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In Tribute to Lady Day

by Michael Bourne

"I'll never forget it," said Terence Blanchard of the moment when his life really began. "I was in the third grade and a jazz band came to my school for a clinic. Alvin Alcorn was the trumpet player. And when I heard him, I said, 'I want to do that!'"

Since that moment, Blanchard's become one of the best of his generation at doing just *that*—playing the trumpet—from New Orleans to working with Lionel Hampton and Art Blakey, from a band with saxophonist Donald Harrison to a band of his own. Blanchard was among the first of the so-called "young lions" fanfared in the '80s as a player and composer to be reckoned with. And, coincidentally, a whole other career happened beyond jazz. He's working more and more as a composer for the movies, especially Spike Lee movies like *Malcolm X* and the forthcoming *Crooklyn*. He's become so active in the movies that for a while it seemed as if Blanchard wasn't playing anymore.

Tain't so. And, if it weren't otherwise obvious that he's serious nonetheless about the trumpet, now comes his most heartfelt album. *In My Solitude: The Billie Holiday Songbook* spotlights Blanchard's trumpet with strings in a gathering of Lady's standards. "Good Morning Heartache." "Don't Explain." "Fine And

Mellow." "Lady Sings The Blues." Terence Blanchard sings through the trumpet—and a young lion has become a young master.

"Detour Ahead" opens the album—apropos for someone whose life as an artist often seems a musical odyssey through detour after detour.

"It all started when I was five," said Blanchard, born in New Orleans in the spring of 1962. "Everyone in my family played music. My father studied opera and traveled with a singing group." Blanchard's own interest in music awakened while "messing around" on the piano of neighbor Martha Francis. "I'll never forget Miss Francis. My father started me on lessons with Miss Francis when I was five."

Blanchard wasn't all that excited about lessons initially but was encouraged more and more by his father. "He'd always be playing his classical records. He was very instrumental in developing my appreciation for music. He'd sit next to me while I practiced and listen to every note. I hated practicing, but he instilled a discipline in me, and I started to really understand what he was telling me about music, how I should phrase things and that I shouldn't just play the notes





but really get into the music. If it weren't for my father, I don't know where I'd be."

Blanchard was practicing classical piano when one Alvin Alcorn came to his school and, as if meant to be, opened his eyes and his ears to another music and another instrument. "I think what amazed me was that I could see this guy's mouth at one end of the instrument and I heard all this *stuff* coming out the other end. I remember him bending notes and the way he phrased. I couldn't do that on the piano. I remember running home that day and telling my mother and father that I wanted a trumpet."

At a music camp in the summer before sixth grade, Blanchard became friends with the brothers Marsalis. They played together again in the summer before ninth grade and Blanchard was astounded that Wynton and Branford were so much better by then. "I found out they were going to the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, and for a whole year I argued with my parents about going to NOCCA." He eventually enrolled, and one of his teachers was Wynton's and Branford's father, Ellis Marsalis.

"That was a real turnaround for me. I used to listen to records, but I didn't have the right records. I was listening to electronic music, Return to Forever, Weather Report, Maynard Ferguson. I tried to play with those records, but I couldn't. It wasn't until I started going to NOCCA that I was introduced to records of Clifford Brown, Miles Davis, Bird, John Coltrane. I never heard anybody play the trumpet like Clifford Brown. I remember listening to a Brown/Max Roach record that Ellis gave me, and I didn't believe this guy was *improvising* at that *speed*! I'd listen to the records over and over, just the drums or just the piano, to figure it out. Jazz was still a serious mystery to me. John Coltrane scared me to death!" Miles Davis awed and inspired him even more.

Blanchard ventured deeper into the mystery around the jazz scene of New Orleans. He also continued his classical studies and played in the New Orleans Civic Orchestra. He came to New York in 1980 with a scholarship to Rutgers and became a student of classical trumpeter Bill Fielder. Paul Jeffrey, at that time head of the jazz program at Rutgers, was playing in the Lionel Hampton band and, even before school was underway, brought Blanchard along to a rehearsal. Blanchard was playing on the bandstand just for kicks when Hamp heard him and at once offered him a gig. Blanchard worked weekends on the road with Hamp for two years until Wynton Marsalis encouraged him and New Orleans friend Donald Harrison to audition for Art Blakey.

"We auditioned *in* the band at Fat Tuesday's. We'd listen to tapes and learn the melodies and the changes and then come back and sit



"I've always had a strong attraction to singers. There are things you can do with an instrument that are very hard to do with a human voice, creating a mood and certain sounds. But singers have it all: they have the lyric and the melody."



soundtracks for the movies.

Blanchard's symphonic score for the Spike Lee biopic of *Malcolm X* was an all-the-more extraordinary achievement inasmuch as his career in the movies happened, like his first fascination with the trumpet, as if by chance. "It was totally accidental. When kids ask me, 'How'd you get into the film business?' I don't have a clue what to answer."

It happened that saxophonist Harold Vick called him to play for Lee's 1988 college comedy *School Daze*. "I had a solo on a Lenny White record where he wanted a sound like Miles. Spike heard that and wanted to use it. Spike liked my playing and called me back for *Do The Right Thing*."

It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Blanchard the soloist became Blanchard the "technical advisor" on Lee's jazz picture *Mo' Better Blues*. Actor Denzel Washington trumpet-synched what Blanchard was playing on the soundtrack. "We were in the studio, and I was sitting at the piano playing one of my compositions. Spike heard it and liked it and asked, 'Can I use it?' We recorded it a cappella, and Denzel shot it on the bridge. Spike came back and said, 'Can you write a string arrangement for it?' I said sure. I'd never done it before, but I'd studied composition, and it was a matter of knowing the logistics of the instruments. I started learning the particulars of all the instruments in the orchestra. I did the arrangement, and Spike said, 'You have a future writing for

in. One night we played a whole set while Wynton and Branford sat in the back. And then Art said, 'You're a Jazz Messenger now.' And what was wild was that he said, 'I don't want you to give a shit about Freddie Hubbard, Woody Shaw, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, none of them. I just want you to be in this band and work hard at being the best you can be.' He was naming all my heroes! He wanted me to understand that I couldn't be *them*. There was no sense for me to try. I just had to be myself."

He eventually became Blakey's musical director and contributed originals like "Oh, By The Way" to the bandbook. He evolved even more as a soloist and was often the featured balladeer. Blanchard and Harrison stayed four years, then joined together in a quintet, *New York Second Line*, first of the five albums the twosome recorded for Concord and then Columbia, heralded that the apprenticeship was over. They split amicably at the end of the '80s, and Blanchard stayed with Columbia as a bandleader.

Nowadays, Blanchard fronts a quintet with pianist Bruce Barth, bassist Chris Thomas, drummer Troy Davis, and saxophonist Sam Newsome. That is, he fronts a quintet when he's not creating

film. I thought he was just boosting my ego, but he called me to do *Jungle Fever*, and that's when it really started between me and Spike."

Blanchard also became friends with composer and arranger Miles Goodman and was a soloist on Goodman's score for *Housesitter*, the Steve Martin/Goldie Hawn comedy. "We'd talk about particular issues. I remember him telling me about using muted strings because they don't get in the way of the dialog, but you can still hear all the parts and they have a nice icy kind of sound." Blanchard also studied more and more orchestration. "I love Stravinsky's *Rite Of Spring*. Stravinsky had this thing with poly-rhythms and bitonality. I tried to use some of that stuff for *Malcolm X*."

Lee's creative relationship with Blanchard continues a virtual tradition of directors and composers becoming synonymous. "Spike loves melody. Don't give him anything emotional without a melody. He doesn't like underscoring. He wants to hear a theme. 'What's the theme for this character?' Sometimes it's rough because music can get in the way of the dialog, so you really have to choose your points."

They're now working on Lee's *Crooklyn*. "*Malcolm X* was so dramatic that the music kind of wrote itself. This is a lighter thing. There's an element of humor, but there are serious moments. It's a *dramedy*. It takes place in the '70s. It's a slice of life about a family growing up, young kids. It's much different and harder to score than *Malcolm X*. It's more of a challenge. I can't be heavy-handed."

Blanchard has also composed music for several other new movies —*Assault At West Point*, about the court-martial of one of the first black cadets in the 1800s, and the new Wesley Snipes picture, *Sugar Hill*. He's especially excited about a new picture called *Inkwell*. "It's about two families vacationing at Martha's Vineyard. It's a coming-of-age film about a boy who comes into his own over the summer. It's about black youths, but the film is colorless. I have strong emotions about some of these movies being made about black life and Afro-American culture that are very one-dimensional. I'm worried that a lot of directors aren't respecting the Afro-American audience as they should. They think we only want to see one type of film. It's like the '70s, the period of *Superfly*. It's not the truth. I don't see myself in a lot of these movies."

He's just as concerned that jazz resound on more soundtracks. "One of the things I'm trying to do in this business is bring the music I love to film. Duke Ellington was probably the only composer who got a

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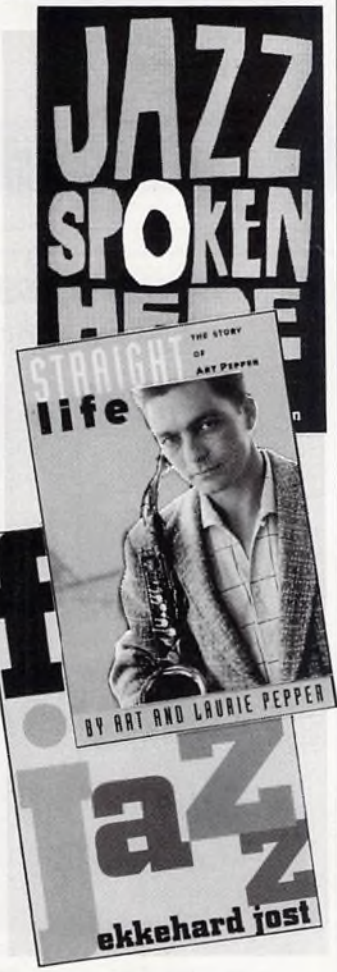
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Blanchard with film director Spike Lee

chance to score film using the music with some degree of integrity. I get tired of seeing downtrodden figures and all of a sudden you hear saxophones swinging. Jazz can be funny, can be sad, can be serious. People score movies using European traditional techniques, but to me it's all about interpretation. It's how musicians look at an eighth note and interpret it. Jazz musicians can play an eighth note with a triplet feeling. They phrase like jazz musicians. I want to take that language and use the orchestration techniques for composing film with a jazz band. You don't have to hear drums all the time or hear a bass walking all the time. There's a lot of room for this music to be used in very creative ways. It can bring something very fresh to this industry."

The Malcolm X Jazz Suite, his third album as a leader for Columbia, intersected the parallel streams of Blanchard's musical life; his band blew on themes from his soundtrack. *In My Solitude: The Billie Holiday Songbook* is even more about playing. "I didn't do the arranging. Miles Goodman did all the arranging. I wanted to do justice to the music, so I didn't want to be a jack-of-all-trades. I figured that if I'm the featured artist, I'm going to have to sit down and work on these tunes and my instrument."

Janie Bryson sings several of the songs with a Lady-like spirit and dramatically recites the haunting "Strange Fruit." Blanchard's usual section—Bruce Barth, Chris Thomas, Troy Davis—joins Goodman's strings as Blanchard's trumpet swings and swoons the beautiful-but-so-often-heartbreaking songs that Billie Holiday immortalized.

"I've always had a strong attraction to singers. There are things you can do with an instrument that are very hard to do with a

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human voice, creating a mood and certain sounds. But singers have it all: they have the lyric *and* the melody. They can express themselves so much. I've always loved Billie Holiday. She was so distinctive. She had a strong influence on everybody. We can break down music theoretically and technically, but when Billie Holiday sings, 'My man don't love me,' you can feel it. You can picture this guy and feel her pain. That's the mark of a great artist. I've always had a passion for Billie Holiday."

