

BLINDFOLD TEST:  
Cassandra Wilson

For Contemporary Musicians

# downbeat

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## KEITH JARRETT

Jazz Tapestries,  
And Beyond

**HENRY THREADGILL**  
Musical Alchemist

**STEVE MILLER**  
The Joker Gets Jazzy

**DOC SEVERINSEN**  
Trumpet Transfusion

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Keith Jarrett

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KEN MILLER



Steve Miller

LYNN GOLDSMITH/GI



Doc Severinsen

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# KEITH JARRETT

*IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT E MINOR CHORD*



TERI BLOOM

Like an unruly, self-determined river, Keith Jarrett's pursuit of musical truth has taken him in a multiplicity of directions, either coursing a wide swath or branching off into tiny tangential rivulets. Similarly, his audience has been alternately swept up by the current, carried into the sidestreams, or been left behind on the riverbanks.

Nature analogies are a real temptation when discussing the current stage of Jarrett's mercurial musical life. In the remote and small town on the western edge of New Jersey that Jarrett calls home, a sense of rural isolation prevails and the only local phone for use by strangers is in the municipal building. On the wintry day of our interview (Coleman Hawkins' would-be 84th birthday, it so happened), bleak, spindly trees ringed a humble lake, a holler away from Jarrett's home/studio. It's obvious that the pianist has hastened back to nature in a real way.

And in an aesthetic way. Asked about the seeming dichotomy of his engagements in both jazz and classical spheres—as well as his infrequent solo improvisational concerts—Jarrett likes to point to nature's example: she is supremely indiscriminatory, evolutionary, irregular and yet unswerving, inspiring and yet unpredictable. And, one might add, deaf to the advice and admonitions of humans. Jarrett is striving to reach a state of inevitability in his music such as that which makes a river flow. Lofty as that may sound (and he has heroically fended off epithets of pretentiousness for nearly 20 years now), Jarrett has come close—especially recently—to achieving his goal.

Precious few jazz artists have finagled the migration into classical repertoire; fewer still have made the reverse trip. When, five years ago, Jarrett broke with his firmly-ensconced jazz ranks and announced his plan to delve into classical music, it wasn't the late-blooming whim of a dilettante; rather, he was returning to the home turf on which a child prodigy from Allentown, Pennsylvania was weaned. Jazz bit the adolescent Jarrett hard. Rather than take the route to Juilliard and studies with Nadia Boulanger, Jarrett hit Berklee and the New York scene. Catapulted into notoriety in Charles Lloyd's popular crossover quartet (where Jarrett first met and played with Jack DeJohnette), Jarrett didn't last long as a sideman. He played briefly—and gutsily—with Miles Davis, as heard on *Live/Evil* (playing Fender Rhodes; it was the last time, along with the simultaneous release of *Ruta And Diatya*—a duet with DeJohnette—that the acoustic purist Jarrett played an electronic keyboard).

In the '70s, Jarrett bucked the Fusion mafia by dividing his energies between his American quartet (saxman Dewey Redman, bassist Charlie Haden, and drummer Paul Motian), his Scandinavian group (saxist Jan Garbarek, bassist Palle Danielsson, and drummer Jon Christensen), and his improvisational solo piano concerts—epic consciousness streams that danced on the shores of impressionism, gospel, bop, and other hybrid musical strains. Jarrett popularized the genre which, to his consternation, gave rise to George Winston and a spate of inane new age ivory ticklers of the '80s. In the early '80s, Jarrett repaired to his New Jersey woods to rehearse Bartok, Mozart, Bach, et al., and prepare for his descent into a demanding new musical realm. But before fully entering his latest phase, he felt the need to clear away emotional debris with *Spirits*—a deceptive work of folkish simplicity crudely overdubbed mostly with flutes and ethnic drums.

Word of new Jarrett releases is nothing shocking; with over 50 albums to date, he is music's rival to the cinema's Michael Caine for sheer prolificity. But Jarrett's last three albums have been particularly noteworthy and revealing. For his first official classical session, Jarrett chose to tackle the hoary studies of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1*; his two-record set, *Still Live*, offers persuasive evidence of his jazz muscle tone in his ongoing trio with bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Jack DeJohnette; *Dark Intervals* is his first solo piano concert recording since 1982.

This three-point study in Jarrettography tells a good deal about his split affinities; he doesn't so much bounce from classical to jazz to piano scapes as he slides over into the separate but equal compartments of his musical being. *Dark Intervals*, particularly, is a testament to Jarrett's recent objective of broadening his scope while

paring down to the essence of music—and being. So, while he plots courses in parallel universes—planning to record Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on harpsichord and new works by Lou Harrison and Alan Hovhaness in the classical world, and reviving jazz standards in his trio—Jarrett is also searching for new meaning in a basic E minor chord. He's thinking about the river's source as well as its effects.

**Josef Woodard:** *Have reports of your eclecticism been greatly exaggerated?*

**Keith Jarrett:** Well, what's the definition of eclecticism, would you say?

**JW:** *Let's say purposefully drawing from divergent areas for material and concepts.*

**KJ:** Well, then I would say, yes, I'm eclectic except that if the definition means "divergent areas," I'd have to disagree that they're divergent [*laughs*].

I would put it differently. I would say that if I'm committed to my art, the way someone would be committed to, let's say, a different kind of life than an artist's, for someone to not use what he hears would be like someone not sleeping because it's different from being awake. You don't go to sleep in order to sleep. You go to sleep in order to be better when you're awake. To me, all the so-called divergent things I do are all plusses to each another. They create a synergy.

I can give you an example. With these last solo concerts, I could never have played so little music so effectively if I had not been working on my technique. The way I balance a chord itself can be a message—at least a message that I'm there and present. Whereas with improvisors in general and especially in jazz, people listen to *what* they play—they listen to the notes they play. Classical listeners listen to *how* a thing is played and they usually already know this piece. What I'm getting close to, because of this so-called eclecticism, is probably a way of playing for the few listeners who can listen to both what and how. But I could never have done that if I hadn't worked in these so-called divergent disciplines.

Did nature decide what she was going to attempt and what she wasn't going to attempt? Or did she just attempt something that was worth trying? From the point of view of not having a position, what is so different about doing the kinds of things that make people say, "Wait a minute, he just gave up jazz. No, he was never playing jazz. Now he's playing classical, but he's not classical. He's a jazz pianist." What if I legitimately hear these things? Is it illegal? [*laughs*] Certain birds or certain mammals, should they never have existed? Some of them have these funny problems with staying alive or moving around. Are we sad that they were ever invented?

**JW:** *With an improvised piece, does it start with a seed and then grow, or do you have a vague sense of general structure?*

**KJ:** I don't have any sense of that. I don't even have a seed when I start. I guess I'd say that it really does start with zero. The thing that's changed is that I can be comfortable with zero. For many listeners, they still want to live back in a previous time in my work. They don't realize that I'm making both a musical statement and also a somewhat life-related statement all the time.

There was the period of time when melody was so important that it was all there was. But melody is an inspired thing. If I know that I could be a melody writer when I want to be, then the next thing is, what is there besides that that I still have to do? One of those things is to see what there is behind the melody. Without the melodies, there's the potential for a melody. Sometimes, potential is much stronger than actually doing it.

One of the greatest fallacies in the laymen's concept of improvising is that it's something that takes you over: you're talented and you just go, man, you just play. It's a gift. That's maybe true on the beginning level. But nobody is really an improviser unless they

throw away all their position papers, all their theses that they might have come up with—all the things they use to justify their work—and consciously make the music do something. There are many ways for music to do something. Some of them aren't even musical in the traditional sense.

Years ago, someone once asked Andre Previn if he knew what I did, and his comment was that if anyone played for an hour-and-a-half straight, they're bound to come up with something [laughs]. Where's consciousness in it all? Also, Andre never tried it. I got him back. My dressing room was also his office in Pittsburgh at that time and I turned his clock back an hour. I thought that was appropriate.

**JW:** "Opening," from *Dark Intervals*, is a case where you delve into areas that are non-pianistic. At various times, you've done experimental things—performed abuses, is one way to put it—with the piano, as if to conquer its clichés. Lately, you've veered away from the extreme of hitting the piano or plucking strings. Is this piece an example of that impulse, in which you use the piano as an acoustic device?

**KJ:** Maybe. Those were expressions of energy. I was trying to let satire be energy rather than energy turned into music. It's like satire; sometimes, I'm tired of satire. If you want to say something about the politics of the United States, why not say it? We need it to be said straight now. When else would it need to be said straighter? There are a zillion clever musicians in the world and I don't think another one is needed. We don't need any more interesting modulations. We need something that says, "Hey, it's not about that." Those are like a coverup, in a way, for the fact that music comes from a deep place. Every deep place is like this scream. In the past, plucking the strings and the new record are similar in that way.

Since *Spirits*, too, I just don't feel like a pianist anymore. I don't have to try to use the piano to say what I hadn't said yet before *Spirits*. Now I'm just trying to live in the spaces of the music when I'm playing. In the past, it's been this kaleidoscopic thing—"Oh, man, it goes from Tatum to Chopin to Erik Satie to Poulenc, Faure, Debussy . . .," some of those guys I don't even like. That's enough of that for me because it was never about that anyway. I now feel like it's, "OK, take it straight. Drink this straight." If I'm playing E minor, I'm not going to play E minor with some neat fourths and fifths in it that make it sound like jazz. Then I might not think about what should come next. Maybe E minor is strong. I'm not going to try to nicen it.

**JW:** It seems that one major difference between doing the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and then turning around and doing "The Song Is You" or "Someday My Prince Will Come" would be emotional imposition. You put yourself into standards and pull yourself out of Bach. Is that fair to say?

**KJ:** Not really. It isn't what you described and it's more similar than you might think. When I start to play Bach, I don't decide ahead of time that I don't want to play this or that way. I start playing and through playing him, I see what I think this music means. In the case of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, I can see so clearly the process. The logic and motion of these lines makes beautiful sense that I'm just more or less following his weave. He's woven this thing and I'm reproducing it by hand. So I'm not restraining anything. The thing that you might think I'm restraining is fine. It's happy. It's not saying, "Well, where's all the input?" This is the weave, this is the tapestry.

In the standards, there's only a sketch, this single line with harmony. So I have to invent the rest of the rug. The emotional input has to go along with it because the trio is inventing it from moment to moment.

**JW:** Does your playing with the Standards trio satisfy your urge to work in a jazz tradition?

**KJ:** Yeah. It's not just that I have this urge hanging out when I'm not playing with them. That's some of it, but that's by no means the biggest thing. It is a communion between the three of us. That's something that's being lost. So, more than this wild urge to

play jazz that isn't satisfied unless I'm playing with the trio, I have more and more of a realization that no one is confronting this material freshly, or they're confronting it freshly with no knowledge of how to confront it at all. Without Gary and Jack, I immediately wouldn't have a trio. That kind of delicacy is more like a tribal language. We all lived in the same tribe long ago and we all spoke this language, and if we don't play it, the language will be relatively lost. That's the way it really feels when we're playing.

**JW:** I thought the American quarter had a unique fragile alchemy to it, which can make life difficult on a logistical level, but it made a statement at a time when jazz needed statements to be made.

**KJ:** It's true. I just want to put out in the open the fact that if the material hadn't been right, the band wouldn't have been a band at all [laughs]. When you have a band—unless if their reason for being with you is money—there has to be some music for them, especially players of the caliber we're talking about. So it was nothing that could be taken lightly. When I asked the other guys to write something for the album *ByaBlue*, man, did that take tooth-pulling to get material. I had the feeling this was something all along that they were hoping could happen. And then when it finally became possible, they didn't come forward, except for Paul [Motian], who, of all the people, was always writing tunes. I like his stuff.

**JW:** What happened to the part of you that, 10 years ago, was writing new music all the time?

**KJ:** It's there, but it isn't asking for media time. I am writing right now. I'm writing a wind quintet and a viola concerto, but that's slightly different. It does occur to me every now and then that if A and B and C could be figured out, I'd like to have a small group to write for. But, gee, we all like things [laughs]. For me, it's about listening and hearing and not so much about writing. Now that I don't have a band, my writing isn't something that has to assert itself.

**JW:** You don't have this gnawing gut instinct to write and therefore be eligible for immortality?

**KJ:** I think that anybody doing something in the arts isn't able to get rid of that feeling, and yet it's a complete illusion. I decided to confront it quite a while ago. This is why you don't see transcriptions of the *Köln Concert*, for example. Anyway, when I'm dead, they'll do it. I don't want to see it on paper. What's Miles going to leave? He won't leave a *Well-Tempered Clavier*. But to me, it's experiential quantity nine out of 10 rather than five out of 10 that when someone leaves, everything leaves with them. It's silly to think you engrave your work in stone when I'm sure, on your deathbed, you're going to think of something you forgot to put in this [laughs]. You've signed your name to this thing and yet you know it's not you.

As far as I'm concerned, *Spirits* is good enough. People who study a person who's dead—which they do seem to do a lot, there's lots of books out—will have to confront that album and my opinion of that album. I guess if I wrote something that I thought was monumental, maybe I'd want to have it published.

**JW:** I'm not thinking so much about a magnum opus as something like "My Song," which is arguably the most hummable of all your tunes. Doesn't that qualify as a different type of lasting impression?

**KJ:** If somebody can write "My Song," then either they had this brainstorm and wrote this deceptively simple piece that everybody likes when they hear it, or they know what they're doing and that's what they did. If I wrote that song—and I admit that I did [laughs] and I admit I like it—does there have to be a sequel to that song in my work?

**JW:** Of the works by living composers you've played—by Arvo Part, Lou Harrison, Hohvaness, Colin McPhee—there's an Eastern connection, either in origin or in musical syntax. Does that have to do with an Eastern sensibility of yours?

**KJ:** I think it has to do with a language that I consider more valuable than our Western language—more expressive and more valuable. It's because it's less and not minimal, you know what I



TERI BLOOM

mean? Lou is one of the last great musical personalities of that era—the Ives time.

**JW:** *If I could stretch a comparison, you're an individualistic musician who is literally removed here, as was Charles Ives. He was also linked with the Transcendentalists. Do you see yourself as a part of that philosophy?*

**KJ:** Probably you could put me there. I have my connections to that.

**JW:** *In terms of avoiding the madding crowd?*

**KJ:** Not in a crotchety kind of way, but I don't think even [Ives] was like that as much as everyone says. It's just that, if I've got as much work in music to do as I had in the first half of my life, there's no way I can do that with any extra distractions than I already have living this isolated. And there's no way I can bring to my work—live work, at least—the right amount of energy.

Really, I think most artists have a greater responsibility than most artists would like to know. And it goes far beyond the art they are involved in. It has something to do with perceiving more than they thought. When an artist is on the brink or could ever get close to showing that, what else is more important to a creative person than perceiving deeper or more of what they thought was everything?

In an age when there's no real father figure—there's no church saying this is right and this is wrong, and if they did no one would believe it anyway—and when there's no faith in teachers or a path that everyone would agree, "Here's a wise man . . .," all that's left is the arts. There's nothing else.

I was reading a book by Paul West and one of the characters is talking to himself, and says, "Life is a blur fit to worship." That's almost the best description of someone who had that innate, intuitive feeling all the time. It deserves more than style. It deserves that you have an attachment to something that is greater than what you see around you, because what you see around you didn't create what you see around you. It's not that simple. db

### KEITH JARRETT'S EQUIPMENT

Contrary to the acquisitive nature of many modern keyboardists who scramble to keep abreast of technology, Keith Jarrett practices fidelity with his roster of instruments. He swears by Steinway pianos, using either German- or American-built models according to his musical task at hand. He also plays a harpsichord and clavichord built by Carl Fudge, from Winchester, Mass. Jarrett also keeps an assortment of flutes, drums, recorders, a King soprano sax, and a trumpet in his studio, should the spirit strike.

### KEITH JARRETT SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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# Henry Threadgill

COMPOSER, BANDLEADER,  
AND ALCHEMIST

By Kevin Lynch

**H**enry Threadgill has arrived. His music has been audible for a long time up the road, in the wind. Air has played its now-you-hear-it-now-you-don't music since the early '70s, a trio using silence as a fourth bandmember, as a shadow in musical time. But did we really see the complete Threadgill coming?

There he was in the front line of David Murray's acclaimed octet several years ago. But Threadgill was priming his own Sextett to take Main Street USA. At first, it sounded like a brassy bunch of would-be saints taking a long, existential road to uncertain deliverance. The band was prone to abstract dirges, but there was dark humor and irony in those heavy strides, the band's load of idioms lightened by Threadgill's growing mastery of musical synthesis. No clanking eclectics, these. After three small-label recordings, the Sextett signed to RCA Novus records last year and turned the corner in 1988. Was it merely good fortune that put the bandleader's face all over mass-media magazines this past year in a "Dewar's Profile" advertisement? Did the scotch-sellers realize this is a "progressive" jazz musician?

