Joe Satriani, *Surfing With The Alien* (Relativity). Madhouse, *16* (Paisley Park). Dixie Dregs, *Best Of The . . .* (Grand Slam). Greg Hyslop, *Manhattan Date* (Slope). Ernie Mansfield/Juan Bibiloni, *Color Drops* (Catero).

Laraaji, *Essence/Universe* (Audion). Wavestar, *Moonwind* (Audion). Richard Burmer, *Bhakti Point* (Fortuna). Michael Harrison, *In Flight* (Fortuna). Peter Kater, *The Fool And The Hummingbird* (Silver Wave). Peter Davison, *Winds Of Space* (Higher Octave). William Aura, *Half Moon Bay* (Higher Octave).

Bernie McGann Trio, *At Long Last* (Emanem). Bernie McGann Quartet, *Kindred Spirits* (Emanem). Jeff Gardner, *Spirit Call* (Ulysse). Ululation, *Ululation* (Long Shot). Simon H. Fell, *Compilation 1* (Bruce Fingers). Bird/Trane/Sco, *Now!* (BTSN). Robert Shure/Heikki Sarmanto Quartet, *Man With A Sax: An Adventure* (Cadence Jazz). Ed Bennett Trio, *Ed Bennett Trio* (Vision). Scotty Young, *Downside Up* (Space Administration).

Alfred 23 Harth/Ferdinand Richard/Peter Hollinger, *Gestalt Et Jive* (Creative Works). Lajos Dudas/Tommy Vig, *Mistral* (Konnex). Burton Greene Quartet, *Valencia Chocolate* (Cat). Ruud Brink/Ray Kaart, *Just You, Just Me—Just Jazz* (Cat). George Ruby/Wollie Kaiser, *Ruby Domesticus Vulgaris* (JazzHaus Musik). Schwarzwaldmädel, *F* (JazzHaus Musik). Kubist Tier, *20th Letter Of The Alphabet* (Go-Dot). Jan Kaspersen Quintet, *Puzzle In Four* (Olufsen). Gianni Gebbia, *Gianna Gebbia* (Sound Event). db

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WE'VE MOVED



## SOME OTHER STUFF

**A** hodge-podge of new releases, reissues, and a few unclassifiables of note

Beginning with **Art Pepper** It took until 1977, believe it or not, for the great altoist to lead a club date in New York City, and *Live At The Village Vanguard* (Contemporary VDP 5043-6, 54:39/55:27/54:50/68:08 minutes) is as complete a documentation of the event as we're likely to get. This four-CD set includes three lengthy tunes not found on the four individual LPs released by Contemporary, and while the Japanese-only CD booklet sacrifices the original album liner notes, Pepper's invaluable nervous between-song chatter and intros are retained. Moreover, the CDs—ordered chronologically, so you can gauge Pepper's nervousness from night to night—capture the nightclub ambiance with startling reality; the sound—as it is in the Vanguard—is intimate and warm, and most of the performances feature long (and not always captivating) bass and drum solos by George Mraz and Elvin Jones, respectively, which further the "live" feel. But Pepper is magnificent throughout, transferring his edgy emotional state into the highly expressionistic impasto of his later period. Highlights are many, among them the bluesy Jackie McLean-ish squeals on *Blues For Les*, the piping, pungent clarinet on *Anthropology*, a jittery but coherent *You Go To My Head*, and the driven exorcism of *Cherokee*, where Elvin's swirling momentum is crucial to propel Pepper into catharsis. All told, an inspired, revealing sequence of performances.

Another multi-LP set, this one three volumes, has been boiled down into a double-CD compilation of **Hampton Hawes' All Night Session 1-3** (Contemporary VDP 5031-2, 59:28/58:43), though no new material is offered. Recorded, as the title suggests, over a single November 1956 evening, these 16 quartet sides find the pianist at—or very near—his creative peak, with a loose, live feel despite their studio origin. Hawes was a solid Bud Powell disciple and probably the best post-war pianist to emerge from L.A.'s post-bop scene, and the program consists of sturdy standards (like *I'll Remember April* and *April In Paris*) and blowing session favorites (*Broadway*, *Groovin' High*, and their ilk). If the material provides no surprises, it focuses all attention on Hawes, whose individualistic responses leaned ever more towards blues and soul shadings in the manner of early Horace Silver. Guitarist Jim Hall's cooler musings supplied a necessary counterbalance, especially given bassist Red Mitchell's slippery asides.

