

JAZZ—Russian Style

For Contemporary Musicians

down beat

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COREA**
Musical
Imagination

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Courting Destiny

BIRD: The Movie

**TRIBUTE TO THE
10th ANNUAL CHICAGO
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For Contemporary Musicians

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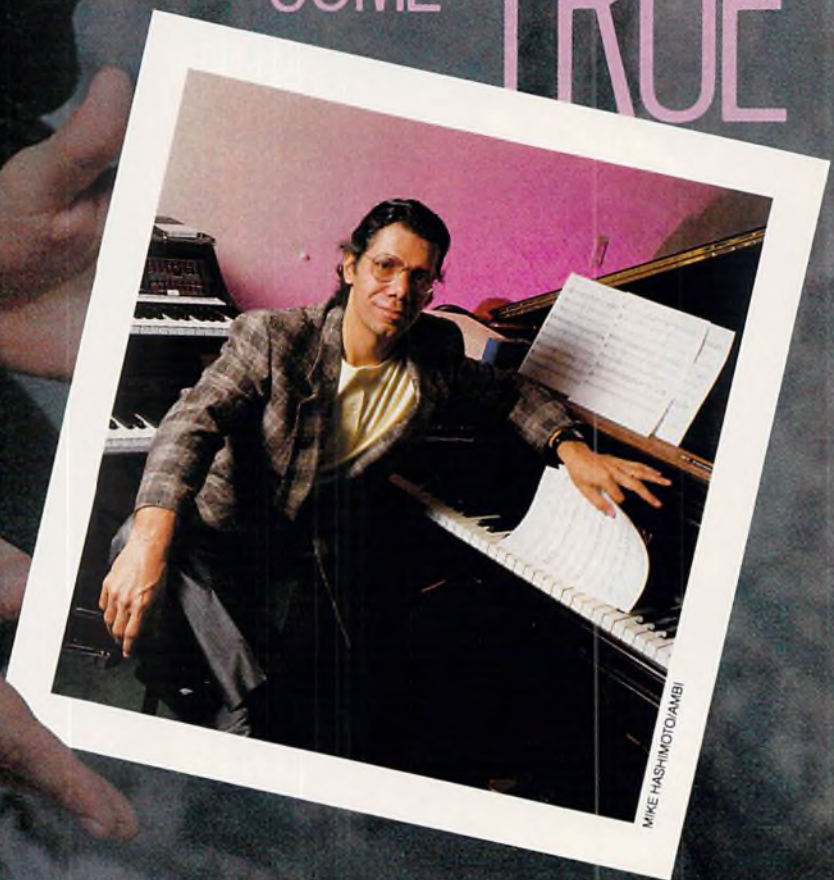
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By Josef Woodard

CHICK COREA PIANO DREAMS COME TRUE



MIKE HASHIMOTO/ABBI

To watch the evolution of Chick Corea's Elektric Band over its now three-year course makes for an interesting lesson in the dynamics of electronics as relates to music. Corea—who, on countless album projects, has covered the gamut of jazz impulses, from avant garde to Third Stream to hard-driving fusion to post-hard bop—began the band as a return to the world of wires and knobs that engaged so many with his Return to Forever bands in the '70s. The second Elektric band album, *Light Years*, was a calculated attempt at penetrating the sphere of radio playlists, generally dismissed in critical circles. This year's model, *Eye Of The Beholder*, signifies yet another chapter: the integration of grand piano and a more epic, suite-like musical structure bode well for his ongoing group entity.

If, in good '80s fashion, Corea has been seduced by—and ably tackled—digital wonders and the prospects of airplay, he has come closer to full circle recently.

Early this summer, in the midst of a nationwide tour with Herbie Hancock's Headhunters II, Corea's Band was taking it to the tube, making a third appearance on *The Late Show*. Corea's band—bassist John Patitucci, drummer Dave Weckl, guitarist Frank Gambale, and saxist Eric Marienthal—brings some musical heat and finesse to Corea's latter-day fusion, flecked—as much of his music is—with a latin, romantic spirit.

The following night in concert at Los Angeles' Greek Theater, the stakes were higher and the tunes elongated. The quintet navigated a revised version of Corea's standard, *Spain*, replete with mutated sections, a modified unison melody and altered rhythms. It was a testament to the flexibility of this young band, which, no doubt, cut its teeth on Corea's music of yore. On *Eye Of The Beholder*, Corea himself, the great hybridizer, comes clean with a punchy and almost idiomatic salsa piano groove. To close, the band—never shy with chops and volume—rose to the occasion with *Amnesia*, a heavy-metal Castillian bebop tune with running bass and perilous melody lines.

In the midst of our interview in Corea's dressing room at the television studio before a *Late Show* taping, someone came in grinning, informing Corea that the band would be able to play a second tune—the more uptempo *Passage*—under the show's closing credits. "Good," says Corea, "Let us blow."

"There's the name for your next album," says the journalist.

"Blowing is the spirit of jazz," Corea continues, "and, whether it comes out with a backbeat or a ting-a-ling or a piano solo, it's improvising. It's the spirit of spontaneity, the spirit of life, the spirit of living. It's not like it's one guy's penchant or idea. It's something that's very basic to everybody, I feel. And once they're reminded of the freedom to create or just play and experience their own imagination taking form, it almost becomes a mission to want the environment to have more of that in it. At the very least, music is a soothing thing. In this world of pressures and the need to survive, music is a soothing thing. But, at best, it can be an expanding thing. It can help a person expand."

Corea's mission of mind-expansion barrels forward, with

signposts in the subconscious, the fingers, and the airwaves.

JOSEF WOODARD: *The title reminds me of a Dewey Redman record, The Ear Of The Behearer. What significance does it have: is it just about the subjectivity of beauty and perception?*

CHICK COREA: Pretty much. It's one of our more powerful clichés, because it's so true. The reason why I like it is that it's the last resort. In any discussion about art, it's the final platform. It's the highest level of what you can discuss on. It will resolve any conflict about what you've got going about this or that, because beauty is in the eye of the beholder. To disagree with that or not allow that or think that's wrong is a violation of human rights [*laughs*].

It's particularly applicable to my life these days.

JW: *I wonder if that individualistic approach to taste and culture gets a little lost in the world of mass media, in which everything leans towards homogeneity. People can cling to collective opinions at the expense of deciding for themselves.*

CC: But once again, you have this very simple way to evaluate that: whatever group you're trying to analyze, they're all made up of individuals and each individual has the freedom to say what he likes and doesn't like. So it basically comes down to an individual question. It isn't just a symptom of something that just exists in music. In life, the more that viewpoint is applied, the more healthy environment you find.

JW: *What motivated you to incorporate acoustic elements at this point, when, almost definitively, the band is electric?*

CC: Well, the band is my band. It's my musical platform and I don't consider the band so much a specialized project in that I'm trying to do a particular kind of music. Maybe at first, three years ago, I wanted to resurrect my electric sound, with electric guitar, electric bass, and keyboards. But now that I've gone through two records and maybe 300 concerts around the world, it's beyond that.

Without the acoustic piano, I felt incomplete, since it's my basic instrument and the instrument I express myself best on. I didn't want to have the acoustic piano and not have the other instruments, so I decided to confront the technical and production problem of incorporating it into the electric sound.

JW: *So "electric" actually equates with the idea of blowing to you, not just as juice out of the wall?*

CC: It wasn't just electricity out of the wall. But in actual fact, now that I've written *Eye Of The Beholder* music and now that I've done a couple of trio tours with John Patitucci and Dave Weckl on just acoustic instruments where we've done things like resurrect the *Three Quartets* music and play Monk and play free music, I said to these guys "We can't not bring this back to the Elektric Band. We must include some of this feeling." That's not to disperse the audience; it's all got to make sense somehow



THE ELEKTRIC BAND: (from left) Dave Weckl, Frank Gambale, Corea, Eric Marienthal, and John Patitucci.

musically.

JW: You were really plunging into the world of electronics when you started the band. Did you feel as though you reached the limitations of the digital realm, and had to return to the acoustic piano?

CC: I've always been interested in how I can use electronics and computers and synthesizers. This last venture—putting my keyboard system together and beginning to use electronics with my band—led me to a point where I tried to find the instruments that would best serve what I liked to do. The instruments I found were the Synclavier and the Kurzweil and some Yamaha products—TX 816s and certain things. I put enough time into those instruments to see what their parameters are, how far I can stretch that, what use they can be to me.

At the moment, I'm totally bored with the search for new sounds. I don't have any interest in it, other than to dip into what I've already found to utilize. I have 400,000 orchestras on my floppy discs. So then my attention turned to "Now that I've got this stuff, how can I include it and mold it and raise the quality of it?" And then I turned my attention to "How can I now take the acoustic piano and make it work in this context?"

JW: It seems like the tunes on this album breathe a lot more than on *Light Years*. You oscillate between passages that are somewhat impressionistic and will then lock back into the groove. Whereas *Light Years* seemed to have almost a pop approach, with concise tunes and, god forbid, fade-outs.

CC: And so it was. On *Light Years*, I attempted to make music that would fit into radio formats. It was the first time I had ever attempted to do that. It was partly successful and partly unsuccessful, now in retrospect.

JW: Given your accent on the spontaneity you were referring to, was it hard for you to—as you say—fit into the radio format with *Light Years*?

CC: I personally found it difficult to try and make an intelligent piece of music that only lasts four minutes. It was a strain. It didn't come naturally to me. Occasionally I'd come up with a piece, and it would be too short. That was a discipline. I wanted to see if I could keep the integrity of my message and intent and yet put it in a form that would get broader ears, and have more people experience the music. I also decided, in *Light Years*, to try and write songs that would keep a single rhythm from beginning to end, which I know is another thing that gives predictability to a listener and tends to keep them in the groove and interested rather than changing tempos and varying things, as I'm want to do. So I disciplined myself as a composer, and I found it an interesting thing.

On *Eye Of The Beholder*, I did the opposite. I took one theme that I dreamt and had the idea that I wanted to make music with piano again, with this band—which I love very much. Also, I decided I wanted to make the music live in the studio. They're almost all first or second takes. The musicians are all just killers. You put a piece of music in front of these guys, and, if they like the music, they'll just devour it. In addition to that, most are incredible sight readers as well. I just put the score in front of them and we're wailing while I'm catching up, because I'm not that good a sight reader. I read the score and certain notes in my piano part; I have to practice while Dave and John are wailing on it.

JW: With *Light Years*, your introduction of Eric Marienthal on saxophone instantly made a link to the jazz tradition in a way that electric guitar and keys don't. Was that your intention in bringing it into the group?

CC: It is a jazz tradition, but it's very much a pop tradition, too, if you look at different styles. But no, my purpose for the saxophone was a lyrical one. After a year of just the electric trio, with all synthesizers and Fender Rhodes and another year of a quartet with the trio plus an electric guitar, I started to miss having a lyrical breath for melodies.



LYNN GOLDSMITH/GETTY

CHICK COREA'S EQUIPMENT

With the launching of the Elektric Band three years ago, Corea more or less reinvented his keyboard setup, taking into account the multifarious technological advances since his prior forays into electronics. And yet, certain instrumental elements remain—out of nostalgia and practicality. He had been using a Fender Rhodes, MIDI'd to his higher tech synthesizers. He still has a Mini Moog on hand—a remnant of the Return to Forever era.

This year, he has streamlined his gear with the addition of the newly unveiled Yamaha MIDI grand piano. The Yamaha has enabled Corea to integrate his favorite keyboard into an electronic network of sound sources, to trigger sounds and achieve electro-acoustic timbral blends. On stage, the grand is miked with two AKG 414 microphones and a Heinenstill pickup, with a special guard and a plexiglass shield to keep Dave Weckl's nearby bass drum from bleeding into the piano. Among his synthesized sources are a rack-mounted Kurzweil 250, several Yamaha TX816s and a Synclavier, which provides sounds and sequences. The Yamaha KX5 also serves as a keyboard controller, as do the Yamaha KX88 and KX76 units.

CHICK COREA SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- as a leader**
- Eye of the Beholder—GRP 1053
 - GRP Super Live in Concert—GRP 2-1650
 - Light Years—GRP 1036
 - Elektric Band—GRP 1026
 - Septet—ECM 1297
 - Voyage—ECM 1282
 - Children's Songs—ECM 25005-1
 - Trio Music—ECM 2-1232
 - Three Quartets—Warner Bros. 3552
 - Tap Step—Warner Bros. 3425
 - The Mad Hatter—Polydor 6130
 - My Spanish Heart—Polydor 9003
 - The Song of Singing—Blue Note 84353
 - Piano Improvisations, Vol. 1—ECM 1014
 - Piano Improvisations, Vol. 2—ECM 1020
 - A.R.C.—ECM 1009
 - The Leprechaun—Polydor 6062
 - Friends—Polydor 6160
 - Delphi 1—Polydor 6208
 - Secret Agent—Polydor 6176
 - Inner Space—Atlantic 2-305
 - Bliss—Muse 5011
 - Before Forever—Quintessence 25011
 - Chick Corea—Blue Note LA395-H
- with Gary Burton**
- Lyric Suite for Sextet—ECM 1260
 - In Concert, Zurich—ECM 2-1182
 - Duet—ECM 1140
 - Crystal Silence—ECM 1024
- with Herbie Hancock**
- An Evening With...—Columbia 35663
 - Corea/Hancock—Polydor 2-6638
- with Return to Forever**
- MusikMAGIC—Columbia 34682
 - Best of...—Columbia 36359
 - Live: NY Concert 5/77—Columbia 35281
 - Romantic Warrior—Columbia 34076
 - No Mystery—Polydor 65'2
 - Where Have I Known You Before—Polydor 6509
 - Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy—Polydor 5536
 - Light as a Feather—Polydor 5525
 - Return to Forever—ECM 1022
- with Circle**
- Paris Concert—ECM 2-1018/9
 - Circling In—Blue Note LA472-H2
 - Circulus—Blue Note LA882-J2
- with Miles Davis**
- At the Fillmore—Columbia 30083
 - Directions—Columbia 36472
 - Circle in the Round—Columbia 36278
 - Live/Evil—Columbia 30954
 - Bitches Brew—Columbia GP 26
- with Lenny White, Stanley Clarke, Joe Henderson, and Freddie Hubbard**
- Griffith Park Collection—Elektra 60025
 - Echoes of an Era—Elektra 60021
 - Echoes of an Era—Elektra 60262-1-1
- with Fredrich Gulda**
- The Meeting—Philips 410397
 - Mozart Double Piano Concertos/Fantasy for Two Pianos—Teldec LC3706

I'd write these melodies and the keyboard or guitar would have to play them. I missed someone blowing [laughs].

JW: *It's interesting that you have had the same line-up for even this long. It's rare in jazz; it's much more that bands are fleeting things, with people gathering and dispersing.*

CC: Absolutely. My role model is Duke Ellington in this regard.

JW: *In that he wrote for his musicians?*

CC: Not only did he write for his musicians, but he had a philosophy of life that placed value on the camaraderie and trust and the wonderful things that you can build up in a relationship over a period of time—the richness that can come to a relationship over a period of time.

JW: *In the band, you engage in a practice that's sort of fallen away of late, which is trading fours. That's a bebop notion, in a way.*

CS: It's a trademark of bebop, I know. It's almost a dixieland kind of thing. That's from the spirit of jazz being a fun kind of music, which was pre-bebop. With the '40s and the introduction of drugs, jazz became very serious. But Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington weren't serious. Well, neither is Dizzy Gillespie.

I always like it when there's an expression of fun. I don't mean as a put-on. One way to make some fun is to throw musical phrases around.

JW: *Also in the '40s, the influence of bebop was something of an introspective revolution. That's when jazz began to take on a more intellectual stance.*

CC: My theory is that drugs did it. Drugs introverted musicians. Drugs have a direct relation to a person's ability to extrovert and communicate with his environment. The more street drugs are taken, the more a person introverts, and doesn't communicate. I think that's the sole difference between musicians who are more entertainers—who talk to the audience and include the audience more—and those who aren't.

That's the one thing I never did like about the jazz atmosphere—it's ultra-alooofness and coolness. I was brought up in an Italian family that always hugged each other. We were very open physically and very effusive, emotionally. When I got to New York in the '60s, the jazz scene was so cool, I didn't know what to do. I actually had a very difficult time. It was almost an ethic. It was like "Don't become too effusive, man, otherwise you're not hip and cool." I got caught in that a little bit, but I shook it off pretty quick because I didn't like it.

JW: *What is the basis of your relationship with Herbie Hancock?*

CC: Herbie is an interesting case, because we haven't played together that much except for a very intense period in '79. That really solidified our musical relationship to a point where, after not having gotten together for I don't know how many years, we got together recently and sat down at pianos and it was better than ever.

Prior to that, it was just a mutual admiration society. Herbie I consider one of my. . . I don't know if mentor is the right term. In the '60s—even a little bit before Miles, Herbie made those first Blue Note records. His sense of harmony, his sense of bebop and sense of adventure attracted my attention. It struck a similar chord in me. I used to look forward to listening to him. I learned a lot from Herbie. When we got to get close and play together, it was such a dream come true, to not only listen to him but trade phrases with him.

JW: *You and Herbie are Miles alumni. There is this general view, however credible, that in that historical moment, Miles crystallized electric jazz fusion and that he sent emissaries out.*

CC: Nah, that's Disneyland. Miles is definitely a leader and has created a number of paths musically. I think musical styles evolve culturally; there are always leaders and he was one of them. But there were other things that occurred that I thought were equally as important. I feel that the formation of the Mahavishnu Orchestra was equally important. What John McLaughlin did with

the electric guitar set the world on its ear. No one ever heard an electric guitar played like that before, and it certainly inspired me.

