

Blindfold Test: TOMMY FLANAGAN

For Contemporary Musicians

downbeat

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JOHN SCOFIELD
Guitar Wanderlust



ANTHONY BRAXTON
The Dynamics Of Creativity

AMINA CLAUDINE MYERS
Soul Plus Imagination

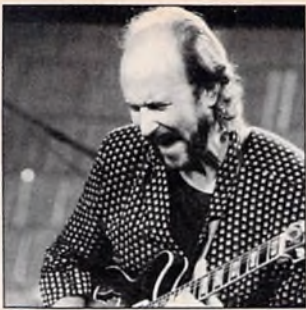


TOM SCOTT
*Pat Sajak's
New Music
Director*



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Anthony Braxton



Tom Scott



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Cover photograph of John Scofield by Aldo Mauro; photograph of Tom Scott and Pat Sajak courtesy of The Pat Sajak Show.

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For Contemporary Musicians

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CONTRIBUTORS: Jon Balleras, Larry Birnbaum, Michael Bourne, Tom Copli, Lauren Deutsch, John Diliberto, Leonard Feather, Andy Freeberg, Art Lange, Howard Mandel, John McDonough, Bill Milkowski, Paul Natkin, Herb Nolan, Gene Santoro, Mitchell Seal, Pete Welding.

CORRESPONDENTS: Albany, NY, Georgia Urban; Atlanta, Dorothy Pearce; Austin, Michael Point; Baltimore, Fred Douglass; Boston, Fred Bouchard; Buffalo, John P. Lockhart; Chicago, Jim DeJong; Cincinnati, Bob Nave; Cleveland, C. A. Colombi; Detroit, Michael G. Nastos; Las Vegas, Brian Sanders; Los Angeles, Zan Stewart; Minneapolis, Mary Snyder; Nashville, Dave Jenkins; New Orleans, Joel Simpson; New York, Jeff Levinson; Philadelphia, Russell Woessner; Phoenix, Robert Henschen; Pittsburgh, David J. Fabilli; San Francisco, Tom Copli; Seattle, Joseph R. Murphy; Toronto, Mark Miller; Vancouver, Vern Montgomery; Washington, DC, W. A. Brower; Argentina, Max Seligmann; Australia, Eric Myers;

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**EDITORIAL/ADVERTISING
PRODUCTION OFFICE:**
222 W. Adams St., Chicago IL 60606

ADMINISTRATION & SALES OFFICE:
180 West Park Ave.
Elmhurst IL 60126

John Maher, Advertising Sales
1-312/941-2030

East: Bob Olesen
720 Greenwich St., New York NY 10014
1-212/243-4786

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By Howard Mandel

More than any other of the '80s' established electric guitarists, John Scofield seems at ease in a bar interpreting standards or playing the blues. Scofield's cool on a stage or in a studio responding to challenges veterans pose. Scofield testifies in genial conversation, "Playing—that's supposed to be the main stuff."

Scofield works sophisticated city nightspots, roadhouses in "secondary markets," and prestige concert halls during jazz fests worldwide. His band may be an ensemble of several years' accomplishment, a trio he called together, or a spur-of-the-moment collaboration. Scofield's music is by turns piercing, lyrical, reckless, thoughtful—depending on his mood, the response of his colleagues and audience. When he's hot—and he has a true professional's consistency—he shoots off steely, far-from-predictable lines with natural, funky rhythm. Trademark Ibanez AS-200 in hand, Scofield can rock a house with altered Tin Pan melodies, post-bop harmonies, and what-the-hell spirit.

His jazz, like his thinking, is unpretentious. Straightforward. Flat-out. Which is what he's dubbed the Gramavision recording he's just cut with newly-gathered assistance.

"I'm not disbanding my quartet with Dennis Chambers, Gary Grainger on bass, and, recently, Jim Beard on synthesizer," Scofield insists.

"I've done four albums with them, extending the instrumentation

sometimes on record, and I need to do something else. They're coming out of that funk angle, and although I think that rhythm section is the most malleable, it's got a very big sound, even when it's playing soft.

"I've wanted to play with the texture of upright bass, where the drums are tuned a little higher, and away from the backbeat that Dennis gets. I want to play chords on the guitar sometimes, and I want to have a lighter sound. I've had the luxury of playing lines over synth washes—in trio I have to play things a little more expansively. There's a certain delicacy that I've wanted to try. I'm not saying one way or the other is better—I just want to hear myself along with that. And also to play some music that reflects the harmony of standards."

Despite his success in partnership with Chambers and Grainger, documented on last year's live-in-Japan album *Pick Hits*, Scofield's grown restless. "I wanted to play with Johnny Vidacovitch on drums. Even when he plays 'Secret Love,' the old song, or 'Pensitiva,' a standard bossa nova, there's this certain kind of thing that happens. It becomes an unidentifiable groove—not a bossa nova, not a jazz tune, and not New Orleans. But there's something happening.

"I wanted to play with upright bass, and somebody like Anthony Cox who has experience with open forms as well as bebop and standards. He can take it in a lot of different ways." Late last year Scofield gigged at Sweet Basil with Cox and Terri Lynne Carrington on drums—"She did some work on the record, too. Steve Swallow produced it, Joe Ferla engineered, and Don Grolnick played B-3 organ on a couple tunes, including 'Cissy Strut.'"

JOHN SCOFIELD

RESTLESS GUITAR PLAYER

Ever since Scofield emerged in the '70s as a post-modernist—confident, flexible, and tradition-steeped enough to bring something personal yet appropriate to such distinctive stylists as Jay McShann, Charles Mingus, and Miles Davis—he's connected with both abstract extentions and grooving entertainments. His trio with Swallow on electric bass and drummer Adam Nussbaum is recalled as one end of this spectrum. His embrace of



ALDO MAURO

New Orleans—"Cissy Strut" is early Meters, tenorist Benny Wallace and Mac "Dr. John" Rebennack are among his favorite cohorts—and r&b (hear "Dock Of The Bay" and "Shotgun" on the George Jinga-coordinated '60s retrospective *Missing Links*) is another.

"The music of *my* people—who knows what that is? The Connecticut Sound's not a big part of my thing," Scofield scoffs. "What is the Connecticut Sound—the sound of Prudential-Bache insurance? 'I woke up this morning, and both my cars was gone/I got so upset, I threw my martini on the lawn,'" he quotes Martin Mull's "Suburban Blues."

Well, what makes Scofield credible? Where'd he get his blues?

"From the radio, hot damn, right off the radio. My parents weren't really into music. I learned from records and the radio and the few live bands and musicians I met. The music from as early as I can remember was rock & roll, r&b, and folk music, then jazz when I got a little older. And that's the background of everybody I know, whether they're from the ghetto or wherever. They learned from the media, and the few good musicians they'd meet.

"I didn't meet any good musicians until I was 18 or so—I didn't meet any jazz musicians in Connecticut, that's for sure. Except for Dave Brubeck. I used to go to his house and play with his son Chris, the trombonist who still plays bass in dad's band. Dave was really nice, and gave free records to any kids who were visiting and were interested in the music. But Dave wasn't really accessible to teach a young guitarist about jazz. I just sort of picked it up.

"In New York, there are incredible guys who get it together really young. Like Jackie McLean and Sonny Rollins, who used to go to Bud Powell's house and Monk's when they were teenagers. Or, today, Marcus Miller and Omar Hakim, both from Queens. But if you live in suburbia or the country you meet just a couple of musicians before you're old enough to move to the city. And those musicians don't have to be great, because when you first start to play you're not ready for Bud Powell, anyway. Some guy who's interested in music and has the right records and shows you, 'If you play this scale and this chord it should come out right; try it'—he's important, too."

Of course, one must eventually expand horizons, seek more advanced training, and test oneself against peers. Scofield went to the Berklee School of Music.

"You can interact with yourself, but it's a one-way street. And after a while, it sort of stops. The main thing to me is playing with other people, the weird interplay and all the subconscious stuff that occurs." To honor the "subconscious stuff," Scofield records essentially live. Though his Gramavision debut *Electric Outlet* was the result of elaborate overdubbing, he's limited manipulation and processing on subsequent LPs.

"Maybe we're looking at a future where instrumentalists are rare," Scofield speculates. "Because what are you gonna do? You want to be a professional guitar player, but there's no place to work. There are about a 10th of the live gigs there were 15 years ago. I don't know—some people are pessimistic about the future. And society *has* got to come to grips with this incredible technology—computers, that's what we're talking about. Something with artificial intelligence that can get a great sound right away. But I don't want to be pessimistic. It *would* be nice if, with all this technology at our fingertips, great music came out."

Is synthesized music what people want?

Scofield pauses for a moment. "I want people to like what I do, for survival's sake—otherwise I can't play gigs. But sometimes I don't think about that at all. And I think I'd *like* to not think about that. Right now I'm thinking about playing certain music, about how to get that together, and not about whether people will like it or not. I'm doing this thing with upright bass, and drums, and no synthesizers, and not as many back-beats, per se: there's going to *always* be a beat. I'm doing it for musical reasons, for *me*, because I want to change. If I was thinking about the public I'd probably go more in the other direction. But I think that my public is really jazz fans, people who simply like music. You lose some, you gain others.

"I don't think about radio airplay, either, because my music does not get on the radio. Did you know that? These records I've made with all these elements of r&b and pop don't get on the radio. What gets on the radio is something else. I don't understand it. I don't *want* to understand it. I don't want to sit down with market analysts who say, 'Maybe if you do *this* you can get your stuff on the radio.'"

Why resist such advice?

Scofield sighs. "I've played some standards for years—"Softly As In A Morning Sunrise," "Just Friends,"—and I like to play these songs that are sort of *in* me. I feel I have something to say in them.

"What we're talking about is improvisation, right? Not just playing the songs, but playing that leads you into improvisation. A lot of the Tin Pan Alley stuff is harmonically great to play on. These sets of chord changes are America's finest. The chord changes, the harmonic things, are excerpts from the past 200 years of classical music. The chords to 'All The Things You Are' are classic harmony examples; they move like so, and there are a million lines you can play through them. Once you learn them, they're fascinating, and become addictive. Like blues changes. They're classic in that sense.

"But what we think of as the most popular tunes of the last 15 years don't necessarily have those harmonic situations. It doesn't make them better or worse, but I don't think they're universal

vehicles for musicians to improvise on. There are a couple of songs out there that are harmonic—'Just The Way You Are' has nice changes, but I don't want to sound like I'm playing in a lounge band. Stevie Wonder and Michael McDonald write harmonic stuff I like, but when I think of Stevie Wonder's songs, only Stevie can do them, seems to me."

Scofield realizes something besides harmony has changed since the glory days of the American songbook. "Those tunes from the '30s and '40s, and the show tunes, they were sheet music hits. There were eight million recorded versions of these. They were songs people sang every day. What's on the radio now isn't what you sing every day, or play on the parlor piano."

So what's a restless guitar star to do to refresh himself?

"I keep thinking that I'm just going to play better on the guitar, and that's what's going to be different. But maybe I need to collaborate. I played a couple of solos on a Mike Gibbs big band record that hasn't come out yet, and I talked to Mike about getting together some time and writing music together. You know, he's one of the great orchestrators. I'd like to do that."

"I've talked to Pat Metheny, and we want to do a record when the time is right. I want to play with Swallow. I want to record my quartet with Jim Beard on keyboards [Robert Aries is on *Pick Hits*], and see how that goes. I met an Argentine bandoneon player, Dino Salucci, in Europe, who asked me if I wanted to do a duo record, and I would. This guy's got a beautiful, warm sound—doesn't play bebop by any means, but he's listened to a lot of jazz. I could duet with the bandoneon because it's a chordal instrument and it can play lines. He's got South American rhythms, but it

wouldn't be me playing Argentine music, it would be me playing with this guy Dino. . . ."

Scofield won't go acoustic—"I'm really an electric guitar player. I've gotten a sound that I like, finally. Did you ever notice that when these electric guitar players play acoustic guitar they all sound the same? Except for McLaughlin—he's got an incredible sound, and his acoustic music pours out of that instrument. Maybe a guitar-synthesizer," he muses.

And to some extent, he resents his restlessness, which may be partly prompted by market pressures to continually do something new.

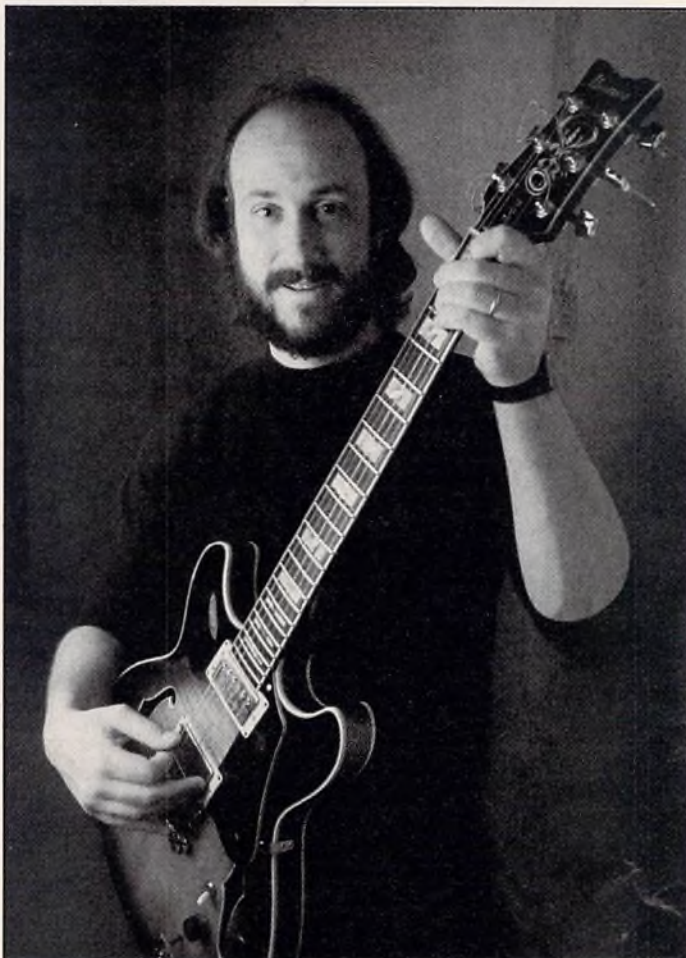
"My idols seemed to be able to make record after record of their jazz, and it was OK," he says with a trace of irritation. However, McShann, Mingus, and Miles operated under equally frustrating, if different, market constraints.

Then, unexpectedly, Scofield understands his situation, and sums it up.

"I don't know if I'm going to do anything new in my life but I would like to; yeah, because all the stuff that I admire is new and different. But isn't it really about taking everything that you're made out of, everything you ever heard, and for some reason it comes out different?"

"If you listen to Charlie Parker's music you can hear these rococo things from classical music, blues, and everywhere put together in this ingenuous way. The same thing with Ornette: for some reason he wasn't scared to free the music up, and go on instinct. But the melodies, everything he uses came from the music. When you really analyze it, you can say, 'This came from this, this came from that, but who would have thought of putting it together like that?'"

"For some reason these guys were strong enough, felt brave enough, were individuals enough to do it their own way." John Scofield and I both lean back and consider, hope, *trust*, that he's that strong, brave, and individual a musician, too. **db**



ALDO MAURO

JOHN SCOFIELD'S EQUIPMENT

"My Ibanez AS-200 is the same thing that's been in a million articles. I wish I could change the setup to something else—I just haven't found anything I like more. I'm very slow to change. I put a little more fuzz-tone on it when I rock out," he says of his guitar. "and a little less when I want to get a clean, chordal sound. But what's really different is the music. Then again, maybe even the music's not all that different. People might hear my trio and shrug, 'Oh, that's John Scofield.'"

The guitarist's current deemphasis of roachhouse funk for flatout jazz hasn't affected his choice of equipment at all. Scofield still uses a Pro-Co Rat distortion pedal, a Boss Octave stereo pedal, and an Ibanez reverb and two Sundown guitar amps. He uses D'Addario strings.