Another West Coast pianist, still active, of a somewhat different bent, is **Clare Fischer** who, in addition to various big band, vocal, and salsa settings, frequently surveys standards (or original lines based on standards) in solo or small group contexts reminiscent of the late Lennie Tristano. Two recent CDs reinforce the Tristano connection, albeit unintentionally. *Clare Fischer Plays By And With Himself* (Dis-



Art Pepper at the Village Vanguard.

covery DSCD 934, 63:47) employs occasional tape manipulation and overdubbing, along with idiosyncratic views of conventional structures (*Fugue* and *Counterall*—the latter a knotty contrapuntal version of *All The Things You Are*) and Impressionistic harmonies and subtle harmonic alterations (*Laible Woods* and *Blues In F*, respectively). As a pianist Fischer won't dazzle you with his chops, and his compositions are often more cerebral than exciting. The sound quality is sometimes echoey and reverberant, depending upon the keyboard and mic placement used.

A pair of Fischer group dates have been compiled on *Blues Trilogy* (Discovery DSCD 936, 63:17). The title cut is a marvelously moody sequence for six clarinets of differing sizes, plus rhythm section; however, the subsequent pieces (a version of Bread's saccharinely horrific *If*, among them) are just too slight to retain interest despite the provocative ensemble colors. The CD's second session, a duet between Fischer and longtime compatriot, altoist Gary Foster, works best when Foster reminds us of two of his influences, Paul Desmond and Lee Konitz. Again, those sparks that do result may not set off any fireworks, but they are subtly illuminating nevertheless.

Those listeners requiring fireworks need only acquire CDs by **Cecil Taylor**—of which there are now two more, of varying vintage, available. The clarity of ensemble sound on *Conquistador* (Blue Note CDP 7-46535-2, 37:20) makes this new CD of the 1966 session noteworthy; it's so much easier to follow the line of logical development, from Taylor's opening salvo through the intricate thematic incarnations, including the essential textural relationships—constant shifts of activity, accompaniment, and color—that define the flow of the two compositions. You can now clearly hear the distinct delineation between the two bassists—Alan Silva's squeaky ornamental glissandi and Henry Grimes' solid foundational detail—as well as the crisp interaction between CT's piano and Andrew Cyrille's percussion, the tartness of Jimmy Lyons' alto, and Bill Dixon's pungent trumpet. Despite the woefully short playing time (*couldn't* an alternate take or two be found?), this is a beautiful—and for newcomers, a relatively accessible—experience.

The 1978 *Cecil Taylor* (New World NW 201-2, 58:41), on the other hand, is a more jarring, confrontational experience which nevertheless reveals exquisite compositional de-

tails among its moments of repose and rigor, and the sound quality reflects the difference, forgoing the warmth of the Blue Note CD for a more clinical immediacy and absolutely no distortion at the climactic moments. This session served to introduce a powerful Unit which would grow together even more in subsequent recordings. Among the newcomers was trumpeter Raphe Malik, who was an explosive, *loud* influence on the ensemble—say, along the lines of a Roy Eldridge sensibility, compared to Bill Dixon's Kenny Dorham-ish intricacy—and Ronald Shannon Jackson's drums essay a more fervent propulsion than his predecessors. If Taylor's career can be seen as an ocean which approaches and recedes, this music is the first indications of an oncoming tidal wave.

Speaking of energy and intensity, no one's ever doubted **Lionel Hampton's** ability in those areas. A session from 1955, *Hamp And Getz* (Verve 831 672-2, 52:01), finds him in a surprisingly compatible collaboration with tenorman **Stan Getz**. So as to not lose ground alongside the vibist's uptempo frenzy, Getz is especially fluid and forceful on *Cherokee*—his honking could be mistaken for Illinois Jacquet. But there's an equally surprising ill-at-ease feeling in the ballads (almost salvaged by Hamp's nicely muted, marimba-like passages), and only a romp through *Jumpin' At The Woodside* (with Lou Levy's bopping piano solo) prevents a dulling sameness from taking hold of the proceedings.

