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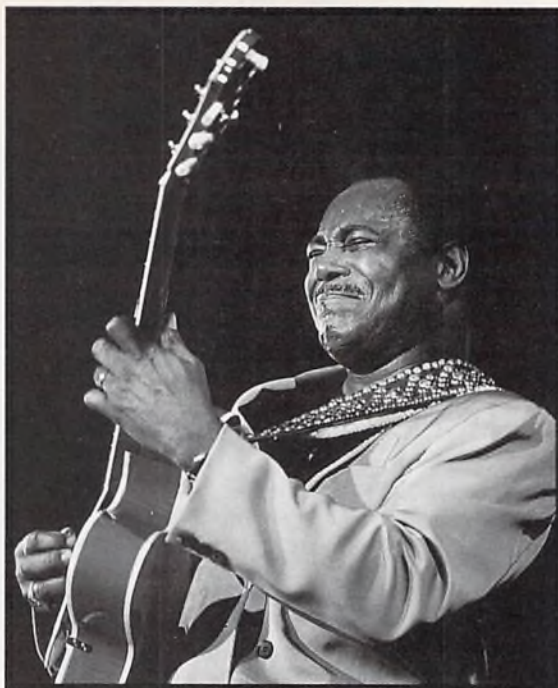
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Tackling Gershwin

Roberts has made a career out of playing the music of past masters. And right now, he's on a roll with George Gershwin, making his boldest statement yet with a radical reconstruction of "Rhapsody In Blue."

By Larry Birnbaum

Cover photograph of Marcus Roberts by Jeff Sedlik. Marcus Roberts plays the Steinway piano provided by Steinway Hall Los Angeles.



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T Marcus Roberts TACKLING GERSHWIN

By Larry Birnbaum

Of all the young traditionalists who answered Wynton Marsalis' call to battle, none has accomplished more than Marcus Roberts. At age 21, he replaced Kenny Kirkland in Marsalis' quartet. He won the very first Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition in 1987 and later became the first artist to have his first three albums as a leader hit #1 on *Billboard's* jazz chart. On his 30th birthday, he premiered his epic *Romance, Swing And The Blues* with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra; the following year, he led the orchestra on a nationwide tour.

Just turned 33, Roberts is making his boldest statement yet with the simultaneous release of *Portraits In Blue*, an orchestral album featuring a radical reconstruction of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody In Blue," and *Time And Circumstance*, an album of original compositions for jazz trio. "My agenda is to play for any people who are open to what the premise of jazz music is," says the pianist. "We are simply trying to get the music to all people who might have an interest in exploring what has been achieved in jazz music and what the current possibilities of jazz music are. The other important point is to educate the public about what contributions have been made by pianist/composers in American music."

So far, Roberts has met these goals by using a focused, market-friendly strategy: He's made a career out of playing the music of past masters—sometimes he dedicates entire albums or concerts to a single artist or composer—selling impressive amounts of CDs in the process. And right now, he

seems to be on a roll with Gershwin, an American stylist whose melodies and chord changes have played a crucial role in the development of jazz.

After six albums for Novus, Roberts made his Columbia debut in 1994 with *Gershwin For Lovers*, a collection of standards; the same year, he played piano in an American Symphony Orchestra performance of Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm' Variations" (a new version of which appears on *Portraits In Blue*). His fascination with the pianist/composer dates back to childhood. "Gershwin was one of the first people I remember hearing when I started getting into jazz music," Roberts recalls. "The first time I heard 'Rhapsody In Blue,' I didn't know whether it was jazz or classical music, but I did know that it was something I was interested in. I didn't hear that piece again for many years, and by the time I did, I had figured out that Gershwin was a songwriter who had a very important place in history."

Roberts recorded "Rhapsody In Blue" with an ensemble of over 40 pieces, including members of New York's Orchestra of St. Luke's and such young jazz musicians as trumpeter Marcus Printup, trombonist Ronald Westray and saxophonist Wessell Anderson. "One of the important qualities of this particular version is who I was able to get in terms of the jazz band portion, and I think that has a lot to do with how it sounds," he says. "I didn't want it to have a hokey jazz perspective. I wanted to bring out the personality of the music."

Beginning with a bluesy banjo figure that precedes the usual

opening clarinet glissando, Roberts presents "Rhapsody In Blue" as it's never been heard before. "It's different because it takes advantage of the natural jazz sensibility of the piece," says Roberts. "What I mainly tried to do was to present what had happened since he wrote it. I wanted to establish a real organic relationship with jazz music without destroying what was written, but it's been completely changed. To play that piece from a jazz perspective means that you've got to swing; your whole rhythmic approach has to be coming from another place."

He approached Gershwin's score with meticulous care. "I always start off with very intense study," says Roberts. "You must understand with great clarity what the composer's original idea was before you can determine how the music should be changed. I went through it very carefully, and I especially studied the piano part, which gave me a portrait of how everything else should function."

Roberts, who's been blind since childhood, chose to analyze the piece aurally, even though he can read braille notation. "I just listened to it on tapes," he said. "They even sent me a MIDI file with the whole piece on it so I could isolate parts and study them that way." Roberts uses a Voyetra DOS-based program on a Gateway 2000 computer with a speech program that reads to him what's on the screen. "I have a keyboard and



*"We have a view that
... But on [Gershwin]*

tone-generator that produces the voices, all the different sounds. That's how I'm able to compose music as well as review things that are played into it. So with the 'Rhapsody' score, for example, you could go into Voyetra, and if you want to hear what the strings are doing, you could isolate them. It's real hip. You can even target exact measure numbers. So between the speech program and that, it's been a huge breakthrough as far as my ability to analyze and compose."

Roberts rehearsed the piece with the student orchestra at Northwestern University during an artist residency at the Evanston, Ill., campus. "I think it was there that I started to figure out what I really wanted to do," he said. "They were well prepared, and without that, I don't know if I could have pulled it off. I needed an environment where I could verify and see where I was in terms of the learning of it. Then, through playing it with them, I started to hear some things to try."

Once in the studio, Roberts worked directly with the jazz-band component of the ensemble, while conductor Bob Sadin handled the orchestral duties. When asked how Roberts maintained artistic control over such a huge project, he

PHOTO BY ALAN HUGHES



welcome to the jazz café

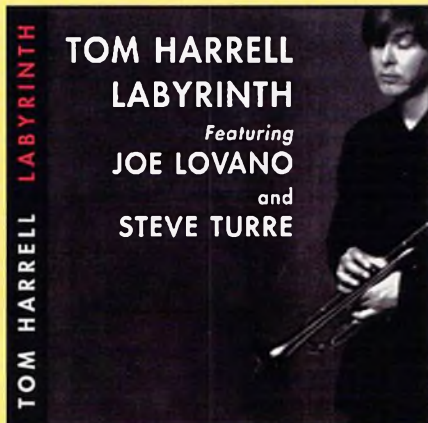


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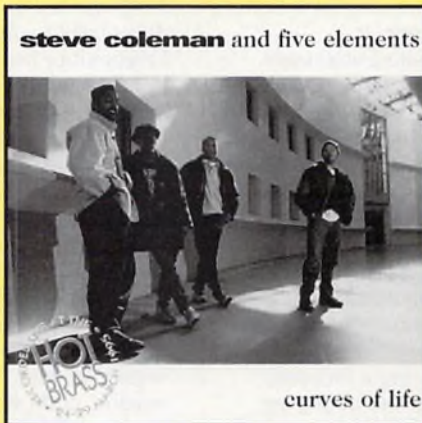
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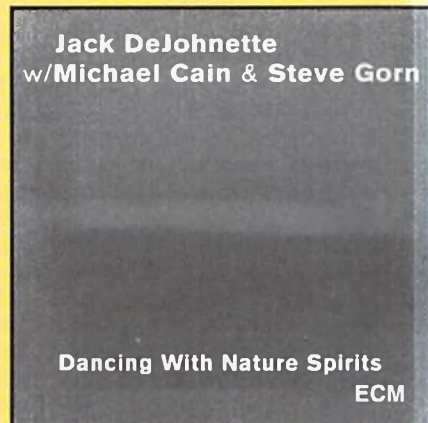
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nce music is notated that it cannot be transformed.
] solo parts he obviously could play whatever he wanted to.”

responds, “Me being in control was more of a question of being sort of cool and letting everybody help in ways that were needed. The one thing about doing a project like this is it teaches you the value of working with people. That’s not always authority or control. Sometimes it’s about knowing when to let other people take control.”

Following Gershwin’s own example, Roberts improvises many of the piano passages, interpolating the stride stylings of James P. Johnson as well as modernist influences ranging from Bud Powell to McCoy Tyner. “We have a view that once music is notated that it cannot be transformed,” he explains. “The term ‘classical’ causes us to feel that we don’t dare even change a Gershwin cadenza. But on the solo parts he obviously could play whatever he wanted to, and he was very influenced by all the Harlem pianists. He was a scholar who wanted to send a clear message to the European classical composers that, look, this is some music you need to check out.

“I think if Gershwin heard this, he would celebrate it. I think it’s what I can hear in his music, that desire to kind of move forward. But at the same time, he clearly had a sense of history. He went to Ravel wanting to take composition. He’d make a lot of jazz critics upset [today] because he was not somebody we could say drew on everything just from himself.”

Although it also draws on history for inspiration, *Time And Circumstance*, a suite of 14 Roberts tunes about a love affair, is resolutely contemporary. Youthfully accompanied by drummer

Jason Marsalis and bassist David Grossman, Roberts is relentlessly inventive, drawing new energy from a vast reservoir of tradition, forging an imaginative synthesis that transcends trends and bridges eras. “The formal structure of it is very different for a jazz trio,” he says. “I wanted to write some music for a band that I am developing, and I wanted it to have life. I did not want it to sound like a cocktail trio. I wanted something that had the power of a quintet or sextet, and I did not want the same mood throughout the whole thing. I felt it needed to have a certain ebb and flow that at times became very disparate, in terms of the emotions that are covered.”

But Roberts’ expansiveness, like his mentor Marsalis’, doesn’t extend to free-jazz or fusion; indeed, no other disciple has more faithfully toed the Marsalis party line. “A lot of musicians have been greatly influenced by Wynton’s contributions,” he says, “and I come directly from that soil. When I joined Wynton, I certainly had never heard anybody play like that, so that had a huge impact on my piano playing and the ideas that I would draw from.”

Judging from his album sales alone (Roberts was among the top 10 jazz artists of 1995 and *Gershwin For Lovers* was the year’s 13th best-selling CD, according to *Billboard*), he has succeeded in his quest to open the public’s ears to his interpretations of jazz history. But he doesn’t stop there—he’s eager to express his views verbally, as well, offering an unabashedly partisan take on the jazz scene.

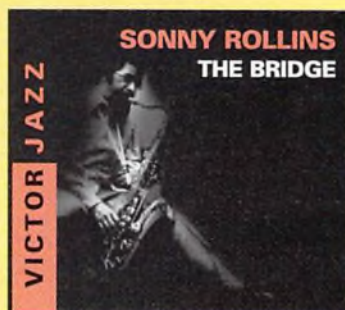
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GERSHWIN FOR MUSICIANS

DOWN BEAT: *What appeals to you about Gershwin tunes—melodically, harmonically, stylistically?*

MARCUS ROBERTS: I just like the fact that his melodies are blues-based, and the way that the chords move—they do lend themselves well for manipulation and freedom in terms of improvisation in jazz. I think that's why we see so many versions of his songs. Clearly, that material has been used by everybody to develop a lot of the vocabulary that we associate with the music. Plus, my other interest in Gershwin is based on the fact that he was a pianist. It functions well in that way. For example, I learned the three little Gershwin preludes when I was in high school.

He had a real good way of pulling off being really repetitive. Somehow, he pulls it off. You hear his constant reference to B-flat on "They Can't Take That Away From Me." The reason he gets away with it is because he always ties it in to the blues. That's one of the reasons he hung out in Harlem a lot and why you'll notice the pinnacle of his whole

compositional output was *Porgy And Bess*. It seems like he really was on a mission in terms of incorporating those influences into as many broad forms as he could. He was interested in exploring European formats along with the AABA song forms. And he wanted to do it based on influences that were clearly American, primarily jazz-based. I think all those things are Gershwin-esque.

DB: *Name five Gershwin standards that you think are fun to play in a jam-session situation.*

MR: "Rhythm" changes would definitely be first. I guess those are sort of the ones I pick to record. I've heard "A Foggy Day" played a lot. Certainly "Our Love Is Here To Stay" is a real popular one. "But Not For Me" is one I would say, too. That one has been played a lot of different ways. It started off as sort of a ballad, eventually became a bebop tune ... that tune has seen a lot of treatment. Probably "Nice Work If You Can Get It" is a nice tune to blow on, too. And "Lady Be Good"—I almost forgot about that.

—Ed Enright

EQUIPMENT

"There are things I like about German Steinways, but generally speaking, I prefer playing American Steinways. As a matter of fact, that's my own piano that I used on *Time And Circumstance*."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

PORTRAITS IN BLUE—
Sony Classical 6336
TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCE—
Columbia 67567
**MARCUS ROBERTS PLAYS
ELLINGTON**—Novus 63187
GERSHWIN FOR LOVERS—
Columbia 66437
IF I COULD BE WITH YOU—
Novus 63149
AS SERENITY APPROACHES—
Novus 63130
PRAYER FOR PEACE—Novus 63124
ALONE WITH THREE GIANTS—
Novus 3109
DEEP IN THE SHED—Novus 3078
THE TRUTH IS SPOKEN HERE—
Novus 3051

Columbia 47977
VOL. 2: UPTOWN RULER—
Columbia 47976
VOL. 3: LEVEE LOW MOAN—
Columbia 47975
**INTIMACY CALLING. STANDARD TIME,
VOL. 2**—Columbia 47346
**THE RESOLUTION OF ROMANCE,
STANDARD TIME, VOL. 3**—
Columbia 46143
THE MAJESTY OF THE BLUES—
Columbia 45091
LIVE AT BLUES ALLEY—
Columbia 2-40675
MARSALIS STANDARD TIME—
Columbia 40461
J. MOOD—Columbia 40308

with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra

THEY CAME TO SWING—
Columbia 66379
THE FIRE OF THE FUNDAMENTALS—
Columbia 57592

with Wynton Marsalis

BLUE INTERLUDE—Columbia 48729
**SOUL GESTURES IN SOUTHERN BLUE
VOL. 1: THICK IN THE SOUTH**—

"I think to believe in anything, you have to be in some kind of movement," he says. "What we are basically trying to do now is pick up the pieces after what happened in the 1970s and early '80s, and we are attempting to reeducate ourselves and the public about what is great in jazz music. I don't consider it a hostile or adversarial thing, but if you ask me what I believe in, the answer is blues and swing."

The pianist bristles at the notion that his movement focuses too narrowly on the past, dismissing any thought that jazz repertory ensembles might stifle innovation. "The greatest art always transcends the time in which it was created," he says. "If we can't find any value for future generations in Duke Ellington's music, then his music actually has no value and had no value when it was created. But the greatness of Ellington's music is so clear that even if all you're trying to do is play it as it was written, then to me that is a modern statement. We can write our own arrangements of his pieces. We can present original music that is based on the concepts that he or other jazz musicians proposed. But we also have the option that was introduced in European music, which is to simply play the music as it was written, and there is a lot of value in that."

Like his passion for Gershwin, Roberts' dual proficiency in jazz and classical music dates back to his early days as a piano student. "My lessons were classical," says Roberts, "but always with an emphasis on jazz. My first piano teacher was a real hip cat; he taught me standards and theory. He made me learn how to read braille music notation. What you have to do is read one measure of the right-hand part and learn that, and then you read the same measure in the left-hand part, and you try to put it together. It's very tedious. There are three different types of notation that you have to learn, and none of them relate to staff notation. And then, of course, you have to learn staff notation, because if you're playing with sighted musicians, what do they know about braille music?"

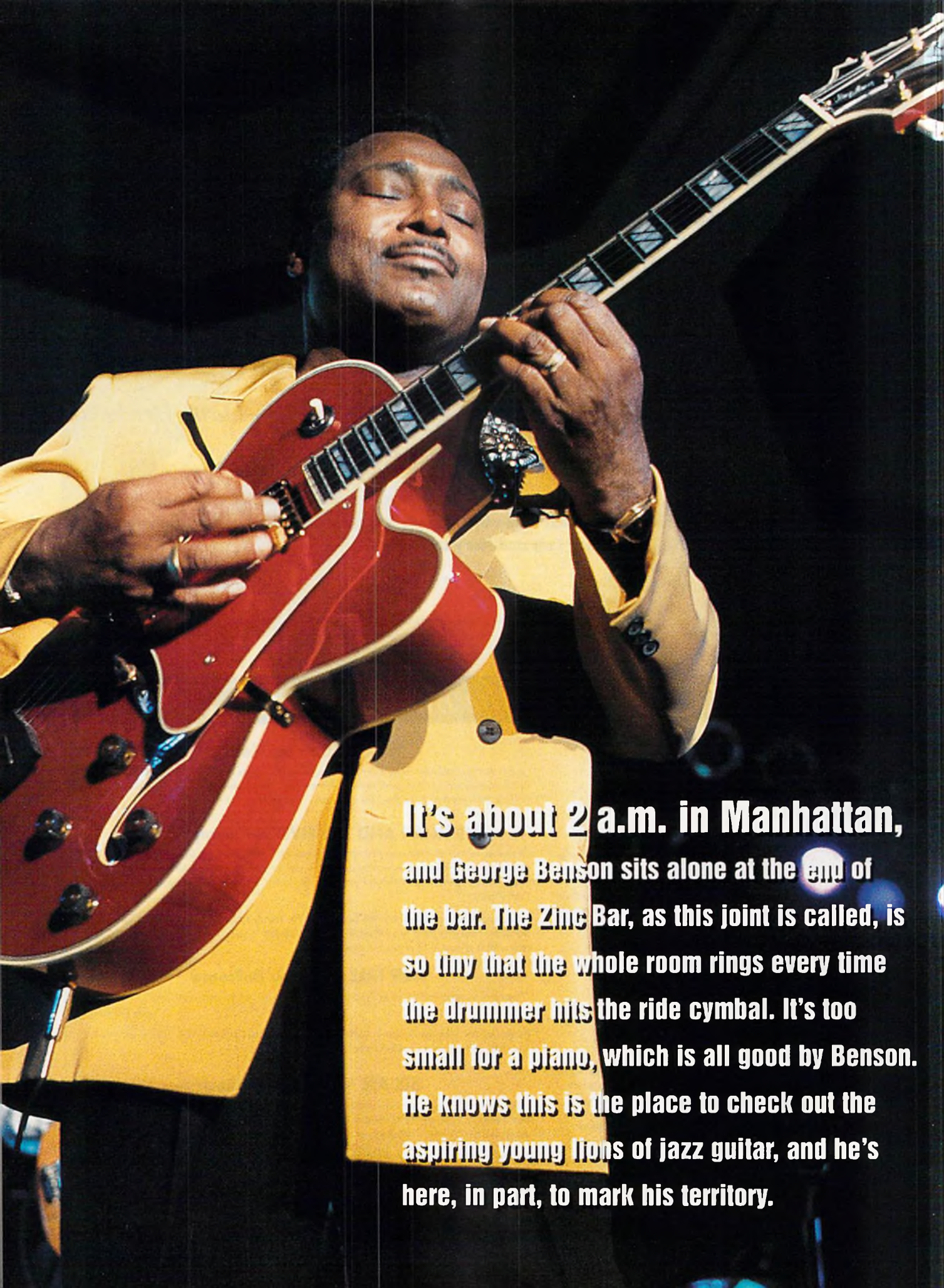
Roberts is active in organizations like the Lighthouse and the American Foundation for the Blind. "I am starting to gain more of an interest in that kind of work," he says, "because I realize the challenges of growing up blind in a visual culture. One of the big struggles that I have had is that I can't really look at the music and verify that it's been written out properly. The value of MIDI for me is to have a tool for composition. I've been working through that, and it's a gradual process. It's getting better and better, and I do feel that in the next year I will completely solve it. I have remained diligent, and I'm blessed to have musicians who are patient and are willing to work these things through with me."

