

**B.B. KING'S ULTIMATE CROWN**

# DOWN BEAT

*Jazz, Blues & Beyond*

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## Monsters Meet

**McCoy Tyner &  
Michael Brecker**

**The Lost Art  
of Arranging**

**Tim Berne &  
Marty Ehrlich**

**Classic  
Cannonball  
Adderley**





## 16 McCoy Tyner & Michael Brecker

### *An Easy Marriage Of Styles*

Two generations from Philadelphia. One fantastic musical combination. That's pianist McCoy Tyner and saxophonist Michael Brecker together on McCoy's stellar new release, *Infinity*. McCoy and Michael celebrate their mutual return to Impulse! in the wake of this significant musical first.

By Martin Johnson

Cover photograph of McCoy Tyner and Michael Brecker by Teri Bloom.



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TERI BLOOM

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MITCHELL SEIDEL

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# An Easy Marriage of

# Styles

McCoy Tyner & Michael Brecker

By Martin Johnson

It's hard to believe, but pianist McCoy Tyner and saxophonist Michael Brecker, pillars on the scene for decades, had never played together until a gig a year ago at Yoshi's in Oakland (see "Caught" Apr. '95). That evening revealed a deep rapport and good chemistry that can be heard on Tyner's *Infinity* (Impulse!), which features the finest playing both men have documented in several years (see "CD Reviews" Oct. '95).

It is no exaggeration to say that Tyner is a living legend. His piano work helped elevate the John Coltrane Quartet of the early '60s into one of the finest jazz groups ever heard. In the three decades hence, Tyner has established perhaps the most widely imitated approach to his instrument, a hearty romanticism powered by a huge orchestral sound. Along with his *DB Readers* and Critics Poll-winning big band, he continues to perform with his trio of bassist Avery Sharpe and drummer Aaron Scott.

For Brecker, fame and critical recognition have been a little overdue. He made a name for himself in the '70s both as co-leader with his brother, trumpeter Randy, in the Brecker Brothers and as a sideman of choice for highbrow pop recordings. He has maintained a balance of sideman pop and jazz work as well as working as a leader and for last three years with his brother again. Although frequently associated with fusion, his brawny yet cerebral style is straight outta the jazz tradition. Perhaps his lack of recognition illustrates how many jazz buffs prefer to listen with labels instead of their ears.

When Tyner and Brecker met one afternoon at the Steinway showroom in midtown Manhattan, a number of contrasts were immediately apparent. Tyner walks slowly with a regal bearing, Brecker moves quickly, and even when relaxed looks like he has a lot on his mind. But despite some obvious physical and demographic differences, they have a lot in common. They are both thoughtful men who measure their words very carefully and enjoy talking about music without dishing dirt. Once they settled in, the kind of rapport emerged that makes *Infinity* so delightful.

**MARTIN JOHNSON:** *What attracted the two of you to the project?*

**MCCOY TYNER:** Well, I've always liked Michael's playing. But I really wasn't sure he was from Philly [looking at Brecker with a wryly raised eyebrow, both laugh] until he gave me a rundown, and I said, "Oh, okay." There are so many musicians from Philly that

it's unbelievable! We had that in common and... well, I've been influenced by John [Coltrane] a lot, too. So I thought it would be an easy marriage of styles. I think he has an individual voice and plays very sincerely. I was influenced by Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk, and you can hear a little bit of that influence in my playing; but I think that I still have my own voice.

**MJ:** *Michael, how did you feel about it when approached by McCoy?*

**MICHAEL BRECKER:** It was something I dreamt about for a long time. It's hard to explain. For me, it's more than the fact that I'm influenced by McCoy and John Coltrane. I think the quartet was the reason I became a musician....

**MT:** Hmmmm, that's interesting.

**MB:** And that was sort of characterized by the fact the group went beyond the strength of John Coltrane. The group consisted of four musicians and was a marriage that transcended the individual musicians. It was a powerful and musical and spiritual force. I felt it was one of the strongest, if not the strongest, group of the century, along with one or two of the Miles bands, and, just talking off the top of my head, maybe Duke Ellington. I was so strongly influenced by McCoy's playing. I never thought we would get to play together; I don't know why....

**MT:** ...See, you never know. [laughs]

**MB:** So when the chance came, of course, I jumped at it. And the only way to characterize it is that it's the most comfortable I've ever felt in any context.

**MT:** We had lotsa fun. Yoshi's was.... [trails off and smiles, deferring back to Brecker]

**MB:** It started the very first night, it was a tremendous amount of fun. [McCoy giggles] It's led us to do a couple of different types of gigs, things that should be strange.

**MJ:** *What do you mean by different types of gigs?*

**MB:** We played at a trade convention and had a great time. Not a regular audience, a lot of folks from MCA. [the parent company of Impulse!]

**MJ:** *Whose idea was it to do "Impressions"?*

[Both look at each other unsure of the answer.]

**MT:** I think it was you. I had done it on *Remembering John*. I think you suggested it.

**MJ:** *Either of you fearful of inviting the ghost of Coltrane?*

**MT:** [looks at Michael] You want to answer that?



**MB:** No, you try.

**MT:** Well [smiling], to tell you the truth, there's one thing I realized. We can never recapture anything, because it [the world] is always changing. It's always different. People leave the planet but their styles remain here. They're here in spirit. What I'm saying is that to try and duplicate anything doesn't make any sense. That's the reason why when I left John, Jimmy [Garrison] and Elvin [Jones] were ready to leave, and they said, "Let's play as a trio." I said, "No," because it's like a tree, your roots are there but you branch off. What I'm doing is like an extension of what I did with them. It's 1995, and I'm still drawing strength from those roots. The deeper the roots the higher the tree can grow. I love my roots, but, by the same token, you have to continue to grow, and try to create new ideas. But John is always present. Like Charlie Parker, he's there, and that's good. People still remember them, and you work to keep their ideas alive.

**MJ:** And how did you feel approaching it as a saxophonist?

**MB:** Um, [pausing] I didn't think about it in terms of how I was going to approach it. It just so happens that I'm very strongly influenced by John Coltrane. Very much so, too, by Joe Henderson, Sonny Rollins. Those are the three, as far as saxophone players go, dominant forces, the roots of my playing. Then there is other stuff that has grown out of that. When I get up and play with McCoy, I just play. I don't think, "I don't want to sound like this." Harmonically, it has worked out wonderfully, I don't have to think about it.

**MT:** [murmuring] He sounds like himself, let's put it like that. That sums it up. Even with all those influences. [clearing his throat and projecting] Even in my case, I had a chance to meet Bud Powell, he's from Willowbrook, Pennsylvania, and he lived right around the corner from me at one point. Thelonious Monk and Art Tatum have been major influences, but I came up with something of my own. Even though someone may open the door, you have to walk in yourself.

**MB:** Well, it almost goes without saying, but McCoy has such a strong influence on the piano that it's pretty much changed the

**"One of the things I like  
best about the whole  
feeling behind [Infinity] is  
that a tune can come, and  
we'll just do it.  
It doesn't really matter  
who suggested it....  
When things are right  
they just stick out."**

**—McCoy Tyner**

way the instrument is played. He's changed the piano harmonically forever, and that's a remarkable thing.

**MJ:** Because of your influential role, do you find it difficult to listen to younger players for fear of hearing an aspect you did not want to see repeated?

**MT:** I hear influences from what I've done, but I hear their own individual personality, because when you're young you're still developing. It's the same with me when I was with John. I was lucky to be in an environment where I could grow and let my own sound come out. That's what I hear in the young players, some of them seem to be working hard to be individualists. If I could play a part in that, then I'm very thankful. I'm very happy to see that some of the young people I've influenced are working hard to create their own sound. It's funny, someone

opens the door for you, then you open the door for someone else, and pretty soon you have an open house!

**MJ:** Let's come back to Infinity. Was it a mutual decision to do "I Mean You"?

**MT:** One of the things I like best about the whole feeling behind this project is that a tune can come, and we'll just do it. It doesn't really matter who suggested it. We were looking in Monk's book and we said, "Hey, this might be a good tune." I had recorded previously with [John] Scofield. When things are right, they just stick out; it [the tune] just announced itself really.

**MJ:** And "Good Morning Heartache"?

**MT:** I've been playing that for a while, and I've loved it. I heard Billie Holiday sing it and... [waves his hand in amazement]. I had the opportunity to familiarize myself with the song. I think I played it a long time ago, then stopped, then I started playing it solo.

**MJ:** Is that when you began picking up the tempo toward the end?

**MT:** Yeah.

**MJ:** You've had a trio together for many years now. Has it been difficult to maintain the continuity?

**MT:** No, I believe in that. I was with John for six years, and you become like family during that time. You can draw on that, it

## EQUIPMENT

McCoy Tyner plays Steinway pianos.

Michael Brecker plays a Selmer tenor sax and a Yamaha soprano sax with Dave Guardala mouthpieces and reeds. With an Akai EW1 he triggers an Akai S1000 sampler and various synths, including an Oberheim Matrix 12. Korg

Wavestation and Korg MIR.

Michael's effects units include an Alesis Quadverb, Korg A-3, Ensoniq DPY and Lexicon LXP1. All of his effects go through an Akai MPX820 mixer. He also employs a Shure wireless microphone system.

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

### McCoy Tyner

*INFINITY*—Impulse! 171  
*JOURNEY*—Verve Birdology 519941  
(Big Band)  
*THE TURNING POINT*—Verve Birdology  
513573 (Big Band)  
*REMEMBERING JOHN*—enja 6080  
*SOLILOQUY*—Blue Note 96429  
*44TH ST SUITE*—Red Baron 48630  
*NEW YORK REUNION*—Chesky 51  
*THINGS AIN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE*—  
Blue Note 93598  
*REVELATIONS*—Blue Note 91651  
*UPTOWN/DOWNTOWN*—Milestone 9167  
(Big Band)  
*LIVE AT SWEET BASIL*—Evidence 22106  
*BON VOYAGE*—Timeless 260  
*DOUBLE TRIOS*—Denon 33CY-1128  
*QUARTETS 4X4*—Milestone 55007  
*SUPERTRIOS*—Milestone 55003

*SONG OF THE NEW WORLD*—Fantasy  
OJC 618  
*SONG FOR MY LADY*—Fantasy/OJC 313  
*SAHARA*—Fantasy/OJC 311  
*THE REAL McCOY*—Blue Note 46512  
*TODAY AND TOMORROW*—GRP/Impulse!  
106

### with John Coltrane

*THE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: THE  
COMPLETE ATLANTIC RECORDINGS*—  
Rhino R2-71984  
*EUROPEAN IMPRESSIONS*—Bandstand  
1514  
*LIVE IN STOCKHOLM*—Charly 117  
*THE EUROPEAN TOUR*—Pablo Live  
2308222  
*LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD*—  
MCA/Impulse! 93136  
*LIVE AT BIRDLAND*—MCA/Impulse! 33109

*JOHN COLTRANE AND JOHNNY  
HARTMAN*—Impulse! 157  
*BALLADS*—Impulse! 156  
*CRESCENT*—MCA/Impulse! 5889  
*A LOVE SUPREME*—Impulse! 155  
*TRANSITION*—Impulse! 124  
*NEW THING AT NEWPORT*—GRP/Impulse!  
105

### Michael Brecker

*NOW YOU SEE IT (NOW YOU DON'T)*—  
GRP 9622  
*DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME*—MCA 42229  
*MICHAEL BRECKER*—MCA 5980

### The Brecker Brothers

*OUT OF THE LOOP*—GRP 9784  
*RETURN OF THE BRECKER  
BROTHERS*—GRP 9684  
*STRAPHANIN*—Arista 9550 (out of print)

*HEAVY METAL BEBOP*—Arista 4185  
(out of print)  
*BACK TO BACK*—Arista 4061 (out of print)  
  
**with Steps Ahead**  
*STEPS AHEAD*—Elektra Musician 60168  
*MODERN TIMES*—Elektra 60351  
*MAGNETIC*—Elektra 60441

### with various others

*IS WHAT IT IS*—Atlantic J22 82571  
(Mike Stern)  
*80/81*—ECM 21180 (Pat Metheny)  
*THREE QUARTETS*—Stretch 1103  
(Chick Corea)  
*RESTLESS*—Warner Bros. 45536 (Bob James)  
*IN PURSUIT OF THE 27TH MAN*—Blue  
Note 794591 (Horace Silver) (out of print)  
*IN NEW YORK*—Barking Pumpkin/Rhino  
74240 (Frank Zappa)  
*GAUCHO*—MCA 37220 (Steely Dan)



gives you a chance to grow and develop.

**MJ:** Speaking of growing up and developing, tell me how did the Philadelphia scene differ given the decade between y'all?

**MB:** When I came up in Philly, there wasn't that much of a scene left. There were a couple of clubs; I did a lot of playing in people's houses and after-hours clubs, strangely enough, and I don't know if any of those are still there. But some of the people we have in common are still around. I grew up in the suburbs of North Philly. I come from a musical family, that's how it all started with me. By the time I was in high school, I started meeting a lot of people in the jazz community in Philadelphia, a lot of great players. It's phenomenal to me, and no one's ever been able to explain how Philly has produced so many great musicians. A lot of great musicians continue to come out of Philadelphia in spite of the fact that there are not a whole lot of places to play.

**MT:** I grew up in a basically black community, but it was a *community*, people were concerned with each other. I didn't have a piano from age 13 to 14—I started [playing] when I was 13. People in the neighborhood let me use their pianos. I'd alternate between three neighbors, and they were very encouraging. I'm so glad I grew up in Philly. To me, at that time, Philadelphia was a nice place to live. It had a nice domestic scene, but it had a nightlife, too. We had major jazz clubs. There were plenty of gigs for guys that played. A guy could open up a bar and put a piano in. He was supposed to have a music license, but he could get that later, once he saw how it worked. I worked in little clubs, Ridge Avenue...

**MB:** Ridge Avenue? Yeah.

**MT:** There were lots of gigs, especially on weekends. It was a great scene, and there was a lot of enthusiasm about playing and jams; we had jam sessions at people's houses. That was common. [*imitating a bystander*] "Jam in North Philly, let's go." You would have Lee Morgan, Archie Shepp, Reggie Workman and the Heath brothers. There was a lot of enthusiasm and people were serious about music. Things have changed a bit, though there are still great musicians there, but then the town had a special feeling.

**MB:** I agree.

**MJ:** You wrote several of the songs on the record on the way back from a West African music festival. What was it about the trip that inspired you?

**MT:** I wrote some of it while I was there, particularly in Dakar. What I do sometimes is wait until a project comes up and I start writing. I have a tendency to do that. Sometimes I write out of pure inspiration. "Fly With The Wind" I wrote at a date in Cleveland. I went by the club in the daytime and sat down at the piano and wrote. Most of the time it's all there,

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**DALLAS, TX,** Feb. 1 (Thurs.), University of North Texas (Denton), School of Music, Avenue C and Chestnut

**AUSTIN, TX,** Feb. 2 (Fri.), University of Texas, Dept. of Music, East Campus Drive

**CHICAGO, IL,** Feb. 3 (Sat.), Northwestern University, Regenstein Hall (Music), 1965 S. Campus Dr., Entrance A

**CINCINNATI, OH,** Feb. 4 (Sun.) University of Cincinnati Coll.-Conservatory of Music

**BOSTON, MA,** Feb. 9 (Fri.), Berklee College of Music, 1140 Boylston Street

**NEW YORK CITY, NY,** Feb. 10 (Sat.), Carnegie Hall, Del Terzo Studio, 8th Flr., 154 W. 57th Street

**FAIRFAX, VA,** Feb. 11 (Sun.), George Mason University, Dept. of Music, Performing Arts Building

**LAWRENCE, KS,** Feb. 15 (Thurs.), University of Kansas, School of Fine Arts, 452 Murphy

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I just need something to make it come out.

**MJ:** McCoy, has Africa been more inspirational for you than any other place? One of my favorite records of yours is Asante.

