

A MILES TRANSCRIPTION:
So What

For Contemporary Musicians

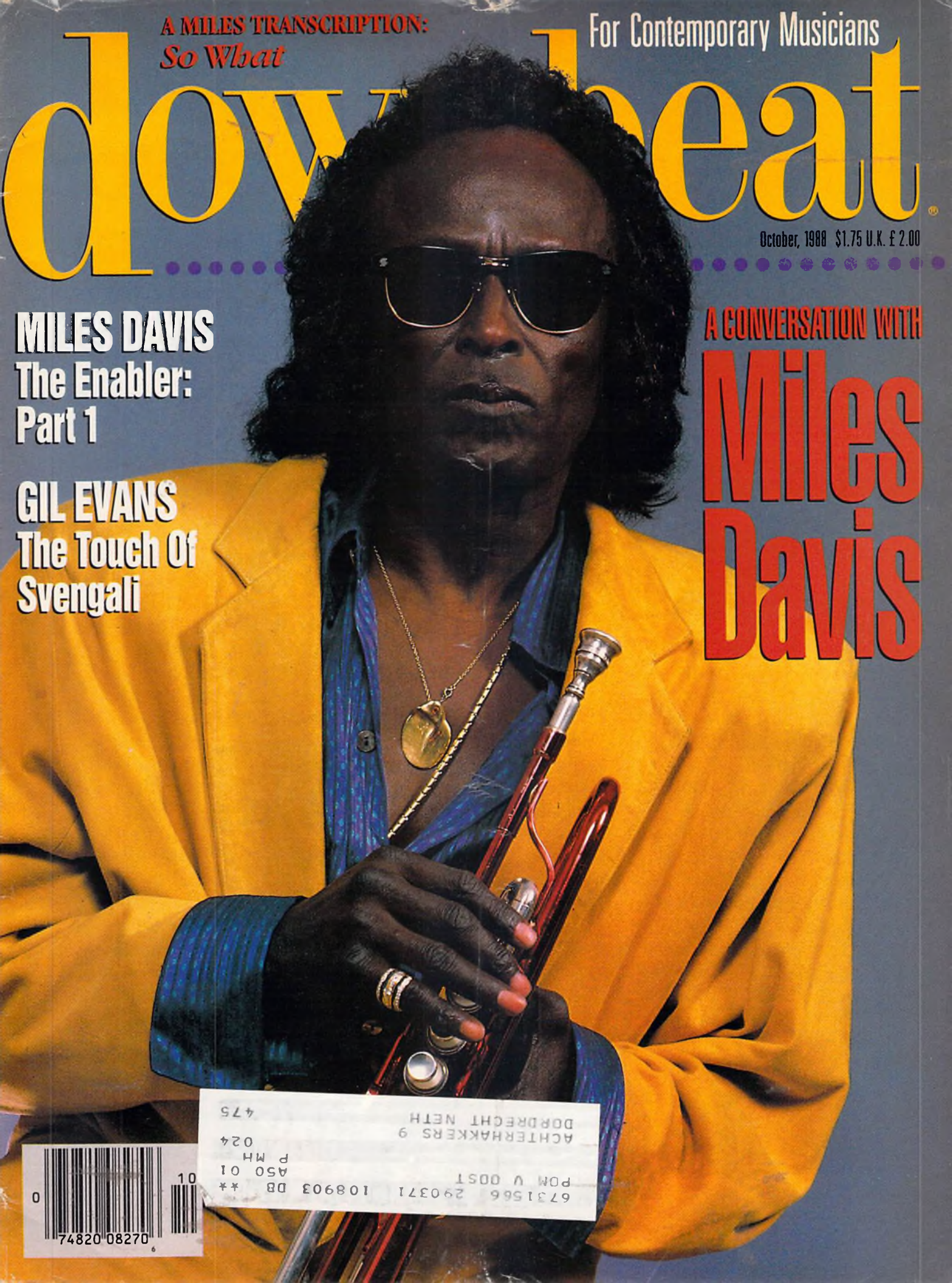
downbeat

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MILES DAVIS
The Enabler:
Part 1

GIL EVANS
The Touch Of
Svengali

A CONVERSATION WITH
**Miles
Davis**



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SUSAN PARSHALL

Miles Davis



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Miles Davis



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Gil Evans



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His love for music won't let him stop with the rich jazz traditions he has helped to form. Miles Davis has embraced change, listening to everyone and everything around him—" . . . you gotta realize it's 1988 and the shit rubs off on you whether you like it or not." In an extended interview, Miles shares his thoughts on current and former band members as well as the early years with such greats as Lester Young and Bird. He's got a lot to talk about, as **John Ephland** discovers.

22 MILES DAVIS: THE ENABLER
When thinking of Miles Davis, perhaps most people tend to see him as an important trumpet stylist. But Miles has always played with others, generating a parallel reputation as a bandleader, as someone who has turned out musical stars (as much as that is possible in jazz). **Gene Santoro** explores the mystery of working in a Miles Davis band in the first of a two-part article.

25 GIL EVANS: THE TOUCH OF SVENGALI
Gil Evans may best be remembered as a gentle genius. His contributions to music spanned five decades and included work with an incredible variety of artists. Join **Howard Mandel** as he provides a retrospective through the words and feelings of those who worked with and loved Gil Evans.

Cover photograph of Miles Davis by Ebet Roberts

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For Contemporary Musicians

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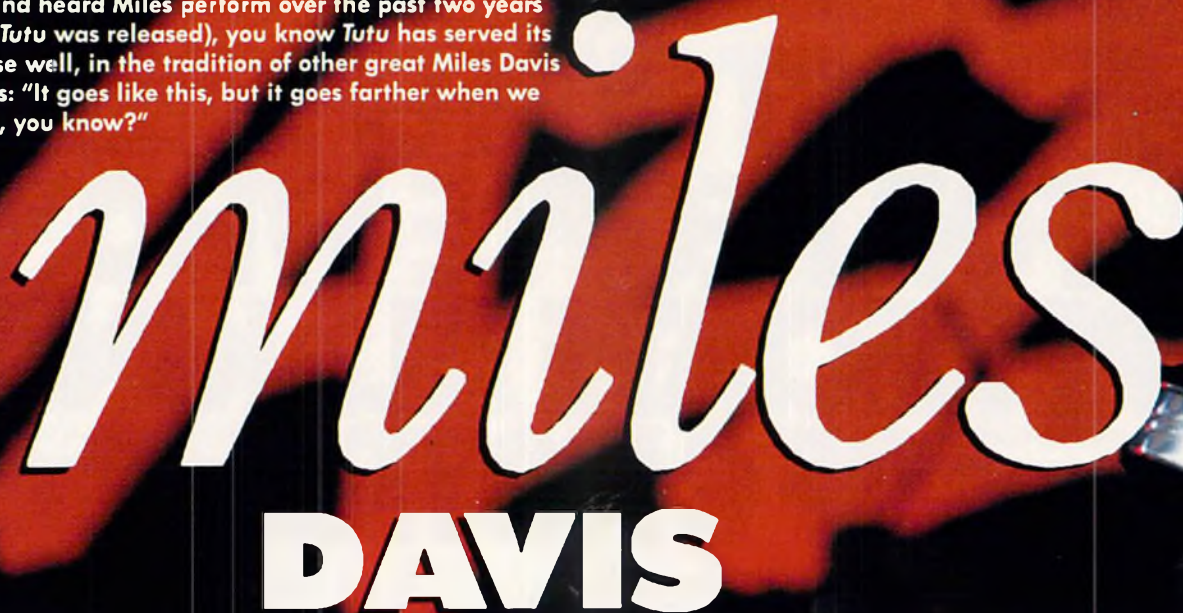


MILES
TO GO

“A nd Terence [Trent] D’arby came up to my room in Milan, callin’ me Mr. Davis. He said, ‘I carry around *Kind Of Blue*. I play it for inspiration . . . before I play.’” Perhaps not everyone knows who the young Mr. D’arby is or the kind of musical success he currently enjoys. He is a musician. “Mr. Davis” is a musician. There is a bridging across generations with Miles Davis. To anyone who has followed his career, if only by glances, his music is synonymous with change and an openness to new styles, new ideas. So it’s no wonder that a young musician might find favor in the presence of the Prince of Darkness.

It’s been awhile since Miles has graced the pages of *db* (Dec. ’84). Decoy was then the current rage, topping sales charts in addition to being voted best jazz album by *db* readers. (His electric jazz groups won top honors in ’85 and ’86 with both the readers and critics.) Another album for Columbia, *You’re Under Arrest*, stretched his bandmates even further and included a few guest appearances (ex-sideman John McLaughlin for one). And then, next thing you know, Miles is recording a “concept” album with a new label, Warner Bros. When was the last time that happened? *Tutu*, complete with full-cover front and back photos of Miles, brought him together with bassist/composer/producer/arranger Marcus Miller in an album that streamlined the music force on hand even as that inimitable trumpet voice continued to shine.

“Synthesizer programming” allowed for more guest artists. And yet, the sound was lean, simply providing—as always—“a program, a menu, a guide.” If you have seen and heard Miles perform over the past two years (since *Tutu* was released), you know *Tutu* has served its purpose well, in the tradition of other great Miles Davis records: “It goes like this, but it goes farther when we play it, you know?”



miles

DAVIS

Miles’ most recent recording, *Siesta*, harkens back to a period when his love of Spanish music surfaced in a big way—with *Sketches Of Spain*. Rightly dedicated to “The Master,” Gil Evans, it continued the pace set by *Tutu*, using a spare lineup of artists alongside synthesizers and trumpet. Once again, Marcus Miller had a major role, playing along and composing the music as a film score. Although Miles plays on only about half of *Siesta*, when he does, “he doesn’t just play solos; he creates moods” (see *db* record reviews, Apr. ’88).

His current band includes Robert Irving III and Adam Holzman on keyboards, Kenny Garrett on saxophones and flute, Joseph Foley McCreary on guitar, Benny Rietveld on bass, Marilyn Mazur on percussion, and Ricky Wellman on drums. And it is with this band that Miles continues to tour worldwide even as he receives more awards, shows up on tv, paints/sketches professionally, etc. And, as if all this wasn’t enough, his vast catalogue continues to be reissued in record and CD formats.

Miles has a lot to say, with subjects as diverse as Beethoven, performance styles, and the impact of Charlie Parker.

Read on, and see if you don’t agree that the Sorcerer has a few more tricks up his sleeve, and quite a few more miles to go.

JOHN EPHLAND: Let’s talk about your style of performance. You like to move around a lot.

MILES DAVIS: I walk around all the time because there’s different sounds on stage. . . . Nobody wants to stand still and play, you know what I mean? It’s old-time, man; it’s Jim Crow. Not Jim Crow, Uncle Tommish when you go to the microphone and you play and you step back and bow to the audience, like the audience is doing something for them when they are really teachin’ the audience.

JE: I think of my wife, who is a dancer, and how she is always



MITCHELL SEIDEL

drawing comparisons between dance and jazz or improvisational music. Music is movement, particularly improvisational music. So, creatively, your juices are flowing when you're moving.

MD: Yeah.

JE: Aren't your ideas coming a lot easier than if you're stationary?

MD: Sometimes, like when Trane heard the high sound of a soprano sax, you can pick up the higher sounds like that. It's not too hard, like not as high as a dog. When I first gave Herbie the electric piano, he really loved to play it 'cause Herbie would try anything. But Keith Jarrett, I got him an organ and an electric piano. He used to play them for me like this [*demonstrates moving around*]. Same thing when I'm walkin' around that they do.

JE: Standing still?

MD: Yeah.

JE: And it's different for a drummer because a drummer, in a sense,

is rotating on that stool; they've got all four limbs moving if they're really doing it.

MD: Marilyn, my drummer, she dances around when she plays. And Ricky, my drummer Ricky, he's just as steady as, he's a bull; he can play two hours, then take a solo. But I'm sayin', I know George Duke walks around and he plays his ass off.

JE: Speaking of Trane, there's a phrase I've read that you used in connection with him: "that thing." It was something subjective that you used when you heard something and it was the kind of sound that you wanted in your musicians.

MD: It's the thing that connects the melody with another melody, that shows a musician, that shows himself, you know; and it also shows me what he knows and what he doesn't know. For instance, Coleman Hawkins, the way he plays *Body And Soul*, that's an old record and when Frank Sinatra used to phrase, he taught me how to phrase. . . .

JE: He taught you how to phrase?

MD: Yeah, when Frank Sinatra sings, when I was at an early age, *Night and Day*, the way he phrases; the way Orson Welles used to phrase, the way Orson Welles used to speak, the heavy accent that would stop short. Orson Welles had a way of speaking, it was like care. Most didn't know I have that. That's what I liked about him.

JE: All the people that you have mentioned were before this kind of mobile stage presence-type thing. For example, Coleman Hawkins or John Coltrane, when they would play, they would do that old thing where you go to the mic and solo, right?

