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David Sanborn Answers Critics

**Orbiting
with Sun Ra**

**Toshiko Akiyoshi's
Jazz-life Battles**

**Jazz for the
Hip-Hop Nation**





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Cover photograph by Ken Franckling.

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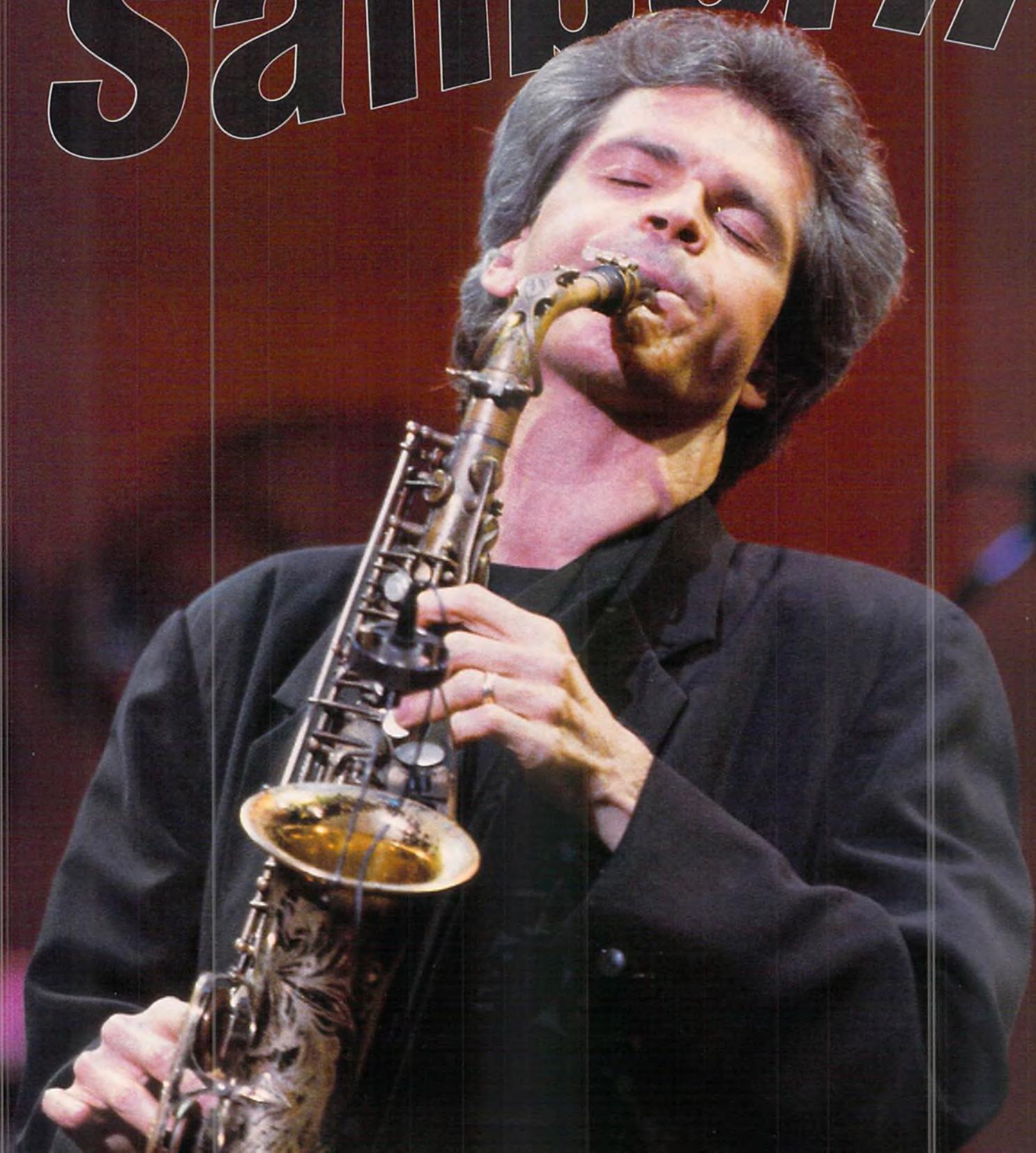
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Sanborn



Swings Back

By Howard Mandel

Surprise! "I'm not a jazz musician," alto sax star David Sanborn says with a shrug and a self-deprecating grin, leaning forward from the sofa of his comfortable loft which overlooks the Hudson River.

Instrument cases surround a baby grand piano and the 40-something wailer who's earned four gold records and a platinum one for 12 releases as a leader during a 25-year career; who was player-host of the TV-show-cum-jam-session, *Night Music* (see **DB** Apr. '90); who deejayed a nationally syndicated jazz radio program for six

"The music that really made me want to become a musician was by Ray Charles.

David Newman and Hank Crawford were the guys. They combined the sophistication, some of the harmonic sensibility, certainly the hipness, and the rhythmic undercurrent of jazz with the emotional directness of gospel and the structural elements of r&b."



years; who as a kid in St. Louis gigged with Julius Hemphill, Oliver Lake, and Lester Bowie; who studies the horn with George Coleman; who's toured and recorded with Gil Evans, the Brecker Brothers, the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, and a passel of pop and rock name acts. And yet, our host appears to be a tad defensive. It's partly the result of a curmudgeonly but arguably fair 2½-star **Down Beat** review of Sanborn's best-seller-yet, *Upfront*, by critic Kevin Whitehead (Aug. '92), and the lengthy discussion (which both call very cordial and illuminating) Whitehead and Sanborn had upon

meeting at a birthday party for saxophonist/composer Tim Berne.

"Not that I'm offended by the description," Sanborn continues, "but I think the rhythmic orientation of what I do is not really jazz. Where I came from, the kind of musical context I grew up in, the kind of playing I did when I was a young player, and the way my playing was formed was in more of a rhythm & blues context. The music that really made me want to become a musician was by Ray Charles. David Newman and Hank Crawford were the guys. They combined the sophistication, some of the harmonic sensibility, certainly the hipness, and the rhythmic undercurrent of jazz with the emotional directness of gospel and the structural elements of r&b.

"I can give you other reasons why I wouldn't consider myself a jazz musician, like I don't really have a command of the vocabulary that comes out of the tradition. But actually, I don't know why anybody would want to call themselves *anything*. The implication is exclusionary. I'm a jazz musician—so that means I'm *not* a rock & roll musician, not a rhythm & blues musician? If somebody describes themselves as a jazz musician—I'm interested in what that means to other people and why somebody *would* describe themselves as a jazz musician."

Go ahead, blame the media or the recording industry for such distinctions. Sanborn concedes it's an old story: "You've heard this rap a thousand times from musicians—labels are meaningless. Now, I understand why people are very protective about the word 'jazz' and about what they consider jazz. I understand a desire to maintain a connection with the tradition and a respect for the history of the music, which has been a marginal music in this culture.

"But I think you can go a little overboard with that. Jazz is a growing, evolving art form, and it has to incorporate a lot of different things. Where does Sly Stone or James Brown fit in? They influenced a lot of jazz musicians. I look at music as, 'Do you like it or don't you?' Whether it's jazz or not is irrelevant."

That's a player's—and fan's—prerogative, but not a critic's. Writers on the music are assumed to have gained, through broad and deep listening, an historical perspective



PAUL NATKIN/PHOTO RESERVE

on the music, and big, relatively objective ears for what's good and maybe even new. We've got to draw stylistic distinctions to communicate with our readers, despite all the inherent inadequacies of language.

Whitehead chided Sanborn for playing clichés with conviction, for doing "something agreeable, even if it's only romping on his usual licks" over vamping rhythm tracks, or making a "nice" but ultimately forgettable keg-party-and-dance record, a record that's calculatingly commercial. These are charges Sanborn's heard before. Regarding one: he denies the electrified, Marcus Miller-produced *Upfront* was created by overlaying tracks.

"*Upfront* was a live record, as live as *another Hand*," he says, citing his previous release that featured guitarist Bill Frisell, pianist Marcus Miller, bassist Charlie Haden, drummers Joey Baron and Jack DeJohnette, among other critically acclaimed improvisers (see "Reviews" Sept. '91). "It actually took us less time to do *Upfront*, about a week, compared to 10 days for *another Hand*, which seemed to be more complicated to get together in the studio.

"The general tone of *another Hand* is more introspective, and it has more contextual elements of jazz than *Upfront*. But I wouldn't consider it strictly a jazz record, either. I'm not trying to get myself out of the line of fire of being evaluated as a jazz musician," he hastens to add, "but it's not an area that I operate in to a great degree.

"The albums I made in the '80s with Marcus Miller were from the pop end of the r&b and funk spectrum. We were writing songs in the studio; we were interested in exploring those structures, that context. I sort of burned out on doing that. Not only working in that

context but also working that way, building tracks. It's basically a compositional approach to music, and it eliminates a large part of the interactive element which is the essence of any kind of jazz. I *have* operated in that context . . ." he trails off.

To hear Sanborn do so, turn to his '70s recordings with Gil Evans' orchestra. On *The Music Of Jimi Hendrix*, Sanborn was employed by both Evans and arranger/trombonist Tom Malone to suggest Hendrix's lyrical vocals and melting lead guitar. On *Svengali*, Sanborn blows uncharacteristically fragmented lines on George Russell's "Blues In Orbit," and is followed by tenorist Billy Harper, who displays a stronger grasp of the bebop vocabulary and grammar. Then there's 1977's *Priestess*, on which Sanborn constructs a statement that is in no way less powerful or idiomatically satisfying than that of Evans' other altoist, Arthur Blythe.

"David Sanborn's style is an icon in modern American culture," Whitehead amplified in a recent telephone chat. "And I think his solo on 'Priestess' is a fine piece of work—that's a perfect setting for what he does really well. What's ironic is that as a result of Sanborn's making a good, solid record like *another Hand*, it raises the expectations for his future recordings. What I was saying about *Upfront* is that, in 20 years, a whole lot of people will not be listening to that record, and I believe if something is really good, it will stand the test of time."

"I'll grant Kevin Whitehead this: *Upfront* is like a keg party," counters Sanborn. "I told him, 'You're right about that. But what's wrong with having a good time? Does that minimize what the music is? Does that make it frivolous, does that make it less? Do you have to freight everything you do with some historical importance? Is

that the criteria for good music?"

Whitehead responds, "I have two words for that: Fats Waller. He's evidence that one can make records that are jazz and that are frivolous and that stand the test of time. They swing, he improvises on the melodies and sometimes on the lyrics, there are jazz solos—and 60 years later people still listen to them with enjoyment."

Sanborn has other criteria in mind for true jazz. "What a great jazz musician does is tell a really great story," he maintains. "There's tension, release, continuity, shape, all kinds of historical references, humor—it's a wide emotional and dynamic range. When Ornette [Coleman] plays, it makes me sad and happy. Sometimes I say Ornette and Bob Dylan and Sonny Rollins are my favorite comedians—in the most respectful, positive sense—because they make me laugh a *real* laugh, the kind that liberates me.

"I mean, I'm a saxophone player, and I've listened to Sonny

Rollins, Charlie Parker, Tab Smith, Johnny Dodds, Sonny Stitt, Jackie McLean, and all the great players, including Louis Jordan. I've heard people describe jazz as having come to a fork in the road in the mid-'40s, where it went one way with the bebop school of Charlie Parker and Bud Powell and Monk, and became less dance-oriented, more cerebral music. I've got to say, I don't happen to agree that that necessarily eliminated the visceral aspects of—or more visceral responses to—the music.

"And then there was the so-called show-business, dance-oriented pop end of jazz, with people like Big Joe Turner and Joe Houston. Louis Jordan is a prime example. Let's say, just for the sake of simplicity, we've got Charlie Parker and Louis Jordan. There were a lot of connections, but they definitely went in two different areas. And sometimes they crossed over, right? Out of Louis Jordan came rhythm & blues and players like Willis Jackson, Sam Taylor, the honkers and screamers or however they've been described over the

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years—the Texas tenors, Arnett Cobb, King Curtis. Out of Charlie Parker came Miles Davis. We've got two subsets of jazz here.”

Ah, but the crossover is where this genealogy—and its current issue—gets really interesting. Because both Davis and Coleman, presumed heirs of Parker's bebop coup that captured jazz and

“Jazz is a growing, evolving art form, and it has to incorporate a lot of different things. Where does Sly Stone or James Brown fit in? They influenced a lot of jazz musicians. I look at music as, ‘Do you like it or don't you?’ Whether it's jazz or not is irrelevant.”



whisked it far from its swing-era popularity into elite realms of art music, never really abandoned jazz's blues connotations. Each sought, in personal ways, to re-emphasize pop elements through the use of “social” rhythms and contemporary electronic instruments.

The best r&b/rock-born players, those with the most access to show-biz/pop contexts (Sanborn being a prime example, but Pat

Metheny and John Scofield being others), recognize the musical limitations of their branch of the family and have consistently moved to embrace the farther-reaching harmonies, the more complex rhythms, the freer improvisational gambits, the twisted melodies, and the extremely gutsy or technical feats of the “cerebral” branch. In jazz, that old mind/body dichotomy ain't what it used to be.

Hear the first cut on *Upfront*, Marcus Miller's “Snakes,” where Sanborn stretches a quasi Native American motif (set by thumbed bass, funk organ, and spacious guitar fills) up through an unexpected modulation, into one of his signature cries, beyond a chicken-head chorus and into squealing lines of acidic articulation that flow over the bar. Sanborn certainly phrases like a jazz player, creates tension and provides release, details his interesting, personal stories, has a distinct and polished sound, and admirable curiosity.

“I enjoy playing in a lot of different musical contexts,” Sanborn admits. “I think it serves my playing well to do that, because it keeps me interested. I look back on some of my playing with Gil as rudimentary, a lot less sophisticated than some of the later playing I did. That was 20 years ago. I was playing better later.

“I don't expect everybody to like what I do all the time. I do what I do for my own reasons. Regardless of what some people think, they're not financial reasons. I do it because I like it. Maybe that puts me in an even worse position in some people's eyes—maybe I was better off having people think that I did it for the money. But I don't do it for the money—I do it 'cause I like it. I made *Upfront* because I like that record. I can listen to it. I love *another Hand*, and it was very different for me to put myself in what was mostly an acoustic context. But the kind of context that I operate in more [often] is more like what *Upfront* is.”

And that's why David Sanborn thinks he's not a jazz musician? It's not just modesty. Lighten up, y'all. If jazz doesn't have room for his kind of sound, applied to keg parties, dances, or any old irresponsible whim of the moment, it's jazz's loss, now and for the future.

DB

Sala Brothers

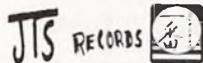
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EQUIPMENT

“I play a Selmer Mark VI. These days, I use La Voz medium reeds. I have to work on them, because they're just so inconsistent. I've been using a Dukoff DB mouthpiece, but I'm probably going to switch, because it's wearing out, and I can't find another one to replace it.”

Is he an equipment freak?

Sanborn pauses, then silently points around the room in which saxes in cases sit in a line on the floor, along the walls, under the piano, and atop its lid. “Does that answer your question? I've been playing a soprano sax recently, too.”

What about electronics?

“No, I'm very equipment ignorant. I have to have somebody come over and hook up the [Yamaha] DX7 sometimes—I just use it for writing, when I need some kind of sequencer or drum-machine thing to figure something out. But lately, I've simply been using the piano. It's much more rewarding.”

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

(See DB Aug. '88 for additional listings.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <i>UPFRONT</i> —Elektra 961272 | <i>SVENGALI</i> —Atlantic 1643 |
| <i>ANOTHER HAND</i> —Elektra Musician 961088 | <i>THE GIL EVANS ORCHESTRA PLAYS THE MUSIC OF JIMI HENDRIX</i> —RCA/Bluebird 8409 |
| <i>CLOSE-UP</i> —Reprise 25715 | with various others |
| <i>STRAIGHT TO THE HEART</i> —Warner Bros. 25150 | <i>THE RESURRECTION OF PIGBOY CRABSHAW</i> —Elektra 70415 (Paul Butterfield) |
| <i>BACKSTREET</i> —Warner Bros 23906 | <i>IN MY OWN DREAM</i> —Elektra 74025 (Butterfield) |
| soundtracks | <i>DOUBLE VISION</i> —Warner Bros. 25393 (Bob James) |
| <i>LETHAL WEAPON 2</i> —Warner Bros. 25985 | <i>THE RETURN OF THE BRECKER BROTHERS</i> —GRP 9684 |
| <i>GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS</i> —Elektra 61384 | <i>BACK TO BACK</i> —Arista 4061 (Breckers) |
| with Gil Evans | |
| <i>PRIESTESS</i> —Antilles 1010 | |
| <i>THERE COMES A TIME</i> —RCA/Bluebird 5783 | |

Orbiting With Sun

SUN RA

By John Diliberto

Shards of sound scatter across the concert hall. Blips and bleeps, squiggles and snarls spew out from stage right, where a short, portly figure dressed in iridescent robes turns knobs and throws switches, orchestrating a sonic collision of satellites and asteroids. Suddenly, he turns from his Moog synthesizer and begins spinning around bodily, wiping the backs of his hands across a Fender Rhodes piano.

