

**B-3 JAMMIN' WITH JIMMY SMITH**

# DOWN BEAT

January 1995, \$2.95 U.K. £2.50 Can. \$3.75

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& Michel Camilo**

**New Jazz Queen  
Cassandra Wilson**

**David S. Ware  
& Charles Gayle**

**CLASSIC INTERVIEW:  
Roy Eldridge**

**BLINDFOLD TEST:  
Ralph Peterson**

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ON THE  
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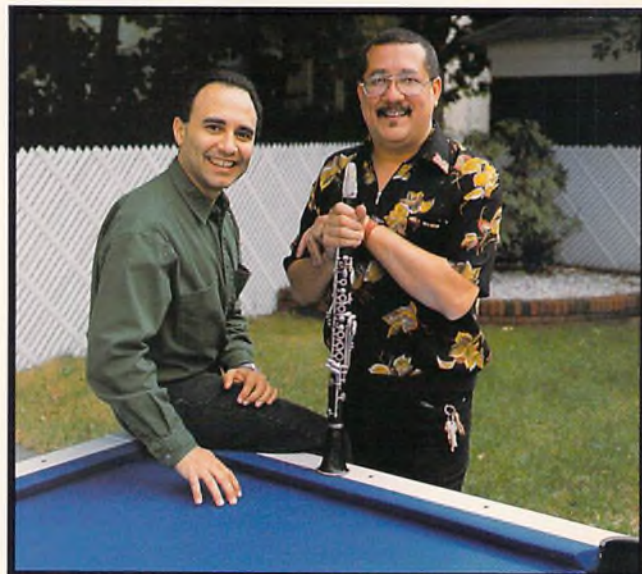
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S O N N Y   R O L L I N S

**S**

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more stuff.”

# When

# DOWNBEAT Gets Mad

**I**t's a privilege to talk to Sonny Rollins. He hardly needs the publicity interviews bring (this one took months to schedule), but once he sits down he's generous with his time. We spent three hours talking in his Tribeca highrise flat, his hideaway when he comes to Manhattan from his home upstate. It was a surprising conversation in several ways.

Rollins keeps his own counsel; consider how he ignores rude folks who've told him to junk his band (trombonist Clifton Anderson, guitarist Jerome Harris, electric bassist Bob Cranshaw, percussionist Victor See Yuen, and Billy Drummond or Harold Summey on drums). Rollins has often claimed not to read criticism of his work (which makes him self-conscious), yet he proved very aware of what's written about him, even soliciting this critic's feedback.

The humorous bent so evident in his tenor playing only occasionally surfaces in conversation. He laughed a little but never cracked a grin, looking remote behind stocking cap and oval shades, as a gray afternoon turned to evening. He's a slow, deliberate talker, one who'll circle around a topic for a while, repeating himself as he does (many of his comments have been condensed for space), ready to chew over any question raised for as long as it takes him to explore it—which, come to think of it, is a lot like the way he improvises.

**KEVIN WHITEHEAD:** *You've been quoted as saying, "I try to be uplifting." There is a buoyancy to your playing now which quite obviously makes an audience feel good. It's as if you draw sustenance from the music, and it's contagious to the listener.*

**SONNY ROLLINS:** I just played out in Monterey and got a review, that someone showed me, which expressed that exactly. I'm not always aware of these things, how it reaches the people, because my job is to play. Also on the festival was Joe Henderson, and Ornette Coleman. I think the guy said Joe's playing was "cool and cerebral," and then referred to Ornette Coleman's playing as "confounding." So he said the people were ready for Sonny's brand of playing, my "open-hearted" playing. But I wonder, though, how I'm viewed by jazz writers like yourself.

This is the way I play, I'm not playing this way for effect. At this point in my life I think I'm pretty close to playing what I'm feeling when I play. It doesn't always come out, because of the place, or my proficiency on some particular night, or because I'm at the mercy of the elements: a bad reed, something like that. I'm

gratified the guy said people were hollering and stamping and all this stuff; but I see in that a danger, because I feel that a lot of people in the jazz community might feel, "Oh, Sonny's not a serious player," because I'm not confounding or I'm not cool and cerebral.

**KW:** *This has come up in interviews before: you seem concerned that playing calypsos, for example, will be perceived as frivolous.*

**SR:** If you enjoy what you're doing, the people are going to feel your enjoyment, because you're doing it with more gusto or more whatever. They are hearing my enjoyment as it were.

**KW:** *And isn't that part of the craft of playing jazz, to express yourself on an emotional level as well as a purely musical level?*

**SR:** I certainly feel that way. But again I remember when I was growing up, people took Louis Armstrong not so seriously. When I was at an immature stage of my life, I took Louis Armstrong not so seriously. But he was singing also, so that had something to do with it.

**KW:** *The humor in his music was problematic.*

**SR:** Right. As opposed to Charlie Parker, who made a point of being serious: standing very still when he played, that kind of stuff.

**KW:** *Yet Bird played quotes which were . . .*

**SR:** Very funny, very funny.

**KW:** *And for that matter had stock jokes that he liked to use.*

**SR:** Exactly. Very humorous. Bird had a very great sense of humor. But that was then, this is today. Maybe I'm wrong about this, maybe I have too much of a shield up against criticism, but I have a feeling that this is taken by a lot of critics as something to be dismissed, that I'm not playing difficult-for-people-to-understand music.

**KW:** *As a critic I can only speak for myself. My belief is, it's not about the tune you play, it's about what you do with it. On a certain level, it doesn't matter if you start by playing "Moritat" [aka, "Mack The Knife"], or a Dolly Parton cover, or "St. Thomas." Rather, it's about the invention you bring to it. It almost doesn't matter where you start, as long as you get started.*

**SR:** Well, okay, you're a critic after my own heart then. [laughs]

**KW:** *Thank you sir! I'll put that on my tombstone!*

**SR:** This is my philosophy of playing. It could be "Mary Had A Little Lamb." The development of themes, this is the way that I play. I don't care what it is, it's what you do with it.

**KW:** *There are different roads one can travel to arrive at uplifting effect. The contrast between you and Coltrane is a classic example. He had that uplifting effect, but did it with great seriousness. Stop me if I go too far afield, but if you want to take an analogy from literature, George Eliot is noted for her sense of uplift but not her raucous sense of humor. As opposed to, say, Jonathan Swift, who's uplifting in his way. It's not like working in the quote-unquote comic mode or serious mode determines the effect of the music.*

**SR:** Okay, so it doesn't have to be either/or—right, yeah.

**KW:** Or, as often in your case, it can be both. *"The Freedom Suite," that has very serious subject matter. On Way Out West, the subject*

**SR:** Oh yeah. Definitely. Now there are also times where I can approach a quote from a few notes. Usually the tempo would have to be more laidback, so there would be time to contemplate things. I seem to recall playing a few notes and leading into something that way. But I don't know which came first, the few notes or the idea.

**KW:** *When you stumble on a good quote, do you ever crack yourself up? Surprise yourself?*

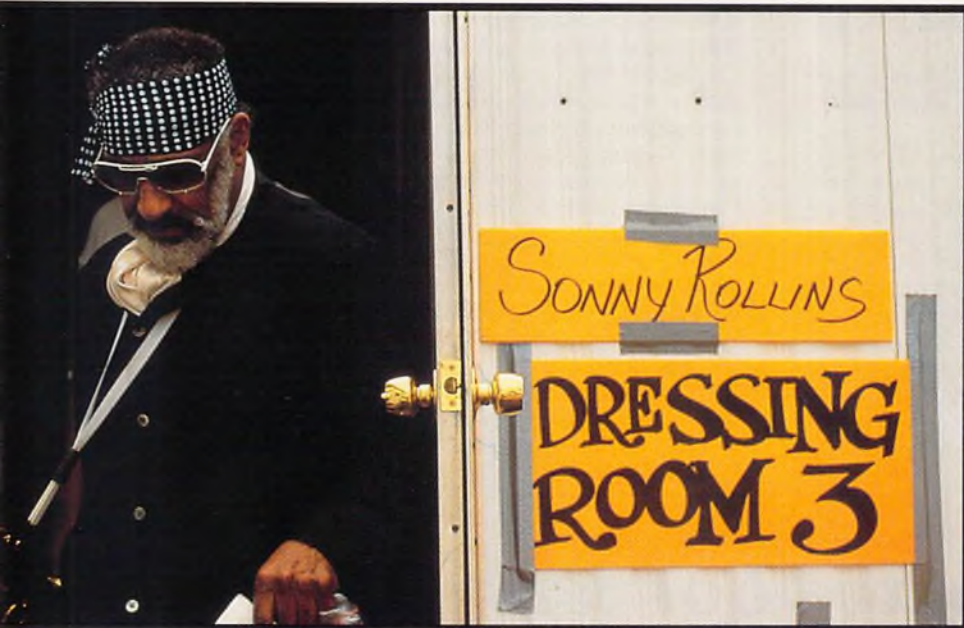
**SR:** Yeah, sure, yeah. I get surprised all the time.

**KW:** *This may be too personal, but if you're in a rotten mood when you go on stage, does the act of playing and the act of creation uplift you?*

**SR:** Being in a rotten mood before you go on stage can often be a plus. When I'm playing, and if I'm playing at a satisfactory level to myself—I'm a tough critic on myself—I would come off feeling much better. Sometimes it's good to go on the stage when you're mad, because you take it out on the music, and then you actually play more wild, play more stuff. Once I go on the stage, I turn that energy into a positive thing. Because when I'm on stage, that's the biggest moment of my life. Every night, any time I play, that's the high point of my life. Unless I have a bad, bad night, or the band is betraying me, or I'm betraying—my reed is bad, or my horn is. Then I can feel rotten when I come off.

**KW:** *How often, on average, do you feel like you turn in a bad performance? Once a year?*

**SR:** I'm afraid it's a little more than once a year. I just turned in a bad performance recently when I was playing out in the Hollywood Bowl. There were mitigating circumstances; I know the reasons why



"Once I go on stage, I turn that energy into a positive thing."

*matter is ostensibly not as serious—although I'd argue the music is serious.*

**SR:** Even when I'm playing with elements of humor, I'm always serious about what I'm doing. I mean, I'm never throwing away stuff that I'm playing, so it's hard to delineate. Like *Way Out West*, I was seriously playing. I may have put some quotes in there or something that may have been hilarious sometimes, but these things came to me in the midst of my seriously playing.

**KW:** *The jokes have equal weight with the rest of it in terms of thematic development.*

**SR:** Definitely. Because outside of a few very superficial things that I might do, very rarely, most of those quotes come to me out of the blue. They're not practiced.

**KW:** *Not something you can see coming six bars in advance?*

**SR:** No, no. It comes right at the time.

**KW:** *Is it sometimes that you're three notes into a phrase and realize this could be a quote from a song, so then you'll complete the phrase?*

**SR:** I might play three notes, and then I realize that what I'm playing is "My Old Kentucky Home," or something like that. I realize that's what I was going for, without knowing. . . . There are times when I may start out playing a few notes like you said, that's very perceptive on your part. I never thought of these things. There are times when a whole motif, a whole phrase will come to me, a whole quote. It just comes out.

**KW:** *Without any predetermination on your part?*

**SR:** Right. Before I realize what I'm playing, it's out already.

**KW:** *It sounds like the sense of discovery is as great for you as for any member of the audience. What a wonderful thing that must be!*

that happened. I won't go into why. That's sort of a different thing, if you kind of know.

**KW:** *Was this because of circumstances beyond your control?*

**SR:** Yeah, right. There were circumstances which were beyond my control. Even if they're within your control, there are some nights when things just don't happen. But I've gotten to the point now where even the nights that things don't happen to my satisfaction, I can still deliver a professional enough performance. I won't disappoint too many people, it won't be disastrous.

**KW:** *I presume you're aware your trio records of the '50s like Freedom Suite or Way Out West are a benchmark against which other saxophone playing is measured. Even nowadays, on trio records by such tenor players as Willie Williams, Craig Handy, or Steve Grossman, there will be explicit or implicit references to those recordings.*

**SR:** Well okay, that's great. I'm deeply honored, really. I really feel good about that, because I've gotten a lot from my elders. So if any guy can get something [from me], I feel that I've paid back a little bit. So that's great, I like to hear that. And I kind of agree—those records made enough of an impact, so when you hear guys playing in that context today, it kind of brings those to mind.

**KW:** *In an interview a few years ago you spoke about being interested in playing in a trio format again. Is that really true, and has anyone approached you about doing that?*

**SR:** I've been approached about it. I think the people at Lincoln Center asked me about that four or five years ago, to recreate the trio setting with upright bass and drums and myself. I'd like to play trio again; I like playing solo also. But it takes a lot out of you. It's

just that I prefer to play with more people. It takes a little bit of the weight off of me, and also, I would hope, adds to the people's enjoyment.

**KW:** *How do you go about deciding who the guest musicians will be at your annual Carnegie Hall concerts? [In '93, it was Terence Blanchard; previous guests have included Roy Hargrove and Branford Marsalis.]*

**SR:** Well, it's always a difficult period, when I have to go through this concert thing. My promoter, Julie Lokin, wants me to have someone who has some kind of commercial attraction, and I have to have someone who I'm compatible with, musically. So this narrows it down tremendously. It's really a big soul-searching thing. A fine line between art and commercialism has got to be drawn. Somebody has to draw it.

**KW:** *Are you sensitive about the way some people talk about your bands, as if they are somehow beneath you? Does it offend your sensibilities that people would suggest that?*

**SR:** I think that's probably unfair criticism, because all these guys are really top-notch musicians. I would take it as probably a knock on myself. I should be able to present the whole package in a way that people would not be able to say these guys don't sound right or whatever. Now as far as people comparing, I've had the pleasure, the fortunate pleasure of playing with some great musicians in my career. So if they're going to expect every drummer I play with to sound like Max Roach, or Elvin Jones, or Art Blakey, or Tony Williams, it's hard to get a band like that.

**KW:** *The economics are prohibitive.*

**SR:** The economics are also prohibitive. For records, okay, records you can get anybody. But as a regular performing band, I

try to get guys who are good musicians, have some compatibility with what I'm doing. Because I'm likely to go slightly ahead or slightly behind the rhythm, whatever, they've got to keep it [*claps hands in steady time*] right there, so that I can have something to play against. And I try to get guys who are easy to live with on the road. That's also part of having a band. This is life, this is real life. So, no, I don't have Ray Brown and Max Roach, but they don't have me, either.

An all-star thing is okay for special occasions. The last thing I did like that was the Milestone all-star tour, that's around 15 years ago. [*ed. note: Milestone Jazzstars, 1978, with McCoy Tyner, Ron Carter, and Al Foster*]

**KW:** *Was that a satisfying experience for you musically?*

**SR:** That was a fairly satisfying experience. I know all those guys. I played with McCoy when he was a teenager in Philadelphia. It was fun playing with them because I have a great deal of respect for them. But everybody had a different musical conception. I think the strong point of the concert was McCoy or Ron or me playing by himself, or playing trio. Each individual playing, I think that was the most successful part of that tour.

**KW:** *You've expressed a desire to play with Max Roach again.*

**SR:** We actually are discussing doing something together now; an extended work, an orchestral piece we'd both be involved in. We want it to be something which is very special, not just the fact that him and I are playing together. So that's where we're at now; we're still talking about it.

**KW:** *Is there anything else you would like to talk about today?*

**SR:** Well, okay, let me say this. Sometimes festival programs have descriptions of you, and I sometimes get offended by it. For

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instance, I just read at the Monterey Festival, the first line was, "Sonny Rollins is deeply rooted in the style of Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins." Now, in a way, I know Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins. . . .

**KW:** *But that statement doesn't really tell you anything.*

**SR:** Doesn't tell you anything. They're like two different ends of the pole. So, do I play like Lester for one song, and then Coleman? It's demeaning in some way.

**KW:** *Because it's reductive?*

**SR:** Well yeah, reductive, right. Exactly. I notice some of these other guys' biographies, they've got everything that they've done; but when they come to me, they don't quite know what to say. And I can understand why, because I think in my career I've done a lot of different things. I mean, for a while they'd say, "the greatest living saxophonist," but now they've gotten off of that; so now they don't know what to say about me. Anyway, something like that makes me mad, and then I play better, usually.

**KW:** *That's probably why the guy put it in there!*

**SR:** Yeah, well, I doubt it. So that's one thing I wanted to say. Then another thing—see, you got me going now. This summer, when I was playing festivals, I found out that now anything goes under the title "Jazz Festival." Maybe it's a good thing, but I just lament the fact. The reason why, quite frankly, was because I have to maybe follow some guy that's really playing crowd-pleasing, accessible music.

**KW:** *Don't you think that describes your music?*

**SR:** I still am playing straightahead jazz. And that's still not as accessible as a guy singing [*claps in time*], "Come back, baby! Everybody, clap your hands!" It's still not the same thing as that.

Blues is great. Pop-jazz is great. I'm not putting down any of that. I'm saying that if we have to follow that, or compete with that, it makes it hard for the jazz person. If the jazz musician doesn't compare favorably, isn't that putting a nail in jazz's coffin? The particular incident that brought this to light, I had to follow a pop-jazz group. . . .

**KW:** *Did you have trouble getting the audience, following that?*

**SR:** No, I got the audience, I got the audience, but . . .

**KW:** . . . *but you had to get mad first.*

**SR:** [*laughing*] Yeah. Exactly.

DB

## EQUIPMENT

Sonny Rollins (still) uses a Selmer Mark VI tenor, 130 series; a Berg-Larsen metal mouthpiece, size  $130\frac{1}{2}$ —a big one; and either a LaVoz medium or Fred Hemke 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  reed. "It's not like the old days, playing a 4 or 5 reed," Rollins says. "Those days are gone forever."

