

MODERN JAZZ QUARTET's 40th ANNIVERSARY!

DOWN BEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

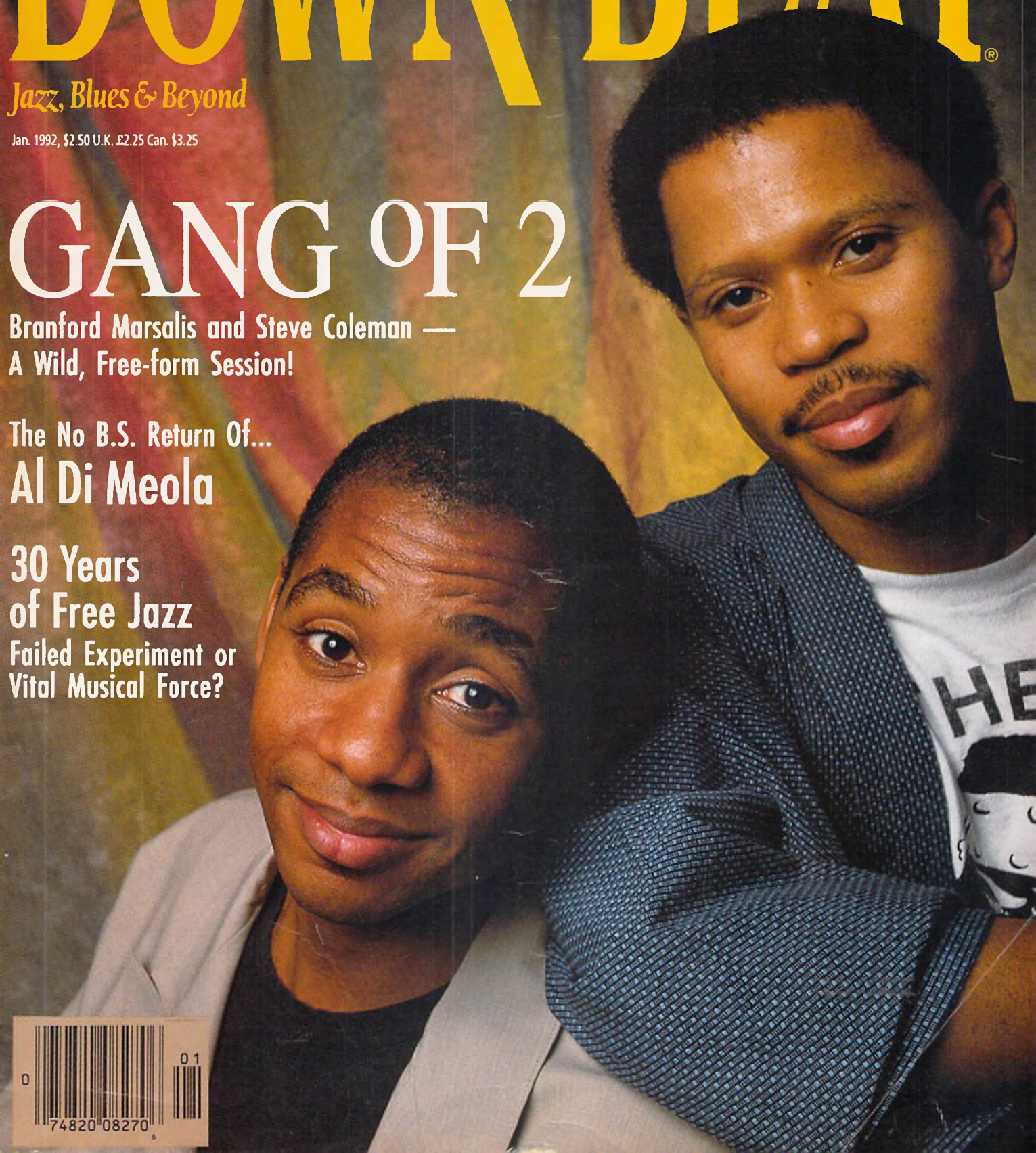
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GANG OF 2

Branford Marsalis and Steve Coleman —
A Wild, Free-form Session!

The No B.S. Return Of...
Al Di Meola

30 Years
of Free Jazz
Failed Experiment or
Vital Musical Force?





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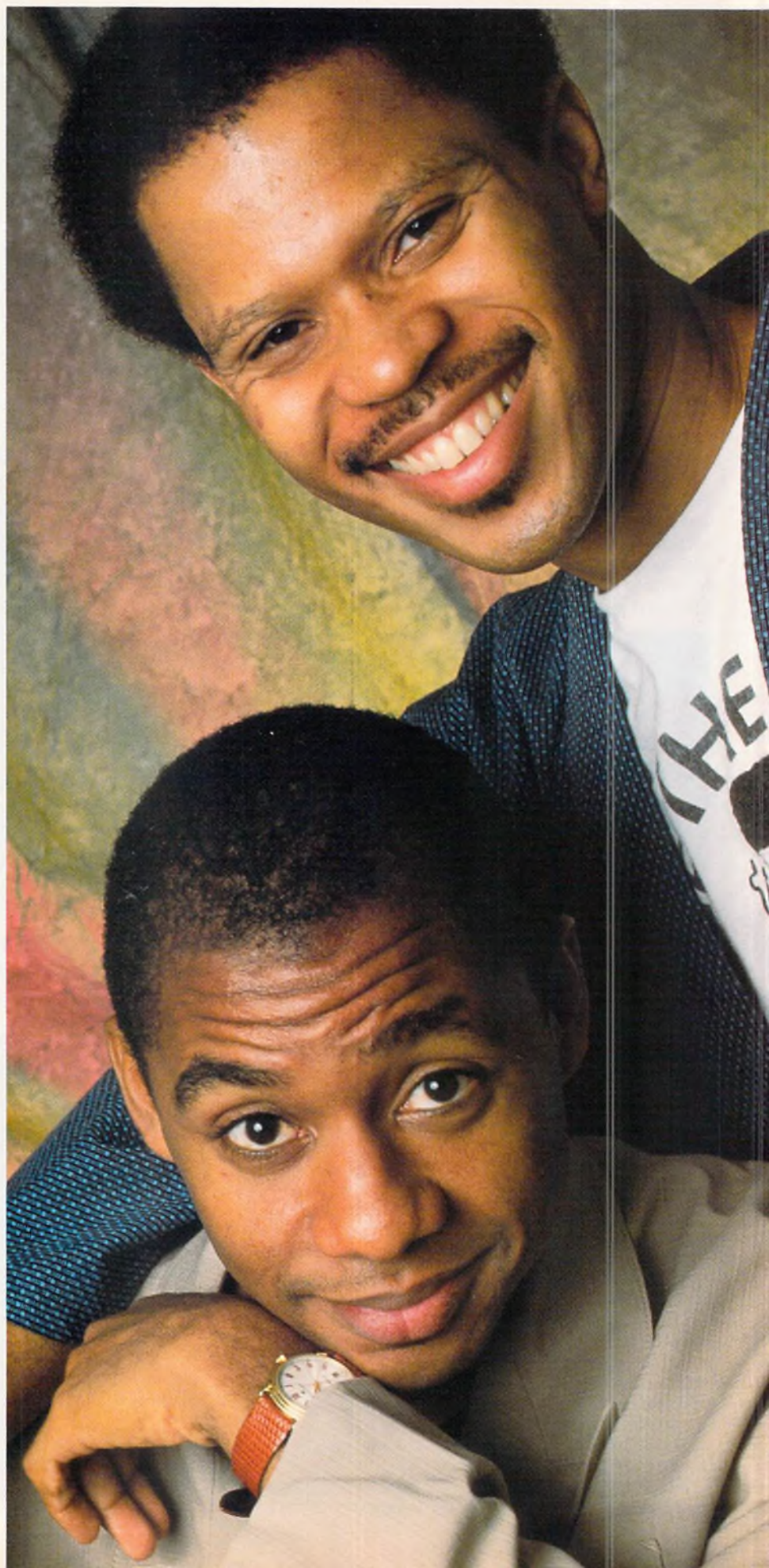
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GANGLER



By Bill Milkowski



STEVE
COLEMAN
and
BRANFORD
MARSALIS
CALL 'EM
AS THEY
SEE 'EM!



he posters were splashed all over town: "BRANFORD MARSALIS with very special guests STEVE COLEMAN and his Five Elements. DON'T MISS THIS EXPLOSIVE SAX SHOWDOWN. FIVE EXTRAORDINARY PERFORMANCES ONLY!"

While it wasn't exactly a cutting contest on the order of Flip Phillips and Lester Young in one of their classic JATP battles, the two did mix it up a little bit during their week-long engagement at the Joyce Theater last fall, a prestigious concert hall in the Chelsea section of Manhattan that ordinarily showcases up-and-coming dance companies.

Coleman and his Five Elements ensemble opened with an electrified, rhythmically charged set, serving as a visceral counterpart to the acoustic intimacy of Branford's trio (with bassist Robert Hurst and drummer Jeff Watts). Steve exuded a funky Brooklyn street vibe with basketball shoes and colorful, loose-fitting garb. Branford dressed strictly GQ. Coleman danced openly to the groove, his unbound enthusiasm at times causing him to leap off the ground, à la Pete Townshend. Branford played it cool.

Seemingly polar opposites—one an instigator on the cutting edge, the other in the neo-classicist camp—beneath the surface, the two saxophonists have much in common, not the least of which is a wicked sense of humor and their mutual disdain for critics. The engagement at the Joyce gave audiences a chance to hear for themselves what they have in common musically. We spoke to both saxophonists backstage just minutes before their final night together.



Down Beat: *This billing sort of implies the two of you are kindred spirits.*

Branford Marsalis: Is that true, Steve? No, not us. man.

Steve Coleman: We supposed to hate each other.

BM: You know, he's with the M-Base clan and I'm with the neo-classicists [laughs]. The two shall never mix, man.

DB: *I didn't know that a neo-classicist could play on a Gang Starr record.*

BM: Oh, that's right. I forgot about that. [laughs] Uh . . . that was an aberration, man. Don't mind that.

SC: On that stuff, he doesn't care. Gang Starr, Sting, Grateful Dead, all that shit. He doesn't care. That's what that's about. [laughs]

DB: *A neo-classicist with no conscience.*

BM: [laughs] Yeah, an eye on the market always, babe. The truth is, I dig Steve Coleman and have for a long time. I first heard him on one of the early Five Elements records. This was right after I came to town in '82. I was real scared when I first got to New York. You know, this was supposed to be the place where all the bad motherf**kers are. Then I heard 'em, and I wasn't scared no more.

SC: [laughs] Well, I remember a friend of mine said, "Have you heard Wynton's brother?" I said, "What brother?" So I went to this

place called Possible 20 to check this guy out. You were playing alto then, weren't you?

BM: No, that's when I first started playing tenor. That was my first week.

DB: *Can you remember your impression of Branford then?*

SC: I thought he could play. The thing is, when you first hear cats when they first come to town . . . when I listen to people I listen for not only what they're doing but the potential of what they might become. At that time, I was pretty young, he was pretty young. I could hear what his basic influences were but I really didn't get a good listen to him until I heard him later with Blakey and a little after that with Wynton. I heard you with Blakey on alto [check out Blakey's *Keystone 3* on Concord Jazz]. Man, I saw this funny video of you with Blakey. You were playing these hybrid, funk-bop licks. Just watching y'all was funny. I mean, Wynton was a little, skinny kid. And you had all this big hair.

BM: It was never big but I just never got it cut . . . just a lot of out-of-shape hair. But it looked great with a tuxedo.

SC: That hairstyle was coming out of the '70s, that whole period. It was before he got his Magic Johnson look.

BM: I prefer the term "neo-classicist" look. [laughs] But what was very apparent to me when I first came to town was a lot of the people I met in New York were primarily concerned with the

perpetuation of their own egos. And the thing that struck me about Steve was that he was about the music. Everybody thought he played "out" at the time, I guess. But when I heard Steve play, the first thing that came to my mind was Charlie Parker. And critics that were hearing you playing Five Elements shit, they never dug the cross reference. They never heard Bird. They couldn't really hear where that shit was coming from so they wrote all this bullshit about obtuse meters and all this other nonsense. So when I did *Scenes Of The City* in 1983, for that [Charles] Mingus track, I said I wanted to get Steve Coleman. And all these people said, "Steve Coleman?!! That cat?!" And I said, "That's right, Steve Coleman."

DB: You obviously didn't have a problem with the way he played.

BM: None whatsoever. See, most people that I know can't hear. They have good memories. They memorize sounds or records like how you memorize a photograph. But they can't hear for shit.

SC: You talking about audiences or musicians?

BM: Both. And critics, too. Like for instance, when I was in Wynton's band I was playing like Wayne [Shorter]. And the writers said, "He plays very much like Wayne." So then I go on a gig and start playing verbatim Sonny Rollins solos and these writers would say, "Wow, man, I hear a lot of Wayne in your playing."

SC: [laughs] See, most jazz musicians and critics have this thing about whether you can play changes or not. Ain't that right? It's like, "Can he play? Can he play changes?" You heard that shit all your life, right? Cats be saying, "He can't play no changes." That kind of thing. I know what they mean . . . I understand, basically. But I always thought one of the most important things was not changes, but phrasing. I really notice a big difference in the phrasing of cats who checked out Bird and transcribed his solos and whatever . . . just went through a whole thing with Bird. And with Branford, I heard it immediately the first time I heard him play. And, to me, it's not about whether you can play the shit verbatim or not. It's about hearing a certain lineage in a cat's playing, in his phrasing, his form, how he gets in and out of things, his sense of balance in the music. You can hear all that in the music. And you can hear a big difference in different people's playing because of that. A lot of cats who come straight out of Albert Ayler, they're gonna have a different sense of balance and resolution and phrasing and everything than a person who comes out of Newk [Rollins] or Bird.

BM: The bottom line is, jazz has an underlying logic that can't be denied. I started reading *Down Beat* in the '70s, and in interviews that I read, there had been those people who constantly tried to pretend as though the lineage didn't exist. They always used the coinage "new" as in "the new sound," as if previous generations had no cumulative influence on this new music. I was a history major in college and I never once heard a history teacher say that in order for us to progress as a nation we must destroy the past. Nor were historians ever labeled neo-classicists. But it seems in jazz there's an obsession with new vs. good. It seems like new is much more important than being good, and I don't agree.

DB: Isn't that more about marketing?

BM: I'm talking about interviews . . . critics, musicians themselves, the way they refer to the music. The fact is, as I once said in an interview, there's freedom in structure. There's really no freedom in what they call freedom. If a cat is playing a certain style of music and that's the only style of music that he can play, then he's not free. He doesn't choose to play avant garde or whatever they call it . . . open-sky music, all these f**ked-up names. He ain't got no choice. He has to play that because that's the only thing he can play. That's not freedom; that's slavery.

SC: It's like only knowing one way to get to your house and you don't have any other way to get there. If that way is blocked off, then you can't go home.

BM: And you have a slew of musicians who are getting tumultuous amounts of credit and they only know one way to their home. And they make fun of the people who know five or six ways instead of trying to learn other ways. Well, most of them don't have the musical ability to learn five or six ways.

SC: It's hard, too, because once you start getting known for something, that's when it becomes even harder to learn something else. Because you're getting all this hype now and you have to live up to this big image, you know what I mean? And then, you can't admit that you don't know anything. When nobody knows you, it's much easier to learn, I feel.

BM: But then the question they throw at you is, "Why are you even bothering to learn that? You should be trying to develop your own sound." But I *am* developing my own sound. By learning all this other stuff, I will eventually get my own sound. Sonny Rollins and Wayne Shorter and Herbie [Hancock] and Ron [Carter] . . . they all told me the same shit.

SC: Getting back to when I first heard you, around that time, I read this thing you said in an interview about originality. You said, "I'm too young, I got time to get my own sound. By the time I'm 30, I'll have my own sound." And then recently, I talked to somebody . . . not one of your fans. . .

BM: One of my dear friends. [laughs]

SC: [laughs] Yeah, right. And he was saying, "Well, I read this article where Branford Marsalis said that he was gonna get his own sound and I don't feel like he's done that." But I feel like I hear a big difference between your playing then and your playing now. And it's not . . . you know, critics look for this . . . I don't know what they look for, but they're always wrong.

BM: Most of 'em can't hear, first of all.

SC: But I'm sitting here listening to him this week, and I'm hearing a lot of shit . . . there's a depth there, a certain kind of detail that was never there before. And it's funny because I hear some of that same thing that I heard in your early stuff and in my own early recordings that I hear in some of the younger guys today.

BM: It's because we are signing record contracts much earlier than the previous generation. So we are expected to play with the technical fluidity and melodic innovation of people in their early 30s when we're still in our early 20s.

SC: Well, I don't wanna name names but there's a whole lot of young cats out there . . . some of them are getting recognized right now but they really don't have any experience, they haven't played with anybody and they're getting this kind of hype heaped on 'em now. And I just hope it doesn't stop them from learning, because it has a tendency to just squash that whole growing process.

BM: Well, that's really up to them. It's like the thing you can never do . . . I feel there's a lot of hyperbole that influences reality. Like if somebody's gonna do an interview and tell some writer that I'm the saddest motherf**ker that's come down the pike . . . if I believe that, then that's my problem. And if an interview comes out and says I'm the baddest motherf**ker . . . if I believe that shit, that is also my problem. I think that every artist of every kind in any idiom, be it a writer or a musician or a dancer, *you* have to know when you're good and when you suck. You have to get into yourself and you have to do what you have to do to improve. So all of the other stuff is all peripheral. It doesn't even matter, anyway.

DB: So you must feel satisfied about your new trio record [The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, see "Reviews" Nov. '91]. It's like



an incremental leap from the first three records you did.

BM: Oh, hell yeah. And I expected it to be this way. It's just been a logical progression. I turned 30 right when *Crazy People Music* hit. Not like 30 is a magical number, but around there . . . 29, 30, 31 . . . something happens. There's a point at which, with all deference to the people you love and respect, you have to say, "I don't want to play like them anymore." And for me, the big step was saying, "I can't stand playing standards." And I knew that would come one day.

SC: You knew that would come one day?

