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For Contemporary Musicians

# downbeat

February, 1988 \$1.75 U.K.£2.00

## CARLOS Santana An Inner View

**STEVE COLEMAN**  
*Stretching The Alto*

**CASSANDRA  
WILSON**  
*Streetwise Harmonies*



**OREGON**  
*Synthesizing Cultures*

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Carlos Santana

BONNIE SHIFFMAN



Oregon

CHRIS CUFFARO



Steve Coleman

ALDO MAURO



Brandon Fields

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# down beat

For Contemporary Musicians

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**PRESIDENT** Jack Maher  
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**FEBRUARY 1988**  
VOLUME 55 NO. 2

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**down beat** (ISSN 0012-5768) is published monthly by Maher Publications, 180 West Park Ave., Elmhurst IL 60126. Copyright 1988 Maher Publications. All rights reserved. Trademark registered U.S. Patent Office Great Britain

registered trademark No. 719, 407. Second Class postage paid at Elmhurst, IL and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: \$18.00 for one year, \$31.00 for two years. Foreign subscriptions add \$5.00 per year.

Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, photos, or artwork. Nothing may be reprinted in whole or in part without written permission from publisher. Microfilm of all issues of **down beat** are available from University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106. MAHER PUBLICATIONS: **down beat** magazine, **Up Beat** magazine, **Up Beat NAMM Show Dailies**.

**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** Please allow six weeks for your change to become effective. When notifying us of your new address, include current **down beat** label showing old address.

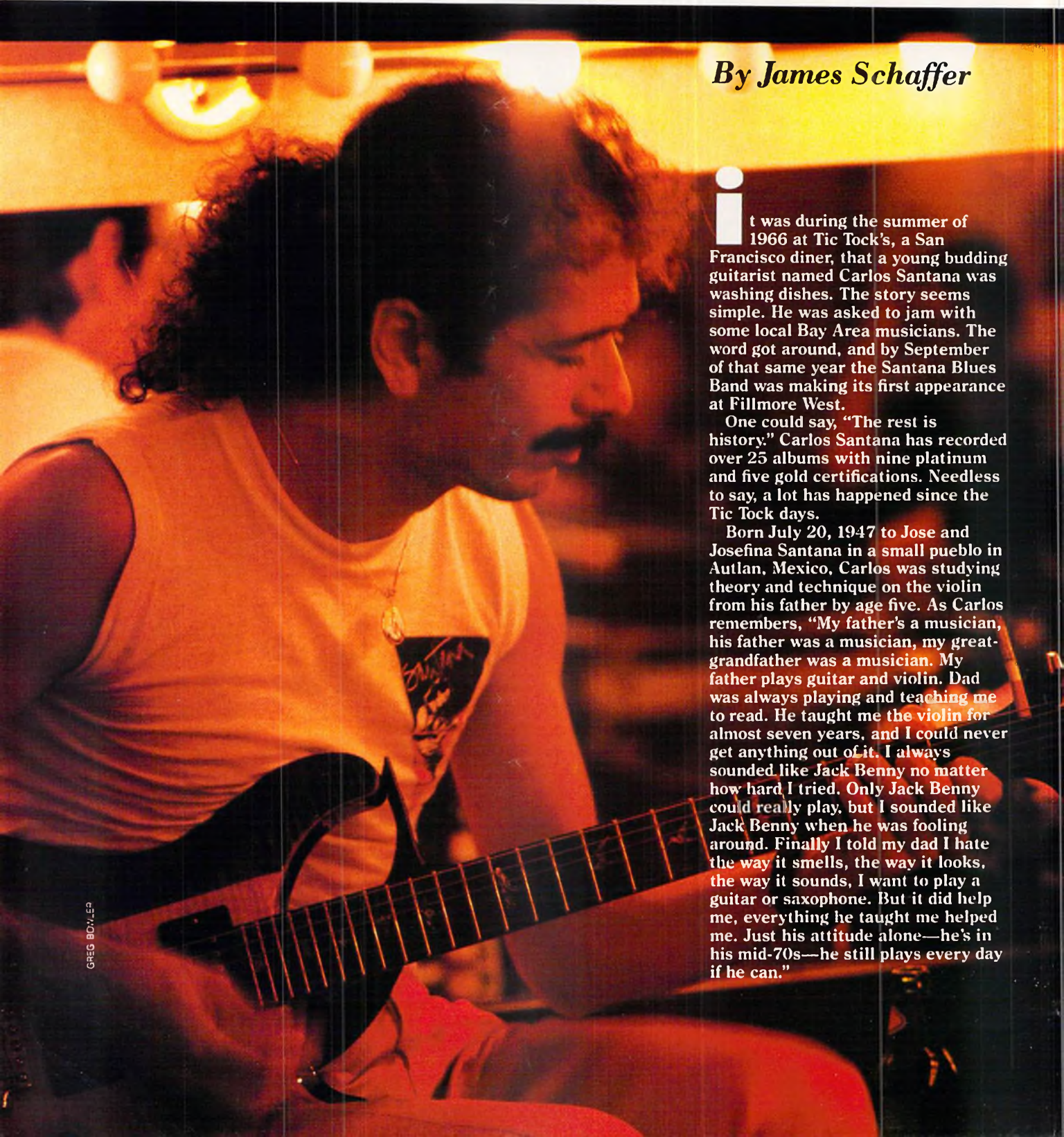
**POSTMASTER: SEND CHANGE OF ADDRESS TO down beat**, 180 W. Park, Elmhurst, IL 60126  
**CABLE ADDRESS: downbeat** (on sale Jan. 7, 1988)  
 Members, Audit Bureau of Circulation, Magazine Publishers Association



# SANTANA

## An Inner View

By James Schaffer



**i**t was during the summer of 1966 at Tic Tock's, a San Francisco diner, that a young budding guitarist named Carlos Santana was washing dishes. The story seems simple. He was asked to jam with some local Bay Area musicians. The word got around, and by September of that same year the Santana Blues Band was making its first appearance at Fillmore West.

One could say, "The rest is history." Carlos Santana has recorded over 25 albums with nine platinum and five gold certifications. Needless to say, a lot has happened since the Tic Tock days.

Born July 20, 1947 to Jose and Josefina Santana in a small pueblo in Autlan, Mexico, Carlos was studying theory and technique on the violin from his father by age five. As Carlos remembers, "My father's a musician, his father was a musician, my great-grandfather was a musician. My father plays guitar and violin. Dad was always playing and teaching me to read. He taught me the violin for almost seven years, and I could never get anything out of it. I always sounded like Jack Benny no matter how hard I tried. Only Jack Benny could really play, but I sounded like Jack Benny when he was fooling around. Finally I told my dad I hate the way it smells, the way it looks, the way it sounds, I want to play a guitar or saxophone. But it did help me, everything he taught me helped me. Just his attitude alone—he's in his mid-70s—he still plays every day if he can."

In 1955, the Santana family moved to Tijuana, where Carlos eventually put down the violin, only to strap on the guitar. One of his first influences was a local guitar giant named Javier Batiz. As Carlos muses, "Javier was playing music specifically by B.B. King, Little Richard, Bobby Bland, and Ray Charles. He had those four guys down. So to be a kid in '57 going to the street park to listen and play—you know how the sound of an amplifier and guitar travels when it bounces off the trees and cars. The way Javier was playing with the beautiful twang and tone that B.B. King has—that really hit me."

Recently, Carlos and I got together to talk about his beginnings, his hopes, and his visions at his beautiful home in San Raphael, near San Francisco.

**James Schaffer:** *Tell me, who influenced you as a young growing musician?*

**Carlos Santana:** When I came to America, around 1966, I saw B.B. King for the first time. I saw in his face the tone, before he hit the note, because of how he makes his face look when he goes for one and hits that note. Later on, around 1969, is when I first heard of John Coltrane, and that changed everything around. But before John Coltrane, I liked Michael Bloomfield and Eric Clapton. I was totally into B.B., Freddie, and Albert—the Kings. Then I heard Gabor Szabo. Gabor Szabo took me out of there, as well as Bola Sete and people like that. And eventually, once you get into Grant Green and Wes Montgomery, you're on your way to picking up your own individuality as to where you fit into all this.

So as far as music for guitar, all these guitar players turned me around. But as far as philosophy in life, John Coltrane is the one, because of his tone and what he said and how he said it made me realize that I'm not a weekend musician. I'm not a person who plays music just to deodorize—it's not a job. In other words, it's more like a way of life. He taught me how to make spiritual progress. It immediately shows in your instrument, in your vocabulary, in your tone. He got me interested in Eastern philosophy as well as Christianity with nobody in between. You know, just you and I. So I think John Coltrane—and Aretha Franklin, with the *Amazing Grace* album—showed me that there was something more than just playing music. Music is not a fad, it's a very serious vocabulary—a very serious lingo, a universal language.

I'm at a point right now, where I'm really, really hungry to learn more about bebop—theory and changes. Why Monk would play certain things this way, and Bill Evans would go this other way. How come, all of a sudden when you hear one chord, your fingers immediately know where to go? It's almost like your fingers have, as Shirley MacLaine says, "muscles with a memory of their own." Einstein once said "Imagination is the most important thing, more important than knowledge."

I guess it comes back to the blues again. That's why I love the blues and reggae music. As soon as you hear reggae music, immediately in your mind—I'm in Tübege, Montego Bay, or something like that and I'm there. When I hear the blues, I'm at home, whether it's done by John Coltrane or Herbie [Hancock] or whoever. The blues is something that, to me, will never sound old or dated. The way the blues should be played actually is the slower, the more soulful. If you can play slow and soulful, you can play it, otherwise, well it's like a master acrobat. You have a bunch of beautiful riffs and licks and tricks and stuff but it's like empty bottles, there's nothing in them. To me that's the criteria of soulfulness, when you play slow and deliberate, that shatters me more than hearing a guy play a zillion notes.

Charlie Parker and Coltrane did that too; they're in another league, but they do both. It's like a boxer, when a guy hits you 20,000 blows, but they're all really fast and don't have any punch. But if he swings from way over here, he only needs one to put you down—and that's kind of like the same theory. It's how deep you get inside yourself when you hit that note. For me, I am hungry to learn about different kinds of scales. It's all a vocabulary that I use and I need as much as possible. Otherwise, it's like going to a swimming pool and jumping in the same way

everytime. It's boring. Why even have a swimming pool? The purpose is, how you can dive inside and get wet differently everytime and take whoever's listening with you? So all those things to me are important as far as where I am today.

Listening to Wayne [Shorter] a lot, and his new band, I feel like I'm two years old, like I don't know anything. Then Miles comes around with a tape of a show he did in Boston six or seven days ago, and it's incredible how these people just keep growing. The lifestyle of supreme musicians fascinates me. Like regular people shed their personalities every few months or years, changing their cars or clothes, but musicians change every second, every time they play. It fascinates me, because on one hand it's natural, and on the other hand, sometimes it feels like it's cruel because you can't look back and appreciate anything. You're constantly going forward-motion, so you don't have time to sometimes appreciate it until someone tells you, "Hey, this cassette that you did three months ago, man you got to hear it." I know it happens to a lot of musicians, but that's part of the urgency for newness.

That's something Wayne, Miles, and Herbie—the three trailblazers—always remind us, as musicians: not to stagnate or be locked in. Even when they give you platinum handcuffs, they're still handcuffs. No matter how elegant the straightjacket is, it's still a straightjacket and you've got to get rid of it. That's the beauty of it. Like when you do play with the Fabulous Thunderbirds, John Coltrane, or John Lee Hooker you realize that, what you're playing with this person isn't going to work with this other person. The language of music is very beautiful.

**JS:** *You know, that brings up something about the chemistry of putting bands together. You've now put together 35 bands? How important is the chemistry aspect? When it comes to choosing band members, you say, "I want this bass player," when you can really choose almost anyone you want.*

**CS:** The most important thing is learning from, again, Herbie, Wayne, and Miles that the musicians that they always pick, are *musicians* that first of all trust what these people write down for them to play. Even though they might not write every note, they do give you a guideline and a lot of musicians reflect their personalities in their music. If you've got a hot dog out there who wants to disregard your arrangement and wants to flex muscles out there, showboating, then you immediately know. Miles says he can tell by the way they walk or dress. I can tell by their eyes or what comes out of their mouth. You know, if you eat garlic it's going to come out. If you have good thoughts it's going to come out. So I try to pick musicians who, I feel, can see their vision, and their mission or lifestyle can enhance and complement what we're trying to say and how we're trying to say it. A lot of times, with drummers for example, the beat is here and the next beat is over there. Some people play in the middle, some in back, and some in front. It all depends on where you want it. Sometimes you can get it all out of one drummer, but other times you're not going to get it, because this guy just plays like himself and nobody else. So I have to learn how to be wise getting a person who has his identity but is like water. I can still ask him, or a bass player, "Can you go from Paul Chambers to Paul McCartney?," or do I have to be stuck with this forever? This to me is also very important, because I don't play just one idiom of music. We play two hours, and we try to really express the fullest of reggae, Afro, latin, jazz, or whatever they call it because it's just one beat anyway. It's just one groove and what you put in it. For those people who have to give it a name, well, that's for them.

**JS:** *Has there ever been a time you felt you didn't want to do this . . . like something came up that turned you around so you didn't want to play anymore?*

**CS:** No, but I have met a few people who have come to that realization. For me, I haven't been there yet. I'm too much involved with discovering notes everyday. There's only so many notes, but to me each one is like an ocean, there's so much to them. I don't measure my life according to *Rolling Stone* or the *Pope* or *Billboard* or anything like that, so all those things don't

affect me. I go by how, each day, I do get a chance to do what I call "milking the cow," trying to play. If I can give myself chills, or make my hair stand up, it doesn't matter whether I'm in front of Macys or in Madison Square Garden seven days in a row.

I know people who have played Madison Square Garden seven days in a row and they're not happy. To me, just realizing the Lord gave me the language, in my own simple way; and much of what I do know, I feel it—that's enough for me. That's a blessing that a lot of rich men cannot buy, that feeling to get *inside* the note. Your eyes roll back to your ears and you're gone. My mom says, "Where do you guys go when you do that?" She was watching Patti LaBelle one time, when she asked me that. So that's enough for me. The fact that I can sit down, appreciate anything that Wayne, Miles, or Coltrane do. That's enough for me. A lot of men cannot buy the gift to hear. A lot of great musicians cannot even hear. So that, to me, is enough motivation for me to get up in the morning and say, "Ummmm, what am I going to do with the day?"

You know the difference between real music and the ordinary approach to music. You play it once and next time you change, because it sucks. For music's sake, you could play anything right now by Horace Silver or Lee Morgan and it sounds current. That's the criteria for good music, something that's got the qualifications of classical music. And speaking of classical music, I've been talking to some symphonies to put this thing together with John Lee Hooker, Milton Nascimento, Armando Francisco, Quincy [Jones], Santana; for us to play one song and be backed up by a symphony. I'm sure there's got to be a symphony out there that's not afraid to put John Lee Hooker out there doing the blues with the cellos going "ba ba ba ba." Those things turn me on man, it really turns me on to put American Music—the foundation of American Music—in the same setting as Beethoven, or whoever, because Gershwin tried to do it and he got a lot of negative response from the press at the time. And now they're re-discovering his music is very beautiful and very deep. That's my goal, not only just to sell albums every year, but to do things that in three or four years you change where these things are going. Where this thing is going has exhausted already for me and for a lot of people like myself. The '60s is really coming around, *La Bamba* put the cap on it. The proof is that a couple of months ago a new film came out with Annette Funicello and Frankie Avalon called *Return To The Beach*, so now they're moving back into the '60s. I'm waiting for this because it's too narrow, too confining where the media has taken this lately. It's just the same drumbeat on every hit. The '60s to me is important, not for nostalgia, because I don't even like nostalgia, but because it emphasizes individuality. The power of individuality, there's nothing like it. That's beautiful, that's something that we need to constantly remind America about, because in America there's a lot of suckers. In Japan you fool them once but you don't fool them twice, or in Europe either. In Europe they know more. I'll give you an example: whenever I want some videos of great music or great musicians I always get them from Japan, Europe, Canada, or sometimes even Australia. I'm talking about *American* musicians. You're not going to get a Muddy Waters video here, or trumpet kings or Billie Holiday—all those kind of things, John Coltrane, all these hits come from Japan.