I wanted to express that emotion. John's band, more than my experience with Miles, led me to want to turn the volume up and write music that was more dramatic and made your hair move.

JW: *Is that also what led you to a Mini Moog and to the beauty of bent notes?*

CC: Jan Hammer was definitely an influence at that point. Just the idea of playing a melody line on a synthesizer intrigued me. It opened me up, because the style of piano that I had learned came from Bud Powell and Horace Silver, which was basically a hornish approach—single lines on the piano with left hand accompaniment. But it was a melodic concept. Pianists like that would learn their lines and become interested in horn players' lines more so than even pianists'.

I learned more from horn players in the '50s and '60s than from pianists. I only listened to a few pianists. A couple of the obvious horn influences: Bird and Diz were some of the first ones. But I used to love Blue Mitchell's playing in Horace Silver's band. If there was any one band that I was a wigged-out fan of, it was Horace's band when I was in high school. I used to bug the guy at the record store to pull the new releases. When *Blowin' The Blues* came out, I was in heaven. I transcribed every note off that record. So Blue's trumpet playing was very influential. Also Clifford Brown and Sonny Rollins and then, a little later, Coltrane.

JW: *So you weren't so much a Bill Evans student?*

CC: Not at first. Actually, Bill Evans' playing led me to become very appreciative of Art Tatum's playing. Before that, I glossed over Art Tatum. I thought he tinkled. It was just the touch, sort of tinkly. I thought of Bill's playing as being lyrical instead of tinkly, and the next time I listened to an Art Tatum record, I thought, "Wow, that's beautifully lyrical."

It's interesting how these threads get woven.

JW: *As they were being woven, would you analyze that, or was it just observation after the fact?*

CC: All after the fact, when I have talks with the likes of yourself. To me, one of the intensely interesting things about living is that you have skills and art and ways of living that get passed along. Really, the conception of an idea always comes from one individual. So we refer to individuals who were great at something, like Mozart or like Art Tatum or like Coltrane or whoever. But, in actual fact, the evolution of styles and the acceptance of ways of living, is really a group action, not an individual action.

I think of an incident, meeting Stanley Jordan for the first time recently. He opened a concert that we played together after he had made a bit of noise with his record. I really liked the way he played, so I met him and complimented him, and he gave me this big compliment about having listened to my music and having enjoyed it. At that moment, I realized that it all comes around. He might have just been beginning when I had a band some years ago and heard it and liked it. And there he is playing on a stage and I'm thinking "Hmum, that's some interesting stuff." It keeps going around.

JW: *That's also true of the members of your own band. They're second generation players who, no doubt, were very influenced by Return to Forever.*

CC: Dave Weckl had a band called Night Sprite, which was a tune off of *Leprechaun*. Now I'm listening to these guys and learning from these guys and seeing how they put things together in a new way. It's just a great game. It makes your age and your body and your nationality and your gender and your race and your educational background just kind of dribble away. Where we finally meet is on a level that's very strong and real, which is with one's taste in art and music and in styles and with an exchange of that sort of thing.

It makes you feel endlessly young.

db

COURTNEY

PURSUI



The ghost of John Coltrane slips in through the back door of New York's showcase performance venue, the Bottom Line. It's been years since he visited this town. His arrival is, of course, unexpected.

Trane looks curious—intense, eyes on some distant prize—just like that classic Chuck Stewart photo adorning the inside liner of Live At The Village Vanguard Again! He carries his tenor with him.

Discreetly, he moves through the darkness, stationing himself stageside to hear Courtney Pine, a no-nonsense, baby-faced Brit whose saxophonic "sheets of sound" are stirring critics throughout the jazz community. Pine launches a torrid attack, the ferocity of which humbles the house and shakes loose a calendar from the wall, its pages fluttering about and landing in the shadows at Coltrane's feet. Trane smiles, cradling his horn as Courtney blows.

PINE

by Jeff Levenson

NG A SONG OF DESTINY

At 23 years of age, Courtney Pine carries himself like a seasoned veteran. His look, his play, the way he slings his tenor up to the mic all convey an attitude that most jazz players spend a lifetime developing yet never quite nail down. That Pine has pulled together a style of play that honors the work of great masters—Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Wayne Shorter—and at the same time gives insurgent promise to the jazz expansionism of the new guard underscores his uniqueness as a torch-bearing artist.

"I'm definitely going in a certain direction," he admits, "but I don't think I'm really me yet. I'm still working at it."

Pine could turn out to be Britain's most noteworthy contribution to jazz. Not that England hasn't had its share of players: pianists George Shearing and Marian McPartland, saxophonists Tubby Hayes and Joe Harriott (with whom Pine feels a special connection). The difference here is that aside from refining a refreshingly bold musical concept, Pine is a publicist's dream, a daring jazz media darling who, like Wynton Marsalis before him, walks tall, carries a big stick, and understands the basic tenets of power packaging.

Just as Wynton's star was meteoric, Pine too has moved fast. With only two albums under this belt, and few touring credits outside his homeland, he has already demonstrated that he accepts the challenge of walking a musical tightrope, of unabashedly celebrating a musical past not quite his own while ingeniously incorporating into the mix other world musics (most notably in his case, West Indian reggae, calypso, and ska).

The idea is that as the young saxophonist opens his eyes, ears, and heart to the teachings of America's past masters, his personal discoveries, transmuted through cultural predisposition, become *ours*.

"When I took Sonny home," he says of Rollins' Contemporary Records classic, *Way Out West*, "It was similar to the reggae music I was listening to. He played very rhythmically, as if the music was cut from the same mold as reggae. When I uncovered Wayne Shorter with Weather Report, I heard his ability to play all the chords; it was an unusual style. Then I discovered Coltrane—I think my first album was *A Love Supreme*—

and I felt close to his energy. He could make his instrument sound like something more than a saxophone. From there I moved back in time, discovering the players who influenced those musicians."

Pine was born in London in 1964. After studying clarinet, he switched to saxophone, prompted in the main by *Way Out West's* celebrated cover photograph of Rollins chically brandishing his tenor while modeling a gunbelt and Stetson. The image (perhaps more than the music, to Pine's uneducated ears at the time) was rich enough to inspire his change in instrument.

He worked with funk and reggae bands before adopting jazz as his preferred idiom, his play evolving from a '60s sensibility that emphasized urgency and bravura set against spiritual ideals. Though few of his peers initially understood this strain of the music, he attracted empathetic playmates when he founded the Abibi Jazz Arts (TAJA), an English organization promising creative solidarity among young black musicians.

Out of TAJA came the 20-piece Jazz Warriors, an ensemble designed to shape the area's burgeoning jazz sub-culture and to promote work opportunities. The big band made its performance debut at the Fridge 1986, a London nightclub associated with back-beat oriented music. The show's success effectively introduced jazz to an enthusiastic audience and, more importantly, communicated to the music community that the messengers of this *new* sound were young, hip, and serious.

"The Jazz Warriors was a revolving platform," Pine says of the collective. "My girlfriend and I put out feelers. We got phone numbers of players we thought would be interested in this thing. After awhile we got 100 or 200 people coming down saying they would like to play this kind of music. We attracted more musicians than we expected.

"The overall organization has now spread to the place where we run workshops. We have an office and we promote a couple of bands from within. The whole thing appears to have taken hold. In England there is an interesting phenomenon in the clubs based

on [the success] of a place called Waldorf Street. It's a disco in the traditional sense. But instead of playing Earth, Wind & Fire or Stephanie Mills, they feature latin jazz or the music of Art Blakey . . . to packed houses!"

As a result of his musical and organizational skills, Pine found himself spearheading a movement that knew no precedents in England. His reputation, now inexorably linked to the politics of national culture, gained momentum and led to a record deal for the Warriors (*Out Of Many, One People*) and for himself (*Journey To The Urge Within*).

Journey features Pine working both tenor and soprano saxophones, and doubling on bass clarinet. He used various members of the Warriors to round out the small group combinations that recorded behind him. *Children Of The Ghetto*, a track that featured vocals by Susaye Greene, became a radio hit in England, propelling album sales far beyond anyone's expectations for the first-time effort.

His follow-up, *Destiny's Song + The Image Of Pursuance*, further dramatized Pine's preciosity. Produced by Delfaeyo Marsalis with a sonic clarity that mirrored the leader's creative focus, the album examined Pine's devotional instincts. Song titles like *The Vision*, *Sacrifice*, and *In Pursuance* offer fitting testimony to how dramatically influential Coltrane and his *A Love Supreme* period have been to the young tenorist.

“I see music as a reflection of one's personality,” he offers. “All the greats said what they said with their music. If you believe in [Thelonious] Monk's music, for instance, you know Monk. That's who he was. My music reflects what I believe in because I can't play something that isn't me. I can't play something I don't know anything about. Everything that I've played is in my music somewhere. You put all the ingredients in, and then something unique comes out the other side.”

That something resonates with the muted nobility of one who plumbs not just his own cultural heritage for inspiration but that of the brother- and sisterhood of jazz musicians struggling to bring legitimacy and justice to



VIRGINIA SEXTON



VIRGINIA SEXTON

their efforts. Given his Caribbean roots (his father was born in Jamaica), Pine might well have settled for convenient, readily accessible styles of play. He might have drifted into a career of hackneyed musical forms that spelled commercial success, but barely tested his artistic mettle.

Quite obviously, he did not. Instead, Pine looked to develop a black British style that, ironically, drew creative purpose and inspiration from beyond the Atlantic—with one notable exception. That exception was Joe Harriott, a fiercely independent altoist from the West Indies who settled in Britain in the early '50s, at first experimenting with free-form play (not unlike Ornette Coleman), then later with fusions between jazz and Indian music. His work, though sadly unacknowledged by all but a small coterie of followers, proved prophetic.

Harriott's career has particular meaning to Pine since the neglected jazzman represents one of England's first true innovators, a man who only years after his death received a modicum of recognition. Pine knows that should a singularly distinctive style evolve from his efforts and those of fellow black contemporaries in Britain, one of the movement's progenitive voices belongs to Harriott.

"He was the outstanding player in England," the young saxophonist explains. "He wasn't really successful—I believe he played

mostly in pubs—but he made a few great records that were enormously influential. Clearly, he was ahead of his time."

Pine, on the other hand, conveys the unmistakable impression that he, alone among the new-guard jazz artists, is perfectly on time, his success a function of musical mastery coupled with cultural readiness coupled with the jazz media's zeal for fostering celebrity. In the brief time that he has become a vanguard jazz artist, few other players have commanded as much attention or stirred as much emotion.

Even touring greats (including many who have accompanied his heroes) know of his reputation. Some, like George Russell, Elvin Jones, and Art Blakey, have offered him high-visibility jobs. Pine has played briefly with Jones and Blakey, two rousing experiences that impressed him beyond words.

"I can't fully express what it feels like," he enthuses, "because one thing these men have is a sense of history *and* a sense of doing something new. They're searchers. And that's what I like about all the jazz greats. That's what ties them all together."

It remains to be seen how far Pine will go, where, precisely, his muse will take him. He speaks of his intrigue with computers. And he mentions his sax quartet, the World's First Saxophone Posse. He registers an eagerness to record with Wynton. And he affirms almost piously his interest in working

with McCoy Tyner, Coltrane's soul-mate. Whatever the chosen endeavor, he is mindful of the need to place craft above all else.

That is why his career path has been a paradigm of vertical passage, a rocketing ride on the Astral Express. One might say, with a divine allusion to Pine's spiritual forebear (a celebrated saxophonist recently sighted at a New York haunt), the flight has been pure *Ascension*. db

COURTNEY PINE'S EQUIPMENT

Courtney Pine uses two main tenors. One is a Selmer Super Balanced Action, the other a 1957 Selmer Mark VI. He uses an Otto Link #10 metal mouthpiece, and his preferred reeds are made by Fred Hempke (#3½) and Vandoren (#3).

His sopranos are a Selmer Super 80 Mark II, and a Yamaha 62 Curved. He uses a Selmer G metal mouthpiece with Fred Hempke #4 reeds. Pine's bass clarinet is Selmer, played with a Selmer G mouthpiece and Vandoren #3 reeds. He plays Gemeinhardt Alto & C-Flutes.

COURTNEY PINE SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

JOURNEY TO THE URGE WITHIN—Antilles/New Directions 8700

DESTINY'S SONG + THE IMAGE OF PURSUANCE—Antilles/New Directions 8725

with the Jazz Warriors

OUT OF MANY, ONE PEOPLE—Antilles/New Directions 90681

BIRD



By Scott Yanow

The Movie

After years of gossip and speculation, the film biography of Charlie Parker is finally a reality. Simply titled *Bird*, this long-awaited movie (set for general release in September and winner of two awards this past summer at the Cannes Film Festival) has been filmed by actor, and producer/director for *Bird*, Clint Eastwood. It promises to be factual, educational, and entertaining, one of the few Hollywood biographies to deal directly with the jazz life.

There have been many attempts through the years to build a movie around a jazz figure but most have fallen far short (not counting documentaries and filmed concerts). From Paul Whiteman's 1930 *King Of Jazz* (which contained perhaps 10 minutes of worthy music) and the largely fictional, if occasionally amusing, bios of the '50s (*The Benny Goodman Story*, *The Five Pennies*, *St. Louis Blues*, *The Gene Krupa Story*, *The Glenn Miller Story*, etc.) to the abysmal *Lady Sings The Blues*, jazz has usually been sold short in Hollywood, serving as the background for gangsters (*The Cotton Club*) or adding atmosphere to trivial romances (*New York, New York*). Among the few exceptions have been *The Gig*, *Round Midnight* (by France's Bertrand Tavernier), and now *Bird*, whose script was originally purchased by Columbia

in '82 as a vehicle for Richard Pryor.

"I saw Charlie Parker when I was a kid in Northern California," recalled Clint Eastwood, "and I was always amazed by his music. He was very intricate technically yet didn't hot-dog it like many of the players of the time. I've always loved jazz ever since I heard my mother's Fats Waller records. I listened to jazz of the past such as King Oliver and Bix Beiderbecke and eventually moved up to Charlie Ventura, Jackie & Roy, Brubeck, Mulligan, and then Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. I played a little bit of cornet, trumpet, and fluegelhorn but I never became terribly proficient, just good enough to admire the people that really played it.

"I heard that there was a script on Charlie Parker and my agent had a copy when Columbia was thinking of filming it. I read it out of curiosity and was quite surprised by how good it was. As it happened, Columbia was in a transition period, changing executives, and they wanted something Warner Bros. owned. I told Warner Bros. that I thought *Bird* was very good material on an American icon of music and that it was a shame that no one had done the story yet. We have a good relationship—I do a lot of pictures for them—so they acquired *Bird* in a trade.

"Joel Oliansky, who wrote the script, wanted to do extensive rewrites," continued Eastwood, "but, other than a bit of editing that I did, we stuck to the original screenplay. Much of it was based on Chan Parker's book *Life In E Flat*. It is very accurate historically with just one or two fictionalized sequences to tie up loose ends. To give an example, for Charlie Parker's death in the movie we ran the exact same television show he was watching, the same episode of the Dorsey Brother's show."



To play the challenging role of Charlie Parker, Clint Eastwood picked 26-year-old Forest Whitaker. "I'd always liked Forest as an actor," commented Eastwood. "I'd seen him play some small parts along the way. He did a test for us and I knew immediately he'd be perfect for the part."

"When I first met with Clint," remembered Whitaker, "I actually didn't know what part I was auditioning for. We talked briefly about jazz, which I had a little knowledge of. At the next meeting, he gave me some pages of the script and that's when I realized what the part was about. I was actually more familiar with John Coltrane and Miles Davis than I was with Parker."

Best known for his small but memorable roles in *The Color Of Money* and *Good Morning, Vietnam*, Forest Whitaker had actually been a singer and occasional trumpeter in his early days. "I mostly played classical trumpet and just a little jazz but I was more versed in voice." In high school Whitaker sang in the school choir, studied opera, and played football, making all-league as a defensive tackle. In college on a football scholarship, Whitaker became much more interested in acting, at first performing in musicals and then gradually shifting to dramatic parts.

"To prepare for the Charlie Parker role, I consulted with his wife Chan Parker, Red Rodney, Ray Brown, and many other musicians. I also read every book on Parker that I could possibly find." One of the most important bits of preparation that Whitaker underwent was to learn how to play the alto saxophone. "I had never played the saxophone or any reed instrument before. I practiced six, seven hours a day. Lennie Niehaus, my only

teacher, worked with me very closely."

How does one teach a nonmusician in his mid-'20s to play like Charlie Parker in just two months? "I basically started him from scratch," recalls Lennie Niehaus, the musical coordinator of *Bird*. "It helped that he looks like Bird physically. Parker kept his fingers close to the keys so he would be able to play as fast as he did. I taught Forest the correct embouchure and we started out with simple tunes like *Now's The Time*. We eventually advanced to the solos he was to mime, going over scales, fingerings, and different keys. He didn't actually sound like Bird; musicians work for 20 years and don't get to that point, but Forest was a quick learner. He practiced a lot in front of the mirror. We went over everything countless times. At one time, we were thinking of getting a real saxophonist for the closeups but Forest got so good that one can't tell that he's not playing. The movie starts off with him taking an 11-chorus solo on *Lester Leaps In* and every breathing spot and phrase had to fit. It was hours and hours of work."