BM: Hell yeah, it's bound to come if you gonna play anything worth a damn. You know what I mean? Like Bird and them did to the standards what we'll never be able to do to the standards. So the only thing we can do is do our thing, you know? I mean, there are certain standards I don't mind playing, and most of them have never really been standards . . . Monk tunes, Wayne Shorter tunes, Herbie tunes, shit like that. But standards in general, man . . . I'm like . . . that's why when we did *Trio Jeepy* and it was considered like this landmark record, it was very amusing to me. Because *Trio Jeepy* was a record . . . I had to do a record before I went out on tour with Sting. *Royal Garden Blues* was disastrous because I did it after Sting's tour, and I need at least six to eight months to get my jazz chops back. And that would've meant a two-year lapse again. So I recorded *Trio Jeepy* right before I went on Sting's tour. I didn't have a band, so I called up Milt [Hinton] and we went into the studio [with Jeff Watts] and we did some standards. And it was called this really modern-day landmark, but really we just went in and had a jam session, essentially.

DB: It sounded like it.

BM: You know, that's what it was. And people were saying, "This is great!" But that wasn't my idea of a great record at all.

DB: Mine either.

BM: Good. I'm glad you agree.

DB: But this new one is my idea of a great record.

BM: Yeah, it is. This is what I would've done as far back as '87, except one thing that is often overlooked in terms of development is personnel. Don't nobody play the drums like Jeff Watts. And very few play the bass like Bob Hurst. But neither one of them was available in '87. So I had to go with what was available . . . not trying to be mean to the cats I was playing with at the time, because they're great musicians. I mean, Lewis Nash and Delbert Felix are definitely great musicians. But *Random Abstract* was a compromise record. Because when we started rehearsing, I brought out all of this material that wound up being a part of *Crazy People Music*, and it couldn't be played, so I had to shelve it.

SC: And it's also about the rapport you have with Jeff and Bob. 'Cause that's what I'm hearing.

BM: It's an intellectual rapport, though. I had a great personal relationship with Delbert and Lewis, but we didn't have the kind of intellectual relationship that can really make the music take off. There are very few people I can have that kind of relationship with, though. The shit is all about music for me. And that's what I love about Steve. It's all about music for Steve. Steve is one of the few musicians I can talk to where when we talk we don't have to deal with each other's ego. We have a conversation. I don't have to say . . . like if Steve is playing next to whoever and I say, "Yeah, man, that motherf**ker played a great solo," I don't have to dance around and go, "Yeah, and you sounded great, too." We can just talk. If Jeff is playing some bad shit on a tune, I can say, "Hey man, Tain was *playin'* that shit." And if the shit I played was sad, he don't have to say, "Man, that sounded really good." We don't have to deal

with any of that pampering-egos stuff. We can talk about Bird or talk about Sly Stone or James Brown or whatever the f**k you wanna talk about, and it never has to become a debate on personal taste. Like, if I ain't into the shit, I ain't into it, and it ain't no thing. With everybody else, it's a thing. You have to like the person that they like or you're somehow indicting them.

SC: A lot of times in interviews, interviewers try to get you to go at each other. One guy did an interview with me once and wanted me to come down on Kenny G. And I mean, Kenny G's music is not my favorite type of music, true. But I'm not gonna sit there and rag the cat, because I got better things to do. Kenny G should be allowed to play anything he wants. It makes no difference what I like and what I don't like. And they try to underscore this thing between me and Branford. I mean, it's obvious that we have different tastes, just by listening to us play. . . .

BM: But then again we don't.

SC: What they miss is the connection. I really think it's maybe because what you said before. They can't hear.

BM: Oh, they can't, man. I mean, the shit they be writing!

SC: I think that when I started my band, I could've told interviewers anything about my influences or whatever, and they would've believed me.

BM: I shoulda said, "I'm a bad motherf**ker." And at least two or three people would've wrote that I was.

SC: Some of the early gigs I got . . . I remember one time, I went to this punk-rock place and I asked the cat for a gig. Cat say, "What kind of music do you play?" I say, "What kind of music do you have here?" He tells me they book punk-rock, so I say, "That's what we play." I gave him a tape, and the next day he says, "Well, sounds great. There's one tune in here that sounds a little bit like jazz, but the rest of it sounds good." And that was it. We just went in and played it the way we played it. And the only reason I did that was because I knew club owners, for the most part, can't hear.

BM: That's right.

SC: Same with critics. If I tell them I'm influenced by music from Siberia or whatever, they'll write that shit down and then the next interviewer will copy that and it goes on and on. That shit has happened to me. People have called me up and

said, "Well, I don't know much about you so could you send me some materials, some interviews." So they copy from those interviews to write their interview. You know what I mean? Or sometimes you'll say something and people will make mistakes. Geri Allen did something in one of her interviews where she said M-Base meant "Basic Array of Structured Experimentation" . . . she f**ked up the last word and said "Experimentation" instead of "Extemporations." And I saw that same mistake in 20 interviews after that, just from that one time she said it wrong. Which, to me, just proved that cats get other interviews and copy the shit down. They have no idea themselves what's going on.

BM: I had one interview in *Down Beat* [Nov. '89] where I made a reference to Nicolas Slonimsky's *Thesaurus Of Scales And Melodic Patterns*, and it came out as "Leo Straminski"! Then some guy sends me a letter saying, "You oaf! It's not Straminski, it's Slonimsky." Well, no shit, but I didn't say that.

DB: Sounds like lazy-writer syndrome . . . too many critics doing the equivalent of learning on the bandstand.

BM: All I know is, the first person who ever decided to describe music with adverbs should be shot in his ass.

SC: [gales of laughter]

BM: I have yet to hear a "thundering drum" or a "lacromous saxophone." I'm still waiting to hear that shit. I mean, you know, it worked in Walter Mitty, but I haven't seen it work since. I have yet



to see onomatopoeia be effective in describing any kind of artistic performance.

SC: And you have to understand that most critics and writers . . . they're usually cats who tried to be musicians and didn't make it, so they turn to some music-related job.

DB: *Branford, has playing in a trio liberated you in a sense?*

BM: Well, it's always been easy for me to play in a trio setting. I've never had that problem. It's really strange to me that every time you say trio, people say, "Man, you must've been terrified."

SC: I don't get that either, man. What is that about?

BM: I think somebody must've told them 20 years ago that it was terrifying to be in a trio setting.

SC: I didn't get that. Even when I was reading about Rollins and shit, I still didn't get it. I think a lot of musicians who aren't good musicians think that you need a piano in order to make music. But Branford can go up there and play solo and make it work.

BM: I don't know about all *that* shit. [laughs] You get up there and do that.

SC: But you know what I'm saying. They think that if the piano leaves, you can't hear no more, it just gets like some kind of "out" shit.

BM: Well, most musicians . . . that's the way they are. They hang on that piano for dear life, boy. For me, the thing was, I used to sing to myself. That's how I learned songs. That's how I knew when I could play a song. If I couldn't internalize the song, then I couldn't play it. Like, I could just learn the scales for "Giant Steps" and play it in a passable fashion. But for me, I was very insistent on being able to play melody on songs. And I've always known if I could sing the song in my head, I could play the melody on my horn. If I couldn't hear the changes go by in my head, I wouldn't play it. So all those songs, I can hear the shit in my head. And if I can do that, then the piano's right here [points to his head].

SC: And you can get to a certain point where you hear the whole band in your head . . . the bass, the drums, everything. And that's the difference between playing music and faking it. There's a lot of guys, for example, who can't even keep a form straight. They'll play and go to the bridge and generally get lost on normal shit, you know? And a lot of that's because when they practice alone they don't hear that whole thing in their head. Or else they just practice licks completely divorced from any kind of context.

BM: I think the biggest problem with playing music in the United States is that, you know . . . the United States societal norms are defined by Western European civilization. And the majority of American musical culture was developed by African Americans, who have a completely different aural sensibility. That's a-u-r-a-l, not o-r-a-l. But anyway, that's where the school problem comes in. Because, from the Western vantage point, everything is written down, everything is understood through the literal text. Whereas, for the African sensibility, the tradition is passed down orally. There's a dichotomy there, there's a problem there. Because when you talk to cats at clinics about the way shit sounds, they immediately raise their hand and start asking about chord scales. And you know how I feel? I say, f**k chord scales, because it's only a theory. It doesn't exist. I mean, we can burn all the sheet music right now and the only thing that that means is we wouldn't have a chance to butcher Mozart's music. Because Mozart's dead, we don't know how the shit was supposed to sound. Mozart wrote down the shit that he heard in his head, but there are people that are teaching where they make you think that Mozart wrote what he wrote because he could write music. But there are ways of knowing, man, that supersede writing. Louis Armstrong couldn't read music. Didn't seem to hurt him none. I think that a lot of times in the educational environment, when it comes to jazz, it's just tough . . . everybody that's teaching the music was brought up to believe in the Western European philosophy. And in America, it's a combination of the two, but the oral tradition is never really

highlighted. They don't talk about it, it's never really brought into focus. It's all theory, chord scales, theory, chords scales. "This is what Bird played." It's never like *why* did Bird play this? And the why is the most important question to mankind.

SC: They don't know why.

BM: I mean, World War I started in 19-whatever . . . 14, 19, 11, whatever that shit was . . . who cares when? The question is why? Why did it start? What were the ramifications of this? That's the shit that, when I listen to music, I ask myself. Why did Bird play what he played? What are the musical ramifications of him playing this exactly the way he played it? And that's something that a chord-scale book can never teach you. I think that it is the logic of music in general that slips by most people. Education is almost a deterrent, sometimes. And I'm not putting down education, because I was musically educated. I can read and all that shit, but I say f**k that because the way that it's taught is an overwhelming deterrent for a lot of people who play jazz. What do you think, Steve?

SC: I always say that about Western education.

BM: You supposed to disagree with me, man.

DB

STEVE'S EQUIPMENT

Steve plays a Selmer Mark VII alto saxophone with Vandoren mouthpieces and reeds. He also utilizes Dr. T's line of computer music products and the Synthophone, from Softwind Instruments (Switzerland).

COLEMAN SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

solo

MOTHERLAND PULSE — JMT 834 401

with Five Elements

BLACK SCIENCE — RCA/Novus 3119-2-N
RHYTHM PEOPLE — RCA/Novus 3092-2-N
ON THE EDGE OF TOMORROW — JMT 834 405
WORLD EXPANSION — JMT 834 410
SINE DIE — Pangaea 42150

with Dave Holland Quintet

EXTENSIONS — ECM 841 778
THE RAZOR'S EDGE — ECM 833 048
SEEDS OF TIME — ECM 825 322
JUMPIN' IN — ECM 817 437

with David Murray

LIVE AT SWEET BASIL, VOL. 1 — Black Saint 0085
LIVE AT SWEET BASIL, VOL. 2 — Black Saint 0095

with Cassandra Wilson

POINT OF VIEW — JMT 834 404
DAYS AWEIGH — JMT 834 412

with Strata Institute

CIPHER SYNTAX — JMT 834 425

with Marvin "Smitty" Smith

KEEPER OF THE DRUMS — Concord Jazz 325

with Abbey Lincoln

TALKIN' TO THE SUN — Enja 79635

with Greg Osby

MAN-TALK FOR MODERNS VOL. X — Blue Note 95414

with Geri Allen

IN THE MIDDLE — Minor Music 850 013

with Branford Marsalis

SCENES IN THE CITY — Columbia 38951

BRANFORD'S EQUIPMENT

Branford plays a Selmer balanced-action tenor saxophone and Selmer Mark VI soprano sax, both with Fred Hempke #4½ reeds. His mouthpieces are modeled by Dave Guardala.

MARSALIS SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

THE BEAUTIFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN — Columbia 46990
MUSIC FROM MO' BETTER BLUES — Columbia 46792
CRAZY PEOPLE MUSIC — Columbia 46072
TRIO JEEPY — Columbia 44199
RANDOM ABSTRACT — Columbia 44055
RENAISSANCE — Columbia 40711
ROYAL GARDEN BLUES — Columbia 40363
SCENES IN THE CITY — Columbia 38951

with Wynton Marsalis

BLACK CODES FROM THE UNDERGROUND — Columbia 40009
HOT HOUSE FLOWERS — Columbia 39530
THINK OF ONE — Columbia 38641
WYNTON MARSALIS — Columbia 37574

with Sonny Rollins

FALLING IN LOVE WITH JAZZ — Milestone 9179

with Miles Davis

DECOY — Columbia 38891

with Sting

... NOTHING LIKE THE SUN — A&M 6402
BRING ON THE NIGHT — A&M Bring 1
THE DREAM OF THE BLUE TURTLES — A&M 3750

with Grateful Dead

WITHOUT A NET — Arista 86134

with Dirty Dozen Brass Band

MARDI GRAS IN MONTEUX — Rounder 2052
VOODOO — Columbia 45052

with Steve Coleman

SINE DIE — Pangaea 42150

In a nutshell, the Al Di Meola story thus far: in 1974, a 19-year-old whiz kid guitar player from New Jersey was snatched up by Chick Corea. Di Meola landed a gig in the most popular incarnation of Corea's Return To Forever, which epitomized a type of mid-'70s fusion bravura. He boasted conspicuous technical prowess—precise articulation, blinding digital speed, intricate muting strategies, rhythmic permutations. His thickly distorted rock-guitar tone and his posturing, borrowed from both heavy metal and flamenco, helped secure Di Meola's spot in the pantheon of guitar heroes.

Crowds, usually stocked with awed, slack-jawed guitar players, cheered. Critics, meanwhile, sniffed at what was perceived as a textbook case in what was wrong with fusion guitarists—strutting empty virtuosity and rock & roll poses rather than drinking deep of the jazz spirit. Di Meola pursued the field of jazz-rock pyrotechnics through the '70s and early 1980, while also delving into acoustic guitar summits with John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia. Later in the '80s, he experimented more extensively with acoustic guitar and synths, including another acoustic guitar trio with Larry Coryell and Bireli Lagrene.

Then comes an extended pause in the saga. To anyone who pays attention to the club and festival circuit, Al Di Meola never left. To the music consumer who judges the jazz scene by what appears in the "New Releases" bin, the question was: Where has he been keeping his bad self? Cut to 1991, and after a long, dark period, Di Meola comes out with a one-two punch: the acoustic *World Sinfonia* album released this summer (see "Reviews" Nov. '91) and the upcoming electric album *Kiss My Axe* (see p. 42), both on the Tomato label.

The Roxy on L.A.'s legendary Sunset Strip has played host to rock and pop acts, and also a fair share of fusion over the years. Next door is the rock & roll chic of the Rainbow Bar & Grill. Down the street is the headbanger's headquarters, Gazzarri's. On a fall night, the renascent riffmeister Di



DEBORAH EDELSTEIN

Kiss My Assets

AL DI MEOLA

By Josef Woodard

Meola played a special showcase for industry types, press, and other hangers-on.

It was a dual-faceted affair. After a long set by his well-received, tango-inflected World Sinfonia band, we heard a sampling of music from his new electric band, which includes his first serious employer and fusion forefather, keyboardist Barry Miles. A sense of reclaiming turf was in the air.

With World Sinfonia, Di Meola's agile guitar lines intertwine with tasteful rhythms laid out by dual percussionists Arto Tunçboyacı and Gumbi Ortiz, and an additional nylon-stringed guitarist, Chris Carrington. But it is the dazzling Argentine bandoneon player Dino Saluzzi who very nearly steals the show, with his exotic timbres and musical profundity.

The evening was presented as a kind of return of a heavyweight. Faced with rejections and indifference from the record industry, Di Meola was kaboshed from recording for four years. Couldn't get arrested. Now, with his Tomato product gaining a warm

reception, sweet vindication may be his.

The subject of that fallow four-year period is obviously on Di Meola's mind the next day when we talk at the Mondrian Hotel, a few miles down the Strip. In the restaurant patio downstairs, overlooking an atypically smogless city, Di Meola comes to a noontime interview wearing an Aspen Police cap. He drinks iced coffee and munches on sour grapes.

"Four years without a record," he shakes his head, "that's a crime." More than just a cheezy pun, the album title *Kiss My Axe* is, according to Di Meola, "directed at the music industry. I've encountered the most frustrating time of my life. I don't think I got half the respect that an unknown would have gotten. It was like I was over."

"What was going on was that the trend for signing artists was moving more towards easy listening. I could name names at major labels right down the line. The one true gentleman was Bruce Lundvall, who absolutely wanted it but unfortunately had to get



Di Meola in concert with Dino Saluzzi

DEBORAH EDELSTEIN

"It's great to have an I'll-show-you attitude. That's usually when you turn out the best stuff. I like music that comes from pain."

approval from above."

Was the struggle to get back in the ring what made him stronger in his resolve?

"Absolutely. It's great to have an I'll-show-you attitude. That's usually when you turn out the best stuff.

"I like music that comes from pain. The best jazz and classical music come from some kind of tragedy. Tango music is about tragedy. It's deep. Music that's on that one happy surface—that's not what life is about. It's just not about happy sax music." At that moment, as if on cue, a glib, pentatonic sax solo comes on the restaurant speaker. Irrked, he motions to the waiter, "Could you turn that off? We're doing an interview over here."

World Sinfonia is the delayed result of the tango bug which bit Di Meola in 1985, when he met *nuevo tango* master Astor Piazzolla—the composer and bandoneon player who blends tango, classical, and jazz elements freely. Throughout the '80s, the Argentine Piazzolla's stateside reputation rose dramatically, through the advocacy of Kip Hanrahan's American Clave label, recordings of his music by the Kronos Quartet, and other sources.

Di Meola befriended the *nuevo tango* king and talked of a collaboration. "His performances moved me. This kind of music moves you to tears. He explained to me that the origins of tango are Neapolitan, from Naples. That's where my parents are from. My first instrument was the accordion, and a lot of the music we heard in the house was derivative of that. So it's something that touches me on a deeper level. What I like about it is that it's a new form. It's not a

form that has been played to death like a lot of the Brazilian derivatives that so many of the North American jazz artists have tapped into already—myself included."

When Piazzolla had a debilitating stroke, the idea of calling Saluzzi came up, and a tour and recording project came about within the last year.

"He's gotten faster," Di Meola says of Saluzzi. "There's a lot of excitement in the group, with the percussionists. I've gotten better, too, as a result of playing with percussion. To be able to do the kind of syncopated things that we do is not a guitaristic kind of thing. But it's a side of me that's a very important side to show. My early tendencies were to play percussion and drums; that was more natural to me than playing guitar."