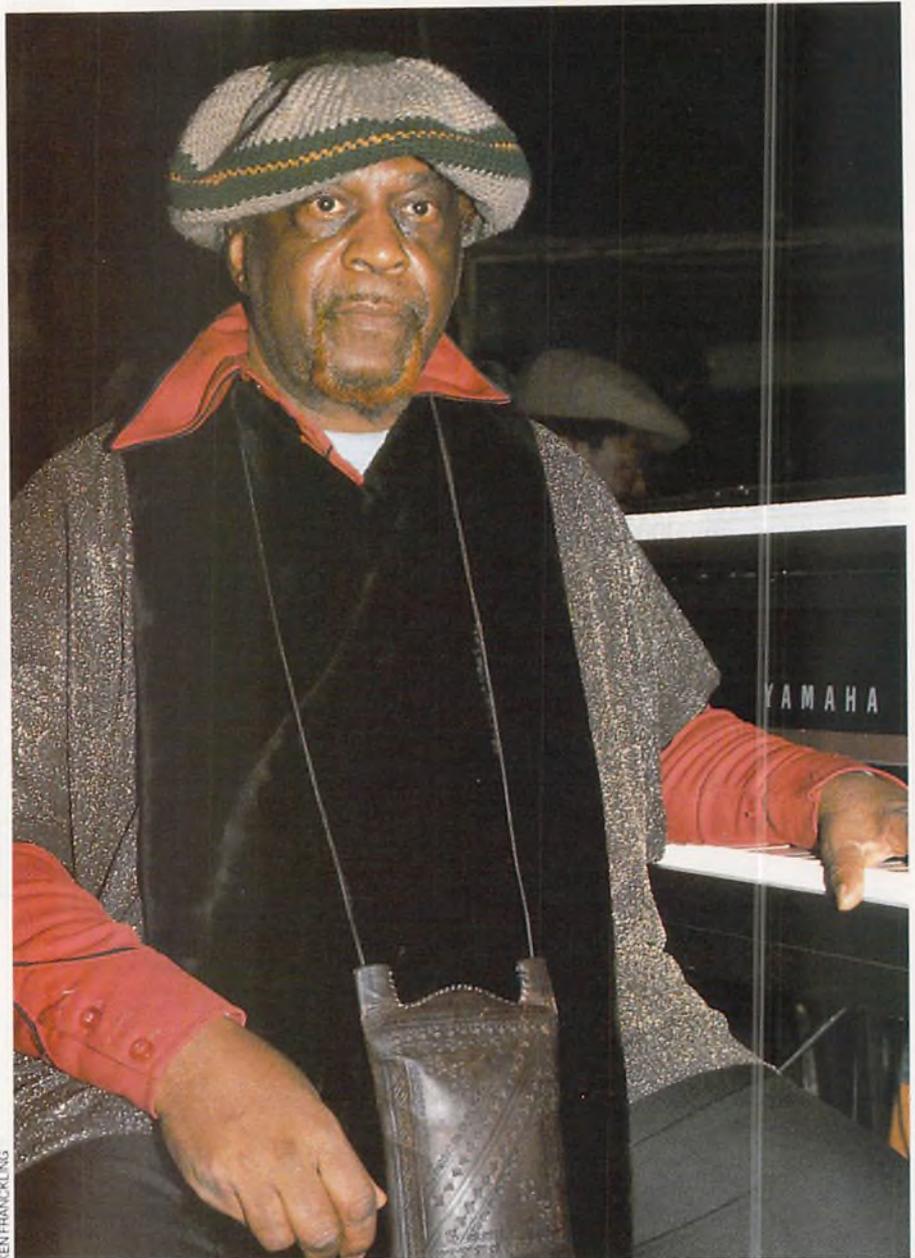
"It's like a journey, but you're on the road, and you have to do what you have to do for the changes of scenery, changes of feelings. You have to be ready for those potholes in the road."



These are some early moments of electric jazz, courtesy of the Columbus of space music, Sun Ra.

Sun Ra!

The name resonates out of the tombs of ancient Egypt. But somewhere, Sun God took a turn into the taverns of Chicago and the nightlife of jazz. It's been just about 40 years since Sun Ra formed the Arkestra in Chicago after leaving the big band of Fletcher Henderson. He began cloaking strange new sounds in a mythology from the rings of Saturn, leading his own big band in a vortex of swing, electronics, bebop, the avant garde, r&b, and a maze of cosmic metaphysics. In that time, he's maintained a stable of musicians who have toured relentlessly and released more than 200 albums on labels as small as El Saturn and as large as A&M. Musicians passing through his group have singed the fringe of the avant garde, including John Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, Sunny Murray, and Julian Priester.



KEN FRANKLING

You'd think that this DB Hall of Famer and winner of the Big Band category in the '92 Critics Poll would be treasured as an institution of jazz, held up alongside Bird and Basie, Duke and Miles. With literally thousands of compositions, it seems like Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra would be dedicating programs to him. But despite appearances on *Saturday Night Live* and the cover of *Rolling Stone*, accolades from the mainstream have eluded Sun Ra. "In America, a lot of people don't know about me because most musicians try to be famous or make lots of money or get booking agents and all that," he says with little self-effacement. "But I wouldn't fit into some places because a lot of people in America are out of it,

you know?"

That may be, but there's been no dearth of Sun Ra albums or performances throughout the United States and Europe, where they headline festivals and sell-out concert halls with the consistency, if not the audience size, of the Grateful Dead.

But these are not the best of times for Sun Ra and his Arkestra. The celestial being from Saturn has become a victim of some earth-bound infirmities. Sun Ra is approximately 80 years old (his birth date was always speculative), having suffered a stroke in 1990, and two more since. The most recent occurred this past October, days before we were scheduled for our interview. Once a robust, rotund figure who danced across the stage, waving his robed arms to

direct his Arkestra, he's now carried to his keyboard in a wheelchair, his face wooden, his hand movements minimal. Yet he still plays, and some Arkestra members claim he sounds better than ever.

And Sun Ra isn't the only one with problems as this ancient clan closes in on 40 years together. Over the years, members such as trumpeter Hobart Dotson, bassist Ronnie Boykins, wind player Eloë Omoe, and most recently, saxophonist Pat Patrick, have left the planet. To use the Ra vernacular. Longtime vocalist June Tyson died November 24 after battling breast cancer. Influential tenor titan John Gilmore suffers tooth maladies and hasn't fully recovered from pneumonia.



JAN PERSSON

The Arkestra has never had an easy time of it. For the last 20 years or so they've lived hand to mouth, occupying a run-down row house in Philadelphia—not the most elegant way to travel the spaceways.

But Sun Ra has been stretching the boundaries of jazz the way Einstein bent the laws of physics. Building on a foundation of swing from his days with the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra in the early 1950s, Ra used Henderson, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington as launching pads for his often-electronic new music. Ra, whose self-aggrandizing personality makes him frugal with compliments, is effusive when he speaks of Henderson.

"When I arrived on the planet, I always liked music that was together, and that was the most together music I ever heard," he says. "He was the one behind Bessie Smith and Ethel Waters, schooling them, playing

for them. He was just an innovator, a creator you might say, someone who was interested in the precision and discipline of being able to put things together and coordinate it with taste, with mastership [sic] and all that."

But Sun Ra was already a disciple of bop by the time Henderson died in 1952, and that's what his first group, the Herman "Sonny" Blount trio, started playing. But by the mid-'50s, a bop band was nothing new, and Sun Ra discovered a hook that set him apart. With his producer, Alton Abraham, he was folding the Bible, Egyptian mythology, black spiritualism, and science fiction into a unique and convoluted cosmology. He took on the name Sun Ra, and, with costumes lifted from a Chicago Opera performance of

Madame Butterfly, he began the Arkestra. He ended his life as Herman Sonny Blount, proclaiming himself a citizen of the universe, born on Saturn, and preaching of the space age.

He was playing a lot of standard tunes with the trio," recalls saxophonist John Gilmore. "We weren't playing a whole lot of his arrangements, mostly standards. About six months later we were playing this number, 'Saturn,' and I heard it. For the first time I heard it, and I knew that I wasn't just up there playing. I thought, 'God, this cat is somethin' else.' I could hear those intervals."

It's not easy for everyone to get aboard the Ra spacecruiser. Overly serious jazz fans are put off by the carnival atmosphere of a Ra performance. More traditional audiences think Ra is making nothing but noise, a

"keening dissonance," according to *The New York Times* in 1961. But a quick listen to any of the Evidence reissues, e.g., *Holiday For Soul Dance*, *Supersonic Jazz*, and *We Travel The Spaceways*, reveals the roots and traditions of Sun Ra's sound, as well as the beginnings of what would be called free-jazz. (Other titles are available on Delmark, hat ART, Black Saint, ESP, and Rounder.)

Arkestra performances are free-flowing affairs that might start with saxophonist Marshall Allen playing an African kora, segue into Fletcher Henderson's "Big John Special," slide into Ra crooning "East Of The Sun, West Of The Moon," and careen into a free-for-all of horns blowing at the precipice of infinity.

"Sun Ra has the biggest book I've seen in my life," exclaims saxophonist Noel Scott, who has been with the Arkestra since 1979. "Marshall [Allen] has four suitcases full of music. Ra has three arrangements of almost any standard that you name, be it 'Old Black Magic' or 'I Didn't Know What Time It Was.' He has four arrangements of 'But Not For Me.'"

Ra doesn't call out the tunes in concert. He just starts playing, and eventually a lead emerges as the band scrambles through sheaves of paper, pulling sheet music off the floor, trying to find the right tune. "He doesn't sit in the dressing room and run off the tunes we're going to play," says saxophonist Allen, who's been with the band since 1958. "When he gets to the audience, that's when he decides. The way he calls them is to just play the intro, and off we go. Sometimes you don't have time to find your music, so you better know your part well enough."

"Sometimes it sounds like the intro to 'But Not For Me,' then he goes into 'Yesterdays,'" laughs Scott. "Sometimes he changes his mind. It's a competition between the reed and brass sections to see who would catch a tune first."

He adds, "And heaven forbid you make a mistake and pick the wrong song."

"The music is like a journey," says Ra, speaking slowly from his hospital bed, "and they have to have a map."

But Sun Ra says that map is only a guide. "It's like a journey, but you're on the road, and you have to do what you have to do for the changes of scenery, changes of feelings," he says. "You have to be ready for those potholes in the road."

That may account for the Arkestra's penchant for free improvisation. Even in recent years, when Ra's sets have been dominated by standards from Fletcher Henderson, Jelly Roll Morton, and George Gershwin, the band always takes an opportunity to blast off.

Allen is at his best in these sections, hammering his alto keys like pistons with

lines scrawling across the consciousness in a blur of sound. "The way Sun Ra does it, you're creating at the same time," says Allen. "If everybody's in tune, everybody's clicking, you're on the vibration."

"Sometimes, none of it's written 'cause everybody's coming from intuition," adds Gilmore.

"It's all discipline, working and discipline," says Ra, who once said that everything they do on stage is completely planned. "Music is a language, a conversation, and they have to keep talking the same language and dialect."

Ra used to rehearse the Arkestra every day in the cramped living room of his row house. His keyboards were stacked at one end while the Arkestra piled in amongst the

Night Of The Purple Moon (El Saturn). Ra also got some gentle, ethereal whispers from his electric celesta, heard to beautiful effect on an album called *Impressions Of Patches Of Blue* (MGM), a set of duets by Ra and vibraphonist Walt Dickerson. "I still have it [the celesta]," says Ra, "but it's too fragile to take out." (None of these titles are currently available.)

However, it's the Moog synthesizer for which Sun Ra is still best known, launching astral epics like *Space Probe* (El Saturn) and "Out In Space" from *It's After The End Of The World* (MPS). "I'm fascinated by the sounds," says Ra in his soft, Southern drawl, still present from his former life in Alabama. "I can do things with synthesizers. If I

the Crumar company in Italy, and subsequently by Akai. With trumpet-style valves and a wheel that allowed you to bend notes and jump through seven octaves, it was a space-age clarion call for the band. "It had a great sound," says Allen. "You just blow in it lightly, and you can slur and trill."

But it was difficult to manipulate. "A lot of the guys had trouble playing the keys and turning the knob at the same time," admits Allen, who still plays it occasionally.

Not even state-of-the-art technology can escape the pull of Ra's mysticism. Most musicians may think they're plugging in for electricity, but Sun Ra knows they're really plugging into the spirit world. "If some of my instruments go out, the electronic instru-

"... music's my food, and I need to hear me some different sounds. I don't want to eat the same food everyday, I don't want to hear the same sounds everyday. That's why I have a band."



ANDREW LEPLEY

frayed furniture and garish, surreal paintings of aliens and Egyptian symbology. Now, while he still hits the stage with 12 or more pieces, most of them are pickup musicians from each location. The current core band is just Ra, reed players Allen, Gilmore, James Jackson, and bassist Tyrone Hill.

As an avatar of the space age, Ra needed instruments that reflected the new technology. Almost from the beginning, he played unusual electronic keyboards at a time when even the Fender Rhodes wasn't used in jazz. "People didn't know what was happening, they didn't know it was electronic," says Gilmore. The origins of these instruments are as lost in the mists of time as the Pyramids of Egypt. The Solovox was an early keyboard instrument made by Hammond that emulated the sustained sounds of strings. You can hear it intertwining with the violin of Stuff Smith on Ra's earliest sides from 1956, released last year as part of *Sound Sun Pleasure* (Evidence—see "Reviews" May '92).

The Clavoline was another techno-relic with its eerie, theremin-like sound gracing *The Magic City* (Impulse!). The funky, clavinet sounds of the Rok-si-chord dominated

wanted to get the feeling of thunder, it's there. If I want the feeling of space, it's there. You could do it maybe with a piano, too, but the point of it is that with a synthesizer I can not only play the melody, but I can play the rhythm, and then I can pull something down that I never heard before. That's important to me because music's my food, and I need to hear me some different sounds. I don't want to eat the same food everyday, I don't want to hear the same sounds everyday. That's why I have a band. They get some strange sounds out of the instruments. I don't need no electronics. I can make a band sound like an electronic band, without electricity. I can do that."

Sometimes, his band has been electronic. In the early '80s, the horn section was as likely to step up playing Electronic Valve Instruments (EVIs) as reeds. Designed by Niles Steiner, they were manufactured by

ments, that's when I reach over into the spirit thing and play all the instruments," Ra proclaims. "Although they use their hands, I play them. I just let them tap in on my spirit. That may be too far-out for some people at this particular point."

No doubt it is. Ra's keyboard pyrotechnics have been toned down in recent years. He's gone through instruments such as the Crumar synthesizers in the early 1980s, then used several Casio models, but now he relies on a Yamaha SY22, mostly for piano and organ sounds. Electronics are almost absent from more recent albums such as *Blue Delight* and *Purple Night* (both A&M).

Despite his ill health, he still speaks confidently of the future and says he's going on the road as soon as he leaves the hospital. "I need a change of scenery," says Sun Ra, who is into his fourth decade of altering the musical landscape for the rest of us. **DB**

The State of Electric Jazz

By Bill Milkowski

Contrary to the wishes of acoustic-jazz purists, who no doubt have revelled in the post-Wynton young lions movement that's grabbed headlines and record-company attention of late, the state of electric jazz is still alive and well in the '90s. And as valid as ever, according to several musicians and industry types surveyed by DB.

Jack DeJohnette, a longtime practitioner and pioneer in the use of electronic instruments in jazz, sees the advances in sampling and synthesizer technology as new opportunities to enhance his music. "To me it's just additional colors on the palette, and it all relates to how it's applied. Some people use it real tastefully, other people prefer the real raw sounds. And to me, it's all valid."

DeJohnette got his first dose of decibels with Miles Davis during one of Davis' most ferocious electric periods, marked by such seminal fusion albums as 1969's *Bitches Brew* and '70's *Live-Evil* (both for Columbia). He went on to experiment further with electronics in Compost, a band he formed with fellow drummer Bob Moses, and later in the various incarnations of his Special Edition band. The most recent Edition featured saxophonists Greg Osby and Gary Thomas playing with MIDI attachments on their horns, giving them immediate access to an array of futuristic synth sounds.

DeJohnette himself made extensive use of drum machines and triggered samples on *Zebra* (MCA), a soundtrack he did with trumpeter Lester Bowie; and he mixed it up with Pat Metheny's Synclavier guitar and Herbie Hancock's synths on *Parallel Realities* (MCA). On his latest release, *The 5th World* (Blue Note), DeJohnette unleashes the electric-guitar fury of Vernon Reid and John Scofield, accompanied by Michael Cain's synthesizers, Lonnie Plaxico's electric bass, and touches of electric drums from Will Calhoun. Clearly, at age 50, DeJohnette remains as open-minded about the use of electronics in jazz as he did when he joined Miles at age 26.

"My band is acoustic-electric, not one or



the other," he says. "I utilize keyboard sequencers, but I'm drumming along in real time. We have an acoustic pianist in the band, but he's also playing some synths. And Lonnie Plaxico goes back and forth between electric and acoustic bass. I like that kind of versatility."

DeJohnette is quick to point out that in over-hyping the so-called neo-conservative jazz phenomenon, the media has inadvertently turned its collective back on people

"... we must acknowledge the fact that jazz music has always borrowed from other sources, and changed the rules as it expanded and moved on."

—Jack DeJohnette

who are making ambitious use of electric instruments. "Bands like Ronald Shannon Jackson's Decoding Society are doing some really adventurous things. You also have people like Jean-Paul Bourelly, Greg [Osby], and Gary [Thomas] utilizing that stuff on their own projects. There's quite a few young musicians dealing with electric music today, and they're all being overlooked because the mainstream acoustic-jazz thing is supposedly what's happening right now. And I have nothing against that. That's great, and I'm glad to see that happen, but that's not all there is to jazz. That's just part of a whole

wider spectrum of improvised music going on today. And also," DeJohnette continues, "we must acknowledge the fact that jazz music has always borrowed from other sources and changed the rules as it expanded and moved on."

DeJohnette believes that the semantic argument about acoustic versus electric ultimately comes down to a matter of intent. "It's a matter of how these sounds are used. Everybody's to their own tastes. Some people hate synthesizers, some people find use for them. Pat Metheny gets a lot out of them. He utilizes samples and sequences with the acoustic stuff in a very tasteful, very organic way. I like to deal with those things myself; but there are also times, like when I'm playing in the trio with Keith [Jarrett], where there are no electronics involved at all. So I'm not going into a tug-of-war between one or the other. I'm integrating them. And how I utilize them depends on what I'm writing, what the song calls for. There are warm, inviting sounds; and there are harsh, grating sounds. It just depends on what combination is appropriate."