MD: Well, you know the way John played, it was, all the stuff he played was throwin' him off-balance anyway. So it didn't matter whether he was standin' in front of the mic or what. And sometimes I can't remember him even goin' to the microphone or him bein' in the vicinity of the microphone. But not like old musicians with bebop clichés and stuff. Dizzy just asked me, called me up the other day and said, "I gotta get me one of those microphones you got on your horn."

JE: He doesn't have one yet?

MD: No, he's been askin' me that for six months. I thought he had it. Well, I hooked it up for him, you know.

JE: One last question about Coltrane. How did you follow his later music on Impulse? Say, from *A Love Supreme* on?

MD: I never did hear his records after, you know, after he left the band.

JE: Did you follow his career much and the kind of music he was into?

MD: It was the same thing. It was the same thing playin' with me. I don't like, I didn't like the piano player.

JE: McCoy [Tyner]?

MD: I don't like all that bangin', you know? I like a piano player that gets a sound out of the piano. Like a baby grand; gettin' a sound out of a baby grand like Bill Evans and people like that, and Herbie and Chick and George Duke. They know how to play the piano by itself and make it sound like a piano. I don't like guys who make a livin' playin' in the mode.

JE: Playing in the mode?

MD: Yeah. We just did it because it's one style. You know, you can play the whole set like that . . . who could play after Coltrane? He played everything in the mode, you know, and McCoy just used to bang around, and I couldn't stand that.

JE: What were you looking for that wasn't there, that wasn't happening with McCoy's playing?

MD: He just didn't have any touch, you know? There's nothin' there. . . . The way he played with John, he kept the vamp goin', then he got monotonous. I know how Trane played, it would get

monotonous if you'd sit there a long time. Even though it's a style; only he could do that and make it work. You know, when they played [*sings/hums a little of My Favorite Things*], what is that?

JE: My Favorite Things?

MD: Yeah. Only he could play that. There's some of those that I did just because of the way he plays. I used to give him sets of chords to play—three, and five, six chords in one bar, two bars, 'cause he always could do 'em. And to hear McCoy bang around like that and. . . This is only my opinion, what I like to hear. I couldn't see nothin' there. I could see Elvin Jones. Also, they didn't have a good bass player. Nobody else but him.

JE: So you'd say their best stuff was the duets? When John and Elvin would get off on just the two of them playing?

MD: Yeah, that's what I would want to hear.

JE: You've made a lot of records. What is the value of recordings, beyond the immediate use of live material for possible new ideas? I've read that you're not all that interested in your older records.

MD: It's like a program. It's like a menu, when you go out—say, "Here's *Tutu*, here's what they're gonna play. *But*, it ain't gonna sound like that. See, here's what they're gonna play, this is a guide, this is *Tutu*." It goes like this but it goes farther when we play it, you know? That's all it is. Is that what you're talkin' about?

JE: Let me say it a different way. Say, for example, you talk about Miles Smiles.

MD: Which one is that?

JE: The album, Miles Smiles?

MD: I can't remember it.

JE: OK. What value is there in having records around except for people who want to listen to the kind of stuff that you were listening to back then? In 10 years, is *Tutu* something you'll be glad was recorded?

MD: Yeah.

JE: You'd go back and listen to it?

MD: Yeah. You can always listen to it, is what I'm sayin'. When you play in person, *Tutu* is only a guide for what we might do. It's different on every take. A record, you can't do anything, man. . . They should look at it like a program for a concert, like what we *might* play. All the rest is a composition.

JE: What about the whole "neo-classic" jazz scene?

MD: What is "neo-classic"?

JE: I guess that's critics term. Take what someone like Miles Davis did in the mid- to late-'60s, an all-acoustic jazz format, and 20 years later with a new group of players. You've dropped the all-acoustic format and have some very strong artistic reasons for doing so.

MD: Like I said, one thing is because I don't like to walk up and take a bow.

JE: Right. Electronics free you up.

MD: Well, you can hear better with electronics, the audience can hear better. They can hear every little thing that we have set up. They can hear *everything*. Listen to this [*takes out portable tape player, offers headset to me to hear a tape of their recent live music*]. Can you hear that?

JE: I can hear what they're playing.

MD: You can hear it's separated. This was last night. You can hear everything, everybody's portion.

JE: Yeah. It's not muddy.

MD: Yeah. You know acoustic players, if you're not in the same room with 'em, you can't hear 'em. You can't hear the bass, you can't hear the piano, you can hear the drums; sometimes they're off-balance. If it was acoustic, there'd be no microphone, not at all.

But if you're gonna put a mic by the drums, one in the piano, one in front, and maybe another one for the saxophone player, one in front of the bass—it might as well be electric. That's what it is anyway.

JE: You're not playing in somebody's room. You're playing for an audience.

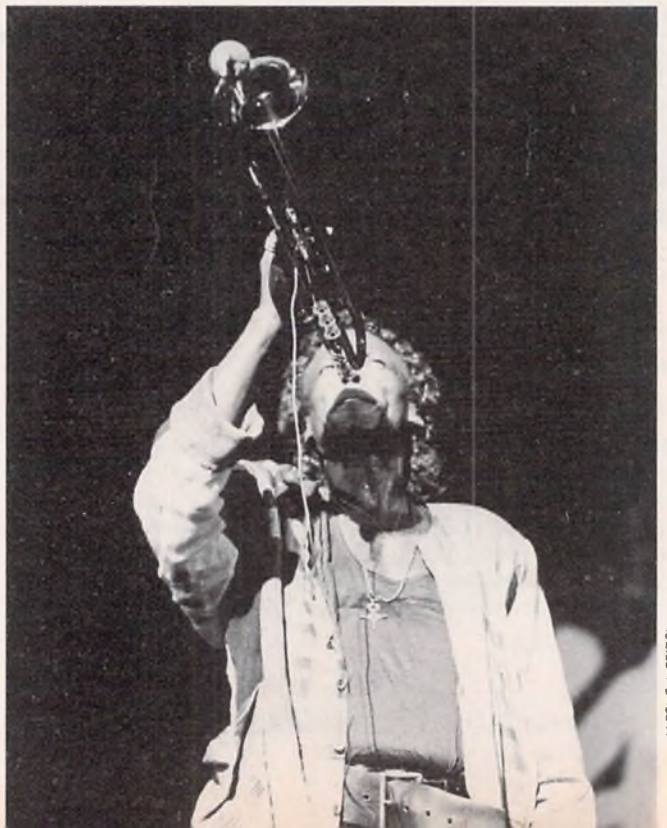
MD: Yeah, for 4,000 people, 3,000 people. . . And people, television, people have seen faces, half-smiles, cheap smiles, half-applause [*claps faintly*], you know? Expressions and movements that mean "I'm sorry," or "Yes." . . . They know when they look at you what is real or whether you're just bein' pretentious, or doin' this because you're really *in* the music. They can hear the notes, they can hear *everything*. They can look at you, and when you play acoustic, I mean, they could tell how awkward you must feel. They could see that, see your carriage. Don't you know when a guy wants to fight you? And don't you know when he's afraid or when he's not afraid? You've seen cheap smiles on faces on TV. You know when you do this [*makes gesture of a phony facial expression*].

JE: Yeah. There's another job goin' on just to be on stage.

MD: Yeah. Well, you know, if you could hear it, you know you're givin' it to 'em, you don't have to do that. The applause, if they don't like it, they don't like it. And they usually do like it if you spend some time doin' it. You can tell the hard ones, why it's takin' some time. Most white people used to think, and the critics used to think, that black people just picked up this instrument and they did it because they all have rhythm. It's not so. A lot of people do a lot of workin' in music. You can tell Herbie put a lot of work into the piano. Ahmad Jamal. . . I can't see that in some piano players. If [Herbie] can prepare, then he can make you like what he wrote in 1988, or the way he plays in 1988. In 1944, he couldn't play like that—'cause, in the first place, the police didn't like black musicians; 'cause they thought they stole all the white women. Like what Orson Welles did at the Mercury Theater and scared everybody. Now you can't scare people, no matter what you do, you know? People are too hip now. Everybody's got as much music as I know. Even if they're not playin' it.

JE: What if they are playin' it?

MD: Well, you know that. . . OK, we played last night, Adam got up to play. I had to tell Adam, "In the first place, you're white. And white guys take long phrases. So you gotta be aware of what



MITCHELL SEIDEL



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you can do. Don't start somethin' black and can't finish it, you know? Play what you can play. Don't try to do like what you see somebody else do. So, you know, set up the background so we can play comfortably." You gotta get rid of your ego. Nobody's gonna look at you and say, "That was a nice sound." You see the piano players in my band, and synthesizers, them motherf**kers have a habit of just turnin' it up real loud so that people can know what they're playin'. . . . But in order to do that, you have to learn how to play like that. You know, you just can't say, "Let me play."

JE: Yeah. It's not just going to come out.

MD: Well, it's accordin' to what you learned. Adam used to tell me, "Guess what I'm learnin' in my class." And it's still the old stuff that they're teachin'. The bebopper stuff. I told Adam, "Even if you have to get somebody else's personality, borrow it from him." You know what I mean? Like, if I'm gonna play basketball, I'm gonna do it like Magic [Johnson]. You know? It's not yours but at least you're doin' like he is. And pretty soon it might get to be yours.

JE: Is that something you followed when you were first coming up?

MD: Yeah . . . I've always wanted to play like Dizzy or . . . shit, there's so many guys . . . there's 10 f**kin' trumpet players; you gotta follow what you like about 'em. . . . If you gonna be a player and you wanna solo, you gotta get the great soloists and see why they did certain things, you know? See where they come from. If they're comin' from Texas, or did they have a Baptist upbringing. Most soul singers sung in church. That's why they sound like that. They ad lib off the notes, which is flamenco music, the scale, like Arabic music, like Jewish folk songs, and stuff. Gypsies. That's like Baptists. Most white singers sing straight. They're just gettin' to play like soul music, you know. They copy, they borrowed sounds.

JE: So when you talk about soloing, do you just mean improvising?

MD: Yeah.

JE: How does that fit in with the players in your band that may not have the links to the history of jazz, that would give them that kind of tradition or basis?

MD: They have to find out what they like. Say I'm a piano player—so if I had any sense at all, I would have to go with Herbie, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett. Herbie can't play like Keith, and Chick can't play like Keith. Nobody plays like Keith. Chick can't play like Herbie, but Herbie might be able to play like Chick; I doubt it because Chick plays like he would play drums. He uses his hands

and he can only play *one* tempo, you know. Like the way I like to hear him. And that's, a medium tempo like this [gestures]. And the reason he can play like that, at that tempo, is 'cause he makes up his mind. With that tempo you have to make up your mind right away. You know, you can't be thinkin' of bein' cute.

JE: It was a different thing back then, when you first started with more than one keyboard player and it was Herbie or Chick or Keith or Joe Zawinul. And that was a different scene than it is now with more than one keyboard player. Or is it the same? Are we talking about the same kind of thing?

MD: No, you're talkin' about two different things. You're talkin' about orchestration and composition. I'm talkin' about what would a guy do to be a soloist. He has to copy either one of those three.

JE: But were those guys doing that when they hit your band or did they come into it like you were working with Herbie?

MD: I remember he was playin' like Bud Powell. Tryin' to play like Bud, but to his technique he started adding doing like Bud and somethin' else, he played a *style*. He also, we introduced him to playin' like Ahmad Jamal, fakin' like that on a ballad, it's a medium tempo ballad. All three of them play the shit out of ballads. And that's where you can tell they do their own sound. And it's also like Art Tatum. You have to go past all those great soloists like Art Tatum. And you got that honky tonk music, boogie woogie, Lux Lewis, things like that. They're doin' it now. Like Huey Lewis and the News, that's all that is [hums a few bars of one of their recent songs]. That sound is honky tonk music. I heard a lot of it lately. "The thing of rock & roll" . . . *The Heart Of Rock & Roll!* [continues to hum a few bars of the same song]. Honky tonk players play it. But you gotta realize it's 1988 and the shit rubs off on you whether you like it or not. All the television shows, all the MTV, and all the black soul sound. And when you write music, it's *gotta* seep in. It's *gotta* be like that. You know? That's what the top ten says—that everybody's alike. Those that aren't in the top ten, you probably get some good music. *Beethoven* was one of the top ten. Not the best, but one of the favorites. . . . In Beethoven's era, it was like the top ten. You know, five composers that played what the queen would like, what the king would like. But the ones that they didn't like had a new sound, you know? They probably sounded like John Cage [laughs]. They say, "We can't use that, we can't do no waltzes." . . . It's just havin' an open mind. You just can't say, "I'm gonna be like him." "I'm gonna be better than him." You can't get in that kind of thing. . . . The reason you say you can do it is because whoever does it does it so good that it *fits*. You know? But when you leave them and you don't hear it, you can't do it. Like if you look at a painting, like cubism, man, you know, and you say, "Oh yeah!" But if you hadn't seen a cube, it wouldn't have been there. Bob Berg, I used to tell, "Bob, why do you play in this spot? You not supposed to play this spot." He said, "It sounded so good, Chief, I had to play it." I said, "The reason it sounded so good is because you wasn't playin'." As soon as he jumps in, he f**ks it up. It's a hard thing playin' with a group.