Then came the 1988 **down beat** International Critics Poll, and Threadgill placed in 11 different categories. Readers of **db** agreed with the critics, voting him top Composer and near the top for Jazz Musician Of The Year and for Acoustic Jazz Group. His dominance in the Polls still seems sudden, even after 12 years on the recording scene.

Threadgill's way to the forefront of contemporary creative music has always been oblique and circuitous; he's a collector of musical styles and an explorer who constantly stops to observe the surrounding world. He was a first-generation member of Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM); but just when his contemporaries were gathering notice for forging a new school of Great Black Music, there went Henry, lighting out for the territory with r&b road bands, an Army rock band, gospel groups, baying his saxophone across America's dusty byways. The sax-bass-drums trio, Air, an unlikely



formula for longevity, has kept on blowing its daring, witty collective music to the present. All along, his skills and ambition gathered strength: he formed a marching band, a dance orchestra, and a classical-jazz group called the Wind String Ensemble, a refinement of a band called X-75 which he formed in the late '70s and which recorded a half-masterpiece album, now long out of print.

But the Sextett carried him through the haze of relative obscurity. In the Critics Poll, he scored not only for his bag full of reeds but as top Composer, and his two RCA Novus albums placed in the top five albums of the year.

Yet Threadgill's music can hardly be quantified. It sounds so close to us and yet so far in the past, and far into some rococo post-post-modern future. The startling range and power of *Easily Slip Into Another World* recalls the best American artistic visions—idiosyncratic and sardonic, and constantly surprising in its lyrical generosity of spirit—from Twain to Doctorow's *Ragtime*, from Ives to Ellington. Threadgill's thematic obsession with death rises again in music and lyrics that both defy and embrace the Big Black Beyond. His vision has brightened just enough for us to see all sorts of

remarkable things in it. The album is a brash, swaggering vindication of the tradition that regenerates itself in a dialectic of individual imagination and democratic dynamism. It's music of the moment that echoes familiar images of the past with the elemental eloquence of myth.

**W**hy does it seem so significant now as new jazz, new music? Perhaps partly because anguished expressionism and austere statements have been co-opted into the post-modern flea markets of today's culture. Jaded listeners can be annoyed by music, it seems, but not disturbed. A concerned, committed artist needs to be a cunning persuader, dealing a strong personal vision without a tiresome modernist hubris or the post-mod tendency to deconstruct art into a shell game of manners and styles.

So how does Threadgill produce fresh, unadulterated music from the jazz-blues tradition? Perhaps it's best to consider the words of Muhal Richard Abrams, a man who chooses his public statements selectively, Threadgill's first important employer in music, and founding father of the AACM. Abrams described Threadgill

as "the Magician, for his instinctive emotives of transparent melodic colors underscored by an inverted harmonic palette of variable density," and for his "enlightening expression of alchemical activity."

When told of the description, Threadgill's warm, open face screws up into an "aw-shucks" grin; then he emits a long, soft chuckle. Then he's deadpan, as if sifting grains of truth from Abrams' sparkling *bon mot*.

"Yes, Muhal has always spoken to me about music in those terms. Transparent melodies. They actually do come out of nowhere. They are pleasing, but it can take a while to hear them. An inverted harmonic palette is essential to how I write."

Bebop's inverted chords helped make modern jazz changes swift and complex. But Threadgill's music hardly sounds like the burnished, cool intricacies of neo-bop. His music takes its sweet time, digs into gutbucket blues, dances, promenades. It stops to howl at the moon and wonder. What enchants the kid-in-the-candy-shop in each listener is his alchemy, a mix of hoary elements gathered into a felicitous whole, more than ever on *Easily Slip*. And the most important ingredient is the voice, both human and unadorned, as an instrumental concept; Threadgill if anything is an alchemist of voices. He mastered clarinet, flute, alto, tenor, and baritone sax not to become a versatile session man, he says, but because he needed many personal voices to tell his full story. He's a composer first and foremost, which most people are now realizing.

"Yeah, I am a composer," he says matter-of-factly. "And I'm not just a jazz composer. I don't want to be limited by that label. I draw from whatever I need to, not just jazz. That's just a part of me."

Some jazz purists may get off his bandwagon at this point. But the voice gets

him where he wants to go. He sometimes starts a composition in a humble, time-honored way.

"'Spotted Dick Is Pudding' has some lyrics," he says. "It started out as a vocal piece." Threadgill is a gourmet, he says (Spotted Dick is a Scottish pudding), and he must have been hungry when he created what would become a soaring New Orleans-style anthem.

"That song sort of appeared when I was sitting waiting for the F-train at the station. The melody came along: da da da da da dah, da da-da de da-daah," he sings. "It started like that, then I just kept working with it, singing and singing and the lyrics just came out. [*He sings again*] 'Found myself some spotted dick, took it to the table mighty quick. Tied a handkerchief 'round my neck, and ate it to the quick.'

"I did it right from the vocal tradition, that's where it started. No piano, no systems, nothing. I was just singing. It's a song, but I didn't have to tell the musicians," he said with a sly grin. But his arrangement, and his band—especially tailgatin' trombonist Frank Lacy—grabbed the lyrical phrasing and hoisted it into a grand New Orleans-style celebration of life.

Threadgill's study of music has been like a gourmet's search for culinary possibility. His inclination to search, pick, and blend makes a simple song into a rich creation. The young Threadgill began as a pianist, but hearing Charlie Parker converted him to the alto sax. However, he chose not to join the race to be "fastest alto in the West." Threadgill absorbed bop's harmonies as an arranger like Tadd Dameron did, or more precisely, as Jelly Roll Morton, his main musical hero, might have. Threadgill's self-tailored study in a series of college music programs, including clarinet and voice training, led to the mastery of reeds and a sense of vocal phrasing. He readily worked in every kind

of local band and orchestra; and as part of the first TV generation, he would learn to play with high and low culture like a kid switching around the channels of his experience. He developed an almost literary need to convey his ideas about society and culture through his music. That instinct toward articulation, to "enlightening expression," may partly explain why his musical components are, in effect, so many voices: the distinct voices, often noted, of each of his own horns. There are then, the voices of the ensembles—Air's conversational interplay, the Sextett's antiphonal interplay of brass, strings, and percussion—and the (underrated) voice of Fred Hopkins, Threadgill's one constant bandmate since the early '70s, with perhaps the most personal sound and vocabulary of any contemporary bassist; his are gravelly groans, grumbles, and sighs, as if the big fiddle is uttering its own mind.

Most literally, there's Threadgill's need to articulate in the use of lyrics and the female voice. He's working on an opera with Thulani Davis. But the female voice has always been in his music, from the disembodied beauty of Amina Claudine Myers' contralto on the elegaic "Celebration" from *X-75 Vol. 1* to Cassandra Wilson's feline ironies winding through Air songs to Aisha Putli in the Sextett. Ah yes, Aisha Putli.

"I heard her on Ornette's *Science Fiction* album and I couldn't forget that voice," Threadgill says. "It took me 10 years to track her down. Ornette had lost her phone number."

Putli, a native of Bombay, has the sensuality, vocal technique, and range to deliver Threadgill's thematic obsession in "My Rock," which is part contemporary art song, part timeless torch song. The poetic lyrics suggest that death is a time of flashing insight into one's humanity, the singer swaying between the desire to return with the revelations and to settle into peace: "Got yourself a place, found yourself a rock, found a pearl."

The image of a jewel as the hard-earned reward permeates the proud, handsome calypso "Black Hands Bejewelled," a more personal statement directed at Threadgill's own race.

"That was a very subtle message to black people, if they could interpret it," he says. "I mean, what do the black hands represent? Work, hard work, and something there to caress you; your mother caresses you with her hands, to soothe you, and to prepare food."

Threadgill clearly draws from the social and spiritual history of his people. But he feels that a value system bound to a tradition can be a trap, as he suggests in the "Dewar's Profile" quote. It's perhaps the most widely read statement he's made. It calls for amplification because it is essential to his perspective, and the quote is a splice job from a statement made in an article by Gene



Part of the Sextett at the Village Vanguard: (from left) Threadgill, Fred Hopkins, Rasul Siddik, and Frank Lacy.

MITCHELL SEIDEL



Santoro in *The Nation* in July of 1987. The "Dewar's Profile" quote reads:

"Tradition is a background of ingredients; in itself it's nothing. If you can't make something out of it, the world can do without it."

It's a provocative, challenging statement at a time when some perceive jazz as trading too heavily on its past and groping for its future.

Threadgill expands: "For instance, if we can only reproduce, we need to forget about it, go on to something else. It's a waste of time." Threadgill is making a distinction between reproduction-as-replication and organic reproduction. "The process, idiom, and styles we work in need to be livable forms; livable forms can be reproductive forms. When those forms cease to produce offspring, when the forms cease to be evolutionary, I think they have outlived themselves. Either they become classical forms or they keep growing. I believe the true, great generators are like that. Other things fall by the wayside. It's like what happens in nature."

How to evolve as an artist is the real question. You can do it by synthesis, as an ongoing personal process, he says.

How precisely can a musician synthesize sources?

"You synthesize all the things that are in your musical parameters, you bring it together, that's what your musical person is doing. It can be voluntary or involuntary—however the process occurs—but there should be some sort of internal consciousness that's jelling these things, so they can go through and keep going and extend, rather than tying things off."

Without naming names, Threadgill takes aim at young musicians who have rigorously learned a particular idiom and feel compelled to replicate it.

"This is 1988—I meet a musician born in 1968, or maybe 1958. They may be going back into some neo-classicism and staying there, in a particular tradition, such as those created by Charlie Parker, or Miles Davis created vis-à-vis Charlie Parker. That is a whole spiritual and social reality that one has to be part-and-parcel of in order to synthesize. Music is not exclusive of the physical environment. It is everything that is in its environment. Music is a living organism, it is sound, a part of life. Sound is a form of life."

That may sound like an alchemist talking; but these ideas echo the AACM conceptions of music as the possibility of sound more than a manipulation of conventional musical elements. Yet how does 44-year-old Henry Threadgill succeed in remaking Morton's mid-1920s music where others might be failing to find a new synthesis in Parker's or Davis' music?

"Well, you go back to Jelly Roll and

you're going back to the one reality in terms of jazz, right? I mean, I could easier get closer to Charlie Parker by going back to Jelly Roll. The further back you go, the closer you get to one, the source, and the more likely the genes and chromosomes are there for all the tribes that sprang out of it. That's what happened in [Alex Haley's] *Roots*—you find all these generations created out of this one couple. You start seeing the power and all the information and how a lot of things spring out of his music. You start looking at all the musical styles and interests that were disseminated, not only musically but theoretically."

Threadgill feels Morton is more important than ever today. He finds a social reality that Morton dealt with—control of his own published music—as a lesson for black Americans, and jazz musicians, even today.

"I mean that was way past the thinking of Scott Joplin. If he had had control of his own goods, he wouldn't have been battered and tattered in his mind, you know. He was still on the subservient plane."

Yet Joplin remains a musical hero whom Threadgill has synthesized into his own voice. His next album will be a collection of rags, "my own rags, all originals. Nobody writes rags anymore."

Threadgill has arrived, however, not by virtue of deft musical archeology and reconstruction but because he's finding a balance between his artistic needs and the need to communicate the emotional depths of his vision.

"Music has the same power over me that it has over everybody else. It's the nature of being human to be emotional. You don't lessen anything by becoming more emotional about a situation, you can still be in control. Music is like riding a wild horse: you can control it as long as you got the reins.

"I don't want the music to [just] run away with me," Threadgill says. "I want it to run away with you, too. I want it to take us all away right over into something, run us out of the state we're in. I want to get rid of that control of our real emotions, transcend that control to create that magic—where the whole moment is transposed, tranquil, but the emotions alive. We get shot into another reality which is right here, right now."

Threadgill composes to give meaning and context to the moment, a moment born of an inspired melody and stretched into a moving space to improvise within. But the musicians must stay within that compositional space and character. Up above the magic and marching, Threadgill is on a high wire, riding that horse. It's about balance, this jazz dialectic, whether you're composing or improvising.

"Just about everything I do comes out of my sense of being in this world and the effects it has on me, and on humanity, and not just humanity but life," Threadgill says. "I think that all artists are in that position. It seems to be something you can't get



MITCHELL SEIDEL

## HENRY THREADGILL'S EQUIPMENT

Threadgill chose not to reveal the makers of his instruments. "That's a form of advertising," he said, "and frankly I'm not happy with the way they have dealt with me." He's now looking for a new instrument manufacturer in Europe.

## HENRY THREADGILL SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### as a leader

*EASILY SLIP INTO ANOTHER WORLD*—RCA Novus 3025  
*YOU KNOW THE NUMBER*—RCA Novus 3013  
*SUBJECT TO CHANGE*—About Time 1007  
*JUST THE FACTS AND PASS THE BUCKET*—About Time 1005  
*WHEN WAS THAT?*—About Time 1004  
*X-75 Volume 1*—Arista Novus 3013

### with Air

*(NEW AIR) AIRSHOW No. 1*—Black Saint 0099  
*(NEW AIR) LIVE AT MONTREUX '83*—Black Saint 0084  
*80 DEGREES BELOW '82*—Antilles 1007  
*AIR MAIL*—Black Saint 0049  
*LIVE AIR*—Black Saint 0034  
*AIR LORE*—RCA Bluebird 6578  
*MONTREUX SUISSE AIR*—Arista Novus 3008  
*OPEN AIR SUIT*—Arista Novus 3002  
*AIR TIME*—Nessa 12  
*AIR RAID*—India Navigation 1064

### with David Murray Octet

*MURRAY'S STEPS*—Black Saint 0065  
*HOME*—Black Saint 0055

### with Sly and Robbie

*RHYTHM KILLERS*—Island 90585

### with Anthony Braxton

*FOR TRIO*—Arista 4181

### with Roscoe Mitchell

*L-R-G—THE MAZE—SII EXAMPLES*—Nessa 14/15

### with Mual Richard Abrams

*YOUNG AT HEART, WISE IN TIME*—Delmark 432

away from. You cut out the artist in you and you're going to get bruised in this way.

"Other people may not need the artist in themselves. But everyone's here to make us aware of different things, so we can keep this delicate balance of life going, make it work. That's why we got these stations in life which we're supposed to fill. What are we gonna be—teachers? Doctors? Whatever, these are delicate stations that have to be balanced. And the artist serves to synthesize certain information to make us aware of the balance, to heighten our lives from awareness."

# STEVE MILLER

By Bill Milkowski

**S**omething is happening. Barry Manilow calls on Stan Getz and Gerry Mulligan for his *Swing Street* album. Sting recruits Kenny Kirkland and Branford Marsalis for his touring band and cuts tracks with the Gil Evans Orchestra. Huey Lewis features Getz on the title cut of his *Small World*. Steve Miller brings in Milt Jackson and Phil Woods for his *Born 2B Blue* session.

Are these self-made millionaires suddenly getting hip? Are jazz musicians suddenly in vogue among popmeisters with unlimited resources and exotic whims? Or is this what happens to rock and pop stars when they hit that 40-year-old plateau?

In Miller's case, his current interest in jazz goes much deeper than this. Though the 45-year-old pop star made his fame and fortune with such simple, catchy anthems as "The Joker" (1973), "Rock 'N Me" and "Fly Like An Eagle" (1976), and "Abracadabra" (1982), he has had a lifelong, deeply personal relationship with the jazz standards that appear on *Born 2B Blue*.

"My Dad has always been a big jazz and blues fan and my mother was a great singer," Steve explains. "She sings kinda like Ella Fitzgerald . . . real sweet, nice, pure voice. She taught me all those songs as a kid. 'Willow Weep For Me' and 'When Sunny Gets Blue' were the tunes she used to sing to me when I was real small. For 'God Bless The Child' I didn't go back and listen to Billie Holiday's version or anybody's versions. I just had that song in my heart. All these tunes were songs I learned by heart over the years."

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on October 5, 1943, Miller grew up in a richly musical environment. His jazz-loving father was a doctor who also happened to be one of the two or three guys in town to own a professional studio-quality Magnacorder, the kind most radio stations of the day used. The only other person in the area who had such sophisticated recording equipment was a close friend of Dr. Miller's by the name of Lester Polfus (a.k.a., Les Paul, The Wizard of Waukesha).

Steve remembers frequent visits to the Miller home by the likes of Les, Tal Farlow, Charles Mingus, Red Norvo, and others. "This was around 1948-49. My Dad would go to see these great jazz musicians, record them, and eventually strike up great friendships with many of them. So all of these people were coming over to the house all the time and I was hearing their music at a really impressionable age."

Miller not only got to meet these jazz greats and hear them perform impromptu concerts in his living room, he also received some invaluable tips from them about the business. "I learned all about multi-track recording, speeding up tape and slowing it down from Les Paul way back when. And I learned about how to promote records from him. He'd always send us packages of his stuff everytime he and Mary [Ford] put out a single. So I saw the whole business and really became infatuated with it."

