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Remembered

For Contemporary Musicians

downbeat

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**THE WORLD
SAXOPHONE
QUARTET**

**BUILDING ON A
NEW TRADITION**

**MIKE MAINIERI &
STEPS AHEAD**
THEY'RE HITTING
IT HEAVY

DAVE GRUSIN
SCORES & MORE

**THIRD ANNUAL
MUSICFEST U.S.A.
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The World Saxophone Quartet

MICHAEL WILDERMAN



Larry Rosen with Dave Grusin



David Byrne

DEBORAH FEINGOLD



Billie Holiday

DON HUNSTEIN

Features

16 THE WORLD SAXOPHONE QUARTET:

BUILDING ON A NEW TRADITION

They broke new ground with their horns and a "piano-less, phantom rhythm section." Stronger than ever, *The WSQ—Julius Hemphill, David Murray, Oliver Lake, and Hamiet Bluiett—minus Murray, talk with Gene Santoro* about their unique story, the creative process, and balancing careers.

20 MIKE MAINIERI & STEPS AHEAD: HITTING IT HEAVY

Their music is "beyond categories . . . or it should be," says bandleader/vibist/composer Mike Mainieri. Indeed, Mainieri's latest edition of *Steps Ahead* is sailing on the success of their most popular album ever. But the group has undergone some substantial changes. **Michael Bourne** gives us the metamorphosis that is Mainieri & Co.

24 DAVE GRUSIN: SCORING IT BIG

He's had many music-oriented roles. But the one he's most proud of is his writing for films. This year, composer/arranger/keyboardist/record company co-founder Dave Grusin's gift for film music won him an Oscar. **Scott Yanow** provides the inside scoop.

28 MUSICFEST U.S.A./ PHILADELPHIA

All roads led to the City of Brotherly Love this past April as student musicians from all over the continent competed in the third annual Musicfest U.S.A., hosted by **db**. **Jimmy Walker** provides the overview along with a gallery of photos.

Departments

6 on the beat, by John Ephland.

8 chords & discords

11 news

13 riffs

35 record reviews: Chick Corea; Dirty Dozen Brass Band; Johnny Hodges; James Williams; Bobby Watson.

40 cd reviews: Henry Threadgill; Steve Reich; Morton Feldman; McCoy Tyner; Dave Grusin; Various Artists: A Sound Approach.

48 blindfold test: Bob Moses, by Fred Bouchard.

50 profile: Bob Wilber, by Dave Helland.

52 caught: Tri-C Jazzfest '89, by Chris Colombi; Ed Thigpen And Friends, by Stephanie Stein; The Harper Brothers, by Michael Handler.

56 pro session: "Curtis Fuller's Solo On 'Blues After Dark'—A Trombone Transcription," by Lawrence McClellan; book reviews: The New Real Book, by Joel Simpson; The Advancing Guitarist, by Rick Peckham.

58 pro shop

60 ad lib: "Sparrow In The Sky," by Howard Mandel.

62 auditions: Young musicians deserving recognition.

Cover photograph of The World Saxophone Quartet by Jules Allen.

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For Contemporary Musicians

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The WORLD SAXOPHONE QUARTET

Hamiet Bluiett

Oliver Lake

Julius Hemphill

David Murray

BUILDING ON A NEW TRADITION

After more than a dozen years of playing together, The World Saxophone Quartet—Hamiet Bluiett, Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, and David Murray—has broken into the mainstream. Whether on their own tunes or somebody else's, their sinuous lines twist and explode melodies and harmonies while managing to suggest a rhythm section.

By Gene Santoro

Switching from Italy's pioneering Black Saint label to Nonesuch for *Plays Duke Ellington* broke them, at least in terms of distribution, press coverage, and sales; following up with *Dances And Ballads* took a little edge off the momentum—newly-converted listeners may have expected more semi-familiar material. But with *Rhythm And Blues*, their third release for the label, they've returned to the pattern established by the Ellington album: taking tunes by soul greats, they refashion them into something very much their own.

Odd as it may seem, **db** has never done a feature on The WSQ, so when I sat down to talk with Julius Hemphill, we made a point of doubling back through the group's history as a kind of intro/recap. Expect for Murray, who was out of town, the other equal members of this cooperative quartet—no leader/follower divisions here—added their own observations without necessarily agreeing. So here, very much in their own words, is The World Saxophone Quartet.

Gene Santoro: Let's go back to the beginnings of *The World Saxophone Quartet*, 12 or 13 years ago.

Julius Hemphill: Yeah, '76 I guess it was. In the fall of '75, Ed Jordan, who was the director of the music department at the Southern University campus in New Orleans, had been visiting New York during the summer. He's a saxophonist, and he had come around and either participated with us in or just viewed different activities we had going on around the city, in the lofts and so on. So he invited us to come down there.

Then we had to figure out what to do. None of us wanted to play other people's music. Nothing wrong with it, it's just the way we felt about it. We were all sort of on the fringes anyway—still are. So we came up with four or five pieces to serve as our repertoire.

In New Orleans we gave a couple of seminars, gave a concert, and appeared twice on the weekend at a local club. Doctor Jordan had a quintet there, so we used his rhythm section, but we also noticed that we got a significant response when we just played by ourselves. So we decided to keep that format. That was the first time, I think, we had gone without a rhythm section.

But you see, some years prior to that some of us had lived out in the Midwest, and we had all kinds of exotic ensembles—I'm talking about BAG [Black Artists Group] and the AACM [Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians]. One of the beauties of those organizations and participating in them was that nobody relied on any preconceptions about what was admissible and what wasn't. We were interested in trying things, alternatives to everything. So Hamiet, Oliver, and I all came out of that '60s scene; and David came out of the church.

Hamiet Bluiett: The first time we played, Donald Harrison and Wynton and Branford Marsalis were all in the audience. The Dirty Dozen Brass Band got started right after we did that. They said, "Damn, if they can do it, we can too; let's hit it." Because the cats in New Orleans wanted to do something new but come up through the tradition doing it. They could recognize that, even though people say to us, "You're not doing the tradition." I just say, "I don't want to walk the same line as you."

Part of our tradition is not copying, it's being creative. Far as I'm concerned, Charlie Parker was *creative*; that's the only thing I have to honor. I don't have to honor his notes, but I need to be creative. Duke Ellington was *creative*—that's what I honor. Mingus, Blakey—they've got their own foundations, not somebody else's. That's part of the tradition, too.

So cloning people is a learning device, like when children learn how to talk by listening to their parents. But at the same time, you've got to be creative. That's what I think this group can keep intact more than any other part.

JH: Anyway, the response we got in New Orleans made us want to pursue this pianoless, phantom rhythm section thing. So we came up with some more material. Our first engagement in New York was at The Tin Palace, and we met with mixed reactions; they ran the gamut from "This is great" to "This is bullshit."

HB: The other saxophone groups at the time were closet groups. Now you've got tons of them. Even Bobby McFerrin, everybody like that, they're coming out with a whole 'nother kinda format without a rhythm section—and we've seen all that happen since we've been together. We were the first group to go into jazz clubs without piano, bass, and drums.

GS: How'd you hook up with Black Saint?

JH: Well, we got invited to Germany to this Moer's music bash—that was probably '77, or maybe the latter part of '76. Anyway, part of the deal was to record what we played on the program, which we did. Next time we went over, we were on a tour, and we had this album out on Moer's. We were gonna offer his music on our records; boils down to, we weren't gonna get much money, just exposure. So on the tour we went to Italy, and met Giovanni Bonandrini; and I said, "Ok, these guys are competitors, might as well let 'em compete." [laughs] So we ended up working out a deal with him.

That has its ups and downs. I mean, he has the greatest current catalog in the world, but you can't find the records anyplace.

GS: How did the hookup with Nonesuch come about?

JH: As I recall, Bob Hurwitz approached us about doing this Duke Ellington project in late '85. Up to that point we had made a point of not recording anything but our own stuff, and that record was our first departure from that. It was appropriate enough.

GS: What prompted that shift?

JH: Well, an American company, the first one in 10 years or so, had expressed interest in us—serious interest, not just "I'll call you next week." The mind games we'd been going through with these foreign people only served notice that we had to get our American thing together, because that's how it should be. So that was part of the appeal this project had.

HB: And Nonesuch afforded us wide exposure. See, we couldn't sell as many records on Black Saint; being that they're imports, they have restrictions on how many records he can even get into the country. But since Nonesuch is part of Warner Bros., there's no trouble about that.

JH: Also, it was a challenge to take some very familiar stuff and make it fresh. In fact, we appeared opposite the Ellington band at the Berlin Festival a couple of years ago, and the report the next day in the papers said they'd been hearing the Ellington band for 30 years, so they were more interested in something different, and we happened to be there.

HB: When Hurwitz said Duke Ellington, it was the one name where there was no problem—*absolutely* no problem. In fact, we wondered, "Damn, why didn't *we* think of that?" See, our whole thing had been to do our own music because one of the frustrations for musicians is not being able to do their own music. But Duke Ellington—he's like the grandfather, the great granddaddy; it's impossible to get around him. I feel that way about a lot of other people besides him. But Harry Carney was my idol, and he was with Duke since he was 18 all the way up until after Duke died. So for me, doing Duke was no problem; he represented creativity to me. Same as Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Miles, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, a lot of other people; to me Duke represents a musician who always took material and made it theirs.

Oliver Lake: I thought it was a great idea, myself. Duke Ellington had been my idol for a long time, and David's too, so we were excited about that. I also understood where the record company was coming from, to have some kinda marketing angle.

We already had a string of albums that were all originals, so maybe it would bring some more people to us if they heard us interpreting one of the masters.

To pick the tunes for that album, we just let each other know what we were doing. As it turned out, there were no duplications, so it worked out.

GS: That album certainly put you over into the mainstream. You'd gotten attention before in the jazz press to a certain extent, but that album is when you started to get big media.

JH: Yeah, and it was real useful. I think it's critical to be in the media in as big a manner as possible [laughs]. The question about "Is jazz alive?" is really about "Is jazz in the media?" The answer is "no." It's not that jazz has stopped going on, it's that the media attention has shifted. And the Duke Ellington album confirmed some suspicions I had had.

People don't know what they want to listen to—I'm making a generalization, of course, but it's not too far off the mark. It's whatever they see, whatever they're *told* to check out. Duke Ellington, now: there was a *lot* of response just from the name, which preconditioned people to listen to it. But that process makes you wonder just how much they're really into it. They may genuinely like the music, but there are all these important aspects to it they seem totally ignorant of. It's a name thing—Duke Ellington. It's like tapping an artery: you want blood, here's blood.

Aside from that, we didn't do anything different with those songs that we do with any other songs. In my opinion, a melody's a melody—one doesn't outweigh another. You might make some personal associations with this one or that one; but outside of that, they're either good or bad. So what was important about that album, and why it put us over, is that people recognized the songs.

OL: I think it was partially because we were with our first American label as well as doing Ellington that got us that kind of attention. I think it was the combination of those two elements that helped us quite a bit with the media.

GS: Why don't you talk about what you guys do to your material generally?

JH: When you have this homogeneous grouping of voices, to make it sound acceptable you need to cover a few things that people expect to hear, generally speaking. They expect to have some kind of pulse going on. In the long haul they expect it to be basically tonal, if you want it to be popularly received. So with any song, our job amounts to having to cover the rhythm, the harmony, and the melody by way of saxophones. So it's about the same challenge for any melody, unless it's a song that has an instantly recognizable bass line, say, and in that case it becomes a melody of its own. So you have to supply the expected, you have to flesh out the anticipations to make it work as regular music for the general public. You have to try to be clever and make it flow, give it a pulse without being real obvious. You've gotta make it believable.

GS: How do you parcel out the work?

JH: Well, when there's a project we say, "I'll take that tune." It's mostly on a choice basis: not "You do this," but "I'll do that, what about you?" For the Ellington project I wanted to pick the most obvious, most known thing—"A' Train." To me, that was the greatest challenge, to make an "A' Train" not like any other. I *mean* for it to be different when I get finished, I mean for it to be singular. But again, it's the same set of considerations no matter who the composer—to make these saxophones sound like a *band*, an ensemble that's capable of providing chordal accompaniment. It's a challenge, to make it go "oom-pah" without it going "oom-pah" [laughs].

We're often asked if we have a kind of group development about the charts. We don't do any kind of interaction about the arranging; it's not a group effort that way. Whoever's making up the charts just gives out the parts to people. I would find it very annoying if we did have group arrangements—it's like the

elephant by committee [laughs].