JE: Is that related to your counsel on "Play what's not there?" That's the flip side?

MD: I was only sayin' that sometime when you look at another form of art that you can see, maybe a guy wants to play out of key for about four or five bars . . . sometimes you see something so bold with your eyes that you say, "Why can't I play what I hear?" You know? "Why should I be afraid to play that?"

JE: Well, was is it? Why is that? Because of the ego?

MD: That's the critics. Critics do that to a musician. [The musicians] want to impress the critics. Herbie, we used to go to Germany. I hate to go to Germany with Herbie.

JE: 'Cause Germany means something to Herbie?

MD: Well, his wife is from Germany, and there are a lot of good musicians in Germany. Piano players have discipline. They say, "You *must* practice eight hours." Herb pulls back his sleeves and shit, and he plays a whole f**kin' concert, a concerto off of *My*



MILES DAVIS' EQUIPMENT

Miles Davis has been playing a Martin B¹ trumpet (via the G. Leblanc Corp.), complete with a .460-inch bore and five-inch diameter bell. He has alternated between a black and blue lacquer finish on his horns with gold-plated trim. The trumpet has been designed by Larry Ramirez at G. Leblanc Corp. and includes a custom-made wireless Sampson CT6 microphone with a wireless AKG transmitter and CX1 capsule. Over the years, Miles has played more than just a trumpet. His live performances clearly demonstrate an interest in orchestral keyboards with a style that helps to direct or augment the music of the other members of his band. On hand are an Oberheim OBXa and a Yamaha DX7. At home, he works with a Roland D50.

MILES DAVIS SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

THE COMPLETE BIRTH OF THE COOL—Capitol 11026
 COLLECTOR'S ITEMS—Prestige 24022E
 CONCEPTION—Prestige 7744E
 DIG—Prestige 24054
 EARLY MILES—Prestige 7674E
 GREEN HAZE—Prestige 24064
 TALLEST TREES—Prestige 24012
 TUNE UP—Prestige 24077
 WORKIN' & STEAMIN'—Prestige 24034
 MILES DAVIS—Prestige 24001
 CHRONICLE: THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS, 1951-1956—Prestige 012-2
 HI-HAT ALL STARS, LIVE 1955—Fresh Sound 302
 AT CARNEGIE HALL—Columbia 8612E
 I LIVE MILES MORE MUSIC FROM THE LEGENDARY CARNEGIE HALL CONCERT—Columbia CJ-40609
 MILES AHEAD—Columbia CJ-40784
 MILESTONES—Columbia CJ-40837
 'ROUND ABOUT MIDNIGHT—Columbia CJ-40610
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 SKETCHES OF SPAIN—Columbia CJ-40578
 AT NEWPORT—Columbia 8978
 DIRECTIONS—Columbia KC2-36472
 CIRCLE IN THE ROUND—Columbia KC2-36278
 MILES SMILES—Columbia 9401
 E.S.P.—Columbia 9150
 SORCERER—Columbia 9532
 NEFERITI—Columbia 9594
 MILES IN THE SKY—Columbia 9628
 FILLES DE KILIMANJARO—Columbia 9750
 IN A SILENT WAY—Columbia CJ-40580
 WATER BABIES—Columbia 34396
 BITCHES BREW—Columbia J2C-40577
 AT FILLMORE—Columbia 30038
 BLACK BEAUTY—CBS Sony SOPJ 39/40
 JACK JOHNSON—Columbia 30455
 LIVE-EVIL—Columbia 30954
 ON THE CORNER—Columbia 31906
 IN CONCERT—Columbia 32092
 BIG FUN—Columbia 32866
 GET UP WITH IT—Columbia 33236
 AGHARTA—Columbia 33967
 DARK MAGUS—CBS Sony SOPZ 96/7
 THE MAN WITH THE HORN—Columbia 36790
 WE WANT MILES—Columbia C2-38005
 STAR PEOPLE—Columbia 38657
 DECOY—Columbia 38991
 YOU'RE UNDER ARREST—Columbia 40023
 MILES AND COLTRANE—Columbia CJ-44052
 TUTU—Warner Bros. 25490-1
 SIESTA—Warner Bros. 25655-1

Funny Valentine. . . . But the drive that he [the white critic] gives a black man is to try to strive to be good. But it's also an Uncle Tom way of thinkin'. It's like a white collar Uncle Tom. You know, "I wear a tie and shirt 'cause I'm comin' downtown to shop and I don't want anybody to think I'm stealin'." So they dress up. It's also a bad way to go into music. Some people who go in like that are very good musicians, but that's it. They have no ideas.

JE: No heart?

MD: Yeah. They just play for. . . .

JE: They're playing for other people instead of for themselves?

MD: Well, they're playin' so a white critic will like 'em, you know?

JE: Black critics are like that?

MD: I don't know any black critics.

JE: Critics are making musicians always look over their shoulders?

MD: They usually do, you know. I know a couple of guys that really . . . one time I had Jimmy Cobb, and a critic said he sounded like he had an axe in his hand. Which sometimes he did. But what he really didn't notice was that Jimmy used to drop tempo a lot of times, you know. Maybe he didn't know what to say. Constructive criticism. He should've said, "I didn't mean nothin'." But a day later, the critic came down to see us and Jimmy said, "There's that motherf**ker. I ought to go punch him in the mouth." A critic'll do that. A second thought goin' in your head.

JE: Do critics have a place?

MD: They have a place, yeah. But, it's just that the musician shouldn't cater to 'em. If your own peers don't tell you how sad you are, the critic can't tell you, you know? A lot of times a critic says, "That sounds good," and you think it sounds like shit. But it's individual taste. And it does destroy a lot of careers.

JE: And that's why it's important to have a musical community? Where people talk to each other?

MD: Yeah.

JE: Nobody's out there in a race with each other. Other artists are not competition. They are fellow artists. I mean, that mentality wasn't there back in the '40s and '30s when Lester Young would come to Kansas City and try and blow out Coleman Hawkins. Is that a game that critics made up?

MD: No. But that's the trouble about it. . . . He told me about Coleman Hawkins and his old lady.

JE: Who did?

MD: Lester Young. We went on a tour together. He said he been waitin' on Coleman to come to Kansas City a long time. But his old lady was, "Where you goin'?" Can you imagine that? Coleman's in town and he's got his horn. Ready to go out. So he knocked her down and went out. And when he came back he [made love to her].

JE: So where's that at in the context of musical community?

MD: Because they want to play together. Usually guys who want to play together get ideas from each other.

JE: They were playing together. They weren't seeing each other as competition in a bad sense.

MD: Yeah, it was competition.

JE: But in a good sense.

MD: Yeah. They both played two different styles. Bean [Hawkins] could never play like that. I used to rehearse the band. In those days, guys jammed together, you got ideas. Lionel Hampton wasn't the only guy throwing sticks on the floor. That came from St. Louis. When I was there, guys used to play like that. If a band wanted a show drummer, they'd come through St. Louis. Fats Navarro and I used to play together. He'd come get me and we'd

MILES DAVIS

By Gene Santoro

Part 1: The Enabler



There's an archetypal story told by nearly every musician I've ever talked to who's worked with Miles Davis. Melted down, its various versions run together something like this: "We were sitting in the studio jamming, and the tapes were rolling like they always were," says MilesMan. "Miles was just standing with his back to us, and all of a sudden he spun around and looked right at me and said, '(Fill in the blank with some very specific directive like, "Don't let me hear you playin' none of that bebop shit," or, "Why don't you learn how to leave some space in there?").' It was about the only straight direction I ever got from him."

There are other, more revealing angles to it, as Herbie Hancock has related different times to different folks, including on the excellent PBS-aired documentary *Miles Ahead*. "He told us not to practice,"

marvels the keyboard great. "He said he was paying us to practice on the bandstand, at the gig; he wanted the freshness of conception that would come about that way. It's an amazing idea, being paid to practice in front of an audience."

He amplified that basic idea earlier this year in *db* (June, '88). As he told Josef Woodard, echoing his former boss, "Many times, I'll start with an idea and something else will come out of it. Rather than me try to follow the idea I originally had, I just go with what I have." When Woodard asked him if he'd learned some of his lessons about leading groups from Miles, Hancock replied, "Absolutely. About teamwork, listening, and not being afraid to lean on the band for ideas and direction—allowing space for the band to be part of the direction. Miles never told us what to play, never told us what notes to play."

Welcome to the through-the-looking-glass world of Miles Davis, bandleader. If there are as many styles of leading a group as there are leaders, Miles' approach has still got to rank among the most unusual—and, when the band lineup is equal to it, one of the most challenging and stimulating. Basically, it combines leadership with democracy.

Imagine this Godfather standing in the studio, off to one side, silent, listening, only very occasionally even nodding his head to indicate some form of dis/approval for their initiative. The posture allows him to feign omniscience and maintain his necessary critical distance from whatever is evolving; it also allows him to get people to do things he wants them to do, but without having to spell out just what that is, what the implications of any particular move will be. It frees up the horizon, and lets—in fact, makes—all that work itself out, in its own time, along its own dynamic, for each of the individuals involved. The sleight of hand involved is that, unlike a true *padrino*, it seems Miles rarely has a hidden agenda: he's there to hear what happens, and then deduce where it can go. Thus his attitude forces the players to be participants in the



BERNIE THRASHER



GIUSEPPE G. PINO



VERYL C. OKLAND

democratic model that we call a jazz combo even as it helps to clarify his next direction in the leader's restlessly searching mind.

But leading a band is more than a matter of personal style; to a large and very real extent, it helps determine the shape of music history. A couple of key examples should make how that comes down obvious.

Everyone knows (despite James Lincoln Collier's racist denigrations in his feeble attempt at a "revisionist" biography) how Duke Ellington set up what was essentially a closed feedback loop between himself and his band members. He kept his players on salary and used the studio and bandstand as compositional sketch pads. If during the course of a workout or jam a Johnny Hodges or a Tricky Sam Nanton or a Juan Tizol hooked a melodic idea that grabbed the Maestro, he'd seize it (sometimes with credit, sometimes not) and weave his rich orchestral tapestry around it. In the process, it would become a total composition, something living in a fully ramified way, quite apart from the scrawl or flash that had given it birth.

There's an odd way in which the nature of that relationship—which has functioned as a model for so many outstanding jazz leaders—helps explain why so few of Duke's sidemen ever went on to become imposing bandleaders in their own right, even aside from the very real socio-economic considerations involved. Everything that came out of Ellington's band flowed through his hands and was therefore shaped in his image, regardless of its genesis. Sure, he appropriated the players' input, and custom-wrote parts and solos with their personal attacks very much in mind, but in the end the overall sound, the nature of the material, became embedded in the ongoing body of work that was the Duke Ellington Band—despite changes of personnel, even despite their staggeringly individual voices.

Partly, of course, this resulted from the nature of a big band and the simple fact that its material had to be written in order to keep it coherent onstage; but that's not the only reason. Whenever Ellington shifted directions, the move tended to come in formal shifts, a change of compositional formats—from tunes to suites, for instance. Once he'd evolved it during his early days, the characteristic imprint of his sound re-

clockwise from far left: Miles during a late '50s recording session; the sextet with Paul Chambers, Percy Brice sitting in, 1957; with Wayne Shorter and Jack DeJohnette, Antibes, 1969; with (from left) DeJohnette, Airtio, Dave Holland, Chick Corea, and Steve Grossman, 1970.

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mained, overall, fairly consistent.

Except for his own sound on trumpet—and even that has veered in different directions over the course of 40 years—there is no such sonic continuity in the equally long, equally fruitful, equally seminal career of Miles Dewey Davis III. Deliberately. Where Ellington's various lineups purposely maintained a strong link with their predecessors via compositions and arrangements, however elastic, Miles' groups are about change, often to the point of radical discontinuity. Each of them projects a divergent but characteristic feel that very much reflects not only the time and place surrounding that band whenever it flourished but its own internal makeup as well. It looks real simple, on paper, in hindsight.