Roberts' plans include a full-scale "Rhapsody" tour with a 26-piece orchestra, as well as solo and trio dates. He also intends to cut an album of original music for septet (to be called *Express Mail Delivery*) and another of Scott Joplin rags. Recently, he recorded on Marcus Printup's second album and for Wycliffe Gordon and Ronald Westray's first; he also played a piano solo for the soundtrack of John Singleton's movie *Rosewood*.

As he continues to emerge from Wynton Marsalis' shadow, it's clear that Roberts is a force to be reckoned with in his own right, and with his determination, erudition and musicianship, he will surely make his mark. "My challenge to the jazz community is, what is the sound based on? Jelly Roll, Coltrane, Monk—what ties all of that together?" he asks. "I try to look for what makes things that are great more related. I look for the essence, and I feel that I present that same sound throughout everything that I play. This is really what my artistic struggle is about. It's to present as much music as I possibly can that reflects the basic principles of jazz music and that adds an option to the public."

DB

Ed Enright contributed to this story.



It's about 2 a.m. in Manhattan, and George Benson sits alone at the end of the bar. The Zinc Bar, as this joint is called, is so tiny that the whole room rings every time the drummer hits the ride cymbal. It's too small for a piano, which is all good by Benson. He knows this is the place to check out the aspiring young lions of jazz guitar, and he's here, in part, to mark his territory.

Night Watchman

George Benson

Thirty years since he was *the* young lion and first made the New York scene, Benson is still on hand. And some 30 years after his first solo release (*New Boss Guitar*), Benson is coming out with a new album on a new label. He has jumped ship to GRP after two decades with Warner Bros. to record the funky *That's Right*. It's a new groove for Benson, laden with funky beats and simple vamps, and that trademark guitar sailing over them. Much of it was inspired by Benson's late-night forays into Manhattan, and tonight he's here in the bowels of the jazz world to make sure that new sound is right on. "I get out there and hear new ideas," he says, "then I go home and explore it."

Benson is a smooth but odd-looking man, of a certain age that lingers between young and old. He's no longer the nervous Pittsburgh kid with the toothy grin who greeted the jazz world in the early '60s as the featured performer with organist Jack McDuff. But he's still young enough to comfortably hang with this crowd of sexy brunettes in designer dresses, sideburned dudes in black turtlenecks and Italian leather jackets (smartly following the chicks) and hip-hopsters "keepin' it real." Benson, 56, is no relic, though he'll occasionally let loose a knowing laugh or say old-man things like, "New York is the greatest city in the history of mankind, but it is also the most volatile, and it is the worst in many things. And all the innovation, everything that is great, comes to New York sooner or later."

Benson is a regular in the New York club scene, always with his ear to the ground. "I go to where the people are," he says. "I go to the jazz clubs, because they got the innovators. So I'm up on all that's new and fresh, you know, and I see all the young guys—master young musicians, you know? How about Russell

Malone? You gonna love this kid! He came here and blew New York apart! And there's several other guitar-playing wizards. There's a kid from Philadelphia, his name is Jimmy Bruno—*maaaannn!* And there's a kid from my hometown, an Italian fellow, his name is Ron Affi—*yeeaaaahh*, he's a bad dude, man."

The new guys, of course, are all adept at a sound that is a product of Benson's uniquely odd musical upbringing. In his native Pittsburgh, Benson played the ukulele in nightclubs as a child, then sang doo-wop as a teen. One night he stumbled into a night club to see a guitar player named Wes Montgomery and was blown away. "I heard guitar like I never heard it before," he says. "So I went up to him, introduced myself and asked if he'd teach me something. You know what he said, man? He said, 'Man, I'm too busy trying to learn something myself.'" But as the years went on, Montgomery would check up on Benson to see what the younger guitarist had learned.

Benson eventually landed the gig with McDuff and his funky soul-jazz group. "He fired me the first night, man," says Benson. "Said he didn't think I could make it with the band. But he told me I could stay with the group until they got to New York, and he never did send me home." After being "discovered" by legendary Columbia/CBS A&R man John Hammond, Benson recorded *It's Uptown* (1965) and *Cookbook* (1966), two outstanding soul-jazz albums. But in 1971, he left Columbia to join producer Creed Taylor and his label CTI. Taylor had enjoyed a few pop-jazz hits with Montgomery and saw Benson as a logical successor. Benson recorded a pile of easy-listening jazz albums with CTI, including *White Rabbit* (1972) and *Body Talk* (1973)

After almost a decade of such offerings, Benson signed with Warner Bros. in 1976 and was matched up with A&R man Tommy LiPuma. LiPuma suggested that Benson revive his singing career and inserted just one vocal track on his Warner debut. The track was "This Masquerade," and the record *Breezin'* became the first platinum album in jazz history, selling more than six million copies. He followed with a string of platinum-sellers, including *Weekend In L.A.* featuring "On Broadway" and "Give Me The Night" (produced by Quincy Jones).

But the greater Benson's pop success, the more jazz fans lamented his absence from the scene. That debate over straight-ahead jazz versus pop has come to define Benson's career, and he still bristles at the criticism. "For me, man, music is fun," says Benson. "Cats saying that we owe something to a certain style of music—when did we ever sign a contract to be loyal to a certain kind of music? I'm just a musician playing whatever is available to play, and having a great time doing it."

Pop music to Benson has always been a means to an end. "If I'm in a house and they got 10 people in there and I know that one guy is a jazz fan, I won't play for that one guy," says Benson. "It's futile and it just makes enemies. It doesn't really pan out. Since I can do both, I have a choice. And my choice is to please the most people and still be happy doin' it. I'm not gonna go out of my way. But if it's something that I do well and it's gonna please nine people out of 10, that's my choice."

"The people, the fans, they're the ones who say who's great and who isn't. When they sell 250 million tickets to a movie, it becomes significant and the whole music industry will note that as a moment in time to be remembered. There's something to be said about what people

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“I get out there and hear new ideas. Then I go home and explore it.”

choose. They're the ones who make us successful or not.”

Benson has ventured into the straightahead world with some nice results: Dexter Gordon's *Gotham City* (1981), organist Jimmy Smith's *Off The Top* (1985) and *Big Boss Band* (1991) with the Count Basie Orchestra. But solid as these records are, none has gained the audience of Benson's pop offerings, and nothing angers him more.

“I'm glad I do those things,” says Benson. “But, oh man, when I talk to a fan who hasn't heard *Tenderly*, the album I did with McCoy Tyner—that's the reason why I don't do those things. They sit on the shelf where they gather dust, when they should be in people's houses in their record collections. I can play with McCoy any time of the week, because he's one of my best friends—and one of the greatest musicians that has ever lived, as far as I'm concerned; definitely the greatest jazz pianist that is alive today. But for us to make a record and have it sit on the shelf is a crime, you know?”

So for his last record on Warner Bros., *Love Remembers* (1993), Benson returned to the pop sound that has brought him so much success. “You have to let pop tunes be what they are,” he says. “It's amazing to me that the biggest record Louis Armstrong ever had happened when he was 60 years old—‘Hello Dolly.’ So simple, and just right on the money. Just let it hang out and be what it is.”

Benson spends countless hours in his basement studio in Englewood Cliffs, N.J., just across the George Washington Bridge from Manhattan, practicing and incorporating all that he has learned from his visits into the city, ironically studying young guys who grew up studying him. But he's getting used to young cats mimicking his sound. “Sometimes my wife hears a song on the radio and says, ‘I don't remember you recording that song,’” notes Benson. “And I say, ‘It's not me.’ I get mad at her because she can't identify me. But every guitar player is me.”

He's incorporated some of those new ideas on *That's Right*, which reunites Benson with LiPuma, now president of GRP. The record is a significant departure

from Benson's carefully crafted and heavily produced pop efforts. For *That's Right*, LiPuma brought Benson to Prince's Paisley Park Studios in Minneapolis, where they teamed up with Ricky Peterson. (An accomplished keyboard player and a skilled composer, Peterson co-wrote Prince's hit “The Most Beautiful Girl In The World.”) Peterson and LiPuma put together a funky combo, and with a limited tune list, they laid down a groove and threw together an album. “Tommy knows that I work better under those circumstances,” says Benson. “He knows that I don't like all that polishing up and redoing and all that. This is more exciting.”

Though it's not the acid-jazz project Benson was rumored to be working on, *That's Right* is filled with derived grooves, like the Benson-penned “Marvin Said,” a smooth vamp that takes off on Marvin Gaye's “What's Goin' On,” and “P Park,” a tune based on a Prince lick. “There are a lot of things that can make a song a hit,” says Benson. “It could be a hook anywhere in the song, like, ‘Whoop, there it is.’ Heh, heh. Lyrical hooks are the best, but it don't have to be a lyrical hook. It can be a bass line, too.”

The new record was recorded live in the studio. “I think this one digs in a little more than some other things I've done,” says Benson. “It's a little more improvisational, more off-the-cuff. It's simpler, the way we used to make records years ago. We went in with an idea, just sketches of a song or songs,

“When did we ever sign a contract to be loyal to a certain kind of music?”

and built it as we went along.”

There are some classic Benson-style ballads, but for most of *That's Right*, the groove is the thing. “I think whenever you're recording, you try to create a mood. This one succeeded more so than a lot of things we've done over the last few years. That's more jazzy to do it this way. There's just some fun things on his album, real simple bass, like those CII things we used to do. It's very simple. It's more or less for energy. We wanted to relate to the raw and just react, more than anything else, to the music.”

Which is exactly what gets Benson into his Mercedes and down to the New York jazz scene. As light and airy as his music is, he wants to keep on his toes

and always dig the latest sounds. To Benson, that's the secret to his success. "I think people have their own way of defining what success is," he says. "To me, success is communicating." **DB**

EQUIPMENT

"I'm using the Ibanez GB-5 guitar," says Benson. "It looks like a Gibson L5; it's just about the same size. That's why I call it a GB-5. When we redesigned it a few years ago, we made it a little bigger because I found out that the young people are coming back to the acoustic-electric guitar, the full-body. It's got two humbucker pickups." Dean Markley makes Benson's strings, with a light-gauge .12mm on top.

Ibanez also makes a thinner George Benson model. "The GB-100 is a little bit larger than the GB-10 we did a few years ago, and it's got a whole lotta cloisonné, you know, mother-of-pearl inlays, that finished look." Benson, who studied commercial art in school, designs the guitars himself. "Ibanez don't design them," he says. "They tell me what's selling, they tell me the effects of my design on the sound of the guitar, but I do my own design. I designed the very first electric guitar I ever had when I was 15 years old. My father, a guitarist, built it."

The George Benson Ibanez retails in the \$2,600-\$2,900 range, but Benson is hard at work on a more affordable acoustic-electric model. "We're getting ready to create the premier guitar of our time," he says. "We're trying to make something people can afford, that holds and has a beautiful sound." Ibanez hopes to release that guitar this summer.

Benson is torn between two amplifiers right now. "I'm using the Fender Twin Reverb right now for its fast attack and slow rate time," he says. "I'm so far away from my amplifier on stage, and I need something that gives me an instant response, because I play a lot of notes." But he says his favorite sound comes from the Polytone 104, with which he also travels and records.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

THAT'S RIGHT—GRP 9824
 LOVE REMEMBERS—Warner Bros. 26685
 BIG BOSS BAND—Warner Bros. 26295
 TENDERLY—Warner Bros. 25907
 GIVE ME THE NIGHT—Warner Bros. 3453
 WEEKEND IN L.A.—Warner Bros. 3139
 IN FLIGHT—Warner Bros. 2983
 BREEZIN—Warner Bros. 3111
 BENSON AND FARRELL—CTI/CBS Associated 44169
 GOOD KING BAD—CTI/CBS Associated 45226
 IN CONCERT AT CARNEGIE HALL—CTI/CBS Associated 44167
 BAD BENSON—CTI/CBS Associated 40926
 BODY TALK—CTI/CBS Associated 45222
 WHITE RABBIT—CTI/CBS Associated 40685
 BEYOND THE BLUE HORIZON—CTI/CBS Associated 40810
 I LIKE JAZZ: THE ESSENCE OF GEORGE BENSON—Columbia/Legacy 52921
 THE GEORGE BENSON COOKBOOK—Columbia 52977
 IT'S UPTOWN—Columbia 52977
 NEW BOSS GUITAR—Fantasy/OJC 461

with various others

COLLABORATION—Warner Bros. 25580 (Earl Klugh)
 FREDDIE FREELOADER—Denon 76302 (Jon Hendricks)
 BACK ON THE BLOCK—Qwest/Warner Bros. 26020 (Quincy Jones)
 MILES IN THE SKY—Columbia 48954 (Miles Davis)
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THE

Fred Anderson

The scenario's got Chicago writ large all over it: two boss tenors at a South Side bar locking horns. It's not a battle royale, though, but the big dig, an ongoing exchange of words that started nearly 40 years ago when Fred Anderson first approached Von Freeman between sets at a club called the Trocadero. Now they sit at Anderson's own place, the Velvet Lounge, which is about to undergo major renovation, swapping stories, opinions, compliments and smiles—the two Windy City tenor legends who came to play and chose to stay.

Earl Lavon Freeman—"Vonski" to his friends and fans—has stitched himself into the fabric of Chicago's mainstream since the end of WWII. After studying under Captain Walter Dyett at DuSable High, he went on to work with everyone from Charlie Parker to Sun Ra. Though he's mostly known as a slinger of straight bop and ballads, his debut (made when he was 50!) was produced by Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and he's recently made a surprisingly "out" record with the collective called Fire. A spry, sparkly 73-year-old who could easily pass for 50, Von is living proof of the rejuvenative powers of jazz. Indeed, along with his guitar-playing younger brother George he spends much of his time caring for his mother, who hits the century point later this year. Freeman's tenor sound combines an edgy tone, unpredictable melodic turns and molten phraseology. "Like Fred knows, I'm capable of getting up and playing another way altogether," he warns.

Anderson has made it his musical

by John Corbett

INACILITY

Von Freeman & The Chicago Tenor Tradition

mission to play another way altogether. One of the original architects of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), he too has spent his 67 years as something of a loner, albeit serving as a mentor for many younger musicians, including Von's horn-playing son, Chico. Like Von, Fred's utterly individual saxophone playing has gone woefully underdocumented, though of late he's grown more active, releasing records on the Okka Disk label (formed expressly for the purpose of promoting the music of Fred Anderson). His stellar new quartet (a tad on the straighter side than his others), *Birdhouse*, is named in honor of the Velvet Lounge's precursor, which Fred ran during the late '70s.

Anderson and Freeman sprouted their wings in the age of jam sessions, and that venerable tradition lives on via Fred's Sunday afternoons at the Velvet and Von's Tuesday nights at the New Apartment Lounge. A roots-conscious vanguardist and loose-cannon mainstay: In Onion City, all paths cross.

JOHN CORBETT: *What exactly does it mean to be a part of the Chicago tenor tradition?*

FRED ANDERSON: There's a lot of good tenor players come from here: Gene Ammons, Clifford Jordan, Von, Johnny Griffin. Me, I guess I come into it a little later—and so they say: "Add him to the list."

VON FREEMAN: There's so many guys. John Gilmore, Eddie Johnson, Bugs McDonald. Sonny Stitt made a lot of his reputation here. Pres, too. Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster. See, this used to be the jazz mecca from 1940 to when Bird died in 1955. Earl Hines' big band was here, King Kolax's big band. Captain

Walter Dyett had a school band that was very good; he called it the DuSablites. Sixty-third Street, 58th Street, 61st Street, 55th Street, 43rd Street, 47th Street, 38th Street—these South Side streets all had taverns and places with jam sessions. So much going on during and after the war. You could see it fading when the Pershing went down.

FA: What year did the Pershing close? I remember coming into Chicago from Evanston to see Charlie Parker—I was kinda young at the time—and to see Pres at the Pershing, around '59.

VF: With the coming of the '70s everything collapsed on the South Side, period. It seems remarkable, 'cause there were *countless* clubs. And they always had jam sessions, and all the cats with big names would come in from around the country.