Now, there may be some discussion as to the interpretation; very few of our pieces do we *not* have second thoughts on. Say, "Turn that around, do this first," something like that. But each piece is handled by whoever the arranger or composer/arranger is.

HB: That's the kind of a group it is: we're not a one-decision group. The way it works, if any one person says he doesn't want to do something, then we don't do it—it's either unanimous or it doesn't work. That's really different.

There was a time when we let Julius do almost all of the writing, because during that period he was an extremely frustrated composer—but *prolific*. So we said, "Tell you what, man; to keep you from going off the deep end, whatever you write, we'll play it." But now we've gotten to the point where the other cats in the group write also. Until lately, the only compositions I did were "Hattie Wall" and stuff like the blues. Now I'm starting to do more writing. Earlier on, I just wanted to work on trying to play, 'cause trying to play the baritone sax was giving me *enough* of a problem [laughs].

GS: Dances And Ballads didn't do quite so well.

OL: It did get a less enthusiastic reception, which surprised me 'cause I thought we had some great tunes on there. Maybe when Duke Ellington first recorded *his* pieces, they had to be played for 20 years before they became standards [laughs]. Maybe someday people will go back and play standards from *Dances And Ballads* [laughs]. I just think people jump on things a little bit faster if they're more familiar with them.

JH: The response was cooler, for whatever reason. I don't think the *quality* fell off; it's just that the stuff is not familiar—the recognition factor. I still believe that that has a great deal to do about it. 'Cause now with the *Rhythm And Blues* album coming out there seems to be even more anticipatory energy, and that's simply because more people are interested in rhythm & blues, I guess—I don't know.

See, for *our* audience—the audience we had at first, before the expanded audience we've gotten through Nonesuch—it didn't matter what we played. I think that part of the interest then stemmed from the fact that we played originals. Strategically, however, if you want to tap that market or reservoir of interest, then we have to be not so self-conscious about what material we're doing. It's gonna be our's when we get through with it anyway. In a way, I really like the challenge of doing some well-known stuff and putting some different aspects to it, twisting it. I find it interesting as a composer. There's a lot at work, more than just the notes.

GS: Obviously, the Otis Redding tunes are gonna grab folks, and James Brown's "Night Train." When I saw you do this stuff at Town Hall [Apr. '89], the audience immediately lit up for the bass line of "Dock Of The Bay," for instance.

JH: Oh yeah. People are steeped in nostalgia, anyway.

HB: *Rhythm And Blues* is hopefully the last record of other people's material. It's a decent business strategy, because everyone has done it—mention any name bigger than Pluto, and they've always done other people's stuff to open up the media doors for exposure. You've got a better chance of getting your originals heard when they're riding on some tune that's hot.

OL: I think it's a tradeoff without us compromising anything. Since this album was other people's stuff, the next album hopefully will be our originals again. From there on maybe we'll keep alternating like that, as long as we get to do someone we pick in the way that we choose.

GS: How'd you pick the tunes for that album?

HB: Everybody just picked the ones they wanted to do and did them. Julius did "Messin' With the Kid" 'cause it's a tune he had done a lot in St. Louis. So when he was getting ready to do it,



MICHAEL WILDERMAN

WORLD SAXOPHONE QUARTET'S EQUIPMENT

Hamiet Bluiett uses a Selmer baritone with a low A, but he adds, "Nowadays there are a lot of different saxophones you can buy to suit what you need." He endorses RIA mouthpieces, and his reeds are Vandoren #2 or 3.

Julius Hemphill uses a 25-year-old refurbished Selmer Mark VI alto, with ruby keys and gold-plating. His mouthpiece is an Auto Link modified by Phil Barone; his reeds are Vandoren #2½.

Oliver Lake uses a Selmer alto, with an RIA metal mouthpiece and Vandoren #3 reeds. His soprano sax is "a very old, curved soprano" made by Buford American, with a Selmer mouthpiece and Vandoren #2½ reeds.

David Murray's tenor sax is a Selmer Mark VI, with a Berg Larsen #4 mouthpiece and Rico Royal reeds.

WSQ SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RHYTHM AND BLUES—Nonesuch 9 60864
DANCES AND BALLADS—Nonesuch 9 79164-1
PLAYS DUKE ELLINGTON—Nonesuch 9 79137-1
LIVE AT THE BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC—Black Saint 0096
LIVE IN ZURICH—Black Saint 0077
REVUE—Black Saint 0056

he's going back to when he was in his early 20's; he didn't even refer to any record or anything.

When I did "Night Train," well, Jimmy Forrest was a personal family friend. So I did that, plus I put an Ike Turner sort of bass line to it. So all these people are out of the same area—East St. Louis. And we did a tune we've been doing a long time, called "I Heard That," that fit in that vernacular. Oliver wrote a tune called "Love Like Sisters" that I'm really sorry he didn't get on the record, 'cause I thought it was *great*. And David did "Try a Little Tenderness" in a sort of Otis Redding style; but when you get through with it, it's all Saxophone Quartet, the way we do 'em. You can't go to an Otis Redding record and find that stuff [laughs].

GS: How do you work in the studio?

JH: Well, we don't have a lot of the problems that face other bands. A regular band has to set up: all the balancing, the kit has to be properly mic'ed-up, all that. We just have to get levels, figure out how far to stand away from the microphones, and start playing. So our whole format makes it simpler to record.

GS: Do you tend to do multiple takes, or do things tend to be best on the first or second take?

JH: Sometimes it's multiple takes, but rarely more than three. See, it's part of the same thing: there are fewer things to go wrong. There's less technology involved: the more cable there is, the greater the likelihood that some connection will go out, all of that. Every problem is cut down a little bit because of our setup.

Usually we go for first takes. If you can get a good first take, it'll have a lot of that energy. It may not be exactly what you want, but there'll be some good aspects to it that you won't get on another take. You know, like the eighth take: "Just let me get past this F again . . ." [laughs]. That kinda thing. You get too self-conscious, maybe. But it doesn't bother me, recording; I just get tired of going over and over the same stuff, particularly if I'm the one making the mistakes [laughs]. I like to approach it pretty much as a concert situation. When they say "now," I like to be ready.

GS: Do you have plans to hit the road behind this record?

JH: Well, we just came off a small tour here, and unfortunately the production schedule and the touring schedule didn't coincide. We got a great deal of preview and review interest in our appearances. But I think some of the appearances didn't materialize because the record wasn't ready. The idea was to have done this in conjunction with its release. So I don't know. We seem to have missed that opportunity in the regular way, and we're all sort of booked-up, so I don't know how it's gonna work.

HB: But with me, I don't like to schedule things like that too close, anyway. That kind of schedule may work well in rock, but in the so-called jazz field, if you're good, people talk about you a little bit at a time for a long time. So I think that from now on we should schedule tours to be months after the album comes out.

GS: That raises another question. Do the four of you ever feel like the Quartet is overshadowing everything else you do?

JH: I don't, but then I don't have quite the prominence that some of the other guys have—I don't know exactly why. It's refreshing to have other things to do, but it's also a bit of a problem in that, in my opinion, we could be that much farther along in terms of the media. We have a built-in media attraction if we work it. But everybody's interested in different things, and we're all putting time into our own projects.

OL: I think it's been more positive than anything, because The World Saxophone Quartet has been stronger than any one of us individually. So it just helps our individual things; when I do something of my own, it says "of The World Saxophone Quartet" under my name. I don't have any problem with that.

HB: Yeah, to be really truthful, I have a problem with that feeling. Since I've been in the Quartet, all of my personal stuff has been squashed. But at the same time, due to my wife's sickness, my personal stuff would've been squashed anyway, and it turns out the Quartet saved me instead of squashing me totally. So I can't be mad at it. And the nature of the group is to let you do other things. It's not one of those groups where once you're in it, then you're dedicated to that group. You're not a sideman, everyone knows you've got a definite input. To me that makes it real good.

The other thing is that it's such a *creative group*. I don't wanna call names, but we're not cloning other people's work. We're not out there doing the third generation of Blakey, or the second generation of Miles, or something like that. I'm not saying that as a negativity on the part of other people; it's just an analysis. Now because of that, and because we play without a rhythm section, which is something not totally new—you catch it in church groups, and you catch it in doo-wop groups, but you don't catch it in instrumental groups—I get a chance to play in a way that lets me express as much stuff as a saxophone can do, as opposed to trying to limit what I do to a chord progression, or certain rhythms. I've got the freedom to play, I've got the freedom to *not* play. That's the one I've got [laughs]; I can take my horn out and change my reed, y' understand? Most people can't say that [laughs]. And besides, I'm old enough and mature enough now not to cry over success.

db

Mike Mainieri

& STEPS AHEAD

Hitting It Heavy

By Michael Bourne

If you write about music, you're on a list and albums come to you in the mail. Quite often nowadays the popular (or aspiring-to-be-popular) fusion albums feature keyboard players or guitar players or saxophone players; but whatever they're playing the groove is the same: *generic*, just vamps and vamps, downright tuneless. Steps Ahead sounds different. Mike Mainieri, the leader, plays vibes and that's different to begin with—but also there's a greater variety of grooves, from jazz to rock, from ethnic to modern, and a real interplay among the musicians, and there's *tunes* aplenty! Steps Ahead offers more than the usual fusion of folderol. "It's beyond categories," said Mike Mainieri, "or it should be."

Soon after the group's first American recording, the Elektra/Musician album *Steps Ahead* in 1983, the band became popular at once. Along with Mainieri's vibes, the band featured keyboardist Eliane Elias, bassist Eddie Gomez, drummer Peter Erskine, and saxophonist Michael Brecker, all up-and-coming stars and all eventually leaders. And that year in the **db** Reader's Poll, they were voted the #2 group—twice! They were named both the #2 acoustic group *and* the #2 electric group. "There were jazz purists who were saying we were playing acoustic music and people who were saying I play electronic vibes, so it's fusion. It showed me there were two camps out there, but I don't want to hold onto any one camp or any one audience. I just want to keep writing and keep playing."

N.Y.C. is the group's new release for Intuition and is already the group's most popular album (see **db** "Record Reviews," Apr. '89). And, after years of being a co-op band, Steps Ahead is now basically Mainieri's band. "I'm the leader, the producer, the director of the music. That's real important to me. It got to be out of focus when we were recording for Elektra. Not that the music wasn't great but, being a co-operative, everyone was entitled to have two tunes on the album, rather than

have one mind, one focus, one vision. Someone has to make the choice of what goes on and what doesn't."

Actually, 10 years ago when the original band came together, it was basically Mainieri's band. While he was working on the electric music for *Wanderlust*, his solo record for Warner Bros., Mainieri wanted to play some gigs straightahead. Mainieri was rooming at the time with drummer Steve Gadd and they'd both wanted to play

with Eddie Gomez. He also called Michael Brecker and pianist Don Grolnick. "We played a series of gigs at Seventh Avenue South and there were lines around the block. Once the word got out, you couldn't get into the place. These record executives from Japan came down, checked us out, and offered us a contract to record in Japan. I was recording for Warner Bros. so we couldn't be the Mike Mainieri quintet. We came up with the



Stepping out: (from left) Rachel Z, Jimi Tunnell, Steve Smith, Mainieri

name Steps. We did a week in Japan, a live album called *Smokin' In The Pit*, and a studio album called *Step By Step*. We did it all in a few days. We came back to New York and everybody scattered."

Once he'd finished *Wanderlust*, Mainieri toured six months with a reformed quintet of his friends, pianist Warren Bernhardt, Gomez, drummer Omar Hakim, and saxophonist Bob Mintzer. Then the Japanese wanted another Steps record. Mainieri again called Brecker, Grolnick, and Gomez, with Peter Erskine at the drums. They recorded *Paradox* live at Seventh Avenue South—only they couldn't call the band Steps. "Some band had trademarked the name Steps, a bar band in North Carolina. We offered to buy it from them but they kept jacking up the price. So we just added a word."

Steps Ahead recorded three albums for Elektra—*Steps Ahead* in '83, *Modern Times* in '84, *Magnetic* in '85—and with each record the players changed, though the two Mikes, Brecker and Mainieri, stayed in the forefront. Now it's Mainieri's band again, though bassist Victor Bailey and drummer Steve Smith also front



Bendik, and Victor Bailey.

bands—Bailey with his new Atlantic album *Bottom's Up*, Smith with his group Vital Information. Steps Ahead was always a gathering of leaders, but what's different is that at first the musicians came together, then the music happened; now it's the music first, with the musicians gathered to fulfill what Mainieri wants. "We've had other leaders in the band," said Mainieri, "but the process now is totally different psychologically and emotionally and musically." It's also now a sextet with three young newcomers: guitarist Jimi Tunnell, keyboardist Rachel Nicalazzo, called Rachel Z, and an extraordinary Norwegian saxophonist and composer named Bendik Hofseth, just called Bendik.