"So, in a way, whenever somebody asks me about my equipment, I always feel funny, because maybe if I was at a different time [in my life] I would be playing something different. I'm really playing what I can play at this point."

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

(Besides Sonny's one new release since DB's last Rollins feature, Dec. '92, this abbreviated list includes some older items cited or alluded to in the interview, and one essential big box.)

OLD FLAMES—Milestone 9215	A NIGHT AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD
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By John Ephland

# Beyond THE DAWN

## Cassandra Wilson and Life After *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*

It's been a very busy year for Cassandra Wilson. Her success with the album *Blue Light 'Til Dawn* has kept her on the road, across the pages of countless magazines, and without a thought in her head, so to speak. "My goal is to wake up!" Wilson laughs as she reflects on where she's been and what lies ahead. "It depends on what happens by the end of the year with *Blue Light*. I just don't think about that. If I find I'm up and I'm breathin', hey, I've achieved my goal! Point me in the right direction."

To say that Wilson has crossed over musically would be an understatement. As long as she kept to her recent Brooklyn, M-BASE'd roots, playing that edgy, angular, hip-hoppy jazz, it was pretty easy to call her a postmodern jazz singer, a cutting-edge something or other. But Wilson's creative spirit has kept her from being predictable. For *Blue Light*, she sang covers of Robert Johnson classics "Come On In My Kitchen" and "Hellhound On My Trail" along with music by Joni Mitchell and Van Morrison as well three of her own numbers, including the title tune. The results were applauded not only by the jazz press, but by such "non-music" publications as *GQ*, the *Village Voice*, and *Time* magazine, which called her "the most accomplished jazz vocalist of her generation . . . as exciting as any singer working in pop or rock." And *Rolling Stone*, in an issue titled "The Hot Issue," gave her a two-page spread, one devoted to a photo of her sensually draped across the top of a piano. Have we got the next Madonna on

"Through the confirmation of *Blue Light*, I feel more confident about sharing those emotions that are really close to me."

our hands? Hardly.

And yet, it's amusing, and confounding, that Wilson's album ended up on the *Billboard* Jazz chart. (It's still there, hanging at #11, as of this writing.) Certainly, *Blue Light* isn't a Contemporary Jazz album, referring to *Billboard*'s other chart that covers either smoother/lighter jazz or instrumental elevator music. But it's not pop or rock, either. In any event, labels elude *Blue Light* just as the beauty of dawn can't be frozen in time. How do you follow up an album that appeals to so many listeners yet prides itself on being so unique? This from an artist so musically diverse that when the subject of rap and its influence on her comes up, her only

response is, "I haven't thought about it."

On the one hand, there were the vague references to tomorrow, as if the business side of things was beyond her control. On the other, the shy Wilson did find time to talk about where she's at now, and how much it has to do with her current work with musical director/guitarist Brandon Ross and, especially, producer Craig Street (the craftsman and driving force behind *Blue Light*). The level of candor and musical intimacy she expressed seemed like an about-face: "Through the confirmation of *Blue Light*, I feel more confident about sharing those emotions that are just really close to me; I feel more comfortable doing that and writing and arranging music with that kind of lyrical content—that's really about my life and times and expresses what's goin' on every day, day to day."

As for the creative process itself, Wilson says, "Right now, I'm concentrating on writing. Because I've started playing the guitar again, that opens a whole new space in my mind musically. It used to be the piano; at one point, it was a drum machine, synthesizer, and piano, sometimes even drums; I have a drum kit here. Right now, it's the guitar. I like playing around with open tunings, creating very strange chords with very unusual inversions to get the desired effect. That's how I start the process. As for rhythm, it emerges to support what I've already started."

To hear her band live (at Chicago's Park West) confirms that this process of emotional involvement and "unusual



inversions" is already underway. Along with Ross, bassist Lonnie Plaxico, violinist/percussionist Charles Burnham, percussionist Jeff Haynes, and drummer Lance Carter paint an aural picture of what one can only imagine on *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*: One is struck seeing the group on stage as a collection of folk musicians, playing acoustic instruments, with an African tribal vibe that's both mesmerizing and irresistible. Wilson, adorned in a flowing white dress with dreads and the occasional acoustic guitar, is flanked on either side by a variety of sounds, principal among them being Burnham's razor-sharp violin and Ross' evocative, mood-altering guitar stylings.

Clearly, Wilson, a native of Jackson, Miss., is at home in this obviously more rural setting, swaying as she looks out onto a mixed crowd of young and not-so-young, black and white music lovers. More often than not, her elbows up, she points to her audience, belting out lyrics and sounds, but mostly relying on nuance and groove, her husky, sultry voice blending to an equal level with the band.

Betty Carter's influence is heard, what with her playful and ingenious approaches to lyrics and overall sound. For this writer, Shirley Horn (as well as John Martyn and Michael Hedges) also come to mind as she and the band play material from the new album, including Mitchell's "Black Crow" and Morrison's "Tupelo Honey" (with additional lyrics from "Angel" by Jimi Hendrix). Wilson's delicacy and lilt with a lyric and her subtle approach to rhythm seduce in a way not unlike what Horn does.

By the time Wilson returns for an encore of Johnson's "Hellhound On My Trail"—with guitarist Ross her only accompanist—something apparent has become quite obvious: the audience is eating out of her hand; they clearly "know" her music, hooting and joining her as they've done all night, only more so. "Chicago was the best," she mentions when talking of her most recent U.S. tour. "There was an intimacy there that was soothing and healing for me."

Not since Billie Holiday has a jazz singer criss-crossed the boundaries between jazz and pop with such reverence and authenticity. And yet, if you take Cassandra Wilson's smoky, sexy alto and put it next to some traditional (read: pre-dixieland) material, the argument as to whether or not she's a "jazz" singer becomes irrelevant. Hearing her perform with her band is akin to entering a musical universe unlike anything you'll hear on pop or rock radio stations. "I like the instrumentation," Wilson says, "so I'm gonna stay with it. This band is definitely interesting; it's still very vibrant and has a lot of possibilities."

Similar to the best jazz singers, she articulates like the players she plays with. No wonder, she's rubbed shoulders with some of the best young musicians over the course of her relatively short career (her age is a mystery; one story lists her as being 38). The most prominent are alto saxophonist/composers Steve Coleman and Greg Osby. In a more mainstream vein, Wilson shared the music on her 1988 recording, *Blue Skies*, with pianist

Mulgrew Miller, drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, and *Blue Light* stablemate Lonnie Plaxico.

But the difference between *Blue Light* and the recently issued *After The Beginning Again* (the remaining material she did for jMT, recorded in 1991), which features a cast of players she originally made a name with, is striking if not downright puzzling. One is reminded—when listening to her own “Redbone” and

“There She Goes,” or even such familiar tunes as “Round Midnight” and “Baubles, Bangles And Beads”—that she wants you to get close to her and the music, but only so much. The angular rhythms and melodies remain slightly off-center and funky, the tone and attitude a tad more assertive yet distant.

If Wilson were to repeat with a variation of *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*, it would be hard to blame her. The album's success, in part, was similar to *Blue Skies*, *Billboard's* #1 jazz album for 1988. The 1994 *DB Readers Poll* (see Dec. '94) honored Wilson as jazz's top Female Singer, breaking mentor Betty Carter's five-year lock on the spot. (In the same poll: the 5-star-rated *Blue Light* ended up placing third as Jazz Album of the Year, behind Joshua Redman's *Wish* and Charlie Haden/Quartet West's *Always Say Goodbye*.) And the latest sales figures have *Blue Light* at over 150,000 copies sold in the U.S., 250,000 worldwide. Maybe chicken feed to Mick Jagger and friends, but for a “so-called” jazz musician, we're talking big numbers.

As a result, *Blue Light 'Til Dawn* has become the reason for so much of what's driven Wilson these past 12 months or so. A six-week European tour—with a one-show interruption to Rio!—brought her to the end of '94; just in time to *begin* to think about where she goes from here. This past year also saw Wilson's acting debut in the recent Arnold Schwarzenegger/Emma Thompson movie, *Junior*. In addition, she added songs to the Disney movie *Miami Rhapsody*, and was part of two tribute albums—one to the artist formerly known as Prince (Bob Belden's *When Doves Cry*), the other to Van Morrison, *No Prima Donna*. Wilson was also the featured vocalist in the National Public Radio/Lincoln Center broadcast premiere of Wynton Marsalis' *Blood On The Fields*.

**C**learly, there is a significant critical and commercial consensus surrounding Wilson's artistic moves toward a less-definable, alternative means of expression (and this, on Blue Note, a label that prides itself with the motto: “The finest in jazz since 1939”!). The paradox is that she ain't what you think she is, there's no formula, and she's making it. A look at her live shows (including her Park West engagement) offers some insight. Ed Gerrard, Wilson's manager and someone familiar with the pop market, stated it this way in a recent profile on the big business of jazz: “The number of young people who show up to Cassandra's shows is truly amazing. I don't know if they're better educated or just more open, but they're there and they're receptive. They look at jazz as

'alternative.'"

The roots for this unconventional music stem from, among other things, Wilson's ability or inclination to allow her music to change even as she reconnects with her past. In this case, her move has been toward a softer, dreamier, steamier style. What happened? "Those songs that I chose to sing have a special place in my heart," says Wilson, referring to the repertoire on *Blue Skies*, the music that served as a kind of warm-up for *Blue Light*. Laughing, perhaps from nervousness, she adds, "I don't wanna sound corny, but they do. Especially 'Shall We Dance,' because I used to watch those musicals when I was a kid, and I used to fantasize through that music."

But that was then, way back in childhood. How could she sing about mid-century Hollywood romance, especially given her roots? "I had to find a way to make the music make sense for me. It was very intuitive," Wilson pauses. "I remember what happened . . . all of a sudden I started singing this song, and I was doing this dance, and I thought, 'Oh, okay, now I can do it!' There was something about being able to dance to it and sing it to myself in such a way that made sense for the body movement."

As if to ground it all in some kind of history, Wilson adds, "I was deep into Betty and Sarah [Vaughan]—and I still am. But to a larger extent, I was more into a particular body of music: *Oklahoma* [that's right, the musical], anything that Shirley Jones was in, *Carousel*, *Pal Joey*." Needless to say, Wilson has been looking beyond her mentors for inspiration. *Blue Light*'s move toward, what Wilson calls, "something primordial, basic man-woman energy," suggests that *Pal Joey* has taken on yet another new persona.

Returning one more time to the subject of crystal balls, Wilson states, "It's a day-by-day process." There's been some talk of future work with M-BASERS Coleman and Osby, but when it comes to seeing her current success as a map for the future, Wilson maintains, "If there's somethin' happenin', I don't know about it. I can tell you, nothing's etched in stone, and I don't like the idea of making a copy of *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*."

As for the new look, a look that accents her natural beauty with more seductive poses and a goodly amount of makeup, Wilson says, "I don't have any problems with it." You mean, the sex-object thing doesn't occur to her? "No. It's a stage thing, and people can't grasp your features unless you use makeup."

Keeping the temperature just right, Cassandra Wilson adds casually: "I don't wear anything when I'm on the street. Except for my clothes, of course!"

DB

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*BLUE LIGHT 'TIL DAWN*—Blue Note 81357  
*AFTER THE BEGINNING AGAIN*—JMT 314 514 001  
*DANCE TO THE DRUMS AGAIN*—DIW/Columbia 53451  
*LIVE*—JMT 849 149  
*SHE WHO WEEPS*—Verve 834 443  
*JUMPWORLD*—Verve 834 434  
*BLUE SKIES*—Verve 834 419  
*POINT OF VIEW*—Verve 834 404  
 with Steve Coleman & Five Elements  
*DROP KICK*—Novus 63144

*BLACK SCIENCE*—Novus 3119  
*RHYTHM PEOPLE*—Novus 3092  
 with Bob Belden's Manhattan Rhythm Club  
*WHEN DOVES CRY*—Metro Blue 29515  
 with various artists  
*NO PRIMA DONNA*—Polydor 31452 33682  
 with New Air  
*AIR SHOW NO. 1*—Black Saint 120099

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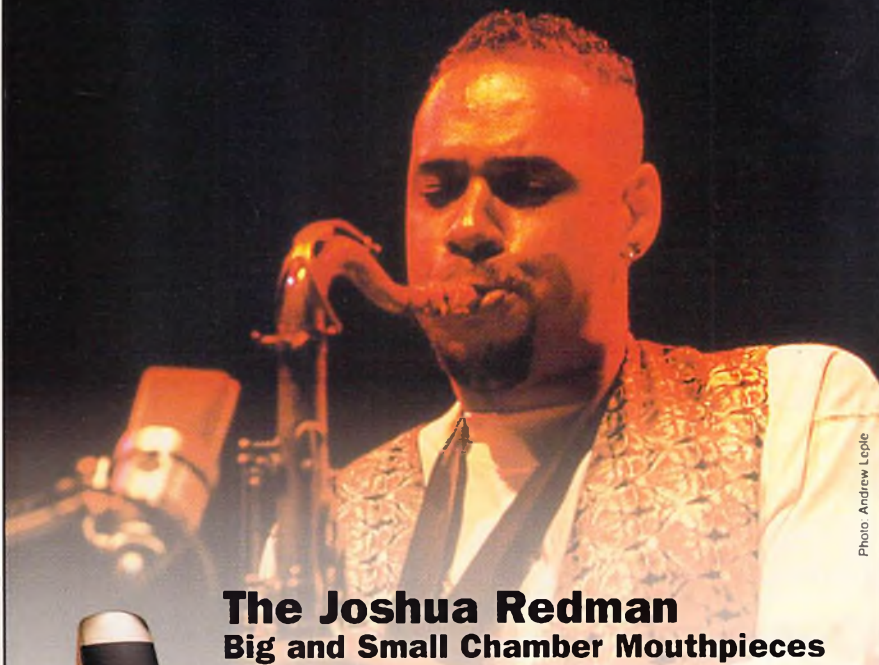


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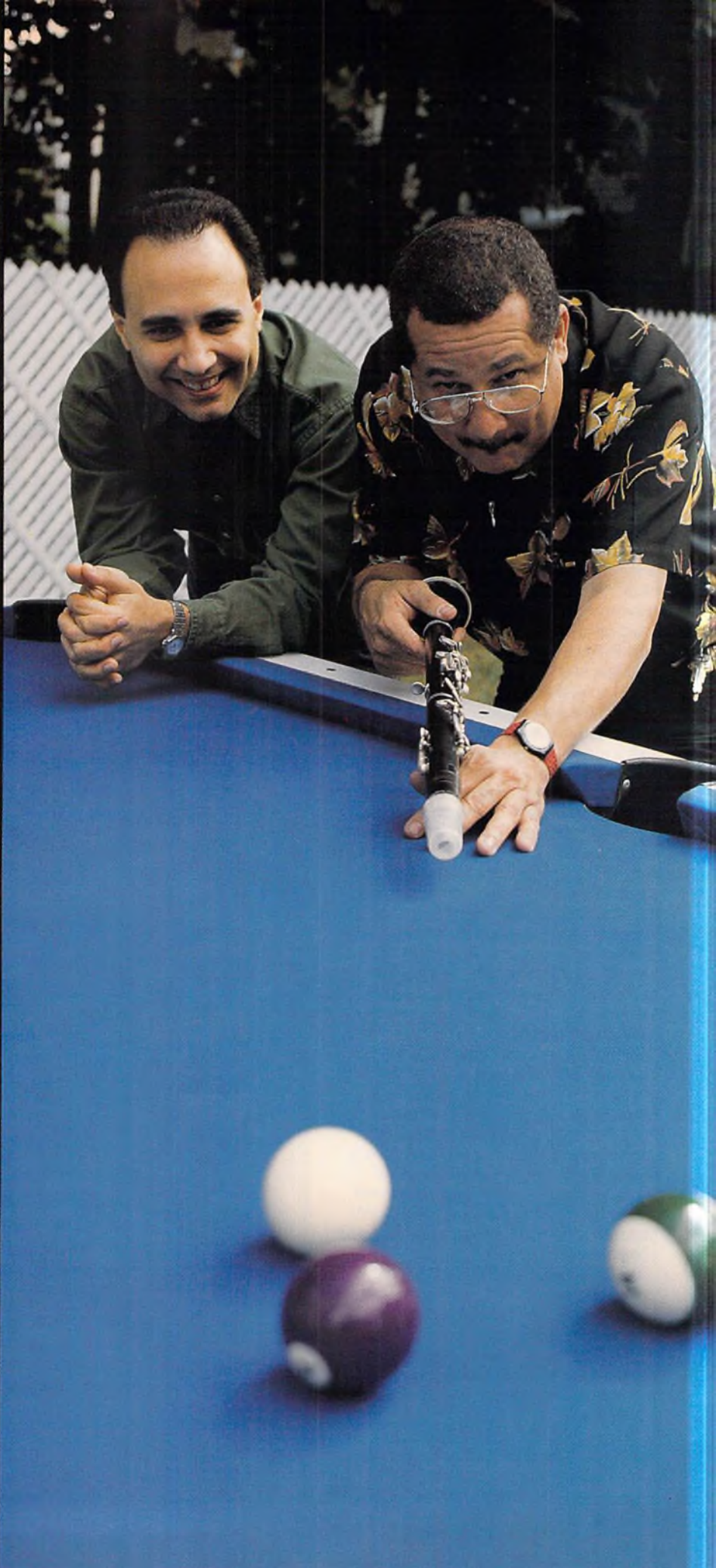
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T H E

# HUSTLERS

**Paquito D'Rivera &  
Michel Camilo  
Bring the Afro-Caribbean  
Tradition within Earshot**

**By Howard Mandel**



**T**he current groundswell of Afro-Caribbean jazz has grown with little hype, virtually unnoticed, as though the music is just beyond earshot. It's often been so. From Jelly Roll Morton's first citing of jazz's "Latin tinge" through Juan Tizol's term with Duke Ellington, from Dizzy Gillespie's meetings with Mario Bauza and Chano Pozo through the "Nuyorican boogaloo" and the golden age of *salsa*—the lively influence of Latin American musicians and their traditions on jazz has remained most evident to those who listen beneath the music's surface, past its front-line stars and its chart-toppers.