**MT:** It's really funny; when I was growing up in Philadelphia there was a cultural affiliation through the community with Africa. We had a big parade for [scholar and Ghanaian founding father] Kwame Nkrumah. I've always been interested in African culture, really all international culture, period. I travel all over the world, and it's so nice to be in the company of people who have different cultures. I take a particular interest in African culture because it's in me and it's reflected in a lot of my songs.

**MJ:** You work mostly with the trio.

**MT:** Most of the time. I do big band dates in Europe from time to time, but only a couple of times here in the States. It's expensive and I don't want to be on the road constantly. I knew Woody Herman very well and Frankie Berry, music director of his band, and he told me to be cautious about [big bands]. I met Basie, but I couldn't get close to Duke Ellington, he was always surrounded by an entourage. But I had one-on-one conversations with Woody, and he passed on some pretty good information about

**"...when the chance came [to play with McCoy], I jumped at it. And the only way to characterize it is that it's the most comfortable I've ever felt in any context."**  
—Michael Brecker

big bands. I watched a video of Duke Ellington and learned so much from it. So the big band experience is really great. But it's scary. I think of all the things involved in running a big band, like paying everybody! [laughs uproariously] That's why we're able to do these festivals in Europe, because they have money allocated for the arts, which is great. [wiping his brow in relief] Whew!

**MJ:** Are you on the road constantly?

**MT:** Some people, like B.B. King and Ray Charles, go out on the road for 10 months.

I can't do that; I have to come home some time to sleep in my own bed for a while. Then go back out again.

**MB:** It's less than it used to be for me. I have two small children [Jessica, 6, and Sam, 2], so I try to spend as much time with them as I can. It's less than half the year [that I'm out on the road]. Like McCoy, I like to go in and out. After about three weeks out, I want to come home. Five weeks is about the most I can take, and that's rare now. I like to sleep in my bed, too. I'm trying to find a balance, but it's difficult to plan.

**MJ:** What is the status of the Brecker Brothers?

**MB:** We've been working pretty consistently for the last three years. We decided to make a record three years ago after not having worked together for a long time, and we liked it so much that we did another album and did a lot of touring behind it. We're going to take a break now and do some solo projects, some other things, and get together again in a couple of years and perhaps do an acoustic group.

**MJ:** Do you still do a lot of sideman work?

**MB:** Not as much as I used to; I'm cutting back.

**MJ:** Does it require a different perspective to come in as a sideman than come in as a leader?

**MB:** Yeah. If anything, it's a little easier. [both laugh] There's a lot less responsibility. I just think about the music and showing up on time. There's nothing about payroll and things like that.

**MJ:** I'm sure you've all listened to each other's work for a long time now. What changes have you noticed?

**MT:** Um, that's a tough question. [both laugh] I think it would be better to ask each individual about their own playing.

**MB:** Yeah, you start. [both laugh again]

**MT:** Well... I've done some solo-piano gigs, and that's really interesting. I'm really enjoying that; I was affected by Oscar Peterson in that regard. I think that every pianist should do that for a while. I feel that I've grown a lot doing that. Really, though, I'm less interested in analyzing how I'm playing today versus how I used to play. I think it's enough to say that I'm very happy with what I'm doing, big band, trio or solo. I see some maturity over the years, and part of being mature is being happy with yourself regardless of what anybody or the critics say. Being happy with yourself is the most important thing.

**MB:** I have to echo McCoy. If anything, what has changed is how I view my playing. I have less of a tendency to judge it; and that's something I never thought would happen. I used to be very hard on myself. Maybe it comes with maturity, but I'm grateful for those moments of nonjudgmental attitudes toward my playing. I find that I'm enjoying myself a lot more.

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# B.B.'s Crowning Achievement

## *Kennedy Center Honors the King of the Blues at 70*

By Zan Stewart

**I**t's a story right out of Horatio Alger: A dirt-poor African-American youth born on a plantation uses plain hard work coupled with ingenuity and talent to become *the* major voice of the blues, and is celebrated by two sitting U.S. presidents. Along the way, he plays concerts and clubs to countless millions of fans, sells innumerable singles, LPs and CDs, collects nine Grammys, is awarded several honorary doctorate degrees and appears many times on television.

That's a rough outline of the life of Riley B. King, otherwise known first as the Beale Street Blues Boy, then Blues Boy and now simply B.B., the humble, soft-spoken musical great from Indianola, Ms., who is unquestionably the King of the Blues.

To hear him tell it, 1995 was *really* his year. King, who turned 70 on Sept. 16, was recently named a recipient of the 18th-annual Kennedy Center Honors, and was venerated on Dec. 2-3 in Washington, D.C., along with the other honorees: playwright Neil Simon, actor Sidney Poitier, opera singer Marilyn Horne and ballet dancer Jacques d'Amboise. The highlight of the weekend was a reception at the White House hosted by President and Mrs. Clinton, followed by an Honors Gala in the Kennedy Center Opera House. There, the awardees sat in the Honors Box with the president and first lady, and were paid tribute by many of America's leading artists.

King ranked this event as "tops." "Meeting the president of the United States is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me," he says, speaking by

phone from a tour stop in Memphis—where he established himself as a blues giant in the early 1950s and where he owns one of two B.B. King's blues club (the other is in Universal City, Calif.).

"Catholics think the pope is the nearest thing to God," says King in the hearty, ringing voice that characterizes his vocals. "To me, it's the president.

Anytime the most powerful man in the world takes 10 to 15 minutes to sit and talk with me, an old guy from Indianola, Mississippi, that's a memory imprinted in my head which will forever be there. To go be honored, to have people playing for you, for the things you may or may not have done in your lifetime, that's the greatest honor to be paid to me."

And that's saying something, given the other kudos King has received. In 1990, he was presented with the Presidential Medal of the Arts by President Bush. "That was a wonderful experience," he says with a smile you can see through the phone lines. Other major honors include the American Heritage Fellowship Award from the National Endowment for the Arts (1991); induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame (1987), the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame (1984) and the Songwriter's Hall of Fame (1990); a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (1987); and honorary doctorates from Yale University (1977) and the



BILL DOUTHART

Berklee College of Music (1982).

It's surprising, then, that a man of King's stature still works a devilishly hard schedule, playing an average of 250 performances in any given year, sometimes hitting two shows a day at concert halls and clubs in Moscow and Paris, New York and Memphis. It's this shoulder-to-the-grindstone work, rather than being celebrated, that's the essential element in keeping a reputation and making a good living.

"In this country, people are always looking for a new movie, a new video, a new artist," King says matter-of-factly. "We forget these things very easily, and while we're busy praising something, we're looking for something else to replace it. So if you get an award, or an honor, don't think that you can go into your room and stop practicing, thinking that you've reached the top, that people will always love you. That would be a sad mistake. If you want to stay out there, you have to continue as you were."



**“MEETING THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE UNITED STATES IS THE  
GREATEST THING THAT HAS  
EVER HAPPENED TO ME.”**

**—B.B. KING**

**K**ing's distinctive style of the blues is built around gravelly throated vocals and guitar solos and fills that are composed of tightly coiled bent notes and long, expansive, singing tones. And while this compelling approach is definitely blues-based, it's got its share of jazz flavor and influence. King has long cited jazz guitarists Django Reinhardt and Charlie Christian as being important to him, as well as acknowledging such seminal blues figures as Lonnie Johnson, T-Bone Walker and Blind Lemon Jefferson. But he's also a big fan of other instrumentalists from saxophonists Lester "Pres" Young and Charlie "Bird" Parker to pianist Oscar Peterson.

"I loved Pres," King says with sincerity. "He didn't play a lot of fast stuff. His ideas flowed smoothly unless he was forced into it, like on something fast like 'Cherokee.' Well, then, yes, he let you know that he did know his horn the way most of us wished we did. But my ideas flow slowly. That's one reason that when Pres, Bobby Hackett, Johnny Hodges, people like that, they played melodies of a song the way they felt it, and it's like a sword going through my heart.

"Miles [Davis], his ideas were so good, way above my thinking. Some guys were so progressive. Well, I guess I could say the same thing about Lonnie Johnson. There are things he played when I was a kid I wish I could play today, that's how advanced he was."

King laughs as he explains why he stuck with the blues over the years: "I finally convinced myself that I can play the blues better than anything else I can do musically—even though I practiced other things, and I always wanted to be versatile, you know, to play with Kenny Burrell or Jimmy Smith. I'd give my right arm to play with Oscar Peterson. I just love his playing. He's one of the greatest, but he still plays bluesy licks and I love them. Bird, he's the same. He had some bluesy sounds that, again, were like a sword going through me."

The guitarist admits that there are things he's not playing that he'd like to, and maybe he'd be able to if he'd practice more. "But I haven't practiced like I should. Never have... never have," he says, laughing again. "After so long, my instrument says to me, 'Are you going to play me or just sit and look at me?' Then I might start to practice. But I mostly do it when I put on new strings, then it sounds sweet and I'll practice till I have to stop. That's usually about once the [cq] week."

King's latest albums are *Heart To Heart*, a 1994 release that's co-led with singer Diane Schuur, and *Blues Summit*,

a 1993 collection that pairs King with Robert Cray, Etta James, John Lee Hooker and the late Albert Collins. B.B. finds ways to keep the blues alive, altering the forms, using, say, an eight-bar blues with a bridge, or playing a pop tune with blues feeling. He also employs some keen musical insights. Still, nothing is easy.

"Years ago, a good friend of mine introduced me to the Schillinger System, and when I learned that, I started thinking in terms of permutations. Like, if you have four notes, there are 24 different ways of playing them. Not that I use those per se, but I might use that idea to find the notes that I like. That's why I'm economical [with my notes], since I can't think that well musically. It's a challenge every night to get up and do something with that guitar."

The blues came King's way via recordings he heard as a youth growing up in rural Mississippi. "My aunt had a phonograph," he says. "That's how I discovered people like Blind Melon Jefferson." As a teenager, he began to play guitar, and, at 19, traveled to Memphis, where he became a disk jockey at a local radio station, landed his first playing jobs and made his first record: "Miss Martha King," a single on the Bullet label. King called Memphis home for years, recording numbers for RPM, Kent and Ace Records that regularly sold 100,000 copies as singles. He toured the U.S. by bus with his up-to-10-piece band, playing to mostly black audiences.

His life, and status, changed in the '60s. The British Invasion found such bands as the Rolling Stones and John Mayall's Blues Breakers citing King, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf as influences. King discovered how deep the

appreciation for his music went when he played the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco in 1966.

"I was nervous because when I came into the hall, no one seemed to recognize me," King recalls. "But when Bill Graham introduced me, saying, 'Ladies and gentlemen, the Chairman of the Board, B.B. King,' the kids stood up and gave me an ovation. That had never happened before, and tears started rolling down my cheek."

King really took off with "The Thrill Is Gone," recorded as a single for ABC Records in 1969 and produced by the noted hitmaker Bill Szymczyk. The song hit No. 15 on the Billboard Pop chart in 1970, landed the bluesman his first Grammy (Best Rhythm & Blues Performance) and made him a crossover artist. King then began to travel internationally, gaining worldwide acclaim. He continued to record for ABC, then MCA. He gave of himself as well, forming the Foundation for the Advancement of Inmate Recreation and Rehabilitation, co-founded with attorney F. Lee Bailey.

As many wonderful years as he's had, 1995 will be difficult for King to match. There were the Kennedy Honors, the 70th-birthday party he hosted on Oct. 27 at the Orpheum in Memphis featuring Al Green, Buddy Guy and Willie Nelson, and the TV appearances on *New York Undercover*, *Baywatch* and *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*—the latter in a possibly recurring role as "Pappy." King can look back on the past year, as well as all the others, and feel a glow of pride and satisfaction.

"Life has given me so many things to be thankful for," he says in a direct tone of voice. "I've gone from a boy on a plantation to staying in the best hotels in the world. I've gained so many friends. And I've been able to help people. Music has done all that for me."

Asked how he'd like to be remembered, King is as succinct as one of his opening phrases to a solo: "As a pretty good guy, and if he wasn't, well, he tried. A friend, somebody you could trust. That's about it."

**DB**

**EQUIPMENT**

B.B. plays, as he has for years, the Gibson ES-355. "You could call it a custom B.B. King model," he says, "in that it has features that I had a little input on. It's the same one that if someone wanted to get one tomorrow, they could get one just like the one I play." He uses a Lab System amp. "It has

a mellow sound, almost like a Fender Twin," he says. "I use the B.B. King string that's made by Gibson for me. The gauges are .10 for the E string, .13 for the B, .17 for the G, .24 for the D, .43 for the A and .54 for the big string. That gives me a light top and a heavy bottom."

**SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

*BLUES SUMMIT*—MCA 10710  
*HEART TO HEART* (with Diane Schuur)—GRP 9767  
*THERE'S ALWAYS ONE MORE TIME*—MCA 10295  
*LIVE AT THE APOLLO*—GRP 9637  
*GUESS WHO?*—MCA 10351  
*NOW APPEARING AT OLE MISS*—MCA 8016

*LIVE AT THE REGAL*—MCA 31106  
*THE BEST OF B.B. KING. VOL. 1*—Flair/Virgin 91691  
*GREATEST HITS OF B.B. KING*—Ace 552  
*ROCK ME BABY*—Ace 119  
*LIVE AND WELL*—MCA 27008  
*BLUES 'N' JAZZ*—MCA 27119





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# The Lost Art of Arranging

*How Big-Band Charting Changed from a Commercial Venture Into a Labor of Love*

By John McDonough

**B**ack in the 1980s, after having written some generally cheering words about the Smithsonian Collection's five-LP set *Big Band Jazz: The Beginnings To The Fifties*, I gave into an impulse journalists should normally resist. I wrote to Martin Williams, its co-producer (along with Gunther Schuller), suggesting a sequel. *Big Band Jazz After The Fall*, I think I called it. The premise was simple. The initial album had been a manifesto to posterity in praise of an era that had a beginning, a middle and, regrettably, an end—1950, by Williams' calculations. It documented big band jazz as a popular art of mass appeal. I don't say that with a smirk. Popularity and art are not always adversaries. The music had grace, originality, craftsmanship and a sense of connection to its audience.

But like anything that feeds on mass acceptance, it also acquired the obligatory formulas and aversion to risk one often finds when the pressure is on to nurture acceptance. When the formulas became a little too familiar, the mass audience moved on to newer, often lesser frontiers, finally bottoming out in the ultimate dumb-down, rock/punk/rap/etc.

Perhaps it was for the better, though. What was left, it seemed to me, was not necessarily the carcass of the big band era, but the birth of another more lean and elite big band age in which arrangers could work in a much less market-driven atmosphere. Relieved of the peculiar pressures of the mass market, new bands and reform-minded older ones found it possible after 1946 to chart directions according to their artistic lights, not the masters of the market.

Wouldn't it be interesting, I suggested to Williams, to explore the course of this second big band era, to chart the odyssey of orchestral jazz and its arrangers beyond the bounds of the swing era? Williams responded with interest and sympathy but said, in effect, there was no money for such a marginal venture.

Now, happily, there is. By the time you read this, the Smithsonian will have



Musicians Laurindo Almeida (left) and Eddie Sefranski compare charts on an old Stan Kenton Orchestra arrangement.

Background Music: Courtesy Of Duke Ellington Collection, Archives Center, NMAH, Smithsonian Institution



released *Big Band Renaissance: The Evolution Of The Jazz Orchestra*, produced by Bruce Talbot with arranger/bandleader/writer Bill Kirchner, who did the lion's share of the shaping and wrote the notes. I will leave it to others to critique the particulars among the 75 selections over five CDs. But no one, I think, would deny that any examination of big bands during these years also invites an analysis of the evolving art of the arranger and the arranger/composer, whose blueprints lie at the heart of what comes out of the horns.

In glancing over these particulars, which range from Duke Ellington to the Willem Breuker Kollektief and Tom Pierson, one is prompted to wonder: Is arranging as we know it becoming a lost art, exiled to a marginal life of perpetual experimentation? There is much to suggest it could be, because the fortune of the arranger is ultimately bound up in the larger fate of the big band. And you know what's happened to *them*.