And, really, for all his success as a composer for the movies, Blanchard's greatest passion is to be what Alvin Alcorn first excited him to be—a trumpet player. He worked hard to finish all his film projects so that this year he'd be free to *play*.

"People have a misconception about me. People think that I do so much film work that I don't want to go on the road—but that's what I really want to do. Writing for film is fun, but nothing can beat being a jazz musician, playing a club, playing a concert. When I stood next to Sonny Rollins at Carnegie Hall last fall and listened to him play, that was *it* for me. I didn't give a damn if I ever wrote another film in my life. You could've shot me and killed me right there, and I would've been happy." **DB**

EQUIPMENT

Terence Blanchard plays a Raja trumpet by David Monette. It's fashioned complete with a mouthpiece. "One of the things I like about it is that the notes are very centered. I don't want to sound too mystical about it, but it does what you expect a horn to do. You can control the sound. The sound can be very brassy or very dark, and it projects."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- IN MY SOLITUDE THE BILLIE HOLIDAY SONGBOOK*—Columbia 57793
THE MALCOLM X SUITE—Columbia 53599
SIMPLY STATED—Columbia 48903
TERENCE BLANCHARD—Columbia 47354
 with Donald Harrison
NEW YORK SECOND LINE—Concord Jazz 43002
DISCERNMENT—Concord Jazz 43008
 with Harrison/Waldron/Davis/Blackwell
ERIC DOLPHY AND BOOKER LITTLE REMEMBERED LIVE AT SWEET BASIL—Evidence 22073-2
FIRE WALTZ—Evidence 22074-2
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NEW YORK SCENE—Concord Jazz 4256
LIVE AT KIMBALL'S—Concord Jazz 4307
BLUE NIGHT—Timeless 217
DR JEKYLE—Evidence 22001-2
HARD CHAMPION—Evidence 22025-2
NEW YEAR'S EVE AT SWEET BASIL—Evidence 22029-2
 with various others
PRELUDE—Criss Cross 1036 (Benny Green)
LET'S HANG OUT—Verve 314 514 454-2 (J.J. Johnson)
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Legend Of The Night Tripper

DR. JOHN

By Bill Milkowski



RONALD HEARD

After racking up Grammys for his last two albums, it's safe to say that Mac Rebennack (aka Dr. John) is on a major roll. Suddenly, at age 53, everything's coming up gris-gris for the gravelly voiced, funky-butt roots doctor.

And 1994 stands to be his most rewarding year in an astonishing career that had its beginnings in 1955, the year he got kicked out of Jesuit high school in New Orleans and decided to become a professional musician. As Mac recalls of that fateful dismissal that launched him on his way, "I couldn't get behind what the padres and the penguins were laying down at all. I didn't like it from the jump."

No matter. Mac wouldn't have made a good student anyway, considering all the goofballs, weed, and junk he was injecting as a wild teen obsessed with the seamy side of the '50s Crescent City music scene.

These graphic tales and more are revealed in Rebennack's audacious new autobiography, *Under A Hoodoo Moon: The Life Of Dr. John The Night Tripper* (St. Martin's Press), a fascinating tell-all account of his life from journeyman rocker, record producer, pimp, and junkie in the '50s to psychedelic Pied Piper in the '60s, million-seller in the '70s, session man, jingle writer, and solo traditionalist in the '80s, and drug-

free Grammy-winner in the '90s. It ranks alongside Miles Davis' provocative autobiography for sheer sensationalism while also shedding light on the early New Orleans r&b scene that was centered around Cosimo Matassa's fabled J&M recording studio.

Of his memoirs, which he began dictating aurally to writer Jack Rummel in 1990, Mac says in typical hipster fashion, "Well, it's like . . . I like to talk shit, anyway. I just jaw-jerked this guy that wrote it down, and he had enough probably to put two more books together. I figured we'd chop, leave this and that out. But I ain't tryin' to hide nothin'."

In the book's prelude, Rebennack writes: "This is a testament to New Orleans funk—to funksterators, tricknologists, mu-jicians who got music burning in their brains and no holes in their souls. Like the tail of a comet blowing through galaxies, these tales are my tribute to them."

The pages of *Hoodoo* are peppered with a rogue's gallery of colorful characters like Opium Rose, Stalebread Charlie, Deadeye, Buckethead Billy, Cubano George, and Shank, the charismatic hustler who turned young Mac onto heroin in the 11th grade, setting him on the course of a habit he finally kicked in 1989. All of them—the good, bad, and ugly—are brought to life by Mac's earthy storytelling manner, which bends the

rules of grammar in a peculiarly New Orleans way.

Aside from his recollections of working sleazy strip joints and his many run-ins with the law, there are tales of Mac's first encounters with New Orleans legends like Professor Longhair, Dave Bartholomew, Allen Toussaint, Huey "Piano" Smith, James Booker, Earl King, Paul Gayten, and his first guitar teachers, Walter "Papoose" Nelson and Roy Montrell of the Fats Domino band. There are also insights into landmark sessions like 1968's *Gris-Gris*, the album that introduced his Dr. John persona, 1972's rootsy *Gumbo*, his homage to Professor Longhair and Huey Smith, and 1973's big breakthrough album, *In The Right Place*, which got him over commercially on the strength of his hit single "Right Place, Wrong Time."

One comes away from the book with a deeper understanding of how extramusical things ultimately have an effect on the way the music comes out. The narcotics he took, the street characters he hung out with, the spicy food he ate, the time he spent in jail, the women he loved and lost, the lessons he learned the hard way all went into the scintillating gumbo we call Dr. John.

As he said in an interview down in New Orleans the day he was to headline the

Krewe of Tucks' annual Mardi Gras Ball. "You are what you eat, you are what you believe, you are what you feel. All of that's the truth, and it all comes out in the music some kind of way because it's in the moment. Music is such a right-this-moment thing that whatever happened today affects what you're doing at that moment.

"I think some of the worst days of my life have been some of my best gigs, and vice versa. I don't know exactly why stuff like that happens. It's just something that comes out . . . maybe sometimes out of frustration or aggravation. There's something connected in all of that, but let Sigmund Freud figure that out. I mean, who cares? The music comes out cool, and that's the one constant in all of it."

Under *A Hoodoo Moon* is being released simultaneously with Dr. John's latest album, *Television*, his funky debut for MCA/GRP. Produced by Rebenack and co-produced by longtime associate/guitarist Hugh McCracken, *Television* is full of the infectious goodtime grooves and wry wit that has made Dr. John a true New Orleans icon. It also features an all-star cast of New York musicians, including saxophonists David Fathead Newman and Ronnie Cuber, trumpeter Randy Brecker, and guitarist George Wadenius. Also on board for the session are New Orleans drummer Freddie Stahle (whose laid-back, second-line grooves graced Dr. John's *Gumbo* album more than 20 years ago) and New Orleans tenor sax great Alvin "Red" Tyler (who played on Mac's first single back in 1959).

From thoughtful, socially conscious statements like "Lissen," "Spaceship Relationship," and the title track to the tongue-in-cheek blues of "U Lie 2 Much," from the evocative voodoo vibe conjured up on "Witchy Red" and "Only The Shadows Know" (co-written with the late Doc Pomus) to the swaggering rap of "Shut D. Fonk Up" (featuring Anthony Kiedis of the Red Hot Chili Peppers paying homage to the likes of P-Funk, Ohio Players, and Dr. John himself), *Television* touches on some of the same musical territory covered on Dr. John classics like *Gris-Gris* and *Babylon* while also opening up some new directions.

"I wrote these songs about stuff I see all the time on the streets and on the road," says Rebenack. "And the thing that ties it all together is the funk. That's the basic element that makes a gig fun, that makes recording fun. It's the funk that makes us dance and feel good." As he puts it in the prelude to *Hoodoo*: "You can't shut the fonk up. No, the fonk got a mind of its own. So saith Mac Rebenack, who some of y'all might know as Dr. John The Night Tripper."

The release of *Television* comes on the heels of *Mos' Scocious* (Rhino), the excellent

Excerpts From *Under A Hoodoo Moon*

—*There were always grueling ordeals; the band packed into one or two cars and flat-out blew nonstop for as long as six weeks. Promoters and booking agents could get away with a lot in those days, and the rules of the game were made up as you went along. I can remember doing mixed-race gigs in places where you knew it wasn't going to be cool. When you blew into a hamlet in Mississippi that had a big sign announcing "United Klans of America Welcomes You," you know you weren't exactly in God's country.*

—*When you got a song published in those days, you didn't get any upfront money; all you did was sign a contract. You had to be very careful about checking these pieces of paper out. I learned this the hard way over a song originally titled "Try Not To Think About You," which I wrote for Art Neville or Willie West to cut. The song never got recorded by these two. It just laid around the Specialty office for a while, until Lloyd Price noticed it. Lloyd ended up stealing the song—which he pulled off because it hadn't been copyrighted. He changed the name to "Lady Luck" and in 1960 it became a big, big hit. But I wasn't steamed at Specialty. The one I wanted to kill (and I mean literally) was Lloyd Price. I heard through the grapevine that Lloyd was scheduled to appear in New Orleans, so I went out and got a gun on the street. My plan was to show up at the venue, wait for Lloyd to finish, and blow him away after the gig, but at the last minute the gig was canceled.*

—*Before too long, I was doing sessions with Eddie Bo, Bobby Charles, and a bunch of other cats. Soon after, Lee Allen and the fellas in the regular studio band (Red Tyler, Justin Adams, Frank Fields, Earl Palmer) came in and announced, "Now you're in the funk club." I felt honored that they would make an issue of my being accepted. All of this was a real mind-opening thing for a youngster like me. Another time, I got my head turned around by Little Richard. On one of Richard's studio dates, he had a bagful of money with him. I watched him as he threw it at Lee Allen's feet, trying to get Lee to go to bed with him. I was floored because I had never seen that kind of action before.*

—*Every break I got from working in the joints in the Quarter, I used to go to*



R. ANDREW LEFLEY

Vernon's to hear John Coltrane when he was in town. Every night I used to sit up behind McCoy Tyner, because I wanted to learn how he played piano. But Trane's music would get so intense—and my head was getting so narcotized—that I'd nod out every time they started, coming out of it only when they finished the set. I never saw a thing McCoy was putting down.

—*On Christmas Eve 1961, my little band took a gig at a joint in Jacksonville, Florida. We was getting ready to go to the gig when we realized that Ronnie Barron, who always took forever to do hisself up for gigs, had disappeared. I went to look for him and found him being pistol-whipped by the motel owner, who'd caught Ronnie with his old lady. I went to get the gun out of the guy's hand. We wrestled for it; I thought my left hand was over the handle but I was actually grabbing the barrel. I beat the guy's hand against the bricks trying to get the gun away from him and the gun went off. I looked down and saw the second finger of my left hand, my fretting hand, hanging by a thread. At the moment I was shot I saw not just my life but my career pass before my eyes.*

two-CD Dr. John anthology spanning 30 years, from his earliest 45s like 1959's "Bad Neighborhood" by Ronnie & the Delinquents and his own "Storm Warning" through his successful Atlantic years and up to his Grammy-winning 1989 album *In A Sentimental Mood* for Warner Bros. Also in the wings is another Rebennack-related project, *Crescent City Gold: The Ultimate Session* (High Street/Windham Hill), in which the good doctor joins forces with pianist Allen Toussaint, drummer Earl Palmer, saxophonists Alvin "Red" Tyler and Lee Allen, and pianist Edward Frank for a kind of "Dream Team" of New Orleans funk. In an interesting departure, Mac plays strictly guitar on this all-star session, flaunting some funky chops on a set of Toussaint and Rebennack originals along with Crescent City classics like Earl King's "Trick Bag" and Huey "Piano" Smith's "Don't You Just Know It."