This, too, will change, as exuberant Caribbean-born jazzmen Paquito D'Rivera and Michel Camilo continue to exert their impact. Already internationally acclaimed and much in demand, Cuban-born reedist D'Rivera, 46, and Dominican-born pianist Camilo, 40, are longtime colleagues and friends who cite many of the same jazz artists—most notably Dizzy—as early inspirations. Each tours constantly with his own groups (Michel usually in trio, Paquito with a quintet or his Caribbean Jazz Project with vibist Dave Samuels and steel drum player Andy Narrell) or as a guest star with classical orchestras (Paquito is due to record with Lalo Schiffrin and the London Symphony Orchestra—he also composed a six-movement *Aires Tropicales* for the Aspend Wind Quintet; Michel has been performing Gershwin's piano concerto, as well as his two-piano rhapsody commissioned by the London Philharmonic for the Labèque sisters, Katia and Marielle). Both have recently released big-band albums—D'Rivera took over mentor Gillespie's United Nation Orchestra for *A Night In Englewood* and Camilo convened a special all-star ensemble for *One More Once*. Both define themselves as composers and instrumentalists, rather than by style or ethnicity.

We met at D'Rivera's home in Weehauken, N.Y., across the river from Manhattan's glorious skyline; we sat in the backyard patio he intends to enclose, the better to shoot pool all year; we sipped espresso and ate *empanadas*.

**HOWARD MANDEL:** *How long have you known each other?*

**PAQUITO D'RIVERA:** Too long! No—I met Michel through the great Cuban drummer Ignacio Berroa, who was playing with you somewhere.

**MICHEL CAMILO:** Yes—in the early '80s we used to do jam sessions Thursday evenings at the loft Soundscape [in New York City].

**PD:** Ignacio told me, "You have to check out this piano player from the Dominican Republic," and I did, but I got the feeling

you weren't available.

**MC:** What happened was, I came to New York in '79, and was working Bob Fosse's show *Dancing*. I was trying to survive, working that show, going to jam sessions; on Monday nights I'd go to a place uptown on Broadway with [saxophonist] Mario Rivera. Paquito finally heard me at the Montreal Jazz Festival.

**PD:** You were subbing for Jorge Dalto in Tito Puente's band.

**"Many musicians here are too bitter, complaining they're discriminated against. I don't even care! Play the music, and that's it! To be a musician is to have a gift from God."**

*—Paquito D'Rivera*

**MC:** Paquito said, "I've heard great things about you—you want to play?" And I said, "Of course." We started working together after that gig.

**PD:** So in and out, off and on, since 1984. Michel's on the [album] I did titled with his composition "Why Not!"

**HM:** [to Camilo] *And your new album is the first on which Paquito's been featured?*

**MC:** That's right. I thought it would be special to bring him back to play "Why Not!" on it.

**HM:** *Paquito, did you know Ignacio Berroa in Cuba?*

**PD:** Oh, yeah. Ignacio was the first-call studio drummer there. I won't say he played jazz, because I can't talk about the jazz scene in Cuba. For all these years, jazz has been a four-letter word there. Yes, the club Johnny Drink had jazz, but with so many problems. I started the sessions there with a very underrated piano player who passed away recently, Emiliano Salvador.

**MC:** One of the real masters.

**PD:** Yes, a master. We called him Emiliano

Tyner, "The Cuban McCoy," because he loved McCoy Tyner so much.

**HM:** *Michel, when you were living in the Dominican Republic, did you know—or know of—the Cuban musicians?*

**MC:** Yes. It's really an advantage to be in the middle of the Caribbean. I don't know if Paquito agrees, but I got influences from the south, like Brazil, from the north as well, and from the sides. We were always following what was going on in Cuba because Cuba is very advanced musically, and we were trying to be in tune with what was happening all around us. As for Emiliano—in the Caribbean we have a very strong piano school.

**HM:** *Why is that?*

**PD:** It's odd—we don't have a strong string school. Not that we don't have any string players at all—but almost!

**HM:** *Cuba has the danzon tradition with violins. . . .*

**PD:** I'm talking about the quality of playing, not about styles of music. It's strange; we have good lead-trumpet players, people with very strong chops, but few trumpet soloists. We certainly have a fine piano school in all of Latin America, including Jorge Dalto, Michel Camilo, Carlos Franzetti—who else?

**MC:** Edward Simon, Hilton Ruiz, Chucho Valdés.

**PD:** Chucho, of course. There are so many—including Claudio Arrau, in a different kind of music. And Gonzalo Rubalcaba, from the new generation of dangerous guys.

**MC:** I think it relates to that fact that a lot of the piano teachers, at least in my country, went to the Paris Conservatory; some of them went to Juilliard, too. Then they came back! So the piano teachers were always very, very good.

**PD:** We have strong traditions in many types of music: not only jazz, but in our national rhythms and classical music, too.

**HM:** *Maybe it's good jazz was a four-letter word; it caused you to study and bring in these other influences.*

**PD:** I really started mixing and learning from all those communities when I got to New York. You know from whom I learned so much about the Venezuelan music I love? Michel Camilo of the Dominican Republic and [guitarist] Fareed Haque, whose father is from Pakistan and who comes from Chicago. I learned the Argentine *tangos* from Jorge Dalto and Carlos Franzetti. When I had a Brazilian band with [trumpeter] Claudio Roditi and [percussionist] Portinho and all the others, I learned from them, too.

**MC:** Paquito used to call his group *scholita*, the little school, because we were all learning from each other. Whenever we'd go on tour I'd request a hotel room next to

Claudio's; he'd practice the whole day, and I'd learn just by hearing him practice his different scales.

**PD:** Claudio is a marvelous professional, a lesson in himself. Like [trombonist] Slide Hampton, he plays three notes, and you say, "Look how he does this, see how it works!" For them, it seems easy. Maybe because they analyze deeper.

**HM:** *Don't you analyze your music?*

**PD:** In some ways, yes. But some people explain things with the vision of a teacher. Michel is that way; Danilo Perez, too.

**MC:** It's due to the fact that I'm classically trained. I was always into finding out "why?" and "how does it work?"

**HM:** *You studied at a Dominican conservatory?*

**MC:** Yes. I graduated from it, and when I came here, from '79 to '82, I studied at Juilliard and the Mannes School of Music and with a lot of private teachers.

**HM:** *Paquito, didn't you have classical training as a child, too?*

**PD:** Oh, yeah. Tito, my father, was a classical saxophone player and had friends in every type of music. And then later I went to the conservatory.

My father was a very Ellingtonian person; he always said there's two kinds of music, good and bad. There is horrible symphonic music, and marvelous *rumbas*, great *meringues*. He also said there are only two ways to play: right and wrong. So it's very good to have big ears.

**MC:** And an open mind.

**PD:** Like the drummer Kenny Washington says, it takes big ears and little ego to make the music happen.

**HM:** *Did you listen to folk music in your native countries?*

**MC:** You hear it in the streets, all over the place.

**PD:** It's everywhere!

**MC:** Even if you don't want to listen to it, you listen to it because everybody else listens to it. The most well-known in the Dominican Republic, of course, is the *meringue*, in all its variations. But there are other rhythms, from the mountains, that are not known here.

**HM:** *Are these mostly dance rhythms?*

**MC:** They are all danceable rhythms, and also they relate to the religions of the Caribbean. Paquito can tell you of similar things, like *son* from Cuba. . . .

**PD:** I think there is more published about them; they are better known.

**HM:** *What strikes me about both your musics is they contain so much celebration, so much festivity.*

**MC:** That's because we're happy, positive people.

**PD:** It's better to be on the plane from here to Holland to Tokyo—even when I'm tired—than being in a factory from 9 to 5.

**"The thing that motivates me . . . is not necessarily the rational side of the music. . . . When a thing swings, it makes me happy. When a thing really swings, it gives me an inner pleasure that is unequalled."**

**—Michel Camilo**

Many musicians here are too bitter, complaining they're discriminated against. I don't even care! Play the music, and that's it! To be a musician is to have a gift from God.

**MC:** Besides that, it took a lot of sacrifice to get where we are. We might as well enjoy it now that people are listening and we have the opportunities to perform. We both want to have as good a time as we possibly can.

**HM:** *What do you feel you've sacrificed?*

**MC:** First of all, I had to leave my country. I was the director of the symphony orchestra there when I was 16. That's a lifetime position—I left that. I wanted to play jazz, so I came here. My parents thought I was crazy to follow the music, without a job. I was going to be a doctor. I'd studied medicine more than three years, but I wanted to follow my dream. So I sacrificed my security, came to see what would happen, went to the jam sessions like everybody does, tried to network, get to know people, spread the word. When I moved here I didn't have any furniture but a grand piano that I spent all my savings on, and a bed we threw on the floor. I was 25.

**HM:** *Michel's earliest records are buoyant, but Paquito's first U.S. record, Mariel, is sad, dark.*

**PD:** Well, I dedicated it to people in the boat lift, refugees. But, in general, my music is happy music.

**MC:** The thing that motivates me—and not just in jazz—is not necessarily the rational side of the music. Dizzy, Duke Ellington, Count Basie—I remember their

big grins. When a thing swings, it makes me happy. When a thing *really* swings, it gives me an inner pleasure that is unequalled.

**PD:** The two musicians I admire most are Dizzy and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; I feel those two made the most gigantic contributions to the art of sounds. You know Mozart was completely crazy. There's so much humor in his music, yet you can't say it's not serious. I think Dizzy's serious contribution is enormous: his approach to every instrument, his lines—we use so many elements he created. But maybe his greatest contribution was he never took himself too seriously.

**MC:** Another thing I admired in Dizzy was the way he always tried to be up-to-date, evolve with the times and changing musics. It's important to keep yourself fresh all the way to the end. In his conversations with me, Dizzy always asked, "Who's the new cat?"

**PD:** And he gave opportunities to that cat. Dizzy not only created a great career in music for himself, but for many others.

**MC:** Yes. We Latins feel we have the right to play jazz because Dizzy took our music into the jazz world and made it possible for us to play the music we love, as well.

**HM:** *How is your music received when you return to the Caribbean?*

**MC:** Wonderfully.

**PD:** In all Latin America. In those countries, they don't have as many jazz fans as they do in the U.S., Europe, and Japan. People come knowing who we are, thinking, "Latin Americans playing jazz, what is that?"

**MC:** Latin America used to be last frontier, but in the last five or six years, concerts and festivals have sprouted up everywhere. People really want to hear jazz, and there are new generations of musicians who've seen what we've done and are following in our steps.

**HM:** *Is what you do considered Latin music there?*

**MC:** We don't get labeled as much there as we do here. There, we're just jazz musicians. In Europe we don't get labeled as much, either.

**PD:** Japan, either.

**HM:** *Do you think there's new interest in the States because of our growing Spanish speaking population?*

**PD:** There are 20 million Spanish speakers here now, legal—we affect the economy and the society, too. Every day there are more people of Hispanic backgrounds in key positions. So it's about time we were heard.

**HM:** *But the significant thing is what you do as individuals, not as Cuban- or Dominican-Americans.*

**PD:** I'm a saxophone player, and that's it.

**MC:** I'm a piano player and a composer. We think of ourselves as musicians and artists.

**PD:** And if we're going to use musical elements from anywhere, we try to do it correctly. No Carmen Miranda or Ricky Ricardo syndrome.

**MC:** We try to use the exact language, not fake it.

**PD:** There are so many languages you can use. But for me, the future and the present is in Latin America, because the musics of that region are so rich.

**MC:** And so many of them haven't been heard yet. I'm into researching them, seeing how to use them, bringing them here, and adding to the whole thing.

**HM:** *You both certainly seem to enjoy what you're doing.*

**MC:** I think it's important, maybe even the most important thing. I respect the school of jazz that's introspective, very down, but I want to be in the fun part of it. I want the enjoyment and the celebration.

**PD:** That doesn't mean we don't work hard. But it's a gift to be working at what you like. And if the people are willing to listen, you have to smile—like Dizzy did.

**MC:** I want the audience to have as good a time as I do. I don't want to make them sad, I want to make them . . .

**MC & PD:** *[together]* Happy!

**DB**

#### EQUIPMENT

"I like to use a model D Hamburg Steinway piano, a nine-footer which I rent from Pro Piano in New York," says Michel Camilo. "There's a special one I like the touch, the action on—I used it on *One More Once*. I have an American Steinway at home, a seven-footer, model B. To help myself write arrangements I use a Korg 01W/FD hooked up to my Mac Quadra 840 AV. And I use Finale software for notation. Performer if I want to sequence grooves then hear them back to see if they'll work."

"I have a Selmer VI alto saxophone from 1957," says Paquito D'Rivera. "It's gold-plated. For a mouthpiece, I use an old metal Selmer F. I have two 7-ring, articulated-G# clarinets: one has a centered tone the other is a model 9. These are from around 1958-1961. For the clarinets, I use a crystal Italian RIA #2 mouthpiece. I use Vandoren #3 reeds on the clarinets, and Rico #3 reeds on the alto. But recently I've been trying Fibracell mediums on both clarinets and alto."

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

##### Paquito D'Rivera

*A NIGHT IN ENGLEWOOD*—Messidor 15829  
*40 YEARS OF CUBAN JAM SESSION*—Messidor 15826  
*REUNION*—Messidor 15805 (featuring Arturo Sandoval)  
*LA HABANA/RIO CONEXION*—Messidor 15820  
*WHO'S SMOKING?!*—Candid 79523  
*THE BEST OF IRAKERE*—Columbia 57719  
*A TASTE OF PAQUITO*—Columbia 57717  
*CELEBRATION*—Columbia 44077  
*MANHATTAN BURN*—Columbia 40583  
*SEDUCTION*—Heads Up 3030 (Roberto Perera)

##### Michel Camilo

*ONE MORE ONCE*—Columbia 66204  
*RENDEZVOUS*—Columbia 53754  
*SUNTAN*—Evidence 22030  
*WHY NOT!*—Evidence 22002  
*MICHEL CAMILO*—Portrait 44482

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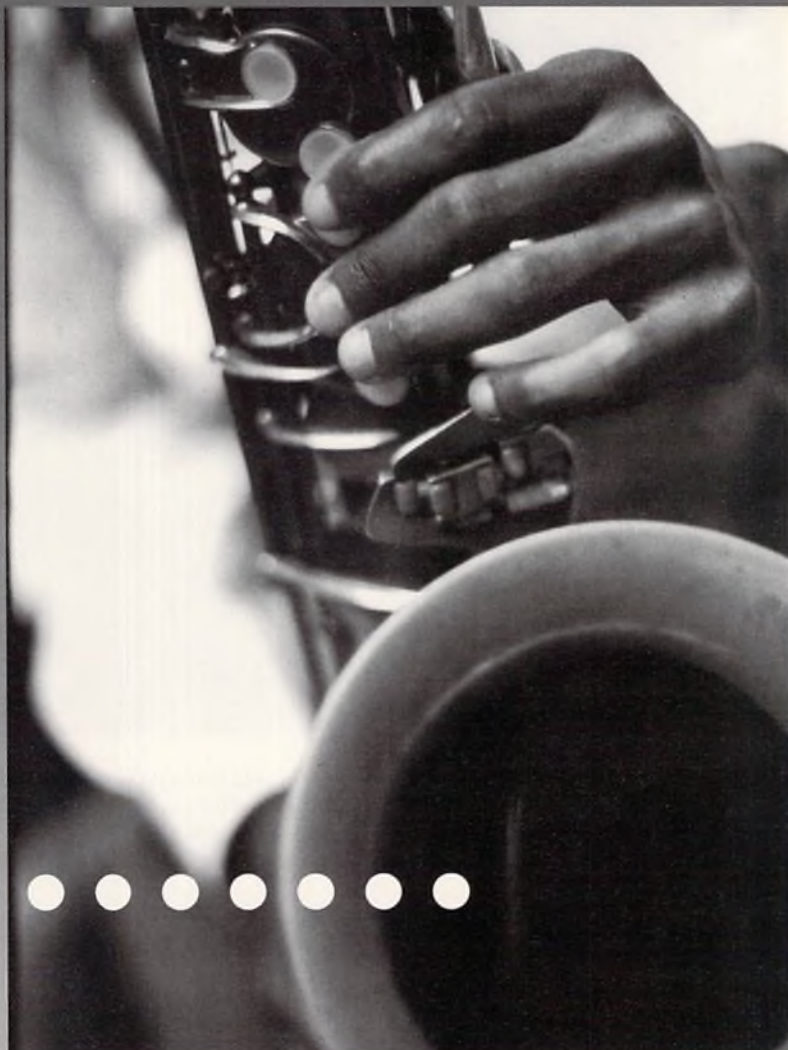
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# Jimmy Smith

## THE B-3 MESSIAH



MITCHELL SEIDEL

### By Dan Ouellette

In 1986, at the height of the synthesized keyboard craze, Jimmy Smith prophetically told a *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter, "It's just a matter of time before this trend turns over, before people get tired of that damn noise and come back to the pure sound of the organ."