"I tried to get my fingering in the movie as close as possible to the actual notes that you'll hear Charlie Parker play," continued Whitaker. "When there are closeups of my fingers, it fits the notes. If the audience ever doubts that it is me as Charlie Parker playing the saxophone then they'll doubt that I'm Charlie Parker and the whole film loses its point."

"All of the actors worked extremely hard at learning their instruments and their solos," added Eastwood. "There's Sam Wright, who plays Dizzy Gillespie, Michael Zelniker, who portrays Red Rodney, and of course Forest. In so many films that



I saw when I was growing up, the fingering and breathing on the horn was completely off and done very poorly."

Did the director consider playing a small part in the movie, perhaps as a trumpeter? "That would have been distracting," chuckled Eastwood. "We tried to keep this movie very straightforward and accurate."

One of the most fascinating aspects of *Bird* is its music. Niehaus utilized up-to-date technology to isolate Charlie Parker's actual solos from the original mono recordings and put them in new settings with the likes of Red Rodney (who plays all the trumpet parts for his character), Jon Faddis (who logically fills in Dizzy Gillespie's solos), pianists Walter Davis Jr., Monty Alexander, and Barry Harris, bassists Ray Brown and Ron Carter, and drummer Johnny Guerin. "It's magic," exclaims Niehaus. "For the technical details one would have to talk to the recording engineer but basically we took the old recordings and filtered out the other instruments. We stuck to the two-and-a-half octaves of the alto, eliminating the trumpet and the rhythm section. We were very strict about preserving Bird's sound. If any other instrument leaked into the alto's range I'd write for that instrument to cover it up. It's a brand new technique that hasn't been used in this context before."

"The possibilities are endless. All of the ad-lib alto solos in the movie are played by Bird accompanied by today's musicians. Charles McPherson, who can sound as close to Bird as anyone around today, played some of the melody lines but, except for one scene where Red Rodney and Bird play a wedding (where no recordings exist of Parker), all of the solos are Bird's." In addition to placing familiar solos in unfamiliar surroundings, three unissued Parker improvisations from Chan's private collection are included in the film.

The screenplay concentrates on Bird's later life (with flashbacks of his rise to fame) and his relationship with Chan Parker. Whitaker describes his impressions of the innovator's personality: "I found Charlie Parker to be extremely sensitive and very chameleon-like. When he dealt with a specific person he would play within that person's notes/thoughts and fit the sound of the conversation. He changed constantly, harmonizing with whoever he was with. To have a sensitivity that acute caused problems and pain. One could blame his death on the drugs and alcohol, but his sensitivity, which was his greatest strength, was also probably his greatest weakness."

"Although I haven't yet seen the completed movie, *Bird* was my best experience I've ever had as an actor. My earlier movies really don't satisfy me like this one. It was a great responsibility trying to understand the man and his music, knowing why he played an individual note at a certain time and how it related to his thoughts."

"It was the first time that I worked with Clint Eastwood," continued Whitaker. "The set was very relaxed and calm and he was very much on an even keel. He instills confidence and a quiet calm in people around him and commands a great deal of respect without ever raising his voice."

"I did Clint Eastwood's last five films," adds Niehaus, "and he has a great love for jazz. Few people know that he was partly responsible for the success of *Round Midnight*. Warner Bros. owned the script but wasn't sure whether to film it; Clint talked them into doing it. The thing about *Bird* is that it's completely accurate historically. The original screenplay was true to life and then Red Rodney checked it, Gillespie looked it over, and Chan was here for a week reading the script. It's not Hollywood's idea of jazz like *The Benny Goodman Story*. Recently we played a clip for four trumpeters and they could not believe, seeing the Dizzy Gillespie character, that he wasn't playing. The film gives a well-rounded picture of Charlie Parker. Obviously he had trouble with drugs but that's only a small part of the story."

Lennie Niehaus, who plans to become more active again as a jazz altoist, was enthusiastic about getting to write in a jazz context for *Bird*. "Making this movie has been the thrill of my life, a truly marvelous experience." *Bird*, which also stars Diane Venora as Chan Parker, should, at a minimum, do for Charlie Parker what *The Sting* did for Scott Joplin and ragtime. "Anything that helps jazz is great by me," states Eastwood. "I jokingly say that I've been involved with the two main American art forms, the Western movie and jazz. *Bird* is dedicated to musicians everywhere who work so hard and play so well but never seem to get appreciated as much as they deserve."

"I hope that people who are not in the jazz world," concludes Whitaker, "will be able to appreciate Charlie Parker and his importance. He changed the face of contemporary music, setting it up for everyone that followed. After Charlie Parker, the world was a different place. The jazz aficionados already know who Charlie Parker was. I hope that this movie will result in the rest of the world discovering him and recognizing his genius. That would make me happy."

db

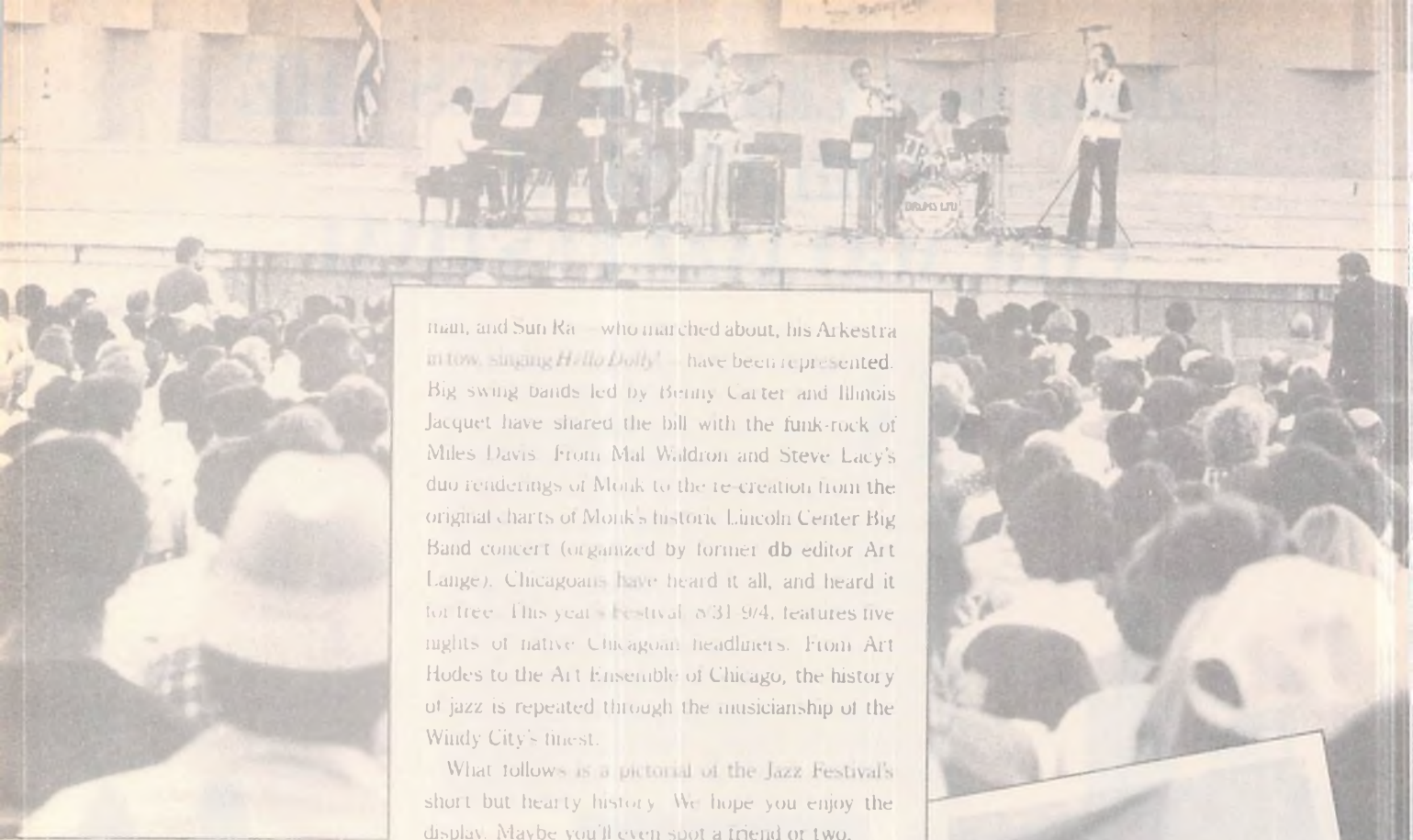
down beat CELEBRATES THE 10th ANNUAL CHICAGO JAZZ FESTIVAL

Beginning as an outgrowth of tributes to Duke Ellington and John Coltrane, the Chicago Jazz Festival has grown into a five-night extravaganza seen by almost half-a-million people each year and heard by uncounted multitudes more via live, nationwide radio broadcasts. On this, the Festival's 10th anniversary, **down beat** salutes the Fest, its organizers, the Jazz Institute of Chicago, the Mayor's Office of Special Events, and its audiences with a photo diary.

Each year the Festival presents the entire spectrum of jazz with a special emphasis on the role of the Windy City. Everyone from Doc Cheatham, a contemporary of Louis Armstrong, to Ornette Cole-



KEN FIRESTONE



man, and Sun Ra — who marched about, his Arkestra in tow, singing *Hello Dolly!* — have been represented. Big swing bands led by Benny Carter and Illinois Jacquet have shared the bill with the funk-rock of Miles Davis. From Mal Waldron and Steve Lacy's duo renderings of Monk to the re-creation from the original charts of Monk's historic Lincoln Center Big Band concert (organized by former *db* editor Art Lange), Chicagoans have heard it all, and heard it for free. This year's Festival, 8/31-9/4, features five nights of native Chicagoan headliners. From Art Hodes to the Art Ensemble of Chicago, the history of jazz is repeated through the musicianship of the Windy City's finest.

What follows is a pictorial of the Jazz Festival's short but hearty history. We hope you enjoy the display. Maybe you'll even spot a friend or two.

G. HUGLEY

(from left) Charlie Rouse, Conte Candoli, and Sal Nistico blowing up a storm at the Petrillo band shell



Bradley Parker-Sparrow, piano, and Harold Jones, alto saxophone, under the watchful eyes of John Coltrane and Wes Montgomery

KEN FREEMAN

Benny Goodman, 1979



LAUREN DEUTSCH



STEVEN GROSS

Jim Bebee, 1984



STEVEN GROSS

Miles Davis, 1982



LAUREN DEUTSCH

Phil Cohran and the Circle of Sound, 1985



STEVEN GROSS

Eddie Johnson, 1986



STEVEN GROSS

Steve Lacy, 1986



Clark Terry and Charlie Rouse, 1985

LAUREN DEUTSCH



LAUREN DEUTSCH

Dexter Gordon, 1987



LAUREN DEUTSCH

Stephane Grappelli, 1987



LAUREN DEUTSCH

Judy Roberts, 1982



STEVEN GROSS

Count Basie, 1981



DAVID MURRAY CHAMBER JAZZ QUARTET

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE—Cecma 1009: *BOOTY BUTT BABOON BREAKDOWN*; *THANKS*; *MINGUS EYES*; *KAHIL'S TURNAROUND*; *CAPTOWN STRUT/KWELLI*; *DYANI?*

Personnel: Murray, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Hugh Ragin, trumpet, flugelhorn; Abdul Wadud, cello; Fred Hopkins, bass.

★★★★

DAVID MURRAY & RANDY WESTON

THE HEALERS—Black Saint 120 118-1: *CLEVER BEGGAR*; *THE HEALERS*, *MBIZO*; *BLUE MOSES*.

Personnel: Murray, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Weston, piano.

★★★★

For the most part, David Murray's recordings as a leader over the past few years—especially the Octet dates—have struck a golden mean between the adventurous and the accessible. *The People's Choice* and *The Healers* tilt the balance somewhat towards the former, if only by contextual parameters. Murray's Chamber Jazz Quartet is a striking ensemble that lends Murray's struts, breakdowns, and ballads unusually vivid color. His duets with Randy Weston extensively use deep shades to create a mystery-filled ambiance.

The instrumentation of Murray's Chamber Quartet lends itself to intriguing, liquid relationships. Murray's bass clarinet, as it has on WSQ classics such as *Steppin'*, provides gruff, funky bottom one moment, and high-pitched vocal texture the next. With such simple devices as a glissando or a trill, Abdul Wadud springs to the foreground or alters the focus of the improvisation. Fred Hopkins has always had a beguiling ability to mesh the big-toned underpinning of a Wilbur Ware with the expanded vocabulary facilitated by the likes of Jimmy Garrison. When Hugh Ragin's brinkmanship is not front and center, he brays, barks, and buzzes to create tactile backdrops.

The flexibility of the quartet is tested throughout a varied program. They are in the pocket on the droll *Booty Butt Baboon Breakdown*, a riff-lined theme with an angular bridge, akin to Julius Hemphill's *Steppin'* both in structure and humor. Unexpectedly, *Mingus Eyes* culminates with poignant balladic sweep as it begins with darting, freewheeling improvisations, fine-tuned through staggered entrances.

A boppish blowing vehicle, *Kahil's Turnaround* features the same type of incisive, inventive solos found on the township-tinged *Capetown Strut*; however, the latter dramatically downshifts, ending with the mournful adagio, *Kwelli: Dyani?*

Murray contributes some exemplary solos on *The People's Choice*, particularly his tough tenor turn on *Kahil's*. *The Healers* provides for a more expansive forum. Its first-take freshness is double-edged, as Murray occasionally falls back on his more well-worn mannerisms. This is outweighed by the prolonged passages Murray is spurred on by Randy Weston's unassuming gravity. The pianists Murray has previously recorded with—John Hicks and Don Pullen, especially—express intensity in very immediate terms, via attack, density, and speed. Weston takes the road rarely travelled, conveying an equally stirring message in spare, precise terms.

Murray and Weston's program has the distinctive African ambiance that Weston has honed over his career. Murray's forays into the extreme high register, particularly on Butch Morris' minor-keyed *Clever Beggar*, take on the nasal, note-bending qualities of northern African double-reed instruments. The alternately spry and solemn title piece begins with Weston milking kalimba and balafon effects from the keyboard; throughout the program, Weston reinforces such exotica with portentous left-hand rhythmic figures and splash-of-color fills. One of Weston's most enduring compositions, *Blue Moses* receives a tour de force treatment, its propulsive pentatonic theme giving way to Murray's ecstatic flurries and Weston's sagacious discourses on the African-American continuum. *The Healers* is a reminder of Weston's mastery, and how infrequently it is preserved on recordings.

—bill shoemaker

mond organ (5), guitar, keyboard (cello) (6), keyboards (scream, bass, flute) (7), guitar, shaker, keyboard (bass), background vocals (9), slide guitar, keyboards (flute, marimba, electric piano), keyboard (flute) (11); Tina Weymouth, bass guitar (1-11), keyboard (flute) (2), keyboard (machine) (7), electric organ (8), background vocals (6, 7); Wally Badarou, keyboard (conga bass) (1), keyboards (sonar, pedal steel) (7); Yves N'Djock, guitar (1, 3, 5); Johnny Marr, guitar (4, 11), 12-string guitar (5), twang bar guitar (8); Mory Kante, kora (2, 7); Phillippe Servain, accordion (3); James Fearnley, accordion (8); Eric Weissberg, pedal steel (3, 10), dobro (6); Arthur Russell, cello (10); Don Brooks, harmonica (9); Lenny Pickett, tenor sax (1, 9), soprano sax (9); Al Acosta, tenor sax (2); Stan Harrison, alto sax (1, 9); Mitch Frohman, alto sax (2); Bobby Porcellii, alto sax (2); Steve Elson, baritone sax (1, 9), soprano sax (9); Steve Sachs, baritone sax (2); Robin Eubanks, trombone (1, 9); Dale Turk, bass trombone (2); Laurie Frink, trumpet (1, 9); Earl Gardner, trumpet (1, 9), flugelhorn (9); Angel Fernandez, trumpet (2); Steve Gluzband, trumpet (2); Jose "Ite" Jerez, trumpet (2); Charlie Sepulveda, trumpet (2); Abdou M'Bou, talking drum, congas, cowbell (1), muted cowbells, congas (2), percussion (3), congas (5); Manolo Badrena, shaker, cowbell, woodblocks, congas (2), percussion (8); Moussa Cissakoo, percussion (oil drum) (4); Brice Wassy, maracas, leg seed pods (4), shaker (5), spoons, bells (7), tambourine, cowbells, ashtray (9); Sidney Thaim, congas (6), percussion (10); Nino Gioia, percussion (music stand) (7); Phil Bodner, cor anglais (11); Kirsty MacColl, background vocals (5, 10); Alex Haas, whistling (10).

★★★★★

"If this is Paradise/I wish I had a lawn mower."—Talking Heads

The Talking Heads' latest album opens with *Blind*, a heavy salsa-tinged Afro-funk tune creased neatly by a razor-sharp horn section; its words take a teasing, reflexive look at the confusion that is language, and how it shapes the world and our (mis)perceptions about it. That perception structures the disc's motive tension: in a sense, the relation between David Byrne's lyrics and the Heads' jammed-out-in-the-studio, pulsating grooves reprise the mind/body split that has long haunted the West. On *Naked*, that division becomes emblematic of everything from how political repression functions (*The Democratic Circus*) to the massive and undesirable changes that would result if either Sierra Club fantasies or World War III came to pass (*(Nothing But) Flowers*).