When asked about the origins of funk, Rebennack launched into a street exegesis on the subject. "When I came up, man, cats always used to use that word. The studio band in New Orleans used to call themselves the

"The thing that ties it all together is the funk. That's the basic element that makes a gig fun, that makes recording fun. It's the funk that makes us dance and feel good."




Funk Clique. And that's when the word 'funk' was not fashionable. In the '50s, funk meant something that smelled bad. Like my grandma used to say, 'I'm gone spank yo' funky go-go, boy.' But cats now want to use the word 'funk' because the general public took a hold of it.

"As for where it came from, people perceive it in different ways. Some kids, they see it coming from James Brown, others see it from Little Richard, some see it from

somewhere else. I personally think maybe someone like [early New Orleans drummer] Paul Barbarin might have invented some of the funk beats. Earl Palmer sophisticated them up and put 'em on records. And then later came drummers like Charles 'Hungry' Williams. He used to play everything funky. I don't care if it wasn't a funky tune; when he got through with it, it was *jonky!* Then drummers like James Black and John Boudreaux and Smokey Joe Johnson took and made styles of funk. And later cats like Zigaboo Modeliste took a piece of those cats' stuff and took it to where the Meters went with it.

"Everybody takes something from somewhere," he continued. "I think Memphis funk came by Al Jackson trying to play a version of Charlie Williams' stuff, and he played it how he played it, which was not a New Orleans style. But because the records was real successful, people accepted that as a form of funk. And then later James Brown had some good ol' funk drummers in the band [notably Melvin Parker and Clyde Stubblefield], and what they did led to other offshoots . . . cats like George Clinton and Sly Stone. Any of them cats, they came out of

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some other cats."

But Mac maintains that the New Orleans brand of funk is very distinctive from the rest. "New Orleans funk is subtle. It always was a little subtle . . . too much for the masses in some kind of way. It's a real inside thing, a real inside job what funk's about in New Orleans. But on the other side of the coin, it opened up a lot of cats' noses about playing funk. I mean, where did a guy like Horace Silver learn to play so funky? Where did Les McCann get to play so funky? Ramsey Lewis . . . lots of cats did some funky shit at one time, and maybe they heard of Allen Toussaint and maybe they heard of somebody else.

"I particularly asked Horace one day, 'When you was coming up, did you ever hear some New Orleans music?' And he said, 'I remember this juke box at this joint we were working in Connecticut. It had Fats Domino singing 'Goin' Home Tomorrow.' And it was the first time I heard blues in that kind of bag.'

"To this day we still play Horace Silver shit. We can play 'Nica's Dream' and 'Senor Blues' on a rhythm & blues gig, and people likes it. People relates to that shit. It might be jazz, but it's also so funky that it falls into some other category.

"Years ago when Art Blakey cut 'Bye-Ya,' that Monk tune . . . the groove he played on that was so New Orleans. When I first heard that record I thought for sure it was a New Orleans drummer. Here's a guy from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who just happened to play Latin music funky. And then there's Vernel Fournier, who put some serious New Orleans feel on 'Poinciana' with Ahmad Jamal. I used to make the rhythm section cats in my band listen to that record to learn how to cop that loose thing while still being tight as a rock. You couldn't find it that way any place else but New Orleans."

But whatever you do, don't talk to this magistrate of the New Orleans Court of Funk about any kind of drum machine-propelled music that purports to be funky. "I call it 'comatose muzak funk' because it puts me to sleep. It's for people that like to be in a coma state. It don't ever make you shake your ass for real. It just stays on a constant thing. I know kids who love that shit. I listen just to see what it is they like about it, but I don't connect to it. It just don't move me. It leaves me very cold, man. Naw, it ain't funk. I mean, the real funk."

And this cat oughta know.

DB

EQUIPMENT

Mac Rebennack plays a Yamaha C-90 acoustic piano, Hammond organ, and Gibson guitars.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

TELEVISION—MCA/GRP 4024
GOIN' BACK TO NEW ORLEANS—Warner Bros 26940-2
IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD—Warner Bros 25889
DR JOHN PLAYS MAC REBENNACK—Clean Cuts 707
THE BRIGHTEST SMILE IN TOWN—Clean Cuts 707
TANGO PALACE—A&M/Horizon 740
CITY LIGHTS—A&M/Horizon 732
HOLLYWOOD BE THY NAME—United Artists 552
DESITIVELY BONNAROO—Atco 7043
IN THE RIGHT PLACE—Atco 7018
GUMBO—Atco 7006
THE SUN, MOON & HERBS—Atco 33-362

REMEDIES—Atco 33-316
BABYLON—Atco 33-270
GRIS-GRIS—Atco 33-234
BLUESIANA TRIANGLE—Windham Hill 0125 (with Art Blakey and David "Fathead" Newman)
Apart from his ubiquitous session work in New Orleans during the late '50s, Mac Rebennack has also appeared on hundreds of sessions as a sideman for other artists, including Maria Muldaur, James Taylor and Carly Simon, Buddy Guy and Junior Wells, Johnny Winter, Van Morrison, Bennie Wallace, B. B. King, Johnny Adams, Sonny & Cher, Bobby Darin, the O'Jays, Sam Cooke, and Phil Spector

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STUART BRWIN

Solidarity, L.A.—Style

BLACK NOTE

By Fred Shuster

Black Note personnel (l-r): Mark Shelby, James Mahone, Willie Jones III, Ark Sano, and Gilbert Castellanos.

It was a hot summer's evening in 1991 when a small group of hip, young musicians fresh from the Playboy Jazz Festival decided to grab a cab and drop by a small jazz club in downtown Los Angeles. That night, trumpeter Roy Hargrove, guitarist Mark Whitfield, and others from the festival's Jazz Futures group ended up jamming with Black Note—a young band dedicated to performing straightahead, original jazz.

Jazz Etc., the club that provided the backdrop for the evening's jam session, was destroyed in the L.A. riots the following year. But nothing could dampen the ambition or spirits of alto saxophonist James Mahone, pianist Ark Sano, trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos, bassist Mark Shelby, and drummer Willie Jones III. In a city not widely known for original, challenging music of any genre, Black Note has maintained a high standard of musicianship and integrity while building a stable following.

"When we started, there weren't a lot of young people playing this type of music in Los Angeles," explained the 28-year-old Shelby in a bustling Hollywood coffeehouse. "In other cities, yes. But in L.A., there

Classic *Jazz* on Telarc

wasn't any solidarity among young musicians. We kind of gravitated toward each other. We didn't have to place an ad in the paper that said, 'Desperately seeking drummer.' We just came together naturally. It was almost a spiritual thing."

The five musicians, who range in age from 21 to 30, met in exactly the same way: at jam sessions. Jones, 25, recalls dropping into a club in late 1990 and seeing Shelby (on upright bass) accompany musicians twice

"When we started, there weren't a lot of young people playing this type of music in Los Angeles. . . . There wasn't any solidarity among young musicians."

—Mark Shelby, bassist



his age. "Just seeing a young guy playing straightahead, acoustic jazz overwhelmed me. I don't even remember what he was playing. We exchanged phone numbers that night. Each guy came along the same way, piece by piece, almost like it was meant to happen."

Once alto player Mahone came aboard, the newly formed band got serious, practicing every night for about four months without even thinking about landing a gig. The musicians agreed early on to work toward a group sound and identity, making sure the music was polished, yet free. Shelby and Mahone, Black Note's primary composers, began knocking out tunes.

"It takes a lot of personal sacrifice to commit to a project like ours," Shelby said. "This is all we've done for four years. We gave up our day jobs to give the music 100 percent. We put everything else aside."

Black Note began gigging anywhere they could—coffee-houses, bars, underground hip-hop joints—just to get live experience and check reactions. At one point in 1991, the quintet found itself blowing at a health-food restaurant—in front of two customers. Said Jones: "We weren't making a lot of money. But we'd be jammin'. In some places, the crowd picked up on the vibe right away. But even people who were ignorant of the music and didn't really understand what was going on, they knew they had seen something different. Our music was coming across as a group thing, both visually and conceptually. And no

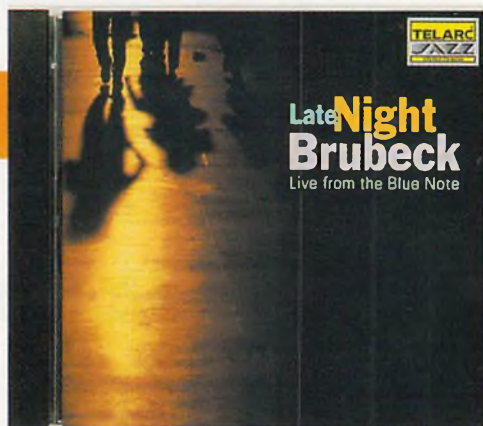


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"We have encouraged a scene in [Los Angeles] by example. There are all kinds of groups and jam sessions now."

—Willie Jones III, drummer



matter how many people were out there, we'd play hard and give it all we had, as if it was a sold-out crowd. Another thing: We never had a hassle with club owners who told us to play standards for people. We've been pretty fortunate that we have a following for the originals."

One early supporter was drummer Billy Higgins, who, in 1991, recorded Black Note's first effort, *43rd And Degnan*, on his own

label, World Stage Records. The disc drew positive reviews in local and overseas music publications, and the band started playing upscale L.A. clubs like Lunaria and Atlas Bar & Grill. Columbia Records jazz a&r director Al Pryor began catching the shows, and eventually Columbia signed the outfit. *Jungle Music*, the band's major-label debut, was recorded and mixed in five days in late 1993. Among the standout cuts are the title

"Everything we've done for the last four years has been to get to this point," said Shelby. "Before we even had any gigs, we would sit around and talk about if we could just get some local gigs. Our goal was not to get a record deal, but to be able to work together and play our music. We've accomplished that goal, so now the next step is to go on the road across America and to Europe."

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"One of the truly gifted musicians" JAZZTIMES



Since Black Note became established, a thriving new scene has developed in Los Angeles, much of it centered at a coffeehouse called Fifth Street Dick's. There, young listeners gather to dig hip-hop, rap, poetry, and a healthy dose of the new straight-ahead acoustic L.A. jazz, as spearheaded by Mahone, Sano, Castellanos, Shelby, and Jones. "I think we have encouraged a scene in this city by example," said Jones, the sole Southern California native in the band. "It's partly the power of a group situation. There are all kinds of groups and jam sessions all over the place now. Young people are getting together, and while we don't want to take complete credit for that, I think we helped start some of that attitude. New bands are coming up based on the vibe we helped create. It isn't that some young people don't like jazz; it's just that they've never been exposed to it. We get people at the gigs asking where this music comes from and who else plays it."

Shelby cites Charles Mingus and Thelonious Monk as main composing influences. Echoes of Monk can certainly be heard on

"Dedicated To Fifth Street Dick's," a spirited number that deserves to land on more than a few forward-thinking jazz-radio playlists. "I'm still developing as a writer," Shelby said. "A person's writing or soloing are extensions of their experiences. I'm trying to articulate how I'm feeling at a particular time, so audiences can catch on. Of course, it always helps when you have good musicians to play it."

These days, Black Note gigs several times a week, often to large club crowds up in the San Francisco Bay Area. All members admit they've been able to weather the storms by keeping their eye on the long haul, rather than aiming for a shortcut. "We said we're not going to take the quick dollar, but we're going to look at long-term goals," said Jones. "It's a rat race sometimes, but we've been able to survive whatever comes along. You have to sacrifice in order to get the greater reward down the road. And not too many people are willing to do that. It's easier said than done. But the main thing is we all get along personally and professionally, and that itself is rare."