The Miller family moved to Dallas, Texas in 1949 and young Steve soon struck up a relationship with a great Texas guitar player who paid frequent visits to Dr. Miller's household. "T-Bone Walker was kind of a hypochondriac," he begins. "That's why he came



## THE JO GETS

over so much; but then my Dad and T-Bone became personal friends. T-Bone would play parties at our house and stay all night and my Dad would record all his stuff. I've got tapes of T-Bone Walker playing in my house around 1951-52 that are just incredible . . . really well-recorded, surprisingly good tapes. So that had a huge influence on me, just hanging out with T-Bone. He's really the guy who taught me how to play lead guitar. That's where I got my jazz and blues roots from. He gave me the fundamentals to do anything I wanted to in blues. I was actually a pretty sophisticated player when I started my first band at age 12 and I've been playing the same licks ever since, for 30 years now."

In his first band, The Marksmen, Miller played Jimmy Reed tunes while employing a few signature T-Bone tricks, like playing the guitar behind his head and doing the splits. In his spare time he'd sneak into jazz clubs to catch cats like David Fathead Newman and James Moody. After five years, he left home to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he hooked up with like-minded musicians like Boz Scaggs and Ben Sidran. In 1961, they put together The Ardells, a white blues & soul group that gained popularity around campus. After three years in



LYNN GOLDSMITH/UGI

# KER JAZZY

Madison, he split for Denmark to attend the University of Copenhagen, where he got deeper into his studies in comparative literature. He returned to Madison to finish up his degree, but something got in the way. It was that nasty ol' blues bug.

"This was late in 1963. I had gone down to Chicago and saw Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf and those guys. And I saw where Paul Butterfield had a recording contract and was getting written up in *Time* magazine and everything. So I decided then and there that I didn't want to teach literature, I didn't want to get a degree. I wanted to play music. So I told my mother, 'I'm gonna go to Chicago and just see if I can make it because there's a blues scene happening down there and all these guys are getting recording contracts.' And to my surprise, she said, 'It's a great idea. You oughta go, as soon as you can.'"

He formed the Goldberg/Miller Blues Band with organist Barry Goldberg (who would later become a charter member of The Electric Flag with Buddy Miles and Mike Bloomfield) and they started to make some noise around Chicago, but that elusive recording contract never came. Miller packed it in and headed to San Francisco in 1966 and formed The Steve Miller Band. That group—bassist Lonnie Turner, drummer Tim Davis, guitarist James Cooke, organist Jim Peterman, and lead guitarist/lead singer Steve

Miller—backed Chuck Berry on a *Live At The Fillmore* album. Two years later, Miller's band debuted with *Children Of The Future*, featuring his old Madison cohorts Boz Scaggs and Ben Sidran. Twenty years and 17 albums later (all for Capitol Records), Miller is reunited with Sidran on the jazzy *Born 2B Blue*.

Sidran took a contempo-pop approach to producing this package of jazz standards in the hope of hooking the vast new (read: Yuppie) market that has been going for jazz-flavored product by Sting, Sade, and Michael Franks in a big way. His arrangements on cuts like "God Bless The Child," Ray Charles' "Mary Ann," Horace Silver's "Filthy McNasty," and Lionel Hampton's "Red Top" have that crisp, bouncy quality associated with West Coast cruisin' fare (read: happy jazz), while Miller's intimate vocals recall the tender, breathy stylings of Michael Franks. On top of that, Steve layers some very cool blues guitar licks—Johnny Guitar Watson's nasty funk lines on "Ya Ya" and "God Bless The Child," T-Bone's nimble blues lines on "Willow Weep For Me," "Filthy McNasty," and the title cut, Mel Torme's "Born To Be Blue." All in all, it's a daring project for a pop icon to undertake—startling some of his fans and sending his record company into a state of shock—but it's precisely where Steve Miller is at right now.

"There was a period around the late '70s when I had fallen out of favor with rock critics and radio programmers. The scene was shifting to a different style of music and I was considered a dinosaur act. You go through these things when you have a career—you're great, you're a genius, you're an idiot, you're the most wonderful thing that ever happened, you're the worst thing that ever happened. When you've been around for 21 years, it's a chart that goes up and down.

"So then in 1982, I beat all the odds by getting this big hit record [*Abracadabra*] when I wasn't supposed to. That sold 4½ million copies, then my next one bombed [*Italian X-Rays*], then the next one [*Living In The 20th Century*] was a hit; but by then I was so frustrated with the record company. They did nothing to promote any of my albums. They put all their energy into two acts on the label, Poison and Megadeth. They just did a \$350,000 video for Poison, a heavy metal group. The whole heavy metal thing is all bullshit, man. It's something that's been foisted on America by a very small group of people. It's strictly a video phenomenon.

"So I finally started thinking, 'Why should I let this record company tell me what to do? Why should I let them keep me from what I enjoy doing the most?' And that whole attitude led to me doing this new album of songs that I love."

Capitol, of course, was less than thrilled when they heard the initial tracks of *Born 2B Blue*, cut with Miller and Ben Sidran's working band (drummer Gordy Knudtson, bassist Billy Peterson, synthesizer specialist Ricky Peterson, and tenor saxist Bobby Malach).

"It all began when I was hanging out with Ben one day in the studio, doing background vocals for his album, *On The Cool Side*. In between reels I started singing 'Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah,' and Ben really dug it. He started thinking about arrangements so he could do it with his band. Then a few weeks later, Ben and his band were playing at The Jazz Alley in Seattle, just a few blocks from my house. I asked them all to drop by during the day to my home studio and we began to work out tunes like 'God Bless The Child,' and the whole thing really turned me on. We got the arrangements down, cut the basic tracks, and when I sat down to play guitar over it, I found that on a lot of the stuff I was able to play blues across the jazz changes, and it worked beautifully.

"And that's really what T-Bone was all about. This is really T-Bone's album. I should've dedicated it to him. The last one [*Living In The 20th Century*] was dedicated to Jimmy Reed and this one is really T-Bone's. He's the guy who gave me the tools to play across jazz changes. He sort of made my blues presentation more sophisticated. And I had a great time playing those same licks on top of 'Born To Be Blue' or 'Willow Weep For Me,' instead of just playing a 12-bar blues. It sounded so good to me!

"So I took what I felt was a great record to the record company,

and they were real disappointed. They wanted *Fly Like An Eagle Part 2*, then *Part 3*, *Part 9*, and so on. And the first thing that David Berman at Capitol said was, 'Well . . . it's a jaaaazz record! You're talking about 20, 30, maybe 40 thousand albums.' But I tried to educate them. Ben and I went in and tried to explain, 'Look, the groundwork has all been laid. There's nothing revolutionary about this at all.' We told them about Sade and Michael Franks and Sting. They had no idea what this album was. I don't even think they know who Milt Jackson is. It's pathetic."

He adds, "There are so many people out there who are ready for jazz. When I play this record for people my age, they just love it. There's a real market for it, it just has to be worked, just like anything else. It has to be believed in."

Miller has two videos now in heavy rotation on VH-1, the cable video show for those who have grown out of the MTV stage. And

yet, curiously, his recent audiences have been almost exclusively high school and college age. They come to hear Miller and the band do all the old hits, some of which were written when they were preschoolers. They sit patiently through the jazz offerings on the program, applaud politely for Sidran's solos and vocalizing, and seem slightly restless whenever saxist Malach gets to stretch out. It's a situation that completely befuddles Miller.

"When I came out to do this tour I thought I was going to see a pretty sophisticated audience. When I got together with the band, I was real surprised because they all said, 'Aw, man, we gotta do the hits.' I told them, 'You guys, I wrote those things 15 years ago and I did 'em to death for six years on the road. I've done the hits forever. I really don't think we're gonna need the hits.' But they kept insisting and they had already learned them, which surprised me. I thought we were basically going to be doing a jazz-blues kind of show. But we went and did our first date and I was absolutely shocked. We played in a gymnasium at a college in Burlington, Vermont, and these kids came in and knew all the lyrics to my greatest hits. I couldn't figure it out."

He later realized that his *Greatest Hits* volume had become a big party record at high schools and colleges all across the country, selling to the tune of 45,000 per month.

"I wasn't aware of how popular the record was because it's been at a bargain basement price for four years. It's a \$5 album and *Billboard* doesn't chart mid-line albums. It's been in the Top 10 for 2½ years in mid-line albums. It's like *Dark Side Of The Moon* [Pink Floyd's 1973 magnum opus which is still, incredibly, charting in *Billboard's* Top 200]. It's this amazing party record. These kids know all the words to all 14 songs on *Greatest Hits*, religiously. I mean, I never had an audience like this in my life, and it's kind of a weird thing to be confronted with. It's just been a total surprise."

While eager new Miller fans stand up and sway back and forth while singing along to old tunes like "Wild Mountain Honey" and "Jet Airliner," Steve admits that he gets "a perverse pleasure" in doing "Born To Be Blue" for them.

"These kids are like virginal in their musical tastes," he says with a distinct tone of glee in his voice. "And we're educating them. At some of the shows, like the one we did at The Orpheum Theater in Boston, you could just see it in their faces. They were listening to 'God Bless The Child' and liking it. They were even cheering for Bobby Malach's solos, yelling, 'Bob-bee, Bob-bee, Bob-bee!' like they were at a baseball game. Sure, they came to hear 'The Joker' and 'Space Cowboy' and all that, but that's not all we're giving them. I mean, I don't want this to end up being a Beach Boys show, where it's 'The hits only, thanks, and don't cloud the issue.' If I was just doing the hits on tour, I'd phone my part in. 'Cause creatively there's nothing happening there. It's just a rerun of something I did 15 years ago, and that I did a lot of."

"I enjoy it, though. I mean, it's fun entertaining an audience, but you gotta reach, you gotta stretch. And on the jazzier, bluesier stuff, that's what's happening for me. I mean, 'Born To Be Blue' is a hard melody line to sing. I had to do scales and all kinds of preparation to be able to hit those opening notes. It's a hard tune to get control of. And working on that tune suddenly got me very interested in what I was doing again."

He's stretching on guitar and as a vocalist, and educating his young audiences in the process.

"We're making 'em listen to the new stuff, we're talking about the new stuff. It's a 'That was then, this is now' kind of thing for part of the show, and a bunch of the kids are going along with it."

There's no way of telling how many young minds Miller may affect with his current excursions into jazz. Maybe some kid will hear "God Bless The Child" and go deeper to discover Billie Holiday. Perhaps some high school band sax player will be inspired by Bobby Malach's hot blowing to go and check out the roots of where his sound comes from. Maybe Ben Sidran's advanced harmonies and Bud Powell licks on piano will turn some budding keyboard player's head around. It could happen, but that's not Steve's intent. He's just playing the tunes he's always loved. The rest is all gravy.

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LYNN GOLDSMITH/LGI

### STEVE MILLER'S EQUIPMENT

On the cover of *Born 2B Blue*, Steve is pictured with a beautiful blonde Jimmy Smith fatbody jazz box, which he played on a couple of cuts from the album. In concert he relies on two Telecaster-shaped guitars, custom-made by Los Angeles luthier Tom Anderson. They are both fitted with Schecter pickups. He also plays six- and twelve-string Ovation electro-acoustics. His onstage amp is a Roland Jazz Chorus and the only effect he uses is a Boss digital delay, which he employs for the echo parts on his hit, "Fly Like An Eagle." Says Steve, "I used to use an Echoplex for that song but these Boss pedals are much better, much cleaner."

### STEVE MILLER DISCOGRAPHY

BORN 2B BLUE—Capitol 48303	FLY LIKE AN EAGLE—Capitol 16339
LIVING IN THE 20TH CENTURY—Capitol 12445	THE JOKER—Capitol 11235
ITALIAN X-RAYS—Capitol 12339	RECALL THE BEGINNING . . . A JOURNEY FROM EDEN—Capitol 11022
STEVE MILLER LIVE—Capitol 12263	ROCK LOVE—Capitol 748
ABRACADABRA—Capitol 12216	NUMBER FIVE—Capitol 436
CIRCLE OF LOVE—Capitol 16357	YOUR SAVING GRACE—Capitol 16079
GREATEST HITS—Capitol 16321	BRAVE NEW WORLD—Capitol 16323
COMPILATION: ANTHOLOGY—Capitol 11114	SAILOR—Capitol 16263
BOOK OF DREAMS—Capitol 16323	CHILDREN OF THE FUTURE—Capitol 16262

# THE MANY FACETS OF **DOC** **SEVERINSEN**

**D**oc Severinsen is a true rarity among trumpeters, a household name. A fixture on Johnny Carson's Tonight Show since 1962 (and leader of the orchestra since 1967), Severinsen has become as well known to the general public for his funny clothes and one-liners as for his trumpet playing. Until recently, jazz listeners had to dig out ancient Charlie Barnet records or an obscure Mike Bryan album to find examples of Doc's jazz chops on disc. Fortunately, the situation has improved a bit with two volumes featuring The Tonight Show Band now available on Amherst.

Severinsen's latest album (also for Amherst) is a change of direction. "I don't know why fusion has become a dirty word," muses the 61-year-old trumpeter. "I like that type of music. *Facets* is basically straightahead jazz tunes done in a contemporary fashion with a different concept of rhythm and a few harmonic alterations. A few years ago I decided that I wanted and needed to do some different things musically. I met Jeff Tyzik, who arranged *Facets*, through Allen Vizzutti who I'd known since he was a kid back in Montana. They've both become kind of like sons of mine. We started spending a lot of time together listening to records and thinking of new ideas, resulting first in my group Xebron and now *Facets*. This is the first album that I've recorded that I don't mind sitting down and listening to; usually in the past I made records and then forgot about them just as quickly."

*Facets* has a mixture of Jeff Tyzik originals and surprising remakes of jazz standards with Severinsen joined by the reeds of Ernie Watts, and a contemporary rhythm section that includes Lee Ritenour, Peter Erskine, and keyboardist Alan Pasqua. "I like 'Maiden Voyage' a lot," comments Severinsen, "and I enjoy our subtle version of 'Stompin' At The Savoy'. It's very laidback and uncomplicated, a mental picture of the Savoy as it looked to me when I made my first visit to New York. The Savoy Ballroom was a primarily black ballroom with very elegant dancers and elegant people. When we recorded this I got into a mindframe where I was seeing it through a smoky haze, a dreamlike look at the Savoy with everyone moving very slowly."

Carl Severinsen was born July 7, 1927 in Arlington, Oregon, receiving the nickname "Little Doc" due to his father (the elder Carl) being a dentist. "Arlington only had 600 people," remembers Severinsen, "so there was no real exposure to music. The earliest that I can remember was when I was a little kid my father would sit at the edge of my bed at nighttime and play violin. He was a very good player, so it's a nice

recollection to have. I started on trumpet quite by accident. My father wanted me to be a violinist like him but I didn't take to it at all. In desperation he asked me what I would like to play and I picked the trombone because I liked the way it looked with the slide as played in the town band. There wasn't an extra one in town and I was too small for trombone anyway. But Herb Clarke, who worked at the Shell service station, had a cornet lying in his attic that I started with."

The seven-year-old developed on his instrument so quickly that after just three weeks he was asked to join the local high school band. "In my hometown that was no big thing," Doc modestly comments. "The high school band included plenty of grade school and junior high students in addition to high school. Three weeks was not really that fast, not if you had heard the band [laughs]."

Growing up in rural Oregon, Severinsen's biggest musical influences came via radio, particularly the popular trumpets of Harry James, Ziggy Elman, and Louis Armstrong. He began to get a reputation around the state and due to a fluke tried out for Tommy Dorsey's orchestra in 1940, when he was still only 13. "There was a ballroom in Portland that the Tommy Dorsey band was scheduled to play. They were short a trumpet player and some local guy in a music store brought up my name, neglecting to mention my age. They sent for me and when I played for the musicians, they were all very supportive, patting me on the head and sending me on my way. That was the first important live band that I'd ever heard. From then on, my ambition in life was to be with Tommy Dorsey."

A few years later Doc did get big band experience playing with a short-lived jazz-oriented band led by Ted Fiorito before World War II, then the Army intervened. After his discharge, Severinsen managed to catch the tail end of the big band era, playing with Charlie Barnet off and on during 1947-49. "Charlie Barnet was great, I really enjoyed being with his group. It was a big jazz band as opposed to the more dance-oriented groups I'd been with. It was also a mixed segregation, and it improved my social awareness. Clark Terry was in the first Barnet band I was in and, man, every note he played went straight to my head like a computer. Not only am I fond of Clark



personally but he's an absolutely fabulous musician and was such a great influence to have at that time in my life.

"Later on I was with another Barnet band that was a bebop group and that was one of the best bands I've ever heard. The trumpet section I was in had Maynard Ferguson, Rolf Ericson, Ray Wetzel, and Johnny Howell. One time I had a blister on my lip and needed to get someone to fill in for me for a couple days. I was told that there was a kid down here from Montreal that was pretty good. Maynard Ferguson came in and played all of my parts, up an octave! It was astonishing.

"Barnet would brook no interference from promoters on his music. He was a real character—the last count that I know to be accurate is that he ended up with 13 wives—but Charlie knew exactly the type of band he wanted."