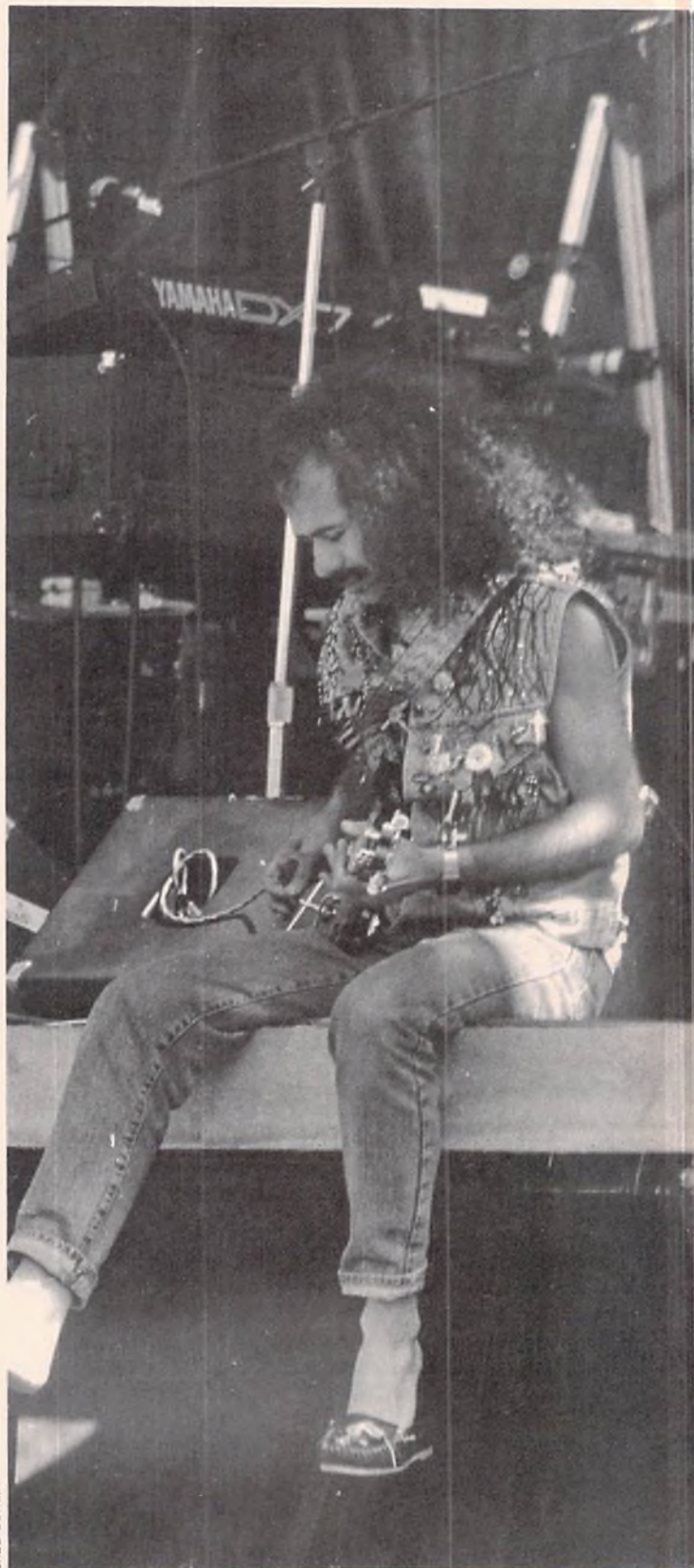
**JS:** Music education is sort of put down, in a way, in the school systems; you almost have to go to a private school to get it.

**CS:** Yeah, well, that's sad because in Japan they show almost everyday on tv Miles Davis or Tito Puente. The artist will play a song and underneath they'll show the notes so you can learn how to read.

**JS:** Really! That's far out!

**CS:** Yeah, I know it's far out! But that's what I'm saying. We're behind on education. So consequently, when people like Johnny Cash or Wynton Marsalis or Sonny Rollins go to Japan, they're ready for them. Because they know what they're about. For me

the kick was to wake up one day in Japan in '77, and see these people in the middle of a funky town outside the big cities, and they're playing mariachis, this folk music from Mexico from when I was a kid. A lady sweeping her stand listening to this music; I thought I was in Mexico, man. So it shows me that they're very



GREG BOWLER

Santana finds some time alone to practice during the Peace Concert in Russia.

advanced and the Europeans are very advanced. The Prime Minister of Japan called it when he said about America, that we're not really motivated for education. People didn't like it—in fact even his own countrymen said he shouldn't have said it. But the guy told the truth. We spend more money on all kinds of other things than teachers in the art of arts: Music!

**JS:** That's right.

**CS:** So what happens is that people . . . why do they have to say "Pride in America?" If you have it, you don't have to say it. People all over the world know that in music and sports, America's spirit is second to none. But we don't have the deep respect that it needs. People should be subsidized—Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, and people like that, they should be subsidized by the government. They are our national treasures. Chuck Berry and all those people. We subsidize the wrong things.

**JS:** Who do you like to listen to these days? What about women in music?

**CS:** Well, Tina [Turner] proved everybody wrong. Because three years ago they told her that she was all over and old and black and a woman! Three strikes against her, but she proved everybody wrong. I listen to her albums a lot; the last one I didn't get into it as much. Sting, I listen to him a lot. Prince, to a certain extent. But I still find myself listening mainly to Wayne Shorter and Miles at this particular time. I'm not listening to Coltrane as much as I used to. The Grateful Dead are a band to definitely reckon with. I've witnessed the Grateful Dead go from classical to cosmic to almost like Weather Report to Chuck Berry to country & western. The brand new bands—there really hasn't been that much since the Police. Michael Jackson of course is fantastic by himself but I need to see him with a band as a whole, I haven't seen one of his concerts. As far as like breaking ground, the last band for me was the Police. Huey Lewis and all those other bands are great, but they're not breaking any ground, they're just playing sophisticated '60s music or '50s music. Miles and Wayne Shorter are the only ones right now for me—one in each of my ears forever. Because they have a certain way of bringing it all together. It's like purposely they create a kind of music that you can't say, what is this? Because the moment you

say what it is, it's something else. This is extremely challenging, motivating, and inspiring. Because it's just music. The pulls and the funky thing that Miles got in there is the heart of New York on a hot summer day. Wayne is just so elegant—the structure, he's an architect. That to me is more fascinating than anything, you know. If I hear of a new band coming out, it would have to have those elements, those elements of '88, today, right now. It just so happens that everything else is—not even the word fusion, it's more like bringing it all back home. Fusion is forced. Even at its best, it's forced. Bringing it all back home, it's easy.

**JS:** So where does Santana the band and Santana the guitar player go from here?

**CS:** We recorded new music, always live. We hit the wall around 2 o'clock in the morning; we play two shows and like a runner when you hit the wall, you start playing things that you don't know what you're going to play. So for about an hour we just went into that zone. It felt really, really good, and I taped it and it shows me that the band is definitely ready to put the cap on Santana, as far as the things that they heard from Santana—*Abraxas* and stuff like that. I'm in the process of putting together a 20-year retrospective for CBS to really close it up and get into the new things and don't look back, that sort of thing. If you want to hear that, go buy the album, because now we're going to go into this and we'll take our chances. That's where I am today. I feel that need to play something new. I've been approached by guys from the old band, the original band, and I say that it's true that there's undeniable chemistry. It's like if you put Miles right now with Wayne and Herbie and Ron [Carter] and Tony [Williams], there's an undeniable chemistry. But unless all of them were writing some music that was *so* new and *so* different, there would be no point. So we're supposed to get together one time and see just how new it is. So there's that temptation. There's a temptation of going out on my own, leaving the bands altogether, just grabbing certain friends and musicians here and there and going out there and going for the total unknown. I'm taking one day at a time. I finished a tour about two months ago that started some time in March, hanging around with my family and discovering the ins of my daughter and son and my baby's teeny-tiny hands. They're priorities. My son is not even five years old, and I was taping him with a camera and said, "Okay, we're going to do this interview with Salvador Santana here, please tell us what music you like the best: daddy's music, or Miles music, or this music, or that music, or Michael Jackson's music?" Now, he's only seen one concert for about 10 minutes and I played Michael Jackson about one time on a cassette in the car, and he was sitting, and stopped, and he says, "Michael Jackson." I said "Michael Jackson? Why do you like Michael Jackson's music the best?" He says, "Cause it's bad." When I was a kid, Chuck Berry and all those people were totally different than what my parents were into.

**JS:** They were bad.

**CS:** Exactly! And now Michael Jackson is bad. He'll check out Miles and say he's bad. But again, he's in a whole other category. Miles transcends eras. Michael Jackson is an entity . . . he's a very special spirit. But when my son told me that, I put my priorities together. This dialog happened very naturally, and the way he said it with so much conviction, it shows me that I need to check out these people also. I need to check out Prince a lot deeper than I thought. I thought Prince was a compilation, which he is, of literally Sly Stone and Jimi Hendrix, Santana, and a lot of James Brown. But when you separate all that from him, there is a lot of Prince in there. That's a reality. Especially when he played the piano totally by himself, without a band. Then I immediately looked up and I said, "There it is, that's the beauty of individuality, right there." So my son put my priorities together again. Everything is tempting. Don't lose yourself. Yeah, I got a whole pocketful of memories and it's great. Like I said, it's a beautiful time right now. I'm watching the beginning of this massive consciousness of America that was stagnant for a while, but now it's moving again.

db

### CARLOS SANTANA'S EQUIPMENT

For the past few years, Carlos Santana has alternated between Paul Reed Smith and Yamaha guitars, strung with D'Addarios (.09, .11, .16, .24, .32, .42), run through three different amp systems depending upon the sound he requires. For basic soloing, there's a single Boogie Mark I amp with a 1 x 12 cabinet including Altec Lansing speakers. For a clean rhythm sound he opts for a pair of Boogie C300 amps, two 4 x 12 cabinets with EV speakers. And for a crunchy, overdriven sound there's always Marshall amps on hand.

For effects, he favors Roland SRV 2000 digital reverb, SRV 3000 digital delays, and a Roland GP8 multi-effects unit. There's also a Yamaha SPX90 unit with chorusing, stereo echo, reverb, et al; Hush 2C noise reduction units, and a pedalboard by C.A.E. in Los Angeles.

And for those moments when nothing else will quite do, there's a Roland guitar-synth.

### CARLOS SANTANA SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

#### as a leader

*BLUES FOR SALVADOR*—Columbia 40875  
*FREEDOM*—Columbia 40272  
*BEYOND APPEARANCES*—Columbia 39527  
*HAVANA MOON*—Columbia 38642  
*SHANGO*—Columbia 38122  
*ZEBOP!*—Columbia 37158  
*MARATHON*—Columbia 36154  
*ONENESS, SILVER DREAMS—GOLDEN REALITY*—Columbia 35686  
*INNER SECRETS*—Columbia 35600  
*MOONFLOWER*—Columbia 2-24914  
*FESTIVAL*—Columbia 34423  
*AMIGOS*—Columbia 33576  
*LOTUS*—Columbia 66325  
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*ABRAXAS*—Columbia 30130  
*SANTANA*—Columbia 9781

#### with John McLaughlin

*LOVE, DEVOTION AND SURRENDER*—Columbia 32034

#### with Alice Coltrane

*ILLUMINATIONS*—Columbia 32900

#### with Buddy Miles

*LIVE*—Columbia 31308

#### with Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, etc.

*SWING OF DELIGHT*—Columbia 2-36590

Dig's Den, Pumpkins. And people dug it. But then they moved to Europe. They wanted me to move to Europe, too, but I said, 'Cancel.' New York has its problems, but cats go to Europe and they lose it, and they don't even realize they lose it. It's easier over there, but I felt if you make it here, you've made it everywhere. You go over there to hang in the expatriate scene or to settle, and you get comfortable or forgotten.

"I'd already started Five Elements, and was gigging here and there. I remember doing a benefit with Sam Rivers' band for Dave Holland, when he'd just come back from his heart attack. Then Dave contacted me. I was quite surprised; I had no idea he'd noticed me, and I asked him, 'Why me?' He said he was looking for the same kind of thing I was: a freedom-within-structure combination. He wanted to hook me up with Kenny Wheeler, who I'd never heard of, and later he brought in Julian Priester.

"Basically, Dave was doing things similar to *Conference Of The Birds* (ECM 1-1027). Some new stuff came from what I had done with Doug Hammond, and things Smitty Smith was doing. I'd got into studying rhythms right before I joined Doug Hammond, to correct the bad time I'd had for so long. The people I liked were always rhythmic, so that helped, and I listened to a lot of African stuff—but not by putting on beads, burning incense, and changing my name. I listened to a lot of Bulgarian stuff, also—stuff from around the world.

"Where a note is placed can be the whole story. So I don't look at my time as odd meters; I tend not to divide up time. I look at it in an African sense, where you have this rhythm, and this other rhythm, and they're related in a certain way. When I write for horns, I realize they're like drums in that they make sounds—they just happen to be tonal sounds. My primary consideration is how they fit together in terms of rhythms."

Coleman responds to a question with a shrug. "I have different kinds of systems, and if you want me to speak specifically about them, I can. But I have the same view that Bela Bartok had about talking technical. Which is, I don't think it interests most people. There's a group of musicians who want to cop, but I'd rather talk about what I'm trying to do on a broad basis than the means I use to do it."

Pressed, he explains, "Most of the means come from living. The technical part comes from studying, but the ideas come from living. I call my music M-Base because I figure I should have the right to name it. I don't like calling it jazz because you run into regular people on the street, and they say, 'What do you play?' You say, 'Jazz,' and they have an immediate image—

whether it's Grover Washington, or King Oliver, or Duke Ellington, or Herbie Hancock. And none of those things sound anything alike. I don't want somebody thinking, 'Wow, he plays like Wynton Marsalis,' because it's not true.

"M-Base is just a name that means something to us—a whole group of us. Base, because what we're trying to do is form a common language. M stands for 'macro'—we just mean big base. But Base is also another word, for 'basic array of

structured extemporations,' which is what most of us are doing. We're all involved with improvisation, and it's usually structured. We hope M-Base won't be such a rigid term that everybody expects us to do only that for the rest of our lives. Anyway, it's not going to be as rigid a term as jazz, or funk, or jazz-funk, or fusion, which are all terms I hate.

"I mean, I'm influenced by music. I'm very influenced by a lot of classical

CONTINUED ON PAGE 53



ALDO MAURO

### STEVE COLEMAN'S EQUIPMENT

Like other young musicians eager to outfit themselves for any eventuality, Steve Coleman's gathered equipment beyond the saxophones he plays. While Selmer Mark VII altos and a Mark VI soprano are his basic gear ("I have a Yamaha soprano I like, too, and switch to it sometimes"), Coleman's support stuff doesn't end in his Van Doren A45 alto mouthpiece (with Van Doren Java #3 reeds) and Guy Hawkins soprano set-up (regular Van Doren #3s).

"At home I've got an Otari 1040 ST computer that does double duty, for composing and business. My software includes Telex, word processing, database, and financial programs, besides Doctor T's Keyboard Control sequencer, and The Copyist. I write some of my own software for composing, and conceptualizing, in machine language—it creates symmetrical and organic melodies.

"And I have two Commodore 64 computers, a Tascam 244 four-track, a Sony TCM 501 audio digital sound processor, to record music onto VCR Betamax tape, and synthesizers. There's a Roland TR 707, a TR 727, an Oberheim XK controller, a Yamaha FB01, TX 7, RX11, DX 72 FD (with a disc drive), and Yamaha TX 812. Also a Teac eight-channel mixer, Roland SRV 2000 digital reverb unit—that's recent—and a bunch of little stuff." Coleman bought his equipment by saving his gig pay—as always, a sound investment.

### STEVE COLEMAN SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

MOTHERLAND PULSE—JMT 850001  
ON THE EDGE OF TOMORROW—JMT 860005  
WORLD EXPANSION—JMT 870010

with Michele Rosewoman

QUIN:ESSENCE—Enja 5039

with Geri Allen

IN THE MIDDLE—Minor Music 1013

with Cassandra Wilson

POINT OF VIEW—JMT 860004

DAYS AWEIGH—JMT 870012

with the Dave Holland Quintet

RAZOR'S EDGE—ECM 1353

SEEDS OF TIME—ECM 1292

JUMPIN' IN—ECM 1269

with Branford Marsalis

SCENES OF THE CITY—Columbia 38951

with Billy Hart

OSHUMARE—Gramavision 8502

with Marvin "Smitty" Smith

KEEPER OF THE DRUMS—Concord Jazz 325

with Doug Hammond

SPACES—Ibid 105

with Sam Rivers

COLOURS—Black Saint 0064

with David Murray

LIVE AT SWEET BASIL, VOL. I—Black Saint 0085

LIVE AT SWEET BASIL, VOL. II—Black Saint 0095

with Abbey Lincoln

TALKIN' TO THE SUN—Enja 4060

with Chico Freeman

TANGENTS—Elektra 60361

**T**ake some classical oboe and guitar, jazz bass and piano, add in tablas and sitars, and the results are the countless New Age recordings issued in the last few years.

Take that same formula, add in intuitive improvisation, commitment, purpose, and a sense of adventure with each note and you have only one result—Oregon.

Since 1970 Oregon has been living up to their debut album's title—*Music Of Another Present Era*. It's a timeless sound that was born of the Eastern and African rhythmic textures of Collin Walcott, the classical guitar and jazz piano of Ralph Towner, the reeds and horns of Paul McCandless, and the muscular bass and wry humor of Glen Moore. Calling their sound a hybrid is too clinical. It's more like an organic growth, a natural phenomenon that seems to belong to every culture and no culture, a World Music.