The Heads are ideally situated to explore those themes. Lyrically, they've always played the ironic urban sophisticates, liberally using the techniques of surrealism and concrete poetry, somehow maintaining a self-consciously wide-eyed naivete that can be as winning and refreshing as it was on their early albums, or as condescending and ambiguous as it became on last year's *True Stories*. Meanwhile, their music has gone to school with the best, and has branched out all over the dance-floor map: gospel-soul, in-the-pocket funk, all kinds of propulsive African and Caribbean



TALKING HEADS

NAKED—Fly/Sire 9 25654-2: *BLIND*; *MR. JONES*; *TOTALLY NUDE*; *RUBY DEAR*; (*NOTHING BUT) FLOWERS*; *THE DEMOCRATIC CIRCUS*; *THE FACTS OF LIFE*; *MOMMY DADDY YOU AND I*; *BIG DADDY*; *BILL*; *COOL WATER*.

Personnel: David Byrne, vocals (cuts 1-11), guitar (1-11), keyboard (space cha-cha) (6), keyboard (bass) (9), toy piano, slide guitar, keyboards (cello, flute) (10); Chris Frantz, drums (1-9, 11), keyboard (percussion), snare (10); Jerry Harrison, french piano (1), keyboard (marimba) (2), keyboard (steel drum), tambourine (3), guitar, background vocals (4, 8), Ham-

hybrids. So they've come to personify the fissures they both represent and probe on *Naked*.

Take a listen, for instance, to the buoyant *Totally Nude*, with its shimmering layers of Zairean-style guitar, its floating, keening pedal steel, its airy openness that physically uplifts you into the lightness of being any good dance track induces. Then take a listen to some of the lyrics: "I'm absolutely free/Living in the trees/The birdies and the bees/Cause I'm a nature boy/Locked up inside/You can't tell me where it's at/Open up, open up, open the door/Rocks and trees and physical culture. . . . We've got a life that's undiscovered. . . . We don't need clothes and we don't need money."

What the Heads have done here is tap into the Tarzan myth that gave a shape to the West's obsession with mind/body duality at the point of its greatest worldwide impact: turn-of-the-century imperialism. White boy goes to the jungle and gets in so tight with nature he outdoes the locals in his understanding of their environment and his ability to harness it. Rousseau and the Romantics had mapped the territory, but it took Kipling and Edgar Rice Burroughs to people it with ever-more-barbarous natives and ever-more-adept sahibs.

The Heads turn that racist fantasy inside out and update it, poke into it with flashes of insight that look like a skittery stroboscopic X-ray. What they uncover is confused, to say the least: right after he rhapsodizes about needing neither clothes nor money their New Age Tarzan sighs, "So civilized." But the alienation at the heart (in the head?) of Western imperialist duality can't be shed with your clothes, can't be left behind when you change your address, isn't automatically purged because you eat raw veggies, as the lyrics repeatedly emphasize. Meanwhile, the musical pastiche of Afro-Caribbean dance beats bubbles and thumps and slinks with outrageous energy. Abetted by the international cadre of Afro-poppers who call Paris (where the disc was recorded) home, the band takes a mongrelized, always-shifting approach to the music that incarnates the self-conscious compromises it takes to balance ego and id in the individual or society or world.

Without that integrated awareness you can only mimic an escape to imaginary freedom, not produce a real set of solutions for all-too-real problems. Like in *(Nothing But) Flowers*, another Afro-pop dance tune lined with twangy guitars and percolating drums: "We caught a rattlesnake/Now we got something for dinner. . . . We used to microwave/Now we just eat nuts and berries," Byrne sings over the refrain "You got it, you got it." What else should you expect but incompetence if you drop post-industrial folk into the Garden of Eden?

The not-so-funny joke is that this sort of muddle, according to the Heads, is not all a function of displacement; as Freud wrote with pessimistic exactness in essays like *Civilization And Its Discontents*, we carry it with us wherever we go. Take how, over the industrially clanking beats of *The Facts Of Life*, Byrne chants, "Mon key see and mon key do/Ma king ba bies, ea ting food/. . . Sparks fly, shooting out/Ma king sure that evey thing is wor king/I can't turn you down/We are pro grammed hap

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py lit tle chil dren/Mat ter over mind/We can not re sist so I won't fight it/Love is a ma chine/ Love is a ma chine without a dri ver/ Machines of love." With typical irony, the song does a lap-dissolve to a gentler musical mode for its extended coda: that only underlines the savage sarcasm when Byrne ends it with a plaintive wail: "The girls and boys combine/ Like monkeys in the zoo/ . . . If chimpanzees are smart/Then we will close our eyes/And let our instincts guide us/Oh oh oh oh no."

What happens when those instincts are unloosed becomes clear over the ominous motifs and chugging beats pulsing through the post-apocalyptic landscape of *Mommy Daddy You And I* as it extends the guerrilla scenario of *Life During Wartime*: a group of families are huddled in a bus headed north to escape the effects of radiation, thinking about "changing the water of life" as they pass by sidewalks frozen at -30°. It's the flow of life up against the control mechanisms; except that, unlike New Agers and '60s hippies and other devotees of the Rousseauian nature myth, the Talking Heads understand that humanity can't unbite the apple, can't go home to the Garden, can't simply unplug the ego. There's no real choice but to live in the always-shifting interstices between the messy outside world and the id's dreams on the one hand and the order our language and consciousness, our desire for continuity and meaning, are always trying to impose on the other. Only in that space do questions like this have any meaning: "Is their skin not the same as yours?/Can they sit at the table to drink/Cool water?" —*gene santoro*



KEVIN EUBANKS

SHADOW PROPHETS—GRP 1054: *SONGHOUSE; VILLAGE DANCE; TWILIGHT TEARS; EYE SPY; MICE MOBSTERS; HE SMILED THE SEA; SHADOW PROPHETS; JENNA'S DREAM.*

Personnel: Eubanks, acoustic guitars, MIDI guitar synth, background vocals; Victor Bailey (cuts 1, 3, 4, 7), Rael Wesley Grant (2, 5, 8), bass; Tommy Campbell (1, 3, 4, 7), Gene Jackson (2, 5, 8), drums; Mark Ledford, vocals; Onaje Allan Gumbs, keyboards (8).

★ ★ ★ ★

RANDY BERNSEN

PARADISE CITIZENS—Zebra 42132: *CARMEN; WHEN TWILIGHT SPEAKS; OPEN INVITATION; BE STILL AND KNOW; IN A SENTIMENTAL (ISLAND) MOOD; Z; GLASS TURKEY; CONTINUUM.*

Personnel: Bernsen, guitar, guitar synth, bass, keyboards, drum programming; Leon Pendarvis

(cuts 1-3, 7), Randy Kerber (1, 3), Mitch Foreman (5), Roy Lyon (5), keyboards; Bruce Hornsby (4), Taras Kovayl (5), piano; Neil Stubenhaus (1, 3), Anthony Jackson (2), Marcus Miller (6), electric bass; Charlie Haden (4), Sam Chiodo (5), acoustic bass; Harvey Mason (1, 3), Tom Brechtlein (2), John Molo (4), Mark Griffith (5), Steve Gadd (6), drums; Rafael Padilla (1, 3), Robert Thomas, Jr. (4, 7), percussion; Michael Hedges (4), Gary Campbell (1, 3, 7), Randy Emeric, Neal Bonsanti (5, 8), Wayne Shorter (6), saxophone; Othello Molineaux, pans (5); Peter Graves, trombone; Kenny Faulk, Brett Murphy, trumpet; Ellis Hall, Paulette Brown, Bunny Hull, Valerie Pinkston-Mayo, vocals (3).

★ ★ ★

Randy Bernsen is a Florida-based guitarist whose first two albums featured the likes of Herbie Hancock, Peter Erskine, Bob James, and his late friend Jaco Pastorius. Bernsen is still exploring every musical whim, or so it seems on his third record, *Paradise Citizens*. In *Shadow Prophets* we see Kevin Eubanks' promise fulfilled in a mass of musical motion, as the 31-year-old Philadelphian focuses in on a single style of guitar playing he loves.

Prophets is a complete turnaround from *The Heat Of Heat*, Eubanks' last GRP release, produced by George Benson, where he showed his interpretations of several pop selections. The new record is more like ground explored on John McLaughlin's *Belo Horizonte* (which also featured drummer Tommy Campbell), the acoustic guitar with electric bass and keyboards. Vocalist Ledford, of Metheny's latest band, adds his interpretive colors. The sound is peaceful but daring. Eubanks really digs in, gets in contact with his instrument, and the result is his best outing yet.

Campbell's rhythmic cauldron on *Songhouse* is matched by Eubanks' stringed web—the mesh doesn't let up for a long time. The sparseness of *Village Dance*, with Eubanks' MIDI guitar synth playing the occasional lush chord behind the action, leaves a lot of room for playing. The music is challenging and chop-stretching. Although not recorded "big," the groove of *Mice Mobsters* is Scofield-ish, and Eubanks scurries over it on his acoustic.

Shadow Prophets is a bluesy ballad. Campbell framing Eubanks' solo with rapid hi-hat work, the guitarist sliding gracefully over the frets, then going in to pick, pluck, and slap his strings. The song starts with just the acoustic, builds like a chant, melodies growing, and ends on a strong vamp groove. Eubanks never goes far afield, in keeping with the GRP tradition, but it's nice to hear him playing jazz again.

Bernsen has no worries about musical boundaries. He and his vast cast bound them quite a bit, lapsing into some rather formulaic funk and reggae grooves, but overall turning in a solid romp through fusionland. In *A Sentimental (Island) Mood* is filled with sounds Jaco loved—pans (Othello, no less), harmonica (or guitarmonica), trombones, and deep horns. Bernsen's arrangement of *Continuum*, and an extra musical collage of Pastorius and Bernsen takes (on CD only), are personal tributes to a friend and mentor.

A lot of dust is kicked up on this record, and none of it settles on the sparse funk of *Z*, or the unrelenting techno-crunch of *Glass Turkey*,

one of which would have livened up a somewhat draggy Side One. Gadd plays it pretty straight on *Z*, but his groove is so big, Miller's so strong, and Wayne's soprano so sweet, Bernsen's playing is lifted to its highest level.

The tightest rhythm section on the LP has to be Gadd and Marcus. Or the drum machine and bass Bernsen put down on *Glass Turkey*. Mason and Stubenhaus are airy but confident on *Carmen*, and they do play well on the vocal tune, *Open Invitation*. Brechtlein and Anthony J. don't distinguish *When Twilight Speaks*, although Bernsen's guitar software now enables him to sound like Toots Thielemans on the melody and a raging Robben Ford on the rideout. Bruce Hornsby and Charlie Haden appear and go largely unnoticed on the LP's acoustic offering.

Bernsen has an ability to get quality players involved, and he generally knows where to place them. But he might think in terms of just one or two different combinations on his next record that could really cook throughout, like Eubanks used. When you have too many good players, some get lost in the shuffle. Bernsen might think more of finding settings to feature himself, and of players to help him come up with unique band sounds —*robin tolleson*



COURTNEY PINE

DESTINY'S SONG + THE IMAGE OF PURSUANCE—Island 90697-1: *BEYOND THE THOUGHT OF MY LAST RECKONING; IN PURSUANCE; THE VISION; GUARDIAN OF THE FLAME; ROUND MIDNIGHT; SACRIFICE; PRISMIC OMNIPOTENCE; ALONE; A RAGAMUFFIN'S TALE; MARK OF TIME.*

Personnel: Pine, tenor and soprano saxophones; Julian Joseph, piano (cuts 1, 2, 6); Joe Bashorun, piano (3, 8, 10); Paul Hunt, bass (1, 2, 6, 7, 9); Gary Crosby, bass (3, 4, 8, 10); Mark Mondesir, drums (1-3, 6-10).

★ ★ ★

ANDY SHEPPARD

ANDY SHEPPARD—Island 90692-1: *JAVA JIVE; ESME; SOL; WANT A TOFFEE; COMING SECOND; TWEE; LIQUID.*

Personnel: Sheppard, tenor and soprano saxophones; Dave De Fries, trumpet (cut 1); Randy Brecker, trumpet (4, 5, 7); Nick Evans, trombone (1); Jerry Underwood, tenor saxophone (1); Paul Dunmall, tenor saxophone (1); Dave Buxton, piano (1-7); Orphy Robinson, vibes (1, 3-5); Pete Maxfield, bass (1-7); Simon Gore, drums (1-7); Mamadi Kamara, percussion (1, 3, 4).

★ ★

These two records are part of a series called *New Directions in Jazz*; while that logo may describe them accurately for England, whence both Pine and Sheppard hail, for the Colonies it seems less realistic.

Pine's second outing as a small-group leader finds him apparently intent on reincarnating the brawling sheets-of-sound Trane of the *Giant Steps/Impressions* era, coupled with the religious stirrings (and liner notes) of *A Love Supreme*. He's got chops to burn, ideas aplenty, what Kevin Whitehead has called a distinctive bassoon-like tone, and a terrific amount of flackery behind him—most of it making him out to be a kind of Brit edition of Wynton Marsalis.

His problem with this disc is the same as Marsalis'; in fact: how do you basically recapitulate, without drastically reworking, the revolution of a generation ago without making it sound fussy, prissy, musty, or—worse—simply irrelevant? Somehow even when Pine's group swings hard—and they can swing hard—there's a whiff of nostalgia that clings to the grooves and envelopes the fire they're trying to work up, douses their attempts at urgency. I guess it comes down to this: if you want to hear Trane, why not just put one of *his* records on, and skip Pine altogether?

Of course, Pine and Marsalis and others like them have an important extramusical agenda as well: that black musicians should take full pride in, and be granted full artistic recognition for, the gargantuan cultural achievements they've wrought in the clenched teeth of repression. But it's not at all clear to me why that assertion has to clothe itself in neostyles, in simple homages. In fact, it seems contradictory to demand a rightful pride of place for black cultural innovations by calling them Afro-American classical music and then constrict the possibility of exploration to delving back into the past. While applying the notion of classical music to the supple and young forms we lump together as jazz may seem like an ennobling tactic, ultimately it becomes both limiting and demeaning—not least because it imports into probing improvisational music all the potentially deadening reverence that comes with the term.

Obviously, this doesn't mean everyone should burn their old records. Nor does it mean there should be no homages, no further attempts to build along historical roads not fully

mapped. Everyone learns from the past—it's the only textbook there is. But learning is not the same as regurgitating.

Sheppard's retake on Trane mostly works the ballad side, the more meditative and modal aspects, especially on soprano. He bends and trills and flutters, but always with an ear fixed on the melody. In the end, though, instead of being a liberating force in the way a sense of melody has been for all the greatest players, it undermines his talent because his sense of melody is so circumscribed. Then too, because some of the ballad arrangements seem less thoughtful than languorous, Sheppard's soprano would have to shoot sparks to overcome the torpor that starts to set in—and it doesn't.

—*gene santoro*



29TH STREET SAXOPHONE QUARTET

THE REAL DEAL—New Note 1006: *FREE YOURSELF; I MEAN YOU; THE LONG WAY HOME; UN POCO LOCO; CONFIRMATION; WHEEL WITHIN A WHEEL; ARE/WERE; 29TH STREET THEME.*

Personnel: Ed Jackson, Robert Watson, alto; Rich Rothenberg, tenor; Jim Hartog, baritone saxophones.

★ ★ ★ ½

YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD SAXOPHONE QUARTET

THE WALKMAN—Coppens CCD 3001: *THE WALKMAN; MY (DISCRETE) CORDUROY DOLL; C.J.;*

BLACK AND TAN FANTASY; THE CLEVELAND TWIST DRILL; CORN CENSUS; TANGO; POWERS OF 2; JAYS-FRANTIC; SQUINCH.

Personnel: Allan Chase, Bob Zung, alto, soprano; Tom Hall, tenor, baritone; Steve Adams, baritone, soprano saxophones.

★ ★ ★ ½

The World Saxophone Quartet started it and now it's happenin' all over: four saxophone players get together and groove on the blend, energy, and concentration of horns without rhythm. External rhythm, that is. Benny Goodman made a lady of Jazz by bringing her to Carnegie Hall; now bands like these are leading her up another rung and giving her airs that prance and sing and even stomp way outside the confines of the rhythm section and good ol' big band section writing.

The 29th is Manhattan and YNSQ Cambridge. Does that mean streetwise versus intellectual? Sophisticated versus rambunctious? Traditional versus experimental? To a point. 29th is all jazz, while YNSQ incorporates jazz into a wide frame.

The Dutch have a marvelous affinity for bumptious cacophony with their creative music—to wit, the Willem Breuker Ensemble—and the Boston boys respond with a hootin', hollerin' club date that is revealing and representative of this rambling, challenging band of individualists. Producer/saxophile George Coppens, who spearheaded European tours for WSQ and 29th and recorded the latter, takes another flyer with YNSQ, providing provocative packaging and club dates in small clubs in small towns throughout Holland that slurp up the band like a double schnapps. No wonder.

YNSQ shows each face intact, like the rustics in a Jan Steen country inn scene—Chase, pure and untrammled; Hall, gritty and unschooled—so the group sound is rough, layered. Their material is raw but original, aiming to twist ears not just tap toes; like Boston composer Jeff Friedman's sly *Tango*, Adams' square-wheeled freight-train band theme (*Squinch*), Chase's thorny *Power Of 2*. YNSQ draws on tradition in abstract ways, yet their covers sound satirical: ununctuous Ellington, nasty Big Jay McNeely. More reflective elements, such as Chase's pastel Arizona archae-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36

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9 BY 7: 88s 4 '88

by Kevin Whitehead

Along with brass band music, the art of solo piano is one of the wellsprings of jazz—perhaps that's why solo pianists seem so mindful of the music's past. It's as if jazz's genetic memory is contained in the piano's wood, wires, and metal plate, awaiting a soloist to bring it forth.