Severinsen's first recordings were with Barnet starting in 1947, and he took short solos with the bebop edition on "Cu-Ba," "Overtime," and "Charlie's Other Aunt." But today he has little affection for those early efforts: "I was just a kid at the time. I play bad on those, I had no training. If I didn't have someone to copy, I'd be lost."

Doc speaks more enthusiastically about finally getting to join Tommy Dorsey's orchestra: "When Barnet broke up the bebop band I managed to hook up with Dorsey at last. Tommy was a taskmaster and there was no looseness in his band; but for every brass player who ever played in his orchestra, every night you came to work was like getting a free music lesson."

With the end of the big band era, Severinsen found himself at the crossroads of his career. "I decided to be a more commercial-type player because at that time you could walk into a record store and see albums by Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis collecting a lot of dust, which was certainly no tribute to the musical taste of the American public. I felt that if the two best trumpeters couldn't sell their records, where do I fit in? Being a small-town boy and not being too adventurous I decided that since I had good technique and chops, maybe I oughta head for something a little more commercial. Many times since I've been very sorry about that because when one is in their early-to-mid 20's, that's the time to hook on to the hottest guys and study jazz. The young players today study jazz like I used to study classical and that's why they're so good at it."

"There was so much studio work in the late '40s and early '50s, that a new guy coming in would get a chance to prove himself. I was hired for the Kate Smith show when they needed a first trumpeter and then I worked on the NBC staff. I did a lot of radio and TV shows and lots and lots of recording. In those days it wasn't unusual for Bernie Glow, myself, and a few others to do three recording dates on the same day, scheduled at 10-1, 2-5, and 7-10."

Severinsen led the life of the highly-paid but anonymous studio musician until a club date with Skitch Henderson led to him joining The Tonight Show Band and in 1967 taking over as the bandleader. Doc quickly developed into a comic foil for Johnny Carson.

Severinsen has been on literally thousands of Tonight shows but a few musical highpoints come to mind for him: "I think The Tonight Show is the perfect home for any musician; it's certainly been a great place for me. I loved having Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Harry James, and all the other musicians on. To have Joe Williams decide to fake something with the entire band faking a chart that you would swear they'd spent hours writing was exciting. I'll never forget Miles Davis at the time his record *Bitches Brew* was out. Needless to say, his music was much too advanced for most people on the show. Miles came out, turned his back on the camera, and just

wailed. I thought it was wonderful [*laughs*]."

After leading The Tonight Show Band for 19 years, Severinsen finally recorded the orchestra in 1986, resulting in two Grammy awards. Why did it take so long before they entered a studio? "The band was always good and ready to record, an all-star band with great soloists. I'd always mention The Tonight Show Band to every record company I was associated with but no one was interested; it seemed like all anyone cared about was rock. My friend Jeff Tyzik was recording with Amherst and he wanted to produce the *Facets* album. We started getting some ideas together and then the owner of the company, Lenny Silver, told me that he'd like to record The Tonight Show Band. I responded by saying, 'That's the worst idea I've ever heard. Every record company in the business has turned us down'. He seemed convinced that he could sell a few records and the two albums turned out really well. It wasn't as jazzy as I'd have liked, mostly the old big band favorites, but he had a definite idea what he thought he could sell. Now I'd like to record The Tonight Show Band again and do a stronger jazz album with some original things and some of our specialty numbers."

In recent years Doc has split his time away from The Tonight Show between his fusion group Xebron and symphony work. "It's amazing that Xebron, without having made a record that's sold more than five copies, has continued on for quite a few years. It's been tough because in a lot of cases we'd be booked somewhere and lots of Tonight Show fans would show up hoping to hear big band charts, and instead I'd show up with an avant garde, jazz-fusion group. A lot of people would walk out because they'd expect us to play 'Stardust', but I refused to compromise. Our audience does seem to be growing though."

"As far as the symphony work goes, I work a great deal as a soloist and a conductor, although when I say conductor, I'm using the term very loosely [*laughs*]. Most of the trumpet music that exists is from the baroque era."

When asked about fellow trumpeters he admires, Severinsen shakes his head in amazement. "There are piles and piles of great players around today. Freddie Hubbard is still one of my very favorites. I still love everything Miles and Dizzy play, and Wynton Marsalis is totally stunning. There are a lot of great young players, too. A kid named Chris Botti at the University of Indiana I caught doing a club date in Indianapolis and he just knocked my socks off!"

Why is so little of Doc Severinsen's jazz playing on record? "I used to do things for Command in the '60s but that wasn't really jazz. I did some fairly decent playing on the Mike Bryan album which was straightahead. At that time in my life I was doing a lot of jazz playing in New York but the opportuni-

## DOC SEVERINSEN'S EQUIPMENT

"I'm partners with Dick Akwright in Oakland, California. Our company is called Severinsen-Akwright and we make a horn called the Bel Canto trumpet. It's the best horn I've ever played by far. I have a great collection of wonderful old Bach and Besson trumpets and this cuts all of them. I also play a very old French Besson fluegelhorn."

## DOC SEVERINSEN SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### as a leader

*FACETS*—Amherst 3319  
*THE TONIGHT SHOW BAND*—Amherst 3311  
*THE TONIGHT SHOW BAND, VOL. II.*—Amherst 3312  
*NIGHT JOURNEY*—Epic 34078

### with Charlie Barnet

*BEBOP SPOKEN HERE*—Capitol 11061

### with Mike Bryan

*MIKE BRYAN SEXTET*—Storyville 4015

### with Stan Getz

*BIG BAND BOSSA NOVA*—Verve 8494

### with various artists

*BIG BAND HIT PARADE*—Telarc CD-80177

ties for trumpeters were very limited as compared to today. I didn't have enough guts to decide to be a jazz troubadour and say that if I didn't make any money it was OK. I had a wife and three kids to take care of and I was brought up in a small town where you were taught to go out and make a living. I imagine if I had it to do over again I'd probably do the same thing. I made good money and was able to raise my family properly. But there were times in my life, like when I became the leader of The Tonight Show, when I could have gone in a different direction. At that point, if I had it to do again, I'd say to hell with everything, I'm making plenty of money on the show, I'm going to have a greater career as a jazz musician. But since I don't have it to do over again, and it's silly to talk about what's past, I just feel that it's never too late for a musician to make assessments and select a new direction. I want to start doing deeper research into playing jazz so I can be better at it. At some point I'd like to do a small group date, maybe trumpet and three rhythm."

Severinsen ended our lengthy conversation with a strong defense of his current direction and of fusion in general: "I went into the jazz-fusion thing because I like rock & roll. Why wouldn't I like it? I heard it before it was rock. I worked at The Apollo Theatre with Barnet opposite rhythm & blues groups like Wynonie Harris and Joe Liggins' Honeydrippers. Five years later I heard a kid named Elvis Presley doing a bad imitation of Wynonie Harris. It always seemed natural to me to have jazz and rock eventually coming together. It bothers me to hear some musicians saying, 'Only this is pure', and, 'This is not jazz'. If it's good, it's good whether it's plugged in or acoustic. Why squelch creativity by saying, 'I don't understand it so it's not any good?' I'd guarantee that if Duke Ellington were a kid growing up today, he'd be fooling around with electronic machines and making marvelous new music." db

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



## ROVA

**BEAT KENNEL**—Black Saint 120 126: *El Amore En Los Tiempos De La Finca; THE AGGREGATE; SPORTSPEAK; COMPOSITION* ◇—30—EGN KBM—78; *WHAT WAS LOST REGAINED*.

**Personnel:** Bruce Ackley, soprano saxophone; Larry Ochs, tenor saxophone; Jon Raskin, alto and baritone saxophones; Andrew Voigt, soprano and alto saxophones.

★★★★★

*Beat Kennel* is ROVA's 11th recording in a decade, and it's their best, going away. And, not because "ROVA's relationship to jazz is becoming steadily more obvious," or that there are whole chunks of "recognizable jazz content" to savor. *Beat Kennel* is not significantly different, in this regard, from an early album such as 1981's *As Was* (Metalanguage 118). The success of *Beat Kennel* speaks more to artistic maturity, rather than an alignment with the stars (Dolph, Braxton, Mitchell, et al.). ROVA can be likened to calligraphers, whose brush strokes have taken on a life of their own after years of meticulous practice; they have discoursed on many of the ideas contained within the program since their inception, but the ideas sing on *Beat Kennel*.

"Sportspeak" opens with darting boppish unison lines that give way to a puckish Arabian-tinted dance. Blustery ostinati serve to jettison improvised highlights, particularly Larry Ochs' gruff squalls. Yet, while the piece certainly relates to jazz, it is far from being an assimilation of or by jazz. In "Sportspeak," ROVA has found a DMZ between idiomatic orthodoxy and reactionary zeal.

The same can be said of Andrew Voigt's "El Amore En Los Tiempos De La Finca," an invigorating opener, full of swaggering, syncopated phrases, ricocheting off rakish riffs. It proves an excellent vehicle for Bruce Ackley, whose simmering, sinewy lines are stoked to raspy hot shouts, a subtly constructed solo that substantiates his status as a world-class soprano saxophonist. Jon Raskin, whose baritone also ringleads this raucous underpinning, keeps the pace up after Ackley's solo triggers an exhilarating collective passage, with a solo brimming with swirling and biting textures.

Raskin contributed two pieces that probe ROVA's "through time" method of blurring the line between written and improvised materials, the aptly named "The Aggregate" and "What Was Lost Regained." The former segues from a plaintive melody stated by Raskin's alto against a drone, through nimble voicings, whose spiky intervals are rounded down by a breathy attack, unravelling, via a yearning-filled Ochs solo, into a four-way conversation, full of quick

rejoinders. The latter alternates jaunty ensemble passages with fiery improvisations; again, Ackley jumps to the fore, turns the heat up a notch, igniting a bracing polyphony.

The reading of Anthony Braxton's groundbreaking saxophone quartet, "Composition ◇—30—EGN KBM—78," is fastidious and satisfying; it's an entertaining and informative exercise to compare it to the original—included on Braxton's classic *New York, Fall 1974* (Arista 4032)—featuring Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, and Hamiet Bluiett. The composition's exploration of dynamics, intervals, and silences is rendered in a taut, and tart, manner. A great follow-up would be a recording of ROVA's collaboration with Braxton for their acclaimed "Pre Echoes" concert series.

—bill shoemaker



## TONY WILLIAMS

**ANGEL STREET**—Blue Note B1-48494: *ANGEL STREET; TOUCH ME; RED MASK; KISS ME; DREAMLAND; ONLY WITH YOU; PEE WEE; THRILL ME; OBSESSION*.

**Personnel:** Williams, drums; Wallace Roney, trumpet; Billy Pierce, tenor and soprano saxophones; Mulgrew Miller, piano; Charnett Moffett, bass.

★★★★

Tony Williams' varied musical background brings an interesting edge to this particular brand of '80s jazz. Drawn to rock rhythms as he left Miles Davis in the late '60s, Williams hasn't been too concerned about staying a "jazz drummer," or selling big, for that matter. As a result, his career as a drumming bandleader has veered off somewhat from those who have preceded (and influenced) him—Blakey and Roach—as well as those of roughly his generation—DeJohnette and Cobham—and for different reasons, respectively.

In a sense, *Angel Street* is a continuation of 1986's *Civilization*; namely, a return to roots. For example, "Angel Street," a straight-ahead medium-tempo vamp, combines the perfect ensemble sound—around a trumpet/saxophone lead voice—with short introductory solos all around, minus drums. In what has become something of an occasional signature of the band, Miller reestablishes the groove towards the end as the band follows him out. And this all-acoustic jazz groove is sustained throughout the whole album.

Williams includes three short solo pieces, all of which serve as intriguing interludes but also as solid reminders that it is a *drummer* who is at the heart of this music. These pieces remind

me of his meterless solos with Davis as well as the way he warms up before this band begins each set when playing live. Here, the sound is fuller, with more emphasis on tomtoms and a looser snare—light years from that '60s sound of tight drum heads, crackling percussion, sizzling cymbals.

"Red Mask" combines an uptempo and insistent rock beat alternating with swinging drive. And even though Moffett doesn't solo, his bluesy basslines can't help but be noticed behind Pierce's full-bodied tenor. Likewise, "Dreamland" utilizes a rocking beat, this time with periodic suspension of drums helping to heighten and release tension.

As with *Civilization*, all of the tunes were written by Williams. None are "blowing" tunes of any great length. Rather, the uptempo group performances combine striking unison lines of horns with piano as jumping-off points for solos of varying length and order, the players coming and going as they mix with repeated choruses. There is one from Williams' book with Davis that provides an interesting contrast in arranging styles. The ballad "Pee Wee," circa 1988, is a tad slower, and waltzes ever so gently. Roney's muted horn is sweet and lyrical, and Pierce's theme statements on tenor at beginning and end draw out the beauty of the song's melody lines. Clearly, "Pee Wee" is the one pause that refreshes in this set.

Ending as it does with a real smoker ("Obsession"), I sense a statement being made: this band is hot and has gelled like no other Williams-led band has thus far. A sure sign of direction, the mix puts his drums center stage; less a specific presence, more the driving force behind all that is generated.

This isn't a revolutionary band, breaking rules or creating from scratch like some of Williams' Lifetime bands of the early '70s. Rather, Tony Williams has simply drawn to himself a striking collection of musicians who know exactly what they are doing, playing strong, purposeful jazz.

—john ephland



## CHRISTOPHER HOLLYDAY

**REVERENCE**—RBI 402: *MOANIN'; WHY DON'T I?; I'LL TAKE ROMANCE; TREATY OF JAZZ; ROUND MIDNIGHT; KISS ME RIGHT*.

**Personnel:** Hollyday, alto saxophone; Cedar Walton, piano; Ron Carter, bass; Billy Higgins, drums.

★★★★

## GUY FRICANO

**THE NEW YORK SESSIONS**—A.F.P. 81242: *CONVOLUTION; SUSPENDED ANIMATION ADAGIO; SUSPENDED ANIMATION MODERATO; LITTLE SUNFLOWER; JOY SPRING; DAHOMEY BLUE; I'VE NEVER BEEN IN LOVE BEFORE; THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE; INVITATION.*

**Personnel:** Fricano, trumpet, flugelhorn; Cedar Walton, piano; Ron Carter, bass; Jeff Newell, soprano and alto saxophones; Edward Petersen, tenor saxophone; Frank Derrick, alto saxophone (cut 4); Eddie Bert, trombone (1, 4); Geraldo De Oliveira, percussion (4, 6); Robert Shy, drums.

★ ★ ★

The estimable team of Cedar Walton and Ron Carter has been a strong, steady presence on the New York scene for the past 10 years or so. They have remarkable empathy, both technically and emotionally, whether they are working as a duo or anchoring the rhythm section on a record date.

When they're in the studio, their mutual understanding and experience (not to mention their chops) can lift up the players around them. That's what happens on both of these recent releases, although with somewhat different results.

Reverence finds Walton & Carter (along with Billy Higgins, whose playing is superb) backing up Christopher Hollyday, the 18-year-old alto sax phenom from Boston. This is a pure, unadorned blowing session. Hollyday has astounding technical ability for a player of his tender age, and his solos here are a rush of ideas. They're so fast and furious, even on "Round Midnight," that they're almost overwhelming—which is both a virtue and a problem.

Hollyday seems unable to relax. Inspired and perhaps a little awed by his august rhythm section (and Rudy Van Gelder behind the board), he pours out streams of notes that practically overlap. At times, it sounds as if he's at 78 while the rest of the band is at 33½. Fortunately, Walton & Carter respond perfectly, playing with restraint. Walton's solos, in particular, focus the music, provide needed contrast, and give the listener some breathing room before Hollyday's next explosion. With an ordinary rhythm section, this record could have been a disaster; with Walton & Carter (and Higgins), it's very good.

Guy Fricano's album is somewhat more conceptually ambitious, with a larger band playing charts written by the Chicago-based trumpeter. In many ways, it's reminiscent of the old CTI style, with its long modal tunes, pseudo-classical overtones (the "Suspended Animation" pieces), and Simonized sound. Fricano is a more introspective player than Hollyday, and his deliberate solos might have veered into heavy-handed sentiment without the fluid, energetic backing of Walton & Carter.

Carter's impeccable time is especially important here, because drummer Robert Shy is not quite as insistent as Higgins. The bass solos seem a bit disjointed, as if Carter's mind is on other things, but he never loses touch with the groove. And it would be hard to imagine another bassist who could pull off the tricky little solo introduction to "Joy Spring" with such aplomb. While the presence of

Walton & Carter doesn't automatically transform this session into an instant classic, it does lift the music out of the ordinary. And you can't ask much more than that from a rhythm section.