Gather boppers who are big-band alumni, get big-band arrangers to radically revamp voicings and section work, and you've got the basic recipe—genius is always the unpredictable ingredient—for something like *Birth Of The Cool*. Lose Cannonball Adderley, and the Coltrane-fired quintet that results speeds into regions Adderley would never have disturbed. Replace Red Garland with Bill Evans, and suddenly *Kind Of Blue* creates a kind of revolutionary focus for the various paths that explorers as temperamentally and sonically unlike as Ornette and Mingus and George Russell and Sun Ra were following out. Use Tony Williams' fractured time signatures and frenetic pulses as the foundation to build a lineup upon, and the centripetal forces thrust outward to power Hancock, Shorter, Carter, and the Boss Himself while they undermine the



JAN PERSSON

Miles with John McLaughlin and Palle Mikkelborg, Copenhagen, 1985.

notions of the hard-bop idiom, and thus allow the music to expand and be reformulated. Become intrigued by Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone so that you delve into electronics and the favored ax of the postwar baby boom, the electric guitar, and jazz-rock fusion spirals out. Obliterate the individual identities of your band, even to the point of refusing to list credits on your albums, because you become obsessed with textures rather than solos, and you wind up with the studio-intensive, rock-funk experiments of *On The Corner*, where the endless ribbons of tape can be edited and mixed in ultramodern fashion into nothing like what the individual band members may have had in mind when they were jamming in the studio. And so on, and so on.

From one perspective, then, Miles Davis as leader is the epitome of Zen, the blank shrug that answers the clichéd question of which, creatively speaking, came first, the chicken or the egg, the band or the concept. From another, he's haunted—so fixed and focused on the never-ending flux whipping up the currents of human life that he is driven by mortality and by mortality's flip side, the urge to write your name somewhere so others coming later will see you've passed this way. His method is to gather Change's inevitable winds around him, to become the eye of the hurricane

time after time—puns intended. And so he deliberately places his own creativity on the line, surrenders it to be at the mercy of the band he heads; his course is set to a large degree by the sounds raging from his personnel. Of course he *picks* them, but less to align with too many preconceived notions of where he's headed than because he's reacting to how they might get him someplace—and this is the key operable word in Miles' vocabulary—new.

What new *is* or will be, exactly, arises from the friction, the tension, the dialectic between Miles' studied technique of near non-direction and the band members' evolving sense of community and purpose, their gleaning from his oblique hints what salient points he's hearing about what they're doing. It completes an ironic circle, to say the least, one Duke's Men would never have had to deal with. Miles' players are effectively always trying to guess what he's making of their attempts to guess what's on his mind, when in the end, of course, what he wants—and when it works, what he gets—is what's on *their* minds: he wants them to plot out their own methods for having the musical conversations we call improvisation. If it seems convoluted on paper, and if it's shredded more than one sideman's nerves, it just happens to be a remarkably flexible and democratic way to cohere a group. With the wrong individuals, if they lack either discipline or initiative to the large extent Miles

demands, or even with the right individuals on the wrong night, it can make for more of a muddle than a statement. But then, that too is precisely Miles' point.

Miles himself spoke to me about it this way: "I don't lead musicians, man. They lead me. I listen to them to learn what they can do best. Like Daryl Jones play a bass line, and he forget it. I won't. I'll say, 'Daryl, you did this last night, do it again.' He'll go, 'What?' I'll say, 'It's right here on the tape [of the show]. That's what gives playing that feeling, like when you see a pretty woman and say, 'Shit, wait a minute.' Listening to what they do and feeding it back to them is how any good bandleader should lead his musicians.

"I go nuts with the first interpretation of a piece. The musicians can f**k me around; if they do it wrong the first time, I'll go off. I'll say, 'Think about the note, think about what you gonna do.' Then again you have to think, they're trying to do what you want 'em to do. So sometimes I'll say, 'Okay, show me what you want to do'—which is worse, nine times out of 10 [laughs]. But you have to have that give and take. That's why athletes have coaches, know what I mean?"

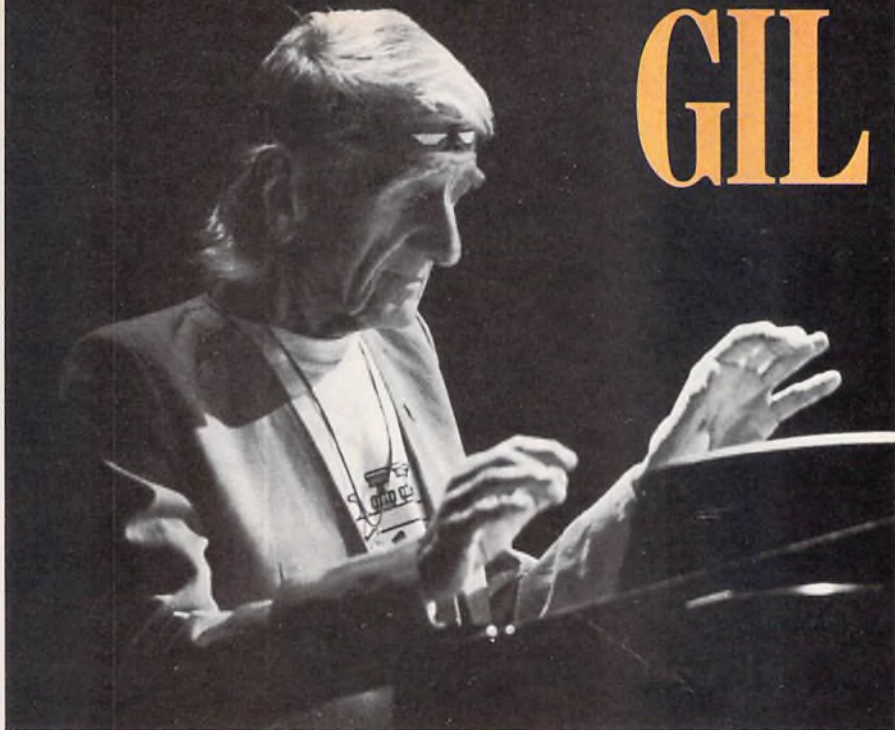
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Part II, to run in the November issue, will consider the ongoing effect Miles has had on key former sidemen over the past 40 years.—Ed.

GIL EVANS

THE TOUCH OF SVENGLALI

By Howard Mandel



The record jacket illustration for *My Fair Lady* is recalled from childhood: George Bernard Shaw, bemused eyebrows and whiskers, peering down from the clouds, strings on his fingers reaching to his immortal characters Dr. Henry Higgins and Eliza Dolittle. This image returned as I listened to the Gil Evans Orchestra at Kaufman auditorium of the 92nd St. Y in New York City during June's JVC Jazz Festival. Evans died in his sleep in Mexico last March at age 75, peritonitis ending his ripe, unregretted life. Since his passing, the man's esthetic example and contributions to music remain far more palpable than any imagined manipulations of a ghost.

Evans' musical family—some of it, anyway—was onstage at the Y, relaxed yet restless, eager to play. His widow Anita, now the band's musical director, stood aside a rack of bells and cymbals; their fresh-faced son Miles (named after Gil's most notable colleague), trumpet in hand, looked to see if everyone expected had arrived. Lew Soloff sat beside Miles, his horn hovering over the shoulders of saxists George Adams and Chris Hunter. Synthesist Pete Levin set up on the far right, behind guitarist Hiram Bullock, who tuned with ostentatious carelessness. Percussionist Manolo Badrena ran out from the wings late, squeezing his way past trombonists Dave Taylor and Dave Bargeron to get to his congas.

There were other soloists, including brass players Hannibal Marvin Peterson and Shunzo Ono. But every member had an important role, if not a featured part: bari saxist Roger Rosenberg, bassist Victor Bailey, and traps drummer Sue

Evans (not blood kin) no less than concertmaster Gil Goldstein at the Steinway grand. Except for Goldstein's place front and center, and the uncramped seating they all enjoyed, it could have been a Monday night at Sweet Basil, where Evans' orchestra established a relatively long-term residency that resulted in his most recent live recordings and a heightened profile for the ectomorphic composer/arranger who slouched at the piano and seemed to hardly raise a finger to direct his band.

Those Monday nights were thrilling. Typically, the bar was full long before Evans' crew had gathered, and remained crowded with musicians and critics (for pleasure, on their nights off), scene makers and stone fans—listeners open to whimsy and risks—as long as Evans and company extemporized on the fascinating repertoire he'd developed out of 50 years of American popular song and a world of musical traditions.

Evans served up unpredictably expansive suites that began as disparate bubbles of noise, then swirled and steamed as if chemical reactions were taking place. From the playfully spirited competition of his musicians jostling to be heard within the thickening brew, a staggering theme would arise—one of Evans' own, *Gone*, perhaps, or *Jelly Roll*, or *Hotel Me* (co-written with Miles Davis), or Monk's *Friday The 13th*, Mingus' *Orange Was The Color Of Her Dress*, or Jimi Hendrix's *Stone Free*. Not just one theme, actually; more often two or three recognizable motifs developed, pulling against each other and co-existing like the simultaneous meanings of a conundrum's solution.



Last photo of Gil: Delphi Theater, Berlin Jazz Festival, December '87.

Soon, something heroic happened. It might be a monstrous solo, played by Soloff or Adams or Hunter or Bullock, David Sanborn, Howard Johnson, Tom Malone, Jimmy Knepper, Bob Stewart, Sonny Fortune (in earlier days, Cannonball Adderley, Phil Woods, Doc Severinsen, Clark Terry, Johnny Coles, Urbie Green, Budd Johnson, Billy Harper, John Abercrombie, Tony Williams, Hubert Laws . . . whoever unpacked with Evans was a quality musician). It might be a shift of gears that simply *had* to be spontaneous, no way could anyone (but Gil?) know that that juxtaposition of tonalities or those polyrhythms would work. It might be the gorgeous roar of massed and clashing coloration—no accident Evans became an arranger, as he loved sounds for their own sakes, and celebrated them the way you might invite all your best friends to one bash of a party. By the end of an evening in Basil, you were at such a party. Giving yourself to the music, which rocked with joy and passion, you participated just like the musicians, who themselves were in the dark about what might occur next.

“I never knew what was going to happen,” admits Arthur Blythe, part of the late '70s Evans gang documented on the stunning studio album *Priestess*, the live-in-Italy set *Parabola*, and the two volumes *Live At The Public Theater*. “There was always a free improvisation element. He'd let you find that space for yourself; then there would be section things to play. It was a loose band, but *structured* loose. I enjoyed that concept. It was fun, and challenging, too.”

Soloff concurs. “Gil's genius was more than his sound, it was the way he performed,” says the trumpeter, who joined Evans in 1966 and never left, even during the five years he was traveling constantly with *Blood, Sweat & Tears*. “Gil had a certain sense of freedom. He had the colossal nerve to experiment in public, and that inspired his musicians to feel freer than in any other circumstances. There was a voluntary discipline he received from everyone; he criticized with humor, and he was never disrespectful in the slightest. He gave respect and got it back. That's what he was about.”

Evans was the rare creator who respected his audience as well as his collaborators (ranging from Skinnay Ennis to Bob Hope, through Miles Davis and Gerry Mulligan, to Steve Lacy, Helen Merrill, and David Bowie); he believed that freedom, spontaneity, excitement, and intelligence were as attractive to others as they were to him, and that large ensembles could function on those principles as well as small ones. Few other post-World War II arrangers were so inclined. Thad Jones certainly had as recognizable a sound, but in the words of bandleader/arranger Angel Rangelov, who studied informally with them both, Jones' style was more tightly organized and conventionally structured.

“With Gil, it was like hearing birds in the forest: you don't know how it started, or where it's going to end. It was like the whole performance was improvised, and there were times Gil played that you'd be lifted in the air, floating on the improvisation all night. It was like, ‘Let's try *this*.’ And nobody would get lost. They'd try to catch where he was going by hearing his three notes on the piano.”

It wasn't *all* improvised, though, and Rangelov thinks Evans had a natural sense of form. “I'd take tapes of my work up to his apartment, and he'd dub everything. Then we'd listen to the tape together, and—imagine his palm was wide-open—he'd close his fist at just the right moment to indicate where voicings could be tighter. Sometimes he looked at my scores, and wouldn't say anything for a half-hour. Then he'd circle something, and say, ‘Take this out. Change here.’ He was a better teacher than the conservatory. He could communicate where to push or take the weight out of a score, judging mostly by ear.”

Evans achieved his early jazz reputation

during the late '40s as Claude Thornhill's bop chart-maker; his versions of *Anthropology* and *Donna Lee* (on *The Uncollected Claude Thornhill*) were clear and linear, notable for the expanded instrumentation of french horns, tuba, and electric guitar (at first, the overlooked Barry Galbraith's) that he continued to employ. But at some point (after helping birth the cool, sketching Spain and *Porgy And Bess* for Miles D., crafting *Guitar Forms* for Kenny Burrell, discovering Hendrix?) Evans chafed at the rigidities characteristic of big bands, and sought to give his players more room for self-expression.

“Gil encouraged us to play unison melodies each in our own way, rather than everybody exactly the same,” explains Lew Soloff. “If we sight read a part down together, he'd say it sounded like a vaudeville show band. He hated that, and wanted people to phrase it differently, together. If we played a part, he wanted us to play emotionally, and use our abilities to cry. That's something he loved about Sanborn—his ability to cry in the music.”