According to vibist Mike Mainieri, who has become more aware of a bottom-line mentality since forming his own NYC Records label, what's hot is not necessarily what sells. "Acoustic jazz may be stylish and hip, and there's a tremendous amount of articles written about these young musicians in suits, but the sad part about it is that their record sales are not reflected in the amount of hype they have gotten. I'm shocked by it, actually. You'd be shocked yourself if you saw some of these sales. They suck. It's shameful. The jazz records that are really selling, like Ronny Jordan's [*The Antidote*, Island] . . . some of these young lions will have to make 20 years of records to sell that many."

Mainieri helped pioneer electric jazz more than 25 years ago with Jeremy & the Satyrs,

a group of jazz-trained hippies who began experimenting with electric bombast in Greenwich Village haunts like the Cafe Au Go Go, Tin Angel, and the Gaslight. A product of big-band discipline, Mainieri had come up as a boy wonder with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra and later toured internationally with Buddy Rich. Upon returning to New York in 1966, he found the music scene had changed radically.

"I was bopper, I still had my goatee. But all these guys were wearing long hair and tie-dyed T-shirts. My attitude was, 'Beatles? What are you talkin' about?' It took me a while to open my mind, but it finally started making sense to me when I joined Jeremy & the Satyrs."

In 1967, the band had a regular gig at the Cafe Au Go Go on Bleecker Street. Upstairs at the Garrick Theater, Frank Zappa & the Mothers Of Invention were holding forth in an extended engagement. "Between shows," Mainieri continues, "I used to talk a lot to Zappa's keyboard player, Don Preston. He was really into the electronic stuff, and he sort of guided me in terms of amplifying my instrument so I could at least be heard on stage. And once you do that, then you go out and buy the toys . . . the delays and choruses and whatever."

Mainieri's earliest electronic experiments resulted in *Journey Through An Electric Tube* (Solid State), probably the first electric-vibes album. In retrospect, he says, "It was this totally weird, fused-out jazz-rock album. People talk about acid-jazz today . . . we were all on acid when we made that record."

He went on to experiment with KAT vibes and other electronic hookups before eventually going full-blown into electronics with Steps Ahead, the high-powered fusion band that at one point featured Mike Brecker's EWI alongside Mike Stern's electric guitar, Darryl Jones' electric bass, and Mainieri's MIDI vibes. In his current edition of Steps Ahead, Mainieri is triggering from the vibes with a German-made K&K MIDI (by Dieter Kandel). His electronic tendencies are nicely balanced by Rachel Z's acoustic grand piano and Bendik's tenor sax (as heard on their latest, *Yin-Yang* on NYC Records). Rachel Z also arrives at an organic blend of both esthetics on her Columbia debut, *Trust The Universe*.

Russ Freeman, whose brainchild the Rippingtons secures a perennial top spot on the contemporary jazz charts, has also been blending more acoustic instruments into his successful electric formula. "I find that at this point in my career, I'm moving away from the high-tech, machine-oriented stuff that I did on the earlier Rippingtons projects," says the multi-instrumentalist. "As technology increases, I find myself going

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Mid-'80s Steps Ahead: (l-r) Michael Brecker, Mike Stern, Darryl Jones, Steve Smith, and Mike Mainieri

back to time-proven instruments like acoustic guitar and acoustic piano. And maybe that's in retaliation for having used so many machines in the past. But the fact is, there really is no sampler or digital keyboard that can truly capture the purity of those acoustic instruments. You can't get that kind of nuance out of a machine."

Meanwhile, Mainieri decries the continued softening of so-called jazz radio stations that stock their playlists with non-threatening pablum to appease the yuppie set. "It's gotten softer, even fluffier, if that's possible," he says. "It's all happy, major-key stuff or happy Brazilian stuff. And it's all just a little bland for my tastes. In terms of fusion, it's gotta go a little left, in my opinion, and it's gotta get tougher, just to create some tension. I think the whole acid-jazz thing that's coming out of Britain has resulted in something that's very original and cutting-edge stuff . . . a really hip crossbreeding of the young lions acoustic-horn thing with some hard club beats behind it. To me, it's the most interesting hybrid of jazz. That, and the M-Base stuff. I think these guys are on the right track."

Saxophonist Bill Evans is also heading in that direction on his upcoming debut for Columbia. According to Evans, whose electric jazz credits include work with Miles Davis, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Herbie Hancock's *Headhunters II*, and the hard-hitting fusion all-star band *Petite Blonde*, the crossbreeding of hip-hop and jazz is definitely the next wave.

"Imagine Ellington horns with a funk groove and a rap loop and a bebop melody. It works, it sounds cool, kids can groove their brains out to it, and still, when I solo on it, you can hear my acoustic-jazz roots," he says. "I feel that the only way the music can be pushed forward is if it reflects the times and contains elements of today's music. People like Miles and Joe Zawinul and Herbie Hancock have all done that throughout their careers. There has to be a certain

segment of each new generation of musicians that does that in order for the future's music to be up-to-date and not just validate the past."

Evans adds, "As far as I'm concerned, as a jazz musician you have to come up learning mainstream acoustic jazz and you have to learn it to the highest degree. But at some point, you have to move on and find ways to make music that is more innovative. When Wynton [Marsalis] came out, Miles used to say, 'Listen, man, I used to hang out with



Bill Evans

Clifford Brown and Lee Morgan and Fat Navarro and Kenny Dorham. These guys were doing this shit 40 years ago. What's the big deal about Wynton playing some old tunes? Go out and buy the records, and you'll hear the real shit.' So, in a way, it's kind of like trying to reinvent the light bulb."

Or, as Mainieri noted, "Although the young fellows today may have tremendous technique and they've got all the records and they've transcribed all the solos, it's sort of like painting from a photograph instead of

using a live model. When I was with Buddy Rich, we played opposite Trane and Bird [John Coltrane and Charlie Parker], four sets a night all week long. So I got to see the live models. These young lions today haven't had the opportunity to hear it live with all the blood, sweat, and tears that go into that experience. And to my ears, it reflects in their playing. Consequently, the young voices today are certainly not as powerful, in my estimation, as the cats I grew up hearing."

Regarding Mainieri's request for more toughness in electric jazz, nothing could get any harsher, more defiantly in-your-face than *Let's Be Generous*, a cooperative electric-jazz group recently formed by keyboardist Joachim Kuhn, drummer Mark Nauseef, guitarist Miroslav Tadic, and former Lifetime bassist Tony Newton. Their self-titled debut on CMP includes hyperactive jams of hair-raising intensity along with radical reworkings of Eric Dolphy's "The Prophet" and "Something Sweet, Something Tender." As Nauseef, the project's initiator, puts it, "For all of us, Jimi Hendrix and Captain Beefheart are as much a part of the common language as John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy are."

For this project, which harkens back to the grungy glory and fierce abandon of early Tony Williams Lifetime albums, Kuhn relied strictly on antiquated synths he had lying around since fusion's heyday. "I was playing electric keyboards with Jean-Luc Ponty in the early '70s and began recording my own projects with synthesizers in the late '70s, but at some point I chose to focus strictly on being a pianist. I played only acoustic piano all through the '80s, but then a couple of years ago Mark called me to do this project. He liked my sound I had back then, this real aggressive, Marshall-on-10-type of sound. And he said, 'Why don't we do a crazy record, something totally uncompromising . . . take it to a higher level than the typical mediocre jazz-rock, something a little bit freer and wilder?'"

"I kind of liked this idea, so I checked out some new keyboards. But after going through all the latest digital keyboards in the studio, I came back to this old Roland Jupiter 4. It had a warmer, dirtier sound. For me, that made it more musical. The new stuff all sounded too clean, too cold. So I used the Jupiter 4 with a Big Muff pedal, the kind Jimi Hendrix used. And I played it through a Marshall amp, which gave me the kind of overtones and feedback sound I liked. That and a Fender Rhodes piano with a wah-wah pedal were my only instruments on that session. And to me, it's a kind of nostalgic sound. It reminds me of the early days of fusion when the music was really adventurous. I had a lot of fun on this session.

Piano is always such a limited instrument for volume, so it was really nice being able to scream and be louder than a drummer for a change."

And where does the jazz-and-electronics industry stand as a result? Beholden to the god of radioplay, for the most part. In an age when "happy jazz" dominates the airwaves, nasty, electric jazz with lengthy solos, distortion guitars, and . . . ough . . . dissonance is bound to be shut out. As Guy Eckstine, A&R at Verve/Forecast, puts it, "It's a Catch-22 situation. To be creative and cutting-edge and respected within the musicians community, you're gonna end up not getting radioplay."

As Kevin Gore of Columbia Jazz sees it, "I think, in general, there has been a large movement toward an electric jazz that is easier to digest, something that you can whistle along with or hum along with . . . what is essentially pop music without lyrics. Listeners are staying with those stations, consumers are buying those albums. There's no doubt about that. Kenny G and the Rippingtons have sold a lot of albums.

"And yet, I think there is still an audience out there that is hungry for heavier stuff, the kind of more challenging music they grew up with in the '70s. A lot of us thought that New Adult Contemporary [NAC] radio was going to address that, but it really hasn't."

Eckstine also sees a potential audience for a more challenging brand of electric jazz. "You go to an Allan Holdsworth show or a Mike Stern/Bob Berg Band show, and the place is always sold-out. There are rabid dogs in the audience waiting to see that stuff, but it doesn't get played on the radio."

Meanwhile, some sonic renegades still persist. Brand X has reunited for some wholly uncompromising electric jazz on *XCommunication* (Ozone), the Brecker Brothers are kicking into high gear in support of *Return Of The Brecker Brothers* (GRP), Scott Henderson mocks the limpness of NAC programming on "The Big Wave" from Tribal Tech's defiantly aggressive *Illicit* (Bluemoon), Al DiMeola is brandishing his electric axe once again on *Kiss My Axe* (Tomato), and former Miles synth specialist Adam Holzman just may have penned a new anthem for a meaner, harsher era in electric jazz with the title cut from his *In A Loud Way* (Pioneer).

And there are more signs. Ronald Shannon Jackson is still slamming behind his three-guitar frontline in Decoding Society. Sonny Sharrock, a veteran of Miles' most subversive electric period, still has his distortion pedal set on stun. Rashied Ali is forming an all-electric band with EWI and Simmons drums triggering raucous sound effects. Paul Motian has put together his Electric Bebop Band. Rykodisc has released *Meltdown: The Birth Of Fusion*, while

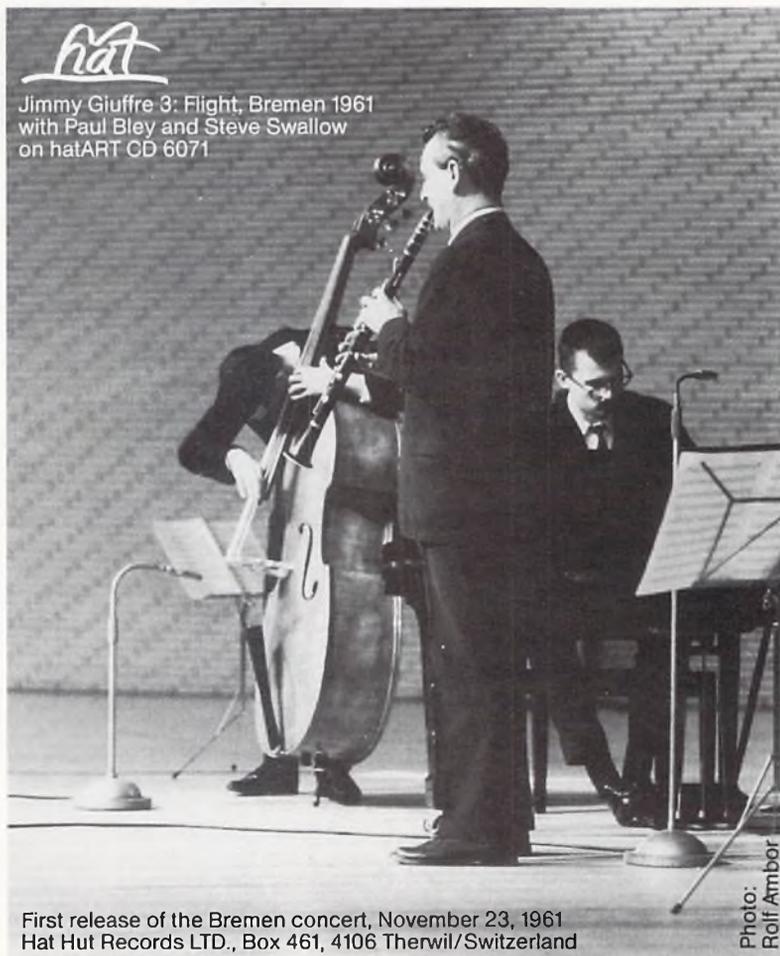


A recent Special Edition: (l-r) Gary Thomas, Mick Goodrick, Jack DeJohnette, Lester Bowie, Greg Osby, and Lonnie Plaxico

Sony's Legacy series has been flooding the market with classic Weather Report, Mahavishnu, and Miles releases from the '70s.

Meanwhile, Verve's Eckstine sees some changes on the horizon for electric jazz. "I think you're going to see more bands that are a little more cutting-edge getting across again. Maybe, we'll even see a rebirth of the

whole fusion thing. I can definitely see starting some sort of thrash-fusion label. I think with all this aggressive, alternative rock music out there now, with bands like Nirvana and Primus and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, it's just a natural jump from there into the raw fusion thing. Something's definitely on the way." **DB**



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The Perils Of Toshiko

TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI

By Mitchell Seidel



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By the leader's own admission, this past year has been one of the worst for the Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra. Without a major-label record for nearly a decade, and faced with the economic realities of the times, the big band just hasn't been touring as much as she would like.

And yet, better times are definitely ahead for the Orchestra. For the first time, a major domestic label—Sony Music—has paid to record and release an album featuring the band, and Akiyoshi believes that their live *Carnegie Hall Concert* will probably be the pump primer to lead to more gigs.

"When I go out with a trio, many people say, 'Do you still have a band? Do you live in Japan?'" the pianist laughs, sitting in the living room of the apartment she shares with husband/saxman Lew Tabackin off New York's Central Park West. "This year, the big band didn't have anything after May. Usually, I have a little quintet work, some trio work. And I teach a little.

"In terms of numbers, this past year wasn't quite a lot. But hopefully, this CBS/Sony recording will do something," she adds. "Probably, this year was the lowest."

Oddly enough, Akiyoshi doesn't feel that the Sony Japanese ownership connection

will help create a dual sales front in her native country. "Really, each company is different. Sony Music in Japan operates differently. It's an entirely different emphasis. Sony Music in Japan is notorious for not doing a lot of promotion in the jazz area. They do quite a lot of promotion in Japanese pop.

"For my band being here, and residing here, the most important thing is to have something here," she adds. "I hope it doesn't sound vulgar or arrogant, but I can survive in Japan. I'm not so worried about it, I have developed so many years of contacts and relationships and respect. Here is the place where we need it, because the band resides here. The band has to be valued and recognized, and also get jobs here, rather than another place.

"It is ironic that the big break came exactly at the lowest point for the band," she says, adding that the high visibility of Sony should help turn things around. "The recording goes just about any place in the United States. Even in a small town of 5,000, they can buy the CD if they want. Perhaps the result of that won't show up until a year later, at the earliest."

While the idea of recording the Orchestra in Carnegie Hall was exciting to Akiyoshi, it

also had its drawbacks. Capturing a single performance meant putting a lot on the line for one album.

"I think this kind of thing is really nerve-racking because it's a one-shot deal. But I think the ideal recording is always the live one because it's different from the studio. But also, I like to be recorded maybe over three days. One of those will come out well. When you have 20 people, any one of them can make a mistake in the concert. We're all human beings. Anyone can make a mistake, including myself. At the same time, suppose everyone played well, which occurred this time. The engineer could make a mistake. If they blow it, there's nothing you can do about it."

The lack of business for the Orchestra hasn't exactly hurt Akiyoshi. She still gets trio work and quartet work with husband Lew Tabackin, the big band's former co-leader who removed his name from top billing when the couple moved back to New York from Los Angeles about 10 years ago. And Akiyoshi's agreement with Sony allows her to record with other labels in groups smaller than eight pieces.

Akiyoshi, who spent time in Boston and New York before moving to Los Angeles in 1973, says she could sense a certain differ-

ence in the players when moving back to New York 10 years ago.

"New York is harder, much harder than Los Angeles, simply because life is hard here," she says. People, and thus the players, "are much warmer" on the West Coast. When she returned to New York, "I had forgotten how hard people are here. Los Angeles people have a certain camaraderie, much more than they have here."

"What separates jazz writing from other writing is that good jazz writing has to come from playing. There are certain esthetic qualities that classical music or movie writing doesn't have."



Akiyoshi says she considers herself fortunate to be able to maintain consistent personnel for her band, considering how tempting it is for New York musicians to go for gigs that pay better. One of those New York players who has been an integral part of her band is Frank Wess, its lead alto voice since 1983. He is rewarded with a solo spot on the new album with his own tune, "Your Beauty Is A Song Of Love." "I thought this was an appropriate time to openly thank him for his great contribution to the band, so we recorded it," Akiyoshi explains.

"I think this band is a much stronger band than the Los Angeles band. Perhaps the ensemble is rougher, but it's a strong jazz band. I think that's characteristic of New York. Basically, they're all jazz players, except one or two. The L.A. band were all excellent ensemble players. There were some great players, but not all of them were jazz players. The soloists were very strong."

She spends a good amount of time in front of the big band conducting with waves of her hand or pats of a closed fist. That doesn't leave too much time for her to sit down and actually play with the band.