JOHN SCOFIELD SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- as a leader**
- PICK HITS*—Gramavision 18 8805-1
- LOUD JAZZ*—Gramavision 18-8801-1
- BLUE MATTER*—Gramavision 18-8702-1
- STILL WARM*—Gramavision 18-8508-1
- ELECTRIC OUTLET*—Gramavision 8405
- OUT LIKE A LIGHT*—Enja 4038
- SHINOLA*—Enja 4004
- BAR TALK*—Arista/Novus 3022
- WHO'S WHO*—Arista/Novus 3018
- ROUGH HOUSE*—Enja/Inner City 3030
- LIVE*—Enja/Inner City 3022
- with Miles Davis**
- SIESTA*—Warner Bros. 25655-1
- YOU'RE UNDER ARREST*—Columbia 40023
- STAR PEOPLE*—Columbia 38657
- DECOY*—Columbia 38991
- with Gary Burton**
- TIMES LIKE THESE*—GRP 9569
- with Dave Liebman**
- IF THEY ONLY KNEW*—Impulse MCAD 33108
- with Missing Links**
- MISSING LINKS*—MCA 42206
- with Ray Anderson**
- BLUES BRED IN THE BONE*—Gramavision 18-8813-1
- with Billy Cobham**
- LIFE AND TIMES*—Atlantic 18166
- FUNKY THIDE OF SINGS*—Atlantic 18149
- with Cobham/Duke Band**
- LIVE ON TOUR IN EUROPE*—Atlantic 18194
- with Marc Johnson**
- SECOND SIGHT*—ECM 833 038-1
- BASS DESIRES*—ECM 25040-1
- with John Abercrombie**
- SOLAR*—Palo Alto 8031
- with Bennie Wallace**
- BORDERTOWN*—Blue Note CDP 7 48-14-2
- SWEEPING THROUGH THE CITY*—Enja 4078
- TWILIGHT TIME*—Blue Note 85107
- with Charles Mingus**
- 3 OR 4 SHADES OF BLUES*—Atlantic 1700
- with Jay McShann**
- BIG APPLE BASH*—Atlantic 90047-1
- LAST OF THE BLUE DEVILS*—Atlantic 8800
- with Paul Bley**
- THE PAUL BLEY GROUP*—Soul Note 1140
- with Don Pullen/George Adams**
- LIVE AT MONTMARTRE*—Timeless 219

Anthony Braxton

THE DYNAMICS OF CREATIVITY

By Bill Shoemaker

The poet Wallace Stevens postulated that imagination asserts itself at the end of an era, creating a new reality. There are numerous indicators suggesting that such a transition is now taking place in music, the rise of digital technology being foremost among them. So, what's the new reality? One of music's more prescient voices, composer-instrumentalist Anthony Braxton offers insights in his three-volume *Tri-Axium Writings* and five-volume *Composition Notes* (available from Frog Peaks Music; 5000 MacArthur Blvd.; Oakland, CA 94613). Graham Lock's *Forces In Motion: Anthony Braxton And The Meta-Reality Of Creative Music* (Quartet Books; London; 1988) also confirms Braxton's stature as a major codifier of music's present future. This recent interview is a supplementary snapshot of Braxton, mid-stride, en route to the new reality.

BILL SHOEMAKER: *The Composition Notes* are self-explanatory, but what are the *Tri-Axium Writings*?

ANTHONY BRAXTON: My philosophical and world view perspective is documented and demonstrated in the *Tri-Axium Writings*. I felt by 1968 that the only way to continue my work was to clarify and give a perspective that I could use to evolve and learn in, based on what I was experiencing in my life. Or, at least, I sought to erect a platform that would make sense, an evolutionary platform that I could use to continue with my work, in learning how to live, learning what attraction means to me, and learning what role creative music would have in my life. So, the *Tri-Axium Writings* is a foundation of the philosophical system, which demonstrates individual-to-group logics. *Composition Notes* contains an analysis of about 360 compositions, up to "No. 120." The five books give an analysis for every composition, and the nature of those devices which have fascinated me. In the late '60s, I made a decision to continue to respond to the music I was hearing by the great restructural masters of the '60s, John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, and Charles Mingus, as well as the restructural world tradition, including the Europeans—Arnold Schoenberg, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Varese—and the great American, John Cage. I wanted a perspective to continue my research. It was never about a monoplane concept of emotional reaction, or even political reaction; although, growing up in the time period that brought forth President Kennedy and his brother, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I was very much aware of the political dynamics of the time period. How could I not have been? I was trying to create a music platform that would be viewed as positive, from a composite world perspective. I'm interested in the dynamic implications of what's happening in this time period, with extended technology, extended architecture, possibilities for extended communication and correspondence, and to learn from those fundamentals that unite us as a species on this planet, to better understand value systems, and the role of beauty and wonder in the discipline we call music. What could this discipline mean in an evolutionary context, concerning perceptual dynamics, or form manipulation, and spiritual, vibrational dynamics? So, I have tried to catalogue my devices from the very



MITCHELL SEIDEL

early period as such that I can now give you the early foundation writings.

BS: What has the process of publishing these writings revealed to you about your work over the past 20 years that is surprising, or intriguing?

AB: I was surprised to see the relationship between the new forming, extended technologies, and the possibilities that we're starting to see in this period, involving DNA manipulation and sub-atomic structures. I was surprised to see the linkage between my work and the scientific community. I was surprised to see how my work links, and respects, the composite thrusts of trans-African, trans-European, and trans-Asian restructural development. I think the last 20 years have helped me to come to respect and to love world musics, and the beauty inherent in its various projections and forms. I am very fortunate to be a professional student of music.

BS: And a professional teacher of music?

AB: Yes. For the past three-and-a-half years, I have had the opportunity to teach at Mills College [Oakland, Ca.]. It's been a very wonderful experience for me. It has, of course, been dynamic, and I've learned a great deal from the experience. I have the opportunity for communication with a new generation of

young people who have fantastic ideas for the future, and I feel that I'm learning as much from my students as they're learning from me. It's been a real honor, and I'll always be especially grateful to [pianist] David Rosenbloom, the virtuoso instrumentalist and composer, and to President Mary Metz.

BS: *Has this experience shaped your understanding of the relationship between creativity and pedagogy?*

AB: I would say in every way. In my Composition Seminar classes over the past three years, I have had the chance to go through my system, and integrate my information into the composite body of knowledge being gathered in this period. I've had to look at the discipline of teaching and how information is being translated in this period. We have entered a period where a specific emphasis on the technical plane has produced a dynamic generation of virtuoso instrumentalists and composers, students who can execute, particularly with electronics, many different possibilities and logics. Yet, we are in a period where we stand to see the momentum of music retarded, in terms of essence, because there's a profound misunderstanding about the creative process. For this reason, I took the position many years ago to no longer identify myself as a jazz musician, so I didn't have to deal with the baggage and weight of the jazz business complex, and the forces that surround the music, manipulate it, and interpret it. I feel there's a need to come to another understanding of what constitutes creative dynamics and logics, to help our students understand what the fundamentals will mean in the next time cycle. What will constitute sound architecture in the next time cycle? What will constitute form manipulation? How will this information be related to the work taking place in physics? How can it be used in the healing process of our nation? How can we harness the forces of our culture and our species towards an evolutionary stance, a positive alignment? How can we use this information to instill a respect for our species? I think music education will have to play a part in this. At the same time, we'll have to go through this next time cycle clarifying the discipline of teaching. What will be the new models?

BS: *Have you developed methods and strategies in your own teaching to bring your students closer to these essences?*

AB: I am in the process of cataloging the devices of what I now call a "Three Partial Sound Entity." With that term, I am referring to my attempts to build a model that will shift attention more to sound manipulation, and what that signals in respect to form, rather than starting with a specific, like what the restructural masters of the 18th century put together in figure-based harmony. We've arrived at a point where all the primary perception languages have been clouded by technocratic definitions which seek to glorify the process at the expense of the essence of what took place. What we need is an information platform that can help motivate our young people to look into their own potential, to understand that they have potential, a concept of self-realization. This is going to be important all over the planet in this time period, whether it be Japan, China, or Europe, which is changing more than most Americans realize. There is currently an intellectual spark which will profoundly change the balance of world vibrational dynamics in the next 20 or 30 years. At the same time, we have, in the last 15 years, entered a period of contraction, where our children grow up with materialistic values, where we are losing the spark of invention, and we are losing contact with that information from earlier periods that could help to motivate our people.

BS: *Does the jazz tradition provide such information?*

AB: Of course. I have nothing but respect for what has brought us to this point. I have nothing but respect for what has been done in just the last five to seven years by the younger musicians who have come from the universities and demonstrated such profound mastery of their instruments. I am only saying that we consider other options and look at the composite picture of what's taking place on this planet. This doesn't imply disrespect to tradition, but we are coming to a serious time on this planet, and

the discipline of music will also be affected.

BS: *Would this contraction also explain why traditional forms, an embracing of classicism, et al., currently enjoys high visibility?*

AB: I would say yes, and that it has been healthy. In fact, part of the complexities of the '60s, for me, involved unhealthy responses to the tradition. I don't think it's possible to think about the future without some kind of understanding of what took place before. And yet, many of the forces that align themselves towards what is now called the tradition have always, for me, been most curious. It's been maybe 14 months now since Warne Marsh left the planet. Warne demonstrated his music up until just over a year ago. Jackie McLean is still alive. If there's such a concern about tradition, I would have hoped that some of the masters that have played such an important role in shaping the tradition, and who have demonstrated evolution in the past 30 or 40 years, would have had more attention paid to them. But that's not happening. What is happening, in my opinion, is that the forces that have aligned around the word "tradition" are really part of the various political orders which come and go in a given time period, having to do with business and marketplace forces. I don't necessarily see this as negative. In fact, I think there are positive dynamics related to the last 10 years. But in the final analysis, we have arrived at a point in time where we're locked into technocratic value systems, value systems that must be examined, or the world that aligns itself with the word "jazz" will not have a healthy evolution. Those forces which attached themselves to the discipline we call jazz, which is really the restructural and intellectual music tradition coming from an axis of trans-African and the European-mystic polarities, will now tell us that there's basically one way of looking at that music, that everyone's vocabulary must have X-amount of devices employed by Charlie Parker or John Coltrane. I think music has been defined in a very unhealthy way in this period, defined in a way that is conducive to market values, but retards its evolution.

BS: *What has been your strategy in avoiding the pitfalls you are describing?*

AB: Well, for me, I had to basically give up the concept of making any money from my discipline. I really had no choice, actually. There was no flexibility; I had to give up the idea of making money to concentrate instead on evolving my work, based on what I was learning. The possibility of working in Europe has made the difference for me in the past 20 years. Were it not for working in Europe I could not have survived. Period. So, I'll always be grateful to the Europeans for the possibilities to document my work through recordings and performances. I think the idea of making money in this time period is the first thing you have to give up if you have a particular idea of what you're looking for in your music. But, there are advantages. I'm 43 years old and, looking about, I feel that I have had a very fortunate life. I was fortunate to discover something that I really love. Not many people are fortunate enough to find something that they can dedicate their lives to. The discipline of music is so wonderful, there's always something new to learn. Knowing this has helped me cope with the complexities of the past 20 years.

BS: *I think there is a semi-conscious, well-intended conspiracy to retain an idea of you as a jazz artist, reinforced by the release of recordings such as the new Monk program.*

AB: [laughing] Yes. If I had not made a record of traditional material they would say I can't play traditional material. If I make a record of traditional material they want to call it old-fashioned. If I develop my own concept of rhythmic logics, it's not swinging. If I play using Charlie Parker's language they say I'm just another guy following Bird. The world of jazz has become too complex. That's why I refer to my music as being simply classical music. I feel, as Duke Ellington felt, that the music is much too large to be contained in this one value system. I don't see it changing in the near future. I have always been excited by the tradition. The recordings with Tete Montoliu [*In The Tradition Vols. 1 & 2*],

where we play Warne Marsh's "Marshmallow" and Charlie Parker's "Ornithology"—that was around 1974, during that period you were put down for playing that kind of material. Now, we're at a point in time where the opposite is true. You play something perceived as separate from the tradition and it is automatically viewed in a negative light. I believe that the dynamic implications of the restructuring music of the '60s recast the whole platform of the music, and made a pan-idiomatic, world perspective possible. We were viewed as renegades, trying to violate the tradition, as opposed to restructuringists who understood that, how beautiful the music was, change is a universal law. Everything changes. Everything evolves. Every structural and conceptual space can be manipulated to cast fresh insight into it. That was the beauty of the '60s. Somehow, the positive implications of the music got distorted under the weight of social and political dynamics, and also to decisions that were made in the jazz business and journalistic complex. My work has had sustained negative press



MITCHELL SEIDEL

ANTHONY BRAXTON'S EQUIPMENT

Anthony Braxton's soprano, soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, and bass saxophones are made by Selmer. He also uses Buffet C melody and Lido contrabass saxophones. Selmer also makes Braxton's E^b soprano and B^b clarinets; his contralto and contrabass clarinets are made by Meadow Leblanc. He uses a Haynes flute and an Anonymous Alto Flute. Braxton uses Brillhart Level Air 4 Star mouthpieces for his saxophones and stock Selmer mouthpieces for his clarinets. He prefers Rico Royal 1 1/2 reeds.

BRAXTON IN THE 80's: A SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

SIX MONK'S COMPOSITIONS (1987) — Black Saint 120 116-1	FOUR COMPOSITIONS (QUARTET) 1984 — Black Saint 0086
LONDON, NOVEMBER 1986 — Leo 414/415	COMPOSITION 113 — Sound Aspects 003
FIVE COMPOSITIONS (QUARTET) 1986 — Black Saint 106	FOUR COMPOSITIONS (QUARTET) 1983 — Black Saint 0066
ANTHONY BRAXTON WITH THE ROBERT SCHUMANN STRING QUARTET — Sound Aspects 009	OPEN ASPECTS '82 — hat Art 1995/96
SEVEN STANDARDS 1985, VOLUME 2 — Magenta 0205	SIX COMPOSITIONS: QUARTET — Antilles 1005
SEVEN STANDARDS 1985, VOLUME 1 — Magenta 203	COMPOSITION 98 — hat Art 1984
	COMPOSITION 95 FOR TWO PIANOS — Arista 9559

for 20 years. I'm surprised. I would think at this point in time there would at least be new criticisms. I'm still hearing questions about my rhythm. I would hope that at least there would be new reasons to reject my work, and, in doing so, demonstrate creativity.

BS: You once identified yourself as an artist who did not follow a linear progression, but one who proceeds from one distinct idea to another outside such a trajectory. Is that still the case?

AB: I have been able to identify 12 primary spaces of my music. I have tried to build a model that demonstrates individual logics, involving vocabulary and language development, and language combinations, along the lines of DNA research of this period. I've tried to develop a system of collective logics, involving ensemble strategies and the integration of fixed, notated domains and improvisational domains. Also, a system of correspondence that interconnects this material. I think this approach has made it complex for those who have one criteria of linear evolution, and have it modeled so strongly on the early masters that they can't look at some of these questions. We will soon be forced to look at this generation in terms of conceptual dynamics, rhythmic dynamics, and harmonic logic. I believe my work will be viewed positively as this era is investigated.

BS: You had moved, at the time of our last interview in 1982, from your coordinate music to your ritual and ceremonial music. Is this still a primary focus?

AB: I can't speak of the ritual and ceremonial music as a Partial [of the "Three Partial Sound Entity"] that's finished, but it completes the dynamics of the model I'm building. The ritual and ceremonial music is the third Partial of my model—stable logics, mutable logics, and ritual and ceremonial logics. As part of my ritual and ceremonial musics, I am working on my third opera, *Trillium R*, which is the third opera in a system of 36 autonomous acts. The operas are dialogues based on the schematics that comprise the second degree of the *Tri-Axiom Writings*. The ritual and ceremonial musics I'm interested in involve storytelling, homage to positive role models, positive alignment. I'm interested in meaning and beauty, as opposed to an existential involvement with sound. *Trillium R* is a four-scene opera that is scored for symphony orchestra, eight singers, and eight solo instrumentalists, and it should be finished by this summer. I'm terribly excited about opera, and storytelling in general—I have been excited by the operas of Wagner, Shostakovich, and Alban Berg for 15 years—and I would like to focus on this aspect of the music for the next five years. The opera utilizes both traditional notation and my own notation. It's the kind of work that could be performed by traditional classical symphonic orchestra. I decided five or six years ago to move into the realm of opera, and was able to have a performance of *Trillium A* at U.C. San Diego in 1984.

BS: There are so many extra-musical elements to opera. In composing operas, are you sparked by a scenic image, a story line, or a Tri-Axiom-based procedure?

AB: A Tri-Axiom precept fitting into a story. Creating the story is very similar to creating a piece of music. There's no one way to approach it, but in the final analysis, the final entity should demonstrate some dramatic curve. There must be some magnetic action. The consideration of magnetism and radiance has become very important to me. What constitutes magnetism? Why is it that a solo by John Coltrane is so interesting, but someone else who uses the same language is not? Why are some musics more interesting to an individual than others? What is being communicated in the sound-event-logic experience, and how can that information be used in the creative decision-making process? This is the context in which I approach the libretto, from the same context of logic and logic associations that I compose the music. I've been at work on *Trillium R* for about three years now. I'm actually behind schedule, now that I have a job. The art of teaching takes a tremendous amount of time and energy.

db

THE MUSICAL DIRECTIONS OF Tom Scott

By Scott Yanow

Nineteen-eighty-eight was a typically busy year for Tom Scott. In addition to recording *Flashpoint* (his second album for GRP), Scott traveled to Europe no less than five times, twice to work on the *Who*

Framed Roger Rabbit soundtrack, twice on tours with Lee Ritenour, and once to perform on Swiss TV with keyboardist Joe Sample. He also wrote the score for the remake of *The Absent-Minded Professor* (Scott has been composing for film and TV soundtracks since 1969) and appeared on several television specials. All of this activity, however, will certainly be overshadowed by his latest assignment as bandleader and musical director of the new late-night *Pat Sajak Show*, hosted by the *Wheel Of Fortune* regular.