Shelby says jazz musicians may have gotten a bad rap in the past, but the climate is different today for serious young players. "We've tried to remain professional and do things in a way that some people don't always associate with jazz musicians," he explained. "We're taking care of business and, at the same time, we're able to articulate something about the music we're playing. You can be a jazz musician and carry yourself in a professional manner on stage and off." **DB**

EQUIPMENT

James Mahone plays a Selmer Balanced Action alto sax; Gilbert Castellanos plays a Yamaha trumpet; Willie Jones III has a Slingerland drumset and uses Zildjian cymbals; Ark Sano prefers Steinway seven-foot grand pianos; and Mark Shelby plays a German-made flatback upright bass.

DISCOGRAPHY

JUNGLE MUSIC—Columbia 57825
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David Baker

composer, performer, and educator, has authored more than 60 books on jazz and improvisation. Currently chairman of the Department of Jazz Studies at Indiana University, Baker has given lectures and helped develop jazz-education programs at colleges and universities all over the United States. He has served as chairman of the jazz panel of the National Endowment for the Arts and is a past president of the National Jazz Service Organization. A longtime contributor to *Down Beat's* "Woodshed" columns and a judge for the DB Student Music Awards, Baker is the third inductee to our Jazz Education Hall of Fame.

ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



Jerry Coker

developed the first college program that offers a bachelors as well as a masters degree in jazz at the University of Miami in 1966. He has since created a similar program at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, where he is an associate professor of music. Coker wrote *Improvising Jazz*, the first comprehensive book on jazz improvisation, and has since authored seven more jazz-instructional titles. This past year, he was inducted into the International Association of Jazz Educators' Hall of Fame.



J.B. Dyas

is the director of jazz studies at Miami-Dade Community College, where he also teaches jazz courses and directs ensembles for New World School of the Arts, Miami's award-winning performing arts high school. A sought-after jazz clinician, Dyas has adjudicated jazz festivals and presented clinics at numerous high schools and universities. For the past eight years, he's been a faculty member of the Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops.



José Diaz

came to McArthur High School in a racially diverse, economically depressed area of Houston, and built one of the best high-school jazz programs in the nation. Eight years later, Diaz is still showing his students that they can have a future without being a sports star. His groups have performed at the Midwest Band & Orchestra Clinic and the International Association of Jazz Educators convention.



Nikki Crathorne

directs jazz and other music programs at King's Elementary and Junior high schools in Seattle. This past semester, she formed a Jazz Choir and Jazz Combo (consisting of 4th-6th graders) as well as a Junior High Jazz Band, and took all three to the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival at the University of Idaho. The Jazz Band and Jazz Choir swung so hard that they took first place in their divisions, and the Jazz Combo was noted for an outstanding performance. A 1989 graduate of the University of Idaho, Crathorne attributes her success with younger groups to the fact that she composes and arranges the music to fit individual students' abilities while emphasizing group strengths.

Key

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



Bobby Watson

LIVE MIDWEST SHUFFLE—Columbia 57697: *Blues Of Hope; Time Will Tell; The Cats; Welcome; Complex Dialogue; Mirrors (We All Need); Ladies; Midwest Shuffle; I'll Love You Always; He's More Good Than Bad; Finger Games; Mabel Is Able; Simon Says.* (66:59)

Personnel: Watson, alto sax; Victor Lewis, drums; Edward Simor, piano; Terrell Stafford, trumpet; Essiet Okun Essiet, bass.

★★★★ 1/2

Following his recent big-band session *Tailor Made*, Watson recorded this new album with his quintet, Horizon, at various venues during a tour of the U.S. heartland in late 1993. The title also alludes to his Kansas roots, but Watson's approach is firmly grounded in the music of Art Blakey's Messengers, where he was a musical director at the time Wynton Marsalis joined the band. But unlike the post-Marsalis generation of neo-boppers, who favor Blakey's '60s sound, the 41-year-old Watson has maintained the drummer's '70s style, a gleaming alloy of original Messenger Horace Silver's Caribbean-gospel-blues amalgam with the molten modalism of middle-period Coltrane.

Horizon is as solid as any jazz group working today; like a championship basketball team, they're strong in all five positions. Stafford's rich, ripe trumpet, Simon's deft, fleet piano, Essiet's fat, rubbery bass, and Lewis' omnivorously swinging drums blend with Watson's suave, vibrant alto to produce radiant, dynamic sonorities that ebb and flow with a cohesion no younger ensemble can match.

The tunes (two by Lewis, the rest by Watson) have a certain air of sameness (glossy, hard-bop themes followed by sheets-of-sound solos that too often seem haunted by Coltrane's ghost), but Watson's crafty arrangements break up the format, and the band's relentless energy keeps the pot boiling. The opener,

"Blues Of Hope," builds from a mid-tempo lope to a climactic explosion of controlled cacophony, while "Complex Dialogue" contrasts Stafford's brash attack with Watson's muscular musings. Watson demonstrates his dazzling technique on the supersonic "Midwest Shuffle," but his breath control on the unaccompanied "Finger Games," where he creates his own eerie echo, is even more impressive.

—Larry Birnbaum



Kip Hanrahan

EXOTICA—American Clavé 1027 2: *You Can Tell A Guy By His Anger; The Last Song; As In Angels (Red Star In The Morning Sky); Red Star; You Can Tell Someone Who'll Never Fulfill Their Potential By The Way They Measure The Evening; What We Learned That Night In Vera Cruz And How We Applied It; G-d Is Great; As In The Bronx (You Can Tell Where Someone Comes From By What They Laugh At); You Can Tell A Moment Of Clarity By The Digital Traces It Leaves; As In The Red Morning; The Last Song On The Album.* (58:16 minutes)

Personnel: Hanrahan, vocals, percussion; Don Pullen, various keyboards; Jack Bruce, bass; Robbie Ameen, drums; Leo Nocentelli, electric guitar; Alfredo Triff, violin; Lucy Penabaz, vocals (11); various artists, including J.T. Lewis, Ralph Peterson, Jr., Anthony Carillo, Richie Flores, Milton Cardona, Andy Gonzalez, and Mario Riviera.

★★★★

Hot on the heels of the superb *Tenderness*, Kip Hanrahan's cinematic 16-song cycle released domestically late last year, comes the composer/conceptualist/producer's impressive follow-up, *Exotica*. An intriguingly beautiful and rhythmically riveting collection of tunes recorded live in the studio, Hanrahan's mood-driven music includes an intoxicating brew of Afro-Cuban pulsings, funk grooves, and jazz passion with his crafted lyrics, which are at turns introspective, discursive, and sensual.

Hanrahan ponders the politics of socialism versus capitalism on several songs (including "The Last Song," where economic, creative, and sexual freedom arrives "when the workers rule the world"), probes the mystical union between the sacred and the erotic on "G-d Is Great," and celebrates carnal love on the seductively funny "What We Learned That Night In Vera Cruz."

Hanrahan—having collaborated with everyone from pop star Sting to the late nuevo-tango bandoneon master Astor Piazzolla—puts together a stellar band for this outing, with distinctive contributions coming from bassist

Jack Bruce, drummer Robbie Ameen, and violinist Alfredo Triff. But it's Don Pullen who steals the show. He contributes remarkable keyboard work throughout, whether he's dancing into dissonant runs, swirling and splashing playful fills, or painting brightly colored soaring lines. Highlights include Pullen's exhilarating, avant tinklings and clankings on "You Can Tell A Moment Of Clarity" and a gorgeous solo that emerges from the percussion feast on "As In The Red Morning."

—Dan Ouellette



Lan Doky/ Humair/Minh Doky/Brecker

PARIS BY NIGHT—Soul Note 121206-2: *Invitation; Blue'n'Boogie; Lover Man; Sonnymoon For Two; Dreams; Secret Love; Someday My Prince Will Come.* (74:37)

Personnel: Niels Lan Doky, piano; Daniel Humair, drums; Chris Minh Doky, bass; Randy Brecker, trumpet.

★★★★

The Doky brothers, Danes of Vietnamese extraction, are a living testament to the international character of contemporary jazz. Joined by the Swiss-born, French-based drummer Daniel Humair and America's own Randy Brecker, they take a postmodern approach to a set of well-worn standards on this live album, recorded at the La Villa club in Paris. Although their material is dead-center mainstream and their approach fairly straightforward, the group's airy textures and ironic, almost humorous detachment set their music sharply apart from the sobersided neo-bop of the young lions on the other side of the Atlantic.

Niels Lan Doky is the nominal leader here, but his fleet keyboard work has a brittle, self-effacing quality, allowing Brecker's wry, sassy trumpet to steal the spotlight. Chris Minh Doky's bass is dry and spare, but Humair's crisp, light drumming fills the gaps with crackling, propulsive energy. Brecker gives "Invitation" a delightfully fresh reading, tickling and jabbing the hackneyed standard back to life. Breaking the melodic line with bop flourishes and wah-wah witticisms, he transforms "Lover Man" from torch song to understated travesty, while Lan Doky ruminates tastefully. The pianist turns Sonny Rollins' barreling "Sonnymoon For Two" into a playful, bluesy romp, suspending clusters of high notes like icicles over choppy chords, and twists the potentially corny "Someday My Prince Will Come" into a tender meditation.

It's more of a clever conversation than a

ponderous statement meant for the ages, but *Paris By Night* has plenty of Gallic charm.

—Larry Birnbaum



Kenny Barron

OTHER PLACES—Verve 519 699-2: *ANYWHERE; OTHER PLACES; MYTHOLOGY; FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE; AMBROSIA; WILDLIFE; I SHOULD CARE; NIKARA'S SONG; HEY, IT'S ME YOU'RE TALKIN' TO.* (67:18)
Personnel: Barron, piano; Ralph Moore, soprano, tenor saxophones; Bobby Hutcherson, vibraphone; Rufus Reid, bass; Victor Lewis, drums; Mino Cinelu, percussion (2,3,6,8).

★★★★ 1/2

Kenny Barron may have completed his trans-

formation from sideman to poll-winner, but he remains selfless and gimmick-free. *Other Places* is sleek, accomplished craftsmanship, with Barron first among equals in a veteran ensemble. He won't flaunt his technique or overwhelm you with force of personality, but he's everywhere.

On "Wildlife" and "Other Places," for example, he circles his soloists, weaving in and out of his themes, and adds tasteful embellishments. Compared to last year's *Sambao* (featuring Touinho Horta and Nico Assumcao), you'll hear less Brazilian influence, though "Wildlife" and "Mythology" find Barron in his samba mode, and culminate in explosive Brazilian percussion from Mino Cinelu.

From the quantity and quality of Bobby Hutcherson's work on vibes throughout, you might guess that this was Hutcherson's date. If it were, it would be among his best in years. Barron and Hutcherson duet on the introspective "For Heaven's Sake," and their sensitive interplay is a highlight, with Hutcherson's reverie easing into a Monk-ish rhythm from Barron. On tenor sax, Ralph Moore adds a lovely, breathy evocation of Stan Getz to the late-night ambience of "Nikara's Song," and roars through Victor Lewis' Tranish "Hey, It's Me You're Talkin' To." On soprano, he seems uncomfortable with the relaxed, playful swing of

Barron compositions like "Ambrosia," and sounds a little stiff.

