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Ella

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16 Ella Fitzgerald

In tribute to the First Lady of Song: From her early years with Chick Webb, her phenomenal song books of the '50s, to her induction into Down Beat's Hall of Fame in 1979 and beyond.

By John McDonough

Cover photograph of Ella Fitzgerald by Herman Leonard.



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Ella

A Voice We'll Never Forget

By John McDonough

Of all the sad thoughts that have seen print since Ella Fitzgerald's not entirely unexpected passing on June 15, none seems sadder than the fact that we have lost a living link to a smarter, more literate, more courtly time in our cultural history.

It was an era that coalesced between the wars, respected elitism, honored craft, imitated elegance, rewarded quality and expired sometime in the 1960s. As long as there were originals of the period like Ella around, though, the spirit of those times had its voices. It all seems the more precious nowadays with every new obituary.

Fitzgerald outlived her era by nearly 30 years, but long enough to pass her musical wisdom to a younger, less fortunate musical generation. But she had been in complete retirement for more than three years at the time of her death. In the '80s and early '90s, her concert schedule was disrupted by frequent hospitalizations. She underwent open-heart surgery in the summer of 1986, and that curtailed her performance schedule, despite her mightiest efforts to maintain her pace. 1990 was to have been a busy year, with nearly 30 concerts scheduled, including performances in Europe. But much of it had to be cancelled before May. She performed several concerts in 1991 to generally excellent reviews. By then she had grown frail-looking and audiences seemed amazed that such a slight lady could still command such a powerful voice.

In 1992 diabetes resulted in surgery to remove a toe. Her final concert appearance was in December 1992 in Palm Beach,

Florida. She was flown out on a private jet and performed sitting down. Though she continued to have a great will to perform, according to sources close to the singer, the amputation of both legs below the knees in 1993 ended any possibility of future appearances.

The dimensions of her reputation, which transcended all category and demographics, can be gauged by the massive obituary profile published by the New York Times.

The work that lies behind the enormous Fitzgerald reputation is divided among three principle record labels: Decca, Verve and Pablo. Her last released recording to date was "All That Jazz" (Pablo) in 1990. It won her 12th Grammy. A subsequent session made in 1991 with her trio plus Harry Edison awaits release. And there are reportedly numerous club and concert tapes from the '50s, '60s and '70s in the vaults.

If the clear, youthful voice was nature's gift to her art, the musicianship that drove it was all hers. Born April 25, 1918 (more recent evidence suggests 1917), in Newport News, Va., it was fate, not training, that led her into singing after an attempt at dancing failed. Benny Carter was among the first to recognize her talent in 1934, and he alerted talent scout John Hammond. But Hammond passed, a decision he would regret but not deny.

She joined the Chick Webb band at 17 in 1935 and quickly made it her appendage. Decca saw to it that most of Webb's records featured her vocals. Today they hold up moderately well, interesting principally because of where they led. Her sound is a bit nasal and adolescent. Her style follows period swing conventions. And for every good tune she gets ("Don't Worry 'Bout Me"), there are a dozen pieces of trash ("Chew Your Bubble Gum"). If this was all there was, Ella Fitzgerald today would be a lively, somewhat interesting period artifact.

After Webb's death in 1939, she took over as leader of Webb's



The Ella Fitzgerald

Legacy

What does this body of work tell us about Ella Fitzgerald and her contributions?

First, the song books helped change the way we think about our classic popular standards. She treated our grandest songwriters as composers; their music, as a canon. Some say her style tended to favor the composer over the lyricist. Perhaps, though no poet could ask for a more perfect recitation of a lyric than Fitzgerald bequeathed to "Supertime" (Berlin) and "Love For Sale" (Porter). Much of the reverence accorded the so-called "American Popular Song" today is because Ella Fitzgerald sang it in the way she did.

She served both art and commerce without pandering. Her commercial albums (those done under Granz, at least) showed a respect for the mass market rare in popular culture. And her jazz albums were so consistently good, critics gave up long ago finding fault, save perhaps for a certain redundancy in the Pablo releases.

Though the elements of her vocabulary are familiar, her technique and sense of proportion held them in balance. Fifty-six years of recorded work—more than 30 of them as an icon—never came between Ella and the kind of artist she was.

This may also tell us something about the woman behind the artist. She was said to be shy and inarticulate, with not an introspective bone in her body. She had little to say about the processes, methodologies and nuances of her interpretations, why she did this and not that, etc. People who aren't given to analysis of such things are often blessed with a natural immunity to that most fatal virus that can strike an intuitive artist—self-consciousness, leading to self-imitation.

Few singers were as dependent upon pure musicianship as she was. Or had such extraordinary reserves of it. She didn't sing songs. She played them. She could not call on the skills of an actress the way Billie Holiday, Lena Horne, Judy Garland or Barbra Streisand could (and can). This is why some have accused her of a certain emotional neutrality, especially on ballads. It is also why she never "sold" (or oversold) her material. She was a songwriter's dream. She let the song speak for itself and seek its own emotional level.

She was never compelled to bother with nostalgia, because she never attached herself to the cycles of fashion that nostalgia feeds on. She had one great pop hit in her career, "A Tiskit A Tasket," and over the last 45 years of her career she seemed to avoid it like the plague, as if that's the one she might end up being remembered for.

The standards that Granz underwrote for her between 1956 and 1989 gave her distance from pop without isolation in the protected sanctuary of mainstream jazz; so far, they seem eternally youthful and relatively undated. The work of her arrangers has worn well, too: Billy May, Nelson Riddle, Paul Weston, Marty Paich and Buddy Bregman, who has been, perhaps, too unfairly dismissed. Bregman, after all, arranged and conducted the seminal Cole Porter and Rodgers & Hart song books. Each has become a classic of American popular music and helped establish Ella Fitzgerald as one of the two or, at most, three most important and influential singers of the 20th century.

Let us hope the 21st can do as well. —John McDonough



JAMES W. BLACKMAN

band. Decca and her manager Mo Gale built her as a single, and for the next 17 years she muddled along as a moderately interesting pop singer who sang what she was told and seldom got out of second gear.

By the late '40s, though, another Ella began to flower, one nurtured and managed by Norman Granz on the Jazz At The Philharmonic concert circuit. This Ella sang only the best songs. And in Granz's open-ended JATP concerts she had the space and freedom to meet the finest musicians of her generation outside of the Decca hit factory. Fitzgerald always had a knack for mimicking other singers. In the JATP concerts she began mimicking the musicians.

It's important to note that she came of age in a time when jazz had moved to the center of popular music and brought with it the jazz musician's respect for and pursuit of technique and virtuosity. With swing and bebop, these values reached a nirvana of fulfillment in the work of Tatum, Eldridge, Goodman, Young, Christian, Hampton, Peterson, Parker, Gillespie and many others. In targeting her

mimicry on musicians like these (and probably Illinois Jacquet and Flip Phillips as well), Fitzgerald trained her sights on some of the most extravagantly gifted virtuosos jazz has produced.

Singers had scatted before Fitzgerald, of course, and she picked up fragments from Armstrong, Leo Watson and a couple of others. But those debts were minor. The origins of Fitzgerald's vocal improvising were rooted primarily in instrumental models, not vocal ones. And particularly the instrumental models at that point where swing and bebop met. She coined an uncanny and remarkably abstract vocabulary of semi-verbal onomatopoeia that expressed the most subtle nuances of jazz improvisation—its attack, smears, curves, phrasing, vibrato and pulse. Coupled with an overdrive falsetto reserve, she met the greatest musicians on their terms and dazzled audiences. In mimicking virtuosity, she came to possess it.

"She set the standard for scatting, not only with the way she soloed, but with her tone," says vocalist Kevin Mahogany, who noted that he studied Fitzgerald long before he listened to male jazz singers. "That's why the instrumentalists respected her so much."

As early as "Flying Home" (1945) and "Lady Be Good" (1947), both for Decca, it was clear how firmly she grasped instrumental vocalizing. But they are mere miniatures compared to the concert performances *Ella Fitzgerald At The Opera House* (Verve/Polygram), a 1957 magnum opus from JATP performances in Chicago and Los Angeles.

By the early '50s, however, there was a problem. Granz may have managed her performing career. But Decca still managed her recordings, which were less than distinguished. For 10 years she was partitioned between two sovereigns. Then late in 1955 fate handed Granz powerful leverage. Decca, which had owned Universal Pictures since 1952, was expecting large profits from the soundtrack album of Universal's *The Benny Goodman Story*. When Granz produced exclusive contracts with most of the film's star musicians, however, Decca had to choose between Goodman and Fitzgerald. The company readily surrendered the singer's contract to Granz.

On the strength of having acquired Fitzgerald's services for recording, Granz set up Verve Records with a view toward reaching the pop as well as jazz market. On Tuesday, Feb. 7, 1956, Fitzgerald joined with arranger conductor Buddy Bregman to begin the first of the masterworks that would put her among the immortals: *Ella Fitzgerald Sings The Cole Porter Song Book* (Verve/Polygram). The other famous song books followed—Rodgers and Hart, Ellington, Berlin, Gershwin, Arlen, Kern and Mercer.

"When I recorded Ella, I always wanted her to be way out front," says Granz. "I didn't want a blend, as if she were a band singer. The reason was that I frankly didn't care what happened to the music. The music supported Ella. I've had arrangers tell me that in bar 23 a trumpet hit a wrong note. I didn't care. I wasn't

interested in making perfect records. If they were perfect, fine. But I wanted to make records in which Ella sounded best. If I thought she sounded great on a first take, I wasn't interested in wasting time doing six more, only to come back to the first one. I couldn't care less if there were clams here and there.

"There were times when I would walk into a studio and they'd have everyone walled off for stereo. I would always see that Ella was in the middle of the musicians. The engineers would go up the wall because they couldn't get any separation. I wanted singing, not separation.

"The issue many people missed when the song books came out was that, with all due respect to Ella, in my mind the writers had to be of equal stature to the performer. Otherwise, it would have come out simply as another collection of songs that Ella did.

That's why in every instance I insisted that she do the verse.

"When we did the Porter album, we came to some verses that were difficult or really didn't work. Ella would get uptight and say, 'Why do I have to do this?' Translation: She had to spend time working on them. Usually Ella would go in and do her songs very fast. We never laid down tracks or anything like that. Everything was live with the band. We would do two takes, three at most, because that's how she worked.

"As the Ella song books became successful, certain composers wanted her to do their work. Irving Berlin actually called up and said his daughters were driving him crazy playing the Porter album. 'When are you going to do me?' he asked. I told him I was researching him now, and he was gassed when the album was finished. He was so anxious to have Ella do his songs, he offered a 50-percent cut in mechanical royalties after he heard the session acetates. It was a very nice gesture."

But the barbarians were already at the gates. As Fitzgerald recorded the Porter album, Elvis Presley made his first network appearances on the CBS Dorsey Brothers Stage Show. As if to italicize the astonishing timing of this confluence, four days after the first Porter session, Miss Fitzgerald actually appeared as a guest with Presley on the Dorsey program. The Presley phenomenon and the rock & roll revolution that issued from it would signal the collapse of the composer's place in American popular music. That it should happen at precisely the moment Miss Fitzgerald offered a new perspective on its appreciation and demonstrated that their work could be treated in a definitive manner as a body of literary work seems an astonishing irony. The song book project would become an unexpected and historic elegy to a vanishing age of literacy, intelligence and elitism in American music.

During the time Granz left the record business from 1960 to 1972, he continued to be her principal producer, though she ventured to Capitol for several albums. Finally came the long Pablo era in the '70s and '80s, when Granz resumed recording

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AKBANK



Ella performs with Zoot Sims and Roy Eldridge in Chicago, 1979

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- ELLA IN LONDON—Pablo 2310-711
- ELLA AND OSCAR—Pablo 2310-759 (with Oscar Peterson)
- ALL THAT JAZZ—Pablo 2310-938
- FINE AND MELLOW—Pablo 2310-829
- THE BEST IS YET TO COME—Pablo 2312-138
- THE CONCERT YEARS—Pablo 4-4414
- ELLA AT THE OPERA HOUSE—Verve 831 269
- FIRST LADY OF SONG—Verve 523 382
- ELLA AND BASIE—Verve 821 576
- ELLA AND LOUIS AGAIN—Verve 825374 (with Louis Armstrong)
- RETURNS TO BERLIN—Verve 837 758
- THE INTIMATE ELLA—Verve 839 838
- ELLA SWINGS LIGHTLY—Verve 847 392
- THE COMPLETE ELLA FITZGERALD SONG BOOKS—Verve 16-314-519832
- THE WAR YEARS—Decca/GRP 2-268
- THE EARLY YEARS-PART 1—Decca Jazz/GRP 2-618
- THE EARLY YEARS-PART 2—Decca Jazz/GRP 2-623
- PURE ELLA—Decca Jazz/GRP 636

and paired her with everyone from Count Basie to Andre Previn to Nelson Riddle, plus a series of intimate duet albums with guitarist Joe Pass. During this period, in 1979, Fitzgerald was inducted into the Down Beat Hall of Fame.

Salle Productions, formed around 1960, was devoted to Fitzgerald's business, professional and performing interests. Its offices were (and still are) at 451 N. Canon Drive in Beverly Hills, home of Granz's original JATP and Clef Records operations.

Fitzgerald made two major motion picture appearances, *Pete Kelly's Blues* (Warner Bros. 1955) and *St. Louis Blues* (Paramount, 1958). There were also numerous television appearances. Among the best: the *Swing Into Spring* programs of 1958 and '59 and a

superb PBS-WTTW Chicago production mounted by Granz in November 1979. The latter teamed her with Count Basie and his Orchestra, Roy Eldridge, Zoot Sims, Joe Pass and many others.

Fitzgerald married bassist Ray Brown in 1947. The couple was divorced six years later but continued to work together. She is survived by Brown and their adopted son, Ray Brown Jr.

Fortunately for the rest of us, Ella Fitzgerald will be remembered for generations to come—through personal recollections and numerous CDs of her recordings. As Mahogany says, "It's a voice that you never forget. When you're a vocalist, that's what you aspire to. I don't know if any of us ever will attain it, but it's a goal worth reaching toward."

DB



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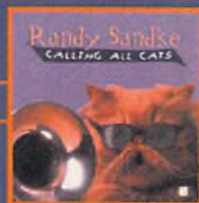
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David Murray, Hamiet Bluiett, John Purcell (seated) and Oliver Lake

New Life After Julius

By Herb Boyd

In this age of evanescence, rapid turnover and short-term loyalty, it is simply remarkable that the World Saxophone Quartet remains

virtually intact. Many of its fans were worried that the group would disband following the death of Julius Hemphill in April 1995. But the New York-based unit of Oliver Lake, Hamiet Bluiett and David Murray endured the loss of a founder as Arthur Blythe, John Stubblefield and Eric Person. Recently, John Purcell—who has worked with Dizzy Gillespie, Stevie Wonder, David Sanborn and Tito Puente, among others—assumed the seat as a multireedist producer and saxophone consultant.

The longevity of the 20-year-old Quartet, which has recorded more than a dozen albums and lived up to its name in performance venues, was one of several questions put to them by Down Beat and a knowledgeable crew from National Public Radio during a recent rehearsal for their next album. "We have managed to stay together by not trying to stay together," baritone saxophonist Bluiett remarks cryptically. "This was my formula because I know this industry. If you try to stay together, it will pull you apart."

From the group's inception, Bluiett insisted that each band member go his separate way and do his own thing. "By pursuing our own careers," he continues, "we somehow kept coming back together, and it was just a matter of making ourselves

ALON HEMPHILL



“Twenty years ago when we started the World Saxophone Quartet, we were in the middle of what they called ‘fusion’— I called it ‘confusion.’”

—Hamiet Bluiett

Purcell's haunting flute evoking the beauty of a Senegal evening.

“David wrote the music for ‘Dakar Darkness,’” says alto saxophonist Oliver Lake, discussing the origins of the composition, “and I wrote the poem. David and I made a trip to Dakar [in West Africa] about two years ago, and we had some heavy experiences while visiting Goree Island and the fortress from where slaves were held and then herded on ships for the voyage across the Atlantic. In my haste to exit the oppressive dungeons, I banged my head against the wall.”