"Arranging is alive and well," says Kirchner, 42, with a brave smile. Yet, in his Smithsonian notes he writes this: "Professional opportunities... are not expanding but may in fact be diminishing .... In recent years it has become the norm for aspiring leaders of big bands to produce—and pay—for recordings of their groups.... The days when big-band leaders made lots of money are obviously long gone."

"It is a lost art," says Bob Belden, 38, who claims to make about half his income doing charts in any voice the customer wants. "Face it. When you look at how arranging is applied to professional situations, it's virtually ignored. The fact that I'm working when so many of the giants are idle is proof enough that it's a lost art."

One of those giants is Gerry Mulligan, whose contributions to the art include four of the 1949 Miles Davis nonet pieces for Capitol as well as important work with his Concert Jazz Band of the late '50s and early '60s, featuring trombonist Bob Brookmeyer.

"It couldn't be a lost art," Mulligan insists, "not when you've got the kind of practitioners you do today who know the big band inside-out and are teaching other generations behind them. There's some great writing going on."

"But it's [going on] in the major universities," Belden counters. "Once you get past the school, there's almost no function for it. Look at all these 'young lions.' How many have made a *Miles Ahead* [for Miles Davis] or *Perceptions* [for Dizzy Gillespie]? They're chicken. Ninety percent of the arranger's art is having a voice to write for."



Thad Jones remains interesting today for changes he brought to the Count Basie sound in the '50s.



Bandleader Artie Shaw (left) had a practical philosophy about commercialism and arranging: "Three chords for beauty, and one to pay the rent." Today, the ratio is reversed at best.

Then where are the "voices"? The Smithsonian boxed set identifies and explores four classes of professional big bands in which the arranger has worked over the last 50 years:

- Road bands, the touring survivors of the swing era and now almost extinct;
- Part-time bands, sometimes called "rehearsal bands," of which Thad Jones-Mel Lewis was the matrix;
- Studio bands, as in the one that Gil Evans assembled for Miles Davis and that Sauter-Finegan built, just for recording;

• Avant-garde bands.

Note that apart from the rare road band, none is self-supporting and permanent anymore. This has consequences for the arranger. There is no rehearsal scale in recording, for instance. And without rehearsal time to shake down a complex chart to the point where it becomes second nature, arrangers may instead write direct, straightforward material that can be played quickly without a lot of fine-tuning and roadblock removal. Volume masks nuance. Others arrangers, out of time pressure or deference to the players,



## Gerry Mulligan



**"It couldn't be a lost art, not when you've got the kind of practitioners you do today who know the big band inside-out.... There's some great writing going on."**

write minimally—a one-chorus open, a half-chorus ride-out, with five minutes of solos and comping in between. Consider Gil Evans' slapdash writing of the '80s. "That's about 80 percent of what I do," says Belden. "My charts are designed to feature soloists. I take my personality out of it. I'm not Marty Paitch, Bill Holman or Bob Florence."

Indeed, such environmental factors have an impact on the way arrangers write. "And if they don't, they should, because you have to have a little consideration for the poor bastards who have to play it," says Mulligan. "I still write to my own limitations as a musician, although with such incredible young musicians and readers now, I probably don't have to pull my punches. I underwrite."

There are other effects, too. When arranging jobs become irregular, so do work habits. In 1988 James Moody ran into Benny Carter on a Chicago street corner. Carter seemed preoccupied and Moody asked why. He said he had to start a new work he was due to premier at the Chicago Jazz Festival. "When?" Moody asked. "Tomorrow night," Carter said, a little embarrassed. Moody's eyebrows arched. "Ooooooh," he said, "a lot of whole notes!" Whole notes, as any arranger knows, wrestle a deadline to submission a whole lot faster than quarter or 16th notes.

**W**hen Carter and his contemporaries were in their prime, the demand for big band arrangements—whether jazz or pop, records or network radio—was huge. It created a flow of work and an infrastructure that drew upon, supported and rewarded the best arranging talent. Money, interaction and daily exercise kept arrangers' skills constantly sharp, focused and fast. (Today that infrastructure is kaput.)

If practice kept skills sharp, a gigantic audience with alert ears kept them disciplined and in line. The dark side to this, of course, was that arrangers were often captives of the formulas audiences expected of their bandleaders. It was confining and occasionally oppressive, especially if you were with the wrong band. Artie Shaw had a practical philosophy about commercialism: "Three chords for beauty, and one to pay the rent." (Today, the ratio is reversed at best.) The arranger pressed at the edges of the envelope at his peril because big band jazz was very popular, and there was much to lose by pressing too far.

Then there is the matter of the soloist. From the '20s through the '40s, jazz was a Jekyll-and-Hyde affair in which arranger and soloist vied for control of the master plan. But despite the magnificent detentes engineered by such masters as Fletcher Henderson, Eddie Sauter, Jerry Grey, Jimmy Mundy, Sy Oliver and Gil Evans, hard-core jazz fans and critics always believed in their hearts that the truest jazz came in small packages and spoke through the soloist's voice. By 1950 bebop had captured the young jazz audience and the singer/entertainer had run away with the pop market. Both ways, the soloist won. The big band as a reflection of the collective culture was caught in a pincer and left stranded in. By the mid-'50s, Miles Davis would become the last important solo innovator to emerge in jazz with any important big band experience on his resume.

Today, alas, there is little to lose. The estrangement between big band and audience is settled. "By the time you got to Thad Jones-Mel Lewis in 1966," Belden says, "that's where the audience left the bands."

So the arranger who is driven by love, not money, is at least entitled to a sense of artistic satisfaction for his underpaid labors. He writes for himself, his fellow musicians and any followers sophisticated enough to listen. The discipline of the dance-oriented market is no longer there and neither is its cash. "It's been kept alive by the love of the idiom itself," says Mulligan.

Bands and arrangers may have lost their franchise on innovation at the end of swing's golden era, but they retained a

residual momentum and the best of them looked for fresh challenges. Arrangers such as George Russell, Manny Albam and Chico O'Farrill briefly turned Artie Shaw, Charlie Barnet and Benny Goodman into alarmingly avant-garde leaders. And Mulligan rattled Gene Krupa's cage with his writing. But the price of such adventures was high. The older audiences stuffed cotton in their ears, while the young ones found it unconvincing. It was a no-win gambit for all concerned. For these leaders, radical innovation presented too many risks from the inside at a time when economics threatened from the outside.

**N**ew bandleaders without deeply defined prewar roots fared better. Stan Kenton had always aspired to be listened to, not danced to, and writers such as Pete Rugulo, Bill Russo, Gene Roland and Bill Holman shaped his book for the concert hall. It was to be the campus, though, that ultimately spared Kenton and other bands from the



**Bob Belden**

chopping block in the '60s and after. "Kenton started a whole movement going," says Mulligan. "That, more than anything, kept the techniques of big band arranging and performance alive until a better time. That's where the critical mass is today—the schools."

For other bands, the new freedom that came to their arrangers was liberating and intoxicating. George Handy threw fox trots to the winds and wrote bold, cubist pieces for Boyd Raeburn that were closer to Stravinsky than swing ("Dalvatore Sally," "Over The Rainbow"). Not to be topped, Woody Herman commissioned and recorded "Ebony Concerto" from



Stravinsky himself. The music was iconoclastic, challenging, full of dissonant virtuosity, and to all but the hippist ears, unlistenable.

Meanwhile, Neal Hefti, Ernie Wilkins, Thad Jones and Frank Foster seemed to find a more perfect entente between arranger, musician and audience. It took shape in the book they helped build in the early '50s for Count Basie. Their charts set a pattern promptly adopted by Tommy Dorsey, Harry James and others.

Woody Herman gave his arrangers—from Nat Pierce and Bill Holman in the '60s to Alan Broadbent, Gary Anderson, John Fedchock and Maria Schneider later on—an even wider birth of autonomy as he tried to embrace fusion rock. "In that regard, though, Buddy Rich was the most successful," notes Belden. "And out of Buddy came Bob Mintzer."

But it was the Basie arrangers who became the most widely imitated musical architects of the postwar years. Their influence also touched some of the best contemporary pop music. It's worth noting that Nelson Riddle, Billy May, Buddy Bregman and others drew on Basie when they arranged some of the

**"It's a lost art. Face it. When you look at how arranging is applied to professional situations, it's virtually ignored.... Ninety percent of the arranger's art is having a voice to write for."**

most enduring, if underappreciated, work ever written for such vocalists as Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat Cole and Bing Crosby.

But probably their greatest innovation, beyond cleverness and specific elements of style, was to fill the vacuum left by the soloist's migration to the combo world. They made it possible, in effect, to institutionalize a cult of personality within a band without the need for a flesh-and-blood person.

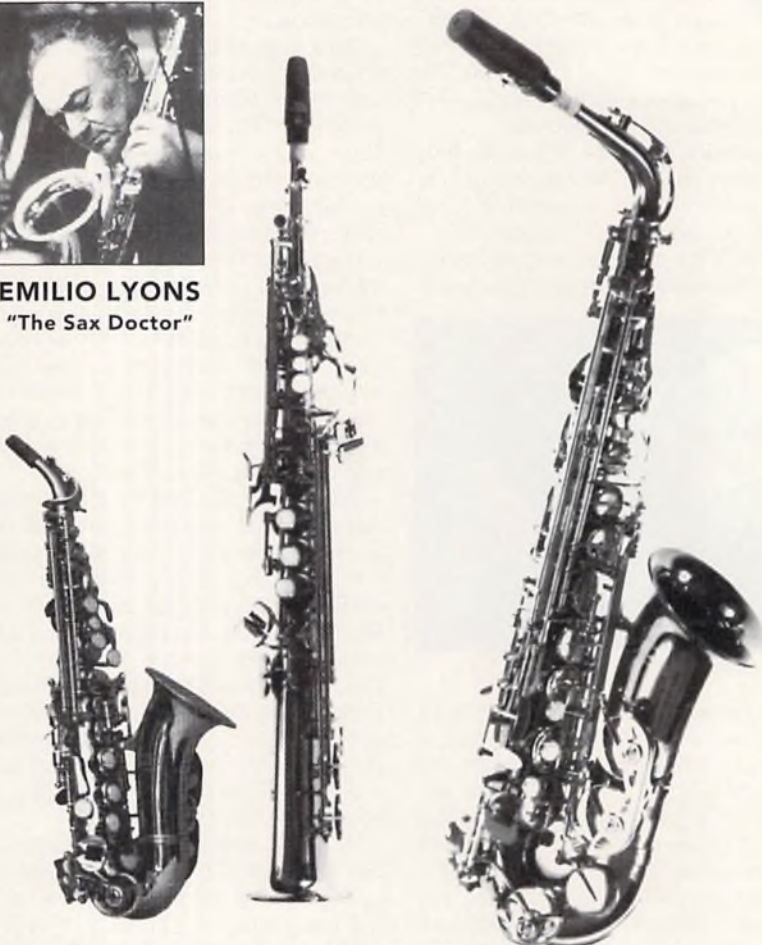
It came not a moment too soon, for the writing was on the wall and it spelled mortality. If we are mortal, an arrangement is forever, as touring versions of the Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey and Jimmy Dorsey bands first demonstrated in late '50s and continue to do today. In the '70s and '80s, the ranks of the ghosts swelled. And they were augmented in the '80s and '90s by a new twist cut from the tradition of the symphony: the jazz repertory orchestra—like the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, Mingus Dynasty, the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band and the Chicago Jazz Ensemble—where the arrangements are the stars and the musicians are servants of music not their own.

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# Today's Market: Big Bands on Campus

**B**ill Holman began his career as arranger/composer with Charlie Barnet in 1950 and went on to leave his signature on Stan Kenton in the '50s, Woody Herman in the '60s and Buddy Rich in the '70s. His current CD, *A View From The Side* on JVC, is one of the too-infrequent outings by the Bill Holman band.

In America, he notes, almost the only place where professional talent can hear their music is at a non-professional venue: the university. Holman, whose work with Tony Bennett and on Natalie Cole's *Unforgettable* album amounted to



Bob Brookmeyer

about the only serious big band work he's done for the commercial market, is a case in point. In recent years his writing has been played often by the University of Nevada band in Las Vegas. "So I don't know that you can make a distinction," says Holman, "between the professional and nonprofessional. For example, Bob Mintzer is one of the more successful big band writers around. Yet his music is played more in schools than in commercial places. How would you classify him?"

"If I were to name a half-dozen arrangers who I consider the best today, I expect you'd hear the same names on the academic side. On the top of my list I'd probably put Bob Brookmeyer, who really doesn't want to be known as a jazz writer anymore because he doesn't like the restrictions the word carries. Also Rob McConnell, Maria Schneider certainly, Toshiko Akioshi, and Johnny Mandel, whom I consider to be one of the most accomplished jazz writers even though he hasn't written a lot of jazz for some years. I would also mention Mike Abene and a guy in L.A. called Joey Sellars, but he's a young writer who's been doing some great things."

**N**eal Slater, director of the prestigious jazz program at the University of North Texas, says the hot

arrangers at the college level include Thad Jones, Maria Schneider and Bob Brookmeyer. Each exposes the student to a different view of the art of arranging.

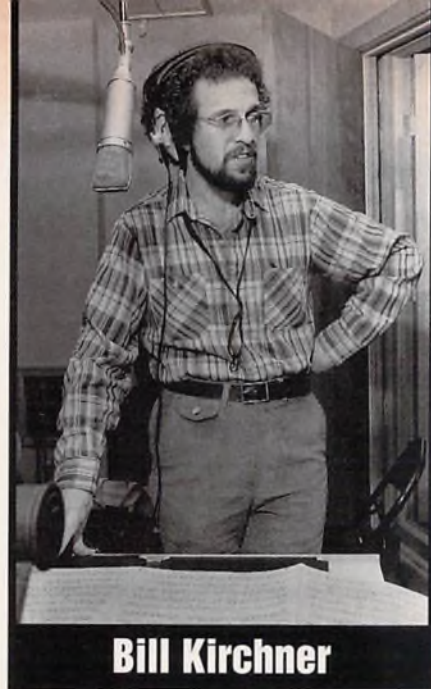
"Brookmeyer is a real master who has gone almost classical in recent years," says Slater, taking his examples alphabetically. "Though his compositions leave a lot of room for improvisation, they are extremely tight and interesting to play. Some of his lines may be easy taken by themselves, but the work it takes to make them fit together is hard. There was a chart Bob did on 'Skylark' that wasn't technically difficult, but each section had places where it was very exposed and every note was not only important but clearly heard. Pitch and intonation demanded great care. It was difficult because it depended on the excellence of a few at times."

Thad Jones, who died in 1986, remains contemporary and interesting for the changes he brought to the Basie sound in the '50s, Slater says. "When you think of the Basie band, you think of block section chords: the first alto plays an octave higher than the baritone. But Thad would take the section differently. Each sax would play five distinct notes in a much more dissonant manner, using the upper harmonics of a chord and really stretching your ear. His work is an education in itself to students."

Of Maria Schneider, Slater says she was influenced by Brookmeyer and Gil Evans and "writes lines that are thick harmonically, yet compact. Not just doubled at the octave, but with a lot of colors. Over a four- or six-beat chord, there will be a shifting progression within the chord, as if shadows of light and color were passing through it. Her work has a composed quality. When backgrounds emerge, they come out of things that have happened before and provide an underpinning of continuity."

"We play the work of the veterans because they were always changing and developing. We play contemporary writers because they have grown out of the work of the veterans."

Surprisingly, Slater says, the writing that takes the greatest pains is the really old material. "The students here are very much into repertoire," he says. "Everybody goes through it, but it's hard because you're trying to be faithful to a specific style. We have a dance book we play with everything from Glenn Miller to Buddy Rich. Everybody's into it, and it's my chance to work on stylistic things" —J.M.