“Gil was gentle. In his band we used our own judgements about when to play solos, and sometimes there were hogs. Horn players, especially, would often jump in. I remember him saying once to the rhythm section, ‘Don't let those male chauvinist horn players wipe out your solos.’ And he told me, about lead trumpet playing, ‘In my band, high doesn't always mean loud.’ Another Gilism: when I was leaving *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, I said to him, ‘You know, we're not making what we *were*, but I still get a paycheck every week.’ And he answered, ‘Convenience is the hardest habit to break.’ I considered Gil one of my best friends. He's an irreplaceable figure.”

Not only irreplaceable—there's no musical figure anything like him. Evans' influence has been widely felt—his is the light touch so many television sitcom

composers strive to emulate. In jazz, listen to drummer Bob Moses' audacious orchestrations, remember Baird Hershey's Year of the Ear, consider where Miles Davis picked up pitting Kenny Garrett's flute against a funky bass line in a foreboding, nearly silent background.

And then there's his heir: “I started working in my father's band in the spring of '83,” says Miles Evans. “I went to England with him and took my trumpet along to keep in practice. It was a mostly British band and I sat in on rehearsals three hours a day for three days. In April of that year we began at Sweet Basil and I was there. That summer we went to Japan on tour with Miles and I played there, too. Then at Avery Fisher Hall, and the Hollywood Bowl.”

“I'm very comfortable leading the band. My musical sensibilities come mostly from Gil Evans and Miles Davis—their later stuff like Miles' *Bitches Brew*, *Live-Evil*, *Jack Johnson*, and *On The Corner*, and Gil's *Svengali*, *There Comes A Time*, and the Ampex record. What I picked up from them was keeping with the times—they didn't stay in the '40s. Musically speaking, my father helped me understand chords, harmonies, and voicings. Lew Soloff and his teacher Edward Trentell and Vince Panzerella helped me on trumpet.”

“Miles says he's cursed,” continues Evans. “His music *must* change. That's how I feel. I want to honor what we've been doing in the band, but I don't want to be on a power trip. There will be changes—I can't describe them at this time—but they'll come gradually and naturally. The band's music will change, improve, and develop just as Gil and Miles did from the *Birth Of The Cool* through their big band collaborations to their most recent originals.”

The elder Evans was an untrained master of psychology, amazingly sensitive



Gil Evans Orchestra at Monterey, 1966.

Gil and Miles during the recording of Miles Ahead, 1957.



ording of

to character, mood, and context, which is why his classic (occasionally uncredited) arrangements for Davis, his film score for *Absolute Beginners*, his overdubs of Airto Moreira and Flora Purim on *Where Flamingos Fly*, and such final works as his heartrending *Collaboration* with vocalist Helen Merrill and spare duet *Paris Blues* with Steve Lacy succeed despite their differences. Does the Gil Evans Orchestra have a future without him?

"We did summer festivals in Perugia, and Sicily," says Soloff, a very modest but pivotal anchorman in the band. "We have some good leads on some further bookings—Anita's handling all that now. There are a couple of records out in Japan on King—*Bud & Bird*, and *Farewell*, which has just been released [*Bud & Bird* is now available in the U.S.— see discography]. In my opinion, the band and the spirit of Gil Evans can survive indefinitely, if we can continue to *create*."

"I don't believe our purpose is solely to perform Gil's orchestrations—any good band could do that, if they were published and rehearsed. But another great thing about Gil was the encouragement he gave people in his band to write! And what people brought in would always bear the earmark of Gil, because he was there so strongly."

"If the music continues to live and grow, that's the essence to me. To have new music continue to come from the band—in my opinion, that would be the important part. I think that's what he wanted. Gil would have encouraged that."

"Miles Evans has tremendous potential, as a bandleader, a trumpet player, and a keyboard man," says Soloff. "He's conducting, and I think he'll rise to the occasion. As for Gil—I still feel his spirit around the band."

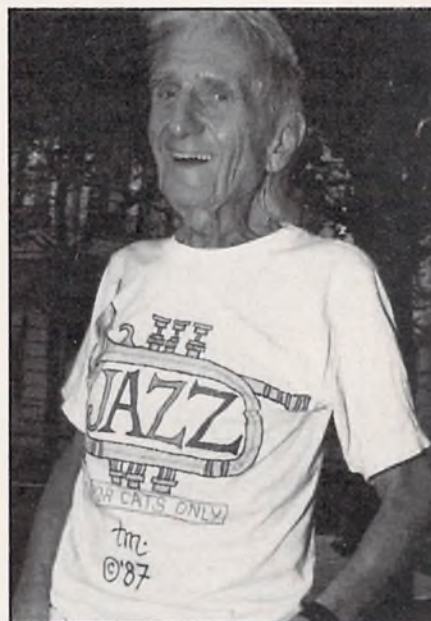
That's what Miles Evans said, too, at the close of the JVC fest concert, after introducing the members of the band. "At this point, I usually say, 'And our fearless leader.' Well, he's not here—in body. But what the hell: and our fearless leader, Gil Evans!" From the audience came a wave of deeply appreciative applause.

Though Evans said offhandedly after an interview once, "When I die, I won't be surprised—I'll just pop off," no one wants to give Gil Evans up. So he's much closer to us than heaven, or some piano bench in the sky. Gil Evans' spirit resides in the hearts and minds of those musicians and listeners who heard him. As audiophile-delighting CDs such as *There Comes A Time* (RCA/Bluebird) and *The Individualism Of Gil Evans* (Verve)—restored under Evans' supervision—are hailed by the press (see CD reviews, **db**, June '88) and promoted by word of mouth, new fans will flock to the man who founded all-inclusive jazz.



Gil conducts 19-piece orchestra with Miles for T.V. on "The Sound of Miles Davis," 1959.

Gil Evans brought his love for Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Charlie Parker, and honestly inspired American pop together with the modernist inevitabilities of Third Stream, the timeless percussion and ancient melodic strains of non-industrialized societies, the electronic technology of the contemporary world, and an abiding faith in personal freedom. Our music can't afford to ignore Svengali's example or his contributions. **db**



ANGEL RANGEL

GIL EVANS SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

- BUD & BIRD—Pro Jazz 671
 - LIVE AT SWEET BASIL, VOL. II—Gramavision 18-8708-2
 - LIVE AT SWEET BASIL, VOL. I—Gramavision 18-8610-1
 - PARABOLA—Horo 31-32
 - PRIESTESS—Antilles 1010
 - LIVE AT THE PUBLIC THEATER (NEW YORK 1980), VOL. 1—Trio 9233
 - LIVE AT THE PUBLIC THEATER (NEW YORK 1980), VOL. 2—Trio 25016
 - WHERE FLAMINGOS FLY—Artists House 14
 - SVENGALI—Atlantic 90048-1
 - PACIFIC STANDARD TIME—Blue Note LA-461-H2
 - THE ARRANGER'S TOUCH—Prestige 24049
 - THE MUSIC OF JIMI HENDRIX—RCA CPL1-0667
 - THERE COMES A TIME—RCA/Bluebird 5783-2
 - INTO THE HOT—MCA 29034
 - OUT OF THE COOL—MCA 29033
 - LITTLE WING (LIVE IN GERMANY)—Inner City 1110
 - BLUES IN ORBIT—Inner City 3041
 - WITH KENNY BURRELL & PHIL WOODS—MGM/Verve V6-8838
 - THE INDIVIDUALISM OF GIL EVANS—Verve 833 804-2
- #### with Steve Lacy
- PARIS BLUES—Owl 049
- #### with Helen Merrill
- COLLABORATION—Emarcy 834 205-2
- #### with Miles Davis
- MILES AHEAD—Columbia 8633
 - PORGY AND BESS—Columbia 8085
 - SKETCHES OF SPAIN—Columbia 8271
 - QUIET NIGHTS—Columbia 8906
 - THE COMPLETE BIRTH OF THE COOL—Capitol 11026
- #### arrangements heard on:
- ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS—EMI-Manhattan E11E-17182
 - THE CHARLIE PARKER STORY—Verve V6-8000
 - HELEN MERRILL: DREAM OF YOU—Emarcy 36078
 - THE UNCOLLECTED CLAUDE THORNHILL AND HIS ORCHESTRA 1947—Hindsight 108
 - THE MEMORABLE CLAUDE THORNHILL—Columbia 32906
 - NEW AMERICAN MUSIC: NEW YORK COMPOSERS OF THE 1970s—Folkways 33901
 - JAZZ IN REVOLUTION: BIG BANDS IN THE 1940s—New World 284

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



ORNETTE COLEMAN AND PRIME TIME

VIRGIN BEAUTY—Epic Portrait 44301: 3 WISHES; BOURGEOIS BOOGIE; HAPPY HOUR; VIRGIN BEAUTY; HEALING THE FEELING; SINGING IN THE SHOWER; DESERT PLAYERS; HONEYMOONERS; CHANTING; SPELLING THE ALPHABET; UNKNOWN ARTIST.

Personnel: Coleman, alto saxophone, trumpet, violin; Jerry Garcia (cuts 1,6,7), Bern Nix, Charles Ellerbee, electric guitar; Al McDowell, Chris Walker, electric bass; Denardo Coleman, drums, keyboards, percussion; Calvin Weston, drums.

★★★★

1987's *In All Languages* exposed the parallels between Ornette's quartet and Prime Time, but *Virgin Beauty* is the first album to integrate Prime Time's dense strata with the quartet's plaintive beauty. Coleman asserts that Prime Time is a band of free equals, but the band's improvisations are loosely arranged, with musicians given roles (not lines) to play. Often, *Virgin Beauty's* arrangements put Ornette up front and everyone else behind.

Coleman sails far above Prime Time's micro-tonal milling on the ballads *Virgin Beauty* and *Chanting*, that latter his prettiest trumpet piece in a decade. (Never mind it sounds like *Feels So Good* as a dirge.) Where Ornette dubs in a bit of trumpet or violin behind his alto, or leads the repeat-after-the-teacher game (*Spelling The Alphabet*), the music's hierarchical structure is clear. Theory aside, Ornette has always put trust in the basic and commonsense—like having one bass sing high and the other swing low. He triumphs by insistently investigating simplicity. What musician who relies on pet patterns as much as Ornette sounds so consistently alive?

Prime Time sounds more conservative, but more focused; *Bourgeois Boogie's* grazing-in-the-grass rhythm guitar doesn't hinder the union of dancing groove and dancing solo line. One reason *Virgin Beauty* is Prime Time's best is that the tunes spell out Ornette's elusive harmolodic alphabet. In its oversimplest form, a musical idea can be played at any tempo or key—an idea applicable to any music. On *Bourgeois Boogie*, the last line of the dippy hook jumps into doubletime on the last repeat, remarking its character. (That's what he calls rhythmic modulation.) On the delirious bar band tune *Happy Hour*—an oompah hoe-down—persistent guitars pass one whiny bent-string c&w/blues lick back and forth through several keys. The alto and electric bass dialogue before the close sounds so natural you forget how incongruous the com-

bination should be.

Jerry Garcia's on three cuts, slipping through the center or nibbling at the edges, but this isn't a full-scale collaboration. A team player, Garcia's one of three rocky guitarists, weaving an ensemble fabric. (If he seems an unlikely collaborator, check out his Ornette modulations on the Grateful Dead *Europe '72's Tennessee Jed*.) But if Jerry's not featured, his presence helps set the album's good-time boogie tone: the laughing-child *Singing In The Shower*, like *Happy Hour* and *3 Wishes*, is as buoyant and compelling as dance music gets. Prime Time is light on its beat—a miracle when the whole band's the rhythm section.

Ornette has said the Third World has the only avant garde music left, and has related Prime Time to Morocco's Jujouka horns-and-percussion choirs. *3 Wishes'* line is pan-Islamic, a belly-dancing snakecharmer's descending slink. Throughout, the rattle of up to three guitars underscores the increasingly obvious kinship between Prime Time's music and guitar-heavy Aropop (never mind that Ornette organized the band long before soukous caught on). With Dead Heads in his corner, infectious dance beats, and Ornette's splendid alto out front, *Virgin Beauty* deserves to be a hit.

—kevin whitehead



BETTY CARTER

LOOK WHAT I GOT!—Verve 835 661: LOOK WHAT I GOT; THAT SUNDAY, THAT SUMMER; THE MAN I LOVE; ALL I GOT; JUST LIKE THE MOVIES (TIME); IMAGINATION; MR. GENTLEMAN (SEQUEL TO "TIGHT"); MAKE IT LAST; THE GOOD LIFE.

Personnel: Carter, vocals; Don Braden, tenor saxophone; Benny Green, Stephen Scott, piano; Michael Bowie, Irv Coleman, bass; Winard Harper, Lewis Nash, drums.

★★★★

The six-year drought is over, Betty Carter has a new album. The release of *Look What I Got!* coincides with Verve's reissue of her Bet-Car catalog: if this just-ended dry spell seemed interminable, consider that most of Carter's recordings since her last major label date in 1963 were self-produced. Those with a brazen view of "the industry" will compare Verve's commitment with the proverbial drop in the bucket. A cloudburst might be a more accurate metaphor, because, without follow-up, soaking rains, there will be little lasting effect.