While Lake was recovering from the blow, Murray challenged him to say something profound about the incident. “That was when I came up with the lines in ‘Dakar Darkness,’” Lake says. “But there was another part of Dakar with beautiful women and lovely scenes, and these images contrasted with those of Goree.” And to employ Chief Bey, Mor Thiam and Mar Gueye—all Senegalese drummers—intensifies the Dakar images, adding vitality to an already festive marketplace and conjuring more spirits from the deep night. The Quartet's association with the African drummers began several years ago during concert engagements in Europe.

Their next recording receives another musical addition with the inclusion of a traditional rhythm section, including some compelling thumps and bumps from bassist Bootsie Collins and drummer Ronnie Burrage. Beyond this, there is talk of adding strings for future projects. “And we are also working with vocalist Fontella Bass on yet another project,” Lake says, noting the group's many activities. “So it wasn't an idea of, ‘Well, I guess we'll do another album with the [Senegalese] drummers.’ It's part of the Quartet's continuum, our desire to grow and expand.”

And expansion, whether in musical concept or group size, has been a central concern for the Quartet since it came together in New Orleans in 1976 after presenting a couple of seminars and concerts. They discovered that the audience enjoyed the music best when

available for the various concert and recording dates. But we also like playing together. And furthermore, we are not just a group, we are a non-profit business, and no decision is made unless we all agree.”

They were obviously in unanimous agreement about adding John Purcell to the Quartet. Purcell had performed with them on a number of occasions, substituting for Hemphill when his leg was amputated and for Bluiett when his wife was ailing.

“John has always been in the mix,” tenor saxophonist Murray interjects, joking that Purcell has been practicing for the spot for 20 years. “He's always been available when we needed him to fill in.”

“But he seemed to always be on the road or out in California when we were interested in a full-time replacement,” says Bluiett. “I think the incident that sealed it was during a gig we had at Sweet Basil's. John can play all kinds of instruments, but when he played the saxello, I felt he had found a sound that we uniquely his. This forced us to reinvent the group, because now Oliver was the only alto, and that allowed the sound of the Quartet to spread out further.”

Purcell, who admits he has been closely studying the Quartet's musical style and approach for years and is a master of acoustical design, explains the group's new sound. “First of all, you must understand that I have been under their umbrella for years,” Purcell begins, “and I know what they are after. From my background in the acoustics for the saxophone I was able to develop a studio

ambience suited for us. What I did was re-balance all the instruments acoustically, custom-designing them so that the overtone spectrum brings out the flavor of each person.”

This design, Purcell says, is based on the metallic structure of the saxophone in relationship to the human anatomy. “In other words,” he explains, “I asked such saxophone players as Benny Carter, Jackie McLean and others how they make the music happen and what problems they encountered. For example, David Sanborn is a comparatively small and high-velocity player and requires a horn with a lighter design, thinner metallic walls on his saxophone. But David Murray is a more powerful player, and his horns need a thicker metallic wall. After I obtained this information, I worked with manufacturers to design horns to meet the specifications of each performer.”

All of this custom-designing and mastery of overtones is evident on Purcell's “Colors,” from the group's latest album, *Four Now* (see “CD Reviews” July '96). After a somewhat rambling search for tonal sonority, the group suddenly explodes in a kaleidoscope of luminosity. Yes, there is an array of incandescent colors, but those colors are rather disconnected, acquiring fresh harmonic strength with each plateau. *Four Now* also furthers the Quartet's involvement with African drums, which began on *Metamorphosis* ('91), but here the rhythmic density has added texture. There are impressionistic moments, too, particularly on “Dakar Darkness,” with



Original founding member/Down Beat Hall of Famer, the late Julius Hemphill (shown here in 1985)

they played without a rhythm section. Hemphill and Bluiett immediately recognized the logic and beauty of the ensemble, but when they made their debut several months later in New York City at the Tin Palace, the reception was mixed. Many listeners were not ready for an original style that had its source in rhythm & blues and black popular music with eruptive dollops of free-jazz. There were others, however, who reveled in the innovative technique that seamlessly interwove composed and improvised fragments. It was a quartet of soloists performing as a cohesive unit. Eventually, the group received an invitation to perform in Europe, and subsequent recording contracts with Black Saint and Nonesuch assured more exposure and secured a niche for them at least on the fringes of jazz.

Despite their influence, finding a comparison to the World Saxophone Quartet is difficult, if not impossible. In the past, it has spawned a host of chamber groups, including Britain's Hornweb and Itchy Fingers, Germany's Manfred

Schulze's Blaster Quintett and Kolner Saxophon Mafia and the Dutch De Zes Winden, not to mention the recent emergence of Frank Lowe's SaxEmble. And with the arrival of Purcell, who has been dubbed "Permanent Purcell" since the open seat now belongs exclusively to him, the group's identity will be even harder to compare or to categorize, especially on its recordings.

"My specialty is the studio," Purcell says, "so I have been anointed producer of the studio but not of the music. And one thing that has never been done [in the studio] in the history of the saxophone, except for Trane, Sonny Rollins and Ben Webster, is the capturing of the horn's true sound without all the engineering gimmickry and compression of the sound. We want to make sure the live aspect is brought to our recordings, that the saxophones are heard in their actual purity."

"Let me tell you something," Bluiett asserts. "Twenty years ago when we started the World Saxophone Quartet, we were in the middle of what they called

'fusion'—I called it 'confusion.' You could hardly make any money without being a fusion band. We would go into places and make them take all the microphones, all the speakers and everything out. We had to fight with people, but in the end they would hear every note and enjoy it. Now we're in the process of going against digital and back to analog and making music the way music should be heard. We are in the forefront of a lot of different stuff. Not only that, but when we went into the studio the last time, there was an engineer who had been there for 20 years, with Grammy nominations and all, but John taught him how to record. I have not been this excited about the band in a long time. I don't like to toot my horn too much, but since you gave me the opportunity, I thought I'd say a few things."

And this is hardly the last word from the voluble Bluiett, or from the ever-evolving World Saxophone Quartet. It seems with each decade—either through repertoire, arrangements or personnel—the WSQ always finds a way to reinvent itself.

DB

EQUIPMENT

Hamiet Bluiett uses a 70-year-old Chu Berry Conn baritone saxophone with Ria and Lawton mouthpieces. He believes any discussion about the reeds he uses is insignificant.

Oliver Lake uses a Selmer alto, with a Ria metal mouthpiece and Vandoren #2½ reeds. For several years he has relied on a very old Buford American curved soprano saxophone, with a Selmer mouthpiece and Vandoren #2½ reeds.

David Murray's tenor saxophone is a Selmer Mark VI, with a Berg Larsen 20 mouthpiece and Rico Royal #4 reeds. His bass clarinet is an old Leblanc with #3 tenor sax reeds.

John Purcell plays a unique King saxello. He also performs on a Powell flute, a Haynes piccolo, a Loree english horn, a Labin oboe and a Miramatsu alto flute. Purcell uses Vandoren #3 reeds with a classic cut on all his saxophones and clarinets, including his Selmer Mark VI tenor.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

FOUR NOW—Justin Time 83
BREATH OF LIFE—Elektra/Nonesuch 79309
METAMORPHOSIS—Elektra/Nonesuch 79258
RHYTHM AND BLUES—Elektra/Nonesuch 60864
DANCES AND BALLADS—Elektra/Nonesuch 79164
PLAYS DUKE ELLINGTON—Elektra/Nonesuch 79137
LIVE AT THE BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC—Black Saint 120096
LIVE IN ZURICH—Black Saint 120077

David Murray

BROTHER TO BROTHER—Gazell 4006 (with Dave Burrell)
LIVE AT SWEET BASIL, VOL. I—Black Saint 120085
CLARINET SUMMIT—India Navigation 1062 (Clarinet Summit)

Oliver Lake

DEDICATED TO DOLPHY—Black Saint 120144
EXPANDABLE LANGUAGE—Black Saint 120074
PROPHET—Black Saint 120044

Hamiet Bluiett

YOUNG WARRIOR, OLD WARRIOR—Mapleshade 02932
BIRTHRIGHT—India Navigation 1030
ENDANGERED SPECIES—India Navigation 1025

Joe Sample & Bob James

ROUGHING UP

SMOOTH EDGES

By Larry Birnbaum

According to a recent article in *Newsweek* magazine, "smooth jazz"—that frothy farrago of instrumentals and vocals by the likes of David Sanborn, Kenny G., Anita Baker and Sade—is today's fastest-growing radio format. Indeed, electrified "contemporary" jazz continues to outsell its acoustic counterpart by a wide margin. So it comes as a surprise that keyboardists Bob James and Joe Sample, whose funky fusions paved the way for the smooth-jazz sound, have each released an acoustic album.

James' *Straight Up* is a trio date with bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade; Sample's *Old Places Old Faces* expands from a core trio with bassist Jay Anderson and percussionist Lenny Castro to a quartet or quintet with drummer Ralph Penland, guitarist Dean Parks and guest saxophonist Charles Lloyd. Both albums are steeped in blues and swing, as well as wistful romanticism, but neither has much truck with bebop. Instead, James and Sample go with the flow of their previous work, their clean, spare lines accentuated by their respective acoustic pianos.

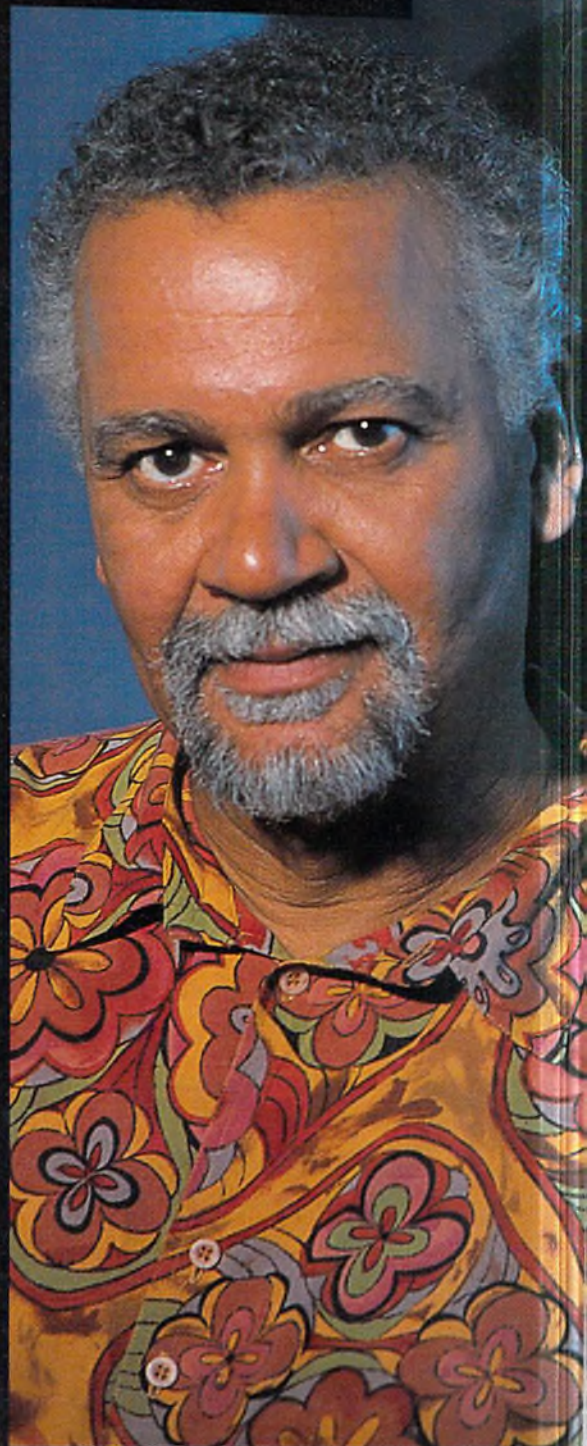
The two men, both born in 1939, took different paths to arrive at similar destinations. Sample, from Houston, grew up in a musical family of transplanted Louisiana Creoles. With teenage schoolmates Wayne Henderson, Wilton Felder and Stix Hooper, he formed a bluesy hard-bop band known, after moving to Los Angeles, as the Jazz Crusaders. In 1970 they plugged in and became the Crusaders, scoring hit after hit until their late-'80s breakup. From 1978, Sample also pursued a solo career,

cutting his own bestselling albums and performing with stars like Marvin Gaye, Tina Turner and B.B. King. Sidelined with coronary problems in 1994 and '95, he's bounced back with his new funk band, the Soul Committee, his solo album and a projected musical play based on the life of New Orleans nun Henriette Delille.

James, from Marshall, Mo., was classically trained, majoring in composition at the University of Michigan. Drawn to jazz, he began jamming in nightclubs, then formed his own avant-garde trio. As a lark, the group competed at the 1962 Notre Dame Jazz Festival, where judges including Henry Mancini and Quincy Jones awarded them first prize. Moving to New York, James spent three years as Sarah Vaughan's musical director before becoming house arranger for Creed Taylor's CTI label, where he worked with Hubert Laws, Grover Washington Jr., Freddie Hubbard and many others. As a leader, he recorded a long string of hit albums for CTI, CBS and his own Tappan Zee label. He also cut classical albums and Grammy-winning duets with Earl Klugh and David Sanborn. Since 1991, he's been a member of the contemporary jazz group Fourplay.

Although their paths occasionally crossed over the years, James and Sample never had an extended conversation until they sat down between tapings of a show for the Black Entertainment Television network in Washington, D.C.

LARRY BIRNBAUM: *With smooth jazz hotter than ever, you've both turned around and gone acoustic.*





BOB JAMES: [laughs] So we're nuts.

JOE SAMPLE: I know. [laughs] But the fact that Bob and I are representing Warner Bros. with two acoustic albums at the same time ...

BJ: ... is a coincidence. There was definitely no knowledge on either of our sides that it was going on.

LB: *What do you think of the smooth-jazz radio format?*

BJ: Smooth jazz, rough jazz, as long as they play my music. I can't vouch for what else they play; all I can do is to make my own music as good as I can. If people think it's smooth, that's all right, too.

JS: The problem with radio now is that if an album doesn't fit into the format of smooth jazz, it's possible that no one will even know it exists. But I am not going to join the formula crowd. It still has to be me, and hopefully there will be one or two cuts that smooth jazz can play.

BJ: The danger is that they're going to make a formula format. A formula is a bad thing, in our area particularly, because we're dealing with spontaneous improvisation. As soon as you start playing in a formula way, whether you're playing smooth jazz or bebop, you lose the surprise, the challenge, the freshness.

Formula translates into a kind of laziness, and it's easy to get a bit lazy. And if you take that many steps further, you get the formula of smooth-jazz radio.

JS: When I hear things on the radio that are of an inferior quality it bothers me, and it bothers me even more that it would be called "smooth jazz." There's nothing wrong with smooth jazz, but to call some of this stuff jazz, or even music. ... It's just inferior, period.

LB: *Why did you decide to go acoustic now?*

JS: When I started playing the piano at five years old, it was an acoustic piano, of course, so that has always been my tremendous love. But in the late '60s, I discovered that what I felt inside, rhythmically, was quite different from the standard 4/4 on the bass. I felt music that had other syncopated rhythms. At that time I didn't know an acoustic bassist who could play those rhythms, so I had to deal with the electric bass, which only works if I'm playing an electric

piano. And all through the years, I was told by acoustic bassists that it's impossible to play those rhythms.

Well, three years ago I was introduced to Jay Anderson, and he made all those guys a liar. So once I began working with Jay, I waited for the opportune time to make the initial recording of the trio, with Lenny Castro.

BJ: Hearing Joe talk about the process, I can almost hear myself saying the same things. We started in a very similar way with music, very early. I started at four, so we started around the same time, and we experienced our music the same way. It's the piano; it isn't the synthesizer; it isn't the electric piano. Those are all byproducts of what happened in the business; but our craft, our technique, our fingers are what is at our roots. There's always going to be the piano. As much as I've ended up thinking as an orchestrator, I never have been able to shake the fact that for me to really be able to play, it has to be on a really good conventional instrument.