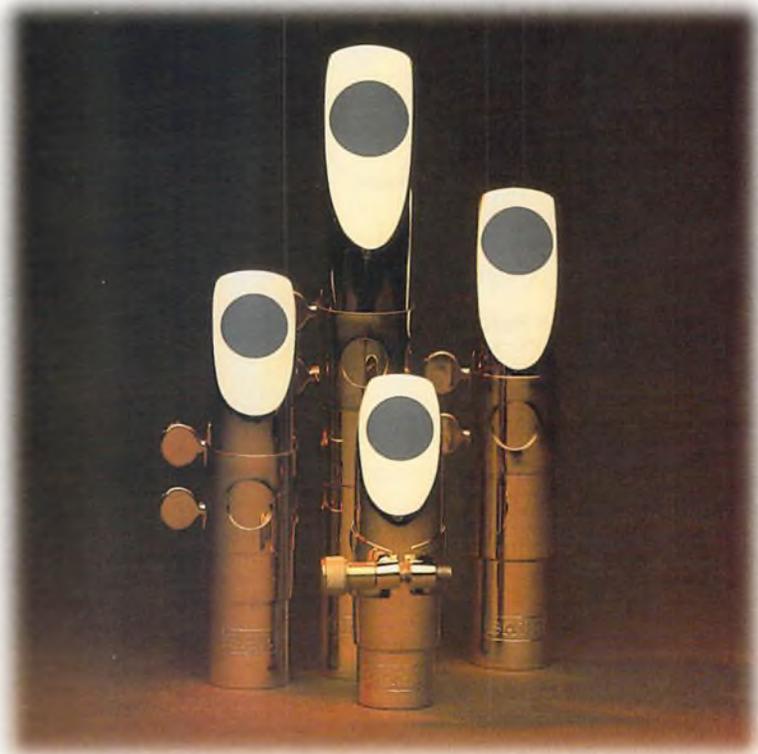
"About five or six years ago, I came to the point where I really needed to play. What separates jazz writing from other writing is

that good jazz writing has to come from playing. There are certain esthetic qualities that classical music or movie writing doesn't have," she says. "Also, I don't play very much with the [big] band. Piano playing is a very little part of the whole Orchestra. I mentioned that to a booking agent, that I'd like to go out as a trio.

"Another reason is the economy. It's gone down, so that a sponsor will say, 'We'd love to

have Akiyoshi's band, but we just don't have the budget. Could she come with a quartet with Lew Tabackin?' It's not so much the performance fee, but the transportation is for 17 versus the four."

The move to New York also affected how Akiyoshi ran the big band. Rehearsal space with the musicians union in Los Angeles cost next to nothing, and parking was free. The midtown Manhattan economy dictates



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\$15-\$20 parking per car and at least \$150 for the rehearsal hall. This has cut the band's rehearsal time from weekly to as-needed.

After arriving back in New York, and before they had a concert, there were three days of rehearsal where Akiyoshi's share of the performance fee was spent. "I was basically working for nothing," she explains. "It's okay, as long as I can manage it. The money's not that important. It's important

when you don't have it."

The band moved to the New School in Greenwich Village for rehearsals and now is back in midtown above the International Woodwind & Brass Center store off Times Square. "It's cheap. The only problem is that they really don't have a piano. They have something that looks like a piano—a spinnet. I won't call it a piano," she jokes.

If the big band sounds a little economi-

cally shaky, it is—until you realize that Akiyoshi rarely, if ever, records anyone's music but her own. This creates two sets of royalties, one as a performer and the other as a composer. "It's quite a lot, when you consider I have 11 albums, and they're still catalog items, and they still sell. Of course, Lew has his own. I make a profit if, for example, the band goes out to Japan tomorrow for two weeks. It's the same thing in America, when you have a long tour, even a five-concert tour. But those things are non-existent now, unless you're Wynton Marsalis. Usually, you have a single concert. If you have two together, you're really lucky."

The Orchestra hasn't been to Europe for more than three years, mainly because there just aren't enough single concert dates to string together into a tour. Single domestic concert dates usually are money-losers, but she takes them occasionally if the event is a special one, or if she can justify the promotional aspect.

"When the Duke had a rare interview—this was years ago—and he was talking about the same thing, he said he loses money going out. And I thought at the time, 'How could that be? How could that possibly be?' You don't know until you have your own band," she says, laughing.

"It's hard on everyone. Every musician involved, they have to have some degree of love. Even the New York musicians," Akiyoshi adds.

Is there any reason to continue when it stops being a labor of love? Did she ever reach a point during the past few years when she said, "This is ridiculous"?

"Oh yes," she smiles. "Until I go to rehearsal." **DB**

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EQUIPMENT

The Spanish-style living room of Toshiko Akiyoshi and Lew Tabackin's apartment contains a magnificent fruitwood Steinway B, about a century old. It sits next to a bare brick wall, with scores piled on top of the instrument and on the floor below.

"About 17 years ago, Lew said he would buy me any piano I wanted. Of course I wanted a Steinway, a new one. I went to all the places in Los Angeles, but every new piano I tried, I didn't like. This was the piano I liked. It just happens to look great. I didn't buy it for the wood!"

A second piano, a six-foot Steinway, is downstairs in the studio Lew uses for practice. Toshiko purchased that instrument from Leonard Feather in Los Angeles when he was moving and looking for a new one.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

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with Lew Tabackin

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Greg Osby

Jazz For The Hip- Hop Nation

By Larry Birnbaum

He was Miles Davis, and I'm some young dude, so I was afraid he wasn't going to put his all into what I was doing," says Easy Mo Bee, the hip-hop producer who laid down the rhythm tracks for what turned out to be Davis' last album, *Doo-Bop* (Warner Bros.—see "Reviews" Aug. '92). "He just amazed me. I'd get on the drum sampler, and he'd fall right in with it. That tripped me out. To him, it was an art form."

Not everyone agrees. Writing in *The New York Times*, John Litweiler described the album as a "perversion," citing "the unvaried crashing and blurring of percussion machines" and the trumpet's subjugation to "the tyranny of the hip-hop beat." Similar criticisms were once directed at jazz itself, which H.L. Mencken compared to the "sound of riveting." Composer Daniel Gregory Mason, the jazz-hating dean of the pre-WWII American classical establishment, bewailed "the pathetic lack of vision that leads people in a mechanical age to make art mechanical too."

Mechanical or not, jazz had a beat you could dance to, and hepcats kicked up their heels to Armstrong, Ellington, even Parker and Gillespie. Avant gardists' fractured tempos hobbled dancers in the '60s, but populist players followed with funky electric jazz for the disco generation. And now, after a decade's worth of sober, scholarly neo-bop, a new movement is taking shape, using live and pre-recorded music in various combinations to bring jazz-funk, hard-bop, fusion, and modal jazz back to the dance floor. Whether you call it doo-bop, acid jazz, or new-jazz swing, it's popping up in clubs from New York to Tokyo, on hip-hop records by groups like Gang Starr and Tribe Called Quest, and on albums by jazz musicians like Ronny Jordan and Art Porter. With deejays scratching and sampling oldies from Herbie Hancock and Weather Report, veterans like Ron Carter and Roy Ayers are recording

HYOU WELZ



Hip-hop comes full-circle: Gang Starr with Jay Leno and Branford Marsalis at a recent taping of The Tonight Show

with rappers, while young bands like Groove Collective and Repercussions are taking live jazz to the dance clubs.

"I don't have any room for closed-minded people, because they're short-changing themselves out of everything life has to offer," says saxophonist Greg Osby, whose latest album, *3-D Lifestyles* (Blue Note), features tracks produced by Public Enemy's Eric Sandler and Tribe Called Quest's Ali Shaheed. "I'm not interested in music that doesn't groove, and that's what I get in hip-hop. It's a fusion of two areas of music that are sorely in need of inspiration, because both of them are stagnating now. Jazz is not about wearing an Armani suit and regurgitating somebody else's music as if you invented it. And there are very few innovators in rap, as opposed to people who jump on the bandwagon."

Though its roots are strictly American, the new jazz-dance fusion, like so many other pop trends, originated in England. "Ten years ago," explains London disc jockey Gilles Peterson, "I started playing jazz records in clubs—everything from Herbie Hancock to Art Blakey to Tito Puente—and mixing it with progressive r&b, mainly hip-hop. The young people developed their own style of dancing to it, fast foot movements and that sort of thing. It was big in the U.K., and around '88 or '89 I was deejaying in a lot of clubs with these acid-house deejays. I was playing very heavy instrumental funk-jazz, and I started calling it 'acid jazz' as a joke. Then I set up a label called Acid Jazz."

"I was managing the careers of [dance-pop artists] Adamski and Stevie B," says American entertainment lawyer Stephen Machat, "and I was in England in the fall of 1990 and came across the acid-jazz scene. I

"Jazz is not about wearing an Armani suit and regurgitating somebody else's music. . . . [Hip-hop] is a sea of sound. You have to listen to the vibe, to almost unlearn what you've learned."

—Greg Osby



fell in love with the music, so I went into business with the people at Acid Jazz after Gilles Peterson left the label. I bought the name, secured the rights to different singles, and brought the entire concept over to the U.S. But I tried to broaden the demographics by bringing in a soulful element, something more upbeat. I love the name 'acid jazz,' but people think it's all going to be jazz, and it's not." Machat's three *Acid Jazz* collections (the first two on Scotti Bros., the third on Acid Jazz) have progressed from British and American to Latin and international sounds, using '70s-style disco-jazz mostly as background texture behind hip-hop and house beats and rap and soul vocals.

A somewhat jazzier approach is taken by Incognito, an eclectic English group, whose album *Tribes, Vibes And Scribes* has just been released on Verve. "People say we're an acid-jazz band, but I

just see us as a music band," says producer/guitarist Bluey Maunick. "In the '70s it was jazz-funk, and now they call it 'acid jazz,' but it's just a matter of crossing the musical boundaries, taking influences from anything that comes without saying this is jazz or soul or hip-hop—just '90s music, really. We've kept the jazz-funk thing alive in Britain, and now we're taking it back to America where it came from."

British guitarist Ronny Jordan's "new-jazz swing" album *The Antidote* (4th & B'Way)—a breezy blend of light funk, cool jazz, and rap—has landed on *Billboard's* Contemporary Jazz chart and a variety of radio formats. "Charlie Christian played the pop music of his day," says Jordan. "Wes Montgomery recorded Beatle songs, and George Benson did soul-funk fusion. So I was trying to do a jazz-guitar album of today. A lot of people see my music as acid jazz, but I'm a musician, not a deejay."

Jonathan Rudnick and Maurice Bernstein frequented British acid-jazz clubs before moving to New York and founding Groove Academy, which presents Thursday-night dances in the basement of the Metropolis Cafe in Greenwich Village. "When we started Giant Step as a club," says Rudnick, "it was to show people that there is an alternative to the traditional jazz scene here."

"There's a deejay, and there's live music on top of that," says Bernstein. "There's a bass player, a conga, drummer, a flute player, a keyboard player, a timbales player, and a couple of horns. There was not a hip-hop/jazz scene as such in England. That's something that American artists like Gang Starr started, using samples. But my belief is that they're going to start bringing in live music."

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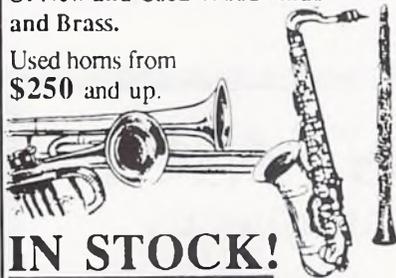
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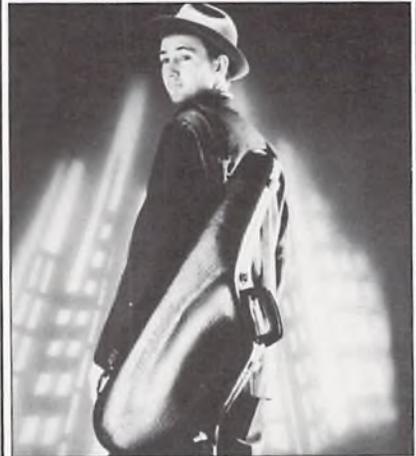
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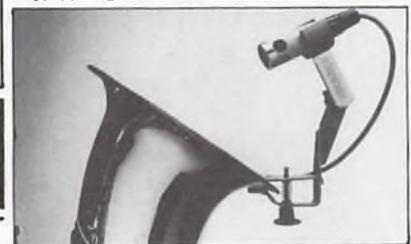


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Groove Academy also sponsors Groove Collective, a band that uses a drummer instead of a deejay to supply the beat. "We all met through Giant Step," says keyboardist Itaal Shur. "A lot of people sit in at Giant Step, even great jazz players like Kenny Garrett, Robin Eubanks, Roy Hargrove, and the 29th Street Saxophone Quartet; but not everyone can play this music. Sometimes they don't lock into the groove, or they just play too much. A big part of our sound is knowing when to drop out. The whole thing about Groove Collective and Giant Step is learning how to spontaneously arrange on stage, so the groove is consistent. The audience plays an important part, too. If they start dancing and getting into the music, that's when it really locks up."

"We always keep it open for improvisation," says rapper/percussionist Gordon "Nappy G" Clay. "When we work with deejays, we know their style and the songs they're playing, and they know our format, so we can anticipate each other. It's not about putting on a show and people watching us, it's about the vibe and the energy and the dance feeling. If they can't dance to it, it's not fun. Cats today come from Berklee with all kinds of theory, but a lot of the stuff that moves people is so simple and instinctive that they can't figure it out. All those guys who are recreating older styles and sounds are doing stuff that's technically very difficult, but they haven't come out with their own thing. We're trying to create something totally original."

But neither jazz nor flesh-and-blood musicians are actually new to hip-hop. First-generation rappers acknowledge the influence of the Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron, who recited militant, heavily cadenced jazz poetry in the '70s. Most early rap singles followed the model of the Sugarhill Gang's 1979 breakthrough hit, "Rapper's Delight," where a studio band recreated the rhythm track to Chic's "Good Times." Not until the release of the single "The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel" (Sugarhill) in 1981 could record buyers hear the twin-turntable collaging technique—using two copies of the same 12-inch disc to isolate and extend the percussion breaks—that gave hip-hop its original name, "break music." Flash, one of the South Bronx deejays who invented the genre, would start his club sets with extracts from obscure disco sides; but then, as he confided to *Rap Attack* author David Toop, he would climax with "Bob James, James Brown, Donald Byrd, Roy Ayers."

"Hip-hop or acid jazz, it's still relatively the same stuff that was happening before, just extended with more modern technology," says vibist Ayers, whose '70s jazz-funk hits have been revived by British deejays and American rappers alike; his latest album,

Double Trouble (Uno Melodic), includes vocals by Rick James and raps by Ayers himself. "I've had about eight hit records on re-releases—rappers who have sampled my music," he says. "I was very happy, because they give you a percentage, but more than that, I was honored that they dig my music. I went from swing to bebop to Latin, disco, funk, and fusion, so I respect all styles of music. When you've been exposed to jazz, it gives you a lot of versatility, if you're open. Now they're trying to get away from sampling and more into live music. But all of it counts."

Hip-hop comes full circle on a forthcoming Gang Starr album, tentatively titled *Jazzmatazz* (Chrysalis), that features new studio recordings of Ayers, Donald Byrd, Courtney Pine, and Branford Marsalis over electronic rhythms produced by the group's lead rapper, Guru. "It's geared to a more mature audience that doesn't know how deep rap music can go," Guru says. "It started when we did a song called 'Jazz Thing' with Branford for Spike Lee's *Mo' Better Blues*, but even before that we had a song called 'Jazz Music.' We started using jazz because everybody else was doing



"New-jazz swinger" Ronny Jordan

CRAIG McDEAN

James Brown samples and we wanted to be different, and because the mellow tracks along with the hard rap beat went hand-in-glove with my voice. Our last two albums have a lot of jazz elements—Monk Higgins and stuff, even Coltrane—but it's pretty stripped-down and minimal."

Even trumpeter Roy Hargrove, a Wynton Marsalis protégé and leader of the back-to-bop "young lions" movement, is working on a hip-hop project. "Hip-hop is the music I came up listening to back in Dallas," he says. "Unfortunately, a lot of it had negative subject matter, like violence and drugs; but this is what these cats were living. I don't support that, but I listened to it, and at the same time I was studying the masters like Clifford Brown and Lee Morgan. So what I would like to do is take my knowledge of the history and transform it into today's music. I used to experiment with it at home: I put a couple of tape decks together and hooked them to an amp, and I was able to lay down tracks with a drum machine, bass guitar, and keyboard. But the guys in my quintet are so versatile, we could do a hip-hop show and then turn around and do the straightahead thing."

Greg Osby, who co-founded Brooklyn's M-Base collective with Steve Coleman, has mixed jazz with funk before, but his new album is a fusion of angular post-bop with "totally unadulterated, raw, street-level, cold-blooded hip-hop," as Osby puts it. "But I found out, when I tried to improve inside of it, that you have to try to deal with it sonically and emotionally. You can't come into it with a lofty intellectual attitude, thinking, 'I'm a musician—I can deal with it,' because there's no key or center. It's a sea of sound. You have to listen to the vibe, to almost unlearn what you've learned. It's some of the hardest music I've ever had to deal with, because it's so dense. But I hope to bring another groove to it. I'm an instrumental rapper on this project, and I hope I'll turn some people on to something they would never have dealt with otherwise."

Convinced of jazz-rap's commercial viability, Preston Powell, a partner in dance-pop producer Jellybean Benitez' artist-management company, is promoting new acts like British vocalist Rosie Ania, who sings sultry Sade-style pop-jazz over hip-hop rhythms. "Young people are reaching back for something authentic," he says, "something they can grasp. When you look at the covers on the old Blue Note albums, you can feel the atmosphere, and that's what these kids want. The New York club scene was finished, but this whole hip-hop/jazz thing is bringing the kids back out. In England they're into dancing to funk-related jazz, but here you need the hip-hop in it to keep the beat, because we're not quite ready for it straightahead—yet."