—jim roberts



## MICHAEL CARVIN

**FIRST TIME**—Muse 5352: *NIGHT IN TUNISIA; MY FUNNY VALENTINE; M.R.; CARAVAN; DEAR TRANE! HIPPO WITH GREEN SHOES ON.*

**Personnel:** Carvin, drums; David Williams, bass; Onaje Allen Gumbs, piano; John Stubblefield, tenor saxophone (cuts 1, 3); Ron Bridgewater, tenor saxophone (4, 5); Claudio Roditi, trumpet (1, 2, 3, 5); Cecil Bridgewater, trumpet (4, 5); Frank Lacey, trombone (2, 4, 5).

★ ★ ★ ★

## CINDY BLACKMAN

**ARCANE**—Muse 5341: *ARCANE; LATE AUTUMN; DUAL FORCE; INCINDYARY; TEETER TOTTER; MIRRORING GLANCES; DECEPTACON.*

**Personnel:** Blackman, drums; Buster Williams, bass (cuts 1, 3, 5, 6); Clarence Seay, bass (2, 4); Larry Willis, piano; Wallace Roney, trumpet; Joe Henderson, tenor saxophone (2, 5); Kenny Garrett, alto saxophone (1, 3, 5, 6).

★ ★

Both of these recent albums on Muse feature drummers stepping forward as leaders. In the case of Michael Carvin, it's a follow-up that's long overdue; for Cindy Blackman, it's a bit premature.

Carvin's *First Time* includes an original jazz waltz called "M.R." I assume it's a tribute to Max Roach, who has some nice things to say about Carvin in a quote on the album jacket. The influence of Roach on the 44-year-old Carvin—an experienced big-band and studio player—is unmistakable. Like Roach, Carvin is a sophisticated, intelligent, *musical* drummer. He plays with a light, fluid touch that gives the music tremendous momentum without overwhelming it. He hasn't quite reached Roach's level of precision yet (who has?), but he does construct similarly lyrical solos marked by careful attention to dynamics and tonal nuances.

Carvin is also a talented arranger, and his settings for the standards are bold and original. On both "Night In Tunisia" and "Caravan," he has radically reshaped the heads, opening up new dimensions within the tunes. "Tunisia" begins with a taut hi-hat figure that underpins the elongated, start-and-stop A-section before it explodes into the hard-swinging bridge.

"Caravan" sounds almost like a Mingus piece: the horns growl and chatter over an insistent bass ostinato and ticking rimshots. The ballads are equally refreshing, and the closing original, "Hippo With Green Shoes On," is a showcase for both Carvin's technique (two superb drum solos) and his lively sense of humor.

Cindy Blackman's debut is less inventive. Despite an all-original program contributed by various members of the band, including two by Blackman, there are many more clichés. The album is in a long string of "let's-go-for-the-old-Blue-Note-sound" releases that have descended upon us in recent years. The better tunes, like Blackman's title cut and Joe Henderson's "Teeter Totter," are solid enough—routine hard-bop stuff with well-played solos—but there are some real clunkers in between.

On such tunes as "Dual Force" and "Mirrored Glances," the arrangements are ragged, with transitions that sound like a novice driver crunching through the gears. Blackman is unconvincing in her leadership role, and the band just wanders along behind her. The sound mix (despite the experienced ears of Rudy Van Gelder) isn't very attractive either: it has a nasty edge to it, and Blackman's cymbals sound too much like pots and pans.

It's decidedly unfair to compare the technical skills of Blackman, 29, with someone as experienced as Michael Carvin—so I won't. I will note that the Tony Williams-influenced Blackman plays at an energy level which catches your ear even in the midst of the most pedestrian material. And her solo piece, "Incindary," is thoughtful and well-executed, if not especially original. Blackman is clearly a drum talent to watch, but as a leader she hasn't quite arrived yet.

—jim roberts



## BERT WILSON & REBIRTH

**THE NEXT REBIRTH**—9 Winds 0124: *ALLISON BY MOONLIGHT; ROSIE'S RHUMBA; ROCKY'S WALTZ; UPSIDE; REBIRTH; WHERE LOVE IS; BLIMINISHED DUES; PERIPHERAL PERCEPTIONS; SPEED OF LIGHT.*

**Personnel:** Bert Wilson, tenor, alto saxophones, bass clarinet; Nancy Curtis, flute, alto flute; Allen Youngblood, piano; Chuck Metcalf, bass; Bob Meyer, drums; Michael Olson, percussion.

★ ★ ★ ★

In a saxophonist Bert Wilson the Pacific North Coast has a regional legend and underground cult figure in post-bebop jazz. He's gained stature through his virtuoso mastery of overtones, polytones, and the extended range that

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## CANDID ON CHROMIUM

by Peter Kostakis

The Candid label was off and running in 1960 when Archie Bleyer, owner of Cadence Records, appointed writer Nat Hentoff producer of a new line of jazz recordings. In the course of an industrious nine months, sessions from blues to avant garde, from Otis Spann chronologically to Booker Little, emerged from N.Y.C.'s Nola Penthouse Studio. By 1961, when the label had run its course, Hentoff's perspicacious choice of talent combined with his propensity to uphold artistic freedom had produced music of lasting significance. Now Alan Bates' London-based Black Lion is returning Candid to the racks through P + O Compact Disc (995 Mansell Road, Roswell, Georgia 30076) reissues on vinyl and, for the first time, \$12.98 list CDs. Though only one CD from the select group of 11 that follows boasts previously unknown tracks, or tracks new to issue (and one other CD is new to U.S. release), "a significant amount of unreleased material" is promised for the future.

Each Candid is a "faithful reproduction" of the original, down to artwork, liner notes, and discographical errors—obedient to standards set by the Freedom reissue series (see **db**, Jan. '89). Unlisted surprise cuts ("Vassarlean" on *Mingus*) and phantom personnel who play without being credited—Clark Terry on "Jumpin' Punkins," Eric Dolphy on "Reincarnation Of A Love Bird (Take 1)"—represent oversights that should have been caught. Quality of sound runs from fair to good except for a poor *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, where inferior source materials must account for the cruddy transfer to digital if LP versions be trusted. (That being true, a stronger printed warning about flawed sound would be appropriate.) Timings are lean: no CD exceeds 48 minutes, not even the Mingus anthology which might have offered alternate takes to fill out the 75-plus minutes maximum of the CD.

The mystifying Zen title, *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* (CD 9005, 46:29 minutes) likely referred to the bassist's role as *de facto* producer on this quartet date while Hentoff sent out for sandwiches. Created by a **Charles Mingus** front line with almost one year's playing experience in a single club, this epic session still sounds as intricate, colloquial, and emotional as the day it was recorded "live in the studio" with nightclub patter and announcements intact. "Folk Forms No. 1" foreshadows the arranged drop-ins and drop-outs, shifts in tempo led by the bass, and stretching solos complete with overlapping improvisation, which also characterize the other selections. "Original Faubus Fables" gives these strategies political context, preserving a priceless surreal Mingus-Richmond vocal. (Mingus: "Name me a handful that's ridiculous, Dannie Richmond.") The drummer answers with a breathless litany of elected officials!) The alto saxophone of Eric Dolphy blows "raspberries" in open tonality, vocal-sounding yet swinging, as trumpeter Ted Cur-



Charles Mingus: ebullience beyond technique.

HERB SNITZER

son bends notes frisky and forward.

The modified standard, "What Love," uses the formal innovations to frame the questioning "dialog" between bass clarinet and the leader's bass: the real-life subtext being Dolphy's announced departure from The Jazz Workshop. Like the previous track, "All The Things You Could Be Now" finds basis in a standard, this time voiced for an imitation large ensemble. Compared to the mainstream of the day, or even the experimental, *Charles Mingus Presents* is filled with yelling souls (literally true on "Faubus!"), human voices roiling in anger and ebullience beyond technique. Where most jazzmen's rhetorical lectures on "harmony" and "tempo" have faded in air, I doubt this essential date's power ever will. In terms of sound, tape hiss is ubiquitous, entering the foreground during bass solos. The digital format does not add presence to each instrumental profile: obvious surface noise has been purged, but quality of reproduction differs little from vinyl to CD.

The economically titled *Mingus* (CD 9021, 47:07) contains "Stormy Weather," a superb holdover from the above session. This vehicle for Dolphy's alto saxophone alone deserves close attention: sobbing the theme in a deconstructed Johnny Hodges vibrato prefaces a solo of thrilling color, dynamics, and displaced rhythms (sadly undercut by an aural "ghost" effect that sounds more bizarre on vinyl). But the album's actual focal point is "MDM," a 20-minute engine of perpetual motion intermeshing ("M") Monk's "Straight, No Chaser," ("D") Ellington's "Main Stem," and ("M") Mingus' "Fifty-First Street Blues." Mingus scores a "mix n'match" for seven individual brass and reed soloists (Dolphy doubles) who pair off by instrument for adjacent solos and exchanges, the contrasting styles gunned by relentless riffs, stop-time breaks, and traded fours.

*Favorite moment:* as the notes from Charles McPherson's alto solo fade, Dolphy rips through after three beats, an outrageous out-

ward projection like "Alien" out of a chest cavity! Jimmy Knepper, Britt Woodman, Ted Curson, Lonnie Hillyer, and Booker Ervin contribute to the musical juggernaut in this equivalent to Fellini's 8½, rife with autobiographical composer references. "Vassarlean," a warm Ellingtonian ballad with striking bass clarinet, and "Lock 'Em Up," a charged feature for the tenor saxophone of Ervin and Mingus' essay on being committed to Bellevue Hospital, complete the well-balanced program. Another essential Mingus work of ho-hum CD sound from a decisive period in his creative life.

Charles Mingus' *Reincarnation Of A Love Bird* (CCD 79026, 45:22), which gathers quartet and septet works dating from the albums *The Jazz Life* and *Newport Rebels*, is the only CD of the current batch to have new material (excepting *Jumpin' Punkins*, which is new to non-Japanese markets). Four of the five long tracks were never before issued on Candid, although three appeared in a recent Mosaic boxed set. One alternate take, "Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams" escaped previous issue because it was misfiled with a Cal Massey session. The present hodgepodge is notable for intergenerational meetings between young lions and living treasures ("Papa" Jo Jones and Roy Eldridge) as well as for two examples of Mingus' way with standards. A 14-minute "Body And Soul" exemplifies both trends in one: the good cheer of Dolphy's double-time, octave-jumping solo after Eldridge's somber elaboration of theme prompting stinging choruses on "Little Jazz" s second ad lib. The anthology does have the feel of a "sampler"—one take per song—which does not reveal Mingus' thought evolving over successive takes. Still, this CD will satisfy not only those familiar with the original releases from which takes were drawn. Ubiquitous tape hiss most offends during the Mingus solo on "R & R."

**Booker Ervin**, Mingus' modernist Texas tenor, so impressed Nat Hentoff during his solo on "MDM" that Ervin was invited to record

under his own name. *That's It* (CCD 79014, 43:20), the resulting quartet program of six songs including four Ervin originals, timelessly showcases the majestic tenorist's earthy tone and sinuous lines on blues, ballads, and burners. He attributed his widening harmonic sense to the influence of Mingus, though—in contrast to Dolphy—Ervin seldom strays from *terra firma*. His solos remain solidly on the beat, respectful of the bar lines while threatening to blow them to bits. For all the constriction of self, his tone and ideas overwhelm, from the authoritative *noir* ballad, "Uranus," to the airborne cries and catapulting speed on the changes of "Speak Low." Speculation about what the saxophonist might have accomplished were it not for his early demise is inevitable after hearing this extraordinary music. The CD has a clear, open sound and a mix that favors Ervin's in-your-face horn—pleasingly in the foreground compared to, say, the grating high profile given Don Ellis on *How Time Passes*.

*We Insist! Freedom Now Suite* (CCD 9002, 37:23), **Max Roach's** "protest album" emboldened by the struggling U.S. movement for civil rights and the newly sovereign nations of Africa, is a letdown on CD, the "dud" in fact of the Candid reissues. Quality of sound, not the noble music, is responsible. Not only do the individual instruments lack profile, but also slight-to-moderate *surface noise*, pops, clicks, and crackles (the antithesis of CDs) sap the impact of this early linkage of African and African-American folk influences. Late-period solos from Coleman Hawkins are the ageless



Max Roach

feature of Roach's collaboration. But they are in good company: Booker Little's trumpet spot on "Tears For Johannesburg"; Abbey Lincoln's recitation of African tribal names accompanied by a percussion quartet, to responding vocals by Olatunji; her "coo to a scream" wordless vocal in duet with Roach's traps, and the master drummer's volatile comping under the "Freedom Day" solos. Thirty years later, the turmoil that motivated *We Insist!* lives on, unresolved; the reason perhaps why this album does *not* sound preachy.

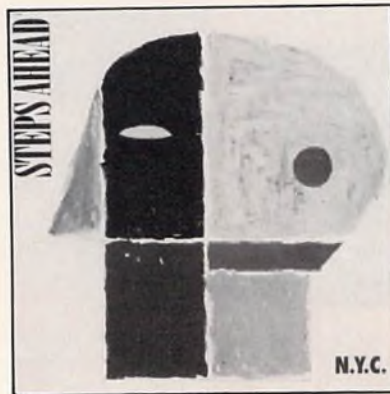
# STEPS AHEAD



**Steps Ahead** has proven to be one of the most influential groups of the 80's, setting standards in musical artistry. Now, with its original musical direction and ensemble sound intact, the latest edition of Steps Ahead continues to chart new directions in modern instrumental music.

Founder and keyman Mike Moinieri is joined by the power rhythm machine of Steve Smith and Tony Levin, and the fire is fueled by young Norwegian saxophonist Bendik Rique Pantojz on keyboards, and guitarists Steve Khan and Roy Gomez.

**N.Y.C.**, the first 1989 release from Intuition Records is a potent brew of contemporary and mainstream jazz modes that will prove to be one of the major crossover jazz releases of the year.



# BIRELI LAGRENE

He stunned the European jazz world at the tender age of 13 with his brilliant interpretations of Django Reinhardt's feral, freewheeling music. Some were calling this Gypsy prodigy the natural heir to that rich legacy. But on his Blue Note debut, last year's *Inferno*, Bireli stepped out from the shadow of Django and asserted a bold new direction on electric guitar.

Now on *Foreign Affairs* the 22-year-old virtuoso goes a step further in establishing his own voice on the instrument. Spurred on by the formidable rhythm tandem of bassist Jeff Andrews (from the Michael Brecker Band), and drummer Dennis Chambers (from John Scofield's group), Bireli bums with newfound conviction while maintaining his uncanny Gypsy lyricism. From his soaring acoustic treatment of Herbie Hancock's "Jack Rabbit" to his own aggressive "Josef," a powerful homage to the classic Weather Report sound, and his tribute to son "Timothée" in a Pat Metheny groove; from his soulful rendering of the standard ballad "I Can't Get Started" to his inspired acoustic guitar improvisations on "Rue De Pierre (Part III)," Bireli plays with typical fire and finesse.

*Foreign Affairs* places Bireli Lagrene firmly in the ranks of the top guitarists on the contemporary jazz scene.



**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
Produced by Steve Khan

90967

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50 BLUE NOTE

**Abbey Lincoln's** *Straight Ahead* (CCD 79015, 39:14) is, to my mind, the better place to hear Hawkins, Roach, Little, and the vocalist

nut, "This Nearly Was Mine," are phrased with a paradoxical light touch, incorporating chord clusters and keyboard-spanning runs. (Voila:

sharp. Traces of static that start then stop during "I Forgot"'s piano segment are the annoying exception.

The heading "Third Stream Jazz" graces the cover of *How Time Passes* (CD 9004, 46:00), the trumpet-plus-rhythm debut of **Don Ellis** as a leader. (Jaki Byard briefly plays alto saxophone in addition to piano.) More than a 1960s marketing device to sell albums, it clues the prospective listener to the contents within. The five original compositions furnish express directions to the players after the fashion of contemporary classical scores. Inspired by a Stockhausen article of the same name, the title track allows for elastic tempo determined by the given soloist. "Waste" extends the option of tempo changes from chorus to chorus. The pinnacle of Ellis' theories for channeling spontaneity, the 22-minute "Improvisational Suite #1" employs a 12-tone row as organizing principle, alternating "free cadenzas and strict time improvisations." Along the way, the suite covers a *cappella* sections; duets between muted trumpet and bass, and trumpet and piano (the latter very pungent); a chorale-like section, and even a half-tilt boogie. Sometimes, as in the exchange between trumpet and piano, the players transcend staid surroundings; more often they sound like consenting victims to *a priori* formulations. *How Time Passes* is a hit-and-miss affair but one worth hearing, which predicts strategies for group arranging that would make their return in the jazz of the 1970s. (My own conclusion: time passes better when filled with passion and humor.) Ellis' luminescent tone blares, placed too high in the mix, stressing his technically prodigious but ultimately busy notejamming. Tape hiss distracts during quiet passages of the "Suite."