LB: *You've both been credited as electronic keyboard pioneers.*

JS: I know I created this reputation of playing the electric piano. I played the Wurlitzer first. I stayed away from the Fender Rhodes, because I attacked it as I would an acoustic piano, and the tuning tines would always break. They were very stiff to play, which I actually loved. If you got the volume up on the Fender Rhodes, the sound would break up, so I used to keep it down, which meant I had to use my strength to get a sound out of the piano. Everyone thought I had gone into the works of the instrument and changed it, but the sound I got just came from a pianist's hands.

LB: *Both of you were identified with the development of a linear style of keyboard playing.*

JS: Yes, eliminating the thickness of the piano.

BJ: Because when the piano was thick, it didn't sound good. If you play a long chord on a Rhodes or any other electric keyboard, it's an artificial decay, and it usually rings longer than you want, so it begins to sound like an organ. So we'd play with thinner voicings, fewer notes.



JS: Exactly.

BJ: It affected my whole approach to soloing. That was the fresh sound, the Rhodes, and I was playing for an audience that was hearing me for the first time.

JS: And they never heard you on piano?

BJ: I didn't have a chance to establish myself on acoustic piano the way that I did with the Rhodes. And the only way I liked playing the Rhodes was much more sparse and lighter. I totally agree about the level being down so you could play harder and more percussive, because the sound of the instrument was so shrill, particularly in the upper register.

JS: The Rhodes taught me a lot about voicings. You could take four notes and spread them far apart, which I never would have thought about doing on the acoustic piano, and they had this fantastic sound.

LB: *Some people say that electronics obscured the musicians' individuality.*

JS: It didn't with the electric piano. Once my finger touches a Rhodes, you will know it's me. Once Bob James touches a Rhodes, it is Bob James. I kind of stayed away from the synthesizers, because I could not hear the individual touch. You could put together an individual choice of notes, but the actual touch, no.

LB: *Your album, Bob, is called Straight Up, but it's certainly not a bebop album.*

BJ: That was very deliberate terminology, because I hate the term "straightahead." It implies that a particular genre of music is straighter, and that the other genre is somehow crooked. But I have always felt that I approached music in a straightahead fashion, so it rubs me the wrong way to have what I play considered not straightahead. The way I think of that phrase is an approach in which you're honest, in which you are trying to communicate in a very direct way, and that's what I've been trying to do. I

"It would be very sad if jazz gets reduced to the point where it can only be one thing. But I don't think that's ever going to happen. We talk about this important element of swing, but I don't often hear people talk about the individual-personality aspect of jazz."

—Bob James

certainly hear it in all of Joe's music, whether he's playing with a funk rhythm section or in a trio setting. I'd call Joe's music straightahead in a second, but it would just be confusing to people who have gotten used to this labeling. So "straight up," to me, is more like a shot of whiskey that's not watered down.

LB: *And your new album, Joe, is similar in feeling to your other music.*

JS: The factor of swing is always there, even if I'm playing something funky. I've been listening to the music of New Orleans, from the Mardi Gras Indians to Fats Domino and Allen Toussaint, and it's all got that second-line rhythm, which is swing. So that is the straightahead factor: that swing is always there. As far as my trio album goes, I am not going to go play bebop lines on the piano. I'm definitely influenced by those things, but that is not my music.

LB: *According to one school of thought, the fusion music of the '70s and '80s should not be considered jazz at all.*

BJ: It would be very sad if jazz gets reduced to the point where it can only be one thing. But I don't think that's ever going to happen. We talk about this important element of swing, but I don't often hear people talk about the individual-personality aspect of jazz. I remember when somebody like Sonny Rollins would

play eight bars of a solo, and I knew who it was. I think I could do it now with Joe, because it's his own approach. Joe is not trying to play a specific, "correct" way, nor are any of the other great jazz artists. They're trying to express their own experiences, their own lives, their own influences, and it's going to come out different.

JS: That was the thing that gave jazz its life. It was an art form with pure, individual voices. I do not hear the individual voices today, because the people who run the music business don't want an individual sound.

BJ: Agreed.

LB: *Both of you have had your music sampled on hip-hop records. How do you feel about that?*

BJ: I'm flattered that somebody would want to use my music. Some people have problems with their music being played in airports. I don't have any problem with that. If the music is getting played, that's a good thing, wherever it is—grocery store, airport, jazz club.

JS: It's an irony. The industry was taken from very musical people and put into the hands of very non-musical people. But they still need music to sell, so they're going back and sampling the music of the musical people. Yet we're still here. I mean, why go back and sample it? **DB**

EQUIPMENT

"I like the Hamburg Steinway," says Joe Sample. "It's the best-feeling acoustic piano around, as far as I'm concerned. And the Fender Rhodes, the one they made before CBS purchased the Fender company in '73, is the best of the electric pianos. It's an outstanding instrument, but you really need a lot of chops to play it. If I am dealing with synthesizers, I will bring the programmers to the studio. I'd rather concentrate on the piano and let a synthesist concentrate on the sounds."

"I am a player of Yamahas, for the most part," says Bob James. "I also own a Hamburg Steinway, which I like very much. I was associated with Fender Rhodes for a long time, but I moved away from that, and for many years my instrument of choice was a Yamaha GS-2, which was their version of the Fender Rhodes. And in recent years, the companies have come out with rack-mounted instruments that I use because I own a Yamaha MIDI grand piano. It's basically a conventional grand, but it has MIDI contacts underneath the key bed where I can control my synthesizers and have the option of using the electronics or not. Whenever I can,

I take it with me on tour, and I have all my custom sounds. I also use a second keyboard in my touring setup, a Korg O1/W. In my studio, in addition to these devices, I have a Technics WSA-1 synthesizer.

"I use a Roland Wavestation, a Korg M-1R and a JV-880 as my three basic rack-mounted instruments, all interfaced through the Yamaha MIDI grand keyboard. I use a fairly standard electric piano sound from the Wavestation, with just a touch of a simulated Rhodes sound from the JV-880 that provides a percussive edge. But I find that the electronic instruments are too shrill at the upper end, so I do a kind of level scaling, which I control from the MIDI grand, where I decrease the level on the electronic instruments the higher up I go. It's not very noticeable, but instead of having that ugly electric sound at the very high end of the keyboard, I just have the pure sound of the acoustic piano. I really prefer when all of my basic playing comes from the acoustic piano keyboard, and that's what I love about the MIDI grand. It's just a matter of pushing a button or two and not losing my concentration."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Bob James

STRAIGHT UP—Warner Bros. 45856
RESTLESS—Warner Bros. 45536
GRAND PIANO CANYON—Warner Bros. 26256
IVORY COAST—Warner Bros. 25757
OBSESSION—Warner Bros. 25495
THE SWAN—Warner Bros. 45978
TWELVE—Warner Bros. 45977
THE GENIE—Warner Bros. 45976
FOXIE—Warner Bros. 45075
HANDS DOWN—Warner Bros. 45794
ALL AROUND THE TOWN—Warner Bros. 45973
SIGN OF THE TIMES—Warner Bros. 45972
H—Warner Bros. 45971
LUCKY SEVEN—Warner Bros. 45970
TOUCHDOWN—Warner Bros. 45969
HEADS—Warner Bros. 45968
BJ4—Warner Bros. 45967

THREE—Warner Bros. 45966
TWO—Warner Bros. 45965
ONE—Warner Bros. 45964
J.S. BACH: CONCERTOS FOR TWO & THREE KEYBOARDS—CBS 45579
RAMEAU—CBS 39540
EXPLOSIONS—ESP (1965; out of print)
BOLD CONCEPTIONS—Mercury (1963; out of print)

with **Fourplay** (James, Lee Ritenour, Nathan East, Harvey Mason)
ELIXIR—Warner Bros. 45922
BETWEEN THE SHEETS—Warner Bros. 45340
FOURPLAY—Warner Bros. 26656

with **Earl Klugh**
COOL—Warner Bros. 26939
ONE ON ONE—Warner Bros. 45141

with David Sanborn

DOUBLE VISION—Warner Bros. 25393

Joe Sample

OLD PLACES OLD FACES—Warner Bros. 46182
INVITATION—Warner Bros. 45209
ASHES TO ASHES—Warner Bros. 25318
SPELLBOUND—Warner Bros. 25781
CARMEL—MCA 37210
VOICES IN THE RAIN—MCA 27077
RAINBOW SEEKER—MCA 31067
ROLES—MCA 5978
OASIS—MCA 5481
THE HUNTER—MCA 1471
FANCY DANCE—Gazell 1016
COLLECTION—GRP 9658

with **the Soul Committee**
DID YOU FEEL THAT?—Warner Bros. 45729

with the Crusaders

CHAIN REACTION—MCA 1648
FREE AS THE WIND—MCA 37073
GHETTO BLASTER—MCA 5429
THE GOOD AND BAD TIMES—MCA 5781
HEALING THE WOUNDS—GRP 9638
HOLLYWOOD—MoJazz 530306
IMAGES—MCA 31360
PASS THE PLATE—MoJazz 530308
RHAPSODY AND BLUES—MCA 1662
SCRATCH—MCA 37072
SOUTHERN COMFORT—MCA 6016
STANDING TALL—MCA 1480
STREET LIFE—MCA 31024
THOSE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS—MCA 1649
UNsung HEROES—MCA 31374
LIVE AT THE LIGHTHOUSE '66—Pacific Jazz 37988 (Jazz Crusaders)
FREEDOM SOUND—Pacific Jazz (Jazz Crusaders)



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James

Blues harmonica virtuoso James Cotton has decided it's time to give his ears a rest. Listeners who know Cotton as the hypercharged boogie-master who played a major role in the Chicago blues revival of the '60s and '70s and whose bands have featured such fabled sidemen as guitarists Matt "Guitar" Murphy and the late Luther Tucker, might be surprised at his latest project: *Deep In the Blues*, an acoustic CD that features Cotton blowing hardedged Delta stylings backed by Joe Louis Walker on guitar, David Maxwell on piano and Charlie Haden on bass.

Why did Cotton, who's become almost as legendary for his onstage sweat and somersaults as for his harmonica artistry, decide to return to his acoustic roots? Not surprisingly, he says he was at least partly inspired by Eric Clapton's "Unplugged" video and the subsequent acoustic mini-craze among erstwhile rock & rollers. But this son of the Delta, who ran away from home at age nine to learn the blues from Rice Miller—the immortal Sonny Boy Williamson No. 2—maintains that even during the years when he was belting out lyrics like "Boogie all night long!" in roadhouses around the country, he was quietly nursing a burning love for the

music of his youth.

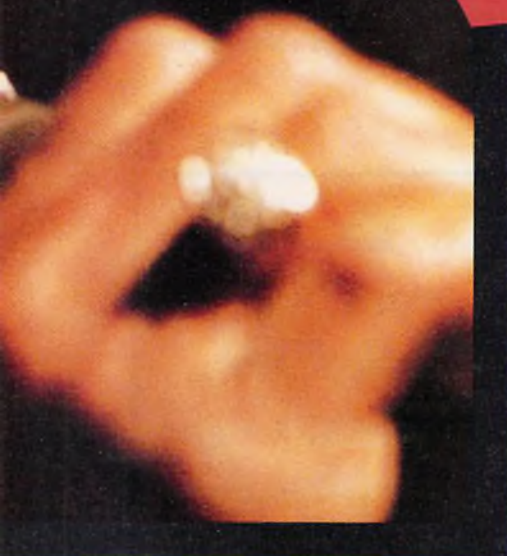
"It's been with me; I always liked it," Cotton says. "When I first started I played with a small group; I wanted to get that sound, which is hard to get. It's the sound that I miss. I like quiet music; when you're playing with all the guys, it has a tendency to get loud. But when you unplug it, you get the true sounds of the instrument."

Cotton says, in fact, that he's become frustrated with how modern blues has become "so loud that you really can't hear what's going on." A lot of the problem, he believes, is that most younger musicians don't get grounded in the true blues tradition. "The younger generation, unless

Cotton's

Quiet Rebellion

By David Whiteis



THOMAS D'AVALLA

their family is into the blues, they don't get a chance to hear it because it's not on the radio that much, maybe one day out of the week.

"You say 'blues' to people, you know—'Wh-what you talking about?' y'know? Like when I go to find a guitar player or somebody like that, I always have a problem because they don't know it."

Cotton thinks technology is at least partly to blame: "They've got better stuff in the studios, better instruments to play on. In some cases, I think it's good; in some cases, I think it takes away from it. People like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, they had their own distinctive sounds, and

they were the creators of it. There's a few [creative stylists] that's there now, but it's so modernized. The younger players, they're playing blues, but they've modernized so much! I guess that you have to be like that before you can make it. Everybody's trying to make a dollar, so they play the stuff that they'll put on radio. You got to be yourself; you got to play what *you* play."

With that admonition in mind, the synergy Cotton and his bandmates achieve on the new CD is impressive. Cotton's Delta-rich harmonica squalls and sandpapery vocals evoke the hard-won wisdom of a well-lived blues life; meanwhile, Haden lays down fluid shuffles and easy-rolling meditations below.

Walker, for all his famed immersion in the rocked-out San Francisco blues scene of the '60s and '70s, finds a keening acoustic guitar tone that cuts a swath through the middle. And Maxwell's piano is alternately tender and percussive, melodically rich yet sparse in the classic downhome mold.

Cotton says he was initially a bit daunted by the prospect of including Haden on the session. "Jean-Philippe [Allard], who's our manager at the company, wanted me, Joe Luis and Charlie. So I first asked about Charlie because I know that he's a good musician but he plays jazz. So I said, 'Well, how will this go?' And when I met Charlie, Charlie's

beautiful—I love Charlie! He's a down-to-earth guy; he's a nice guy; he can *play!*"

Haden, for his part, had similar questions going in. "I was kind of nervous," the bassist says. "When I got the call to play, I was thinking, 'Why would they want me?' because there are so many great blues electric bass players. I felt very honored that they wanted me to play, and I'm very glad they did because I had fun and I learned a lot about the blues. That's their art form and they're masters at it—I learned more about the blues playing with James Cotton and Joe Louis Walker than I have, ever.

Haden, who grew up in Springfield, Mo., found himself drawing on roots that many jazz musicians from more urban backgrounds might not have been able to tap as easily. "I was raised on the real country music, called hillbilly music when I was a kid," he remembers. "That was the real stuff; now, in the age of marketing, it's turned into a big deal—very slick music with their own awards show and a lot of superstar people—but back when I was a kid it was Hank Williams, the Carter Family, the Delmore Brothers, Roy Acuff. The Grand Ole Opry had just started; my parents used to sing on that before I was born.

"Music that came from the struggle for freedom, whether it's the struggle of African-American people in this country—

I like quiet music; when you're playing with all the guys, it has a tendency to get loud. But when you unplug it, you get the true sounds of the instrument.

a savory seasoning to the downhome mix. "The swing of jazz," he says, "is a little bit more sophisticated, more like a catalyst to the improvisation, to allow the improvisation to have continuity and a flow. The shuffle in blues, I think, has more to do with rhythms behind singing, as opposed to instruments."

slavery, the Underground Railroad—the poor white struggle from poverty that took in the music from Ireland, England and Scotland and came over into the Appalachian mountains; I think it's all a spontaneous music of people with a very deep story to tell, and the music that evolves from those experiences, I think, could only have come from the United States. I feel very close to all of that."

So when it came time for Haden to dig his chops into the chitlins-and-cornbread-flavored stew of traditional Delta blues, he slid effortlessly into the shuffle pocket behind Maxwell's boogie comping and Cotton's lithe harp explorations, adding just enough uptown sophistication to lend

agree that cutting this CD was a labor of love; a mood of conviviality and serious play permeated the entire session. "It was a good feeling," Cotton says, "because it was with different people I hadn't been working with, and they're good musicians. We were having a ball in there—when people get together and know what kind of feeling they're looking for, they just do it!"