"I got a call from the producer Paul Gilbert," recalled Scott, "and it all came down to a meeting with Pat Sajak. Before seeing him I went around and did a little digging to find out what kind of guy he was. When I met Pat I told him that I had checked around trying to find someone who would say 'That Pat Sajak is a flaming blankety-blank,' but had no luck. Pat responded that I obviously didn't talk to his ex-wife [laughs]. We hit it off right away."

Since the *Pat Sajak Show* will be going head-to-head with Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*, comparisons between Tom Scott and Doc Severinsen are inevitable. Will Scott's band get a chance to



THE MUSICAL DIRECTIONS OF TOM SCOTT

play very often on the air? "It's going to be 90 minutes-long (as opposed to 60) five-nights-a-week," responds Scott, "so they can't fill all of that time with stars plugging their latest wares. From my viewpoint it's the type of publicity that I couldn't get in 10,000 concerts around this country. Also, I figured it was time to get a regular job since I have a four-year-old and another one on the way. I haven't had a regular job since I guarded Van Nuys with the International Guard; luckily no one attacked.

"They seem to genuinely want a strong, high-class musical contribution to the show. I don't plan to wear funny clothes; it's not my style. Within a few months my exact role on the show will be more obvious. The band is basically a large rhythm section with two guitars, two keyboards, bass, drums, another saxophonist, and myself. I was told to get seven guys in addition to myself; that was the budgetary limit. If they had said 10 or 12 I would have opted to have a horn section, but at least this way it will have a different sound. Currently slated for the band are Harvey Mason on drums, bassist Tim Landers, Carlos Rios and Eric Gale on guitars, Jerry Peters and Barnaby Finch on keyboards, and David Koz on saxes, all wonderful musicians.

Overall, this is the most pleasant group of people I've worked with on TV, including all of the production people. Everyone's easy to get along with and enthusiastic about the show."

Tom Scott's latest album, *Flashpoint*, follows *Streamlines* on GRP, a label Scott is enthusiastic to be part of. "I first met Dave Grusin back in 1967 when we used to play together in the Howard Roberts Quintet. Since then we've co-written a lot of TV projects together. Twenty years later we did a Yamaha all-star band show in Chicago and I was 'at liberty,' between labels. I really hadn't had fruitful experiences at Columbia and Atlantic, so when Dave asked if I'd like to record for GRP, I quickly said yes. It was obvious from their roster that I could basically be myself on my records for them and not have to worry about trying for hit singles."

Flashpoint differs from *Streamlines* in that the latter had a few new age-type tunes while the former is funkier and more passionate. "In general," comments the saxophonist, "*Flashpoint* is a hotter up-tempo album than *Streamlines*, which was a lot mellower. The variety of tunes is stronger and I added some synthesizer technology to the music as an element. I particularly



Scott with (from left) host Pat Sajak and his sidekick/announcer for the show, former L.A. news anchorman Dan Miller.

like the ballad 'Lost In Love,' 'Get A Grip,' and Joe Conlan's tune 'Flashpoint.' It did not take long at all to record this album, around two weeks. I think *Flashpoint* is definitely superior to *Streamlines*, but I'm not an expert about my own music. Whenever a listener likes anything I've done, I'm delighted."

Although still just 40, Tom Scott (born May 19, 1948) has been an important part of the music world since 1966. He talks with pride and love about his parents' musical accomplishments. "My dad, Nathan Scott, is, to this day, a film composer of the highest order. He does not have the popular recognition of a John Williams because he is laidback, but people in the business know how good he is. He wrote for the original *Dragnet* series, *Wagon Train*, *My Three Sons*, *The Twilight Zone*, and background music for *Lassie*, a show in which the main character does not talk, so the music is of great importance. His scores look like works of art. When he met my mother, he was Bing Crosby's musical director on radio, while she, who had been the piano accompanist to Nelson Eddy, worked in the music clearance department at NBC. Music was always all around me as I grew up."

Tom Scott started on the clarinet when he was eight so he could play in the school orchestra. "My parents never had to push me into music; it's in my blood. When I got the clarinet, my father bought me the record of Benny Goodman's Carnegie Hall Concert. That was my giant leap into jazz. By the time I was done with that poor record, it was just a scratchy piece of vinyl. I'd hear three or four notes of Benny Goodman's solo, lift up the needle and try to find the sounds on the clarinet. I'd do that all day long while my friends were outside playing sports. In junior high I started on baritone because that was the only instrument open in the dance band. Gerry Mulligan became one of my heroes, and I was thrilled years later when I got to play with him at Montreux and record *The Age Of Steam*. After baritone I learned alto, flute, and tenor, so by the time I was 15 I had a good arsenal."

The teenager played music throughout high school and credits his quick development to the many casuals and country club gigs that were available. "I gained a lot of experience playing standards and learning how to deliver a melody, selling a song by making the melody something special. I learned how to play jazz by jamming to Music Minus One records until I built up my confidence." Soon Scott was a strong enough musician to lead a Gil Evans-based group for the Lighthouse Intercollegiate Jazz Festival in 1964 and victorious combos at a pair of Hollywood Bowl Battle of the Bands contests.

After high school Scott made the logical transition by enrolling at the University of Southern California, but stayed for only a semester. "I was disappointed with USC because I did not have an outlet to hear the music I was composing at school. When I mentioned that to one of the faculty, I was told that I'd have to wait until my senior year. So when I started getting calls to work around town, I took the plunge."

Tom Scott's first big-league musical job was as a sideman with Don Ellis' innovative orchestra during part of 1966, making his recording debut on Ellis' *Live At Monterey*. "He was kind of an odd fellow," remembers Scott of the trumpeter. "He was always looking for a formula for music and was sometimes guilty of making music that was excessively mechanical and rigid. Now and then, Don would have flashes of real body & soul and he was a damned good musician in terms of his intellect and his technical expertise. I learned a great deal from him, especially about Indian rhythms."

Another early association was with pianist Roger Kellaway. "Roger had played with Don and we split from the band around the same time. I was thrilled when he asked me to sit in with his trio. Roger is a stellar musician and a real individual with a strong spirit of adventure. The album I made with him, *Spirit Feel*, was my first real feature on records."

A few months later Scott played two weeks with the Oliver Nelson big band and was "discovered" by producer Bob Thiele. "He approached me and basically said, 'Hey kid, do you want to be a recording star?' The first album I did for him was a commercial venture playing hits of the moment [*Honeysuckle Breeze*]. I had nothing to do with picking out the songs; I just read my parts. In doing that date I met a lot of people, including Max Bennett and Glen Campbell, who was a sideman on a few songs."

Other albums followed, but more important for the 20-year-old was his acceptance in the studios. "My timing was great. I came on the scene about the time that synthesizers were starting to appear. I was playing a saxophone with an amplifier and an echoplex; primitive by today's standards but it made me very desirable because few others were doing that. Also, I was a quick study. To sit in a woodwind section with the likes of Bud Shank and to play unisons with him, you'd better learn how to play in tune real fast."

Of Scott's early studio recordings, he fondly remembers the *Monk's Blues* date. "It was a thrill being in the company of Thelonious Monk, Oliver Nelson, and Charlie Rouse. I was just a young lad delighted to be with all of these people. I didn't talk much; Thelonious was not the type of person that one could just go and strike up a conversation with, he was in his own space. It was a great session."

In 1971 the saxophonist recorded *Great Scott*, an excellent album (especially the roaring "Lookin' Out For Number Seven") that resulted in his first major entrance into the pop music world due to his inclusion of Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock" on the record. "I was familiar with the song from the movie but I didn't even know who Joni Mitchell was at the time. She heard my album and it led to me touring with her. It was a joy finding parts to play in her music. She'd often hum her line and I'd figure out a harmony; we had great times in the studio. Joni really made her popular statement about the time I was with her. We toured during most of 1974 with great success. With her I always felt like I was part of a class act."

In addition to his association with Mitchell, Scott's sound became popular as the lead voice of The L.A. Express. "It was originally a Tuesday night Tom Scott quintet band playing at a club in L.A., strictly a jazz group. But after Max Bennett joined on Fender bass it changed. Max brought in a few rock-oriented tunes that went over very well; the response was ridiculous. We went from playing to a small house to the joint having lines around the block. The music later got termed 'fusion' but at the time it had no name. It was just something different and fun to play." Two albums resulted (*Tom Scott & The L.A. Express* and *Tom Cat*) before Scott and The L.A. Express parted company due to conflicts with their record labels.

Although he has always recorded occasional albums under his own name, much of Tom Scott's time has been spent either in the studios or accompanying pop artists, setting the stage for other saxophonists (such as David Sanborn, Ernie Watts, and Michael Brecker) to be heard in non-jazz settings. Scott was asked about some of the bigger names he has toured with. "Carole King inadvertently got me launched into the popular arena. I got called in to play on her 'Jazzman,' and that became a surprise hit. Years

before that I met Ravi Shankar through my musical teacher, Hari Har Rao, who was himself a student of Shankar and also a teacher of Don Ellis; I studied Indian music with Hari for around a year. When Ravi was in town to write the score for the movie *Charley*, Hari enlisted me to play on the soundtrack. Later in 1972, I got a call to work on a Ravi Shankar record and met the album's producer, George Harrison. George was totally unaffected by the amazing Beatles fever that infected the country. I toured with him for two or three months. I think he's a very talented guitarist; he has a unique melodic style. Much more recently, in 1982, I did a tour with Olivia Newton-John. It was a nice opportunity for me because I got to open the show and promote my album. I'm not sure that her audience was really my audience but her tunes were good, and it was a worthwhile experience."

After his parting with The L.A. Express in 1975, Scott came east for a session with some of the Big Apple's best. "I got my friend Ralph McDonald to gather together some of my favorite players, including Richard Tee, Bob James, and Steve Gadd for what became *The New York Connection*. They played what I still consider to be some of the definitive rhythm section tracks. My solos were almost irrelevant because they played so well."

During the past decade Tom Scott has made a variety of albums and was asked to comment on some key recordings. *"Intimate Strangers"* [1978] was an attempt to do a long-form suite. It was based on a tale about a guy in a band meeting a girl, having a relationship/love affair, and then having to move on. The story was nothing unusual, but it was a good premise to build an album around, having a connecting theme throughout. *Street Beat* [1979] was much tougher. My writing was in a bit of a slump and I was trying to find a commercial pocket because Columbia was on my case with people asking, 'Who can you get on your album to sing? We need a hit single!' It's one of the albums I remember the least.

"In contrast, *Apple Juice* [1981] was a gas. It was a return to the fabulous New York music scene with most of the same guys who played on *The New York Connection*. It's probably my biggest seller in Europe. *Desire* [1982] was my very first two-track-digital album with no mixing or overdubbing. It required a great deal of pre-production work. In the past I've recorded some tracks without even knowing what the tune was or who else was on it. I think the tune 'Desire' is one of the best I've written and it was great having all of the musicians together, seeing them play rather than just reading about it later. *Target* [1983] was also recorded live and it went smoother because I had a better idea of how to put together this type of session. My last pre-GRP album, *One Night . . . One Day* [1986], was done in collaboration with Pat Williams when he was launching Soundwings. It was great getting to play a few selections with a symphony orchestra and quite exciting trying to improvise between a lot of orchestral textures."

Outside of an occasional tour and his albums, Tom Scott has often been cast in the role of an anonymous studio musician. What does he like most about being in the background? "I most enjoy the satisfaction of being able to go on a gig not really knowing what the music will be like and later, when I leave, knowing—or at least hoping—that I contributed to its success. It's a constant challenge. I've never felt that frustrated about being anonymous in the studio. I think there's a certain problem for people that stay in the studios for too long. People with creative aspirations of their own are looking in the wrong place if they only stick to studio work. After all, in that situation you are serving the needs of someone else, and everyone needs their own outlet."

Throughout 22 years of constant musical activity and now as leader of *The Pat Sajak Show's* studio band, Tom Scott has performed with a countless number of musical greats. Is there anyone left who he has not had the opportunity to play with? "I'd love to play with Miles," states Scott, "or with Stevie Wonder. I've been tremendously lucky getting to perform with so many great musicians, everyone from Ravi Shankar to Monk to Gerry Mulligan. I certainly have no complaints about my life." db



TOM SCOTT'S EQUIPMENT

Tom Scott performs on so many instruments that he ran a computer printout of his equipment for us. He plays a Yamaha tenor, alto and soprano, a Selmer bass clarinet, soprano, tenor and baritone (the latter two are Mark VIs), Buffet clarinets, a Rydall-Carte piccolo and alto flute, a Haynes flute and a Larry Frank bass flute. In addition, for composing Scott utilizes a Yamaha DX-7, a Yamaha MIDI K4-76, three synth modules (an Oberheim Expander and a Yamaha TX812 and TX802) and several MIDI samplers including the Akai 5900, Yamaha TX16W, and Roland Pad-8.

Recently he has also added the Yamaha WX-7, a wind MIDI instrument. "Its purpose is the same as Michael Brecker's Akai EWI. It allows windplayers to send MIDI messages to a synthesizer and it'll be replacing the lyricist for me. I can get warm sounds from it and it allows one to put a lot of expression into the music."

TOM SCOTT SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- as a leader**
FLASHPOINT—GRP 9571
STREAMLINES—GRP 9555
ONE NIGHT . . . ONE DAY—Soundwings 2102
TARGET—Atlantic 78-0106
DESIRE—Elektra-Musician 60162
APPLE JUICE—Columbia 37419
STREET BEAT—Columbia 36137
INTIMATE STRANGERS—Columbia 35557
BLOW IT OUT—Epic 82285
NEW YORK CONNECTION—Ode 34959
TOM CAT—Ode 34956
& THE L.A. EXPRESS—Ode 34952
GREAT SCOTT—A&M 4330
HONEY SUCKLE BREEZE—Impulse 9163
- with GRP All-Stars**
SUPER LIVE IN CONCERT—GRP 1650
- with Billy Cobham**
LIVEMUTHERFORA—Columbia 35349
- with Pat Williams**
DREAMS AND THINGS—Allegiance 443
THRESHOLD—Soundwings 2107
- with George Harrison**
33 & 1/3—Dark Horse 3005
- with Joni Mitchell**
FOR THE ROSES—Asylum 5057
COURT AND SPARK—Asylum 1001
MILES OF AISLES—Asylum 202
- with Steely Dan**
AJA—MCA 1004
- with Gerry Mulligan**
THE AGE OF STEAM—A&M 3036
- with Thelonious Monk**
MONK'S BLUES—Columbia 9806
- with Roger Kellaway**
SPIRIT FEEL—Pacific Jazz 10122
- with Don Ellis**
LIVE AT MONTEREY—Pacific Jazz 1-112

Amina Claudine Myers

INVITATION TO THE SONG

By Stephanie Stein



Another writer may have best capsulized the music of Amina Claudine Myers when he said her songs "... occupy an earth-mystic niche of their own, as if Sun Ra had collaborated with Nina Simone." *Amina*, her recent release, again shows the soulfulness and imagination of this jazz singer, composer, pianist, and organist. This album is perhaps the most accessible of her seven albums as a leader. Her extensive background includes a long history of performing in gospel groups, as well as spending some formative years with the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) in Chicago. The album's more straight-ahead tunes—the rich gospel song "Keep On Loving," "Yes, It's Real" (which has received a lot of pop airplay), and the instrumental "Happiness," with Myers' organ sustaining a killing groove—crystallize her particular amalgamation of great black music. One foot springs from her small-town Southern and gospel roots while the other kicks out as far as her curiosity and abilities can take her.

Myers, both vocally and at the piano or organ, has an ease and naturalness that gives her performances their particular glow, whether cooking along on a vamp, or pouring out improvisations on the piano with spirit and power. During the last few years, while performing with Lester Bowie, Leroy Jenkins, or Henry Threadgill, or heading her own groups, she has enjoyed enough staying power in the jazz world to continue her musical pursuits, seemingly unconcerned with trends, styles, or with what anyone else is doing in particular.

Her sojourn in music began early, at the age of four. "From the earliest I can remember we had a piano in the home. I started to mess around with it and different people in the neighborhood would show me things. I

started formal lessons when I was seven, and I was always asked to sing a lot, when company would come over or for church things. My great uncle and aunt helped raise me, because my mother was often away working when I was very small. We lived in a tiny town in Arkansas—a village really, no one really knew the population. We had to go seven miles to the nearest grocery store and town, where I went to school. It was still segregated then, but I had Catholic teachers and was always taking piano lessons. My uncle had gone to Tuskegee Institute and was really a musician but was a carpenter by trade. He was a Baptist and was always happiest singing. Another aunt gave me a drum and I remember marching around the house, singing and playing with him. He really instilled a sense of rhythm in me."

As a teenager, Myers and several friends formed a gospel group where she served as the main pianist and soloist. They performed not only for her church, but throughout Texas and the Southwest, and Myers became choir director and pianist for her college and various school and church choirs in the years that followed.