There's no threat of sameness on *The President Plays* (Verve 831 670-2, 62:39) as **Lester Young** presides over the Oscar Peterson Trio (quartet actually, with the addition of Barney Kessel's guitar on most tracks) on a program of four stretched-out blowing tracks and eight short ballads (plus a surprise). Lester is clearly in charge here—hear the way he slams on the brakes and forces the rhythm section to follow his lead in the rubato ending of *Tea For Two*. Even when fighting a recalcitrant reed, there's plenty of Prez's mastery in evidence—a slightly swelling tone here, a small sibilant or tonal blur there—and you can hear him trying out new details, some of which work, some don't. Still, this is some of Lester's most willful post-WWII music, especially the jamming on *Ad Lib Blues*, *Just You, Just Me*, and *Indiana*. As for the surprise—two takes of Lester singing *It Takes Two To Tango*—liner note writer Phil Schaap hears Slim Gaillard and Leo Watson in the jive phrasing, but I hear Armstrong, pure and simple.

There's more than a touch of Armstrong audible in **Maynard Ferguson's** straightforward rendition (over a tropical background) of *Stardust*, and that tension (MF's swing phrasing over a variety of contemporary grooves) infects most of *High Voltage* (Intima CDI-73279, 42:58). Maynard's reduced seven-piece electric combo has become increasingly MOR-ish, though their energetic offerings are light years ahead of similar settings for Herb Alpert or Chuck Mangione. The band lays down a variety of substantial grooves—from calypso to funk—which benefit greatly from the exceptional sound quality. A solid choice for fusion fans; other should tread more cautiously.

Big band fans who regret Ferguson's abdication from their ranks have **Rob Mc-**



**Connell's Boss Brass** to sooth their psyches; Impulse has reissued on CD the band's Canadian release *Boss Brass & Woods* (MCA/Impulse 5982, 56:23) featuring guest altoist Phil Woods. The band roars in the right places, Woods works hard in his customary way, the almost painfully earnest arrangements are determined to hold the listener's attention every second, and the sound is just fine. A must for big band aficionados.

What's new for beboppers? Well, there's **Randy Brecker's** *In The Idiom* (Denon 33 CY-1483, 58:23)—the idiom being basic Blue Note post-bop, here afforded the requisite verisimilitude. Brecker's eight punchy originals do sound slightly familiar without being derivative—there's a consonant, optimistic atmosphere throughout—the rhythm section (Ron Carter and Al Foster) is a given and kicks in all the right places, while pianist David Kiko's comping is crisp and curt. Brecker sounds

comfortable here—he doesn't strain after trumpet effects—and Joe Henderson's almost casual tenor mastery is a fine foil. This is an extremely likeable effort.

"Effort" (as in "a strenuous attempt") is the word to describe **Bennie Wallace's** *The Art Of The Saxophone* (Denon 33CY-1648, 61:14), a series of nine duets between Wallace's hyperactive tenor and, alternately, Harold Ashby, Jerry Bergonzi, Lew Tabackin, and Oliver Lake. Three of the four guests are somewhat more conservative, stylistically, than the wildly expressive Wallace, and the jolt one might expect from such combinations is frequently lacking. For example, the three cuts where Wallace spars with Bergonzi (*Edith Head*, *Thangs*, and *Chester Leaps In*) are thinly disguised adaptations of better known tunes (*Donna Lee*, *All The Things You Are*, and *How High The Moon*, respectively) merely used as vehicles for rather pedestrian jamming. On

*All Too Soon*, where Wallace and Tabackin attempt some true contrapuntal weaving of lines, the commentary between the contrasting styles sounds ironic, as opposed to complimentary, and never truly meshes. There are some hot moments—guitarist John Scofield (in place of a piano in the rhythm section) lends a lightness to the comping, and is able to flaunt his flat-out bop chops on more than one occasion; Harold Ashby's blues playing on *Monroe County Moon* is breathtaking; and Oliver Lake kicks in a fine solo on the post-boppish *Prince Charles*. As for Wallace and his highly chromatic phrasing (which I've enjoyed to a large extent on a number of his previous albums), his approach really only jells, in a slightly simplified fashion, on *Prelude To A Kiss*; elsewhere there's a coolness, a reserve, a distance that separates the music from connecting with the listener, however impressive the participants. —art lange

## DUCAL DISCOVERIES

Serious students and collectors of Ellingtonia have long known that it was the maestro's pleasure to call in the members of his orchestra for recording sessions even when there were no contractual obligations to fulfill for any particular company at any particular time. These sessions, which usually took place during well-deserved vacations from concert dates and other scheduled appearances, were invariably held for the highest of all artistic purposes—kicks Duke, universally revered as the supreme composer in all of jazz, quite fortunately also enjoyed the unique distinction of having the world's best jazz band at his beck and call. Unlike the other great band-leaders, Duke was able, through his royalties as a composer, to keep the most valued of his star sidemen on yearly salaries, regardless of how much the orchestra actually earned on the road during any given period. And this was done primarily to insure the fact that such men as Johnny Hodges, Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, Jimmy Hamilton, as well as several others, would be available to rehearse—and record—every gem that his ever-fertile mind would produce.