"I didn't want to just find someone to replace Michael Brecker," said Mainieri, "but a friend of a friend sent me a tape and said I should produce this singer. Bendik sings and writes beautiful poetry. He'd produced the tape himself and played all the instruments. I heard the tenor in the background and he had a strong voice. I called him and told him to come to New York. He sent me some material and it really knocked me out, the breadth of it. He's been commissioned to write music for the ballet and the symphony orchestra. He's played a lot of free jazz. He came over and we hooked up and started playing together."

"I can learn a lot with this band," said Bendik. "I can play with some really good musicians and get an insight into American popular music. I couldn't have a better opportunity. I'd given up on my saxophone ambitions when Michael got in touch with me, so I'm building that up again. I can bring a different attitude and a different energy to the band. I'm from a different world. I wasn't brought up with bebop and paying the dues that these guys have."

That some will compare Bendik with his predecessor is inevitable. "Michael Brecker is an incredible musician and any saxophone players should be aware of what he's doing," said Bendik. "If they compare us, there are two ways of looking at it. One way is if they say I resemble him. Since we belong in a culture that asks for originality, that's a defeat. But if you look at it the other way and say we're making our own standards and compare us on those terms, that's a victory. What we seek to do as musicians is to make our own standards, our own music."

Bendik hopes to eventually record his own album of songs. He's composed four pieces for *N.Y.C.* Mainieri composed or co-composed (with guest keyboardist Bruce Martin or guest guitarist Ray Gomez) the other music. "I love Mike's music and the level of musicianship in this band," said Steve Smith. "It's not easy to find a situation that's this good."

After years of playing rock with Journey and fusion with his own band, Smith is

enjoying both Mainieri's music and Mainieri's being the boss. "Mike is the leader so he takes that intensity and I don't have the headaches. Musically the direction of Steps Ahead and the direction of Vital Information is not all that different. It's a real crossover of jazz and ethnic, Latin, reggae, and rock stuff, and both groups call upon my versatility. We play everything from rock & roll to swinging jazz and everything in between."

That the spectrum of Mainieri's music is so great is only natural considering the roots of his musical life, quite literally tap-roots. "I was a tap-dancer when I was a kid," said Mainieri, born in the Bronx 50 years ago. "It was a weird Jewish-Italian family, a family of vaudevillians. There were 13 composers, dancers, singers. There were only three rooms and we'd all be working on our own acts. My grandfather was a french horn player and he'd be listening to opera in the kitchen. My stepgrandfather was a great rhythm guitarist and he'd be listening to The Hot Club of France and Charlie Christian. Everyone tapped in my house. My father and his brother were a tap dancing team. They didn't use Mainieri. You couldn't use Jewish or Italian names in those days. They were Mo and Bo."

Mike was soon performing himself. "I had a jazz trio when I was 13. I was playing vibes right from the beginning. I saw Lionel Hampton at The Apollo dancing and playing the vibes at the same time and the two things added up to me. I could tap dance and I could play the vibes." Mainieri was joined by two other kids, a girl guitarist and a boy bassist, as Two Kings And A Queen. They were featured, among other acts, in the shows of Paul Whiteman, the once-crowned King of Jazz. "We'd do his television shows, radio shows, and go on tour with him. I was a road baby."

When he was 17 he was on the road with another one-time tap dancer, Buddy Rich. "This was in 1955 and he'd just come back from his first heart attack. He was doing this comeback thing at The Village Gate. I was in the wings and a friend of mine knew him and wanted me to sit in, and finally on the third set he introduced me. 'We've got this kid from the Bronx who can play the vibes.' He was sarcastic, but I went up and counted off this unbelievable tempo. It knocked him and the audience out and he hired me on the spot. It was really an emotional thing. Then he fired the entire band after a week at Birdland and asked me to hire a new band, a sextet. 'And I want you to write all the music.' I'd studied but I hadn't really written music. It opened up a lot for me to be able to arrange and direct the music he wanted to play. That was a six-year stint."

Rich was booked by the government for a 1961 tour of the Far East, but though the tour lasted almost a year, Buddy didn't. "He only stayed three months. He left in the middle of the tour and the band played on. I wound up playing the drums. It was

Hell. We played Vietnam, Laos, and we weren't playing for our troops. We were playing for their troops, in mosquito nets and tents. It was rough. Buddy said, 'I'm getting out of here.' I said, 'You can't leave the guys!' He said, 'Yeah, you're right.' And the next day he was gone. I was Buddy Rich for the rest of the tour! When I came back I was sick. I was down to about 105 pounds from dysentery. I was 24 and I'd been on the road 11-12 years. I was pretty beat."

Mainieri was staggered even more by all the changes in New York and in the music when he returned. "The whole scene was different. The Beatles were happening. The war was happening. When I left, Warren Bernhardt had short hair. When I came back, his hair was much longer and he was playing with Jeremy Steig and The Satyrs. I went on tour with them. That's when the whole Village scene happened for me—Cafe au Go Go, The Garrick Theatre. I started playing different music, not straightahead at all. It was that out, acid, rock-jazz or jazz-rock. Richie Havens was there, and Frank Zappa, and Hendrix would come by and play. Everybody was jamming and taking drugs, experimenting with that whole scene. My whole musical point of view changed."

Mainieri had also come home from the Buddy Rich misadventure with something other than amoebas. "All that music from the Far East had a big impact on me. I was raw, a young kid, and I was open to new experiences, Indian music, music from Thailand and Bali, the Mideast, and Africa. There was this other world. We're so myopic in America. We think it's all here. The impact of these two things—the ancient and traditional cultures with the upheaval of what was going on here—I felt that I was right in the middle of it. That was when the jazz scene was pretty sad, in the '60s. It was really hard to get gigs. Rock was starting to happen. I just kept myself planted in New York, working with different bands."

About that time he also became more and more involved beyond playing. "I started getting my studio chops together, not just playing but understanding the other facets, arranging and producing. When I'd walk into a session, I always felt like the leader. I credit that to the Buddy Rich period. I was instinctively drawn not to just sit there passively and play this percussion part and collect a check. I wanted to make it better or change it. It took me to the other side of the glass. I started arranging more and producing." Through the years he's worked on more than 500 albums as player, composer, arranger, and/or producer, working with a Who's Who of jazz and pop stars. Mainieri toured with Tim Hardin and Laura Nyro; wrote "Jesse" and other songs for Carly Simon; produced and arranged *Still Crazy*



BILL DOUTHART

MIKE MAINIERI'S EQUIPMENT

"I'm using a new set of vibes, Saito, a Japanese vibraphone, and a new MIDI system from Germany called K and K. It hooks up with the vibes, a whole MIDI interface system. Synthesizers that I'm using now are the Korg M-1, Yamaha TX-802, Roland D-50, Akai 900, the Memory Moog, and various processing systems; some I've built myself and some that are standard, DDLs and like that, reverbs. I have four pedals on the left side, volume pedals, and a tricky one on the right side, a pitch changer. It's custom. I send it through the house system, and for years I've used the Roland Jazz Chorus amp and stage monitor."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Steps Ahead

N.Y.C.—Intuition C1-91354
MAGNETIC—Elektra 60441
MODERN TIMES—Elektra/Musician 60351
STEPS AHEAD—Elektra/Musician 60168
PARADOX—Nippon Columbia YF-7044
STEP BY STEP—Nippon Columbia YF-7020
SMOKIN' IN THE PIT—Nippon Columbia YB-7010/11

Mike Mainieri

WANDERLUST—Warner Bros. 3586
LOVE PLAY—Arista 4133
FREE SMILES—Arista 3009
BLUE MONTREUX—RCA/Bluebird 6573-2-RB

Victor Bailey

BOTTOM'S UP—Atlantic 7 81978-2

Steve Smith

FIATAGA—Columbia 44334
ORION—Columbia 39375
VITAL INFORMATION—Columbia 38955

After All These Years for Paul Simon, *52nd Street* for Billy Joel, *Toys In The Attic* for Aerosmith; performed with guitarist Wes Montgomery and produced guitarist Kazumi Watanabe; arranged the phenomenal *American Pie* for Don McLean and *Brothers In Arms* for Dire Straits, and also worked with Art Farmer, Dave Liebman, and Linda Ronstadt, among countless other gigs.

One unique happening was especially fulfilling and eventually headed Mainieri into his newest music. "Steps Ahead is an outgrowth of this band we had in the late '60s called White Elephant. All of the studio cats would meet at midnight 2-3-4 times a week at a huge studio called A&R. I'd put together charts and an engineer friend of mine would record it every night.

It was four saxes, Ronnie Cuber, Frank Vicari, Mike Brecker, and George Young; three trumpets, Randy Brecker, Nat Pavone, Lew Soloff, and Jon Faddis a few years later; two trombones, Jack Pierson and Barry Rodgers; always different guitar players, David Spinozza or Bob Mann or Sam Brown; bass was Tony Levin; two drummers, Donald MacDonald and Steve Gadd; and singers, Nick Holmes, Annie Sutton, Sue Manchester. I'd write these charts and we'd play till 6-7 in the morning. We did it for three years. We toured once, 10 gigs with this 24-piece jazz-rock band, and an album came out in '72. It was on the Just Sunshine label. They pressed 400 records and went out of business. It's a collector's item. Out of that band came Dreams, The Brecker Brothers, Ars Nova, and Steps Ahead. We were playing straightahead, rock & roll, folk songs with horns. It was a real potpourri, totally experimental, totally wild, a real tribal experience. It was a good focus for me to explore the whole idea of composing. And this new album with Steps Ahead is a continuation of that process."

All of the music he's experienced Mainieri hopes he'll realize with his new band. *N.Y.C.* is rocking yet lyrical. It's into the grooves but the grooves encompass the world. It's jazz for the '90s, a music from the heart of Africa and from down in the street. Mainieri is especially pleased to be recording for Vera Brandes at Intuition. This spring in N.Y.C., she presented both *N.Y.C.* and her CD of world music at a blast at S.O.B.'s. Steps Ahead exploded that much more when joined on stage by Senegalese drummers and dancers. "It's the first time that I'm working with someone who's got this amazing curiosity about world music. She's a great jazz fan and she's bringing this other world consciousness to America. Here's a woman who's gone to Indonesia to record and who wants to record traditional music of Alaska. For her it's not a question whether she can make money. For her it's a sheer love of music."

Mainieri will show even more of his own love for music on a new album with duets of his vibes with his friends, half straightahead, half weird, and all Mike Mainieri. And otherwise, Steps Ahead will be playing more than ever this year. "I'd like to keep this one together. The other bands were all-star bands and there was never a commitment to touring. I always want to go out and play. And it's great playing with this next generation. Some of our tunes have sort of become standards in fake books. It's fun playing the old stuff and this new music. Steps Ahead is going out and hitting it heavy for the first time as a band. I'm curious to see what happens."

And at least, unlike his tap dancing father and uncle, for the marquee when he's on the road, Mike Mainieri doesn't have to change his name.

"Yeah, but there'll always be one or two 'i's missing!" db

DAVE GRUSIN

SCORING IT

Big



Dave in the act of creation as brother Don looks on.

By Scott Yanow

When one thinks of Dave Grusin, several different job titles come to mind: record producer, keyboardist, arranger, solo artist, co-founder of GRP Records. But when Grusin himself describes his main occupation, it is his scoring for movies that he emphasizes: "In spite of the fact that Larry Rosen and I started this record company, I've always financed my life through writing for films. I very much enjoy it and even with other activities I always plan to write."

After four previous nominations for his soundtracks, Grusin won his first Oscar for *The Milagro Beanfield War* this past spring. Did he expect to win? "I was shocked," he remembers, "because it was such a long shot that I knew I didn't stand a chance. I actually wrote the score four different times because the film kept on being changed. Having seen it recently, I noticed that it was altered again a bit to accommodate the last changes in the film. For me, writing this score was a matter of finding the right mood and the fantasy quotient to satisfy the mythical aspect of the film."

"A lot of what I do," explains Grusin, "has to do with being the audience for a film. The structured steps are fairly straightforward. After looking at the film, I gain an idea as to the style of music I should write. I study the movie to determine what we are supposed to get people to feel at certain parts of the story and determine which areas of the film would benefit by music. From then on it's mathematical, fitting in a certain amount of music to fit the scenes. Getting the script ahead of time is useful to determine whether it's a project I can contribute to; but my real inspiration comes from actually viewing the film, not what the director tells me about it."