"When I went to college in Arkansas, I decided to major in music education to have something to fall back on. They had very good teachers there and I continued to study vocal music and classical music. But I also kept up learning popular songs of the day, which was something I had done since I was a kid. One day a girl came up to me and said, 'I got a job for you playing in a night club!' And I said, 'I can't play in a night club.' She said, 'Yes you can. It pays \$5 a night!' That was good money for me in those days. So I went down there, and sure enough, they hired me, and to this day I don't know how I made it.

"I was copying everybody—Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, you name it. The club

owner found a bass player and a drummer for me, he really had faith in me. This was in Lexington, Kentucky, where I spent my summers while I went to college. There were some piano players from Memphis who played in the white supper clubs nearby, and they lived in the hotel where the black club was. They showed me things on the piano, all the Coltrane songs and other jazz tunes that were popular. So this was when my interest in learning jazz really started. Then later, the drummer came up with a gig for me on organ. I only knew one song on the organ, but I started copying things off of juke boxes. So I was playing rock and r & b during the summer and on weekends when I was in school, and also kept playing for the choir and learning about jazz. Everything was happening at the same time."

After graduating from college, Myers moved to Chicago where she taught in the public school system for several years, as well as being an in-demand choir director and pianist. It was here that she came in contact with Muhal Richard Abrams and the AACM.

"When I first went to Chicago, I still visualized myself primarily as a singer, on stage. But I had really messed up my voice singing incorrectly for so long when I was singing rock that I couldn't sing for awhile. Playing was always very natural for me—I was never aggressive about it—not that I took it for granted, but I didn't have to *think* that much about it. And though I was really concentrating on teaching, I ran into this drummer named Ajaramu who went all over the city playing congas; so one night I sat in with him. The next thing I knew, he fired his organist and hired me and that's how I started playing in Chicago. Around '67, he

brought me into the AACM, where I met Muhal, Roscoe Mitchell, Henry Threadgill, and everybody.

"It was really an exciting time for me, because when I became a member of the AACM, so many possibilities to create opened up. When I first played with Ajaramu's trio, I was hearing things that I wouldn't play because I was afraid they wouldn't sound right. He really encouraged me and so did Muhal. And everybody had so many different things going. Muhal and Roscoe were painting—it made me want to paint, and I started painting too. At that time, I was very naive as far as writing and composition went, but Muhal was always glad to teach me things; and so I ended up writing some charts for his big band. When you're around someone with his energy, it just made you want to do something—it was very inspiring.

"We had a school for underprivileged children. I taught vocal classes and then I would go sit in on Muhal's or somebody else's class. We presented plays. There wasn't much of a jazz club scene at that time in Chicago, so we presented our own concerts—sometimes we'd have things going on seven days a week. I started writing for all kinds of ensembles, which was something I had never done before then. And it wasn't as if we were really trying to be way out or anything like that, but we knew that the music—jazz—was not limited, that it could go anywhere. In my observation, people will often try to limit you, or put you in a bag, in a hole. So we were really just trying to avoid that."

Myers wholeheartedly credits her connection with AACM members as a strong force in her development, both in the practical matter of getting work, and in strengthening her own talents. Ajaramu's trio with Myers on organ—often reinforced with such incipient experimental leaders as Threadgill, Mitchell, and Anthony Braxton—was reportedly a hot little group, at a time when soul-funk organ groups were tremendously popular. Ajaramu also led Myers to gigs with Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt in the early '70s.

"I knew I just wanted to keep developing my music and travel and meet other musicians, and that I couldn't really do that while I was teaching, so I resigned. Ajaramu was playing with Gene Ammons and he recommended me as an organist. I played with him for a couple of years and that was really an education. Gene was really a beautiful person and I was able to learn a lot from him about programming music and playing standard material. He would play one note and the audience would go crazy, he was such a soulful player. And he was such a pro—I learned all the ins and outs from him. By traveling and playing, you learn so much about how to play jazz, about the business, how to respond to people, about life.

"With Sonny Stitt, I really learned how to use my ears. You had to be really creative with him. One night he called four blues in a row and three of them were in the same

key! He knew every standard in the world and you had to be ready with any tune, even if you hadn't played it for months—you had to know all those songs inside out.

"I realized that the AACM and Gene and Sonny and everything else—all of that prepared me for moving to New York. When I first came here on a visit, I thought, 'My God, no—this place scares me.' Remember the Lower East Side down by the clubs in the '60s? People were hanging out the windows and the fire escapes, and all those strange bars downtown. I'd never seen anything like that. Coming from Arkansas, New York was a total culture shock. Chicago was bad enough, but I had kind of gotten used to it and I grew to like it.

"And it was wild, because when I came here to live in '76, I was confronted with everything I hated in the world. I was riding the subways at three or four in the morning, but everything I was doing was about music, so it had to work out—I was always positive. I wasn't jiving—I was going to hear music or going to hang out where I could get some work. So things that I thought would be frightening turned out not to be once I was in that situation. I was doing things I never thought I would do, eating things I never thought I would eat. But when you make one step it gives you the creative ability to take two. I don't know how I made it up here in the beginning. In some way it worked out, but I'd be hard-pressed to tell you how."

But Myers did hit New York when the loft scene was thriving. Musicians such as Fred Hopkins and Eddie Moore asked her to play with them and helped her find work; and an invitation to work with Marion Brown came as a particular honor. The momentum picked up—she started touring and recording with Lester Bowie and Leroy Jenkins, and eventually was asked to perform and record in Europe on her own.

Her earlier albums, particularly *Song For Mother E*, *The Circle Of Time*, and *Poems For Piano*, affirm her well-earned reputation on the experimental jazz scene. Her determined piano playing, marked by a strong percussive style and marvelously elliptical phrasing, is more reminiscent of McCoy Tyner and Cecil Taylor than rooted in bebop. And at her strongest, her songs, with the hypnotic feel of hymns and chants, can call up the truly universalist spirit of her music, paying an unspoken tribute to such musicians as Coltrane, or, again, Tyner.

Currently, Myers has been performing with her own sextet, which includes John Purcell on reeds, Ricky Ford on tenor, Jerome Harris on bass, Bola Idowu on African drums, and Reggie Nicholson on drums and percussion. And in keeping with some of the larger works she has premiered in the past few years—*Suite For Chorus*, *Pipe Organ And Percussion*, *When The Berries Fell*, and mixed-media and theater pieces that have been performed at The Kitchen, The Dance Theater Workshop, and other

AMINA CLAUDINE MYERS' EQUIPMENT

"The piano I use at home is a Behr Brothers & Co. I bought it second-hand when I first moved to New York and when I found it, I really felt that it was meant for me. When I'm performing in concert, my preference is the Steinway grand, Baldwin, or Yamaha, in that order. I own a Hammond B-3 organ, which I've also had for years and I use Leslie 122 speakers with it. Recently, I've been using and experimenting more with electronic instruments and I really like the Yamaha DX-7 and the Roland D-50."

AMINA CLAUDINE MYERS SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

AMINA—RCA Novus 3030
COUNTRY GIRL—Minor Music 1012
JUMPING IN THE SUGAR BOWL—Minor Music 002
THE CIRCLE OF TIME—Black Saint 0078
AMINA CLAUDINE MYERS SALUTES BESSIE SMITH—Leo 103
SONG FOR MOTHER E—Leo 100
POEMS FOR PIANO—Sweet Earth Records 1005

with Muhal Richard Abrams

LIFE A BLINCE—Arista 3000
SPIHUMONESTY—Black Saint 0032
MUHAL RICHARDS ABRAMS DUET FEATURING AMINA CLAUDINE MYERS—Black Saint 0051

with Lester Bowie

THE FIFTH POWER—Black Saint 0020
FROM THE ROOT TO THE SOURCE—Soul Note 1006

with Henry Threadgill

X 75, VOLUME 1—Arista 3013

with Arthur Blythe

BLYTHE SPIRIT—Columbia 37427

with Frank Lowe

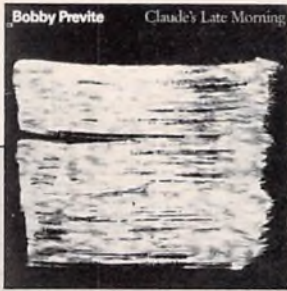
EXOTIC HEARTBREAK—Soul Note 1032

venues, she is working on a couple of new projects.

"Right now I'm working on some electronic pieces and also some blues tunes, because I want to eventually do a tribute to John Lee Hooker and Lightnin' Hopkins—they were my two favorites. I've started working on a symphonic piece as well. In the past I had written some scores for [trumpeter] Leo Smith for 19 pieces, and the big band pieces for Muhal, but never anything this extensive. I want to do something for full chorus, strings, and the works. It's coming along—right now I just have little snippets of it, but this is really my next big thing. I try to work on one or two major things a year. Whether anything happens with them or not, it just really keeps me going.

"And I know, a lot of people do describe my music as spiritual. It's not really for me to say that I'm a spiritual person, but what I try to do, first of all, is to treat people the way I want to be treated. And as far as music goes, I've realized what music can really do to people—it can really help people. And so I take it really seriously—I have to be in good form and good shape and really concentrate. I really have to work with myself to try to stay on the track, because New York can take you off, as you know. Everything you want is here, and you have to deal with all these different forces. I like to make things better for us to get through in this world. I know I was given this talent for something positive, so I want to use it to its utmost." db

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



BOBBY PREVITE

CLAUDE'S LATE MORNING—Gramavision 18-8811-1: *LOOK BOTH WAYS; ONE BOWL; THE KING SO FAR; SOMETIMES YOU NEED AN AIRPORT; THE VOICE; CLAUDE'S LATE MORNING; FIRST SONG FOR KATE; BALLET; LOOK BOTH WAYS (REPRISE); BUD.*
Personnel: Previte, drums, marimba, keyboards, drum machine, vocals; Wayne Horvitz, Hammond organ, piano, harmonica; Ray Anderson, tuba, trombone; Bill Frisell, electric guitar, banjo; Josh Dubin, pedal steel guitar; Joey Baron, drums; Carol Emanuel, harp; Guy Klucvsek, accordion; Jim Mussen, electronic drums, sampling.

★★★★ ½

Who is Claude, and why do I feel like I'm in a movie theater everytime I play this record? The opener, "Look Both Ways," is like a theme for the album (and movie?), reprised as the second-to-last tune on side two (dig that crazy pedal steel!!). The instrumentation reminds me of a soundtrack to a movie never made, the music seemingly composed by a slightly-tilted Henry Mancini.

But this is the '80s and credit must go to the ever-inventive composer/drummer Bobby Previte. Like another drummer with a penchant for taking music and making it his own, namely Tony Williams, Previte has too many ideas buzzing around inside to play other people's stuff as a leader. What makes him unique among drummers, therefore, is his role as a composer/leader. Add to this his love for playing in any context—mainstream to free jazz, blues, funk, and all manner of rock—and what could result is something with a title like *Dull Bang*, *Gushing Sound*, *Human Shriek* (an actual title to a proposed soundtrack made up of electronic inventions performed by BP).

As with *Pushing The Envelope*, his previous album on Gramavision, it's obvious that each tune on *Claude* is carefully crafted with the particularities of each instrument in mind. For example, "First Song For Kate" is like a theme to an imaginary Western, complete with banjo and pedal steel guitar. Bill Frisell's "good ol' boy" plucking brings us into town, while Josh Dubin takes us for a ride off into the sunset, ending the tune on a strange, yet resolved, note.

Each tune is so unique, with a character and setting all its own, offering us glimpses of different times, different places (including that which has yet to take place). "The King So Far" conjures up images of tribal Africa, with Ray Anderson's bone providing the requisite animal sounds/notes/noises (did I hear a Republican shriek in the forest?). And what safari would be

complete without wild and spirited drummers, i.e., Messrs., Previte, Baron, and, I presume, Mussen. "Ballet," on the other hand, is soft and reflective, containing a haunting yet lovely melody. Piano, trombone, guitar, and marimba combine to evoke images of dancers (lovers?) quietly practicing in a late afternoon studio, lit only by a setting sun.

If there is a criticism, it is that *Claude*, whoever he may be, seems to get lost every so often, what with the enormous musical and emotional range and apparent lack of a center (sort of like a soundtrack?). But the playing is inspired throughout, and perhaps more trips to this movie theater will reveal that all-important storyline.

What is recalled in this ambitious program are vivid images, striking characterizations, and great arrangements as well as the persistent fact that although Bobby Previte is a great drummer, his pen appears to be mightier still.
 —john ephland



JAMES BLOOD ULMER

ORIGINAL PHALANX—DIW Records 8013: *SONG NUMBER ONE; FREE SPIRIT; HOUSE ON 13TH ST.; TROUBLEMAKER; ANGEL LOVE; PLAYGROUND.*
Personnel: Ulmer, guitar; George Adams, tenor saxophone, flute; Sirone, bass; Rashied Ali, drums.

★★★★★

REVELATION MUSIC ENSEMBLE—DIW Records 8025: *BODYTALK; PLAYTIME; NISA; STREET BRIDE; BLUES 4 DAVID.*
Personnel: Ulmer, guitar; David Murray, tenor saxophone; Jamaaladeen Tacuma, bass; Ronald Shannon Jackson, drums.

★★

By my count these are James Blood Ulmer's 10th and 11th albums recorded under his name or as leader in all but name. From his first release, *Tales Of Captain Blood*, made 10 years ago on the Artists House label, to the present, he has remained an enigmatic and quixotic presence, eluding attempts to package, define, and categorize him. On record he's certainly thrown the music press into a spin; there is no consensus as to which are the great albums, and which, if any, as some would have it, miss the mark.

This points up a belief in Ulmer by his audience and a corresponding disagreement over his music. In part explained by the genuinely elusive quality of each of his albums, it

underscores the different expectations we all place in someone who is regarded as a leader, a leading light, a voice that carries beyond cult status. But Ulmer remains—after 10 years of knocking about as a sideman and 10 years a front man—the perpetual next big thing out of Edge City.

For his part, Blood continues to move to a more centrist position vis-à-vis popular culture. His strategy has come to seem like a gamble (even though his style has been grafted to any number of recognizable formats including c & w, blues, funk) as mainstream tastes accept fewer derivations. In a very real sense his uniqueness has been a stumbling block in his career: for Ulmer has made more than a style, he's made a music.

The concise ensemble definition his playing and singing have seemed to yearn for rarely has gelled on record. His recent album for Blue Note should have won him a wider audience—coming as close to capturing the tenuous nature of his harmolodic dirges as anything in the entire codex of Ulmer's recorded music. As he continues to wend his way towards his audience (or is it the other way round?), he has released two new LPs, both on foreign labels which further compound the enigma. An overview of each reveal only a glimpse; a part of an entity rather than an entirety.

The *Revelation Music Ensemble* is a reprise of sorts, reassembling a quartet that toured Europe briefly in 1980 and recorded one very important LP, *No Wave*, on the Moers label. That album, with Ulmer, David Murray, Amin Ali, and Ronald Shannon Jackson, is very much in the lineage of Lifetime's *Emergency* and Miles Davis' *Jack Johnson*, except that RME stated rather than implied a hard funk beat over Colemanesque themes.

The new RME reunites Jackson, Murray, and Ulmer with Ali being replaced by Jamaaladeen Tacuma, who isn't exactly temporary help. However, this all-star lineup turns in some routine music. The record sounds, for all the world, like a rehearsal session. The players seem uncomfortable, hesitant. Tacuma and Jackson never gel as a rhythm section: missing are the sharp, crisp breaks and the emotional surge Jackson usually delivers. Tacuma seems especially lost, never really taking hold of Jackson's power marches. Where Amin Ali would supply a hypnotic ostinato figure, Tacuma flashes his chops in a great display of *technical ease*. Ultimately, the music just lays there, no one comes to the fore. Murray's presence is half-felt; his playing wrapped in irony and ennui, a halfhearted simulacra of himself.

Ulmer shadows everyone, noodling away while slipping up to the foreground, then disappearing into the ensemble woodwork. This is a hurried, unsolved affair, far below the standard these artists have set in the past. The real question is why weren't a few more days put into this project? Why was it released in such a state of disarray?

Phalanx is also a homecoming, teaming Ulmer and George Adams back together from the Ohio-based Hank Marr Quartet of the late '60s. For those listeners who have heard the first *Phalanx* album (1986, Moers 02046), the second LP is a turn of direction.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

GOOD VIBES

by Owen Cordle

"Vibes" is one of those words like "blues." You don't know if it's singular or plural. Like the blues, the vibes has produced a string of singular players. Lionel Hampton plays them like the drums. Red Norvo plays them like a piano. Milt Jackson, like a bebop horn. Gary Burton plays 'em like . . . Gary Burton.

You get the drift of this thrifty synoptic lead-in: there are new records and CDs out there featuring vibes players.