—Jon Andrews



Naked City

RADIO—Avant 003: *ASYLUM; SUNSET SURFER; PARTY GIRL; THE OUTSIDER; TRIGGERFINGERS; TERMANI TEEPEE; SEX FIEND; RAZORWIFE; THE BITTER AND THE SWEET; CRAZY KAT; THE VAULT; METALTOV; POISONHEAD; BONE ORCHARD; I DIE SCREAMING; PISTOL WHIPPING; SKATEKEY; SHOCK CORRIDOR; AMERICAN PSYCHO.* (58:00)

Personnel: John Zorn, alto sax, vocals; Bill Frisell, guitar; Wayne Horvitz, keyboards; Fred Frith, bass; Joey Baron, drums; Yamatsuka Eye, vocals.

★★★★★

ABSINTHE—Avant 004: *VAL DE TRAVERS; UNE CORRESPONDANCE; LA FEE VERTE; FLEURS DU MAL; ARTEMISIA ABSINTHIUM; NOTRE DAME DE L'OUBLI (FOR OLIVIER MESSIAEN); VERLAIME (PART ONE: "UN MIDI MOINS DIX"/PART TWO: "LA BLEUE"); ... REND FOU.* (47:02)

Personnel: Zorn, electronics, devices, voices; Frisell, guitar; Horvitz, keyboards; Frith, bass; Baron, percussives; (no instruments listed).

★★★★ 1/2

All Zorn (soundtrack?) music from 1992, *Absinthe* is the real news. But let's start with the brilliant and more entertaining *Radio*. The liner notes list a heady bunch of "inspirations," e.g., Mingus (on *Candid*), Sinatra, Conway Twitty, Roger Williams, Tony Williams' *Lifetime*, Liberace, Stravinsky, Red Garland, and Bob Demmon & the Astronauts (yes!). Naked City's catalog of sounds, styles, and grooves expertly reflects this extremely eclectic list in typical Zornian fashion: mishmash Mahavishnu mixes with imploding surf music, strained & straight cartoonish ditties, bent c&w riffs, and (of course) vocal and saxophonic screams. Zorn gets Frisell to uncork some Jimmy Page-like grunge here and there, and Horvitz recalls Garland one moment, Sun Ra the next.

The manic, spin-the-dial pastiche that is *Radio* makes foreground and background irrelevant, the moods so multifarious that elements like groove, free, atmosphere, and dance are many times finished before they really begin. (Actually, '91's *Heretic* and *Grand Guignol*—both also on Zorn's Avant label—are even more caffeinated.) Zorn's brainy arrangements and jumpcuts are tight as hell, betraying the notion that he's just a Kenny G for mutants. Certainly, *Radio's* earnest wit doesn't really give us anything we haven't already heard from Naked City. In fact, the (New York) Halloween party music that makes up most of this disc might sound dated, corny, despite the shock tactics. Yes, the Howard Stern of Jazz almost overplays

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his hand toward the end. Almost.

Apart from the relative serenity that makes up some of the first section of *Grand Guignol*, the not-quite-ambient nervous moon music that is *Absinthe* suggests a real departure for Zorn. Forget Eno; *Absinthe*'s moody, industrial textures are more suggestive of something like Ned Lagin's *Seastones*, where dry, abstracted sounds tend to be more abrasive, less obviously tied to electronics, and with a certain theatricality. A sampling: the somber "Val de Travers" is Frisell doing Jim Hall on quaaludes, "Une Correspondance" a bright recital of "bells" and what sounds like vibrations from inside resonant garbage cans. "Artemisia Absinthium" a spasm of factory sounds laced with "voices" and buzzing bees, "...rend fue" a disappointing six minutes of dull, undifferentiated "crackling paper" (applause?). Certain thunderous, electronic sheens and Frisell's elongated, at times almost-impressionistic guitar lines are recurring "themes."

Absinthe's emotional range, while varied, covers less ground next to the almost-friendly *Radio*. (In fact, the cover art to both CDs is quite abstruse and involute.) Ironically, in its generally muted kind of way, *Absinthe*, defined as "a green, bitter, licorice-flavored liqueur," is the more expressive of the two. Tie it all together, and what do you get? An interesting trip through a certain someone's brain, mind, dreams, comas.

—John Ephland



Ellis Marsalis

WHISTLE STOP—Columbia 53177: *WHISTLE STOP; DEE WEE; A MOMENT ALONE; MAGNOLIA TRIANGLE; MOZARTIN; AFTER; COCHISE; LIL' BOY MAN; MONKEY PUZZLE; CRY AGAIN; BEAUTIFUL OLD LADIES; LITTLE JOY; WHEN WE FIRST MET. (72:10 minutes)*

Personnel: Marsalis, piano; Branford Marsalis, tenor, soprano saxophones; Robert Hurst, bass; Jeff "Tain" Watts, Jason Marsalis (4,7), drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

This album ought to be credited to Branford Marsalis instead of his father Ellis, since Branford gets the lion's share of solo space, accompanied by his regular bandmates Hurst and Watts. Ellis, arguably the most original and distinctive stylist of the Marsalis clan, is relegated to a sideman role on his own session,

overshadowed by both Branford and Watts, whose virtuosic drumming thoroughly obscures the pianist's sensitive shadings. Only toward the end of the disc, when Watts simmers down, does Marsalis père get a chance to shine. Indeed, the subtle artistry of his elegant phrasing and refined touch are best appreciated on the closing ballad, "When We First Met," where he plays unaccompanied.

Though all the material was composed by New Orleanians—James Black, Alvin Batiste, Harold Battiste, Nat Perrilliat, and Ellis himself—the dominant influence is that of John Coltrane. Not only does Branford follow Trane's modal model, sometimes breaking into urgent yelps and guttural moans, but Watts' solos often mimic Elvin Jones'; and even Ellis, a dyed-in-the-wool modernist, occasionally cops McCoy Tyner's licks.

However derivative, the music is brilliantly executed, with Branford flaunting his formidable chops through tortuous progressions and tricky time signatures. On "Magnolia Triangle," a snaky 5/4 blues, Branford builds slyly on tenor, pushing the changes almost to the breaking point before Ellis smooths the roiling waters with a spare, swinging, downright danceable solo. On "Mozartin'," Branford sounds like Sidney Bechet playing Thelonious Monk, wailing on soprano over a New Orleans parade beat as Ellis plays delicate, jumpy blues. "Lil' Boy Man" takes a quirky balladic

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theme down an angular, almost Oriental path, while "Cochise" flows like a racing stream, blending blues, bop, and swing in a *tour de force* of cross-generational mastery.

—Larry Birnbaum



Vincent Herring

DAWNBIRD—Landmark 1533-2: *SOUND CHECK; AUGUST AFTERNOON; ALMOST ALWAYS; TOKU DO; DAWNBIRD; DR. JAMIE; WHO'S KIDDING WHO; THE DARK SIDE OF DEWEY. (58:23)*

Personnel: Herring, alto, soprano saxophones; Wallace Roney (1-5), Scott Wendholt (6-8), trumpet; Mulgrew Miller (1-5), Keven Hays (6-8), piano; Ira Coleman (1-5), Dwayne Burno (6-8), bass; Billy Drummond (1-5), Carl Allen (6-8), drums.

★ ★ ★

It seems fitting that Orrin Keepnews, who produced the late Cannonball Adderley on so many fine Riverside albums, should produce Herring, whose playing closely resembles Cannonball's. But then Herring shows more originality than Roney, who is Miles Davis up and down. Actually, the session with Wendholt, et al., is better: Herring is more fluid and individualistic. Wendholt plays brighter and with more of a cutting edge than Roney, and the rhythm section equals if not bests Miller/Coleman/Drummond.

—Owen Cordle

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Yellowjackets

RUN FOR YOUR LIFE—GRP 9754: *JACKET TOWN; EVEN SONG; RUNFERYERLIFE; THE RED SEA; MUHAMMED; CITY OF LIGHTS; SAGE; ANCESTORS, WISDOM.*

Personnel: Russell Ferrante, keyboards; Jimmy Haslip, bass; William Kennedy, drums; Bob Mintzer, saxes; Robben Ford, guitar (2); Steve Croes, synclavier; Judd Miller, synth programming.

★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

The Yellowjackets shouldn't be putting out an

album this good, not now. Not after putting out an album a year for umpteen years. Not with Haslip touring and recording with Bruce Hornsby, not with Ferrante and Kennedy getting more and more calls for sessions, and not with the in-demand Mintzer, who, despite the great chops, never before seemed quite a part of the band.

But the good news is that in spite of the distractions, the Yellowjackets have emerged from a recent recording slump with perhaps their best album yet. "Jacket Town" is classic Y.Js, with Mintzer adding bass clarinet under his solo as Kennedy goes double-time and Haslip's bass sings joyfully over the out vamp. "Runferyerlife" is the kicking-est straight-ahead Jacket track yet. Ferrante is even knocked off course at one point, but catches his breath and recovers. "Muhammed" is a curious, soul-searching band improvisation. Kennedy shines on the interesting Latin-funk groove of "City Of Lights" and plays his jazzy New Jacket Swing on "Wisdom," Haslip poking his head out at the right times, and Mintzer and Ferrante sparring patiently over the fade-out.

The band uses all its resources here, and brings back an original Yellowjacket, guitarist Robben Ford, for a beautiful bluesy ballad. The band is still stinging after all these years, folks.

—Robin Tolleson

tive, free encounter with Anthony Braxton, a favorite duet partner. Teitelbaum poses a unique challenge for Braxton because his Moog synthesizer creates whorls of sound, bleeps and drones, instead of mimicking acoustic instruments. Without conventional reference points, Braxton reacts to a series of shifting environments, both turbulent and spacy, created by Teitelbaum, who in turn adjusts to Braxton. "Open Aspect #3" achieves a tremendous range of sound from Braxton's

whalesongs on soprano sax to Teitelbaum's evocation of a music box gone berserk. "Open Aspect #2" centers on a series of tight, cyclical patterns from Braxton's alto, suggesting Philip Glass, but remaining static. Throughout, the struggle to develop a common language can be fascinating. When the duo hits the right balance of coherence and abstraction, Braxton becomes the ghost in Teitelbaum's machine.

The Sea Between compiles live duets be-

Anthony Braxton, *Open Aspects (Duo)* 1982.

Anthony Braxton

OPEN ASPECTS (DUO) 1982—hat ART 6106: *OPEN ASPECT, NOS. 1 THROUGH 6. (73:19)*

Personnel: Braxton, alto, soprano saxophones; Richard Teitelbaum, Moog synthesizer.

★ ★ ★ ★

Richard Teitelbaum & Carlos Zingaro

THE SEA BETWEEN—Victo 03: *AGORA NADA; THE SEA BETWEEN; THE STRUCTURE #01; SCIENCES HUMAINES; THE GHOSTS OF SREBRENICA; GOLEM SKETCHES. (64:58)*

Personnel: Teitelbaum, Yamaha, Kurzweil, and Apple synthesizers, among others; Zingaro, violin.

★ ★ ★

Richard Teitelbaum combats the perception that electronic keyboards are incompatible with improvisation. Since his early, radical work with the group Musica Elettronica Viva, which included Steve Lacy for a time, Teitelbaum has explored the interface between jazz and synthetic improvisation.