**Booker Little's** septet on *Out Front* (CD 9027, 44:14) explores changing meters and tempos à la Mingus (*hold the Stockhausen!*) in seven dominantly dissonant original songs and arrangements. The 23-year-old's post-Clifford Brown trumpet tone, stunning and bitter-sweet, is made more special when uniting in harmony or counterpoint with Eric Dolphy's incendiary reeds. (The digital sound flatters both.) Yet Little's gifts scarcely depend on his soul mate for validation: the trumpeter's clear, mistake-free articulation regardless of pulse, in addition to a penchant for challenging harmonic motion, is uniquely his. Add to this his personalized composing and arranging, realized most fully on this important date, and the tragedy of his death six months after the session, a promise partially redeemed, increases. "Moods In Free Time" best summarizes Little's talents: liberating melismatic exclamations for trumpet over a dirge-like pedal point, Little's solo—like flamenco singer La Niña de los Peines—is sentient and infinitely sad. Compared to *How Time Passes*, Booker Little's creations sound effortless, unself-conscious, and minus "gee whiz": they answer charts with heart.

On *The Straight Horn Of* (CD 9007, 37:18), **Steve Lacy** employs a pianoless quartet with Monk bassist John Ore, Roy Haynes, and Charles Davis for interpretations of three Monk tunes, two by Cecil Taylor, and one Charlie Parker line. The well-chosen program is one reason for the brilliance of this very musical early Lacy date. Head-turning but smartly



Abbey Lincoln: bursting expression.

herself; all participants on the preceding session. Conveying emotional depth through her rough unpretentious singing (one thinks of Monk's advice to her: "Sing it *wrong!*"), Lincoln's interpretations are theatrical in their bursting expression, sometimes resorting to plain utterance of word or words within an otherwise sung phrase. Fresh incisive arrangements by Hawkins, Little, Roach, Julian Priester, and Mal Waldron incite deeply felt solos. The vocal to Waldron's gorgeous "Left Alone" finds extension in churchy, suspended chords from the ensemble, the effect brought to satisfying completion by a Hawkins solo of burly tenderness. Another standout, "When Malindy Sings," beautifully juxtaposes the black plantation dialect of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem, delivered with gruff soul, against keening modern harmonies from the horns, framing a Little solo of fragile strength. A grabbing melodic date that stays with the listener. Good sound quality flatters Lincoln's lashing loud chorus without words on "Blue Monk" and, excepting some hiss, is steady throughout.

**Cecil Taylor's** *The World Of Cecil Taylor* (CD 9006, 48:59) achieves rewarding tension by situating the innovative pianist and his compositions against a "conventional" jazz framework. Trio and quartet performances of five pieces, including long versions of two standards, are thoroughly imprinted by a playful imagination that knows rules are made to be interestingly broken. For example, the drums of Dennis Charles initiate an *inverted* two-bar exchange on "Air," with Taylor reacting to the percussive shapes. (Now that's iconoclasm and anti-piano chauvinism!) Taylor melts both standards until they resemble Salvador Dali soft watches draped over an otherworldly landscape. Applied dissonance with deliberate reference to the familiar themes create unclimbed moments of rare beauty. Taylor's initial variations on the Richard Rodgers chest-

*larger*, more sentient Art Tatum of wondrous dyslexia!) The piano solo on a very different trio, "E.B.," is characterized by high volume and high-speed independence of the hands. *The World Of* affords an essential view of the pianist a quarter-century ago when his muse perilously coexisted within familiar structures. Ultimately a match for the more "obvious" charm of *Jumpin' Punkins*, *World* displays a more mature outlook on freedom. Sound quality is fair, though the geyser-like tape hiss which intrudes on Taylor after Charles' introduction to "Lazy Afternoon" is grating.

Taylor's equally essential *Jumpin' Punkins* (CD 9013, 33:23), with four cuts from trio to octet, was previously available only in Japan. This modernist meeting with Swing Era forms, the title cut in particular, provokes thought as you finger snap. (*What's that gray matter there on the dance floor?*) In the wake of a Steve Lacy solo to parting band riffs, Taylor's mic-like skittering shapes are just right for comping and for his brief solo. More of the same humor abounds on "Things Ain't What They Used To Be," from Shepp's disjointed barfly obligato-over-the-theme statement and Roswell Rudd's gutbucket trombone, to the percussive dissonance of the Taylor solo—to which Clark Terry seems oblivious though *not unresponsive*, tartly quoting from "It Ain't Necessarily So" in answer! Here, Taylor's left hand pulls along tethered to Buell Neidlinger's walking bass, while his right produces ringing jabs and expansive sweeps suggestive of the firestorm Taylor of today. Yet, the lyrical Taylor lives here too, in the sparse and abstract "I Forgot," sounding totally uncomposed whether or not it was totally premeditated: a daring conception of beauty for 1961 that perfectly dovetails tracts of open space. Shepp's Websterian breathiness, bowed bass, and an Alban Berg-like section for a *cappella* piano. Sound is generally good: the snare cracks, the piano image stays

integrated contrasts—partnering a soprano saxophone with a baritone is merely the *first* of these—are another. Lacy brakes the rushing momentum of the Davis solo on “Donna Lee” with an out-of-tempo elliptical figure before gaining his own careening momentum; later, he “worries” a variation on the three-note “brake” and so maintains a wonderful order.



Steve Lacy

The sidemen themselves deserve part of the credit. Baritone saxophonist Davis really warms to the Monk compositions, as some of Lacy’s nonpareil insight into fresh rhymes for the “High Priest”’s chord changes rubs off; the dynamics of the big horn also impress, whether looming gruffly or swooning from earshot. Haynes’ resounding raps on the floor tom, one fleeting detail of his quick thought that transcends timekeeping, keep Lacy’s inspiration resilient on “Played Twice.” Though Ore is mixed “down,” the other players profit from a bright CD sound on this essential reissue. **db**

## CDs: THE COMPOSER’S FORUM

by Bill Shoemaker

**C**ompact discs are the ideal format for new music composers for the same reason compact discs are the ideal format for music, period. The hour-plus capacity of CDs allows for entire works to be heard without interruption. More importantly, their digital sound accommodates the respective subtleties of electronic music and acoustical phenomena. Although the major labels for classical music—Deutsche Grammophon, Philips, et al.—led the initial conversion from LPs to CDs, new

composed music on CDs (music most probably found in the classical music section of your local record store) is just as likely to be found on labels that also produce jazz or even progressive rock artists, as this sampling bears out.

Definitive opera recordings endure for decades, and the first recording of **John Adams’** *Nixon In China* (three CDs, Nonesuch 9 791771-2, 144:45 minutes) will be such a benchmark. Edo De Waart, Adams’ most ardent interpreter, leads the principles of the premiere production in a reading that milks the score of all its pathos and dark, sometimes savagely zany humor. The studio setting affords the singers to plumb the nuances of their characters without dividing their attention with acting and cutting through a live orchestra. It also allows delicate balances between sections of the Orchestra of St. Luke’s to be better savored. With a 64-page booklet that includes the complete libretto, this set is an instant basic library item, and a must for well-appointed coffee tables.

**David Borden** is a no-nonsense, roots minimalist, one who kept the faith of bracing 16th notes and keyboard-dominated small groups. *The Continuing Story Of Counterpoint, Parts 9-12* (Cuneiform Rune 16 CD, 68:02) is a major document of his work, bringing to completion the 12-part title composition that was 11 years in the making. Borden’s forte is a streamlined harmonic sensibility influenced by early European music, and a crisp rhythmic drive devoid of obvious ethnic models, both of which are infused into the last third of *TCSOC*. Borden has also astutely read the signs of the times, integrating computer-driven samples and sequences, and small doses of improvisation (Les Thimmig’s woodwinds give “Part 10” a Surmanesque feel). *The Continuing Story Of Counterpoint* has a happy ending in “Parts 9-12.”

*The Ghost Factory* (Gramavision 18-8807-2, 51:06) presents **Anthony Davis’** tart



Anthony Davis

mix of shifting harmonies, high-contrast tempi, and antiphonal motives and themes

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## HAT HUT RECORDS PRESENTS



### THE ROOTS OF THE MOMENT

### PAULINE OLIVEROS

Known as a pioneer in the field of music, Pauline Oliveros is the originator of **SONIC MEDITATIONS**, a form which has come into its own in the last two decades. In 1968, while she was living in San Diego, Oliveros published an article on the techniques of delay processing using tape recorders. Since then, the world has caught up with the concepts put forth by this original thinker, and now many musicians use these techniques in their work. Within the past few years however, Pauline Oliveros has brought her original concept to a new level in solo performances throughout the world. In addition to her solo work with “The Expanded Accordion,” the composer’s recent projects include music for Malou Mire’s production of “King Lear,” directed by Lee Breuer and music for “Covenant Two” a film conceived and produced by Elizabeth Harris. She is the author of “Software for People: Collected Writings from 1963-1990,” and is currently writing a new book entitled “The Roots of the Moment, Interactive Music and Collaboration.” She is the Artistic Director of the Pauline Oliveros Foundation, which seeks to provide administrative and technological support for innovative artists.

PAULINE OLIVEROS

accordion in past intonation in an interactive electronic environment created by Peter Ward.

THE ROOTS OF THE MOMENT 56:17 on hat HUT CD 6809

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## DOC SEVERINSEN

**THE BIG BAND HIT PARADE**—Telarc 8077: TAKE THE "A" TRAIN; BEGIN THE BEGUINE; SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY; ONE O'CLOCK JUMP; CARAVAN; LET'S DANCE; YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU; WOODCHOPPER'S BALL; IN THE MOOD; SING SING SING; I'M GETTIN' SENTIMENTAL OVER YOU; WELL, GIT IT!; ARTISTRY IN RHYTHM; MOONLIGHT SERENADE; ST. JAMES INFIRMARY; WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHIN' IN. (68:25 minutes)

**Personnel:** Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Pops Big Band Orchestra. Names unlisted except for guest soloists: Doc Severinsen, trumpet; Buddy Morrow, trombone; Eddie Daniels, clarinet; Gerry Mulligan, baritone saxophone; Dave Brubeck, piano; Ray Brown, bass; Ed Shaughnessy, drums; Cab Calloway, vocals.

★ ★ ★ ½

**FACETS**—Amherst 93318: NIGHT TRAIN; CITY LIGHTS; MY FUNNY VALENTINE; TAKE THE "A" TRAIN; SICILIANO; CRYSTAL GARDEN; MAIDEN VOYAGE; STOMPIN' AT THE SAVOY. (45:53 minutes)

**Personnel:** Severinsen, trumpet; Ernie Watts, soprano, alto, tenor saxophones; Steve Kujala, flute; Lee Ritenour, Jamie Glazer (cut 5), Mark Manette (4, 8), guitar; Alan Pasqua, Dave Loeb (5, 6), Matt Harris (8), keyboards; Leon Goer, bass; Paulinho Da Costa, percussion; Peter Erskine, drums; plus additional french horns and strings.

★ ★ ★

As a recording artist, Doc Severinsen's most perplexing problem is deciding what to stand for. He seemed to be off on the right track with his excellent "The Tonight Show Band" albums. They mixed nostalgia with a good sense of contemporary big band swing and seemed to hint that a broader repertoire was on the way. Where then does Xebron, a totally separate fusion group Severinsen takes on concerts, fit into this scheme? And now there are these two albums which further complicate things.

In the Telarc album, Severinsen is among eight visiting musicians who inject welcome yeast into some well-kneaded musical dough. The Cincinnati Pops takes what's by now an overused concept—"hits of the big bands"—and tries to legitimize its resurrection by salting the mix with special soloists, a first-class jazz rhythm section, and some new arrangements that take the material more or less as is and don't attempt to symphonize big band swing.

It succeeds in fits and starts. The sound is uniformly vibrant and alive with presence. Brubeck, Brown, and Shaughnessy mount a sudden and formidable momentum in "Take The 'A' Train" that's exhilarating. And there's a real charge in hearing Severinsen's extraordinary chops go to work on "You Made Me Love

You." His attack on "Well Git It!" and "Sing Sing Sing" leaps like a gazelle. Severinsen's Harry James man, of course. He produces a big, hot, seductive sound that seems to be a lost art in the vocabulary of contemporary music. It's good to hear it in such caring hands.

But at the most basic level the album remains a cliché. How many "In The Mood"s have been recorded by retro-bands. Every nostalgia album has it's "One O'Clock Jump." And is any new insight added into the period with another "Woodchopper's Ball," however splendid a clarinetist Eddie Daniels may be? The concept would have been better served at this point by avoiding played-out territory and looking for the unexpected. For Glenn Miller, how about "I Want To Be Happy" or "I Got Rhythm"? For Goodman, "Bolero" or "Honeysuckle Rose"? Or for Ellington, "Main Stem" or "Tootin' Through The Roof"? The sensibility and period richness would come through as fully as it does in what are by now overplayed warhorses.

*Facets* is a horse of a different color altogether—a kind of soft-rock swing, although it doesn't swing. Severinsen, who was a soloist on the Telarc CD but is leader here, seems to be building bridges from the past into the present and testing himself in the process. Familiar oldies such as "Take The 'A' Train" and "Stompin' At The Savoy" are translated into an '80s fusion vocabulary of electronics and heavy production. The sound is boxed-in and board-fed so that even the string and horn ensembles sound synthesized. There are no endings, only fades. Miles Davis is occasionally peeking around corners, as in Severinsen's attractive muted version of "My Funny Valentine" and one-second-delay overdubs on "Night Train" that remind us of *Bitches Brew*.

It's characteristic of Severinsen's musicianship that he manages to sound convincing in a realm that is not, one would assume, second nature to him. His vibrato is more subtle, almost suppressed, although his sound remains surprisingly warm. Even more convincing are the hard, stony runs of Ernie Watts, a regular in The Tonight Show Band.

Of the material, three originals by producer/arranger Jeff Tyzik are melodic and pretty ("City Lights," "Siciliano," "Crystal Garden"). It's easiest to take them on their own terms. One will have to rise above strong prejudices, however, to cope with "Savoy" and "'A' Train." But who's to say how a tune should be played? One of the most intriguing aspects of popular songs is their resiliency; their willingness to be reinvented by succeeding waves of performers in their own terms.

—john mcdonough

CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE

on an orchestral scale. "Wayang No. 5 (For Piano And Orchestra)" provides the synthesis of compositional clarity and improvisational spark that he so successfully forwards with Episteme, his minimalist gamelan groove crew; Davis' shimmering solos pivot on his trademark quicksilver runs and trilled clusters. "Maps (Violin Concerto)" is a tour de force, a piece even more unrelenting in the technical and expressive demands placed on the Kansas

City Symphony, conducted by William McGlaughlin, and Episteme member Shem Guibbory, who ranges from post-romantic keening to frenetic mandolin-like strumming. "Wayang No. 5" provides a context for listeners familiar with Davis' work, while "Maps" charts new terrain.

If **Lou Harrison** ain't the granddaddy of them all, he's at least a great uncle to the vast majority of the composers surveyed here, as evidenced by *La Koro Sutro* (New Albion NA 015, 72:23). This gorgeously recorded program consists of three works blending world music sources, balancing the sensual and the sacred. The choral writing of the title composition is an exquisite synthesis of Chinese opera and Gregorian chant, subtly propelled and colored by gamelan, organ, and harp. The aptly named "Varied Trio" samples brisk, rhythmic pentatonic expositions, elegaic lyricism, and even a stately rondeau; violinist David Abel, pianist Julie Steinberg, and percussionist William Winant deliver an empathetic performance. Abel is the soloist for the occasionally breathtaking "Suite For Violin And American Gamelan," another stylistic melting pot, composed in collaboration with Richard Dee. *La Koro Sutro* confirms Virgil Thomson's observation that Harrison "mixes things with infallible imagination."



Kronos Quartet: serious fun.

**Kronos Quartet**—violinists David Harrington and John Sherba, violist Hank Dutt, and cellist Joan Jeanrenaud—have, in the best sense, tapped into the crossover market, creating programs that play as well to new music's core constituency as they do to the casual reader of *Time* or *Newsweek*. *Winter Was Hard* (Nonesuch 9 79181-2, 68:01) is no exception. Works by Samuel Barber, Arvo Part, and Aulis Sallinen provide an ample portion of sheer beauty. Composers such as Anton Webern and Arnold Schnittke are made less foreboding.

Adventurous pieces by Terry Riley and John Zorn, and accessible works by Lounge Lizard John Lurie and Astor Piazzolla, reinforce the suggestion that serious fun is the operative mode for the present-day composer. Kronos' agenda is well served by *Winter Was Hard*.

**Somel Satoh** integrates the traditional music of his native Japan with the technology and romanticism of the West. *Mantra/Stabat Mater* (New Albion NA 016, 56:22) forwards an elemental approach to live and taped vocal music. "Mantra" utilizes repeated layering of Satoh's own voice to create otherworldly effects. George Manahan conducts soprano Jane Thorngren and the Pro Arte Chorale on "Stabat Mater," whose ethereal solemnity is punctuated by swells of dramatic tension. Satoh follows the time-honored new music tradition of creating taxing, yet rewarding, music.