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Henry Threadgill's Very Very Circus

LIVE AT KONCEPTS—Taylor Made Records 10292-2: *NEXT*; *SNAKES DON'T DO SUICIDE*; *I LOVE YOU WITH AN ASTERISK*; *SOMEPLACE*; *DANGEROUSLY SLIPPY*; *KING KONG*; *BREACH OF PROTOCOL*. (54:20)

Personnel: Threadgill, alto sax, flute, bass flute; Mark Taylor, french horn; Brandon Ross, Masujaa, electric, acoustic guitars; Edwin Rodriguez, Marcus Rojas, tuba; Larry Bright, drums, percussion.

★★★★★

Caught during the whirl of its self-promoted 1991 U.S. tour, Threadgill's Very Very Circus' twined burbling guitars and relentless shuffle rhythms are in the forefront. "Next" comes a cloud of tubas, then the dark, brassy, thick (due to Thread's timbral wit), and trenchant horns.

Threadgill's fragmentary alto solos are ornery, quizzical, knowing, and sardonic—as unpredictable in their process toward completion as his compositions are. But make no mistake. Masujaa wrings out skeins of trebly single notes; Taylor blows french horn *real* fast over and through the band's dynamic friction; Ross has an ultra-suede sound and plays sensitive acoustic guitar on "Someplace," while bass flute, french horn, and tubas unfurl in contrasting slow time. Yet Henry's in command, playing to insure his expression is abstract yet direct, intense if dispassionate, rich in both contradictions and potential.

He's original—an artist—untamed, on the edge. To pursue him is to risk a rough mix, dry spots, illogical snarls, and moments of blazing brilliance. Word is his Axiom VVC-plus-guests studio production is bright and hot, but with *Live At Koncepts* something weird happens. The music sounds new. —Howard Mandel



Terence Blanchard

MALCOLM X THE ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SCORE—40 Acres and A Mule Musicworks/Columbia 53190: *OPENING CREDITS*; *YOUNG MALCOLM*; *COPS & ROBBERS*; *EARL'S DEATH*; *FLASHBACK*; *NUMBERS*; *FIRE*; *BACK TO BOSTON*; *MALCOLM MEETS BAINES*; *BLACK & WHITE*; *LITTLE LAMB VISION*; *MALCOLM'S LETTER*; *MALCOLM MEETS ELIJAH*; *THE OLD DAYS*; *BETTY'S THEME*; *FRUIT OF ISLAM*; *FIRST MINISTER*; *BETTY'S CONFLICT*; *MALCOLM SPEAKS TO SECRETARIES*; *MALCOLM CONFRONTS BAINES*; *CHICKENS COME HOME*; *GOING TO MECCA*; *FIREBOMB*; *ASSASSINS*; *ASSASSINATION*; *EULOGY*. (58:14)

Personnel: Various artists, including Blanchard, James Hynes, John Longo, trumpet; Mike Davis, Britt Woodman, Timothy Williams, trombone; the Boys Choir of Harlem, vocals; Branford Marsalis, soprano, tenor saxes; Jerry Dodgion, Jerome Richardson, alto sax; Sir Roland Hanna, Bruce Barth, piano; Eugene Jackson Jr., drums; Tarus Mateen, Nedra Wheeler, bass; Blair Tindall, oboe, Simon Shaheen, oud; Michel Baklook, daff; Howard Johnson, tuba; Maxine Roach, viola.

★★★★

Various Artists

MUSIC FROM THE MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK, MALCOLM X—Qwest/Reprise 9 45130-2: *REVOLUTION*; *ROLL 'EM PETE*; *FLYING HOME*; *MY PRAYER*; *BIG STUFF*; *DON'T CRY BABY*; *BEANS AND CORNBREAD*; *AZURE*; *ALABAMA*; *THAT LUCKY OLD SUN JUST ROLLS AROUND HEAVEN*; *ARABESQUE COOKIE*; *SHOTGUN*; *SOMEDAY WE'LL ALL BE FREE*. (50:07)

Personnel: Various artists, including Arrested Development, Joe Turner, Lionel Hampton, the Ink Spots, Billie Holiday, Erskine Hawkins, Louis Jordan, Ella Fitzgerald, John Coltrane, Ray Charles, Duke Ellington, Jr. Walker & the All-Stars, Aretha Franklin.

★★★★ 1/2

In the liner notes to the excellent Qwest/Reprise soundtrack album for his epic film *Malcolm X*, filmmaker Spike Lee writes, "May we all look forward to the day when Black Radio is as diverse as the music you're listening to here." Amen. Produced by both Lee and Quincy Jones, this collection is not only a wonderfully eclectic sampling of music that Malcolm X (nee Little) listened to and was familiar with, but it also includes two extraordinarily contemporary pieces specifically recorded for the film. The poignant Afrocentric roots rap "Revolution," by rural rappers Arrested Development, opens the album, and the stunning Aretha Franklin gospel cover of Donny Hathaway's "Someday We'll All Be Free" makes for a fitting close. In between, there are soulful numbers by Billie Holiday, Erskine Hawkins, Ella Fitzgerald, and Ray Charles, the

rousing r&b swing "Roll 'Em Pete" by Joe Turner, superb jazz outtings by Lionel Hampton ("Flying Home"), John Coltrane ("Alabama") and Duke Ellington ("Arabesque Cookie"), and the classic Motown dance hit "Shotgun" by Jr. Walker and the All-Stars. Rarely are soundtrack albums this listenable.

Then there's Terence Blanchard's uneven score for the film. Blanchard, who plays an exquisite solo on Franklin's tune on the soundtrack album, composed and conducted the 26 works here that range in length from half-minute mood pieces based on classical-music sensibilities to longer undeveloped jazz compositions. Many of the orchestral segments come off sounding like tepid background music, with the exception of a few sections, such as the solemn "Opening Credits," the dramatic and dynamic "Fruit Of Islam," and the exotic-sounding "Going To Mecca." The orchestral pieces may make more sense after seeing the film, but as compositions standing on their own, most don't make it. Not so whenever Blanchard leads his jazz ensemble through his lively and bluesy jazz numbers. —Dan Ouellette



Johnny Winter

HEY, WHERE'S YOUR BROTHER?—Pointblank/Charisma 865122: *JOHNNY GUITAR*; *SHE LIKES TO BOOGIE REAL LOW*; *WHITE LINE BLUES*; *PLEASE COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS*; *HARD WAY*; *YOU MUST HAVE A TWIN*; *YOU KEEP SAYIN' THAT YOU'RE LEAVIN'*; *TREAT ME LIKE YOU WANTA*; *SICK AND TIRED*; *BLUES THIS BAD*; *NO MORE DOGGIN'*; *CHECK OUT HER MAMA*; *I GOT MY BRAND ON YOU*; *ONE STEP FORWARD (TWO STEPS BACK)*. (54:41)

Personnel: Winter, vocals, electric, acoustic guitars; Edgar Winter, vocal (4), organ (4,7), alto sax (4), tenor, baritone saxes (9); Jeff Ganz, electric bass, fretless bass, 8-string bass, upright bass; Tom Compton, drums, percussion; Billy Branch, harmonica (6,8,13,14).

★★★★

On the follow-up to his 1991 Grammy-nominated *Let Me In* album, the veteran bluesman charges into the pieces with blues-perfect throaty and raw vocals and wields a propulsive guitar attack. The only respite from the grit 'n' grind comes in the soulful take on "Please Come Home For Christmas," a duet with brother Edgar (note the album title reference to the equally popular Winter sibling), who also shows up on a couple other cuts playing saxophones and organ.

This is power-packed boogie-and-booze-till-you-drop music: sweaty, loud, feisty, and muscular. Winter is obviously at home unleashing



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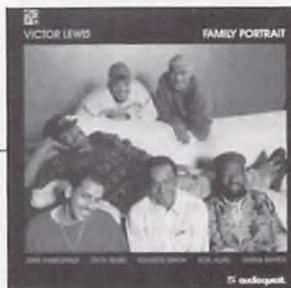
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the rowdier material, including the rip-snorting "You Must Have A Twin" and the hard-driving "One Step Forward" (rifling guitar leads are featured on both). But he also successfully negotiates his way through the less fiery zones on such numbers as the rhythm-shifting "Hard Way," one of the album's highlights, and the bittersweet "Blues This Bad," where the guitar ace gets his acoustic slide to echo his plaintive vocals. The intensity level is high throughout, and no two guitar solos are alike—a rarity for blues albums.

—Dan Ouellette



Victor Lewis

FAMILY PORTRAIT—Audioquest 1010: *FAMILY PORTRAIT; LIL' SIS; RELENTLESS DESIRE; A MIS PADRES; TUDA MUDA; BELLA Y COSIMA; AT A SUGGESTION FROM MR. PETER; AND SO ON . . . FOREVER.* (59:01)

Personnel: Lewis, drums, vocal (1,4), piano (8); John Stubblefield, tenor, soprano sax; Eduardo Simon, piano; Cecil McBee, bass; Don Alias, Jumma Santos, percussion; Pamela Watson (1,4,6), Raymond Cruz (1,6), Bobby Watson (1), Yvonne Hatchett (6), Shani Phillipotts (6), Michael L. Moses (6), Melissa A. Thomas (6), vocal.

★ ★ ★ ★

This isn't what you think, another ego bash for the drummer. This is Victor Lewis, composer (all save Steve Slagle's "Tuda Muda"), accompanist, and painter of moods. The writing bears a resemblance to Wayne Shorter's: lyricism offset by inquisitive irony and a hard-to-pin-down bit of strangeness. Like Pat Metheny, Lewis seems fascinated by voices-as-instruments. (Or going way back, try Max Roach's *Percussion Bitter Sweet* on Impulse! with Abbey Lincoln.)

This truly is a "family." I like how Stubblefield takes his time in building a solo, enriching the composer's intentions. Shorter, Pharoah Sanders, Clifford Jordan, and David Murray infiltrate his sound. McBee's Afro-percussive notes make the bass part of the dense rhythmic base of this music even as his solos (on "Lil' Sis" and "A Mis Padres") take a higher, more lyrical route. Simon's main man appears to be Herbie Hancock, a relevant influence in view of the spaciousness and ambiguity of certain Lewis melodies.

The leader's drum kicks energize "Relentless Desire," and on "At A Suggestion From Mr. Peter" we have a percussion-section blowout. But generally, the feeling of the drums is more subtle. Voices, percussion, piano, bass, saxophones—and a debuting leader's imagination: a portrait of musical success.

—Owen Cordle



Ella Fitzgerald

THE EARLY YEARS (1935-1938), PART 1—Decca GRD 2-618: 43 songs, including *I'LL CHASE THE BLUES AWAY; YOU'LL HAVE TO SWING IT ("MR. PAGANINI"); MY LAST AFFAIR; DARKTOWN STRUTTERS' BALL; I WANT TO BE HAPPY; THE DIPSY DOODLE; HALLELUJAH!; BEI MIR BIST DU SCHOEN; I WAS DOING ALL RIGHT; A-TISKET, A-TASKET; YOU CAN'T BE MINE (AND SOMEONE ELSE'S TOO); WACKY DUST; F.D.R. JONES; I FOUND MY YELLOW BASKET.* (61:16 67:02)

Personnel: Fitzgerald, vocals; Chick Webb, drums; with his orchestra and her Savoy Eight, featuring (among others) Mario Bauza, Taft Jordan, trumpet; Sandy Williams, trombone; Wayman Carver, tenor saxophone; flute; Pete Clark, Garvin Bushell, clarinet, alto saxophone; Edgar Sampson, Louis Jordan, alto saxophone; John Trueheart, banjo, guitar; Joe Steele, piano; John Kirby, Beverly Peer, bass.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

In her first years as a songstress, Fitzgerald projected a sunny, winning personality through clear articulation, flawless intonation, and assured grasp of swing rhythm. Webbs' utterly professional dance band framed her with attention to the dynamics of their riff-based charts, but Ella carried the tunes she performed from age 17 on. Instrumental solos are brief, sometimes spicy, more usually just anonymous and serviceable.

As for the various tunes themselves—the lyrics Ella sang are easily as insipid as anything turned out for pop consumption today; for the most part, their melodies share a wearing sameness. She doesn't distinguish them via interpretation. She feels pretty much the same about "My Last Affair" as about "Organ Grinder's Swing" (both recorded by her Savoy Eight), though the forced naiveté of the latter allows her the freedom to start scatting. There's no irony in her reading of the odious "Shine" and little giddiness in "When I Get Low I Get High." She becomes declamatory on "Vote For Mr. Rhythm" ("of thee I swing") and "F.D.R. Jones" but those campaigns retain slight thrill. Fitzgerald echoes Billie Holiday occasionally, but undercuts any sadder-and-wiser sense with an insouciant bounce. Listen to her vocal quality and forget about meaning. She did.

Presumably, the requirements of the Lindy Hoppers at the Savoy Ballroom rendered tempo variety beyond fast and moderate irrelevant. Webb is heard in detail during his infrequent breaks, and implicitly in the smooth moves of his ensemble. Overall, these two discs (annotated persuasively by Will Friedwald) are snapshots from an earlier America, when Ella and jazz enjoyed—"Hallelujah!"—innocent youth.

—Howard Mandel

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SEVEN HAIKU; SOLO FOR FLUTE, ALTO FLUTE, AND
PICCOLO; PROJECTION 1; EXTENSION 3; INTERSEC-
TION 4; DURATION 2; FOR PREPARED PIANO; FOR 1, 2,
OR 3 PEOPLE.* (65:17)

Personnel: Eberhard Blum, flute; Frances-Marie
Uitti, cello; Nils Vigeland, piano.

★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

John Cage

62 MESOSTICS RE MERCÉ CUNNINGHAM—
hat ART 60951/2: *MESOSTIC NUMBERS 1-62.*
(46:32/46:32)

Personnel: Eberhard Blum, voice.

★ ★ ★ ★

In the period leading up to and following composer John Cage's death in August, his music experienced something of a recording renaissance. Even some of his most intractable, seemingly unrecordable works have now found their way into disc form, such as Wergo's recent incredible eight-CD set *Diary: How To Improve The World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)*, and hat ART's *62 Mesostics Re Merce Cunningham*.

A mesostic is a poem arranged in such a way that a word runs vertically down its middle, crossword style. In the case of *62 Mesostics*, written in 1971, however, the readability of the poems is disrupted by extreme typography, each letter of a word given a different font, size, and boldness. In performance, the vocalist is encouraged to improvise accordingly, de-emphasizing the syntax and meaning of the words. Blum does a remarkable job with them—you're not likely to hear the original poem in his extreme, dynamic, at times convulsive delivery. Note: following Cage's specifications, there are silences between each piece of up to a minute; don't buy this if you measure artistic value in number of notes.

The relatively short compositions on *The New York School*, all written 10 to 15 years earlier by Cage and fellow-travelers Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, and Earle Brown, are less audacious, but equally radical in their sparse, compact conflation of the senseless and the sensual. Brown's "Music For Cello And Piano" is particularly lovely, contrasting jagged bursts with smoother strokes. Feldman's "Projection 1" and "Intersection 4" are given delicate solo performances by Frances-Marie Uitti, and both Wolff pieces, "For Prepared Piano" and "For 1, 2, Or 3 People" (here for three), are entrancing and vivid, owing much to Anton Webern in their terseness. —John Corbett

A Cordial Cole

by Jack Sohmer

In late 1991, the jazz world saw the release of both Mosaic's 18-disc boxed set, *The Complete Capitol Recordings Of The Nat King Cole Trio*, and a five-disc set of McGregor Transcriptions on the budget-priced LaserLight label (see "Reviews" DB Apr '92). After having already issued 21 single CDs (as well as one two-disc set), Capitol is now adding to its own catalog yet one more repackaging of **Nat King Cole** hits—to wit, the four-disc *Nat King Cole* (Capitol 99777; 71:17/72:46/75:10/75:51: ★★★★★).

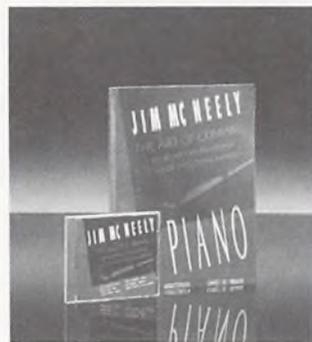


Nat King Cole

Unlike the encyclopedic Mosaic compilation, this one, covering the period from 1943 through '64, devotes most of its space to Nat's work as a solo singer with orchestral backgrounds. Owing to its wider scope, there are also the inevitable duplications, since 36 of the 100 tracks included here showcase Nat in the trio format, performances which are already available on Mosaic. This leaves us with just 64 selections, only one of which is genuinely new—a previously unreleased live performance of the hilarious "Mr. Cole Won't Rock & Roll"—and another, "You Can Depend On Me" (by the Capitol International Jazzmen), which, though not on Mosaic, has already been released on the highly recommended *Nat King Cole: Jazz Encounters* (Blue Note 96693). Unfortunately, about half of the remaining material is of the sort generally maligned by jazz purists. Highly commercial, romantic pop ballads such as "Too Young," "Unforgettable," "The Party's Over," and "Non Dimenticar" brush cheeks with such trivial novelties as "Open The Doghouse (Two Cats Are Comin' In)," "Standin' In The Need Of Prayer," and the c&w-tinged "Ramblin' Rose," making the truly good standards—"Angel Eyes," "Our Love Is Here To Stay," "When Sunny Gets Blue," "I Remember You," "Say It Isn't So," and "I Should Care," among many others—all that more meaningful.