Bobby Hutcherson is the most prevalent, appearing on four releases. The best are his *Cruisin' The Bird* (Landmark 1517) and guitarist Barney Kessel's *Red Hot And Blues* (Contemporary 14044). *Cruisin' The Bird*, an LP of post-bop quintet performances, has a cool and reflective quality at times. Although the title implies a tribute to Charlie Parker, *Bird* is really a Thunderbird. Hutcherson's playing, on vibes and marimba, is sleek and classy like



Bobby Hutcherson

his '64 T-bird pictured on the record cover. The band strives as one to stick to the mood of the three standards and his originals. Buddy Montgomery, who plays piano here, has a special affinity because he's also a vibes player. Rufus Reid supplies the kind of lines and tonal spread that are like a highway. Get aboard and roll. Victor Lewis is the drummer. No complaints here. And young Ralph Moore plays tenor and soprano. He's one of the more thoughtful, less gabby Coltrane-oriented saxophonists. As for Hutcherson, all the elements of his style come off advantageously: improvisation matched to mood matched to theme. The trills, swirls, stair-stepping runs, reflective pauses and go-for-broke double time, unexpected phrase lengths, and leitmotif of groove have rarely sounded better on record.

Out of the cool, into some hot on *Red Hot And Blues*. Out of the post-bop, back to bop, with Hutcherson boppish but rhythmically and harmonically more modern, too. He's sensitive on "You've Charged" and "I'm Glad There Is You," consistently surprising on Kessel's "Blues For Bird," and decorative on Laurindo Almeida's "Barniana": in all, totally compatible with Kessel's quintet. The guitarist gets that good Oklahoma blues feeling: the lope, bent strings, and spidery bebop runs, with the time straight up and down or slightly laidback. Now is renaissance time for Kessel. Kenny Barron

hustles forward in the piano chair. We know what a peerless bebopper he is. Rufus Reid graces the bass department again, and Ben Riley gives us drum chatter in the right spaces. You can't go wrong with this LP.

According to reliable reports, neither could you go wrong at Keystone Korner, a jazz club in San Francisco, during its 11-year life. In 1982, a year before it closed, Hutcherson recorded there, giving us *Farewell Keystone* (Theresa 124). Leading an all-star sextet, he stretches out on modern West Coast originals à la *Cruisin' The Bird*. He and drummer Billy Higgins are consistently rewarding. Pianist Cedar Walton and bassist Buster Williams turn in their customary huge support. And trumpeter and flugelhornist Oscar Brashear and tenor saxophonist Harold Land cut loose occasionally, playing their familiar sounds (Brashear out of Freddie Hubbard, Land out of Land). Hutcherson's "Starting Over," a "Speak Low"-like original, elicits the best solos all around on the LP. Not bad, but *Cruisin'* is more concise, varied, and ultimately better.

Finally, there's Smith Dobson's *Sasha Bossa* (Quartet 1004CD). Dobson is a sparkling, springy pianist who occasionally recalls George Cables. He's also a vocalist with timbral ties to Sinatra, Chet Baker, and Mark Murphy. His wife Gail also sings on a couple of tracks. Hutcherson remains lightly percussive throughout, bringing a Milt Jackson-like touch to the ballads and a snowflake swirl to the bossas and brighter pieces. Mark Lewis' alto saxophone, out of Paul Desmond, graces the title track, Jeff Carney (bass) and Eddie Marshall or Vince Lateano (drums) are steady and unobtrusive in the rhythm section, befitting the pleasant, MOR quality of this CD.

Before Hutcherson, there was **Milt Jackson**, the original bebop vibist, who shows up at the helm of two new albums. *Bebop* (East-West 7 90991-1), the latest, recreates the feeling of the '40s. We know from past recordings that Bags always swings, sticks close to the mood of the blues, and is the warmest of all vibists. So it is with this reiterative album. But each soloist seems isolated in his own bag, skillful but immune to the immediacy of this group. John Faddis is cast in the trumpet role of a young Dizzy Gillespie. J. J. Johnson plays himself, refining the staccato groove and bluesy tone that have made him a trombonist to be reckoned with all these years. Jimmy ("Little Bird") Heath is an admirably structured soloist on tenor and alto saxophone. Pianist Cedar Walton, bassist John Clayton, and drummer Mickey Roker comprise a tough but resilient rhythm section. But like the album title, the performances have a slightly *deja vu* quality. More communicative sparks should have flown among this lineup.

A London Bridge (Pablo 2310-932), recorded at Ronnie Scott's in 1982, is more communicative, looser, more swinging. The instrumentation is the same as Jackson's home base, the MJQ, but the feeling is less cloistered. Bags demonstrates on "Flamingo" and "Close Enough For Love" that he's still the master of ballad embellishments. And on the other tunes, he charges into his solos like a bronco out of the chute. Pianist Monty Alexander swings hard, a mixture of Oscar Peterson's propulsiveness, Art Tatum's harmonic ingenuity, and his own (too much at times)

propensity for quotes and classical music reminders. Ray Brown's bass lines are a treat in themselves, although the bass is underrecorded, and Mickey Roker's drums cook solidly. Altogether, a very respectable jam session.

Gary Burton is the other big name in this set, and he scores with *Times Like These* (GRP 9569). We hear shades of *Duster*, Burton's ground-breaking jazz-rock album of the '60s, in the Burton-John Scofield combination of vibes and guitar; shades of the melodic filigree of the Burton-Chick Corea duets, although no pianist appears here; shades of *Tennessee Firebird* in the country twang of "Robert Frost,"



Gary Burton

a tune by Jay Leonhart; and when Michael Brecker's tenor saxophone shows up on a couple of tracks, shades of Burton's recent *Whiz Kids* LP. The thick overtones of acoustic bass—Marc Johnson is the bassist—are a welcome sound behind Burton again. And drummer Peter Erskine gives the group the best rhythmic boost since Roy Haynes. This one probably isn't meant to be a retrospective, but in suggesting various aspects of Burton's career, it shows how he's refined his prodigious four-mallet technique to serve his musical purposes. And in Scofield, Johnson, and Erskine, he has equal company for a change.

Khan Jamal, who has been associated with avant garde jazz in Philadelphia, shows promise with *Infinity* (Stash 278). This rerelease of sides cut in 1982 and '84 contains not avant jazz but post-bop modal jazz with an African flavor mostly. Jamal's tunes are limited harmonically, and monotony creeps in after awhile despite his ample technique. His style suggests cooled-down versions of Hutcherson and Walt Dickerson. Bernard Sammul, who plays lots of block chords, is stuck with a bad piano throughout. Bassist Reggie Curry, percussionist Omar Hill, harmonica player Clifton Burton, alto saxophonist and flutist Byard Lancaster, and drummer Dwight James or Sunny Murray are the other players, all keyed into the appropriate but still not very exciting exotica.

With **De Helling's** *Hop* (H.H. 001), we get the avant garde duo of Hans Hasebos (vibes and percussion) and Bart van Helssdingen (drums and steel drums) from Amsterdam. This is freedom music with a beat. No mandering all over the rubato wasteland with pot-luck accents and melodic wisps, these guys cook. They change moods together. They nail accents as one. They use lots of sounds, from the truly eerie to straightahead vibes and trap drums. They pull it off because they stay in tempo and move together.

—owen cordle

DISCOVER THE NEW AGE OF JAZZ.

CHET ATKINS

"CHET ATKINS, C.G.P."

Chet Atkins' roots are country, but his current guitar licks in no way resemble "pickin'." He's created a pure, smooth and seamless sound that fits perfectly into the new age of jazz. Chet is still rightfully called "The World's Most Famous Guitar Player." Some things never change.

CHRIS SPHEERIS

"PATHWAYS TO SURRENDER"

Strong melodies and well-crafted rhythms have always been a vital part of Chris Spheeris' imaginative instrumental journeys. On several tracks of his new album, Chris introduces a welcome yet unexpected element to his music—his rich baritone voice!

TRAUT/ROBBY

"THE GREAT LAWN"

Ross Traut and Steve Rodby describe their music as "simple yet intense." And whether they're performing their versions of Monk's "Round Midnight" or the Drifters' "Up On The Roof," this remarkably original guitar/bass duo always stay true to their word.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

The Moers album is the hardest funk Ulmer has recorded—its music is what the *Black Rock* CBS release purported to be but wasn't. And the new Phalanx album? It is, without any qualms, straightahead jazz, much in a mode of the 1970's Blue Note releases by Andrew Hill, Sam Rivers, and Tony Williams.

Themes are clearly delineated, the solos are pithy statements, sometimes creeping towards the tension of the avant garde, then edging back to a steady, hard groove. If there are few moments of genius here (and each of these musicians is capable of hitting that plateau), there is a constant high level of consistency.

This may be Ulmer's most thoroughly satisfying album since the Moers Music Revelation Ensemble album. What's missing are the flashes of brilliance, the right-to-the-edge catharsis he serves up on his best discs. George Adams is on top of his game throughout. The Phalanx setting seems to be tailor-made for his style of avant sonorities, hard bop drive, and r&b gutbucket stomp.

—james brinsfield



JACK WALRATH

WHOLLY TRINITY—Muse 5362: SPHERIOUS; (THE LAST REMAKE OF) I CAN'T GET STARTED; KILLER BUNNIES; IN THE PIT; BABY, YOU MOVE TOO FAST; SPONTOONEOUS.

Personnel: Walrath, trumpet; Chip Jackson, bass; Jimmy Madison, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

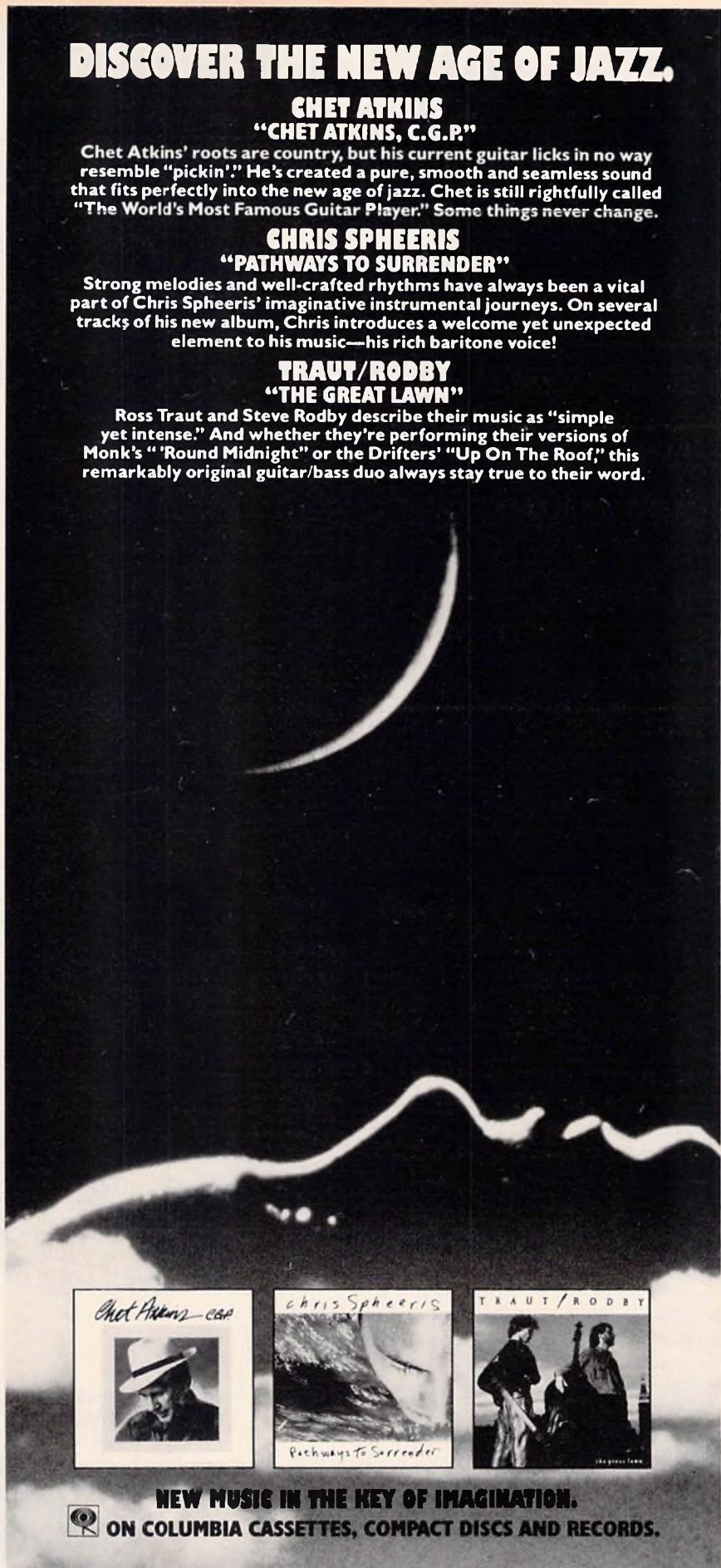
HUGH RAGIN TRIO

METAPHYSICAL QUESTION—Cecma 1007: METAPHYSICAL QUESTION; VARIATIONS OF PAGANINI'S PERPETUAL MOTION; LONELY WOMAN; FANFARE AND MARCH.

Personnel: Ragin, trumpet; piccolo trumpet, flugelhorn; John Lindberg, bass; Thurman Barker, percussion.

★ ★

In an era of retrenchment, it's good to hear players who remember the past but don't build a shrine to it. A quick geneological check would turn up Coltrane, Coleman, and Monk as forebears of the music Jack Walrath and Hugh Ragin play with their respective trios. But these players extend the innovations of the past, moving beyond what Walrath aptly describes as the "noisemaking and/or screaming contests" of some of Ornette's followers to less



NEW MUSIC IN THE KEY OF IMAGINATION.



ON COLUMBIA CASSETTES, COMPACT DISCS AND RECORDS.

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egocentric sessions that—in their most successful moments—keep organization and development in mind.

Walrath, who has played with Sam Rivers and Charles Mingus, among others, comes across as an assured, seasoned performer. His musical intelligence shows not only in his playing, but also in the liner notes he provided; his comments offer insight into the music instead of plugging the performance.

Walrath can sustain a long, lyrical solo (as on the brooding "Baby, You Move Too Fast") or shift into hyperdrive, as on "Spontaneous," where he seems to keep seeing a higher note to chase just over the horizon. This trumpet player cracks his share of notes on "Baby"—and for that matter, any time he aims too high.

Good musicianship pulls him through, but the inconsistency flaws the overall impact.

The trio favors collective improvisation, and though Walrath naturally dominates, bassist Chip Jackson and drummer Jimmy Madison get their chance to solo, too. On the straight-ahead "In The Pit," solos are traded with an especially sure feel for balance. This unity of purpose extends to the rest of the recording. The weighting of high-energy blowing against ballads works well in *Wholly Trinity*. There's a consistency both in the compositions (written by all members, sometimes with an assist from an old standard like "I Can't Get Started") and the playing that makes the recording cohere.

Hugh Ragin's album aims for more extreme playing, with more variable results. "Metaphys-

ical Question" (written by Ragin) and "Lonely Woman" (by Ornette Coleman) show the trio improvising at its best. The playing here is tighter than on a previous Ragin/Lindberg release, *Haunt Of The Unresolved* (NATO 40), and amalgamations like the cross between a marching band and Lester Bowie screeches in "Metaphysical Question" are convincing.

Ragin works up steam as he gets into "Metaphysical Question" and "Lonely Woman"; here he is in control. But the remaining tunes should have been left on the musical equivalent of the cutting-room floor. The only reason to record a composition like the Paganini is to show off great technique. This performance draws attention to the fact that Ragin doesn't have it.

—elaine guregian

MENAGE A TROIS

by Art Lange

The French may have given the term an inherently sexy connotation, but contemporary improvisers have proven that three-way interaction needn't be so narrowly defined—especially when the commonly accepted piano trio is excluded in favor of less-familiar instrumentation. These eight threesomes find individual solutions to problems of balance, proportion, counterpoint, and conversation, and via multiple options transcend the merely sensual to create a myriad of moods and memorable pleasures.

The first step, though, requires compatible attitudes—in concept, if not always in action—due to the intimate nature of the alliance. On *Miniature* (JMT 834 423-1), the spirits are willing, but the compositions are weak. **Joey Baron**, **Tim Berne**, and **Hank Roberts** are all longterm cohorts in Berne's incendiary working group, but as a co-op the lack of a



Tim Berne

leader seems to mean there's no one to "just say No." Collectively, this is a dogged, determined unit of serious demeanor, and their best music results from those somber

moments exploiting Berne's unruffled, lyrical alto—"Ethiopian Boxer," say, where Roberts' cello can alternately contrast with microtonal slurs and Delta-style stringbending or compliment with unison arco lines, while Baron's processed drums supply the street-smart jolt that undercuts the potentially too-romantic situation. Ditto the finely detailed interplay of "Lonely Mood." Problems arise only when they serve incongruity for its own sake; it's hard to hear how the unfocused episodes on "Circular Prairie Song" or "Abeetah" are meant to fit together.