When asked which of his film assignments was the most difficult thus far, Grusin was unable to choose. "All of the scores are impossibly difficult when I am working on them, with the exception of *On Golden Pond*, which seemed to come together fairly easily. The difficulty is usually not with the film but is an inherent part of my psyche; just writing anything is difficult for me. The standard contract gives me 10 to 12 weeks, but usually I end up having six. The most satisfying aspect for me in writing for films is coming up with an original way to get an emotional response from the audience."

For Dave Grusin, the last couple of years

have been hectic. In addition to recording *Sticks And Stones* with his brother Don in 1988, he finished the score to *The Milagro Beanfield War*, went on a European tour with Tom Scott and Lee Ritenour, wrote the music for the Whoopi Goldberg film *Clara's Heart*, played a benefit in New York, wrote another score (*Tequila Sunrise*), worked on Eddie Daniels' *Blackwood* release, and then for variety wrote for a fourth film, *A Dry White Season*.

The Oscar winner was born June 26, 1934 in Littleton, Colorado and grew up in an environment filled with music. "The earliest music that I heard was classical. My father was a very good violinist and a perfect teacher. He didn't push music on us, but it was such an inherent part of our lives that it became a natural part of my childhood. My mother played piano and I started it when I was four, having the usual lessons. I tried to play violin but it was probably very excruciating for my father to listen to. I also played clarinet for quite awhile, minoring on it in college."

Although his parents were classical musicians, Dave also received an early exposure to jazz. "There weren't any jazz records in our house but we would see Jazz At The Philharmonic when it came to Denver. I remember seeing people like Ray Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, Hank Jones, Gene Krupa, Illinois Jacquet, and Flip Phillips. It was very exciting and set the stage for me gaining an interest in jazz."

Despite his musical training, Dave Grusin did not originally plan to study music in college. "Growing up in an agriculture community, I worked on a ranch all through high school. I was interested in cattle and horses and thought that someday I'd be a veterinarian. Three weeks before entering college, I switched to music out of guilt for the immense effort and expense that my father had spent on my musical education. He did not force me to study music but I knew that he'd approve of the switch." At the University of Colorado Grusin majored in piano and did a great deal of playing outside of class, backing such visiting players as Terry Gibbs, Art Pepper, Anita O'Day, and guitarist Johnny Smith at local clubs.

In 1959 Grusin moved to New York to attend graduate school at the Manhattan School of Music. But having to wait six months for his union membership to be transferred made local work impossible and supporting a young family caused Dave to look for a job outside of the city. "An ex-roommate of mine found out that Andy Williams needed a piano player. Andy had had a couple of hit records but he was still a new guy. It involved a great deal of travelling, so I ended up dropping out of school. Andy had an appreciation for good music and for arrangers. It was fun to write big band things for him, although he was never a jazz singer."

Around this time Grusin met his future business partner. "Larry Rosen was a very good drummer who had been with the Newport Youth Band. I was looking for a

drummer to play on the road with us rather than having to pick up local musicians in each city. Larry worked out quite well."

Soon Andy Williams was on his way to fame, hosting a weekly variety show on TV, and Dave Grusin moved to Los Angeles as his musical director and arranger. "It was a nice music show in the early '60s and we didn't perform any music that we would be ashamed of, even though it was on commercial television. It was a grind, a very hard job; but for me it turned out to be an amazing workshop, writing a whole show every week. I had not had that much arranging experience, so I had to learn real fast."

Around this period of time Grusin recorded two now-obscure trio records, *Subways Are For Sleeping* and *Piano, Strings And Moonlight*. "My early piano influences included Art Tatum, whose musicality still kills me. In the '50s I had listened closely to Dave Brubeck because I could relate to him through my classical background. Later I was very impressed by Andre Previn, who was always very credible both in playing jazz and arranging for films. I was knocked out by Bill Evans, plus such players as Russ Freeman and Red Garland. I didn't really play like any of them but I was in such awe that hopefully a little bit of their styles rubbed off on me. I haven't heard my first jazz dates in a very long time but I doubt that they'd still sound good to me. I tend to not go back and listen to my stuff. Once in awhile I'll hear something on the radio that I vaguely recognize; once I'm finished with a project, I cut it loose."

Another rare Grusin album is *Kaleidoscope*, a quintet session with Thad Jones, Frank Foster, Bob Cranshaw, and Larry Rosen. "I didn't know Thad or Frank at the time, but I knew Quincy Jones who advised me on who to call. I had a lot of fun on that date although I was scared to death. It greatly impressed me that those guys would make my album. I still see Bob and Frank now and then and I miss Thad, who I became good friends with, very much."

In 1964 Dave Grusin made one of the most important decisions of his musical career. He decided to leave *The Andy Williams Show* and, rather than become a solo performer, chose to write for films. "Getting the first assignment is always the hardest because if you haven't written before, no one wants to talk about it. I'll always be grateful to Norman Lear and Bud York for taking a chance on me and hiring me for *Divorce American-Style*."

Word gradually spread about Grusin's expertise, and the assignments have come steadily ever since: *The Graduate*, *The Front*, *Three Days Of The Condor*, *Heaven Can Wait*, *The Champ*, *The Goodbye Girl*, *Reds*, *Absence Of Malice*, *On Golden Pond*, *Tootsie*, *Falling In Love*, *The Goonies*—over 30 in all to date. In addition, he has written for TV (*Gidget*, *Maude*, *Good Times*, *St. Elsewhere*, and others) and arranged for other artists, including Sergio Mendes ("Fool On The Hill," "The Look Of Love"),

Quincy Jones, Billy Joel, and Grover Washington, Jr. Although very much in the background, Grusin gained a strong reputation and in 1976 stepped into a new field: producing records.

"It was a mutual decision of Larry's [Rosen] and mine. He had started an album for Jon Lucien on Columbia and called me to write some charts. After we produced a couple of Jon's records, we decided to work as a team on Earl Klugh's albums. We did four of Klugh's dates and then decided to get involved in the afterlife of a record rather than just turning it in without knowing what the record company would do with the project. We designed a logo and went from being a production company to getting a label deal with Arista in 1978, and finally in 1983, going totally independent."

During the past six years, GRP Records has been remarkably successful with its many best-selling albums from a variety of jazz-influenced artists, mostly from the fusion or crossover field, with a few exceptions (e.g., Chick Corea's Akoustic Band and Eddie Daniels' releases).

What qualities must a musician have before being signed to GRP? "First, most of the people on our label, even if they are not necessarily straight-ahead jazz artists, all have a jazz background. It's an area that we don't really want to get away from. Second, they should have a unique style, not sounding like anybody else or everybody else. The instrument of the artist is not a major criteria; we don't just pick one guy in each category. It's more important that they have something unique to say. The third element, and probably the most important one, is that Larry and I have to feel that we can sell their records. We really don't want to make collector's items. I don't believe that anybody on the label has ever been told by us what to play, but we need to know that with our marketing tools we can make their music accessible to an audience. We want to keep the artist happy in terms of sales as well as letting him have artistic freedom. We're not an avant garde or a mainstream label but we're also not interested in making a sort of formula new age product either. We're comfortable in a type of fusion jazz that feels like it's going somewhere and will continue to develop.

"There isn't anybody on the label that I'm not proud of, but I can't take credit for discovering any of them. It's not like the John Hammond story; I think everyone of these artists would have made it anyway. Dave Valentin has been with us the longest. Consistently from the beginning, I've been a big fan of Dave's and consider him almost generically important to the label. I'm also very proud that we have the credibility where an artist such as Chick Corea would want to be on the label. It's a great honor to have people like Chick, Lee Ritenour, Diane Schuur, Eddie Daniels, and Kevin Eubanks with us; I could go down the list."

In 1986, after periods of time living in

Los Angeles and New York, Grusin moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. "I just couldn't stand living in New York anymore. I'd always planned to move back to the Rocky Mountains. It's great being a distance away from everything; I wish it were further away. I've gotten where I like visiting Los Angeles again and I enjoy my work in New York a lot more now that I don't have to be there all the time."

In early 1988, Dave Grusin recorded *Sticks And Stones*, an electronic duet set with his younger brother, keyboardist Don Grusin. Don has managed to avoid being in Dave's shadow. "Don started out being an economist and finally came to music of his own volition when he was in his 30's. He hasn't tried to follow in my footsteps at all. We have a great deal in common, almost an esp thing, but he really has his own voice and we're not in the same ballpark. I have total respect for him and for the musical freedom he shows; I tend to be overly analytical in deciding whether something is correct musically, while Don is a lot freer."

Of his other records, which would Grusin say best display his own playing? "Most of my albums have been electronic in nature but with an emphasis on acoustic piano. *Mountain Dance* is a fairly symptomatic version of my playing of 10 years ago. The *Cinemagic* album, which features my movie themes, was re-recorded for the CD with me replaying the piano parts. *The Dave Grusin Collection* is a good repackaging of my earlier material. My next album, which I'll be working on early this summer, will have the same acoustic focus that the *Harlequin* record did."

In discussing his future goals, Grusin was asked if he ever had a desire to record another straight-ahead trio session. "I doubt if I'd do a whole date. I play that stuff all of the time, but I don't see myself making an album like Chick has with his Akoustic Band. I just don't play it that consistently. Someday I'd like to write a serious piece of classical music. I find it difficult to do in a life full of assignments, but eventually I want to compose some non-jazz music in a contemporary vein."

Does Grusin enjoy occasionally getting away from the routine of composing movie scores to go out on tour? "I'd say a qualified 'no.' Some of it is a total nightmare. The tour I did with Tom Scott and Lee Ritenour, which was 30 one-nighters, was rough. We all got sick with the flu. The concerts were great because by playing that much with the same group our chops were up and the music was very good. But making the plane connections in the morning in order to go to another airport to wait for another plane, that drove me crazy.

"I still don't think of myself as a performer," concludes Dave Grusin. "I don't have a burning desire to go out and play before people. I do it occasionally to try to spread the word about my records, but basically I've never felt like a performer. I much prefer the creative process in the studios, the writing and the recording." db



DAVE GRUSIN'S EQUIPMENT

"My equipment is not that extensive," admits Grusin. "I don't keep on adding new keyboards; I just have my regular rack. I have a Yamaha DX7iIFD and an old DX7. My brother and I share a Yamaha TX816 rack which I haven't seen in a year or two [laughs]. I have my own rack with a Hill 16-track mixer, a Super Jupiter Roland NKS20 digital piano, and a Yamaha XPS90 effects unit. When I work in concert I try to get a Yamaha acoustic MIDI Grand. For writing I use an Atari SG1 software sequencing program called MIDI Track that is quite valuable to me. The 60-track recording machine is the ultimate demo tool. Also, I'm about to get an M1 which seems to be the synth of choice for 1989."

DAVE GRUSIN SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

THE DAVE GRUSIN COLLECTION—GRD 9579
CINEMAGIC—GRD 9547
ONE OF A KIND—GRD 9514
OUT OF THE SHADOWS—GRD 9511
MOUNTAIN DANCE—GRD 9507
NIGHT LINES—GRD 9504
DAVE GRUSIN AND THE N.Y.L.A. DREAM BAND—GRD 9501
KALEIDOSCOPE—Columbia 2344
PIANO, STRINGS AND MOONLIGHT—Epic 24023
SUBWAYS ARE FOR SLEEPING—Epic 3829

with Don Grusin

STICKS AND STONES—GRD 9562

with GRP All-Stars

GRP SUPER LIVE IN CONCERT—GRD 2-1650

with Lee Ritenour

HARLEQUIN—GRD 9522
EARTH RUN—GRP 1021
ON THE LINE—Elektra/Musician E1-60310
RIO—Elektra/Musician E1-60024

with Eddie Daniels

BLACKWOOD—GRD 9584

with Kevin Eubanks

FACE TO FACE—GRP 1029

with Ray Brown

BROWN'S BAG—Concord Jazz 19

with Art Farmer

CRAWL SPACE—CTI 7073

with Quincy Jones

I HEARD THAT!—A&M 3706
BODY HEAT—A&M 3617

with John Klemmer

BAREFOOT BALLET—ABC 950

with Earl Klugh

LIVING INSIDE YOUR LOVE—Blue Note 667-G
EARL KLUGH—Blue Note 596-G

with Harvey Mason

MARCHING IN THE STREET—Arista 4054

with Sergio Mendes

MY FAVORITE THINGS—Atlantic 8177

with Gerry Mulligan

LITTLE BIG HORN—GRP 1003

with Grover Washington, Jr.