The oldest of the pianists surveyed here, **Dick Hyman** reaches back to early tickler traditions. On two new albums, he revives compositions by vintage composers not noted for their piano skills. *Gulf Coast Blues* (Stomp Off 1141) features a dozen generally lesser-known tunes written/co-written by the prolific Clarence Williams (1898-1965). As is customary with *Stomp Off*, the playing is authentically of the period without being slavishly imitative. Hyman's one of our best living stride pianists, so it's no surprise that striding basses and Wallerisms abound. *Shout, Sister, Shout!* bubbles with humor—he's kiddin' on the keys. Elsewhere, Dick blends blues with ragtime (*Achin' Hearted Blues*) or tremulous balladry (*Gulf Coast Blues*). There are surprises, too: he plays the melody with his left while weaving variations with his right on *Let Every Day Be Mother's Day*, plays loping cowboy bass on *Organ Grinder Blues*, and adds innocuous scat to *Cushion Foot Stomp*.

Face The Music (Musicmasters 20147), Hyman's celebration of Irving Berlin, is just as agreeably atavistic, his stride tendencies tempered with echoes of Gershwin (*Lady Of The Evening's* intro and outro), well-bred parlor piano (*Supper Time*), maybe Zez Confrey (*Easter Parade*)—and combinations thereof (*Russian Lullaby*). But as on the Williams set, he never lapses into mere style-dropping. The 58-minute program—whose 14 titles range from the Astaire-associated (*Cheek To Cheek*) to the 1919 obscurity *I'll See You In C.U.B.A.*—showcase Berlin's sentimental melodies as well as they do the pianist's sure instincts.

Sweden's **Per Henrik Wallin** on *Moon Over Calcutta* (Dragon 143) echoes Monk (*Evidence*, Jimmy HcHugh's *Where Are You?*) and Bud Powell (*Deep In A Dream*)—strains that balance his more gentle side. Wallin seems to thrive on contradiction: he can barely brush the keys, or spray notes like confetti (*Phrases*). On the overworked *'Round Midnight*, his lines sound airy and busy at the same time; on the title track he slides from doughy cocktail balladry into a vertigo-inducing descent. Best is the long tour de force *Coyote (Siri)*, where he veers from the dense serpentine tumbling of Lennie Tristano to the stately classicism of Earl Hines. Like Hyman, Wallin keeps his music fresh by rotating his stock of influences.

But German-born **Joachim Kuhn's**

recent who-am-I-this-time? eclecticism seems erratic, suggesting an artist in search of record sales. The six soli comprising *Situations* (Atlanic 81839) are heavily indebted to Keith Jarrett's rubato lyricism and pristine touch; *Hauswoman Song* is built on a characteristically gospel-flavored Jarrett turn of phrase. (*Refuge*, a waltz, is Keith plus Erik Satie). Not that artists need to be original or consistent. A listener who had never heard of Kuhn or Jarrett might simply respond to the pianist's melodiousness and following romanticism—and perhaps wish the tunes were shorter and more varied, and went easier on the schmalz.



Art Lande: substantial.

Art Lande's *Hardball!* (Great American Music Hall 2702) and *Melissa Spins Away* (GAMH 2705) are the first two volumes in a projected set of four recorded at the same time last year. *Hardball!* has the better batting average. Lande plays all-American piano, distilling blues, jazz, parlor pop, Copland, church music black and white, the dance academy, Vince Guaraldi cartoon soundtracks, and more. Selections include *Willow Weep*, *Stompin' At The Savoy*, "the Negro national anthem" *Lift Every Voice*, and Stephen Foster's *Deep River*. Again, this recital doesn't come off as a pastiche; rather it reminds us how rhythmically and harmonically interconnected varied American piano styles are (as when he sanctifies *In The Good Old Summertime*, before it trails off with a musicbox take on *Take Me Out To The Ballgame*). Lande might be that rare pianist with jazz/new age crossover appeal: insistent sunny, but never insubstantial.

The sequel *Melissa* is more narrowly focused: all waltzes, from Randy Weston's *Little Niles* through *Someday My Prince Will Come* to Joni Mitchell's *For Free*. To Lande's great credit, it's not rhythmically redundant, but in order to avoid going ONE-two-three, ONE-two-three, he may let the time go slack. Consequently this set is more subdued and less exuberant than its predecessor.

A master of the 88s, **Mal Waldron** defies name-drop criticism. Even on *Update* (Soul Note 121130), with its *Variations On A Theme For Cecil Taylor* and companion *Free For C.T.*, he sounds like no one else, Taylor especially. (*Free* is mostly a brisk, headlong waltz.) As ever, Waldron



Mal Waldron: exquisite.

demonstrates there's more than one way to be minimal. "I'll take two or three notes and milk them dry before I move on to the next three," he once explained. If there's something brooding about his repetitions, his essential lyricism is unmistakable, his momentum irresistible if not always emphatically swinging. The organic development of his themes, as one motif suggests the next, is always engaging too. The rest of the album's devoted to four standards. If *Night In Tunisia's* corkscrew backing figure seems right up Mal's alley, he perversely bypasses it to dig into the melody. Best of the lot is Frank Loesser's *Inch Worm* (also in 3/4). Melodically and thematically, it's tailor-made for Mal; who else inches along so exquisitely?

A conservatory-trained Okinawan at work in England, **Akemi Kuniyoshi-Kuhn** on *Motion-E-Motion* ([English] Leo 156) plays four improvisations that fall somewhere between free jazz and modern academic music. The title track's a bit florid and prolix, almost New Agey at times. The brief *Misty* (not Garner's) is better, if as reticent as a Paul Bley ballad. But the texturally-shifting *Back Chat* boasts gratifying motivic development; you can hear the process of musical discovery as it unfolds. The E-flat tidepool *Sea Wave* shows it's OK to have a tonal center as long as the swirls don't stagnate. At times, Kuniyoshi-Kuhn's playing would benefit from sharper definition—her heavy use of sustain pedal may cloud over the detail work. But this debut augurs well for the future.

Further outside jazz' scope is composer-pianist **George Flynn's** fully notated *Kanal* (Finnadar 90864), inspired by Andrzej Wajda's bleak but classic film about Polish freedom-fighters trapped in Warsaw's sewers. That source, and Flynn's and Kenneth Derus' liner notes, give the impression this is Art for Furrowed Brows; listeners with a taste for improvised music may prefer to skip those glosses and listen to how compellingly *Kanal* flows, and to Flynn's fascination with the piano's timbral range. Dark, thorny, relentlessly dissonant but finely wrought—it's punctuated by dramatic rests—*Kanal* moves with the organic elegance and wavelike momentum of a good two-fisted improv. Cliché-mongers say Cecil Taylor's piano works sound like atonal academic music; *Kanal* suggests they got it backwards.

db

ODDBALL BIGGER BANDS

by Owen Cordle

Looking for trends among the restless? Actually, it's an anti-trend scene because the music's still on the fringes. Out there, as it were. On the one hand, it lurks like neo-Cabaret decadence. On the other, it says this is the quick-flash of reality, a light at the end of the tunnel of arch-conservatism of the age.

The new music isn't about shock value anymore. It's about shortened attention spans, cinematic jump shots, and the cumulative inputs of sensu-surrounding music/noise: the tape hiss of Nature, the songs of oppressed peoples, the media manipulation of teenagers, and the grab-bag of jazz notes around the oneworld, oneworld, oneworld.

All this roiling music tumbles down the earwaves from oddball bands: strange bohemian orchestras, synthesizer wizards, displaced Africans, renegade rockers, you name it. To wit:



Courtney Pine, the Jazz Warrior.

The Jazz Warriors. Leader-reedman Courtney Pine has been hailed as Britain's superstar. His 20-piece band, heard on *Out Of Many, One People* (Antilles/New Directions 90681-1), reflects the African experience in England. A live recording. *Out*

Of Many features lots of episodic solos among monolithic chords, layered rhythms, and an exotic openness. In a vague sense, the original compositions suggest Charles Mingus, Carla Bley, and Oliver Nelson, all Africanized. The strongest soloists are Pine (out of Rollins and Trane), tenor saxophonist Ray Carless, vocalist Cleveland Watkiss, and flutist Philip Bent. The music has a desert safari quality among a collage of sounds that could represent the jungle or the city. Interesting listening. Objectives accomplished.

Avantgarden Party is an 11-piece band from Denmark. More "party" than "avantgarden," it exhibits kaleidoscopic textures on its eponymous album (Stunt STULP 8805). The compositions, by leaders Helle Hesdorf (alto saxophone) and Otto Sidenius (organ, piano, and electric piano), range through askew r & b, c & w, *Bitches Brew* funk, and Galt MacDermot-like melodiousness to Sanborn rock to Gil Evans voicings. The music shifts rapidly like a fast circus act. The soloists, all contemporary, are adequate. The bluesy quality of Sidenius' organ appears unusual for a Scandinavian band, but it's helpful. The album is generally OK.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 35

From the perspective of the '60s avant garde tradition comes the **European Jazz Ensemble's** *Live* (Konnex ST 5015). Short on conventional chord cycles but long on theme-and-variations solos, these performances owe a debt to Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, Steve Lacy, and Cecil Taylor. The compositions, all from within the band, are set-ups for collective improvising (too much at times) as well as more structured voicings. The sounds include madhouse blowing, chicken squawks, cool bop, sea gull echoes, Alice Coltrane-like floating piano chromaticism, droning folk music, and angularity run amok—all true to the tunes. For all its wildness, this eight-piece band plus vocalist realizes its (and the composers') ideas pretty well. The band boasts players such as trumpeter Allan Botschinsky, bassist Ali Haurand (particularly strong), and drummer Tony Oxley.

Composer and arranger **Steve Weisberg's** *I Can't Stand Another Night Alone (In Bed With You)* (Xtrawatt XW/1 831 334-1) boasts several players who have been showing up on Carla Bley's records recently, including guitarist Hiram Bullock, bassist Steve Swallow, and drummer Victor Lewis. There's also a horn section, a couple of strings, an accordion, and the leader's keyboards. You could easily mistake this for a Bley date, but Weisberg cuts from one motif to another quicker than Bley and the accordion keeps popping up to lend a Greek or Italian influence to the pervasive German quality. At times, this seems like circus music spiced by a few good solos (trumpeters Lew Soloff and Baikida Carroll, trombonist Gary Valente, et. al.). So-so.

The German sound of Weisberg/Bley meets Stravinsky meets the Lounge Lizards meets John Zorn in the music of the **Club Foot Orchestra**, an octet plus percussionist led by trombonist/vocalist/keyboard player Richard Marriott. On *Kidnapped* (Ralph CF-87991), darkness prevails through Marriott's compositions and highly structured arrangements. The solos don't mean as much as the mix of rock, latin, boogaloo, Jewish, American Indian, jazz, and quasi-big band ensemble sounds. The total picture may appear weird and dark, but it doesn't appear menacing because it's all in goofy fun. Fine for what it is.

More hybrid music, vaguely suggesting Zorn and the Lounge Lizards but conceived on the synthesizer, comes from the **Startled Insects** on *Curse Of The Pheromones* (Antilles/New Directions 90630-1). As a technical experience, this music is fairly intriguing, but as an aesthetic experience it's too mechanized. The Startled Insects may turn out to be a single synthesizer wizard augmented by horns and strings on this date. The layering and the minimalist to heavy-metal textures suggest a fertile mind, but this album seems better suited for a movie than for sustained listening.

If the second side of *Blasto* (Nine Winds 0126) by Wayne Peet's **Doppler Funk** had been as good as the first, this record would have been the cream of the crop. Working in a neo-jazz-rock vein, keyboard player Peet overlays funky bass and drums with dissonant horn parts, angular themes, and well-used solo space. That's well-used as in Bruce Fowler (trombone), John Fumo (trumpet), and Vinny Golia (tenor and soprano saxophone). Steubig's bass guitar is the hinge in this music, and at times you can hear Gil Evans' rock period coming together with his cool period around the bass and drums (Alex Cline). Don't overlook Nels Cline's guitar work either. Come to think of it, this is a very good record despite the slowdown on side two. **db**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

ology and Hall's two-faced corduroy doll, introduce flavors that smack of the 1980-founded band's legit roots and readings.

29th, though big city and earthy, is photo-smooth, bop- and solo-oriented, has a sure lead voice and prime soloist in Blakey alumnus Robert Watson, and gets down to swing more consistently. Concert versions of *I Mean You* and *Confirmation*, with more gear shifts than Mingus charts and solos for all, utilize traditional big-band sax voicings, yet lift Monk and Parker into the '90s. Arrangements are unconventional yet smoothly executed, like Hartog's cool chart with a chili-fed Jackson solo on Poco and Watson's delightfully sailing *Wheel*.

Both bands play with fire and flair, exceed technical competency, emphasize fresh writing and jostling ensemble, and give keen slants on one of jazz's newer (and hotter) group forms. —fred bouchard

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.)

PANGAEA: Astor Piazzolla, *Tango: Zero Hour*. Fareed Haque, *Voices Rising*. Kip Hanrahan, *Days And Nights Of Blue Luck Inverted*; *Vertical Currency*. Various artists, *Conjure*, *Music For The Texts Of Ishmael Reed*.

COLUMBIA/PORTRAIT: Stanley Clarke, *If This Bass Could Only Talk*. Ornette Coleman, *Virgin Beauty*. Bobby Enriquez, *Wild Piano*. Thomas Lang, *Fingers & Thumbs*.

CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE

Max Lasser's Ark, *Earthwalk*. T-Square, *Truth*. Various artists, *First Palette*.

RED: Kenny Barron/Buster Williams, *Two As One*. Joe Henderson, *An Evening With*. Cedar Walton, *The Trio*. Bobby Watson Quartet, *Love Remains*.

MILESTONE/PABLO/CONTEMPORARY/FANTASY: Pam Anderson, *Something Special*. George Cables, *Circle*. Kerry Campbell, *Phoenix Rising*. Sonny Criss, *Intermission Riff*. Terry Gibbs Dream Band, *Flying Home*. Phineas Newborn, Jr., *Back Home*. Curtis Peagler 4, *I'll Be Around*. Arthur Prysock, *Today's Love Songs*, *Tomorrow's Blues*.

RCA/NOVUS/BLUEBIRD/PRI-VATE MUSIC: Suzanne Ciani, *Neverland*. Various artists, *Bluebird Sampler '88*, *Novus Sampler '88*.

NARADA/LOTUS: Michael Jones, *After The Rain*. John Doan, *Departures*. Various artists, *The Narada Collection*.

VERVE/MPS/EMARCY: Compact Jazz, *Count Basie & Joe Williams*, *Ella Fitzgerald & Louis Armstrong*; *Stan Getz &*

Friends; Jean-Luc Ponty & Stephane Grappelli, *Woody Herman*, *Gene Krupa & Buddy Rich*; *Wes Montgomery Plays The Blues*; *Oscar Peterson & Friends*; *Jimmy Smith Plays The Blues*; *Lester Young & The Piano Giants*, *Betty Carter*, *Look What I Got*. Helen Merrill/Gil Evans, *Collaboration*.

INDEPENDENTS: Various artists, *The Best Of The Classic Years*, *The Best Of The Jazz Classics* (BBC). Modern Jazz Quartet, *For Ellington* (East-West). Scott Kreitzer, *Kick 'N Off* (Cexton). Max Highstein, *Touch The Sky* (Serenity). Finn Savery, *Shunting* (Point). Charles Loos/Arnould Massart, *Harmonie Du Soir* (Igloo). Illinois Jacquet & His Big Band, *Jacquet's Got It!* (Atlantic). Chuck Brown & The Soul Searchers, *Any Other Way To Go?* (Rhythm Attack). Ray Anthony Orchestra, *1988 & All That Jazz* (Aero Space). Martin O'Connor, *Marty's Cafe* (Great Blue Heron). Gil Evans/Steve Lacy, *Paris Blues* (Owl). Richie Beirach, *Common Heart* (Owl). Pieces Of A Dream, *Makes You Wanna* (EMI/Manhattan). Najee, *Day By Day* (EMI/Manhattan). SOS All-Stars, *New York Rendezvous* (SOS). Defunkt, *In America* (Island). Vladislav Sendecki, *Men From Wilnau* (Island). Brian Bromberg, *Basses Loaded* (Intima). Arrow, *Knock Dem Dead* (Mango). Aswad, *Distant Thunder* (Mango). Jamaaladeen Tacuma, *Jukebox*

(Gramavision). Michael Hoppé, *Quiet Storms* (Gaia). Ron Miles Trio, *Distance For Safety*. Kim Stone, *Earth School* (Prolific). Christer Bothén/Bolon Bata, *Mother Earth* (Dragon). Stan Getz, *Stockholm Sessions '58* (Dragon). Bill Potts Big Band, *555 Feet High* (Jazz Mark). Warne Marsh, *Two Days In The Life Of* . . . (Interplay). Billy Bauer, *Anthology* (Interplay). Pete Malinverni Trio, *Don't Be Shy* (Sea Breeze). Standback, *Norwegian Wood* (Sea Breeze). David Newton, *Given Time* (GFM). Ze Eduardo, *Unit* (Justine). Astor Piazzolla, *The Rough Dancer And The Cyclical Night* (American Clave). Phillippe Saisse, *Valerian* (Windham Hill). Various artists, *Rhythm Of Resistance* (Virgin). Mahlathini And The Mahotella Queens, *Thokozile* (Virgin). Open Art Band, *Line-Up Arrows* (Extraplatte). Little Charlie And The Nightcats, *Disturbing The Peace* (Alligator). Dennis Yerry, *Native Son* (Wildlife).