By surveying a more conservative terrain, **David Murray's** *The Hill* (Black Saint 120 110-1) forgoes *Miniature's* shock theater for a comfortable, immediately likeable familiarity. Murray essays assured, confident tenor on the blues-based "Santa Barbara And Crenshaw Follies"—he whines, whinnies, and whorls notes within an easily traceable scheme, no aimless meandering here—and Butch Morris' surprisingly romantic "Fling"; "Chelsea Bridge" elicits a rich, roasted tone and breathy drawl that owes royalties to Ben Webster. Bassist Richard Davis and drummer Joe Chambers provide firm support on these tunes and something more on the interactive title tune and portrait of "Herbie Miller"; Chambers especially, a colorist of the drum kit, has been too little heard of late. All told, this may be Murray's most accessible disc.

It was 1979 when the prolific **Steve Lacy** last recorded with bass and drums; now *The Window* (Soul Note 121 185-1) revisits that format. Unlike Murray's beefy tenor, there's no fat on the sopranoist's spiny conjectures, and the stripped-down rhythm section—Jean-Jacques Avenel on bass and drummer Oliver Johnson—provides the pulse upon which Lacy toys with intimations of conventional swing. Listeners locked into Lacy's labyrinthine phrasing will appreciate "Twilight"'s rigorous development and the fragile extremities of pitch and dynamics explored on "A Complicated Scene"; others may need time to be seduced by the album's modest manner.

On the other hand, the trio of **Hans Koch** (reeds), **Martin Schütz** (bass), and

Marco Kappell (drums) strives for diversity at all cost, sacrificing continuity for effect. *Acceleration* (ECM 1357) ranges from expressionist roars to impressionist watercolors to timbral hijinks with romantic curves—all deftly done, but with little sense of the personalities behind them. Best cuts: "Im Delirium"'s distorted Slavic waltz, and "Acceleration Controlee"'s sustained tenor invention.



David Murray

There's an equal amount of variety on *Songs & Dances* (CELP 4) from the freewheeling trio of **André Jaume**, **Joe McPhee**, and **Raymond Boni**, but it's handled wisely; their deconstructionist takes on recognizable melodies ("Dock Of The Bay," Ornette's "Blues Connotation," among others) offer comforting moments of respite within striking new scenery. Boni's guitar, à la Frisell and Rypdal, oozes cloudy chords that hover around the horns—"Stompin' At The Savoy" has a dreamy ambience, heard through a haze, while Jimmy Giuffrè's "Moonlight" is almost motionless, a study of subtly persuasive melancholy. Elsewhere, McPhee's trumpet is puckish, pungent, an ironic foil to Jaume's reeds. This CD, from Europe, will grow on you. It's worth the search.

It's been hard to get a handle on **Eddie Harris** over the years—the title song on *Eddie Who?* (MCA/Impulse 33104) is a less-than-modest, tongue-in-cheek autobiographical jaunt through his considerable career—though there's never been quite enough attention paid to his substantial tenor talents. Ably supported by Ralphie Armstrong's resonant electric bass and Sherman Ferguson's solid drums (and occasionally, the leader's overdubbed piano), Harris showcases his tenor on this program of ballads, blues, funk lines, and a standard or two ("Daahoud" is given over primarily to his curiously effective vocalise). This isn't the all-stops-out blowing session Harris' long-suffering mainstream fans have been waiting for, but it's a step in the right direction. (PS: The CD contains two extra tracks.)

The two discs devoted to the **Joe Morris Trio** on *Human Rites* (Riti 02/03) are separated by a two-year period, and reveal substantial stylistic changes in the Boston-based guitarist's methods. An '85 live date, with the estimable Thurman Barker on drums, finds Morris spinning long, sinewy, twisting threads of disjunct melody buoyed by Barker and bassist Sebastian Steinberg's free, casually inflected rhythm. Tempo and phrase lengths accelerate and stretch according to inspiration, not design. By '87 (with Barker replaced by Jerry Deupree), Morris' attack has turned curt and spiky, with less conventional voicings and additional timbral effects. The music's logic is now internalized, less obvious. Guitar fanciers should pay particular attention.

Titles like "Henri Rousseau's Exotic Insects Swarm The Preventive Incense" and "Rabbits And Rodents Actively Seeking The Desert" may alert the attentive listener to the exotic sonic environment provided by **Cinnie Cole**, **LaDonna Smith**, and **Davey Williams** on *Locales For Ecstasy* (trans museq 9). Ostensibly a free-improvised string trio (banjo, violin, and guitar, with some synth slipped through the cracks), the sounds are non-referential to existing or recognizable structures, textures can be sparkling or grainy, syntax a fragmented chatter, interplay gnomic or expansive. From delicate cricket talk to cranky industrial-strength crunch, the improvisations are nonetheless careful, crafted, and sensitive. db

New Releases

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

PHONASTIC: Lester Young, *Lester-Amadeus*. Bengt Hallberg, *Surprise*. Count

Basie, *Count On The Coast, Vols. 1 & 2*. Benny Goodman, *In Stockholm, 1959*. Stan Hasselgard, *The Permanent Hasselgard*. Various Artists, *Americans In Sweden JATP 1957*.

SOUL NOTE/BLACK SAINT: Buell Neidinger's String Jazz, *Locomotive*. Mal Waldron & David Friesen, *Dedication*. Lee Konitz, *The New York Album*. David

Murray, *The Hill*. Steve Lacy, *The Window*.

IMPULSE/TIMELESS: Lionel Hampton, *Live*. Rodney Jones, *When You Feel The Love*. Machito, *Machito And His Salsa Big Band*. Johnny Hartman, *I Just Dropped By To Say Hello*. John Coltrane, *Africa/Brass Vols. 1 & 2*. J.J. Johnson & Kai Winding, *The*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39

TRILOK GURTU



Photo: Ralph Quinke

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TRILOK GURTU

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CMP 33

The contemporary arrangements of traditional Indian ragas and original compositions featured on *USFRET*, the solo recording debut of the Indian percussionist *Trilok Gurtu*, highlight the diverse talents of one of creative music's most distinctive instrumental voices. A member of the World Music ensemble Oregon since 1986, Gurtu has also performed and/or recorded with such artists as John McLaughlin, Jack DeJohnette, Archie Shepp, Gil Evans, John Abercrombie, Charlie Mariano, Paul Bley, Lee Konitz, Ed Blackwell, Philip Catherine, Nana Vasconcelos, Aito Moreira and Flora Purim.

The international assortment of guests appearing on the recording includes longtime associate *Don Cherry* on trumpet, Oregon co-founder *Ralph Towner* on guitar & keyboards, the dynamic Swedish bass guitarist *Johas Hellborg*, the noted French keyboardist and arranger *Daniel Goyone*, the Indian violinist *L. Shankar* and Gurtu's mother, the revered *Thumri* vocalist *Shobha Gurtu*. Each made a special contribution to the project, creating a recording that highlights the percussionist's musicality in a uniquely personal "sound" that has as much in common with Fusion as it does with traditional Indian music.

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FRED ASTAIRE

THE ASTAIRE STORY—Verve 835 649-2: *Isn't This A Lovely Day; Puttin' On The Ritz; I Used To Be Color Blind; The Continental; Let's Call The Whole Thing Off; Change Partners; 'S Wonderful; Lovely To Look At; They All Laughed; Cheek To Cheek; Steppin' Out With My Baby; The Way You Look Tonight; I've Got My Eyes On You; Dancing In The Dark; The Carioca; Nice Work If You Can Get It; New Sun In The Sky; I Won't Dance; (Ad Lib) Fast Dances; Top Hat, White Tie And Tails; No Strings; I Concentrate On You; I'm Putting All My Eggs In One Basket; A Fine Romance; Night And Day; Fascinating Rhythm; I Love Louisa; (Ad Lib) Slow Dances; (Ad Lib) Medium Dance; They Can't Take That Away From Me; You're Easy To Dance With; A Needle In A Haystack; So Near And Yet So Far; A Foggy Day; Oh, Lady Be Good!; I'm Building Up To An Awful Letdown; Not My Girl; Jam Session (Instrumental).* (2 hours, 15 minutes, 56 seconds)

Personnel: Astaire, vocals, taps, piano (cut 37); Oscar Peterson, piano, celeste; Flip Phillips, tenor saxophone; Charlie Shavers, trumpet; Barney Kessel, electric guitar; Ray Brown, bass; Alvin Stoller, drums.

★★★★ 1/2

HOAGY CARMICHAEL

HOAGY SINGS CARMICHAEL—Pacific Jazz 7 46862-2: *Georgia On My Mind; Winter Moon; New Orleans; Skylark; Two Sleepy People; Baltimore Oriole; Rockin' Chair; Ballad In Blue; Lazy River; Georgia On My Mind (Instrumental).* (39:35 minutes)

Personnel: Carmichael, vocals, whistling; Harry Sweets Edison, Conrad Gozzo, Don Fagerquist, Ray Linn, trumpet; Jimmy Zito, bass trumpet; Harry Klee, flutes; Art Pepper, alto saxophone; Mort Friedman, tenor saxophone; Marty Ber- man, baritone saxophone, reeds; Jimmy Rowles, piano, celeste; Al Hendrickson, guitar, electric guitar; Joe Mondragon, Ralph Pena, bass; Irv Cottler, Nick Fatool, drums.

★★★★★

Fred Astaire's influence on American music was miraculous. He seemed to have a six-note range and a chainsmoker's lungpower. And yet, on stage and on film, he introduced more classic songs than anybody ever. The nearly three-dozen classics he sings on *The Astaire Story*—by the likes of Kern, Berlin, Porter, and Gershwin—are only some of them. How did the man with the paper-thin voice do it? By making singing before a mic an act of dancing

in the dark, he's so elegant, you can almost see him gliding across the floor. Still, his phrasing was as conversational as any jazz musicians—he'd talk his way through a couple of key words in a lyric, blurring the line between song and natural speech (surely an outgrowth of his theater years). As Alec Wilder once wrote, Astaire brought out in composers "something better than their best—a little more subtlety, sophistication, wit and style." Every tune written for him seems to bear his mark. So in a sense, whenever jazz musicians play one of these standards, a little of his elegance rubs off.

On 1952's *The Astaire Story*, he gets to inspire jazzmen directly: Norman Granz surrounded him with what amounted to Verve's house band. Even by his own measure, Fred isn't in the greatest voice; his intonation is decidedly shaky (as on "Dancing In The Dark"). But his shortcomings don't sabotage things much. Partly that's because of the eternally fresh material. About the only songs that don't measure up are the two Astaire co-wrote: the predictably contoured "I'm Building Up To A Awful Letdown," and "Not My Girl," with its clap-three-times rhythmic hook, on which Fred plays a little stiff '20s piano. It's redeemed only by Desmond Carter's masochistic love lyric.

The other thing that makes this epic survey work is the band, which gets lots of room to stretch. The music is lightly textured but swings like mad. (Check out the near-definitive "Oh, Lady Be Good!") To me, this is some of the best Oscar Peterson on record—both he and strokehouse Flip Phillips are careful not to overwhelm their guest. Oscar's at his most lyrical and restrained on the Gershwin's "A Foggy Day," but he barrels over the concluding riff blues that Fred sits out. The singer joins in on taps for three numbers, which come off better than they should, and introduces a few tunes verbally (calling his illustrious band "the boys"). The CD remastering is superb; you can literally hear Astaire's tongue moving in his mouth. Warts and all, classic stuff.

Fred Astaire inspired great songs. Hoagy Carmichael wrote 'em. Bix's pal was one of the first pop writers to get the feel of jazz into his scores, but his pieces also reflect the homeyness and easy gait of turn-of-the-century parlor music. They're a weird mix of the savvy and sentimental.

The format of 1956's *Hoagy Sings Carmichael* echoes *The Astaire Story* (right down to the pianist doubling on celeste). Put the singer in front of some sympathetic jazzmen to showcase some of his best numbers. But there's a difference—Johnny Mandel arranged Carmichael's songs for large band, displaying a superior ear for detail. Mandel sneaks "Reveille" into a chorus of "Two Sleepy People"; the low flute break on "Memphis In June" subtly echoes Hoagy's whistling at the top.

On this date, Hoagy's singing seems indebted to old acquaintance Jack Teagarden, who'd sung "Rockin' Chair" a few times himself. Hoagy has the same irresistibly lazy drawl; like Astaire, he was a splendid singer for a guy with no voice. Ray Charles excepted, no one sang Carmichael's material better than the composer. This "Skylark" is the most touching, most perfectly realized I've heard—the palpable splice ending Pepper's solo aside. (Art's

melancholy ballad style is perfect for this stuff.) But Hoagy talks his way through most of "Two Sleepy People," as if his pipes were unworthy of his melody or Frank Loesser's grand *faux naïf* lyric.

Some of Carmichael's most endearing songs are his mood pieces, about a bygone America idealized almost to the point of satire. "Memphis In June" comes replete with grandma rocking on the porch, a grandfather clock ticking in the parlor, and cousin Amanda's fresh rhubarb pie. (The lyricist is Paul Francis Webster.) Hoagy loved hokum; the amazing thing is, he turned it into deceptively casual high art. His songs are pure Americana—national treasures—and *Hoagy Sings Carmichael* contains some of his best recorded work.

—kevin whitehead



BENNY GOODMAN

THE YALE LIBRARY, VOL. 1—MusicMasters CIJ 60142Z: *Sweet Georgia Brown; Macedonia Lullaby; Soft Lights, Sweet Music; Broadway; Marching In Swing; Batunga Train; Cherokee; Slipped Disc; Diga Diga Doo; Lullaby In Rhythm; Don't Blame Me; Blue Room.* (50:05 minutes)

Collective Personnel: Joe Newman, E. V. Perry, Taft Jordan, John Frosk, Ruby Braff, Jack Sheldon, Randy Sandke, John Ekert, Joe Mosello, trumpets; Vernon Brown, Eddie Bert, Bill Harris, Urbie Green, Buster Cooper, Rex Peer, Matt Flanders, Dan Barrett, trombones; Goodman, clarinet; Zoot Sims, Buddy Tate, Dick Hafer, Gene Allen, Jerry Dodgion, Flip Phillips, Paul Quinichette, Ted Nash, Ken Peplowski, Chuck Wilson, Jack Stucky, saxophones; Bernie Leighton, Teddy Wilson, Roland Hanna, Russ Freeman, Ben Aronov, piano; Attila Zoller, Chuck Wayne, Steve Jordan, Jim Wyble, Turk Van Lake, Perry Lopez, Jim Chirillo, guitar; George Duvivier, Tommy Potter, Red Wooten, Milt Hinton, Arvell Shaw, Murray Wall, bass; Roy Burns, Bobby Donaldson, John Markham, Shelly Manne, Don Lamond, Joe Marshall, Louie Bellson, drums.

★★★★

THE YALE LIBRARY, VOL. 2: LIVE AT BASIN STREET—MusicMasters CIJ 60156Z: *Honey-Suckle Rose; Runnin' Wild; Mean To Me; Memories Of You; Stompin' At The Savoy; Blue And Sentimental; One O'Clock Jump; I Found A New Baby; Stairway To The Stars; Body And Soul; Air Mail Special; Nice Work If You Can Get It; Sing Sing Sing; Goodbye.* (61:26 minutes)

Personnel: Ruby Braff, trumpet; Urbie Green, trombone; Paul Quinichette, tenor saxophone;

Goodman, clarinet; Perry Lopez, guitar; Milt Hinton, guitar; Bobby Donaldson, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Volume 1 of these two CDs is an interesting but erratic sampler of the various groups and mood swings of Benny Goodman between 1955 and '86. But Volume 2 is better Goodman. Both are from the Goodman Collection at Yale University, profits from which will make the collection self-sustaining.

In the mid-'50s Benny Goodman slowly became fed up with the way record companies treated his music. So he decided to take control of his own recording career. It was a big mistake. He taped himself in helter-skelter fashion. And without production or marketing support to keep a regular flow of new releases flowing, the tapes piled up. Except for a few "concept" LPs (BG in Moscow, BG in Brussels, etc.), new Goodman albums became rare. Maybe he thought his prestige was negotiable currency with record companies. If so, he missed the point. The value of records to an artist of Goodman's emeritus status in the mass market was publicity, not profit. Without new records, people thought he was dead.

If a young person came to me, said he'd heard about this guy Goodman, and wanted to know what was so great about him that the whole country once went ga-ga, much of *Yale, Volume 1* would leave him puzzled indeed. It starts off with a knock-out punch—a tense, sharp, brutal, and bloody "Sweet Georgia Brown" from 1967. Benny throws himself into this one with a violent, almost kamikaze abandon. He hammers the quarter notes as if they were stakes, each being driven into the beat in one, huge stroke. It's a smoking, red-hot performance. But then the selections go off in different directions. There is the loose, fluent, insouciantly swinging small-group Goodman of "Soft Lights" and "Slipped Disc," both from 1955; and with a 1958 big band ("Cherokee"). But there's also the thin, cool, passionless Goodman sleep-walking through some equally thin and passionless arrangements that momentarily interested him in 1958 ("Macedonia Lullaby," "Batunga Train"). Or the lazy, almost feeble Goodman of "Lullaby In Rhythm," oddly from the same performance as "Sweet Georgia" and held aloft only by some good Zoot Sims. And finally, there is the Goodman of 1986, celebrating himself and Fletcher Henderson one final time in some daringly rejuvenated playing on "Blue Room" with probably the best band he pulled together in 40 years.