With rare exception, by the late '50s, Nat had completely crossed over to the world of mainstream pop. And if we customarily dismiss most of his latter-day repertoire as being beneath his stature as a jazzman, by the same token, we cannot remain totally untouched by the continued warmth of his voice, his subtle humor, and the relaxed charm with which he imbued his every performance. DB

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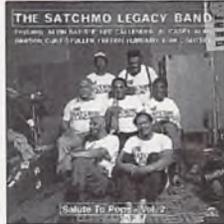
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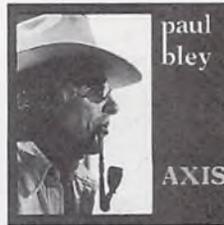
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David Murray

A SANCTUARY WITHIN—Black Saint 120145-2: *SHORT AND SWEET; MOUNTAIN SONG; RETURN OF THE LOST TRIBE; WALTZ TO HEAVEN; A SANCTUARY WITHIN (PARTS I & II); MOST OF ALL; SONG FOR NEW SOUTH AFRICA; BALLAD FOR THE BLACKMAN.* (70:46)

Personnel: Murray, tenor sax, bass clarinet; Tony Overwater, bass; Sunny Murray, drums; Kahil El' Zabar, percussion, senza, voice.

★ ★ ★

MX—Red Baron 53224: *MX; ICARUS; EL HAJJ MALIK EL-SHABAZZ; A DREAM DEFERRED; BLUES FOR X; HICKS TIME; HARLEMITE.* (61:11)

Personnel: Murray, Ravi Coltrane, tenor sax; Bobby Bradford, cornet; John Hicks, piano; Fred Hopkins, bass; Victor Lewis, drums.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

Reedman David Murray's versatility can run to extremes, as these releases—which visit both the outer limits and mainstream of jazz—show.

With more than 25 David Murray CDs on the market, you ask, what distinguishes these?

Murray's free sessions are special, the flip side of his structured ensembles. Left alone with bass and drums, he has room for extended, adventurous tenor solos. Murray responds to great drummers, and *A Sanctuary Within* reunites him with two important percussionists, Sunny Murray and Kahil El' Zabar (of the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble).

Given David's affinity for Albert Ayler's music, working with Sunny is a natural collaboration. Free drummers (like Sunny or Andrew Cyrille) encourage David to reach a little further in his improvisations, as when the two Murrays go exploring on "A Sanctuary Within, Part 1" and Sunny's "Short And Sweet." David's mature style is searching, passionate, and unpredictable, but disciplined. In this open setting, there's less of the edge-of-chaos delirium heard in his early work (compare *3-D Family*).

The challenge of recording this quartet is to balance the percussionists. Sunny Murray *alone* sounds like two drummers. (It's time that someone rediscovered him.) El' Zabar's thumb piano and African percussion are most effective in solos and duets, particularly a reprise of "Song For A New South Africa" (from El' Zabar and David's *Golden Sea*).

By contrast, *MX* takes David about as far inside as he goes. Dedicated to Malcolm X, *MX* is no dirge. Skip the lightweight title track for a straight-ahead session of bop and blues. Murray contributes three memorable new tunes, ranging from an exotically processional ("Icarus") to uptown r&b ("Harlemite"). Other tracks lacking Murray's creative imprint are less compelling. Murray shares solo space with John Hicks, Bobby Bradford, and Ravi Coltrane on tenor. The kid competently handles everything

thrown at him, including Murray's high-speed blues, "El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz."

—Jon Andrews



Herbie Mann

DEEP POCKET—Kokopelli 1296: *DOWN ON THE CORNER; KNOCK ON WOOD; MOANIN'; MUSTANG SALLY; WHEN SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH MY BABY; PAPA WAS A ROLLING STONE; SUNNY; MERCY, MERCY, MERCY; GO HOME; AMAZING GRACE.* (57:59)

Personnel: Mann, flute; Roy Ayers, vibes, background vocal; Cornell Dupree, guitar; Les McCann, piano, vocals (10); David Newman, tenor sax; Chuck Rainey, bass; Richard Tee, electric piano, organ; Buddy Williams, drums, percussion.

★ ★ 1/2

Herbie Mann/ Bobby Jaspar

FLUTE SOUFFLE—Prestige OJCCD-760-2: *TEL AVIV; SOMEWHERE ELSE; LET'S MARCH; CHASING THE BIRD.* (36:21)

Personnel: Mann, Jaspar, flute, tenor sax; Tommy Flanagan, piano; Joe Puma, guitar; Wendell Marshall, bass; Bobby Donaldson, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

For *Deep Pocket*, the debut release on his own label, Mann rounds up a cast of former sidemen. Nostalgia is the goal here, one has to figure. Strangely, the musical result—funk-basted jazz readings of mostly r&b hits—sounds like yesteryear revisited. Depending on your perspective, it sounds either wistful or redundant. In this case, the unapologetically antiquated sound of the band could be construed as a plus, when compared to the more soul-less current mode of pop-jazz crossover. Cornell Dupree's raw, ragged-edged guitar conveys a brute honesty you don't hear much these days. Tee and McCann work up a nice, fat keyboard sound that has nothing to do with MIDI. And Mann acquires himself nicely throughout. You just wish he had a more challenging setting within which to work.

Recorded one fine day in 1957, the newly reissued *Flute Souffle* dared to ask the musical question: What is the sound of two flutes sounding off? On this date, which has withstood the test of time very nicely, Mann and Jaspar both double on flute and tenor sax. The fare shifts from the meditative ("Tel Aviv") to the gently bopistic ("Chasin' The Bird"). Dual flutes chase the melody to "Let's March," and Mann and Jaspar swap impressive ideas on their respective solos, framing a tidy solo turn by Flanagan for textural contrast. Where's the more where that came from? —Josef Woodard

Blue Rhino

by Frank-John Hadley

Fhey, hey, the blues is all right!" When delivered with a certain spirit and color, an unmistakable ease and rhythmic feeling, the barroom mantra reveals all the bracing yet subtle excitement of a black performer's triumph over oppression. This emotional current crackles throughout the 90 songs that Rhino Records has pulled from many storied labels' catalogs for the first five volumes of its *Blues Masters* series, the most ambitious and intelligent effort to anthologize blues recordings you're likely to encounter in your life.



Otis Rush: magnificent suspense

With 18 tracks featuring as many different artists, the same format used for all five discs. *Urban Blues* (R2 71121; 57:53: ★★★★★) is a generous, if broad, introduction to modern blues, taking in both popular city styles (e.g., Texas and West Coast postwar) and less well-known substrains (big-band gutbucket swing). The 12-bar music language is altogether eloquent whether it's **Jimmy Witherspoon** packing complex emotions into words on "Ain't Nobody's Business" or **Otis Rush** employing guitar and voice to infuse his inflections with magnificent suspense on "I Can't Quit You Baby." Other spellbinders present include **Albert King**, **Guitar Slim**, and **Charles Brown**.

Postwar Chicago Blues (R2 71122; 49:23: ★★★★★), compiled by knowledgeable writer Dick Shurman, is one fine celebration of the raw, paint-peeling bent tones emanating from Windy City recording studios from 1950 to 1961. **Muddy Waters** ("Just Make Love To Me") and **Howlin' Wolf** ("Smokestack Lightnin'") are among the titans heard in full cry, couching the urgency of Delta blues in hair-raising amplified terms. **J. B. Lenoir** ("Mama Talk To Your Daughter") and **Earl Hooker** ("Blue Guitar") belong to the second tier of Chicagoans who expressed hope when releasing their inner reaches in song. Highly recommended to die-hard blues hounds and neophytes alike.

The sagebrush singers and musicians whom noted author Alan Govenar spotlights on *Texas Blues* (R2 71123; 61:27: ★★★★★) stand as tall as Colonel James Bowie in a hail of Santa Anna's bullets. There's the rapt intensity of guitars belonging to, say, legendary country bluesman **Blind Lemon Jefferson** ("Matchbox Blues") and modern heroes **Albert Collins** ("The Freeze") and **Stevie Ray Vaughan** ("Flood Down In Texas"). Elsewhere, singer **Big Mama Thornton** puts a choke hold on us with Leiber and Stoller's "Hound Dog." And so on, each expected or surprising selection from the Lone Star State cutting to the quick with its articulate, knowing prose.

Harmonica Classics (R2 71124; 60:06: ★★★★★) is yet another feast for the ears.

Song selector Cub Koda swells the disc with famous or obscure harp gems cut between 1952 and 1980 in Chicago or in various blues outposts. Wizard **Little Walter** starts things off with "Juke," and then notables like **Junior Wells** ("Messin' With The Kid"), **Jerry McCain** ("Steady"), and **Sonny Boy Williamson II** ("Help Me") display their flowing imaginations before a very young **Charlie Musslewhite** concludes the set with "Christo Redemptor." Perhaps licensing problems are to be blamed for the absence of the great John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson.

Finally, *Jump Blues Classics* (R2 71125; 49:18: ★★★★★½), assembled by Peter Grendysa and James Austin, offers choice r&b from 1948-'57 that swings hard on the volcanic emission of sultry saxophones and ardent boogie rhythms. Pianist/singer **Tiny Bradshaw** and his hipsters stoke the engine and zoom right off the track with "The Train Kept A-Rollin'." Vocalist **Roy Brown** gives the real low-down during "Rockin' At Midnight." Luminaries **Roy Milton** ("Hop, Skip And Jump") and **Joe Turner** ("Shake, Rattle And Roll") are also on hand, as are lesser lights such as **Ann Cole** ("Got My Mojo Workin'") and **Rudy Greene** ("Juicy Fruit"). Rhino promises a second jump-blues collection later this year plus nine more compilations in their inspired and instructive series.

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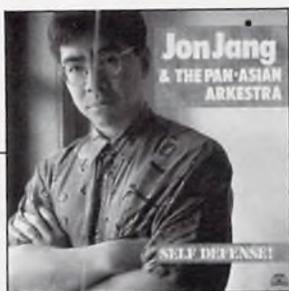


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Jon Jang & the Pan-Asian Arkestra

SELF DEFENSE!—Soul Note 121203-2: *A NIGHT IN TUNISIA; NEVER GIVE UP!; BUTTERFLY LOVERS SONG; CONCERTO FOR JAZZ ENSEMBLE AND TAIKO; REDRESS, GANBARO!, REPARATIONS NOW!, TANKO BUSHI CELEBRATION; MONK'S STRUT; ICHIKOTSUCHO.* (74:47)

Personnel: Jang, piano; Mark Izu, bass, sheng (Chinese mouth organ); Anthony Brown, trap set, talking drum; Melecio Magdaluyo, alto, soprano saxes, flute, percussion; Francis Wong, tenor sax, flute, dizi (Chinese flute); Jim Norton, bass clarinet, soprano sax, flute, dizi; John Worley, Jr., trumpet, flugelhorn, percussion; Jeff Cressman, trombone, percussion; Susan Hayase, taiko (Japanese drums); James "Frank" Holder, congas (1).

★★★★ 1/2

Glenn Horiuchi

OXNARD BEET—Soul Note 121228-2: *OXNARD BEET; WARM SPRING; DANCE FOR A NISEI HIPSTER; STRIKING A RIFF; BURNING EMBERS; WARUBOZU; GOSEI GO.* (49:22)

Personnel: Horiuchi, piano; Leon Alexander, vibes, drums; Francis Wong, flute, tenor sax; Taiji Miyagawa, bass.

★★★★ 1/2

Both superb jazz pianists, San Francisco-based Jon Jang and Los Angeles-based Glenn Horiuchi are leaders of the burgeoning Asian-American jazz movement on the West Coast. They're not only pioneering evocative new musical combinations steeped in the traditions of Asian and African-American music, but they're helping to make this unique hybridization a powerful and exciting new jazz dialect. Inspired by socio-political realities, enlivened by a natural and unobtrusive embrace of cultural diversity, and inspired by the rhythms of Africa and Asia, both Jang's and Horiuchi's exceptional new albums are at turns challenging, passionate, and beautiful.

Jang's CD is a live outing recorded at the 1991 Earshot World Jazz Festival in Seattle. While most of the pieces come from his overlooked 1989 *Never Give Up!*, on the homespun AsianImprov label, they are given a new vitality in the concert setting. Jang and his eight-

member Arkestra unleash a dazzling take on the Diz chestnut, "A Night In Tunisia," not didactically celebrate Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition on "Never Give Up!," and perform a stunning jazz arrangement of the Chinese folk melody "Butterfly Lovers Song" before they take on the centerpiece of the album, the four-movement concerto on the World War II relocation of Japanese American to concentration camps. Thundering taiko interplay with urgent African talking drums in the demonstrative "Reparations Now!" movement, and a Japanese folk dance, "Tanko Bushi," gets appropriated by Jang for the hopeful end section. A fitting end to the album is the hauntingly beautiful "Ichikotsu-chi" played on Chinese flute and mouth organ.

While Jang leans toward the cerebral and writes lengthy and complex pieces, Horiuchi exuberantly leads his quartet through eight of his own melodically-strong compositions. He opts not to use Asian instruments to flavor the music, instead utilizing pentatonic scales in key moments to create the essence of the new dialect. Noteworthy moments: when cool-jazz meets Japanese folk dance on "Dance For Nisei Hipster," when Horiuchi enthusiastically explores the rhythmic dimensions of his piano on "Burning Embers," and when Francis Wong (also a Pan-Asian Arkestra member) plunges into unrestrained tenor sax solos. The title piece is not only the highlight (a Japanese

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tin musical cross-fertilization), but it also ers to the collective efforts of Mexican and panese sugar-beet farmworkers to over- me ethnic/racial differences to form a union Southern California in 1903. —Dan Ouellette



Harry Connick, Jr.

"25"—Columbia 53172: *STARDUST*; *MUSIC, MAE-TRO, PLEASE*; *ON THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE*; *AFTER YOU'VE GONE*; *I'M AN OLD COWHAND* (FROM *THE RIO GRANDE*); *MOMENT'S NOTICE*; *TANGERINE*; *DIDN'T HE RAMBLE*; *CARAVAN*; *LAZYBONES*; *MUSKRAT RAMBLE*; *THIS TIME THE DREAM'S ON ME*; *ON THE ATCHISON*, *TOPEKA AND THE SANTA FE*. (65:45 minutes)

Personnel: Connick, piano, vocals, organ (11); Ellis Marsalis, piano (1); Johnny Adams, vocals (11); Ray Brown, bass (13); Ned Gould, tenor sax (13).

★★★ 1/2

ELEVEN—Columbia 53171: *SWEET GEORGIA BROWN*; *TIN ROOF BLUES*; *WOLVERINE BLUES*; *JAZZ ME BLUES*; *DOCTOR JAZZ*; *MUSKRAT RAMBLE*; *LAZY RIVER*; *JOE AVERY'S PIECE*; *WAY DOWN YONDER IN NEW ORLEANS*. (28:39)

Personnel: Connick, piano, vocals; Jim Duggan, trombone; Liston Johnson, clarinet; Freddie Kohlman, drums; Walter Payton, bass; Teddy Riley, trumpet.

★ 1/2

he sense of time and history have been arped in the curious, meteoric career of onnick. He hearkens back, unapologetically, bygone musical modes and is largely re-

sponsible for sparking a wave of nostalgia for the stuff of Sinatra and Tin Pan Alley lore—often for a generation born decades after the fact. Connick's own rise has been so precipitous and sharp that he's being prematurely treated as a veteran. His latest doubleheader of releases promises to be a kind of before-and-after composite portrait. *Eleven* was recorded in 1978, when he was a piano-pounding prodigy around New Orleans. "25" is a stripped-down document of the musician now that he's reached a quarter century in age.

The question burns: should a 25-year-old be granted this sort of retrospective treatment, especially when the momento dredged out of the attic is as limp an offering as *Eleven*?

Connick is nothing if not respectful of his elders and mentors. He makes no bones about the fact that he's all about borrowed culture. "25" opens with a version of "Stardust," featuring his old teacher, Ellis Marsalis—whose piano playing is smooth-talk compared to Connick's slang spiel on the keys.

(The tendency to compare Connick with Sinatra does the young, developing talent a disservice. Try Bobby Darin. He's a retro vocal stylist who's growing more assured with time—growing up in public. As a pianist, he brings kinetic, splashy energy and rubbery spirit that reveals traces of his love for Thelonious Monk and another old mentor, James Booker. That

ever-suave vibrato and Sinatra-esque phrasing is in contrast to his more loose-jointed piano style.)

Connick's not allergic to kitsch. The finger-wiggling tremolo on "After You've Gone" conjures images of a twirled cane and top hat. His fun-loving approach to "I'm An Old Cowhand" is hardly the revisionist version of Sonny Rollins. As he sings, "I'm a cowboy who never saw a cow," it could be related to questions of authenticity. Does he ride the range of jazz expression in a Ford V-8? He also pulls out a roughhewn pizza-parlor version of "Moment's Notice" and a woozy "Caravan." "25" suggests that, for Connick, the world is a nightclub.

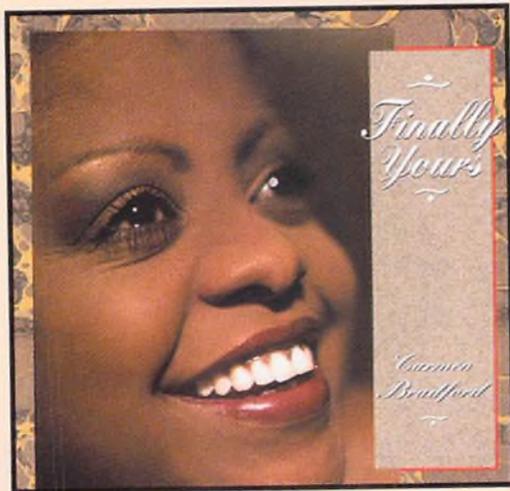
Listening to *Eleven* is akin to watching the home movies of an acquaintance who you haven't known long.