Joe Louis Walker concurs: "It was a fun album to do because it really wasn't a lot of pressure. I've been knowing Cotton for about 20 years, so it ain't too much we can't talk about. If something ain't happening, Cotton'll tell you, 'It ain't happenin'!' And Charlie's a real open guy.

"It was not a thing where I was hired for

a session to do a gig with somebody I didn't know, try to be on my best behavior, don't want to make a mistake—it wasn't like that. It was sort of like just sitting around playing. The main focus was to make sure that what Charlie played fit in with what Cotton was playing, and Charlie's an all-around great musician; he can pretty much fit in with anything. He's got big ears."

Unlike Cotton and Haden, Walker didn't grow up surrounded by acoustic blues or folk music. But as a young musician, he was exposed to a wide variety of sounds at an early age: "I used to open up for people like Mississippi Fred McDowell and Lightnin' Hopkins, when I was 16 and 17, at this little place called Matrix in San Francisco. And that's where I got turned onto it—I just loved watching those guys play."

Walker echoes Cotton's view that the current ascension of blues as an international pop music threatens to wrest the art form from its roots, to the detriment of the music as well as the musicians who play it. "The word 'blues' now encompasses so much—old rock guys, younger black guys trying to move forward with it, old black guys trying to get some recognition and the money they have coming, 16-year-old white guys



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getting beaucoup press and beaucoup money—you know who the headliner was at the Monterey Blues Festival? Patti LaBelle! It'd be nice to see some of the real guys who were blues artists when it was *dangerous* get some sort of recognition."

To that end, Walker's next project will be a CD with an all-star guest list that he hopes will document the continuity of the living blues tradition. "It's sort of a continuing of influences, starting with some of the originators—Gatemouth Brown, Robert Junior Lockwood; then Ike Turner, Matt "Guitar" Murphy, Buddy Guy, Otis Rush; then Taj Mahal, Bonnie Raitt and then on down to people like Little Charlie Baty and myself, Otis Grand from England, Scotty Moore, several other people.

"There's two things that I would like to do: to showcase some of the guys that originated the music, and to showcase [the influences that *they* had. Gatemouth listened to a lot of country and western; Scotty listened to a lot of blues. It seems like this kind of cross-pollination, now, won't fly on the radio, because they seem to think that guitar-playing started with the bands that are going nowadays—alternative, grunge, whatever. That's not to knock the musicians, that's just to say that I believe people have got to go back and really listen to what [the original masters] were doing, to really play."

Cotton, meanwhile, plans to take an acoustic group—probably including David Maxwell and guitarist Bob Margolin—out

on the road. After spending virtually his entire life negotiating the perilous rapids of the music world, he's come to the conclusion that the best way to keep his career going and still remain sane is to sit back and let the music drive: "I'm just having a good time doing it. I enjoy doing it, and I'm going wherever it leads me. There are some things I feel that I would like to do—I would like to be in the movies one day, and get big hit records, like anybody else—but if it never happens, then I'm just going to go wherever the music gets me."

But like Walker, Cotton views his current embrace of the blues tradition as more than simply an opportunity to make music he loves during a time when acoustic sounds are once again considered marketable. "I'm intending to do another straight-ahead blues CD," he promises. "Maybe not with his trio but with the older blues people like [pianist] Pinetop Perkins, [drummer] Willie Smith and all them people. Get them together, if the company will allow me to do it, and put out a CD with them. Because it ain't too many good blues people left." **DB**

EQUIPMENT

James Cotton plays Hohner harmonicas, including the Marine Band series (primarily A-D-C-E-G) and the Chromatic 64. He uses the classic Shure 58 microphone, one for vocals and one for harmonica, running through the house PA and monitor system. In the studio, Cotton plays through a Fender Twin Reverb amp or a Fender Super Reverb amp.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DEEP IN THE BLUES—Verve/Gitanes 529 849
LIVING THE BLUES—Verve 314-521238
3 HARP BOOGIE—Tomato 71662
MIGHTY LONG TIME—Antone's 0015
HARP ATTACK—Alligator 4790 (with Carey Bell, Billy Branch and Junior Wells)
JAMES COTTON LIVE—Antone's 0007
LIVE FROM CHICAGO: MR. SUPERHARP HIMSELF!—Alligator 4746
HIGH COMPRESSION—Alligator 4737
TAKE ME BACK—Blind Pig 72587
LIVE AND ON THE MOVE—One Way 24835
HIGH ENERGY—One Way 27671
100% COTTON—One Way 27670
CUT YOU LOOSE!—Vanguard 79283
BEST OF THE VERVE YEARS—Verve 314 521 38

with various others

MUDDY WATERS: THE CHESS BOX—Chess/MCA 3-80002
MYSTERY TRAIN—Rounder SS38 (with Junior Parker, Pat Hare)
RARE CHICAGO BLUES: 1962-1968—Bullseye Blues 9530 (with Otis Spann, Big Joe Williams, Little Brother Montgomery)
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Ella

1918-1996



Clockwise from top: Ella with Illinois Jacquet, Billie Holiday and Ray Brown, 1950; with Joe Pass in Chicago, 1979; Paramount Theatre, 1957; with Nat Cole, Paramount Basie and John Heard in Chicago, 1979; Ella performing, mid-'80s; with Ray Brown and Louis Jordan, 1940s; background photo: Ella performing in New York with Duke Ellington



Theatre, 1957; with Ray Brown, Dizzy Gillespie, late '40s; with the Chick Webb Orchestra, 1937; performing "A Tisket A Tasket" from *Ride 'Em Cowboy*, 1941; with Count Basie and Benny Goodman looking on, 1948.



Chuck Suber

Jazz Class Visionary

By John McDonough

University and serving three-and-a-half years in the Coast Guard, young Suber entered the music business in February 1946 as an agent at General Artists Corp., having demonstrated no aptitude for performance. ("After instructing me in the key of C on the piano when I was eight," Suber recently recalled with a smile, "my father told me if he caught me touching a keyboard again, he'd break my arm.") The agency saw promise in young Suber and had plans for him that included Hollywood and the business side of TV.

In the early '50s MCA, then the country's most powerful agency, began courting Suber. "It made me think," he once reflected, "that if they see anything in me that they want, then I want out [of the agency business]." MCA had a reputation then as one of the most ruthless of all the talent agencies. When he was offered the position of advertising chief at Down Beat in November 1952, it was the alternative he was looking for. In April 1956 he became publisher.

It was about that time that an invitation arrived at Down Beat to attend a festival of high school stage bands in Brownwood, Texas, organized by Gene Hall of North Texas State (now University of North Texas). It finally landed on Suber's desk, and he was curious. He covered it as a story, and came back excited by its implications.

Music schools then were teaching nothing about jazz. "When I was in school in Indiana around 1950," recalls jazz educator David Baker, "jazz was nothing short of verboten. You could lose practicing privileges for playing jazz. You studied classical music, period. The jazz bands that were in schools were almost

"He was an organizer with a vision of how jazz education could benefit all parties—business, educators, musicians and the music itself."

— Dr. Billy Taylor

This year the name of Chuck Suber becomes the 16th entry to join the Down Beat list of Lifetime Achievement Award winners, an honor created to recognize the work of those who have contributed creatively to jazz in ways other than performance.

Although Suber served as publisher of Down Beat for most of his 24 years with Maher Publications (1952–1962/1968–1982), it is his pioneering work in bringing jazz into the fold of the country's leading music-education programs that has put him among the preeminent figures in the music world.

Suber was to the manor born 76 years ago. His father was a successful drummer (who used to play press rolls with his friend Chick Webb for fun), active union reformer in the '30s and president of AFM Local 802 in the early '50s.

After graduating from Louisiana State

PHOTO BY SPADY BYRD

always extracurricular. About the only exceptions were Westlake in California and North Texas State."

The Brownwood festival opened Suber's eyes to some remarkable possibilities. In 1958 Suber began using the First Chorus editorial column in the magazine as a bully pulpit to press his theme of jazz education, which he was convinced did not have to stop at the high school level. In one First Chorus he argued that the success of the high school festivals meant it was time to start a college one. "If anyone is interested," he said in effect, "call me." Someone did, and soon two representatives from Notre Dame University were sitting in his office finding much to agree on. There, the Notre Dame Jazz Festival was effectively born. Down Beat sponsored with the proviso that it would have control over rules and procedures, including appointment of judges.

"I first met Chuck around that time," says Baker, chairman and founder of Indiana University's 26-year-old jazz-degree program. "I had been at the Notre Dame Jazz Festival, and he was among the judges with Frank Holstein, Stan Kenton and two others. Chuck was not simply in on the ground floor. He could see ahead to the structure that could be built on top."

Suber's position as publisher of a leading music magazine was unique among those interested in jazz education. "While others made contributions on their own campuses and in their own fields," Baker points out, "Chuck's contribution transcended this. He had a huge range of contacts and could bring all these disparate elements together."

"First, he was outside the academy. He didn't have the baggage that the university had to contend with. And second, through a national music magazine like Down Beat, he could see the whole picture and make himself a kind of switchboard through which all this activity could be coordinated, organized and brought to a critical mass. He let us know we weren't alone. This magnified the impact of what we were doing."

Lee Berk of Berklee College of Music in Boston agrees. "Chuck was enough of a visionary to understand the importance of breaking down the isolation that surrounded a lot of the individual programs," he says. "And he used Down Beat to that purpose."

He also appealed to a mutuality of self-interests and showed that everyone had something to gain by bringing jazz into the music-education curriculum. "Chuck brought the talents of an organizer to this task," says pianist Billy Taylor, another long-time proponent of jazz education. "He was an organizer with a vision of how jazz education could benefit all

**"Chuck was not simply in
on the ground floor.
He could see ahead to the
structure that could be
built on top of it."**

— David Baker

parties—business, educators, musicians and the music itself. He was able to orchestrate all these separate interests into, well, an ensemble. He put together a combo, and it worked."

Using his contacts with instrument manufacturers, Suber helped organize clinics and rallied major advertisers to co-sponsor clinics with musicians such as Louie Bellson, Clark Terry and Buddy DeFranco, all of whom had been endorsing their products for years.

And for bandleaders like Stan Kenton, who were facing the decline of the big band as a force in the mass market, the success of the Notre Dame program became the matrix for the development of clinics and music summer camps. When Suber and Ken Morris proposed to Kenton in 1959 a summer music camp at Indiana University, this meant work to the business-minded Kenton. His young musicians were keenly attuned to the idea of being a music faculty.

"Work was the short-term benefit," Taylor adds. "Kenton also knew that there were students who could be recruited to play in school bands. In so doing they would get the massed sound of a jazz orchestra in their ears. It was good audience-development for the future."

Then there were the music schools themselves. What was their interest? "You have to give Chuck credit when you consider that," says Taylor. "In those days, you were fighting very entrenched and tradition-bound departments. They didn't want this stuff. They thought it would denigrate their efforts. Chuck used his publishing resources to give a validity to jazz performance. The fact was jazz had expanded the standards of virtuosity necessary to play well in any genre. Today, trumpets are playing higher. The bass violin has become a virtuoso instrument. Very few professional classical musicians can do some of the things that a good player in a jazz combo can do. Chuck helped force educators over the years to admit, often begrudgingly, that there is much musicality in jazz to be admired and to be learned from."

Suber made his case to the universities as much on the realities of commerce as the nobility of art. "He knew that one of

the things that could convince a university to get jazz into these programs was to show it could give them a bigger bang for their buck," says Baker. "Chuck would point out that with a big-band program, you could have one teacher over a class of 25 kids, next to the purity of the small group, with one teacher and four people."

"And there was also pressure for black studies, and jazz could help relieve that pressure on the university. When Cecil Taylor did a class at the University of Wisconsin, he was reputed to have had 1,500 students. When you have something that generates those kind of revenues, a university gets very interested."

Jazz education turned out to be in the interests of Down Beat, too. The swing era was over, and fans no longer bought the magazine to learn the latest gossip about Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw. The business justification for jazz education was clear to Down Beat. It not only helped build a market for its most valuable advertisers; it offered them a medium through which to reach it. For advertisers, most of Down Beat's best circulation came from this readership.

In 1978, Suber joined Chicago's Columbia College on a part-time basis. After he left Down Beat in 1983, he assumed full-time duties and became head of the graduate division of the Management Department. Today, he divides his time between his home in New Orleans and Columbia, where he is artist-in-residence and teaches music students about the business of music—the knowledge of survival. The department recently established the Chuck Suber Scholarship program.

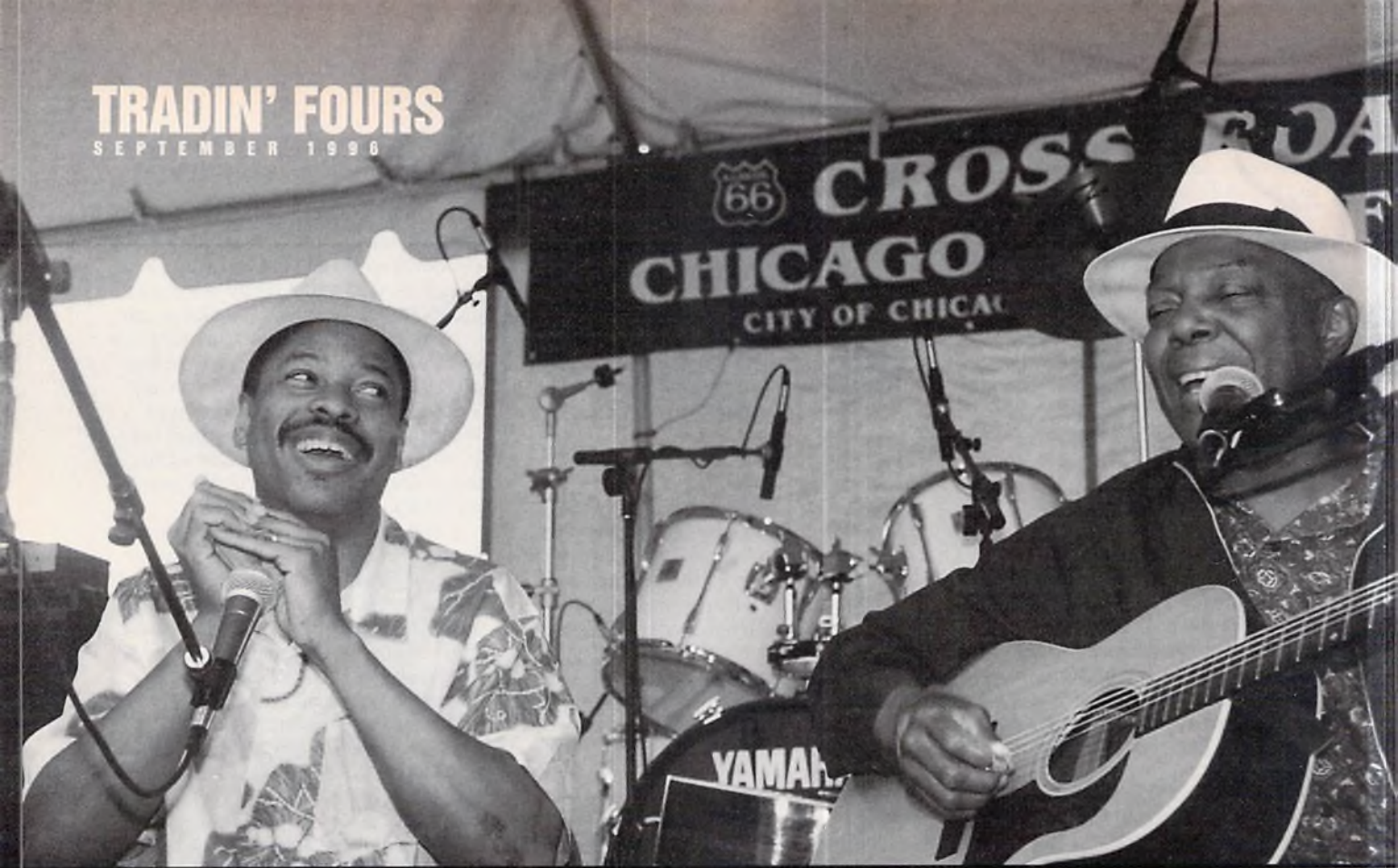
Suber is author of two books, *Quotations For Artists, Performers And Managers* and the new *Dictionary For Artists, Performers And Managers*, out in September. Both are published by Charles Suber Press.