JC: *Do you see a big difference between New York and Chicago?*

VF: New York is much more competitive, and it shows in the music. Let me relate something that happened to me with Chico. I've been in Chicago all my life, but Chico's been in New York for years, ever since he used to hang up under Fred. Now we had a gig at the Blue Note. The bass player and the drummer couldn't get there. So I'm worried to death. "Chico, what are we gonna do? We can't work the Blue Note without a bass and drum!" "Daddy, not to worry," he says. I didn't even know what he was talking about, 'cause I'm from Chicago where it's *hard* to find cats who can play. Chico's watching me to see my reaction. We walk in the club, and there must be four or five drummers with their drum sets! And about four or five bass players. And all

these cats can play! They had heard through the grapevine that he didn't have a drummer and bass player. That's the difference between New York and other places: the competition. And everybody migrates there who wants to make it.

JC: *Neither of you migrated to New York.*

FA: I've never really played in New York, yet. In the first place, music's always been like a hobby to me. I raised a family, married, had a day job. I've played the music because I loved it.

VF: Everyone had gone to New York, except me and Fred. Even the AACM cats.

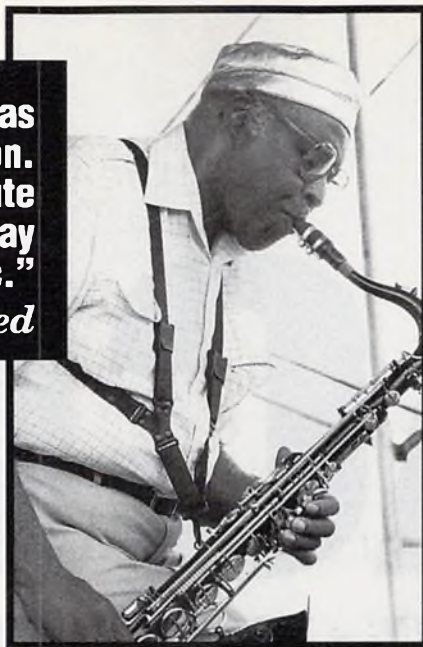
FA: I think they went to New York around the same time as Chico. I remember when Joseph [Jarman] formed the Art Ensemble, he was playing with me before that. We had a group that played the first AACM concert. Joseph came to me and said: "I think I'm gonna hook up with Roscoe [Mitchell]." Next thing I know Lester Bowie came in, and they formed the Art Ensemble. But at that time I wasn't thinking about leaving Evanston, 'cause I'd just bought a house.

VF: It's so ironic that most of your popularity came from Europe.

FA: Well, I went to Europe on account of George Lewis. He took a tape to Burkhard [Hennen, of the Moers Festival] of me and Anthony Braxton, playing at [the Evanston coffee house] Amazing Grace. But they were already in Europe. I'm still here, you dig?!! And they're all gone. Chico's gone, Muhal's gone. And me and Von, we're still here! The thing is, these cats used to follow me down on Wells Street. We'd play in this little storefront for a church organization. George, Douglas [Ewart], Hank [Hamid Drake], Felix Blackman. That was a good experience for

"When I started playing, I was thinking of being an extension. I wanted to contribute something, but I wanted to stay with the roots of the music."

—Fred



JANET KUBILE

them, 'cause by that time all the jam-session places were gone.

JC: Fred, how did you meet Chico?

FA: I was at the North Park Theatre one day. [to Von] I saw you, and you said: "My son is goin' to Northwestern, up in Evanston." So Chico used to come over to my house.

VF: Oh, man, he loved Fred. Sit up under Fred. I didn't raise him, Fred did.

FA: He'd come over, we'd sit up all night listening to records, listening to Bird, all the guys.

VF: See, they were all trying to get Fred's way of phrasing. And the way Fred heard. 'Cause you see, Fred's never heard music like other people. One time, I'll never forget, at the Trocadero, he said: "Man, I just don't play like y'all." And he never

has. He always had his own way.

JC: In what way is he different?

VF: He plays the way that he hears and the way he feels, which takes a lot of courage. Most people play the way they think they're supposed to play, the way they think they're supposed to hear. The good thing about back in that day, you had Bird,

Pres, and a few people that were top artists on their own instrument. Bird had a few records, Pres had a few, Ben had a few, Hawk a few. But you didn't have billions of CDs with everybody playing just about the same thing. These were different styles all together.

FA: I think you realized that, too, because you created a style. I'll say this now, and I told your son about it: Johnny Griffin is you! [Von starts to demur] No, no, no, ain't two ways about it. Dig this: Johnny Griffin went to New York, then made this record *Chicago Calling*, remember? I listened to it, then I played it for Chico and said: "Who's that sound like?" He said: "Man, that sounds like my father." Now, I know you're modest and say no, but Johnny Griffin left Chicago and took you to New York.

VF: I was already out of school before he came to DuSable. Next thing I know, he was famous! He's kind of like Gene Ammons. Gene Ammons and I were the two little hotshot saxophone players at DuSable. When I looked up, he had gone with King Kolax, and then he went on to the Billy Eckstine band. He never looked back, either. Almost everybody who wasn't playing like Hawkins was into Pres. And then you had the little limbs—part-Hawk/part-Pres. Then Charlie Parker: Although he played alto he had this tenor sound, not a high sound like most alto players during his era. He had this deep tone. Everybody had their different style of playing, which made it so great. When Trane came along, he wiped out that history 'cause everybody wanted to play like Coltrane. So then you had about 50 million Trane clones, but they didn't know where Trane came from.

FA: Charlie Parker, Dexter ...

VF: ... and what was the cat he played with, used to play the Pershing all the time, hit all those high notes? Earl Bostic! Hellava saxophone player.

FA: Oh, now you're telling me something new. I knew he'd played with Johnny Hodges, but I didn't know Trane was with Earl Bostic. Trane had been in good company a long time! [laughter]

VF: He was well-seasoned!

FA: And then he got all these ideas together and he created Coltrane. This is the whole thing, if you're speaking about myself. I listened to all these people and I never did try to cop off the records.


VF: Oh, Fred, you always had your own style. I remember his formative years—he never played like anybody. And a lot of people, they didn't understand Fred.

'Cause they're looking for the latest riff. But I always appreciated what he played.

FA: He was the only cat! He comes up to me, and says, "Keep on doin' what you're doin'." That meant a lot to me, 'cause I was catching hell.

VF: I could hear the swing and the general

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JC: *The same is true of you. I don't hear anyone phrasing the way you do.*

VF: Well, Fred and I are coming from the same place, just from different directions, actually.

FA: I had this vision, years ago when I started playing, that I wanted to create my own voice.

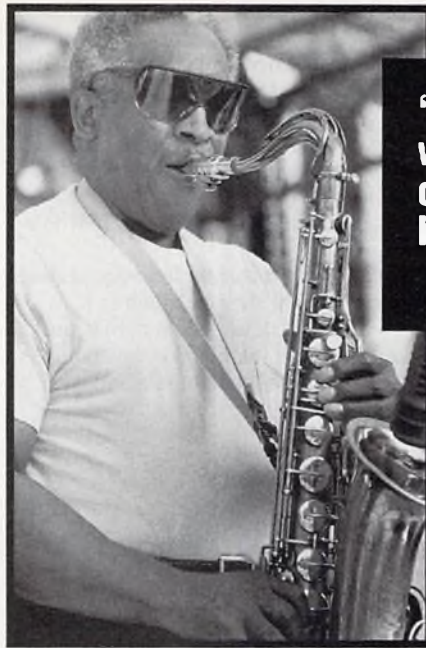
JC: *Let me throw out an idea: I think one reason Chicago is such a special place for jazz is because the distinction between mainstream and so-called "vanguard" is less hard-line than elsewhere.*

FA: I think what changed all that was the AACM. Muhal [Richard Abrams], he played with all the cats, played with all the mainstream guys ...

JC: *Played in your band, didn't he, Von?*

VF: Uh-huh.

FA: ... but he had some different ideas about what he wanted to play. He wanted to move the music a little bit. And then he put the guys in the position of putting on concerts, presenting the music, writing their own music. I think this is one of the main things that happened in Chicago. The AACM contributed to the music. It's



"I've often tried to figure out where creativity comes from or where it goes. I'm 73 and I haven't found out yet."

—Von

listening to what I play—maybe they won't understand how I phrase or whatever, you dig, but I know one thing, they can hear the feeling of the roots.

JC: *You've both had ongoing jam sessions for many years. Jam sessions waned at a certain point, but I know you both think they still serve an important function. Why is that?*

VF: It helped save the music on the South Side. There was nowhere to work.

FA: And that's the same way it is now. The reason I have so many musicians come to the Velvet Lounge now is a lot of them aren't working. Some of them work a few weekend gigs, some are out playing on the street. This gives them a presence, they can present themselves.

VF: And a crowd is just a bonus. To me it has more to do with the ambiance of the

part of the history. You can call it "jazz," "avant garde," anything you want. What it is is some good music. It's an extension. When I started playing I was thinking about being an extension. I wanted to contribute something, but I wanted to stay with the roots of the music. I never wanted to lose the roots. Anybody

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occasion. Jam sessions are like the old West. Who could draw his gun the fastest? We all know that that stuff is mostly legend. Somebody outgunned someone—really someone hit the ceiling, he ain't hit nobody. It sounds glamorous to jam session. We go with the legend.

FA: Years ago I used to go to jam sessions and not play. I could have, but I had so much respect for the guys, so I wouldn't get up there until I felt like I could be effective. So what I would do is go home and practice. And this is what we try to do

here, now. We encourage the cats to come up and play, take a short solo, then come on down, go on home and practice. Come back in two weeks, three weeks, try again. But just a cat come up with no respect think he can do anything: no good!

VF: Mess up the atmosphere in the whole room.

JC: *Jam sessions are about learning, respect, inspiration, more than gunslinging.*

VF: Well, it's like I said, most of that stuff is legend. The first thing you learn about music is you have good nights and bad

nights. I've often tried to figure out where creativity comes from or where it goes. I'm 73, and I haven't found out yet. I've gone to work and felt great: "Baby, I'm gonna express myself tonight!" And *nothing* happened, all night long I can't get nothing. And then sometimes just everything flows. And I don't know why. As a professional, you try to keep everything at a certain level that you never go under.

FA: If you're playing out [live], you've got to keep yourself at a certain level. And the only way to do that is to stay on the instrument.

VF: Fred, you said the key. You got to practice!

FA: You can't take anything for granted. If you take yourself for granted, taking the public for granted, you're through. They know. They're listening to what you played last time, what you're playing now. They're paying to see you perform.

VF: This is the hidden psychology of jazz: the audience. A musician who grows older has to study all these facets. The study of an audience is one of the greatest studies in the world. A lot of people say: "Ooh, I'm blowin', baby. But how come they ain't diggin' it?!" Well an audience may be diggin' you to death, they might even get up and walk out on you, but still dig you. The very cat that walks out during your solo might be the same one hollerin': "Man that Fred Anderson's playin' like mad, baby." Another one sitting there [claps his hands and rocks his head] later say, "Man, they ain't sayin' nothing." Drives you nuts.

JC: *You're both hovering around the 70-year mark, but you're also so young at heart. What advice would you give younger players?*

FA: You've got to always think you can do something different, something better. Never think you've got it made, never get the big head and always keep your mind goin'. I go back and play the basics. If you think you know the basics, then you don't know the basics. Go back and start working there again; you'll find you learn something. And you might find it'll take you someplace you haven't been before.

VF: Fred, you've echoed my thoughts again. While you were talking I was thinking about some of the great saxophone players who are still living: Sonny Rollins, Teddy Edwards, Benny Golson, Harold Land, Pharoah Sanders—he's not quite as old as we are but with that beard he has the look of a sage; one of my favorites of all time James Moody, and Johnny Griffin. The biggest thing that I find as I grow younger [Anderson chuckles], and Fred hit it: It's so hard to remember what you've forgotten. All these things I learned 50 years ago, if I don't practice every day, they leave me. And I don't realize till I hear some guy 40

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DAVEY HARRIS

years my junior playing what I played 50 years ago, and I'd forgotten I'd even played it. And I know Fred does the same thing. And a poor man like Sonny Rollins, he's probably forgotten more than the average cat is gonna ever play. Sometimes you forget you've got to practice every day. And as you get older, you've got to practice more. Everybody's got it backwards: They practice 15 hours a day when they're 20, then they get to 60 or 70, they say: [*lowers his voice to that of a gruff*

old man] "Well, I got it covered."

FA: No, can't do that. Got to keep your mind going. Don't use it, you'll lose it. Getting old, your mind doesn't have to be feeble. Your health has to be there, too. That's the only thing that can get in the way.

VF: I was writing a little jive book once, then I gave up on it. But my last theme was: It'd knock me out to see a guy 100 years old that was out playing Bird. One hundred years old, creating something new!

DB

EQUIPMENT

Vonski's tenor is a new Selmer Super 80. He brought a great, beat-to-hell old leather bag with his initials on it, though declined to have it photographed. He uses a Otto Link #9 mouthpiece and Rico Royal's brand-new #2 medium reeds. Fred, too, exclusively uses a Selmer Super 80—his is the black-and-gold Super Action II version. His mouthpiece is a Berg Larsen 120/2m. For the last three years, on a tip from Von, he's been using Bob Black's Acousticut reeds, medium-hard.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Von Freeman

DEDICATED TO YOU—SteepleChase 31351

LESTER LEAPS IN—SteepleChase 31320

WALKIN' TOUGH!—Southport 0010

SERENADE AND BLUES—Nessa 11

HAVE NO FEAR—Nessa 6

DOIN' IT RIGHT NOW—Atlantic 1628

with George Freeman

REBELLION—Southport 0027 (Von plays piano only)

NEW IMPROVED FUNK—Groove Merchant 519

with Chico Freeman

FREEMAN AND FREEMAN—India Navigation 1070

with Fire

FIRE WITH VON FREEMAN—Southport 0035

Fred Anderson

BIRDHOUSE—Okka Disk 12007

DESTINY—Okka Disk 12003

(Marilyn Crispell, Hamid Drake)

VINTAGE DUETS CHICAGO 1-11-80—Okka Disk 12001

(Steve McCall)

THE MISSING LINK—Nessa 23

DARK DAY—Message 0004

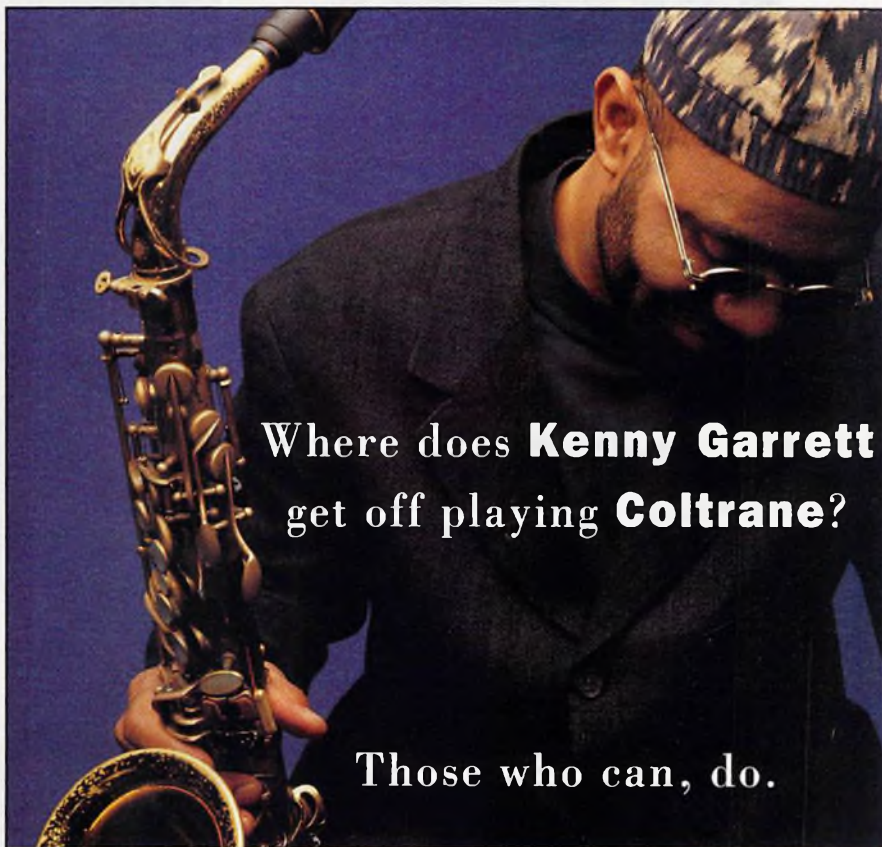
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Ears **Clean,** *New* **Dream**

by Jon Andrews

Tell Dave Holland his new band sounds like nothing he's done before, and he's pleased. "I like to think of the music being in a process of change all the time," says the bassist. Starting fresh with the new players and different instrumental lineup introduced on *Dream Of The Elders* satisfies that need for change. "I take a break before starting a new group—in this case it was two and a half years," he confirms. "I feel like it cleans my ears out." For Holland, soon to turn 50, this regenerative process involves breaking things down to the bare essentials and then building from the ground up.





Although Holland's previous quartet recorded *Extensions*, placing second in **DB's** Critics and Readers polls for Best Jazz Album of 1991 (among other accolades), the group disbanded without attempting a follow-up. Holland confesses that when an opportunity to record a second album arose, "I wasn't quite ready. By the time we were ready, the band was finished. I don't regret things like that—I'm happy we got even one record."

Cycles of change are a hallmark of Holland's protean career. In the 28 years since Miles Davis plucked him from a London bandstand—when he became an important component in Miles' transitional and early fusion groups—Holland has spurned the collective improvisations of Circle (with Chick Corea and Anthony Braxton), the growth of the ECM sound, the sonic explorations of reedist Sam Rivers and the cyborg funk-jazz of the M-BASE movement.

More noticeable have been Holland's recent high-profile engagements with Joe Henderson, Herbie Hancock and Betty Carter. Personally, he's also rediscovered the rewards and challenges of solo performance, recording *Ones All* (1993) after a European solo tour. In the solo format, Holland demonstrates a rare ability to command the audience's attention over an album's or concert's length, deriving a wide range of expression from his instrument while telling the listener a story. He prefers to work solo regularly over a period of time to master the demands of the format, comparing the experience to delivering a stand-up monologue. "It's very different from playing with an ensemble and sharing the music with other musicians, having that conversation and interaction," he observes. The payoff comes from the listeners' response. Holland doesn't believe that a solo performance requires more from the listeners. To the contrary, he asserts, "The audience is less intimidated by a soloist and there's more intimacy going on. That's one of the things I really enjoy about it—you can get closer to the audience in a solo context."