This vast backlog of never-before-heard recordings has quite fittingly passed on to Duke's son, Mercer, a top-rate musician in his own right and one who, better than anyone else, knows how to keep the master's spirit alive. It is from this large legacy of private recordings, then, that Mercer selected the material that appears on the first release of the new LMR label, to all indications the promising harbinger of even more great releases to come. None of these performances has ever been made public before, and it is unlikely, for reasons of timing, that they will ever be issued in their entirety on any other mode than the compact disc.

Audiophiles will be happy to learn that none of the music was originally recorded under anything less than ideal circumstances, and that the carefully preserved pristine tapes have now been enhanced by digital remastering so as to further upgrade their sound to state-of-the-art CD standards.

Volume one is entitled *Studio Sessions, Chicago 1956* (LMR CD 83000, 54:41 minutes), and, among its 15 selections, one will discover nine totally new provocative compositions, all of which were recorded in brilliant hi-fi mono. Volume two (*Dance Concerts, California 1958*; LMR CD 83001) logs in with an overwhelming 70:45 minutes of surprisingly well-balanced live stereo recorded at a swinging dance date at Travis Air Force Base on March 4, 1958. Volume three (*Studio Sessions, New York 1962*; LMR CD 83002, 54:03) offers the listener a mind-boggling assortment of 16 more new compositions. Volume four (*Studio Sessions, New York 1963*; LMR CD 83003, 58:42), consists largely of new titles featuring Ray Nance and the members of the world's most star-studded sax section. The final CD in the series is Volume five (*The Suites*; LMR CD 83004), a generous 71:22 of long-awaited answers to long-held questions. Though Ellington collectors have for some time known about the existence of *The Degas Suite*, a 1968 score written for a French art film whose production was aborted for lack of funds, and *The River*, a 1970 ballet recorded here only for the purpose of providing choreographer Alvin Ailey and his troupe with a working model of Duke's conception, this is the first time that any of us have been privileged to hear the works themselves.

This series not only constitutes a treasure trove in itself, but, since it will also no doubt serve as a well-needed bolster for public interest in mainstream values, its successful reception will more than likely encourage the producers (Little Major Record Distributors Inc., 40 West 57th Street, Suite 1510, New York, NY 10019) to continue with the project. There is good reason to believe that the

material on these five CDs represents only a small portion of previously unissued latter-day Ellington. Indeed, there may be in Mercer Ellington's possession literally hundreds of hours more of equally great music just waiting to be heard.

*The Private Collection* series, in addition to its first-time-ever presentation of so many new compositions, is also notable for the insight it gives us into Ellington's working methods. Although all of the performances are complete, all of the section and solo work flawless, it can be assumed that, in Duke's mind, these recordings were designed to serve as documentations of works in progress, to be stored for later attention and possible revision. It was as characteristic of Duke to constantly go back to earlier works of quality and totally redesign them as it was for him to jot down a few new ideas, mold them into an orchestration that would be the envy of every sensible mortal, and then, quite literally, put the completed piece on the shelf for a later date. And the fact that he was always embarking on newer and newer projects worked to preclude his ever returning to his stockpile.

Each volume in the series contains notes by Stanley Dance and complete track-by-track personnel and comments on the performances, and, for reasons that should be obvious to any lover of Ellingtonia, no one volume can be recommended as being the best. They are all indispensable.

Riding on the tail of this hefty batch of guaranteed award winners is Rykodisc's digital repressing of Ellington's 1959 Columbia album of his score for Otto Preminger's *Anatomy Of A Murder* (Rykodisc RCD 10039). At only 34:47, it may not seem to be an economical purchase, but the music is first-class Duke throughout. What is more, in order to appreciate the quality of the orchestration and the soloists, one does not have to tolerate the distractions of an absorbing plot and outstanding performances by Jimmy Stewart, Lee Remick, and Ben Gazzara.