"Chuck occupies a pivotal position in the jazz-education movement," Taylor says. "He was the first. You could say the same about him that we also say about the best musicians: His timing was the greatest."

"He was and is a proselytizer," Baker says. "He took no prisoners and made no compromises. I'm so happy he's getting this honor. He is one of the great unsung heroes. My heart really sings." **DB**

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

1981 John Hammond	1989 Norman Granz
1982 George Wein	1990 Rudy Van Gelder
1983 Leonard Feather	1991 Bill Cosby
1984 Dr. Billy Taylor	1992 Rich Matteson
1985 Dr. Lawrence Berk	1993 Gunther Schuller
1986 Orrin Keepnews	1994 Marian McPartland
1987 David Baker	1995 Willis Conover
1988 John Conyers Jr.	1996 Chuck Suber



Phil Wiggins (left) and John Cephas

TOM HAZELTINE JR.

Plenty Good Medicine

No one in their right mind questions B.B. King's exalted title of Blues Ambassador. But if the roving dignitary suddenly called it a day, perish the thought, true blues on the global stage wouldn't be completely devastated because there's another remarkably sincere, open-hearted and talented elder statesman of the music on the go: John Cephas.

Singer/guitarist Cephas, half of the acclaimed acoustic blues duo with harmonica player Phil Wiggins, gives a friendly little laugh when asked about their many, many performances all over the world. "We're on the road at least eight months a year," he said. "We try to figure out if it's worthwhile moneywise to go to a particular gig and if it's in a reasonable travel time that we can handle without so much stress and strain."

Cephas and Wiggins have been torchbearers of Blind Boy Fuller's Piedmont blues and other folk strains of black music since they teamed up in 1977, not long after meeting at the Smithsonian's American Folklife Festival. Cephas' rich

baritone singing and intricate, refined ragtime fingerpicking are a perfect fit with Wiggins' rural-blues harmonica stylings. They make a concerted effort to keep the folk-blues tradition going by not only performing but by acting or providing music vignettes for nationally touring stage productions like Jackie Torrance's *Bluestory* and by instructing students in folk blues at Seattle's Puget Sound Guitar Workshop.

Still, there's no place like home. In Cephas' case, a house north of Richmond, Va., perched next to a few acres of farmland. "After being out on the road for so long—five, six weeks, two months—it's always such a joy for me and a pleasure to come home here in Caroline County, outside the mainstream of the world, and just sit down and *relax*. Sometimes I just close the door, maybe for a day ... and I'll just pick up my guitar and play some wonderful tunes."

The duo's latest album, *Cool Down* (Alligator), reflects the wonderment Cephas and Wiggins find in the tranquil home-composed instrumental "Caroline In The Morning" and in the blues of the Piedmont and Delta regions. Not to mention Bessie Smith's classic blues, Wiggins' socially aware originals and a Skip James blues made with African kora player Djimo Kouyate.

Wiggins believes the music played by

Cephas and him has a benign quality. He points to the title of a song he wrote on the new album, "The Blues Will Do Your Heart Good." "It's what the blues is all about," Wiggins says. "People automatically think of sadness and depression, and people say, 'I don't want to hear that sad music.' But the blues, of course, is uplifting music, music to rejuvenate you, to nourish the spirit. Be true to yourself, stick by your dreams, and when you get down, the blues will pick you up again."

Influenced by piano players from various musics as well as the mighty blues harp triad of Big Walter Horton, Little Walter Jacobs and Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller), Wiggins prefers we listen carefully to his harp work and think twice before categorizing it as blues, though. "I just play music," he says. "I guess it's blues if you define blues as music that comes from your heart."

For Cephas, active bluesman and occasional lazybones, music is "one of the best tonics that anyone in this world can have. A life without music is no life at all, because life itself is so complex and so hard [with] so many ups and downs. If there was no music, then, brother, life would be gloomy; it would be without emotion, without feeling. So everyone should have music in their life. Everyone. That's the medicine that carries you from day to day—music." —Frank-John Hadley

Working Through Adversity

It's been quite a while since Peter Apfelbaum last headlined Slim's in San Francisco. On this mid-June evening, the composer/arranger/multi-instrumentalist commands the stage with his sextet to introduce hometown fans to the material from his new album, *Luminous Charms* (Gramavision). The exhilarating set of jazz, buoyed by funk and world-rhythmic textures, marks the triumphant return of the 35-year-old Berkeley jazz prodigy, who had been largely absent from both the national and local scenes for the last four years.

Apfelbaum frankly admits that the last few years have been fraught with setbacks and disappointments. At a time when young up-and-comers were making a major impact on the jazz scene, he was not only without a record deal, he was finding closed doors and don't-call-us-we'll-call-you responses from local club bookers.

"I try to be philosophical about it all," says Apfelbaum, best known for his 17-piece Hieroglyphics Ensemble and his collaborations with the late trumpeter and multikulti maestro Don Cherry. "I don't want to complain because in many ways I've been very lucky. But last year in particular I became a bit bitter and disillusioned. It was difficult. When I formed the sextet and tried to get gigs, club owners were either disappointed that I wasn't playing with the Hieroglyphics or they didn't know who I was."

That's surprising, given that he was the prime mover-and-shaker of the Bay Area's youth-driven jazz scene from his days at Berkeley High in the late '70s through much of the '80s. His Hieroglyphics Ensemble was not only a spawning ground for such future stars as Craig Handy, Benny Green and Joshua Redman, but it was also touring internationally. Plus, Apfelbaum himself was garnering national recognition as one of the most important young musicians forging a forward-looking outlook on jazz.

But then his record label, Antilles, was bought by PolyGram, which downsized its roster. Even though the Hieroglyphics' two albums, *Signs Of Life* and *Jodoji Brightness*, were critically well received, Apfelbaum and his innovative big band were unceremoniously dropped.

With the Hieroglyphics on an extended hiatus, a year-and-a-half ago Apfelbaum began to make changes. "I got to the point where I realized I couldn't be putting all my eggs into one basket anymore. In order to work more, I knew I had to form a smaller band."



Peter Apfelbaum

Apfelbaum insists that the sextet—composed of bassist John Shifflett and a core cast of Hieroglyphics, including guitarist Will Bernard, trombonist/bassist Jeff Cressman and drummer/percussionists Deszon X. Claiborne and Josh Jones—is not a lesser version of the big band. "If anything, it's a more developed unit. We can develop ideas much quicker than the Hieroglyphics. The sextet is much more of what I've

been hearing in my head all these years." Plus, while the leader rarely indulged himself as a soloist in his big band, the sextet setting allows him the space to stretch on tenor saxophone.

Over the past couple years, Apfelbaum says he's learned to be more resourceful. He performed a few side jobs here and there, including a sax slot with vocalist Ann Dyer, a drumming gig with bassist Lisle Ellis, a couple of dates in a horn section for the band Phish and organizational duties for Cecil Taylor's orchestral project at last fall's San Francisco Jazz Festival (see "Caught" Feb. '96).

But with the May release of *Luminous Charms*, the tide began to change. His sextet performed at the Knitting Factory's What Is Jazz? festival in June, headlined Yoshi's in July and scored a slot at the Eddie Moore Jazz Festival in August. This fall, Apfelbaum performs at the Monterey Jazz Festival and will be featured in two San Francisco Jazz Festival shows—a sextet date and a Don Cherry concert tribute.

All this has made Apfelbaum optimistic. He's already forecasting 1997 as the Hieroglyphics Ensemble's comeback year. "It's funny. I've been trying to basically do the same thing with the same people for all these years. It's finally being appreciated as something that's valid and valuable."

—Dan Ouellette

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Building A Career Foundation

Strength. Groove. Feeling. It's all part of Cheron Moore's playing, whether the 37-year-old is bringing live drums into rap with Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg (*The Chronic*, Priority), appearing with Solomon Burke on *Till The Night Is Gone: A Tribute To Doc Pomus* (Rhino) or working with the likes of James Brown, Albert Collins, James Cotton and Bonnie Pointer.

Moore's early training was hanging around the funk band Kool & The Gang, in particular, drummer George Brown. He later attended the School Of Music & Communication In Jersey City, N.J. "They taught me simplicity," says Moore. "When you get back to the simplest way of doing something, chances are you'll do it right. What you build will make sense because you started from a foundation.



Cheron Moore

"Most of us get hung up on how many licks we can put into a one-bar roll," he continues. "I call it a slugfest. But I play best when I'm in a little cafe in Beverly Hills with a three-piece, playing some brushes." Drumming inspirations, besides Brown, include Elvin Jones, Buddy Rich, Buddy Miles, Clyde Stubblefield, Dennis Chambers and Billy Higgins, each for his own reasons. "Dennis makes me want to put my drums in the closet and get a day gig," laughs Moore. "Now, Billy makes me want to go home and just practice. You love drums after you see him. Billy reminds you of what it's all about, being

12 years old and taking that Camco set out of the box."

Moore has learned the importance of planning for life after the drums, and it's changed his perspective a little bit. "I don't sweat cats on their playing," he says. "I think we've all got something to add or share. I like a drummer's business skills before I like his playing. I'm looking to see if you're a go-getter." A thick skin is another necessary ingredient for a working drummer. "If you're a drummer who can't keep time, man, you're just fired. And if you're working with Dre and Snoop at Death Row Records, you're fired with a black eye or a big knot up on your head. It's scary. You've got to be able to get cussed out and live with all of that."

Moore is writing for and recording his own band now, and he enjoys calling the shots. He is developing several drum-related inventions, and has clothing, footwear, drum, hardware and cymbal endorsement deals. "Endorsements are not the world of free equipment, but the opportunity to have a relationship with a manufacturer, and have a say-so in their products," he says. "If you really love the product and get into telling people about it, then they want to make you bigger. And don't wait until you've got 27 Grammy albums before you think your resume is big enough to start going after things in your career."
—Robin Tolleson

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Jeremy Davenport

A Lyrical Take On Romance

Trumpeter and vocalist Jeremy Davenport's artistic development can be traced to the understated cool of Chet Baker, the tutelage of Harry Connick Jr. and Ellis Marsalis—and the romantic stylings of Alffa.

Davenport first heard "I'm In The Mood For Love," which closes his self-titled debut CD (Telarc Jazz), when the earnest "Lil' Rascal" bleated it to his sweetheart, Darla. Alffa's wide-eyed moxie made an impression on a young Davenport.

"I remember thinking, 'How could you ever sing a song to a girl?'" says Davenport, who is now 25 and quite comfortable singing to girls. "It's such a strange dynamic. Some cats don't want to sing, 'I'm in the mood for love.' They want to play it. I like singing it."

Davenport grew up in the suburbs of St. Louis, the son of a St. Louis Symphony trombonist and a vocal music teacher. His interest in jazz came early. By junior high, he and some classmates had formed the Todd Williams Quintet, whose alumni went on to back Wynton Marsalis and Joshua Redman. While studying at a New York conservatory, Davenport met a then-unknown pianist and singer named Harry Connick Jr. who shared Davenport's fondness for classic swing. After *When Harry Met Sally* made Connick a star, he hired Davenport as a trumpeter in his big band. Davenport likens his four-year hitch with Connick to being in music school, with the added bonus of "beautiful pay, beautiful accommodations and beautiful hours."

Davenport also studied under Ellis Marsalis at the University of New Orleans. One experience in particular reinforced his early fascination with lyrics and singing. "We were playing 'Tenderly' together. I

was playing the melody. He stopped in the middle of the tune and looked at me over his glasses, in his Mr. Marsalis way, and goes, 'Do you know the lyrics to this tune?' I said no. 'You know what this song is about?' No. 'Why are you playing it?' I was like, 'Oh, shit.'"

Davenport's lyrical take on romance is simple and sweet, in keeping with the sentiments of "They Can't Take That Away From Me," the Gershwin standard on his CD. "This may be a self-defeating thing to say, but there's no depth to my lyrics. I want the depth to be in the improvisation, in the composition, in the reason I use certain chords or certain voicings or

certain rhythms. I like music that is melodious. I like the swing and I like the energy, but I also like it to be pretty and listenable. I don't necessarily want to play music that you need a degree to enjoy."

A fantasy about his favorite Miles Davis recordings—the *In Person At The Blackhawk* live set—neatly distills his own stylistic ambitions. "What if Frank Sinatra had stopped by that night and sang a tune with the band? What would have been the dynamic? Those cats were from two different camps, but I enjoy them both on different levels. What if that would have happened? It would have been some beautiful music, I think." —Keith Spera

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	Good	★★★
	Fair	★★
	Poor	★



Cecil Taylor

Iwontunwonsi
Sound Hills 8065

★★★★

The scarcity of Cecil Taylor performances in the period since his MacArthur award in 1992 has forced ravenous Taylorites to satisfy themselves on late issues of live tapes, like *Iwontunwonsi*. FMP's been releasing the steadiest stream since their landmark boxed set in '88, including two sturdy 1990 sessions—the solo *Double Holy House* and a trio with bassist William Parker and drummer Tony Oxley. *Celebrated Blazons*—both of which hit the shelves three years after the fact. *Olu Iwa*, a septet and quartet recording from '86, came out eight years later on Soul Note.

In any case, this 1986 solo set—taped at Sweet Basil when that club was considerably more open-eared—is a welcome addition to Taylor's opus. He was playing consistently at the time (I must have seen him five times that year, including this concert), and his imagination and energy level were at something of a career peak. The pianist's frequently erratic choice of sidemen means he's often his own best band. (With such diverse, rich, multifaceted music as his, who needs anyone else?) Taylor makes his own documentation tough by starting with a trademark vocal incantation, mostly off-mic. He squeezes snide sounds from his nose like a soprano Howlin' Wolf, then opens his throat to intone organic, portentous, poetically supersaturated text.

The disc's main course is a 44-minute non-stop romp through Taylor's known, but constantly reworked and recombined, material. There's the unbridled force and pummel of a man impossibly potent at age 57; at 40 minutes, listen to him burn rubber like Conlon Nancarrow's player-piano come alive. But listen also for Taylor's underlying emotional power—the loving grace and stirring romance of his familiar melodic themes, which only heighten the impact of his fury-flurries. Where he's got the right hand of Andreotti and the left hand of Thor—huge, open chords resounding like thunder—he also opts for sensuous blues lines and lush (never simpering) harmonies. There's a tad more voice at the end, and one note to finish the ride. As usual, he tops it with a sweet little fragment, more a postscript than

a part two.

It won't nudge out Cecil's best unaccompanied records, like *Garden* (hat ART) and *Silent Tongues* (Arista), but *Iwontunwonsi* is a strong hit of Taylor caught mid-motion. —*John Corbett*

Iwontunwonsi—*Iwontunwonsi* [three untitled tracks], (48:58)

Personnel—Taylor, piano.



Bucky & John Pizzarelli

Live At The Vineyard
Challenge Jazz 70025

★★★★

We've gone longer than we should in these columns without addressing the fine work of John Pizzarelli, whom RCA introduced to the big-time four years ago, presumably in answer to Columbia's Harry Connick. Pizzarelli's records have been pointedly urbane and coolly elegant. He has a handsome and commanding presence, an engaging voice and well-bred, adult taste, with generous trimmings of Nat Cole for inspiration. All qualities that make him at home in either a jazz room or cabaret. They are the icing, however,

on a first-class guitar virtuosity. And on this (pre-RCA) duo date with his father from 1987, it's clear where it all came from: papa Bucky.

Pizzarelli Sr., 70, is one of the unsung jazz guitar masters in the Kress/Van Eps lineage of chordal players, although he also plays excellent single-string and rhythm lines. Here, father and son perform a varied program whose well-honed ensemble precision betrays the kind of preparation that comes from lots of woodshedding, one suspects at home. Between the four hands, they make an orchestra of 14 strings, nowhere more than on a petite but solid "Sing, Sing, Sing." But more than guitar technique has been handed down, by the evidence here. John has acquired a true sensibility for the classic song form and seems to revel in it.