Born in Jersey City in 1954, Di Meola was inspired to pick up the guitar after seeing Elvis Presley on TV, at a time when the Ventures' twangy licks were the rage. From the age of eight, he began to take the instrument seriously, learning from respected local jazz guitar teacher Bob Aslanian. "He was amazing," Di Meola comments, "a very big inspiration to me.

"I went through all the standards and learned all the fundamentals at a very young age, even though the excitement for me was in pop and rock music, like most kids. It seems pretty natural how I would wind up playing the music I did. I had the background of jazz and the likings of more progressive music. Fusion was for me.

"When I saw RTF with Earl Klugh, I said, 'Wait a minute. That's for me.' He was in the band between Bill Connors and me, for about a week. I saw them in Boston when I was attending Berklee, and I said, 'What?'

Earl is fine; he does his thing, but it's so different than RTF. It was a dream come true because a week later, Earl had left the group and I got a tape—me playing in Barry Miles' group—to Chick."

That version of RTF ended—"prematurely," says Di Meola—in 1976, after two years, and when Di Meola was 21 years old. Stanley Clarke and Lenny White pursued a funk direction, Corea veered off into more elaborate settings, and Di Meola carried the progressive, high-energy fusion torch.

But noise fatigue eventually set in. "I exhausted the volume after so many years of that. That's why I've done so much acoustically in the last 10 years." Which is not to say he swore off the electric. "The electric guitar itself is a different animal. You can actually play more lyrically with an electric guitar, because it sings. You can't play more rhythmically, really. I think the acoustic guitar is more demanding. It separates the men from the boys. You can't cheat."

When scanning for external stimulus, Di Meola's ear doesn't necessarily go out to guitar players. "I'll listen to Keith [Jarrett] for inspiration, or Egberto Gismonti, or Piazzolla. If I could have some of that same kind of quality in my music I'd be very happy. That's what I'm trying to achieve, a certain depth in the music. I want to grow as an artist. The kiss of death is to have a hit single."

One trademark of Di Meola's playing is the premium he places on articulation, of picking each note clearly. "Different areas that you pick, different ways you hold your hand all change the tonality and color of the sound. Even though half the time I'm unconscious of what I'm doing, I think it's impor-

tant. I don't really rely on any gadgets to do that kind of thing. Good articulation is what allows people to *feel* those notes. I always liked that about flamenco music; you can feel the notes. It's not about trying to glide around those notes, slurp around those notes, sweet-pick, hammer-on, and all those gimmicks.

"It has to do with your certainty, too. Chick always liked that. He gave me a great compliment when I first joined the band. He said, 'You know, I really like the fact that you play with conviction, even if you make a mistake.' I like that, too. When you make a mistake, it's really out there—boom. I don't like guys who are afraid, and everything they play sounds afraid.

"A great speaker speaks out. That's what I'm about. Whether I make a mistake or not, it's going to be out there."

Kiss My Axe, Di Meola believes, is among his best work yet. "I really concentrated on the quality of the composition and on some unconventional ways to place harmony. Our ears are so accustomed to hearing certain changes, my aim was to avoid a conventional sound. At the same time, I wanted to retain a certain appeal. I don't want to turn people off. There are just twists everywhere that

make it interesting.

"The worst thing you could have is just a groove happening without any kind of letup, without change or release. The best jazz has release. That's the problem with a lot of the fusion music from years ago, and pop music—after a minute, you're fatigued. You

can't handle it after awhile. For the first minute, it's exciting, but if it doesn't let up, you have problems. You're not dealing with a vocalist who's telling a story. With instrumental music, I feel you really have to do some special things to make it exciting."

DB

EQUIPMENT

With *World Sinfonia*, Di Meola plays an Abe Wechter nylon-string acoustic guitar, an Ovation custom steel string (with Guild Phosphor Bronze strings, L350 gauge), a Lexicon reverb, TC Stereo Chorus, and Bag End monitors.

With the electric project, his main axes are a '58 Gibson 175 guitar and a '58 Les Paul with DiMarzio pickups. He uses Bag End monitors, a

Mesa Boogie amp, and an old 50-watt Marshall amp. He also uses custom Paul Reed Smith guitars in conjunction with Synclavier and Roland GR-50 synthesizers. String-wise, he uses Dean Markleys for both guitars, and insists on extra-heavy picks, custom-made by Manny's in New York City. "It's a latter sound," he says. "It's harder to use it, but you graduate to it."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

KISS MY AXE—Tomato R2 79751
WORLD SINFONIA—Tomato R2 79750
CASINO—Columbia CK-35277
CIELO E TERRA—EMI 46146
ELECTRIC RENDEZVOUS—Columbia CK-37654
ELEGANT GYPSY—Columbia CK-34461
LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN—Columbia CK-34074
SCENARIO—Columbia CK-38944
SOARING THROUGH A DREAM—EMI 46337
SPLENDIDO HOTEL—Columbia CJM CK-46117

TIRAMI SU—Manhattan 46995

TOUR DE FORCE "LIVE"—Columbia CK-38373

with John McLaughlin/Paco de Lucía

SAN FRANCISCO—Columbia CK-37152

PASSION, GRACE & FIRE—Columbia CK-38645

with Return To Forever

ROMANTIC WARRIOR—Columbia CJM CK 46109

WHERE HAVE I KNOWN YOU BEFORE—Polydor 825 206

NO MYSTERY—Polydor 827 149

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Bop Baroque The Blues

MODERN JAZZ QUARTET

By Michael Bourne



JOHN BOOZ

John Lewis, Milt Jackson, Connie Kay, and Percy Heath

Even when they're named on the albums, they're elegant. "The Modern Jazz Quartet is composed of John Lewis, piano; Milt Jackson, vibraharp; Percy Heath, bass; Connie Kay, drums." It's also a touch of class that Jackson's instrument is always called a vibraharp, not a vibraphone or downright vulgar *vibes*. And they look as

good as they play, always dressed with style, as if they're the MGQ. But that's only the character of the MJQ, an image of refinement. Even more elegant is the music they've created.

The Modern Jazz Quartet celebrates 40 years of music together in 1992. Lewis, Jackson, Heath, and the original drummer,

Kenny Clarke, formally incorporated as a business and a band in 1952. Clarke quit in 1955, but with Kay at the drums, the band played on. They'd all come from bebop. Jackson, Lewis, and Clarke, with Ray Brown the bassist, were the rhythm section of the Dizzy Gillespie big band, and for awhile they worked as the Milt Jackson Quartet. But once they became the Modern Jazz Quartet, with Heath the bassist and Lewis the musical director, the music became something else, beyond bebop, beyond even the ballads and the blues of jazz. Lewis directed the MJQ into a music as compositional as Ellington, as swinging as Basie, and a music as much inspired by Bach as the blues. "Vendome," by Lewis on the quartet's first recording, was definitive: a fugue that grooves. And soon they were playing this "chamber" jazz all around the world, often where only the most classical music resounded.

They played what was supposed to be "The Last Concert" at Lincoln Center in 1974. Yet even when disbanded, from time to time they gigged, and in 1981, for some concerts in Japan, the MJQ reunited. They'll travel the world that much more to celebrate the 40th anniversary.

Though they've all played great music with others, they'll all be best remembered for the music they played together—and, one by one, they talked about 40 years of the Modern Jazz Quartet.

Milt Jackson

Milt Jackson took bebop innovation to the vibraharp. Bags, as he's been called by friends ever since the Air Force (and supposedly due to the look that comes from tired eyes), worked with Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, Coleman Hawkins, Howard McGhee, Tadd Dameron, and Thelonious Monk. He joined Woody Herman in 1949 but soon was playing with

Dizzy's big band alongside John Lewis and Kenny Clarke. The Milt Jackson Quartet became the MJQ, but all through the years he's also worked as a bandleader. Recording many albums, including classic encounters with Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Wes Montgomery, Oscar Peterson, Count Basie, and Ray Charles, his newest recording is a *The Harem* (MusicMasters 5061).

Michael Bourne: *It seems as if there are parallel streams in the music of the MJQ. John is baroque and you're the blues.*

Milt Jackson: I guess you can say that. John writes a lot of that music. I write most of the blues things and ballads that we play. John is the musical director but there is no leader. That's had a lot to do with the longevity of the group.

MB: *Do you approach the baroque music in a different way from playing the blues?*

MJ: Having to read John's music was a challenge to me. I was never that good a reader, but once I've learned the notes on the paper I improvise on a baroque piece the same as I would on a jazz piece or a ballad.

MB: *It's sometimes said that you broke up the MJQ.*

MJ: Yeah. Everybody felt it was such a loss that the group broke up, yet I must say I didn't feel that way. We represented the epitome of everything, and most people, because of our appearance and the presentation, assumed we were four of the richest black cats who ever graced a stage. But that was the most bitter disappointment. When I saw all these other groups and singers making far more money than we would ever see, this was one reason I left.

I hadn't really planned on coming back, but in '81 they got this festival in Japan. John asked me if I'd do six or seven concerts. I said okay. I figured by '85 we could make enough money that we could retire again and each of us do what we want.

MB: *Have you also felt artistic wants?*

MJ: John is the musical director and the guiding force of what we do, so I don't really think about it. I've had to adopt this outlook so I don't get in his way and hamper what he wants to do. I feel it's necessary to do other things but it's hard to say what those other things are. Atlantic mentioned they'd like us to make an album with Roberta Flack. I have a feeling John wouldn't want something like that to overshadow the image. I would never want to destroy the image or the unique style of the quartet, but I feel we need to do other things to branch out. We've got to appeal to some of the commercial aspects of this business if we're going to make real money.

MB: *What keeps you and the quartet together?*

MJ: I enjoy the uniqueness of playing together, the way we can sound so precise

as one. That comes from long hours of practice and performing. Connie, I can always appreciate his really steady time. He's one of the most marvelous timekeepers. Percy is one of the steady bass players. John has such an extensive knowledge of jazz and classical. I like a form of playing he doesn't use a lot but I love it when he uses it, a locked-hands style of chords. It reminds me of a very modern Erroll Garner. And I enjoy John's writing.

This group together cannot be duplicated.

John Lewis

John Lewis is the pianist and musical director of the MJQ. He's composed much of the repertoire, especially the chamber-like pieces. He arranged and played with the Dizzy Gillespie big band of the latter '40s and worked with Charlie Parker while finishing his studies at the Manhattan School of Music. Apart from the quartet he's written music for movies, television, theatre, ballets, and orchestras, and taught music at Harvard and City College of New York. He's also the musical director of the American Jazz Orchestra and, with his wife, harpsichordist Mirjana Lewis, he's recorded several albums of Bach.

MB: *Is the music of the Modern Jazz Quartet as modern as it was 40 years ago?*

John Lewis: The name has nothing to do with it. It was an arbitrary name, the quickest name we could get cleared for a corporation in New York state. It had nothing to do with a description of the music.

MB: *Was it a consensus that you became the musical director?*

JL: That just happened naturally. I'd been an arranger. That's my forté.

MB: *That the quartet would play bebop and blues was obvious, but was it ever a problem directing the quartet into the baroque music?*

JL: It wasn't difficult. It was just something they hadn't done before. It was something nobody had done before.

MB: *Bach was meant to be improvised.*

JL: Yes. I wanted to use that. We had a wonderful experience in Leipzig last year. Leipzig is where Bach lived and died. We played at the famous concert hall and it was a very good performance. We played mostly music from the recording *Blues On Bach* [Atlantic 1652]. It was great to do that in the city where Bach worked.

MB: *You've played jazz many places where only classical music was played.*

JL: Jazz is an art. Art Tatum should've been a concert artist, and Coleman Hawkins.

MB: *You've also created, in your dress and your presentation, an elegant image.*

JL: I hope so. My model for that was Duke Ellington. That was the most elegant band I ever saw.

MB: *Ellington created music for the individuals in the band. What do you appreciate best about the individuals with you in the quartet?*

JL: Milt has the ability to improvise something for you at any time that you need it. He's always been marvelous that way. There's no "I can't do that." Milt has this other quality. He knows thousands of songs. It's incredible. That always makes a very rich bank for me to draw on.

Percy has always been a wonderful reader of the things that I've written for him. He gives time and works on things, and when he has them he has them very well.

Connie is one of the best musicians I know. I'm talking about his ears, what he hears. He knows what's right and what's wrong. I ask him many times what he thinks about things we're rehearsing. And also, his wonderful sense of what to do with drums. And he can play under the most adverse conditions.

MB: *Why did the quartet break up in 1974?*

JL: We took a vacation. That's what I call it. I did other things and the others who wanted to do other things, did. Connie made tons of records. Percy worked with his brothers. Milt worked a tremendous amount outside. It was very healthy. And, as far as I'm concerned, it was a short vacation. I guess we were destined to take it to this point.

Percy Heath

Percy Heath was a flier during World War II, and when he came home he bought a bass. He was gigging soon thereafter and first traveled with Howard McGhee. After settling in New York he played for everyone around the bebop scene and recorded countless albums with Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, and more. When the MJQ disbanded in 1974 he formed a popular band with his brothers, saxophonist Jimmy Heath and drummer Tootie Heath. Nowadays, when he isn't on a stage playing, he's on a boat fishing.

MB: *Where was the first gig the quartet played?*

Percy Heath: I think we had a gig on 4th Street, Chantilly or something like that, right behind where the Blue Note is now.

MB: *One story is that Ray Brown played bass with John, Milt, and Kenny Clarke in Dizzy's band and was supposed to play bass with the MJQ.*

PH: I was the bass player from the beginning of the Modern Jazz Quartet. I never replaced anybody! That story keeps getting out that John envisioned the quartet when they were with Dizzy. I don't know what he envisioned, but we sat in Milt Jackson's old gold Cadillac and decided the Modern Jazz

Quartet would be our name. We'd been working as the Milt Jackson Quartet. John said he had an idea to write some music for that formation but what he had in mind was a band with nobody's name on it. We became the Modern Jazz Society, Inc., of which the MJQ is the working entity.

MB: Originally you each fulfilled certain duties.

PH: John is the musical director. I used to do the money. Connie used to do the transportation. Milt used to do the vibraharp, period. I had to keep track of the money all over the world. It was a pain in the neck. Since the reorganization, I was relieved of that. Milt does the collecting now.

MB: What have you enjoyed most about these 40 years?

PH: I enjoy the music. It was a challenge to learn to play that stuff. I listen to those old records and I can't believe I did it. I was

a self-taught bass player. John would write what I couldn't play and I'd have to step up and play it. It took a long time for me to meet the challenges laid down by John. I've been in school for 40 years! I appreciate that very much.

I also appreciate the improvisation in the group. That's the mystique of the group, the improvisation with the themes and interludes that John has orchestrated. And in 40 years it's never been the same any two nights that I can remember. Besides, we like each other. We were friends even before I became a musician. That friendship and the magic happens when the four of us play. It's not a rhythm section with soloists. It's like four different lines up there, contrapuntal lines.

And, of course, we have an audience of three generations of people who come to listen to us. That's why it's lasted. If nobody

came to hear us, we wouldn't be together tomorrow.

MB: The MJQ is unique, but isn't it curious that other musicians haven't come along and played music like this?

PH: When we first went to Japan we heard a quartet play the first two albums we made. They played the music identically, including the mistakes!

Connie Kay

Connie Kay joined the MJQ in 1955. He'd worked as a house drummer at Minton's and for several years played with Lester Young. He'd also become a regular on r&b sessions for Atlantic—though it's almost unbelievable that the exquisite percussionist of the MJQ was also the drummer on "Shake, Rattle And Roll"



The Musical Director

MITCHELL SEIDEL

OUT OF THE TRADITION

Forty years ago the group was incorporated as "The Modern Jazz Quartet." Three years later, in 1955, not a few fans were startled to learn from the band's musical director, pianist John Lewis, that they adhered to musical principles that were established in the swing era.

"Yes, that is right," Lewis recently reaffirmed. "Our inspiration was the Count Basie Orchestra of the '30s and '40s. Their ensemble playing sounded so spontaneous, and the integration of those great soloists with what the rest of the band was doing felt so right, it was like a small group of people conversing. They

made their big band sound like a small one. We tried to make our small band feel like a big one."

It was in his native Albuquerque that Lewis first heard the Count Basie Orchestra's greatest soloist, tenor saxophonist Lester Young. "It was in 1929 or '30," Lewis recalled. "Yes, that was when he was playing in his family's band, led by his father. He sounded special, like himself, even then, well before his time with Basie."

Lewis said that Young influenced him pianistically, citing his own "single-note, linear solos" which "imply the harmonies." Anyone who doubts the influence

of Young and Basie on Lewis should hear Lewis' sensitive and inspiring orchestral accompaniment to Young on their records of 1950 and '51.

Yet the post-bop MJQ did sound modern, and it sounded distinctly like itself both individually and collectively just as all jazz players and bands are supposed to. Essentially the Modern Jazz Quartet developed an esthetic that depended on relaxed time and open space. They achieved a seamless balance between formal composition and improvisation. As great as the solo work became, they really did function like sections of an orchestra, often playing in counterpoint, and always swinging with magnificent collective élan.

If the immediate influence was the Count Basie orchestra in its classic period, the indirect influence was, as drummer Jo Jones of that band has indicated, Louis Armstrong. The flexible flow of the Basie All-American Rhythm Section was the result of a conscious effort to emulate Armstrong's melodic rhythm, his phrasing, according to Jones.

And so, the Modern Jazz Quartet reminds us that jazz was modern before Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and it was possible to innovate on the basis of the jazz tradition by making a kind of counter movement to what the alto saxophonist and trumpeter had wrought on the basis of the same tradition. Like all major achievements in the history of jazz, the music of the MJQ reflects the interaction of imagination with awareness of the tradition which is being innovated upon. In short, the Modern Jazz Quartet shows that it is possible to preserve through change.

—Bob Davis

by Joe Turner and the earliest hits of the Clovers, the Drifters, Ruth Brown, and Ray Charles. Unlike the others in the quartet, he's never worked as a bandleader, but he's played on more records than the others combined. When not working with the MJQ he's played with Benny Goodman, Paul Desmond, Roberta Flack, Van Morrison, the Manhattan Transfer, the Soprano Summit, and John Lewis.

MB: How'd you join the quartet?

Connie Kay: I went down to Birdland to see the quartet. I liked the quartet. They were closing that night and Sonny Stitt was playing the next week. I told Monte Kay [the MJQ's late manager and a co-founder of Birdland] if Sonny didn't have a band I was available. Monte called me, maybe six in the morning, and asked me if I'd like to make a gig. I said, yeah. I thought it was with Sonny but Monte said the quartet. Klook [Kenny Clarke] quit and they were playing a one-nighter in Washington and two weeks in Cleveland. I assumed they just hired me in a hurry. And here I am, still.