Today, with the Hammond B-3's chunky chords and burbling lines in vogue, the 66-

year-old living jazz legend is still bristling over the instrument's falling from favor for nearly two decades. Sitting in the backyard patio of his Sacramento, Calif., home, Smith—who singlehandedly and explosively thrust the organ into the jazz lexicon in the mid-'50s with his innovative bop stylings—is unashamedly peppering our conversation on the Hammond B-3 renaissance of the '90s with plenty of "I told you so"s.

"I was saying synthesizers were bullshit back in 1982 when I wrote the monologue for my *Off The Top* album," says Smith, who is black coffee to the max with his rapid-fire responses, delightfully caustic wit, and vitriol-laced critiques. "Here today and gone tomorrow, just like I said then. But the Hammond will last into infinity. Those synthesizer freaks try to get the B-3 sound, but it's too light, too weak. It's a poor copy. When you play a synthesizer. . . ." He

searches for the right words, instead clutches his throat and starts a retching motion. "It makes me want to throw up."

Then, animated with messianic zeal, Smith expounds on the B-3's virtues, pausing after each attribute to make sure I'm following him. "The Hammond has body. It's got depth—and resonance. It's got clarity—and quality. And you can feel it. It's not so much that you can hear it. It's the feeling that's important. You see, it's like a drummer. You don't want to hear him. You want to feel him. You can have the best drummer in the world, but if he's too loud, he's out of place. With the Hammond, you feel it in your bones." His gravelly voice has risen in pitch and his excitability is ready to bubble over in the same way he erupts into a scintillating organ groove. "Look at my hands. They're shaking just thinking about playing. Don't talk to me too much about my music 'cause I get carried away. I go off. I go completely off."

From the sounds of it, that's how Smith has always been when it comes to the keyboards. The son of a stride piano-playing father, Smith taught himself how to play at an early age in his hometown of Norristown, Pa., where he was born Dec. 8, 1928. At nine, he performed a boogie-woogie piece on the popular *Major Bowes Amateur Hour* radio program. Smith remembers his winning performance well, laughing as he retells the story of how they just about had to drag him from the stage. "There I was in a pair of shorts with piano books on the seat underneath me so I could reach the keys. Once I got going, I didn't stop. The announcer was saying, 'Ladies and gentlemen, this kid's on fire. He's burning the place up.' While everyone was applauding me, I kept going. My mother, who took me to the show, was off to the side telling me to get off the stage, but I wouldn't leave."

With show business in his bones, a few years later Smith was teaming with his father in a song-and-dance act while immersing himself in Art Tatum music and picking up piano pointers hanging out with Bud Powell's kid-brother Richie. "I was at Bud's house every day," recalls Smith, who, once wound up, takes great pleasure in recounting the tales of his youth. "He lived in Willow Grove, Pa., which is about six miles from Norristown. Richie and I'd be there early waiting for Bud to wake up. He'd get his coffee and then go straight to the piano. After awhile, he stopped me from coming because I was learning too much. I figured out a couple of his tunes, 'Un Poco Loco' and 'Glass Enclosure.' I played them for him, and I wiped them out. After that, he told me to stay home."

Copping licks from Powell came in handy years later when Smith, home after serving

in the Navy during World War II, was in a Philadelphia club catching a Charlie Parker show. Powell was in Bird's band, but failed to show up for the early gig. "Bud was always late," Smith says. "This stride piano player Fats Wright was filling in. He saw me in the audience and wanted me to play. I was good enough, but I was scared. Fats started calling, 'Where's little Jimmy Junior?' Well, by then I was under the bar hiding. Finally, they pushed me up there. The first tune was 'Lady Be Good.' My hands were shaking, but after I got into it, I was gone. After the set Bird thanked me and hugged me. Then, who walked in but the Frantic Man himself. He asked Bird, 'Who played? Who played? He's not goin' take my gig.' But Bird just told him, 'Shut

**"Look at my hands.  
They're shaking just  
thinking about playing.  
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'cause I get carried  
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completely off."**

up and play."

After stints in formal music education at the Halsey Music School (harmony and theory), Hamilton School of Music (upright bass), and Ornstein School (piano and theory), Smith joined the r&b band Don Gardner & His Sonotones in the early '50s. But he soon tired of pounding on the piano. "The pianos were always so out of tune, it was ridiculous. Plus, the ivory was so worn out on the keys, I was getting blisters from playing on the wood. I knew there was something better for me." That's when Smith made the trip to the Harlem Club in Atlantic City to check out Wild Bill Davis holding court on the organ. "I said, 'That's for me!'" recalls Smith in a shout. Then, quieting his voice as if he were reliving the moment, he whispers, "When he finished playing, I snuck up on the bandstand to touch the action. It was so soft. I knew I could play it."

Smith says he borrowed money from a loan shark, bought his first Hammond B-3

in 1954, and set out to teach himself how to play it. His woodshed was a small room in a Philadelphia warehouse. "Nobody was teaching organ then. I just looked at it and thought, 'Oh, man, this is going to be a job.' But I liked challenges. Right off, I realized I had to do something about the pedals because I didn't want to always be looking down at them. So I had an artist from the Ornstein School make me a three-foot by three-foot chart of the pedals that I taped to the wall in front of me. Then I experimented with different stops and draw bars until finally I found the right sound, the Jimmy Smith sound, and the rest is history."

**N**ot only had Smith found his voice on the organ, he revolutionized its use, eclipsing Wild Bill Davis' swing-oriented style and innovatively proving with percolating foot-pedal and left-hand bass lines and lightning-fast, blues-drenched right-hand runs that the Hammond could scorch with bebop intensity. Influenced as much by the horn playing of Illinois Jacquet, Arnett Cobb, Sonny Stitt, Dexter Gordon, Coleman Hawkins, and Gene Ammons as by keyboard players, Smith burst into the jazz world with his guitar/drum/organ trio in 1956 when his first two albums, *A New Sound—A New Star* and *The Champ*, were released on Blue Note. After two well-received live-trio albums, in 1957 Smith spent three days recording music in several different ensemble configurations, which resulted in five LPs (recently reissued with the tracks in the order they were recorded as *The Complete February 1957 Jimmy Smith Blue Note Sessions*).

Smith continued with Blue Note until 1962 (recording 30 discs with his steady drummer Donald Bailey and oftentimes with guitarist Kenny Burrell), when he signed with Verve, where he scored with such mammoth hit albums as *Bashin'*, *Organ Grinder Swing*, and two dynamic, large-ensemble LPs with guitarist Wes Montgomery and arranger Oliver Nelson. After his contract with Verve ended in 1968, Smith recorded throughout the '70s and '80s with a variety of labels, including Atlantic, MGM, Mercury, Elektra Musician, and his own label, Mojo. He also recorded for Milestone, which is where he issued his last three releases before returning to Blue Note for his appropriately titled, deep-grooving new disc *The Master*, a trio collection highlighted by many of Smith's greatest hits performed live in Japan at Kirin Plaza Osaka in December 1993, and featuring Burrell and drummer Jimmie Smith (no relation).

While Smith takes great pride in his collaborations with Montgomery ("We locked from the moment we met"), he goes

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# RITUAL MAGICK



TERI BLOOM

bonkers when discussing his longtime association with Burrell. "On the new album, it was like the old days. We were feeding each other, steady feeding the whole way through. Most guitarists, you gotta tell 'em how to play. You know, play a suspension here or make a chord larger there. But not Kenny. He knows what to do. He's a master in his own right. We burnt Japan up when we recorded this album. Everyone was hollering, even the engineers."

Smith is visibly excited, tapping his fingers on the table as if he's ready to retreat into his backyard studio near the swimming pool, switch his Hammond on, and roar. When I mention how great he and Burrell sound on "Down By The Riverside" on the Verve *Carnegie Hall Salutes The Jazz Masters* disc, he barks, "What'd I tell you, man? Anytime we play, it's the same thing. We were just having conversations. I feed him and he feeds me, just like I told you. Look out! We bar nobody. It's a marriage, and we're not talkin' about divorce."

The organ was relegated to miscellaneous status in DB's Critics Poll until 1964, when Smith's prowess on the instrument necessitated it getting its own category. The master of the Hammond B-3 has been king since that time, with such players as Jack McDuff, Jimmy McGriff, and, most recently, Joey DeFrancesco—often credited with the organ's current revival—periodically imperiling Smith's reign. What does he think about that? "Most of those guys were my students. I can remember Jimmy McGriff and Groove Holmes racing over to my house at nine in the morning. They'd be

outside arguing. They were crazy. I tried to get them to practice together, but they didn't want to share anything I taught them. Jimmy'd learn a passage and then go home and hide. He'd lock the doors, pull the shades down, put soundproofing on the windows. They were good friends, but, man, they woke me up every morning."

What does Smith think of DeFrancesco, who, I remind him, learned Smith's "The Sermon" when he was five? "Come on, now. I don't think nothing of his playing. I taught him from when he was seven until he was 14. He's playing Jimmy Smith. He says he's not, but he lies. He's a nice kid, but he can't help but play me."

Tired of this line of questioning, Smith switches gears, indicating that he has one more story to tell. Calling it a "classic," he launches into his tale of the night that such jazz greats as Sonny Rollins, Hank Mobley, Art Blakey, Max Roach, and Thelonious Monk all came to a small club called Jimmy's in New York to hear Smith shortly after *The Champ* was released in '56. Recalling it like a young kid describing a treasure, Smith gushes: "They thought I was overdubbing on the record because I was playing so fast, so they came to see for themselves. Well, after awhile, they all started coming up to play. All those horns and Art asking to take Donald Bailey's place. The house was burning. Then Monk walks up to the bandstand, gets behind me, and starts playing with me on the organ. Man, that was the most exciting thing that ever happened to me besides being born."

Not all is so rosy, though, complains Smith, who's been living the Hammond life for 40 years now. He says his legs are getting worn out, his wind is shorter, and

his blood is thinner. He's still gigging and even doing some recording with the hip-hop group Us3 for its upcoming project, but he says he's tired and wishes he had a nest egg tucked away so he could start contemplating semi-retirement. All this talk comes shortly before he invites me into his studio—his organ sanctuary—where, in the process of demonstrating just how expressive his Hammond B-3 really is, he magically rejuvenates.

In this private session, Smith flicks on his organ and huge Leslie speaker, settles in behind the keys, and sketches an impromptu piece that starts with soulful musing and ends with passionate eruptions of molten beauty that make the windows shake. Seeing him drift off to a heavenly zone and listening to him purr-growl while playing, I realize how young Smith looks. With no noticeable gray hair, a still-trim body, and fingers and feet that can still ignite a blaze, he could almost pass for himself, circa 1957.

With the organ vibrations humming deep inside me as he plays, I understand what Smith means when he says it's not necessarily what you hear but how it feels. The Hammond may have been down for a spell, but, as Smith continues to testify in his shows and on disc, it's not ready to die.

DB

#### EQUIPMENT

According to Jimmy Smith's wife, Lola, who serves as his business manager, give the organ master a good Hammond B-3, two Leslie model 122 speakers, and microphones for both the tops and bottoms of the speakers and he'll deliver the goods—that mellow and rich, funky sound he's famous for. Jimmy also owns a Baldwin piano. In his private practice studio, his Leslie speakers are housed in a cabinet built by Keyboard Products.

As for why he feels the Leslie speakers work so well with the Hammond B-3, Smith replies, "Because they have the beef, they have the power. With a 60-watt driver on top and a JBL on the bottom, they can break your eardrums."

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

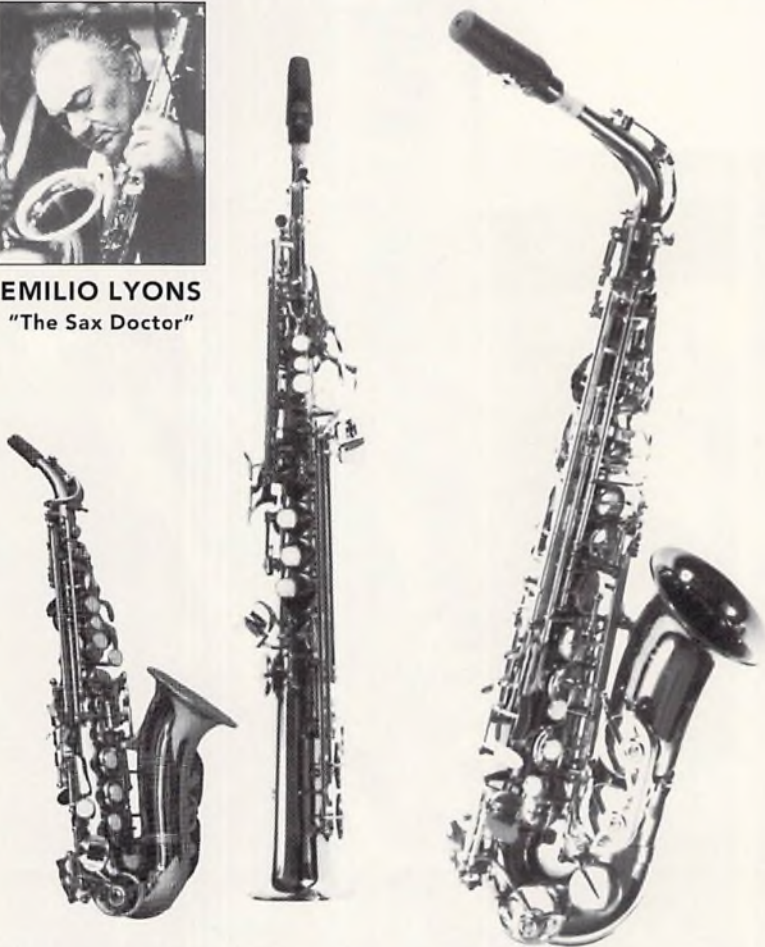
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# MADNESS

October 7, 1994. It's 1 pm, and tenor saxophonists Charles Gayle and David S. Ware are sitting down to talk in a makeshift basement conference room on Leonard St. in Lower Manhattan. They waste no time getting comfortable, hardly noticing the seeming chaos around them: the arbitrariness of the mix-and-match table and chairs, the doors that don't yet close. Right above us, the roar created by men working to transform the two overhead floors into a bigger, more acoustically sound, more esthetically pleasant version of downtown's key new-music venue, the Knitting Factory, is audible but not intrusive.

Gayle and Ware just might empathize with the cats upstairs. Catch either on the bandstand or on one of their new sessions for quartet—Gayle's *Translations* and *Raining Fire*, Ware's *Earthquation*—and what you'll get is an abstracted view of how form follows function: two supremely burnished horn players extending the parameters of perceived space, bending time, and making sense outta what, at first, might seem like nonsense.

Both men are at the center of their musics, but where Gayle's sidemen tend to shift (his new trio date, *Kingdom Come*, features veteran expatriate drummer Sunny Murray), Ware's vibrant rhythm section (Matthew Shipp, piano; William Parker, bass; Whit Dickey, drums) approaches the steadfastness and telepathy of Cedar Walton, David Williams, and Billy Higgins. The two men have been refining their own revolutionary designs for decades now (Gayle is 55, Ware, 44); as a result, their jazz bears the stamp of idiomatic originality. It's adventurous, staunchly individual, imaginatively contemporary, in short, highly rewarding.

And, increasingly in demand. A week earlier both had done triumphant gigs on the West Coast (Gayle's on the tail end of a full-fledged tour), where crowds searching for something wild and beautiful reputedly encountered that, and then some. Of late, Gayle has been adding a shot of new-thing invention to punk-metal icon Henry Rollins' amplified swagger, while Ware has just signed a deal with Homestead Records, an independent rock label whose roster has included guitarists Elliott Sharp and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore. Both reedmen, it would seem, are appealing to a younger generation that respects jazz's illustrious past but are also seeking to find much more in the music's present and future.

Though they've been friends for quite some time, it was no easy task getting Gayle and Ware together. As tenor players both were a tad wary about the implication that their styles were somehow similar.

Almost as soon as the two had settled in, they turned the spotlight of interrogation on me:

**CHARLES GAYLE:** Whose idea was this, man?

**K. L. WILLIAMS:** *Do you think it was a bad idea, Charles?*

**CG:** No, I just want to know why [Down Beat] wouldn't give [David S. Ware] his own piece.

**DAVID S. WARE:** [*laughing*] Well, I wanna know why they wouldn't give Charles a separate piece.

**KLW:** *I pitched it this way because I thought it would be more seductive. That's all.*

**"Basically, you can either play a music with someone else's rules, or you can make up your own."**

*—Charles Gayle*

**CG:** Well, I'll tell you something. I think one of the biggest problems in dealing with this particular music—and by that, I mean jazz—is that people tend to lump things together instead of individualizing them. They'll get all the cats from Europe, Germany, and all these other places and make it seem as though everybody's playing the same thing. And it's just not true. Personally, I feel David has spent too much time carving out his own personal story for us to be linked. He's just as different as Clifford [Brown] is to Blue Mitchell. To me, in the end, it's just a matter of respect—of respecting the time a cat has put into learning how to do his own thing.