Although there's no hint of who plays what in the album notes, by my reckoning Bucky takes the first solo on "Three Little Words," lightly and elegantly. Then John bursts in with some eager and aggressive playing in a tight, swinging groove. The same tension exists on "Stompin' At The Savoy." On "Honeysuckle" the order is reversed, and it's Bucky who pounces in second with a stout broadside of chords. In the final chorus, these two well-matched guitarists go head to head to a happy draw. Bucky also plays a short piece from *Concierto de Aranjuez*, which he recorded definitively and in greater depth with Howard Alden in 1992 for Stash. And Bix Beiderbecke's piano piece, "In The Dark," is lovingly rendered.

There aren't that many second generations in jazz. So add Pizzarelli to Redman and the short list of others. —*John McDonough*

Live At The Vineyard—*Three Little Words; Jitterbug Waltz; I'm Through With Love; I'll Never Be The Same; All This And Heaven Too; Route 66; This Will Make You Laugh; Honeysuckle Rose; Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me; Concierto de Aranjuez; Spain; Pick Yourself Up; Romanza; In The Dark; Straighten Up And Fly Right; Triste; Send In The Clowns; Stompin' At The Savoy; Sing, Sing, Sing.* (61:36)

Personnel—Bucky Pizzarelli, John Pizzarelli, guitars.

THE HOT BOX

CDs	CRITICS	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
BUCKY & JOHN PIZZARELLI <i>Live At The Vineyard</i>		★★★★	★★★1/2	★★★	★★★
STEVE COELMAN & FIVE ELEMENTS <i>Curves Of Live</i>		★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
PETER ERSKINE <i>As It Is</i>		★★★1/2	★★★	★★★★	★★★★
CECIL TAYLOR <i>Iwontunwonsi</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★1/2



Peter Erskine

As It Is
ECM 21594

★★★★

With *As It Is*, drummer/composer Erskine continues his trio excursions through music both spare and lyrical. The band's first two albums, *You Never Know* and *Time Being*, prompted comparisons with certain Paul Bley and Bill Evans trios. But Erskine's approach is markedly different, and not just because his is a drummer-led band.

To begin with, the group has avoided the "easy" mark of playing standards, Cole Porter's "Everything I Love" from *You Never Know* being the lone chestnut recorded thus far. Instead, the emphasis has been on original compositions with the occasional oddity thrown in (*As It Is* sports the wistful "Touch

Her Soft Lips And Part," written for a film score of *Henry V* in 1943 by William Walton). Piano trios minus standards can be ugly, which is what Bley's excursions were at times. In Bley's case, however, the original material more often than not expressed a jagged beauty with sly, Ornettiish overtones. In Erskine's hands, the music can be dreamy or perky, filled with intriguing eddies, lyrical despite the absence of catchy melodies.

"Glebe Ascending" opens with pianist Taylor's gentle chords played opposite Danielsson's spare bass notes. Erskine enters the fold moments later with chimes, cymbals and light tom toms. Eventually, a moderately slow, almost bossa tempo emerges, guided by Taylor's chordal couplets answered by Danielsson and punctuated by Erskine. Taylor's "Glebe" is followed by Erskine's "The Lady In The Lake," a ballad of sorts at times reminiscent of the Miles Davis/Bill Evans composition "Blue In Green." The pattern of repeated lines throughout is used again, only this time a turning seems to take place, as if an actual bridge and return occurs, giving a more songlike quality to "Lady."

In general, a sense of continuous invention exists with the notion of "we always solo and we never solo" an apt description. Minimal structures offer maximum opportunities for tonal expression and "deep listening," or the experience of hearing before playing. This is true even with more arranged pieces like "Episode" and "Woodcocks," where all three players closely follow composer Taylor's relatively brisk single lines into uncharted waters that have less to do with improvising on

chords as much as they suggest avenues for nuance, embellishment and the use of space. Things are a tad more playful with Vince Mendoza's tuneful "Esperança," featuring one of a number of short, evocative Erskine solos.

At times, a sense of stasis, or incompleteness, sets in. The long-form "Au Contraire," the seventh of nine pieces, highlights the music's persistent lack of resolve, or closure. Finely executed, "Au Contraire" nonetheless lacks a certain charm and cohesion heard elsewhere. "For Ruth," apart from some new rhythms and colors from Erskine, likewise needs something that warrants its inclusion at this point in the program. Not so with Erskine's "Romeo & Juliet," the closer that plays like a hymn, or benediction. Yes, the solemnity and composure that distinguish *As It Is* are here. Erskine's best drum solo is here as well, along with a haunting theme statement, giving one the feeling that the music itself is holding the listener's hand.

Trying the patience of those who hear meandering, unfamiliar song forms and no "there" there, Erskine's trio music is deceiving. Delicate, it somehow refuses to become strictly background music. Up close, its sparseness belies easy description. Another comparison, this one with the equally reverberant Keith Jarrett Standards trio (labelmates all), perhaps comes closer to describing Erskine's trio. Both bands are led by strong piano voices, anchored by solid bassists, and driven and shaped by richly distinctive drummers. Both bands achieve an unbridled lyrical intimacy: One does it through original music, the other courtesy of messrs. Gershwin, Kern, et al. Both bands



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attain a kind of selfless state where the group sound elevates the music past personalities into another realm. I like what Chicago Bulls coach Phil Jackson has to say in this regard, referring to basketball players: "They live for those moments when they can lose themselves completely in the action and experience the pure joy of competition." The competition part may not apply, but *As It Is* certainly is about getting lost in the music. —John Ephland

As It Is—Glebe *Ascending: The Lady In The Lake: Episode. Woodcocks: Esperança: Touch Her Soft Lips And Part: Au Contraire: For Ruth. Romeo & Juliet. (57:18)*
Personnel—Erskine, drums: John Taylor, piano: Palle Danielsson, double-bass.



**Steve Coleman
& Five Elements**

Curves Of Life
RCA Victor 74321

★★★★

Some critics snort at the stiffness of his rappers, some poo-poo the mathematical tinge his funk intermittently displays. But Steve Coleman's kaleidoscopic cadences and jagged melodies still connect the dots in my mind. I hear the so-so rhymes as yet another rickety element of a gloriously rickety music, and leap at the chance to get lost in the labyrinth the group invariably concocts with its highly democratic back-line/front-line switcheroo. For me, Five Elements remains a very happening band.

Curves Of Life is one third of a boxed set that has been released in Europe, culled from a weeklong stint at the Hot Brass Club in Paris. The box contains two other discs that document alternate Coleman ensembles, the Mystic Rhythm Society and Metrics (both are scheduled for individual domestic release before the end of the year). Methinks the MRS session is the most novel, but *Curves* kicks enough butt to stand up with such Five Elements jewels as *sine die* and *Rhythm People*. Granted, it's not a break toward new territory, or an amendment of past agendas. But because it's recorded live, there's a palpable *esprit de corps* at work that gives the stuff an extraordinary shimmer.

The addition of David Murray on a couple of cuts also boosts the personality of the music,

ultimately adding a bit of novelty, and bumping the overall frenzy level. Five Elements can be a jam band, but Coleman's M-BASE language isn't a dialect that's been spoken by many outside the family. Murray comes in wailing, proud of his breaches in vernacular. On "Country Bama," while Coleman works the mutant ninja routine (ever-twirling phrases that slash out with a steely certitude), Murray trusts in the resonance of the squall, and discharges a solo that should have been on the *Twister* soundtrack.

Coleman's known for his adherence to originals, but over the last few discs, he's outfitted some standards in M-BASE garb. "Salt Peanuts" and "Confirmation" made last year's *Def Trance Beat* seem more inclusive. Here, the theme to "Round Midnight" gets run through myriad permutations. It's possibly the most aggressive take of Monk's bittersweet lament on record. Any romance missing from the interpretation can be found on "The Gypsy," a duet between Coleman and pianist Andy Milne that reminds how eloquent the alto player can be negotiating "tunes."

With drummer Gene Lake steadily slicing and dicing with concise beats, what *Curves Of Life* ultimately reminds us is how exacting Coleman's sound really is. In his hands, back-beat is a pliable ploy. Here, the main thrust of Coleman's now decade-old esthetic becomes obvious: how the flow of sound—long and short syllables, muttered and declaimed beats, shake & bake tones, exclamation and nuance—is inextricably linked to the rhythmic inflections surrounding it. In this band, everybody's a percussionist. —Jim Macnie

Curves Of Life—Multiplicity Of Approaches (The African Way Of Knowing); Country Bama: The Streets; 'Round Midnight; Drop Kick Live: The Gypsy; I'm Burnin' Up (Fire Theme). (78:07)

Personnel—Coleman, alto saxophone; Andy Milne, piano, keyboards; Reggie Washington, bass; Gene Lake, drums; David Murray, tenor saxophone (2, 7); Black Indian, Sub-Zero, Kokayi, vocals (7).



Katia Labeque

Little Girl Blue
Dreyfus 36186

★★

Eliane Elias

Solos And Duets
Blue Note 32073

★★★

As far as piano duets go, I count Albert Ammons and Lux Lewis' "Nagasaki" as the seminal groover, the sessions between Hank Jones and John Lewis as the apex of finesse, and Cecil Taylor's and Mary Lou Williams' meeting as an intriguing game of bumper cars. Double-keyboard dates should proffer confluence of course, but in the jazz realm, they would also do well to have some creative tension at their center. To a large degree, that element is missing from classical virtuoso Labeque's teaming with a phone-book's load of professional improvisers. *Little Girl Blue* is marred by too much accord.

The liner quotes from Glenn Gould and Bill Evans help discern the esthetic turf, and perhaps my lack of regard for these four-handed forays comes from the fact that there's more Vienna than Kansas City at play. The liners also remind that Labeque is upfront about this stance. "I don't play jazz, I play the music of jazz composers," she's quoted as saying. Perhaps that's what makes several of these tunes resound with the feeling of display pieces. It's like walking through a zoo: "Here is the grand leopard, known for its devastating ability to pounce." Look down and all that's lying in front of you is a sleepy creature bored with its cage.

A couple of the drawing-room blues and chamber romps do manage to growl a bit, however. Gonzalo Rubalcaba goads some freneticism out of Labeque on "Besame Mucho," and Michel Camilo's work on "La Comparsa" makes it sound less like a recital hall and more like a cantina. Sadly, those peaks are blemished by having to sit through "Volcano For Hire," the pianist's transaction with Joe Zawinul's electric keyboards. Imagine Tomita trying to boogie.

Elias turns with Herbie Hancock on *Solos And Duets* are much more vivid, if still a tad on the academic side. Elias has both the facility and the feel, and is used to the reciprocity of group improv. So, when she and Hancock dig into "The Way You Look Tonight," there's a tacit agreement that they're going to bandy a slew of ideas. That's what happens, too. The melody isn't a life raft to be clung to (as is pretty much the case on *Little Girl Blue*), but the starting gate for a race between seasoned competitors. It's thick with ideas, and loaded with finesse.

During the "Messages" triptych, the pair go the other way, allowing for maximum use of space. The phrases dart and weave, yet stillness is revealed to be the most overwhelming component. It's a deep method of cavorting, and it makes up for the *Facing You*-era, Keith Jarrett notions that Elias conjures during the solo portion of the program. In the end, her strong suit is the gamesmanship of exchange.

—Jim Macnie

Little Girl Blue—*We Will Meet Again; My Funny Valentine; On Fire; Besame Mucho; Prolong Comienzo; Little Girl Blue; Quiza, Quizas, Quizas; Volcano For Hire; Turn Out The Stars; Summertime; La Comparsa.* (57:19)

Personnel—Labeque, Chick Corea (1, 9) Herbie Hancock (2), Marielle Labeque (3), Gonzalo Rubalcaba (4, 5, 7), Joe Zawinul (8), Joey DeFrancesco (10), Michel Camilo (11), pianos.

Solos And Duets—*Autumn Leaves; The Masquerade Is Over; The Way You Look Tonight; All The Things You Are; Joy Spring/Have You Met Miss Jones; Just Enough; Asa Branca; Messages.* (54:03)

Personnel—Elias, Herbie Hancock (3,6,8), pianos.

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Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra

Coming About
enja 90692

★★★★★

Evanescence was Maria Schneider's debut recording, released on enja in 1994. It was nominated for two Grammys and carried her reputation far beyond Greenwich Village, where her orchestra has played every Monday night at Visiones since 1993. *Coming About*, her second album, exhibits all the virtues of its predecessor. There is the richness of color,

the seamlessness with which the sections of the ensemble are meshed to one tapestry, the movements as unhurried as looming clouds, the discipline in the attention to detail. But *Coming About* takes many more risks.

There are seven selections. Each can stand alone, but cumulatively they make a powerful autobiographical statement. The first is "El Viento" ("The Wind"), an everchanging process (like its title) that was commissioned in 1994 by the Carnegie Hall Jazz Orchestra but never recorded until now.

Schneider wants "improvisation to be interwoven with composition," and she is successful at building soloists into her larger purposes. Ben Monder's volatile guitar, Larry Farrell's darkly brooding trombone and the laser light of Greg Gisbert's trumpet never fully emerge from the ensemble because the music never stops evolving beneath them. The soloist on the next song is the most striking individual voice in the band, tenor saxophonist Rich Perry. He uses notes sparingly, yet he lays bare the poignance of "Love Theme From *Spartacus*" (one of two pieces not written by Schneider).

The first movement of the three-part suite "Scenes From Childhood" is "Bombshelter Beast," a piece about youthful fears. Scott Robinson's baritone saxophone is properly bestial, and Monder's guitar keens like a fanged creature while the band lurches and roils. Next comes "Night Watchmen," a scene of more mysterious impulse in which the young Schneider observes with fascination the

nocturnal movements of the men who patrol a factory next to her family home. Perry and trumpeter Tim Hagans embody the composer's sensual and imaginative responses to those night shadows. "Coming About" takes us sailing on a Minnesota lake in summer, and ends the suite with major-key affirmations. As its shape unfolds, "Scenes From Childhood" vividly evokes a private interior landscape in order to share it.

"Giant Steps" is a fresh harmonic confrontation with the Coltrane classic, and "Waxwing" closes the album with eight minutes of flowing elegance.

Included with *Coming About* are intelligent liner notes by Terry Teachout, extensive technical information about the recording, 21 photographs from the session by Jimmy Katz and luminous sonic quality by engineer Jim Anderson. These production values enhance one of the essential big-band recordings of the '90s to date by a composer/arranger who has the promise to become a major voice.

—Thomas Conrad

Coming About—*El Viento*; *Love Theme From Spartacus*; *Scenes From Childhood*: *Bombshelter Beast*/*Night Watchmen*/*Coming About*; *Giant Steps*; *Waxwing*. (67:50 minutes)

Personnel—Schneider, composer, arranger, conductor; Mark Vinci, Tim Reis, Rich Perry, Rick Margitza, Scott Robinson, Charles Pillow, reeds; Tony Kadleck, Greg Gisbert, Laurie Frink, Tim Hagans, trumpet, flugelhorn; Keith O'Quinn, Rock Ciccarone, Larry Farrell, George Flynn, trombone; Ben Monder, guitar; Frank Kimbrough, piano; Tony Scherr, acoustic and electric basses; Tim Horner, drums.

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Plunge

Falling With Grace
Accurate 5016

★★★★

What is it about bass instruments that makes them so appealing? Part of the allure has to do with the fact that you not only experience auditory sensations, but your entire body feels the sonic vibrations. Then there are those twilight hues of blue and indigo that evoke melancholic memories. Whether embodied in the honks and blats of a bass clarinet or the bass stops of a Hammond B-3, the lower the pitch the more gutsy and arousing the music seems to get.