A SECRET PLACE—Kudu 32

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



CHICK COREA AKOUSTIC BAND

CHICK COREA AKOUSTIC BAND—GRP GR-9582: *BESSIE'S BLUES*; *MY ONE AND ONLY LOVE*; *SOPHISTICATED LADY*; *AUTUMN LEAVES*; *MORNING SPRITE*; *T.B.C.* (*TERMINAL BAGGAGE CLAIM*); *CIRCLES*; *SPAIN*.

Personnel: Chick Corea, piano; John Patitucci, bass; Dave Weckl, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

In Chick's clique this was long-awaited—an akoustic shot from CC and the Young Lions. The Elektric Band began with this same personnel, so the guys know each other well. There's no lack of playfulness in the Akoustic Band. It's obvious in the first bars of "Bessie's Blues," right on through the new excursion to "Spain" that has the kids romping through dekades, time zones, and hemispheres.

Weckl is an amazing drummer, possibly the finest technician Chick's ever worked with. But what's even more impressive is the way he blends things together. Soloing over one of Chick's vamps he's Latin one minute, dirty funk the next, then completely backwards to what Chick's playing, intentionally of course, and never losing control or throwing off his mates.

Weckl has the advantage of having heard Steve Gadd do similar things on Chick's *Leprechaun* album some 14 years ago. There were times, however, when I thought he might have done better to leave the pianist in the foreground. Chick's ideas weren't deflected—just partly obscured. A couple times I thought the drummer was getting carried away. It sometimes sounds like Dave, too, is doing so much that he couldn't possibly be listening, but I think he is.

Patitucci gets low, bending, arching tones, reminiscent of Miroslav Vitous with Chick, on "My One And Only Love." He gets the whole band involved in his solo on "Autumn Leaves." The group is delightful on the out-vamp as they toss the ball back and forth.

This is more a physical band than the Keith Jarrett trio that's been performing and recording standards. There's more contemplative time in Keith's group. Chick's is a player's band, athletic and graceful. More player's band than thinker's band. It's more direct, to the point. The groups involve the listeners in different ways—Chick wants to make sure you don't yawn, hauling out wheelbarrels full of ideas. Jarrett ponders every note more, and makes the listener think about it, too.

Corea's interpretive intro to "Sophisticated Lady" is a pleasure, as are many of the grooves they take it to. Chick never loses his vision (or

his humor) during the trip, as they ride it and ride it, until double- or triple-timing it one last frantic time they collapse in a heap, before the leader puts in finishing touches. The voting was very close, but I'd have to say the "old guy" wins the MVP award for this LP. Chick is playing great, and his arranging is in top form.

The two "new" originals are "Morning Sprite" and "T.B.C." "Sprite" demands wide ears because the LPM (licks-per-minute) is very high. Dave plays every punch with Chick. "Terminal Baggage Claim," in addition to having a good name, features the bassist in some very lyrical mid-range playing, with less chops heard, and a solo that sounds out of Chick's children's music or a Peanuts TV special.

This group right now can do no wrong. They're hot, they play *together*, and they probably rival the popularity that Stanley, Lenny, and Al had with Chick. With a solid record company behind them, Chick and the guys are in a position to stay together and make even more dramatic music. —robin tolleson



DIRTY DOZEN BRASS BAND

VOODOO—Columbia 45042: *It's All Over Now*; *VOODOO*; *OOP POP A DAH*; *GEMINI RISING*; *MOOSE THE MOOCHE*; *DON'T DRIVE DRUNK*; *BLACK DRAWERS/PICCOLO*; *SANTA CRUZ*.

Personnel: Gregory Davis, trumpet, vocal (cut 7); Efreem Towns, trumpet; Charles Joseph, trombone; Kirk Joseph, sousaphone; Kevin Harris, tenor saxophone, percussion; Roger Lewis, baritone, soprano saxophones; Jenell Marshall, snare drum percussion, bass drum (1), vocal asides (1); Lionel Batiste, bass drum, snare drum (1); Dr. John, piano, vocal (1); Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet, vocal (3); Branford Marsalis, tenor saxophone (5).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

The DDBB is primarily a rhythm band and an ensemble-oriented band. Its soloists aren't poll-winners, but they produce the right colors. When guests such as Dr. John, Dizzy Gillespie, and Branford Marsalis are added, the DDBB pulls them to itself and makes them part of its own sound. This is an example of the infectious collective spirit of New Orleans music.

This community spirit informs the eclectic repertoire of the DDBB. On one hand, there's the true blues of "Drawers," sung robustly by Davis; on the other, the free jazz introduction and ending to "Voodoo" and the pop cover of Stevie Wonder's "Don't Drive Drunk." The band plays convincing bebop with Gillespie on

"Oop" and with Marsalis on "Mooche," and its r&b performance, "It's All Over Now," with Dr. John, should be hitting the radio airwaves.

The good Doctor, born and reared in New Orleans, falls naturally into the band's loose-jointed beat on his feature. Marsalis, also a native, fluidizes his attack on "Moose": more rhythmic rapport. And Gillespie is appropriately laidback on his track, with Marshall's snare providing the pop of the title.

As adept as the guest soloists are—Marsalis sounds the most inspired—the band itself is its own best advertisement. Its ability to juxtapose riffs, to cover all the traditional brass band growls and flutters, to cover for trap drums and electric or string bass, and to find the perfect groove on each tune make it a strong ensemble. Its repertoire and approach make it contemporary.

The resurgence of jazz in the '80s wrought by the Marsalises and other modern musicians from New Orleans has benefitted traditional bands like the DDBB. The possibilities are wide open. Take Kirk Joseph, for example. His amazing sousaphone lines and sound are as contemporary, agile, and hip as the best electric bassists. He's one example of the continuum of New Orleans music from past to present—as is the entire band.

This album is the band's third—and its first on Columbia. Can an album with Wynton be far behind? Stellar collaborations aside, this album further proves the adaptability of the New Orleans marching brass band concept. It's still a groove. —owen cordle



JOHNNY HODGES

THE COMPLETE JOHNNY HODGES SESSIONS: 1951-1955—Mosaic 6-126: *You Blew Out The Flame In My Heart* (1/15/51) through *Scufflin'* (9/8/55), including *Solitude*; *Sophisticated Lady*; *Day Dream*; *I Got It Bad*; *Come Sunday*; *In A Mellow Tone*; *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart*; *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*; *Warm Valley*; *Mood Indigo*; *Perdido*, out of a total of 62 tracks, also inclusive of two seven-tune ballad medleys and an alternate take of *The Jeep Is Jumping*.

Selected Collective Personnel: Hodges, alto saxophone; Emmett Berry, Harold "Shorty" Baker, Clark Terry, trumpet; Lawrence Brown, trombone; Al Sears, Ben Webster, tenor saxophone; Jimmy Hamilton, clarinet and tenor saxophone; Harry Carney, baritone saxophone; Leroy Lovett, Billy Strayhorn, piano.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

RIPPLINGTONS

FEATURING RUSS FREEMAN

Tourist in Paradise



record reviews

When Johnny Hodges left the Duke Ellington Orchestra in 1951, after 23 years of uninterrupted artistic and professional association, it did not really signal the end of an era, as some pessimistic observers were wont to predict at the time. For, unlike Cootie Williams or Barney Bigard or Ben Webster, who had all left years earlier to pursue their own individual careers as sidemen and leaders, Hodges, in his own septet, maintained without digression the same stylistic identification he had created while in musical partnership with Ellington. (The word "partnership" is used advisedly in this case, because at no other time in jazz history had any other sideman contributed so integrally to the development of an orchestral concept and sound as Hodges during his tenure with Duke.)

The classic Ellington timbral aura, then, remained intact in Hodges' hands, albeit in scaled-down form. Of course, the orchestral concept translated into chamber-sized proportions was not new, as is evidenced by the many small-group Ellington records of the '30s and '40s, particularly those issued under Hodges' name. And a few of those titles were so beloved by producer Norman Granz that it was decided to re-record them for release on his Norgran and Clef labels. Thus, we also have updated versions of "Good Queen Bess," "Jeep's Blues," "The Jeep Is Jumping," "Day Dream," "Hodge Podge," and "Squatty Roo" appearing in this set.

It should be remembered that the Ellington universe had always been a self-generating organism. It bred from within and had little need for external input. During the swing era, it remained largely untouched by the shifting vagaries of public taste while it concentrated on creating its own wholly unique brand of jazz. In a like manner, Hodges, as soloist, appeared resolutely impervious to the latter widespread influence of bop, in general, and Charlie Parker, in particular. It is no accident, then, that when he formed his own group he would choose men of similar persuasion and stylistic independence, men whose self-assurance was firm enough to withstand the volatility of musical fashion.

Both Emmett Berry and Lawrence Brown loom large in this respect, for they were both not only masters of their instruments, but were also among the most consistently inventive of improvisers, irrespective of style or era. With the exception of the entire post-1932 Ellington canon itself, the Hodges records in this set constitute the most impressive repository of Brown's artistry to be heard anywhere. A non-Ellingtonian, Berry had been primarily a free-lancer from the mid-'30s on, and, as such, can be heard on hundreds of excellent records, but seldom in such a lush setting as the one that Hodges provides. Almost equally incisive as Berry's work here is that of his subsequent replacements, "Shorty" Baker and Clark Terry. Al Sears was never a major jazz soloist in the sense that his replacement, Ben Webster, was, but he did have his good points, not the least of which was his dependability. Also heightening interest in two of the later sessions are the contributions of Jimmy Hamilton and Harry Carney. Favorable comment should also be made in regard to the fully-voiced, richly textured arrangements, the balance between the horns, and the overall accuracy of intonation so rarely evidenced on bop records of the



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This six-record boxed set, which also includes a booklet containing Stanley Dance's historical appraisal of Hodges, his session-by-session analysis, and a discography, can only be obtained by mail-order. Send \$54.00, plus \$3.50 shipping (\$6.50 overseas), to Mosaic Records, 35 Melrose Place, Stamford, CT 06902. —jack sohmer



JAMES WILLIAMS

MAGICAL TRIO 2—EmArcy 834 368-1: *BOHEMIA AFTER DARK; TOO LATE NOW; A PORTRAIT OF ELVIN; ROADLIFE; IN THE OPEN COURT; YOU ARE TOO BEAUTIFUL; LULLABY OF THE LEAVES.*

Personnel: Williams, piano; Ray Brown, bass; Elvin Jones, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Several piano stylists, all infectious swingers, have nourished the wellsprings of James Williams' music. He reminds us of Monty Alexander's enthusiasm; but through the heartfelt yearning of Bobby Timmons and the voicings and strength of McCoy Tyner, he has emerged with his own piano identity.

This second trio set with drummer Elvin Jones follows *Magical Trio 1*, an album that featured Williams' former employer Art Blakey; Ray Brown plays on both. Undoubtedly, both releases and Williams' style will fuel debate over the reconstruction of hard bop. But his playing has content, his respect for tradition balanced by his own special individuality. For example, *Trio 2* displays Williams' penchant for extracting a hidden chestnut from the embers, as on the evocative Jay Lerner-Burton Lane ballad, "Too Late Now."

The flair in Williams could deceive listeners to view his uptempo playing as deliberately exciting and showy. But he has absorbed enough from acoustic pianists no one admits to begging for these days, with the result that identifiable mannerisms emerge. Clean articulation marks his playing at all tempos, even when his ideas develop as tight-knit arabesques and convoluted runs; highlighting his solos on "Bohemia After Dark" and "In The Open Court" are figures he interpolates by rocking and slinging them almost with abandon. Tyner created a similar effect but the contours of his figures, as influential as they've proven over the years, are today quite ordinary and less angular. Tyner's shadow may be said to loom over "A Portrait Of Elvin" (with effective double-timing by Brown) in its being a powerfully stated waltz concluding with a rumbling conversation between drummer and piano.

The 16-bar blues "Roadlife" has a memora-

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
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ble theme and provocative harmonies. It opens like bright singing in pursuit of a richly soulful gospel feeling. A great set-ender, it has, like its subject, a life of its own and deserves to be heard very often. In "Lullabye Of The Leaves" we really hear Williams' distillation of Bobby Timmons not so much in his solo, which sparkles with an individual sense of rhythm and a harder touch, but in the way he states the melody, the harmonies he employs, and the dynamics and overall feeling. Williams has a tune saluting Timmons which he recorded both on *Trio 1* and on an album while he played in their mutual school of the Jazz Messengers. Here is a style that has evolved with integrity. Listening for the isolated trill or the powerful statements, one finds ingredients of James Williams that cut across his inspirations.