In the early '50s, Giacinto Scelsi challenged the harmonic precepts of serialism with pieces that elaborated a single pitch. **Marianno Schroeder's** readings of *Suites Nr. 9 And Nr. 10 For Piano* (hat Art CD 6006, 52:47; first recordings)

have the density and stasis that Scelsi wanted for the listener to hear the note "within itself." These pieces emphasize coloration and dynamics, strong suits for both Schroeder and her Bosendorfer Imperial, resulting in an occasional proto-minimalist ambience. Ultimately, Scelsi's theory about the note is validated, as these sometimes confrontative compositions take on a life of their own, and transcend theory.

*Concerto Grosso* (hat Art CD 6004, 54:52) is a radical, shocking departure for **Richard Teitelbaum**, known primarily for open-ended synthesizer performances with the likes of Anthony Braxton. Though Braxton and trombonist George Lewis are on board, don't expect the liquid, improvisational exchanges of earlier encounters. *Concerto Grosso* is true to its name, replete with late-18th Century materials. The rub is that Teitelbaum employs robotics, MIDI, and interactive computer programs to achieve a stunning soundscape. For its sonic splendor alone, *Concerto Grosso* cannot be ignored; in this case, the means justify the end. Ever provocative, Richard Teitelbaum has given neo-classicism an intriguing new wrinkle. **db**

## SOLO/DUO IMPRESSIONS

by Art Lange

Impressionism—applied to music—relies largely upon the performer's *sensual* response to the material at hand, there would seem to be no better canvas than the solo—or, at most, duo—arena. The empty space surrounding the individual artist allows unlimited timbral subtlety, looser (if any) harmonic constraints, and unimpeded rhythmic variety. If, for most musicians, Impressionism also suggests an intimate, introspective, less-energetic approach, you can probably credit (or blame) Claude Debussy.

Jazz musicians from Ellington to Evans (Gil and Bill), Sidney Bechet to Sun Ra, have followed the French composer's path at one time or another, and, as **Andy LaVerne** so adeptly demonstrates on *Jazz Piano Lineage* (dmp CD-463, 66:09 minutes), Debussy's music has spun a thread traceable through jazz's keyboard tradition which is stronger than ever today. With his carefully considered program of Corea, Hancock, McCoy, Jarrett, Brubeck, and others, plus copious notes, LaVerne presents that rare bird, an experience both educational and entertaining. Some of the pieces ("Waltz For Debby," "Pannonica," "In Your Own Sweet Way") are standard repertory, others (Jarrett's "In Front," Herbie's "The Sorcerer," Chick's "The Brain") seldom attempted, but in all LaVerne sticks relatively close to the original style while avoiding mimicry. He's an out-and-out lyricist (though intricate rhythmic details don't escape him), so it's no surprise that Bill

Evans is the touchstone of his theory. Tunes like the latter's "T.T.T." ("Twelve Tone Tune") and Corea's "Children's Songs" stray farthest from recognizable jazz rhythm, but do exemplify an on-going trend in jazz today.

LaVerne's version of fellow pianist **Richie Beirach's** "Water Lilies—#4 'Green Reflections'" incorporates the most "modern"



Richie Beirach

classical harmonies and least conventional jazz elements—as the title suggests, it's a placid Debussyian study with, eventually, more than a trace of Scriabin in its harmonic and rhythmic movement. Beirach's own recent solo outing, *Common Heart* (Owl CD-048, 56:53), while containing no overriding principle, shares many of LaVerne's sensibilities—even

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to the point of including LaVerne's densely constructed yet fluid "Liquid Silver." With composed contributions from many of Beirach's close friends and musical collaborators, the disc surveys a melody-laden unity—interior voicings and harmonic movement are of prime concern throughout, with less emphasis on rhythmic impetus, though Beirach evidences plenty of power in reserve. For variety, his own "The Last Rhapsody" is a somewhat more recognizably structured "ballad," with a few "Old World" curves and a touching sentimental theme, and Japanese percussionist Masahiko Togashi's sparse "Essence" adds inside-the-piano textures.

Nevertheless, there's a viable difference between Beirach's full-blooded brand of Impressionism and the unique, nearly Romantic stance of **Andrew Hill** on *Verona Rag* (Soul Note CD-121 110-2, 48:14). Hill's severe chord alterations and Monkish rubato on the ever-introspective "Darn That Dream" are more muscular and jazzy than Beirach's intent, though sharing a sublime use of pedal effects and dynamics. Elsewhere, tunes like "Retrospect" and the spellbinding Joplinesque title rag slide in and out of stride, left-hand boogie, and heavily percussive events, thus disrupting phrase regularity, adding tension at every turn, while maintaining a brilliant continuity. His surface melodicism hides a deceptively complex undercurrent.

Flutist **James Newton**'s Impressionism carries him slightly north of Italy's Verona, to record solo *In Venice* (Celestial Harmonies CD-13030-2, 75:12). Making use of the mag-



James Newton

nificent decay time (and echo) in the apparently cavernous San Lazzaro Degli Armeni Cathedral, Newton offers a primarily pastoral and reflective program, exploiting the environment to haze single floating phrases, add contrapuntal texture to flurries, and create a cloudy ambiance that's occasionally hard for the listener to penetrate. Newton's titles refer to

dreams and "celestial" connotations, spirituals and spiritual sources, closely mirroring the music's rarified demeanor. There's a spontaneous, improvisatory feel throughout—even to Debussy's composed "Syrinx"—which relies, however, mostly on meditative tempos . . . and which, paradoxically, demands not contemplation but active listening to discern Newton's nuances.

Swiss reedist **Urs Leimgruber's** *Statement Of An Antirider* (hat Art CD-6013, 64:51) similarly employs the sonorous characteristics of his environment, in this case an especially resonant Zurich studio. Soprano lines resembling those of an Indian shenai hang in space, resonate, decay, and are renewed within Leimgruber's circular breathing; his long-held tenor notes create exquisite overtones and an almost physical presence. The longish pieces are structured around Leimgruber's ritualistic devotion to extreme states of expression; his howls attempt to escape gravity, soar upward with Aylesque abandon, grow organically from breath-induced requirements.

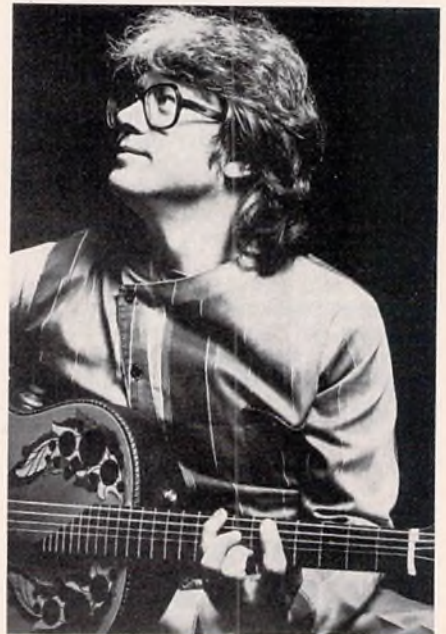
**Gerry Niewood's** *Alone* (Perfect Sound CD-1262, 48:50), by way of contrast, places this saxist/flutist in a more conventional song-oriented program. Again, the self-penned titles reveal Impressionistic intent: either meditations on Nature ("Reflections By A Waterfall," "April Breeze," "Starlight Soliloquy") or friends ("Elizabeth's Song," "Adam's Mood," "Carly's Lullaby," etc.) or style (the boppish "To Clifford & Stitt," with implied "Cherokee" chords). Niewood's rhapsodic bent and considerable technique let him spin effortless variations in otherwise familiar frameworks; weakest is the sheer sentimentality of the flute pieces. The danger with Niewood's approach is a too-narrow focus, a monochromatic sameness.

**John Surman** sidesteps the threat of sameness by overdubbing synthesizer support of exquisite poise, shading, color, and texture—if he were a painter, one would remark on his deft handling of detailed, yet unobtrusive, impasto—underneath his reed musings. *Private City* (ECM CD-1366, 43:44), his fourth—by my count, not all on ECM—solo recording, is a beautiful display of his experience in this most revealing medium. From the haunting recorder melody of the opening "Portrait Of A Romantic" to the more Impressionistic "On Hubbard's Hill," Surman's everpresent lyricism paints evocative landscapes with calm, lucid strokes, and his themes, whether borrowed or influenced by folk musics of the British Isles or subtle Oriental sources, contain enough dancing lilt to ensure vitality.

Bassist **Miroslav Vitous'** 1977 ostensibly solo outing, *Miroslav* (Freedom CD-741040, 36:19), also overdubs multiple keyboards, with a not-surprising Weather Reportish influence. But the older engineering and equipment results in sound quality not as airy, crisp, or clean as current recordings. Vitous' arrangements, too, have a clunky earnestness in the more moody pastoral impressions like "Tiger In The Rain" and "Pictures From Moravia," or "Sonata In The Rain," where his musical vision overwhelms his capabilities. The best, most explosive cuts here are the ones which add Don Alias' orgy of percussion.

Vitous' duet of a decade later, with **Larry Coryell**, *Quartet* (Jazzpoint CD-1021, 48:02), eschews overdubbing for a straightforward

bass/guitar collaboration. (The somewhat misleading title is not satisfactorily explained, though it has something to do with the disc's dedication to Bill Evans and Scott LaFaro.) The bright, occasionally harsh engineering emphasizes that the pair play a jittery complement of lines, colliding and interweaving, but never completely blending together or losing their distinctive tonal identities. The music, meanwhile, heavily reliant on Evans-associated items, makes for a creative friction—



Larry Coryell

Coryell's spiky lines puncture our memory of Evans' elegance on tunes like "Autumn Leaves," "My Romance," and "Stella By Starlight." Yet despite their bite, Vitous and Coryell never quite go for the jugular.

Another bassist with plenty of collaborative chops (including fine duo sessions with Clark Terry and Warne Marsh) is **Red Mitchell**. On *You're Me* (Phontastic CD-7528, 49:00), he lends credible support to the consistently captivating piano of **Tommy Flanagan**. Mitchell is a less flagrantly virtuosic player than Vitous—though he can slash and sting in freer surroundings—and his solos are "simpler" and more direct, in keeping with Flanagan's effortless invention. The pianist is a marvel of intelligent understatement, spinning phrases which seem inevitable but slide into surprising details. A striking contrast to Andrew Hill's is his version of "Darn That Dream"—a concentration on *singing*, gentle and compassionate if only slightly melancholy, and not the all-out philosophical questioning of Hill.

Mitchell's duet with clarinetist **Putte Wickman** (*The Very Thought Of You*, Dragon CD-161, 67:44)—a first-rate Swedish swinger with a silky tone and Goodmansque fluidity—is an even more casual affair. The sound quality favors Wickman (the session was recorded in Mitchell's apartment), which is a shame because you have to strain at times to catch Mitchell's marvelously exuberant slides and asides. Highlights include a dramatic, noirish

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I & II (Genes) Various Artists, *A Taste Of Superfriends* (Cheetah). Duke Ellington Orchestra, *Digital Duke* (GRP). Glen Miller Orchestra, *In The Digital Mood* (GRP). Diane Schuur & The Count Basie Orchestra, *Diane Schuur & The Count Basie Orchestra* (GRP). Mikio Masuda, *Smokin' Night* (JVC). Hiroku Kokubu, *More Than You Know* (JVC). Shawn Phillips, *Beyond Here Be Dragons* (Chameleon). Anders Jormin, *Eight Pieces* (Dragon). Roger Kellaway & Red Mitchell, *Alone Together* (Dragon). Brus Trio & John Tchicai, *Soaked Sorrows* (Dragon). Gerald Albright, *Bermuda Nights* (Atlantic). Ray Charles, *The Best Of* (Atlantic). Roberta Flack, *Oasis* (Atlantic). David Borden, *The Continuing Story Of Counterpoint Parts 9-12* (Cuneiform). Univers Zero, *Uzed* (Cuneiform). Miriodor, *Miriodor* (Cuneiform). Al Jarreau, *Heart's Horizon* (Reprise).

Donovan, *World Power* (Mango). Junior Delgado, *One Step More* (Mango). John Mayall, *Chicago Line* (Island). Mili Bermejo Quartet Nuevo, *Homecoming* (Jimena). Jose Chalas, *Living On Avenue F* (Sunjump). Doug White, *No Cover Charge* (Spotlight). Billy Hart, *Rah* (Gramavision). John Scofield, *Pick Hits Live* (Gramavision). Charlie Elgart, *Signs Of Life* (Novus). Bireli Lagrene, *Foreign Affairs* (Blue Note). Mal Waldron Trio, *Mal, Dance And Soul* (Tutu). Al Cohn, *The Final Performance Vol. One* (RAZmTAZ). Various Artists, *The Christmas Collection* (Narada). Herb Alpert, *Under A Spanish Moon* (A&M). Various Artists, *Stay Awake* (A&M). Orhan Demir, *North West* (Hitite). Eve Cornelious, *Faces Of Eve* (Pooky Looky). Klezmer Conservatory Band, *A Jumpin' Night In The Garden Of Eden* (Rounder). One O'Clock Lab Band, *One O'Clock Lab Band* (Lab). Johnny O'Neal & Dave Young, *Soufful Swinging* (Parkwood). Hugh Marsh, *Shaking The Pumpkin* (Soundwings). Vangelis, *Direct* (Arista). Liz Gorrill & Andy Fite, *Phantasmagoria* (New Artists). Jerome Cooper Quintet, *Outer And Interactions* (About Time). Sommerville & Thompson, *Truth* (Grindstone). Marilyn Crispell, *Labyrinths* (Victo). Pete Sears, *Watchfire* (Redwood). Waterboys, *Fisherman's Blues* (Chrysalis). Rava & Magnoni, *Andata Senza Ritorno* (Plainisphere). Benny Goodman, *Live At Basin Street Vol. 2* (Musicmasters). Hugh Ragin Trio, *Metaphysical Question* (Cecma). 5UU's & Motor Totemists Guild, *Elements* (Recommended). Motor Totemists Guild, *Shapuno Zoo* (Rotary Totem). Lena Horne, *The Men In My Life* (Three Cherries). Mihaly Pocs Quintet, *Waxwork* (Corvus). Bobby Hutcherson, *Farewell Keystone* (Theresa). Arosia, *30 AR* (Musikhuset Aarhus). John Handy, *Excursion In Blue* (Quartet). Smith Dobson, *Sasha Bossa* (Quartet). Danny Heines, *Every Island* (Silver Wave). db

## MAIL ORDER SOURCES

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attracted the attention of a fledgling Pharoah Sanders during Sanders' Oakland period. And as would be expected, Wilson's cult status also results from his playing reeds from a wheelchair, to which he's been confined since a childhood bout with polio. But never mind that. He's a more than capable musician, and his previous album appearances with Sonny Simmons, drummers Jimmy Zitto and Smiley Winters, and others, more than confirmed his status in the '60s pyrotechnical new jazz.

*The Next Rebirth* (which follows *Rebirth*, done for the AuRoar label), like later albums of '60s vanguardists, features serious improvising and lots of inside and outside maneuvering over a lyrical foundation. Wilson composes by taking chances avoided in most of the current fusion. He employs a cyclical harmonic construction for "Rocky's Waltz," brought out by its minor seconds and fourths; accessible atonality characterizes "Peripheral Perceptions"; and elsewhere Wilson encourages some Latin rhythmic backing.

As though projecting another self, Wilson's peripatetic style reveals a man steeped in the varied textures and emotions of language. He approaches each note and tone consciously, and tonal nuances distinguish his phrasing. His approach resembles Rollins' in the fact of what it achieves, but the resulting effect is more in the realm expressed by George Adams or

David Murray, or Anthony Braxton, whose hard-edged tone on alto finds kinship here. Yet Wilson's bent for particular overtones and the way he shapes his pyrotechnics, like Albert Ayler of yore, utilizes polytonality and chordal layering that gives reed phrasing a top, middle, and bottom. On "Allison By Moonlight," for example, his serpentine attack shows off his straight lyricism and overblowing, employing the full range of the instrument and achieving the fullest possibilities of melody. No, the technique isn't by any means a new one, but recording is the musician's best means of codifying his virtuosity; a virtuosity that is better presented here and which the appearances on record 20 years ago managed to obscure.

First-class musicians are *Rebirth's* other members. Allen Youngblood seems inspired by pianist Cedar Walton and has a nice outing on "Rosie's Rhumba." drummer Bob Meyer has been Wilson's heartbeat for over a dozen years, and bassist Chuck Metcalf performs throughout with splendid intonation. Flutist Nancy Curtis is not heard on the fiercely uptempo tracks, but otherwise displays a warm tone that, with Wilson's bass clarinet on "Rocky's Waltz," contributes a Dolphy-McIntyre quality.

Performance settings like this one benefit the reed players like Bert Wilson, allowing him to apply his craft to the melodious without sacrificing what he really wants us to hear.

—ron welburn

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## cd reviews

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"Topsy" and a wistful (you guessed it) "Darn That Dream." Though Wickman never stumbles he could not be accused of being overly boisterous either. This sort of pleasant, polite, easy-going program is, well, putty in his hands.