On his return to New York, Holland felt comfortable with solo space and ready for a studio project. The resulting CD sounds relaxed, upbeat and relatively "composed." The bassist agrees, "*Ones All* reflects my involvement with song forms [like 'God Bless The Child'] and with creating compositional settings." Asked to compare *Ones All* to his first solo session, *Emerald Tears* (1977), finally available on CD after an inexcusable delay, Holland

points to his extensive, "open-form" work with Sam Rivers through the '70s. With Rivers, he recalls, "the blank canvas was there and the choices were ours as to where the music would go. *Emerald Tears* is certainly influenced by playing with Sam for a long time." Curiously, the composer considers the comparatively structured *Ones All* to be a more personally liberating experience than the abstract, introspective *Emerald Tears*. He explains, "That probably reflects the way I feel. I feel freer now. I'm not controlling the flow of music as much as letting it all come out."

When Holland finally felt ready to assemble a new band, the first call went to Steve Nelson. Holland had worked with the vibraphonist in a project with drummer Tony Reedus, and considered Nelson a key hire. He acknowledges that Nelson's availability was "as much as anything, the reason for having a vibraphone in the band." The inclusion of Nelson's mallet instruments adds intriguing colors to the ensemble's sound. The vibraphonist can achieve uniquely African effects, evoking the balafon or kalimba. "Steve's got a lot of tricky things he does with the mallets," says Holland, "and he gets some really different colors out of the bars, like a piano player would draw different colors from the piano." For a man who's rarely recorded with the vibraphone, Holland warmly praises Nelson's sparkling contributions, observing, "What's so beautiful about the vibraphone or marimba is that it's a percussive instrument, and so, as well as providing harmonic colors, it's a very strong part of the rhythm section and the percussion section."

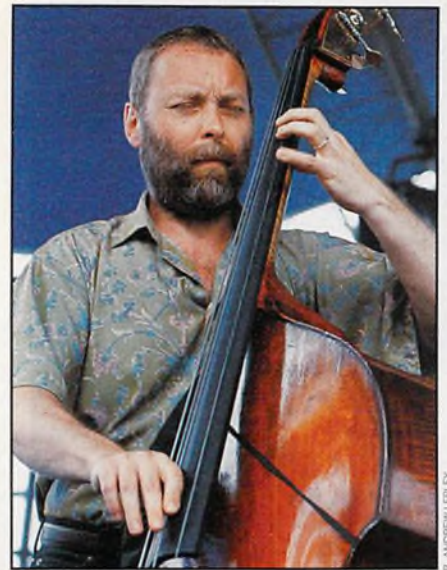
Holland maintains high expectations for the new quartet. In addition to the vibes, the group surrounds the resilience and momentum of the leader's bass playing with up-and-comers Eric Person on saxophones and Gene Jackson on drums. Holland's mission statement for assembling a new band is straightforward. "I'm attempting to create a band that is interesting and challenging for the musicians involved, and at the same time, gives them the opportunity to express themselves. Those are the attributes that I like in a leader, like Duke Ellington or Miles, who are centers around which people can congregate and function and develop their own music." Asked whether Miles' reputation for obscure communications limited him as a leader, Holland laughs, "That's why he's a great leader!" He elaborates, "If Miles asked for

a specific, that's what he'd get. If he gave just a general idea, you'd start thinking and putting the creative process to work, and he'd get much more than he would have asked for!"

Saxophonist Person sounds confident and fluid with this group, matching his best work with Chico Hamilton or Ronald Shannon Jackson. It can't be a coincidence that Nelson and Person, like Kevin Eubanks and Steve Coleman before them, seem to blossom in Holland's employ. The bassist quickly dismisses any suggestion

that his working in his group could become a rite of passage for developing talent, as Miles Davis' band was for the young Holland. Instead, he sees Person as an opportunistic talent ready to take advantage of a highly visible showcase. "Eric is in the right frame of mind right now," notes his boss. "He's ready and he wants to play."

Considering Eubanks, Holland points to the guitarist's contributions to the *Extensions* quartet as a continuation of his solid work. He maintains that anyone who



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW LELY

"I feel freer now. I'm not controlling the flow of music as much as letting it all come out."

heard new facets of Eubanks' playing on *Extensions* had simply missed out on a string of good performances. He recalls, "The first time we played together, he brought some lines and some tunes that we just learned on the spot in a jam-session setting. It was great stuff, and we helped each other find some new things." The two share a strong appreciation for the touch of acoustic string instruments and continue to work together, subject to geographic limitations and Eubanks' commitment to *The Tonight Show* TV band.

Once his new band was in place, Holland was anxious to get into the studio. The knockout track on *Dream Of The Elders* may be "Equality," with Cassandra Wilson giving voice to Maya Angelou's plaintive, soulful poem, as put to music by Holland. Initially adapted for Betty Carter's *Feed The Fire* project, but not used, the poem made a lasting impression on the bassist. "When I came to 'Equality,' it scanned exactly as a song form, and I started to hear some music very quickly." *The Dream Of The Elders* session allowed Holland to realize "Equality," calling on an old friend for the vocal. Holland explains, "I've known Cassandra for quite some years now. I'd come to visit her in Brooklyn where she lived, and we'd play duets together. I've always loved her singing, and I thought her voice would be perfect for the emotional quality and the register of the song." And so it is. After achieving an inspired, irreplaceable take

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EQUIPMENT

Dave Holland plays a smaller, German-made three-quarter bass, about 90 years old, and a larger, French-made three-quarters bass, about 120 years old. He uses Thomastik Spirocore strings and German bows.

For amplification, he utilizes a Gallien-Krueger amp, along with an Underwood pickup mounted on the bridge of the bass, and an AKG C-406 microphone placed between the bridge and the foot.

Over the past year, he has added an acoustic bass guitar (i.e., a bass guitar with an acoustic body) made by Michael Tobias. Holland uses this instrument in performances with Gateway, and it can also be heard on Herbie Hancock's *The New Standard*.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DREAM OF THE ELDERS—ECM 21572
ONES ALL—Intuition 2148
EXTENSIONS—ECM 21410
TRIPPLICATE—ECM 21373
THE RAZOR'S EDGE—ECM 21353
JUMPIN' IN—ECM 21269
LIFE CYCLE—ECM 21238
EMERALD TEARS—ECM 21109
CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS—ECM 21017

with Gateway (John Abercrombie, Jack DeJohnette)
HOME COMING—ECM 21562
GATEWAY 2—ECM 21105
GATEWAY—ECM 21062

as co-leader

WORLD TRIO—Intuition 2152 (Kevin Eubanks, Mino Cinelu)
THE ORACLE—EmArcy 846 376 (Hank Jones, Billy Higgins)
QUESTION AND ANSWER—Geffen 24293 (Pat Metheny, Roy Haynes)
DAVE HOLLAND SAM RIVERS, VOLS. 1&2—IAI 373843.373848
CIRCLE: THE PARIS CONCERT—ECM 21018/21019 (Anthony Braxton, Chick Corea, Barry Altschul)
IMPROVISATIONS FOR CELLO AND GUITAR—ECM 1013 (Derek Bailey; out of print)
MUSIC FROM TWO BASSES—ECM 1011 (Barre Phillips; out of print)

with Miles Davis

FILLES DE KILIMANJARO—Columbia 46116
BITCHES BREW—Columbia 40577
BLACK BEAUTY: MILES DAVIS AT FILLMORE WEST—Sony SOPJ 39-40 (Japan only)

with Chick Corea

A.R.C.—ECM 21009
SONG OF SINGING—Blue Note 84343

with Anthony Braxton

ANTHONY BRAXTON LIVE—Bluebird 6626
DORTMUND (QUARTET) 1976—hat ART 6075
NEW YORK, FALL 1974—Arista 4032 (out of print)

with Sam Rivers

CONTRASTS—ECM 1162
WAVES—Tomato 2696492 (out of print)

with various others

THE NEW STANDARD—Verve 314 529 584 (Herbie Hancock)
FEED THE FIRE—Verve 314 523 600 (Betty Carter)
SO NEAR, SO FAR—Verve 517 674 (Joe Henderson)
SPIRITALK 2—Blue Note 30132 (Kevin Eubanks)
RHYTHM IN MIND—Novus 63125 (Steve Coleman)
CRYSTAL FIRE—enja 7029 (Karl Berger)
DEER WAN—ECM 21102 (Kenny Wheeler)
GNU HIGH—ECM 21069 (Kenny Wheeler)
WHERE FORTUNE SMILES—One Way 29312 (John McLaughlin)
MORNING BUGLE—Rouner 356 (John Hartford)
VASSAR CLEMENTS WITH NORMAN BLAKE, JETHRO BURNS, SAM BUSH ET AL.—Flying Fish 701

during the final rehearsal, the group was elated to find that the performance had unexpectedly been recorded. Holland raves about Wilson's vocal, now preserved on CD. "She's beautiful on it."

With ears thoroughly cleaned out, band assembled and album recorded, only touring remains for now. The quartet will be on the road through the summer, initially to Europe, but bound for the United States and scheduled to arrive in New York and California in August. Holland expects to spend much of the

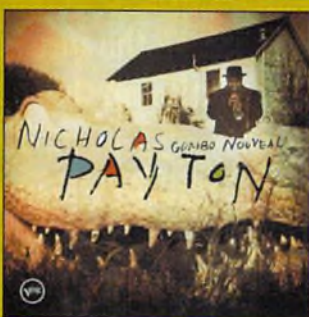
remainder of the year on the road with Herbie Hancock's quartet. (Holland's performance on bass and acoustic bass guitar inject an essential energy and drive into Hancock's latest *The New Standard*.) He also looks forward to working in some dates with longtime colleagues John Abercrombie and Jack DeJohnette as the reformed Gateway trio. **DB**

(For further information, Dave Holland maintains a World Wide Web Site located at <http://www.citw.ca/holland/>)

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Woody Herman 50 Years In The Big Band Business

By John McDonough

For 50 years, bandleader and reedman Woody Herman remained a great force in big-band jazz by constantly reinventing himself. Perhaps none of Herman's Herds swung more mightily than his groups in the early '60s, well-represented on the recent Verve reissue Woody Herman: Jazz Masters 54. In light of this and other recent activity surrounding Herman (including three books and a discography), we've reprinted the following "Classic Interview" from our issue dated November 1986, less than one year before his death at age 74.

The band is playing to a full house—about 2,700 people, mostly young. It's a hugely enthusiastic crowd that has come to hear a band at the peak of its powers. As the group blares its way full-throttle through one of its wildest head routines, suddenly a violent, stabbing trumpet break seems to come ripping through the theater from nowhere. Everyone looks up to see what it is. A musician literally comes flying through the air from the upper balcony down toward the stage on a support wire. He is dressed in a Superman outfit and hits the stage running before blasting out a few more slashing high-note spires between echoing drum breaks. The crowd cheers madly.

Part of an old Alice Cooper act, maybe? Sun Ra pretending to descend from a neighboring galaxy? Or perhaps Miles Davis' latest "new direction" in his own special theater of the audience put-on?

None of the above, thank you. All this happened 40 years ago at the Paramount Theater in New York. It was just another show for the Woody Herman band, the one we now think of as the First Herd; the trumpeter in the Superman outfit playing "Apple Honey" was Pete Candoli.

Herman, whose reputation for

progressive bands and musical integrity over the last 25 years seems starkly out of register with such showbiz shenanigans, confessed all this recently and showed no noticeable regrets. "It was madness, but my background is show business," he laughed. "And we indulged in show business that would make Kiss look like a string quartet."

"I lead a road band. As long as you're on the road, you have musical freedom. When you stay in one place, you lose that freedom. ... I couldn't exist if I didn't go through all the throes of being active on the road."

Herman has been talking about the past a lot lately for a special reason. This month marks his 50th year as an active bandleader, an absolutely unique accomplishment. It was on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November 1936 that it all began, and it continues today.

Herman has changed his stripes so many times over the course of his career, it would take a spreadsheet to detail it all. The first Herman-led band rose out of the ashes of Isham Jones' dance orchestra, in which Herman was a sideman from 1934–'36. When Jones retired in 1936, Herman and several other members incorporated the orchestra's remnants as "The Band That Plays The Blues."

After inheriting most of the operating apparatus of the Jones orchestra, including contracts with Jones' booking agency, GAC, and Decca Records, Herman emerged as frontman. He could sing novelty numbers and croon a ballad in perfect period style, as many of the old Decca sides show. This first Herman band debuted in Brooklyn on election night 1936. The group achieved a modest reputation, served as house orchestra to various Decca artists (Bing Crosby's hit "Deep In The Heart Of Texas" was backed by the Herman band) and scored its first significant hit with "Woodchopper's Ball" in 1939.

But none of this would have been enough to sustain the career Herman now celebrates. "We had reached a certain level before the war," he says, "but then things were determined by forces beyond our control. Everybody got drafted, and even though we started as a co-op band, finding replacements became my sole responsibility. That's when I started making the drastic changes that led to the First Herd of 1944. If the war hadn't come, we probably would have continued as before. I wouldn't have been forced to move in the direction I did. Also, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman and some of the others had tremendous equity in their prewar successes. I didn't have that much to lose by radical change. That's why we started attracting a different kind of young player than would go to Benny. Arrangers, too. We came up with great people. It was a band guys wanted to be part of."

After the war, the big band era went into decline. But Herman and one other bandleader, Stan Kenton, bucked the tides and entered the period that would establish their most enduring reputations. Although they remained friends over the years, they often disagreed on musical matters. "Kenton's

CHARLES STEWART



Above: Woody Herman in the early 1960s

greatest weakness was his handling of arrangers,” Herman notes. “He invented them. He didn’t go to the right sources by my standards. He looked for guys who would emulate Kenton, and that left very little room to find out the writer’s point of view. He was reaching out through his arrangers for something new, but didn’t know what he was looking for. I disapprove of window-shopping at the expense of your audience.

“I was always intrigued from the earliest days of having guys who were in the band write for the band. I think they’ll usually come up with better material than an outsider. And I was always very proud of the fact that we’d have a couple of guys in the sections who also arranged; this was the best situation. In the First Herd we had Ralph Burns and Neal Hefti. I have always tried to utilize people like these. They were closer to the music than I was in many cases. They knew best what guys should take what solos.”

The Second Herd was born at the height of bebop’s popularity—September 1947—and the young players Herman hired not only brought with them the new music but a new voicing for the Herman reed section. Stan Getz and Herbie Steward had been playing in a group with Shorty Rogers in an L.A. club; Herman hired the band virtually intact (though Steward would soon be replaced by Al Cohn). When Zoot Sims came over from Benny Goodman and Serge Chaloff was summoned from

Boston, the smooth, dry “Four Brothers” blend became the most identifiable reed voicing since Glenn Miller’s clarinet lead trademark. “I knew right away this was an important sound that belonged to us,” Herman recalls.

It was the first two Herds that produced the most remembered and still-requested titles of the Herman book. No subsequent band would yield a body of work fans would continue to demand hearing. But this didn’t mean there wasn’t more exciting music still to come. Future Herds drew additional material from within their ranks, often combining with earlier ideas. The great Third Herd of 1953–’54 (with Nat Pierce, Dick Hafer, Kai Winding, Carl Fontana and Don Fagerquist) deployed with the “Four Brothers” sound on “Moten Swing.” In the early and mid-’60s, a series of LPs for Philips and Columbia marked another peak, as Bill Chase, Phil Wilson and Sal Nestico became riveting forces in the Swingin’ Herd.

Herman’s old book, an accumulation of 50 years’ worth of scores, has been turned over to Berklee College in Boston, where future generations will study and play it. But it’s not all there. Some of it is still on the road with the band. And even Herman himself may still think about the old days, especially when his current band jumps into “Four Brothers” or “Caldonia.”

Herman looks at the concept of the

jazz repertory orchestra—a standing orchestra designed to perform existing jazz works of the past—as a “noble idea,” but sees nothing in the theory that can replace the experience of actually playing music night after night. “When the Mel Lewis Band celebrated 20 years in the Village, what were they celebrating?” he asks. Then he answers himself: “Twenty years of playing one night a week. That doesn’t say much to me. I don’t mean that it’s not a fine band. But it couldn’t afford to exist if the guys weren’t involved in other things.

“I lead a road band. As long as you’re on the road, you have musical freedom. When you stay in one place, you lose that freedom. I go around the country and run into guys I played with 40 years ago, 20 years ago, last year. They talk about how great the old days on the road were. Now they’re stuck in reality. I know damn well I couldn’t exist if I didn’t go through all the throes of being active on the road.”

These days Herman roams the world about nine months a year, down from 11 months a few years ago. As the parade of new players continues through his ranks, Herman continues to pick, choose, advise, support, argue and edit. “I call myself a coach more than a bandleader,” he likes to say. “And my teams win.”

DB

For The Fun Of It

Russell Malone twisted his guitar around the changes like a juggler tossing plates to his partner across the stage. Now, with an almost wicked smile, he whirls a pineapple. Then, out of nowhere, he whirls a *chainsaw*. Diana Krall laughed and never flinched, once even twisting *herself* at the piano, harmonically *and* physically, hand over hand, catching and throwing back chords with some extra English of her own. Paul Keller only smiled and walked on, his bass anchoring the musical whirlwind.

I don't remember what song the Diana Krall Trio was playing at that particular moment on that particular concert of last summer's Montreal Jazz Festival. It's like remembering an especially colorful burst in a whole skyful of fireworks. It was sparkling. It was swinging. It was, as I remember thinking, as much *fun* as jazz *ought* to be.

"My mum always told me to have fun, that we're *playing* up there on the stage," says Diana. "When I've played with John Clayton and Jeff Hamilton, we talk and we joke while we're playing. I have the same thing now with Russell and Paul. They're so funny, and our communication now is on such a great level in so many ways. We're still trying to see how far we can push each other."

Krall's trio joined the Benny Green Trio in a festival-long tribute to Nat Cole, the gigs in Montreal climaxing a tour across Canada. It was meant to be a unique project. It became a working *band*. "It was an accident," says Krall, happily amazed.