**DSW:** Well, I agree with [Charles] that people tend to lump things together. But I really think this interview is indicative of a whole new era. [*to Charles*] Remember all that stuff we used to talk about back when we did our first Silkheart albums, how we wanted to do this and that? Well, I think we're in that now. This is a fine beginning, and I think right now—the beginning—is the best time for us to break things down for people—to define ourselves. Let's start here.

**KLW:** *Much of the stuff I've seen written about both of you has been favorable. Have you received any bad press?*

**CG:** Yeah, years ago. In the '60s and before.

**KLW:** *Do either of you think your music is*

*difficult to understand?*

**CG:** I don't.

**DSW:** Well, I feel like the music is a mirror; it makes everyone, even me, the musician, face their own inner reality. To me, if an individual comes to the gig unwilling to face himself, he's gonna have problems dealing with the music.

**CG:** I'm not sure "difficult" is used like it was years ago, maybe, when this type of music was first being introduced on a mass level in the late '50s and '60s. Because of the time that has passed, that [criticism] has sort of gone away. The only people I've heard who have had any difficulty have been people who've really not been introduced to anything other than what you might call regular, standard chordal music. With most people who've at least heard some form of this music before, it's a matter of taste: they either like it or they don't. Personalizing your music is a pretty old concept, and by now, people have heard so much that our stuff is no big deal.

**KLW:** *Is that the reason both of your audiences seem to be getting bigger and more enthusiastic?*

**CG:** Well, things happen when they happen. I mean, with the exception of one or two people, I don't think this music ever really got the shot it could have had in the first place. After Trane and [Albert] Ayler left, the whole scene sort of went into a tailspin. Our music is not the same as theirs, and the times are different, but we're still out here trying to pursue our own personal thoughts through music.

**DSW:** Yeah, but when you mentioned how all the different kinds of music have come and gone in the meantime, it's interesting to me because I used to think that sort of thing worked against me—particularly in New York. At one point, the audiences seemed kind of jaded, like they'd heard everything already. It was like they were sitting back and saying, "*Impress me*," or something.

The people in San Francisco last week were so beautiful, so open. And in North Carolina! [*sits up, excitedly*] . . . man, I think that was the best gig my group ever played, in part, because the audience was so hyped up. They were with us—yellin' and stuff—the whole way through. Even the lady who introduced us. When she came out at the beginning, she said, "Are we ready to have some fun?!" It was great.

**KLW:** *What are your biggest musical challenges?*

**CG:** Right now, it's to be spiritual. And spontaneous. I don't work in a structured format anymore, so I hope that whatever I already have inside me can make me as spontaneous as I can possibly be.

**KLW:** *Charles, did you ever write anything down?*

**CG:** Yeah, I've put some songs and things down on paper before, but I didn't like them. *[laughing]* I guess I thought I was deeper than I really was, and when I played the stuff back, it was stupid. I tore 'em up.

**KLW:** *So you do read music?*

**CG:** Yeah, but that's not the way I work now. I go out, and I play. *For now.*

**KLW:** *David, I know you write things out for your band. Do you have one particular musical challenge?*

**DSW:** Well, another interviewer recently asked me why [my group's] music was "always so intense." Like Charles said, it's about music, but it's also about something that transcends music—that transcends the forms, so to speak. I heard Sonny Rollins play some single-note lines once that seemed like they came from infinity, and then went into infinity. Once you learn the fundamentals of music, which is to say, a system by which you can convey ideas to

any of the cats you might be working with, well . . . after that, the study is within. You've got 12 notes to deal with, and it's all on you.

**CG:** On the other side of that, though, it's also important for audiences to know that musicians have choices. Sure, you've got 12 notes and sub-tones and things, but all the music isn't necessarily in there. I don't feel I can really speak for someone who doesn't know scales just because I know the scales; knowing them doesn't always mean that you use them, anyway.

When you personalize music, you're usually going up against something that is

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**"Once you learn the fundamentals of music . . . the study is within."**

*—David S. Ware*

entrenched in people's minds. I stopped listening to music a long time ago because I felt I had to. At that point, I realized I could cop what other cats were doing too easy. Basically, you can either play a music with someone else's rules, or you can make up your own.

**KLW:** *I want to talk about John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins. I know David was tight with Sonny as a young man, and Charles, you've obviously listened to a whole lot of Trane.*

**CG:** I saw Trane quite a few times, and I think he was *it*, man. There's almost nothin' else to say. He's the one cat who came through every phase and every style—and popped everybody. Just like Bird did. There were many other cats who had some creative moments, but they didn't have Trane's tone—except maybe Dexter Gordon—and they didn't have his presence. He played so much he ran people outta town, and not in a bad way, either. I don't really like to compare musicians, but it was just a healthy, wonderful thing to see and hear a cat play so much music.

**KLW:** *David?*

**DSW:** Well, we were talking about the spiritual before, and for me, Trane was the essence of that. Back when I was a teenager, it was Trane who crystalized the idea of music as a vehicle for transcendence.

**KLW:** *How about Sonny Rollins?*

**DSW:** With Sonny it was a bit different because, like you said, I had a personal

relationship with him. I can remember hanging out at the [Village] Vanguard back in the '60s, man, and just being knocked out by his projection. There were times when his playing made me cry.

Then once when we were hanging together, about '69, Sonny said to me, "This is a very opportune time," y'know, like, he was asking me to join his band. And in my head I was hearing us as a two-tenors thing like Pharoah [Sanders] and Trane. It never happened, but, man, at that moment, I felt like I had it all. I was like, let's go!

**CG:** Well, to me, 'Trane was a more powerful musician, spiritually, but something else is interesting about Rollins. Trane might've pushed more, but when you look back now and dissect things, and talk about cats splitting up time and all that stuff, there's probably nobody more gifted than Rollins. I mean, I heard him play with Elvin Jones, Jimmy Garrison, Wilbur Ware; and couldn't nobody play those silences like Rollins—except maybe Lester Young. I preferred hearing [Rollins] without a piano player because they usually filled all that space up, without realizing that his silence gave as much to the music as what he played.

**KLW:** Do either of you think that this last line of questioning—comparing Coltrane to

Rollins—is unfair?

**DSW:** I just think that putting one saxophone player up against another is almost like pitting religion against religion. [Gayle nods in agreement] Everybody plays music for different reasons. Otherwise, there would be no originality or individuality.

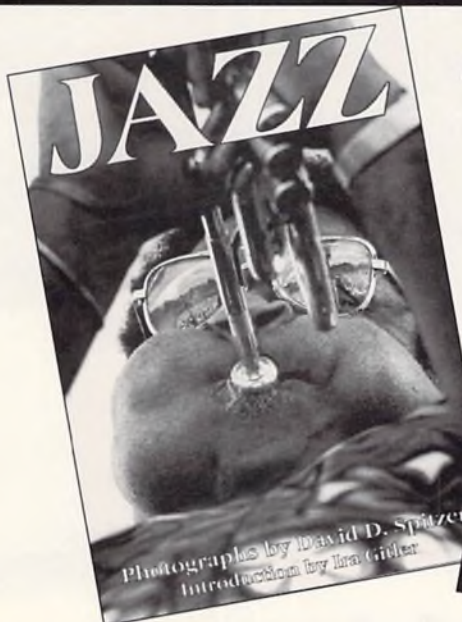
**CG:** Well, I'm just not sure we should talk about these things publicly. I mean, David's right; but we all know that cats have been

competing for years. It's not unhealthy. We know about Freddie [Hubbard] and Lee [Morgan] and everybody else gettin' into town and talking about bragger's rights and stuff. I was there.

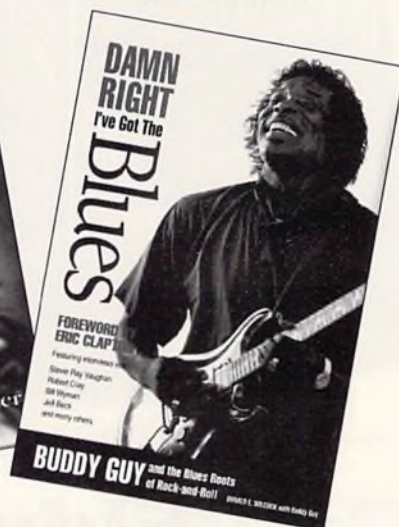
You can't really compete with nobody, anyway, except to have them motivate you. I might hear David play, and say, "Man, this cat's slammin' too hard for me." [both laughing] And I'm hittin' everyday, too? Maybe I should go sit at the piano.

DB

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David S. Ware has two Buffet Crampon model S1 tenor saxophones, one silver and the other gold-lacquered. He uses a hard-rubber Otto Link 10-star mouthpiece and medium-strength Bari plastic tenor reeds.

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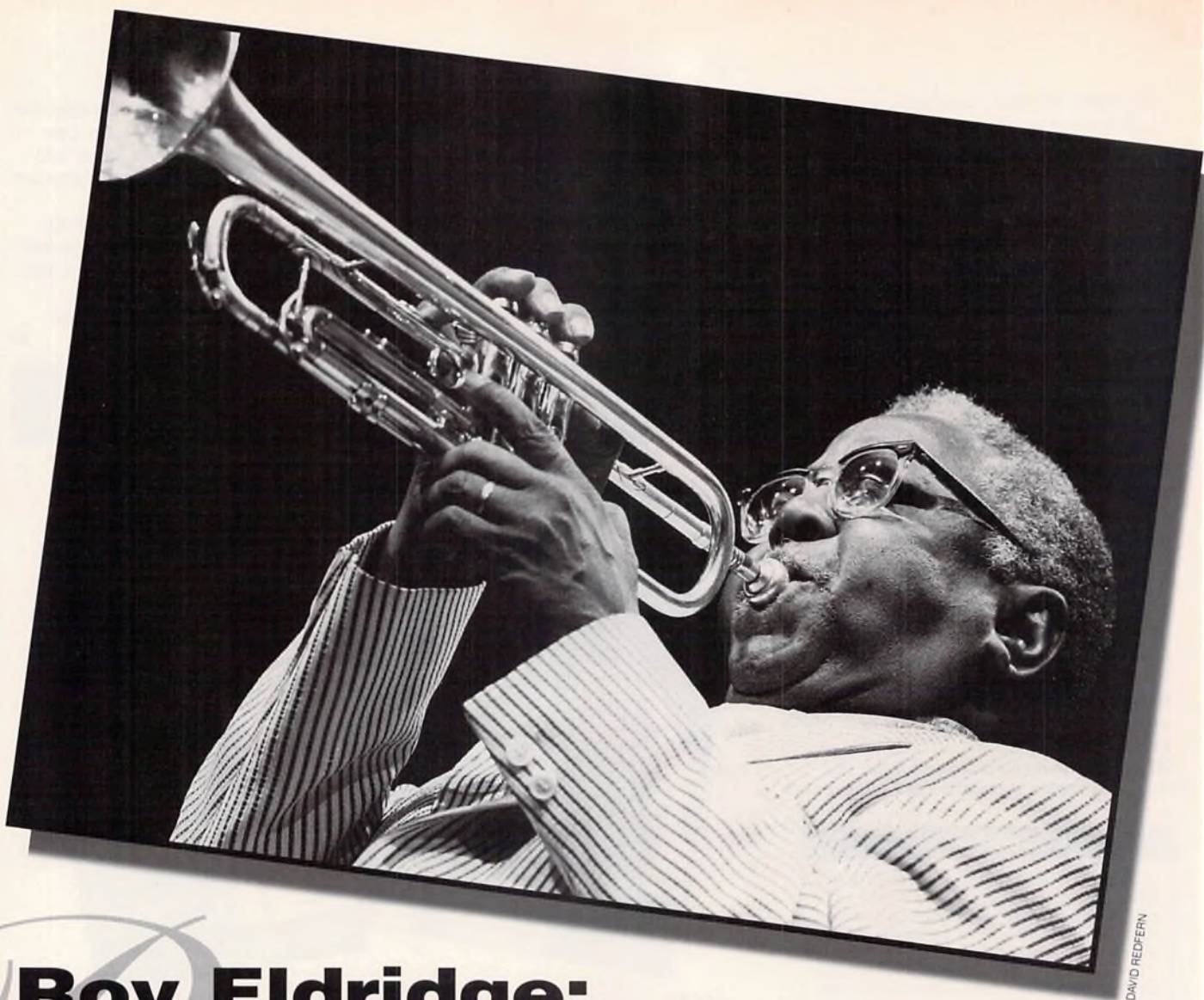
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## Roy Eldridge: Legendary Lip in the Golden Years

By John McDonough

*Reprinted from our December 15, 1977 issue, the following "Classic Interview" with Roy Eldridge looks back on the trumpeter's long career as a soloist and bandleader.*

**M**ore than 40 years ago Roy Eldridge's name first appeared in the pages of this magazine. He "almost plays sax on the trumpet," **Down Beat** proclaimed. "He hits 'em higher and faster than Louie."

Louie was, of course, Louis Armstrong, in 1936 the presiding god of swing. Benny Goodman may have been king, but Louis was still the god of most rising brass men. A decade before he had been a great innovator, throwing open doors most of his contemporaries didn't even know existed. He not only extended the language of jazz. He made it so clear and logical that he convinced a generation of musicians that his way was the only way.

In 1936 Eldridge assumed the mantle of reformer. He nailed his theses to the door of the Three Deuces in September, and radio station WMAQ spread them across

the country fast. Within a year the old revolutionary of the '20s was enfolded into tradition, and the bantam, cocky newcomer showed the world there was more than one way to skin a 32-bar chorus.

From Armstrong it's clear that Eldridge has learned how to build a solo, how not to shoot his wad in the first 16 bars, how to control pace and tension so that there is a beginning, a middle and an end. But there the comparison ends. His notes are not majestic and sweeping like Armstrong's. They are intense with laser-sharp points on the end. When they hit, they sting. Yet, for all the implied explosiveness, they are soft, tough, and muscular. Suddenly, in the first eight bars of the second chorus, the whole pace of the solo changes. A rift in the upper register is capped by a stabbing, white-hot ingot of sound that would become one of Eldridge's most electrifying

trademarks, the high note.

All that—the high notes, the Three Deuces, and the rest—happened over 40 years ago. Today Roy Eldridge and a handful of others survive as a sort of preservation hall of the swing era. But somehow he makes it all seem not so long ago at all.

As for the preservation-hall aspect of Eldridge in the 1970s, the comparison stops when you hear the music. Why has the music of New Orleans' Preservation Hall always sounded so superannuated and dottering? Age always provided a convenient explanation. Jazz is a young man's game. But then musicians who had recorded in their 20s and 30s began to get into their 60s: Goodman, Benny Carter, Harry James, and Roy Eldridge. Why don't they sound feeble, wobbly and appropriately preserved? Perhaps it was because they were better musicians to begin with.

"Now you're talking," says Eldridge, age 66. "I don't put anybody down, but I've heard some of the things they've done. Musically it's not the work of real musicians a lot of the time. For example, a cat will go from E) to G, but they won't make the G7 to carry them to G. They play E) and go straight to G. They don't open the door, they just break through it. I learned all that stuff from my brother Joe. The cats who came up in the '30s studied music seriously. They knew all that.

"I don't think age is necessarily a factor in musicianship. There are good classical players that have got some years on them. I think if you keep your health and your strength, you can play as long as you want. People say when you lose your teeth you can't play anymore. Well, I've had false teeth since I was 17, and it hasn't gotten in my way.

"You have to remember the trumpet is a mean instrument, the meanest there is. It's a damn monster. Sometimes I feel like throwing it out the window, it's such a beast. There are times when it treats you so sweet and nice that everything comes out just perfect. Then you come back to it the next night, rub your hands together and say to yourself you're going to do it all over again. You pick up the horn, put it to your chops, and the son of a bitch says, 'Screw you.'"

Eldridge carries a unique burden today. It's his brilliant past and the insistence of his present audiences that he equal it constantly. That is, of course, impossible, as anyone who has heard his more recent records over the last 10 or even 20 years knows. But those who hold that impossibility against him are missing something. And so are Eldridge's more devoted fans who insist that he is still the redhot Roy of 1937 and nothing has changed.

"Some of my old records really scare me when I hear how well I played on them," laughs Eldridge, "particularly some of those airshots. My trumpet sound has changed because my level of technique has changed. I don't dig playing fast like I used to years ago. I don't think I do it as well today as I did then. I'm more into ballads today because I can play them better. I

**"...the trumpet is a mean instrument, the meanest there is. It's a damn monster."**

believe I have more feeling for them today than when I was younger. They require a special discipline. A lot of cats don't have the patience to play them. They double- and triple-time their way through them. They play too many notes. I used to do it myself. I'd hate to play them, so I'd fly all over the horn on them. But today I like them. I have time for them.

"As for writers and critics, I don't have to be told when I play well and when I don't. Believe me, I know. It does make me mad when a guy catches one set and then leaves. I remember the first time I saw Louis Armstrong around 1931. I caught the first show and didn't think he was playing anything. But I decided to stay for a second show. That's when he got himself together and turned the place upside down with 'Chinatown.'

"With me, I don't like to have to play every night. Believe me, if I ever hit the lottery I'll take my horn and make a lamp out of it. Music is something I have to get into before I start to enjoy it. Sometimes it takes a set or two. Sometimes I hit it from the first note. Stamina isn't a problem with me. I can play a fourth set better than a third, and a fifth better than a fourth. The longer I play the stronger I get. It's because I don't put a lot of pressure against my teeth. But non-pressure playing is nothing new. I once knew a cat who could dangle a trumpet from a string and still get high notes from it."

For Eldridge times are good today. About 30 weeks a year he can be found in his base of operations, Jimmy Ryan's on 54th Street in New York. Then there are special concert appearances with Ella Fitzgerald and tours with Norman Granz and George Wein that take him around the world.