—jack sohmer

# video reviews

## LEGENDS & A LEGACY

The history of jazz is salted with documents—photos, tapes, rare records, posters, film, whatever—most of which is squirreled away in various private and semi-private collections. So it's illuminating when an effort is made to organize some of these materials and make

them available. In this case, the documents are film, for the most part from the private collection of David Chertok, and released as The Jazz Video Collection by Video Artists International.

*Trumpet Kings* (72 minutes). Narrator Wynton Marsalis is the guide on this film-clip trip through the history of jazz brass, from its murky Buddy Bolden/New Orleans origins to Lester Bowie and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. The distance isn't as great as one might think.

To be sure, it's a layman's tour, but no less interesting as it's strung together with more than 20 excerpts from Chertok's legendary movie archives. Louis Armstrong, the jazz trumpet's root source, is shown in a 1933 film (pre-dating his feature film debut in *Pennies From Heaven* by about three years) performing *Dinah* and a wonderfully exaggerated scat vocal on *I Cover The Waterfront*. Great rare material. Complementing Louis is a clip of Red Allen (1964) doing a gritty version of *St. James Infirmary*.

From the same period, writer, director, and producer Burrill Crohn touches on the parallel development of trumpet styles nurtured in the white dance bands of the 1920s and '30s—the classically influenced styles personified by the likes of Bix Beiderbecke (no film). There are excerpts of film appearances by Bunny Berigan (1937) and Red Nichols (1934). This footage is played off a 1930 film fragment of Freddie Jenkins (with Duke Ellington) using a tin derby for the famous Ellington wah-wah sound. Trumpet effects—plunger music—are further expanded upon by performances by Cootie Williams (1964) and Muggsy Spanier (1963). We also get to hear—and see—Cat Anderson hit altissimo high C. Then there is an especially exciting piece of film featuring a Buck Clayton/Charlie Shavers "cutting contest" from a 1958 performance.

Into the era of Dizzy Gillespie, as evolved from Louis Armstrong through Roy Eldridge ("Roy had the fire of Louis Armstrong and the dexterity of Coleman Hawkins"), Eldridge is shown in a 1961 film-clip playing with Hawkins. Like most of the film excerpts here, there is almost no information about the bands or the origin of the film. So, you can play trivia games: In what 1961 feature film was there a night club scene with a band featuring Roy Eldridge and Coleman Hawkins? Dizzy, who turned the instrument inside out for his generation of players and trumpet players to come, is featured in a 1947 clip with Cab Calloway, in another segment from 1959, and finally, at the conclusion of *Kings*, in his only appearance with Louis Armstrong, on a 1959 edition of *The Jackie Gleason Show*.

There's no film record of Fats Navarro, who died at age 27, or Clifford Brown, killed in an automobile crash at age 25. Representing their "spirit" is a great piece with Lee Morgan and Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers (1959). Miles Davis, and the drift toward more modal playing and less complicated structures than bebop, is shown in a 1959 television appearance with a small Gil Evans band playing *Kind Of Blue*. The group includes John Coltrane, Paul Chambers, Wynton Kelly, and Jimmy Cobb. But it's just a taste, a kinescope fragment. West Coast cool is covered by Art Farmer with Gerry Mulligan (1959) and Shorty Rogers in a 1962 performance. Other important players woven into this tape include Freddie Hub-

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## 1 THE MASTERSOUNDS.

*SHALL WE DANCE?* (from *THE KING AND I*, World Pacific). Buddy Montgomery, vibes. Rec. 1957.

I don't recognize that player. You know, you don't have that many vibes players playing today, or shall we say, playing today's music. It's difficult for me to recognize those playing fusion, free-form, new music. That was pretty much in the modern jazz era, though. Good performance—give it three stars.

## 2 AL FRANCIS. BLUES FOR

*BOOKER* (from *JAZZ BOHEMIA REVISITED*, LCU). Francis, vibes.

It's not a player I recognize. The vibraharp is a very mechanical instrument: if you don't have the pulsator motor going around, you lose the essence of the instrument. Without vibrato, something's missing; it's a bland sound, you don't get the best results. Two stars.

## 3 ROY AYERS. VIRGO (from

*YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED*, Columbia). Ayers, vibes.