—ron welburn



BOBBY WATSON

NO QUESTION ABOUT IT—Blue Note 90262: *COUNTRY CORN FLAKES; FORTY ACRES AND A MULE; WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU; BLOOD COUNT; NO QUESTION ABOUT IT; MOONRISE; AND THEN AGAIN.*

Personnel: Watson, alto saxophone; Roy Hargrove, trumpet; Frank Lacy, trombone; John Hicks, piano; Curtis Lundy, bass; Victor Lewis (cuts 1, 2, 6, 7), Kenny Washington (3-5), drums.

★ ★ ★

THE YEAR OF THE RABBIT—New Note 1008: *THE JEEP IS JUMPIN'; GOOD QUEEN BESS; THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE; SQUATTY ROO; BLUES FOR ALTO; ISFAHAN; JEEP'S BLUES; A FLOWER IS A LOVESOME THING; HONEY BUNNY.*

Personnel: Watson, alto saxophone; Irving Stokes, trumpet; Art Baron, trombone; Bill Easley, clarinet, tenor saxophone; Jim Hartog, baritone saxophone; Mulgrew Miller, piano; Lawrence Lucie, guitar; Curtis Lundy, bass; Kenny Washington, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Somehow, Bobby Watson has fallen through the cracks. An accomplished altoist capable of fiery exuberance when the mood strikes, Watson can claim a resume of uncommonly catholic breadth—from swing (sideman in The Savoy Sultans) to hard bop (musical director for Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers from 1977-81) to the adventurous (co-founder of the 29th Street Saxophone Quartet). Albums under his own name run the repertory gamut from Gershwin to Ornette. And yet, in light of the burgeoning reputations of even younger—Watson is only 35—and somewhat more conservative players, he is consistently underrated, when

he is rated at all.

Unfortunately, while both of these releases display Watson's flexible talents in sturdy, dependable settings, neither promises to break him through to a larger audience. The problem with the Blue Note album is, paradoxically, that it sounds too much like a Blue Note album from the label's heyday, while lacking the spark of individuality which raised their greatest efforts from the parade of otherwise pleasant, but merely competent sessions. Here, the material is one of the culprits, consisting of—with one notable exception—original themes of Messengerish design, well-paced, well-proportioned, but of no great immediacy or imagination. Further, Watson's best previous records have been quartet dates, where he can stretch out to his heart's delight; on *No Question About It*, trumpet and trombone thicken the texture but add little else. (Hargrove, still in his teens, sounds skillful but over-cautious of his obvious talent; he'll blossom eventually. Lacy has been heard to better advantage in Henry Threadgill's Sextet.) Finally, the attraction of Watson's playing lies in the tension between his neo-classic impulses and his desire to break out into freedom (as he does, occasionally, to strong effect, on his Red Records). But backed by longtime cohorts Hicks, Lundy, and Washington, the accompaniment seems more comfortable than confrontational. Maybe these guys are too friendly.

The exception to the above is Billy Strayhorn's "Blood Count." Watson wisely tries not to mimic Johnny Hodges' nonpareil performance, though there are certain similarities (a sly swoop here, an aggressively bluesy phrase there) in homage. Ditto on *The Year Of The Rabbit*, an overt tribute to Hodges in tunes and temperament. The music retains its striking character (and original arrangements, transcribed by Watson) thanks to persuasive part players—Stokes' growling trumpet, Baron's brash trombone, Easley's woody clarinet. Watson too is portraying a role, but the buoyancy of his phrasing and gritty determinism of his blues playing (especially on "Jeep's Blues," where he threatens to rev up a chainsaw compared to Hodges' ever-elegant, jewel-encrusted switchblade) convinces us that he feels this music. No one would suggest that Watson is out to replace the beloved Ducal classics, but it is nice to be reminded of their felicities once in a while.

—art lange

DRAGON: Steve Dobrogosz/Berit Andersson, *The Final Touch*. Cartridge Bros., *Gold 'n' Dreams*. Börje Fredriksson, *Fredriksson Special*.

RCA/BUEBIRD/NOVUS: Erskine Hawkins, *The Original Tuxedo Junction*. Oliver Nelson, *Black, Brown And Beautiful*. Paul Desmond/Gerry Mulligan, *Two Of A Mind*. Chet Baker, *Let's Get Lost*. Hilton Ruiz, *Strut*. Michael Shrieve, *Stiletto*. Henry Threadgill, *Rag, Bush And All*. Various Artists: *How Blue Can You Get?*, *Early Black Swing*.

FANTASY/RIVERSIDE/PRESTIGE/MILESTONE: Stanley Turrentine, *The Best Of Mr. T*. Vince Guaraldi, *Greatest Hits*. Chet Baker, *In Milan*. Clifford Brown: *Big Band In Paris, Quartet In Paris*. Nat Adderley, *Work Song*. Mark Murphy, *That's How I Love The Blues!* Bill Evans, *How My Heart Sings!* Thelonious Monk, *5 By Monk By 5*. Gene Ammons, *Bad! Bossa Nova*. Eric Dolphy & Booker Little, *Memorial Album*. Wes Montgomery, *Fusion!* Milt Jackson Orchestra, *Big Bags*. Bobby Timmons, *In Person*. Red Garland & Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, *Moodsville Vol 1*. Hank Crawford, *Night Beat*. Bud Shank, *Tomorrow's Rainbow*.

SILKHEART: Charles Brackeen: *Attainment, Worshippers Come Nigh*. David S. Ware, *Passage To Music*. Booker T. Trio, *Go Tell It On The Mountain*. Dennis Gonzalez New Dallahorleanssippi, *Debenge-Debenge*. Ahmed Abdullah And The Solomonic Quintet, *Ahmed Abdullah And The Solomonic Quintet*.

MOSAIC: Johnny Hodges, *Complete Sessions 1951-1955*. Shorty Rogers, *Complete Atlantic And EMI Recordings*. Cecil Taylor and Buell Neidlinger, *Complete Candid Recordings*. Freddie Redd, *Complete Blue Note Recordings*.

CAPITOL/BLUE NOTE/INTUITION: Freddie Hubbard, *Times Are Changing*. George Adams, *Nightingale*. Eddie Palmieri, *Sueño*. McCoy Tyner, *Revelations*. Tommy Smith, *Step By Step*.

SPLASC(H): Furio DiCasteri, *Solo*. Mario Fragiaco, *Trieste, Ieri Un Secolo Fa*. Claudio Lodati Dac' Corda, *Voci*. Giorgio Azzolini, *Giorgia Mood*. Vittorino Curci, *Notizie Del Sole Vero*. Art Studio & Tiziana Ghigliani, *Onde*. Fonolite Group, *Gland*. Gioconda Cilio, *Deep Inside*. Arrigo Cappelletti, *Reflections*. Diego Ruviodotti Quartet, *Maestrale*. New Emily Jazz Orchestra, *Neanthropus Retractus*. Barga Jazz, *2nd Concorso Arrangiamento Composizione Per Orchestra Jazz*. Festa Group, *Congo Square*. Mario Piacentini, *Canot Atavico*. Guido Manusardi Quartet, *Bra Session*.

CONCORD JAZZ: Jeannie & Jimmy Cheatham, *Back To The Neighborhood*. George Shearing and Hank Jones, *The Spirit Of 176*. Herb Ellis & Red Mitchell, *Doggin' Around*. Susannah McCorkle, *No More Blues*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54

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.)

hat ART: Franz Koglmann, *Orte Der Geometrie*. Bobby Bradford/John Carter, *Comin' On*. Steve Lacy, *Morning Joy*. Fritz Hauser, *Die Trommel & Die Welle*. Sato Michihiro, *Rodan*.

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cd reviews

★★★★ EXCELLENT

★★★★ VERY GOOD

★★★ GOOD

★★ FAIR

★ POOR



HENRY THREADGILL

RAG, BUSH AND ALL—RCA/Novus 3052-2-N: *OFF THE RAG; THE DEVIL IS ON THE LOOSE AND DANCIN' WITH A MONKEY; GIFT; SWEET HOLY RAG.* (38:33 minutes)

Personnel: Threadgill, alto saxophone and bass flute; Ted Daniel, trumpet and flugelhorn; Bill Lowe, bass trombone; Diedre Murray, cello; Fred Hopkins, bass; Newman Baker and Reggie Nicholson, drums, percussion.

★★★★ 1/2

The music starts with everybody running—for the door, the ceiling, the sky. After a brief theme statement, it's into a series of solos as Threadgill, then Lowe, then Threadgill again blow away. And so, the tone for the whole album is set.

As with Threadgill's previous *Easily Slip Into Another World*, the music is composed and improvised and composed. Tempos change, arrangements come and go as do theme statements, providing launching pads for more solos, among other things. By structuring his music thusly, Threadgill brings (and has brought) new possibilities to improvisation: you're not sure when someone will stop, another start, or the whole band will return. And "blowing" doesn't necessitate long solos. Perhaps the only weak link in this chain of events comes with occasional lackluster melodies—the best music for this reviewer on "Off The Rag" comes between theme statements.

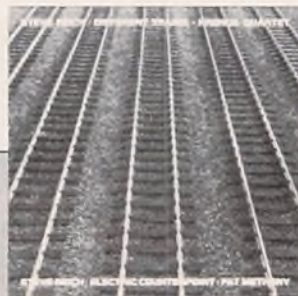
Cellist Murray, the album's co-producer, is a distinctive voice in this set; her playing arco or pizzicato, it doesn't matter. She and Hopkins are a team, rhythmically and sonically. You can hear two stringers playing off each other, as in the second Murray solo towards the end of "Off The Rag." The funky sections of "Devil," where she solos over the band's riffing, are simply delightful. But no sooner is one grooving to her arco lines than all of a sudden the band drops tempo as Baker and/or Nicholson alternate with Hopkins in a meterless exchange. Hopkins' tone is most often warm, round, and expressive: honks and moans (on a bass!) alternate with a steady pulse.

The pace slackens a bit on "Gift." Elegiac images predominate as Threadgill plays flute across lines played by, at alternating points, the rest of the band. The mood is somber, heightened by its highly-composed/controlled nature. Even the tinkling of bell-like percussion at the end serves only to add a sense of dreaminess. Lovely and haunting.

The rag as a music form (sort of) returns in the set closer. "Sweet Holy Rag" contains some of the finest Threadgill playing on record to date. And, suprisingly, he plays and plays and

plays. His sax lines punctuate; then lead, reaching out over the melody; then hold back slightly behind the beat. He honks but he sings. And throughout, you can hear the tasteful plucking of Murray in a sort of counterpoint to not only Threadgill, but to everyone else as well. As opposed to the other "rag" ("Off The Rag"), the searching melody lines that hold forth for most of "Sweet Holy Rag" seem to amass significance the more they are repeated. "Sweet Holy Rag" is yet another occasion wherein we hear all the elements referred to above, this time with the piece gathering more and more momentum as it draws to a close.

New Orleans to new music, whether marching or swinging, all that running lands them in the sky.
—John Ephland



STEVE REICH

DIFFERENT TRAINS/ELECTRIC COUNTERPOINT—Elektra/Nonesuch 9 79176-2: *DIFFERENT TRAINS; ELECTRIC COUNTERPOINT.* (41:47 minutes)

Personnel: Reich, tapes, samples; David Harrington, John Sherba, violins (cut 1); Hank Dutt, viola (1); Joan Jeanrenaud, cello (1); Pat Metheny, electric guitar, electric bass (2).

★★★★★

MORTON FELDMAN

THREE VOICES FOR JOAN LA BARBARA—New Albion 018: *THREE VOICES.* (49:48 minutes)

Personnel: Joan La Barbara, voice.

★★★★★

Steve Reich and the late Morton Feldman are composers usually considered to be in different ballparks. Feldman, a student of Wallingford Riegger and Stefan Wolpe, and a colleague of John Cage, Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, and David Tudor, spent most of his life developing, through graphic notation and other devices, methods of loosening the composer's control over a composition's outcome. Reich's intricate rhythmic tapestries are pivotal to minimalism's tightening of the compositional reigns. *Different Trains* and *Three Voices*, however, represent respective changes in direction toward a common ground.