Bill Kirchner

**"I can think of a lot of arrangers who are doing great work.... But they'd be the first to tell you they don't make a living with big band writing."**

**M**eanwhile, out there in the real world, legitimate arrangers today face a small and often humbling marketplace for their skills: ad agencies, TV work and other bric-a-brac. "I can think of a lot of arrangers who are doing great work," says Kirchner. "Mike Abene has been one of the unsung heavyweights since the early '60s. Bob Mintzer has done several big band records. But they'd be the first to tell you they don't make a living with big band writing."

Younger arrangers such as Mintzer, Fedchock, Schneider and many others pick up extra money through publishing deals with companies that provide charts to the education market. "They are the ones who the young music students are looking up to," says Belden, "not Basie or Ellington, not in terms of making it really swing hard. The arranger's art may be nearly lost in the real world, but in the schools it's burning."

So music schools generate new generations of arrangers destined to do their arranging for a one-person orchestra playing to a one-person audience on a computer. "A decade or so ago when *Miami Vice* was popular," Kirchner notes, "Jan Hammer would write a whole score in his basement in upstate New York and FedEx it to L.A. That really started the trend to just have your own MIDI studio and record your own music yourself."

An art without an audience may be lost, but not dead. Documents like the Smithsonian boxed sets are there to be studied and extended whenever enough people want to hear it. Meanwhile, the pros rest, not so much as custodians of a lost art as an exiled and solitary one. **DB**



## Marty Ehrlich & Tim Berne

# Liberal



**“One of the reasons  
you haven’t felt a change  
since Ornette emerged  
is... at that time there  
was nothing else like it.  
Now, you’ve got all  
these shades, a  
Threadgill or a Braxton.”**

—Tim Berne

By Jim Macnie

**T**he musical lives of Tim Berne and Marty Ehrlich have been weaving around each other for the past 20 years. Both saxophonists hit New York in the mid-to-late '70s, sharing interests in the kind of liberal investigations that wafted through the loft-jazz scene at the time. But instead of solely embracing the hyper expression that was a hallmark of the movement, each began to shape specific ideas into a much more refined take on what they heard as modernism. Curiosity regarding options

was the main parallel between the two. Harnessing myriad ideas—from Africa and Europe, from swing to squall—both Berne and Ehrlich came up with potent results.

Boldfaced character has become evident on both of their subsequent recordings, the combined number of which leaps into the double digits. Berne has a penchant for extended works that rely on discrete movements to advance the action. He’s a resourceful composer/arranger whose grand statements seldom slip out of his grasp. The moniker of one Berne band, Caos Totale, belies the well-considered guidelines he’s capable of issuing. The

three jMT releases by his Bloodcount group—*Poisoned Minds*, *Lowlife* and *Memory Select*—suggest that a quartet can sound symphonic. In October he completed a piece for the Kronos quartet, tentatively titled “Soul Fields.”

Ehrlich’s lyrical solos are equaled by his



# al Expressionists

gift for crafting luminous, pliable melodies. His current work being some of jazz's most emotionally rich, he's able to make the weighty seem whimsical. The bespectacled Ehrlich develops his various interests by maintaining distinct groups. His Dark Woods Ensemble currently uses cello and french horn to augment the family of reeds played by the leader. The DWE's *Just Before The Dawn* (New World) is gorgeous (see "CD Reviews" Dec. '95). An upcoming quintet disc on enja, entitled *New York Child*, will likely be as articulate and evocative as '94's *Can You Hear A Motion?*

Both hornmen, who are 41, who can ambush the expected and still come off as supporters of exquisite musical moments, participated in Julius Hemphill's memorial concert back in the spring. At one point both were members of Hemphill's Sextet. Each, especially Berne, had a deep relationship with the late saxist/composer. Our three-way chat took place on a scalding summer afternoon at Marty's East Village home. We ate grapes, discussed what Ornette tunes we whistle while doing the dishes (Tim: "Happy House"; Marty: "Congeniality") and laughed as much as we grimaced.

**JIM MACNIE:** *You're both cerebral and physical players.*

**MARTY EHRLICH:** Hopefully, it comes together. One of my preoccupations has been the contrast of rhythmic feels. That's important.

**JM:** *Here, at the end of the century there are other ways to accomplish having a physical presence. In Tim's music, there are times you feel like you're being mauled. It's overwhelming.*

**TIM BERNE:** That's timing; I'm into the drama of it all.

**ME:** I agree, I like the drama of Tim's music. Moments of suspension and transition... how one thing gets to the next thing. My presentation is quite different than Tim's. But that's a concern of mine, the dramatic shape. When I think of a piece, I often like to have the improvisation on the thematic material—melodic, textural, harmonic—happen before that material is stated as an unified head. I find that really exciting. The first I was aware of it was *Conference Of The Birds*, widely considered as Dave Holland's masterpiece. He does that. When it finally comes together, it's great.

There was something exciting about the music of the '70s—the Art Ensemble or the Braxton Quartet—you were always aware that they were always thinking of the whole. And that's something I think Tim and I want in our pieces, whether they're 40-minute pieces or two-minute pieces. Some of that stuff was uncanny. It gives me something to aspire to.

**JM:** *Even in late-period Trane, rather than hearing him as a soloist being catapulted, you can hear it as the band catapulting itself.*

**ME:** He also got into a long-line kind of thing, like on *Meditations*, extending beyond the suites. Everyone often talks about Trane in terms of intensity, intensity. But listen and you also hear tremendous restraint. There's too much made about the way he emoted. There's a lot of holding back in those pieces.

**JM:** *You guys have known each other for a long time.*

**TB:** I'd heard of Marty, he probably knew about me. At one point, me, you and Julius were living together. I couldn't even play, I was just beginning, and these guys would be playing so much. I'd go, "Oh man." Sit in my room. Inspiring but intimidating. I could play a few terrible notes.

**ME:** The loft was in downtown Brooklyn so we could play at 2 or 3 in the morning.

When I first got here, I went to hear music every night. Back then, you could go to the clubs for no money. You could nurse a beer at Basil's. Jazz at the Public Theater. I remember it fondly.

**TB:** I heard about 8,000 concerts at Rivbea and LaMama. Tin Palace. I've been in the area since '74.

**JM:** *So what are we going to miss with a figure like Julius gone?*

**ME:** That's a hard one.

**JM:** *Is having a mentor like him, someone who can disseminate ideas, crucial?*

**TB:** This is someone whose record *Dogon A.D.* changed my life. I was listening to Braxton and the Art Ensemble, and on the other side, soul music. But *Dogon* fused it together for me. Incredible groove, soulful tone, playing all this beautiful shit. At the time I thought he was getting the same effect as someone screaming by playing lyrically. The idea that you could play melodically and still get this incredibly emotional, visceral sound. It wasn't a question of either you played totally out or you played in.

**ME:** There was a specificity to his stuff that's not easy to get to—a directness. I never studied with him formally. In the last few years, he was my main employer. His music had deep roots and, on the other hand, it didn't sound like something you'd heard before. At times, he would write a piece in the idiom, such as "Spiritual Chairs," and they're not ersatz pieces. That's one of the most beautiful gospel pieces anyone's ever written.

**JM:** *You guys are in a steady position careerwise now.*

**TB:** I don't think either of us are making any money, but I can record consistently, yeah. But that just means you've got someone paying for the documentation. But you can't just sit back and wait for the phone to ring. You have to stay about a year ahead of yourself. We do a lot of stuff as leaders, and that's when you make the least money. To pay a band on tour nowadays is hard. I've got this guy Stefan [Winter] on jMT who saves my ass every year.

**ME:** For me, it's a matter of wearing a fair amount of hats. I've made my living almost totally as a sideman. Recently, I've been leading a number of groups. But I still wear the hats; I have to. Seeing the world through other people's eyes isn't always bad. You learn.

**TB:** Working in [Michael] Formanek's band really helped me. Exposed to all this complex music that takes me to all these places and then get back to my shit and get revitalized.

**JM:** *Who of our generation has changed the saxophone language?*

**ME:** Kenny G. No, let's take it seriously. I have a problem with the question. Seems like we're at a point where... people ask: "When's the next Coltrane or Miles going to come?" I don't think that's going to happen. The music is so big now. Nobody can encompass all of it. There are some really strong approaches out there. I'm not saying it's a finite language, but more about how people put it together. On the radio the other day, I heard "Funky Blues Again." [Johnny] Hodges, Bird and Benny Carter, and I enjoyed hearing it as one alto player. We talk so much of the differences—it's the similarities that are striking. So I don't buy into the waiting for the great-messiah thing.

**JM:** *But who could be the last one we could agree upon? Ornette?*

**TB:** One of the reasons you haven't felt a



change since Ornette emerged is because it's not going to happen as easily. At that time there was nothing else like it. Now, you've got all these shades, a Threadgill or a Braxton.

**ME:** And when you listen back to Ornette, what was the big deal? You hear the roots, the connections... he wasn't coming from Mars.

**TB:** You've got these guys like Roscoe [Mitchell], Braxton, Julius and [Oliver] Lake, and they're all very individual. They may not have the impact as saxophonists, like Coltrane; but as minds, they're pretty individual. They got me into music.

**JM:** *I'm not trying to push some form of mono-reedism; I'm trying to find out your skew on the horn.*

**ME:** I think maybe Benny Carter is the most creative improviser out there now. You could make a good argument. I caught him, and he's playing superb. Speaking of Ornette, he was so successful at creating his whole musical environment. That opened up a lot for a lot of people. So I'll throw out an issue: to what extent you can define your own reality is important. That wasn't so much the case in the '40 and '50s, when you really had to prove your ability to play blues and the pop tunes of the day to work. That's one reason why it's hard to say that THIS PERSON IS THE BEST AT THIS. In a sense we have the ability to create our own total musical presentation. That's not necessarily always good; there are a lot of lousy original presentations out there. But it does, hopefully, give one the ability to get to what they really should be doing. And that opened in the '60s and '70s. About your question of who's changing the music: in this whole question of tradition, one thing I resist is talking about people merely as instrumentalists. To me, the excitement in jazz, as compared to classical, is that you're not just a player of an instrument—you're a creator of a whole music. So I like to think, "What's the context?"

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—Marty Ehrlich

**JM:** "How High The Moon"?

**ME:** Well, "How High The Moon" is not a piece of dead music. I mean, it has by no means been exhausted. That tune is as interesting a challenge as anything else. But at some point, it might not be.

**TB:** It's about why you're playing it. If someone's playing it 'cause they love it, it's probably going to be pretty convincing. But if they're playing because they're trying to get a record date on some label that makes you play four standards and three originals... you've got to be yourself. Way back when I heard rumors about some guys wanting me to do a record with a big-name rhythm section playing standards, I just cracked up. That kind of shit is dumb.

**ME:** I do "Johnny Come Lately" because I want to do it. It feels to me like it fits into my background. I think Tim's one-hundred percent right. So much weird music happens otherwise.

**TB:** The term "standard" has such an odd connotation. Negative. People say, "Oh, I wouldn't be bothered." It's just a song, a good song. Call it that. Anybody who is dedicated can make music out of that. If you're doing it as a study, it probably sounds like a study.

**ME:** Technique is having the tools to express what you need to express. The debate over whether Monk could play piano went on for years. He could do

certain things that no one else could, in a totally virtuosic manner, and could play his own music. That's all you need. Who knows? Maybe at times he wished he could play like Art Tatum. Miles said when he realized he couldn't play like Dizzy and stopped trying, things got a lot better for him.

**JM:** *Does being multi-instrumentalists help you compose? Does it trigger compositional opportunities?*

**ME:** I've really liked having this large palette of sounds. It helps compositionally, in the pacing of an evening. It helps my ear. It's also helped me work with other people. With two saxophones, between Stan Strickland playing flute and soprano and my horns, it feels bigger—right there, you've got orchestration possibilities.

**TB:** Me, too. Chris Speed plays clarinet, I play baritone, there are a lot of combinations, and when the guitar comes, it's as big as I want it to sound. I've always liked the low register of the alto, so it was logical to go down. Never liked the tenor or soprano; maybe it's a B<sup>b</sup> thing. Baritone suits me. Again, I like the idea of being a bit uncomfortable on bari, and hoping that something fresh arises from that.

**JM:** *Do you share your musical quandaries with others? Who do you exchange ideas with?*

**ME:** I think that the most valuable time is in the actual working it out with the group. That's a lot of what this music's about. Until you do it, it's a bit hard to get the whole picture.

**TB:** That's why having a band is so great. I have guys that want to come over and work it out. They say, "No man, let's do the new ones!"

**JM:** *Are you feeling more articulate in middle age?*

**TB:** No, it gets harder.

**ME:** When I was 17, Lester Bowie told me, "Music gets harder, not easier." It's true: the more you know, the more you have to judge things.

DB

#### EQUIPMENT

Tim Berne plays a Selmer Mark VI alto saxophone, Berg Larson 110/3 mouthpiece. Vandoren 3 1/2 reeds. His baritone is a Selmer Mark VI, with Ria mouthpieces #8s and #3s. He uses Vandoren reeds. "I hate computers," he says, when asked about compositional software.

Marty Ehrlich plays a B<sup>b</sup> Buffet clarinet with Vandoren mouthpieces. "I have

two bass clarinets, Selmers, with mouthpieces by Bill Street. I play Selmer saxes, my alto with various Myer mouthpieces and a tenor that uses a metal or rubber Otto Link. My soprano has a Selmer mouthpiece. And I play a Powell flute with a Lillian Berkhardt headjoint."

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

##### Marty Ehrlich

*JUST BEFORE DAWN*—New World Countercurrents 80474

*FALLING MAN* (with Anthony Cox)—Muse 5398

*DARK WOODS ENSEMBLE*—Emergency Peace New World 80409

*THE TRAVELERS TALE*—enja 79630

*PLIANT PLAIN*—enja 5065

*THE WELCOME*—Sound Aspects 0026

##### with various others

*THE HEARINGA SUITE*—Black Saint 120102 (Muhai Richard Abrams)

*ONE LINE. TWO VIEWS*—New World Countercurrents 80469 (Muhai Richard Abrams)

*FAT MAN AND THE HARD BLUES*—Black Saint 120115

(Julius Hemphill)

*FIRST PROGRAM IN STANDARD TIME*—New World Countercurrents 80418 (New York Composers Orchestra)

*LARKS. THEY CRAZY*—Sound Aspects 026 (Robin Holcomb)

*SONG FOR (SEPTET)*—New World Countercurrents 80452 (Mario Pavone)

*LOW PROFILE*—enja 8050 (Michael Formanek)

*WEATHER CLEAR. TRACK FAST*—enja 79667 (Bobby Previte)

*HUE AND CRY*—enja 8064 (Bobby Previte)

##### Tim Berne

*MEMORY SELECT* (Bloodcount; to be released)

*LOW LIFE*—jMT 697 124 054 (Bloodcount)

*POISONED MINDS*—jMT 697 124 055 (Bloodcount)

*PACE YOURSELF*—jMT 834 442 (Caos Totale)

*NICE VIEW*—jMT 314 514 013 (Caos Totale)

*FRACTURED FAIRY TALES*—jMT 834 431

*DIMINUTIVE MYSTERIES (MOSTLY HEMPHILL)*—jMT 514 003

*SANCTIFIED DREAMS*—Columbia 440753 (out of print)

*THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN*—Empire 24

##### with various others

*MINIATURE*—jMT 834 423 (Joey Baron, Hank Roberts)

*LOOSE CANNON*—Soul Note 121261 (Michael Formanek, Jeff Hirshfield)

*...THEORETICALLY*—Empire 72 (Bill Frisell)

*FIVE CHORD STUD*—Black Saint 120140 (Julius Hemphill)



# Cannonball Adderley

## The Responsibilities of Success

By Don DeMicheal

*The following "Classic Interview" with Julian "Cannonball" Adderley is reprinted from our June 21, 1962 issue. We find the alto saxophonist at a high point in his career, reflecting on the huge success of his group with brother/cornetist Nat.*

**C**annonball Adderley, sometimes called Julian, is that rare jazz musician who is able to communicate verbally as well as musically. He is a loquacious man. At almost any time, no matter the place, the rotund altoist will speak on any subject pertaining to jazz, be it business, musical techniques or criticism. He seldom minces words.