That sounds a little like Bobby Hutcherson, or Dave Pike, but it's not them. In a setting with quite a few electronics, for me, the surrounding sounds are far too loud [for the vibes]. It needs a very delicate background to be heard; it's too mechanical, it only gets so much volume from the microphone without creating feedback. You have to be sympathetic in terms of background, and this is not suitable for the vibes to stand out. One-and-a-half.

## 4 TERRY GIBBS DREAM BAND. DANCING IN THE DARK

(from *SUNDOWN SESSIONS*, Contemporary). Gibbs, vibes; Bill Holman, arranger.

I didn't recognize the artist, but I did like the band. Now there the instruments were acoustic, so the vibes could be heard. What's the point of any solo if you cover it up? That was a nice arrangement, too. Three-and-a-half.

## 5 DOUBLE IMAGE. MIST

(from *DOUBLE IMAGE*, Inner City). Dave Samuels, vibes; Dave Friedman, marimba.

I think I finally got one: Gary Burton, or somebody playing his style. I like his four-mallet conception, but he doesn't use vibrato. It takes away from the essence overall. One of the greatest four-five mallet players was Milt Buckner, from Detroit, like me. He was so good his contract read he couldn't play vibes in Hamp's band. He arranged and played piano. I respect Gary's playing, so four stars.

## MILT JACKSON

by Fred Bouchard

**B**oston's WHRB-FM underground library holds bags of Bags—nearly 50 albums led by veteran vibraphonist Milt Jackson, plus some 50 more as a charter member of the Modern Jazz Quartet, by now to be considered a jazz institution. On many of those countless classic sides he has offered mallet stylings that range from bluesy to baroque, but all contain a swinging measure of Bags' inescapable, immediately recognizable groove.

Jackson visited the WHRB studios recently in shades, azalea sports shirt, and deck whites for straight-talk on his axe (a 1930s Deagan), the constant closing and opening of jazz clubs. New York joys, music industry controls, and the mass media's neglect of jazz. It was all in aid of his stay at Cambridge's spiffy Regattabar, with his easy-riding, loose-limbed quartet, featuring pianist Kenny Barron.



Bent on finding some soul food, Jackson TCB-ed a record-time (40 minute) Blindfold Test, his first since 1975. He was given no information about the records played.

## 6 RED NORVO TRIO.

*SEPTEMBER SONG* (from *SAVOY SESSIONS*, Savoy). Norvo, vibes.

There's no vibrato there, either. I find it hard to rate when the instrument is not realizing its full potential. One reason I was drawn to the vibes was the fact I could transfer the vibrato of the human voice to the vibes using the motor's speed control. Two stars.

## 7 LIONEL HAMPTON.

*JIVIN' WITH JARVIS* (from *SWING CLASSICS*, RCA). Hampton, vibes.

There's a distinctive style! That's the master himself, Hamp. There were only two others playing the vibes when I started: Red Norvo and Adrian Rollini. Hamp inspired me to take it up. I was already at the edge of the Swing Era and into bebop. It was my challenge to make the vibraharp sound like Charlie Parker or Dizzy [Gillespie]'s horn, vibrato included. Four-and-a-half.

## 8 BOBBY HUTCHERSON.

*WITCHCRAFT* (from *IN THE VANGUARD*, Landmark). Hutcherson, marimba; Kenny Barron, piano.

This sounds like Bobby Hutcherson's style; he's one of the few who play marimba. On the marimba and xylophone the bars are made of wood and there's no electrification or amplification. The pianist has elements of Cedar

Walton's style, but I'd have to hear more. The band I had with Cedar, Ray Brown, and Mickey Roker is my favorite band of all time. Bobby's style is very unique, so four.

## 9 GARY BURTON. SUNSET

*BELL* (from *ALONE AT LAST*, Atlantic). Burton, vibes.

This sounds like Gary Burton or his influence: I can usually tell by the three-four mallets and the straight [no vibrato] sound. I can't say I'd know his followers; I'm not much into the contemporary sound. I stick to things I think I'll get something from. I'm not putting it down, it's just my personal taste. Two-and-a-half.

## 10 ANDRE HODIER. CRISS

*CROSS* (from *THE PARIS SCENE*, Savoy). Fats Sadi, vibes.

That tune's from one of the first albums I made with Monk. *Eronel* was on there, too. I don't know the player, but he's very good, and they had nerve to play this difficult tune. Three-and-a-half for getting through the composition!