Times have changed since Eldridge first burst on the scene in the '30s and became the most influential trumpet of his generation. He wasn't disturbed at all by the evolution into bebop in the '40s, aside perhaps from feeling like an old shoe during the height of the modern/moldy fig fracas. But when Norman Granz began teaming him with Dizzy Gillespie, Howard McGhee, and Charlie Parker, it was clear he sounded right at home. He knew there was a place for him in "modern" jazz.

When the next new wave of the early '60s came, accommodation wasn't so easy, however.

"I remember Coleman Hawkins and I arrived in Monterey back around 1960," he says, recalling his first encounter with the avant garde. "We were going to play a set with Ben Webster and a guy I wasn't familiar with called Ornette Coleman. When Bean and I got there, Ornette was doing something. I turned to Bean and said, 'What the hell is that?' He didn't know. It sounded like a chicken scratching himself. Later on, this guy starts telling us about this great new sax player. The greatest thing since Charlie Parker. I said, 'Who?' 'Ornette Coleman,' he says. 'You mean that guy who was rehearsing this afternoon,' I said. I started to say something, but Ben Webster sort of gave me the sign to lay back, not say anything. So I kept my mouth shut while this cat kept raving on about how great he was.

"When [Hawkins] and I heard the actual set, we thought he was putting us on. I didn't know where he was coming from at all. It was a whole new language. Parker didn't surprise me because I could recognize where he came from. Ornette and Archie Shepp, whom I first saw at the **Down Beat** Festival in Chicago in 1965, came out of nothing I ever knew about. I still can't get with it. There's nothing I can use there.

"Its lack of discipline makes it a refuge for fakes and fakers. Once I was in England and had a dressing room with a piano in it, so I decided to do an avant-garde session myself right in the dressing room with my own tape recorder. So I banged out a lot of crap using my elbows and fists and all that. When I got back in the States, there was this cat who was on a free-jazz kick. So I pulled out this tape and told him there was this fantastic player in England I heard. This sucker really went for it. 'Oh yeah, man, what's his name?' he said. The greatest thing he'd ever heard.

"That kind of freedom is a license for fraud. That's why there's nothing in it for me."

Happily, the jazz tradition is rich enough now so that there's enough for everybody. Particularly Roy Eldridge. **DB**

# CD REVIEWS

## Key

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



### Reggie Workman

**SUMMIT CONFERENCE**—Postcards 1003: *ENCOUNTER*; *ESTELLE'S THEME*; *CONVERSATION*; *METEOR*; *SOLACE*; *SUMMIT CONFERENCE*; *BREATH*; *GONE*. (56:46)

**Personnel:** Workman, bass; Andrew Hill, piano; Sam Rivers, tenor and soprano saxes, flute; Julian Priester, trombone; Pheeroan akLaff, drums.

★★★★ 1/2

In its late-'60s heyday, free-jazz was perceived as a music of boundless possibility, but today it's just another historical style, as strictly defined as bebop. As performed by bassist Workman's all-star quintet, this former avant-garde music has been polished and refined into a sort of shadow mainstream, awaiting its turn in the revivalist limelight. Using a vocabulary codified 20 years ago, the virtuoso veterans on *Summit Conference* create highly structured, tightly focused improvisations that sound rich, ripe, and fully mature—neither fresh nor stale.

As titles like "Conversation" and "Summit Conference" suggest, the musicians engage more in dialogue than solo work, with Rivers' grainy tenor sax and Priester's burr-toned trombone often locked in crafty counterpoint over Hill's spiky piano chords. Lyrical tunes like John Carter's "Encounter" and Rivers' "Meteor" unravel into expertly shaded moans, squawks, bleats, and whines, smartly propelled by akLaff's crisp drumming and Workman's churning, throbbing bass.

But even at its most abstract, as on Priester's "Breath," where an open-ended theme unfolds into an all-out barrage, the music keeps its analytical cool. And on Hill's closing ballad, "Gone," the players use classical restraint to achieve an elegiac tenderness that would have been almost unthinkable in the angry salad days of freedom.

—Larry Birnbaum



### Jessica Williams

**MOMENTUM**—Jazz Focus 003: *STONEWALL BLUES*; *NOMMO*; *WE KISS IN A SHADOW*; *SHUFFLE BOIL*; *IT'S EASY TO REMEMBER*; *LITTLE DOG BLUES*; *YOU DO SOMETHING TO ME*; *THEMBI'S TUNE*; *SHERLOCK'S LAMENT*; *AUTUMN LEAVES*. (75:14)

**Personnel:** Williams, piano; Jeff Johnson, bass; Dick Berk, drums.

★★★★★

**ARRIVAL**—Jazz Focus 001: *BIRKS WORKS*; *I'VE NEVER BEEN IN LOVE BEFORE*; *JAPANESE FOLK SONG*; *MISTERIOSO*; *LULU'S BACK IN TOWN*; *RUBY MY DEAR*; *WRAP YOUR TROUBLES IN DREAMS*; *BLUES FOR STRAYHORN*; *FOR YOU AGAIN*; *THE CREATOR HAS A MASTER PLAN*; *THE CHILD WITHIN*; *MOOD INDIGO*. (69:02)

**Personnel:** Williams, piano.

★★★★ 1/2

It's rare to hear a pianist who puts the instrument to work with the freshness and finesse that Jessica Williams does. Classically trained at the Peabody Conservatory, Williams really knows her way around the keyboard. Wait, there she goes under the lid, tugging at the strings as if playing a giant bass harp. And there she is again, rippling high notes on the keyboard like windchimes as an accompaniment to a Japanese folk song. Williams explores the entire instrument, inside and out, top to bottom, for maximum expression.

With the sensitive collaboration of Jeff Johnson on bass and Dick Berk on drums, *Momentum* offers both standards and originals that keep getting better with repeated hearings. It's strange, but ultimately successful, the way Williams takes apart the melody of Cole Porter's "You Do Something To Me" and displaces it, note by note, into different registers so that at first you think some crazy Viennese composer from the 12-tone school has gotten hold of it. When the melody finally blurts out in the bass, it's equally shocking. Williams is a musician with some wit (check out those boof, boof attacks on "Little Dog Blues" and a quote from the *Rocky And Bullwinkle* theme elsewhere).

Her biggest influence is pianist/composer Thelonious Monk, whose music she plays on both of these discs. Williams has Monk's thudding attacks and deadpan, stuttering rhythms down cold. To them, she adds a more refined technique that makes it possible to create a continuous dialogue with herself. On *Arrival*, listen to the intricate counterpoint on "I've Never Been In Love Before." Williams has a fabulous independence of hands to match her imagination.

On *Arrival*, Williams makes use of the piano's potential in unusual ways, playing the strings

like a brassy lute on "Birks Works." And Williams' original "The Child Within" has the poignance of a standard without any old associations getting in the way. Everybody has influences. What counts is how spectacularly this pianist has subsumed other voices so that hers rings out loud and clear.

—Elaine Guregian



### The Leaders

**SLIPPING AND SLIDING**—Sound Hills 8054: *SLIPPING AND SLIDING*; *EVERYTHING CHANGED*; *FUKAWA T.*; *HIGH SUMMER*; *LOUISA*; *BLUES ON THE BOTTOM*; *MIST*; *DRUMS TIL DON*. (58:16)

**Personnel:** Lester Bowie, trumpet; Chico Freeman, tenor sax; Arthur Blythe, alto sax; Cecil McBee, bass, piano; Kirk Lightsey, piano, flute; Famoudou Don Moyé, drums, percussion.

★★★

The Leaders are a vanity band. It's implicit in their name, a sort of failed attempt at humility—the leaderless band made entirely out of leaders. In that respect, they're the absolute flipside of the Art Ensemble of Chicago's egoless collectivism of yore. A self-satisfied attitude carries into the music, as well, which consists primarily of okay tunes, fairly conservative soloing, some dross, and a few half-hearted ventures into the musical outback.

*Slipping And Sliding* is a well-recorded studio date. Pianist Lightsey contributes four tunes—the cool, altered blues of the title cut sports Bowie's trademark slurring and smearing; "Everything Changed" is an optimistic vehicle for the radiant Blythe, who continues the last few years' return to form; Moyé's trap-set spotlight, "Drums Til Don," rests an intriguing head on a funky bassline; "High Summer" is a rather vapid, poppy, vaguely Latin tune laced with conga breaks by Moyé. Bassist McBee contributes the good groove of "Blues On The Bottom." The unmemorable "Louisa" moves McBee to piano for a duet with Lightsey on flute. Freeman's only composition, "Mist," is a sentimental piece with some surprisingly cheesy percussion.

The most outside (and shortest) cut, "Fukawa T.," starts freely with a five-note ostinato pattern, breaking into shared long-tones and some real blowing. Unfortunately, it never really gets its footing. Like most of the Art Ensemble's work since the mid-'80s, *Slipping And Sliding* just seems like it's coasting along.

Considering how unadventurous and in-the-bag the Leaders have proven to be, isn't it ironic that Lester Bowie is seen as the figurehead of the outcats? I'd like to hear something new where he proves just how far away from Wynton he really is.

—John Corbett



## Rob McConnell

**OVERTIME**—Concord Jazz 4618: *OVERTIME*; *THE TOUCH OF YOUR LIPS*; *STELLA BY STARLIGHT*; *HAWG JAWZ*; *AFTER YOU*; *ALONE TOGETHER*; *THIS MAY BE YOUR LUCKY DAY*; *WAIT AND SEE*. (61:02)

**Personnel:** Arnie Chycoski, Steve McDade, John MacLeod, Guido Basso, Dave Woods, trumpet; McConnell, Alastair Kay, Bob Livingston, Jerry Johnson, Ernie Pattison, trombone; Gary Pattison, James MacDonald, french horn; Moe Koffman, John Johnson, Alex Dean, Rick Wilkins, Bob Leonard, saxophones; David Restivo, piano; Ed Bickert, guitar; Jim Vibian, bass; Ted Warren, drums.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

The latest Rob McConnell opus for Concord may not cause too many hearts to race with excitement. But the usual, highly polished craftsmanship is here in force along with a

variety of moods and voicings. McConnell's often witty album notes are a clear guide to intentions well met once again by Canada's preeminent big band.

The CD opens with a bass vamp that must have put the trombones into a trance. It's inspired by Ray Bryant's "After Hours," McConnell says, though Bryant was obviously inspired by Avery Parrish, who surely knew Ellington's "Dooji Woogi." There's some good messaging of the blues by pianist David Restivo and the brass section while the rhythm section drops out. But the best of the blues is on "Hawg Jawz," with colorful ensemble voicings and outstanding plunger work by Steve McDade against a slow shuffle.

The ballad voicings on "Touch Of Your Lips" have a glassy, Claude Thornhill-Gil Evans transparency to them. The effect is to replace sentiment with stoicism, a quality that is inclined to stir more admiration than affection. One ballad, "Alone Together," is mounted as a jam session between McConnell's trombone and Ed Bickert's guitar. Solos build at a good pace as the band swings beneath in a breezy hammock of harmonies. "This May Be Your Lucky Day" is a McConnell original with roots in the Second Herd in which Alex Dean and Rick Wilkins are nicely inspired by the two tenor dialogs of Al Cohn and Zoot Sims. And "Wait And See" is another medium-tempo piece. But both are on the bland side, despite expert performances.

—John McDonough



## Kevin Mahogany

**SONGS AND MOMENTS**—enja 8072 2: *THE COASTER*; *WEST COAST BLUES*; *THE CITY LIGHTS*; *NIGHT FLIGHT*; *NEXT TIME YOU SEE ME*; *SONGS AND MOMENTS*; *CARAVAN*; *MY FOOLISH HEART*; *RED TOP*; *JIM'S BALLAD*; *TAKE THE A-TRAIN* [sic]; *WHEN I FALL IN LOVE*. (65:36)

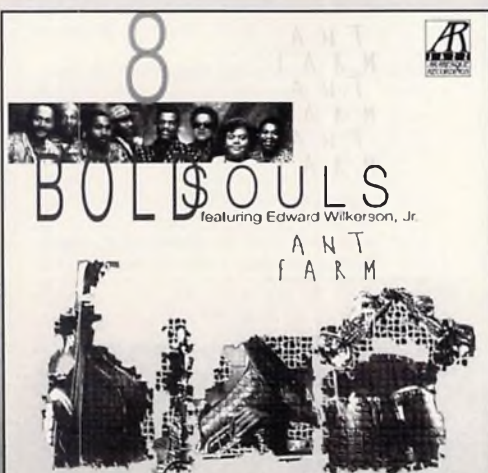
**Personnel:** Mahogany, vocals; John Hicks, piano; Ray Drummond, bass; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums; Arthur Blythe, alto sax (5,8); Kevin Eubanks, guitar (2,6); Michael Mossman, trumpet; Robin Eubanks, trombone; Steve Wilson, clarinet, alto sax; Willie Williams, clarinet, tenor sax; Phil Brenner, alto flute, soprano sax; Gary Smulyan, bass clarinet, baritone sax.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

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## CD REVIEWS

Freddie Hubbard, and Maria Schneider, *Songs And Moments* finds Mahogany singing with style and conviction on material ranging from blues to Brazilian. With tunes by Cedar Walton and Grachan Moncur III as well as Ellington standards, he joins the tradition of straight-ahead singers like Johnny Hartman and Joe Williams; but there's a lightness in his voice that hints at the pop potential of a Bobby McFerrin or Al Jarreau.

Mahogany's tenor is husky enough to suggest a baritone, pliable enough to hug a bebop phrase like *Saran Wrap*. His delivery brings out every syllable in the lyrics, and his scatting and wordless crooning are smoothly enunciated. A onetime saxophonist, he cuts deeper without words, scatting ferociously on "Caravan" and "Red Top"; his warm, ingratiating way with a lyric takes the bite out of a blues like "Next Time You See Me," bitterness out of ballads like "My Foolish Heart." He shows occasional bursts of power but generally keeps his emotions veiled behind a sort of sonic smile, allowing incisive soloists like Arthur Blythe, Michael Mossman, Kevin and Robin Eubanks, and John Hicks to steal his thunder.

—Larry Birnbaum



### Peter Delano

**BITE OF THE APPLE**—Verve 314 521 869-2:  
*SPONTANEOUS ID; HEARTFELT; THE DISTANCE*  
*STAGE; REFLECTED SPIRIT; THE SWEETEST*  
*SOUNDS; SUNRISE REMEMBERED; IMPROVISATION*  
*#2-BLUES; ON THE SPOT; DEMONIC DISORDER;*  
*CASTELLARAS. (72:01)*

**Personnel:** Delano, piano; Gary Bartz, alto saxophone (1,10); Craig Handy (3,9), Chris Potter (1,10), tenor saxophone; Tim Hagans, trumpet (1,10); Dick Oatts, flute (4,9); Chuck Wilson, alto flute (2); Joe Locke, vibraphones (4,6,9); Eddie Gomez (1,10), Marc Johnson (4,8), Gary Peacock (2,5,7), Peter Washington (3,9), bass; Joe Chambers (4,8), Jeff Hirshfield (2), Victor Lewis (1,10), Adam Nussbaum (3,9), Bill Stewart (5,7), drums; Ray Mantilla, congas (1,10); Richard Locker, Tomas Ulrich, cello (2).

★ ★ ★ 1/2

### Alan Pasqua

**MILAGRO**—Postcards 1002: *ACOMA; RIO GRANDE; A SLEEPING CHILD; THE LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURNS; TWILIGHT; ALL OF YOU; MILAGRO; L'INVERNO; HEARTLAND; I'LL TAKE YOU HOME AGAIN, KATHLEEN. (53:45)*

**Personnel:** Pasqua, piano; Dave Holland, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums; Michael Brecker, tenor saxophone (2,4,8); John Clark, french horn (2,5,7,9); Willie Olenick, trumpet, flugelhorn (2,5,7,9); Roger Rosenberg, alto flute (2,5,7,9); Jack Schatz, trombone, bass trombone (2,5,7,9); Dave Tofani, bass clarinet (2,7).

★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

Sharing production and arranging responsibilities. Peter Delano and Bob Belden set an ambitious goal. *Bite Of The Apple* showcases the 17-year-old pianist playing original compositions in a wide variety of styles with several intriguing combinations of established veterans. A Latin-jazz septet featuring percussionists Victor Lewis and Ray Mantilla, with a front line including Tim Hagans and Gary Bartz, blazes its way through "Spontaneous Id" and "Castellaras." Delano is completely confident on these tracks, navigating the rapids with a speed and power suggestive of a young McCoy Tyner. Another combination featuring Craig Handy breathing fire on tenor saxophone is nearly as effective. (An entire CD by these two groups would have been breathtaking.)

Smaller group offerings present more of a grab-bag. A sextet with alto flute and cellos,

and a collaboration with Dick Oatts on flute don't gel, but the trio of Delano, Gary Peacock, and Bill Stewart cuts loose on "Improvisation #2-Blues." With so many diverse styles and groupings represented, *Bite Of The Apple* can sound disjointed, not unlike a compilation. With its strong arrangements and fine performances, *Bite Of The Apple* needs only a center of gravity.