So it's no surprise that Plunge, an unorthodox, bass-oriented quartet, should unveil such a remarkable debut. *Falling With Grace*, at once soulful and vivacious, is a refreshing plummet into the deep end of the tonal spec-

trum. Boston-based trombonist/composer Mark McGrain aptly demonstrates that he understands the potent power of the bass frequency as he leads his ensemble—tuba player Marcus Rojas (of Henry Threadgill's Very Very Circus and Spanish Fly fame), drummer/percussionist Bob Moses and double-bassist Avishai Cohen—into this low-registered fling spiced by the merrymaking revelry and percussive buoyancy of New Orleans Mardi Gras and Brazilian Carnival.

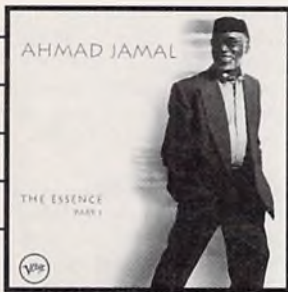
With all band members taking their share of rhythmic responsibilities, Plunge delivers grooves as wide as a house, fat drones that rumble window panes and pulsing bass beats that simultaneously undergird tunes and drive them. While McGrain takes the bulk of the solos, floating lyrical "bone lines above the earthy cadences on such melodic beauties as "The Mist" and "Trick Of The Light," Rojas also gets to stretch on several tunes and Cohen plucks catchy percolating rhythmic motifs. But it's Moses, with his flinting drumming excursions and accelerating tempo-shifts, who propels many of the pieces, including the funky, swinging opener "Wagdanz" and the speedy closer "Running, Running."

Other highlights include a ragged-edged, foaming-at-the-mouth romp through "Dog" and the vibrant, booty-shaking cooker "Beneath The Wheel," featuring McGrain's siren-like trombone wails.

—Dan Ouellette

Falling With Grace—Wagdanz: 394; Beneath The Wheel; Reveille: Just Like Alice; Dog: The Mist; Rafael's Drum; H.S.L.E.: Mungo: 11:11; Trick Of The Light; Running, Running. (61:35)

Personnel—Mark McGrain, trombone, alphon; Marcus Rojas, tuba; Avishai Cohen, double-bass; Bob Moses, drums, percussion, voice.



Ahmad Jamal

The Essence Part 1

Verve 529 327

★★★★½

I Remember Duke, Hoagy & Strayhorn

Telarc 83339

★★★★

Nearly 40 years ago, Ahmad Jamal introduced his spare, spacey piano style. Since then that distinctive sound has become part of the nation's musical treasury.

In these two releases (one from '95, the

other his latest), Jamal retains the less-is-better format. However, those signature bars of space are too often filled with dazzling runs and clusters of playful chords.

Not to worry, though. Jamal's tendency to smear melodies and his ability to transmute familiar musical phrases into something wholly new are still intact, as is so vividly expressed on the title tune of his recent *The Essence Part 1*. His rippling sequences of notes and that contagious ostinato establish a motif that tenor saxophonist George Coleman fields and deftly returns, giving his rendition an even funkier edge. Then comes a flurry of Jamal's characteristic interludes, each one bouncing tentatively in and around an increasingly dense harmonic pattern.

"Toulouse" and "Flight" have similar busy moments, especially when Jamal's left hand rumbles a bass line and his right hand darts across the keys like a bumble-bee. And that old standby "Lover Man" is boldly enlivened; it is colorful and hyperactive like Dennis Rodman fighting for a rebound. In fact, it is the brilliant array of instrumental colors—and Jamal seems to love bright pastels and impressionistic images—that invests these tunes with such allure. Enticing, too, are "Catalina," where the group coheres in a somber way around bassist Jamil Nasser's deep, persistent throb, and "Bahia," which, like "Catalina," invokes the Jamal of the past when every whistler worth his pucker had "Poinciana" on his lips.

This is the mood and rhythm that is heard most on Jamal's tribute to Duke Ellington, Hoagy Carmichael and Billy Strayhorn. The bulk of the compositions belong to the Duke, including an extensive version of "In A Sentimental Mood," allowing Jamal to display his colorful arsenal of pianistic skills. He gives the tune a dramatic but sensual interpretation, cleverly garnishing it with recognizable filigree from the Ellington repertoire.

Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge" has been crossed so much that it's simply remarkable it still holds up after such a passage of time. Once more there is a conspicuous bass line to which Jamal adds fleeting chromatic runs and a passel of delicate notes that flutter like a swarm of butterflies. As on "Don't You Know I Care," the least known of the Ellington tunes, Jamal dips into his classical bag for an assortment of swift glissandos, sugary obbligatos and lavish crescendos. To this tune and elsewhere, the bassist Ephriam Wolfolk and drummer Arti Dixon are capable sidemen, and even less obtrusive than Jamal's longtime associates, bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier. Even so, Jamal's poetry at the keyboard resonates with expected beauty and expression.

—Herb Boyd

The Essence Part 1—Flight; Toulouse; The Essence; Lover Man; Catalina; Autumn Leaves; Street Of Dreams; Bahia. (56:02)

Personnel—Jamal, piano; James Cammack (1–2, 4, 5, 7, 8), Jamil Nasser (3, 6), bass; Idris Muhammad, drums; Manolo Badrena, percussion; George Coleman, tenor saxophone (3, 6).

I Remember Duke, Hoagy & Strayhorn—My Flower; I Got It Bad; In A Sentimental Mood; Ruby; Don't You Know I Care; Prelude To A Kiss; Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me; Chelsea Bridge; I Remember Hoagy; Skylark; Never Let Me Go; Goodbye. (62:34)

Personnel—Jamal, piano; Ephriam Wolfolk, bass; Arti Dixon, drums.



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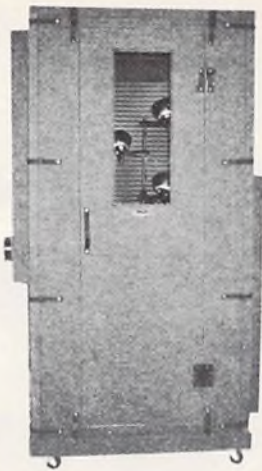
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CD REVIEWS



Arturo Sandoval

Swingin'
GRP 9846

★★★★

Just Music
Jazz House 008

★★½

On *Swingin'*, Sandoval offers a wide range of tunes with solos that reveal profound affection for, and deep musical knowledge of, such trumpet masters as Louis Armstrong ("It Never Gets Old"), Dizzy

Gillespie ("Dizzy Atmosphere," "Swingin'"), and Woody Shaw and Freddie Hubbard ("Moontrane"). A pleasurable and satisfying album, *Swingin'* has a broader focus (contemporary numbers are included) than his previous all-mainstream recording, 1992's tribute to Clifford Brown, *I Remember Clifford*.

Here, Sandoval can be hard as nails (e.g., the rigorous opening to "Woody") and tender as a fond farewell: the poignant "Reflection," the dulcet "Streets Of Desire," where he plays piano. Indeed, he seems open to any emotion, keeping his commanding technique mostly under wraps and making melodic statements that ring with authenticity. The trumpeter's clean articulation, ripped trills and facile fourths spark "Moontrane," and on the title track he gets a fat, creamy flugelhorn sound, delivering cartwheel descents and lines punched to crisp conclusions. For speed, he offers the uproarious "Real McBop," playing convoluted, tongued lines. The sweetness of "Reflections" is moving, not cloying.

The sidemen score. Brecker eats up the shifting changes of "Moment's Notice" and "McBop," working with a boppish warmth; Daniels mixes mellifluous lines with more angular patterns on "Swingin'"; and Stern's notes have a round gleam on "Streets Of Desire" and "It Never Gets Old." Throughout, Calderazzo plays one bebop bent passage after another—has he ever swung harder?—and Patitucci and Hutchinson build a firm foundation. Calle contributes a stunning "out" chorus on "McBop," where he overdubs flute, tenor and baritone sax parts that are paired with Sandoval's cup-muted horn.

Just Music, recorded in London in 1988, is mainly of historical value. Sandoval, then residing in Cuba, traveled extensively, and here leads a sextet more suited to Vegas lounges than a jazz room. Most tunes have a pop flair to them: "Saving All My Love," a hit for Whitney Houston; "Al Chicoy," a Latin-rock vehicle; even "Georgia On My Mind" has a corny mix of overstated horn passages coupled with the leader's throwaway mixed English/Spanish vocal.

Still, two pure Latin numbers—the vibrant "Sambeando" and the upbeat Cuban rhythm-driven "Libertao"—find the ensemble in sync, offering bubbling rhythm-section parts that buoy Sandoval's perky horn. Of the non-Latin tunes, Paul McCartney's "My Love" is stated simply and with feeling.

The other featured soloists add little to the project. Chicoy's notes have too much twangy feedback, while the versatile Torres is a bit short on compelling ideas. —Zan Stewart

Swingin'—*Moontrane*; *Swingin'*; *Moment's Notice*; *Streets Of Desire*; *Real McBop*; *Weird Fun*; *Dizzy Atmosphere*; *Reflection*; *Woody*; *It Never Gets Old*; *Knack The Knife*. (7:21)

Personnel—Sandoval, trumpet, flugelhorn, piano (4); John Patitucci, bass; Greg Hutchinson, drums; Joey Calderazzo, piano (1-3, 5-10); Michael Brecker (3, 5, 9), Ed Calle (1, 3, 5, 6), tenor saxophone; Eddie Daniels, clarinet (2, 7); Mike Stern, guitar (4, 6, 10); Clark Terry, trumpet, flugelhorn (11); Dana Teboe, trombone (1).

Just Music—*El Misterioso*; *Saving All My Love*; *Sambeando*; *Reggae*; *Al Chicoy*; *Georgia On My Mind*; *My Love*; *Libertao Carnaval*. (51:20)

Personnel—Sandoval, trumpet; Jorge L. Chicoy, guitar; Hilario Duran Torres, piano, synthesizer; Jorge Reyes Hernandez, bass; Bernardo Garcia Carreras, drums; Reinaldo Valeras Del Monte, percussion.

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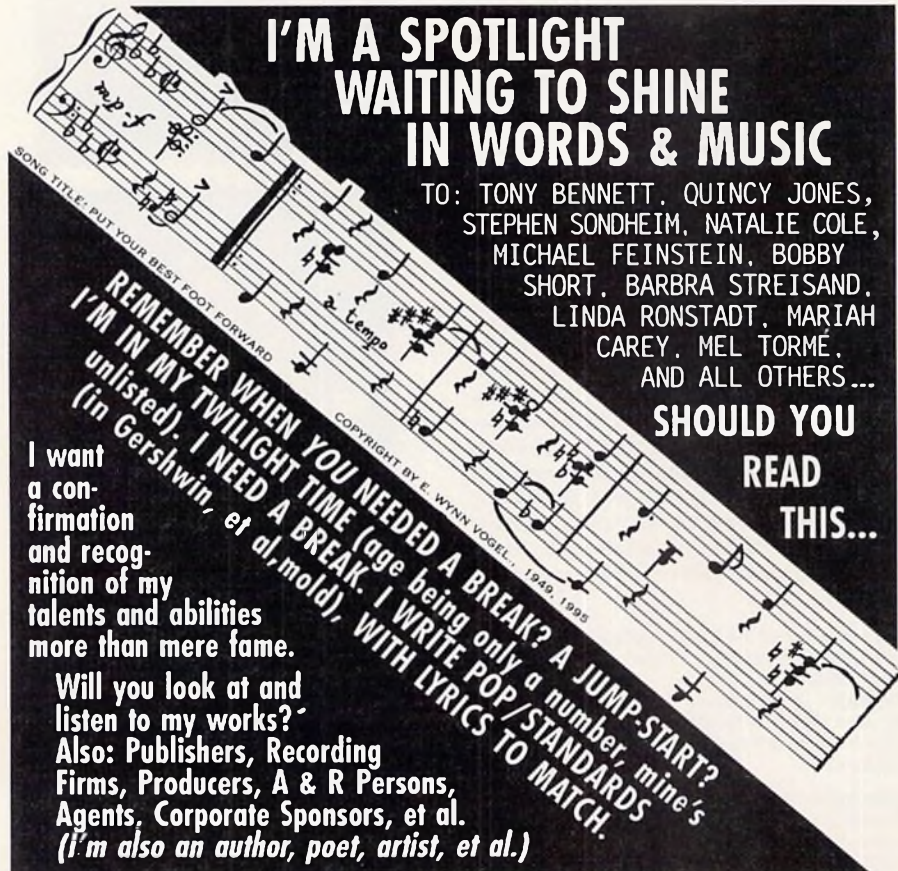
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Various Artists

Kansas City
Verve 529 554

★★★★½

Various Artists

The Real Kansas City Jazz
Columbia/Legacy 64855

★★★

Brave Hollywood souls occasionally try film projects with jazz themes. If you're a Down Beat reader, you surely did your duty and saw *Cotton Club*, *Bird*, *Mo' Better Blues* and *Round Midnight*. The trouble is, it seems, only Down Beat readers saw them—not Readers Digest readers, which the producers would have preferred for their numbers. Now it's director Robert Altman's turn. I won't prognosticate on his odds of jinxing the jazz-Hollywood hex. But if his movie, *Kansas City*, is as most of this sound track CD, I can predict he'll at least get Down Beat readers into theaters. The opening cut, "Blues In The Dark" (with ambient crowd sounds left in), which features broad and somewhat solicitous solos by James Carter and Joshua Redman, tries awfully hard. Like amateurs tackling Shakespeare or Tennessee Williams, these young players come perilously close to over-acting and turning in a standard jam session screen caricature.

Then comes a light, airy "Moten Swing," whose only concession to the camera is to abandon the long, seldom explored path of riffs in the original leading to what we all know as "Moten Swing." But Jessie Davis and Carter lay down convincing work that never violates the idiom. Nicholas Payton then plays an outstanding turn on "I Surrender Dear."

By the time "Queer Notions" comes loping along in its semi-atonal gate, I have suspended most disbelief. Another Fletcher Henderson chart, "Yeah, Man," is the kind of roofraiser that lets Redman and Handy rip with full fury. They give it a fine sense of period, and not a pinch of camp. In the final analysis, that's what gives this soundtrack its integrity as a free-standing jazz work—some of the best contemporary players giving the best they've got to another generation, and no condescension in sight. Even old Hot Lips Page might feel the heat of the brass battle in "Lafayette."

For those who might care to dip into the real Kansas City, Columbia offers *The Real Kansas City Jazz*—25 titles strung out more or less

chronologically from 1925 to '41. Considering the marketing tie-in with the film and the fact that Columbia had Victor and Decca material available, it would have seemed appropriate to reserve a few of the 25 slots for the originals on which the soundtrack titles are based. Alas, only "Queer Notions" is included. If Bennie Moten's 1932 "Prince Of Wales" for Victor is here, why not "Moten Swing" and "Lafayette"?

Or the original Commodore "Pagin' The Devil"?

That said, this CD seems pitched more at collectors than moviegoers. The first five cuts were actually made in Kansas City or St. Louis in the '20s, and another 13 in San Antonio, Birmingham, Hot Springs, Dallas and Chicago. Producer Michael Brooks aims for a comprehensive view of the Southwest. In addi-

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tion to covering basics (Basie, Andy Kirk), he tosses in a number of unexpected obscurities. All are interesting, including a variation on "Moten Swing" by the Carolina Cotton Pickers; though he might have included Boots and His Buddies over a second George Lee cut. Harlan Leonard ("My Gal Sal") is among the least deserving of obscurity, however, and maybe RCA Bluebird will do him justice one day.

In truth, less of the music of the Southwest than legend would like was the Divine Word, and this album makes no argument to the contrary. Its historical candidness is admirable. Frank Driggs' notes put the music in municipal as well as historical context, though his discussions of the records don't track with the programming. And much of his material is nearly lost in an inept swamp of overprinting and booklet design. —John McDonough

Kansas City—*Blues In The Dark*: Moten Swing; *I Surrender Dear*; *Queer Notions*; *Lullaby Of The Leaves*; *I Left My Baby*; *Yeah, Man*; *Groggy Bottom*; *Solitude*; *Pagin' The Devil*; *Lafayette*; *Solitude* (63:05)
Personnel—Nicholas Payton, James Zollar, Olu Dara, trumpet; Curtis Fowlkes, Clark Gayton, trombone; Don Byron, clarinet; James Carter, Jesse Davis, David Newman, Craig Handy, David Murray, Joshua Redman, saxophones; Russell Malone, Mark Whitfield, guitar; Geri Allen, Cyrus Chestnut, piano; Ron Carter, Tyrone Clark, Christian McBride, bass; Victor Lewis, drums; Kevin Mahogany, vocal.