Oregon came together in the late 1960s, when they were all members of the Paul Winter Consort. Moore and Towner had already been playing together since 1960. They recorded with Winter on the albums, *Icarus*, named after the Ralph Towner composition, and *Road*. While Winter purveyed an occasionally ersatz melange of classical-jazz-ethnic music, the members of Oregon were already fine-tuning their own synthesis in hotel rooms during Consort tours.

They were a few years too early with their all-instrumental chamber World Music. They recorded several albums for Vanguard before moving to Elektra and then ECM.

With their willful eclecticism, they've never been a purist

group. So when Towner introduced synthesizers into the mix a few years ago, it was a sign of growth, rather than conflict. On *Ecotopia*, their newest release, there's even a drum machine.

Oregon members have always pursued individual careers. Towner is the most prolific, recording a number of solo and ensemble albums. He's in the ECM stable of collaborative players and has recorded with Gary Burton, Jan Garbarek, and John Abercrombie. McCandless has two solo albums, has recorded with pianist Art Lande and the group Gallery, and recently signed with Windham Hill Records. Moore, who also plays a knee-style violin, has one solo recording and is working in the state of Oregon with violinist Steve Kindler and guitarist Jerry Hahn. Trilok Gurtu (added to the group after Walcott's tragic death) is a new member, but is hardly a novice. He appears on many ECM recordings and has played with Jack DeJohnette, Don Cherry, and Gil Evans. He's currently putting together an album with his mother, an Indian classical singer.

In New York City, Oregon was at the end of a five-day club stand and were gathered in Gurtu's cramped hotel room. In one corner, McCandless was shaving reeds for his oboe, Gurtu was practicing on a drum pad, and Glen Moore was working off his nervous energy. As Towner and I entered we gathered on the bed, floor, and chairs and reflected on the career of this influential, still-growing group.

It was a particularly good day for reflections, coming on the third anniversary of Collin Walcott's death on November 8, 1984. *Ecotopia* was their first recording without Walcott, but one of his compositions, *Song Of The Morrow*, is there as a memory.

# OREGON

By John Dilberto

## BEAUTY, AND THE BEAT

**JOHN DILIBERTO:** Let me ask you a difficult question. When Collin was killed in the accident, did you think of packing it in as Oregon?

**RALPH TOWNER:** Yes, we did. But we did have a chance to play with Trilok in a memorial concert for Collin, and then we sort of took a break. Eventually Paul and Glen and I got together at my house in Seattle where I live now—spent three or four days and we didn't touch an instrument. We just basically played frisbee and walked around in the park and tried to get our bearings.

Trilok was Collin's best friend, I think even more than we were as it turned out. Trilok had his own relationship with Collin and the music they shared. They had a tremendous influence on and helped each other musically and as friends.

Collin still has an influence just by the fact that we're all so closely connected with him. It's a miracle. When I think about it I realize how miraculous it is that Trilok should exist, because we weren't about to start auditioning drummers. It wasn't even about drums. It was about something bigger than that, and here comes Trilok who had already been earmarked by Collin—Collin had suggested that he ought to be his replacement years before the accident.

**GLEN MOORE:** Today's the third anniversary of Collin's death. It's

been three years and we've been playing together for two-and-a-half years. We've done six tours now together. And the music that Ralph is writing and that I'm writing now is beginning to be tailored to our hearing Trilok when we write the piece—not just hearing his drum part but feeling his influence in the way he drums. We're on the verge of learning one of his pieces now. So that his music is making its way into what we're doing, and when you hear us live now you'll hear that some of these free pieces we do have this rhythmic, incredible complexity and drive that he brings to it that we're responding to and being moved by.

**JD:** It's interesting looking back to see how the group has developed in different directions from the Paul Winter Consort, since Oregon essentially came out of the Consort.

**GM:** The group did not essentially come out of the Paul Winter Consort. Ralph Towner and I met in 1960 in Eugene, Oregon, when we were both at the University of Oregon. And we were playing together for 10 years before we ever heard of Paul Winter. We did join the Paul Winter Consort for a short period of time, and there, along with Collin—who we met prior to the Winter Consort—we played some with Collin, with Tim Hardin at the





CHRIS CUFFARO

Woodstock Festival, and other places, and then the three of us joined the Paul Winter Consort in January of 1970 and there met Paul McCandless. By June of that year we had an offer to do a recording which we did in California in 1970 [*Our First Record*, actually released in 1980].

We were working with the Winter Consort at the time and it was an encouraging circumstance to be able to play music that we enjoyed playing on a stage. We'd been doing it prior to that time in bars and stinky little places. So the experience with Paul Winter was a really good one and launched us in a way, introduced Ralph to the 12-string guitar and introduced us to Paul McCandless, but we'd left the Winter Consort by . . . well, we recorded in 1972 for

Vanguard—the first record that came out [*Music Of Another Present Era*]. Ralph and I existed as humans playing together for 10 years prior to that.

**JD:** What sort of music had you been playing before the Consort?

**RT:** You mean Glen and I? Well, I think prior to moving to New York, I had studied classical guitar, so I was a classical guitarist and a jazz pianist along the lines of Bill Evans. Bill Evans was a real strong influence, and Scott LaFaro. So Glen and I would play in the clubs, and half the set would be Bill Evans-style trio jazz and the other half would be pretty much down-the-pike Brazilian music with the guitar.



CHRIS CUFFARO

When we joined Paul, what happened was this unusual instrumentation triggered my composition mechanism again, which had been sort of dormant since college, since I'd graduated, and I started writing original material for that group. When we joined Paul Winter he was playing a collection of styles rather than an amalgamation of styles. We were playing everything from Elizabethan music to Brazilian music to adaptations of Baroque music and some adaptations of Bartok.

So when I joined Paul, that really triggered some composition from me that was going to accommodate all these really interesting and wonderful combinations of instruments, which was Paul Winter's conception as far as the gathering of instruments and having a consort. And so, as I said, that triggered my compositional juices again.

**JD:** *It seems like that era of the Paul Winter Consort is the era most people think of. Your [Towner's] composition Icarus probably being the high watermark for that band.*

**RT:** That was the signature tune as it turned out. Interestingly enough I think I was only with them for about a year-and-a-half. But very influential years.

**JD:** *How conscious was the blending of ethnic elements with classical elements?*

**PAUL McCANDLESS:** I don't think it was conscious. Paul Winter actually took that approach. He was very consciously trying to integrate the grooves from all of the great music traditions and wound up getting kind of stuck up until the point that Ralph broke into the group and started blowing out this music that had all these . . . if you fussed around you could say "Gee, it's a little like this or it's a little like that." But there was no direct correspondence to the influences I feel that the music that we do and the styles that have been evolved in Ralph's writing and then also in my writing and Glen's and our playing as a group. We've digested our influences. So we've synthesized a lot of things in ourselves, but it comes more from the intuitive and creative side than it does from a project of bringing in a lot of influences.

**JD:** *Speaking of synthesizing, you've been introducing a lot of electronics into the group slowly over the last few years.*

**RT:** It's the last six years. Well, I have been introducing it slowly. The thing is that synthesizers can do very wonderful things that only synthesizers can do, and they certainly can't replace the complexity and the personality of acoustic instruments, let's say, just in terms of the complexity of sound. They're so useful in what they can do. They haven't been a disruptive factor.

I think the best synthesizer players and programmers are the people that have a lot of experience playing an acoustic instrument.

They have more a sense of sound. I don't have to worry when I find a sound or program a sound into a synthesizer, whether it's going to blend with an acoustic instrument or not. It blends because of my taste in sound.

So it's been exciting. It gives us an even broader extreme as far as the kind of range that we can play at. We can go from a real high-end in terms of volume and that kind of excitement and still maintain our original ability to play what you might consider more chamber improvisation on the acoustic instruments. So we don't lose anything, and we just gain another arsenal of sounds that we can use.

**JD:** *You initially started using the Prophet 5, and it seems like you were using it more texturally in the beginning. On the new album you seem to have a few other devices.*

**RT:** I've got a lot more synthesizers MIDI'd together. I still have the Prophet 5 and that's always useful. But they're all connected and can be linked together in any order with whatever master keyboard is playing it but, yeah, this stuff just keeps growing by leaps and bounds. Paul is an excellent synthesizer player and programmer, and he has two so we included those on the record. His are wind-driven. I just play the keyboards, but for economic reasons we can only drag my synthesizers around.

**JD:** *Twice Around The Sun, from the new album, seemed to be written on synthesizers.*

**RT:** Actually, it was. That's the only tune that I've written on synthesizers. I can't say that. Hold it. The second tune that actually was invented was a result of the synthesizers. Often I write just on the guitar and the piano. Yeah. You're right.

**JD:** *Paul, what electronic wind instrument are you using?*

**PM:** I'm using an older wind instrument called a Lyricon wind driver, and it's a system that runs CVs (control voltages) and gates. In other words it's all voltage rather than digital, but the Oberheim Expander makes a CV to MIDI conversion and from that I can start to use all of the MIDI controllers and MIDI voice assignments that become available when you're in the MIDI realm.

**JD:** *Do you have one of the MIDI Lyricons that someone retrofitted a few years ago?*

**PM:** Yes, I have a MIDI box but I don't use it because the expander CV to MIDI conversion is better, or as good, so I don't need it, and I like the speed of the CVs. It's very immediate. It's a little bit of a spoiler to play CVs rather than MIDI, because when you go through that conversion there's a delay time. It gets like a little bit of a bad dream. And you have to start and stop—it's a little bit like the oboe. You have to stop listening to what you're doing in terms of breath pressure and fingers and just listen to when the sound comes out if you want to keep up with the metronome or whatever's going on.

**JD:** *Why is it of all the classical influences I feel in Oregon I feel the Renaissance, pre-Baroque the most?*

**RT:** That would have been the last one on my list. I like that music personally. I've played a lot of Renaissance music and unusual guitar transcriptions. There's a flavor, an atmosphere in Renaissance music that definitely could find its way in, but again, as Paul had said, as a digested aesthetic that might creep out. There's a certain flavor to Renaissance music that for me has a kind of dryness and a simplicity and yet a meaning for every note, and of course the harmonic rules that exist there. That might filter out mainly in terms of gesture or attitude, but as I say we've never intentionally tried to introduce a Renaissance spin-off piece. That's how you get into the kitsch stuff, when you think—add trap drums to Bach, which I always get violent about, or any of those hybrid adaptations.

**GM:** Musical shotgun weddings. I would think that if a Renaissance connection was made [it might be due to] the instrumentation, the fact that the guitar or the lute was at its heyday in Renaissance times, and horns reminiscent of the oboe perhaps, so that the

sound of those two instruments can be identified with Renaissance music.

**PM:** That's a very good point, because the guitar was the center in some of the Renaissance music. I mean dead center. In our group, at least in the guitar pieces, that's also true. The guitar is the motor and it generates a lot of rhythm and the texture of the piece, often doubles the melody and is playing contrapuntally also. Electric guitar players and folkies don't play counterpoint. They mostly just play strum, thud chords or they arpeggiate, but Ralph's style of playing is to play more than one voice at a time with an independent motion. To have melody, chords, and bass. And that is a good connection with the Renaissance and the Baroque also.

**RT:** Right, in the voice-leading. That's from studying composition and Baroque music and Renaissance music as a player and developing my piano playing from, say, Bill [Evans] or Herbie Hancock and the early influences. It's voice-leading where every voice is connected to another one. If you would write out my parts I think you'd find there's logic in every note as far as on the inside was moving. You could write it out, transcribe it, and it would sound very good. You would know which part to assign to which, like the alto or the tenor or something like that.

**JD:** But you did say that Renaissance would be the last classical influence. What would be the first one?

**RT:** Well, now I've changed my mind because of what they just said. Putting it that way sheds a different light on it.

**JD:** I was reading an earlier interview with you where Collin mentioned it was difficult in the beginning to integrate elements that he was bringing into the group, the Indian and Third World elements.

**RT:** Did he say why he felt it was difficult?

**JD:** He said there was Oregon and there was this "ethnic sideshow" I believe was the expression that he used.

**RT:** I think it's mainly because Glen and my time thing had been either Brazilian or jazz time feeling, which is a whole different kind of meter and time feel. And Collin's sense of time was not jazz-influenced. He hadn't played jazz at all, and he had a very centered kind of beat that was strongly African-related and he was an expert on all of that. And it took quite a few years for us to concede that the beat could exist other than where we thought it should be from player to player. And I don't know if Collin might have budged up a little further for the beat.

I don't know if this is too strange, but it's a very wide thing when you feel a pulse and you're playing. And when you're playing you can play what they say is on top, you know, play very early. Like if it's one-two-three, one is quite a big, fat space and there's quite an interpretation and quite often when you're locked in this time playing you all have the same agreed concept where you meet in this broad concept of a pulse. And so Collin's was very centered and sort of back on his heels. I mean, you have this feeling when you hear African music being very settled, and the jazz time you feel is very urgent. It happens very quickly and there's an insistence about it. So the difficulty was that meeting.

**JD:** Trilok, you've been on some unusual recordings for a tabla player. I remember you played on the Barre Phillips album, Three Day Moon, and you were playing with Lou Reed's back-up group, the Everyman Band, and with Don Cherry.

**TRILOK GURTU:** And then I made a record with Paul Bley and Barre Phillips. I did a lot of playing. I played Indian music. Played African music, too. And jazz. A lot of jazz. And free jazz. [laughter] Kaput jazz. I've been through a lot of changes. That's what I liked.

**JD:** How long did you study the tablas in India?

**TG:** I'm still studying, but I began when I was six. I had different masters. It's not like how you are educated here. I couldn't go to schools to study. I had to go to the teacher and study. And I studied for two years with one teacher and then I stayed with one master. Stayed with him for three years. I just followed him

## OREGON'S EQUIPMENT

There was a time when Oregon was thought of as the purist of acoustic groups, but that has changed radically in recent years with the additions of synthesizers and signal processing.

**Ralph Towner** is the biggest techno-junkie. He's still using the Prophet 5 he got several years ago. He's since added a Roland Super Jupiter Rack Mount, a Roland D-50, a Kawai K-3 Synthesizer, a Kawai drum machine, and an Ensoniq ESQ-1 rack mount. It's all MIDI'ed together through an Akai Programmable MIDI Patch-Bay. He sequences with a Sequential Circuits Poly-Sequencer and an Alessis sequencer. For signal processing Towner uses a Lexicon PCM 70. A Mac Plus Computer runs Op-Code Patch Edit Library and Professional Composer and Performer Sequencer software. His home studio has a Fostex 8-Track, but he likes to record direct to two-track, driving the synthesizers with his sequencers and playing his guitar in real-time.

Speaking of guitars, Towner is still primarily an acoustic axe-man. He plays two custom classicals made by Jeff Elliott. One is a cut-away and the other a jumbo body. He also plays two Guild 12-strings. His horns are a Yamaha cornet, King trumpet and french horn, and Couesnon flugelhorn. Like all members of the group, he uses Walter Woods Amplifiers, "because they're the only ones with EQ on them."

"I use a lot of volume pedals," says Towner, "so I can play some things, change the programs and play something else, rather than locking something into a sequencer and leaving it. I have to respond to whatever's happening. I find them [the sounds] as we're playing."

Reed player **Paul McCandless** has also joined the electronic age. He plays two Lyricon wind-drivers that have been retro-fitted for MIDI. He runs them through an Oberheim Expander and a Prophet 5 and uses an MCS MIDI Control Station. His processing includes a Lexicon PCM 70 and a few Boss Chorus pedals. His reeds, still his main instruments, are a Laurette oboe GM 54 and a Laurette english horn DK08. His soprano and soprano saxophones are Selmers, played with Vandoren #4 and #3 reeds respectively. He also has a collection of wooden flutes.

**Glenn Moore** has remained relatively immune to electronics, relying on his 1715 Klotz string bass, with Tomastic strings, strung high C and low C with D and A in the middle. He also plays a Gemunder violin and a nameless viola. He does use two Underwood pick-ups and Lexicon PCM 60 and 70 reverbs and digital effects units.

New member **Trilok Gurtu's** tablas are custom-made. "They are all custom-made in India," he claims. He has a Sonor conga and Paiste cymbals that include a Dark Ride 22-inch with sizzles, a Flat Ride, 8-inch, 10-inch, and 11-inch cymbals, a 13-inch high-hat and a custom 10-inch snare drum made by Chris Brady and Gary Ridge of Australia. Trilok has also been plugging in, using a vocal processor and MIDI-Verb.