In 1967 the Book of the Month Club issued an excellent three-LP set recorded by BG at Basin Street in New York 12 years earlier. *Yale, Volume 2* gives us a cohesive hour-plus of additional material from that date. It's some of the best post-war Goodman on record. His sound is round, fat, and vivid. He plays with considerable enthusiasm and consistent flow. His "Runnin' Wild," for instance, is a *tour de force*—three solo choruses in the middle and then three more to take it out, each one more taut than the one before, and with no key changes. There's a wonderful rhythmic variety in his playing too ("I Found A New Baby"). His attack and constructions constantly break up the standard eighth-note swing phrases at

unexpected points with surprise accents, pauses, and broken-field twists. Although his harmonic risk-taking sounds conservative today, I suppose, this is still the work of a master improviser who rarely let himself fall into set solo routines. And that doesn't grow stale.

And if that's not enough, the rest of the group could hardly be better. Ruby Braff never seems to play a wrong note. And the often very circumspect Teddy Wilson is jostled into some of his most energetic playing in a decade. Urbie Green's precision-cut trombone was to swing what J. J. Johnson was to bop. And Paul Quinichette, who played a kind of quivering caricature of Lester Young, gets off some good, if perhaps excessively stylized solos.

—john mcdonough

ORNITHOLOGY

by Kevin Whitehead

Bird's soundtrack ruffled fans' feathers, but without Eastwood's movie we wouldn't be enjoying a splendid **Charlie Parker** reissue boom. There's never been a better time to take up *Ornithology*—not if you own a CD player. The complete works on Verve and



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Savoy—including false starts, incomplete takes, and studio chatter—are treasures; both companies and compiler/producer/annotator Phil Schaap treat Charlie Parker's artistry with suitable respect. His scrapes and incomplete works are as important as Melville's, and for the same reason: they illuminate the masterpieces.

As for the movie's alleged state-of-the-art sound—Bird's alto sings much more clearly on these discs than on *Bird's* soundtrack. For those of us who never heard him live, his instrumental presence is a revelation. It wipes away the aural image of his sound we've gotten from countless muddy bootlegs.

Taking the boxes chronologically, *The Complete Savoy Studio Sessions* (Savoy Jazz ZDS 5500; 3 cds; 3 hours, 26 minutes, 22 seconds) has been newly remastered for CD by Jack Towers. Its extensive 20-page booklet and the format are based on Savoy's still-available five-LP box of a decade ago—but the CD box includes four "Marmaduke" scraps not on that issue. For those who prefer Parker's bop uncut, these '44-'48 dates are the right stuff: "Billie's Bounce," "Now's The Time," "Koko," "Donna Lee" (and Dizzy, Miles, Max, John Lewis, Tommy Potter, Curly Russell), . . .

Bird's flights appear so perfectly spontaneous, fans might resent the multiple alternates: they spoil the off-the-cuff illusion. "Parker's Mood" is one of the most perfect blues ever recorded by a jazz musician. It's been called "themeless"—but you can hear how carefully Parker hones his statement through several takes, while never varying the opening fanfare. The LP box had great sound for the '70s, but reproduction is notably clearer and fuller here. A niggling complaint: a big cardboard box houses what could have been squeezed into a small plastic one. The collectors I know are hurting for shelf space as it is.

Save for the opening Tiny Grimes session, a transitional jump date—where "Tiny's Tempo" gets a little faster with each take, the better to exploit Bird's strengths—Parker's Savoy sides are pure small-group bop. That purity has been an example to disciples ever since, walking the straight and narrow in his name.

But *Bird: The Complete Charlie Parker On Verve* (Verve 837 141-2; 11 hours, 14 minutes, 39 seconds) reminds us how non-dogmatic Parker was—how studiously he avoided the stylistic limitations perpetrated in his memory. There are moments here to rival Savoy's burning bop—"Blues For Alice," "Si Si," and "Swedish Schnapps" are among the happiest Bird—but generally, the edge of innovation is off the straightahead stuff. If Norman Granz nudged Bird toward unlikely sessions, it suited Parker's mood. Granz's settings for Bird were hysterically diverse: JATP jams; bop quartet, quintet, sextet, septet; big band; strings; big band and strings; strings and chorus.

The set is 10 CDs, with no session spread over two discs. There are almost two hours of previously unreleased stuff, and grandmaster Schaap (assisted in remastering by Tom Ruff and Dennis Drake) has worked up a new and better cut of Chico Farris's 1950 "Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite" from editing instructions found



WILLIAM P. GOTTLIEB

Bird and Tommy Potter, the Three Duces, 1948.

with the original tapes. The '48 Machito date omitted from Verve's '85 Parker-LP box is here too, as is a new take of Machito's "No Noise Part II." There are also three new Ella Fitzgerald spots from a '49 Carnegie Hall jam ("How High The Moon" with improvised lyrics, "Flyin' Home," and "Perdido"), as delightful and minor as you might expect.

Much has been made of the Afro-Cuban sides, but equally fascinating are their comic "Mexican" counterparts: "La Cucuracha," "Estrellita" (one new take of each), and "La Paloma." Parker could be sentimental, but on these tunes you can glimpse the keen sensibility of a satirist. The '51-'52 conga/bongo dates (including "My Little Suede Shoes" and "Tico Tico") anticipate several waves of Latin-Caribbean fads. The durable calypso strain we associate with Sonny Rollins stems directly from Bird's "Barbados" for Savoy, and these sequels.

As for those troublesome strings: violin sweetening, that middlebrow symbol of "taste," paradoxically shows off Parker's exquisite taste. He seems unaffected by their affectation. On the first take of "Laura," Bird's stark horn splattered over the sweetening sets up a conceptual dissonance.

The cult of the soloist symptomatic of Bird lore—from Dean Benedetti's Parker-only tapes to *Bird's* butchered soundtrack—began when Parker decided to rise above the fray: his cool upper partials float not so much outside as above the harmony. In soupy settings, Parker invites the listener to slice him away from his background (as I've done, for space reasons, by not dwelling on sterling solos and support by Dizzy, Monk, Buddy Rich, Roy, Pres, Ben, et al.). When big band and strings compete—a wilting-orchid "Temptation"—it doesn't come off, because it breaks down the wall between Parker and his backing.

No matter where the nickname "Bird" came from, it stuck because Parker so obviously and effortlessly flew above shifting waves of support and tides of fashion. How better to show the distilled grace of his style than by placing it in any absurd setting? But the string dates are also his most direct confrontation with the classic American songs, whose harmonic and melodic contours and whose development parallel

that of jazz.

Depending on the source—from master tape to well-worn 78s—sound ranges from the amazing to the acceptable, mostly the former. The new Verves and Savoy's should spawn lots of doctoral theses about Bird's reed squeaks. With the improved highs, they're clearer than ever, and I don't mind a bit; they're like a painter's brushstrokes. Detractors have always derided Parker's tone, but his admiration for Johnny Hodges sings through many of the later sides. It's almost as if he tackled the exquisitely maudlin "Old Folks" (classic kitsch: Dave Lambert's whitebread choral arrangement ends on a gospel cadence) just for the thrill of playing the bridge straight, with Hodges arabesques.

It'd be hard to overpraise the book of notes by Schaap, whose penchant for detail is legendary. He interviewed 60 musicians and insiders in the course of his research, and his scene-setting is admirably meticulous. (But for the lowdown on the "Etaoin" and "Shrdlu" to whom some JATP jams are credited, see litcrit Hugh Kenner's book *The Mechanic Muse*.) The complete Parker on Verve is about as close to perfect as reissues get. The inevitable kvetch: the at-a-glance table of contents on the back of the big box isn't reprinted on the back of the booklet.

As Art Lange has pointed out in these pages, the advent of CDs has quieted debate over the pros and cons of complete reissues, as CD listeners can skip or program over whatever they're not in the mood for. (With a finger on the scan button, cultists can skip every solo but Bird's, just like Benedetti.) That ability to edit comes in handy on the four volumes of *Bird At The Roost: The Savoy Years—The Complete Royal Roost Performances*, "all known Royal Roost broadcasts" in four chronological volumes (ZDS 4411, 55:21 minutes; ZDS 4412, 54:26; ZDS 4413, 63:22; ZDS 4414, 72:41). I love listening to host Symphony Sid Torin's malapropisms, dj gibberish, and bursts of yiddish. For a three-cent stamp, he'd send the squares Walter Fuller's booklet "What Is Bop?" (Wouldn't you kill for a copy?) But few will want to hear Sid prattle every time; the tracking lets you blot him out.

Hard to believe that in 1948 and '49 New Yorkers could turn on the radio in the middle of the night and hear the likes of Bird and Dinah Washington, broadcasting live. (For 90 cents, you could catch the show in person.) Parker's regulars are along—Kenny Dorham or Miles, Al Haig or Tadd Dameron, Potter or Russell, Roach or his echo Joe Harris—and they play his classics, as well as seasonal fare like "White Christmas," and a bit of "Auld Lang Syne." Bird put the current "Slow Boat To China" in heavy rotation. There are occasional guest shots: the day after Christmas '46 (vol. 4), Milt Jackson and bop tenor Lucky Thompson sit in, and Dave Lambert and Buddy Stewart drop by to scat "Deedle." Stewart also croons "Life is just a bowl of sour milk, my dear" on the happily morose "Hurry Home."

Away from the studio, Bird and his quintets open up. The brunt of Bird's Savoy recordings comes from 1947 and '48; the earliest studio dates in the Verve box come from the same period. The Roost broadcasts are the

flipsides of those studio sessions—less well recorded, but looser, more dynamic. These airchecks are also the most eloquent tribute to the partnership of Parker and Max Roach, whose hand-and-glove phrasing is a marvel of telepathic interplay. Roach crackles through Bird's rests: a modernist's take on classic blues call-and-response. They remake the past, just as Bird's writhing blues presage the coming of Ornette.

Sound is much cleaned up, courtesy of Jack Towers; the ubiquitous Schaap's notes to individual volumes are a four-part mini-bio. But these recordings are a cruel tease—we hear Sid introduce Dinah as "the mekushla of the blues," but we don't get to hear her set. A proper appraisal of Roost doings may require not a CD player but a time machine.

Definitive Parker reissues have been slow to come; no other jazz artist spawned so many shoddy bootlegs and airchecks. Of course, the reason those issues sell is his overall consistency. Case in point is *The Bird You Never Heard* (Stash CD-10; 68:39), culled from four sources: there are four tunes with trumpeter Herb Pomeroy and an unknown rhythm in Boston, January '54; four with a mystery quartet in New Brunswick, NJ, August 1950; two tracks with Bud, Mingus, and Art Taylor at Birdland, 5/30/53 (not to be confused with the Bird-Bud-Mingus debacle two years later); three more taped at the University of Oregon in November '53, with Chet Baker, Jimmy Rowles, Shelly Manne, and bassist Carson Smith. The sound is pretty bad on the first and third batch—the radio signal drifts on a Boston "Funny Valentine," static drowning brushes on snare. It's a little better on the second and fourth. The Baker concert has the most curiosity value; Manne takes a liking to "Barbados," but the on-site recordist cut Baker's and Rowles' solos. Of historical interest.

Bird's studio work for Dial, as essential as the Savoy and Verve, awaits systematic CD issue. In the meantime, there's *Bebop And Bird, Vols. 1 and 2*, from Rhino's new jazz label. *Volume 1* (Hipsville R2 70197; 57:32) has two takes of "Bongo Bop" taped for Dial in New York, October '47, and three more tunes from that December. In addition, there are six numbers from a 6/30/50 Birdland aircheck. *Volume 2* (R2 70198; 57:57) dips into Dial's 7/29/46, 2/19 and 2/26/47 Hollywood dates, supplemented by nine quintet performances from NY's Rockland Palace, 9/26/52, where the quintet includes guitarist Mundell Lowe. A string section joins in on "Laura" and Gerry Mulligan's "Rocker."

Matrix and take numbers are listed, but both "Bongo"s are listed as "masters." Rhino claims sound has been "digitally enhanced," but the Dial transfers are pretty noisy, and the live sound pretty weak. These issues are disappointing stopgaps. (But if you can't resist, try *Volume Two*, the better all-round program.) Bird plays his tail off on a breakneck "Lester Leaps In" and a radically recast "This Time The Dream's On Me," and he gets in his calypso groove for "My Little Suede Shoes" and "Sly Mongoose." (But splicing hijinx mar the fun.) Like the Stash set, these Hipsvilles hark back to the Parker mystery issues Verve and Savoy have put behind. The Dials next, Mr. Schaap? **db**

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1 SONNY CLARK MEMORIAL QUARTET.

"Nicely" (from *Voodoo, Black Saint*)
Wayne Horvitz, piano; John Zorn, alto saxophone; Clark, composer.

I have no idea who's playing, but the tune reminded me of a Sonny Rollins tune, like "Paul's Pal." I liked the theme, but that was about all I liked. The performance was not up to it. I think I've heard them before, but the intonation kept me from identifying them. It might be Jackie McLean. For the theme, four.

2 HERBIE HANCOCK.

"Round Midnight" (from *THE OTHER SIDE OF ROUND MIDNIGHT, Blue Note*)
Hancock, piano.

I heard Phineas Newborn play a few months back, and it sounded like he was taking time to deliberate over the piece. It reminded me of his phrasing and interpretation of the song, which I love. Five stars if it's Phineas; if it's not, it's somebody undeserving of five!

3 KING COLE TRIO. "Bop Kick"

(from *INSTRUMENTAL CLASSICS, Capitol*) Personnel as guessed.

That could have been one of Nat Cole's trios with Jack Constanzo on bongos. The sound of the piano and that Oscar Moore guitar sound. I like the tune, the way it moved. I thought it might be somebody influenced by Nat, like early Oscar [Peterson], but I've never heard Oscar play with bongos.

4 SHEILA JORDAN/HARVIE SWARTZ.

"Tribute" ("Quasimodo") (from *OLD TIME FEELING, Palo Alto*) Personnel as guessed.

I'm pretty sure that's Sheila. So it must be Harvie Swartz on bass. She's been writing lyrics since we were in Northern High in Detroit together. We'd cut the same kinda classes to listen to the juke box on the corner play "Now's The Time." That was in the mid-'40s. (Sorry to give away your age, Sheila!) Sheila wrote the first lyrics I ever heard to "Round Midnight," but I didn't know she'd written some for this [Charlie Parker] tune. She's so musical. A high rating, four-plus.

5 DAVE MCKENNA. "Moon Country"

(from *A CELEBRATION OF HOAGY CARMICHAEL, Concord Jazz*) McKenna, piano solo.

That's Dave McKenna. It sounds like there's a rhythm section. That's the way Dave plays. *Feh heh*. He's got the rhythm section built

TOMMY FLANAGAN

by Fred Bouchard

Tommy Flanagan, the genial professor of bebop, has made his mark over the years as a quintessential accompanist, bringing the best out of Ella Fitzgerald, smoothing Coltrane's sheets of sound. He has been coming out on his own for over a decade, and with what limpid felicity!

Flanagan's firm but gentle grip on the great jazz melodies of his era has lately yielded tributes to the pens of Coltrane, Monk, Ellington; and he plans new ones for Thad Jones and Benny Golson. His globetrotting trio with bassist George Mraz and drummer Kenny Washington played as elegantly and timely as a Swiss watch recently at the Regattabar in the Charles Hotel, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In his premiere BT, Flanagan was told nothing about the "set," based in part on his trio's Regattabar selections (e.g.,

in. He's self-contained. "The Old Country," isn't it, a Hoagy Carmichael or Willard Robison tune? I like the old songs. I like the way Dave played it. Give it four-plus. He can always play better.

6 CHARLIE PARKER. [listed as]

"Thriving On A Riff" (from *ORIGINAL BIRD, Savoy*) [listed]: Parker, alto saxophone; Miles Davis, trumpet; Dizzy Gillespie, piano.

That's the first five-star record you've played. The pianist is Sadik Hakim. [Flanagan hums the skittery, highly accented piano solo along with the record.] The tune is "Anthropology"; I cut my teeth in modern music on this one. Probably Dizzy on trumpet, Max or Kenny Clarke on drums. I love the groove on it. [Later:] Never mind what the jacket says. The names were changed for contractual reasons. Diz had a union card and Sadik [Argonne Thornton] didn't.

7 JOANNE BRACKEEN.

Title track from *Ancient Dynasty* (Columbia). Brackeen, piano; Joe Henderson, tenor saxophone.

I don't like the sound of it. It's a put-on between Latin and serious. It wasn't an electric grand, but [the recording] has that



JOSEPHINE SHIELDS

"Quasimodo.") Sadly, sides by a couple of rare peers (Elmo Hope, Dick Twardzik) were misplaced. Once again, a tip of the beret to our host, Harvard Yardbird Charlie Davidson.

weird treble. I've heard all the players before, but I couldn't name them. They're striving too hard but not getting anything out of it. It doesn't make it for me. No stars. (I hope that's not Chick Corea.)