Diana and Benny's manager, Mary Ann Topper, and Montreal's producer, Andre Menard, put the tour together. "We decided it would be great to do music of Nat Cole. Benny could concentrate on the instrumental side. I could concentrate on the vocal side. Russell Malone came to my mind, and Paul Keller had been in Russell's band. I knew it would work because of Russell's and Paul's connection. They're great friends and we just got along. We didn't even rehearse. We talked on the phone about a couple things and really didn't get together until Winnipeg. ...

"I don't like to have anything worked out too much. We have arrangements, but, even through those, I like to throw things out on the bandstand, see how far we can push it. ...

"Russell can really *deal*. He can turn up



JUDY SCHALLER

Diana Krall

the gas really high. When we were still feeling each other out, I said to him, "Go ahead! Step all over me!" I like to be challenged by him, and I certainly *am*. ...

"Paul has incredible time and swings his butt off. He knows tunes and has great arranging ideas for the trio. He's like a rock. He's holding down the fort for us."

Nat Cole, as Diana observed, recorded "a zillion tunes," but the trio played live mostly hits of the King Cole Trio, from the romantic "You Call It Madness" and the ironic "You're Looking At Me" to the metaphorically sexy "Frim Fram Sauce" and a trio vocal of "Hit That Jive, Jack." Impulse! recorded the trio's tribute on Krall's recent *All For You*, also including "If I Had You" as a Krall/Green duet and the heartbreaking "A Blossom Fell" as a tribute-within-a-tribute to Nat's younger brother Freddy Cole. "I was inspired by Freddy at Bradley's. He knocked me out. I'll never forget it."

Malone sometimes worked with Freddy Cole and echoes Nat's great guitarist, the sublime Oscar Moore. Russell also sometimes steals the spotlight—which is okay, says D.K. "We bring out the best in each other. We put it on this record. I'm very critical, and I never listen to my own records, but I listen to this record because I love listening to these guys." Krall hopes that the trio eventually can play much more than Nat's music—but with the same sensibilities and personalities.

All For You is her third album as leader. *Stepping Out*, for Justin Time, featured two of her friends and mentors, bassist John Clayton and drummer Jeff Hamilton. *Only Trust Your Heart* (GRP) featured two of her heroes, saxophonist Stanley Turrentine and bassist Ray Brown, and

two other favorite session-mates, Christian McBride and Lewis Nash. Diana also guested on two recent all-star albums. Her exquisite "And I Love Her" highlights a GRP celebration of the Beatles. Her soulful "Fresh Out Of Love" is one of two new Benny Carter songs that she sings on Carter's *Songbook* for MusicMasters—with "Echo Of My Heart" to be released on the second volume.

Krall is already booked into 1997, usually with Malone and Keller, including a spring and summer tour of Europe and Canada, a solo appearance July 9 on an all-star Carnegie Hall salute to Ella Fitzgerald, most of August in New York with the trio at the prestigious Oak Room of the legendary Algonquin Hotel and various other gigs this fall in the United States and on the Blue Note circuit around Japan. Needless to say, she's come a long way from the British Columbia town of Nanaimo.

Diana Krall is a star-in-the-making. She swings hard at the piano and can play some of the greasiest blues anywhere. She sings with an often-touching tenderness yet also with remarkable grit. And yes, she's beautiful. There's potential crossover appeal aplenty—to pop, to magazines, to movies—but, thanks just the same, she'd rather play jazz.

"I've played pop stuff in piano bars, and I wouldn't mind singing on a pop record or a commercial. I'm game, but playing the music I *want* to play is the most important thing. I grew up with eclectic tastes at home musically, but my heart is in the *groove*. I just want to play piano and sing. The bottom line is the music, the music, the *music!* And that's *fun!*"

—Michael Bourne



Seamus Blake

Making Waves In Funky Waters

With his burly sound and fleet imagination, London-born, Vancouver, B.C.-raised saxophonist Seamus Blake has caused more than a bit of a stir among the jazz cognoscenti of New York City.

"It's not acid jazz, it's not rock music, it's not Knitting Factory alternative," says Blake, 24, a 1992 Berklee College of Music grad. "People at our shows at C.B.G.B.'s Gallery and the Knitting Factory tell us it's a kind of funky alternative grunge jazz, and that's probably kind of close, though we're not really grunge."

Blake's 1994 *Criss Cross* debut, *The Call*, captures the saxman's fondness for

spinning improvisations that fall outside the harmony, as well as more melodically driven numbers that remain within those bounds. But that mostly post-bop collection will hardly prepare listeners for Blake's just-released *Criss Cross* follow-up: *The Bloomdaddies*, a nothing-less-than-zealous album that's delivered by a co-op band featuring Blake and fellow tenorman Chris Cheek, bassist Jesse Murphy and drummers Jorge Rossy and Dan Reiser. The rhythmically charged, back-beats-in-abundance group plays an assortment that includes a funk-based "Do We?" a down-home-ish "Hick As Heck" and a riotous version of Louis Prima's "Sing, Sing, Sing,"

the saxophonists sometimes enhancing their solos with electronics such as delays, wah-wahs and harmony processors.

The quintet came together about two years ago, after Blake, Murphy and Rossy had played some trio dates on the West Coast. The players started thinking of different directions, gathered Cheek and Reiser (both friends of Blake's from Berklee), started writing material and bought some electronics, which they tried out for the first time at the Ottawa Jazz Festival in 1994. "We got a bad review," Blake reports happily. "That made us think, 'Hey, we're onto something.'"

—Zan Stewart

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Calling It Quits, Sort of

Oliver Jones is the kind of pianist who likes to make others sound good, often setting aside his considerable chops to gently embellish someone else's solo.

At the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival in Moscow, Idaho, where Jones sometimes serves as the house pianist, he has accompanied everyone from Freddie Hubbard to Gerry Mulligan. And he always lets the other stars shine brightest. In his hometown of Montreal, he has long been known as the second most famous pianist, behind his childhood friend Oscar Peterson.

However, at 61 and with a new CD (*From Lush To Lively*) on the Justin Time label, Jones has finally gained recognition as a gifted, fleet-fingered improviser and tasty accompanist. He's received invitations from top jazz festivals. And with Oscar Peterson slowing down a bit, Jones is finally being acknowledged in Canada with the sort

of adoration locals usually reserve for hockey and beer.

So what has Jones decided to do now that the spotlight is swinging his way? Predictably enough for the teddy-bear-resembling pianist, he's going into semi-retirement. "Now that I'm getting all these replies, I'm ready to call it quits," Jones says with a soft laugh. "It's a wonderful feeling, actually. I feel like I've accomplished an awful lot."

Jones, who began touring at the age of five, says he thinks "55 years is enough on any gig." Instead of 125 shows a year, he'll cut back to about 12. He wants to spend more time with his wife, more time in the recording studio and more time on college campuses, where he hopes to pass along some important messages.

"So many kids play everything they know in every solo," he says. "They don't know when to listen and how to complement the other soloists. Sometimes you can get so much out of grooving behind the other musicians that you don't have to solo."

He says jazz musicians should not be afraid to holler, either. "Sometimes the music is cooking and everyone is standing there acting serious. If the music moves you, don't be afraid to shout."

That enthusiasm can be heard in Jones' enormous capacity for swing, one trait he has in common with Peterson. Though



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Oliver Jones

Jones and Peterson both studied with Oscar's sister, Daisy Peterson Sweeney, and though they both play with startling speed and brilliant cascades, their sounds remain distinct. Jones has a soft touch, with hints of Art Tatum and Earl Hines tossed in. An engaging player who never falls back on cliché riffs, he says he still learns from playing with giants such as Herb Ellis, Ray Brown and Elvin Jones—all of whom joined him at Hampton's festival in February.

"It's a wonderful feeling to be able to share the stage with so many of them," Jones says. "Every night is still a lesson for me. I don't think that will ever change."
—Jonathan Eig



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At a time when government support for jazz is at an all-time low, musicians like Wendell Harrison set an example for survival in the '90s. For nearly 20 years, the Detroit-based, 53-year-old saxophonist/clarinetist/educator/businessman has been a one-man jazz machine with his non-profit company Rebirth Inc. (supported by private-sector grants) and his WenHa record label. He's a smaller version of what the Manchester



Wendell Harrison

Craftsmen's Guild is to Pittsburgh, or what Jazzmobile is to New York City.


Harrison and his wife, pianist/educator Pamela Wise, deal with virtually every facet of jazz in the Motor City: recordings, concert production, radio broadcasts and educational seminars. "People out here in the Midwest aren't distracted," Harrison noted. "It's not as busy as New York or Los Angeles. You've got time to develop the ideas out here. Plus, people want to see things happen, so they will support you."

Like so many other musicians, Harrison made the trip to New York in the '60s. He came back to his hometown in the early '70s to record, teach and produce concerts. "I founded a label [Tribe records], a

magazine ... I never could do that stuff in New York," he said. "The quality of life was a lot better here for me." In 1978, Harrison created Rebirth Inc., which has produced concerts featuring Ellis Marsalis, Freddie Hubbard, Eddie Harris, Jerry Gonzalez and Hank Jones; traveled to schools in the U.S. Midwest and in West Africa and the Middle East; and mentored many of Detroit's next generation of jazz players, including Geri Allen, Robert Hurst and James Carter, who played contrabass clarinet on Harrison's Clarinet Ensemble recording *Rush & Hustle* (WenHa). According to Harrison, writing music for modern jazz clarinet was a worthwhile

challenge. "You have a lot of good clarinet players, but a lot of them are classically trained. They don't know anything about jazz language. Then you have a lot of saxophone players that play clarinet. They can't produce a quality sound out of the clarinet, so it's a constant education thing."

Harrison's ventures are proof that artists must stick to the basics to survive. "A lot of us have been relying on the NEA, especially in the Midwest," Harrison lamented. "We're going to have to go back to the drawing board and deal with our communities one-on-one in terms of getting small businesses to support the art form." —Eugene Holley



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CD REVIEWS

JULY 1996

KEY

Excellent
Very Good
Good
Fair
Poor

★★★★★
★★★★
★★★
★★
★



Dave Douglas

Five

Soul Note 121276

★★★★★

The brightest concoction of classical renderings for jazz in many a moon, Douglas' string band returns with *Five*. It even tops '94's *Parallel Worlds*, the band's immediate predecessor. With a nod to Max Roach, not since John Lewis' early "chamber works" with strings and jazz quartet has a band been more capable and expressive with variable-form compositions, strings and jazz rhythm section.

"Classical renderings" is probably not the most accurate description of this music. After all, a quick glance at the back sleeve clearly suggests a seemingly patternless eclecticism, what with six of the 10 selections dedicated to Steve Lacy, Wayne Shorter, colleague Mark Dresser, Woody Shaw, John Cage and John Zorn. Add a Monk and Roland Kirk tune to the eight by Douglas and we've got a sort of post-modern jazz holiday for strings. The program itself plays as one seamless piece of music, with barely a pause between most selections: solos, familiar themes, partial groupings, classical and jazz voicings for violinist Mark Feldman and cellist Erik Friedlander—all these devices and more are used time and again. And since we're talking about a suite of sorts, part of the fun comes from seeing/hearing/ guessing the clear references to Shorter, Zorn, et al., as parts of a whole. And yes, this is Douglas' project, but one gets the feeling all five members are in on it, suggesting, framing, making definitive contributions, all in the true spirit of improvised music.

The pacing is excellent as one song follows another in a variety of short (41 seconds) to mid-length (six minutes) to long (13 minutes) pieces. "Invasive Procedure" sets the stage with a kind of chamber-jazz-meets-jarring, off-kilter-trumpet bebop. No sooner are we there, however, then the pace settles into a kind of multi-level swing groove as a busy band gives off a kind of avant-dixieland polyphony in composed form. "Going, Going" (for Shorter) suggests a nod to the saxophonist's more plaintive and abstract sides. From piece to piece, there is ebb and flow, expressiveness followed by composure, flowing lines give way to groove.

In general, the traditional head-solos-head

affairs give way to Douglas' ingenious arrangements full of extended lines and abrupt changes in tempo, key or pitch. But that doesn't mean there isn't any swinging—or that the music here is a cut-and-paste pastiche. Check Douglas' inspired soloing on "Actualities," dedicated to trumpet influence Woody Shaw. I hear "Actualities" as a kind of miniature for *Five*, with Douglas' smart, puckered playing at medium tempo sandwiched by a heady opening arrangement followed a clearly classical rubato/swing digression by Feldman and Friedlander, bassist Gress (replacing Mark Dresser from the original band) and drummer Michael Sarin, all members performing in understated fashion. Clearly, the composition evolves according to pattern, but still allows for great freedom of expression. Where is Woody in all of this? Go looking, is the answer.

There is perhaps no greater, more imaginative "cover" of Kirk's "The Inflated Tear" than the one heard here. Utilizing the song's obvious lyrical qualities, not to mention emotional depth, Douglas weaves his Feldman/Friedlander team into the forefront of a tapestry normally associated with Kirk's angst-ridden blues tonalities.

And so it goes, each player superb in different ways, alone and with each member: in solo, duo, trio, quartet and quintet settings. A world of musical possibilities is opened, not the least of which is improvising in new settings. Douglas' production is intimate, each voice heard to best advantage busting up, playing it smooth or laying down delicate lines. There's so much more here, but time's up.

—John Ephland

Five—*Invasive Procedure*; *Mirrors*; *Going, Going*; *Seven*; *Who Knows*; *The Inflated Tear*; *Actualities*; *Knit Brow*; *Over Farrell's*; *Mogador*. (60/31)

Personnel—Douglas, trumpet; Mark Feldman, violin; Erik Friedlander, cello; Drew Gress, bass; Michael Sarin, drums.



Tom Harrell

Labyrinth

RCA Victor 68512

★★★½

Tom Harrell offers neither range nor flash in this debut Victor CD. His sound, as on other records, has a vibratoless stability that is even and tart but without great shifts of tension or temperament. Without the protection of conspicuous virtuosity and hard-swinging bravado, though, Harrell draws you in to listen closely and track his logic. Just as in the work of Chet Baker and Miles Davis, both of whom he resembles, this is where the rewards are buried. The virtuosity here is simple—clean articulation that never overreaches itself in the service of a thoughtful and imaginative improviser.

Maybe the real virtuosity is in the writing. Of the 10 titles, nine are Harrell originals. Although the themes themselves seem fairly routine, he has adorned at least five of them in some class-A scoring performed by his quartet plus Joe Lovano, Gary Smulyan, Steve Turre and Rob Botti, whose oboe lends a certain etiquette to "Majesty" and "Blue In One," but not

THE HOT BOX

CDs	CRITICS	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
DAVE DOUGLAS <i>Five</i>		★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★
TOM HARRELL <i>Labyrinth</i>		★★★½	★★★	★★★	★★★
MAX ROACH <i>New Orchestra of Boston/ So What Brass Quintet</i>		★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½
JACK DEJOHNETTE <i>Dancing With Nature Spirits</i>		★★½	★★★	★★★★½	★★½

one inconsistent with the overall formality of the music.

A few other points of interest: "Hot Licks" and "Cheetah" are both boppish numbers, though the latter disengages into more open territory as Don Braden floats in and out of tempo during a long solo. Harrell follows in his most free-form work on the CD. Gary Smulyan contributes good baritone on "Blue In One" before Harrell enters in a bleak and sullen solo that slowly assumes a sense of triumph leading into the final church-like ensemble. On "Darn That Dream" Harrell duets with himself, sitting in on piano and laying the chordal guideposts before his overdubbed flugelhorn. The keyboard work is utilitarian, but the horn is elegant. And "Bear In Mind" offers a startling contrast—very gospel-like and funky, with so many familiar licks it hardly passes as an original. Harrell plays through the changes in a staccato but smooth line of eighth notes. But his narrow range and soft attack give his solo a cramped feel that begs for at least a brief emotional breakout and catharsis.

This is an ambitious and well-realized album. Its voicings and restrained solo work should please the growing number of jazz-lite buyers without leaving Harrell's core audience in the lurch.

—John McDonough

Labyrinth—Samba Mate; Marimba Song; Cheetah; Blue In One; Hot Licks On The Sidewalk; Majesty; Sun Cycle; Darn That Dream; Bear That In Mind; Labyrinth. (65:00)

Personnel—Harrell, trumpet, flugelhorn, piano (8); Steve Turre, trombone (4-7, 9); Gary Smulyan, bass clarinet (4-7, 9), baritone saxophone (3); Rob Botti, oboe (4, 6); Don Braden, Joe Lovano (4-7, 9), tenor saxophone; Kenny Werner, piano (1-7, 9, 10); Larry Grenadier, bass; Billy Hart, drums; Leon Parker, percussion (6, 7, 9).



Max Roach

With The New Orchestra Of Boston And The So What Brass Quintet

Blue Note 34813

★★★½

He could easily sit back on his bop throne, but at age 72 Max Roach is still one of jazz's most eager-eared innovators, constantly looking to extend his already impressive resume of experiences. Just last year, for instance, he put out the surprising record *It's Christmas Again* (Soul Note), featuring two lengthy music/text/sound collages. On Roach's Blue Note debut (!), he picks up on a line of thought he's been unspooling since the late '50s, when composer Peter Phillips wrote

"Concerto For Max" for the master drummer.

Roach has periodically returned to classical settings ranging from percussion ensembles to string groups (his daughter is cellist Maxine Roach). The bulk of this disc consists of "Festival Journey," a 51-minute composition by Fred Tillis, a Texas-born composer and poet who teaches at Univ. of Mass., Amherst. Full of melancholic flame and folk-inspired melodicism, "Festival Journey" is neo-romantic orchestral Afro-Americana in the venerable tradition of William Grant Still. With a Russian severity—Mussorgsky's brooding bass storms tempered with Prokofiev's bright colors (both chromatic and timbral)—it has the narrative feel of a tone poem; indeed, the liner text indicates that three of Tillis' own poems serve as an introduction to the piece, but sadly they weren't included in the package.

Through three active movements, Roach interacts with the orchestra in different ways—most often in simple counterpoint, playing solos either alone or with some subgroup of the full ensemble. At 14:20, his trademark "melodic" drumwork sneaks in; his rolling, polyrhythmic toms could easily fool you into thinking that a bassist has joined him to pluck out the tune. Strings play a lush, serious, blues-touched melody against Roach's brushes and cymbals at 21:30, lightening the mood when they recap it at 33:30. And around 27 minutes in, Roach's solo is followed by M'Boom-like pitched percussion, echoing the previous themes. The climactic third movement, subtitled "Strutting," revolves around a swank march rhythm, played as only Roach can.