Not since his mid-'60s tape pieces, recently reissued on *Early Works* (Nonesuch 9 79169-1), has a Reich composition relied on found materials as much as "Different Trains," a highly-charged work that contrasts his childhood cross-country train trips during WWII,

and those darker rail journeys of his European Jewish contemporaries. Notating speech samples of his governess, a retired Pullman porter, and Holocaust survivors, Reich constructs a riveting rhythmic mesh of strings, speech fragments, and train sounds. He successfully extracts emotional immediacy from semi-determinate processes, assisted by the sky-opening attack of Kronos Quartet. "Different Trains" is the most powerful music Reich has created to date.

The third in a series of pieces where soloists play against pre-recorded tapes of themselves, "Electric Counterpoint" recapitulates Reich's signature pulse statements and his abiding interest in African music. Not only does Pat Metheny render the jangly Afro-pop-tinged melodies, interlocking cadences, and triple-meter canons with clarity, he enhances the piece with his trademark airbrushed sound. After the torrents of "Different Trains," "Electric Counterpoint" is a cool rinse.

"Three Voices" is one of Feldman's forays into minimalism during his last years, a setting of fragments from a Frank O'Hara poem dedicated to Feldman. Feldman elegantly dovetails the three voices, evoking the text's image of snow whirling in a child's glass ball. Joan La Barbara's unadorned delivery is well-suited to the piece's dense harmonies, slipknotted chromatic lines, and subtle shifting coloration. Consistent with minimalist orthodoxy, the duration

of "Three Voices" facilitates a gradual, accumulative impact; this is a work to be heard in its entirety, but not necessarily at the recommended low volume. "Three Voices" is a stirring reminder of Morton Feldman's legacy.

—bill shoemaker



McCOY TYNER

REVELATIONS—Blue Note 91651 2: *YESTERDAYS*; *YOU TAUGHT MY HEART TO SING*; *IN A MELLOPHONE*; *VIEW FROM THE HILL*; *LAZYBIRD*; *DON'T BLAME ME*; *RIO*; *HOW DEEP IS THE OCEAN*; *SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME*; *CONTEMPLATION*; *AUTUMN LEAVES*; *PERESINA*; *WHEN I FALL IN LOVE*. (60:18 minutes)

Personnel: McCoy Tyner, piano.

★ ★ ★ ★

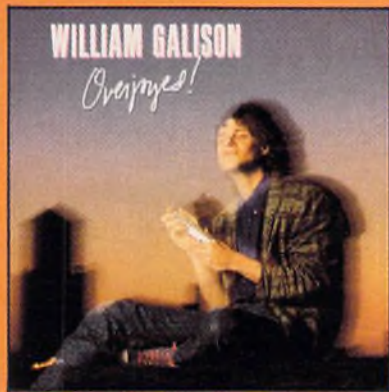
Not Bill Evans, not Herbie Hancock, not Ahmad Jamal nor Cecil Taylor—with all due respect to each of those greats, no pianist since Bud Powell has had as widespread an influence as McCoy Tyner. The reasons aren't tough to fathom. His thundering sustain-pedalled chords, outwardly billowing-like cumulous clouds, are majestically uplifting. They also make him a model accompanist. Those chords give shape to a harmonic structure, yet are so nebulous around the edges they don't hamper a soloist's choice of notes. That majesty and openness are of course what Coltrane loved about his playing—and explain why hundreds of pianists flatter him in the sincerest way.

The freedoms he allows fellow players serve Tyner the soloist too, and those qualities are intact here. Coltrane's "Lazybird" exemplifies his tumbling forward motion and his dramatic mood swings between light and dark orchestral colors. Still, perhaps mindful of his place in jazz history, McCoy has entered what we might consider his classic phase. He's turning more and more to the standard repertory—there are no less than five standards here (bringing him full circle to his early Impulse LPs), and his own ballad, "You Taught My Heart To Sing," is pleasingly reminiscent of Jerome Kern. He's also letting more vintage manner-

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isms into his playing—chiefly the stride tinges he slides in here and there. A buoyant “Don’t Blame Me” has moments of Walleresque puckishness; whimsy is rarely named as a Tyner strong suit, but there it is. And in this context, the tremolo chords he’s always used to sustain and build tension sound more like throwbacks as well. The atavisms remind us that McCoy, like the old masters, is a decidedly two-handed player. His drumming pedal-point basses on Irving Berlin’s tune answer its title’s question: deep indeed. Precious few pianists get a more cavernous sound.

Tyner’s talents are so formidable, it’s odd he’s made only two solo albums. His first, the ’72 Trane tribute *Echoes Of A Friend*, for Milestone, has an overwhelmingly powerful “My Favorite Things”; he takes the tune about as far from Julie Andrews’ roots as it’ll go. The belated sequel, *Revelations*, shows how gracefully his style has aged. —kevin whitehead



DAVE GRUSIN

COLLECTION — GRP GRD-9579; *SHE COULD BE MINE*; *THANKFUL 'N' THOUGHTFUL*; *RIVER SONG*; *PLAY-*

ERA; *AN ACTOR'S LIFE*; *ST. ELSEWHERE*; *SERENGETI WALK*; *EARLY A.M. ATTITUDE*; *BOSSA BAROQUE*; *ON GOLDEN POND*; *MOUNTAIN DANCE*. (57:59 minutes)

Personnel: Grusin, keyboards, programming, percussion; including Lee Ritenour (cuts 1,5,7,8), Eric Gale (7), Jeff Mironov (11), guitar; Steve Gadd (1,4,7), Harvey Mason (5,11), drums; Marcus Miller (2,11), Ron Carter (4), Anthony Jackson (7), bass; Don Grusin (1,5,7), Ian Underwood (11), synthesizers; David Sanborn (2), Grover Washington, Jr. (4), Ernie Watts (5), saxophones; London Symphony Orchestra (10); NHK Strings (7); Tokyo Brass Ensemble (7).

★ ★ ★ ★

Dave Grusin is respected in many areas of music—as a pianist, as a programmer, as a composer of jazz fusion and movie music, and

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as co-president of one of the more successfully run jazz labels, GRP (see pp. 24-26). *Collection* is a "Best Of" from his GRP catalogue, and shows him at some of his very best sessions through the years, creating soundscapes, arranging his fine players (only the best will do) to their peaks. Grusin carves material around his musicians—"Thankful'n Thoughtful" is a perfect fit for Phoebe Snow and David Sanborn, for instance.

"Mountain Dance" is something of a fusion standard by now, with its Metheny-ish vapors and Corea spryness. As on "River Song," there's a lot of keyboard wash, but the tune never loses sight of what he's trying for. It's always clear who the main melodic voice is. Grusin, like fellow keyboardist Bob James, is sometimes accused of writing "fuzak," but upon close inspection his artistry is easily seen. Grusin's drum programming (all programming, really) on "River Song" is as good as I've heard it. Over the course of an album he'll make it difficult to differentiate between what's programmed and what's played. "River Song" and "St. Elsewhere" are composed, arranged, programmed, and performed totally by Grusin.

The "St. Elsewhere" theme is about as joyous a march as you're going to hear, as smooth as is non-humanly possible. But the Gadd/Jackson-inspired funk of "Serengeti Walk" leaves "Elsewhere" in its wake. Here we can see how Grusin makes use of space, invention, and repetition, and sees the overall picture. He knows how to build a song. He knows when to drop pieces out, work less instrumentation to his advantage, rather than always thinking about more.

Grusin uses Grover Washington, Jr.'s soprano on the somber Spanish melody of "Playera," and brings in the nimble Lee Ritenour for the Brazilian-flavored "Early A.M. Attitude." The composer's "On Golden Pond" theme is a masterful blend of pop and classical influences. Grusin's music isn't out to challenge the listener as much as purely entertain. He doesn't stretch his musicians to their limits, but rather he finds spaces where all are perfectly comfortable and can easily express themselves. The result is close to perfection, much like Steely Dan's rhythm tracks used to be. Space and time are limited commodities in Grusin's songs. He writes for each instrument individually, and has a great knack for knowing what will sound good and where. —robin tolleson

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Personnel: Eric Persing, keyboards (cuts 1-7, 10-12); Efrain Toro, keyboards (2, 7), percussion (2, 3, 7, 9); Todd McKinney, keyboards (3); Randy Mitchell, guitars (3-5, 7-9, 12); Justo Almario, sax (3, 7, 9, 12); Larry Garcia, keyboards (5); Scott Andrews, guitar (5); Craig

Sibley, keyboards (8); John Campbell, keyboards (9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ½

Question #1: How often have you been impressed with the electronic sounds on a recording, looked up the liner notes for some insight into the equipment and were met with a simple "John Doe: keyboards," or even "synthesizers and drum machine"? Question #2: How tired are you of the blankness behind the cliché: "It's possibilities are only limited by your

imagination!"?

Well, Roland has gone to some trouble to satisfy our curiosity about just how some of the best contemporary electronic music is created—on the latest versions of their equipment, naturally: they have let loose the educated imaginations of superb electronic musicians to make this impressive and enjoyable CD and included a 24-page booklet documenting equipment used, diagramming recording setups, and letting the musicians tell how each selection was made. It may be a bit of the trade-show-in-your-own-home, but Roland has taken care that the music itself be excellent entertainment, featuring a wider variety of sounds, effects, and styles than you encounter in most recordings of this genre, and giving you the leisure to study them with their creators as your guides.

The music really is impressive and well-conceived. The first thing that hits you is what would have to be any electronic sound company's baby: their sax. You have to remind yourself that this is a synthesized sax, since it sounds so good at first blush. Then, once you know, you realize that it is a conservative blowing style, light on nuances and vibrato. It suits the context perfectly; so Eric Persing has cleverly made best use of it within its limitations. But it would be fair to infer that the search for the complete electronic sax sound is not over. This same tune features an electric guitar-sampled sound, which in both timbre and stylistic nuance is virtually indistinguishable from the real thing. The real treat in this cut, though, is the sampled human voice which performs some electronically-enhanced scatting. It sounds for all the world like a live singer coming through a signal processor.

The CD touches many bases: complex poly-rhythms, tempo changes (all sequenced and explained in the booklet), unusual sampled sounds (e.g., breathing through SCUBA apparatus, a bowl dropping in a bathtub) effectively integrated into the music, enveloping new age moods, processed live sax, guitar, and piano. . . . The combination of sounds and moods is often quite daring, frequently crossing stylistic boundaries, keeping the music fresh throughout. Of course, electronic music lends itself to this, with the immense range of sounds available today. But all too frequently commercial constraints limit the types of combinations—call it the scope of the creators' imaginations—in recordings. Here the commercial consideration pushed in the other direction: to demonstrate just what instruments such as the D-550 L/A Synth Module, the S-550 Digital Sampler, the R-8 Human Rhythm Composer, MKS-20 S/A Piano Module, the MKS-50 Polyphonic Synthesizer Module, and the BOSS ME-5 Multi-Effects Unit can do in the hands of masters.

Fortunately the stars of the show remain the musicians. The booklet documents a number of feats of ingenuity involving synchronization, trading licks among players not all present at the same time, modifying and using samples in particular ways (some of which are surely applicable to equipment other than Roland's). But it is the music itself which is the most compelling element of the package, and which gives this CD an ear-opening appeal far beyond the music-producing community.

—joel simpson

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blindfold test

1 ART BLAKEY AND THE JAZZ MESSENGERS.

"Blues March" (from *BLUES MARCH*, Blue Note) Blakey, drums; Lee Morgan, trumpet; Benny Golson, tenor saxophone, composer.

The jazz I like has strong rhythm and strong blues; I know and like this. I'm embarrassed not to know the tenor player, but the trumpeter is Lee Morgan, one of my favorites of the era. That's called "Blues March." It's alchemy to take a march and make it into something that bluesy and soulful. It's in the tradition of the black people taking something inherently stiff, and making it swing. That's in the cakewalk tradition, imitating how rich white people walk, and doing something hip with it. Five stars. If all marches sounded like that, I'd join the army.

2 MILTON NASCIMENTO.

"El Dorado" (from *YAUARETE*, Columbia) Nascimento, vocal, composer; Alex Acuna, drums; Robertinho Silva, Mazzola, percussion; Neal Stubenhaus, bass.

That's Milton. I have a bunch of his albums, but not that one. Great playing, a beautiful tune, great mixture of sounds; the groove and tempo were beautiful. The sound of the drums was earthy and dry. I'm getting away from the cymbal sound myself. The bass player was a killer, too. The production was wonderful, and I appreciate that. That first record you played was older; old or new, jazz records tend to be made in a day. This record took a long time. Some people think spontaneity is great; I think it's just a budgetary restriction. The more time you spend, the more finely-crafted [the album]. Of course, high-craft production without deep music is not ultimately satisfying, but this has both. I can't make [my own] record in a day anymore; I don't hear music like that. Seven stars.