Open Aspects (Duo) 1982 reissues an inven-

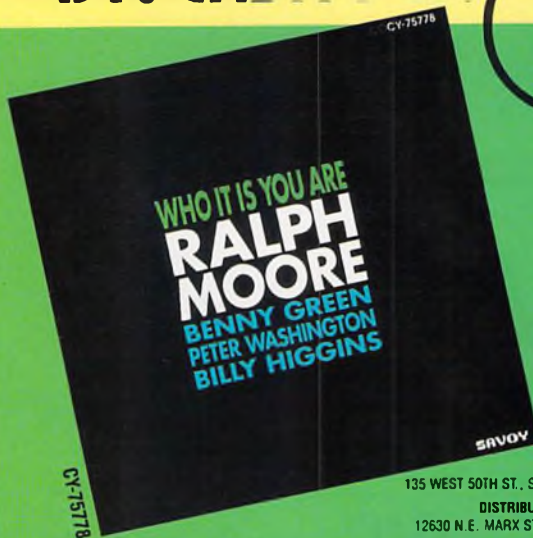
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tween Teitelbaum and Portuguese violinist Carlos Zingaro from 1987 and 1992, and the technological leap to digital synthesizers, sampling, and MIDI connection is striking. Teitelbaum accesses a wider range of sounds, and can emulate Zingaro's incisive violin. This capacity allows a close, interactive dialog with the violinist. In a role reversal, Teitelbaum mostly complements Zingaro's playing. Zingaro is not as captivating a soloist as Braxton, and he fails to bring much warmth or lyricism to offset the orchestral synths and electronic storms that surround him on "Sciences Humaines." Teitelbaum's ominous "Golem Sketches" (from his multimedia opera) is the most successful and "composed" track, with electronically treated violin leading the way through Middle Eastern chimes and cymbals, and disembodied voices. The sea is a particularly good metaphor for power, flow, and unpredictability in Teitelbaum's music.

—Jon Andrews



Phil Wilson

THE WIZARD OF OZ SUITE—Capri 74040-2: *MUNCHKINLAND; IF I WERE KING OF THE FOREST; IF I ONLY HAD A BRAIN; WE'RE OFF TO SEE THE WIZARD; DING DONG THE WITCH IS DEAD; IN THE MERRY OLD LAND OF OZ; OVER THE RAINBOW; PERDIDO; ST. JAMES INFIRMARY; LADY BE GOOD; GHOST OF A CHANCE; WOODCHOPPER'S BALL; I LIKE THE SUNRISE.* (64:04)

Personnel: Wilson, Wolfgang Ahlers, Paddy Plato, Bubi Grossmann, Egon Christmann, trombones; Lennart Axelsson, Manny Moch, Paul Kubatsch, Bob Lanese (1-7), Heinz Habermann (8-13), trumpets; Herb Geller, Emil Wurster, Harald Ende, Christoph Lauer (1-7), Stephan Von Dobrzynski (1-7), Danny Moss (8-13), Werner Roennfeldt (1-7), Thomas Gramatzki (8-13), reeds; Stephan Diez, guitar; Wolfgang Schlueter, vibes; Harry Grube (1-7), Walter Norris (8-13), piano; Lucas Lindholm, bass; Ronnie Stephenson, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

The suite—the first seven tracks—contains show-type writing and jazz solos. The last six charts are more traditional big-band jazz. Wilson, a master of the forms, suggests Bill Holman and Al Cohn, arrangers who juxtaposed section on section while the feeling of swing multiplied. Some of his unison variations

("Perdido" and "Lady Be Good") recall vibist Terry Gibbs' big band from the early '60s. In all, this is very clear-cut, structured writing.

The band—Hamburg's NDR (North German Radio) big band plus guests such as Norris, tenorist Moss (from England's Ted Heath band), and British drummer Stephenson—matches precision and creativity. Swedish bassist Lindholm walks the ensemble around on broad shoulders (I remember Jimmy Woode of the Kenny Clarke-Francy Boland big band, another fine international outfit—now long gone). Wilson, featured soloist as well as writer, mixes economical bop figures and earlier trombone sounds in his supple solo turns.

In a way, this reminds us that Wilson is a veteran who deserves greater recognition. May the glory days be now as well as the '60s, when he was playing in and writing for Woody Herman's Swingin' Herd.

—Owen Cordle



Bob Mintzer

ONLY IN NEW YORK—DMP 501: *TREASURE HUNT; MODERN DAY TUBA; TV BLUES; RELENTLESS; WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN; GOOD MORNING, GOOD DAY, GOOD NIGHT; I WANT TO BE HAPPY; BROTHERHOOD; LIFE OF THE PARTY; LIFE WITH THILO.* (67:34)

Personnel: Mintzer, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet (2), vocal (3); Lawrence Feldman, Bob Malach, Pete Yellin, Roger Rosenberg, saxophones; Marvin Stamm, Laurie Frink, Tim Hagans, Bob Millikan, Ron Tooley, trumpets, flugelhorn; Keith O'Quinn, Mike Davis, Dave Panichi, Dave Taylor, trombones; Phil Markowitz, piano; Jay Anderson, bass; John Riley, drums.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

In his notes for this recording, Mintzer—one of the rare and most gifted champions of the contemporary big band—riffs off the title, bowing to a city with musicians "who are up to the task of making the music sound fresh and spontaneous, who stand up and solo with distinctive personality and then sit down and sound as one."

That's concise, justified appraisal of a band that finds an inspired route between taut navigations of Mintzer's smart, post-mainstream charts and expression of a more personal, improvisational imperative. Solowise, Mintzer, trumpeter Tim Hagans, and pianist Phil Markowitz stand out in the ranks. Mintzer's ideas usually have a conservative lean, which makes a piece like the mercurial "Good Morning, Good Day, Good Night" a welcome anomaly. But, questions of innovation aside, the basic sound—lucid, porous, big, warm as a beating heart—wins you over in a New York minute.

—Josef Woodard

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Steve Tibbetts

THE FALL OF US ALL—ECM 78118-21527-2: *DZOGCHEN PUNKS*; *FULL MOON DOGS*; *NYEMMA*; *FORMLESS*; *ROAM AND SPY*; *HELLBOUND TRAIN*; *ALL FOR NOTHING*; *FADE AWAY*; *DRINKING LESSON*; *BURNT OFFERING*; *TRAVEL ALONE*. (69:53)

Personnel: Tibbetts, electric and acoustic guitars, percussion, discs; Marc Anderson, congas, steel drum, berimbau, percussion; Marcus Wise, tabla; Jim Anton, Eric Anderson, bass; Claudia Schmidt, Rhea Valentine, voice; Mike Olson, synthesizer.

★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

An extremist in the best sense, guitarist Steve Tibbetts disdains comfortable middle ground. At peace, he creates delicate acoustic struc-

tures. Fired up, he unleashes an onslaught of electric rage backed with thunderous percussion from partner Marc Anderson. *The Fall Of Us All* ranks with his best and wildest work (alongside *Yr and Exploded View*), because it smoothly reconciles Tibbetts' volatile mood swings with his developing interest in the music of Indonesia and Tibet.

"Dzogchen Punks" and the aptly titled "Hellbound Train" use representative motives, as steady drum patterns connect open spaces echoing distant chimes and gongs to the anguished yowls of Tibbetts' electric guitar, culminating in a cathartic percussive assault. Although Tibbetts utilizes wordless vocals and synthesizer to smooth rough edges of his meandering compositions, the core of his music remains guitar with drums. The real departure comes with the expanded use of poly-rhythms and the new ferocity of Anderson's drumming, possibly related to Tibbetts' studies in Tibet and Bali. The guitarist's absorption of those styles is more evident on the detailed, but less intense acoustic tracks that make up the second half of the album, like "All For Nothing" and "Travel Alone."

Tibbetts hints that *The Fall Of Us All* concludes a phase of his work. If so, it's the clearest, most concentrated iteration of his ideas to date.
—Jon Andrews

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THEORY AND MUSICIANSHIP FOR THE CREATIVE JAZZ IMPROVISER

by michael longo





Joe Ford

TODAY'S NIGHTS—Bluemoon 79191: *TODAY'S NIGHTS; INTERIOR MOTIVE; AMY'S WALTZ; BUFFALO CHIPS; CHEMICAL RESIDUE; MY LIFE WITH YOU; BLUE MUSE; IZIT; ALWAYS THINKING OF YOU.* (49:16)
Personnel: Ford, soprano, alto saxophones; Kenny Kirkland, piano; Charles Fambrough, bass; Jeff "Tain" Watts, Nasai Abady (8), Darrell Brown (3), drums; Vince Evans, synthesizer (5,9).

★★★ 1/2

Ford, a longstanding saxist with McCoy Tyner, makes a generally strong impact on his debut as a leader. Thanks go, in part, to the crack rhythm section of Watts, Kirkland, and Fambrough, who crisply underscore Ford's thoughtful compositional and improvisational instincts. Ford is an assured stylist who tends toward velvety phrasing even when the going gets tough-edged. The turf varies from hard-bop to hints of left-field playing to easily digestible r&b-tinged numbers.

Of special interest from the sidelines is Kirkland, who blows mightily here, with a more pointillistic approach than Ford's pianist employer. The bucolic scatology of the title aside, "Buffalo Chips" is an infectiously feisty chops-fest, while "Amy's Waltz" sways darkly, and the

title cut is a truly handsome medium-swing thing. Closing the album is "Always Thinking Of You," a funk-gospel ditty that seems to have been airlifted from another album entirely. Program your CD player accordingly.

—Josef Woodard



Bluesiana Hot Sauce

BLUESIANA HOT SAUCE—Shanachie 5009: *MY LAST MEAL; BRICKYARD BLUES; I WALK ON GUILDED SPLINTERS; DON'T MOW YOUR LAWN; YOU DON'T KNOW ME; BUSTED; BLUE MONK; RUBY'S FLOWERS; AT LAST; THE BLUE LADY.* (53:12)

Personnel: Allen Toussaint, piano, vocals; Toots Thielemans, harmonica; Michael Brecker, tenor saxophone; Will Calhoun, drums, vocals; Ray Anderson, trombone, vocals; Paul Griffin, Hammond B-3, piano; Eddie Gomez, bass; Joe Bonadio, percussion; Phil Hamilton, guitar; Chuck St. Troy, vocals; Joe Ferry, Tony Ferry, Michael Patrissi, Doug Munro, Don Mulvaney, backing vocals (4).

★★★ 1/2

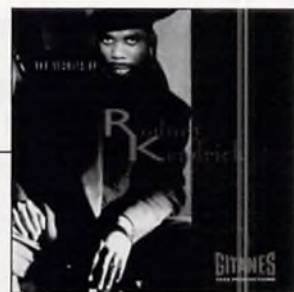
This album is the sequel to producer Joe

Ferry's two critically and commercially successful Bluesiana Triangle sessions of gumbo blues with such musicians as Dr. John, David "Fathead" Newman, the late Art Blakey, and his drumming replacement on volume two, Living Colour's Will Calhoun. Like its predecessors, this hot-sauce volume was recorded live in two six-hour recording sessions. But here, instead of allowing a blues jam to spontaneously ignite and dictate the songs as on the earlier albums, Ferry sets the parameters, structuring the collection by calling the shots ahead of time on which tunes get played. It's a gamble that pays off primarily because most of the selections he's chosen are strong and because he's filled the studio with an all-star cast of artists adept at melding blues with jazz.

Ray Anderson is one of the many standouts, vocalizing in the wild and funky zone on his "Don't Mow Your Lawn," and moaning sad-sack 'bone lines on the Ray Charles hit, "Busted." Keyboardist Paul Griffin also comes up big throughout the collection with churchy Hammond B-3 organ fills, especially on the rowdy opener "My Last Meal" and the jazz standard "Blue Monk," which also features wailing harmonica soars by Toots Thielemans.

The best vocals are by Allen Toussaint on his New Orleans-styled "Brickyard Blues." The only major disappointment is the reggae-tinted run through Dr. John's "I Walk On Gilded Splinters."

—Dan Ouellette



Rodney Kendrick

THE SECRETS OF RODNEY KENDRICK—Gitanes Jazz/Verve 517 558-2: *SLIDE THE WORLD INTO PLACE; GANAWA IN PARIS; THE NEW WORLD IS ORDERED; BERKSHIRE BLUES; DIG; SHARON; SLICK EXIT; TAKIN' IT WITH ME; DOWN HERE BELOW.* (60:13)

Personnel: Kendrick, piano; Turu Alexander, drums; Tarus Mateen, bass; Houston Person (2,6,8), tenor saxophone; Kenny Garrett (1,5,7,9), alto saxophone; Graham Haynes (2,3,8), cornet; Roy Hargrove (1,5,7), trumpet; Chi Sharpe, Aaron Walker, Big Black, percussion.