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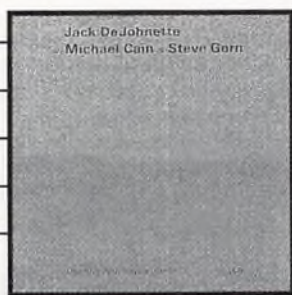
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It doesn't always achieve an effective integration of more swinging drums into the straighter orchestral time (coming off more like a dialogue between the two than a unified statement), but "Festival Journey" is nevertheless a pleasurable trip. That sense of integration is more fully realized on the Roach-penned "Ghost Dance," though. The So What Brass Quintet alternate riffs and rococo, swinging along with the drummer's magical sticks, then stopping briefly to blow like chamber brass. Steve Turre takes a great round alone with Roach, examining the place where 'bone meets beat. Lovely arrangement, cool tune, super solos. And who is that hot young drummer?

—John Corbett

With The New Orchestra And The So What Brass Quintet—*Festival Journey*—Movement I: Outbursts, Thunder, Clouds and Mists; Movement II: Bells, Drones And Spiritual Fantasy; Movement III: Strutting; Ghost Dance (63:05)

Personnel—Roach, drums; New Orchestra of Boston conducted by David Epstein (1), Cecil Bridgewater, Frank Gordon, trumpet (2); Marshall Sealy, french horn (2); Steve Turre, trombone (2); Robert Stewart, tuba (2)



Jack DeJohnette

Dancing With Nature Spirits

ECM 21558

★★★½

Let's put the bottom line right here on top. The more open space Jack DeJohnette allows his music, the more convincing he sounds. His last few Special Edition outings have been crowded, claustrophobic affairs, as ambitious as they were under-developed. I never ran into anybody who really, really dug 'em. But I bet I meet one or two fans who applaud the percussionist's return to ECM (this is his first date as leader for the label since 1982's *Inflation Blues*). Why? Because he sounds more natural than he has in ages. Given the record's title, I guess I mean that literally.

Stressing intuition over composition, and commandeering a minimalist sprawl that evokes "world" music spaciousness, DeJohnette teeters toward incantation while running down some kind of flora and fauna voodoo. Where his ex-boss Miles Davis gave his own extended meditations the crackle of electricity (recheck "Lonely Fire" from 1974's *Big Fun*), DeJohnette proffers an amorphous acoustica that can be simultaneously dainty and hyper. If it works, and largely it does, it's because the self-con-

sciousness that marred his *Fifth World* and *Earth Walk* discs has been replaced by a buoyant disposition that claims all outdoors for its rumpus room.

These five pieces are utterly excursive in character; meandering and morphing is their stock in trade. Here, melody is less important than rhythmic initiative, so all three players make sure their moves enhance the flow. Bits of tension are generated along the way, then abandoned. Pastoral moments are savored (Gorn's reeds and flute are especially allowed to glisten). "Anatolia" is the sound of the trio engaging in mutual contemplation. "Healing Song For Mother Earth" is a rhythmic expedition reminiscent of Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring*. The band touts minutia and nuance: The field of solitary piano notes that are part of the album's salutation are meant to be individually valued, and the intermittent use of hand percussion underscores a revived dedication to modesty.

The most animated the disc gets is during a Cain/DeJohnette duet passage toward the close of "Mother Earth." Though there's little melody to proffer, Cain manages to generate some repetitive patterns that serve a similar function. Their kaleidoscopic character sustains a feeling of variety. Without that kind of invention, these pieces would drift into the ozone they resourcefully employ.

DeJohnette's been living in rural New York state for years now; the further he distances himself from the urban anxiety, the more articulate he sounds. No wonder he, Keith Jarrett and Gary Peacock took a 26-minute stroll on "Autumn Leaves" last year. —Jim Macnie

Dancing With Nature Spirits—*Dancing With Nature Spirits; Anatolia; Healing Song For Mother Earth; Emanations; Time Warps*. (72:10)

Personnel—DeJohnette, drums, percussion; Steve Gorn, bansori flute, soprano saxophone, clarinet; Michael Cain, piano, keyboards.



Christian McBride

Number Two Express

Verve 314 529 585

★★★½

On his sophomore outing, McBride leaves his fellow young lions behind and surrounds himself with seasoned stars, pushing past hard-bop into the modal and fusion territory of Miles Davis' late-'60s bands. With sidemen like Kenny Garrett, Chick Corea and Jack DeJohnette, the bassist doesn't have to do much more than keep up, which he manages adroitly, and stay out of the way, which he

can't quite accomplish. Despite his progressive posturing, McBride remains a deeply conservative stylist whose plodding imagination lags behind his prodigious technique. But his resourceful "accompanists" neatly steal the show, using McBride's derivative compositions as vehicles for their own high-powered musicianship.

Corea and DeJohnette sizzle on the opening "Whirling Dervish," with Garrett adding an extra dose of angular intensity; but McBride's solo is nervous and rushed. DeJohnette's aggressive drumming fires Corea to near-vintage form on the pianist's classic "Tones For Joan's Bones," but again McBride sounds stiff and forced. He's more comfortable on "Youthful Bliss" or "Grove," smartly supporting a mellower team featuring Gary Bartz, Kenny Barron and Steve Nelson.

Two bass features, a lugubrious bowing of Wayne Shorter's "Miyako" and a multi-tracked MOR take on Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower," only underscore McBride's tendency toward foursquare literalness. But on "Divergence," he makes fusion and even free-jazz seem viable all over again, hanging in gamely while first Corea, on electric piano, and then Garrett, on alto sax, expertly shred the funky theme into cosmic confetti. Here, however, McBride stays well in the background, exercising his most effective leadership by following attentively. —Larry Birnbaum

Number Two Express—*Whirling Dervish; Youthful Bliss; Tones For Joan's Bones; EGAD; Miyako; Divergence; Jayne; A Morning Story; Grove; Little Sunflower*. (63:56)

Personnel—McBride, acoustic bass, fretless electric bass (8, 10); Kenny Garrett (1, 6); Gary Bartz (2, 4, 8, 9), alto saxophone; Chick Corea, piano (1, 3); electric piano (6); Kenny Barron, piano (2, 4, 5, 7, 9); electric piano (8); Steve Nelson, vibes (2, 9); Minu Cinelu, percussion (10); Jack DeJohnette, drums (1-9).



Richie Beirach

Trust

Evidence 22143

★★★½

Many Evidence releases contain material originally recorded for other labels—small American independents like Teresa, or Japanese labels like King and Trio. You never know what you're going to get with an Evidence album, because the production values vary with the original sources.

Richie Beirach's *Trust* was apparently rescued from the vaults of a now-defunct label called Pathfinder. It offers copious quantities of musically literate, technically divers, *fin de*

siècle piano jazz. Beirach is not a poet of the instrument like Keith Jarrett, who can freeze you right in your chair with a simple opening phrase. But he can arouse cognitive curiosity. *Trust* would be stronger if Beirach had included more pieces like Wayne Shorter's richly voiced "Nefertiti." The album is dominated by his own compositions, and they lack intrigue. "What Are The Rules?" is an attractive, stabbing line (it intrudes like pokes in the ribs) and "Rectilinear" is as evocative as its title.

All of Beirach's songs get more interesting when he leaves the heads, because then his state-of-the-art rhythm section kicks in. Dave Holland and Jack DeJohnette are separate intelligences that come together to imply shifting continuums of time. They each do something riveting on every cut: DeJohnette's tip-toe ballet across the stereo panorama of his cymbals on "What Are The Rules?"; Holland's dark echoing of the theme beneath Beirach on "Trust"; Holland's introduction to his own "Jamala," like an ominous summons; DeJohnette's vast polyrhythmic patterning for Gary Peacock's "Moor."

The audio quality, while not on the level of Postcards or AudioQuest or ECM, is superior to that of most Evidence releases. It is sufficiently detailed to render the plethora of sonic subtleties occurring within this trio's interaction.

—Thomas Conrad

Trust—*What Are The Rules?*, *Trust*; *Moor*; *Jamala*; *Boston Harry*; *Gargoyles*; *Nefertiti*; *Johnny B.*; *Rectilinear*. (51:22)

Personnel—*Beirach*, piano: Dave Holland, bass: Jack DeJohnette, drums.

"Rain." Tunes vary from lilting bossa novas to slow ballads. Nothing drags, freshness reigns. The satisfying results speak to several factors: Carter's depth as a composer of romantic numbers; the high level of the lyrics, several by Carter himself; and the ace performances.

Dianne Reeves is subtly poignant on the gentle bossa "Only Trust Your Heart," while Marlena Shaw instills hope amidst heartbreak on the languid "Rain." Shirley Horn is magical, infusing life into the languorous "A Kiss From You," and Joe Williams is down-to-earth as the fool-around lover on "I Was Wrong." The delightful teaming of Carmen Bradford's grit and Kenny Rankin's glow makes "All That Jazz" stand out, and Diana Krall's "Fresh Out Of Love" is tender, heartfelt.

Carter solos often, casually releasing elegant, cabernet-colored tones from his horn. Warren Vaché is most musical, as are Chris Neville, Steve LaSpina and Sherman Ferguson, three crafty fellows who make the performances shine.

On *Journey To Next*, Carter plays the big band composer/arranger/conductor, offering five suites (Dizzy Gillespie and Quincy Jones also contribute one each) written between 1956 and 1985. This music (released here for the first time) was commissioned for animated shorts, films made by Oscar-winning animators John and Faith Hubley after the soundtracks were recorded.

Carter's works have breadth, employing everything from percolating swing to tasty Latin moods. "Harlem Wednesday," from '56, has two lush ballad segments with the gorgeous alto of Hilton Jefferson and a spiffy swing motif stated

by fat-toned trumpeter Taft Jordan. "People, People, People" ('74) sports Thad Jones delivering moving passages on flugelhorn, Maynard Ferguson on muted horn à la Dizzy then mile-high like himself on '66's "Urbanissimo," and vibist Lionel Hampton and trombonist Lawrence Brown trading brisk phrases with élan on "Adventures," from '56.

Gillespie's "Voyage To Next" ('73) is composed of brief yet entrancing motifs, one zesty Latin-rock, another in a fusion style where Dizzy and protégé Jon Faddis sound remarkably like Miles Davis, post-'69. Jones' "Of Men And Demons" ('69) mixes off-beat rhythms, snatches of electronics and actor Richard Boone's comical mumblings into a catchy whole.

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Benny Carter

Songbook

MusicMasters 1106

★★★★½

Benny Carter/ Dizzy Gillespie/ Quincy Jones

Journey To Next

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★★★★

Songbook pairs 14 top-drawer singers with 15 songs by Carter, ranging from the classic "When Lights Are Low" to debuts like

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However, many of the pieces are extremely brief and can leave a listener longing for more. (Some of these films are available on video as *Art And Jazz In Animation* from Lightyear Entertainment: 800-229-7867.)
—Zan Stewart

Songbook—*Only Trust Your Heart; All That Jazz; I Was Wrong; Rain; Cow-Cow Boogie; Fresh Out Of Love; Speak Now; A Kiss From You; You Bring Out The Best In Me; My Kind Of Trouble Is You; When Lights Are Low; Lonely Woman; Key Largo; We Were In Love; I See You.* (77:36)
Personnel—Carter, composer, alto saxophone; Dianne Reeves (1, 14), Carmen Bradford (2, 13), Kenny Rankin (2), Joe Williams (3, 14), Marlana Shaw (4), Jon Hendricks (5), Diana Krall (6), Billy Stritch (7), Shirley Horn (8), Bobby Short (9), Ruth Brown (10), Westia Whitfield (11), Nancy Marano (12), Peggy Lee (15), vocals; Warren Vaché, cornet; Chris Neville, Gene DiNovi (15), piano; Steve LaSpina, John Heard (15), bass; Sherman Ferguson, Roy McCurdy (2, 6, 13), drums.

Journey To Next—*The Cosmic Eye Suite; Jazz Waltz/ Cosmic Joy/Sirius Samba; Urbanissimo; Voyage To Next Suite: Prologue/The Now/Distopia/The Then/Blues For Mother Earth/Conjuring Up Other Worlds/Well, Mother Do You Think They'll Make It?; Harlem Wednesday; People, People, People; Adventures Of An "": Of Man And Demons.* (52:04)

Selected personnel—Gillespie (5-11), Jon Faddis (5-11), Maynard Ferguson (4), Talt Jordan (12), Joe Wilder (1-3), trumpet; Frank Wess (1-3, 5-11), Hilton Jefferson (12), Pepper Adams (13), Pete Christlieb (15), Ernie Watts (15), reeds; Lawrence Brown (12, 14), trombone; Hank Jones (1-3, 12), Roger Kellaway (15), keyboards; Ray Brown (4), bass; Shelly Manne (4), Mickey Roker (5-11), Mel Lewis (12), drums; Dee Dee Bridgewater (5-11), vocals; Jean-Luc Ponty (15), electric violin.



World Saxophone Quartet

Four Now
Justin Time 83

★★★½

Four Now features the same three Senegalese percussionists from the WSQ's 1991 album *Metamorphosis*, but achieves more satisfying results, as Africa meets America on something closer to a level playing field. Then, the percussionists had minimal compositional input, and horns and drums played simultaneously rather than together, with dissonant jazz counterpoint grating harshly against stark African beats. Now, drummers Mor Thiam and Mar Gueye contribute almost half the material, and the saxists descend from the stratosphere long enough to party in

earthy Afro-pop style. Even at abstract altitudes, wind and rhythm sections find ways to mesh, although the gears sometimes grind across the culture gap.

The most balanced synthesis is found on Gueye's opening "Dou Dou N'Daiye Rose," where the massed horns carry a true African lilt between bouts of barnyard cacophony and squalling solos by David Murray (on tenor) and new member John Purcell (saxello). Murray's "Dakar Darkness" is more discursive, with Oliver Lake reciting a tourist's impression of a West African visit. Purcell's modern chamber blues "Colors" lurches clumsily to a compromised rhythm, and Hamiet Bluiett's classically inflected tone poem "For Now" shifts uneasily over a pounding beat. But Lake's "Just A Dream," drawing inspiration from Fela Anikulapo Kuti and early Sun Ra, locks infectiously into an effervescent groove.

On Thiam's two tunes, however, African elements blithely dominate the jazz riffs. Lake's acrid, angular alto solo can't dilute the sweetness of "Suga" s call-and-response theme, while "Sangara" s uplifting melody and propulsive beat keep each of the horns firmly in the pocket. When at last Thiam calls out, "David," Murray responds with a scorching solo, boldly bridging the divide between jazz's futuristic branches and its ancient roots.
—Larry Birnbaum

Four Now—*Dou Dou N'Daiye Rose; Dakar Darkness; Suga; Colors; For Now; What A Dream; Sangara.* (54:25)
Personnel—David Murray, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Hamiet Bluiett, baritone saxophone, contra-alto clarinet; Oliver Lake, alto saxophone, vocal recitation (2); John R. Purcell, saxello, english horn, alto flute, C flute; Chief Bey, Mor Thiam, Mar Gueye, percussion, vocals.

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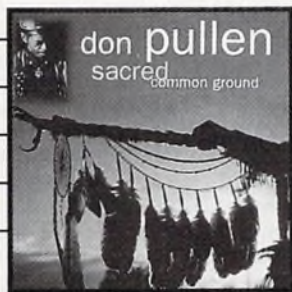
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BLUE NOTE



Don Pullen

Sacred Common Ground
Blue Note 32800

★★

Recorded only a month before Pullen died of cancer last year, this album is a curiously unsatisfying last testament that pushes the limits of eclecticism past the breaking point. An outgrowth of a foundation-funded dance project choreographed by Garth Fagan, it brings together Pullen's regular band, the African Brazilian Connection (plus bassist Santi Debriano and trombonist Joseph Bowie),

and a Kootenai Indian group from Montana, the Chief Cliff Singers. But because jazz and Native American music share neither roots nor an extensive history of contact, the common ground alluded to in the title is hard to find. Instead, the two idioms are awkwardly juxtaposed, side-by-side or one on top of the other.

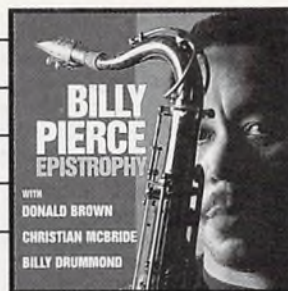
The tunes, jointly credited to Pullen and Kootenai singers Mike Kenmille or Francis Auld, are in fact impressionistic jazz takes on the accompanying traditional chants. The closest thing to a true fusion is the opening "The Eagle Staff Is First," where the band plays hard-bop riffs and Pullen sprinkles dissonant keyboard clusters over a Kootenai song. Elsewhere the two ensembles generally alternate; when they do play together, on "River Song" or "Message In Smoke," the mismatched syncopations create a jarring clash. Pullen interprets different Indian melodies as gospel, blues or free-jazz, but while the pianist has his moments, as on the balladic "Resting On The Road" and the elegiac title cut, his band never works up a head of steam.

The late Jim Pepper, a Native American jazz saxophonist, managed to make Indian music swing, but for Pullen, who claimed partial Cherokee ancestry himself, the twain never really meet.
—Larry Birnbaum

Sacred Common Ground—*The Eagle Staff Is First; Common Ground; River Song; Reservation Blues; Message In Smoke; Resting On The Road; Reprise Still Here.* (46:36)

Personnel—Pullen, piano; Carlos Ward, alto saxophone; J.T. Lewis, drums; Mor Thiam, African percussion; Joseph Bowie, trombone; Santi Debriano, bass; Mike Kenmille,

Clifford Burke, Arleen Adams, Gina Big Beaver, Clayton Burke, Kenny Lozeau, Francis Auld, vocals and drums.