The endearing qualities of charm are in direct correlation to your intimacy with the subject. You want to pinch the kid's cheek and say, "Keep it up, kid." You don't want to own a recording, put out by a major label, no less. There's nothing inherently wrong with this dixieland, party-time-in-Crescent-City music—except for the piano playing, of course.

Gifted, if hardly groundbreaking, Connick is one of the few prime populist jazz heroes of the day. Hope springs eternal that populist jazz heroes might instill in their fans an appetite for the harder stuff.

—Josef Woodard

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Only Billie

by Bill Shoemaker

The conventional wisdom on **Billie Holiday** used to go like this: her place in jazz history rests squarely on her recordings for Columbia during the '30s, as her conversion to cabaret star in the '40s (and the syndrome of abuse that plagued her until her death in '59) blunted her supple, yet limited technique until she was a shameless ghost of her former self.

But there's always been a passionately held opposing view—expressed during the '50s by Miles Davis and Nat Hentoff—that the Verve-era Holiday reached unparalleled depth, warmth, and reflectiveness while still retaining technical command of her material. It took the earlier LP version of the 10-CD *The Complete Billie Holiday On Verve 1945-1959* (Verve 314 513 859-2; 11 hrs., 55 min.; ★★★★★) to convince Buck Clayton, who performed with Holiday for both Columbia and Verve, that the Verve recordings were Lady's greatest. After the 12-hour immersion required to hear this splendidly packaged collection of all-star studio sessions, concert recordings, and revealing rehearsal tapes, it's impossible not to agree.

Norman Granz's genius in producing Holiday was returning her to the small-group con-



PAUL J. HOEFLER

Billie Holiday: unparalleled depth

text. Not only was she inspired by her collaborators—again, Granz was wise to surround her frequently with musicians she had known in better times, such as Clayton, Roy Eldridge, and others—she also had a minimal load on her own shoulders. The camaraderie of old friends, and the energies of younger musicians such as Oscar Peterson, Barney Kessel, and Ray Brown, provided the necessary spark for

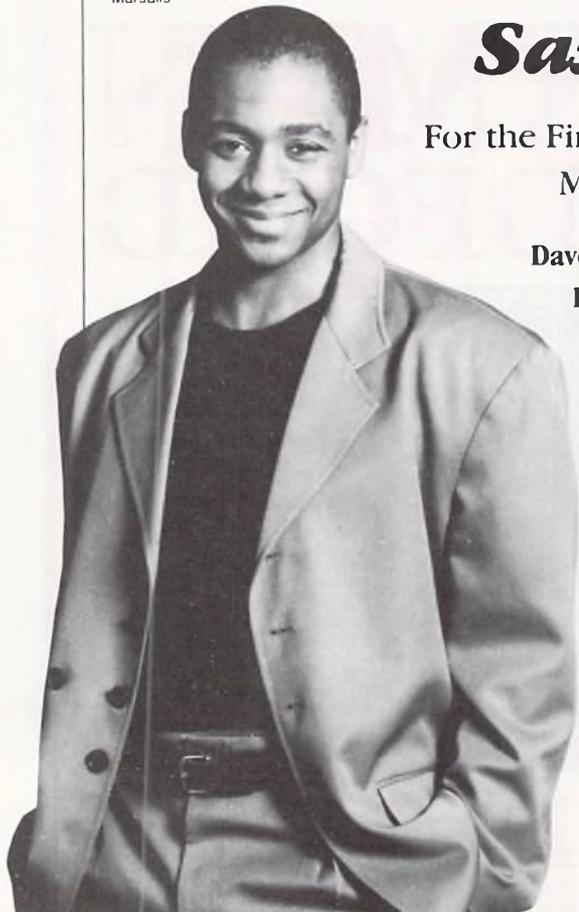
Holiday. Even though Holiday frequently struggled through take after take to get what she was after—a sequence of eight takes of "A Firm Romance" details how she detoured around sticking points in an interpretation—the finished product retained the spirited freshness of an off-the-cuff quip.

The most striking aspect of Holiday's work during this period is how her stylistic debt to Louis Armstrong manifested itself within her obvious struggle to retain a glint of hope and romance in the progressively hardening edge of her voice. Her Pops-derived enunciation, the elongated, exaggerated phrase endings, and the slipping between a sly, gliding legato and straight-talk *Sprechgesang* are expertly crafted to convey not just melancholy and pain but also a resilient joy.

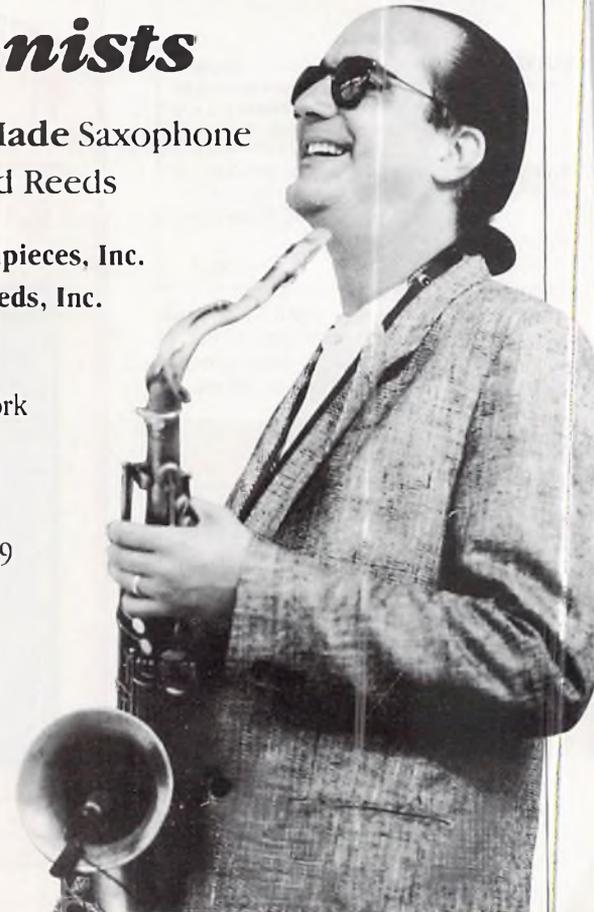
Certainly, no other jazz artist offers a better glimpse of the abyss than Holiday during this period, both on such repeatedly waxed trademark songs as "Lady Sings The Blues"—the '57 Newport version, which pivots on Mal Waldron's engaging support, is downright scary—and minor gems like '56's "Ill Wind," which features an evocative Ben Webster solo. No one can impart such a sweet sense of the grace from which one can fall as Holiday does on the feverishly paced '54 version of "What A Little Moonlight Can Do." No saxophonist, no trumpeter, no scat diva. Only Billie Holiday.

DB

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John Lee Hooker

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Personnel: Hooker, guitars, vocals; Jimmie Vaughan (1), Robert Cray (3), Albert Collins (6), Tim Kaihatsu (3), Rich Kirch (5,6,10), Billy Johnson (5), Mike Osborn (6,10), guitars; John Hammond, guitar, harmonica (8); Richard Cousins (1,3), Jim Guyett (5,6,10), Steve Ehrmann (8), bass; Kevin Hayes (1,3), Scott Mathews (5,8), Bowen Brown (6,10), drums; Jimmy Pugh, keyboards (1,3); Mitch Woods, piano (5); Deacon Jones, organ (6,10); Charlie Musselwhite, harmonica (9).

★★★★

straight shot of blues brimming with rowdy boogies, painfully slow and introspective numbers, a foot-tapping acoustic shuffle, and the explosive title tune (a remake of a Hooker classic) that launches the album into the blues zone—that's *Boom Boom*. As in past efforts, Hooker's inimitable vocal musings—and sometimes, his deep soulful mumbings—are enough to recommend the album; but check out the incredible guitar work by John Lee and his lineup of all-star blues axmen. (Slide-ace and former Hooker band member Roy Rogers once again is producer.) Especially noteworthy is the Robert Cray-Tim Kaihatsu-Hooker interplay on "Same Old Blues Again," a slow blues where three could have kept playing for an entire decade without fear of losing the listener. As always, the three solo tunes Hooker intimately delivers are gems.

—Dan Ouellette



The Jazz Tribe

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CD REVIEWS

BLUES. (72:57)

Personnel: Jack Walrath, trumpet; Bobby Watson, alto sax; Steve Grossman, tenor sax (8); Walter Bishop, Jr., piano; Charles Fambrough, bass; Joe Chambers, drums; Ray Mantilla, percussion.

★ ★ ★

The eponymous debut of the Jazz Tribe provides buoyant but unsyrupy themes that receive accessible but uncompromised readings, sequenced unassumingly among more hard-hitting stuff. Walter Bishop's "Valley Land" and Bobby Watson's "Pamela" are bright, lyrical pieces that could probably nudge their way onto smooth-jazz playlists, while college and Pacifica programmers would go for more fiery cuts like Ray Mantilla's "Six For Kim," stoked by an extended percussion discussion between the composer and fellow M'Boomer Joe Chambers.

While there's a few ragged edges attributable to the festival conditions under which the recording was made—a cracked note at the top of a tune, a mic mishap here, a less than crisp ending there—this is a satisfying and promising first date for a band with a lot of shared history among its members.

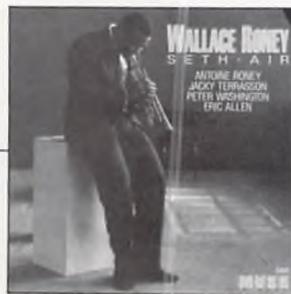
Walrath's incisive lines and Watson's simmering soulfulness make for an intriguing front line. If Steve Grossman, who's a walk-on for a smoldering "Star Eyes," was on board full-time, it would be icing on the cake. And Fambrough's *faaaat* tone underscores Bishop's agile lines extremely well. —Bill Shoemaker

meets a slow, hot wind. He likes to decorate melody, as Monk's "Ruby, My Dear" and Duke "Isfahan" make clear. There are three flute pieces here, too, which he plunges into with the same passion that he exercises on tenor. Of these, as on tenor, he's inside the tune and not merely skidding along on top, as flutists at times sometimes wont to do.

Green (more and more like a Red Garland/Wynton Kelly of the '90s), Washington, and Nash also show respect for the jazz tradition, swinging and soulful investment. A Tabackin-Nash duet on Monk's "In Walked Bud" brings out the drummer's bopping best. The pianist's block chords on "Lost In Meditation," another Ellington tune, are divine.

I don't know how to deny any stars for this album. It would be hard to improve on the mastery evident here.

—Owen Corcoran

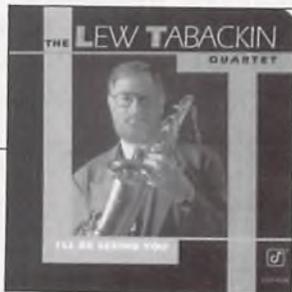


Wallace Roney

SETH AIR—Muse 5441: MELCHIZEDEK; A BREATH OF SETH AIR; BLACK PEOPLE SUFFERING; 28, RUE PIGALLE; LOST; PEOPLE; GONE; WIVES AND LOVERS. (52:32)

Personnel: Roney, trumpet; Antoine Roney, tenor sax; Jacky Terrasson, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Eric Allen, drums.

★ ★ ★



Lew Tabackin

I'LL BE SEEING YOU—Concord Jazz 4528: I SURRENDER, DEAR; WISE ONE; I'LL BE SEEING YOU; RUBY, MY DEAR; CHIC LADY; PERHAPS; ISFAHAN; LOST IN MEDITATION; IN WALKED BUD. (59:19)

Personnel: Tabackin, tenor sax, flute; Benny Green, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Lewis Nash, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Where is Lucky Thompson when we need him? Thompson and Tabackin would make a fine pair of "tough tenors." What I mean to say is that Tabackin is a tenor man "in the tradition." He incorporates a whole range of tradition in his style, from the Zooty flavor of his entrance on "I Surrender, Dear" to the Rollins-like drive of Bird's "Perhaps."

His is an arpeggiated approach, chords up and down, with a throaty attack made up of equal parts cataclysmic slurs and staccato runs. His vibrato is a broad swipe: horse laugh

The '91 Montreux gig with Miles Davis and the tour with Davis' '60s quintet have anointed Wallace Roney for a potentially straightjacketing role. Acid-etched Milesian lines predominate on *Seth Air*. *Seth Air* is not only Roney's first recording after the Montreux gig, but it was recorded on the day Miles passed, the news of which reportedly reached the musicians in mid-session. It's a solid album, leavening the muscular modal blowing and vaguely Shorter-esque expositions with engaging interpretations of Gershwin's "Gone," which is hinged by nimble trumpet-drum exchanges, and Bill Bacharach's loopy waltz, "Wives And Lovers."

His brother, saxist Antoine, has a sleek sensibility of form and a burnished tone. He's taken over a big chunk of the writing chores from Wallace; they have a similar bead on the bop extension of the '60s. The rhythm section of Jacky Terrasson, whose originals blend well with the Roneys', heavy lifter Peter Washington, and Eric Allen, is fluent, flexible, and, like a glowing coal, all heat with little flame. Though the units Roney built around Gary Thomas, Mulgrew Miller, and Cindy Blackman were arguably more explorative, this is the type of band Roney needs if he is to take his work as a leader up another notch or two.

—Bill Shoemaker

Liquid Architecture

Jon Andrews

Better known as a visionary than as a musician, **Brian Eno** rethinks pop music with curiosity and imagination. *Nerve Net* (Opal/Warner Bros. 9 45033-2; 27: ★★★★★½) offers songs with familiar tricks and quirks, but the apt title suggests a low tension in his work. Eno's projects exist only in the recording studio, where realism is no constraint. His song structure may seem familiar with insistent rock and dance beats, but the content is calculatedly unreal, layered with layered drums, mutant synthesizers, and masked guitars. In the past, Eno's vocals established an emotional bridge to the listener, despite obscure lyrics. On *Nerve Net*, voices are distorted, disguised, or unintelligible, implying that technology impedes, as much as facilitates, human communication. Robert Fripp's bruising guitar menaces several tracks. "JuJu Space Jazz" reaffirms Eno's interest in Zawinul-style fusion. *Nerve Net* succeeds because it's willfully perverse—it challenges assumptions about pop-song production and port-circuits expectations.

Eno pioneered the "ambient" genre, and *The Riverboat Assembly* (Opal/Warner Bros. 9



Eno: calculatedly unreal

45010-2; 57:29: ★★★★★½) adds to his catalog of floating instrumentals intended to blend into the listener's environment. This is slow, subtle electronic music, produced with characteristic detail and depth of field. The melodies are soft, like shadows, and distant, like stars. Eno's a planner, more interested in flow and structure than sentiment. You'll hear no warm, fuzzy new-

age glucose—these abstractions are devoid of emotional content.

Guitarist **Michael Brook** blends experience in world-music production (Yousou N'Dour and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan) with technological innovation. Brook's second album, *Cobalt Blue* (4AD 9 45000-2; 45:50: ★★★★★), sets the sustained wail of his electronically modified "infinite guitar" against rippling guitar figures and pan-ethnic rhythms, many powered by versatile percussionist James Pinker. Eno, a frequent collaborator, adds string arrangements and instrumental treatments. Although Brook's music incorporates an ambient aesthetic, *Cobalt Blue* has an immediacy and a rhythmic kick that demand attention.

Harold Budd's *The Pavilion Of Dreams* (Editions E.G. EEGCD30; 47:41: ★★★★★) was produced by Eno for his Obscure label in 1976. This music is Budd's most overt expression of jazz and classical influences. Budd surrounds Marion Brown's soulful alto sax with mallet instruments for "Bismillahi 'rrahman 'rrahim," and salutes John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders with "Two Songs" for harp and angelic soprano voice. Budd's early-'70s ensemble work emphasized sensuously pretty melodies with shimmering textures. More recently, he's opted for the simplicity of spare keyboard music. For sheer lyricism and feeling, he's never surpassed *Pavilion Of Dreams*. **DB**

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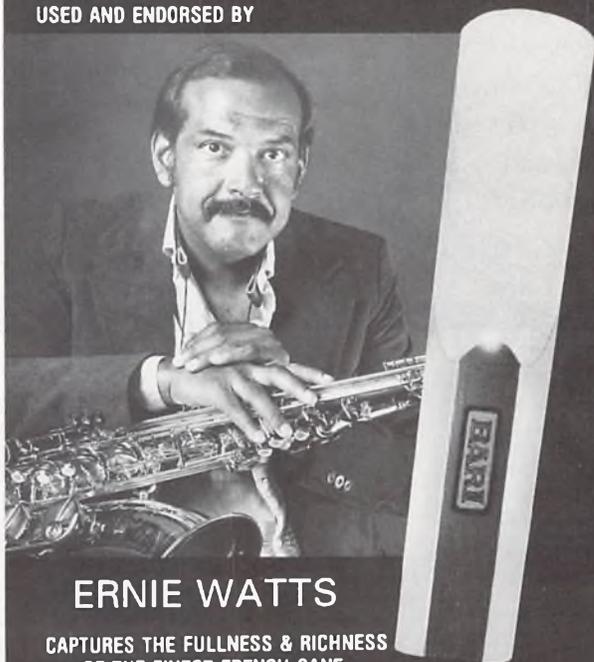
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Brax Tones

by John Corbett

At this point, I'm reasonably sure that **Anthony Braxton**, Steve Lacy, David Murray, and Paul Bley are involved in some sort of contest to see who can release the most records. Damned hard to keep current, too! With this diverse batch of new releases, we can chalk up a few more to the saxman in the cardigan.