The gotta-be-a-jazz-musician seed was planted deep in Adderley by the time he was graduated from Florida A&M College in 1948, a few months before he turned 20. But he went into teaching instead of playing and became a high-school music instructor in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

"I was thoroughly disgusted at that time," he said. "I had my heart set on being a musician all my life, and there was nothing. These were really the dark ages, 1947-8-9-50. There was just nothing happening. No big bands. The giants of jazz were in poor shape financially. There was nothing going on."

In the fall of 1949, he worked a few weeks in a Miami club. But other than these few playing engagements, Adderley's alto was idle until 1950, when he went into the army.

"I decided to go into the [army] band. And that's the only reason I got back into music from a performer's point of view, because I was through. It meant nothing to me any more. I'd been practicing all my life, and there was no outlet for it."

During his service tenure, most of it at Fort Knox, Ky., Adderley received encouragement from all who heard him, including the members of traveling bands passing through. But after his discharge from the army in 1953, Adderley returned to Florida and teaching.

In the summer of 1954 his brother, Nat, who had completed the academic requirements for a teaching certificate after his army discharge, came to Fort

Lauderdale to play the summer with his older brother. At the end of the summer Nat joined Lionel Hampton's band and subsequently toured this country and Europe. Nat's letters to his brother describing the tours did nothing to lessen Cannonball's determination to play.

The Adderleys joined forces with Buster Cooper (who had played trombone with Hampton during part of Nat's stay with the band) and Cooper's brother and formed a "brothers band," planning to work the summer of 1955.

"We were going to work with Ruth Brown, or somebody," Cannonball recalled. "My first night in New York, Nat was out playing with Paul Williams, making some money, so we couldn't have rehearsal. The Cooper brothers and I went down to the Cafe Bohemia to see Jimmy Cleveland. We got there, and this Cafe Bohemia incident took place."

Adderley refers to his sitting in with the band, Oscar Pettiford's, and making such an impression that he not only got a job with the band but within a few days was signed to a recording contract as well.

"And from that point on," he said, "I was a confirmed jazz musician. Nothing else could interfere. Before I sat in I had envisioned going to school again. I had enrolled in New York University. I never went to class."

He did, however, have to return to Florida from September to Christmas in order to fulfill a teaching contract. In January 1956, the first Adderley quintet was formed.

"That was a mistake," Adderley says now. "But it was an effort. I could have worked with somebody else, gone back to New York and taken my chances freelancing, but by this time I was making 10 grand a year in Florida. I had this teaching at five grand, and I was making \$150 a week playing at night, plus I had a couple of side hustles. I sold automobiles, and I did quite well, too. I had the gift of gab. Old ladies, I could sell them any kind of car. It was hard to turn my back on all that and come to New York with nothing. So we decided to organize this band."

It was not successful. At the end of 1957,

Adderley broke up the band and joined Miles Davis. In September 1959, Adderley formed another quintet with brother Nat, as before, and met almost instant acceptance.

In retrospect, considering the success of Adderley's second group, it is puzzling that the first group did not catch on with the jazz public. The form and format were the same; the personnel was similar. Why did the first fail and the second succeed?

"It's tough to say," Adderley observed after reflection. "People are funny. The records we made then are selling three times as well now. I can't explain people's reluctance to attach themselves to a new group when there's not a reason for them to be interested in some personality in the group. Our group had no stars. There was no one in the group who was well known, including the leader—the leader was a newcomer.

"And there might have been some resentment. Mercury [with whom Adderley was under contract] was promoting me as the new Bird and all that foolishness—against my wishes; I had nothing to do with that. I talked to Bob Shad [a Mercury a&r man at the time] and he said, 'Our business is to sell records, and we feel this is the best way. That's all.'"

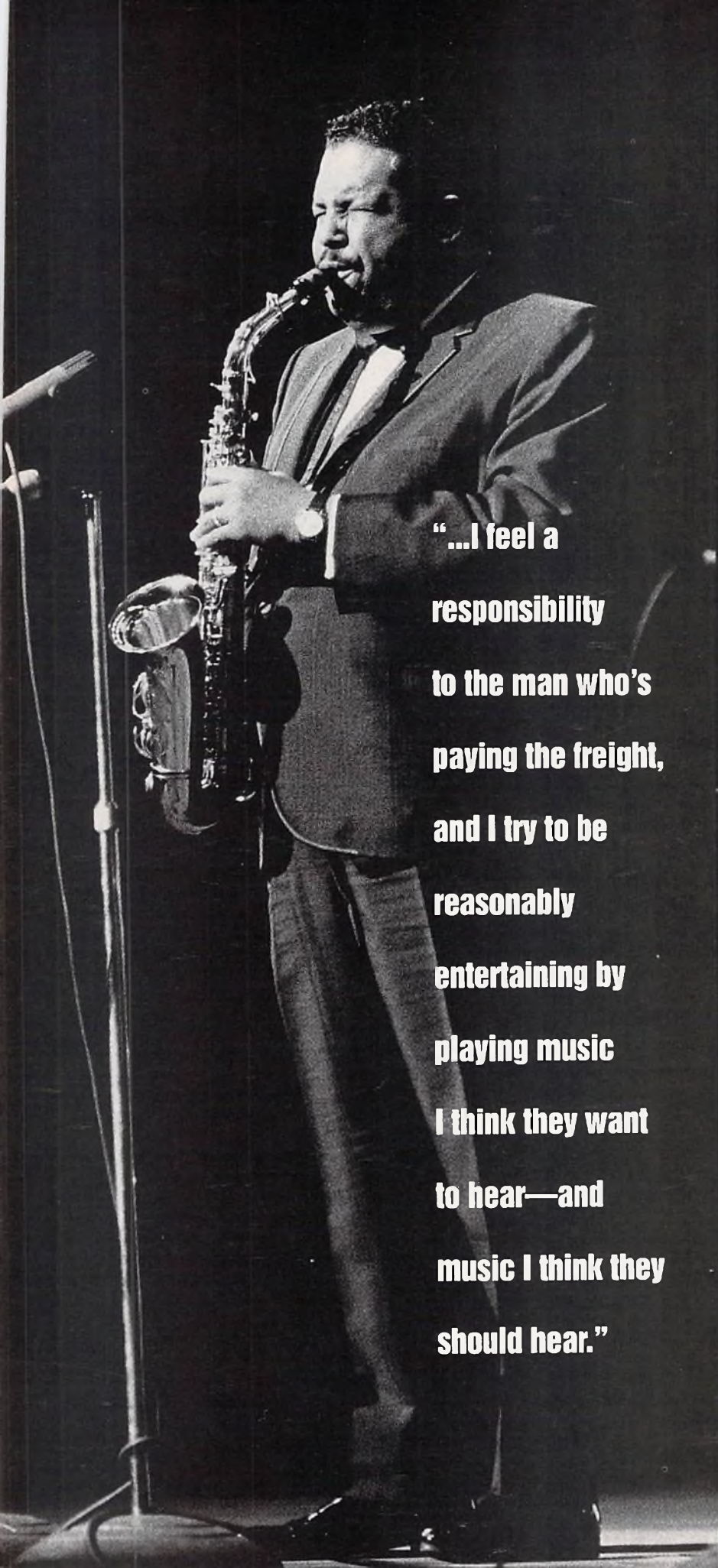
Perhaps one of the factors of the second group's success is Adderley's verbal communication; his announcements sometimes last as long as three or four minutes, are warm, witty and, by turn, down-home or erudite.

"I always announced the tunes," he said. "But I don't think I was as mature then as now. I guess there's been some development in our thing all around. Everybody's a better player now. You know, I learned a lot with Miles and Coltrane and those cats. I had never played with anybody before of their stature, musically and commercially."

It has been said that the Adderley group's success stems from Bobby Timmons' "Dis Here" (not "This Here," according to Adderley), soul jazz, formula jazz. Adderley denied this vigorously.

"We went into rehearsal," he said,





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referring to the group's formation period, "and we just played the music we enjoyed. There was nothing calculated about it, unfortunately; I wish there was. There was no formula."

If the answer to success lies not entirely in stage manner, and if there is no musical formula, then what is it that makes the Cannonball Adderley group popular? Most of the answer is in the leader's attitude toward music and audiences:

"If I'm going to play my horn for people and they're going to pay money to hear me, I have an obligation to them. They come to see you for a reason. If they didn't have a reason, they'd go see everybody. So if you make records, for instance, and they buy your records and come in and ask you to play those tunes from those records, I play them. I won't play that same tune over and over again. Even Coltrane will do that now; he'll play 'My Favorite Things' every time somebody asks for it, and he's bugging himself by doing it. I won't do that, because there are other people who didn't come just to hear a particular tune.

"However, I feel a responsibility to the man who's paying the freight, and I try to be reasonably entertaining by playing music I think they want to hear—and music I think they should hear.

"Programming is a serious thing. I have a sextet. Everybody in the band is a soloist. I have to have regard for the key the last tune was in, the tempo, who played a solo, what's requested, what's going—are we promoting this tune or that tune—or what have you. There's many things to think about.

"In addition to this responsibility to the audience, you have a responsibility to yourself, the band, your art. Where does the compromise come? I will make mine by playing things I think will proliferate the art on a concert stage and before a captive audience or one that's there to see you because you're an artist rather than somebody who's out on a Friday or Saturday night to drink liquor.

"And you have to keep the guys in the band happy. Guys in my band own homes and automobiles and things. There's a reason for it."

One thing Cannonball Adderley has done is to be successful financially doing what he must do. There have been implied condemnations for his being successful. The condemnations smell of sour grapes, especially when it is realized that most jazzmen are as interested in making money, much money, from jazz as they are in the artistic side of the music.

Adderley summed up his feeling about being a jazzman and being financially solvent succinctly: "I see no reason why jazz musicians should not live well simply because they're jazz musicians and artists. Responsibility to the art doesn't mean you have to be hungry."

**DB**



# Testifyin' The Blues

**J**oe Louis Walker doesn't just play the blues. He testifies, preaching with the gutbucket intensity of a blues elder and incinerating his tunes with high-voltage guitar blasts stadium rockers would die for. At 45, Walker's entrenched into a blues groove that finds him playing at the top of his game. He's not only racking up points with impressive recordings (his latest, *Blues Of The Month Club*, is his third for Verve and arguably his strongest album to date), but he's also become a hot commodity on the road, closing the year with whirlwind touring throughout North America and Europe as well as in Turkey and Japan.

In between rollicking gigs at the Monterey Jazz Festival (two sets, including a fiery showcase in the main arena) and a paint-blistering exhibit the following weekend at the San Francisco Blues Festival, Walker enjoyed a respite from the blue zone to relax at his Bay Area home and reflect on his steady rise into the blues upper echelon. A native of San Francisco, he recalls the mid-'60s when the city was in the throes of a blues revival. It was also a time of musical exploration and cross-pollination, when it wasn't unusual for psychedelic rock, jazz and blues groups to split bills and share licks. Walker received his hard-driving blues tutelage in Mike Bloomfield's band. During this time, Walker jammed with such roots-oriented rockers as the Grateful Dead, Al Kooper and Steve Miller, and even found himself rubbing shoulders with Jimi Hendrix.

"A lot of people think I started playing the blues in the mid-'80s, but I was gigging in the '60s," explains the gap-toothed, wide-shouldered Walker. "I was living the blues lifestyle during a time when everything was excessive. Let's just say, I almost died. I had to find another way to live. That's when I immersed myself in gospel music."

In 1975, Walker joined the Spiritual Corinthians, a stint that lasted 10 years and resulted in one album and a date at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, which is where his interest in playing the blues was rekindled. He says, "During my gospel music days, I learned that playing from the heart gives the music its purity. I discovered that a career in music is not about making money. And for me it's not about singing those going-down-the-river-to-shoot-my-baby songs. Someone else can do that. When I was ready to play the blues



Joe Louis Walker

again, I carried all that I learned with me, so that now I try to look at things with a positive slant. That's the testifying part of my music." With other valuable lessons in making ecstatic and inspirational music under his belt, Walker rejoined the blues fold in 1985, forming the first incarnation of his backup band, the Bosstalkers. Their immediate popularity garnered them a record contract the next year.

Walker recorded five albums for Hightone Records, the Oakland roots label that gave Robert Cray his start. "They nurtured me and let me make mistakes and grow up in the studio. I was fortunate. I would have never found myself as a blues musician if I hadn't had the freedom Hightone gave me." As for all the hype about being the next Cray, Walker says it wouldn't have been so bad except for the fact that critics likened his muscular blues to Cray's soul-sweetened varietal. "But, who knows, maybe if I had continued playing the blues from 1975 to 1985, people would have been saying Robert Cray was going to be the next Joe Louis Walker."

Despite the erroneous comparisons, Walker was quick to be recognized by the blues community. He scored W.C. Handy Awards as Contemporary Artist of the Year from 1988-'90, the Big Bill Broonzy Award from the French Academy of Jazz in 1987 and the BBC's Blues Band of the Year prize in 1990. In addition, he wrote

tunes for both Branford Marsalis' *I Heard You Twice The First Time* and B.B. King's 1993 Grammy-winning album *Blues Summit*. More recently, Walker has been flexing his producer's muscles with Little Charlie & the Nightcats (*Night Vision*) and Otis Grand (*He Knows The Blues*). A recently completed project he's particularly excited about is his appearance on James Cotton's upcoming all-acoustic trio album, which also features Charlie Haden.

In 1992, Walker signed with Polygram Jazz France/Verve as one of its first blues artists. He released *Blues Survivor* in 1993 and *JLW* in 1994. For *Blues Of The Month Club*, he enlisted guitar legend Steve Cropper, of Booker T. & The MGs fame, to co-produce. "They say you don't want to meet your heroes," Walker says. "But Crop breaks the mold. There's not an egotistical bone in his body. He was ordained to come in and give these songs his stamp of approval." In addition to his trademark bruisers, Walker offers a few catchy melodies sung with impassioned exuberance, a couple numbers drenched with Memphis Horns support, a spunky solo-acoustic-guitar outing and the slide-snarling gem of the bunch, "Bluesifyin'," a largely autobiographical testimony. On it, Walker sums up his blues life by recommending his own epitaph: "Here's a pickin', slidin', singin', ridin', bluesifyin' son of a gun." Amen.

—Dan Ouellette





Jon Mayer

## Child Of Bop Reborn

**J**on Mayer sees himself as “the Rip Van Winkle of jazz,” a pianist who made his mark early with Jackie McLean and John Coltrane before abandoning the jazz world and eventually the piano altogether. At 57, he’s just getting around to releasing his debut as a leader, assuming a secure role as the lead soloist in Les McCann’s Magic Band and finding a whole host of challenges and opportunities as a new “kid” on the block.

“I’m more serious about the piano than at any time in my life,” says Mayer, who moved back to Los Angeles in 1991 and returned to performing for the first time in 12 years. “As a consequence, I’m playing better and changing. All of a sudden, I’m tapping something within myself and rediscovering the joy of connecting with my music.

“During all those years that I didn’t participate, I was always seeing the keyboard and thinking tunes and laying them out in my mind. That whole sort of internal dialogue or imaging continues. Combine it with the fact that I did lay off, and I’ve come back with the kind of energy that reminds me of when I was 18, and the music is that fresh again.”

The benefit of Mayer’s hiatus is apparent on *Round Up The Usual Suspects* (Pullen Music), a trio recording with Ron Carter and Billy Higgins. His approach to standards and the title track—the lone original on the CD—is thoroughly fresh, modern and melodic. The album’s focal points are its two blues: the ebullient standard “Red Top” and “Usual Suspects,” which he was inspired to write after seeing Coltrane perform at New York’s Jazz Gallery in 1960 with a new quartet.

Currently, Mayer views his playing as a mixture of a lot of Red Garland, some Bill

Evans and Erroll Garner, the joy of Wynton Kelly and a heavy blues foundation. “I’m a child of bebop. I was born into that era and was around for some of the most vital playing and players. I either knew, played with or heard the greatest players of the day, and it obviously had a formative impact.”