MAIL ORDER SOURCES

If your local record store doesn't carry these records, try writing NMDS, 500 Broadway, NYC 10012, Daybreak Express Records, POB 250 Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215; Roundup Records, POB 154, N Cambridge, MA 02140, or North Country Records, Cadence Bldg., Redwood, NY 13679

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WOODY HERMAN

40TH ANNIVERSARY CARNEGIE HALL CONCERT—RCA 6878-2-RB: *Blue Flame*; *Apple Honey*; *Sweet And Lovely*; *Four Brothers*; *Brotherhood Of Man*; *Early Autumn*; *Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams*; *Everywhere*; *Biou*; *Cousins*; *Blue Serge*; *Blue Stan Getz*; *Caldonia*. (56:08 minutes)

Personnel: Pete Candoli, Conte Candoli, Alan Vizutti, Nelson Hatt, John Hoffman, Dennis Dotson, Bill Bryne, Danny Styles, trumpets; Phil Wilson, Jim Pugh, Dale Kirkland, Jim Daniels, trombones; Herman, clarinet, alto saxophone; Stan Getz, Flip Phillips, Zoot Sims, Jimmy Giuffre, Sam Marowitz, Frank Tiberi, Gary Anderson, Joe Lovano, John Osowski, reeds; Jimmy Rowles, Nat Pierce, Ralph Burns, Pat Coil, piano; Billy Bauer, guitar; Chubby Jackson, Rusty Holloway, bass; Don Lamond, Jake Hanna, Dan D'imperio, drums; Herman, Mary Ann McCall, vocals.

★ ★ ★ ★

THE BEST OF THE DECCA YEARS—MCA 25195: *Woodchoppers Ball*; *Do Nothing Til You Hear From Me*; *Amen*; *Blue Flame*; *Deep In The Heart Of Texas*; *Blues In The Night*; *Four Or Five Times*; *Blue Prelude*; *By-U, By-O*; *Milkman, Keep Those Bottles Quiet*. (31:27 minutes)

Personnel: Clarence Willard, Nelson MacQuordale, George Seaberg, John Owens, Cappy Lewis, Ray Linn, trumpets; Jerry Rosa, Vic Hamann, Neal Reid, trombone; Herman, clarinet, alto saxophone; Joe Bishop, Jerry Horvath, Sam Rubinowich, Eddie Scalzi, Herbie Haymer, Joe Estren, Ray Hopper, Saxie Mansfield, Pete Johns, reeds; Tom Linehan, piano; Hy White, guitar; Walt Yoder, bass; Frank Carlson, drums.

★

Woody Herman made something on the order of 250 records under his own name for Decca between the time he took over the Isham Jones band in 1936 and left the label for Columbia in 1945 (plus more as a Decca house band backing various singers). And believe me, the skimpy 10 numbers on this indifferent reissue are not the "best." Coming at a time when MCA should be putting together a serious Herman retrospective, this is an insult—both to Herman and the poor consumer expected to pay \$11.95 for a 31-minute CD.

It's a particular disappointment because outside of *Woodchoppers Ball*, *Blue Flame*, and a few other early Herman standards, the pre-1945 Herman decade has never gotten any real LP exposure from MCA. Granted, it was not a pace-setting orchestra then. Herman himself did a lot of singing, and the band never

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BIG BAND SHUFFLE

by John McDonough

Illinois Jacquet's been leading an all-star big band off and on for about five years. Atlantic Records has finally recorded it, and the album, *Jacquet's Got It!* (81816-1, 44:38 minutes), is a knockout. The precision and attack are as accurate as any lab band; note, for instance, the tricky rhythmic placement of the brass stings in the fourth bar of *Savoy's* bridge. But few lab bands swing like this one. The charts are simple and flow like good improvisation, i.e., the 32 bars of sax on *Savoy*. Marshall Royal's rich alto soars wonderfully on *Three Buckets*. Frank Lacy, John Faddis, and, of course, Jacquet himself all are at the top of their form. It's the best Jacquet in years, in fact. Duffy Jackson's coiled-spring intensity could be relaxed a bit by loosening the pinch in his high-hats (*Tickettoe*); but overall his work is excellent. Only Rudy Rutherford sounds inarticulate during a too-fast pair of choruses in which too many notes slip and slide through his fingers like beads of mercury.

Loren Schoenberg, whose taste and musicianship are ennobled by a wise and tough-minded sense of jazz history, has produced his second LP, *Time Waits For No One* (Musicmasters 60137K, 53:38)—an album of many voices. If it has no single focus, however, this is more than offset by the unexpectedness of its diversity. Who, for example, plays Horace Henderson's 1933 chart of Coleman Hawkins' semi-12-tone piece, *Queer Notions* today? While the band performs repertoire material, there's no ultimate intent to recreate. Artie Shaw's original clarinet solo on *Lady Day* is harmonized for ensemble. And Gary McFarland's semi-impressionistic *Spring Will Be A Little Late* is certainly not for the nostalgia-minded. The jewel though is the band's whack at the 1932 Benny Morton/Eddie Durham *Blue Room*. The velocity accelerates as the Richard Rogers tune is progressively stripped of excessive melodic weight until nothing stands at the end but a stark, red-hot skyrocket of a riff. Mel Lewis' drumming is beautiful throughout, but here especially. And when you've heard this version, friends, dare to face the original (currently on an RCA early Basie set).

Claude Bolling, whose various jazz "suites" have been on the uneven side, has invigorated this Duke Ellington program, *Bolling Band Plays Ellington Music* (CBS 42474, 46:12) by tending away from the familiar Ellington-101 standards (albeit *Sophisticated Lady* and *Mellowtone* are here) and toward the more advanced works. Bolling's *Ko-Ko*, *Sepia Panorama*, and

Cotton Tail are more than just respectable. They're exciting, carefully crafted powerhouses, respectful of Ellingtonian nuances but free of mustiness and academic preoccupations. The *Cotton Tail* reed section playing is near perfect. While Cordelette's drumming wisely makes no attempt to copy Sonny Greer, his press rolls under *Ko-Ko* are an understanding period touch that works. Although the band is the star, the soloists are right, playing lines that had become set parts of the arrangements. A second volume, containing *Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue*, is noted on the album jacket, but was not available for review.

Spectrum (DMP 461, 65:11) is a sudden forward shift from the iambic lyricism of big band swing into the contemporary aesthetics of brass-reed juxtapositions. A couple of decades ago, rock began eating into the rhythmic mobility of jazz, and **Bob Mintzer**—whose *Tales Of Rhoda Rat*, *Party Time*, and the epic *Good News*, were Buddy Rich staples in the '70s—is one who still writes with the impression of all quarter- and half-notes against a back beat. Staccato eighth-note sequences march rather than swing. His charts overall are tense, almost nervous, in their brassy, on-the-beat percussiveness (*Hanky Panky*, *Frankie's Tune*). Although Mintzer is an excellent and swinging tenor (*Heart Of The Matter*, *Solo Saxophone*, both small group numbers) and the band is as good as they get, the rigid pulse of both his writing and the band's attack sounds more like that of a soft-rock combo band than a jazz band.

A similar inertia bogs down the **Koeln Big Band** on its *Update* CD (Delta II 102, 63:29). Like Mintzer's band, leader Michael Villmow provides most of the writing, which in his case tends to be pompous and overblown. *Horns & Electric Rhythm* and *Sahara* each sound like a long fanfare until an unidentified trumpet stirs things up a bit on the former and an alto does the same on the latter. *Bluff* is an elementary vamp overlaid with high-tech and occasionally interesting solo displays. Overall, it seems, the smaller the audience gets for big band jazz, the more progressively self-indulgent the bands seem to become. Only on *Black Bottom Blues* does this CD start to sound like a real jazz group.

Ping Pong (ProJazz 650, 50:55) by the **Ed Palermo** band is a remarkably swinging contemporary outfit, playing here works by Wayne Shorter, Jaco Pastorius, Horace Silver, Donald Fagan, John Lennon, and Palermo himself. The leader's chart on *Ping Pong* gets things off to a snappy and engaging start, balancing brass and reeds in a perfect equilibrium. This characterizes the general approach of the band, which also has the good taste not to confuse decibels with emotion. One moves through the 12 tunes listening for a misstep. But it's not there; even the *Perry Mason Theme* becomes solid big band jazz material. *Ping*

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FROM ALL POINTS OUTWARD

by Art Lange

Marshall McLuhan notwithstanding, the intermingling of ethnic musics from various locales is not a recent phenomenon; in fact, it's doubtful that anything resembling a "pure" music, untainted by what was being created over in the next county, has ever existed anywhere in the world at any time. Communication with new lands injects new ideas, new materials, new instruments, and inevitably alters the evolution of the local music, whether it's Javanese trading ships bumping into New Guinea tribesmen and borrowing a log drum for their gamelan, or Lower East Side noise-improvisers visiting uptown groves of academia and lifting a string quartet to electrify and distort to their own ends.

This batch of CDs share little in common, stylistically, outside of a willingness to adopt and adapt elements of ethnic cultures from beyond their immediate sphere of experience. In so doing they reinforce the notion that music in the 20th century is a continuum that allows transcendence of time and space; in the hands of an imaginative practitioner, any aspect of any music from any time or place in the planet's history can be put to use—brought to life—in our eternal present.

Steve Tibbetts has recorded three previous LPs for ECM; his most recent release, *Yr* (ECM 1355, 38:26 minutes), was originally issued on his own Frammis label in 1980 and received five stars in a **db** review. It certainly deserved the acclaim



Steve Tibbetts: crisp, snappy.

then, and has lost none of its sizzle in the interim. The bright, vibrant digital sound seems perfect for the crisp snap of Tibbetts' acoustic guitar and the buoyant blend of congas, bongos, and tablas which support his deft fingerpicking—and just when you think you've got him pegged as a soft-sell all-acoustic New Age folkie, he kicks in with screaming, hard-edge electric Hendrixisms.

Self-produced and self-engineered, *Yr* makes effective use of overdubbing, and sports plenty of insinuating melodies—my favorite, *Ten Yr Dance*, is a sort of Indian (raga) hoedown. Guitar fanatics may appreciate Tibbetts' work initially, but there's enough substance in the alternating moments of repose and fury to capture the non-specialist's interest as well.

Tibbetts pops up on *Free Fall* (Innova MN 106, 61:52), a collection of five distinctive pieces from members of the **Minnesota Composers Forum**, as well. Curiously, though, his *Four Letters*, the result of a three-month stay in Nepal, contains little guitarwork. Instead, the nearly 14-minute piece reveals Tibbetts the orchestrator/arranger, blending sampled tapes of street sounds and monks' ceremonies into cloudy washes of electronically-generated sound—including great raucous blaring horns, reverberant drones of voices, and an atmospheric Nepali folk song. Mike Olson's *Three Days In The Arrowhead* continues the ethnic conceit by layering synths, drum machines, and electric piano into percussive gamelan imitations and other electronic drones. The other works, while not exhibiting any specific "ethnic" influence, are certainly not negligible. Henry Gwiazda's *Sinfony* is a jittery collage of electronically-sampled Mozart and rockish guitar solos that wears out its welcome fairly quickly. John Devine's *Stap Thinking Or Get Out Of The Way*, on the other hand, is an attractive, focused, riffy theme (with inside-and-out solos) for saxophone quartet. And Pat Moriarty's *Out Of Touch/Albert* explores episodes ranging from tightly organized motifs to jazzy freedom—most impressive among the quartet's improvisers is pianist Ellen Lease; I'd wager she's spent some time listening to Cecil Taylor.

Stephan Micus is a German multi-instrumentalist/composer who has travelled around the world collecting exotic instruments and influences which he then blends into his own atmospheric soundpieces. On *Twilight Fields* (ECM 1358, 46:42), his shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute) playing shares a contemplative simplicity with the original, and his long melodic lines unfold slowly, making impressionistic effects out of subtle tonal variance and nuanced repetition. He also likes to overdub contrasting textures for dramatic effect—*Part 1* of the title suite combines muted bell-like (gamelan) percussive flowerpots, the metallic clang of zithers, and an airy, transparent flute. Throughout, the music is gentle, intricate, ethereal, but never precious.

A different sort of bamboo flute—the Indian bansuri—is played by Steve Gorn on percussionist **Glen Velez's** *Seven Heaven* (CMP 30, 40:32), and the results, punctuated by Velez's vigorous virtuosity, sometime build to a calculated frenzy. The flamboyant Velez and his percussive cohort Layne Redmond alternate on Irish bodhran, Brazilian caxixi, Thai frame drum, African

mbira (thumb piano), among others, and the subtle tonal differences are caught and reproduced clearly on the clean, close recording.

Like Velez, **John Bergamo** is a rhythmic wizard, able to articulate dazzlingly complex multi-rhythms, and keep them clear, audible, relentless. And, like Velez, he makes use of ethnic percussive instruments from Mexico, China, Japan, Ireland, India, and all points outward. But Bergamo's *On The Edge* (CMP 27, 63:10) uses extensive overdubbing and studio effects (in collaboration with engineer Walter Quintus) to create free-flowing percussive rhapsodies that border on the orchestral. Bergamo's remarkably varied percussive palette is capable of suggesting anything from cows mooing or Tibetan choirs chanting (simply by rubbing his fingers across a drum head) to, more ambitiously, a post-nuclear landscape of bleak despair (on the title track). Here too, the sound reproduction is stunning, so much so that the tones and textures become a sensual experience (especially on headphones—but be careful... the chiming tubes on *The Sirene Of...* might loosen your fillings).

Percussion is, of course, a key element in latin music, and the rhythmic undercurrent to **Gonzalo Rubalcaba's** *Live In Havana* (Messidor 15960, 61:07) is hot, hot, hot. *Green Dolphin Street*—typical of the program's flashy stop-and-start intensity, riffing horns, extravagant synth solos, and rocky electric bass—is stretched like taffy but the overzealous arranging, conveys plenty of excitement but never loosens up enough to survey moments of subtlety. The band bristles on the marvelously titled *Concatenacion Heroica*, but the hectic, energetic fusion of, say, Eddie Palmieri and Weather Report, overloads on electric circuitry and arranging overkill, and grows wearying after a while.

Conveniently labeled by critics as a musical auteur, **Kip Hanrahan's** turf is a



Kip Hanrahan: skydiver.

steamy metropolis where various cultures, mysterious characters, and emotional climates overlap, sizzle, smolder, and otherwise dance in musical and physical couplings. On *Conjure* (Pangaea 42135,

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found a strong voice through the many novel- ties and pop tunes it did. But at its best, it could play good swinging jazz (*Cousin Chris, Hot Chestnuts, and Get Your Boots Laced*, none of which are on this set). While I wouldn't want a "complete" Decca-Herman set, an adequate, properly annotated one is long over- due (not even the personnel is provided on this abomination).

When RCA issued the two-LP Herman 40th anniversary concert in 1977, it was well re- ceived for its blend of old and new, not to mention the fine playing all around. This CD version drops the band's reprise of *Blues In The Night* (heard in its original record on the MCA set), plus some of the more contemporary pieces the band was playing at the time (including a seven-minute *Fanfare For The Common Man*, which could easily have been accommodated in the CD's unused playing time).

The remaining cuts are mostly spirited if sometimes uncertain reunion pieces. Giuffre, for instance, almost misses his final break on *Four Brothers*. But the Condoli brothers have a terrific time on a swinging 1971 chart of *Brotherhood Of Man*. And Stan Getz, whose lyricism becomes almost Johnny Hodges-like in its glissandos, is properly sensual on *Early Au- tumn*, not withstanding a squeaker in his first solo chorus. His *Blue Serge* is a better bal- anced solo, though, and *Blue Getz* is a swing- ing, rolling gem. *Cousins*, based in part on Illinois Jacquet's original *Flying Home* tenor solo, becomes a lose-knit jam session for all the guest saxes. Unfortunately, Woody couldn't resist the temptation to editorialize during the playing. All in all, a not quite great concert, but full of warmth and fun. —john mcdonough

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45:36), a 1983 session originally available on American Clavé Records, he stirs a smoky brew of gumbo spices and bluesy attitudes, marrying the funky Ishmael Reed lyrics with melodies by Carla Bley, David Murray, Allen Toussaint, Lester Bowie, Steve Swallow, Taj Mahal, and Carman Moore in a rich cauldron of instrumental and vocal talent. Topics range from meditations on skydiving to a hip retelling of Judas' woes, and the music celebrates the primacy of rhythm and the rainbow hues of the blues.