FB: That's Fats Sadi, the Belgian vibist.  
MJ: Oh, yeah! I heard him in person with the Kenny Clarke/Francy Boland Big Band, but, again, if a player doesn't make a lot of records or you don't hear them, it's hard to identify his style. db

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### KENNY G

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it did this year and that's great. People talk about our music as being gimmick-oriented. Why is it so gimmick-oriented? I look at it like we've broken through some kind of communication barrier, we've reached people.

And with the response from this album, there must be some substance to what we're doing. Two million people don't buy a record because it's a fluke. It's hit home somehow and I'm glad.

**SS:** In addition to planning your next album, what other projects have you been involved with recently?

**KG:** This year has been the best for me. I've been doing a lot of studio work, which is still kind of new for me, and every record I've played on has gone gold or something. It's been a lucky time period and I'm savoring it. I've played on Whitney Houston's new album, Smokey Robinson's, George Benson's, Sheena Easton's, Aretha's. I worked with Lee Ritenour—there have been a lot of great projects.

I got the chance to work with Burt Bacharach and it was actually a pretty funny experience. I broke my thumb last April and had to wear a cast. A couple of weeks later Bacharach called, which amazed me. He wanted me as the soloist for *Love Power*, the single with Dionne Warwick and Jeffrey Osborne. I said "Great, no problem." I hung up the phone, looked at my hand and thought, "How am I going to pull this off?"

I found this hip doctor and told him I just had to be able to play this session. He said, "Bring your horn down. We'll see what we can do." He took the cast off and made this little brace so it could work. Somehow, I managed to play the session perfectly! My mother would never have forgiven me if I hadn't. My folks don't know about Narada Michael Walden or Kashif, but you say Burt Bacharach and my mom starts to glow. It's like playing a benefit for the Seattle Hebrew Academy.

**SS:** How are things progressing with your band?

**KG:** Earlier this fall we opened for Whitney Houston for two months, which gave us tremendous exposure—20,000 people a day. And this November and December, we finally had our first real tour—sound and lights, two tour buses, a truck. I got to bring my bicycle, a ping-pong table. I want to stress the fact that I don't live and breathe music. In fact, I don't even listen to music, I never really have. The only time I do is when I'm recording.

But do you know how long I've been wishing to be able to actually get out there and gig? The guys in my band had been sitting around Seattle forever trying to figure out what to do. A lot of the satisfaction I get is from seeing them get a lot of experience and make some money, and watch them grow. They are all such good players.

I don't use name players, I don't use the studio guys. The reason is that I really want to use my efforts in things that can get across to people. I love my band and people really respond to them. And it's better for me because I've got my friends up there.

On the road recently, I was working out at some health club, and maybe my face is becoming more well known than I realize. Someone came up to me and said, "Do you know how many times my girlfriend and I have made love to your music?" I almost dropped the weight I was lifting! I started laughing and he said, "I just want to shake your hand. Thanks for that song." That was it, that was the greatest compliment I ever received.

db

## DON BYRON

FINDING NEW VOCABULARIES FOR THE CLARINET IS THIS YOUNG, ADVENTUROUS ARTIST'S GOAL.

By Jeff Levenson

**D**on Byron has a global, World Music perspective that finds him navigating difficult and varied waters—one day manning his clarinet through the tricky, free-blowing trade winds of David Murray's Octet or Craig Harris' Tailgater's Tales or Hamiet Bluiett's Clarinet Family, the next day negotiating the treacherous ethnic crosscurrents of klezmer music.

The fact that Byron is young and black, playing eastern European dance music most often viewed as "Old World" and Jewish, makes for good copy. After all, black jazz musicians who manifest a decided edge in their play are not often heard blowing klezmer. Aside from fielding occasional questions pertaining to the authenticity of his efforts—Who is this new guy and why is he playing *this* music?—Byron himself questions why klezmer is not appreciated as an adventurous and swinging idiom worthy of the same creative considerations afforded "new jazz" or any other challenging world music.

"I think klezmer has been cast as 'Old World' beyond the truth of the matter," he explains, in response to a commonly held misconception regarding the music. "That's the real issue. It's 'Old World' to a certain extent, alright, but it's not static. I think it couldn't internalize American elements fast enough for the assimilation drive of the people it represents.