## OREGON SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| ECOTOPIA—ECM 1354                        | <b>Towner w/<br/>Gary Burton</b>           |
| CROSSING—ECM 1291                        | MATCHBOOK—ECM 1056                         |
| OREGON—ECM 1258                          | SLIDE SHOW—ECM 25038-1                     |
| IN PERFORMANCE—Elektra 9E-304            | <b>Towner w/<br/>Jan Garbarek</b>          |
| ROOTS IN THE SKY—Elektra 6E-224          | DIS—ECM 1093                               |
| OUT OF THE WOODS—Elektra 6E-154          | <b>Towner w/<br/>Simon &amp; Bard</b>      |
| THE ESSENTIAL OREGON—Vanguard<br>109/10  | TEAR IT UP—Flying Fish 262                 |
| MOON & MIND—Vanguard 79419               | <b>Towner w/<br/>Weather Report</b>        |
| VIOLIN—Vanguard 79397                    | I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC—Columbia<br>31352 |
| TOGETHER—Vanguard 79377                  | <b>Paul McCandless as a leader</b>         |
| FRIENDS—Vanguard 79370                   | ALL THE MORNINGS BRING—Elektra 6E-<br>196  |
| WINTER LIGHT—Vanguard 79350              | <b>McCandless w/<br/>Gallery</b>           |
| DISTANT HILLS—Vanguard 79326             | GALLERY—ECM 1206                           |
| MUSIC OF ANOTHER PRESENT ERA—<br>Terra 1 | <b>Glen Moore as a leader</b>              |
| OUR FIRST RECORD—Vanguard 79432          | INTRODUCING—Elektra 6E-197                 |
| <b>Ralph Towner as a leader</b>          | <b>Moore w/<br/>Larry Karush</b>           |
| TRIOS/SOLOS—ECM 1025                     | MAY 24, 1976—JAPO 1901                     |
| DIARY—ECM 1032                           | <b>Trilok Gurtu w/<br/>Barre Phillips</b>  |
| BATIK—ECM 1121                           | THREE DAY MOON—ECM 1123                    |
| OLD FRIENDS, NEW FRIENDS—ECM<br>1153     | <b>Gurtu w/<br/>L. Shankar</b>             |
| SOLO CONCERT—ECM 1173                    | SONG FOR EVERYONE—ECM 25016                |
| BLUE SUN—ECM 1250                        |  |
| SOLSTICE—ECM 1060                        |  |
| SOUND AND SHADOWS—ECM 1095               |  |
| <b>Towner w/<br/>John Abercrombie</b>    |  |
| SARGASSO SEA—ECM 1080                    |  |
| FIVE YEARS LATER—ECM 1207                |  |
| <b>Towner w/<br/>Azimuth</b>             |  |
| DEPART—ECM 1163                          |  |

everywhere. I didn't touch the tablas so much, I just went around with him and he gave me some lessons, and in the night he would say, you can play now. So I would play. That was my education.

**JD:** When did you come to the States?

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# Cassandra Wilson

A NEW  
KIND OF  
SINGER

A NEW  
KIND OF  
SONG

By Kevin Whitehead

**T**here are only three things you need to sing like Cassandra Wilson: a natural instrument to make agnostics believe in Providence, technique to spare, and exquisite taste. Nothing to it.

You could hear she was different from her first appearance in 1985, on Steve Coleman's *Motherland Pulse*, snaking through the melodic maze of *No Good Time Fairies*, filling its dips with smoke and honey. You could already hear her well-developed ear, a taste for unlikely intervals, and a refreshing refusal to wow us to death.

It was a watershed. "I thought that was the sickest tune I'd ever heard," Wilson says with a characteristic low snicker—she laughs a lot, and her face has an animate beauty photographs don't catch. "I had to work on it a long time, because singers aren't taught to hear such intervals—close or strange intervals. Working on that kind of music opened my ears to hearing different ways of singing; it's one of my favorite songs now."

Since then, her voice has continued to ripen, her delivery continued to mature. Cassandra Wilson now has two albums of her own, 1986's *Point Of View* and '87's *Days Aweigh*, and has recorded with Coleman's neo-artfunk Five Elements, the gutbucket freebop trio New Air, and a studiously mainstream Jim D'Angelis/Tony Signa unit (with whom she moans a drowsy but compellingly atmospheric *Two Sleepy People*). New Air's *Air Show* boasts the most nimble free singing since Jeanne Lee's heyday. But Wilson's own albums are her best showcases; their mix of sly humor, essential seriousness, and articulate grace mirror her personality.

Wilson wrote, co-wrote, or arranged about half of her own albums, penning snidely humorous lyrics and/or sleek melo-

dies. *You Belong To You*, on *Days Aweigh*, simultaneously deconstructs moon/June banalities and trendy self-satisfaction: "I used to think that I was just a puppet on a wing/Now I find I'm the one who holds the strings." Her compositions are more musicianly than singerly: she doesn't write them easy on herself. *Square Roots*, which leads off her debut, is a ready example, with its casual shifts between triple and duple meter, irregular line lengths, melodic asymmetry, and wide-interval lattice-climbing. Yet somehow she does it all—rummaging in her dusky low register for the first couple of lines—without calling attention to how fiendish the song is.

She also has a hazy but deep, readily identifiable contralto voice which helps, given the varied material she sings, from standards to the Mississippi reggae of Olu Dara's *Electromagnolia*. Contrary to p.r. talk, there's nothing daring or gutsy about doing a little Tin Pan Alley, a little jazz, and a little pop—you can hear such daredevils at the Holiday Inn lounge, any night of the year. The trick to crossing over is not making lowest-common-denominator music. Wilson is a jazz singer—you can hear the Sarah Vaughan, Betty Carter, Abbey Lincoln (and maybe Carmen McRae)—who brings the same good sense to non-jazz material.

Of the young Brooklyn gang who've emerged on record in the last two-three years (Coleman and Geri Allen the most conspicuous), Wilson most deftly interweaves rock and jazz dialects—one reason being that the rhythm section's phrases stay as supple and subtle as the singer's.



LOVA FOTTE

**C**assandra Wilson now lives in Brooklyn Heights—spittin' distance from the Brooklyn Bridge—in a New York-sized apartment with just enough room for an upright piano. She is originally from middle-class Jackson, Mississippi, in the rolling countryside south of the Delta, and came by her easy commingling of styles early. Mom listened to Motown on the radio, Dad to his jazz records—Monk, Duke, Ella, Nancy Wilson, "But not a lot of Sarah," Wilson recalls, with barely a trace of a Southern accent. "He was the one who really instilled in me a respect for jazz.

"I started studying classical piano when I was six or seven, studying for six years. Then my father taught me how to play basic



**CASSANDRA WILSON QUARTET:** (from left) drummer Mark Johnson, Wilson, bassist Lonnie Plaxico, keyboardist Rod Williams.

guitar, folk-music chords. I'd always sung. Then I started writing songs at about 11 or 12, when I started playing guitar. I never wrote songs at the piano then; I'd had no theory, just reading. But when I picked up the guitar I started hearing differently. I didn't pay any attention to chord symbols or anything, I just played with different tunings and the sounds that I could make. The guitar gives you a lot of leeway in that sense.

"I wrote maybe 20 tunes between the ages of 11 and 15, folk-type songs, 'cause that's what I was playing on the guitar and listening to—Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, Judy Collins. When I was in college, around the mid-'70s, I got my first professional gig, every Tuesday night at a club in Jackson, guitar and singing. That's when people first started telling me that I could sing. But I used to have this nya-a-a-h vibrato, too—remember Buffy St. Marie? The club owner told me nobody could make it with a voice like that. I got rid of it, but there is a trace of it left; you can hear it."

Wilson got married, and stopped singing for awhile. After graduating from Jackson State, she and her husband moved to New Orleans for a year—where she gradually got back into it, sitting in with Earl Turbinton and Ellis Marsalis—and then to East Orange, New Jersey a year later. (They

later split up.) "I had not expected to go to New York, hadn't planned to go. When I first came up I tried to get a day gig; I couldn't get anything happening, so I just started going around to jam sessions."

At the Jazz Forum, she met pianist Sadik Hakim, who got her her first New York job—"The Galleon. The Bronx. 1982. I got a few gigs, sang around town. Things turned around for me when I met Steve Coleman at a Bob Cunningham gig I sat in on in 1983, on the anniversary of Charlie Parker's birthday. I got up and did *Cherokee*. Steve was really impressed. He couldn't believe a singer was checking out Charlie Parker, 'cause he was really into Bird at one time. But he kept telling me, 'Look, you're gonna have to break out of this type of standards gig, to make a mark for yourself.'"

Coleman harangues her for singing standards even now. "He was the first one that really encouraged me to write my own material, to do original music, and to just spot a direction of my own—not disregarding the tradition by growing out of it. Which was not logical to me then; I really fought it. I was like a bebopper; I used to listen to Bird like constantly, every day. I just wanted to be able to sing that kind of music. At that time Betty Carter was *it*, the last word in singers.

## CASSANDRA WILSON SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

DAYS AWEIGH—JMT 870012  
POINT OF VIEW—JMT 860004

with Steve Coleman

WORLD EXPANSION—JMT 870010  
ON THE EDGE OF TOMORROW—JMT  
860005  
MOTHERLAND PULSE—JMT 850001

with New Air

AIR SHOW NO. 1—Black Saint 0099

with Jim DeAngelis & Tony Signa

STRAIGHT FROM THE TOP—Staliras 8084

"I really started listening to Abbey Lincoln after Steve and I started working together, because he really admired Abbey. To this day, she's one of my favorite vocalists. The way she sings is not about working out on stage, it's about getting across a message, it's about singing the lyric."

The jazz tunes and AmPopSongs Wilson tackles aren't among the usual singers' dozen. *Point Of View* had a sensuous *Blue In Green*, at a treacherously slow tempo; *Love And Hate* is by Grachan Moncur, the non-Brooklyn ringer on *Point Of View*. "When I lived in New Jersey, Grachan taught me a lot, spent a lot of time playing piano, teaching me how to hear correctly, saying, 'You must learn to sing a melody before you can improvise.' *Some Other Time* on *Days Aweigh*, I fell in love with that when I used to hear John Hicks do it. I came across *I Wished On The Moon* on an old Billie Holiday tape. I hadn't heard anyone do this but Billie [1955], so I wanted to give it a shot."

She takes Irving Berlin's *Let's Face The Music* at a defiantly fast clip. "Henry Threadgill suggested that—I was shocked because he hates the standard repertoire—but it came out differently from the way he suggested. I greatly respect Henry, he's one of the finest musicians of my time." Still, that New Air date aside, further Wilson/Threadgill collaborations appear unlikely, victims to the difficulty of separating personal and professional relationships.

Wilson has started eyeing the major labels—somewhat skeptically, and not without reason, given the way she does things. The agreeably rough *Point Of View* took two days to record and mix; she did the brunt of producing for the polished *Days Aweigh*, which took only twice as long. She wouldn't mind a bigger budget—but she knows the downsides. She'd just as soon produce herself, and she's realistic about the reception her particular mix of styles would get at either a jazz or a pop label.

There are ample reasons to fear for her integrity, given the fates of most who've walked that path before. But I think Wilson could survive the leap in leagues from German indie JMT to major label X. She has enough confidence in her musical awareness and good judgment to tell the well-meaning moguls where to get off. Nothing to it. db

LONA FOOTE

# record reviews

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



## MOSE ALLISON

**EVER SINCE THE WORLD ENDED**—Blue Note 48015: *EVER SINCE THE WORLD ENDED*; *TOP FORTY*; *PUTTIN' UP WITH ME*; *JOSEPHINE*; *I LOOKED IN THE MIRROR*; *GETTIN' THERE*; *TAI CHI LIFE*; *WHAT'S YOUR MOVIE?*; *TROUBLE IN MIND*; *I'M ALIVE*.

**Personnel:** Allison, piano, vocals; Dennis Irwin, bass; Tom Whaley, drums; Bob Malach, alto saxophone (cuts 1, 7, 9), tenor saxophone (4, 6); Arthur Blythe, alto saxophone (1, 6); Bennie Wallace, tenor saxophone (1, 2, 7, 9); Kenny Burrell, guitar (2, 5, 8).

★★★★

This album is Allison's first renewal form for his poetic license since 1982, and, in approving the application, let it be said that he is aging more like a fine wine than a sharp cheese. Allison has often been mentioned in the same breath with William Faulkner, since both are associated with Mississippi, but, in comparing him with 20th century American writers, a more apt matching would be with Kurt Vonnegut. They share more than their birthday, most importantly an awed fascination with the writings of Céline. Both have also been scorned by "serious" (read: constipated) academicians for their utterly simple language.

Allison's pithiness is certainly the equal of Vonnegut's, and he can be as quasi-pornographic as Céline ever was, but added to those elements is a uniquely southern flavor that lends a philosophical dimension to gallops humor. No one else could write a love song for his wife built around the theme of being unable to forgive her for putting up with him, and get away with it.

Now that he's hit 60, and/or since he's sitting pretty, at long last, with a label that takes care of its artists, Allison has finally gone public with his view of the recording industry in *Top Forty*. It is, for him, a verbose extension of something he said about one of his former labels about a decade ago, when he was questioned about the long intervals between albums: "They don't do much for me, I don't do much for them." He has a way of summing things up with just enough of a twist to the dagger to make it tickle.

Lyrics-wise, the new gem here is *I Looked In The Mirror Today*, an ode to aging that speaks more to the process of maturing than merely getting older, with Allison's unique combination of the dirty old man and the wise old sage, waxing sentimental and smart-aleck at once, but also revealing in a phrase the true basis of his music these past 30 years: "... Mixin' up the boogie and the do-si-do."

It goes deeper than that. His technique is

grand in its subtlety. Allison can wring overtones on 10-note chordings that hover in all dimensions for longer than it would take Jarrett to twitch up and down from the piano bench six times, yet these are only occasional emphases, always brief. They are as close as he comes to ornamentation.

The other players sound more integrated and of a common purpose with the leader than in Allison's past recordings. Without intending to demean the talents of Irwin and Whaley, it must be said that they remain in the background, providing a foundation solid enough to support any given pyramid. Blythe emotes more on his two cuts than on any of his own recent recordings. Malach, not yet widely known on this side of the Atlantic, easily could become someone to watch. Burrell is simply himself. Enough said. Bennie Wallace, the Tennessee Tenor Terror, sounds righteously right in this context. Though Allison figuratively provides full job descriptions for his soloists, Wallace still manages to turn things through some surprising directions and comes back on the way instead of *in* the way. Him'n'Mose would make a good pair of ambassadors to represent southern white boys who play jazz.

All in all, this album is a perversely joyous reaffirmation of the possibility of not merely surviving but flourishing in an insane world by taking everything with a grain of salt, usually in an open wound, reminding yourself, as you grit your teeth, that there's a joke in every episode of the human drama, no matter how sad it might seem.

—w. patrick hinely



## STING

**... NOTHING LIKE THE SUN**—A&M 6402: *THE LAZARUS HEART*; *BE STILL MY BEATING HEART*; *ENGLISHMAN IN NEW YORK*; *HISTORY WILL TEACH US NOTHING*; *THEY DANCE ALONE* (GUECA SOLO); *FRAGILE*; *WE'LL BE TOGETHER*; *STRAIGHT TO MY HEART*; *ROCK STEADY*; *SISTER MOON*; *LITTLE WING*; *THE SECRET MARRIAGE*.

**Personnel:** Sting, vocals, bass, guitar (cuts 4, 6); Branford Marsalis, saxophone; Kenny Kirkland, keyboards; Manu Katche, Andy Newmark, drums; Mino Cinelu, percussion, vocoder; Andy Summers (1, 2), Fared Haque (5), Mark Knopfler (5), Eric Clapton (5), guitar; Ruben Blades, Spanish recitative (5); Gil Evans and his orchestra (11); Ken Holman, piano (12); Dolette McDonald, Janice Pendarvis, Vesta Williams, Rene Gayer, vocals.

★★★★ ½

I had a lot of reasons ready not to like this

album. First off, just so's we get it out of the way up-front, I was not exactly the world's biggest fan of *Fantasias About Odd-Coloured Amphibians That Go Bump In The Night*; it sounded to me like reheated Police tunes with different and not always well-deployed instrumentation. *Sting With Negroes*—as one review sagely dubbed the sort of minstrel show the blond-&-blue-eyed lad was putting on—just about summed it up for me. Then there was the timing: coming out almost exactly one year after Paul Simon's *Graceland* stirred up political controversy and brought to a wide audience attention some dynamic African-pop sounds filtered through Simon's own Tin Pan Alley sensibility (and revitalized the little fella's flagging career in the process), this Sting effort smacked of cashing in. And why were two of the whitest men in pop suddenly so into all-black bands and sounds, anyway?