Billy Pierce

Epistrophy
Evidence 22128

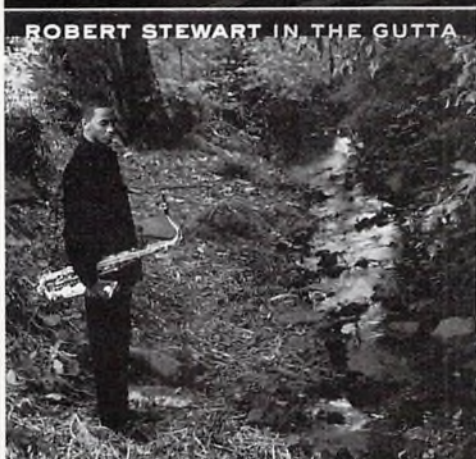
★★★★

Saxophonist Billy Pierce makes no secret of his love for two of jazz's great masters, Thelonious Monk and Sonny Rollins. The title of his new CD, of course, is a Monk work, and Pierce's reinterpretation makes clear his admiration, coupled with his own insight into the workings of such a piece. These qualities are evident throughout *Epistrophy*, from the fresh approach to Johnny Mercer's "I'm An Old Cowhand," featuring the singing bass of Christian McBride, through a mélange of

"Robert is probably the oldest young man I've ever met...he has a very old soul; you'll hear this when you sit back and find yourself 'tappin' yo' foot.'"

—D. Chansin Berry, Documentary Director/Producer

ROBERT STEWART IN THE GUTTA

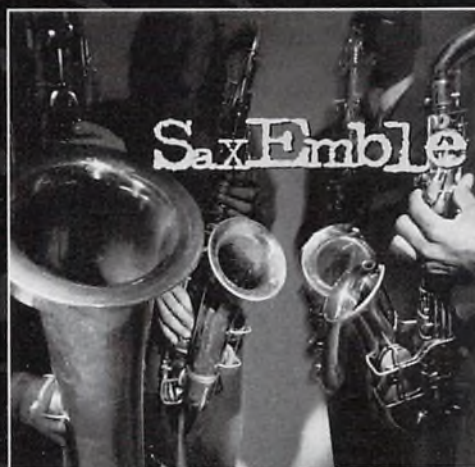


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James Carter, alto, tenor, baritone sax
Frank Lowe, tenor sax
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Cassius Richmond, alto sax
Gindy Blackman, drums

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Rollins and Monk tunes, and one original each from Pierce and pianist Donald Brown.

In his jagged-yet-melodic solo, Pierce hints at Monk's "In Walked Bud," embellishing his exposition with the mentor's touch. Drummer Billy Drummond displays exceptional, rock-steady time on Rollins' "Strode Rode," which Pierce utilizes as the ultimate chase. Monk's "Criss Cross" is a superb vehicle for Pierce's saxual overtones, and his lyricism captures the poignancy of the Monk ballad "Ugly Beauty," as if he were vocalizing words that aren't there. There's a trace of Pierce's pedigree with Blakey and Tony Williams on *Epistrophy*, but mostly it's new ideas distilled through the senses of four very simpatico colleagues.

—Francesca Nemko

Epistrophy—*I'm An Old Cowhand; Bye-Ya; Ugly Beauty; In Walked Toot; Strode Rode; Epistrophy; Mr. Glenn Roy; Criss Cross; Pent-Up House.* (55:17)

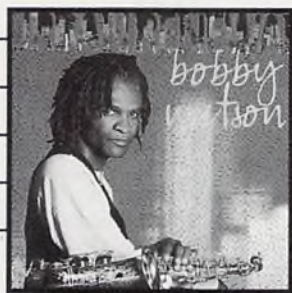
Personnel—Pierce, tenor saxophone; Donald Brown, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Billy Drummond, drums.

Watson and producer Tim Patterson's ideas on funk seem a better match for "smooth jazz" fans than for the serious r&b crowd who patronize chichi dance clubs and listen to agitated beats on urban radio. Watson's fate in the pop world, after all, rests in the hands of an unpredictable jury whose criterions for musical pleasure are quite alien to those of us who admire his past solo projects and work with Art Blakey, Sam Rivers, the 29th Street Saxophone Quartet and others.

Good luck, Bobby. —Frank-John Hadley

Urban Renewal—*Lou B; Agaya; Hi-Tech Trap; If Love/Hate; Beatitudes; Here's To You Babe; Back In The Day; P.D.; On Great Jones Street; Reachin' And Searchin'; Welcome To My World.* (59:50)

Personnel—Watson, alto, soprano and tenor saxophones, flute, hammer; Victor Lewis, drums, bucket, spoken words (7); Sammy Figueroa, percussion; Rachel Z, piano, electric keyboards; Mark Soskin, piano (1, 5, 9); Greg Skall, electric guitars; Gregory Jones, electric basses; Dejah, spoken words (3).



Bobby Watson

Urban Renewal
Kokopelli 1309

★★★½

Bobby Watson has taken a new direction. Twenty years scaling the heights as a jazz alto saxophonist and composer just didn't give him the satisfaction he wanted, so he's plugged in with his group Urban Renewal and set his sights on the contemporary r&b market. Pop music can only benefit for the involvement of this technically impressive musician who plays his alto (and now tenor, soprano and flute) with a firm emotional commitment.

On his first album for Kokopelli, Watson packs exhilaration or tenderness into the sound of his instruments, according his sunny compositions and those of drummer Victor Lewis a distinctive character beyond the glossy anonymity of electronic textures. His improvisations are mobile and intense, nothing like the twaddle of a Kenny G. Watson's fevered blowing on the propulsive standout track "Love/Hate" achieves a certain freedom of expression, a controlled anarchy rare in commercial music. Not unexpectedly, the songs—nine instrumentals and two with spoken counsel on modern technology or love—lose their immediacy whenever Watson drops out and the guitar player or one of the pianists take over the soloing duties.

Rhythms, of course, are vital selling points for any r&b designated for mass consumption.



Sparrow

Solo
Southport 0013

★★★

Tatsu Aoki & Sparrow

If It Wasn't For Paul
Southport 0034

★★★★

Welcome to the many moods of Chicago-based pianist and label honcho Bradley Parker-Sparrow. Both of these recordings allow him to show the range of his ruminative stylings. *Solo* is a series of 16 intimate soliloquies while *If It Wasn't For Paul* is a set of 10 rambunctious sonic adventures. Although neither of these discs fits into the ready-for-prime-time, jazz-radio structures, none of the playing is distant or inaccessible.

On *Solo*, Parker-Sparrow ranges from austere elegance to nearly florid romanticism. At his best, as on "Death In Capetown," his playing is elegiac and affecting. His "Bruce Lee" is a far cry from the kind of techno urgency that usually accompanies a Ninja episode. Instead, it is a pallid, somewhat easygoing trek through bucolic terrain; if either darkness or mortal danger is present, then it is very discreet. The record falters on its final track, where Joanie Pallatto's phrasing seems at odds with Parker-Sparrow's mood. In general, although *Solo* is



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CD REVIEWS

an often-engaging recording, most of the material lacks sufficient variety to sustain interest for an hour of such an introspective approach.

No such singleness of mind is found on *If It Wasn't For Paul*. Parker-Sparrow and Aoki are all over the map on this album of improvised duets. Stretches of fiery and raucous dissonance dissolve into sweet, graceful passages and vice-versa. Aoki's playing owes an obvious debt to postmodernists like William Parker and Reggie Workman. Their escapades together are absorbing, but on each player's solo

track they reveal great personality and depth. Sadly, as is almost endemic to the genre of improvised music, the CD becomes a game of waiting for the next highlight. Each performance could use a bit of editing, but that problem takes away little from an intriguing release. —Martin Johnson

Solo—*The Crystal Kingdom; An Evening Sonata; Etude: Interiors; Fugue For Glenn; Bruce Lee; Osceola; So Fine; Spacewalk; Lake Of Tears; Ballad No. 1 In D-Flat Minor; Waiting; Death In Capetown; On The Horizon; Rebecca; Not To Love You.* (65:14)

Personnel—Bradley Parker-Sparrow, piano; Joanie Pallatto, vocals (16).

If It Wasn't For Paul—*Bamboo Strut; Dracula; Someday Free; Ants; Tatsu Solo; Return Of Dracula; What Can I*

Say?; *First Day; Sparrow Solo; Shark.* (61:50)
Personnel—Aoki, bass; Parker-Sparrow, piano; Joanie Pallatto, vocals (2, 6).



Fred Hersch

Passion Flower
Nonesuch 79395

★★★

Point In Time
enja 9035

★★★

Fred Hersch is a technically fluent player with fast hands who has absorbed influences from a range of styles. The lyricism of Bill Evans can be heard one moment, the chunkier, more abrupt style of Monk might show up the next.

When Hersch distills all of those influences, he can be quite expressive. On *Passion Flower*, for example, the gentle grace of his solo playing on "Lotus Flower" is nicely refined; and on the trio performance of "Ballad For Very Tired And Very Sad Lotus-Eaters," Hersch's simple melody and embellishments are affecting. "The Peacocks," from *Point In Time*, displays his appealing, sleek technique and exotic turns of harmonies. What sometimes hangs Hersch up, however, is a tendency to lose the thread of his ideas in longer solos and arrangements. On *Passion Flower*'s "U.M.M.G." and "As Long As There's Music" from *Point In Time*, for example, he starts out fine but goes on too long, losing a sense of structure. Perhaps the answer is more interaction with his sidemen so that the pianist doesn't have to organize such long stretches.

These two recordings are quite different in nature. *Passion Flower* is a tribute to Billy Strayhorn. On *Point In Time*, four of the 10 tunes are Hersch originals. Still, Hersch's strengths and weaknesses are the same in both cases.

Passion Flower uses solo piano, trio and trio with string orchestra. The variety in scoring demonstrates how well Strayhorn's music holds up regardless of the orchestration. But overall, there's a lack of finesse in the execution of this project, particularly when compared with such outstanding Strayhorn tributes as Joe Henderson's *Lush Life* and Art Farmer's *Something To Live For*.

In terms of instrumentation, Hersch is at his best on *Passion Flower* when he's all by himself. In the trio settings, Hersch cohorts

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bassist Drew Gress and drummer Tom Rainey mesh well with Hersch at times, but not always. There's good give-and-take on "Rain Check," for example, with stylish drumming that sounds as if a tap dancer had set up shop on the snare-drum rim. Other times, it's more a case of follow the leader, with minimal interaction between Gress, Rainey and Hersch. One might expect the string arrangements to add depth and complexity, but on "Lush Life," for instance, the arrangement is merely sweet; it doesn't reflect any of the darkness of the tune's somber lyrics.

Point In Time features good playing, but sometimes there isn't enough drama. For example, Wayne Shorter's "Infant Eyes" isn't slow enough to be effective. At other times, Hersch's arrangements seem contrived. The time-feel of the vamp that opens "You Don't Know What Love Is," for example, doesn't fit with the rest of the tune. More tunes with the stylistic coherence of "Drew's Blues" or the modal "Point In Time" might have led to more consistently involved playing.

—Elaine Guregian

Passion Flower—*Lotus Blossom; Day Dream; U.M.M.G. (Upper Manhattan Medical Group); Pretty Girl (The Star-Crossed Lovers); Rain Check; Something To Live For; Lament For An Orchid (Absinthe); Ell (Isfahan); Ballad For Very Tired And Very Sad Lotus-Eaters; Tonk; Passion Flower; Lush Life.* (62:44)

Personnel—Hersch, acoustic piano; Drew Gress, bass (2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12); Tom Rainey, drums (2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12); Andy Bey, vocals (6); Nurit Tilles, piano (10); string orchestra conducted by Eric Stern (2, 7, 12); Lois Martin, viola (12).

Point In Time—*Point In Time; You Don't Know What Love*

Is; As Long As There's Music; Spring Is Here; The Peacocks; Infant Eyes; Cat's Paws; Too Soon; Evidence; Drew's Blues. (61:42)

Personnel—Hersch, piano; Drew Gress, bass; Tom Rainey, drums; Rich Perry, tenor saxophone (1, 4, 6, 9, 10); Dave Douglas, trumpet (1, 4, 8, 9, 10).



Peter Leitch Colours & Dimensions Reservoir 140

★★★★

Guitarist Leitch's latest recording exemplifies how important accomplished associates are in jazz. Here, he assembles musicians he's worked with for over 10 years: John Hicks (on six releases), Jed Levy (they go back to an '80s Jack McDuff band) and Marvin "Smitty" Smith (on six, too). The rapport they share comes

through on memorable compositions, four of which are Leitch's own.

His "Round Lake Burnt Hills" brings the aural and visual together in a portrait of panoramic harmonies. Another Leitch original, "Song For Jobim," gives the guitarist opportunity to ply the sound of his nylon strings against a prismatic spread of colors fanning out from the horn and rhythm sections while "Smitty" Smith's Brazilian rhythms somehow comb through allusions to the late Antonio Carlos Jobim's repertoire. Gary Bartz's "Rift Valley Lucy" features insightful solos from Hicks, Claudio Roditi and Bartz, who blows with an obvious lilt of humor. Pensive blue tones draw out coolish solos on "Smitty" Smith's "Moment Of Truth." The palette gets even lusher on Mingus' "Duke Ellington's Sound Of Love," where Leitch's acoustic guitar shifts modulations that usher in one of two solos on this CD by Rufus Reid, who explores the guitar qualities of his own instrument.

With Duke and Mingus in mind, had Leitch's own voicings as well as those of various horn configurations leapt higher or leaner, this CD might have reached the state of majesty that it aspired to. Regardless, *Colours & Dimensions* fulfill the title's promise.

—Zoë Anglesey

Colours & Dimensions—*Bluesview; Song For Jobim; I Concentrate On You; Round Lake Burnt Hills; Rift Valley Lucy; Moment Of Truth; Ursula; Duke Ellington's Sound Of Love; Presumed Lost.* (71:19)

Personnel—Leitch, acoustic and electric guitars; John Hicks, piano; Gary Bartz, alto and soprano saxophones; Jed Levy, tenor and soprano (4) saxophones, alto flute (2, 6); John Hicks, piano; Rufus Reid, bass; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums.

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William Parker

Testimony

Zero In (no number)

★★★★½

In Order To Survive

Black Saint 120159

★★★★

Flowers Grow In My Room

Centering Records 1002

★★★★½



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Assistant William Parker made his first record as a leader, *Through Acceptance Of The Mystery Peace*, back in the '70s. These three new discs are the first to bear his name as principal since then, though he's been busy making a reputation for himself as the premier free-jazz bassist in the biz.

Testimony is Parker's first solo-bass outing. Recorded live in one night at the Knitting Factory, it bears a dedication to Barre Phillips, whose record *Journal Violone* christened the solo-bass format back in '68. A rewarding, challenging listen, it starts off with a brilliant 23-minute arco sprint aptly dubbed "Sonic Animation." Parker sets up sound territories and energy fields, then explores them in depth; smears and slurs, chugs and glisses—in places his bow is so hot it seems it could start the bass aflame. On "Light #3," he applies his bowing singlemindedly to a careful study of harmonics. Parker's unmistakable pizzicato style is evident on the title track. Swinging little ostinato figures are looped and varied compellingly along with a trace of Wilber Ware's love of the bass' sheer mass.

The two group records demonstrate Parker's uncompromised identification with and extension of the '60s free-jazz tradition. *In Order To Survive* features the stellar, Jimmy Lyons-influenced alto sax of Rob Brown as well as the beautiful touch of ex-Cecil Taylor drummer Dennis Charles and surprise star Grachan Moncur III, who adds rich trombone textures. Thematic fragments emerge and are submerged in active free play—Parker's "Anast ..." is a bittersweet ballad and a great showcase for Brown. At the bottom, Parker is a master harmonic tactician: He chooses and places his notes perfectly to add the right tension or nuance.

Parker has kept his 20-plus-piece Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra working regularly in NYC, a near miracle these days. On *Flowers Grow In My Room*, the giant ensemble successfully integrates improvised and scripted material: Often the horns play a tandem part, one or two splitting off to wail awhile as the rhythm section (including fine drummer Susie Ibarra) bubbles openly underneath. Though it must have been a nightmare to record, the group's story is well told in this live document.

—John Corbett

Testimony—*Sonic Animation; Testimony; Light #3; Dedication; The 2nd Set.* (78:19)
Personnel—Parker, bass.

In Order To Survive—*Testimony Of No Future; Anast In Crisis Mouth Full Of Fresh Cut Flowers; Testimony Of The Stir Pot; The Square Sun.* (72:05)

Personnel—Parker, bass; Grachan Moncur III, trombone; Rob Brown, alto saxophone; Lewis Barnes, trumpet; Cooper-Moore, piano; Dennis Charles (1-3), Jackson Krall (4), drums.

Flowers Grow In My Room—*Huey Is Left Alone; Snowflakes In The Desert; Huey Goes To Coney Island; Flowers Grow In My Room; We Cannot Put Off Being Human Another Day; Golden Smoke In The Chapel.* (70:55)

Personnel—Parker, (1, 3, 4), Hal Onserud, bass; Rob Brown, Marco Eneidi, alto saxophone; Will Connell, alto saxophone, flute; Chris Jones, soprano saxophone; Richard Keene, Assif Tsahar, tenor saxophone; Dave Sewelson, Joe Ruddick, baritone saxophone; Dave Hofstra, tuba; Lewis Barnes, Roy Campbell (1, 2, 3, 5), Richard Rodriguez, trumpet; Alex Lodico, Masahiko Kono, Steve Swell, trombone; Billy Bang, violin (1); Leoparar Wittlorge, cello (1); Akira Ando, cello, bass (4); Gregg Bendian, vibes, drums (2); Susie Ibarra, (1, 3-6), Shoji Hano (5), drums.

J A Z Z

Braxton At The Ivories

by Jon Andrews

Anthony Braxton's investigations of standard repertoire provoke discussion, if not controversy. The latest, fascinating wrinkle is his move to the piano. On these performances, he plays piano exclusively, limiting himself to the American song form.

Knitting Factory (Piano/Quartet) 1994, Vol. 1 (Leo 222/223; 75:23/75:43; ★★★½) What makes the quartet music so striking, even jarring, is the paradox created by Braxton's forceful, occasionally discordant playing in an otherwise conventional setting. Instead of delivering the expected chord, Braxton may explode that chord into a cluster. A solo that starts out sounding dark and ruminative, as on Lennie Tristano's "Wow," becomes turbulent as Braxton adds furious cascades of notes accentuated by thunderous strikes at the keyboard. The closest parallel might be Cecil Taylor playing Ellington in the early '60s.