★★★★

This debut recording by 33-year-old Rodney Kendrick shows a piano style that combines the pointillistic chord clusters, quirky harmonic dissonances, and African underpinnings exemplifying the best of Thelonious Monk and Randy Weston. Kendrick's playing, arranging, and writing are proudly neoclassical, as evidenced by the rhythmically complex "Slick Exit" and the midtempo "Slide The World Into

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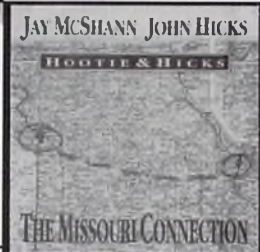
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Place," with frontliners Hargrove and Garrett contributing nicely.

Witness two Randy Weston compositions—"Ganawa In Paris," with a strong, processional "percussion discussion" led by Sharpe, Walker, and Black, and "Berkshire Blues," done in a gospel-blues trio setting. Saxophonist Houston Person and cornetist Graham Haynes chip in on the boppish "The New World Is Ordered" and "Takin' It With Me." Kendrick and his cohorts revive Miles Davis' "Dig," with Kenny Garrett doppleganging Jackie McLean. And Kendrick's performances on the ballads "Sharon" and "Down Here Below" (written by Kendrick's current boss, Abbey Lincoln) reveal his beautiful touch as an accompanist.

—Eugene Holley, Jr.



Larry Willis

SOLO SPIRIT—Mapleshade 01432: *TAKE MY HAND PRECIOUS LORD; MOTHERLESS CHILD; THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE; COME SUNDAY; SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER; WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS; LET US BREAK BREAD TOGETHER; THE LORD'S PRAYER; MAY THE GOOD LORD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU.* (76:21)

Personnel: Willis, piano.

★ ★ ★ ★

A TRIBUTE TO SOMEONE—AudioQuest 1022: *KING COBRA; WAYMAN'S WAY; SEN SEI; A TRIBUTE TO SOMEONE; MAIDEN VOYAGE; FOR JEAN; TEASDALE PLACE.*

Personnel: Willis, piano; Curtis Fuller, trombone; John Stubblefield, tenor, soprano saxophones; Tom Williams, trumpet; David Williams, bass; Ben Riley, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

Most often, you have to be dead to merit an appreciation like Larry Willis' *A Tribute To Someone*. "Someone" is Herbie Hancock, alive if absent from the scene, the pianist's influence, friend, and long-ago classmate. Mixing Hancock tunes and Willis originals, this lively *Tribute* focuses on Hancock's music circa 1963-'68. Willis understands the elements that made albums like *Maiden Voyage* and *The Prisoner* so enjoyable, and his compositions, like "Wayman's Way," achieve Hancock's stated goal of writing hummable tunes with infectious rhythms. Willis Latin-izes "Maiden Voyage" with a salsa-flavored arrangement he might have played with Jerry Gonzalez. The frontline, led by imaginative newcomer Tom Williams on trumpet, introduces themes with smooth harmonies, and Willis' accompaniment pushes the soloists with his insistent left hand. Curtis Fuller is a welcome presence on trombone, though he sounds a little rusty. John Stubblefield is featured on saxophones, and he plays with urgency and expression, particularly on Hancock's title track and Willis' "For Jean," a tender duet for piano and soprano sax. Stubblefield's nearly as neglected and underrated as Willis. Neither relics nor reminiscences, these are fresh, vibrant tunes that make you wonder, again, why Hancock himself doesn't make records like this.

Solo Spirit is Willis' tribute to a higher authority, a fervent exploration of the improvisational possibilities of traditional spirituals. Recorded with great presence and (analog) warmth, Willis uses dynamics and silences to maximize the emotional power and drama of "Take My Hand Precious Lord" and "Motherless Child." These heartfelt, introspective performances build slowly, with melodies emerging hesitantly from Willis' brooding, ominous chords. "This Little Light Of Mine" and "Let Us Break Bread Together" are brighter and less solemn. Duke Ellington's "Come Sunday" fits perfectly with the hope and sorrow of these hymns and spirituals. Solo performance emphasizes Willis' strong rhythmic foundation, and these songs are distinctive vehicles for his melodic imagination and interpretive skills. *Solo Spirit* compares well with investigations of similar material by Horace Parlan and Dave Burrell. The maximum-length CD of over 76 minutes has its greatest impact when spread over several listenings.

—Jon Andrews

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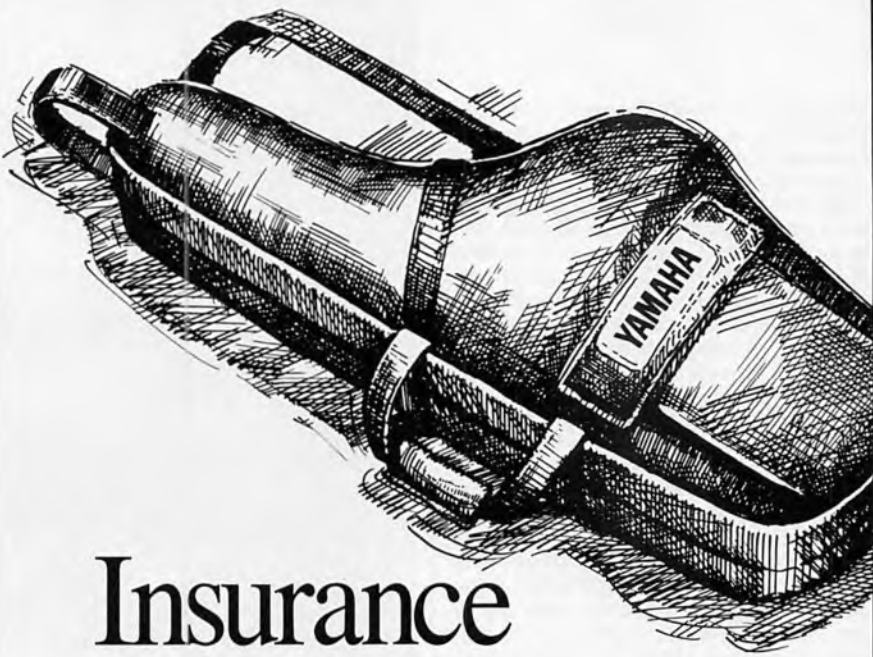
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Blues In The Bones

by Frank-John Hadley

The consummate blues player **Charlie Musselwhite** pushes the esthetic envelope on album #15, *In My Time* (Alligator 4818; 62:43; ★★★★★½). He matches his balletic harmonica playing with his understated vocals on West Coast-style Chicago blues selections (two equally alert bands assist), then sets aside his Lee Oskars and sings and plays guitar (his slide work is uncanny) on solo country blues tunes and consecrated blues co-featuring the Blind Boys of Alabama. In Musselwhite's blend of grace and intensity there are layers of authentic feeling.

Continuing his late-career success with *Lucky So And So* (Bullseye Blues; 9521; 50:32; ★★★★★½), **Charles Brown** relies on his trademark sad singing and his wrenchingly pungent piano accents to renew classics like "Driftin' Blues" and "Black Night." "A Song For Christmas," a new item, is full of introspective cheer. Brown's found a comfortable niche amid help-mates who share his calm craving for elegance: saxophonist Clifford Solomon, guitarist Danny Caron, and respected Crescent City arranger Wardell Quezergue.

In recent years, **Koko Taylor** has been on automatic pilot, keeping her energy level high but often treating her material indifferently. (No doubt personal misfortune has been a distraction.) *Force Of Nature* (Alligator 4817; 64:41; ★★★★★), however, returns her to royal status. She turns her performances into triumphs, kicking the dust off of well-travelled anthems "Hound Dog" and "Born Under A Bad Sign" (with Buddy Guy), and thrashing an assortment of newer tunes (thumbs-up for song-writers Little Milton and Nightcat Rick Estrin; a thumb-in-the-eye for Moon Martin). A harmonica virtuoso disposed to laziness, **Junior Wells** literally blows hot and cold on *Undisputed Godfather Of Blues* (GBW-008; 46:27; ★★★★★). But his random instrumental brilliance and his eccentric (and haphazardly recorded) vocalizing turn several done-to-death modern blues standards into provocative frolics. At times the pokerfaced Chicago sidemen are Bud Abbotts to his Lou Costello.

Recharging 10 masterworks from his song-book, the late Telecaster tormentor **Albert Collins** snaps off tense lick after tense lick on *Collins Mix (The Best Of)* (Pointblank 39097 2; 52:40; ★★★★★½). Saddled with a major label's gussied-up production, he doesn't better or equal the original recordings of "Frosty," "Honey Hush," and the rest, but the deep frost of his guitar sound and that everlasting ability to phrase eloquently are nevertheless captivating. Big-name guests Branford Marsalis, Gary Moore, and B.B. King are here for show. In the late 1970s, Collins chose **Aron Burton** to play bass in an important edition of the Icebreakers. Years later, singer/bassist Burton finally gets his own widely distributed feature album, *Past, Present, And Future* (Earwig 4927; 69:55; ★★★★★). Here are nine satisfactory songs from European studio dates in 1986-'87 (he's backed by local musicians, including pianist

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Charlie Musselwhite: the singing harmonical

Champion Jack Dupree) and five numbers recorded last year in hometown Chicago with his gritty band, which has brother Larry (another ex-Icebreaker) on guitar.

Debuting as sessions leader with *Long Overdue* (Black Top 1099; 63:20: ★★★½), **Junior Watson** offers assured, intricate, nuanced, and swinging guitar playing that could draw approving nods from T-Bone Walker, Pee Wee Crayton, and other West Coast blues archetypes. He is joined by two dependable ensembles in a solid program consisting mostly of tunes selected from the archives (e.g., Crayton's "Cool Evening" and J. B. Lenoir's "Mojo Boogie"). Watson's singing has some appeal, at its most effective evoking a teary Charles Brown ("Lump In My Throat"), but he really should have given authentic vocalist Brenda Burns more than two turns.

The **Smokin' Joe Kubek Band** crusades for Texas blues. As expected, guitarist Kubek and singer Bnois King perform with clarity and firmness when gassing up their third album, *Texas Cadillac* (Bullseye Blues 9543; 49:46: ★★★). This time, however, the music suffers because the new rhythm team doesn't conjure a pliable feeling of swing like the playing of the less muscular musicians they replaced. Kubek's gang also lost its best songwriter when drummer Phil Campbell walked; they're now dependent on secondhand material, although their ground-rumbling treatment of Muddy Waters' "Still A Fool" is killer. **Big Joe and the Dynafloes** a D.C.-based, jump-blues quartet, have reason to be proud of *Layin' In The Alley* (Black Top 1098; 45:30: ★★★), their most impressive effort to date. Drummer Joe Maher's singing rises beyond the pale of the ordinary, and he and his skilled players have written tunes that accent their hankering for fun à la Roomful of Blues and Mitch Woods. The Dynafloes owe Anson Funderburgh many thanks for hooking them up with hands-on producer Hammond Scott and Black Top horn-arranger Mark Kazanoff.