Still, *Look What I Got!* is an album to be drenched in. Carter is at her captivating best, velvet soft one moment, steely the next, infus-

ing each note with an assertive, embracing humanity. This is not an album to analyze or place in historical perspective, notwithstanding Carter's secured place in history. Like all of Carter's recordings, *Look What I Got!* is to be heard feelingly.

Carter is a great interpreter, but also a great interpolator. She prefaces her wistful reading of *Imagination* with a lark-about scat on a double-time vamp, a device that goes to the core of the text in an unobtrusive manner. *The Man I Love* is deceptively straight-up; while she adheres to the melody, her coloration supplies an intriguing sub-text.

It is through these qualities that one can best appreciate Carter's least-heralded strength—her songwriting. At the heart of a Carter song is a qualified sense of hope. The title song is a sultry, spellbinding ballad in which love is fulfilling, but serendipitous. Even when exhilarated, Carter is not a starry-eyed romantic, as is evident in *Mr. Gentleman*, a bopping sprint in which Carter resolves to "hold on tight."

Carter's supporting cast has the tough job of following in the footsteps of the excellent trio of *The Audience With Betty Carter* (now on Verve 835 684)—John Hicks, Curtis Lundy, and Kenny Washington. Yet, despite not having the extended performances afforded by the live album format, and accommodating the big-hearted tenor of Don Braden, the two trios sharing duties—Benny Green, Michael Bowie, and Winard Harper comprise one; Stephen Scott, Irv Coleman, and Lewis Nash the other—give Carter the flexible, prompt-full support that sends her flying.

Look What I Got! is one of the year's best.

—bill shoemaker



WYNTON MARSALIS

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

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record reviews

on several CBS albums and in frequent performances initially with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, then the Herbie Hancock Quartet, and finally his own group, has been that of an acclaimed virtuoso confidently endeavoring to ennoble every sound heard in his Monette B-flat horn. He seems destined to succeed.

The Wynton Marsalis Quartet Live At Blues Alley, to date the only feature concert recording by a member of the esteemed Crescent City family, exists on the elevated plateau where foursquare jazz excitement commingles with refinement, where exceptional players' instrumental abilities and ordered thought facilitate the release of only the most cogent emotions. The impeccably groomed confreres Marsalis, Marcus Roberts, Bob Hurst, and Jeff Watts, each in his 20s, gave their all in performances before the Washington DC club's patrons in December 1986 and the resulting two-fer stands as Wynton's best offering, edging out last year's *Marsalis Standard Time, Vol. 1*. The sweat worked up in a jazz-room setting is more pungent than that exuded in a recording studio.

On an inviting program of five standards and 11 originals (*Knozz-Moe-King* appears in six-minute version, then three briefer ones; seven-minutes-plus *Juan* gets two reprises), Marsalis plays with a quality that is at once declaratory and lyrical. His pure tone is all the more arresting for signs of wistfulness that show themselves most conspicuously in quiet

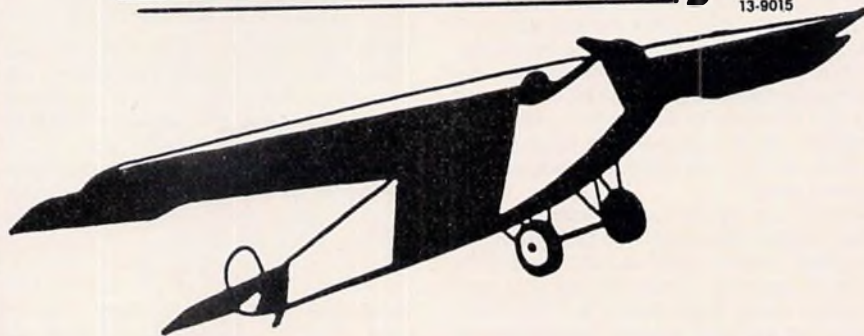
numbers *Just Friends* and the Louis Armstrong-associated *Do You Know What It Means To Miss New Orleans*. While a genuinely deep blues feeling runs through much of his work on the four sides, he doesn't yet have the profound soul-of-a-man expressivity of a Roy Eldridge or Harry "Sweets" Edison. A trifling complaint. Wynton's wise, focused developments and elaborations of motifs, so effortlessly produced, so swingingly propelled, oftentimes inspire awe, especially when his trumpet sings as if it had been anointed by Fats Navarro, Clifford Brown, and Freddie Hubbard. To give heed to his every-note-counts solos, as you must, brings on the same dizzy wonder one feels upon viewing the Colossus of Memphis, the prodigious granite statue of pharaoh Ramesses II.

Marsalis heads up an outstanding team. Pianist Roberts matches the bravura of the bandleader. He too conveys the sense that he knows exactly where his complex thematic inventions are heading—many solos prevail as models of clarity and flow. Roberts is a talent deserving immediate, enthusiastic recognition. Watts and Hurst on drums and bass respectively also concern themselves with the pursuit of musical excellence, providing gloriously driving backgrounds for Marsalis and Roberts or swinging right along with them. It should be noted Watts the soloist pounds out almost seven minutes of polyrhythmic fulminations in *Chambers Of Tain* and Hurst's spot-

Bill Bergman

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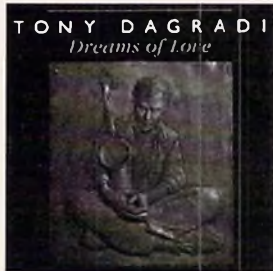
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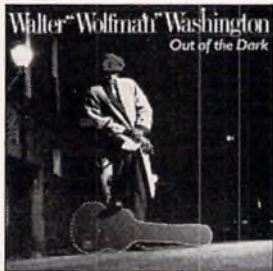
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record reviews

light section in Charlie Parker's *Au Privave* presents aural pleasures as well.

Suffice it to say, the listener will likely come away from the nearly two hours of music encountered on this set wishing he or she had been on hand for the nights the splendid Wynton Marsalis Quartet recorded for posterity at Blues Alley. —frank-john hadley



PAUL MOTIAN QUINTET

MISTERIOSO—Soul Note 21174: *MISTERIOSO*; *ABACUS*; *ONCE AROUND THE PARK*; *GANG OF FIVE*; *PANNONICA*; *FOLK SONG FOR ROSIE*; *BYBLUE*; *DANCE*; *JOHNNY BROKEN WING*.

Personnel: Motian, drums; Bill Frisell, electric guitar; Jim Pepper, soprano and tenor saxophones; Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone; Ed Schuller, bass.

★ ★ ★ ★

THE PAUL BLEY QUARTET

THE PAUL BLEY QUARTET—ECM 823 250: *INTERPLAY*; *HEAT*; *AFTER DARK*; *ONE IN FOUR*; *TRISTE*.

Personnel: Bley, piano; John Surman, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Frisell, electric guitar; Motian, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Paul Bley and Motian's long, if now occasional, collaboration has a serviceable benchmark in Bley's current quartet. In Bill Frisell and John Surman, they have cohorts who place the same high premium on resonant phrases and sponge-like silences. *The Paul Bley Quartet* is a bit more probing than their first recorded encounter (*Fragments*—ECM 829 280), and a bit less desultory.

These are improvisors who create opportunities for each other. There are few pianists with ability to re-gear an ensemble; few guitarists with Frisell's palette; few reedists who can slip between foreground and background like Surman; and few drummers with Motian's talent for implying melody with stark rhythms. On *Quartet*, more often than not, these opportunities are seized upon.

For the most part, this 53-minute program has an edgy, urgent quality, derived from open-to-suggestion compositional devices and assertive performances. Bley's suite-like *Interplay* ventures into chromatic metabop, propulsive free jazz, and depth-plumbing rhapsodic interludes. Surman's sinewy soprano gives the vamp-anchored beginning of *Heat* a Coltraneish lilt, until Frisell's feedback and effects-filled solo peels back the veneer to reveal raw pulp.

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Gruntz has been fronting similarly constructed bands for 15 years now, combining all-star musicians into one-time only aggregations, and composing new works that showcase the particular gifts of each year's participants. The strength of this year's band is the unique variety of soloists of such high calibre, and, much to his credit, Gruntz has written pieces which provide for a parade of strong-willed, high intensity solos while keeping the overall compositional atmosphere intact.

Recorded live October 15-17, 1987 in Ft. Worth/Texas at Caravan of Dreams on hat ART CD 6008 (DDD).

George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band '87 HAPPENING NOW!

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Only Bley's solo closer, *Triste*, lacks a palatable improvisational energy. This is an uncharacteristically lush Bley solo, replete with waves of loungey arpeggios. A curio, considering Bley's usual unsentimental intensity, haphazardly tacked onto the program.

Motian's own recordings tend to be more of a summation—of a tour, a year, a creative trajectory—than a take of the moment, such as *Quartet*. *Misterioso* is no exception: lean readings of two Monk tunes; a scorching revision of *Dance*, a peak for his '70s trio; four new, well-conceived quintet pieces; poignant solo vehicles for Frisell and Jim Pepper.

Motian's quintet is a road-wise working band that knows how to mix it up. Pepper can whip up a bluesy swagger, as he does on the title piece, or take an Ornettish turn, as on *Dance*. Joe Lovano is one of the few American tenors under 40 who can exploit both sides of the late '50s-Rollins/Coltrane coin. Frisell has the elbow room for his cowboy twang, his more orthodox jazz chops, and his outside forays. A fine complement to Motian. Ed Schuller can muscle a band along, or step out with impressive virtuosity.

Motian also knows how to construct a program, meshing the buoyancy of Monk, the terse angularity of *Abacus* and *Dance*, and the ruminative lyricism of *Once Around The Park* and *Rosie's Folk Song*. *Misterioso* is a well-packaged album, but there isn't a pat track in the lot.

—bill shoemaker



JACK WALRATH + SPIRIT LEVEL

KILLER BUNNIES—Spotlite 25: *SNAGADAA*; *A STUDY IN PORCINE*; *KIRSTEN SUNDAY MORNING*; *KILLER BUNNIES*; *DUKE ELLINGTON'S SOUND OF LOVE*; *FOUR FREEDOMS*; *DUSTBITER*.

Personnel: Walrath, trumpet; Paul Dunmall, tenor saxophone; Tim Richards, piano; Paul Anstey, bass; Tony Orrel, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Jack Walrath's an equal opportunity improviser—his interest in musicians has more to do with abilities than cliques. In 1980, he recorded with a quartet from his own home state of Montana. In France in 1985, he sat in with the British quartet Spirit Level; they liked what they heard, and reunited for a few dates in Britain and France in '86. During the tour

they ducked into a studio to record *Killer Bunnies*.

Walrath's four tunes are typical, driving modern bop; Dunmall's *Four Freedoms* and Richards' *Dustbiter* are close enough in tone to Jack's writing to make common interests clear. The compositions are improvisers' springboards, and all hands favor a gruff and open approach. Walrath (as on *Porcine*) alternates pent-up vertical block voicings with wide-open horizontal stretches; the tension generated by the former prime the soloists for release on the latter. Dunmall on *Snagadaa* and *Porcine* lets out throaty roars of freedom; his shouting tenor spirals as close to Evan Parker as to Coltrane. At such moments, the whole band may dive into the fray, but no one ever forgets the structure or drops the pulse; polyphonic hard bop.

McCoy Tyner has left his mark on pianist Richards, who laps up the modal bases under Jack's music and his own *Dustbiter*. Anstey's bass sound is deep, his time centered; Orrel sets the energy level, while his polyrhythms coax his bandmates into finding their own paths. Walrath's assets need little review: his fat sound in all registers and solid command of the horn, his lightness on his feet. Jack's understated plunging on *Porcine* and Spanish tinge on *Snagadaa* quietly reflect his long view of the trumpet history.

Romping even on *Kirsten's* 5/8 roll, Spirit Level sound as well-drilled in Walrath's music



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as his own Masters of Suspense. (Only on his tidying of Mingus' Ellington tribute do they sound like they're reading.) This *Study In Porcine* differs in detail from the later Blue Note version, but the method is pointedly the same: an alternation of *in* and *out* which ignores the boundaries some players set for themselves—the sorts of boundaries Jack Walrath ignores.

—kevin whitehead



MODERN JAZZ QUARTET

FOR ELLINGTON—East-West/Atlantic 90926-1: FOR ELLINGTON; JACK THE BEAR; PRELUDE TO A

KISS; IT DON'T MEAN A THING; KO-KO; MAESTRO E.K.E.; SEPIA PANORAMA; ROCKIN' IN RHYTHM.

Personnel: John Lewis, piano; Milt Jackson, vibraphone; Percy Heath, bass; Connie Kay, drums, percussion.

★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

The Modern Jazz Quartet was the first chamber-jazz group and, in their late-'50s-to-early-'60s heyday, one of the most popular jazz groups of any kind. Since reuniting in 1981 (after a seven-year separation) they've recorded for Pablo and Atlantic, and now they've launched their longtime producer Nesuhi Ertegun's East-West label with *For Ellington*.