Well, I still can't answer all those questions, but now that I've heard the record I feel more like it might be better to suspend judgment for a bit, and live and listen and learn—because Sting apparently has. Otherwise there's no way to explain... *Nothing Like The Sun*, which is also not much like his first solo effort, despite occasional mood carryovers and wholesale personnel transfers. Following in the wake of Amnesty International buddies like Peter Gabriel, and along the model of Simon's *Graceland*, Sting has fashioned a rich and evocative resonance of musical textures drawn literally from around the world to craft some compelling tunes and arrangements. To pull a sample: *Lazarus Heart* bundles together Afro-latin percussion, chattering West African-ish guitarwork, and Branford Marsalis' crooning sax; *Englishman In N.Y.* jumpcuts from cool jazz to beat-box bursts over a loping music-hall beat; *Fragile* splices its opening soundtrack atmospherics with a buoyant if blue calypso body; *Rock Steady* presses that pre-reggae beat into service for a spoof on televangelism that turns the story of Noah inside out; *The Secret Marriage* closes things out with a reworked melody from Hanns Eisler set as a piano-with-voice *lied*.

It also pulls together the themes stitching through the album's dozen tunes—key among them, public vs. private life in the late 20th century. Even a whimsical bit like *Englishman In N.Y.* confronts the distance between what the old Brit expatriate should be doing, according to the social dictates of his culture, and how he actually lives. But the post-Amnesty-International-tour Sting broadens his scope to investigate how that theme translates into some of the world's less savory political arenas, like Pinochet's blood-drenched Chile in *They Dance Alone*, which finds the mothers of the *desaparecidos* dancing their self-affirming defiance in the faces of the Army's thugs. *History Will Teach Us Nothing* puts that lesson in a larger context, insisting over its propulsive beat that "Sooner or later we learn to throw the past away/Our written history is a catalogue of crime/The sordid and the powerful, the architects of time"—a clear reiteration of the notion that history is a tool of the oppressors, written for them by their academic minions and excluding from its portals the oppressed, the obliterated, the literally disappeared.

Pace Allan Bloom, these are not misguided or abstract questions, and it's to Sting's credit that he recognizes the need to address them—again. And he recognizes, too, that the artificial boundary erected by "liberal" politics between social questions and private lives is a problematic division, which is why *The Secret Marriage* ties things together at the album's close. Eisler was a friend and collaborator of no less a light than Bertolt Brecht, and like Brecht was forced to flee Nazi Germany for the U.S., where he, again like Brecht, was hounded by right-wing McCarthyites for his Marxist views. Marriage, of course, is one key place where the realms of the public and the private intersect in most people's lives, where a couple's innermost feelings and their social roles and ratification merge. Proceeding as it does by negatives—thus mimicking the Shakespearean sonnet that gives the album its title—*The Secret Marriage* demonstrates how private lives can slide out from under public control only by explicit rejection of the powers that would coerce them.

So there's more here than meets eye or ear the first time around. And if . . . *Nothing Like The Sun* doesn't rebut all the problems I raised up above, well, maybe that's not really its job.

—gene santoro



## BRANFORD MARSALIS

**RENAISSANCE**—Columbia 40711: *JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS*; *LAMENT*; *THE PEACOCKS*; *LOVE STONE*; *CITADEL*; *THE WRATH* (*STRUCTURED BURN-OUT*); *ST. THOMAS*.

**Personnel:** Marsalis, tenor, soprano saxophone; Kenny Kirkland (cuts 1-2, 4-7), Herbie Hancock (3), piano; Bob Hurst (1-2, 4-7), Buster Williams (3), bass; Tony Williams (1-2, 4-7), drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

Interviewed for **db** (3/87) not long before taping these sides, Branford declared that his chops were restored to pre-bop shape, that he was about to form a working quartet, and that mainstream values are where it's at.

*Renaissance* both is and isn't the album you'd expect after those comments. *Love Stone* and a hell-bent *Just One Of Those Things* find Marsalis smoking in classic 1957-64 style, walking in the footsteps of Rollins, Trane, Joe Henderson, and Wayne Shorter. He gets a big masculine sound from his horn along with the ensemble, his lines are rhythmically and harmonically varied and complex, and he doesn't fumble—revivalism

with a vengeance. J. J. Johnson's *Lament* shows his new maturity as a ballad player; his nuanced attack nods to Ben Webster.

Branford's curse is that he's talented, lucky, and lazy enough to get by quite nicely on minimum effort. His soprano, heard on three tracks, has always sounded sinewy and pretty, but he occasionally lapses into coasting on tone alone. (He's also picked up Henderson's nervous habit of trilling in place to fill space.)

That promised working group is nowhere

here to be heard. Instead, he taps old compadres for a pickup quartet. He's lucked out. Listen to Bob Hurst and Tony Williams shadow Kenny Kirkland through his solo on *Lament*; they sound like a *band*, mutually sensitive to subtleties of phrasing and pulse. And if the leader won't write more than one blowing tune (*The Wrath*), he appreciates Williams' dependable pen (*Love Stone*, *Citadel*).

The quartet is good for five tracks. Cut-and-paste, the album's padded out with a live,

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honest, but offhand, solo *St. Thomas* and a drawn-out impressionistic *The Peacocks*, where B's soprano bobs between notes like a bird jittering its head. A trio track (with Herbie H. and Buster W.), *The Peacocks* doesn't blend with the quartet stuff in style or sound, but it's too pretty to quibble over for long.

Blakey's '80s grads have been slow to find their own musical identities. (Wynton's an exception; late bloomer Bobby Watson's more typical.) Branford has been maddeningly complacent about finding his voice *manana*. After he's 30, he says—so be patient till 1990.

—Kevin Whitehead



SPHERE

**FOUR FOR ALL**—Verve 831 674-1: *BAIANA*; *BITTERSWEET*; *LUNACY*; *SAN FRANCISCO HOLIDAY* (*WORRY LATER*); *LUPE*; *THIS TIME THE DREAM'S ON ME*.

**Personnel:** Charlie Rouse, tenor saxophone; Kenny Barron, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Ben Riley, drums.

★ ★ ★

**LIVE AT UMBRIA JAZZ**—Red 207: *TOKUDO*; *SAUD'S SONG*; *CHRISTINA*; *DECEPTAKON*.

**Personnel:** Charlie Rouse, tenor saxophone; Kenny Barron, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Ben Riley, drums.

★ ★ ★

Sphere seems less like Sphere without Monk. There's only one Monk tune on these two records to remind us that Sphere began as an exponent of the late pianist and composer's music. But among the originals by Rouse, Barron, and Williams, there is frequently the tenor-and-piano unison favored by Monk in his quartet. And of course Rouse's hoarse sound and Riley's following-the-melody solo on Monk's *Worry Later* recall their days with his quartet.

Still, most of Sphere's originals and performances on these records exhibit less personality than its earlier records. These new records are good but not great—steady competence rather than sustained excitement, solid modern-mainstream playing that's been a jazz staple for 25 years or so now.

On the positive side of this competence are the group's unity, the distinct personalities of the musicians, and their flair for thematic improvisation. Rouse leads the way in the last category, a motific carryover from his tenure with Monk. To realize that the saxophonist functions best with interesting chord changes and a strong melody, you need only to com-

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pare his solo on *Worry Later* and Barron's modal *Lunacy*. There are too many trading-water phrases in his workout on the latter. His intonation slips occasionally throughout the albums.

Williams is the star of the live set, with three compositions (all except *Saud's Song*, which is Barron's) and four solos. His wow-ing, sliding, elastic, telegraphed notes are unlike any other bassist's approach except perhaps Ron Carter's. This is vastly different from any of Monk's bassists.

The repertoire is balanced more evenly on *Four For All* and includes, in addition to Monk and Harold Arlen (*This Time The Dream's On Me*), Rouse's *Bittersweet* (on *Autumn Leaves* changes) among others less standard. But the level of playing is similar on each album. We should applaud Barron's crackling sound and sparkling drive on each just as we should applaud Sphere's original attraction to Monk's music. More of that, please. —owen cordle



### RY COODER

**GET RHYTHM**—Warner Bros. 25639-1: *GET RHYTHM*; *LOW*—COMMOTION; *GOING BACK TO OKINAWA*; *13 QUESTION METHOD*; *WOMEN WILL RULE THE WORLD*; *ALL SHOOK UP*; *I CAN TELL BY THE WAY YOU SMELL*; *ACROSS THE BORDER LINE*; *LET'S HAVE A BALL*.

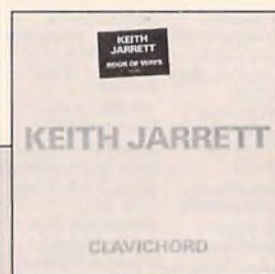
**Personnel:** Cooder, guitars, vocals; Van Dyke Parks, keyboards; Flaco Jimenez, accordion; Steve Douglas, saxophones; Jorge Calderon, bass; Buell Niedlinger, acoustic bass (cuts 2, 6, 8); Jim Keltner, drums; Miguel Cruz, percussion; Bobby King, Terry Evans, Arnold McCuller, Willie Greene Jr., Larry Blackmon, Harry Dean Stanton, vocals.

★ ★ ★ ★

Few musicians in any style have created as instantly recognizable a voice, a sound, as Ry Cooder has over the last 20 years or so. The welter of rhythms and elements from all over the musical map somehow coalesce into a welcome and magic and kinetic whole. Because if there's one thing you can say about Cooder, it's that he never lets his music rest on its accumulated laurels. How many other folks would—or could—juxtapose a kind of booze-shot bottleneck blues (*Low—Commotion*) with a witty whirl of Pacific reggae (*Going Back To Okinawa*), a solo acoustic rendering of Chuck Berry (*13 Question Method*) like what Joseph Spence might've done if he'd played bottleneck, and an ironic calypso lament about feminism (*Women Will Rule The World*) that sounds at times like it's migrated through Vera

Cruz?

And then over and above all that is the plain and simple fact that nobody, but nobody, can coax the bottleneck into the kind of aching, nuanced, vocalized cry Cooder catches when it's in his talented hands. And his collection of co-conspirators still pump it out with the knowing lustiness that comes of being the seasoned, rather than jaded, old pros they've become. So do yourself a favor. Invite over a bunch of people you really like to a potluck dinner, make sure there's enough, uh, stimulation so that all hands can get pleasantly rowdy, and drop this record on the turntable. Trust me. You'll have a ball. —gene santoro



### KEITH JARRETT

**BOOK OF WAYS**—ECM 1344/45: *Book Of Ways 1 - 19*.

**Personnel:** Jarrett, clavichord.

★ ★ ★ ★

Four stars for what it is, but what is it? Improvised but not jazz, tonal and evocative but not bland-aid muzak. Jarrett's keyboard studies have less to do with either than with classical musicians' rediscovery of original instruments, whose rough-hewn timbres long ago fell from fashion. The clavichord may be as old as the 13th century; three centuries later, the bigger and nattier harpsichord pushed it aside. The clavichord's sound was smaller (but more physical), its tone more clanky, more medieval.

Jarrett views the musician as a vehicle for music flowing from elsewhere. Given the instrument, it's not surprising that many of these keyboard songs suggest the early stirrings of Western harmony—right down to the Moorish/Spanish strain. He does overdo the inevitable baroque harpsichord echoes here and there. Yet more often the sound resembles John Fahey's ringing, fractured folk guitar.

The clavichord is called a fretted instrument. Depress a key: a brass blade strikes a string somewhere along its length. Damped above that point, the string vibrates freely beneath it, like a guitar string struck below a stopped fret. Using key pressure alone, a player can shape a note's vibrato, control its volume and bend its pitch, like a plectrist.

The clavichord is ripe for guitaristic effects, and Jarrett plays the guitar hidden within it, stomping out fat, strummy chords and drone "open" strings. He does harp and koto too—his fool-the-ear music parallels 19th century *trompe-l'oeil* painting. 4 could be Metheny; 7 sounds like forgotten Stephen Foster; 8 twangs

big Duane Eddy bass notes; 10's a barbaric yawp. Yet it's all united, in its unhurried progress, by the compelling sound of the instrument itself.

Where he's most animate, Jarrett's rapidly spinning, harmonically stable, quasi-finger-picked figures focus attention on the crisply metallic sound of responsive strings. *The Book Of Ways* is his disquisition on the instrument-makers' genius. He knows the clavichord's flexibility is perfect for expressive improvising—and that its archaic sound will never find a home in jazz. Yet somehow he keeps preciousness and pretension in check; the music seems to roll out of him. Better still, he's usually too involved to sing along. —Kevin Whitehead



## IKE QUEBEC

### THE COMPLETE BLUE NOTE 45 SESSIONS—

Mosaic 3-121: *A Light Reprieve*; *Buzzard Lope*; *Blue Monday*; *Zonky*; *Later For The Rock*; *Sweet And Lovely*; *Dear John*; *Blue Friday*; *Everything Happens To Me (Short Version)*; *Mardi Gras*; *What A Difference A Day Makes*; *For All We Know*; *Ill Wind*; *If I Could Be With You*; *I've Got The World On A String*; *Me 'N Mabe*; *Everything Happens To Me (Long Version)*; *How Long Has This Been Going On*; *With A Song In My Heart*; *Imagination*; *What Is There To Say*; *There Is No Greater Love*; *All Of Me*; *Intermezzo*; *But Not For Me*; *All The Way*.

**Personnel:** Quebec, tenor saxophone; Skeeter Best (cuts 1-18), Willie Jones (18-26), guitar; Edwin Swanston (1-8), Sir Charles Thompson (9-17), Earl Vandyke (18-26), organ; Charles Sonny Wellesley (1-8), Milt Hinton (9-17), Sam Jones (18-22), bass; Les Jenkins (1-8), J. C. Heard (9-17), Wilbert Hogan (18-26), drums.



Jazz has minor poets. Players who do not legislate for their instruments, who do not preside over soundalike contemporaries, and who do not define historical periods. These minors (not to be confused with minor leaguers) interpret the sound of their time, but not without leaving the imprint of their own compelling stylistic adjustments. Who really cares if one of their number becomes the jazz equivalent of Andrew "To His Coy Mistress" Marvell, the greatest minor poet in English literature? They matter enough to brighten history with resolute music of lasting appeal.

We could argue who rightly belongs in the minors for tenor saxophone—Don Byas, Chu Berry, Wardell Gray? But the membership of Ike Quebec, onetime Blue Note talent scout,

A&R man, and friend to Thelonious Monk and the moderns, is solidier than ever before, based on the evidence found in this three-record set.

*The Complete Blue Note 45 Sessions* consist of three dates from 1959-62, including sides previously unissued or issued on singles intended for jukebox rotation. The collection of ballads and smokey soulful to jumping blues would sound more at home in *film noir* than malt shops—no-fat emotional, deliver-the-goods pithy, and maybe a shade darker than befitted a pop medium.

These sides provide revelation upon revelation of Quebec's completeness as a tenor voice. He shares idol Coleman Hawkins' and Ben Webster's commandingly stout tone and

their swinging yet masterfully paced attacks inside the bar lines, as well as those two tenor giants' proclivity for playfully used dynamics and bravado in reshaping thematic materials. The exuberant shout of Count Basie tenor Herschel Evans is here, too. Yet, Quebec's personality finally dominates these 45s through a "mixture of his advanced harmonic sense, and his emotional feel, which comes right out of the tradition of 1930's style romantic tenor," in the words of annotator Loren Schoenberg. "No one else put these things together like Ike Quebec did."

Quebec's textbook caliber solos on *Dear John* are not isolated occurrences of genius; they typify his creativity. The first is based on



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the lazy set-up and reworking of a snippet from *Too Close For Comfort*. The enticingly slurred but flowing introduction on the second gives way to a quiet passage, repeated to devastating effect until Quebec raises up from dovey coo to squawks of tenor potency. This triumph, more than a lesson in tongueing, breathing, or embouchure control, stems from a basic mastery and integration of improvising strategies. Empathetic sidemen on the first two ses-

sions magnify Quebec's achievements. With Skeeter Best's wittily swinging guitar spots, such as his country-twang boogie on *Zonky* in support, how could Ike miss? On soaring performances such as *Mardi Gras*, where the time lunges from carnival mambo to swinging four, the rhythm section parades true grit. If Ike's partners on the final session do not match these efforts, they keep his backgrounds steady

Mosaic's too-good-to-be-true booklets, with photos, notes, and appreciations in addition to impressive packaging, may make spoiled brats of everyone eventually. The label continues to astonish and delight with Texas-size eye-fuls of gone but not forgotten "music we thought we knew." The boxed sets are available only by mail order from: Mosaic Records, 197 Strawberry Hill, Stamford, Connecticut 06902. Long live minor poetry. —*peter kostakis*

## JAZZ ITALIAN-STYLE

By Kevin Whitehead



Over the last few months I've been digging through a pile of 40 or 50 jazz records from Italy—which by no stretch of the imagination makes me an expert on Italian jazz. If such pleasant research has impressed me with anything, it's the vitality and variety of the Italian scene—to which no one can do justice in so little space. For economy's sake we'll skip over those few you've probably heard of already, like trumpeter Enrico Rava, pianists Giorgio Gaslini and Guido Manusardi, and free-percussionist/catalyst Andrea Centazzo, as well as too many worthy sidelinks. Apologies up front. What's here (or not here) is based on one distant observer's perceptions. I'll name 15 or so records that stood out for me; think of them as fragments of a large mosaic.