Several years ago, I heard Braxton complain that record companies only wanted to record his quartet music. Thank goodness that didn't keep hat ART from recording *Willisau* (Quartet) 1991 (hat ART 4-61001; 64:10/65:00/71:57/57:23: ★★★★★), a miraculous four-disc set that should become a contemporary jazz landmark. Though it's a pricey initiation, *Willisau* is the perfect entry point to Braxton's challenging music, aided by extremely detailed, blow-by-



Anthony Braxton: elegant, and at times, unearthly sonic landscapes

blow liner notes from Graham Lock, the British writer whose book *Forces In Motion* takes the

very same quartet as its object of study. *Willisau* is split into two live discs and two studio discs. The studio sides are divided into individual pieces, allowing the group to play with the intricacies of discreet form. A touch warmer and livelier, the concert recordings feature disc-length collages of new and old Braxton compositions, elegant, and at times unearthly sonic landscapes. Braxton and pianist Marilyn Crispell, percussionist Gerry Hemingway, and bassist Mark Dresser move together and apart with absolute conviction, creating intense, daring, personal music that marks them as having a singular great identity, perhaps as one of the all-time great quartets. On *Willisau* alone, there is music enough to keep you busy—and happy—for months.

8 Duets Hamburg 1991 (Music & Arts 7169:15: ★★★★★), with German bassist and music critic Peter Niklas Wilson, is a set of seven new pieces (one played twice), and "Composition 40A," a flute/bass holdover from 1974 that also appears in a quartet arrangement on *Willisau*. Often, the two take a basic, repetitive pattern or phrase and use it as the ground for improvisation and variation. On "Composition 156," Braxton bellows the subsonic riff on contrabass clarinet. Same axe in hand, the clarinet gets slow and low on "Composition 155," creeping through the deepest registers. Meanwhile, both takes of "Composition 157" capture Braxton's slithery soprano as it constricts a line and snakes out a solo.

Braxton conducts a live recording of *Composition No. 165 [for 18 instruments]* (New Albion 050; 50:05: ★★★★★), played by the University of Illinois Creative Music Orchestra. In his witty storybook liner notes, the composer refers to "cloud formations," a visualization which helps characterize the highly spatial, mutable, but non-developmental sound clusters that rise and fall on "Composition 165." It's not fluffy gaseous, really; more like stone clouds—hard, dissonant, in places sharp and prickly. Between these events are more sparse, sloping interludes. The ensemble does a beautiful job with the difficult piece, and sparingly from Drew Krause and electric guitar from Mark Zanter lend the Orchestra unusual timbral potential. Along with the quartets and duets, this large-ensemble work is yet another shining moment in the ongoing saga of Braxton's work.

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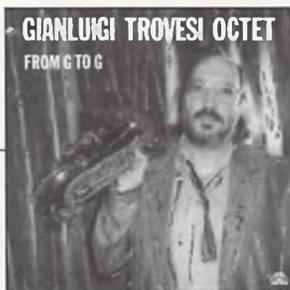
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Gianluigi Trovesi

FROM G TO G—Soul Note 121231-2: *HERBALK; HERBOP PART I; HERBOP PART II; NOW I CAN; FROM G TO G; DEDALO; HERCAB*. (58:46)

Personnel: Trovesi, alto sax, alto clarinet, bass clarinet; Pino Minafra, trumpet, prepared trumpet,flugelhorn, didjeridoo, vocals, noise; Rodolfo Migardi, trombone, tuba; Roberto Bobati, Marco Micheli, acoustic bass; Marco Remondini, cello; Fulvio Maras, percussion; Vittorio Marinoni, drums.

★★★★★

That an invigorating album full of inspired musicianship; compelling and oftentimes interesting melodies; exclamatory and playful improvisational conversations; exotic and fanciful solo flights; pockets of rippling percussion, horn outbursts, and crazed/nonsensical vocals; and superb Trovesi alto and bass clarinetursions. As much informed by the jazz of Eric Dolphy and Ornette Coleman as by the folk and classical traditions of Central and Eastern Europe, Trovesi's Octet delivers the most animated, dramatic, energetic, humorous, and unpredictable jazz I've heard in quite some time. Special plaudits go to the Italian group's melodic through "Now I Can" (great bass clarinet/ba dialog) and the delightfully fun hokum, "Hercab."

—Dan Ouellette



Bruce Forman

FORMAN ON THE JOB—Kamei 7004: *HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOIN ON; UN POCO LOCO; AUTUMN NOCTURN; REAL LIFE; PRISIONE; LAST MINUTE CALYPSO; LULLABY; A NIGHT IN TUNISIA; ANGELS JUST ARE; PEOPLE WILL SAY WE'RE IN LOVE; I CONCENTRATE ON YOU*. (57:49)

Personnel: Forman, guitars; John Clayton Jr., bass; Vince Lateano, drums; Mark Levine, piano (1,2,4-9); Joe Henderson, sax (1,2,5,8); John Santos, percussion (2,4,6,9,11); Andy Narell, steel drums (2,6).

★★★ 1/2

Guitarist Forman has enlisted a stellar cast of San Francisco artists for this mainstream jazz jaunt through upbeat bebop pieces, romantic ballads, and calypso and Latin-inflected jazz numbers. Joe Henderson makes his immense presence felt on four cuts with his gripping sax clusters and ecstatic flurries. And Forman, with his warm and melodic tones, is right there with Henderson, either harmonizing with him on the head of the rousing rip through Bud Powell's "Un Poco Loco," or matching Joe's zest with his own dizzying solo on "Night In Tunisia." Unfortunately, not all is so exhilarating here. As a matter of fact, a few pieces are downright nondescript.

—D.O.



Paolo Rustichelli

CAPRI—Verve Forecast 314 517 206-2: *FEMMES; BOLD MAN; CAPRI; MERKEL; BOKRUG; FULL MOON; EL TOPO; THE BRIDGE; BLACK PLASTIC; CAPRI (REPRISE)*. (46:56)

Personnel: Rustichelli, keyboards, Synclavier, Vocodor vocals, Waveframe Audioframe; Wayne Shorter, soprano sax (1,7), tenor sax (5,9); Herbie Hancock, Steinway grand piano (2); Miles Davis, trumpet (3,10); Andy Summers (5,7), Carlos Santana (6), Foley McCreary (8), guitars; Benny Rietveld, bass (1,5-7,9); Munyungo Jackson, percussion (1,5,7); Ricky Wellman, drums (1,5,7,9).

★★ 1/2

Italian composer Paolo Rustichelli calls his work "mystic jazz," which I guess means, judging from the trendy pop sheen cast over the proceedings here, cosmic funk and new age with jazz flavorings. Rustichelli's cloying—and outdated—synth slashes, atmospherics, and slices of vocal samplings make for tiresome listening, and upbeat pieces such as "Bold Man" and "Bokrug" seem more like exercises in funk-making than the real soul-driven thang. But then there's Wayne Shorter, who unleashes fine soprano and tenor sax solos on several tunes, Carlos Santana delivering emotive guitar lines on "Full Moon," and Miles Davis, in one of his last studio sessions, contributing two solid takes on the title composition with and without mute.

—D.O.

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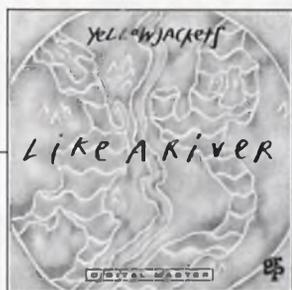
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Yellowjackets

LIKE A RIVER—GRP GRD 9689: *MAN FACING NORTH; MY OLD SCHOOL; RIVER WALTZ; DEWEY; MEMOIRS; AZURE MOON; SUENOS; 1998; SANDSTONE; SOLITUDE.* (63:07)

Personnel: Russell Ferrante, keyboards; Jimmy Haslip, bass; William Kennedy, drums; Bob Mintzer, sax, EWI; Tim Hagens, trumpet (7-9); Nana Vasconcelos, percussion (1-3,6).

★ ★ 1/2

saccharine). But the most bothersome thing about this album is the dismaying end-fades on both "Suenos" and the equally-strong "Sandstone" just when the improv conversations are beginning to heat up. Worthy of note: Russell Ferrante's fine piano runs and Tim Hagens' inspired trumpet lines. —D.O.



Maria Muldaur

LOUISIANA LOVE CALL—Black Top 1081: *SECOND LINE; BEST OF ME; LOUISIANA LOVE CALL; CAJUN MOON; CREOLE EYES; BLUES WAVE; DEM DAT KNOW; SO MANY RIVERS TO CROSS; DON'T YOU FEEL MY LEG; LAYIN' RIGHT HERE IN HEAVEN; WITHOUT A FRIEND LIKE YOU; SOUTHERN MUSIC.* (52:09)

Personnel: Muldaur, vocals, tambourine; Charles Neville, soprano saxophone (4), background

Too bad the entire album doesn't work on the level of inspiration developed in the intriguing musical dreamscape of "Suenos" (Spanish word for dreams), one of the few pieces that makes for a challenging listen. Most of the melodies are served with dinner-jazz calm and ease and more often than not are ingratiatingly sweet (or, in the case of "Solitude," downright

vocals (1); Dr. John, lead, background vocals; piano; Zachary Richard, Acadian accordion (3); Amos Garrett, guitar; Cranston Clements, guitar; background vocals (7); David Torkanowsky, piano, organ, keyboards; Chris Severin, six-string electric bass; Herman V. Ernest III, drums; Alfre "Uganda" Roberts (1), Kenneth "Afro" Williams, percussion; Mark "Kaz" Kazanoff, tenor, baritone saxes; Ernest Youngblood Jr., tenor sax; Jam Sharif, trumpet; Laurence "Rockin' Jake" Jacobs, harmonica (11); Aaron Neville (1,3), Phillip Manuel (5,7), Lucy Burnett (5,7), background vocals.

★ ★ ★ ★

Put songstress Maria Muldaur (best known for her 1974 pop hit, "Midnight At The Oasis") in a New Orleans studio, give her a variety of fine Southern roots songs to sing, back her up with a Who's Who of Crescent City musicians, and you hit the jackpot. The spotlight is on Muldaur's soulful, sassy vocals throughout as she effortlessly delivers spirited country-flavored Cajun-tinged tunes, r&b cookers, tangy Southern rockers, and a show-stopping ballad. There are the two spirited duets with Dr. John and the rowdy New Orleans party song "Second Line" that Muldaur enthusiastically grooves and warbles her way through. This could be Muldaur's best album despite the unnecessary inclusion of a new run through the tearfully sexy "Don't You Feel My Leg" from her "Oasis" days. —D.

Giants at play.

La Voz.

Benny Golson
La Voz tenor hard

Everette Harp
La Voz soprano medium hard
La Voz alto medium hard
La Voz tenor medium hard

Jeff Kashiwa
La Voz soprano medium
La Voz alto medium
La Voz tenor medium hard

Ronnie Laws
La Voz alto hard
La Voz tenor hard

Sonny Rollins
La Voz tenor medium soft

David Sanborn
La Voz alto medium

Stanley Turrentine
La Voz tenor medium hard

rico royal

Buddy Collette
Rico Royal tenor #2 1/2
Rico Royal alto #2 1/2

Scott Page
Rico Royal tenor #3 1/2

Sonny Rollins
Rico Royal tenor #2 1/2

Stanley Turrentine
Rico Royal tenor #3 1/2

Frederick L. Hemke

Kenny G
Hemke soprano #2 1/2
Hemke tenor #3
Hemke alto #3

Kenny Garrett
Hemke alto #3, #3 1/2

Jeff Kashiwa
Hemke tenor #2 1/2

Stanley Turrentine
Hemke tenor #3 1/2

RICO

Ronnie Cuber
Rico baritone #3 1/2

John Klemme
Rico tenor #2 1/2 and #3
Rico soprano #2 1/2

Plasticover

John Klemme
Plasticover tenor #2 1/2, #3

Dave Koz
Plasticover alto #3 1/2
Plasticover tenor #3 1/2

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Sun Ra

"Constellation" (from *MEDIA DREAMS, El Saturn*)
keyboards.

...el it's American. Sort of sounds like one of those things from the cusp of the art scene, the sort of Kitchen Performance inter-type scene. I really like it. I wish I had done it myself. I'm extremely envious that somebody else did it. I'd give that 5, usually. It sounded like there was a drummer in there. I thought that was a little bit pesky, but in a way that's one of the nice characters—to have something as jazzy and over something as home-demo-ish as a drumbox is rather interesting. It had a good sense of humor as well. That's very important, I think. But I don't know what it is.

JD: *Sun Ra*.
...t's not! I don't believe it. I would never have guessed that. Never! I never found him amusing.

**2 Steve Roach
& Robert Rich**

"...ve Magick" (from *SOMA, Hearts of Space*)
Roach, Rich, synthesizers, samplers,
percussion, flutes.

...ounds like Harry Partch so far. It's not manic. The atmosphere is so rich, it's got a really lovely feeling to it. So dark and number. It's really nice. I could do without some of the long reverbs, but that's just a production detail [laughter]. I'll give it a 4 1/2, not last one. A half-point penalty for the lazy use of reverb.

3 Miles Davis

"...araoh's Dance" (from *BITCHES BREW*,
Columbia) Davis, trumpet; Joe Zawinul,
composer, keyboards.

...s, that's so gorgeous. This sounds like Miles Davis to me here. I have to give it 6, not afraid. Or at least 5 1/2. It's just so authoritative and so unfrightened, you know? I mean, when you listen to this and you hear a lot of the other things we've heard, they are cosmetic in a way. They kind of retreat and put nice little touches in and so on. But this just comes straight out. Boy, that's a real lesson to me, hearing that. Because you don't often get a chance to be completely surprised like that, where you don't know what it is. I don't know what record it is.

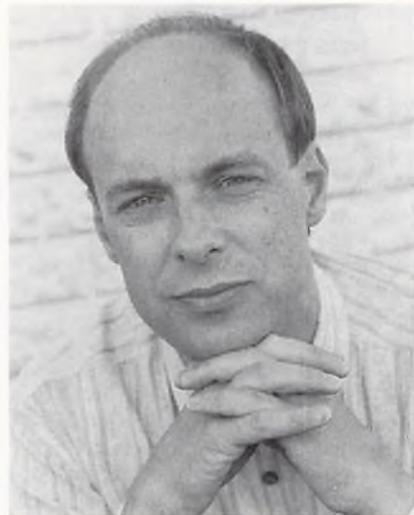
JD: *Bitches Brew*.
...F**kin' beautiful. I mean, just the presence of the boldness and just pushing straight out there and not getting frightened of it. It's a very brave piece of music. I think at the least that deserves [laughter]. Every single sound in there was so dense with life and excitement and spirit.

BRIAN ENO

by John Diliberto

Brian Eno is a music provocateur, surfacing first with the group Roxy Music in the early 1970s. His 14 solo albums include *Another Green World*, *Here Come The Warm Jets*, and *Before And After Science* (Editions EG). In the late '70s, Eno started a trend toward more contemplative music with ambient music recordings like *The Plateaux Of Mirror* (Editions EG) with Harold Budd and his *Music For Airports*, *Discreet Music*, and *On Land* (Editions EG). His ambient experiments continue on one of two recent albums, *The Shutov Assembly* (Opal/Warner Bros.—see p. 47).

Eno is a composer who draws equally from the avant garde and the street and then produces pop hits for other people. Among them are three albums each by Talking Heads, David Bowie, and U2, including their Grammy-winning *The Joshua Tree* and their most recent *Achtung Baby* (both Island). On the other hand, his avant-garde Obscure music label helped bring classical composers John Adams, Michael Nyman, and Gavin Bryars to a wider audience.



JOY BLAKESBERG

Often regarded as a synthesizer player—and consistently named in that category in *DB's* Critics and Readers polls—Eno instead considers himself to be more of a sound manipulator. On his other recent album, *Nerve Net* (Opal/Warner Bros.), he mixes hip-hop rhythms, industrial textures, and the liquid fusion of early electric Miles Davis.

4 John Zorn

"The Big Gundown" (from *THE BIG GUNDOWN*,
Icon/Nonesuch) Zorn, composer, alto
saxophone, saw; David Weinstein, Mirage
sampler, microcomputer.

I have no idea what this is. I'm never very fond of these parts in records where it's freaky-outy a bit. But I was enjoying it up until then. A serious penalty for cheap string sounds... I like that... Oh, I love that. It's very difficult to make a single judgment about it. It's the kind of music I never, ever, ever listen to. It's too pyrotechnic for my taste, you know? This is the kind of music I associate with John Zorn, someone like that. It's very neurotic. It's sort of the opposite of that Miles Davis, because it changes its mind every two seconds, and says, "Oh let's try this. No, that didn't work, let's do this. Oh my God, where am I?" It's so riddled with neurosis I can't listen to it for very long. Though, if I took individual bits, I like them, you know? The pieces are actually interesting on their own, and eyebrow-raising [laughter]. That's the best compliment I can give it.

I have to say in terms of a good try, an honorable effort, I'd have to give it a 4 1/2. In terms of a listenable result, as far as I'm concerned, I'd have to give it about a 2. So I have to give it, oh, 3 1/4.

5 Public Enemy

"Brothers Gonna Work It Out" (from *FEAR OF A
BLACK PLANET*, Def Jam/Columbia) Chuck D,
Flavor Flav, vocals; Hank Shocklee, Carl Ryder,
Eric Sadler, Keith Shocklee, synthesizers,
samplers.

I really love this. It's just so f**kin' full of life, and again, really weird and brave and uncompromised. I guess that's what I like about some of these things you're playing. They just don't hold back. They don't cosmeticize themselves. And that piece you just played is about as unc cosmetic as you could get [laughter]. You know what I love about a lot of rap songs is all this dissonance that's within them, where people are using bits of samples they've taken from a record but there happens to be some instrument completely unrelated that's also there. They can't get rid of it, so it just stays in there. And inside that thing, did you hear that little, like a car horn going on in the background? Really fabulous!

Well, I'd certainly put that in my tops. I might have to give that a 5 as well. Or a 4 3/4 anyway. It's just so gritty and dirty. Now you see, this has all the things that Zorn is after, I think, but it's cool, too. It's not so f**kin' nutty and psycho-analytical. You can tell this guy is not on the therapist's couch when he's playing this.

DB