3 JO JONES. "Baby Laurence"

(from *THE DRUMS, Jazz Odyssey*) Jones, speaking, solo drums.

That's Papa Jo Jones: I used to run into him in a drum shop in New York; it was great to just hear him talk. I saw Baby Laurence dance on West Fourth Street, backed by Mingus and Dannie Richmond. I love tap dancing, drumming with your feet. I saw [the film] *Tap*; it's corny but a real vehicle for the dancers, and my man Jimmy Slide steals it. He glides, weightless. Gregory Hines takes tap into the '90s; with triggers on his feet he sets off Simmons tom toms—a deep, massive, meaty sound. Jo hits sticks on rims; that's as close as you can get. Five. I dance and sing while I'm playing drums.

BOB MOSES

by Fred Bouchard

Rahboat Ntumba (Bob) Moses first hit the scene playing vibes on Queens' Latin circuit, then big time playing drums for Gary Burton's early quartet (1968). Since joining the New England Conservatory in 1984, Moses has impacted the scene with a vengeance. Last spring he could be heard all over Cambridge: leading his afro-funk-reggae dance band Mozamba (Western Front), with Bob Mintzer or Tiger Okoshi (The Willow); with Mick Goodrick backing singer Dominique Eade (Middle East Cafe), or pianist Laszlo Gardony (Ryle's).

Moses' talents as a leader have embraced wide-ranging projects (e.g., *Story Of Moses*, Gramavision), prompting the late Gil Evans to call his music, "A party with a purpose." In his first BT,



MITCHELL SEIDEL

Moses scattered stars liberally, reasoning: "Whether you like their music or not, all musicians deserve credit for trying to do something positive."

As jazz has moved away from dance, my interest in it has lessened.

4 JACK DEJOHNETTE'S SPECIAL EDITION. "India"

(from *SPECIAL EDITION*, ECM) DeJohnette, piano, drums; David Murray, Arthur Blythe, reeds.

That's Jack DeJohnette. He's one of the greatest drummers in the world. He can play any style amazingly well, but this style is not my favorite. It's his horn players; I don't care for his group concept. Too much looseness; I'd rather get to the point. I like country & western, blues—simple music. I used to like Jack on those CTI records with Stanley Turrentine. Jack playing piano in our group Compost. He was so swinging, so in tune with the drums, he was one of my favorite pianists. But Jack tends not to edit: he'll play 12 hours and it's all great to him. I say, "Give me the three essential minutes." That's why I like popular art: movies that move quickly, books that have plot, not writer's chops. For Jack and the drumming, five.

5 NEVILLE BROTHERS.

"Run Joe" (from *FIRE ON THE BAYOU*, A&M) Cyril Neville, vocal; Herman Ernest, drums.

That's my favorite band in the whole world. The Neville family has the funkier band on the planet. That's my idea of everything I look for in music: the dance groove, great

singing, playing. I'd love to see them live on their home turf—New Orleans. Their current drummer, not this one, is my favorite: Mean Willie Green. I bow down to him; he's a mother. Seven, of course. That's also one of my favorite tunes. Music to me is not intellectual content, but heart. They take you right back to Africa. It's the roots, the real deal. The whole family sings great: that's percussionist Cyril singing.

6 ASTOR PIAZZOLLA & GARY BURTON.

"Vibraphonissimo" (from *THE NEW TANGO*, Atlantic) Personnel as guessed.

That opened my visionary eye. I started to see things. Some music is good to party to, to dance to; reggae talks about day-to-day situations. But this opens my third eye, that visionary plane. Hermeto Pascoal's music does that for me. I'd heard that Gary Burton and Astor Piazzolla made an album together, and it's wonderful. It's like a soundtrack to a movie. I could see separate realities, a lotta stories, a lotta life. I could see knife fights, people dancing in a bar, people making love and fighting, children, old people. [The tango made] images in my mind that could very well be Argentina, where I've never been. It's wonderful when music takes you on a trip. I only get analytical with music if I have to learn a piece; otherwise I let music take me where it wants to take me. Gary Burton is the Art Tatum of the vibes; nobody plays them better, and that's as good as I've ever heard him. The band was just as excellent. Seven!

db

BOB WILBER

REED MASTER BOB WILBER LEADS BANDS ON TWO CONTINENTS, SCORES MOVIES, WRITES HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AND KEEPS THE JAZZ LEGACY SWINGING.

by Dave Helland

Could a Chinese musician have put a curse on Bob Wilber? He cut his musical teeth in the swing era, when clarinet was king. Benny Goodman was his first inspiration, but the first jazz record reissue programs enabled him to study the styles of Baby Dodds, Frank Teschemacher, and Sidney Bechet. Or he could go to the Village and hear Pee Wee Russell and Muggsy Spanier play at Nick's. Wilbur Sr. took the family to Carnegie Hall to hear Ellington premiere *Black, Brown And Beige*. Bob studied with Sidney Bechet (moved in with him, in fact) and hung out on



MITCHELL SEIDEL

Swing St. hearing the beginnings of bebop.

A recording artist as a teen, in his 20s Wilber needed to forge his own musical identity when the public saw him as simply

a Bechet protégé, someone who swung when the modern scene was groovin' high, who played hot when cool was the word. Now in his 60's, Wilber is enjoying the success that comes with leading his own bands in both Europe and the States, record labels interested in both his new projects and the reissue of older recordings, collaborations with film director Francis Ford Coppola on *Cotton Club* and *Tucker*, and is a perennial TDWR listing in the Soprano Sax category of **db's** Critics Poll.

Wilber tells his own story in *Music Was Not Enough* (Oxford University Press). Not the typical story of a jazz-crazed youth raised in orderly, genteel Scarsdale between the World Wars, Wilber and his pals were not merely fans. They organized concerts featuring Art Hodes and Mezz Mezzrow, and played jazz at lunch time. A commuter train to Grand Central Station put them just a subway ride away from 52nd St. and Jimmy Ryan's or the Village and Nick's: "The greatest hangout for high school kids."

Wilber met Bechet in the Village in 1944 at a time when Bechet lived in relative obscurity, feeling his era in jazz was finished.

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DAVID SANBORN'S EQUIPMENT

Dave has a Yamaha baby grand piano in his apartment, along with 10 assorted saxes lying around, all Selmer Mark VI 144000 series **with La Voz reeds (mediums)** and Ducoff #8 mouthpieces. He also has a goldplated Yamaha soprano sax and a Selmer soprano which he recently acquired.

KENNY G'S EQUIPMENT

Kenny's tenor is a Selmer Mark VI, 59,000 Series, with a Ria mouthpiece #5. His alto is a Selmer Mark VI, 75,000 Series, with a Beechler plastic mouthpiece #5; soprano is a Selmer, "which is too old to be a Mark VI. It's a beautiful old horn that I really love." Attached is a Dukoff mouthpiece #8.

All his reeds are LaVoz by Frederick L. Hemke - #3 reed on tenor and alto, and #2½ on soprano.

GEORGE HOWARD'S EQUIPMENT

George Howard does not currently endorse any saxophone; while he favors a number of different brand and models, he is at present using a Selmer Mark VI soprano, **with Rico Royal reeds.**

MICHAEL BRECKER'S EQUIPMENT

Michael Brecker plays a Selmer Mark VI tenor sax with Dave Guardala mouthpieces (a special Michael Brecker Model designed for him). **He prefers LaVoz medium reeds.** His soprano is a Yamaha with a bent neck, though he

WAYNE SHORTER'S EQUIPMENT

Wayne Shorter plays a Yamaha soprano saxophone with a curved neck, and a Selmer Mark VII tenor saxophone. He uses Otto Link #10 mouthpieces on both horns, **with Rico #4 reeds for the tenor and Rico #3 reeds on soprano.** To compose at home, Shorter utilizes a standard acoustic piano and a portable Korg 800 synthesizer.

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Excerpts reprinted courtesy of **downbeat** magazine.

Bechet opened a music school in his home in Brooklyn and Wilber was one of his first—and only—students. “I was soaking up his ideas of jazz and his theories, like having the rhythm in your head and swinging against it. He would often work at the piano, playing a song and showing me how he would harmonize it. There is no better experience for a young jazz player than apprenticeship to a master.

“Bechet was not a New Orleans player in quotes. He was very much a swing era player; loved Art Tatum, Kenny Clarke, Sid Catlett, and wasn’t interested at all in Preservation Hall,” explains Wilber. “Sidney was a very dominating kind of person. You can tell from listening to his music. He dominated any ensemble he played with by the sheer expressive force of his playing. And he was a wandering gypsy soul, very much a creature of whim. When his contemporaries were making their names in the ’20s, he was wandering around Europe and didn’t make a single record from 1925 to 1931.”

Within a few years Wilber and his group, The Wildcats, were recording, first backing up Bechet for Columbia and then under their own name for Commodore. Wilber and the Wildcats were on their way and so was Bechet, who went to France for the first major post-war jazz fest and found himself the toast of the continent, overshadowing the Charlie Parker band with Miles Davis.

But in the States, the ’50s found a waning public interest in trad jazz as first bebop and then cool caught listeners’ ears. “When I first heard ‘Groovin’ High’ and ‘Salt Peanuts,’ I thought bebop was clever, very humorous, and obviously very fast, but it didn’t have for me the kind of soul and emotion I associated with jazz. It was very slick, very flip, very hip.

“Later on, I heard them more and realized they had the breadth to do blues and ballads and so forth. Bird sounded wonderful with a swing rhythm section, but when everybody tried to play like him on every instrument I don’t think the results were very successful. Which is funny, that’s all part of the mainstream now. I play Bird licks myself; we all do.

“I think there is a new division of jazz: the old categories—the revivalists vs. the moderns—if they applied at all, are definitely outmoded now. Now we have a new breed of jazz where swing is not one of the objectives. Certainly Diz always swung, Bird always swung, but I don’t think Cecil Taylor is particularly interested in swinging nor are the Chicago Arts [AACM] people. Jazz has gotten away from the dance and has become a concert music, which I kind of lament. I like the idea of the ‘joint is jumpin’,’ of a communal art where everybody is taking part.”

Excuse me while I skip two decades of Wilber’s life: the search for his own sound

and an audience; his work with Benny Goodman and arranging popular ’60s melodies for a swinging treatment by the World’s Greatest Jazz Band; Kenny Davern and Soprano Summit; recordings of both jazz and classical music, his originals and rearrangements of standards. Wilber was even told he could be a star if he just changed his billing to “Bobby.”

When Francis Ford Coppola found himself way behind schedule and way over budget in the shooting of *Cotton Club*, Wilber was called in amidst the chaos of production to find early Ellington tunes and arrange them to fit footage of lavish dance routines that couldn’t be reshot. “Coppola’s insistence on authenticity was quite amazing. Usually Hollywood is pretty square about what jazz sounds like but he was very insistent,” said Wilber who worked with Coppola again on *Tucker*. Coppola needed an arrangement of “The Song Of India” that had the sound of Tommy Dorsey’s hit without the estate being able to make claims against it. Listen for the melody played by Don Lusher and see how Wilber makes it reminiscent of, but different from, Dorsey’s own playing.

Wilber structured the jazz program at Wilkes College, Wilkes-Barre, Pa., around the study of individual composers like Jelly Roll Morton and bands like John Kirby’s, using their charts and transcriptions as well as their records. He also brought Sammy Price, Doc Cheatham, and Mel Powell to campus. The college is also the repository for Wilber’s papers: 40 years worth of transcriptions of classic recordings as well as his own scores and arrangements. But for the most part he is skeptical of classroom jazz. “It’s just not conducive to producing artists who express themselves. It tends to produce excellent technicians who can read like a whiz, but they are all playing the same charts. Creative players go out at an early age and start playing like [saxophonist] Scott Hamilton did. If they can apprentice to a Bechet, like I did, all the better.”

Wilber is a leader of the jazz repertoire movement; his recreation of Benny Goodman’s 1938 Carnegie Hall Concert earned rave reviews in *db* (April ’88). “It was a recreation, a celebration of a great event in jazz,” boasts Wilber, who agrees that it was theatre “in the sense of making it visually appropriate to the era. Everything about it was supposed to recreate a bygone era, but not as a museum piece.

“What is happening in jazz is what has been happening in classical music for many, many years. We celebrate Bach and Beethoven. Their music is still as valid now as it was then, just as the music of Jelly Roll Morton, Ellington, Armstrong, and Bechet is still as valid now as when it was created. And it can be recreated with creativity. I think it is the most important movement that is happening in jazz today.” *db*

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

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