"The average person that supports klezmer music is really paying for the luxury of a single ethnic perspective. Unfortunately, the music is getting used for that. And that's why the young cats who play klezmer really don't include some of the innovative stuff that takes in more mainstream American information. A lot of the newer klezmer cats just gravitate to the older musicians or they make up a revisionist version of what klezmer was like. In a certain way, it's a luxury of isolation."

As if to combat the limitations of cultural and musical isolationism, Byron throws himself into different group situations that challenge his powers of adaptation. In New York earlier this year, under the auspices of The World Music Institute, he played a trio date with percussionist Gerry Hemingway and pianist Marilyn Crispell—and his spirited excursions ignited the group's interactive improvisations. The next night he spun



MITCHELL SEIDEL

sinewy Tailgater solos alongside front-line-mate Craig Harris.

He has the unerring ability to shift mindsets, to work deliberately and imaginatively within the dictates of any chosen idiom. But his concerns don't end with maintaining that idiom's artistic purity and purpose, especially as established by historical imperatives. He is equally respectful of the need for cross-pollination, thus fostering the music's natural, developmental flowering.

His studies at the New England Conservatory of Music and his recordings with the Boston-based Klezmer Conservatory Band forced him to address the classic issue involving the maturation of any musical form—that is, the creative pull between old and new. In effect, he arrived at the doctrine of avant-traditionalism, crucial for any form yet moreso for klezmer, where the music's revitalization is dependent on steady transfusions of new, young blood.

"As far as I'm concerned," he admits, "I'm only interested in music that is moving. It's about growth. I naturally gravitate to the end of the music that I feel is growing—music that has, if not an avant garde perspective, then at least a perspective of going forward.

"Playing klezmer is not about blowing your load over an endless group of vocabularies. Improvising over music is discovering what to do with emotion at certain points. What you do with a blues lick in some situations is different than what you do in klezmer. You have to find the places where the emotion fits.

"As a clarinet player I've had to be really accurate about language and grammar—which language and grammar I need to be using in any musical situation. Playing different musics requires separate skills. For instance, I've played straightforward gigs that

require different skills than playing with David [Murray]. For that matter, playing in a traditional big band is really different than playing in David's big band. When I learned to play klezmer it wasn't that I came in there thinking I'm really a hot jazz player. What I've found is that I tend to gravitate towards whoever is playing the trickiest, outest stuff—in whatever idiom I'm working in."

While klezmer has enjoyed its share of innovators and role models—Sammy Musiker and Mickey Katz among them—Byron feels that few jazz clarinetists have captured the subtlety, power, and expressive capabilities of the instrument. It may be that the image of the clarinet has suffered from accepted misgivings regarding its difficult embouchure, and from an unfair stereotype—parallels here with klezmer—linking the instrument's heyday to a former era, that of the big band leaders of the '30s and '40s. "In jazz the growth of the instrument has been stunted," Byron maintains. "So if you want to make the clarinet a contemporary jazz instrument, it isn't smart to go back to Benny Goodman records.

"There are about three clarinet players who I really like. I like Jimmy Hamilton, Artie Shaw, and Tony Scott. Scott is underrated—[he's] not especially technical but he's done a grittier thing than most players. And Shaw was probably the strongest all-around player of the three. But I think Jimmy Hamilton had the most modern ears over changes. In a lot of ways, he was probably the biggest bebopper of that [Ellington] section, easily the most progressive voice there."

Byron's appreciation of the various contributions made by celebrated clarinetists marks him as a quick study; he has learned from all the instrument's major practitioners. His own sense of control, his ability to swing exuberantly from the heels and to wrench from his horn singing, liquid melodies, place him in a unique category among young-bloods. He is mature beyond his years, a formidable feat considering his instrument is not known for its generosity to musicians. Additionally, he moves through worlds seemingly beyond his ethnic reach, with cultural roots not quite his own.

"I don't like or dislike any music I play any more or less than I like jazz," he claims, "It's just that in jazz I don't have to deal with having my ethnicity create a credibility problem.

"Frankly, I don't think the final role of an ethnic music in America is to have it on the Johnny Carson show with Doc Severinsen. The question is this: Are people—any people—willing to take their whole ethnic package into the melting pot with them all the way? Or, at one point do they decide to abandon it for the stereotyped, blanched whiteness that doesn't include anybody's ethnicity? I think it boils down to that, and it's something every serious ethnic musician has to answer." db