The quartet must be prepared to follow its volatile leader anywhere, starting inside and proceeding to the outermost limits. Marty Ehrlich, on reeds, and drummer Pheeroan AkLaff have the versatility to cope with the extreme mood swings contemplated by the quartet's versions of "Darn That Dream" and Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way." Propelled by Braxton, they stretch the song's parameters at length to the point of abstraction, often resolving into open-form improvised codas.

Piano Quartet, Yoshi's 1994 (Music & Arts 849; 76:47/75:19/78:42/79:06; ★★★½) This four-CD set extensively documents a weeklong engagement for the quartet. I hear more variety and subtlety in Braxton's work on this set. He initially plays graceful, delicate figures on Mal Waldron's "Soul Eyes," though jagged edges, extended ruminations and eruptions of emotion characterize most solos. Some might find this treatment of "Lush Life" barbarous, moving from a funereal introduction to an intense, ringing piano solo, finally dissolving into open improvisation.

On the whole, Braxton's pyrotechnics are better integrated into the ensemble's sound, if occasionally excessive. There is an inescapable tension in the quartet between Braxton's challenging, occasionally ominous presence on piano and his colleagues' initially straightforward treatments of the material. That dynamic drives the group forward as Braxton guides the quartet through a transformation of the song. On Brubeck's "The Duke" and Clifford Brown's "Joy Spring," Braxton's dark, complex accompaniment of



Braxton's latest work: fascinating wrinkles

Ehrlich's melodic playing seems subversive, almost at cross purposes.

Here, as on the Leo sides, Ehrlich is consistently strong, particularly on alto sax and clarinet. On "Soul Eyes" and "The Duke," he plays the melodies beautifully and with great expression, ranging from warm lyricism to raw emotion as Braxton pulls him into the churning maelstrom.

Anthony Braxton/Mario Pavone: Seven Standards 1995 Quintet (Knitting Factory Works 168; 65:36; ★★★½) Co-led by bassist Pavone, this quintet features Dave Douglas on trumpet and Thomas Chapin on alto sax and flute, two players adept at the transition from traditional playing to extended technique. Each is completely convincing playing inside.

AkLaff reaffirms that he's an ideal drummer for Braxton. He's powerful, and he complements the pianist's explorations with accents and splashes of color. AkLaff combines with Pavone to give the music coherence, bringing the soloists back to the composition. The band's version of Monk's "Eronel" is spirited, enjoyable bop with an edge. This single-CD has uniformly strong performances and relatively compact solos, making it the best, most economical, introduction to Braxton's piano music.

Solo Piano (Standards) 1995 (No More 2; 63:19/57:53; ★★★½) Braxton's most recent piano recordings, this two-CD set is disappointingly dry, despite an intriguing tunestack loaded with Mingus, Monk, Coltrane and Wayne Shorter compositions. Some tracks, like George Coleman's eventful "Variations On The Scene" and Monk's "Pannonica," are full of color and variety, while others seem to be pencil sketches. Shorter's "Black Nile" sounds tentative and drained of rhythm. Without the context and grounding provided by an ensemble, Braxton's playing on this session can sound brittle and incomplete. I wished he'd pick up a saxophone. **OB**

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Imaginary Landscapers

by John Corbett

Identifying something as classical music is about as helpful as saying a certain animal is a mammal: yes, but what *kind*? Like jazz, classical music has no quick-and-easy checklist of omnipresent characteristics; it is a broad, multiform category, not stylistically or generically singular. Even contemporary classical (post-WWII is normally used as a convenient marker) takes myriad shapes, from neo-baroque and postmodern to aleatorics and aggressive texturalism.

John Cage: *Imaginary Landscapes*

(hat ART 6179; 51:15; ★★★★★^{1/2})

Harbinger of chance processes in composition, John Cage has proven to be perhaps the key figure in experimental music. This record is composed of new readings of his five "Imaginary Landscapes," written between 1939 and 1952, as well as "But What About The Noise ... ?" from 1985. Across the board, the music is beautifully recorded and breathtakingly performed by the Maelstrom Percussion Ensemble directed by Jan Williams. Utilizing an expanded palette that includes turntables, prepared piano and, on number three, 12 radios, the ensemble explores stimulating aural tracts, some strictly notated, some with a high degree of indeterminacy. But the most unusual minute-and-a-half is no doubt the final landscape, scored for record albums, which in this version was constructed out of 42 different pieces by Anthony Braxton—all taken, not coincidentally, from hat ART releases.

David Rosenboom/Anthony Braxton: *Two Lines*

(Lovely Music 3071; 71:47;

★★★★^{1/2}) California-based composer and pianist David Rosenboom has been using neurological models and natural evolutionary forms as musical fodder for decades, turning to both improvisation and computer programming for fresh input. On *Two Lines* he employs his Hierarchical Form Generator program, which allows the piano to digest and reuse input from Braxton's alto, soprano and sopranino saxes, clarinet and flute. The result is an exciting, often wave-like interaction (Braxton loves those undulations!), emanating somewhere between the zap of synapses in action and the zip of a stimulated microchip.

Earle Brown: *Music For Piano(s) 1951-1995*

(New Albion 082; 68:06; ★★★★★^{1/2})

This expansive and utterly entrancing collection spans from "Three Pieces," written before Brown met his compadre Cage, to his most recent "Summer Suite '95" (which he says is "the *jazziest* of my piano pieces," though it's hardly Tatum), composed after Brown took a 30-year break from writing for



John Zorn: daringly undynamic

piano. David Arden plays them with great sensitivity to their wise dynamics and insinuated structures. Like Cage's chance-procedures tapeworks, "Corroboree" and "25 Pages" use multi-tracking, which allows Arden to play three simultaneous parts. Arden's interpretations manage to be warm (sometimes hot) and human without being sentimental, upending the idea that indeterminate procedures are by their very nature cold and unemotional.

Jonathan Harvey: *Jonathan Harvey 1*

(Auvadis Montaine 782034; 64:50;

★★★★) Coming more directly out of modernism than the experimental tradition, British composer Jonathan Harvey magically juggles graceful melodicism with the sharper abstractions and complexities of post-serialism. His music for strings, performed by the Arditti String Quartet (bar none, the best around), is a real treat; particularly nice are his second string quartet—which contains a tangle of luminous melodic lines—and "Scena," for violin and chamber ensemble, an explosive piece written specifically for the indomitable first-fiddler Irvine Arditti.

John Zorn: *Redbird (For Agnes Martin)*

(Tzadik 7008; 49:54; ★★★★★)

On his domestic American label, Tzadik, John Zorn has initiated an impressive "Composer Series," which includes discs by Alvin Curran, Harry Partch, Yuhi Takahashi, Arnold Dreyblatt, Jim O'Rourke and other important experimentalists, both young and old. This release features two of Zorn's own pieces: "Dark River," a daringly undynamic nine-minute piece for solo bass drum (played by Jim Pugliese), and the 41-minute title-track, a very Morton Feldman-esque chamberwork scored for harp, viola, cello and percussion. Zorn has often claimed that a short attention span steers his ship, but these two pieces are slow-motion studies—either static or gradualist in orientation—that show another of his many faces. **DB**

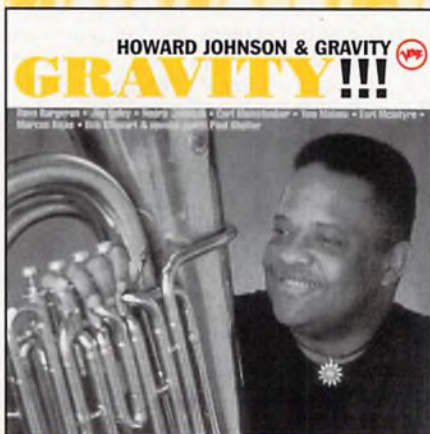
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REISSUES

Duke Returns

by John McDonough

Duke Ellington may have been dead these 22 years now, but he hasn't been sleeping. The music keeps coming back.

The Duke In Boston (Jazz Unlimited 2022; 53:14; ★★★★★) Like the famous live Fargo recordings of 1940, these two midnight broadcasts catch the band in its natural habitat of 1939-40 playing for dancers. Unlike the later concerts, which would be so rigorously documented, there is no sense of occasion here. The tunes are mostly Ellington pieces of the late Brunswick period, including a startling "Tootin' Through The Roof" in which Rex Stewart and Cootie Williams toss aside set solos. Aficionados will also note the first appearance of the fanfare Duke would later use to herald in his pageant of hits. (Jazz Unlimited CDs are distributed by City Hall Records, San Francisco.)

The 1952 Seattle Concert (RCA/Bluebird 66531; 55:20; ★★★★★) Not since Buddy Rich joined Artie Shaw had a drummer so transformed the character of an orchestra as Louie Bellson did Ellington's in 1951. The eccentric individuality of the '40s was suddenly replaced by a crack unit with the precision capabilities of a stage band. This CD is a bracing appendix to the definitive performances on Columbia (e.g., the classic *Ellington Uptown* and *Ellington Indigos*). Bellson is full of ideas, tension, punch and sheer panache on "Skin Deep." Clark Terry is wry on an abridged "Perdido." And Ray Nance's violin noir on "Caravan" is a set solo, but a perfect one.

The Complete Capitol Recordings Of Duke Ellington (Mosaic 5-160; 69:13/66:34/69:35/67:37/66:36; ★★★★★) From 1953 to 1955 Ellington worked hard to score in the pop market. If things like "Bunny Hop Mambo" or a Kenton parody on "Isle Of Capri" seemed to strip Ellington of all dignity in his hunger for a hit, today they can be enjoyed as music curiosities. I don't mind telling you that the first Ellington LP I ever bought in 1956 was one of the Capitols, *Ellington '55*, and I still play it. It's one of the hardest swinging of all Ellington albums, with Dick Vance and Buck Clayton contributing charts on swing era standards ("One O'Clock Jump," "In The Mood," etc.). So many of these 96 tracks (which also include the album *Ellington Showcase*) have been ignored for so long, there's much here that seems in effect new. Try "Band Call," "Discontented Blues" and "Night Time." Or the fine piano trios. (Mosaic Records: 35 Melrose Place, Stamford CT 06902)



Ellington: His piano stands undiminished

Live At The Blue Note (Roulette 28627; 71:26/63:31; ★★★★★) Originally recorded in August 1959 and released as *Billy Strayhorn Live!* as cover for a contractually challenged Ellington, this is a slap-dash production—but a charming one. Musicians solo off-mic, phones ring and there seems to be a party going on somewhere. But the informality is provocative. The band plays in a leisurely manner as if no one's looking. And Ellington tosses off a quirky stride solo on "Tonk" and cracks jokes between solos on a lovely "Mood Indigo." There are 22 previously unreleased numbers and stereo with a live presence as resplendent as Duke's wit.

Duke Ellington & John Coltrane (Impulse! 166; 34:56; ★★★★★) The joker in such unlikely couplings as this is that there's a reason they're unlikely: The principals often have nothing to say to each other. Though this famous 1962 Ellington/Coltrane encounter produces a certain tension, it doesn't produce much cohesion. The result is less than meets the ear, an exercise in estrangement. It probably seemed daring to exchange rhythm sections. But Ellington tends to disappear in Coltrane's. And Trane ignores that beat Ellington's men give. Ballads offer the best common ground.

Duke Ellington & Coleman Hawkins (Impulse! 162; 48:08; ★★★★★) Hawkins is totally at home in this 1962 miniature that includes Hodges, Carney, Nance and Lawrence Brown—probably the best Ellington all-star date since *Back To Back* with Hodges in '58. Hawkins has "Self Portrait" to himself and gathers much strength as he pushes through a six-minute "Mood Indigo."

Togo Brava Suite (Blue Note 30082; 67:01; ★★★★★) Too often Duke's suites were becoming a series of fanfares for soloists. But when the reeds play, as they do here, Harry Carney still dominates the ensemble, and that

gives material like "La Plus Belle Africaine" body and value. Also, Ellington's piano stands undiminished on "Lotus Blossom" and "Melancholia." That said, though, *Togo Brava Suite* is not an Ellington album I've returned to much over the years.

Flashback: Rick Henderson, who joined Ellington at age 24 on alto (as the Capitol period began) and now lives in Washington, D.C., laughed as he recalled "The Bunny Hop Mambo." "Oh Boy! Most of us knew it was the company that wanted us to record it, not Duke. If you work for someone and they want something to promote, it's a two-way street. What people don't realize is that we played many dance dates and needed a lot of short dance pieces in the book."

Asked about *Ellington '55*, Henderson, who had replaced Johnny Hodges, said he didn't recall any one session: "What we would do was record things at different sessions in different cities. Then Capitol would decide how to put together an album. We never knew how it would come out until it was out."

By the time of the Blue Note date, and Hodges' return, Clark Terry said, "Johnny and everybody else in that band took everything with a grain of salt, including life. It was not a big deal when he came back." The Blue Note, he says, "was always a break from one-nighters. We stayed at the Southway Hotel on 60th and South Parkway. John Williams, Mary Lou's first husband, would drive us back and forth." **DB**

Ellington's initial **Down Beat** ratings:

- *Seattle Concert*: ★★★★★ (9/8/54 issue)
- *Ellington '55*: ★★★★★ (9/22/54)
- *Ellington Showcase*: ★★★★★ (A/4/56)
- *Live At The Blue Note*: ★★★★★ ½ (7/28/66)
- *Duke Ellington & John Coltrane*: ★★★★★ (3/28/63)
- *Duke Ellington & Coleman Hawkins*: ★★★★★ (3/28/63)
- *Togo Brava Suite*: ★★★★★ ½ (A/12/73)

BLINDFOLD TEST

JULY 1996

Claudio Roditi

by Michael Bourne

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and 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.

Claudio Roditi first played trumpet as a child in Brazil. "There was a school behind my house, and I listened to the band rehearsing. One day, I went into the bandroom, and when my eyes saw the trumpet, I immediately fell in love."

Roditi first jammed in Rio around the height of the bossa nova at the turn of the '60s. He ventured to Europe in 1966 for an international competition, with Art Farmer among the jurors. He studied at Berklee and stayed around Boston six years before settling in New York in 1970. Since then, he's gigged with Bob Mover, Amaury Tristão's band with Charlie Rouse, Herbie Mann, Paquito D'Rivera (for eight years), Dizzy Gillespie's United Nation Orchestra and Slide Hampton's JazzMasters.

Roditi is working more and more as a leader nowadays, playing his unique fusion of Brazilian bebop that's characterized all the more by his very mellow sound. He's recorded a dozen albums up-front, including the recent *Jazz Turns Samba* (Groovin' High), *Samba Manhattan Style* (Reservoir) and an encounter with the Metropole Orchestra for Mons.

This was his second Blindfold Test.

Nicholas Payton

"When The Saints Go Marching In" (from Gumbo Nouveau, Verve, 1996) Payton, trumpet; Jesse Davis, alto sax; Tim Warfield, tenor sax.

It's a very interesting reharmonization of "The Saints." The trumpet at times sounded like Freddie—the tone, the vibrato and a few mannerisms—but the lines don't sound like Freddie. I don't know who it is, but it's a good trumpet player with good chops; he went up to the high register with a lot of control. The saxophone solos seemed rather short to my taste. They didn't have the time to develop the solos. 3½ stars.

Franco Ambrosetti

"Yellow Submarine" (from Movies, enja, 1986) Ambrosetti, trumpet; John Scofield, guitar.

I don't recognize the tune, but it's very interesting, very different. I like very much the introduction. The trumpet solo is very good. The trumpet player has an incredible intonation. There's some Freddie Hubbard influence and a little Miles. I'm going to guess that it's the Swiss trumpeter Franco Ambrosetti. Not too many trumpet players have this kind of cleanness in their articulation nowadays. He's playing uptempo and yet you hear all the notes coming out. It could be something he did with John Scofield. I'll give this one 4 stars.

Art Farmer

"Gentle Rain" (from Gentle Eyes, Mainstream Records, rec. 1971/1993) Farmer, flugelhorn.

"Gentle Rain" by the Brazilian composer Luiz Bonfá is a version done by one of those rare musicians. In a few bars, you know who's playing: the great Art Farmer, one of my very favorite trumpet players, one of my very favorite *musicians*. Also, he's the reason I got a flugelhorn for the first time in 1966, after I'd seen



ANDY FARRER

him on the cover of *Down Beat* playing an instrument I'd never seen in Brazil. His sound has so much warmth. His harmonic sense is so developed, so advanced. The choice of notes is so much his own. 5 stars.

Archie Shepp

"The Girl From Ipanema" (from Fire Music, Impulse!, rec. 1965/1995) Shepp, tenor saxophone.

If I'm not mistaken, this is a version Archie Shepp did of "The Girl From Ipanema" many years ago. It's certainly different, an avant-garde version of the bossa nova—which means "the new thing" in Portuguese—but that style of ensemble to my taste is too sloppy. This version of the tune is interesting nevertheless, the harmonizations, and I do like the improvised section very much. 3½ stars.

Roy Hargrove

"Nostalgia" (from Family, Verve, 1995) Hargrove, Wynton Marsalis, trumpets.

It's a nice version of "Nostalgia" by Roy Hargrove and Wynton Marsalis. I've heard this record. 3½ stars. It's well played, but I must say that it does not give me the goosebumps that Fats Navarro's record still does to this day. One of the primary reasons is that when Fats Navarro's did it, it was brand new. This music was being created at that time. There was a freshness to it that I don't hear nowadays on [recordings like] this. It's very hard to bring that energy back into the music. It was a different era, a different time.

The same applies to the bossa nova. When the music was being created in Brazil in the late '50s and early '60s, there was something in it. If we play it nowadays, it does not have the same quality. It's almost like classical music. You're doing something that was done before. You try to infuse something new, but it's very hard.

MB: "The Girl From Ipanema," for example, is also a very familiar tune.

Yes, but he modified the tune. On Archie Shepp's version of the bossa nova, he was looking for something else, trying to do something creative with it. Here, they took "Nostalgia" and played the same tempo basically, the same ending and stuff.

Are you saying it's more recreative?

That's a good way to put it. I feel there's too much of that going on in jazz nowadays. There's too much recreation of things that we've heard before but without the creative energy that happened when that music was being invented.

DB