Alan Pasqua uses horn arrangements sparingly, almost frugally, to add warmth and depth to the pensive melodies of *Milagro*. This unassuming, often low-key album sneaks up on you in the absence of expectations, and insinuates itself into your consciousness and CD player. For his late debut as a leader, the pianist has assembled a program of glowing, thoughtful tunes, propelled by the tasteful rhythm section of Jack DeJohnette and Dave Holland,

who know about quiet, pretty music from all those ECM sessions. Along with their melodies, compositions like "Acoma" and "Milagro" surge and flow, with the latter carrying a Latin folk theme. Michael Brecker's tenor saxophone helps generate tension and turbulence on "Law Of Diminishing Returns" and "Rio Grande." For the yearning "L'Inverno," Pasqua and Brecker evoke Herbie Hancock with Wayne Shorter. Pasqua's playing is warm and introspective throughout *Milagro*. He adds flute and brass to four tracks, and the textures and gentle insistence of the arrangements remind me of Hancock's *Speak Like A Child*.

Who would have expected such a subtle, charming recording from Pasqua, best remembered for less-than-subtle electric keyboards with the (Holdsworth-era) Tony Williams Lifetime? —Jon Andrews

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## CD REVIEWS



### Santana Brothers

**BROTHERS**—Guts & Grace/Island 314-523 677-2: *TRANSMUTATION/INDUSTRIAL*; *THOUGHTS*; *LUZ AMOR Y VIDA*; *EN ARANJUEZ CON TU AMOR*; *CONTIGO (WITH YOU)*; *BLUES LATINO*; *LA DANZA*; *BRUJO*; *THE TRIP*; *REFLECTIONS*; *MORNING IN MARIN*. (52:21)

**Personnel:** Carlos Santana, guitars, drums, percussion; Jorge Santana, Carlos Hernandez, guitars; Chester Thompson, keyboards; Karl Perazzo, drums, percussion; Walfredo Reyes, Billy Johnson, drums; Myron Dove, bass.

★ ★ ★

For Carlos Santana's second outing on his own Guts & Grace label, he enlists younger brother Jorge (former leader of the Latin band Malo) and nephew Carlos Hernandez (a young hard rocker who's yet to discover his own voice) to help him steer and propel the guitar-charged ride. In this first recorded collaboration the star has participated in with any family members, *Brothers* features impressive pop-rock guitar interplay, especially when the two brothers talk to each other with their axes on such relaxed tunes as "Contigo" and "En Aranjuez Con Tu Amor" (the latter could do without the breathy synthesizer sheen). Less effective is the Carlos-a-Carlos exchange on "Brujo," where there's more muscle flexing than dialoging.

The three-guitar summits, for the most part, succeed when the collective energy of the Santana clan ignites on such rousing numbers as "La Danza" and "The Trip." Not as satisfying are the tunes where each guitarist is featured. The only exception is Carlos Santana's "Luz Amor Y Vida," a percussive-rich Latin rock number that showcases a barrage of his signature licks. Despite its unevenness, *Brothers* shows promise for future Santana family projects.

—Dan Ouellette



### Ken Peplowski

**LIVE AT AMBASSADOR AUDITORIUM**—Concord Jazz 4610: *BIRKS WORKS*; *NUTS*; *I DON'T STAND A GHOST OF A CHANCE*; *THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE FREE*; *AT LONG LAST LOVE*; *MENINA FLOR*; *I BRUNG YOU FINJANS FOR YOUR ZARF*; *WHY TRY TO CHANGE ME NOW?*; *EXACTLY LIKE YOU*. (63:47)

**Personnel:** Peplowski, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Howard Alden, guitar; Ben Aronov, piano; Murray Wall, bass; Tom Melito, drums; Harry "Sweets" Edison, trumpet (3,4,9).

★ ★ ★ ★

He is known as "Peps" in some quarters—a natural epithet that also reflects his musical

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personality. His ability to electrify a session rarely fails, as this live date amply shows. Not only is Peplowski hot—veteran trumpeter Edison is in memorable form on three tracks.

On tenor for the first four cuts, Peplowski occasionally suggests the late Zoot Sims with his crooning balladry ("Ghost Of A Chance") and infectious brand of swing ("The Best Things In Life Are Free"). Alden enters the picture strongly on "Nuts," a Peplowski original that echoes the Stan Getz/Jimmy Raney recordings of the early '50s. The smooth-running tenor improvisation on "Birks Works" is closer to Sonny Stitt, with whom Peplowski once studied, than to either Sims or Getz.

The remainder of the performances, on clarinet, document Peplowski's agile facility and engaging way within the Goodman/DeFranco tradition. He and Alden take on all challengers on "I Brung You Finjans For Your Zarf," a complex, uptempo composition by Red Norvo and Tal Farlow. The guitarist, who, like the reedman, covers the swing and modern-mainstream waterfront, is a swinging melodist and perfect rhythm-man throughout.

Aronov has the spare, clean approach of Basie and Hank Jones. Wall and Melito round out a rhythm section that never fails. And Edison's soulful crying on "Ghost," pre-Dizzy work on "Best Things," and punchy phrases on "Exactly" are icing on what is already a most satisfying cake. —Owen Cordle



## Laurie Anderson

**BRIGHT RED**—Warner Bros. 9 45534-2: *SPEECHLESS; BRIGHT RED; THE PUPPET MOTEL; SPEAK MY LANGUAGE; WORLD WITHOUT END; FREE-FALL; MUDDY RIVER; BEAUTIFUL PEA GREEN BOAT; LOVE AMONG THE SAILORS; POISON; IN OUR SLEEP; NIGHT IN BAGHDAD; TIGHTROPE; SAME TIME TOMORROW.* (52:31)

**Personnel:** Anderson, vocals, keyboards, violin, percussion; Eno, keyboard, loops, treatments; Joey Baron, Dougie Bowne (8), drums; Cyro Baptista, percussion; Ben Fenner, bass; Greg Cohen, guitar, bass; Guy Kluevsek, accordion; Gerry Leonard, Jamie West-Oram, Marc Ribot, Adrian Belew, guitar; Lou Reed, guitar, vocals; Phil Ballou, Arto Lindsay, vocals; Kevin Killen, treatments; Neil Conli, shaker; Peter Scherer, keyboards.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

Idiosyncratic storyteller/performance artist Laurie Anderson plays by the rules of her own imagination on her first pop/avant-garde album in four years. She offers lots to muse upon in her song-spoken word pieces that are at turns cryptically cerebral, whimsically cute, cool

pensive, and provocatively mysterious. While Anderson delights in posing theoretical questions within the context of her songs (e.g., the Zen koan "Is time long or is it wide?" on "Same Time Tomorrow"), it's her embrace of commonplace images and ideas that keep her poetry from withdrawing into the esoteric zone. Working with co-producer/keyboardist Brian Eno (remarkably their first collaborative project), Anderson paints brilliant theme-appropriate soundscapes that make this disc a treat for headphone listening. Particularly strong supporting performances are turned in by the top-notch drum/percussion team of Joey Baron and Cyro Baptista.

While Anderson rarely disappoints in her captivating live multimedia performances, she's not as wholly engaging in the recording medium where some tunes like "Night In Baghdad" fall flat musically despite their compelling subject matter. Elsewhere, though, Anderson powerfully hits the mark, crafting lyrically and melodically memorable compositions (the haunting "Speak My Language," the tango-inflected "Beautiful Pea Green Boat," the stark duet with Lou Reed on "In Our Sleep") that recommend this self-described collection of songs about love and destruction.

—Dan Ouellette



## Gerry Mulligan

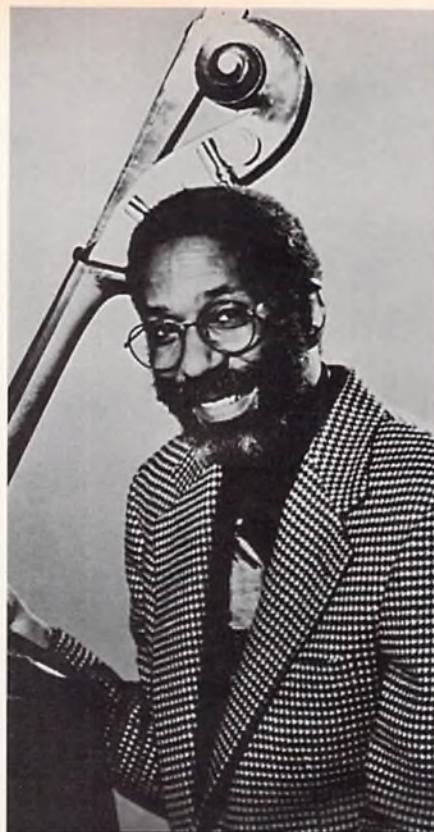
**DREAM A LITTLE DREAM**—Telarc 83364: *NOBODY ELSE BUT ME; HOME (WHEN SHADOWS FALL); DREAM A LITTLE DREAM; I'LL BE AROUND; THEY SAY IT'S WONDERFUL; THE REAL THING; NOBLESSE; HERE'S THAT RAINY DAY; GEORGIA ON MY MIND; MY FUNNY VALENTINE; AS CLOSE AS PAGES IN A BOOK; MY SHINING HOUR; WALKING SHOES; SONG FOR STRAYHORN.* (66:35)

**Personnel:** Mulligan, baritone saxophone; Ted Rosenthal (1-9,12-14), Bill Mays (10,11), piano; Dean Johnson, bass; Ron Vincent, drums.

★ ★ ★ 1/2

Gerry Mulligan's gift for melodic improvisation is glowingly displayed in this set of familiar tunes. Rosenthal's Bill Evans-like piano adds to the lyrical atmosphere. Mulligan the composer checks in with the playful "Walking Shoes" and a pair of evocative ballads, "The Real Thing" and "Song For Strayhorn."

Looking back at the saxophonist's career, one now misses the counterpoint of the quartet with the late Chet Baker, the humorous exchanges with Bob Brookmeyer, and the instrumental colors of the Concert Jazz Band. Nevertheless, it's good to hear his warm bari in a standard quartet setting and to know that he remains as graceful as ever. —Owen Cordle



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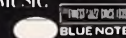


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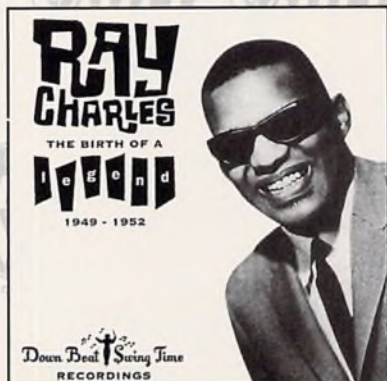


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**CD REVIEWS**



**Giorgio Gaslini  
Globo Quartet**

**LAMPI (LIGHTNINGS)**—Soul Note 121290-2:  
*LUPUS IN FABULA; PULSAZIONI INCROCIATE*  
(CROSSED PULSATIONS); *AURA; TAKE FOUR; LAMPI*  
(LIGHTNINGS); *CANTO ALTO (HIGH CHANT);*  
*ELLINGTON PORTRAIT; MYANMAR SUITE; TRATTICO*  
*FOR HERBIE NICHOLS; MYANMAR SUITE (2ND VER-*  
*SION)*. (77:59)

**Personnel:** Gaslini, piano; Daniele Di Gregorio,  
vibraphone, marimba, percussion; Roberto Bo-  
nati, bass; Giampiero Prina, drums; Moe-Moe  
Yee, Burmese harp (10).

★ ★ ★

Before Giorgio Gaslini undertakes another project as ambitiously varied as *Lampi* (*Lightnings*), it might be helpful for him to remember that quintessential design dictum, "less is

more." Any one of this album's four motifs might have provided the 65-year-old pianist with a stunning record. But taken together, his snazzy extended-form cantos, his Ellingtonia, his loving take on Herbie Nichols, and (whew!) his Western suite with Far East seasonings all make for a rather diffuse mix.

None of that, however, should discourage interest. They make the best of the pianist's attempt to create what he calls "musica totale," and most likely share his background (if not his experience) in both the jazz and classical vocabularies. At slower, more ruminative tempos as on "Aura" (the third of the "Lampi" suite's five movements) or "Canto Alto," each instrument's natural properties are utilized to full advantage, creating an expansive wash of cymbals and woody overtones that truly vibrate Gaslini's already rhythmic melodies.

But that doesn't mean they shouldn't focus on something. On the strength of the almost reverential Ellington and Nichols triptychs, it'd be interesting to hear the quartet delve further into each the way Gaslini did with Thelonious Monk (*Gaslini Plays Monk*) and Albert Ayler (*Ayler's Wings*) some years back. Vibes man Daniele Di Gregorio and bassist Roberto Bonati shadow each other over the themes, reacting swiftly to Gaslini's little polytonal twists and turns. It's just too bad the achieved momentum can't make all of *Lampi* (*Lightnings*) worthwhile.

—K. Leander Williams

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## Satch, Smack & Swing

by Kevin Whitehead

**L**istening to Louis Armstrong on *Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man: 1923-1934* (Columbia/Legacy 57176; 60:56/63:00/63:18/67:57: ★★★★★½) and *A Study In Frustration: The Fletcher Henderson Story* in sequence is to hear jazz coming of age, from intersecting perspectives. (The "Smack" Henderson box spans 1923-1938.) Some folks insist jazz must swing, always; if so, they'll have to chuck most of the 1920s. It took awhile for most musicians to catch on, even with Armstrong's example.

He already sounded like himself on his first (likely memorized) recorded solo, on King Oliver's "23 Chimes Blues." It's rhythmically supple, as he slides in and out of doubletime; he tears upward for dramatic effect at one point, later harps on a repeated staccato note, presaging his mature self. As often in the early years, his companions are less rhythmically sure. (One minor quibble: sound on the earliest sides is not up to contemporary snuff; compare "Snake Rag" to engineer Robert Parker's Oliver restorations.) These performances suggest why jazz improvisations came to be called "solos"—for a master like Louis, it's as if the background didn't, couldn't, matter—at least until his comrades caught up. One great pleasure of this set is hearing everyone else gradually rise toward his level, as the music emerges from the swamps of bad sound and stodgy rhythm.

*Portrait* is an excellent introduction for the uninitiated; it, of course, includes many Hot Fives and Sevens classics ("Cornet Chop Suey," "Potato Head Blues," "West End Blues," etc.), and the "Weather Bird" duet with Earl Hines (one of the very few collaborators who comes off as Louis' peer), but even the well-versed will delight in the rarities compiler Dan Morgenstern dishes up. There's a lot of Armstrong backing singers, some pretty awful, like Hociel Thomas and Lillie Delk Christian. The vocalists here, even great ones like Bessie Smith and yodeling Jimmie Rodgers, make you admire Louis' own singing; 1927's "Gully Low Blues," say, reveals him as a self-conscious artist, able to get into and stand apart from the material at once.

Presenting these sides in chronological order—with one tiny exception—makes you appreciate the Hot Fives and Sevens even more, too; for the late '20s, their polish and swing is stunning. Track-by-track annotation by Morgenstern and Loren Schoenberg tells you what and who to listen for, and Dan's biographical essay is typically excellent; for one thing, he puts Armstrong's anti-bop pronouncements in context, downplaying them in the process. The bottom line: hooray. The box's title evokes Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, but Armstrong was more like the first Dedalus' son, Icarus: he flew so high and got so hot, he melted the wax.

One place Armstrong spread the swing gospel was Fletcher Henderson's New York big band, where he alighted for a year (unhappily, says Morgenstern) starting in late 1924. *A Study In Frustration* (Columbia/Legacy 57596;



Melting the wax: Louis Armstrong

72:10/74:39/46:59: ★★★★★½) is a welcome reissue of the 1961 four-LP box that for many years was the standard introduction to Henderson. More than any rival unit, his orchestra jazzified standard dance-band arranging practices, like dividing brass and reeds into opposing sections; many of its early charts were, in fact, retooled off-the-shelf arrangements. The band also nurtured many great soloists, such as Coleman Hawkins, clarinetist Buster Bailey, cornetist Rex Stewart, and perennially underrated trombonist Charlie Green. On the eight tracks where Armstrong solos (only two reprised in the Louis box), he swings mightily as the band chugs along in chipper, but square, 2/4.

How convenient it would be if the orchestra immediately learned to swing from Armstrong's example! But as a generous selection of late '20s tracks shows, its rhythmic progress was slow. Even Hawk took a while to rid his playing of slap-tongue corniness. From the evidence here, Bailey and trumpeter Tommy Ladnier caught on quicker, but then they'd known Louis longer. You can hear the band becoming more limber from session to session; by late 1928, only stolid bari sax and tuba keep it from taking off in 4/4.

Still, even on the early tracks you can enjoy the band's intricate charts, bluesy background riffs, precision ensemble playing, and other niceties. Then you can thrill to the miracle of '33, the year the band erupted into one magnificently swinging unit. Three of Smack's 1933 masterworks—"Yeah Man," Hawk's avantish whole-tone "Queer Notions," and Jelly Roll Morton's "King Porter Stomp"—were revived four decades later by Sun Ra, who'd worked with Henderson briefly in the '40s, but probably knew these pieces from the original LP box. Benny Goodman used literally hundreds of Henderson arrangements, too. (Fletcher's original "Stealin' Apples" and "Sugarfoot Stomp" are here.) Any composer/arranger/leader revered by both Sun Ra and Benny Goodman deserves your respect. If you consider yourself culturally literate, you better know your Fletcher Henderson. **DB**



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## Bundles Of Bud

by Bill Shoemaker

**C**oinciding with the pianist's 70th birthday, the recent releases of *The Complete Bud Powell On Verve* (Verve 314 521 669-2; 77 15/48:05/57:35/63:49/64:43: ★★★★★) and *The Complete Blue Note And Roost Recordings* (Blue Note 30083; 69:03/69:58/64:13/72:11: ★★★★★) prompts a much-needed rethinking of **Bud Powell's** central role in jazz's evolution. Powell's personal tragedies have straightjacketed most assessments of his art. The standard, oversimplified argument links Powell's early Roosts and the first Blue Notes to periods of relative health in the '40s, while the Verves of the '50s are "inconsistent," connoting Powell's diminished capacities. The hitch is that Powell's late-'50s Blue Notes are often stunning, just like many of the Verves.