MB: You came from swing and r&b, not from playing baroque fugues. Was it difficult to adjust your style to this chamber jazz?

CK: When I joined the quartet we weren't playing that much in that style, maybe "Vendome." Most of it was straightahead. I was still feeling my way around at that time. I still hadn't come to a point where I had a style. I knew I couldn't play like I played with Lester. This was subtle music, but it was warm music. My mind was set to play what was happening. I knew what we were playing was good music and the people liked it. I liked playing the little suites and fugues. Once we got them together, they swung like everything else.

People ask me if I feel restrained, but I play the way I feel. John knows what I can do and tells me what he wants. There's a certain beat I started playing called the "lope." So sometimes when he writes a piece he'll tell me to play the "lope." I don't have any restrictions. I can play anything I want to play as long as it fits with what's happening.

MB: After all those r&b records you made, being back with Atlantic is a homecoming for you.

CK: I got the quartet the gig with Atlantic. [Label co-founder] Ahmet Ertegun asked me if I thought the quartet would be interested in making some records. Atlantic was thinking about going into jazz, and we'd finished our commitment with Prestige. John said, "I don't know. That's a rock & roll label." But after a while, we went with Atlantic. We were their first jazz artists.

MB: Why does this band endure?

CK: The money's nice. It wasn't nice in the beginning. It never was what it should've



HYOU VIELZ

been. It was a shame to be in a group that everybody said was great but all we'd hear about was all these others making millions. That was a drag. But we set it up so we were paid every week whether we worked or not. It was comfortable. I wasn't hurting for anything.

What keeps us together is the music,

that's number one. I like John's music and I like the way Milt and Percy play, but for me when it's over it's over. I think that's one of the reasons we've stayed together. Each of us has our own thing. We don't even hang out after the gig. When we're not working we might not call each other or see each other until we're at the airport. **DB**

FAVORITE RECORDINGS

Atlantic Records is celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Modern Jazz Quartet with a four-CD box, *MJQ40* (82330—see "Reviews" p. 39). It includes 54 tracks, from 1952's "Vendome" through "Rockin' In Rhythm" from 1988. Most of the tracks were recorded for Atlantic, but the collection also includes five of the earliest pieces recorded for Prestige and other music recorded for United Artists, Philips, Finesse, Little David, and Pablo—though none from Apple. Among the rarities are four tracks from a 1966 concert in Japan and two unreleased pieces, "Blues In The Bergerie" and "The Trip" from 1971. The MJQ is joined on several tracks by chamber musicians or an orchestra and the collection also features recordings with guest artists: "Fugue For Music Inn" and "Fun" with Jimmy Giuffrè, "Bag's Groove" with Sonny Rollins, "La Cantatrice" with Diahann Carroll, "Fugue In A Minor" and "One Note Samba" with Laurindo Almeida, "Alexander's Fugue" with the Swingle Singers, and "Green-sleeves" with Paul Desmond. The MJQ dedicates the collection to their late producer, Nesuhi Erte-

gun

Asked to pick their favorite from the 47 albums they've recorded, the individuals showed a remarkable unanimity. Connie Kay picked *European Concert* (Atlantic 2-603), recorded in Scandinavia during the spring of 1960. "It has almost the whole style of the quartet," said Kay. "We played straight. We played fugues. And everybody was floating." *MJQ40* includes "I Remember Clifford" and "Round Midnight" from those concerts. Percy Heath picked *The Last Concert* (Atlantic 2-909), recorded at Lincoln Center in New York on November 25, 1974. "I think that was the culmination of the whole 22 years we were together," said Heath. "We played almost everything in the repertoire. We played 3½ hours. They just kept bringing us back." *MJQ40* includes "Skating In Central Park," "The Jasmine Tree," "The Legendary Profile," and "Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise" from that night. Milt Jackson also picked *The Last Concert*, and John Lewis picked both.

—M.B.

EQUIPMENT

John Lewis plays a Steinway piano. Milt Jackson plays a 1937 Deagan Imperial virbraharp and owns another made in 1939. He plays mallets originally made by Fred Albright. Percy Heath plays an Italian bass created by Rogeri in Cremona almost 300 years ago. Connie Kay plays Sonor Highlights drums, with a 19-inch bass, 14 × 14-inch floor tom, 12 × 12-inch side tom,

piccolo snare, with calf heads made for him. He uses Avedis Zildjian cymbals: an 18-inch sizzle, 17-inch ride, 16-inch flat-top, and 14-inch hi-hats, plus a 15-inch crash by Sabian. He uses JC Combo sticks with the smallest beads. Other percussion includes woodblocks, triangles, finger cymbals, Crotale cymbals tuned to E-flat or G, and a belltree.

FREE JAZZ

A COLLECTIVE IMPROVISATION

BY THE ORNETTE COLEMAN DOUBLE QUARTET



STEREO

ATLANTIC 1364
FULL DYNAMIC FREQUENCY SPECTRUM

30 Years Of Free

Thirty years ago this month, DB's reviewers passed judgment on Ornette Coleman's album *Free Jazz*. Pete Welding gave it ***** while John A. Tynan gave it none. Bassist Charlie Haden played on the session, critics John McDonough and John Litweiler have radically different assessments of the music's influence. What follows are Haden's, McDonough's, and Litweiler's accounts of the music and movement surrounding the creation of *Free Jazz*.

The Making Of Free Jazz by Charlie Haden

When I first met Ornette Coleman in 1957, he told me the way that he was hearing music was to improvise on the feeling and the inspiration of a song rather than on the chord structure. I told him that I had been hearing the same thing before I met him, but every time I tried to do that people would become very upset with me. And he said, "They used to throw me off bandstands. If they would just listen to what's happening, they would understand that we are actually playing the song."

There are so many different ways to improvise. It's all about honesty and beauty and communicating beautiful music. And how you go about it is what's inside you. As Ornette told me, you can take any standard song, your inspiration from that song, and play from that inspiration and spontaneously create a new chord structure as you're playing.

When we arrived in New York in November of '59, we went into rehearsal at the Five Spot. Ornette had been writing some music for a double quartet: he wanted to

use two drummers, two bass players, two trumpets, and two saxophones. He was already thinking about who to use as horn players, including [cornetist/trumpeter] Don Cherry, and [drummer Ed] Blackwell and Billy [Higgins], having played with them before, and [the late bassist] Scotty LaFaro, my closest friend in life. Sometimes Scotty would go to rehearsals that I did with Ornette and listen; although, he told me on the side, "I don't know if I can play this music or not because I love playing chord changes." And I said, "That's what we're doing!" And he said, "No you're not!" And I said, "Yes we are!" Sometimes when I wasn't available, Scotty would play for me.

Ornette told me that he had called Freddie Hubbard and Eric Dolphy to do the other horns. It wasn't a surprise that he would call Eric, but it was a surprise to me that he would call Freddie Hubbard, because Freddie was really a bebop trumpet player. He had spoken to Freddie and heard him play and he thought that he was one of the only other trumpet players that was open-minded enough to do this thing that Ornette wanted

to do.

If I remember correctly, I don't think we actually had a formal rehearsal for the *Free Jazz* session until we got to the recording studio at Atlantic Records. [Nesuhi Ertegun, producer for, among others, the Modern Jazz Quartet, produced *Free Jazz* along with Coleman's other Atlantic titles.] Their old studio was real small; I remember we went in and went over the music one time and then recorded it [on December 21, 1960]. We did two takes of everything, and the best take was released as the Double Quartet record *Free Jazz* on Atlantic with the Jackson Pollock painting. Later, about 15 or 20 years later, they issued the second take on another album [in 1971 and '81, on *Ornette Coleman/Twins* and *Atlantic Jazz-lore*, respectively].

Ornette's reasoning behind the Double Quartet doing this kind of album was that with more horns things could open up even more than with just the Quartet, and become even freer if the horns were playing the right music; as far as the composition was concerned, that would give them a take-off

point for improvisation. And he thought it through with that instrumentation, including whatever instrument Eric chose to play. Eric ended up bringing just his bass clarinet and didn't play alto. As it was, everyone was open to discovery, experimenting, and playing free. There was a discussion where Ornette said, "Just listen, and your roles will come to you. Somebody will have a certain role, and then that role will be taken by somebody else and you'll have a different role. And the double instrumentation can free each player up to do what they want to do at different times."

The impact of what is called avant garde jazz and free jazz was very very strong when we came to New York and opened at the Five Spot. It was more than a controversy because a lot of people became angry, including the press, and a lot of musicians were very upset, saying things they took back later on after they discovered that the music was really valid. The impact in that time period was tremendous, similar to the impact that Bird and Diz brought to 52nd Street, the same kind of feeling.

In the wake of *Free Jazz*, there have been a number of new groups, like the Jazz Composers Orchestra, Archie Shepp's band, the AACM, Art Ensemble of Chicago, Cecil Taylor, the direction John Coltrane eventually went—including a date with Don, Eddie, and myself [*The Avant-Garde* (Atlantic)], Sonny Rollins hiring Don Cherry and Billy Higgins [*On The Outside* (Bluebird)]. There's John Scofield; Pat Metheny; and Keith Jarrett, in the late '60s and '70s, when he hired Dewey Redman and me, writing some tunes by and for Ornette; Old And New Dreams; Geri Allen; the Liberation Music Orchestra; Lincoln Center presenting the music of Dewey Redman and Ornette this past November. Ornette has influenced almost every musician whose making any kind of contribution to the art form.

In essence, the ongoing spirit of the music is to play and improvise with an energy that's different from the traditional jazz energy, to create something that's never been before in a way that's going to change the world and is something that you do with your whole life's energy, that you do on another level, a level above chord changes. Actually, any great musician that's made any kind of impact on the art form, like Coleman Hawkins, Sonny Rollins, or Bud Powell, that's the way they approached improvisation. Bird's approach to improvisation, risking his life with every note he played, was to create something that's never been before, on a level that's way above the normal level of life. That's what Ornette's music is about, that lasting way of improvising, that desperation to create something that's never been before.

Ornette and I used to talk about when you look at music, play it as if you never

heard music before, creating it for the first time. As for the audience, they know they are going to be challenged, and that they're going to have an experience they'll never forget.

Failed Experiment

by John McDonough

When Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* came out in 1961, the war between the partisans of bop and swing had been over for about a decade. But I think those memories of the '40s influenced the critical response to free music, generally, and to *Free Jazz* in particular. By stonewalling bop, only to see it become the dominant voice in jazz, conservatism as a critical position destroyed its credibility. And this, among other factors, predisposed the next generation of critics, I think, toward a sloppy, anything-goes, open-mindedness.



Albert Ayler

You can't get more open-minded (or empty-headed) than Bill Mathieu, who wrote this about Albert Ayler's "Ghost": "To an astonishing degree it commands the suspension of critical judgement and [presents] itself . . . to the listener on a level above quality, above personal like or dislike. It simply is what it is [from *DB's Music 1966*]." He gave it five stars and never had the vaguest idea why. Free jazz apparently meant freedom from critics as well.

No critic wants to be caught on the wrong side of history. And many who were obliged to stand up and be counted on free jazz knew well that to oppose a new idea that ultimately prevails is to reserve space for oneself in the next edition of Nicolas Slo-

nimsky's *Lexicon Of Musical Invective* (Univ. of Washington Press), that famous collection of contemporary but distinctly unprophetic snipes against the likes of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Chopin. But what to make of free jazz? Were Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, and all the others charlatans or geniuses? Jazz had never produced a music in which fakes could move so easily and undetected among real musicians.

In trying to find a reference point where none existed, some artists made radicalism itself an esthetic in the '60s. The problem was critics jumped the gun and gave the resulting music the benefit of much doubt too easily. They honored its raw, unprocessed "energy" and "passion" as if these elements constituted artistic achievements. They proclaimed its importance before the "experiment" was done. Their writing reflected a romantic faith in the concept of progress. Jazz was said to have "progressed" from swing to bop with a branch into cool, then through hard-bop and modes, and ultimately to "freedom," the implication being that each step produced something more "advanced" than the one before, as if jazz were a metaphor for the American dream.

But free jazz contained a more subversive metaphor, namely that even progress has limits and that beyond those limits looms an abyss of disintegration. The irony is that jazz did not *progress* into freedom. It *retrogressed* into it. It was not an advancement of musical law. It was a rejection of it. Total freedom cast jazz backward into a primal lawlessness, an emotional state of nature; and in so doing reminded us that all progress is not necessarily progress.

I first heard *Free Jazz* around 1965 and thought it was a gag. When I realized it wasn't, I listened with bewildered fascination, trying to find some point in the experiment. Over the years I came back to it from time to time, thinking that fusion or what little rock I heard might make it sound suddenly accessible or even conservative. I'm listening to it now as I write. And still it seems without cohesion, even hostile. Thirty years have passed now. *Free Jazz* is itself now history. Has history repeated itself? Has free jazz prevailed as bop did? I think not.

The systems of free jazz, if they existed, were too insubstantial to sustain a critical mass, like those of the Woodstock Nation and other social experiments in freedom of the period. By disposing with form, the freedom movement took its cue from Milton Babbitt: "Who cares if you listen?" Free ensembles like the AACM and the Globe Unity Orchestra were not jazz bands; they were and remain research & development labs. I have no problems with experimentation—as long as the process is not confused with the result.

In 30 years, the trajectory of free jazz as

a whole seems to have jumped only from the Five Spot to the Knitting Factory without ever escaping the smell of sawdust or the crutch of subsidy. I say this because there comes a point in the life of every *avant garde* when it must either put up or shut up. Free jazz has not made that leap. It led up to a dead end because, ultimately, it was more ideology than music. It may be that any genre as self-defined and unaccountable as free jazz lies beyond the reach of critical affirmation or reproach. I'm not sure about that. But I do know that lasting artistic value is not given down by the gods. It rises up through an informed cultural consensus involving musicians, critics, and the public. And no amount of critical affirmative action on behalf of free jazz has made this happen. I don't know how big the free jazz audience is today, nor would I guess. Besides, to argue over numbers would be to submit art to a kind of pebecite.

Whatever its size, though, it remains a counterculture, separate and apart from the main body of jazz activity. This is why it has not had a major impact in music education programs or on the generation of musicians who are now inheriting the assets of jazz history. Bop and hard-bop remain the axis on which modernism still spins in jazz and people listen. Free jazz, with its ideological subtexts of black liberation, third world primitivism, and spiritualism, continues to exist in the outer world of 20th century eccentrics.

Thank You, Ornette!

by John Litweiler

We all know that you intended the name *Free Jazz* for one of your compositions, not for the new jazz idiom you created. And we all know that you had no intention of starting a revolution in jazz when you first recorded in 1958, and said, "I believe music is really a free thing . . .," anymore than Louis Armstrong intended to start a revolution in 1926. Nevertheless, those revolutions happened, and jazz is so much the richer for them.

Why did your music have such an impact? Why did the last revolution in jazz begin with you, rather than with, for instance, Lennie Tristano or Bob Graettinger or others a few years earlier? Because you *had* to create music your way—based on melodic lines, rather than on chord changes—in order to express what you had to express. "I believe jazz should try to express more kinds of feeling than it has up to now," you said, and the rare breadth and depth of emotion and insight that you offered were the best possible demonstration. Jazz' uniqueness, above all its other features, lies in its implicit



Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry

insistence that each jazz artist must, as Von Freeman says, "Express yourself"—not someone else's ideas, not what a code or rule book or tradition demands, but *yourself*. What was most immediately useful about your vision was the freedom of choice it gave other musicians. Now they realized they had the option of playing outside chord changes, if they chose.

Of course, none of this was the least bit experimental—as Don Cherry pointed out, your teachings were "a profound system," and the young Chicago musicians who discovered their own voices within Muhal Richard Abrams' bands learned from your and John Coltrane's and Albert Ayler's discoveries. These Chicagoans were a humanizing force in free jazz—they brought back blues, the sounds of traditional jazz and swing, long-ignored instruments such as the violin and clarinet, and self-invented and found instruments. At least as important, they were creating new extended forms and even restructuring the jazz ensemble. Rhythm section-less wind groups and unaccompanied horn solos appeared. Meanwhile, after you and some friends toured Europe, a generation of musicians in England, Germany, exiled South Africans, and others discovered they could join their own native musical heritages with the jazz tradition. Why, free jazz even inspired much that occurred in the final developments of bop—that is, modal jazz and fusion music.

You certainly altered the mainstream of jazz. There is a main line, or mainstream, of jazz development that stretches from Buddy Bolden and James Reese Europe down to the very latest works by Edward Wilkerson and Dennis Gonzalez. Before you came along, Ornette, a very few individuals (most obviously, Armstrong and Parker) and idioms (early jazz, swing, bop, and their extensions) dominated jazz. Even though you and some others have exerted a very wide influence indeed, so many separate idioms have appeared—yours, Cecil Tay-

lor's, Ayler's, the Art Ensemble of Chicago's, free improvisation, and on and on—that no single individual or idiom dominates; it's as if the mainstream of jazz has become a delta, like the mainstreams of the other Western arts near the end of the 20th century.

It's no accident that in your wake, jazz has begun to receive its appropriate respect as a fine art, often with the same kind of foundation and government support that symphonic composers and orchestras receive. After all, you received the first Guggenheim fellowship for jazz composition, and you led the way in bringing jazz into the concert halls and rooms, large and small, of today, just as bop took jazz out of dance venues and put it into nightclubs.

And now in 1992, there is a wonderful wealth of music to be heard, from the throb of your electric rhythm tribe Prime Time and the free fusion of Ronald Shannon Jackson and Blood Ulmer to the down-home romps of Henry Threadgill's Very Very Circus, to the bawdy humor of Lester Bowie and Ray Anderson and George Lewis to the wild humor of Hal Russell's NRG Ensemble and the quirky humor of John Zorn, to the intense thematic investigations of Roscoe Mitchell and the freewheeling blowing of the Rova and World Saxophone quartets, to the post-Monk evolution of Steve Lacy and Mal Waldron, to the intense, spiky interplay of the Evan Parker Trio and the goofy satire of Willem Breuker, to the operas of Anthony Davis and Leo Smith, the symphonic works of yourself and Anthony Braxton—like you, he touches all bases—and the dense sonatas-upon-sonatas of Cecil Taylor, to the lyricism of Bobby Bradford and the fire of Paul Smoker, to the Latin American folk jazz of Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra and the West African jazz of Pierre Dorge's New Jungle Orchestra, to the compositional mastery of Carla Bley and Muhal Richard Abrams and blues-stomping Edward Wilkerson with his 8 Bold Souls, to the pastoral harmonies of Pat Metheny and the thoroughly urban harmonies of McCoy Tyner, to the grand scope of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, the grand ambitions of Keith Jarrett, and many other, different directions.