CeDell Davis is a proud Delta musician who

has worked rough & tough taverns for several decades. On *Feel Like Doin' Something Wrong* (Fat Possum 1004; 45:52: ★★★★★), he heralds the timeless vitality at the core of rural blues with innate naturalness. Using a butter knife as a slide, this former confidant of guitarist Robert Nighthawk draws intense emotions from traditional material like John Lee Hooker's "Boogie Chillen" (with guitarist R. L. Burnside) and down-home originals (seven done solo, two with a New York electric ensemble) that can stomp like nobody's business. Don't be put off by Davis' unusual tuning, proof enough of his sublime singularity. Another unsung hero, the Memphis barrelhouse pianist **Booker T. Laury** has finally cut his first stateside album, going it alone on *Nothin' But The Blues* (Bullseye Blues 9542; 49:42: ★★★★★). Although close to 80, he rolls his *nine* digits across the keyboard with captivating ease and zest, and always makes his singing thoroughly engaging and crystal-clear in expression. Each of the nine songs exemplifies his absolute commitment to the blues.

Robben Ford & the Blue Line play contemporary blues on *Mystic Mile* (Stretch/GRP 1107; 51:21: ★★★½) that tilts toward the realm of rock & roll. The bandleader is a world-class guitarist, with an impressive range of emotions, and a musical intelligence that allows him to build tension without strain or trickery. His singing shows marked improvement over past recordings. The trio works through Jack Bruce and Pete Brown's "Politician," Big Maceo's "Worried Life Blues," and eight acceptable originals, conveying their spirit of earnestness. Last and not least, the European blues-rock star **Zucchero** offers a sorry mess called *Miserere* (London 314 517 097-2; 48:30: ★). He sings with earnest artificiality in English and Italian and works out blues patterns on his guitars while surfing the wave of grandiose pop production. The ultimate "thrill" is the title track, where one Luciano Pavarotti (no kidding) soars above an orchestra and Zucchero's bottleneck.

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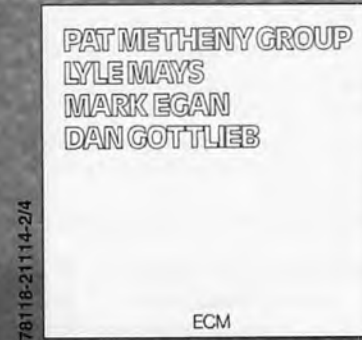
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Abbey's In Love

by Bill Shoemaker

Abbey Lincoln is the least virtuosic of jazz' great divas. The years have taxed the less-than-startling range she had when she emerged from the supper-club circuit in the mid-'50s. Yet, the saucy chanteuse splayed on the cover of *Abbey Lincoln's Affair . . . The Story Of A Girl In Love* (Capitol Jazz 81199; 48:11: ★★) had few of the interpretative assets Lincoln now effortlessly employs. Beginning with her Riverside and Candid albums of the late '50s and early '60s, Lincoln honed her sophisticated delivery with a heightened social consciousness. Though she owes a stylistic debt to Billie Holiday—one eloquently stated on *Abbey Sings Billie, Volume 2* (enja 7037-2; 40:21: ★★★★★)—Lincoln's singing is as much a savoring of life as it is a roadmap of life's treacheries, a sensibility well detailed on her recent encounter with Hank Jones' impeccably mannered piano, *When There Is Love* (Verve 519 697-2; 64:00: ★★★★★).

The original *Affair* album, which composes two-thirds of this expanded collection, featured Lincoln backed by semi-sweet Marty Paich string arrangements on half of the cuts, and sensible woodwind charts by both Benny Car-



Lincoln: an inviting aura of intimacy

ter and Jack Montrose on the rest. Ironically, it is on the previously uncollected cuts that Lincoln is the most effective, particularly a soothing quintet setting for Ellington's "Warm Valley," and

Carter's big-band arrangement of Duke's "Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me."

Lincoln's second volume of Holiday chestnuts is culled from the same '87 concerts that produced the equally engaging first installment, *Abbey Sings Billie* (enja). Lincoln confidently handles both gut-wrenchers like "Don't Explain" and seemingly carefree, lightly swinging vehicles like "Please Don't Talk About Me." The rhythm section of pianist James Weidman, bassist Tarik Shah, and drummer Mark Johnson curls around Lincoln's supple phrasing, while tenor saxophonist Harold Vick's smoldering obbligati and solos provide an appropriate Pres-like subtext to Lincoln's interpretations.

When There Is Love has an inviting aura of intimacy. Lincoln and Jones leaf through the classic repertoire like a photo album, dwelling on songs like "The Nearness Of You" and "Time After Time" like cherished memories. Lincoln's own tunes blend in seamlessly with jewels like Ellington's "Black Butterfly," though the reverb employed on her unaccompanied "First Came A Woman" doesn't serve her well. Jones is the perfect foil for Lincoln at this stage of her career. His accompaniments are brimming with delicious details that glance brightly off Lincoln's phrasing like sunlight off a window. Hopefully, this isn't a one-shot collaboration.

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For too long, NRBQ has been championed as the little band that could. Their self-branded form of omni-pop includes hook-laden ditties, heartfelt country twang, and gutsy power that could rock any house.

wonderful. Allen and company squawked and trilled on "Rocket #9" (which NRBQ covered on their debut album in 1969), and Allen took a brilliant solo on Duke Ellington's "Prelude To A Kiss," a standard showpiece from Ra's repertoire. (Adams' ability to wring out beautiful piano solos full of air and harmony is rarely heard on the group's recorded work.) After the raging "Rocket #9," Adams silenced the club with a gorgeous solo on Ra's "Fate In A Pleasant Mood."



Organized mayhem: NRBQ's Joey Spampinato (l) and Terry Adams

No doubt, however, few have heard the quartet's side that can swing from bop to free-jazz standards. Their turns with works by Thelonious Monk and Sun Ra have been stunners to those who thought no party band could swing like this. Held on what was the anniversary of the Arkestra's annual gig here, NRBQ recently showcased this jazz side at the tiny Iron Horse Music Hall in Northampton, Mass.

NRBQ (New Rhythm & Blues Quartet) took the stage with three of the late Sun Ra's former sidemen—including the legendary alto saxman Marshall Allen—for a tribute to an old friend and source of inspiration. The result was a perfect blend of Sun Ra's soaring, spacey, and sometimes sweet musical cosmology with NRBQ's quirky command of musical Americana.

Allen (who joined Sun Ra's band in the early 1950s), trombonist Tyrone Hill, and trumpeter Dave Gordon took the stage wearing the traditional Arkestra-sequined skullcaps. NRBQ keyboardist Terry Adams called a set that ranged from weird to

NRBQ mingled their own tunes in with the Ra ones. But the legacy of Sun Ra was the evening's focus. On the band's "Spampinato" (named for band member Joey Spampinato), the Sun Ra hornmen turned the song into a ferocious soloing vehicle. It was the kind of organized mayhem that has made Ra's and NRBQ's live shows both celebratory and famous. The highpoint of the set may have been guitarist Al Anderson growling Howlin' Wolf's "Three Hundred Pounds Of Joy" while the Ra sidemen pushed the blues stomp onto higher ground.

NRBQ's rock-solid rhythm section, bassist Spampinato and drummer Tommy Ardolino, showed they too could swing and sputter with Sun Ra's wildly varying repertoire. Anderson (who recently left the band) handily plunked out Wes Montgomery fills.

With a full moon high over the Berkshires, NRBQ ended their set the way Sun Ra and company would—by leaving the stage, one by one, snakedancing their way through the club, singing Ra's ode to the beyond, "We Travel The Spaceways." —Rob Dudko

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1 Lew Tabackin

"Perhaps" (from *I'LL BE SEEING YOU*, Concord Jazz, 1992) Personnel (and composer) as guessed.

That's Lew Tabackin playing "Ah-Leu-Cha"; I'd have liked to hear the countermelody on the original Charlie Parker played with Miles Davis. Peter Washington on bass and Lewis Nash on drums. Lew plays with sprinklings of Lucky Thompson and Sonny Rollins, but really sounds like himself. 4 stars.

2 Julius Hemphill

"Anchorman" (from *THE FAT MAN AND THE HARD BLUES*, Black Saint, 1990) Andrew White.

I'm stumped. Could be Charles Tyler. Rova Saxophone Quartet? Lenny Pickett and Borneo Horns? Not what I've been listening to lately. It sounded like the blues with traces of Ellington. I liked the use of clarinet in the ensemble; it's rare to hear them these days. Nice interaction and arrangement: 4 stars.

3 Bill Barron

"Yes, No, Maybe So" (from *THE NEXT PLATEAU*, Muse, 1987) Kenny Barron, piano.

This could be Donald Brown on piano; I like what he's doing. A bunch of young guys. The piano and tenor unison reminds me of some early Andrew Hill stuff, but it sounds like Donald to me. I can't guess the tenor player, so 4 stars.

4 Steve Slagle

"Violation" (from *SMOKE SIGNALS*, Panorama, 1991) Joe Lovano.

That might have been Kenny Garrett [alto saxophone] and Jean Toussaint [tenor]. Pretty contemporary. Rhythm section was nice, a good night-club feel. Maybe Bobby Watson? No. I'm biased, they're friends of mine; 5 stars.

5 Jack Walrath

"Jump Monk" (from *GUT FEELINGS*, Muse, 1990) Personnel as guessed.

That's Jack Walrath. "Jump Monk" is one we played with [Charles] Mingus. This arrangement is on Muse, something he did at Academy Hall. I love it! I think Don Sickler was conducting. I know the tenor player, used to work with Art Blakey, we had a battle at Small's Paradise . . . ah, Carter Jefferson. I loved the string introduction; I'd have liked

RICKY FORD

by Fred Bouchard



DAVID SCAVONE

Even as a Boston teenager jamming at Wally's, saxophonist Ricky Ford had a big, strong sound on tenor. Studies at New England Conservatory under Joe Allard, Jaki Byard, and Ran Blake expanded his musicianship. Now a busy player and teacher, Ford celebrates a nine-year artist-in-residency at Brandeis University.

In 1993, Ford received the Chevalier des Arts et Lettres Medal from France for his "Land Preserve," dedicated to ecological awareness; starred in the French TV documentary *Ricky Ford*

Encore with Byard, Milt Hinton, and Ben Riley; produced an exhibit of Hinton's photographs for Brandeis; led his Hot Brass; and transcribed Ellingtonia for a concert at Berklee College with Herb Pomeroy and Gunther Schuller. Ford's latest release is *American-African Blues* (Candid), featuring Byard, Hinton, and Riley.

He took his first BT quite seriously, fretting over guesswork. Listed leaders play tenor saxophone solos, except where soloists' names follow recording dates.

more interaction with the strings and less jamming. It was a great arrangement, though. 5 stars.

6 Joe Henderson

"Miles Ahead" (from *SO NEAR, SO FAR*, Verve, 1992)

Sounds like Joe Henderson. I don't know the tune, could be Billy Strayhorn. The giveaway is his tone—the timbre of his high G, his very identifiable altissimo register, a couple of trills here and there. I'd have to give it 5 stars. Joe Henderson has a very delicate sound—one of the few players who's been influenced by Lester Young from a technical rather than stylistic viewpoint.

7 Willis Jackson

Selections from *CALL OF THE GATORS*, Delmark,

1950, various personnel.

Sounds like Illinois Jacquet, something out of the '50s—make that the '40s. Arnett Cobb? No, that's Illinois; those are his high notes. 5 stars for style.

8 Duke Ellington

"Take It Slow" (from *THE PRIVATE COLLECTION: VOLUME 3, STUDIO SESSIONS*, LMR, 1962) Paul Gonsalves.

Right away—Paul Gonsalves. My God, what a sound! I never heard this piece before, but I know that sound: like a 50-year-old bottle of Bourgogne. Early '60s vintage Duke: I could hear Harry Carney and Johnny Hodges. A million stars for creativity, the longevity of the music, and the immediate impact it has on your aural senses. Paul Gonsalves is so emotionally expressive in this context. DB