Indeed, Mayer learned early with some of the best. The New York City native was 19 when he recorded “Strange Blues” with McLean and 20 when he made the “I Talk To Trees” sessions with Coltrane. Despite some early classical training, he got his jazz chops in “kid bands” with the late Larry Gales and Pete La Roca before gigging regularly with Lou Donaldson, Donald Byrd and Kenny Dorham.

He started traveling internationally with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Big Band, Kai Winding and Dionne Warwick, but that ended when he couldn’t get a work permit in England during a stint with Sarah Vaughan. He wound up leading the band for the Manhattan Transfer in the 1970s and writing commercial jingles until personal problems kept him from continuing in music.

He tried to return to New York in the

late ‘80s and found no takers in the commercial field, yet he decided to stay. When he realized that was heading nowhere, he flew back to L.A. and gave himself a week to find employment. Mayer wound up with a job most any L.A. musician would kill to get: a six-month gig at a Beverly Hills restaurant where he could play jazz and not just background music. Within a couple of years, his trio (with bassist Bob Maize and Harold Mason on drums) was established as one of L.A.’s best, and he was working with Les McCann (who had earlier recorded Mayer’s “When It’s Over”) in a duet setting and with the electric Magic Band. As much as Mayer loves the way that setting brings out his rhythmic side, he’s found a unique power in the trio format.

“It’s really a consummate challenge to maintain interest for the listener. You become orchestral, you employ colors. The thing that makes the difference is dynamics. You take that, and the ‘bonding’ that occurs with three guys who become one person, and there’s no experience higher that I have ever tapped into.”

—Phil Gallo

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# Hard Bop Lives Up To Its Name

**T**he N.Y. Hard Bop Quintet has a lot to live up to. The band has named itself after the revered mid-'50s to mid-'60s outgrowth of bebop—a compelling, evocative style that had a darker, bluesier cast than its predecessor and sported alluring melodies on top of insistent, persuasive rhythms. The hard-bop period was epitomized by the emotional and deep music of Art Blakey, Horace Silver and Sonny Rollins.

This new Hard Bop unit is worthy of its namesake. The ensemble, started in the summer of 1991 and now represented by its debut release—*The Clincher* on the Swiss TCB label (distributed domestically)—is the real thing. Led by pianist Keith Saunders and featuring Jerry Weldon (tenor saxophone) and Joe



The N.Y. Hard Bop Quintet

Magnarelli (trumpet) in the front line, the band delivers mostly originals à la Silver and Blakey with a crackling intensity, high-level improvisations and a pure-pleasure mellifluousness that holds the listener rapt.

Don't be misled: This is no mere copycat crew. The Hard Bop's original tunes have a '50s flavor and groove but a '90s slant. Their numbers are all arranged to include introductions, interludes and climactic shout choruses. "Those elements add to the music," says Saunders, 35, who handles the arduous chore of bookings engagements. "We need as much variety as we can get, to

make the music interesting for the audience, and for us, too."

Saunders, Weldon and bassist Bim Strasberg first played as a unit on an ad hoc trip to Japan under the aegis of drummer Eddie Ornowski (who is now on hiatus and has been temporarily replaced by Clifford Barbado). Back home in New York, these 30-somethings decided to form a quartet, which became a quintet when Magnarelli brought Weldon (they'd met while on Lionel Hampton's band) to a jam session. "We couldn't not hire him. He's such an incredible, dynamic player, and he and Joe play melodies together as if they came from the same womb," says Saunders, a Van Nuys, Calif., native who's lived in Queens for a decade.

At first, the Hard Bop appeared solely in and around Manhattan, originally playing the defunct Village Gate and the Squire, and more recently at Visiones and Small's, where they performed in November. Now, there have been tours: two to California (in 1994 and early 1995) and one just completed to the Midwest, where the group performed in Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland and other climes.

While its members are dedicated, the Hard Bop still cannot thrive on the intermittent work it gets. Its members make a living working as sidemen, and occasionally as leaders (both Weldon and Magnarelli have albums out, *Five X Five* on Cat's Paw Records and *Bella Carolina* on Criss Cross, respectively).

"At one point, we were appearing two to three times a month in New York, as much as any new band," says Saunders. "But, ironically, now that the record is out, a couple of clubs that we played have closed and things are tighter."

The pianist offers this no-bull view of the band's future: "We love that we have a record. That gets us over the hump, separates us from other bands. But we need to work more, 20–22 weeks a year. That might get us noticed by a major promoter, would give us the chance to hone our music, let us see what we can do."

—Zan Stewart



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Peter Weller

## Actor Jazzed By Miles

As you enter his domain nestled high above L.A.'s famed Sunset Boulevard, Peter Weller's first order of business is to show off his pride and joy—a wall-sized original abstract painting bequeathed him by his departed hero and backstage hanging buddy Miles Davis. For Weller, an accomplished actor best known as the acrobatic icon "Robocop," being part of Miles' inner circle the last year and a half of the legend's life was the "grand privilege" of his own.

"Miles read in many movie-magazine blurbs what a huge jazz fan I was, and his entourage came up to me after a mindblowing gig at the Strand in Redondo Beach and said he wanted to meet me," recalls Weller, who has tried mastering the trumpet since age nine, when he got his first wind of *Miles Ahead*. "He spots me across the room, turns and sneers, and in playful disdain, rasps, 'Robocop?'"

Miles, who died in September 1991, knew some of Weller's more notable film work (which includes *Shoot The Moon*, *Naked Lunch* and the new sci-fi thriller *Screamers*, due out in January) and had heard of the actor's appearance with the old Tonight Show Band, when he played "Lover Man" alongside Doc Severinsen. "He always asked me what I was up to," Weller says. "When I'd mention some movie project, he'd say, 'I don't mean your career. When you gonna get a band together?'"

Before receiving his degree in dramatic arts and English from North Texas State, Weller majored for a year in the school's famed jazz program, but he abandoned it the minute he realized he wasn't going to approach the greatness of his idol.

Miles' encouragement, however, rekindled the Wisconsin native's jazz flame. Purely for fun, Weller and movie-star pal Jeff Goldblum (who specializes in avant-garde piano) jammed for friends at home and at parties off and on for three years, but it took another great jazz

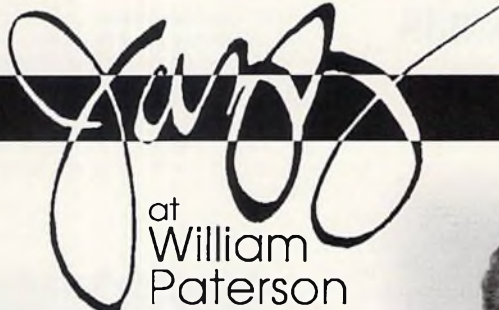
aficionado's cajoling for Weller to smell the coffee. "It was Woody Allen who really kicked me in the ass to go play live," says Weller, who stars in the director's latest venture, *Mighty Aphrodite*.

So, for the last year or so, on Saturday nights when the two are in town, Weller and Goldblum join guitarist Peter Harris (also Weller's theory teacher and noted Hollywood arranger) and, as The Three Guys From Italy, blow warm, breezy and occasionally out-there versions of standards like "As Time Goes By" and

"Stella By Starlight" at the chic La Petite Four on Sunset. And they're a hit.

Weller paid Miles back for his inspiration by scoring his Oscar-nominated 1994 directorial debut, the short film *Partners*, with unreleased Davis tunes. "His music was perfect for it, as if he scored it metaphysically," Weller muses. "His contribution to the world was like Mozart's, influencing so many people to find their voice. And inspiring me to master jazz the best I can."

—Jonathan Widran



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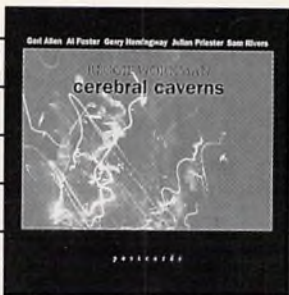
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## Reggie Workman

### Cerebral Caverns Postcards 1010

★★★★

**B**assist, composer, situation-maker and -shaper Reggie Workman delves deeply into musical possibility on his second very good (and exceptionally well-recorded) Postcards production. Beyond the powerful, mature modernism of '94's *Summit Conference*, Workman here explores a world apart from any genre's idioms, instrumental groupings or such-like conventions. It's as though he starts at the juncture of cohesion, complication and climax sought (and found) by the best post-'60s jazz; each track depends on the individual, imaginative virtuosity and intuitive interactive creativity of his carefully chosen colleagues to expose inner states of thinking-being and render them dynamically dramatic.

The ensemble's rich musical vocabulary retains jazz's definitive harmonic extensions, relentless rhythms and eternally blue ground—but abandon expectations, ye who enter, of such reassuring guideposts as constant swing or repeated melody. Instead: Workman's saw-toothed bow and reverberant pluck add to the icy ambiance of Gerry Hemingway's drum-triggered electronic/artic soundscape and Elizabeth Panzer's haunting harp atmospherics.

Workman's oak-solid bass tethers Sam Rivers' breathy, agitated flute, roaring tenor and beseeching soprano saxes, Julian Priester's bold, dark probes and Geri Allen's freely expressive and responsive piano forays. Workman strides securely atop Al Foster's ferocious tempi, and he's unselfconscious with Tapan Modak's tablas. Yet in trio (diffuse with Allen and Hemingway, at center with Panzer and Hemingway, pointillistic with Allen and Panzer), quartet (with Rivers, Panzer and Hemingway on the title track; Rivers, Priester and Foster on "Fast Forward"; Rivers, Allen and Hemingway on "Evolution"), or with all hands (Foster, Allen and Panzer sit out "Ballad," but everyone's on the relatively straight-ahead "Half Of My Soul"), Workman never limits the bass to the bottom. He's explicitly in force *everywhere*.

Rivers' musical voice, hoary and robust, imbues the music with another authoritative personality; his long-slanting soprano lines,

flurries and keening on "Evolution" are particularly strong. Allen blurs common distinctions between soloing and comping and is adept inside the piano on "Seasonal Elements," weaving a wiry web with Panzer, who works against mere prettiness with quirky twists and mysterious strums. Hemingway is rangy and coloristic—indeed, this entire team of spelunkers digs where we've seldom gone before, flooding dark chambers with their flashes of brilliance. What Workman brings to light on *Cerebral Caverns* is fantastically rare and rewards repeated listening.

—Howard Mandel

**Cerebral Caverns**—*Cerebral Caverns*; *What's In Your Hand*; *Fast Forward*; *Ballad Explorations*; *Hall Of My Soul* (*Tristan's Love Theme*); *Eastern Persuasion*; *Evolution*; *Season Elements* (Spring-Summer-Fall-Winter). (56:08)  
**Personnel**—Workman, bass; Sam Rivers, flute, tenor, soprano saxophones; Julian Priester, trombone; Geri Allen, piano; Gerry Hemingway, drums, electronic drum pads; Al Foster, drums; Elizabeth Panzer, harp, Tapan Modak, tablas.



## Eddie Palmieri

### Arete Tropijazz 81657

★★★★

**T**he charm and excitement that pervades an Eddie Palmieri album (or performance) starts with his piano. Wedding the surprise tonalities and blues feel of jazz to what has become his trademark sound of brass against so-called salsa rhythms, *Arete* is heard as an extension of last year's award-winning *Palmas*. Only this time, Palmieri's piano seems a tad more ubiquitous, to the delight of at least one reviewer.

Made up of eight originals, all arranged by the 59-year-old bandleader, *Arete* features Palmieri's octet in tow, a delightful mix of jazz and Latin players. And except for altoist Donald Harrison's vocal (I can't hear it) on "Sixes In Motion," *Arete* is an all-instrumental album (as was *Palmas*, a Palmieri first). The vivid production, courtesy of Palmieri and son Eddie II, is almost too bright tending toward brittle, the digital domain playing against the brass, bongo and even Palmieri's piano, which almost sounds like a digital keyboard.

Palmieri's trademark *masacote*, or synchronization of horns with the rhythm section,

defines his band. On past recordings, including *Palmas* and the delightful *Sueño* (from '89), this musical coexistence has favored airtight arrangements that tended to keep everyone busy, in the game. The effect was to almost marginalize Palmieri's solo contributions. Perhaps his piano voice has been seen as only one of many, as opposed to the distinctive solo voice, his octet in essence being his true voice.

And yes, *Arete* cooks with the alternating and coinciding teams of Harrison, trumpeter Brian Lynch (you'd swear he was doubling up), trombonist Conrad Herwig with Richie Flores on congas, bongo player Paoli Mejias, timbale/percussionist Jose Claussell, drummer Adam Cruz (on four cuts) and bassist John Benitez. And everyone gets solo space. The cooking, round-robin exchange of Lynch/Herwig/Harrison sets the stage for Palmieri's piano against Benitez's funky, dragging bassline on "Don't Stop The Train" only to be followed by Mejias' hot, hot, hot bongo playing. Indeed, the strength of *Arete* comes via the so-called jam sessions, whether it's in the *guajira*, or Cuban country style, as on "Definitely In," or the *descarga*, or jazz-style jam, of "Sixes In Motion." "Definitely In," for one, features some conventional swing against a salsa groove, while "Waltz For My Grandchildren" swings and swirls around Palmieri's Tynesque chords, his emphatic support punctuating everything.

But, at times, one can't help but wait for the arrangements to be done with to hear Eddie alone with his rhythm section. No offense, guys, but the real deal here is the cook in his own stew, lifting the music beyond what at times gives the appearance of a more traditional Afro-Cuban music, *masacote* or no *masacote*. Just listen to his chords against Benitez's bass lines or, later, Claussell's timbales on "Oblique": nothing fancy, just unlike anyone playing piano these days. When the horns lay out, the mood is completely different, the groove and the vamp taking on a mysterious, sensual brilliance. The fast-paced closer, "Sixes In Motion," is too damn short. Palmieri's juicy solo too brief. A section of horn riffs follows an opening percussion discussion with bass solo, is spiced by piano and alto only to return to more sizzling percussion, all of which fade after just under seven minutes. So much is started and left unfinished, leaving the listener asking for more of this crunched swinging of the Latin pulse.

*Arete*, like all Palmieri music, is filled with passion, delicious percussion and makes you want to move your butt. But it also sparkles with (a little more of) the hands of a master put to ivory. Here's to even more of the same.

—John Ephland

**Arete**—*Don't Stop The Train*; *Definitely In*; *Sisters*; *Crew*; *Waltz For My Grandchildren*; *Caribbean Mood*; *Oblique*; *Sixes In Motion*. (51:40)

**Personnel**—Palmieri, piano; Brian Lynch, trumpet; Conrad Herwig, trombone; Donald Harrison, alto saxophone, vocal (presumably on 8); Richie Flores, congas; Jose Claussell, timbales, percussion; John Benitez, bass; Paoli Mejias, bongo; Adam Cruz, drums (2, 3, 5, 7).





## Clusone Trio

**I Am An Indian**  
Gramavision 79505

★★★★½

Some modernists avoid the past in quest of the unheard; some postmodernists scabble at historical references for want of anything original to say. Clusone Trio neither aver the well-worn pleasures of yesteryear nor do they use pastiche as an easy out. Aggressive, playful, clamorous, baffling, romantic, cutting, diffident, fun—they're a perfect incarnation of the ambidextrous form of jazz that has been evolving in Holland over the last three decades.

*I Am An Indian* is the group's second record (of three). Consisting of live recordings from '93, it first appeared on Michael Moore's own Ramboy label. Kudos to a revamped and rejuvenated Gramavision for having the vision to re-release it for U.S. consumption.

Thoroughly drenched in swing, the threesome is powered by one of the most dynamic engines in today's jazz: drummer/percussionist Han Bennink. As buoyant and full of joy as Papa Jo Jones, Bennink can break from a full-tilt groove to release what sounds like a closet

full of junk, then dive right back in where he left off. He's also prone to play off or against his partners, and particularly in this trio he'll sometimes wander away from a group activity or play incongruously as if in another world. For listeners schooled in action/reaction improvising, such aloofness may be frustrating. But Bennink likes to disrupt those closely held values, challenging his audience to hear seemingly unconnected simultaneity as a valid approach to improvising.