The landscape of this *terra cotta incognita* was not quite what I expected. Besides the music of relatively high-profile Italians like those mentioned above, some sounds were already stuck in my mind: Art Studio's Braxtonian freebop, flavored with electric guitar and voice-as-instrument; the rewarding post-bop eclecticism of composer/pianist Roberto Magris' Gruppo Jazz Marca; the Gil Evans-inspired orchestral writing of Dino Betti van der Noot; Claudio Fasoli's straight-ahead tenor storytelling; the deconstructive/reconstructive cross-culturalism of bassist Marcello Melis' 1976 *The New Village On The Left* (Black Saint 012)—Melis, Rava, Roswell Rudd, and Don Moye intertwined with a Sardinian vocal quartet.

To Americans, Enrico Rava is the typical Italian jazz musician because there's something recognizably *Italian* about his style—if Italian is taken to mean the cultural stereotypes embodied in tv spaghetti sauce ads. Rava—like the vaguely florid Manusardi—is an effusive gesturer, swept up in emotion: not too far in temperament from the bleary romantics played on screen by Giancarlo Giannini.

Dipping into the pile of albums, I expected a dozen Carusos of the tenor, with huge vibratos and sighing attacks. While few Italian sax or brass players come on like Pagliacci in mid-sob, singing—if not

operatic—attacks are common to all styles. There are a few evasive mainstream saxophonists whose sounds stand out: the searing, busy but intense alto of Bobby Porcelli, tenorist Larry Nocella's pleading tone (a lasagna of George Adams, Jimmy Forrest, and King Curtis on *Everything Happens To Me*, Red 187), the unspectacular but heartfelt baritonist Sergio Rigon (crooning Doris Day's *Secret Love* on a quartet date, *Feelings*, Red 159). The best Italian saxophonists get a bellyfull of sound, though booted by rhythm sections (like Rigon's—Ettore Righello, Carlo Milano, Giampiero Prina) that are conscientiously fleet, light on their feet. No rhythmic hangups in Italy—the swing is real and assured.

The truth is Americans should speak Italian with as faint an accent as Italians speak bop and post-bop. They're truly fluent, understanding not just the sound but the logic of jazz language. After all, the Northern Mediterranean is no less likely a crossroads for European harmony, Moorish modes, and Central African polyrhythms as the American South. (And didn't Italy try to colonize Ethiopia?)

An Italian player may resemble another jazz musician not due to direct imitation but because the two travel parallel paths. For example, multi-reedist Gianluigi Trovesi (on his trio LP *Dances*, Red 181) echoes bagpipe-y Italian folk dance music—and in so doing often sounds curiously like John Surman, investigating his English folk roots in similar electronics-tinged jazz contexts.

But many Italians sound so American, they'll disappoint Yanks who've come to prize regional diversity. Some are imitative to a fault; to my ears, acclaimed altoist Massimo Urbani bogs down too often in slavish devotion to Coltrane. Paying dual tribute to him and Ayler on *Dedication To A.A. & J.C.* (Red 160), his flipping between mimicking one and the other becomes grotesquely comic.

Still, Ayler's influence makes sense—in keeping with our naive *Italian* concept—for his almost bathetic emotionalism. Tenorist Roberto Ottaviano—on his varied half of *Tenor Line* (Centrotre 103)—marries Ayler's folksy innocence to Mike Brecker's overt emotional strain. But he also gets circular like Evan Parker, and his straight-ahead balladry and bop are convincingly soulful, too; personal if not singular. He's on alto and soprano for another session with his regular compatriot, pianist Arrigo Cappelletti (*Samadhi*, Spalac(h) 111) in

an attractive set closer to the ECM mainstream.

Ottaviano shares *Tenor Line* with the New Emily Orchestra, a sardonically unpredictable salon septet who play *Four Brothers* and *Airegin* for flappers. Their guitarist/banjoist, Marcello Franchini, is a highly distinctive and witty stylist, a subversive traditionalist a la Pee Wee Russell. Franchini sprays notes and power chords from the banjo like a heavy-metal axist; his steel-string guitar's a machine gun.

Not surprisingly, those Italian musicians who allow humor into their playing seem to reveal more of their roots. I suspect they're inspired by the comedic/theatrical/post-free music coming from the Netherlands and Germany, that makes no apology for reflecting (and caricaturing) national culture. By contrast, the mainstreamers seem to need to validate their work by sounding American.

The sextet Gruppo Contemporaneo (on *Aspettando I Dinosauri*, Bull Record 0009) offers one of the more extreme versions of Breukeresque culturally-reflexive satire, with some fine playing for good measure. Guest trumpeter Guido Mazzon sounds like Italy's answer to Lester Bowie, but Nino Rota/carnival-music tendencies also drift through. Meanwhile, *The Unrepentant Ones* (Italian Jazz Club 005) are a gaggle of prominent post-moderns—Mazzon, trombonist Giancarlo Schiaffini, altoist Mario Schiano, bassist Bruno Tommaso, multi-instrumentalist Renata Geremia, and the superbly flexible drummer Toni Rusconi—who gather for some light-handed poly-free play with an occasional AACM accent.

Most overtly *Italian* in this line—and my favorite of the albums surveyed—is the Pino Minafria Quintet's *Colori*, on Spalac(h) 108. Trumpeter Minafria's half-valve work and vocal inflections resemble an unlikely cross between Wynton M. and Lester B., just as his quintet's music can get as overtly lyrical as the former's, or may slyly mock bop-combo and barrelhouse-blues clichés like the Art Ensemble—while working in Italian wedding music and other regional strains. Any band that features accordion and didjeridu on the same cut can't be bad. Minafria makes imaginative, varied, ambitious, lyrical music, abetted by Sandro Satta on alto, keyboardist Antonello Salis, bassist Paolo Della Porta, and drummer Vincenzo Mazzone.

Among pianists, Piero Bassini is known

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40



## DANNY GOTTLIEB

**AQUAMARINE**—Atlantic B1806-1: AQUAMARINE; MONTEREY; THE AVIARY; ALASKA; WATERFALL; BEING; DUET; UPON A TIME; PEACE OF MIND. **Personnel:** Gottlieb, drums, percussion; Mark Egan, bass (cuts 2, 4, 5, 9); John Abercrombie, guitars, guitar-synthesizer (1, 3, 8); Doug Hall, keyboards, guitar (1, 2, 4, 5); Cafe, percussion (1, 2, 5); Bill Evans, saxophone (4, 5); John McLaughlin (7), Joe Satriani (2), Jeff Mironov (4), Steve Khan (5), guitar; Dave Samuels, vibes (4); Mitchell Forman, keyboards (6).

★ ★ ★ ★

## BILLY COBHAM

**PICTURE THIS**—GRP 1040: TWO FOR JUAN; SAME OLE LOVE; TAURIAN MATADOR; YOU WITHIN ME WITHIN YOU; THIS ONE'S FOR ARMANDO; SIGN 'O' THE TIMES; THE JUGGLER; DANSE FOR NOH MASQUE.

**Personnel:** Cobham, drums, percussion, computer sequences; George Duke (1), Gerry Etkins (3, 4, 7), Michael Abene (2, 4-6), keyboards; Grover Washington Jr., saxophone (2, 4, 6); Tom Scott, Lyricon (1, 5); Abraham Laboriel (1), Victor Bailey (2), Ron Carter (4, 6), bass; Sa Davis, percussion (2, 5); Randy Brecker, flugelhorn (3); Wayne Cobham, computer programming (3, 7).

★ ★ ★ ½

Danny Gottlieb's the consummate comper, the tastiest drummer you could think of. He can fire it up, of course, but when I think of Danny it is mostly in the way he makes everybody else sound good around him—his art of accompaniment. Billy Cobham, on the other hand, says, "Hey man, follow me." He redefined jazz-rock's boundaries in the early 1970s, and let's face it, the guy's never been much less than the leader on any session he's been on—that's just the force of personality in his playing. Cobham's put out a dozen or so records, this is Danny's first album as a leader.

*Aquamarine* doesn't really sound like a drummer's record. It's more a series of wispy jazz, fusion, and latin settings that show off Gottlieb's texture-building and musicality. Danny's one of the drummers that you hope will make a solo record. Somewhat noticeably absent is Pat Metheny, with whom Danny spent many years and did some tremendous playing. Present quite a bit is former Metheny bandmate Mark Egan, with whom Gottlieb has recorded under the name Elements. John McLaughlin, with whom Danny's been playing most recently, is along for one flashy duet number.

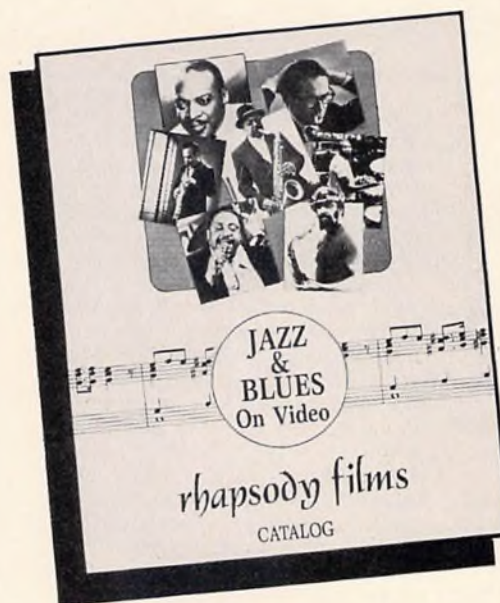
Gottlieb uses his electronics for punctuation

at times, but is mostly walloping what sounds like acoustic drums in what sounds like real time. Joe Satriani lends some nice sophisticated blues guitar to *Monterey*. Danny uses quite a few excellent guitarists, while Cobham for a change doesn't have a guitarist aboard on his new record.

There's some adventurous drumming on Gottlieb's LP that proves the development of the loud end of his range—the soft end never has been in question. *The Aviary* features Gottlieb almost exclusively on cymbals (a specialty), mixing it up with a MIDI'ed, birdlike

Abercrombie. Maybe Danny's guilty of trying to show off a few too many sides on *Aquamarine*, but it's his first solo project so you can hardly blame him. I hope Gottlieb records with Gil Evans' band, because he also sounds fantastic there.

Cobham is showing some technical and musical growth. He's back into electronics—remember, he was doing it before most everyone else—and his home computer is involved too. I remember *Taurian Matador* from Cobham's live *Shabazz* record, when it was totally out of control. Here it's completely pro-



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grammed, except for Randy Brecker's hot-blooded flugelhorn break, some keyboards, and Cobham's live drums. You can almost hear the wheels turning in Billy's head as he solos over the sequencer.

*Danse For Noh Masque* is reminiscent of some of Cobham's solos on his first solo outing, *Spectrum*, a record that holds up very well after 14 years. There is some fine music on *Picture This*, with the drummer still showing glimpses of superhuman strength, but as on *Two For Juan* and the tribute to percussionist Armando Peraza, he's tempering it, making it sound like part of the song. *You Within Me Within You* shows a different Grover on tenor, and hearing him get to stretch is a pleasure. The Purple Man should get a kick out of BC's

high-powered arrangement of *Sign 'O' The Times*. It's brilliantly underplayed by Cobham, Washington, and Carter. I can see Billy wanting to cover Anita Baker's *Same Old Love* too, but they don't take it out, or give it a stamp of their own.

Both of these records can be recommended, although for different reasons. Billy is experimenting with sampling, programming, and other electronic gadgetry, which to his credit he makes rather musical. Danny Gottlieb is still more interested in the music; it seems. Although he may lack some of Cobham's leadership abilities and experience, Gottlieb has enough musicality to make *Aquamaine* shine a little brighter.

—robin tolleson

# Waxing On

## FUSION SALVO

- THE FENTS:** *THE OTHER SIDE* (Passport Jazz 88031) ★★★★★
- TOM LETIZIA JAZZ/FUSION GROUP:** *CHUCKHOLE BLUES* (TL 003) ★★★★★
- KAZU:** *TIME NO LONGER* (Frog 6458) ★★★★★
- MAN JUMPING:** *WORLD SERVICE* (Editions EG 49) ★★★★★
- CARLOS BENAVENT:** *PEACHES WITH SALT* (Frog 6435) ★★★★★
- POCKET CHANGE:** *RANDOM AXIS* (Passport Jazz 88016) ★★★★★
- BRANDON FIELDS:** *THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY* (Nova 6802) ★★★★★
- PLAYERS:** *PLAYERS* (Passport Jazz 88014) ★★★★★
- JOHN MACEY:** *MORE NOTES FOR YOUR MONEY* (Hi-Rise) ★★★★★
- NEO-FUSION:** *CORIUS* (Fortress 7900600019) ★★★★★
- BILL SHIELDS:** *SHIELDSTONE* (R.S.V.P. 9001) ★★★★★
- BLUE SKY:** *WISH I WERE HERE* (Bannerworks 67001) ★★★★★
- RICK SWANSON & URBAN SURRENDER:** *WINDSOCK* (American Gramophone 687) ★★★★★
- WINDOWS:** *WINDOWS* (Intima 73219) ★★★★★
- WISHFUL THINKING:** *THINK AGAIN* (Pausa 7205) ★★★★★
- SPECIAL EFX:** *MYSTIQUE* (GRP 1033) ★★★★★
- CLIVE STEVENS:** *AND BRAINCHILD* (Frog 6453) ★★★★★
- PEGASUS:** *COMMUNICATION* (Frog 6454) ★★★★★

Chops, chops, chops. Everybody, it seems, has monster chops today. The conservatories keep churning out proficient chops machines. You check into Berklee or the Guitar Institute Of Technology or any of those emporiums of higher learning and you leave with more chops than you know what to do with. Nowhere along the line do they teach you how to feel, how to play with attitude. That, apparently, is either there from the beginning or it's not. Some pick up on those things through playing gigs, others don't.

As was true of the last fusion roundup, (db Oct '86) all the players listed here have chops in abundance. Some have that extra element, that intrinsic quality that separates them from the pack. The rest are left hanging with chops. Scales and luries of 64th notes are cool and everything, but if not tempered with a certain amount of soul and attitude it all just becomes a blur, an exercise, a demonstration for other musicians. That's when you've got tuzak.

**The Fents** is a group of young West Coast musicians who combine ample chops with the kind of renegade attitude that defined fusion in the early days of Tony Williams' Lifetime and the Manavishnu Orchestra. Plus, they can write. And they have the added advantage of having been a solid working unit since 1979. That chemistry comes across on their debut album, *The Other Side*. Guitarist Ted Hall and Miles-Davis-group synth-wiz Adam Holzman

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

here for two fine Red discs on which the Open Form Trio (with Attilio Zanchi, bass; Prina, drums) backs Bobby Watson. OFT's 1980 *Old Memories* (Red 152) sounds remarkably like JoAnne Brackeen's trio—which means crisp, percussive, driving music that's hard to resist, derivative or no. Enrico Peranunzi, bassist Enzo Pietropaoli, and drummer Fabrizio Sferra—the Space Jazz Trio—on YVP Music 3007 (from Germany) play modest, post-Bill Evans trio music distinguished by nicely balanced interplay.

Italy's ivory king Franco D'Andrea on *No Idea Of Time* (Red 202, with tenor/soprano saxist Tino Tracanna, bassist Mark Helias, and drummer Barry Altschul) mixes Monkish playfulness and stride echoes with his own outgoing exuberance. His solo on *Es* (Red 158) is imbued with striking, relentless lyricism—he approaches the piano like a too-fervent lover.

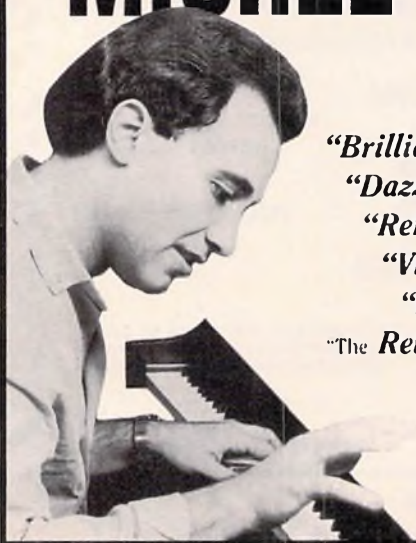
Helias and Altschul aren't the only Americans with second careers in Italy. Bob Neloms, Cameron Brown, and Dannie Richmond are the rhythm section on that Larry Nocella date. Brown, Hon. Burton, and Beaver Harris back Urbani on Red 146. Dave Liebman, guests on a sleek and tasty post-bop set by trumpeter Paolo Fresu, *Inner Voices* (Splasc(h) 110) with Tracanna; trombonist Glenn Ferris joins the free-bopping Nexus on *Night Hiding* (Red 190), with Minafria.