Nowadays Ellington tributes are a dime a dozen, but this one is special. Ellington's music was Third Stream before Gunther Schuller coined the term; his sassy amalgamation of classical forms and jazz techniques paved the way for the MJQ's cool concept of collective improvisation within tightly plotted structures. Here the material suits the ensemble so well it's easy to forget that John Lewis and Milt Jackson wrote only two of the tunes.

The Quartet's versions of Ellington and Strayhorn compositions are remarkably faithful to the original arrangements and yet wholly true to their own style. There are, of course, disparities of scale, texture, and timbre—the growl

of Cootie Williams' trumpet, for example, doesn't reproduce on vibes—but other differences are more subtle. Ellington, for all his refinement, was more exuberant, more humorous; he swung harder; his harmonies, though they predated bop, were more daring. It's a measure of his greatness that the MJQ can fall considerably short of his mark with such excellent results.

To their credit, the foursome have challenged themselves with three selections—*Jack The Bear*, *Ko-Ko*, and *Sepia Panorama*—from the repertoire of Ellington's 1940 orchestra, widely considered his finest. That was the band that included Jimmy Blanton, and Percy Heath's twangier, more astringent bass is prominently featured, often following Blanton's parts note for note. The effect calls to mind Charles Mingus, another pioneer of structured improvisation.

Besides these seminal gems and the two fondly nostalgic originals, the group also performs the better-known *Prelude To A Kiss* and *It Don't Mean A Thing*, as well as an extended version of *Rockin' In Rhythm*. Jackson and Lewis effortlessly switch lead and supporting roles throughout, the vibist's luminous romanticism offsetting the pianist's spare aridity. Likewise, Kay's crisp drumming is as unobtrusive as Heath's bass is conspicuous, as all four

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members coalesce into a balanced unit that bops the blues with elegance and reserve
—Larry Birnbaum



JAMAALADEEN TACUMA

JUKEBOX—Gramavision 18-8803-1: A TIME A PLACE; META-MORPHOSIS; RHYTHM OF YOUR MIND; JAM-ALL; IN THE MOOD FOR MOOD; JUKEBOX; NAIMA; ZAM ZAM WAS SUCH A WONDERFUL; SOLAR SYSTEM BLUES.

Personnel: Tacuma, electric bass; Byard Lancaster, saxophones, flutes; Ronnie Drayton, gui-

tar; Dennis Alston, drums; Alan Sukennik, piano (cuts 1,2,5,6), keyboards (6); Alfie Pollit, synthesizer (7); Frederick Phineas, harmonica (9).

★ ★ ★ ½

STANLEY CLARKE

IF THIS BASS COULD ONLY TALK—CBS 40923: IF THIS BASS COULD ONLY TALK; GOODBYE PORK PIE HAT; I WANT TO PLAY FOR YA; STORIES TO TELL; FUNNY HOW TIME FLIES (WHEN YOU'RE HAVING FUN); WORKIN' MAN; TRADITION; COME TAKE MY HAND; BASICALLY TAPS.

Personnel: Clarke, basses; Gerry Brown, John Robinson, Stewart Copeland, Ndugu Leon Chancler, drums; Wayne Shorter (cut 2), George Howard (8), soprano sax; Freddie Hubbard, trumpet (5); Edward Arkin (2), Steve Hunt (6,7) synthesizers; Vance Taylor (5), George Duke (8), piano; Alan Holdsworth, guitar (4); Byron Miller, synth bass (5); James Earl, low bass (6,7); Paulinho Da Costa, percussion (5); Gregory Hines, tap dancing (1,9).

★ ★ ★ ½

These Philadelphia-born bassists have had a lot of influence on they way their instruments are approached. Stanley (and Jaco) made it cool to play bass in the 1970s, and Jamaala-

deen has shown how far out the instrument can be taken, moving from an r&b background to Ornette Coleman's harmolodic rainforest.

Tacuma has been guilty since of throwing several kitchen sink's worth of music into his LPs, trying to be everything to everybody, making albums that hold together about as well as a saltine in a cup of chicken noodle soup. But on *Jukebox* he stays with one rhythm section throughout, and it pays off with his most consistent musical set yet. You can hear the meiodic ideas in his bass playing, because things are calmer around him, and his writing shows focus.

Saxman Byard Lancaster gets the "Most Outside" award, although if Ronnie Drayton had more space for guitarings like he gets on *Meta-Morphosis*, he'd vie for the honor. On *Jam-All* Jamaaladeen's Philly r&b roots pop through every chance he gets, as Lancaster offers up the Eastern melody. Even on what one might call a "throwaway" jam, like *In The Mood For Mood*, Tacuma is trying to stretch some kind of way JT's *Zam Zam* is one of the nicest bass solos I've heard since Jaco's *Portrait Of Tracy* a dozen years ago.

In the music Tacuma likes, all the players are of equal weight. Every voice counts because everyone can pretty much holler out what he or she feels. Improvisation means the

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record reviews



Jamaaladeen: focusing in.

listener may suffer sometimes, but the rewards are great. In a lot of Stanley Clarke's music, from RTF to *If This Bass Could Only Talk*, the composer seems more the star, even though there are spaces for some incredible virtuosity. The amount of interpretation allowed the band seems somewhat limited. It sounds like the guys are playing parts.

Stanley opens and closes the date in duet with tap dancer Gregory Hines, an interesting idea perhaps, but it loses something in translation to disc. Sounds too much like the bassist jamming and somebody pounding on a table top. Alan Holdsworth hides behind MIDI-guitar sounds until unleashing his trademark fluid avalanche notes on the Police-inspired *Stories To Tell*. Clarke stretches with drummer Gerry Brown a bit on *Workin' Man*, which is really a remake of his old tune, *Lopsy Lu*. Stan should lay off the Vocoder he pulls out on his update of *I Want To Play For Ya*—it spoils some of the nice, sparse bass filling he does. The high points on his new record seem to be remakes of old Clarke tunes off the one great Stanley album, *School Days*. He's not a progressive or prolific composer, and here relies too much on gimmicks and old riffs, without giving his talented sidemen room to express themselves. *Jukebox* catches Tacuma in motion, but Stanley's bass is speaking the same old language.

—robin tolleson

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.)

PRO JAZZ: Al Hirt, *That's A Plenty*. Buddy DeFranco, *Garden Of Dreams*. Rick Strauss, *Jump Start*.

CANDID: Charles Mingus, *Reincarnation Of A Love Bird*. Toshiko Mariano Quartet, *Toshiko Mariano Quartet*. Oscar Pettiford, *Vienna Blues*. Chamber Jazz Sextet, *Plays Pal Joey*. Zoot Sims/Bob Brookmeyer, *Tonite's Music Today*. Booker Ervin, *That's It*. Various Artists, *Candid Jazz*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

Anthony Davis
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photo by Lisa Bogdan

cd reviews



**GIL EVANS/
STEVE LACY**

PARIS BLUES—Owl 049CD: REINCARNATION OF A LOVEBIRD; PARIS BLUES; ORANGE WAS THE COLOR OF HER DRESS THEN BLUE SILK; GOODBYE PORK PIE HAT; JELLY ROLL; ESTEEM. (60.03 MINUTES.)
Personnel: Evans, acoustic and electric piano; Lacy, soprano saxophone.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Just a coupla guys getting together, like they've been talking about doing for 30 years or so. Just so happens these coupla guys carted an awful lot of jazz history into the studio with them—in more ways than one.

The last recording Gil Evans ever made was also characteristic in some key ways. For Evans, jazz was a historical collection of forms and concepts that were constantly being reinvestigated and then reinvented. It's an attitude he and collaborator Lacy share, and it motivates this record from the choice of material to the ways they rework the stuff to their use of the duo format.

The compositions line up as three by Mingus,

one by Duke, two by Lacy, and one by Evans; they all receive treatments as fresh and enlightening as you'd expect from this probing pair. With Evans at the keyboards, pieces like Mingus' *Lovebird* or *Orange Was The Color* become studies in silky Impressionistic modulation and abrupt rhythmic zigzags, sudden chordal splashes and played hammerings. From the electric keyboard Evans draws a rounded, softened tone that hovers somewhat ominously while it clusters thickened and inverted chords around Lacy's soprano on tunes like *Lovebird* for the opening and closing statements. On the acoustic he'll string out an arpeggiated sequence or unpredictably roll the progression up into a slam-dunked trill and then let the next bar or two float in a rest. For anyone who needs convincing that Evans' prowess as a jazzman equals his rep as a composer/arranger, this one should clear things up.

Nobody doubts Lacy's skills as an improviser or composer, and here he weaves his blues-tinged tone with its smooth airiness and its lilting intimations through Evans' increasingly dense harmonic thickets. Take *Paris Blues*, where the soprano moves nimbly and subtly as the piano restacks chords and sequences in a way that belies the "simplicity" of the blues. In fact, the artistry with these two comes in how they rarely call attention to what they're doing: it's allowed to seem to just happen. As Lacy says of one tune in his brief liner notes, "Gil did not know this one before. But after brooding upon it for a few hours, we came up with a halfway decent reading of it." It's the highest tribute to them both that they did their brooding off-mic, and that what results flows with apparently unpremeditated ease.

—gene santoro

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blindfold test

1 JOHNNY HODGES. *COME SUNDAY* (from *THE CARNEGIE HALL CONCERTS JANUARY 1943*, Prestige) Duke Ellington's Orchestra; Johnny Hodges, alto saxophone.

[Within two seconds] Johnny Hodges, *Come Sunday*. Was this from a memorial concert or something? He's one of my granddaddies, one of the most brilliant saxophonists who lived, the epitome of contemporary saxophone music. When I was a kid, my mother was the musical one in our house; Hodges and Earl Bostic and Tab Smith were her men. How many stars you got? Five? I'll give him seven.

2 GROVER WASHINGTON, JR. *REED SEED* (from *REED SEED*, Motown) Grover Washington, Jr., alto saxophone; John Blake, electric violin.

Grover? Yeah, I'll give him a four. He's a contemporary master. He may play different music than I'd want to get into, but he's no slouch. That area he plays, he plays extremely well. That's an attractive tune for that idiom. It's a little light, but I'm sure he's serious about it, and it's still an art, science, and technique to lay it out like that. [laughs] What makes Grover so strong is how he goes to the bank every week.

I've tried to work in that idiom, maintaining the African tradition—the dance thing—like Grover does. When I was younger I thought r&b would be my arena; this is the jazz extension of modern r&b. But I want to do something else, structurally and harmonically. Seems like here he's got to stay within a certain harmonic thing to keep the music appealing.

That's John Blake, isn't it? He's excellent. I did some things with a straight quartet and his string quartet at the Bottom Line. The rhythm section sounds adequate—they could probably be more than adequate. Sometimes these records are about being just adequate.

3 SONNY CRISS. *THE BLACK APOSTLES* (from *SONNY'S DREAM*, Prestige) Sonny Criss, alto saxophone; Horace Tapscott, pianist/composer/arranger.

Who's that, Tapscott? Seems like I used to play that tune. Is that Gary Bartz? He was younger than me, came up after I left. Oh, I know: Sonny Criss.

I liked Sonny—I didn't know him personally. He got in a little rut towards the end of his life. Funny how you might play light when you're successful, and when you're down, you play darker, maybe more interesting music. He had a personal sound; there's

ARTHUR BLYTHE

by Howard Mandel

Alto saxist Arthur Blythe embraces jazz traditions, improvisation, and risk-taking in a bear hug, sounding a ripe, lyrical call of the city and the jungle. Since arriving in New York in the '70s, having established himself in association with Horace Tapscott on the West Coast, Blythe's toured and recorded with Chico Hamilton, Gil Evans, the Leaders, and his own ensembles featuring James Blood Ulmer, James Newton, Olu Dara, and Todd Cochrane, among others; he's maintained a trio with tubaist Bob Stewart and cellist Abdul Wadud, and an In The Tradition Quartet (pianist John Hicks, bassist Anthony Cox, drummer Bobby Battle).

Blythe's most recent album, *Basic Blythe* (Columbia), features his original



ANDY FREEBERGEN/CORBIS

repertoire arranged for strings by Robert Freedman. This is Arthur's first Blindfold Test; he was given no information in advance about the records played.

something about his vibrato, the way he releases his tones. I'll give Sonny five.

Tapscott and I were associated for 10 years or better—I like to look at that as a reciprocal relationship. We had a quartet, a sextet, and then he had his big band, too. We stay in touch. His sound is in that orchestration, but I can't say what it is.

4 ORNETTE COLEMAN. *OLD GOSPEL* (from *OLD AND NEW GOSPEL*, Blue Note) Ornette Coleman, composer, trumpet; Jackie McLean, alto saxophone; Billy Higgins, drums.

It's Ornette, ain't it?

HM: Doing what?