With '84's *Vertical's Currency* (Pangaea 42136, 40:35) and the most recent installment in the ongoing saga, *Days And Nights Of Blue Luck Inverted* (Pangaea 42137, 51:29), Hanrahan chronicles the moments of anticipation, anxiety, alienation, desire, and despair which motivate and exasperate his protagonist through various relationships. With a film director's sensitivity he creates intensely visual vignettes, suggesting elements of the urban experience in shadowy hallways and bedrooms, revealing the psychic scars and bruises we receive from love's scours. Appropriately, the music is sinuous, never overly aggressive, but subtly contagious, communicating a furtive glance, an offhand gesture, a casual (but misunderstood) remark. He builds his arrangements from the ground up, a percolating (latin inspired) rhythm section, burbling bass guitar (sometimes two or three), and sinewy guitar parts, upon which he layers expressive vocal or sultry instrumental soloists. Under Hanrahan's deft touch, the city's melting pot

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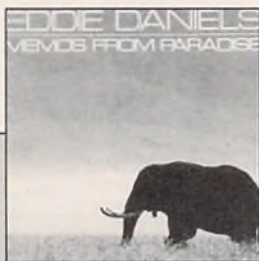
Pong is a very welcome CD pleasure.

So too is **Bill Yeager's LA Jazz Workshop** big band (AM-PM 300, 65:05). Actually, there are two sets of personnel, and the one on the first five cuts is the better one. Nothing unexpected, mind you. But the title track, *Medium Basie Swing*, sets the tone. And like the Palermo unit, Yeager holds the mood steady and swinging through a crop of post-swing era jazz originals and standards by Freddie Hubbard, Shorter, Mingus, and others. Gary Meek's tenor just about blows the dikes on *Ozone*, followed by John Bambridge (of the Tonight Show Band) on trumpet and a terrific fling by the whole sax section. Once is enough for Mike Diageau's opening glissando device on *Carcuss*; its reprise on *Shuffle* is a bit of obvious self-plagiarism. And one could lose the girgling electronics on *Pork-Pie Hat*. db

vibrancy contrasts with the individual's angst, and mystery and melancholy lurk around the next corner.

Far removed from Hanrahan's haunted urban landscape, the popular and traditional black South African bands heard on *Homeland* (Rounder 11549, 60:20) celebrate life's vagaries with a rich diversity of musical colors and textures. The lack of texts to these 20 cuts prevents closer identification with the singer's plight or exuberance, and it sounds like a number of

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EDDIE DANIELS

MEMOS FROM PARADISE—GRP 9561: *SPECTRA- LIGHT; DREAMING; HEARTLINE; LOVE OF MY LIFE; HOMECOMING; EIGHT-POINTED STAR; MEMOS FROM PARADISE; SEVENTH HEAVEN, CAPRICCIO TWILIGHT, IMPRESSIONS FROM ANCIENT DREAMS, FLIGHT OF THE DOVE.* (59:55 MINUTES)

Personnel: Daniels, clarinet; Roger Kellaway, piano, celeste, Fender Rhodes; Terry Clarke, drums, percussion (cut 7); Eddie Gomez, bass; Al Foster, drums; Glen Velez, percussion (7); David Nadien, Elena Barere, violins; Lamar Alsop, viola; Beverly Lauridsen, cello; Gloria Agostini, harp (6); David Samuels, marimba (6).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Eddie Daniels, bopster reborn on GRP, proved his clarinet mettle first with *Breakthrough!*, taking on some fingerbustin' semiclassical pieces with unheard of aplomb and style, then he retrenched with incredible lightness of bebop (*To Bird With Love*), and now he's exploring new horizons with keyboard wizard and composer Roger Kellaway. Supple and elegant beauties await your ears here from these two genies. Of course, the music's a bit facile and overburnished at times, in both the Shavian (chamber avant gardy) and Grusinian (glossy) traditions, but the brilliant charts and exhilarating interchanges make this a date to relish, not to stuff.

Claims of musical marriage raise eyebrows in these opportunistic times, but Kellaway and Daniels do share qualities of mercurial wit and peripatetic energy, and affinities for will-o'-the-wisp changes, transparent textures, and effort- less sophistication. Wild inversions, metrical derring-do, and the surprise of it all fly far beyond the pale of most contemporary music; yet Kellaway keeps a hand on the wheel. It's a rare pleasure to feast on Kellaway's compositional genius, which has barely surfaced in the decade since his Cello Quartet (on A&M). Though darker-hued, it likewise integrated strings and rhythm in bop-extension alchemy. This album breathes freer and sees farther horizons, exuding Eastern spices, modes, and space. Daniels—who may, on clarinet, play

anything written, implied, or even thought—is the soulmate of Kellaway's bursting bosom in these excursions beyond the ozone. On re- entry will they be too hot not to cool down?

"Side One" dazzles with lightning clever- ness, from the *Hot House*-slanted *Spectralight* bloomer, through the incandescently gorgeous *Heartline*. Kellaway pens in kudos to Bartok and Pärtch and Rimsky-Korsakov without bat- ting an eyelash. Daniels' sole tune, the purling samba *Dreaming*, unfurls more straightfor- wardly than Kellaway's rest. Gomez can sustain a note like it was bowed, easing the undertow. Foster dots exclamation points with a brush wire or belltree kiss.

Further out, the title suite cools out with spaciousness, finer integration of the string voices, and a blow-in-your-ear cadenza. Daniels' ability to flit from chalumeau through the ceiling in nanoseconds with no perceptible dynamic shift almost never gets in the way of his making music of import, if not substance. Spanning the second half (hour) of the disc, it was commissioned by Daniels to premiere at a 1987 gig they shared at Fat Tuesday's. Value- minded buyers, likely to be amused by 60 minutes of effervescent music, may be spe- cially titillated by the bonus *Eight-Pointed Star* which, gilt with harp and marimba, fairly flies off the disc in a shower of laser bips. Once the rush subsides, the residuals should bear inter- est. One to dream on. —fred bouchard

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41

tracks were artificially faded out, but the music is so infectious that there's bound to be *something* here that will grab hold of you and not let go. Unless you're a South African aficionado none of the names here will ring a bell, but the sense of discovery and delight at the wealth of sounds only adds to the excitement. A few highlights: the almost Cajun-sounding squeeze box and fiddle unisons from Mzikayifani Buthelezi; German Hadebe's roller-rink organ and space-age synth on the same tune; the contrasting gut-string (nearly Delta) acoustic guitars and chattering layers of the electric model; the dance hall instrumental jive of the Boyoyo Boys versus the shimmering choral singing of the Umzimkhulu Black River Band; the garden hose and 25-liter can covered by inner tube rubber whomp of Majakathatha; and on and on.

While falling somewhat short of the hyperbole of its title, *Soweto Street Music: The Definitive Collection* (Prism 551, 72:01) is a similarly representative compilation of South African *mbaquanga*, notable for its bouncy, urbane, exhilarating counterpoint between chiming electric guitars, "lead" bass guitar, wheezy squeeze box, and roller-rink organ. Instrumental cuts by groups like those of Kid Malume and Phillip Encobo call to mind the easy lilt of New Orleans' late, lamented Meters; elsewhere the call-and-response vocals and effervescent choir singing communicate recognizable feelings despite the unfamiliarity of the tongue.

Out Of Africa (Rykodisc 20059, 68:13) is just as pleasing if a bit more polished. This 11-cut compilation surveys a similarly wide range of music, not only from South Africa but also Nigeria, Zaire, Senegal, Cameroun, and the Ivory Coast, offers longer tracks (more groove potential), and displays a more Westernized influence (especially in the production values). Many fascinating indigenous details survive—unique vocal effects including tongue-clicking and growling, percussive patterns, instrumental hocketing, etc.—but you can also hear more than a few synths (though subtly used) have crept into the arrangements.

Some of the better-known names—Youssou N'Dour, Ebenezer Obey, Tabu Ley Rochereau—offer outstanding performances, but there are also a number of ear-opening discoveries to be made, such as the Caribbean-influenced horn charts and percussive underpinning of Somo Somo—not too dissimilar from Gonzalo Rubalcaba's Cuban band.

Squeeze box (accordion) is the central focus of Louisiana zydeco music, all but invented by Clifton Chenier. One of Chenier's successors, **Stanley "Buckwheat" Dural Jr.**, originally came out of an r&b background, so perhaps it's only natural that *Buckwheat's Zydeco Party* (Rounder 11528, 68:47) serves up a gumbo of musical styles—some spicy two-step zydeco along with a few New Orleans r&b standards (*Walkin' To New Orleans* and *Tee Nah Nah*), a couple of Otis Redding-inspired soul numbers, a straight blues or two, a dash of reggae, even Little Richard's howling *Tutti Frutti* makes an appearance. Buckwheat's band is a bit slicker than most traditional zydeco ensembles, and the groove they set up is more rigorous—almost compulsive—than that of the equally compelling African pop sensibility.

Brave Combo's use of the accordion is something else again, usually flipping back and forth between Tex-Mex norteno and flat-out Polish polka, and the band is fluent in a staggering number of ethnic styles. But it's their wacky intensity and bizarre song selections that make them my favorite party band. Imagine hearing the Doors' *People Are Strange*—as a Yiddish hora. Or *O Holy Night*—as a cha cha. Or Tennessee Ernie Ford's *Sixteen Tons*—as a cumbia. They're all on *Musical Varieties* (Rounder 11546, 66:06), a welcome compilation from their four rare self-produced LPs. Mixed in among the tangos, polkas, Brazilian foros, mambos—even *Let's Trim Twist Again*—is an infectious humor and a contagious gotta-dance verve.

The bandoneon is a squeeze box which differs from an accordion in that it is not set up like a keyboard on one side, but rather has buttons which produce various notes under both hands. The bandoneon is the

national instrument of Argentina, and **Astor Piazzolla** is not only its Art Tatum



Astor Piazzolla: sensual and savage.

(technique-wise) but also its Thelonious Monk (compositionally speaking). Piazzolla's revitalization of the moribund tango into *tango nuevo* was no less of a shock to Argentinians than the bebop revolution in the States, as he expanded a popular dance form and elevated it to classical status. The 22-minute title track from Piazzolla's *Tristezas De Un Doble A* (Messidor 15970, 47:01) shows how; this is not the bubbling rhythmic cauldron of most latin musics—in fact, there are no drums or percussion in the quintet—but a silky-smooth, suave, elastic, lyrical, luxurious flow of melody energized by episodes that revolve on long pedal points, free improvised sections, ornate counterpoint, and surprising tonal quirks. The music is sentimental, but not syrupy, with a structural rigor and unexpected twists, totally seductive.

Piazzolla himself has been quoted as saying *Tango: Zero Hour* (Pangaea 42138, 46:14) is "... absolutely the greatest record I've made in my entire life." It's hard to argue with him. Expressive as the Messidor CD is, this music explores darker regions of the soul, with razor-sharp rhythms and taut ensemble interaction juxtaposing the pain of longing with the passion of fulfillment. The moods are so persuasive you can all but taste the heavy, humid, hot-house air as it seeps into your lungs, and feel the emotional sting of the alternately delicate and diabolical sounds.

If these two CDs show the *tango nuevo* in its purest form, Piazzolla's *Concierto Para Bandoneon/Tres Tango* (Elektra/Nonesuch 79141, 37:15) is a more ambitious hybrid. The orchestral accompaniment (conducted by composer and former Dizzy Gillespie sideman Lalo Schifrin) adds a lush cushion for the characteristic bittersweet melodies, underscoring particular motifs or introducing contrasting material, though I prefer the tart quintet. Piazzolla's string writing calls to mind Milhaud in its lighter moments, though the darker chromaticism of the Swiss composer Frank Martin is sometimes suggested. It's Piazzolla's virtuosic playing, alternately sensual and savage, however, which makes the music soar.

db

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1 CHARLIE PARKER. BONGO BEEP (from *THE EARLY BIRD, Baronet*) Bird, alto saxophone; J.J. Johnson, trombone; Miles Davis, trumpet.

The thing I liked about Parker, mostly, was rhythm and sound—the rhythmic momentum and fluidity, and the way his sound is a combination of big and kinda raunchy. It's close to the kind of sound I'm interested in, I guess, with a hard reed and a big mouthpiece; it was a broad sound even with those funky mics. I'm more attracted to that than some of the thinner, whiny things that are more common. I dug the J.J. Johnson solo a little better than the Miles—that mute thing was really hip.

2 ORNETTE COLEMAN. THE LEGEND OF BEBOP (from *THE ART OF THE IMPROVISERS, Atlantic*) Coleman, alto saxophone.

I guess I heard that before I heard any bebop [laughs]. I've played that with [John] Zorn, in fact. That was pretty influential for me; that and listening to [Julius] Hemphill shaped a lot of my approach in terms of playing melodically, as opposed to being a texture player or a screamer or even a bebopper. Hearing those guys play not over set chord changes, but play melodically—the way they play lines, sometimes, the transposing melodies that Ornette's really into doing—I was really into that whole approach in the early '80s of making up my own patterns and kind of applying them to different situations. I've tried to get away from that now. But the main thing for me was that it showed me how to play so-called avant garde jazz and use melody instead of playing over changes as the basis for improvising, which is pretty much the way I still do it.

3 HENRY THREADGILL SEXTETT. BLACK BLUES (from *JUST THE FACTS AND PASS THE BUCKET, About Time*) Threadgill, alto saxophone.

I just saw a recent concert of theirs in Germany, where they were incredible. What I like about Henry is the way he organizes the writing and the improvising; his backgrounds and foregrounds are really interesting, there's always something happening, a subtext to the solo, that he's planned that gives the soloist a purpose. Henry feeds the soloists all this information, which I really like, this density that really appeals to me and a structure that's very imaginative—it's not just throwing out some chords and saying "Blow," or doing some free-bop stuff. I'm trying to learn how he does that; it's a real inspiration to me, to have the whole band playing all the time, all these layers of events happening all the time. The stuff's pretty deliberately raggedy most of the

TIM BERNE
by Gene Santoro

Alto saxist Tim Berne is one of the best contemporary musicians emerging on the New York scene. Not only as a player, where he's worked hard at developing a splintery, edgy cry, but as a composer whose works alternately grind with the sheer pulverizing relentlessness of urban life and throw themselves headlong into the city's endless carnival.

Berne took up the sax because of his love for r&b and soul music, and studied with alto great Julius Hemphill because he heard in Hemphill's own work a cross between the improvised and compositional techniques he was increasingly fascinated by and the raw scream the alto can produce. Producing a series of records on his own Empire label, Berne perfected his craft and learned the business ropes at the same time. So when Columbia Records offered him a shot, he could take total command of his project in a way relatively few young players are prepared to. The two tautly arranged albums that resulted, the pun-



ningly titled *Fulton Street Maul* and *Sanctified Dreams*, unleash sheets of shearing noise and seduce with more thoughtful melodic explorations. They've drawn reams of critical praise. In addition to his output as a leader, Berne has been a key player on the downtown NY-Brooklyn-Hoboken axis, co-conspiring with folks like John Zorn, Bill Frisell, and Greg Osby.

This was Berne's first Blindfold Test.

time, but he's given a good name to raggedy [laughs]. I wish the sound quality on all his early records was better.

4 ERIC DOLPHY. G.W. (from *OUTWARD BOUND, Fantasy*) Dolphy, alto saxophone.

That was the first Dolphy record I ever had—the double album on Prestige. I like the writing almost as much as the playing. As a player, his influence on me because of what he did didn't last as long as Julius' or Ornette's: there's a certain quality that I think of as Southern in their sound that I could relate to because of the soul music that I was listening to, this parched quality I really like. Dolphy's thing is more city to me, and for the technical thing is pretty incredible—the clarity, the melodic ideas, which are pretty out. But ultimately the writing is what interests me; in fact, it's creeping in now even more than it has, some of his weird harmonies and strange lines. It's got a kind of theatrical sound to it that sounds almost like a parody of jazz—but I dig it.

5 MACEO PARKER. PARRY (PART 1) (from *JAMES BROWN'S FUNKY PEOPLE, Polydor*) Parker, alto saxophone.

Oh yeah, I burned out on that stuff; I listened to it all the time in the '60s, and still listen to it over and over again without getting tired of it, 'cause of the groove. The drums on that stuff are incredible. And as far as the sax solos, Maceo was out of his mind—he was taking some out solos. For that kind of music, I still prefer that to what's happening now: the guys who have unbelievable chops and play incredible slick stuff, it's almost like they're too good, it's too perfect. What I dug about Maceo was his tone and the fact that it wasn't perfect, it wasn't totally symmetrical, it was just totally funky and simple and rhythmically amazing.

6 SUN RA AND HIS SOLAR-MYTH ARKESTRA. SPECTRUM (from *THE SOLAR-MYTH APPROACH VOL. 1, Affinity*) Marshall Allen, alto saxophone.

I like the backdrop, the whole beginning—the clusters that sound like a whole bunch of saxophones and a synthesizer. It's something I was interested in even before I started playing, so I can't really dismiss it as an influence—by the time I learned it was wrong it was too late [laughs]. Those are some of the first records I ever had; in the late '60s you could get them in cutout

CONTINUED ON PAGE 62

JAMES WILLIAMS

A LOVER OF JAZZ'S RICH TRADITION, THIS ACOUSTIC PIANO PLAYER FROM MEMPHIS CONTINUES TO COOK WITH THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS.

by Jonathan W. Poses



In this era of blasphemous musical commercialism, the public tends to think, *Elvis is Memphis*. Because of the prevailing attitude, the city's blues and jazz tradition often gets glossed over, or worse—buried. What of W. C. Handy's 80-year-old compositional celebrations; what of pianist Phineas Newborn, so influential for a quarter-century and still heard in his home town today? There are other significant native sons: Frank Strozier, George Coleman, Jamil Nasser, and Harold Mabern to name but four.

The fact is, perhaps more than at any time previously, Memphis' musical heritage is in good hands. Look, for instance, at the current class of home-grown jazz pianists: Mulgrew Miller (see *db*, March '88), Donald Brown (both 33 years-old), and their elder, James Williams, 36, who happened to follow Brown and preceded Miller as a Jazz Messenger.