Like Billie Holiday's Verve recordings, Powell's are often cited as snapshots of a sensitive artist unravelling in an indifferent, if not inimical society; subsequently, the vigor of the '62 club recording *'Round Midnight At The Blue Note* (Dreyfus 36500-2; 35:37: ★★★★★) is attributed to his sanctuary in Paris during the late '50s and early '60s. Yet, just as Holiday's conveyed a vivid sense of tarnished beauty and lost innocence, so do Powell's lapses of concentration and will. Powell's flawed performances on both



Bud Powell: doomed bebop poet and jazz piano nexus

sets are often as compelling as his most incisively conceived and technically brilliant recordings. Heard as a totality, the 177 master takes, alternates, false starts, and breakdowns that make up these comprehensive sets depict Powell not just as bebop's doomed poet but as the nexus of the piano's evolution in jazz.

To create what remains the dominant style of today's mainstream, Powell drew upon early

role models and bopper peers, employing a stunning, classically grounded technique (what Powell did with an attack as flat-fingered as Monk's makes Blue Note's *The Amazing Bud Powell* billing something of an understatement). Powell's classical training is key to performances like "Bud On Bach" (BN)—where Powell rips through "Solfeggietto" then recasts it as a bop tune—or "Tempus Fugue-It"

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## CD REVIEWS

(V), where his mercurial right hand glances off his eruptive left hand to create a bracing emotional counterpoint. Powell could apply a modernist sensibility to the florid styles of Tatum and Garner as well as bask in their lushness. Recorded during the legendary '51 session that produced the gloriously manic "Un Poco Loco," the solo takes of "It Could Happen To You" (BN) were propelled by Powell's urgent attack, giving the Tatumesque flourishes an edgy undercurrent. For the most part a savoring of Garner's sweeping arpeggios and chiming octaves, "Stairway To The Stars" (V) has one of Powell's most jarring from-out-of-nowhere endings. The markedly more relaxed usage of such devices on "Lover Man" (D) and "There Will Never Be Another You" (D) is a telling measure of Powell's Parisian repose.

Of his contemporaries, Powell was most influenced by Monk and Elmo Hope. Hope is often cited as the source for the jabbing left-hand voicings that became a hallmark of Powell's style. Bertha Hope reveals important information about Hope's influence on Powell as part of Verve's outstanding 150-page booklet of commentary, interviews, and discographies (aside from Michael Cuscuna's '88 interview of Blue Note founder Alfred Lion, Blue Note's 40-page booklet is sorely lacking—their discography has no LP title key, and the layout of original album covers omits *Time Waits*, the '58 date with Sam Jones and Philly Joe Jones

that included Powell's hard-driving "John's Abbey"). Monk was quoted in the '40s that he often wrote specifically for Powell, the only pianist he felt did justice to his music. Powell's late-'40s versions of "Off Minor" (BN) and "52nd Street Theme" (BN) (the latter, featuring Fats Navarro and Sonny Rollins, is one of only 24 non-trio performances on the Verve and Blue Notes sets) have an ebullient evenness quite distinct from Monk's own versions. A mid-'50s take on "Epistrophy" (V) is indicative of how Monk's compositions accommodated Powell's then-fractured, but oddly satisfying, expositions. Yet, in Paris, Powell could summon much of his earlier powers through Monk's tunes, as evidenced by the solemn "Monk's Mood" and the jaunty "Thelonious" (D). (Columbia missed the boat by not reissuing Powell's *A Portrait Of Thelonious*.)

Powell's extensive use of the trio format to distill his influences and idiosyncracies was a double-edged proposition. The trio setting allowed his tangents and abrupt changes in direction to run their course. Powell found appropriate support in each phase of his career. Both boxed sets document Curley Russell and Max Roach matching Powell's soaring energy in the late '40s and early '50s, and George Duvivier and Art Taylor adeptly responding to Powell's chorus-by-chorus moodswings in the mid-'50s. The well-mapped performances of Powell's Paris trio with Pierre

Michelot and Kenny Clarke on *'Round Midnight At The Blue Note* (the Blue Note collection ends with "Like Someone In Love," their feature on Dexter Gordon's *Our Man In Paris*) led many to believe that Powell had fully recovered.

Yet, despite a series of albums also featuring names like Ray Brown, Paul Chambers, Art Blakey, and Roy Haynes, Powell's proclivity for trios did little for his stock as a composer. Powell's compositional range extended beyond the bop conventions he mastered in such blithe early works as "Bouncing With Bud" (BN) and "Celia" (V), as he had a rare ability to integrate European essences within a jazz framework. In addition to pieces like "Tempus Fugue-It" and "Bud On Bach," Powell arguably laid the groundwork for such third streamers as John Lewis and Ran Blake with compositions like "Glass Enclosure" (BN), a set of variations that peel away a ponderous veneer to expose raw emotions. The insouciantly swinging "Parisian Thoroughfare" (V) is a paradigm of continental suavity, even though Powell wrote it years before his first visit to France. But, Powell's quintessentially American voice was plainspoken on tender ballads like "I'll Keep Loving You" (V) and "Time Waits" (BN), and cooks like "Hallucinations" (aka "Budo") (V) and "The Scene Changes" (BN). Among their other benefits, the Verve and Blue Note sets make a strong case that Powell's compositions should be regularly celebrated. **DB**



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## Refined & Stylized

by Dan Ouellette

**R**egarded as the easy-listening offspring of fusion (oftentimes garnering the derogatory label "fusak"), "contemporary jazz" is a perma-press realm where serene melodies and gentle rhythms rule, and omnipresent synthesizer sheens and comely instrumental restraint prevail. Purveyors of contemporary jazz know full well that widespread appeal and commercial success are best realized by adhering to the niche's soft-and-warm, quiet-storm parameters.

One of the veteran bands of contemporary jazz, **Hiroshima** may integrate such evocative instruments as koto and taiko drums into the mix on *L.A.* (Qwest/Reprise 9 45601-2; 53:37; ★★), but the end product is still a manicured music that reflects the stereotypic glitz of the metropolis the album celebrates. The opening number, "Voices," with its synth veneer and muted-guitar snarl, sounds like background music from one of those Fox-TV primetime soap operas, and the sweetly romantic vocal rendering of James Taylor's "Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight" feels out of touch with its angst-ridden lyrics. Plusses are when leader Dan Kuramoto takes a synth break to blow a smoky blue sax solo on the fine "Native Sun" and when the group delivers the final track "One World" with compelling urgency.

While Hiroshima's "bop-hop" disappoints with its sanitized blend of hip-hop and bebop, **Special EFX** scores with the upbeat, body-moving "Hip Hop Bop" from its newest, *Catwalk* (JVC 2038-2; 52:07; ★★). The band accommodates more of a grit factor here, starting the proceedings with a nitty-gritty funk tune that eventually loses its steam and smooths out with a synth wash and mediocre tenor sax ride. Despite a couple percussion-drenched treats, the fun and funky "George Can't Dance," and a satisfactory take on Marvin Gaye's "Mercy Mercy Me" (with James Robinson's emotive vocals), much of the rest of the collection is reserved for placid, synth-shaded tunes featuring the hushed vocals so prevalent to this genre.

Special EFX guitarist Chieli Minucci and percussionist George Jinda make a cameo appearance on bassist **Gerald Veasley's** second album, *Signs* (Heads Up 3027; 59:58; ★★), energizing a couple funk-lite pieces early in the going. Grover Washington Jr. also guests, contributing lilting tenor and swirling alto sax lines to "Salamanca" and "Soul Seduction," respectively. But Veasley is the star of the collection, igniting a funk flame in the rowdier moments as well as stepping out with several grooving six-string bass solos, which save this session from succumbing to a state of out-and-out torpor.

Saxophonists are at the forefront of the contemporary jazz scene, with soprano players dominating the spotlight. One of the most popular soprano sax stars is **Najee**, whose new *Share My World* (EMI 7 2438307842; 63:59 ★★½) is a soothing package of pop/r&b/soul/jazz fusion entrenched in familiar melody-based territory. Several of the



Najee: a soothing package

tunes are dreamy and romantic, others work into a gentle groove, and a few, including "(G) Street," even have a bit of a bite. Plus, there's the fair-weather opening number, "My Angel," which features an African male chorus. While Najee delivers plenty of safe soprano sax trills throughout the collection, he rarely improvises. The most noteworthy veer from the norm comes at the very close of the album, when he provides a glimpse of his jazz chops.

Soprano saxophonist **George Howard** is even less adventurous on *A Home Far Away* (GRP 9780; 48:35; ★★). He sketches gently sinuous lines that carry the serene, catchy melodies and occasionally waft above the vocalists who apply a soft-focus to the songs. There's minimal stylistic variety in this polished set of soft funk, slick pop, and jazz lite. Notable exceptions are the enjoyable synth-sax interplay on "A Home Far Away," the rich percussion support by Paulinho Da Costa and Munyungo Jackson, and Howard's own soprano sax flights on the finale, "Renewal."

Multi-saxophonist **Andy Snitzer** also steers onto a straight, well-worn path with *Ties That Bind* (Reprise 9 45736-2; 52:12; ★★½). While straitlaced, soft-bellied melodies and an emphasis on synthetic instrumental support dictate the overall direction, Snitzer does approach the wailing zone on his alto, and on tenor offers a grainier and more robust tone rare for this genre. Highlights include a couple of funky workouts, including the cooking "One Regret" with Wah Wah Watson on guitar, and the bluesy, swinging end song, "Next Time You See Me," where Snitzer enlists an impressive jazz ensemble featuring Joe Sample, Christian McBride, Lewis Nash, and Larry Goldings.

Two pianists, **David Benoit** and **Kim Pensyl**, fare better on their latest releases. Benoit's *Shaken Not Stirred* (GRP 9787; 46:14; ★★) has its share of synth and vocal softness and cosmetic glamour but also features some out-of-the-ordinary playing. Benoit works out a catchy standard-time piano riff loosely based on Paul Desmond's "Take Five" on the funkified "I Went To Bat For You," invites a chamber orchestra to help him spin out the fun on "Chi Chi's Eyes," and dips into a straight-ahead jazz vein with an acoustic group on the subdued

"Sarah's Theme." Pensyl also exhibits a diversified collection with his newest, *When You Were Mine* (Shanachie/Cachet 5010; 45:06; ★★). While much of his material is pleasantly upbeat and breezy or sentimentally slow and romantic, Pensyl impresses with a solo piano piece, "Gone Too Soon," and an ensemble number that showcases his keyboard talent, "I Can Hear You Dreaming," which is marred only by the vaporous synthesizer wash so representative of, and so indispensable to, the contemporary jazz genre. **DB**

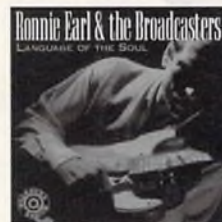
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# BLINDFOLD TEST

## 1 Andrew Cyrille

"Shell" (from *MY FRIEND LOUIS, DIW/Columbia*)  
Cyrille, drums, composer; Oliver Lake, alto sax;  
Reggie Workman, bass; Hannibal Marvin  
Peterson, trumpet; Adegoke Steve Colson, piano.

I don't know who that is, but I like it. It's not a regular band, though—not because it doesn't sound good, but 'cause it sounds safe.

Hannibal? Cecil McBee? Santi DiBriano? Interesting head—I'd like to play on it. The drummer fills so that counting the rhythm is not too difficult. Is it Gene Lake?

[After musicians are identified] The mixing process is deceptive; Andrew usually has more burn in his cymbal and drum sound, even if he's playing sparse. He was being thoughtful—the tune could have been longer. 4 stars, because it was open and kind of different.

## 2 Dave Brubeck Quartet

"Nomad" (from *JAZZ IMPRESSIONS OF EURASIA*, Columbia) Brubeck, piano, composer; Paul Desmond, alto sax; Joe Benjamin, bass; Joe Morello, drums.

Lee Konitz? [at a drum break at the turn-around] Now that was Blakeyesque! But the rest is flat, no bounce, no contour to it. There's more to playing this music than just reciting scales over changes.

Must be the pianist's date; he's the only one allowed to be aggressive, which is as senseless as having everybody aggressive at the same time. The point is to have a conversation. The pianist states motifs like a classical musician, but he never gets up in them. Is the drummer Shelly Manne? Mel Lewis? 2 stars, just fair.

## 3 Gonzalo Rubalcaba

"Circuito" (from *THE BLESSING*, Blue Note) Rubalcaba, piano; Jack DeJohnette, drums; Charlie Haden, bass.

I heard Rubalcaba at Mt. Fuji; he has lots of stuff besides the authentic Latin things. I recognized Jack as soon as he came in—let him play! He's a real musician, a piano player and bass player, too. He hears orchestrally, way out beyond his own instrument.

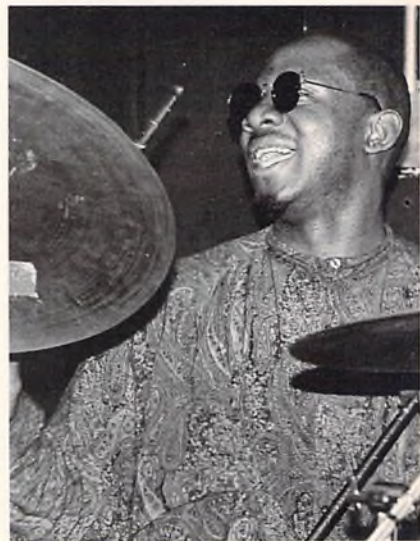
It's astonishing these guys got it together so quickly. There's a difference between being well-rehearsed and being a band, and this isn't a band, yet; but what makes such quick musical relationships possible is talents like Gonzalo's and DeJohnette's!

## RALPH PETERSON

by Howard Mandel

Drummer Ralph Peterson burst onto the jazz scene in the late '80s, an enlightened-yet-spontaneous proponent of vigorous rhythm. Having studied cornet as well as traps with Rutgers University's distinguished jazz faculty, Peterson presented his Fo'tet, quintet, and trio in collaboration with, among others, Geri Allen, Don Byron, and David Murray on five albums for Blue Note, the most recent of which is titled *Art* in honor of his mentor Mr. Blakey, the unforgettable Messenger.

For this, his first Blindfold Test, Peterson considered each selection very seriously and had some pointed comments. He had no information in advance about the music that was played.



Jack, 5 stars, Gonzalo 3½. Listen to his chops! But contrary to what he's been told, he needs to listen more to what's going on around him.

## 4 Marvin "Smitty" Smith

"Salsa Blue" (from *THE ROAD NOT TAKEN*, Concord Jazz) Smith, drums; Kenyatte Abdur-Rahman, percussion; Wallace Roney, trumpet; Steve Coleman, alto sax; Ralph Moore, tenor sax; Robin Eubanks, trombone; James Williams, piano; Robert Hurst, bass.

Is it Jerry Gonzalez's Fort Apache Band? This is a rhythmic orchestra as well as a harmonic one. Everything everyone's playing is feeding into the arrangement. Is it Tito Puente? The percussionist really lays into it, but there's a neatness that's uncharacteristic of the genre. I like this—it's way up there like I'd like to get my band to sound spontaneously, though this sounds rehearsed.

[After identification] Smitty does everything very well, with a lot of discipline. As a drummer, I love to watch and listen to him play—but sometimes, it's the sloppiness that makes it fun. 4; no, make it 4½ stars.

## 5 Paul Motian

"Kathelin Gray" (from *MOTIAN IN TOKYO*, JMT) Motian, drums; Joe Lovano, tenor sax; Bill Frisell, electric guitar.

Joey Baron? I like his spirit—and he shaves his head, so he can't be all bad. This is Frisell, right? And Zorn? I don't dislike it—except for the mix. Bill plays loud—if that's

not the pot calling the kettle black! To take that away from him technically is to take away something that is.

Maybe it's Motian? He and Joey play in the same register. Motian's always interesting, though his swing is not to my taste. And Lovano: Joe plays *Joe*, but he's definitely in the school of the Snake Doctor, Mr. Joe Henderson.

3½ stars. Motian recorded it like a drummer would record, with Frisell way under the drums!

## 6 Jonathan "Jo" Jones

"Ad Lib" (from *THE MAIN MAN*, Pablo) Jones, drums; Harry Edison, Roy Eldridge, trumpet; Vic Dickenson, trombone; Eddie Davis, tenor sax; Sam Jones, bass; Freddie Green, guitar; Tommy Flanagan, piano.

Ed Thigpen? Oh, I know who it is—5 stars, make that 10. Papa Jo Jones. He's a cat, like Prez and Hawk, whose playing never stopped growing. They could play through all the styles because their concepts were so firm, strong, and valid. Sweets? He and Clark Terry come out of the box very much the same. Buddy Tate, no? I'm hearing past the drums. . . . Al Grey? This is probably a Pablo session. Drummers like to hear that *slap* of the bass: is it Milt Hinton?

I knew it was Papa Jo from the way he came up off the hi-hat, from the length at which he stayed on the hi-hat, and how he opened it up. He's the standard bearer by which all others are judged. He's the patriarch of thematic development. And humor! Salt Peanuts, Salt Peanuts! **DB**