And, when it comes down to it, he's in fact an incredibly close listener and responsive partner; he just looks for less obvious communication routes to travel.

Reed player Michael Moore is an absolute marvel. His soft tone and rhythmic panache give him a somewhat West Coast hue (betraying his California origins?) while an abiding love of Johnny Hodges is evident in his seemingly boundless melodicism. When Clusone turns to tunes like Irving Berlin's "The Song Is Ended," Bud Powell's "Celia" or Sebastião de Barros' "Sonoro," Moore's radiant tone sings out, though he's no stranger to sharper and more fragmented sound images, either. And now and then he'll whip out his melodica and blow plastic little chords for surreal effect. Surely the most versatile cellist around, Ernst Reijseger is perpetual thought-motion. He can lock in with Bennink, becoming Jimmy Blanton (if he's walkin') or Freddie Green (if he's strummin'). He's capable of being as gonzo and nutty as Bennink, as gentle and sweet as Moore, and adding sudden classical gasses (hear "Tsimshian"). On Dewey Redman's "Qow," he lays down a hard blues, hits slick licks and lithely doubles Moore's lines. And when Reijseger cuts loose, the sky's no limit.

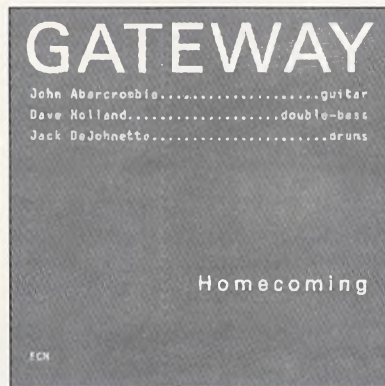
These very live-sounding recordings capture the thrilling trio mixing styles, eras, energies—reveling in the exuberance of jazz. Don't miss out.  
—John Corbett

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<b>CLUSONE TRIO</b> <i>I Am An Indian</i>		★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★★
<b>CHET BAKER</b> <i>The Legacy</i>		★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½



**I Am An Indian**—Wigwam; *Angelica: Tlinglit; I'm An Indian, Too: The Gig; I'm An Indian, Too; Oow; Bella Coola: Celia; Tsimshian; Sonoroso; Mijn Geheugen Is Een Zeef; The Song Is Ended; Salish.* (67:26)  
**Personnel**—Michael Moore, alto sax, clarinets, melodica; Ernst Reijseger, cello, voice; Han Bennink, drums, percussion, harmonica, voice, piano, electronics.



## Chet Baker

**The Legacy**  
 enja 9021

★★★½

If you have an ear for the meditative horn of Miles Davis against the transparent voicings of Gil Evans at the crest of their partnership,

you will find much here to like, even once removed, on this fine concert performance of Chet Baker with the North German Radio Orchestra recorded in 1987. Although Herb Geller (who sounds filtered through a P.A. system) and Walter Norris are also featured soloists, the music is preeminently a showcase for Baker, who has such a serene way with the trumpet you would swear you were listening to a flugelhorn. But if the jacket says trumpet, you gotta believe.

Baker died several months after this concert. He was 58 and still playing as well as ever. But his musical persona had never made anything more than the most modest demands on technique. Part of his more enduring legacy, in fact, was to help end the 30-year arms race of virtuosity that had brought jazz from New Orleans to bebop and demonstrate there were alternatives to high notes and faster tempos. Here, Baker is all still waters. He rarely drifts more than a few whole tones in any direction from any given tonic and almost never sends off so much as a ripple of vibrato. His long, doe-eyed notes are as unflinching in their pitch as an emergency-warning test on the radio. Another word for all this in lesser hands might be bland. But Baker remained a fine improviser at middle-to-moderate tempos and an evocative one at ballad speed, all qualities attractively displayed here.

Arrangers Jorg Keller and Horst Muhlbradt are responsible for the bulk of the orchestra-

tions, which are rendered softly and never fight the soloist. Both use muted brass and flutes in blends that clearly evoke Evans, especially in the introductions to "Here's That Rainy Day," "How Deep Is The Ocean" and "Django." When backing the soloist, they are soft, discrete and complementary without any special tricks up their sleeve.

—John McDonough

**The Legacy**—*Here's That Rainy Day; How Deep Is The Ocean; Mister B; In Your Own Sweet Way; All Of You; Dolphin Dance; Look For The Silver Lining; Django; All Blues.* (52:58)

**Personnel**—Baker, Lennart Axelsson, Heinz Habermann, Manfred Moch, Paul Kubatsch, trumpet; Wolfgang Ahlers, Hermann Plato, Manfred Grobmann, Egon Christmann, trombone; Herb Geller, Jochen Ment, Stan Sulzman, Harald Ende, Werner Ronfeldt, saxophones; Wolfgang Schluter, vibraphone; Walter Norris, piano; John Schroder, guitar; Lucas Lindholm, bass; Alex Riel, drums.



## Mark Isham

**Blue Sun**  
 Columbia 67227

★★★★½

After countless Hollywood soundtracks, trumpeter Mark Isham returns to his jazz roots for his first session as a leader in five years. Not surprisingly, *Blue Sun* is cinematic—a series of composed, beautifully realized scenes with warmth, atmosphere and beguiling hooks. Isham is cool and concise in his approach, favoring long tones and staying close to the melody. He uses the mute extensively and effectively as he works out a debt to Miles Davis.

On "Trapeze," he takes a fleet, muted solo that buzzes with energy over the purr of Doug Lunn's electric bass. To hear Isham in such a straightforward "jazz" setting, you'd have to go back to his early '70s work with Art Lande's Rubsia Patrol. *Blue Sun* is a mature, sophisticated work, emphasizing well-crafted compositions but allowing windows for improvisation.

"Barcelona" offers Milesian *duende*, with extensive soloing, while the propulsive "Tour de Chance," with Daniel Goldblatt on electric piano, suggests Miles' *In A Silent Way* period. Steve Tavaglione's breathy, soulful tenor solos provide a good contrast to Isham's moody introspection. The combination is striking on Ellington's "In A Sentimental Mood" (a rare

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Isham interpretation of a standard) and "That Beautiful Sadness," with the latter title describing much of the CD. Isham creates colorful images with the title track, where Kurt Wortman's drums and Isham's muted horn and distant, glimmering electronics suggest a rambling desert caravan (the Rubisa Patrol, perhaps?). "And Miles To Go...Before He Sleeps" is built up from an irresistible, mesmerizing vamp, the kind that replays in your head for days.  
—Jon Andreus

**Blue Sun**—Barcelona: *That Beautiful Sadness; Trapeze; Lazy Afternoon; Blue Sun; In More Than Love; And Miles To Go...Before He Sleeps; In A Sentimental Mood; Tour De Chance.* (60:59)

**Personnel**—Isham, trumpet, cornet, flugelhorn, electronics; David Goldblatt, acoustic, electric pianos; Steve Tavaglione, tenor saxophone; Doug Lunn, electric bass; Kurt Wortman, drums; David Torn, Peter Maunu, guitar loops (2); Lisbeth Scott, vocal loops (7).



## Larry Goldings

**Whatever It Takes**

Warner Bros. 45996

★★½

## Light Blue

Minor Music 801026

★★★½

There's been no lack of organ donors on the jazz scene of late. Long-missing masters like Jimmy Smith, still-vibrant vets such as Jack McDuff and underheralded also-rans like Winston Walls have all made decent discs in recent months. But these players are seniors; in their hands the Hammond B-3 still resonates with the sound of a bygone era. In the shadow of those moves, the significance of a guy like Larry Goldings taking up the mantle is obvious.

On these two new records, *Whatever It Takes* and *Light Blue*, the New York keyboardist does his best to purge his music of anachronistic elements. Using a contemporary improviser's viewpoint, he puts a somewhat novel spin on a long predictable language.

The Warners record is bound to be heard by more people, and it's a shame that it's so schizy. Organ groups are historically associated with the groovier side of jazz, and grooves in 1995/96 usually carry pop connotations. So Goldings' choice for opening *Whatever It Takes*

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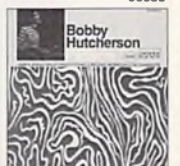
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## CD REVIEWS

with funk tunes by Sly Stone and Stevie Wonder shouldn't raise an eyebrow. Neither should bringing in Maceo Parker and David Sanborn. But the saxists are largely riffmeisters whose reps are built upon solos that tout syncopation over sophistication. So "Big Brother" and "If You Want Me To Stay" wind up as baubles (and obvious radio fodder) compared with nifty originals that bring up the record's rear. Josh Redman's tenor on the leader's "Wrappin' It Up" is much deeper than the prancing done by the above altoists on "Boogie On Reggae Woman." Goldings, however, gets to shine on Wonder's tune. He spins a solo with phrases that are as cogent as they are cool.

On "Up For Air," the record's core band of Goldings, guitarist Peter Bernstein and drummer Bill Stewart prove they don't really need any help to get the job done. All their ideas are cross-hatched. When the invitees come back at the end for "Yipes!" the New Orleans-tinged funk sounds as cheesy and generic as a '70s sitcom theme.

When the more satisfying *Light Blue* was recorded in '92, Goldings had no need for a guest list. The trio is on its own, and more space for inventive accomplices Bernstein and Stewart begets a righteous ensemble balance and a clearer sense of purpose: jazz interaction. The swing that defines the date sounds more natural than that heard on *Whatever's* meager

soul ditties.

On tunes the band really digs into—"Valse Hot," "Ant Dance," "Little Green Men"—all the players are inspired. The boss stays clear of his instrument's clichés: the rush of volume swells, the sweaty expressionism meant to symbolize dramatic content. He's a pianist whose excursions on organ trust isolated notes to carry considerable weight. In cahoots with Bernstein, who thinks similarly, Goldings makes a pointillism fest.

Almost every measure is teeming with ideas, making the all-to-groovy gliding of his market-friendly pop outing seem trite by comparison.

—Jim Macnie

**Whatever It Takes**—*Big Brother; If You Want Me To Stay; Willow Weep For Me; Boogie On Reggae Women; That's Enough; Wrappin' It Up; Slo-Boat; Up For Air; Prayer; Yipes!* (65:00)

**Personnel**—Goldings, Hammond B-3 organ, clavinet (2, 4), piano (9); Peter Bernstein, guitar; Bill Stewart, drums; Maceo Parker, alto saxophone (2, 4, 10); Richard Patterson, electric bass (2, 4, 10); Joshua Redman, tenor saxophone (5, 6, 10); David Sanborn, alto saxophone (2, 4); Fred Wesley, trombone (2, 10).

**Light Blue**—*Little Green Men; You're Looking At Me; Berkshire Blues; All To Soon; Ant Dance; Laugh, Clown, Laugh; Puttin' On The Ritz; Here, There & Everywhere; Valse Hot; Will You Still Be Mine?* (60:21)

**Personnel**—Goldings, Hammond B-3 organ; Peter Bernstein, guitar; Bill Stewart, drums.



## Steve Kuhn

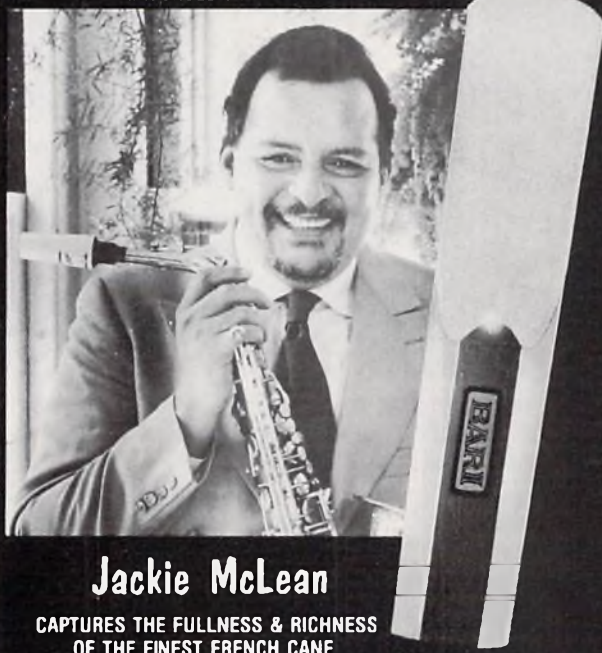
### Seasons Of Romance Postcards 1009

★★★½

The Postcards label continues to release strong albums by veterans who've been bypassed by the majors. Steve Kuhn has more good albums *out of print* than most pianists ever record. As the title tells you, this session emphasizes affairs of the heart. Dori Caymi's elegant "Romance" sets the tone, with Kuhn's trio giving a lush treatment to the unashamedly pretty, softly swaying tune. Kuhn's stirring, samba-like "Clotilde" and "Good Morning, Heartache" are standout

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tracks, making the best use of the pianist's interactive, emphatic left hand. With its gentle swing and chiming chords, Steve Swallow's "Remember" could be Kuhn's homage to Bill Evans.

*Seasons Of Romance* sets Kuhn in trios and quartets, alternating trumpeter Tom Harrell and saxophonist Bob Mintzer. Kuhn has a light touch and introspective leanings, and he's rarely recorded with horn players. You more often associate him with his many (unavailable) ECM dates, especially the ones in partnership with Sheila Jordan. Harrell's control and airy, fragile tone make him a good match for Kuhn, especially on the trumpeter's "Visions Of Gaudi" and Kuhn's uptempo closer "Looking Back." Mintzer turns in a down-and-out, soul-searching tenor solo on "The Pawnbroker," but otherwise seems out of place.

Starting with his striking *Live At Maybeck Recital Hall, Vol. 13* (Concord Jazz, 1991), and continuing with *Seasons Of Romance*, Kuhn may be working through a particularly productive period.

—Jon Andrews

**Seasons Of Romance**—*Six Gun; Romance; Visions Of Gaudi; There Is No Greater Love; The Pawnbroker; Remember; Clotilde; Good Morning; Heartache; Looking Back.* (52:50)

**Personnel**—Kuhn, piano; Tom Harrell, trumpet (3, 6, 9); Bob Mintzer, tenor saxophone (1, 5, 7); George Mraz, bass; Al Foster, drums.



## Turtle Island String Quartet

By The Fireside

Windham Hill 01934 11175

★★

**W**indham Hill's ledgers first went into the black with music based on the seasons, so there's nothing mind-boggling about its continuation of mood music geared around natural points of the annum. By the time you read this, flakes will have fallen somewhere in North America, and these self-proclaimed "lively interpretations of traditional standards and wintry classical pieces" will have

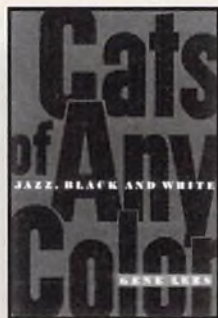
tickled someone pink. But pink is about as emotional as the Turtles' music gets—never blazing red.

A cuteness lines their music, and as initially enchanting as it might be, it's tepid in repetition. The lead track, "Near Northern," is the theme to an elf's dance, all sprightly and sentimental.

It reminds that the new-grass vernacular Turtle violinist Darol Anger helped David Grisman establish almost two decades ago hasn't developed much. All that's necessary is an affable melody, some vamps to give it movement and a chance to work those chops. The interaction is often clever, but much of *Fireside's* original music never transcends the depth of a music-box tune.