When Claude Debussy, at the turn of the last century, said, "There are no more schools of music, and the main business of the musician today is to avoid any kind of outside influences," he was prophesying jazz today. None of this would have happened if you hadn't had your own vision, Ornette, and if you hadn't taught those young Los Angeles musicians in the 1950s how to create a kind of music that hadn't been played before. After the breath of life you gave it, jazz has been a living, changing, and, yes, growing music for the last 30 years and more. For all these free musics, then, a mighty large chorus of voices thanks you, Ornette Coleman.

DB

Key

Excellent	★★★★★
Very Good	★★★★
Good	★★★
Fair	★★
Poor	★

Star

Garbarek/ Vitous/Erskine

STAR—ECM 849 849-2: *Star*; *Jumper*; *Lamenting*; *Anthem*; *Roses For You*; *Clouds In The Mountain*; *Snowman*; *The Music Of My People*. (42:26)

Personnel: Jan Garbarek, soprano, tenor saxophone (cuts 3, 6, 7); Miroslav Vitous, double bass; Peter Erskine, drums.

★★★★★

Here we go again. Another austere, cathedral-like Manfred Eicher ECM production made in the dead of another one of those Norwegian winters (a year ago). Yes, Eicher's all-too-familiar sound is heard augmenting (encouraging?) the already haunting saxophones of Jan Garbarek. It doesn't help that both Vitous and Erskine advance this sort of thing with their porous, spare lines and slight punctuations. Who needs another snowball on a lonely winter night?

Well, having heard all three men in different contexts, and with the exception of Erskine's occasional stints with the Abercrombie trio and Bass Desires, I'd have to say that Garbarek, Vitous, and Erskine have been able to bring out the best in each other here. For Garbarek, *Star*'s approach is jazzier, more ethereal and less earthy than last year's *I Took Up The Runes*. There are even instances on three tunes where, when stating the melody, he somehow uses electronics. The effect is to lift the music heavenward.

In an all-originals program (Jan penning the lilting title track, Miroslav with four, including the bouncy "Jumper," Peter with two, "Snowman" being a tripartite offering), there is a simple beauty to the melodies. Listen to "Star" and "Roses For You," with Jan's soaring soprano anchored by Miroslav's acoustic, conversational bass lines, a style reminiscent of Vitous' days with Weather Report minus the funk. His "Clouds In The Mountain"—a tune built upon a six-note melody line and sug-

gesting a quiet, mountain snowfall—seems to be a play on his 1969 composition, "Mountain In The Clouds." As for Mr. Erskine, I must confess, if someone were to blindfold test me, Peter's drums might get confused with Jack DeJohnette's, the drum tuning and cymbal work amid the bass-drum and tom-tom accents recalling DeJohnette's '70s dates with Garbarek, Bill Connors, and Ralph Towner. And yet, Erskine plays it all with finesse, impeccable taste, knowing just when to comment and when to lay out.

Maybe what makes this album work best for me is its take on the jazz esthetic: the intimate, conversational style that nurtures personal expression, communication, and spirited improvisation. It's a delight to hear talents such as these come together in a spirit of "gladness all around," listening intently to each other. Simply put by Erskine, "The music reveals itself as this newly formed trio plays." A warm offering for those cold winter nights. (reviewed on CD)

—John Ephland



Bill Bruford

ALL HEAVEN BROKE LOOSE—Editions EG 2103-2: *Hotel Splendour*; *Forget-Me-Not*; *Candles Still Flicker In Romania's Dark*; *Pigalle*; *Temple Of The Winds*; *Nerve*; *Splashing Out*; *All Heaven Broke Loose*. (50:14)

Personnel: Bruford, electric, acoustic, and chordal drums; Django Bates, keyboards, Eb Peck Horn, trumpet; Iain Ballamy, saxophones; Tim Harries, acoustic, electric bass.

★★★★★

After two decades of pioneering progressive rock and fusion, drummer Bill Bruford began exploring a new direction in *Earthworks*, the band he formed in 1986 with a crew of young lions on the cutting edge of Britain's jazz scene. Since then, his playing has opened up considerably. In the more loosely defined context of *Earthworks*, Bruford is able to play with the kind of flexibility and nuance that simply wouldn't work in the more bombastic, beat-conscious contexts of Genesis, Yes, King Crimson, or his own late-'70s fusion band.

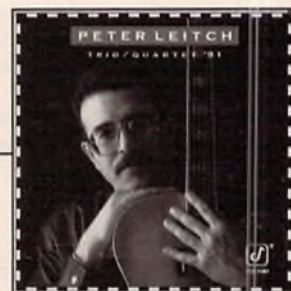
On *All Heaven Broke Loose*, his third *Earthworks* album, the Paul Motian-Jack DeJohnette influence is more pronounced than ever. His sparse approach and delicate touch on "Candles Still Flicker In Romania's Dark," a somber Django Bates ballad reminiscent of Carla Bley's work, is like a new suit of clothes for the onetime fusioner. His quick, light cymbal work on "Forget-Me-Not" and the title cut is another departure, while his open-kit playing on the turbulent, free section of "Splashing Out" pro-

vides some of the most intriguing moments here.

But this album is not just about drumming. A bulk of the compositions—about half are truly evocative and challenging, the other half merely clever—are built around the strong sax voice of Iain Ballamy, a major talent on the U.K. scene and certainly a new face to watch for in the '90s. Ballamy scorches with soprano on top of the churning North African groove of "Pigalle." His tenor kills on "Temple Of The Winds," a tune in which producer David Torn's knack with feedback loop technology comes heavily into play. Torn's imaginative use of delays and reverbs here creates a droning texture that serves as a kind of hypnotic foil for Ballamy's robust horn. And on "Splashing Out," a nod to the UK's acid jazz scene, the gutsy tenor player is underscored by Bruford's slamming house beats, which might sound right at home on a C+C Music Factory record.

The most provocative moments come on "Nerve," an edgy bit of tricky-metered, high-tech funk that comes off as the U.K.'s answer to M-Base. That's just one of the many hats that Bruford and his fellow chameleons wear on this wildly diverse package. (reviewed on CD)

—Bill Milkowski



Peter Leitch

TRIO/QUARTET '91—Concord Jazz 4480: *Britty Ditty*; *Sweet And Lovely*; *Tones For Joan's Bones*; *All Too Soon*; *After The Morning*; *Inner Urge*; *Spring Is Here*; *Borrowed Time*; *Winter's Tale*; *The Song Is You*; *When Will I See You Again*. (68:05)

Personnel: Leitch, guitar; Nell Swainson, bass; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums; John Swana, trumpet, flugelhorn (cuts 1, 5, 11).

★★★★½

EXHILARATION—Reservoir 118: *Exhilaration*; *'Round Midnight*; *Trinkle Tinkle*; *But Not For Me*; *Played Twice*; *How Deep Is The Ocean*; *Pannonica*; *Slugs In The Far East*. (54:44)

Personnel: Leitch, guitar; Pepper Adams, baritone sax; John Hicks, piano; Ray Drummond, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

★★★★★

Canadian-born guitarist Peter Leitch has been honing his skills in the field of straightahead jazz guitar for many years. His sudden burst of prominence, and his tag as an "emerging great," has more to do with the shifting environment around him than with any new personal plateau. The increased appetite for clean-toned, fat-body guitar and clean-tooled, imaginative lines puts a player of Leitch's strengths in a new forefront. On two new releases from

Leitch (*Exhilaration* being a CD reissue), the guitarist displays a formidable musicality that has to do with his synergistic points of reference. His phrasing defies guitaristic clichés and reflects a horn player's flexibility; and his respect for straight-ahead jazz tradition doesn't preclude fresh ideas.

This much is clear from the Leitch-penned title cut on *Exhilaration*, an uptempo, hard-bop tune featuring pianist John Hicks and Pepper Adams' growling honk on bari sax—a low-end counterpoint to Leitch's lines. The album is highlighted by the all-too-rare reading by a guitarist of Thelonious Monk tunes—four of them, including a furious "Trinkle Tinkle."

Trio/Quartet '91 is an even more impressive and well-rounded project, with Leitch basking in the open air of a trio setting (apart from the three tracks with trumpeter John Swana). Drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith shows again his surefire instincts, in both the support role and with a memorable solo on Joe Henderson's "Inner Urge." Leitch takes off on the standard themes of Chick Corea's "Tones For Joan's Bones" and "The Song Is You," but his own compositions—the icily elegant "Winter's Tale" and the oblique bossa, "When Will I See You Again"—are customized vehicles for expression.

Leitch gets around on the fretboard, but, more importantly, he also gets something said on the instrument. (reviewed on CD)

—Josef Woodard



Dave Grusin

THE GERSHWIN CONNECTION—GRP 2005: *THAT CERTAIN FEELING*; *SOON*; *FASCINATING RHYTHM*; *PRELUDE II*; *HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON?*; *THERE'S A BOAT DAT'S LEAVIN' SOON FOR NEW YORK*; *MY MAN'S GONE NOW*; *MAYBE*; *OUR LOVE IS HERE TO STAY*; *'S WONDERFUL*; *I GOT PLENTY O' NUTHIN'*; *NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT*; *MEDLEY: BESS YOU IS MY WOMAN*!! *LOVES YOU PORGY*. (80:06)

Personnel: Grusin, keyboards; Dave Weckl, (cuts 2, 3, 5, 7-9), Sonny Emory (4, 6, 11), drums; John Patitucci, bass; Eddie Daniels, clarinet; Chick Corea, piano (10); Eric Marienthal, soprano sax (8); Sal Marquez, trumpet (7, 9); Gary Burton, vibes (3, 8); Lee Ritenour, guitar (9, 11).

★ ★ ★

For the first 1 minute and 12 seconds of *The Gershwin Connection*, we get an atypical gust of history in the form of George Gershwin's own piano roll version of "That Certain Feeling," circa 1925. From there on out, there's little mistaking that the music here was made in the 1990s, at a time when GRP is the heavyweight jazz label and the name Dave Grusin is syn-

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ON COLUMBIA

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onymous with clean-machined piano playing and film scoring.

Any jazz musician with a modicum of standards identification has a Gershwin connection. Gershwin was the rarest of musical forces in our century, perched between pop, jazz, and classical modes. He had sure Tin Pan Alley instincts of what made a solid pop song and intuited the beauty of jazz chord substitutions. He died at age 38 in 1937, and left a little kingdom of great songs.

Several of those songs are included in this valentine to the Gershwin oeuvre. Thankfully, the overplayed "Summertime" is not among them. On "How Long Has This Been Going On?" Grusin's tack is to break the melody up into syncopated accents, meted out by the ever-supple team of Weckl and Patitucci. "There's A Boat" and "I Got Plenty O' Nuthin'" have been pretty well Grusin-ized, rendered in softly funky terms. Chick Corea and Grusin politely swap licks on the theme of "S Wonderful." The album winds down, sans rhythm section, for a pleasant solo reading of "Nice Work If You Can Get It" and a soupyly orchestrated medley from *Porgy And Bess*.

Polished to a fault, well-intentioned, and stocked with gleaming performances, the album still fails the innate challenge of pushing Gershwin into another creative realm. The best that can be said for *The Gershwin Connection* is that it is nice work. (reviewed on CD)

—Josef Woodard



Earl Klugh

EARL KLUGH TRIO, VOLUME ONE—Warner Bros. 26750-4: *Bewitched*; *Days Of Wine And Roses*; *How Inensitive*; *Spartacus*; *I Remember April*; *What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?*; *Say A Little Prayer For You*; *Night And Day*; *Lonely Girl*; *Too Marvelous For Words*; *One Note Samba*.

Personnel: Klugh, acoustic guitar; Ralphe Armstrong, bass; Gene Dunlap, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

Byrd lives! Charlie Byrd, that is.

This program of lush jazz standards, sambas, and appealing pop melodies harkens back to some of Byrd's best trio work from the '60s on Riverside. Stripped of the slick, high-tech trappings that permeated past Klugh albums, this sparse offering focuses on the purity of nylon-string guitar, a soothing sound

that is perfectly suited for EZ-listening, lite-jazz radio stations.

Klugh will probably get tons of airplay in those circles with his smooth rendition of the Hal David-Burt Bacharach ditty, "I Say A Little Prayer For You," and the buoyant waltz, "Love Thorne From Spartacus." But this album is more than just hip dentist office music. It's also about interplay and improvisation. Bassist Ralphe Armstrong and drummer Gene Dunlap are old friends, having grown up with Klugh in Detroit. The three show a high degree of empathy on tender offerings like "What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life?" and "Lonely Girl" while their spirits bubble over on upbeat numbers like "Bewitched" and Cole Porter's "Night And Day." And nothing I've ever heard in any dentist office swings as hard as their "I'll Remember April." Klugh's finger-picking facility and improvising chops are well-known. The surprise here is Armstrong, a former fusion bassist who used to tear it up on electric with the likes of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Jean Luc Ponty, and Frank Zappa. His big-toned upright bass is a formidable presence here as he grooves hard and walks steady in the tradition of Ray Brown.

Given that it's subtitled *Volume One*, we're probably in store for more of the same from this organic, easy-swinging trio. And that's good news for guitar fans. I'll take this over *Soda Fountain Shuffle* any day. (reviewed on cassette)

—Bill Milkowski

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QUARTET 40



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The Sound Of Youth

by Owen Cordle

It's the early '60s, and you're an introspective teenager in high school. A lifelong jazz fan, you buy Miles' *Kind Of Blue*; the pianist plays the most romantic sound you've ever heard. Then you buy **Bill Evans' *Sunday At The Village Vanguard***, it becomes your personal barometer—almost for life. This album reaches you when no other can.

Nostalgia? Perhaps. But encountering Evans at that age and then following his subsequent albums is something you can't get via reissue or if you were born later. Apart from how big an influence he became or how his playing changed, Bill Evans will always be "forever the sound of youth," as someone has written about jazz.

We have, then, four previously unreleased albums of Evans. One catches the transition from his earlier, melancholy sound to his later, light-hearted sound, and three show his fully mature later style. The earliest, *Blue In Green* (Milestone MCD-9185-2; 53:00: ★★★★★), recorded at a concert in Canada in 1974, features his second best-known trio. Bassist Eddie Gomez and drummer Marty Morell were heirs to Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian, the players with whom Evans established, circa 1960, the standard for the modern, conversa-



Bill Evans, 1980: solidly inventive

tional piano trio. Both play vigorously on "One For Helen," "So What," "34 Skidoo," and the others that represent Evans' buoyant side. The title track, "What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life," and "If You Could See Me Now" recall the brooding, earlier Evans. If you are familiar with *Since We Met* and *Re: Person I Knew*, two Fantasy albums recorded at the Vanguard earlier in '74, you have an inside track on *Blue In Green*. By the way, this last-known Evans album from the Fantasy group

sports a cover sketch of the late pianist by singer Tony Bennett, who also recorded a couple of outstanding albums with him.

Evans' last-known recordings, period, are from August 31-September 7, 1980 at the Keystone Corner in San Francisco. (He died September 15, 1980 at age 51.) *Consecration I* (Timeless CD SJP 331; 49:39: ★★★★★), *Consecration II* (Timeless CD SJP 332; 48:39: ★★★★★), and *The Brilliant* (Timeless CD SJP 329; 50:50: ★★★★★) give no hint that death was near. In fact, they're notable for the opposite feeling, the bubbly exuberance that had coincided with his hiring of bassist Marc Johnson and drummer Joe LaBarbera two years before. Some of the tempos threaten to run away ("Like Someone In Love" on *I*, for example), and echoes of the muted yet pianistically rich melancholia of the LaFaro-Motian trio are caught only in passing (e.g., "Polka Dots And Moonbeams" on *I*, "My Foolish Heart" on *II*, and "Letter To Evan" on *The Brilliant*). This trio is more supple than Gomez-Morell. And Evans sounds downright busy as almost all the performances evolve into his favorite medium tempo. Overall, the trio is solidly inventive and consistent throughout these three albums.


Who knows where this last musical phase might have led Evans? Who knows what might have been if LaFaro hadn't been killed in a car crash in 1961? One thing is for sure, Evans wasn't reminiscing with tears in his own last days. (all reviewed on CD) **DB**

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The R&B Equation, Part 1

by Dan Ouellette

When I interviewed rock critic Greil Marcus last year, he recalled how *Rolling Stone* writer Jon Landau had once torn apart Eric Clapton's guitar playing on a Cream album and, in the process, devastated him. "Landau called Clapton the master of the cliché," said Marcus. "But Clapton was primarily a blues guitarist then and the blues is based on clichés. A good blues player bends the cliché but never dissolves the familiarity and received nature of the riff. The blues is a shared language." Marcus argued that to what degree the licks and riffs are derivative isn't as important as how well that "shared language" is felt and expressed.

The essence of the blues, whether it manifests itself in r&b, gospel, or early rock & roll, is in the emotion of the singer or the musician. That soul is what makes the latest batch of digitally remastered '50s r&b CD reissues on the Flair (distributed by Virgin) and Specialty (distributed by Fantasy) labels so priceless. The blues language was kept alive on disc during the postwar '40s and early '50s by such small independent labels as Specialty and Modern. Not only were they torchbearers of the blues tradition in the '50s, but many were the spark plugs that set rock & roll into motion.

B.B. King was one of the most important sources of inspiration for such guitarists as Clapton, Jimmy Page, and Jimi Hendrix. *The Best Of B.B. King Volume 1* (Flair 2-91691; 57:13: ★★★★★) features his superb guitar playing—thick, syrupy, single-string runs on the slow blues and stinging jabs and blazing riffs on the rousing boogies—which perfectly complements the emotion of his songs. Many of the tunes here were big hits on the r&b charts, including "Three O'Clock Blues," where King coaxes his guitar to lament as plaintively as his husky voice.