Williams, Miller, and Brown grew up together cutting their teeth on r&b charts, Booker T., Ray Charles, Donny Hathaway, Motown, King Curtis, Ramsey Lewis, and the like; they learned and played gospel in church, studied the European tradition, too. Intermittently, the threesome were roommates at Memphis State and elsewhere. By the early '70s, Williams, who didn't start learning the piano and organ until he was 13, owned a solid local reputation, leading a trio and quintet as well as gaining in-town studio work.

It wasn't enough however, and, in 1974, "although there was more I could learn in Memphis," the mellifluous pianist left for Boston and the jazz-rich Northeast, and "at the ripe old age of 22," he received an invitation to teach at Berklee College of Music. "I think not being able to hear the great artists with any degree of regularity was as much of a factor as [anything]," says Williams. "Just like any occupation, whatever you do, you really want to see how you function when you're around the best."

Having employment waiting, doubtless, made the move viable. Nonetheless the pianist did not shy away from "electric gigs . . . wedding receptions where I played [Fender] Rhodes. I had nothing against it; it was a lot of fun." In short order, the Tennessean, who only plays acoustically

today, developed relationships with long-time resident drummer Alan Dawson, bassist extraordinaire George Duvivier, and a multitude of future collaborators and peers. Saxophonist Billy Pierce and guitarist Kevin Eubanks both became a part of Williams' straightahead sextet, Progress Report, and appeared on two recent Sunnyside recordings *Progress Report* (SSC1012) and *Alter Ego* (SSC1012).

In Boston, Williams found plenty of heavy-weight free-lance work, playing with trumpeters Thad Jones and Art Farmer (*Something To Live For*, all Strayhorn material, Contemporary 14029), reedmen Benny Carter, Arnett Cobb, Sonny Stitt, and Joe Henderson, guitarist Pat Martino, and many other standout artists. "I was very lucky to be on some of those bandstands," recalls the always modest and versatile Williams who, to date, owns eight record credits as leader in addition to a plethora of sideman dates with people as stylistically varied as guitarist Tal Farlow (*Cooking On Full Burners*, Concord Jazz 204) and Mingus alumnus, trumpeter Jack Walrath (*Master Of Suspense*, Blue Note 46905).

Williams lists many as mentor: Wynton Kelly, McCoy Tyner, Chick Corea, Sonny Clark; eventually adding Errol Garner, Nat King Cole, and Bobby Timmons, all of whom he draws from when performing. However, like those before him, Williams credits part of his growth and development—on and off the bandstand—to Art Blakey. The soft-spoken, provocative Williams joined Blakey in '77 for a stint lasting four years during which he contributed compositions galore on no less than 10 Messenger dates.

"Working with Art Blakey was my first true professional experience," he stresses emphatically. "The Jazz Messengers are so unique. You play prestigious rooms every night, you travel [around the world. You work with] good musicians—in some cases

exceptional musicians." Indeed, in one stretch the frontline compared with Blakey's best: trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, altoists Bobby Watson and Billy Pierce, in addition to bassist Charles Fambrough.

With Blakey, Williams' commitment to jazz history and the music's tradition deepened while his sense of leadership crystallized. "He let us paint ourselves into corners. We ran the band, we called rehearsals, made closing announcements."

Sensitive, concerned, and determined, Williams unabashedly discusses such topics as the meaning of musicianship, dedication, controlling one's own financial destiny, and the dissipation of comradery among artists. Band personnel, he claims, change so frequently groups don't have a chance to jell. As a result, he maintains, the music suffers, becomes stagnant, often sounds thrown together.

"Looking back, you can see bandmembers were totally committed to that group first and foremost. You could see the same personnel. Listeners knew the sidemen as well as they knew the leaders in Diz's, Bird's, and Miles Davis' small groups, bands like John Coltrane's Quartet, Ornette Coleman's band. Historically, that's how the music moves forward." Today, says Williams—who admits economics play a big part—it's difficult to cite a band whose personnel is a constant.

Earnestly, Williams chastises colleagues and friends alike who take for granted those who preceded them: people like pianists Hank Jones, Tommy Flanagan, and Ahmad Jamal, or someone like Milt Jackson who Williams plays with often. "How can they be out of style?" he wonders.

"With Milt, for example, it's about real no-nonsense swinging *at all times*. He's very clear—without verbalizing it—about what he likes to hear. He plays a lot of the great tunes, a lot of the classics, plays a lot of the blues. You play in the true tradition of what jazz really is, in the true spirit of what jazz really is. I just love that opportunity. When I see him go out night after night . . . no matter how complex his playing is, it's always swinging. The blues is never far away, if indeed it is away at all. I would like to have that much feeling, capture and convey that much feeling in my playing. He doesn't play one note that he doesn't feel. . . . That's the way it should be."

Williams knew the time was right to leave Boston four years ago—it was time to move to New York. More often than not, he found himself going to the city to perform or watch. These days, Williams is a much-in-demand, Big Apple mainstay, leading his own groups in addition to taking on gigs as a sideman.

Recently, he forced himself "to take a break and do a trio record"—something he's planned for quite some time. The results of

his effort can be heard on his latest release, *Magical Trio, Vol. 1*, (EmArcy/Polygram 832-859-2) and the soon-to-be-issued *Vol. 2* (EmArcy/Polygram). "I really wanted to make this special [so that it would] challenge me," says Williams, who judges himself as harshly as he does others.

On the initial disc he brought two of Pittsburgh's most celebrated jazzmen together for the first time on record in their four-decade-plus careers. Blakey and Ray Brown agreed to participate. "That certainly created a lot of interest," Williams states calmly, though visibly enthused. Recorded in one day, the set marks the almost unheard of appearance of Blakey as a sideman and his first in trio format in 17 years. "He did it as a favor to me," says Williams of his former boss, noting that Blakey's only previous trio efforts—each with Thelonious Monk—took place in 1958 with Oscar Pettiford on bass and subsequently, in 1971, on two different occasions, with bassist Al McKibbin. "I told Mulgrew I felt the world was upside down. Here I was the leader. You should have seen those guys together. Laughing, reminiscing. There were no egos involved. They were there in support of me."

The first disc turned out so well, it prompted the second, this time with Elvin Jones joining Brown. "Elvin and Ray know each other, and I had worked with Elvin previously." Adds Williams, "I think this one is even stronger than the first."

This summer, for the second time, Williams has been touring as part of Dizzy Gillespie's 18-piece orchestra. The ensemble, under the direction of protégé Jon Faddis, showcases powerful players, including, among others, Frank Wess, Jerry Dodgion, Ralph Moore, Howard Johnson, Bob Stewart, Steve Turre, Lew Soloff, and Britt Woodman.

"In the jazz orchestra, it's not just James Williams. It's no problem for me," says the pianist who always welcomes the chance to play with high caliber talent. "I'm doing the project because it's something I want to be next to. . . . I'm not coming there to bring my own personal style. . . . I want to do it. It's important, and certainly very prestigious," comments Williams, a pragmatist. "There's high visibility. . . . but most of all, being out there with—and, as I said, I don't like to use the word genius too often—one of the few great geniuses of the 20th century."

"The easiest thing in the world is to play your own compositions. That's for sure, but when you can get out there and interpret somebody else's music, and still bring your own personality into it, that's when you see your own growth and scope."

It would seem that Williams' intellectual and practical approach combined with his natural and developed talent and continual thirst to improve—personally and musi-

cally—all serve him well. "I feel a certain amount of maturity, confidence, and, hopefully, more substance in my playing. I like to think I project my personality a little bit more than before," says a satisfied Williams, who put himself on a three-to-five-year plan upon his New York arrival.

"I feel very comfortable with how my career is developing. Sure I would like to see certain things. I feel very fortunate my career is where it is, though. I get a chance to play, record, and travel with the best musicians in the world on a fairly consistent basis."

Of course, Williams sometimes forgets to include himself among them. db

MARK HELIAS

IMBUED WITH A SOLID, DEEP, AND WOODY SOUND, THIS "LATE BLOOMER" ON ACOUSTIC BASS IS EMERGING AS A COMPOSER, TEAM PLAYER, AND LEADER.

by Kevin Whitehead

Mark Helias bloomed late. He didn't take up the acoustic bass until he was 21, but within four years played well enough to enter the Yale School of Music. Seemingly all of his colleagues and contemporaries from the mid-'70s New Haven scene have been making their own records for years—Anthony Davis, Ray Anderson, Gerry Hemingway, Jay Hoggard, Pheeroan akLaff—while Helias was content to be a "composing sideman," contributing tunes to albums by trombonist Anderson and drummers Hemingway and Barry Altschul. (Over the last decade he's recorded with all three—and saxophonists Anthony Braxton and Dewey Redman, pianists Anthony Davis and Franco D'Andrea, vibist Charlie Shoemake, and funksters the Slickaphonics.) Records under his own name didn't start arriving until late '86. He now has two fine free-bop albums on Enja—*Split Image* (4086) and *The Current Set* (5041)—that confirm the strength of his musical vision.

What took him so long? "I was under the mistaken impression that people would approach me and ask me to make a record, because they would have noticed the quality of my work." Helias, who's got a quick, sharp wit and a practiced deadpan delivery, breaks out laughing. "But then I realized that a lot of people don't consider the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 53

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composing angle of jazz or improvised music that much. Besides, I wasn't a dazzler on the bass, according to accepted criteria."

Well, if dazzler means being what he calls a "speed merchant"—someone who motorboats around the bass' upper register—then he's right. But those who are dazzled by a deep and woody sound, solid time, and shapely lines that direct a band from the rear will disagree with his modest assessment. (Can one be a self-effacing dazzler?) "It's easy to hear a horn player come in and knock your socks off," Helias says. "It's not so easy to pick up on the kind of support and the kind of context that's created for that horn to jump out. For a while I was a little bit upset about it, but then I realized that's the way it is: too bad."

Helias has always been a team player—which is what's made him so impressive a leader now that he's stepping out. Working for giants like Redman and Braxton gave him valuable insights into running the show. "I've noticed that some of the most interesting people I've worked with empower you with responsibility"—in Redman's case, that meant letting him write his own bass parts; in Braxton's, finding an approach to a solo that complements his fiendishly involuted compositions. "That responsibility makes you play to your capabilities. I've found that to be a real trait of a good leader." Laboring as a sideman for years has made him a liberal-minded boss.

Mark Helias was born in 1950 in New Brunswick, NJ, and grew up listening to Philly soul and radio pop. "I started playing the drums when I was 12, then picked up the guitar. My friends and I tried to play what we heard on the radio—we were into Muddy Waters, things like that. We didn't understand what it was really about, we just dug it." Later, he got an inkling of things to come: in one garage band, things fell into place only when he and the bassist would switch instruments. "The groove started to happen, the drummer smiled; I had a definite affinity for that function." By 18, he'd switched from guitar to electric bass—an axe he still plays in the "no wave" Slickaphonics, who've made two albums for Enja and three for Germany's Teldec. (When accused of selling out, he says he's paying out—that the bad press the Slicks get probably costs him jazz gigs.)

Helias got into jazz the same way many of his generation did: rummaging in the 99¢ bin at the local record store, where he picked out Cecil Taylor's *Unit Structures* and a hard-bop anthology *Blue Note Gems Of Jazz*. You can imagine his parents' concern when he started listening to *Unit Structures* in the dining room. Or when he began taking clarinet lessons so he could learn to read music—but quickly got into high-energy screeching.

But his real turning point was walking into



Mark Helias

KEN VAN SICKLE

a Rutgers U. gym and hearing a live orchestra for the first time. "The low sound struck me immediately. When I heard the orchestra I got into the bass, started studying immediately. I studied for a year with John Smith—a great guy, ex-principle bassist with the Seattle Symphony—and then with the NY Philharmonic's Homer Mensch." Helias studied Euromusic theory at Rutgers—he's written a variety of chamber- and computer-music pieces—and jazz at the university's "alternative college," Livingston, where the faculty included Larry Ridley, Kenny Barron, and Ted Dunbar. Before he got out of school, he'd met and begun playing with trumpeter Herb Robertson (who's on Mark's albums), and played straightahead jam sessions Prestige producer Ozzie Cadena organized at his New Brunswick record store.

"When I finished at Livingston in 1974, Homer asked me if I was interested in going to graduate school. He said Yale and I said [deadpan] 'Yeah, sure.' After playing bass for only three-and-a-half years, it seemed kind of strange. I just started at age 21, this is impossible."

It was possible. In New Haven, he carried on a double life: playing bop at local bars with townies like Wayne Boyd ("a fantastic guitar player") and joining an already-extant group with fellow Yalies Davis and Hemingway. "They had always looked for a bass player who could play all that [free] stuff and also the more traditional stuff. I fit the bill." Through fellow bassist Mark Dresser—with whom he recently did a basses-and-electronics duo gig at NY's Knitting Factory—Helias met Ray Anderson. Helias, Anderson, and Hemingway formed a cooperative trio named Oahspe (don't ask), now known as BassDrumBone. (They've recorded for Auricle, Minor, and Soul Note.) Through Anderson he slid into a parallel trio under Altschul's leadership.

Helias has lived in New York since '77, but is still working through the possibilities

rasied while living in Connecticut. "[Trumpeter/composer] Leo Smith was a very profound influence. I was getting heavily educated with all this Western European stuff; he showed me the possibilities of just anything happening, and being able to accept things happening without being critical. When I think back on the number of high-quality musicians there were up there—not just good players, but thinkers with interesting ideas—it's pretty clear there was something going on." Smith recommended Helias to Braxton, with whom he toured in 1977 and recorded *Six Compositions: Quartet* (Antilles 1005) in 1981. (You can hear Braxton's lingering influence on *Split Image*'s angular tune, Z-5.)

Through Anthony Davis, Helias met drummer Ed Blackwell, with whom he had instant rapport and whose playing he loves. ("Inside of a bebop tune, he'll take you to Africa.") Blackwell later recommended him to Dewey; Helias was with Redman from 1978 through the mid-'80s, appearing on the tenorist's two Galaxy LPs and the gorgeous *The Struggle Continues* for ECM (1225). Also through Blackwell, he was roped into the as-yet-unrecorded quintet Nu, with trumpeter Don Cherry, altoist Carlos Ward, and percussionist Nana Vasconcelos.

Mark has also worked with drummers Ben Riley, Billy Hart, Roy Haynes—and the late Dannie Richmond, whom he'd met at a jam session. "I'd never had an instant hookup with a drummer like that. I felt like I was floating on a cloud." Later he joined Richmond and Ray Anderson on a European tour, backing tenorist Bennie Wallace.

"I marvel at the uniqueness of every drummer. Every one has their own biological kind of groove—where they play inside the time or outside the time. But compatibility is about timing in a macro-sense, too: how one takes an idea and develops it, how much one parrots the other, things like that. You just try to figure out where a musician is coming from, try to understand where they're at to make it work between you."

The insight that shifting relationships keep players alert informs his work as a leader. He admires Kip Hanrahan and Bill Laswell for the odd combinations of players they come up with, and tries to do something similar. *The Current Set* is strikingly polyglot: Mark shares rhythm chores with bop drummer Victor Lewis; Herb Robertson and Greg Osby meld in the front line; Tim Berne and Nana get down together on *Greetings From L.C.* On one level, he's deliberately counteracting the cliquishness of the NY scene. "I noticed that there were scenes welling up that were not overlapping. I really don't like that; I've always been conscious of unity as opposed to differences. It's interesting to watch the relationships develop between musicians. People get excited, and I think that shows." It does. **db**

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bins. There were a couple in that series that were better. I saw that band at Slug's four nights in a row in 1970; they were doing six-hour sets. I'd buy the records, but it never really translated. The screaming stuff is almost a theatrical thing. I was into it, though. When I first picked up a saxophone that's what I would do. But on record it's the textures that are more compelling.

7 GREG OSBY AND SOUND THEATRE. You Big (from GREG OSBY AND SOUND THEATRE, JMT) Osby, alto saxophone; Kevin McNeil, guitar; Michele Rosewoman, piano.

For me the most interesting part was the blowing when Osby came in. The stuff between the guitar and piano was just in that free-bop zone—it didn't have much character. The tune had more character than the blowing. It didn't seem like the rest of the band was as inventive or as comfortable with the tune as Osby. Everyone didn't need to solo to get the point across. My way of thinking is if someone solos, for the next person who solos there has to be something else happening. And if it doesn't happen organically with a band that's been playing together, you put something in there that makes what you want happen—shape it, like a Threadgill does, throw a wrench in there and make 'em go [laughs]. And Osby's sound is fuller, a little more lively in person.

8 WORLD SAXOPHONE QUARTET. STEPPIN' (from LIVE IN ZURICH, Black Saint) Julius Hemphill, alto saxophone; Oliver Lake, alto saxophone.

I remember the first concert they did in '76 at the Tin Palace. Knowing Julius and knowing his writing output, most of which is unrecorded, I liked this group because it was an outlet for Julius' writing. I like the other people's writing too, but because Julius was so underrecorded as a leader that was the value of the group for me. I personally never really liked the way they improvised together, except for a few live things I saw: it always sounded to me like they lost the character of the composition when they started improvising. It seems like it's every man for himself—which I know isn't true, but that's what it sounds like. Especially since some of the arrangements are so strong, I would want the tunes to have more to do with the improv than they do. Obviously I'm a fan of those guys, individually especially, but I would rather have seen Julius be able to make a record a year of his stuff instead of this, although it's really successful.