8 DAMERONIA/PHILLY JOE JONES. "Them Of No Repeat"

(from *LOOK STOP LISTEN, Uptown*) Personnel as guessed.

Dameronia. Philly Joe. Yeah. Cecil Payne—one of the most distinctive sounds in jazz today [on bar]. I love his quote there: "reebop boom bam!" I don't know that tune, but five stars for Tadd [Dameron, composer]. Five stars for [drummer] Philly Joe. Five for Cecil. Five for [pianist] Walter Davis. That's 20!

9 SIR ROLAND HANNA.

"My Secret Wish" (from *GIFT OF THE MAOI, West 54*) Hanna, piano solo, composer.

That's my old friend Roland Hanna; he went to Northern High, too. Sir Roland—nobody can work a theme quite like he does. Wonderful! It's kinda folksy, somebody's folk song. Well-played. That's another four-plus, because I've heard Roland play songs I like better. db

HARRY "SWEETS" EDISON

THIS CLASSIC BASIE TRUMPETMAN STILL MAKES A LITTLE GO A LONG WAY.

by Gene Kalbacher

When the 73-year-old trumpeter Harry Edison says, in response to a question, "I don't think I've reached any goals," he isn't being forgetful or self-effacing. It's just that he never set any goals to begin with.

Who could have imagined—certainly not a man of no goals—that 50 years after he first boarded Count Basie's bus he would still be content, much less able, to play *For My Pals*. Yet, as the title of his recent Pablo recording attests, he's doing just that.

"The trumpet is the loudest instrument in the band, and it demands attention when it's played," relates Edison from his home in Los Angeles on a sunny summer afternoon. "The herald trumpets were used when the kings and queens were announced." For the first time in the conversation, Edison isn't speaking from direct experience.

Edison can't claim to have witnessed the courtly brass fanfares of the Holy Roman Empire, but he has heralded his share of royalty—from Count Basie and Lester Young to Duke Ellington and Johnny Hodges, from Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan to Frank Sinatra, Art Tatum, Buddy Rich, and Nat Cole. And on *For My Pals*—a sextet date with Curtis Peagler, Buster Cooper, Art Hillery, Andy Simpkins, and Tootie Heath—Edison honors his departed comrades Basie ("Count Me Out"), Ellington ("Sophisticated Lady"), Holiday ("Lover Man"), and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis ("On The Road With Jaws"), the tenorman with whom he co-led a band for eight years.

Edison's has indeed been a regal life. As a youngster in Columbus, Ohio, he couldn't afford a ticket to see his idol, Louis Armstrong, so he snuck into the dance. Money was tight in his household (his parents split up when he was six months old), but his mother, who raised him, bought him his first trumpet when he was 12. "Had it not been for Louis Armstrong, I never would have picked the instrument up," Edison remembers. "My mother, a wonderful person, bought me that first trumpet for \$7 with 25 cents down. She never thought she'd get it paid for." Though he never had a formal lesson on the instrument, he says with pride today that he's "never been out of work." And though he doesn't own a Van Gogh or drive a Silver Shadow Rolls, he owns something no one can steal or repossess—a



JORGEN BO

nickname conferred upon him half-a-century ago by The President, Lester Young. Countless trumpeters have played louder, and countless faster, but none has played with more focused lyricism and economical, unhurried swing. And, to this day, none plays sweeter.

"Sweets Edison" ("When somebody calls me Harry, it sounds funny") has adapted and adjusted his whole life—making a little go a long way—but never sacrificed or compromised melodicism. He remarks, matter-of-factly, "I think the composer wrote the melody for a reason—to be played!"

Asked about the origins of his spare, lyrical style, Edison answers: "There were many guys I admired, especially Red Allen and Roy Eldridge besides Pops, so I had to try to play something they *didn't* play because I couldn't play something from *everybody* I liked. And years ago, the old cliché was, 'I'd rather be the world's worst originator than the world's greatest imitator,' because you'll never reach your potential by imitating somebody. I never could think fast anyway," he continues, with a chuckle, "so the notes just came few and far between. Basie proved that if you put the right notes in the right places at the right time, they are very effective."

Riding the bus from 1938-50 with the Count Basie Orchestra, the greatest swing machine of all time, covering as many as 500 miles between stops, Edison played one-nighter after one-nighter, amassing invaluable wisdom and having a ball. Yet, had he not persevered, he might have quit the band in frustration early on.

"When I joined the band," he recalls, "we didn't have any [written] music; everything was head arrangements. When I joined, there were only three trumpets—Ed Lewis, Buck Clayton, and myself—two trombones, four saxophones, and four rhythm. At the

beginning, it was very difficult for me to find a note to the arrangements. Some of the guys had played with the Benny Moten band [Edison had spent six months in the Lucky Millinder Orchestra, working largely from written scores], so they were together, and they knew their own notes. I told Basie one night I wanted to quit. The night would pass by, and I'd still be trying to find a note for a tune we'd played at the *beginning* of the night. But Basie said, 'You sound good, you're playing good.'"

But Edison managed to cope, to find his notes, and today, looking back, he still marvels at Basie's organic, informal-yet-effective bandleading style: "We were all living at the Woodside [Hotel, in New York City]. Basie would play a riff on the piano, then tell the trumpet players, 'Go up to Buck's room and get some riffs to this little melody.' And he'd tell Prez or Herschel [Evans] to get the saxophone players to get some riffs. The rhythm section—the only thing they had to do was just *swing*, see? After a couple of hours, when we all came back to the basement to rehearse, we'd have a whole arrangement. 'Jumpin' At The Woodside,' 'Swingin' The Blues,' 'John's Idea,' 'Sandman'—all those tunes were just head arrangements."

Basie may have kept a tight reign over the orchestra's arrangements (years later it was the boss' idea, according to the trumpet player, to slow down the tempo on Neal Hefti's "Li'l Darlin'"), but he was never much of a disciplinarian, says Edison. A constant string of one-nighters imposed its own discipline—"You really couldn't be late because we'd get off the bus and go right into the dance hall"—as did the demands of the audience. At the Savoy ballroom, he recalls, if the band didn't swing, the Lindy-hoppers didn't dance, and if the Lindy-hoppers didn't dance, the band didn't work the next night.

"Basie," according to Edison, "was a musician's musician. He didn't like a lot of notes; he liked a few notes but a lot of intensity from the rhythm section. And the tempo—he never stomped anything off that wasn't swingin', that didn't give you that pulse and make you feel good." And feeling good, despite the grinding roadwork and the bigotry the band encountered down South, was what it was all about.

"We all wanted to play for Basie so bad," Edison emphasizes, "that we *couldn't* wait for him to get on the bandstand. Basie would never know he was the leader because he traveled right along with us on the bus; even when he could afford to take a train or fly, he'd stay on the bus with the guys." There were some nights, however, given Edison's reputation as a prankster, when Basie may have wished he'd taken the train. When Edison wasn't laying down sterling solos on the bandstand, he was secretly loosening the strings on Walter Page's bass or, with

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fellow trumpeter Clayton as his accomplice, finding Basie's stash of chicken on the bus, devouring it, carefully rewrapping the bones, and pretending to be asleep when the boss discovered the heist and raised hell.

Did Edison have any inkling at all, 50 years ago, that he and his bus mates were making history and establishing a tradition? "No, no, no," he replies, quickly. "I didn't have any inkling I was making anything [nor much money, he points out] but a lot of fun. 'Tradition'—I don't think that entered our minds. There was nothing but brotherly love among all the musicians, because we spent more time together than we did with our wives. It was an experience I wouldn't trade for the world, the highlight of my life."

Edison's tenure with Basie may have been the capstone of his career, in terms of formulating his philosophy and solidifying his style, but it surely wasn't the final glory. After leaving the Count in 1950, Edison toured with Jazz At The Philharmonic, Buddy Rich, and Josephine Baker before settling in the mid-'50s in California, where he worked for 15 years as a studio musician, including a stint with Frank Sinatra, with whom he recorded *Swing Easy* and *Songs For Young Lovers*.

If finding a note in Basie's head arrangements proved trying for him in the late '30s, then session work, ironically, posed an even greater challenge. When Edison, never a very good sight-reader, first walked into a session, he encountered "nothing but notes," and complicated ones to boot. "I got a big laugh when I first walked into the studio to do 'The Hollywood Palace' show," he chortles. "I told the guys in the band, 'This is not 'One O'Clock Jump,' because there was no music to 'One O'Clock Jump!'" But, again, he persevered, relying on his characteristic wit and good humor—plus the pre-session coaching of section mates Manny Klein and Conrad Gozzo—to get him through.

Returning to the present, Edison intones, "Music is so complex these days. Nowadays, the *more* notes you play, the more you're recognized as a good musician." Things have surely changed since the Swing Era—when jazz was the popular music of the day, when melody was sovereign, when cutting contests separated the men from the boys, when an entire 15-piece orchestra recorded with but one microphone—but Edison is too thankful, and too busy, to be bitter. "When I recorded with Basie in the '30s," he relates, "we only had one microphone, but the sound came through. If you made a mistake, you had to make the whole thing over again. The microphone was hanging over the middle of the band, so the soloist would have to stand up. Nowadays it's so technical. They have the producers, the electricians, the men on the board—they can make you sound bad or sound good. In

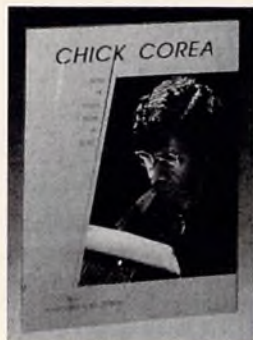
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profile

those days, everybody that recorded could play anyway, so the control man didn't have any control over you at all. Either you played

over the world. I've done the best I could with this instrument, and I'm still trying to learn how to play it. That's why I'm looking



Harry Sweets Edison (circa 1965)

TOM JACKSON

a good solo or you didn't."

On the current recording front, in addition to his *For My Pals* date, Edison expects to cut a session with Jimmy Rowles and Ray Brown, and is eagerly anticipating a possible waxing with Wynton Marsalis. "He's the epitome of the instrument," Edison says. "He always has something good to say about the old-timers, and he gives everybody credit for inspiring him to play."

Most days, Edison rises early and spends hours on the phone with friends. Early evenings are devoted to golf, a passion he learned from the late Basie guitarist Freddie Green. He remains active on the national and international performance scenes, but between-gigs practice, he confesses, is becoming more and more a chore. "As you get older, things become harder to do. Taking lessons, learning how to play the *right* way when you're younger, will enhance your playing as you get *older*. Bad habits are easy to form but hard to break. Wynton plays *correctly*, but he'll be playing a long time. He's been taught the breathing, the fingering, how to reserve his energy." In his travels, Edison is often approached by aspiring musicians, whose most frequent question concerns the spacing of his notes. "I tell 'em, 'As you get older, they'll space themselves, because your fingers and mind don't work as fast. You have to *practice* at putting fewer notes in your solos.'"

Excusing himself to return to the studio, Edison offers this career summation: "God has blessed me by preserving my life this long. I'm one of the chosen few. I still enjoy playing, and I've made so many friends all

forward to playing with Wynton Marsalis, so he can teach me something."

Retirement? He dismisses the notion out of hand. "After you've devoted all your life to trying to play your instrument"—and, in the process, brought added luster to the crowns of royalty—"what are you going to retire to?" db

MAARTEN ALTENA

by Bill Shoemaker

There's new music, and there's "new music." The latter is an umbrella term, denoting approaches to composition and improvisation that have solidified over time in recognizable, if not predictable, ways. It's the former—new music without the quotation marks—that Dutch composer and bassist Maarten Altena is interested in, tenaciously going against the grain of, successively, Europe's jazz and—ah . . . quotes again—"free music" establishments in his pursuit.

Along with Han Bennink, Willem Brueker, and Misha Mengelberg, Altena is a principle exponent of the "Dutch school," which broke ranks with the emulators of American jazz and forged a unique facet of present-day European music in the late '60s. Having paid dues with a variety of touring American jazzmen, ranging from Dexter Gordon to

Marion Brown, Altena was primed to participate in cooperatives, including Instant Composers Pool and Company, that defined a European identity in improvised music.

"I feel that I'm a jazz musician in the respect that, when I compose, I compose with certain musicians from my quartet and octet in mind," said Altena this past fall, during the Allentown, Pa. stop of the first North American tour of his acclaimed Octet. "That's very much in the jazz tradition. But I'm European and I'm honest about that, and modest. I would be an idiot—it would be cultural imperialism—to pretend to play a blues without making that clear."

Conversely, Altena is wary of the implicit generalizations contained in the term, "Dutch school." The oft-cited characteristic of their pungent humour is a case in point. When Altena, who collaborated for several years with a clown in music theater pieces, had a broken wrist cast in the mid-'70s, he also placed a cast on the neck of his bass to record an album of solos entitled *Handicaps* (ICP 012). "But, I wouldn't call myself a satirist. Brueker is more of a satirist. Mengelberg is more of a dadaist. I would call myself a cross between a lyricist, a structuralist, and a colorist. Sometimes there is some irony, but more in the English way.

"By the late '70s, however, I got fed up with the stylizing of free improvisation. It became a style in which everybody had a personal language, a personal idiom; so it became a matter of putting this person together with that person to get a particular result. I don't care for the all-star method. I wanted more structure, so I started composing, very banal song-like things at first, as a kind of revolt against this highly expressive so-called free jazz. You might call it a musical puberty, revolting against things to make it perfectly clear that you don't want those things anymore."

The offspring of this adolescence were Altena's Quartet, formed in 1979, and his Octet, begun two years later. Both units have released several well-received albums on Altena's own Claxon label (Alexander Boersstraat 16; 1071 KX Amsterdam; Holland; giro 4001400). Altena has benefitted from relatively few personnel changes in the intervening years, enabling him to hone compositional techniques and improvisational strategies. The Octet includes: the respected British trumpeter, Marc Charig; Wolter Wierbos, felt by many to be the "next" trombone force to be reckoned with in Europe; the exemplary reedists Peter van Bergen and Michael Moore, the only American ever to win Holland's coveted Boy Edgar prize; conservatory-trained violinist Maartje ten Hoorn and pianist Michiel Scheen, and the flinty American percussionist Michael Vatcher. ten Hoorn, Moore, and Wierbos are in the current edition of the Quartet.

"The way I compose now includes improv-

isation, but in a structured way. The Octet has allowed me to explore orchestration. I like to get as much variety as possible, in



Maarten Altena

KENN MICHAEL

terms of sounds, and dynamics. That's why the Octet should perform in an acoustic environment, without amplification. We just played at the Victoriaville Festival, a big festival with a big sound system, stage monitors, and all that. We would play very softly and they would turn up the microphones, and then we would suddenly play very loudly. Those changes are best heard in an acoustic environment.

"I also like to include structures that

activate the musicians—game pieces, like John Zorn's, or an earlier composer like Earle Brown. We use conducting techniques, so that people have their own way to organize things, unified by a general idea, like a melody. *Rif* [the title composition of the Octet's recent CD release—Claxon CD 87.1 DDD] is a piece like that, a good example of what we do now. Composition and improvisation come together and are indistinguishable. The beginning has a silly melody that, through the piece, lives its own life—there are mirrors of it; there are composed links of it that the conductor, Vatcher, layers towards the end of the piece; and at the end, we play it like we're waving flags.

"When we do composed material, I want it to be as perfect as possible. But I also want the improvised portions of a piece to have a perfection of composition. It wouldn't be too pretentious to say that's rare in improvised music. We aim at high standards for performing a piece. That enables us to make the improvisations more expressive, gives us a broader range of expression. When you have fixed points, points of departure, a frame, that's a valuable structure.

"I believe in the Stravinskian way of composing, that every new piece is a new musical world. So I don't pay much attention to being personal, or having a personal style. I also value clarity, of having each idea be hearable. [Anthony] Braxton came up to me at Victoriaville the other day, and that's what he related to. That's what goes into each new piece; and I try to make each piece a new piece. I don't try to refine ideas; I try to go where I haven't been before. Which is tough." db

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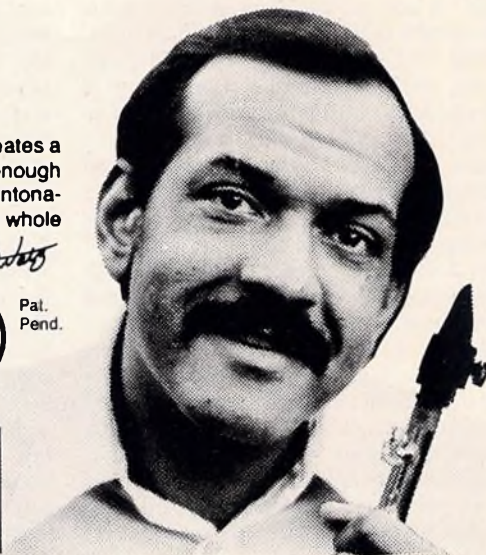
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