Other pioneering r&b electric guitarists with noteworthy reissues are **Guitar Slim** and **Johnny Guitar Watson**. On *Sufferin' Mind* (Specialty 7007-2; 71:23: ★★★★★), Slim serves up spiky, quick-fire licks that elevated him to the front of the pack in the mid-'50s r&b band movement. Highlights include Slim's signature piece, simply titled "Guitar Slim," and the rousing shuffle, "Prison Blues," where his guitar lines harmonize with those of the horns set into full swing. On *Three Hours Past Midnight* (Flair 2-91696; 45:45: ★★★★★), Watson helped pave the way for the sharp-edged guitar styles of '60s rock with rapid-fire slashes and stings, stutterstep guitar breaks, and blistering solos. He maintains a strong footing in the blues, even during his wildly hopping romp through "Hot Little Mama." Of special interest to Robert Cray fans is Watson's "I'm Gonna Hit That Highway," covered by Cray in 1983 as "Don't Touch Me."

The material of the blues-based vocalists is just as impressive. One of the best collections is **Etta James' R&B Dynamite** (Flair 2-91695; 56:55: ★★★★★), recorded when she was a teenager. She unleashes ecstatic and raw gospel vocals on gritty r&b numbers, gripping ballads, and funky New Orleans-flavored



Early B.B.: a most important source of inspiration

songs. Not only are many sexually suggestive, but some are blatant, including her hit duet with Richard Berry on "Roll With Me Henry." The best tune—alone worth the price of the entire album—is James' sassy dialog with Harold Batiste's tenor sax on "The Pick Up."

You can't talk about soul in blues-based music without bringing up two other incredible singers from the '50s, **Sam Cooke** and **Dorothy Love Coates**, both of whom recorded gospel music for Specialty. *Sam Cooke With The Soul Stirrers* (Specialty 7009-2; 65:51: ★★★★★) represents the first recordings the soulful crooner made. He's at his smooth-and-sweet best here, dipping into the heartfelt zone. *The Best Of Dorothy Love Coates And The Original Gospel Harmonettes* (Specialty 7205-2; 63:37: ★★★★★) features Coates wailing, shouting, and hollering her way into another world, launching into these spirituals while the Harmonettes take flight into their call-and-response conversings. Great rocking beats and, mercy, what an incredible contralto!

Pianist **Floyd Dixon**'s unmistakably bluesy pieces on *Marshall Texas Is My Home* (Specialty 7011-2; 57:58: ★★★★★) aren't overpowering, but they do please, especially the jaunty "Hey Bartender" (later popularized by the Blues Brothers), the previously unissued "Instrumental Shuffle," the chugging "Ooh-Eee! Ooh-Eee!" and the slow, down & out "Hard Livin' Alone." While **Lloyd Price** had only one monster hit in the early '50s (the 1952 raunch & roll masterpiece, "Lawdy Miss Clawdy," one of the first race music tunes to cross over to the pop charts), the Louisiana-born singer stays in the blues vein on *Lawdy!* (Specialty 7010-2; 62:06: ★★★★★), serving up a feast of tunes ranging in style from early doo-wop to spicy New Orleans rumba. Both Dixon and Price's works have aged well.

No so with **Little Richard**. *The Georgia Peach* (Specialty 7012-2; 58:37: ★★★★★) features such seminal rock & roll tunes as "Tutti Frutti," "Long Tall Sally," "Kansas City/Hey-Hey-Hey," "Jenny Jenny," and "Good Golly Miss Molly." While this collection shows how pivotal a figure the shrill-voiced and crazed pianist Little Richard was in rip-snorting r&b into full-fledged rock & roll, it also suggests that at this crossover juncture, the soul of the music is eclipsed by flash and frenzy. Could it be that material steeped in the blues ages better than rock because of its depth and immediacy of emotion? That's the conclusion I came to after listening to these blues-based masterpieces. (all reviewed on CD) **DB**

Formative Works

by Bill Shoemaker

Bold! Historic!" read the ads: hyperbole when applied to most recordings, but not Delmark's AACM albums from the late '60s and early '70s. **Joseph Jarman's** *Song For* (410; 51:22: ★★★★★), **Muhai Richard Abram's** *Levels And Degrees Of Light* (413; 43:12: ★★★), and **Anthony Braxton's** *3 Compositions Of New Jazz* (412; 43:21: ★★★★★) are basic to understanding the AACM's heretical impact in the late '60s. And, the **Art Ensemble of Chicago's** *Live* (432; 76:24: ★★★★★), documenting their '72 homecoming from their pivotal European residence, is the oldest example of their suite-like concert performances avail-



LINDA WING

'60s Muhai: the outlines are there

able on CD. Not all of the experiments on these titles hold up; but, fortunately, the most ill-considered one—Abram's sophomoric use of reverb—was fixed in the remix.

The ensemble the now criminally underrecorded Jarman put together for *Song For* is nothing less than legendary: trumpeter Bill Brimfield; tenor godfather Fred Anderson; the late, great drummer, Steve McCall, and the late, destined-to-be-great bassist, Charles Clark; pianist Christopher Gaddy; and drummer Thurman Barker. Additionally, all of the tenets of Jarman's music were already in place, such as fanfares floating over drum swells, elongating into themes tinged with bop and serialism, adagios with a hallowed, hymnal feel, catalysing impassioned solos, and a more pointed integration of auxiliary percussion and poetry than practiced by his colleagues. No wonder, then, that *Song For* has retained its edge and its cogency.

Abram's orchestral sensibility is outlined, but only outlined, on *Levels And Degrees Of Light*. His shading of melodic materials is particularly effective on the title piece, as soprano Penelope Taylor glances off Gordon Emanuel's vibes and Barker's cymbal washes like sunlight off a fast-moving stream, before giving way to Abrams' surefooted clarinet. The highpoints of the remainder of the program, however, are passages of flat-out energy music, featuring, in addition to Abrams' cascading piano clusters, exemplary solos by Braxton, Clark, and the post-tough tenor of the pre-Kalaparusha Maurice McIntyre.

While many components of Braxton's improvisational vocabulary are impressively in place, particularly his timbral variety and his chiseled lyricism, his compositional lexicon is at a formative stage on *3 Compositions Of New*

Jazz. This program of two Braxton works and trumpeter Leo Smith's "The Bell" is carried by the dovetailing rapport between Braxton, Smith, Abrams, and violinist Leroy Jenkins. More often than not, they opt for a dense textural weave, in part facilitated by a large instrument inventory; but, when the need arises, they also generate enough rhythmic power to more than compensate for the absence of bass and drums.

The AEC's *Live* combines confrontational juxtapositions and stretches of seamless flu-

idity. Yet, compared to later concert recordings, *Live* is not as dynamically paced and proportioned. Still, there is a lot of engaging material—a relentless opening barrage that segues to one of their patented, pungently humored themes; some fine solos, particularly from Malachi Favors and Lester Bowie; a funky strut of a closer. And, anyone who found this recording in its previous incarnation as a two-LP set to be a particularly fractured listening experience will find the continuity of the CD format to be a blessing. (all reviewed on CD) **DB**

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RECORD & CD REVIEWS



Freddy Cole / I'm Not My Brother I'm Me

Freddy Cole: Vocals and Piano
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Nat Cole is not forgotten, and one who remembers best is Nat's brother Freddy Cole. Freddy, born in Chicago in 1931, was the youngest of the Cole kids. "Everybody was a musician. I started playing piano when I was 6 and then went to the New England Conservatory for my music education. I graduated in 1956 but where I really learned was around the streets of New York."

Freddy was already gigging while in school and nowadays he's playing clubs and cabarets all around the United States and the world. That he's the brother of so great and famous an entertainer is both a blessing and a curse. Freddy loved Nat, but because he's Nat's brother he's always expected to sing Nat's songs, and being so identified with Nat often, ironically, overshadows Freddy's own gifts as a performer. Hence the title song of this album, *I'm Not My Brother, I'm Me* (SSC 1054D).

"I've always done some of Nat's things. I'd stay away from *Mona Lisa* and songs like that, but Nat had such a wealth of songs that I can do songs Nat did that nobody knows Nat did." And does the audience, at last, know who's singing now? "I've been pretty lucky," said Freddy Cole. "After a while, they hear it's me!"

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Henry Kaiser

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Personnel: Kaiser, Jim O'Rourke, guitars.

★ ★ ★ ★

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Personnel: Kaiser, electric, acoustic guitar, mid-guitar, synclavier, vocal; Bruce Anderson (cuts 1, 3, 12), Richard Thompson (4, 6), John McCain (5, 16), Brian "Buckethead" Carroll (14), guitars; Danny Carnahan (2), guitar, cittern, vocal; Raymond Kane (4), guitar, vocal; Hilary Hanes (1, 3, 12), Gary Lambert (5, 6), Andy West (8, 13), Alan Smith (16), electric bass; John Hanes (1, 3, 12, 14), Mark McQuade Crawford (5, 16), John French (8), Charles K. Noyes (9), drums; Ngoc Lam (2), 17- & 26-string danh tranh; Tom Constanten (1, 3, 12), Miguel Frascioni (10), keyboards; Robin Petrie (2), hammered dulcimer, vocal; David Balakrishnan (3, 6), violin; Bruce Ackley (3), soprano saxophone; John Oswald (10), alto saxophone; Sang Won Park (9), kayagum, vocal; Jin Hi Kim (6), changgo drum; Greg Gumbel (1, 3), Cary Sheldon (1, 3, 12), Elodea Kane (4), Vernon Edgar (15), vocal.

★ ★ ★ ★

Henry Kaiser may be the most eclectic and unpredictable guitarist around. He favors wild Hawaiian shirts, with a flamboyant repertoire to match, and *Hope You Like Our New Direction*, with its tongue-in-cheek title, is a well-stocked wardrobe of style, shapes, and colors. (The joke here being there is no single new direction; each track here shoots off into its own course.) It kicks off with the ultra-familiar Bo Diddley beat for a cover of Buddy Holly's "Love's Made A Fool Of You," but it isn't long before Kaiser's love of the unfamiliar takes over. There's an exquisite blending of a Skip James Delta blues with Vietnamese folk songs and ethnic improvisation which eventually flows into the Appalachian ballad "Cold Rain And Snow." Chilling.

Then in short order is a version of "Rock On" as if covered by Agharta-period Miles (check out those background organ chords and Co-sey guitar), a Hawaiian group song, an exotic

ballad sung in Arabic by Richard Thompson, an improvisation with Korean musician Sang Won Park, real-time compositions for synclavier or midi-guitar, a couple more lovingly parodistic covers, some industrial-strength guitar flash, and even the requisite Beefheart encore. Interesting thing is, for the enormous variety here, there's never a sense of overkill or stylistic plundering; in fact, those pieces which reflect Kaiser's love for other cultures are often the most moving, because of his sincerity and sensitivity.

Tomorrow Knows Where You Live is an altogether more concentrated duet with another unconventional guitarist, Jim O'Rourke. Though there's no overdubbing involved, the pair at times create textures and timbres reminiscent of '50s and '60s electronic experimenters like Pierre Schaeffer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Morton Subotnick. O'Rourke's "Just As A Wall Of Quiet Flowing Stands Near" slowly unfolds as a Gyorgy Ligeti score might; in general, their longer pieces tend towards such "spacy" atmospherics. The confusion of instrumental sounds (can those be guitars?) enriches the musical experience, as they fill in the textures with surprising percussives and organ-like sustains. Too, it's nice to hear some steel-string acoustic guitar mixed in with the electronics, suggesting a Renbourn/Jansch duo for the post-Derek Bailey, post-Bill Frisell '90s. Though he's got chops—traditional and unorthodox—in abundance, hot licks aren't a priority with Kaiser; making music is. (reviewed on CD)

—Art Lange



Van Morrison

HYMNS TO THE SILENCE—Polydor 849 026-2: *PROFESSIONAL JEALOUSY*; *I'M NOT FEELING IT ANYMORE*; *ORDINARY LIFE*; *SOME PEACE OF MIND*; *SO COMPLICATED*; *I CAN'T STOP LOVING YOU*; *WHY MUST I ALWAYS EXPLAIN*; *VILLAGE IDIOT*; *SEE ME THROUGH PART II* (JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH THEE); *TAKE ME BACK*; *BY HIS GRACE*; *ALL SAINTS DAY*; *HYMNS TO THE SILENCE*; *ON HYNDFORD STREET*; *BE THOU MY VISION*; *CARRYING A TORCH*; *GREEN MANSIONS*; *PAGAN STREAMS*; *QUALITY STREET*; *IT MUST BE YOU*; *I NEED YOUR KIND OF LOVING*. (47:20/48:42)

Personnel: Morrison, lead vocals, acoustic and electric guitars, harmonica, alto sax; Paul Robinson, Dave Early, drums; Nicky Scott, bass; Neil Drinkwater, piano, synth, accordion; Eddie Friel, piano, organ, synth; Georgie Fame, piano, organ, backing vocals; Carol Kenyon, Katie Kissoon, backing vocals.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

If only Van Morrison had stopped at the midway point of this double-CD package, his *Hymns*

To *The Silence* might have been another *Moon-dance* or *Astral Weeks*. The first CD is an inspired collection of songs, full of what Morrison does best: soulfully reflect on the complicated, confusing state of the world while yearning for a simpler lifestyle founded in faith and grace. It's this tension between his longing for the numinous and his struggles coping with a strife-filled, lonely, workaholic existence that makes Morrison's first 10 songs so compelling.

This lyrical territory is hardly new for the poet-mystic, who, like such other pop artists as Bruce Cockburn, Bono of U2, and T Bone Burnett, has successfully integrated the sa-

cred with the profane, the spiritual with the human without sounding didactic or sanctimonious. A prime example here is his cover of the traditional hymn "Just A Closer Walk With Thee." Morrison gives it a straight church reading, complete with organ, piano, and backup gospel vocals, but reinterprets the tune by exuberantly preaching a homily in the mid-section, reminiscing about the simpler days "before rock & roll, before television" and calling for "more silence, more breathing together." There are several truth-seeking songs played in a range of musical flavorings—standard fare for Morrison—including rollick-

Mature Jazz Quartet

by Owen Cordle

The **Modern Jazz Quartet** came to my hometown, Raleigh, N.C., once—February, 1972, to a place called the Frog and Nightgown for an extended weekend. How much would the cover charge be now for such a gig? Probably about the cost of *MJQ40* (Atlantic 82330-2), Atlantic Records' four-volume retrospective of the group's 40-year history.

MJQ40 traces the group from their eponymous 1952 album on Prestige to 1988, when it recorded *For Ellington*, another in its long affiliation with Atlantic. There is a 10-year gap (1974-84), which coincides with its breakup (1974-81); but subsequent tracks show that the Quartet simply resumed where it left off, all artistry intact—if not better—for the hiatus.

Disc One (76:44: ★★★★★) opens with a 1952 performance of pianist/musical director John Lewis' "Vendome," a track that foreshadows much to come. The Bach-like counterpoint, synchronized ensemble work, and vibraphonist Milt Jackson's bluesy take-offs are hallmarks. The vibist's "Bluesology" and "Bags' Groove," the latter with tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins at Music Inn in Lenox, Mass., in 1958, help to relieve and counterbalance the hybrid design of Lewis' compositions and arrangements which comprise the bulk of this 14-tune set. The album ends with "Odds Against Tomorrow," the title tune to one of Lewis' film scores (1959), which reminds us that the pianist has always been interested in more than jazz per se.

Disc Two (76:10: ★★½) begins with a pair of orchestral pieces that define "third stream," the union of jazz and classical music that was taking place circa 1960. Instrumentally, the blend of Quartet and orchestra is organic and effective, but the fact is, there's little jazz. Other collaborators on this album include vocalist Giahann Carroll on Lewis' "La Cantatrice," guitarist Laurindo Almeida on "One-Note Samba," big band horns on "Ralph's New Blues" and "One Never Knows" (skillful mixing of colors again), and the Swingle Singers on "Alexander's Fugue." This is the least interesting set from a jazz perspective, although it does reiterate Lewis' prowess at larger forms and different instrumental combinations.



The MJQ early on: (clockwise from lower left) Milt, Connie, Percy, and John

Whether by design or chance, these volumes do fall into a pattern. If the first introduces the Quartet and the second emphasizes "third stream" and other combinations, *Disc Three* (76:17: ★★★★★½) illustrates its liveliness in concert. Four tunes from *Concert In Japan '66*, two from *Blues At Carnegie Hall*, two from *MJQ Live At The Lighthouse*, and one from *Paul Desmond Plus MJQ At Town Hall* capture a looser, less inhibited Quartet. The difference lies in Jackson's animation and the group's fluidity from section to section within tunes. We also have "Blues In The Bergerie" and "The Trip," previously unissued performances from the (1971) *Plastic Dreams* session, the former with a brass quintet, the latter (sans brass) reflecting the surrealism popular during those days.

Disc Four (76:18: ★★★★★) gives us six performances before the 1974 split, five afterwards; and again, it's the live tracks—from *The Last Concert*—that stand out, particularly Lewis' "The Jasmine Tree" and Jackson's "The Legendary Profile." The group's Ellingtonia is also exemplary—no wonder it has been called an Ellington band in miniature, for what we have is the identity of the individual musician retained in an ensemble that has a life of its own, too. If the Quartet is Lewis' vision, Jackson's tempering, bassist Percy Heath's Jimmy Blanton-like foundation, and Connie Kay's accents and integral textures (percussion as distinguished from drumming), it is also vibes-pianobassdrums—one word, and still the last word in small-group jazz. (reviewed on cassette) **DB**

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ing r&b boogie, hushed folk-rock, swinging jazz, and Irish folk. There's even a superb cover of Don Gibson's classic country blues tune, "I Can't Stop Loving You," that Morrison passionately sings in his rough-hewn style (with ample support from the Chieftains).