American pianist Mike Melillo sits in with drummer Fabio Jegher's inventive two-voice and rhythm Italian Vocal Ensemble on *Chiaroscuro* (Red 203). Flavia Vallega and Roberta Garbarini scat unusual syllables, reminding us that Italian and English phonetics are very different; the singing's lushly romantic without the shrill shrieking of some American vocal ensembles. I wish I had space to do them justice—but I've abandoned hope of paying even token tribute to all who deserve it. *Scusa*

db

# MICHEL CAMILO

Jazz Pianist



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supply most of the chops and attitude here while bassist Laurence Cottle and drummer Moyes Lucas Jr. bolster the backbeat. Hall and Holzman make an impressive duo, locking in on intricate harmony and unison lines and trading blazing solos. Hall's monster guitar riffs on tunes like *Four Sheets To The Wind*, *Rubber Discipline Helmet*, and *Back In The Saddle* are out of the Allan Holdsworth school of legato-sustain, but he injects more bite and soul into his playing. Holzman's cool chordal voicings on *The Scenery Man* show off his jazzy side, while he and the band rock out with metal intensity on the wry *I Don't Want My MTV*. An auspicious debut. Brand X with fangs.

**Tom Letizia** is a bop-influenced guitarist from Ohio. His Tom Letizia Jazz/Fusion Group leans more toward the acoustic side of this hybrid music than The Fents, and his compositions highlight the tight interplay of his warm-sounding guitar with Alan Nemeth's acoustic and electric vibraphones. Letizia does not have the incendiary, mind-blowing chops of a Holdsworth or Hall but he does have a knack for composition, as he demonstrates on the ambitious *I'll Never Quit* and the humorous *Chuckhole Blues*, which features his hip Jon Hendricks-styled vocalese in unison with his nimble bebop guitar lines. (Tom Letizia Records, 3993 E. 93rd St. Cleveland, OH 44105).

On *Time No Longer*, **Kazu Matsui**, a bamboo flute specialist, is joined by a number of illustrious West Coast friends, including guitarists Robben Ford, Larry Carlton, Lee Ritenour, and Toto's Steve Lukather. The warm, haunting sound of Japanese bamboo flute adds a new twist to the old fusion formula, and the four hot guitarists offer some stinging licks, but the tunes are far from thrilling. Much of the material here sounds like background music for jeans commercials or NFL football highlights. Lukather kills on *Voice From The Dark*, and Ritenour's solo on *Bonfire* is more aggressive than you're accustomed to hearing from his own records. Carlton turns in a typically cool performance on the slick L.A. pop-funk of *Goblin Hunt*, and Ford solos with conviction on *Rainy Moon*. A bunch of hot solos in a contrived context.

The British aggregation known as **Man Jumping** is certainly the most eclectic and adventurous of this bunch. On their Editions EG debut, *World Service*, they dabble in a number of World Music contexts with surprisingly good results. This is one very inventive unit, brimming with ideas and a renegade spark. Call it neo-fusion. It's definitely new-sounding compared to the old worn-out cliches of West Coast fuzak. The compositions and arrangements here are fresh, blending Eastern instruments with Western technology and a dash of wry British wit. *The Perils Of Tourism* is a flamenco flurry complete with clicking castanets, spiced with some "out" Middle Eastern-style reed playing. On *It's Been Fun* they indulge in some Indian fanfare with cool tabla playing and ethereal Jon Hassell-ish synth loops. *The Wedding* is a kind of Balinese ceremonial jam recalling the hypnotic lattice-work patterns of King Crimson's *Discipline*, but utilizing keyboards, saxes, and talking drums instead of guitars and traps to create the pulse. *The Big Swing* is a big band chart in the noir-ish tradition of Henry Mancini's work on '50s tv shows like *Mr. Lucky* and *Peter Gunn*. On *The*

*Rocks* is a polyrhythmic stew set to text and *The Trouble Is Is* recalls the Princely funk of The Purple One from Minneapolis. Lots here, and it's all very good.

**Carlos Benavent** is the accomplished Spanish electric bassist who played with Paco De Lucia and with Chick Corea's *Touchstone* band. The Chick influence is especially apparent in tunes like *Devotion*, the sprightly samba *Here We Are*, and the title cut from *Peaches With Salt*. Same kind of mini-Moog phrasing and difficult stop-time unison lines that Chick is noted for. Saxophonist Jorge Pardo burns over the churning percussion work of Ruben Dantas on *South African Tour* and Benavent distinguishes himself as an expressive, melodic player on *Unforgettable Girl*. Perhaps the most interesting piece is the waltz arrangement on *Clarinets & Mandolins*, which features the bassist on mandolin. A spirited project with the kind of bass playing that fans of Bunny Brunel and Percy Jones would enjoy. (Frog Records is a West German label at Mousonstr. 12, 6000 Frankfurt 1, West Germany).

Speaking of attitude, **Pocket Change** has none. The material on their Passport Jazz release, *Random Axis*, is mostly tame, generally formulaic, and largely limp. Leader David Patt displays some warm guitar lines on *Alpha Vaida* and guest saxophonist Brandon Fields ably carries the melody on the mellow title cut but there's really nothing noteworthy here. Later for this one

**Brandon Fields**, however, acquits himself admirably on his own album, *The Other Side Of The Story* on his own Nova Records label (1061 Broxton Ave. Los Angeles, CA 90024). Paired with trumpeter Walt Fowler on the frontline, Fields alternates between Brecker Bros-ish funk (circa *Heavy Metal Bebop*) and a cool Jazz Messengers feel. And what a band! Bassist John Patitucci (Chick Corea Elektric Band) combines with drummer Gregg Bissonette (Maynard Ferguson, David Lee Roth) to make one serious rhythm section. They swing like jazz vets on the title cut and on the smoking blowing session, *Sunday Morning*. Patitucci walking an insistent upright on the latter. The bassist plays strictly bottom on *Bullfunk*, which features some sizzling guitar from Robben Ford, then he digs into his patented soloistic approach on the fervent samba of *Aggressive Tranquility*. Fields and Fowler blend well throughout, particularly on *St. Albans* and *Room 100*, and the two blow over some sequenced techno-funk on the Steps-ish number, *The Brain Dance*. This one's a sleeper and definitely a keeper.

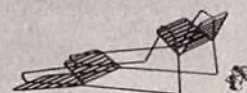
**Players** is an all-star band consisting of bassist Jeff Berlin, guitarist Scott Henderson, drummer Steve Smith, and keyboardist T Lavitz. Chops galore here, combined with seasoned know-how. The fact that each player is also a composer helps give this album some depth. Four different sensibilities come into play on *Players*. Berlin's *Freight Train Shuffle* and *20,000 Prayers* are not only vehicles for his astonishing technique but also stand as solid tunes on their own. On a live version of Henderson's *The Creeping Terror*, the guitarist traverses the line between bop chops and all-out-wang-bar-hammer-on rock theatrics, while Berlin walks with authority behind. Lavitz flaunts his Floyd Cramer-meets-Herbie Hancock piano chops on his gospel-inflected *Be-*

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tween *Coming And Going*, and shares sizzling unison lines with Berlin on *Vehicle*. Smith's slow rock ballad, *50/50*, features some passionate guitar work from Henderson, while the funky, uptempo *Valentine* has him playing legato sax-like lines. Stylistically it's a bit of a hodge-podge, and you sense that each player is saving his best compositions for his own album. But the tunes aren't shabby, and with these cats it's truly Chops City—and then some. One letdown is the fact that some of these tunes are merely reprised from other albums (Berlin's *Freight Train Shuffle* and *20,000 Prayers*, Lavitz' *Between Coming And Going*, Smith's *50/50*) and in some cases executed with less fire than the originals. But this single album serves well as a kind of compilation for those looking for an introduction to four great talents.

**John Macey** is a young man from New Jersey who just may have the chops to rival another favorite son from the Garden State, Al Di Meola. This guy is a scorcher, though he doesn't really try to fit his chops into any coherent context on *More Notes For Your Money* (Hi-Rise Records, P.O. Box 975 Union, NJ 07083). This is strictly a pedal-to-the-floor, pull-out-all-the-stops, let 'er rip blowing session. The right hand picking technique recalls Di Meola and his left hand facility on the fretboard is uncanny. The guitar/drums duo on *Mr. Day* is six minutes of unbridled energy in a raw, burning homage to John Coltrane. Macey traverses the neck on the aptly-named *Scale Wars*, displaying an incredible legato technique. *Zen In The Art Of Reverb*, on the other

hand, is a mellower Metheny-esque affair, while *Split-Fingered Blues* has him soloing on an easy swing groove. This is a kind of defiant no-frills production. Guitarists who like to jam will admire this album for its honesty and sass. And the album cover carries this hilarious message: "Our Pledge—no guitar-synthesizers, no midi, no drum machines, no dance music, no sappy acoustic stuff." Burning bebop feel with rock intensity. Maybe somebody will grab this guy and put him into a band context. He needs to direct all that energy somewhere.

More reckless abandon on the fretboard comes from Dudley Brooks of the California-based **Windows**, whose 1984 debut was recently re-released by Intima Records (P.O. Box 5110, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413). Like Ted Hall and Scott Henderson and John Macey, the cat has chops to die for, as he forcefully demonstrates on *Like Clockwork*, the funky swing of *Departure Time*, and burning *Night Life*. Damn, this guy's nasty! Good writing and more great rhythmic backing make this album a sweet surprise for fusion fans. Although saxophonist Michael Acosta is no Michael Brecker and pianist Ed Cohen is no Herbie Hancock, they ably trade fours with the smoking Brooks and navigate their way through all the 64th note flurries in fine fashion. Bassist/producer Skipper Wise doesn't let things dissolve into jam-time, making the production crisp and full of power. And he slaps like silly on the samba groove of *Riff Raff*. Drummer Tim Timmermans supplies Weckl-like precision and punch throughout. Great band. I wonder what they're doing now?

**Neo-Fusion** is also an interesting outfit. Bassist Greg Brown seems to be the ring-leader, setting the pulse with his vicious slap-bass technique and supplying the bulk of the compositions, all of which are based on his wicked bass riffs. A bit slick, a tad sterile, but brimming with energy and ideas. A distinct nod to the Dixie Dregs on *Slapper* and *Creation*. Lots of unison lines and triplets and all the difficult technical stop-time stuff on the title cut, *Copious*. Great chops, but I wish they'd take a breath once in a while, maybe come up for air with some fresh ideas and more dynamics. (Fortress Records, 944 Marcon Blvd. Suite 110, Allentown, PA 18103).

**Bill Shields** managed to corral quite a few superstars for his *Shieldstone* album on R.S.V.P. Records (531 W. 20th St., Connersville, IN 47331). Stanley Clarke co-produces and plays electric bass throughout. Elsewhere, Bob Magnusson plays upright, Jack DeJohnette holds down the drum chair, Airtio appears as percussionist, John Abercrombie plays guitar, Freddie Hubbard fills in on trumpet. Not bad company. Shields himself is a keyboardist (Fender Rhodes, DX7, and grand) of modest gifts, one of which being a good feel for accompaniment. He comps in a jazzy vein on *Tabatha*, a nice vehicle for Abercrombie's warm-sounding guitar and Gordon Brisker's husky tenor sax. He swings with feeling on *Moving Up* and the latin section of *No Name*. But the tunes don't always do justice to the personnel, particularly on the lame ballad *Barr Trail* and the pseudo-funk of *Shieldstone*. DeJohnette, of course, sounds swinging and brilliant no matter what context he's in, but Abercrombie seems uninspired here, save for the fiery latin section on *No Name*. Overall the album has the feel of a slap-dash project, lacking the conviction of band projects like *The Fents* or *Man Jumping*. Only goes to prove that all-stars do not a burning record make.

*Windssock* is largely a vehicle for drummer **Ric Swanson** and features the soloing of guitarist Larry Coryell and alto saxophonist Richie Cole, but it's hardly an inspired affair. Like Shields' album, this one is another example where the sum of the parts is not greater than the whole. *Wildlife Refuge* is a happy jazz vehicle for Cole's sax, while the title cut lies there like a blintz—a waste of Coryell's talent. *Mary Ann's Song*, with its smokey club ambience, has a nice feel and features some fine harmonics by Coryell on the intro, but *Damosch Park* is slick cruisin' fare and *And Time Lingers On* just lingers on. (American Gramophone, 9130 Morman Bridge Rd., Omaha, NE 68152).

**Blue Sky's** *Wish I Were Here* had me wishing I weren't. The vibes/guitar formula of Kevin Rolstad and Dave Peterson, respectively, is an enchanting enough collaboration, backed by drums/bass rhythm section, but a tendency toward blandness left me feeling empty. When Rolstad works the keyboards, as he does on *Down The Road*, it's a Metheny/Mays-ish situation (a la *American Garage*). With Rolstad on vibes, it's a cooler feel, like on *First Snow* and the dark reggae of *Island Colors*. There's something here, soundwise. Now if only they can sack the slick sensibility and explore that guitar/vibes combination with more daring, they may happen onto something very cool indeed. We'll see. (Bannerworks



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**Special EFX** takes a turn toward the mellower side of things on their third GRP release, *Mystique*. They eschew the traps set entirely on side one, placing more prominence on the shadings and nuance of George Jinda's percussive colors. And on three tunes they highlight the evocative New Age-ish grand piano work of the Hungarian player known as Szakcsi. Guitarist Chieli Minucci keeps his massive chops in check by placing more emphasis on the melodic content of each tune, and he underscores the vibe on several tunes with acoustic guitar. Consequently, this album is lighter, more pleasing to the ear in some ways than their more electric outings of the past. But they do set aside some room to burn, like on the rocky vehicle *When The Earth Was Flat* and the party groove of *Islands*, a zydeco feel propelled by drummer Dennis Chambers. Victor Bailey appears on the ballad *Pleasance*, which features Szakcsi's lush keyboard stylings. And Minucci and Jinda have some loose fun on the duet jam, *Udu Voodoo*. All in all, good tunes, good production values but perhaps a tad too Club Med-ish for fusion fans.

**Wishful Thinking** performs with more spark and verve on *Think Again* than they did on their previous *Pausa* outing, last year's eponymous debut. This time out, guitarist Tim Weston solos with guts and a kind of rock intensity that was missing the last time. Check out his solo on *Rhythmic Weirdness* or the cleverly-arranged *Mike & Randy Leave For Pluto*. Drummer Dave Garibaldi kicks the band along with his rhythmic snap, particularly on the party-time samba romp of *The Green Room* and the ambitious suite, *The Dreamist*. Weed out the happy jazz (*Little Will* and *Clown's Disguise*), take a few more risks, bear down a bit more and you've got a kicking outfit. (*Pausa* Records, P.O. Box 10069, Glendale, CA 91209).

Clive Stevens' **Brainchild** is as lame a project as I've heard in some time. Anonymous funk with rotating players from New York's studio scene (bassists T. M. Stevens, Lincoln Goines, Fernando Saunders, guitarists Jeff Golub and Ronnie Drayton). Leader Stevens is supposed to add a touch of freshness with his lyricism and wind-synth playing, but the vamps don't take the playing anywhere. You'd have to scour the import bins for this one, but why bother?

**Pegasus** is Spain's top fusion group, featuring the warm guitar excursions of Max Sune. This band is into pleasing melodies and simple rock-dance backbeats, but their penchant for Weather Report-ish harmonies and tonalities helps them steer clear of the dreaded happy-jazz disease. *Hunted By The Flash* has a decidedly dark edge to it, and Sune's nimble guitar lines mix with Josep Mas Kitflus' call-and-response synth lines on *Paraphernalia* to kick up some excitement (though Kitflus' sound seems woefully dated and a bit sterile). Elsewhere, Rafael Escote does his Jaco thing on fretless bass, while drummer Santi Arisa provides just the basics. All are accomplished players but somehow there's a cap on the energy level here. Sune seems to be straddling the fence between mellow Metheny-esque melodicism and very visceral fusion. He's got the chops to go either way.

—bill milkowski

## 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.)

**ATLANTIC/ANTILLES:** Daniel Ponce, *Arawe*. Startled Insects, *Curse Of The Pheromones*. Helcio Milioto, *Kilombo*. David Mann, *Games*. Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra, *Dorsey, Then And Now*. Gerald Albright, *Just Between Us*. Modern Jazz Quartet, *Lonely Woman*. Jess Stacy & The Famous Sidemen, *Tribute To Benny Goodman*. Lee Konitz, *Inside Hi-Fi*. Esther Phillips, *Confessin' The Blues*. Joe Turner, *Big Joe Rides Again*. Art Farmer Quartet Featuring Jim Hall, *Live At The Half-Note*. Charles Mingus, *Oh Yeah*. Manhattan Transfer, *Brasil*. Jim Pepper, *Comin' and Goin'*. Bobby Short, *Performs The Songs Of Andy Razaf*.

**ARHOOLIE/FOLKLYRIC:** Clifton Chenier, *Sings The Blues*. Michael Doucet & Beausoleil, *Hot Chili Mama*. Steve Jordan, *El Corrido De Jhonny El Pachuco*. Los Campesinos De Michoacan, *Canciones De Mi Tierra*. Various Artists, *Where Was Butler?* (A

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## 1 JR. WALKER. SHOTGUN

(from JR. WALKER & THE ALL STARS

GREATEST HITS, Motown). Walker, tenor saxophone; other personnel unknown.