So the Turtles turn to Bach, Tchaikovsky and Vivaldi for inspiration. It's there the musicianship shines. Danny Seidenberg's arrangement of the latter's "Winter" from *Four Seasons* plays with texture while skirting the original's melody. Likewise, Praetorius' "Lo, How A Rose E'er Is Blooming" is a swell vehicle for cellist Mark Summer's inspired ruminations. Like the snips from the *Nutcracker*, they give an eerie touch to the unending cheer. But it isn't long before the mud season appears. The end of the disc is gooped up with the arrival of Mr. Americana-for-Hire, Garrison Keillor: he steps in for a Ken Nordine tribute on "Do Something Nice For Your Mother." The silly bombast that

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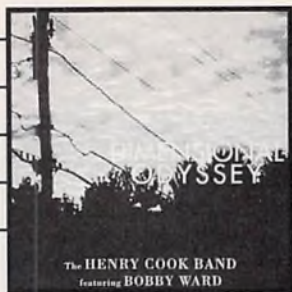
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## Henry Cook Band

**Dimensional Odyssey**  
Accurate 5012

★★★★

**T**his lean, mean band plays with such swaggering conviction you'd swear they're all household names. Instead, they are: a) Henry Cook, who has been a part of the Boston scene as both performer and teacher for many years, and who plays his saxophones and flutes with exuberant vertical volatility; b) Cecil Brooks (the trumpeter not the drummer), formerly of the Sun Ra Arkestra, a daredevil who makes action paintings in every solo, with long lines intersected by spattering runs; c) pianist Jacques Chanier, a fresh voice from Paris; d) Brian McCree, who plays in-your-face bass; e) Bobby Ward, who comes from the great Boston drum tradition (Haynes/Dawson/Williams), and whose pointillistic cymbals do not so much keep time as illuminate fields of energy.

*Dimensional Odyssey*, recorded at the Willow Club in Somerville, Mass., has the pop and electricity only found on live jazz albums. Yet Cook's group takes a disciplined approach to raising hell. Cook (on soprano) and Brooks execute the careening hairpin turns of the opening "Arabesque" like two Formula One cars wheel-to-wheel, then split apart to streak down separate tracks. On "Echoes Of Nichols," the horns don't solo but incite one another with blistering eights and then step aside for succinct statements from each member of the rhythm section. When the horns come back, they screech the theme with an effective and strong pent-up passion.

There are three compositions by Cook and three Ward/Chanier collaborations. All have asymmetrical shapes with unexpected starts and equally surprising decelerations. The most likely to last is Cook's "Prayer For Bosnia," an intense flute lament.

Recent Accurate releases by Garrison Fewell and Lello Molinari and now Henry Cook reveal that Boston's isolated ecological niche has evolved some fascinating forms of jazz life.  
—Thomas Conrad

**Dimensional Odyssey**—*Arabesque; Echoes Of Nichols; Prayer For Bosnia; Appointment In London; Sequences Of The Duke; Mind's Eye; Dimensional O.D.C.* (63:06)

**Personnel**—Cook, soprano and alto saxophones, flutes; Cecil Brooks, trumpet; Jacques Chanier, piano; Brian McCree, bass; Bobby Ward, drums.

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## CD REVIEWS

# JAZZ

## Alto Analysis

by Larry Birnbaum

A perennial poll winner who's never maintained a steady major-label affiliation, Phil Woods has received much less attention this decade than last. In a way, Woods is a victim of his own success, since he pioneered the acoustic bebop revival that opened the door for a younger generation to steal his thunder. But as a first-generation bopper, he has the advantage of both original inspiration—he was, after all, the man to whom Bird handed his horn—and the mature ability to play in his own distinctive voice. And in his stubborn resistance to the vagaries of jazz fashion, Woods has carved himself a unique and enduring niche.

*The Phil Woods Quartet/Quintet 20th Anniversary Set* (Mosaic MD5-159; 60:51/61:06/55:58/47:35/46:06; ★★★★★) Five compact discs worth (also available on Q-disc vinyl) of previously unreleased material here trace the history of Woods' long-lived combo through seven sessions recorded between 1976-1992. The first two, from concerts in Japan and Finland, feature pianist Mike Melillo, whose mild free-jazz tendencies pull Woods out of his bebop groove into a spacier orbit, with the saxophonist flashing occasional modal and even fusion licks. By the 1981 studio date that fills most of the second disc, Melillo has been replaced by the solidly straight-ahead Hal Galper, and the band gels into a single-minded unit, allowing Woods to wail in a mainstream mode deeply rooted in swing and blues on such tunes as Bud Powell's "Web City" and Wood's own "Reets' Neet."

With the addition of Tom Harrell on trumpet, the quartet becomes a quintet, and a 1984 studio session finds the group in hard-bop territory. With a technique as formidable as Wood's own, the quirky, brilliant trumpeter spurs the altoist to new heights and ultimately upstages him in places like Horace Silver's "Where You At." Trombonist Hal Crook and pianist Jim McNeely then replace Harrell and Galper, and the quintet sounds a nostalgic note on a live 1991 recording at Catalina's in Los Angeles, as Woods dips into Earl Bostic-style r&b. Trumpeter Brian Lynch takes Crook's place on a live show at Ronnie Scott's in London and a final studio date, with Woods waxing almost mellow on such ballads and blues as Benny Carter's "Just A Mood" and Lynch's "One For Mogie."

Bill Goodwin's busy drums and Steve Gilmore's stolid bass give the band's sound an unbroken continuity. Unspectacular soloists, they're unfailingly supportive, doggedly following Woods' every twist and turn. But it's Woods' passion and energy that makes the music extraordinary; though the



Woods: radiating a fiery urgency

tempos slow down over the years, his horn always radiates a fiery urgency. With a bright, supple tone that can range from a bluesy growl to a clarinet-like croon, he breathes champagne bubbles into ballads and hurtles through tortuous runs with bobbed momentum. And when it comes to reviving obscure standards, from Ettore Stratta's "High Clouds" to Billy Strayhorn's "Upper Manhattan Medical Group," nobody picks them better. (Mosaic Records: 35 Melrose Place, Stamford CT 06902)

*European Tour Live* (Red 123163; 49:05/46:20; ★★★★★) This gorgeously recorded double CD captures Woods' original quartet with Melillo, Goodwin and Gilmore in a 1980 performance in Perugia, Italy. While never less than tight, the group is looser than in later incarnations, and Woods is at his creative peak, exploring every melodic nook and cranny of standards by Gershwin, Harry Warren, Alec Wilder and others. He takes an intense, unsentimental approach to the ballads that dominate the program, alternating eely bop lines with expressive cries, but on Joe Henderson's "Isotope," he heads for the ozone, etching furiously acidic figures over Melillo's fractured chords.

*An Affair to Remember* (Evidence 22125; 62:09; ★★★) Woods latest studio album consists entirely of standards—not the obscurities he usually favors but familiar movie themes like "Laura," "Invitation" and "Over The Rainbow." Here, the high-strung horn man sounds relatively relaxed, as though someone had removed the burr from under his saddle. Lynch's hard trumpet blends so smoothly with Woods' alto that there's little artistic tension between them, and the rhythm section, with McNeely on piano as well as Goodwin and Gilmore, is so perfectly attuned to the leader that it sounds nearly perfunctory. Still, Woods strips the material clean of clichés, bringing dry-eyed insight to even the dewiest ballads. **DB**

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## CD REVIEWS

### BEYOND

#### Elevator To The Stars

by Jon Andrews

Imagine that 1950s pop music progressed toward the millennium without being overrun by rock and r&b. In this unrealized future, you'd hear the loopy 1960s mixture of electronic sound effects, lounge acts and shopworn showtunes labelled "space age bachelor pad music." Does the current craze for cocktail culture have a place in your life? If you get a kick out of Spike Jones, cartoon music or vintage movie and TV themes, or secretly hum along with Muzak, belly up to the bar.

**Esquivel: *Music From A Sparkling Planet* (Bar/None/BMG 056; 37:06; ★★★½)** Juan Garcia Esquivel, once named "the Duke Ellington of Mexico," is a preeminent muse in this peculiar sub-genre. Esquivel's swinging, often witty arrangements are distinctive for the leader's grandiose piano and the emphatic horns (used for "bam! pow!" punctuation), vibes and Latin percussion. Tunes like "Third Man Theme," "Granada" and "My Blue Heaven" get the full treatment, with dramatic piano flourishes, guitar twang and a vocal group crooning "zoo-zoo-zoo." *Sparkling Planet* was compiled with lavish notes by Irwin Chusid. It's way too weird to be truly "easy-listening."

**Perrey-Kingsley: *The In Sound From Way Out!* (Vanguard 79222; 29:30; ★★★)** In 1966, Jean-Jacques Perrey and Gershon Kingsley used "Electronic Sonosyntheses" (early synthesizers, prototypical overdubbing and sound effects) to construct this wild, joyfully silly record. This antidote to "serious" electronic music uses percolating electronic rhythms, rowdy sound effects and extensive editing to make the computer sing and play. "Countdown At 6" sounds like Space Camp Grenada, complete with whiny children. Goofy tunes titled "Barnyard In Orbit," "Jungle Blues From Jupiter" and "Electronic Can-Can" require little explanation.

**The History Of Space Age Pop: Vol. 2: *Mallets In Wonderland* (RCA 66646; 49:37; ★★★½)** Ubiquitous Irwin Chusid mined the RCA vaults for a series of compilations organized around such themes as "stereo action" effects. *Mallets In Wonderland*, showcasing percussionists, is the most upbeat, eccentric and musically interesting of the lot. I was won over by the Three Suns, an oddly infectious guitar, organ and accordion combo augmented by percussionists for bubbling versions of "Caravan," "Fever" and "Colonel Bogey March." Esquivel, the Sauter-Finnegan Orchestra and Henry Mancini all contribute, and Shelly Manne and Ray Barretto are among the percussionists.



Esquivel: too weird for "easy-listening"

**Esquivel: *More Of Other Worlds, Other Sounds* (Reprise 45844; 34:15; ★★★)** This complete album was recorded for Reprise in 1962. Despite the Sun Ra-like title, it's surprisingly earthbound, with Esquivel arranging distinctive, but straightforward treatments of standards with a few originals. Esquivel uses horn crescendos, Latin percussion and a vocal group to add a Spanish feeling throughout, which seems more appropriate with "The Breeze And I (Andalucia)" and "La Mantilla" than with "Canadian Sunset." If you want to bask in Esquivel's glorious excesses, start with an anthology.

**Cocktail Mix: Vol. 1: *Bachelor's Guide To The Galaxy* (Rhino R2 72237; 47:31; ★★★½)** *Bachelor's Guide* travels the same spaceways as the RCA series, assembled and annotated (extensively) by the inevitable Irwin Chusid. With a broader base of recordings to draw on, this is a diverse compilation, including percussion-oriented tracks from Les Baxter and Felix Slatkin. There's a stronger jazz flavor, coming from Russ Case and Dave Harris (alumni of Raymond Scott's groups) as well as Bobby Hammack's version of Scott's rollicking "Powerhouse."

**Four Rooms Original Soundtrack** (Elektra 61861; 46:51; ★★★½) It's appropriate that the retro-pop group Combustible Edison revive and update space age bachelor pad music through a soundtrack. These reformed punk-rockers embrace lounge music and cocktail culture as an alternative lifestyle. Their contributions to the movie *Four Rooms* put vibraphones and Duane Eddy-style guitar upfront, along with Lily Banquette's vocals, backed by taut basslines and cheesy electric keyboards. The overall effect can be reminiscent of John Zorn's Naked City (slowed down) or Angelo Badalamenti's *Twin Peaks* scores. Originals like "Antes de Medianoche" blend smoothly into Esquivel's versions of "Harlem Nocturne" and "Sentimental Journey." **DB**



# BLINDFOLD TEST

JANUARY 1996

## Medeski Martin & Wood

by Howard Mandel

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to identify the musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information about the recordings is given to the artist prior to the test.

Since *Notes From The Underground* (Accurate), their self-produced debut of 1992, keyboardist John Medeski, drummer Billy Martin and bassist Chris Wood have spread the energy of the not-all-that-young East Coast funk-oriented virtuosi via steady tours of the U.S. and Europe. Two more albums (both from Gramavision) and their spot on the recent *Get Shorty* soundtrack have disseminated their quick, edgy spin on the ever-challenging and diverting equilateral trio format even wider. Both jazz-jazz fans and those of the hip-hop fringe find something to like in their fresh-squeezed sounds, gutsy vamps and lively grooves.

In person, the three regard their budding careers with casual, unpretentious professionalism—and they're just as critical of themselves as toward anything they hear.

This was their first Blindfold Test.

### Bill Evans Trio

"Conception" (from *The Complete Riverside Recordings, Riverside, rec. 1956*) Evans, piano; Teddy Kotick, bass; Paul Motian, drums.

BM: Reminds me of Bud Powell.

JM: It's Bill Evans comin' out of Bud—with Paul Motian. Evans' early stuff is my favorite. His rhythmic phrasing across the bar line is amazing, more aggressive than later. He gets more harmonic later, too. This is so linear, so bebop for him—and he's not comping with his left hand so much. You hear the beginning of his rhythm-section interplay, between the piano and drums especially; it got more contrapuntal later. 5 stars.

### Tony Williams Lifetime

"To Whom It May Concern: Them" (by Chick Corea, from *Turn It Over, Polydor, rec. 1972*) Williams, drums; Larry Young, organ; John McLaughlin, guitar.

JM: The Bill Evans Trio? [laughs]

BM: Burning!

JM: No—Larry Young, John McLaughlin and Tony Williams! I love it! On this record it's printed, "Play it loud, play it really loud!" As a kid, when I'd never thought of playing organ, I loved this and listened to it all the time. And didn't know why. McLaughlin plays some heavy stuff—and Larry Young! Nobody's done anything like this since him! To play with Tony Williams, you have to leave a certain kind of space and still play strong. Larry Young *does that!* His left hand! He's the only guy who could, all by himself, be a great rhythm section with Tony and Elvin Jones!

CW: He's pushing Tony, but Tony's pushin' back—this is totally groovin'. I like the way it was recorded, too—very live and raw, hot-to-tape, live.

BM: Things feeding back a little bit, almost out of control. All around: 5.

### Ornette Coleman & Prime Time

"Badal" (from *Tone Dialing, Harmolodics, 1995*) Coleman, alto saxophone, et. al; Badal Roy, tablas.

BM: You're immediately caught up in how this is recorded.

JM: It doesn't have that produced sound—it sounds like a band playing together.



CW: That bass playing might sound so cheesy, but here it's cool!

JM: I like the tablas, which can be a touchy thing, too.

BM: The combination of everything is great. Henry Threadgill?

JM: It's Ornette! His trumpet playing and his violin playing, too—it's so original, it's endless Ornette! You know it's him!

CW: And his melodies: fast and complicated, but you can sing them.

JM: They're a vehicle for the improvisation. Ornette is so serious! 'Melody is the form!'

All around: 5.

### Herbie Hancock

"Quasar" (from *Mwandishi Herbie Hancock: The Complete Warner Bros. Recordings, 1995/rec. 1972*) Hancock, Fender Rhodes electric piano, mellotron, percussion; Benny Maupin, composer, reeds; Julian Priestler, trombones; Buster Williams, basses; Billy Hart, drums; Eddie Henderson, trumpet; Patrick Gleason, Moog synthesizer.

JM: I love the horn stuff, but not that keyboard/synth sound. I like the music.

BM: Beautiful orchestration—it reminds me of Jaco's record *Word Of Mouth*.

JM: That Theremin sound reminds me of the theme from *Star Trek*.

CW: Can that synthesizer! It's so dated! The Brazilians, like Hermeto Pascoal, can use it and make it sound great. But to me, a synthesizer doing *that* detracts from the beautiful colors of the orchestration.

JM: In a way, it's cool that it dates it, because it lets you know where it's coming from—early '80s, late '70s. Though somebody could be using that sound now, these days. Who knows? The recording sounds more recent than that to me.

BM: It's so retro, to go back and find the sounds.

CW: It's a trip. I'm not sure where it's going, though.

JM: Don't worry about it. It goes into that groovin' 7/4, and it could get corny, but it doesn't.

CW: Overall it's cool, but it's still vague to me. Oh, wait—on electric piano, it's Herbie Hancock!

JM: Great, man! You can hear his touch on electric piano; his rhythmic placement is so unique, and his orchestration—that's why it works so well. Also, the recording is so good. People use these sounds now, but you can tell this is from the '70s just by the vibe.

BM: 5.

CW: 4.

JM: To me, it's some of the coolest. 4½ or 5.