Everything works for disc one. Not so on the second. Morrison continues in the same thematic mode, repeating himself more often than not. Do we really need another entreaty on silence such as the long-winded, rambling, nine-minute title tune? There's also another church hymn, "Be Thou My Vision," yet without

any of Morrison's autobiographical embellishments. That gets saved for the poem, "On Hyndford Street," read over an airy synth wash, that unfortunately is a redundant retelling of Morrison's reminiscences on the silent days (another poem, "Pagan Streets," is a stronger work). The rest of the disc consists primarily of love songs, some of which work (the blissful "It Must Be You") while others don't because they are overly romantic or poorly crafted (including "Quality Street," rife with such clichés as "I see the end of the rainbow now/True love has blessed me somehow! . . . So I thank

God for sending me you . . ."). (reviewed on CD)
—Dan Ouellette

TRANSPLENDENT



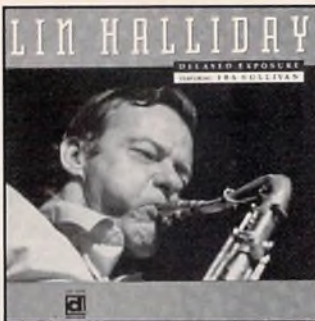
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Rob Parton

JAZZTECH BIG BAND WITH CONTE CANDOLI—Sea Breeze CDSB-112: *BLUES FOR MR. P.; LAURA; SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY; VIGNETTE FOR TRUMPET AND FLUGELHORN; 'S WONDERFUL; DREAMER OF DREAMS; PARTIN' SHOTS; A TIME FOR LOVE; MAIN STREET NEWS; EVANOLOGY. (53:41)*

Personnel: Parton, Mike McGrath, Steve Smyth, Tom Reed, Al Hood, Candoli, trumpets; Russ Phillips, Brian Jacobi, Jim Martin, Mike Young, Scott Bentall, Tony Garcia, trombones; Bob Frankich, Ian Nevins, Tony Vacca, Greg Mostovoy, Kurt Berg, saxophones; Larry Harris, piano; John Moran, guitar; Stewart Miller, bass; Bob Rummage, Bob Chmel, drums; Bill Elliot, percussion.

★ ★ ★

Rob Parton's Jazztech band is a consummate Chicago-based unit that plays it's own arrangements of originals and other material with precision and high craftsmanship. It lies in a direct line of descent from the original swing bands of the '30s (as opposed to some of the more overtly progressive big bands fashioned by, say, Bob Brookmeyer, Gil Evans, or Bob Mintzer) and comes down to us filtered through the evolutionary impact of Kenton, James, Basie, and more recently probably Rob McConnell. If it is resolutely stand-offish on nostalgia, though, it nevertheless seems very proud to be making modern music the old-fashioned way: acoustically and with real musicians.

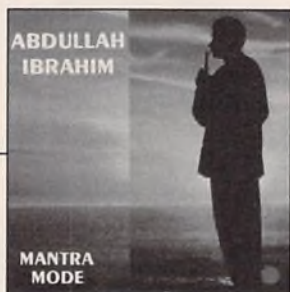
Parton's Jazztech band, as the name perhaps implies, seems to pursue the values of perfection at the expense of spontaneity. It's hard to listen to a concert piece like "Vignette" or a sculpted ballad like "A Time For Love" and not admire its flawlessly shaded ebbs and flows. But it's hard to love it, too, hard to be swept away by its disciplined solemnity and cool propriety. Where's the heat?

This is a "tight" band, a term widely considered to be complimentary these days, as if skill superseded substance in the musical pecking order. Yet the quality that made big bands exciting at their height was their looseness. This was the heart of ensemble swing, small "s." The best of the up-tempo pieces here ("Blues For Mr. P," "Sentimental Journey") are bright, clever, sometimes subtly ingenious, and always "tight." But arrangements which demand that every prominent brass section note be punched with a rim shot make it hard for any drummer to drive a band.

Soloists Tony Vacca, Bob Frankich, and

Larry Harris are well up to the band's high standards. Conte Candoli, of the Tonight Show Band, cameos nicely on three numbers. (reviewed on CD)

—John McDonough



Abdullah Ibrahim

MANTRA MODE—Enja R2 79671: *BAYI LAM*; *DINDELA*; *BARAKAAT*; *TAFELBURG SAMBA/CARNIVAL SAMBA*; *MANTRA MODE*; *BEAUTIFUL LOVE*; *TSKAVE*; *ROYAL BLUE*. (40:13)

Personnel: Ibrahim, piano, drums (cut 6); Basil "Mannenburg" Coetzee, tenor sax; Robbie Jansen, alto and baritone saxes, flute; Johnny Mekoa, trumpet; Monty Weber, drums; Spencer Mbadu, bass; Errol Dyers, guitar.

★ ★ ★

Recorded in Cape Town during his triumphant return to South Africa last winter after years of exile, Abdullah Ibrahim's *Mantra Mode* has the feel of a long-awaited homecoming—the occasional tentativeness is quickly subsumed by obvious joy, and simple nostalgia gives way to deep reflection.

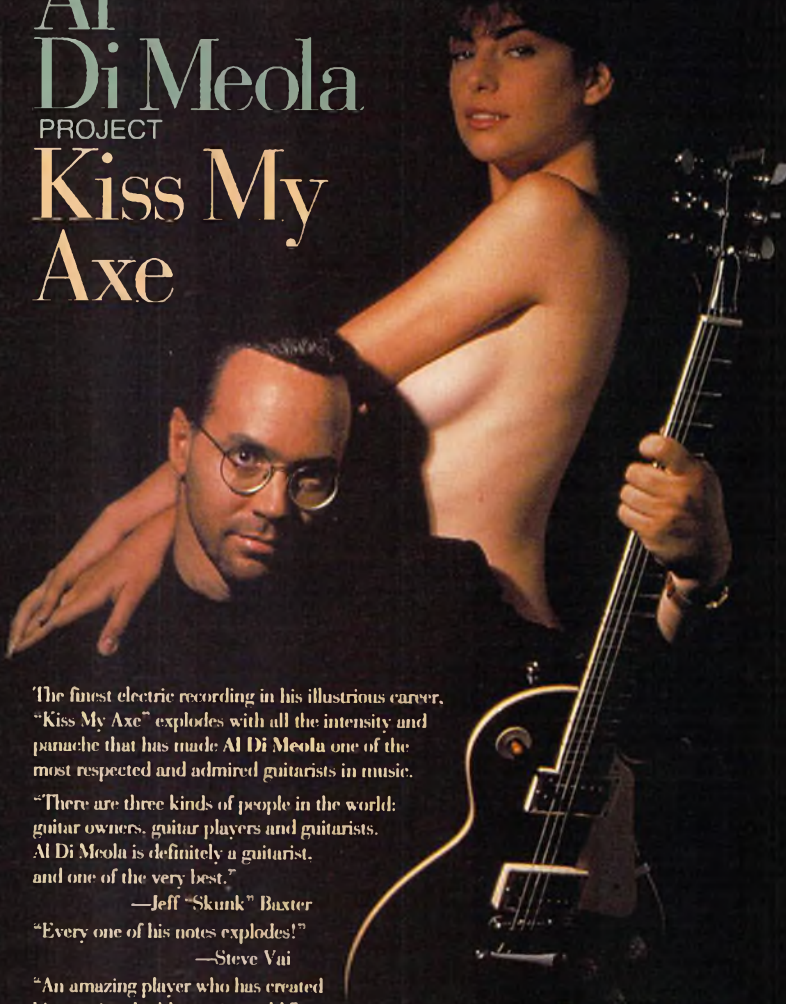
For this invigorating yet noticeably ad-hoc set, Ibrahim wisely built the program on material familiar to his South African cohorts—"Bayi Lam," a traditional Xhosa song played by East Cape bands since his youth, and "Tafelburg Samba," a Cape Town dance hit from the '50s—and untaxing, well-hooked themes such as "Dindela," "Tsakave/Royal Blue," and the title piece.

But, even when rounded out by "Barakaat," a piano solo full of mood, and "Beautiful Love," a wistful flute feature for Robbie Jansen, the program clocks in at a scant 40:13. The strategy works, providing the requisite elbow-room for forwarding the intriguing South African mixture of fiery exclamation and relaxed cooking. Basil "Mannenburg" Coetzee is the most consistently engaging soloist, forwarding a soulful lyricism occasionally capped with nappy textures. Jansen, who plays a gritty alto, and Johnny Mekoa, who can daub the blues with a honey-dipped tone one moment and rip through bop runs with a steely tone the next, generally take longer to hit full stride, but the high points of their solos are worth the short wait.

Mantra Mode doesn't have the orchestral heft of Ibrahim's recordings with his stateside ensemble, Ekaya, nor do any of his hometown collaborators have the defining power of Carlos Ward or even Ricky Ford; still, *Mantra Mode* is an enjoyable album of historical value. (reviewed on CD)

—Bill Shoemaker

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RECORD & CD REVIEWS

Cruisin' For Some Fusion

by Robin Tolleson

Fusion got a bad rap in the 1980s ("fuzak"), and so much of the music was bland and lifeless that even musicians ran from association with the term. It was fashionable to be a jazz purist in the face of the "Quiet Storm" format. But with the growing impact of world music and new synthetic textures, there are fresh sounds coming our way. Maybe it's okay to *play* again, to really try and burn, as most of these new releases show.

With *Kiss My Axe* (Tomato 79751: ★★★★★), the fingers are flying, and **Al Di Meola** is again staking his claim among the elite burners. *Axe* is reminiscent of the guitarist's *Elegant Gypsy* at times, although he varies his rhythm sections and textures most effectively, continuing the global musical pursuits he sported on last year's *World Sinfonia*. He jams hard with Barry Miles, Anthony Jackson, Omar Hakim, and Richie Morales, and settles in for a wonderful flamenco guitar and handclap piece as well. There's an energy and rawness here heard in very few other bands today, electric or akoustic. (reviewed on cassette)

Eric Marienthal's *Oasis* (GRP 9655; 43:48: ★★★) is full of life, despite the alto/tenor saxman's tendency to follow the recent GRP trend toward programmed drums. Marienthal owes as much to the Breckers and David Sanborn as any previous masters, and is as comfortable on the sequenced hip-hop grooves as the ballads here. Bassist John Patitucci makes a brief but memorable appearance, and keyboardists Russell Ferrante (Yellowjackets) and Jeff Lorber split production duties. Ferrante's compositional hand rarely goes astray, and his arrangements include incidental tricks and turns; Lorber's tunes don't pack as much musical punch.

Trumpeter/composer/arranger/vocalist/key-boardist **Jeff Beal** may do a lot of things on *Objects In The Mirror* (Triloka 189-2; 53:56: ★★★★★½), but he does them all well (see "Riffs" Dec. '91). The music, produced by ex-Steely Dan man Walter Becker, is jazzy and quite sophisticated, with serious syncopation. Beal composes for film, and his talents for creating moods with subtle shifts of texture are apparent, as on the haunting "Colombe D'Or." He may owe to Miles for his sound, and to Gil Evans for some of his arranging currents but Beal continues to grow into his own.

If you're doing a direct-to-disc recording like Sheffield Lab's *The Usual Suspects* (CD 32; 52:09: ★★½), you couldn't feel much safer than by hiring a rhythm section of bassist Nathan East, guitarist Paul Jackson Jr., and drummer John Robinson. But these and the other *Usual Suspects*, well, they play a lot of the usual licks. There's some good, finger-snapping funky fusion (and gospel) here, with guests like saxman Steve Tavaglione, Eric Gale, flutist Jim Walker, and saxist Brandon Fields. Any musical momentum built up is stopped by some pretty sterile vocal tunes. Arrangers Bill Moyers, John Beasley, David Benoit, and Bill Champlin should have been more playful—they seem most concerned that the material be played "right."



Charnett Moffett: pop but not dumb

Roland Vazquez's *No Separate Love* (RVD 7001; 51:03: ★★★★★) was recorded live to 24-track and direct-to-DAT, and doesn't lack for adventure or different, interesting textures. The drummer/percussionist proves to be a good composer as well as a groovemeister. With an even split among New York and L.A. session players like Anthony Jackson, Walt Fowler, and Mark Soskin, Vazquez and company prove to be cohesive and heat-seeking. They cook it up on nearly every tune, whether the romp is Latin-based, street funk, or jazz flavored.

Charnett Moffett's acoustic bass skills are well documented, but with *Network* (Manhattan 7 96109 2; 48:28: ★★★★★), he comes to the front lines with a slapping, popping electric, and strong and sure lead work on the piccolo bass. For most of the album he works with drum sounds of his and co-producer Kenny Kirkland's programming and the humanizing efforts of percussionist Don Alias. The melodies are engaging and fresh, pop but not dumb. The album-closing "Truth" is the only track featuring acoustic bass, and Moffett tears that ax up. A complete bass talent like this hasn't been heard from since Stanley Clarke made his impact in the mid-'70s.

Ron Cooley's *Living' The Good Life* (American Gramophone 391; 43:34: ★★) is the kind of predictable pop-jazz that falls easily on the ears—too easily, perhaps. After listening it's hard to remember what you just heard. The Mannheim Steamroller guitarist integrates new age and classical touches, and his band performs dutifully but without too much spark. Cooley is proficient on classical, electric, and guitar synth, but isn't a dominant lead voice. No one takes this bull by the horns.

On *One World* (American Gramophone 991; 46:59: ★★★★★), **Jeff Jenkins** molds a soulful fusion with a kind of world beat. "Spirit Of The People" has an African triplet feel, while "Lexi Major" features Jenkins' tasty piano work over the dense percussion barrage of Mike Spiro. "New Africa" is like a slow, funky samba. There's nothing global about much of the material here, but Jenkins' simple, straightforward piano approach, kind of like a Vince Guaraldi for the '90s, makes much of it work. (reviewed on CD unless otherwise noted) **DB**

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Miles Davis & Michel Legrand

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Personnel: Davis, Chuck Findley, featured trumpets; Michel Legrand, Kei Akagi, Alan Oldfield, keyboards; Nolan Smith, Ray Brown, George Graham, Oscar Brashear, trumpets; Mark Rivett, guitar; Alphonse Mouzon, Harvey Mason, Ricky Wellman, drums; John Bigham, percussion; Abraham Laboriel, Foley, Benny Rietveld, bass; Buddy Collette, Jackie Kelso, Marty Krystall, Bill Green, Charles Owens, John Stephens, woodwinds; Vince de Rosa, David Duke, Marnie Johnson, Richard Todd, french horns; Jimmy Cleveland, Dick Nash, George Bohanan, Thurman Green, Lew McGreary, trombones; Kenny Garrett, saxophone.



This soundtrack from the Australian film *Dingo*, co-starring the late Miles Davis, is notable only for the presence of Miles' signature rasp on a few spoken interludes. The music, which was arranged, orchestrated, and conducted by Michel Legrand, is undistinguished at best. Suffice it to say, Legrand is no Gil Evans, and this is no *Miles Ahead* let alone *Legrand Jazz* (a '58 series of collaborations that included Miles).

From the snatches of dialog here, Miles plays Billy Cross, an iconic American jazz emigre living in Paris. At a concert in Australia, he meets a kid named John Anderson and tells him, "If you ever get to Paris, look me up." Apparently, the kid grows up to be a hot trumpeter Down Under, known to the locals as Dingo Anderson. He takes Billy up on his word, travels to Paris to seek out his hero, and ultimately exchanges fours with him on stage.

Legrand weaves in a couple of Miles motifs here and there, making allusions to "Milestones" on "Concert On The Runway" and to "All Blues" on "Trumpet Cleaning." The rest of the album consists of stiff, big-band fodder and tired-ass vamping on lame funk arrangements, hardly the kind of thing that you would want to remember Miles for. On half the tunes, Chuck Findley is the sole featured trumpeter. He's a competent enough West Coast player and provides some evocative moments on "Kimberley Trumpet In Paris," a haunting bit of solo trumpet set against the Paris street ambience. But this is supposed to be Miles Davis and Michel Legrand, not Chuck Findley and Michel Legrand. Consumer beware. The added disappointment here is that Miles'

chops sound shaky, though his muted trumpet sound remains unmistakably Miles.

About the only thing of interest is the scene that Miles acts out with co-star Colin Friels.

Shades of Dexter Gordon in Bernard Tavernier's *'Round Midnight*. But then, the music was much better in that film. (reviewed on cassette)
—Bill Milkowski

On The Road Again

by Jack Sohmer

Whether or not the **Count Basie Orchestra** of the '50s and early '60s was characterized fairly as a "swing machine," a flippantly derisive term often used by modernist critics, the fact nevertheless remains that the band did swing in a remarkably consistent fashion, albeit in a mainstream style. No one was more aware than Basie himself that jazz had changed markedly since the emergence of bop; he also knew that he could not survive in the business by replicating past glories any more than he could deny them. So he sought and found the happy medium, a style of orchestral music that, while still rooted in the principles of foot-tapping, Kansas City-based swing, also reached out to include elements of post-'40s harmonic textures and more *au courant*, bop-tinged soloists.

Many of the results of this admirable career move can be heard on *The Complete Roulette Live Recordings Of Count Basie And His Orchestra* (1959-1962) (Mosaic MD8-135; 9½ hours:★★★★★), an eight-disc boxed set replete with detailed annotation by Chris Sheridan, author of *Count Basie: A Bio-Discography* (Greenwood Press, 1986). In it, we hear all of the surviving material taped by Roulette at three venues: The Americana Hotel in Miami Beach (March 31, 1959), Birdland (June 27-28, 1961), and the Dans In Ballroom at the Gröna Lund amusement park in Stockholm (August 9-12, 1962). Besides Basie and the rhythm section, the most prominently featured soloists on the first gig were trumpeters Thad Jones and Joe Newman, trombonist Al Grey, and tenormen Frank Foster, Frank Wess, and Billy Mitchell. Joe Williams does the singing, while alto-man Marshall Royal and baritonist Charlie Fowlkes provide the most impressive top and bottom this side of Ellington.

By the time of the band's Birdland date, the older, but still roaring vets, trombonist Quentin Jackson and tenorman Budd Johnson had replaced Grey and Mitchell, and Ocie Smith had taken over for Joe Williams; among other duties, he joined with guesting Sarah Vaughan on "Teach Me Tonight." There were even more changes in the lineup before the band took off for Sweden: the tenor chair that Budd Johnson had just left went to Eric Dixon, whose ability on the flute complemented that of Frank Wess, while the departure of the great lead trumpeter, Snooky Young, left a hole in the band that was not to be filled adequately for some time; but at least his chair, if not his flair, was assumed by one Fortunatus "Fip" Ricard. Owing to injuries sustained in a serious car accident, Sonny Payne had to forego the trip, but, as has always been his wont, Louie Bellson came to



Count Basie: reaching out

the rescue in the nick of time. Also present on these tracks are vocalist Irene Reid and the Swedish-based sitters-in, trumpeter Benny Bailey and trombonist Ake Persson. The most widely represented writers heard in this collection are Frank Foster, Neal Hefti, Ernie Wilkins, Thad Jones, and Quincy Jones; but there are also charts by Nat Pierce, Frank Wess, Wild Bill Davis, Edgar Sampson, Benny Carter, Freddie Green, and Budd Johnson. Understandably, there are a few duplications of titles over the course of the collection, but owing to the variety of soloists, interest never flags.