Yet another bassist, longtime European modernist **J. F. Jonny Clark**, has released his first recording as a leader. *Unison* (CMP CD-32, 46:28) uses frequent overdubbing to foster feverish counterpoint ("Zerkall" uproots lines like a hurricane, but with an implicit swing to fall back on), layer thick slabs of bowed tones ("Legato"), or intertwine percussive and lyrical notions ("Unison"). He's a master of timbre and touch, with a huge, booming presence, comfortable with unorthodox intervals and rhythms, capable of a jackhammer attack (titles like "Accent" and "Motion" indicate his intentions). But he works best as an intricate, instinctive collaborator, as on the tracks here where he spars with, separately, pianist Joachim Kühn, saxist Christof Lauer, and digital engineer Walter Quintus.

Percussionist **Fritz Hauser**—following a devoutly detailed bout of *Solodrumming*, his previous release—has fashioned a duo concept for *Zwei* (hat Art CD-6010, 66:51): individual tracks in conjunction with vocalist Lauren Newton, accordionist Pauline Oliveros, guitarist Christy Doran, pianist Stephan Grieder, percussionist Rob Kloet, and brassman Rene Krebs, which question the dichotomy of shared attitudes, certainty vs. surprise, stability vs. freedom. The majority of these pieces create an unfamiliar ambiance or environment out of minute musical gestures, which sometimes sizzle or ignite with ritualistic nuance and concentration. Individually the 14 tracks display a great variety of tonal effects and events, yet flow together with a common narrative purpose like chapters in a novel.

In the music of Clark and Hauser, the sense of Impressionistic tone-painting has given way to very different, idiosyncratic, often abstract expressions. A third view in the trend against common, shared impressions belongs to British guitarist **Derek Bailey**, whose adamant improvisatory attitude is non-referential, non-sequential, and decidedly intuitive. Bailey glories in the ecstatic immediacy of the moment of creation, and flails, snips, wiggles, and works his strings in miniscule alterations of tone, color, articulation, and texture in an attempt to sustain the New Indefinitely. In a duo with Brazilian percussionist **Cyro Baptista** (Cyro, Incus CD-01, 39:48), his own clanky, rattling percussive attack dovetails surprisingly well with Baptista's crisp, conventional exotica, resulting in a rainbow-hued patchwork quilt—with the needles and pins left in. When Bailey duets with frequent foil **Han Bennink** (Han, Incus CD-02, 56:37), the music takes on a Surrealistic curve. Bennink's sometimes riotous theatrical maneuvers and slapstick antics—which really must be seen, in context, and seldom translate to disc—should not obscure the fact that he's a brilliant percussionist of exquisite timing, provocative color, and explosive textures. On the two-part "Melancholy Babes" (a hilarious title, probably the furthest conceivable description of this wonderfully unholy alliance), Bailey is forced to be more aggressive to suit Bennink's bizarre busyness. This one is not for the shy or faint-of-heart. **db**

# blindfold test

**1 CHARLIE PARKER.** "This Time The Dream's On Me" (from *ONE NIGHT IN BIRDLAND*, Columbia) Parker, alto saxophone.

Well, that's my hero [laughs]. To me, every time I listen to that sound—not just his sound, but the whole context, the way the cats are responding to each other, the way they're creating that language—it's beautiful. Bird had such a command, could create such an atmosphere with the sound that he had. It's very difficult to describe how he does it, because how do you describe a feeling? The things that I really love about him are the way he deals with time, his phrasing, and of course his tone. I get a lot from the way he phrases and gets through all those tight pockets [scats a verse]. Incredible.

**2 ABBEY LINCOLN.** "Driva' Man" (from *MAX ROACH—FREEDOM NOW SUITE*, Columbia) Lincoln, vocals.

Abbey, Abbey, Abbey. I feel a closer link to her than I do, I think, to any other singer. She's a mood-maker. She has this incredible quality to her voice, this angular thing, that can be very pointed. She's a master of emoting and using those qualities in her voice to jump outta the vinyl, and just wrench your heart. She and Betty Carter are the only two singers in my life that I've gone to see live and just had to cry. Abbey brings so much of the social problems of being black into her music, and she's very important for that, the way she taps that and uses the music to express that. That's why she's one of the more important vocalists on the planet, and maybe why she's one of the more overlooked ones.

**3 BILLIE HOLIDAY.** "Me, Myself And I Are All In Love With You" (from *THE LESTER YOUNG STORY VOLUME 1*, Columbia) Holiday, vocals; Buck Clayton, trumpet; Lester Young, tenor; Edmond Hall, clarinet.

Great Lady—what can I say about her that hasn't been said? She did a lot of albums with that kind of a musical surrounding, that upbeat thing. She's another one of the first great phrasers. Her phrasing is impeccable, everything perfect. The sound in her voice is just so unique: the texture of it. I love that kinda nasal thing that's on her voice. Other singers have patterned themselves after Billie, like Etta Jones, and I love it. Listening to her reminds me of when I listened to her—constantly, daily [laughs].

**4 ANITA BAKER.** "Watch Your Step" (from *RAPTURE*, Elektra) Baker, vocals.

## CASSANDRA WILSON

by Gene Santoro

There's no way to put it without sounding like a publicist: Cassandra Wilson has the most strikingly sensual, warmly cunning set of vocal chords to hit the jazz world in years. Weaving the disparate echoes of Sarah and Ella and Betty into a subtle tapestry all her own, she creates taut charts and street-smart lyrics whose ironically bittersweet musings on relationships bring that topic squarely into the restless '80s. Her work with Henry Threadgill's *New Air* and Steve Coleman's *Five Elements* showcases her supple talents in radically different formats; and of course there's her own albums as a leader. Most re-



cently *Blue Skies* (JMT/PolyGram) finds her taking on standards in delightfully unpredictable ways.

It's amazing; money can do a lot [laughs]. It's highly produced, to say the least. You can tell instantly the difference between how much money she's making and how much, say, Max Roach and Abbey were making. But I like Anita Baker, I like her voice, and I think she's doing some interesting things in pop and for pop. She's dealing as her own producer inside an industry that's conservative, which I think is great—she doesn't let anybody tell her what to do about her music. It's one giant step forward for black womankind. But then the problem becomes that now, the record companies are looking for more Anita Bakers instead of a new somebody else.

**5 BETTY CARTER.** "The Man I Love" (from *LOOK WHAT I GOT!*, Verve) Carter, vocals.

Ah, Betty. You know, most singers typically, when it's time for the soloist to play, they go, "Okay, I'll disappear." What I like about this particular piece is that she's right there with the soloist, almost subliminally; the lyrics are like a pad for the soloist to float on top of. I love that. I love to hear just traces, bits and pieces of the vocals, all the way through a song, because I think it gives it continuity. That way you don't have everything broken down into compartments: this goes here, then we have the solo, then we have another, then, vocalist, you come back in. Instead, here you follow whatever the impulse is.

I think you can be very creative when you

deliver lyrics that way, too, because you're not thinking about a special way of phrasing, you're dealing with the context of the solo. And of course I love the way she sings behind the beat: cats are like two and three bars ahead of her and she's amazingly able to resolve it. Etta Jones can do that too: she knows where she is at all times, can be wherever she wants to be and ends up at the right place. You really have to work at that.

It's one of the most difficult things I've found: to be able to play so much with the phrasing that you'll be centuries behind so that you can really deal a phrase, give it that extra punctuation.

**6 ELLA FITZGERALD.** "The Man I Love" (from *MACK THE KNIFE*, Verve) Fitzgerald, vocals.

These are too easy! One of the first singers, along with Sarah Vaughan, to approach a song with a very instrumental concept. And of course, one of my favorites, a singer I grew up with. I always liked her very light-hearted, almost childlike sound and approach to music. It's very uplifting: even when she's singing something that's dark, she makes it bright because of the quality of her voice. You hear at the end how her voice kinda breaks up? Very human. She's always a perfect singer, but when she does that she gets that little bit of vulnerability that I like to hear, those ragged edges. She had those every once in a while with her breathing. Great. db

## THE KINSEY REPORT

ON THE EDGE, THESE BLUESBREAKERS ARE PAVING THE WAY BETWEEN THE BLUES AND ROCK, REGGAE, AND SOUL.

by Larry Birnbaum

"I have the highest respect for traditional blues," says Donald Kinsey. "But on the other hand, I don't hear enough new blues." The Kinsey Report, comprising the three Kinsey brothers—Donald, on lead guitar and vocals; Ralph, on drums; and Kenneth, on bass—and their longtime friend Ron Prince, on rhythm guitar, are trying to change all that. They first recorded as the Kinsey Report in 1984, backing the Kinseys' father, Lester "Big Daddy" Kinsey—a Mississippi-bred, Indiana-based traditional bluesman—on the Rooster Blues album *Bad Situation*. On their own, they gained attention with a single track, "Corner Of The Blanket," from the Alligator anthology *The New Bluebloods*. Now they've won rave reviews for their first full-length Alligator LP, *Edge Of The City*, a high-energy blend of blues, funk, and rock that draws on sources as diverse as Albert King, Jimi Hendrix, and Wayne Fontana And The Mindbenders.

The Kinsey Report kicked off a show at Tramps in New York City with "Come To Me," a soul-rocker that culminated in a torrid Allman-style twin-guitar solo by Donald and Ron. They followed with "Corner Of The Blanket," "Give Me What I Want," and "Answering Machine," a throwaway novelty that's become one of their most requested numbers. Displaying a dimension of the group's music they've yet to record, Donald sang the reggae arrangement of "Johnny B. Goode" he'd written and co-produced for Peter Tosh's *Mama Africa* album.

The Kinseys then brought out Big Daddy and their uncle, blues-harpist Lester Davenport, who performed four songs from *Bad Situation*—but even these had a modern twist. Afterward, Donald contrasted Big Daddy's gruff voice with his own smooth tenor on the hard-stomping "Lucky Charm," which segued into the Stones-like "Full Moon On Main Street." Prince's driving, intense guitar highlighted the funk-tinged closer, "Poor Man's Relief."

"We're still catering to the hard-core blues fans," says Kenneth, "but we're also bringing in a new market. People are always saying the blues is dying, but as long as you keep turning a younger audience on to what you do, it's going to stay alive. I mean, you can't expect us to sound like a band that played in the '50s. Those cats paved the way



for us to be doing what we're doing now, but you just have to move forward. Somebody has to take that step, but at the same time not lose the heritage and the true meaning behind the sound. So we try to hold on to all of that. Big Daddy's still going on road dates with us; people come to see the Kinsey Report do the funky thing, and then Big Daddy comes up. He does some contemporary stuff also, but he can go back and do the old Muddy Waters sound. Then we come back and funk it out a little bit more."

The four band members have played jazz, soul, and even heavy metal, as well as reggae, but their roots are in the blues. "I really have to give my father a lot of credit," says Donald. "He laid something out for us that was within him, and I'm very thankful that we grabbed hold of it and took it on."

Big Daddy had migrated to Gary, Indiana, from Pleasant Grove, Mississippi, near Muddy Waters' hometown of Clarksdale. As a youngster, he'd played guitar in his father's church; later he picked up Muddy's slide technique and Jimmy Reed's harmonica style. His oldest sons, Ralph and Donald, were exposed to music from early childhood, and by their teenage years were playing in their dad's blues & soul review. "We must have done our first actual gig when we were about 10 or 12," says Donald. "Every year when school would get out, we would go on tours throughout the Midwest and South for a month or month-and-a-half. From Gary to Mississippi, we covered it. We were playing like Elks' lodges, musicians' picnics, cabarets. We played this one place in Tunica, Mississippi—Hardface's. That was the guy's name who owned the place. Then there were some little neighborhood places, halls that they would rent for dances, like in Greenville, Mississippi. And in Chicago we were playing big clubs.

"We played r&b and blues," he continues. "We'd do a little Sam and Dave, Joe Tex.

The blues was there, but we always had like a review. We had a big band, 13 or 14 pieces, with horns, exotic dancers. We had the Duke and the Duchess, had Baby Boy—Fred Robinson—on harmonica, and Big Daddy and the boys. It was something else. We had a caravan—a couple of station wagons and one big, long Cadillac."

But in 1972 Ralph joined the Air Force and was replaced by another drummer; shortly thereafter, Albert King came through Gary and checked out Big Daddy's show. "He needed a guitar player," says Donald, "and there I was. Albert talked with my dad, and then he stole me. Two o'clock in the morning, pack your bags and you're gone. And so I got into Albert's band."

Until then Donald's primary inspiration had been B.B. King; his nickname, in fact, was B.B. King Jr. "As a kid I really didn't know that much about Albert King," he says. "But after getting with him, we became very close, and naturally I started listening to all his material. He made me his band leader after about three months, and I just got into it—he blew me away. I loved his style, and he was a pretty heavy influence on me. He talked to me a lot, too. That was my first real gig outside of home.

"I was with Albert for about three years, and I got a chance to record with him on the *I Wanna Get Funky* album. I played the Montreux Festival in Switzerland with him, and that came out on an album, too. I felt really privileged, because out of the whole band he asked me to record with him. He kind of liked my rhythm thing; the wah-wah was real popular at that time."

When Ralph's service hitch was up he returned to Gary, where he was joined by Donald and King's former bassist Busta Jones. All three shared a taste for high-energy rock: Ralph was into Sly & The Family Stone; Donald, Cream and Mountain; and Busta had played with Chris Spedding and The Sharks in England. They decided to

form their own power trio, White Lightnin'. "We just went down to the basement in my dad's house every day and rehearsed," says Donald, "and that's what developed."

With the help of Mountain's Felix Pappardi and his associate Gary Kurfurst, White Lightnin' became the first black American group signed by Chris Blackwell's Island Records. They opened for established hard-rockers like Uriah Heep, Black Oak Arkansas, Peter Frampton, J. Geils, and Joe Cocker, but their self-titled album was poorly distributed and never took off.

While White Lightnin' was tied up in contract disputes, Donald was introduced to Bob Marley at an Island press party. A week later he met Peter Tosh, who asked him to add some finishing touches to his *Legalize It* LP. "I think that Bob and Peter were into American r&b and blues," he says, "and I really think they felt Jamaican guitarists couldn't give them that type of texture."

Donald spent a year touring the U.S. with Tosh; when he got back to Gary, Marley called and invited him down to Miami's Criteria Studios to record on *Rastaman Vibrations*. "When I got there, the tracks were laid; they just wanted me to put the icing on it," he recalls. "Then he turned around and said, 'Donald, come on the road, man'. Everything was happening so fast. And the music had such an impact. Our first gig was in Germany, with 60,000 people—60,000 Germans! I had no idea that the world knew about this music."

In late 1976 Donald was in Jamaica with Marley and his manager, Don Taylor, when six would-be assassins burst in and opened fire, wounding Marley and Taylor. Kinsey, unhurt but badly shaken, flew home to Gary and toured with the Staple Singers, whose bassist recruited Ron Prince for a recording date. Ron and Donald hit it off and, together with Ralph, formed their own funk-rock band, The Chosen Ones.

Prince, born and raised on Chicago's South Side, had played with such bluesmen as Son Seals, Little Oscar, and Syl Johnson, as well as local jazz artists like Ari Brown, Luba Rashik, Pete Cosey, and George Freeman. "I just came up around Buddy Guy, Muddy Waters, all those cats, hearing and experiencing them," he says.

Donald rejoined Tosh in 1978 for the singer's *Bush Doctor* album and subsequent U.S. tour with the Rolling Stones. Afterward he settled in the San Francisco Bay Area and reorganized The Chosen Ones, taking time out to play on Marley's final tour. The Chosen Ones then issued a reggae-flavored EP, but moved back to Gary again when it failed to click. Once more Donald hooked up with Tosh, this time for the *Mama Africa* album and tour. He and Prince hung out at the Sunsplash '82 festival in Montego Bay, where Prince was accompanying soul singer Deniece Williams. But in 1984 Donald left

Tosh for good to re-form the family blues band and produce his father's album.

By this time Kenneth Kinsey, a decade younger than his brothers, had joined the group. When he was 15, he says, "I told my dad I wanted to play bass. He pulled up to a gas station where they knew him, and they said, 'Hey, Big Daddy, we got a bass guitar for sale'. So he bought me this old Epiphone for \$40." Kenneth got his first lessons from Busta Jones and went on to play in a high school jazz band before backing his father on local gigs. "After the *Bad Situation* album we started branching out, doing some road dates," he says, "and that pretty much led up to what's going on now." Of their new album he says, "We were conscious not to go too far into rock, but we wanted to keep a rough edge, because that's us—we're not a soft-playing type of blues band. So a lot of the songs have a heavy vibe to them."

"Rock was always there," agrees Donald. "To me, like they said, the blues had a baby and they named it rock & roll. Rock is just a more intensified version; it's the energy behind it that makes it rock. And I think we really are the offspring of that, as black artists and musicians. From Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Muddy Waters . . . I think that we really represent that energy." db



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