This is too easy; every yuppie in town, and certainly anybody my age, is going to know this tune and who that is [laughs]. From a playing standpoint, I have an unpayable debt to Jr. Walker; I rip him off so frequently, what more can I say [laughs]? I mean, I know these solos extremely well, because I had to lift them all at one point or another for cover bands I was in as a kid. He was the other person, besides King Curtis, that I identified with. This was music that a horn player was going to play. When I was looking for playing opportunities when I was 13 or 14 years old, the only ones I could find with saxophones in them—remember, this is when Bob Dylan and the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix were big and everything revolved around the guitar—dealt with this style of music, which is why so many sax players my age ended up playing it. Soul music was popular and it gave you something to play. King Curtis and Jr. Walker were just the most findable ones doing it. So if you went to an audition, you *had* to play *Shotgun*; it was *the* criterion that meant you could be featured on something. Getting into it led to my eventual career as a saxophone player, I think, as much as anything else. Jr. gets his own special stars—as many as he wants. The band is great on this too; the simplicity of the arrangement—with organ and organ bass, one guitar, a drummer, and some background singing—is something nobody would let you get away with these days; but it swings hard with very few ingredients. And Steve Reich credits this song with part of his interest in music that stays within one chord.

## 2 OLIVER NELSON. THREE

SECONDS (from SCREAMIN' THE BLUES,

Fantasy/OJC). Nelson, tenor saxophone; Eric Dolphy, alto saxophone; Richard Williams, trumpet; Richard Wyands, piano; George Duvivier, bass; Roy Haynes, drums.

I guessed it was Dolphy immediately from the opening notes of his solo, but I didn't recognize Nelson. It's funny, because something about Nelson in that recording—the way he does some little runs and approaches high notes—sounds to me very Trane-esque. I mean, I wouldn't have guessed it was Trane, but I would have guessed that it was somebody influenced by him, as so many players were at that time. Dolphy's playing is just unbelievable. He embodies that joke: You ask a Martian what the definition of jazz is and he says, two wrong notes in a row [laughs]. Dolphy did that with more finesse and pizzazz and flair than anybody ever did; he boldly goes where no man has

## LENNY PICKETT

by Gene Santoro

If he's one of the busiest sax wielders around, it's because he does so many things so damn well. Lenny Pickett first broke through to fame as a key member of the acclaimed (and widely recorded) Tower Of Power horn section, where his solos took the scorching r&b tenor tradition and pushed it farther outside.

Since leaving that group a few years ago, Pickett has relocated to New York, where he's hurled himself into the Apple's mad multivalent music scene. So it is that any typical week for Pickett can include such diverse activities as cutting sax solos for megabucks pop stars like Paul Simon or Rod Stewart, composing for avant choreographers, doing standard jingle work, making sessions for downtown scenemakers like Laurie Anderson, running a workout or two with his own idiosyncratic sax lineup, the Borneo Horns (whose first album, *Lenny Pickett With The Borneo Horns* [Carthage 7001], deftly captures their unique twists and blends), and—last but not least—uncorking his crowd-



pleasing screamers for the revived *Saturday Night Live* band. Versatility is too pale a word to cover the colorful range over which Pickett exerts his burly-toned sax muscle.

This was Pickett's first Blindfold Test. He was given no information about the records played.

gone before [laughs] harmonically, and is unafraid. I mean, to this day he sounds like a modernist; it'll take another 40 years for anybody not to call him one. His approach is so amazing, like where he got in trouble with the horn where they were trading fours, had a squawk where the high note wasn't coming out the way he wanted it to, and so the next note is an explosion, of exasperation, practically, or release. He's challenging to listen to for many people, but if you listen to him from a phrasing standpoint and for the extreme vocal quality of his phrasing there's a lot to be gained. I love him. He exceeds the categories of stars.

## 3 JAMES BROWN. NIGHT

TRAIN (from SOLID GOLD, Polydor).

Brown, vocals, drums; other personnel unknown (probably L. D. Williams or St. Clair Pinkney, tenor saxophone).

I know that one really well, though I might not have guessed it was St. Clair for the tenor solo, since he gets more outside on the later James Brown stuff, like the things he did on the records from the '70s, which was really gone, more influenced by the avant garde movement, people like Marion Brown. Certainly at the time this was made the whole Texas sound was pervasive: all those cats, Arnett Cobb and those guys, who came out of there, and Illinois Jacquet, everybody who did an r&b gig by that point ended up

adding a little bit to the vocabulary. And James' singing is indispensable; on most James Brown records, especially the later ones again, without his voice in there the tune almost falls apart sometimes—that's how important his rhythm is to the overall structure. This also gives an example of one of the differences between a hit record today and one 25 or 30 years ago. Today they won't let you have even a sixteenth note out of tune or out of place on the second inside guitar part [laughs], but on that record there are endless examples of discrepancies of intonation and synchronicity in the timing, and the record survives anyhow—in fact, it's a classic. Stars? Oh, James Brown gets his own stars, because he invented himself—there was nothing like him before, and he consistently picked the most interesting sounds from around the world and the most amazing players to work with.

## 4 WORLD SAXOPHONE QUARTET. HATTIE WALL (from

LIVE IN ZURICH, Black Saint). Hamiet Bluiett, baritone saxophone; Julius Hemphill, alto saxophone; Oliver Lake, alto saxophone; David Murray, tenor saxophone.

I knew who that had to be. Great group, a bunch of veterans and the kid [laughs]. This

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## BRANDON FIELDS

ONE OF L.A.'S TOP HIRED GUNS, THIS SAXIST PUTS MELODY AT THE FOREFRONT OF HIS IMPROVISATIONS.

by Robin Tolleson

Something happens to these bebop baby boomers like Brandon Fields along the way. They get in a funk band for awhile, attend some blues jams, sit in at the local latin dance club, pick up all these extra influences, and the next thing you know they're playing the heck out of all the stuff. Listen to *The Other Side Of The Story*, the first solo record by the 30-year-old saxman Fields, and you can certainly hear the influence of that first wave of post-bop players, the fusion pioneers, Sirs Brecker and Sanborn. That makes Fields post-post-bop, and he's pretty much able to hook you in any kind of groove he tries.

It's something of a "Local Boy Makes Good" story. He's actually from Santa Ana, in Orange County, five minutes from Disneyland. But once he made a decision to "go for it" in music, it wasn't long before he'd exhausted what Santa Ana had to offer for jazz, and moved to L.A. in 1982. The resulting stints with George Benson, Robben Ford, Kenny Loggins, Johnny "Guitar" Watson, Buddy Miles, Phil Upchurch's LA Jazz Unit, and the *Late Show* Band speak of his success.

He followed a lot of the "proper channels" when breaking into the business, hanging out at clubs that featured his kind of music with pockets stuffed full of demo tapes. In Brandon's case, it worked. He impressed session saxists David Boruff and Steve Tavaglioni, the latter whose sound is more like Sanborn than Sanborn. When Tavaglioni was too busy to take a session, he'd recommend Fields to the producer.

Fields jams around town with bands like Los Lobotomies and Karizma; the latter a group that bends and stretches and is run by keyboardist David Garfield. Karizma did a Japanese-release album called *Cuba*. You might walk in on them at the Baked Potato playing *Bullfunk* or another of Fields' compositions. "We do a lot of original tunes, but they take on more the feeling of standards, because everybody's been playing them for years." *Bullfunk* in particular shows a healthy r&b influence, and has become something of a "blowing tune" around town. "I grew up hearing a lot of Crusaders," he says. "Some albums that were big influences were Billy Cobham's *Crosswinds*, Herbie Hancock's *Thrust* album, and the Crusaders' *Southern Comfort*. I liked Wilton Felder's



playing, and they did a live album called *Scratch* that I used to jam with all the time. That was a great record to play with. And [Michael] Brecker really caught me on the *Crosswinds* record—that was the first time I'd heard him—and the writing on that album! I'm really Brecker- and [David] Sanborn-influenced, as far as sounds and stuff. One reason I put so many different styles on my record was so not to be pigeon-holed. A lot of the other work that I do in town, other peoples' records and stuff, just calls for that contemporary alto thing, and on a lot of songs it's very natural for me to sound like Sanborn. That influence went back to the middle of my high school years."

The Sanborn influence naturally seems to come out in ballads. "The different situations that you're involved in will bring out different influences. If I'm playing in a straightahead context, then there's more 'Trane influence that comes out, because I do have a great 'Trane collection, and also a great Liebman collection. I've listened to all those guys quite a bit."

His mom was a piano major in college, and Brandon started playing piano at the age of five, continuing until he was 12. He started on the alto at the age of 10. Fields got a lot of encouragement from his parents throughout his musical childhood, not just to be an artist, but to be a productive person. "They're just very positive thinkers, and forward-motion type people," says Brandon. "There are a lot of talented people that just don't produce. You produce something when you feel the urge. I think sometimes you have to kick that in the ass a little bit and just work on new ideas. In order to share with a lot of people you have to be a little more prolific. And first of all you've got to want to share what you do with other people."

He attended Cal-State Fullerton for a

year, playing in a chamber sax quartet ("They played more experimental music. That was my first experience with multiphonics and other saxophone techniques."), and sat in on big bands at several JCs in the area. After moving to Los Angeles he got a call from contractor Les Hooper to do some jingles and his first tv show. The studio work has been steady ever since. It's been mostly soloing, not section work—lucky for him, because he doesn't play clarinet, and only a little flute. "It's been alto primarily for the last 10 years, but in the last year-and-a-half it's been more tenor. Before that I was playing more soprano than tenor.

"The sound is really important, just to get your ideas across," claims the red-headed saxman. "The sound of your voice is what initially engages people, I think, and then whatever you have to say besides that makes it that much more interesting. There have been some players that I've liked, that had great ideas, that didn't get it across with a strong sound. So I was always really conscious of sound. So much so that you go through five boxes of reeds without finding one. And always looking for mouthpieces, and trying to get the right kind of horn." Fields is pretty much settled on old Selmers. He's got three different altos and two tenors that are from that vintage, and says, "They seem to have more of that sound that I want." He's using Lavoz medium reeds on alto, tenor, and soprano. He's just begun endorsing soprano and tenor mouthpieces by Berry and Associates.

Most of Fields' first solo record, *The Other Side Of The Story*, was polished in the clubs around L.A. in the two years before it was recorded. The album was done right before drummer Gregg Bissonette joined David Lee Roth's band, and bassist John Pattitucci took off with Chick Corea. That band was real familiar with the material. It'll be a little different for the second album, due out soon. "The first record was more of a band album, worked up over two years of gigs every Tuesday night at The Baked Potato. It has a very natural feel, and the band was involved in a lot of the arranging of the songs," says Fields. "I don't think the next album is going to be that way. I don't have a band that's doing all the material right now, so it's a little different thing.

"Sometimes improvisers work better on more familiar forms, so it's writing something, then practicing it and learning it enough so it really feels second nature to you. I want to finish the songs, and then be able to play them enough before I go in and record so that the band feels loose on them, and it's pretty much still a live feeling. I don't want to treat it as some kind of pop album and stack everything. I think jazz needs to be fresh. It depends a lot on the spontaneity of the recording session, and the interaction of ideas."

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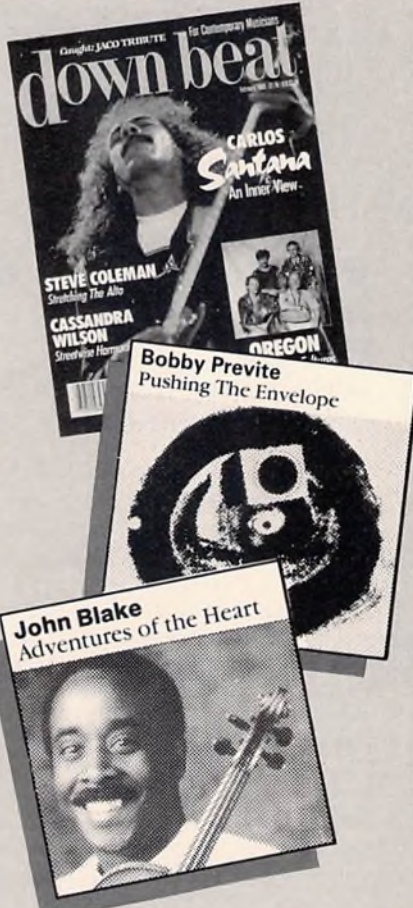
AND GRAMAVISION

Fields is a hired gun around L.A. now, being called into the studio to just throw down a solo—come in smoking, lay it down, and don't take up much of our time, please. "I try to go in with an open mind, not with any preconceived notions of what I want to sound like that day, so I'm more influenced by the song itself than by what I want to play. I like some of my solos better when I haven't really practiced that hard before I go in to play. Sometimes you have a tendency to think too much saxophone and instrumental ability, rather than what the song calls for. Especially in a pop context, or something that needs a little more finite expression, like an eight bar solo. You've got to get this idea across real fast, and it can't be too note-y or anything like that."

One of the more popular records that Fields has done is The Rippingtons' *Moonlighting* (Passport Jazz 88019)—that instrumental jazz-funk group is the brainchild of guitarist/composer Russ Freeman, and also features David Benoit on acoustic piano, Jimmy Johnson on bass, Tony Morales on drums, and Kenny G makes an appearance. Fields says the group got its name because they'd be on a gig and burning, and Freeman would say, "You guys are rippin'."

Fields' playing on Alphonse Mouzon's *Love, Fantasy* (Optimism 6001) fits the bill perfectly. The similarities are there to Sanborn on the ballads, and a bit of Brecker on the grooving *Hello, I Must Be Going*. Fields ties it together with his own glue, and his soulfulness helps make that LP a pleasant surprise. The saxman proves he's adept in a section or doing his solo thing on Bill Meyers' *Images* (Spindletop 114), showing off a fine sound and some good chops on soprano sax. The music of keyboardist/arranger/composer Meyers is challenging, and Fields is in excellent company on the record. He also enjoyed working on the new Kenny Pore record, *At This Moment* (Palo Alto), and with Walt Fowler on Julie Kelly's new album *Never Let Me Go*.

Melody is a priority to Fields. He seems to prefer those players whose musical thoughts can be followed, who show more of the popular tradition and craftsmanship of the instrument. "I'm not a big Ornette Coleman fan, but I appreciate what he's doing," he says. "What I really like is his originality of thought. But I just like more saxophone, somebody who's more involved in the craft of the instrument, as well as cerebral thought processes. I think it's important for anybody to hear as many albums of different people as you can. Because you really can't be pure of thought—I would hate to think what I'd sound like if I had been practicing in a cave, with no outside influences at all. What I try to do is take the influences and groove. Play music with all the influences, and then hopefully by continuing to play your own ideas eventually start coming out." db



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## blindfold test

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

is clearly a critics' choice, this group, and I like them a great deal. Once again, a very minimal instrumentation—people should be aware that you can go pretty minimal on instrumentation, take the low-key, chamber kind of approach that goes back to Louis Armstrong's Hot Five, and really pull it off. They intone very well together, have their own sense of their *own* intonation, which is a really unique thing. It proves that intonation is something that's completely interpretable at all times—if it sounds good, it's in tune. And they make it sound good. I also like their freedom in the way they handle the doubles. They didn't solo at all on this one, which I also like. So much of the stuff I've been writing lately has no improvised solos on it at all, and I think there's something good about that—who says everything has to carry the tag "jazz"? I don't want it, to tell you the truth; I'd just as soon we abandoned those kinds of categories entirely. But jazz has been so traditionally involved with improvisation that people forget there's another tradition originally associated with it, of ensemble playing. This is a great example of it. I'm glad they're getting the kind of attention they are getting. They get a bagful of stars for each saxophone player.

### 5 KING CURTIS. *Soul Twist* (from *Soul Shots Volume 3*, Rhino). Curtis, tenor saxophone; other personnel unknown.

So we know who *that* is [laughs]. What do you say about King Curtis? My wife called out from the other room that it sounded like me, and I don't think you can help growing up when I did without sounding like him, at least to some extent. I remember the solo on Aretha Franklin's *Respect*; I wore out the record at that spot, and I think it's about four bars long, but it was the greatest thing. To me, there were things that described what I was hearing in my head, what that sort of vocal approach to saxophone was supposed to sound like. King Curtis had that completely nailed down. There's some beautiful stuff in there, some kind of double-tonguing or diddle-tonguing in the breaks that's really wild. And he was always such a facile player. I think he got bagged as being an r&b player but always wanted to be thought of without such a narrow focus; many of his instrumental records have some very hip, jazz-oriented playing on them, and he was certainly capable of a lot more than playing solos on r&b singers' records—though he was amazing at that. All the Atlantic stuff he did described the art form, which is why he's one of the most imitated sax players of our day, even by English kids who don't know who he was. I really identify heavily with him. He gets lots of special stars. db

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