Twelve of the better performances from the overseas gig are also available on *Basie In Sweden* (Roulette CDP 7 95974-2; 58:16:★★★★★), which, like the Mosaic, was produced by Michael Cuscuna. Most of the charts are Foster's ("Little Pony," "Backwater Blues," "Who Me?," "In A Mellowtone," "Blues Backstage," and "Four, Five, Six"), but also included are Hefti's "Plymouth Rock" and "Splanky," Wilkins' "Peace Pipe," Green's "Corner Pocket," and Davis' famous reworking of "April In Paris." This abbreviated set could provide a worthwhile introduction for those not yet prepared to indulge in the larger investment.

By July 1975, when *Count Basie Big Band: Fun Time* (Pablo PACD 2310-945; 48:58:★★★★★) was recorded in Montreux, only trumpeter Sonny Cohn, Grey, Dixon, Fowlkes, and Green remained of the previous personnel. Now, along with Grey, the main soloist was the hard-blowing tenorman, Jimmy Forrest, whose "Body And Soul" is a standout. Hefti's arrangements are in prominence here, but although the signature is the same, the slant is somewhat different, what with Dixon now assuming the virtuosic tenor role on "Whirly Bird," along with such recent replacements as lead alto-man Bobby Plater, bop trombonist Curtis Fuller, and, in Sonny Payne's chair, drummer Butch Miles. (all reviewed on CD) **DB**

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RECORD & CD REVIEWS



Fred Hersch

FORWARD MOTION—Chesky JD55: *INTRODUCTION; HEARTSONG; DAYS GONE BY; TANGO BITTER-SWEET; CHILDREN'S SONG; JANEOLGY; PHANTOM OF THE OPERA; LULLABY; DREAMSCAPE; PROFESSOR K; FORWARD MOTION; . . . DEPARTED . . .; FREVO; NOSTALGIA*. (73:49)

Personnel: Hersch, piano; Rich Perry, tenor sax; Erik Friedlander, cello; Scott Colley, bass; Tom Rainey, drums.

★★★★½

Fred Hersch can play hard and he can play pretty; unlike most guys his age, he prefers pretty and makes it work. Hersch achieves a delicate, stylistic balance between exquisite, classically trained technique and straightforward bop chops. This date marks the first of many lead sides on which Hersch airs only his own smooth, elegant tunes. His music draws you in, tells slow stories.

This quintet, jelled after a session in Hersch's SoHo loft, frontlines tenor and cello in bitter-sweet autumnal tones. Hersch brilliantly juggles personnel permutations—five quartets, two trios, one solo amid 14 tracks—for a riot of colors in a generous and exceptionally well-sustained, clearly defined set. Post-boppers "Janeology," "Professor K," and "Nostalgia" show unusual complexity and beauty, and draw solos in kind. "Heartsong," a lively linear samba, cuts loose with Perry's smooth solo and ends abruptly without losing shape. "Children's Song" is eminently hummable. "Frevo," a speedy honey of a samba by Egberto Gismonti, is the lone borrowed item, and Hersch often does subdivide beat and phrase in that lightly dancing, spirited way of Brazilians. (reviewed on CD)

—Fred Bouchard



Fourplay

FOURPLAY—Warner Bros. 4-26656: *BALI RUN; 101 EASTBOUND; FOREPLAY; MOONJOGGER; MAX-O-MAN; AFTER THE DANCE; QUADRILLE; MIDNIGHT STROLL; OCTOBER MORNING; WISH YOU WERE*

HERE; RAIN FOREST. (62:40)

Personnel: Bob James, keyboards; Lee Ritenour, guitars; Nathan East, bass; Harvey Mason, drums; Patti Labelle, El DeBarge, Darell DeBarge (cut 6), Philip Bailey (11), vocals.

★★★½

It would be hard to find four more in-demand studio players over the last 20 years than the members of Fourplay. But the mere fact that all these credentials got together does not a magical musical event make. My hopes were high that with little money-making motive, they might do this project for fun and really try to stretch things out. Too often, though, the heads wear thin, solos sound perfunctory, and the arrangements lack sparkle and individuality.

There are moments when they take it up a notch and let us see what might be possible if a band like this could stay together for a length of time. "Quadrille" is one of the most interesting compositions I've heard from Bob James, and it's played with subtle brilliance by the band, especially skinsman Mason. East shines, too, taking the weight of the jam on his own shoulders, playing a gritty rhythmic punch. The guitarist's "October Morning" further explores his Brazilian interests, blending funk and samba into a heavier, but still graceful feel. On "Bali Run," Rit barks and twangs like Robert Cray while the rhythm stews.

At best, they're a West Coast version of the group Stuff—dirty and funky, with musical teeth. At their worst, they show why the promising fusion music of the 1970s was ditched by its fans in the '80s—it became homogenized into sounding like TV show themes, and tried to cross over with out-of-place pop vocals. Fourplay is still carrying some of that baggage, and instead of going back to the drawing board, I wish they'd just throw the whole drawing board out and start from scratch. (reviewed on cassette)

—Robin Tolleson



Prince

DIAMONDS AND PEARLS—Paisley Park/Warner Bros. 25379-2: *THUNDER; DADDY POP; DIAMONDS AND PEARLS; CREAM; STROLLIN'; WILLING AND ABLE; GETT OFF; WALK DON'T WALK; JUGHEAD; MONEY DON'T MATTER 2 NIGHT; PUSH; INSATIABLE; LIVE 4 LOVE*. (65:46)

Personnel: Prince, guitar, keyboards, vocals; Levi Seacer, Jr., rhythm guitar; Tommy Barbarella, keyboards; Sonny T., bass; Rosie Gaines, vocals, keyboards; Michael B., drums; Tony M., raps; Damon Dickson, Kirk Johnson, percussion.

★★★★

It had to happen. A decade ago, Prince was

pinned with the ahead-of-his-time accolade for his free, crosstown traffic between black and white, funk and rock stances. Now, pop music has splintered in multiple directions, with rap and revisionism being common buzzwords. On his latest project, Prince comes off like a precocious soulster trying his best to keep up with the times.

He's always been deft at appropriating r&b and pop idioms in his own intuitive fashion, working ingeniously by the seat of his pants (or lack thereof). Here, though, his stylistic house blend—pop, rap, gospel, innuendos—is almost too diplomatic, and too casual. Whereas past albums have been testaments to Prince's self-reliance, *Diamonds And Pearls* is the handiwork of Prince and the New Power Generation, his own private Family Stone. Like a latter-day Sly Stone with an extended warranty, he guides his ensemble into some hip, theatrical territory. Despite his new album's ultimate lack of payoff, Prince continues to function at a high level, mediating his basic narcissism and sexual braggadocio with a natural flowing musicality.

Unlike his rap and hip-hop contemporaries, Prince's N.P.G. is mostly about a real time, live musical experience. Still, samplers and other tics of digital technology creep into the mix, as with the rhythmically diced-up samples of car horns on "Walk Don't Walk." The title tune is a soulful jewel, a case study in how to string together a few choice motifs. "Strollin'," on the other hand, is a toss-off ditty laid over a stilted swing groove.

By and large, *Diamonds And Pearls* is, at best, journeyman Prince product. But by industry standards, that's still mighty praise. (reviewed on CD)

—Josef Woodard

Floating Patterns, Slow Revelations

by Jon Andrews

What a paradox. At a time when mainstream musics are driven by increasingly conservative forces, an audience springs up for alternatives, even in the classical realm. Suddenly, a harvest of fascinating recordings of music by under-recorded radicals **Morton Feldman** and **John Cage** is available for the curious.

Morton Feldman launched from Cage's influence into a unique, very personal style. He's instantly recognizable, once you get to know him. Painters, especially Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, strongly influenced Feldman, and immersing yourself in his music is like exploring one of Pollock's paintings—you experience an alien landscape with its own depth and internal references. Recurring melodies and sensuous textures are Feldman's brushstrokes—his canvas is the listener's sense of time and space.

The epic "Crippled Symmetry," from *Why Patterns? Crippled Symmetry* (hat ART CD 2-60801/60802; 57:23/65:15: ★★★★★), is a 1983 landmark which crystallizes Feldman's



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ideas. Soft structures shimmer and shift over 91 minutes, anchored occasionally by vibraphone. The music is full of paradoxes: quiet (CD format is mandatory) though not tranquil; spacious, but complex; melodic figures are repeated, but this is not "minimalism." With imagination, you can hear, in the flute and piano, sounds of bird songs, foghorns, crickets. Accept this music on Feldman's terms, and the experience can be spellbinding.

Feldman's *Rothko Chapel* (New Albion NA 039: ★★★★★½) features more familiar melodies and signposts. Directly inspired by Rothko's paintings, and the chapel designed to house them, this atmospheric music contains spiritual elements, including a celestial chorus and an angelic soprano voice. Like a painter, Feldman arranged these floating fragments using ear and intuition. Ethereal and radiant, *Rothko Chapel* may be the best introduction to Feldman's work. (reviewed on cassette)

Moving from chapel to cemetery, composer/conductor **John Adams** argues that, with *American Elegies* (Elektra Nonesuch 79249-2; 49:38: ★★★★★½), Feldman links contemporary composers, like Adams and Ingram Marshall, with an "elegiac strain" in American music reaching back to Charles Ives. I'm not completely convinced, but Feldman's influence on Adams' piano concerto, and on Marshall's "intuitive" soundscape, is clear enough. Feldman's contribution to this sadly beautiful al-



John Cage: now who's laughing

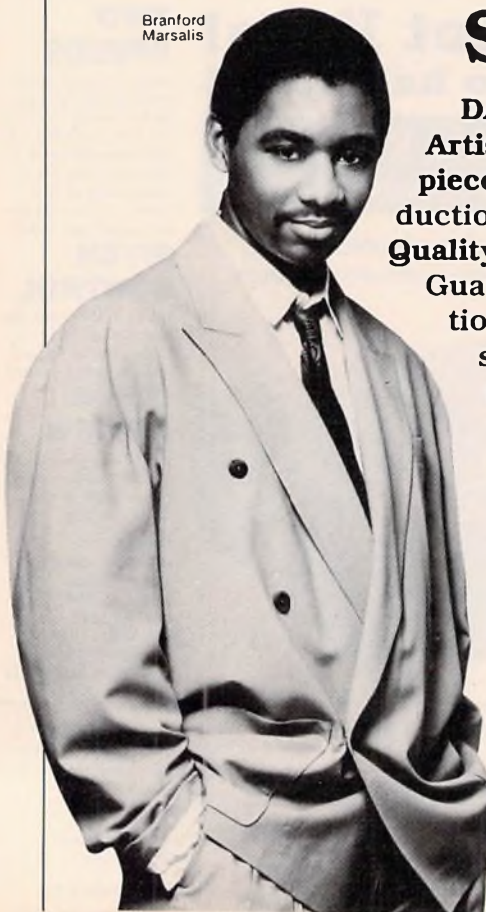
bum, "Madame Press Died Last Week At Ninety," is short, but it persists in memory.

Feldman believed that artists should express themselves with the simplest materials available. For *Bunita Marcus* (hat ART CD 6076; 71:36: ★★★★★) is a long, spare meditation for piano performed by Hildegard Kleeb. Her task is to weave "modules" of gently sustained tones and scattered phrases into a coherent performance. You hear colors as the notes decay in the air, seemingly for hours. "Bunita Marcus" is not background music—it develops note by note, phrase by phrase, demanding (but rewarding) your attention.

John Cage remains notorious for cold, abstract writing, directed by random factors. *The Perilous Night/Four Walls* (New Albion NA 037 CD; 71:18: ★★★★★) unearths scores written in the 1940's, when Cage allowed emotional content to seep into his work. Sensitive interpretation by pianist Margaret Leng Tan, the compositions are surprisingly moving and accessible. On "The Perilous Night," Leng Tan attacks Cage's prepared piano with controlled rage—it sounds like a gamelan ensemble in a tantrum. "Four Walls" describes "a disturbed mind." Leng Tan uses Cage's trademark devices of repetition and silence dramatically to express confusion, forgetfulness, and frustration through painfully distracted melodies. This recording could be a revelation for Cage-haters.

Music For Five (hat ART CD 2-60701/60702; 59:27/67:08: ★★★★★½) collects Cage's open-structured "time-length" pieces, including the infamous "4'33"," and "Music For Five," which sounds like structured improvisation. The set is dominated by two versions of the recombinant "45' For A Speaker" (in English and German). In these five distinct works (performed simultaneously), Cage deploys pianos, cello, and percussion for timed intervals and in different combinations, all while the speaker reads Cage's text. Two versions may be overkill for all but confirmed Cage disciples. (albums reviewed on CD unless otherwise noted) **DB**

Brantford Marsalis



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Michael Brecker



1 Phineas Newborn, Jr.

"Oleo" (from *A WORLD OF PIANO, Contemporary/OJC*) Newborn, piano; Sam Jones, bass; Louis Hayes, drums.

You can hear that particular album a thousand times and it's still like you're hearing it for the first time. It's so fresh, so innovative, and provocative in so many ways. That's my spiritual father at the piano, Phineas Newborn, Jr. That's "Oleo," a Sonny Rollins composition, Sam Jones on bass, Louis Hayes on drums. That is one of the few 5-star albums, but I have to give it a thousand stars. That's one of the greatest trio recordings of the last 30 or 40 years. Phineas was so special, his sound, his concept, his use of dynamics, his use of the pedals, his feeling. He was a magnificent blues player. B.B. King will tell you all about that. He's one of the few people I associate the word "genius" with, extremely underrated. People like Ray Bryant, Tommy Flanagan, Hank Jones, Oscar Peterson speak in awe of this gentleman. All of us have to pay homage to Phineas.

2 Chick Corea

"Rhythm-a-ning" (from *TRIO MUSIC, ECM*) Corea, piano; Miroslav Vitous, bass; Roy Haynes, drums.

That was a friend of mine, Chick Corea. That was *Trio Music* with Miroslav Vitous and Roy Haynes, and of course, the Thelonious Monk composition "Rhythm-a-ning." I enjoyed it. They did an album earlier, *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*, and along with Phineas, Oscar, Ahmad [Jamal], Ramsey [Lewis], we were having devotional services for these albums in the mid-'70s. I've always enjoyed Chick's various periods. He was definitely taking this tune out. He likes to be daring. I wouldn't say it's my favorite interpretation of the piece—but you can never hear enough of Monk's music. 3½ stars for being daring and imaginative with it. It's hard to play something after Monk has put his signature on it. It's hard to do anything better than Monk.

3 Benny Green

"The Fruit" (from *IN THIS DIRECTION, Criss Cross*) Green, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Lewis Nash, drums.

That sounds like Kenny Barron. I recognize Buster Williams playing bass, and probably Ben Riley, Kenny's favorite drummer in his trio settings. That's a Bud Powell composition. I know it very well but can't think of the title, maybe "The Fruit." That's a 3½-star performance. Nice bass solo. Buster has a few signature phrases I recognize.

JAMES WILLIAMS

by Michael Bourne

You'd have to say Art Blakey was the greatest leader of all times," said pianist James Williams, "because he produced so many leaders." Williams ought to know. He's one of many Jazz Messengers-turned-leaders.

Williams, born in Memphis, graduated from Memphis State with a degree in music education. He settled in Boston and for several years worked on the faculty of Berklee while also working around the Boston scene, often with drummer Alan Dawson. He played piano in Blakey's band from 1977-'81, and during those years, alongside Bobby Watson, Billy Pierce, Charles Fambrough, and Wynton Marsalis, contributed a variety of pieces to nine Jazz Messengers albums. He also recorded many of his own albums, including sessions for Concord and Sunnyside. Williams has also produced more and more albums for others, including Billy Pierce, Bill Easley, Donald Brown, Harold Mabern, Tony Reedus, and Geoff Keezer.

Williams is one of the most active sidemen around the New York scene, backing up folks like Milt Jackson, Bobby Hutcherson, Freddie Hubbard,



Art Farmer, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, and Benny Carter. But most often he enjoys fronting what he calls the Magical Trio. Ray Brown, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Charnett Moffett, and Jeff Watts are featured on his three Magical albums for EmArcy. Being from Memphis, one of the hallmarks of James Williams as a pianist is the blues. He's also inspired by spirituals, and on his forthcoming recording he's joined by a choir. This was his first Blindfold Test.

Buster played on my first trio date, *The Arioso Touch* [Concord Jazz]. I'm pretty sure that's Kenny. It's played very well. I know Kenny's playing very well but I didn't hear any phrases that I generally associate with him, so I may be well off base. But for some reason, I get the feeling this is Kenny or someone very influenced by Kenny.

MB: Benny Green.

JW: No kidding! Go ahead, Benny! Benny's playing has changed since this recording, I'd say. Right now, I'd say he's more influenced by Bobby Timmons. This is very good playing.

4 Duke Ellington

"Reflections In D" (from *JAZZ PIANO, Smithsonian*) Ellington, piano.

That's a great interpretation. That's quite a tone poem. That's easily 5 stars, actually another of those thousand stars! That's the grand grand of all grand masters, Edward Kennedy Ellington. "Reflections In D." If it wasn't for him, most of us wouldn't know what to play out here. He spanned practically the history of jazz, from playing with Sidney Bechet to playing with John Coltrane. Very few artists have been so daring in so many

different directions. He was a great pianist. Willie "the Lion" Smith was one of Duke's mentors. That whole style, James P. Johnson and Harlem stride, he came right up through that. He and Bill Basie both were some serious ticklers!

5 Tommy Flanagan

"Raincheck" (from *JAZZ POET, Timeless*) Flanagan, piano; George Mraz, bass; Kenny Washington, drums.

Wow, that's another of my heroes. That's the man from Detroit, Tommy Flanagan. He's had the best and most consistent trio the last dozen years. That was George Mraz on bass and Kenny Washington on drums, and they're playing Billy Strayhorn's "Raincheck." That was a spectacular performance. 4½ stars easily. Throughout the solos and whole performance you heard all kinds of suggestions and phrases of things Duke played, a little bow to Dizzy, just dropping those things in, those nuances, and very much the voice of Tommy Flanagan comes through loud and clear. He's the definitive interpreter of Billy Strayhorn and Thad Jones. He's pound for pound one of the greatest pianists of all time. DB