AB: Since you put it that way. . . . This is an album with Jackie McLean. He's one of my teachers, too; I'll give him a five, too. He's got a bad reed on, though. Hear that catch there?

The tune grooves like Ornette's. Is the trumpet player Don Cherry? He's leaning Cherry's way. Is the drummer Blackwell? It's got that syncopation—or Billy Higgins? They've got a similar strut.

Jackie and Ornette have a different sound, Jackie's being a little heavier. They both came out of the tail end of bebop, but with different involvement. Jackie laid with the more traditional aspect, and concentrated on improvisation, while Ornette took the tradition and tried to do something different with it. It's more complex than that. Jackie wrote some pieces. But Ornette was a composer—he always had that identity—as well as an improviser.

5 HENRY THREADGILL SEXTETT. *BEJEWELLED BLACK HANDS* (from *EASILY SLIP INTO ANOTHER WORLD*, RCA Novus) Henry Threadgill, alto saxophone.

That's Henry Threadgill—I hear the style of his writing and his sax sound in there. I like the instrumentation, it's different. Sometimes he's more oriented towards the ensembles than the soloists—though he solos, too. But he thinks of teamwork to make a statement, rather than using them to support his statement. Which is fine, because he has such a personal way of having the music come together.

Henry has a big, dark sound, and brilliancy. I'll give him four, 'cause I'd like to hear him play the sax a little more in that setting.

6 CHARLIE PARKER. *JUST FRIENDS* (from *THE CHARLIE PARKER STORY, VOL. 1*, Verve) Charlie Parker, alto saxophone; with strings.

Charlie Parker—he's one of my foster parents also. Surrogate father, you could say. Five: I give him the biggest nickel you've got. The arrangements are poot-buttish; they're a setting, though, and Charlie Parker's musicality is so high he makes it come alive. It's poppish for that period—everybody's a professional; but I imagine whoever did the arrangements brought them in without consulting Bird. They weren't bebop arrangements. It would have been a lot different if Gil Evans had written the charts.

db

JOE LOUIS WALKER

THIS BLUESMAN FROM SAN FRANCISCO IS OFFERING THE REAL DEAL WITH LOTS OF HEART AND SOUL

by Bill Milkowski

Joe Louis Walker was doing pretty good around 1968-69. There was a big blues boom happening in the Haight out there in San Francisco. Young longhairs were listening to blues cats like Mississippi John Hurt and Lightnin' Hopkins right alongside the likes of Moby Grape and the Jefferson Airplane. And that deep blues influence carried over to the psychedelic rock bands. Joe was being hired to provide the real blues feel in various local rock bands while also fronting his own r&b band. One of those was Blue Train, a soulful quartet that had steady work playing Motown and Stax/Volt covers on the San Francisco/San Jose/Sacramento circuit.

And on occasion, he would be invited to sit in on gigs with some of the great bluesmen who passed through the area—Earl Hooker, Freddie King, Mississippi Fred McDowell.

Joe was making a living playing guitar and getting a real blues education on the side. The perfect setup. But something happened to impede his progress.

"My life just hit rock bottom. I went to jail. I was incarcerated for a year and when I got out I was sort of going back and doing the same things I did that got me put in jail for a year," he said to the fine British blues chronicle, *Juke Blues* (P.O. Box 148, London W9 1DY, England).

Soon after that dark period in his life, Joe got religious and joined a gospel group called the Spiritual Corinthians. He stayed with them for 10 years, recording one album



JOHN DELEON

(*God Will Provide*) that they sold on the bandstand after gigs.

All those varied experiences came to bear on his fine debut as a leader, *Cold Is The Night*—which was awarded France's Big Bill Broonzy Prize for best blues recording of 1987—and on his smokin' follow-up album, *The Gift* (both on Hightone Records, 220 4th St., Oakland, CA 94607). They are the mark of a man who plays with authentic blues feel and sings with gospel fervor.

In short, Joe Louis Walker is the real deal, not some overnight success riding the wave of this blues revival that has hit in recent years. He's paid his dues. And now when he's singing the blues, you believe him.

Says Joe of *The Gift*, "It's just a culmination of different influences that I've had in my life. I played a lot of gospel, I played with just me and a harmonica player in a country blues-type thing, I've played in lots of soul groups where we'd sing *Midnight Hour* and *Roadrunner*. I've played in Chicago blues groups and I've played in psychedelic rock & roll bands. And I just try to make the right stuff fit in the right place on this album."

It's a satisfying effort for blues purists, more so than recent albums by Robert Cray, who is often heralded in the press as a kind of modern day blues messiah. On tunes like the funky *Shade Tree Mechanic*, punched up by the Memphis Horns, and the honking *Mama Didn't Raise No Fool*, Walker delivers the goods vocally. And he lets loose with some slashing guitar work on *Thin Line* and *Everybody's Had The Blues*. This combination of r&b rhythms, rock firepower, soulful singing, and B. B. King-inspired licks made Walker a hot ticket on the European blues festival circuit this past summer.

Born in San Francisco on Christmas Day, 1949, Joe Louis Walker early on came under the influence of his musically-inclined cousins. He picked up the guitar at age 12 and played in bands with his cousins until age 16. That's when he began answering ads in

the local San Francisco papers, the ones that read: "Far-out psychedelic rock band looking for really excellent lead guitar player. Must love the blues."

He had gotten to be close friends with blues star Mike Bloomfield on the West Coast. The two guitarists shared a house in San Francisco just after Bloomfield had split from Paul Butterfield's band and was in the process of forming the Electric Flag. On Bloomfield's recommendation, Walker went to Chicago in 1969 to seek out Otis Rush for a gig to further his blues education. That gig never came to pass but Joe did pick up some Chicago blues experience while playing Sundays at the I-Spy Lounge on W. 63rd St.

After that stint in Chicago, Walker returned to the West Coast and began working with Blue Train, back and forth between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Around this time he also got some invaluable lessons from backing Earl Hooker, whose slide stylings he greatly emulates today.

His 10-year period with the Spiritual Corinthians, following that year in jail, taught him as much about life as it did about music. "I went in the gospel group to get away from a lot of negative bullshit and fortunately I was surrounded by a bunch of good people who liked you for who you were, not for what you had. So it was a real positive experience. And I'm still with the Corinthians in my heart. It's just that I'm doing something else now."

Walker got pulled back into the secular side of music in 1985 when he toured Europe for two months with the Mississippi Delta Blues Band. He recorded *Cold Is The Night* a year later, completing the live session in just nine days. That album was released in 1987 to wide acclaim, particularly abroad. And now with the release of *The Gift*, the good news about Joe Louis Walker is catching on stateside too.

"I think it's a good time for the blues," he says. "I think it's a good time in general for music that's made by people as opposed to music that's made by synthesizers and drum machines and computers. I really feel that people are hungry for some humanness in the music."

If that's true, the passion in Walker's voice and the cry in his bluesy Stratocaster will be a banquet for their undernourished souls. db

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DAVIS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

go downtown and jam. You know, we'd go to Minton's and jam and we'd start soundin' alike when we were jammin'. And away from each other we'd play our own thing.

JE: Bird picked up a lot of his ideas from other people that came through K.C. before he split for New York.

MD: He had to. If you listen to Ben Webster, you can hear Bird. You can hear the same breaks, like in *Cottontail* and *C Jam Blues*. It sounds just like Bird. And Ben was a supporter of Bird when people and critics didn't know what to write. You know, didn't know if he was a fluke. I was a young man then and I know that movement was goin' on.

JE: The critics were confused?

MD: They were confused between Earl Bostic's speed and Jimmy Dorsey's, the way he played alto. . . . But Bird wasn't in any competition at all. He was just one of those things that happen every 100 years. I mean, he could do anything. He was a complete musician. He was just like Art Tatum. Art Tatum heard one of those player-pianos with two people playin'. He thought it was one.

JE: And so, that's what he went with.

MD: Right. But Bird was just one of those people. And Duke Ellington. During Coleman Hawkins' time they had, just before with Fletcher Henderson, Horace Henderson, Duke Ellington, they used to write an encore for the saxophone. . . . When bands used to play together they'd try . . . well, this isn't subtle at all, but they would have, a battle of the bands; used to see the most difficult saxophone section solos. Not solos, but sections. Playin' an out chorus. Which is like what Ralph Burns wrote for Woody—*Four Brothers*; they used to do that all the time.

JE: And that was a capella?

MD: No. With the rhythm section. Horace Henderson's band. Fletcher Henderson and his brother and the arrangements they used to have. You can look back at Duke's old arrangements—they always had saxophone out choruses, you know? [*does some riffing*]. *Cottontail*. Doin' this they were soundin' like Bird [*more riffing*]. And Bird's followers were dancers. That's the reason they played in two-part phrases. The time step was like [*demonstrates*]. You know it was like two-bar phrases. That's the way you get that style. But he had about four or five styles. He had a style like that [*gets up and does a tap step*]. You've seen it [*a Tea For Two step*], but fast. He wrote like that. [*he sings along with the step, to Moose The Mooche*] *Moose The Mooche* is like that. Free phrases. The way he writes it, it was different. When he first played it, Lucky Thompson put his saxophone down and started laughin'. He said, "Look at this." The notation was so different. That's all the music Lucky had read, it wasn't like that [*more Moose*]. You know, the accents comin' more differently. And now you have Prince, the way Prince writes. First beat and the third. Things that happen here that really hold it together. Like last night, I told our drummer, I said, "Marilyn," I told both of them, "I want something that hangs together" [*he counts off a four-beat measure, accenting the first and third beats*].

JE: Kind of like a variation on a reggae beat?

MD: No, it's just somethin' that would hang a rhythm section together. You know, say like it's tiltin' a little bit and the rhythm section has a little wrinkle in it; you can do that, you can always pull it together [*counts off, again accenting first and third beats*]. It's not reggae. It comes from that, it comes from 4/4. Reggae's like a half [*counts off half-step beats*].

JE: It's a shuffle, almost like a tap dance?

MD: Like a half-shuffle.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54

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JE: Getting back to playing, do you like the festival scene, the big crowds vs. the club days?

MD: There's nothing wrong with big audiences, you know? The only thing wrong is some halls, like Avery Fisher, the sound floats. And some of 'em, like—where did we play?—we played somewhere, and there was an echo, there was like a big [makes echo sound]. That's all we'd use. It'd be funny, and we'd play around with it, play with it. But there's nothin' wrong with a good audience.

JE: So, is there anything to be gained from playing a small club anymore? Is there anything you miss about playing a small club?

MD: Yeah, the closeness, you know? You can hear each other and you get a better feelin'. When you're like tight, you know.

JE: What do you have planned ahead?

MD: I want to play music, try and get it on record. But in a live format . . . 'cause live records are so great. You can feel the enthusiasm and everything, you know? And like I said, a record is only like a program. "This is what they might play, and it might sound like this. If it's worse, it would sound like this." But, there are so many pluses when you play in-person. . . . You'd be surprised how different the band sounds with Marilyn and Benny. It's like a perfect marriage, you know. Marilyn is like a whole drummer. I have yet to tell her what to do. . . . A drummer like her, she's a woman and she moves around when she plays; she knows when the shit don't fit 'cause she can't feel it, you know? She's a helluva drummer, man. And Benny plays on top of the beat.

JE: You never went back to an orchestral setting. Have you thought about that much?

MD: I did one in Copenhagen. Yeah, this year. *Aura*. It was the last one I did for Columbia. I got his Soning award. It's like \$10,000. . . . It's an award that a guy set up. A rich guy in Copenhagen, I

guess, Sweden. Leonard Bernstein, Isaac Stern, and myself [have] gotten it. So I went over there. And of course they wanted me to play. So, I played and I accepted the award. The radio band played.

JE: Conceptually, what's happening?

MD: Well, Palle Mikkelborg wrote this composition that shows what I've done from . . . the styles I've played up till now. And he made a scale out of my name. And that's where I met Marilyn. We had about four drummers up there, 10 trumpets, we had a full brass section, saxophone stuff. About 20 pieces. So Palle, he wrote this composition, a helluva composition. I left Columbia. It was my last album.

JE: When was it recorded?

MD: About three years ago.

JE: And it's been in the can ever since?

MD: When I left Columbia, I went to the National Endowment for the Arts, 'cause they would pay for the last, to make an additional recording, which was \$1400. . . . And they [Columbia] wasn't interested, so I did it with some of my own money. And that's one of the reasons I left them.

JE: They were holding back?

MD: Well, one reason, they didn't put out *Time After Time*, which I told 'em I'd done two years before they put it out. . . . Anyway, I left. Gotta good deal with Warner Bros. . . . One of the greatest rock & roll records they [Columbia] ever heard was *Jack Johnson*; which it is. It's a motherf**ker, you know? It just happened. I wrote it for Buddy Miles. But they buried it. Like, under "Film Music." Instead of puttin' it out and puttin' some thought into it, you know? You can give 10 minutes to anything and, think about it, it'd be better than what it is. db

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