The Real Kansas City Jazz—*Kater Street Rag*; *Boot To Boot*; *Won't You Come Over To My House*; *Paseo Street Strut*; *Blue Devil Blues*; *Prince Of Wales*; *Queer Notions*;

Lotta Sax Appeal; *Lady Be Good*; *Rockin' And Swinging*; *Western Swing*; *Swingin' Lester Leaps In*; *T-Town Blues*; *Tickle Toe*; *Baby, Look At You Now*; *Little Joe From Chicago*; *I Left My Baby*; *My Gal Sal*; *Swingmatism*; *Harvard Blues*; *Smooth Sailing*; *Long Gone Blues*. (72:30)
Personnel—The bands of: Bennie Moten, Jesse Stone, George L. Lee, Walter Page, Fletcher Henderson, Andy Kirk, Jones-Smith Inc., Don Albert, Carolina Cotton Pickers, Original Yellow Jackets, Harry James, Pete Johnson, Count Basie, Ernie Fields, Mary Lou Williams, Harlan Leonard, Jay McShann, Horace Henderson, Billie Holiday.



black/Note
Nothin' But The Swing
 Impulse! 177

★★★½

B Sharp Jazz Quartet

Mirage
 Mama 1012

★★★

Nothing provides as much hope for the future of jazz than the emergence of new groups, especially a coterie of promising musicians who understand their musical legacy while seeking to add to its glorious heritage. Black/Note and B Sharp, with their keen regard for the elements of swing and penchant for the straightahead jazz format, embody these principles and quest, though they bear distinct ensemble tactics and repertoires. Black/Note anchors its sound in the post-bop tradition and B Sharp, no less swinging, prefers a percussive, more African-tinged approach to the funkways.

With alto saxophonist James Mahone's tossing off a number of lusty and assertive solos, black/Note has a dependable voice up front. His dexterity and hard-bop tendency take on a finer glow with "An Open Letter (To Vanessa)" when braced by Gilbert Castellanos' muted trumpet.

However, it is not until the sixth tune that the basic ensemble is heard without the highly proficient additives of tenor saxist Teodross Avery or trumpeter Nicholas Payton. That the group—which is proud of its allegiance to the sound of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, right down to Willie Jones' press rolls and the spiky horn arrangements—is able to command such formidable guest artists is evidence of its ability to swing. Swing is the thing for black/Note, and "West Coastings," albeit short, locates them geographically and musically.

What is most certainly obvious and arresting about B Sharp is the tightness of the ensemble (another characteristic it shares with black/Note), the collective ear that keeps them on the same page. And yet, except for a couple of tunes and Randall Willis' occasional probing search for something beyond the tried and true, they seem content to settle in a mellow groove without breaking the calm or arousing tension.


Such a critique, however, does not apply to "Beside Jo'self," which contains ample wattage and is a kicker of the first order, especially given Willis' potent tenor saxophone and Herb Graham Jr.'s incessant message from the tomtoms. Graham is equally spirited and precise on "Intrepid Fox," where his rapid rumbles are melodically answered by pianist Rodney Lee's amazing grace at the keyboard.

—Herb Boyd

Nothin' But The Swing—*The Core*; *Mahonisms*; *Double Indemnity*; *Saturday Night*; *For Someone So Beautiful*; *An Open Letter (To Vanessa)*; *J'ai Beaucoup de Chance (I'm So Lucky)*; *Gettin' Your Trane On*; *West Coastings*; *Two Souls Coalesce*; *I Saw Her First*; *Allergic Reaction*; *Early Morning (Before Dawn)*. (49:04)
Personnel—Ark Sano (5-12), Greg Kurstin (1-4), piano; James Mahone, alto saxophone; Gilbert Castellanos (6, 8-13), Nicholas Payton (1-4), trumpet; Mark Anthony Shelby, acoustic bass; Willie Jones III, drums; Teodross Avery, soprano and tenor saxophone (5, 8).


Mirage—*Beside Jo'self*; *Spirit Of J.C.*; *The Velvet Touch*; *Mirage*; *Inner Urge*; *Feelin' Monk*; *Nate's Bedtime*; *Intrepid Fox*; *C.R.S.* (61:14).

Personnel—Herb Graham, Jr., drums; Randall Willis, tenor and soprano saxophones; Reggie Carson, bass; Rodney Lee, piano and B-3 organ; Eric McKain, percussion (2, 4); Carmen Bradford, vocalist (3, 9).



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Kevin Hays

Go Round
Blue Note 32491

★★★★

On his sophomore outing, pianist Kevin Hays isn't out to impress with a razzle-dazzle keyboard show. Eshewing both speed and swagger, the 27-year-old Hays—one of the new crop of young jazz talent Blue Note has been nurturing and a member of the label's fledgling all-star ensemble featuring such other up-and-comers as Greg Osby, Tim Hagans, Javon Jackson and Billy Stewart—intuitively plays into the emotional core of *Go Round's* nine pieces. He's also stretching beyond the acoustic terrain he covered on his John Scofield-produced debut, *Seventh Sense*. This time out Hays, serving as his own producer, tastefully plugs in for a couple tunes with electric piano (it sounds so good, will it, like the Hammond B-3, be back in vogue soon?) and Seamus Blake's FX-embellished tenor saxophone. Miraculously, neither the funk-tinted title number nor the captivating "Early Evening"—both of which feature Blake's wah-wah sax riffs sounding like psychedelic guitar—come off smelling at all like cheap fusion.

Hays proves to be a fine composer, with all the tunes here originals except for film composer Bronislaw Kaper's "Invitation," superbly arranged as a graceful midtempo dance for this session by Pat Zimmerli, a former Monk Competition winner for Composition. Hays writes complex pieces that change shape and color as the ensemble, featuring Blake joined by fellow tenor Steve Hall on several tunes, negotiates the compositional stops, starts and swerves with aplomb. The turmoiled and meditative "Sutra" (both takes) is particularly striking as is the swinging "Quiet," a misleading title for such a compelling piece that blooms with piano passion.

Hays, regular pianist with Benny Golson's band and more recently a touring member of Sonny Rollins' group, is deservedly the man of the hour. And while his entire band ably supports him, it's unsung hero Billy Hart who keeps the juices flowing. His consistently subtle but brilliant cymbals-to-skins contributions are worthy of as much attention as the others.

—Dan Ouellette

Go Round—Daybreak: *Early Evening*; *Go Round*; *When I Wake*; *The Run*; *Sutra*; *Quiet*; *Invitation*; *Sutra* (reprise). (68:18)

Personnel—Hays, piano, electric piano; Steve Hall, tenor saxophone (1, 3–7, 9); Seamus Blake, tenor and soprano saxophones (1–6, 9); Doug Weiss, bass; Billy Hart, drums; Daniel Sadownick, percussion (1, 3, 5, 7, 8).

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CD REVIEWS

JAZZ

Size Matters

by John Corbett

No question, small labels have their ears closest to the ground when it comes to exciting, creative new music. Unhampered by mega-label red tape, willing to take wilder chances and bigger risks, they often are the jump-off points for fresh sounds and new stars. Here's some of the best out now.

André Jaume/John Medeski: *Team Games* (CELP C31; 69:24; ★★★★★) Saxophonist and clarinetist Jaume is a musician perennially deserving of wider recognition. Based in Marsailles, France, he's made strong records with Jimmy Giuffre, Joe McPhee, Charlie Haden, Charlie Mariano and other well-known players (many released on the small French CELP label), as well as an ambitious recent project with gamelan orchestra, *Borobudur Suite*. This unlikely pairing finds him with hotshot keyboardist Medeski (on piano exclusively)—and voila!, the twosome's first encounter is a hit, from the funkified Monk of "Ba-lue Bolivar Ba-lues Are" through a couple of Trane and Steve Lacy gems and Jaume's bubbling "Gin Fizz." Medeski's full of pluck, as always, and Jaume's warm clarinet is heard to excellent advantage.

Sainkho Namtchylak/Ned Rothenberg: *Amulet* (Leo 231; 69:46; ★★★★★½) Singer Namtchylak is an absolute wonder—capable of stupefying vocal gymnastics, she opts for musicality over spectacle, particularly in these gorgeous duets with New York reed-magician Rothenberg. Masterfully mingling multiphonics with a human pulse beating beneath, Rothenberg's extended techniques perfectly complement Namtchylak's radiant voice; the stunning results, recorded in concert over three years of performances, range from open improvisations to adaptations of traditional music from Tuva (Sainkho's birthplace) and Lappland.

DoppelMoppel: *Reflections* (FMP 74; 67:18; ★★★★★) Always wanted a follow-up to this bizarrely armed quartet's great 1982 debut, *'Round About Mittwoch*, an East German showcase for the Bauer brothers, Conrad and Johannes, on trombones and Joe Sachse and Uwe Kropinski on guitars. *Reflections* is a studio session from '86, when the bloc was still a bloc. It's a great joy that FMP chose to release it, because the peculiar grouping had a unique and wonderful sound: spiky guitars, burbling 'bones, Conrad's outrageous facility and Sachse's propensity to rock out.

Vinny Golia/Joëlle Léandre/Ken Filiano: *Haunting The Spirits Inside Them ...* (Music & Arts 893; 73:04; ★★★★★½)



John Medeski: full of pluck

More unusual instrumentation, with Léandre and Filiano on basses and Golia on every instrument known to be blown. The trio engages in intense, close-listening free improvisation, and that immediacy is heightened as the group breaks down to duets and solos. The bassists know how to avoid turning the deep sound into molasses, countering low arco with high pizz and making a suitable space for the horns. Optimal setting to hear Golia, whose records don't always show off his marvy multi-instrumentality.

Double Jeu Trio: *Actual Stories* (Unit 4094; 54:59; ★★★★★) Out of Francophone Switzerland comes a sizzling little rock-hopped, free-jazz flavored trio. Primarily working with neat, sectional compositions by saxist François Chevrolet, Double Jeu's guitarist Christian Graf is both tasteful and tasty and drummer Bernard Trontin stokes the locomotive's coals with hot grooves. On the title cut they deftly move between lyricism and abrasive grunge (Chevrolet's reed sound is remarkably relaxed given the band's hard drive), while "Blue Birds" changes shape as fluidly as a morphing computer image. Supercool Swiss unknowns!

Mujician: *Birdman* (Cuneiform Rune 82; 76:03; ★★★★★) Third Cuneiform release for this all-star British quartet, with Keith Tippett on piano, Tony Levin on drums, Paul Dunmall on reeds and Paul Rogers on bass, and like the others it's a doozie. Sensitive interaction, but volcanic all the same, it's organic free-jazz played just right, and the three long cuts leave the listener breathless. Rogers, especially, is to be watched for; bassheads check out his incredible solo disc *Heron Moon* (Rare Music).

Bobby Zankel Trio: *Human Flowers* (CIMP 103; 69:51; ★★★★★) Alto saxophonist Zankel has a very strong echo of Jimmy Lyons in his playing, which might mean one would expect the ghost of Cecil Taylor to rise in pianist Marilyn Crispell. But Crispell is an original musician, and she and drummer Newman Baker conjure their own spirits in stirring, energetic, at times lush collective free- and partially scripted play with Zankel.

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BEYOND

With Strings Attached

by Jon Andrews

When strings and jazz meet, the results can be checked. Too often, strings have been used to sweeten commercial compromises. There are no compromises here—only adventurous attempts to incorporate the European classical tradition as one component in a broader worldview.

String Trio of New York: *Blues ... ?* (Black Saint 120148; 53:59; ★★★★★) A slightly confusing title for a solid CD of jazz, blues and even reggae, much of it with a blues feeling. Violinist Regina Carter emerges here, playing with new boldness and clarity. She maintains a beautiful tone while strutting and gliding through these tracks, including her own reggae-based "Hurry Up And Wait." Along with a fast-paced suite of Charlie Parker tunes, the String Trio covers interesting selections from Ellington, Miles Davis and Lee Morgan. The strong originals include John Lindberg's down-home "Bellyachin' Blues," featuring the composer's groaning bass, and guitarist James Emery's Ornette-ish "Cobalt Blue."

Erik Friedlander: *Chimera* (Avant 57; 63:06; ★★★★★) Cellist Friedlander has assembled an unusual but flexible lineup of cello, bass, clarinet and bass clarinet. His writing emphasizes the strength and versatility of the ensemble by allowing open space for interaction and collective improvisation in duets and other combinations. By mixing and matching strings and clarinets, as on the pensive, pretty "Alluvium" and the moody "Mercy Street," he creates interesting harmonies and textures in support of the soloists, including Chris Speed on clarinet, who recalls Jimmy Giuffrè in this context. Friedlander (also heard in Dave Douglas' String Group) challenges the audience with thoughtful, but very listenable, ensemble work.

Renaud Garcia-Fons: *Alboreá* (enja 9057; 52:39; ★★★½) Garcia-Fons gets his distinctive sound from a five-string double-bass. Given his remarkable facility with the bow, the light tone and fluid, expressive phrasing sound much closer to the sound of a cello or a violin. *Alboreá* seems very much a European project. The title refers to Andalusian wedding music, and other worldly influences, such as Stéphane Grappelli, flamenco music and Astor Piazzolla's *nuevo tango* are discernible. Garcia-Fons is a highly melodic player, backed by a sympathetic ensemble of accordion, bass and percussion.

Arcado String Trio: *Live In Europe* (Avant 58; ★★★½) Live performance



String Trio of New York: jazz, blues & beyond

demonstrates the breadth of Arcado's collective interests. These wide-ranging, episodic compositions wander through open improvisation, blues, standards and contemporary classical influences as well as jazz. Original members violinist Mark Feldman and bassist Mark Dresser are joined by Dutch cellist/producer Ernst Reijseger. The trio's speed and virtuosity are singular, as they fly in close formation through knotty, complex ensemble passages. Dresser's "Lanette" opens with the trio playing percussion on the bodies of their instruments, passes through a lively Caribbean melody and closes with a series of playful quotes by Feldman.

Rabih Abou-Khalil: *Arabian Waltz* (enja 9059; 58:08; ★★★★★) Abou-Khalil's previous projects sought an improvising free zone between the traditional Arabic influences that inform his oud playing and Western jazz musicians. This time, the cultural exchange involves the Balanescu Quartet and violinist Alexander Balanescu, who's worked with Carla Bley in a big band context, as well as with contemporary composers like Gavin Bryars. Abou-Khalil's trio establishes the context, as oud, frame drums and tuba lay down the rhythmic foundation. The Balanescu Quartet is well integrated, playing with urgency and passion. Abou-Khalil's solos are frequently dark and searching, well matched by the mournful strings on "The Pain After."

Pierre Favre: *Window Steps* (ECM 21584; 43:13; ★★★½) Cellist David Darling brings warmth and tonal color to percussionist Favre's solemn, somewhat chilly quintet session. Darling fills multiple roles, offering counterpoint to Kenny Wheeler and Roberto Ottaviano's horns, supplying atmospheres with his eight-string electric cello or supplying a rhythmic foundation. The interplay between Darling's cello and Steve Swallow's electric bass is particularly interesting, as Darling adapts to accommodate Swallow's shifts from guitar-like melodies to more traditional basslines. Favre is a subtle, creative percussionist who prefers to comment on the action rather than drive it forward. **DB**

REISSUES

The Last Of The Savoy

by Paul de Barros

The last 16 discs in Denon's 20-bit Master Transfer Collection of classic Savoy releases include some bebop-revolution dandies, many "firsts," plus a few duds. The packaging is very cool: exact, miniaturized duplicates of the original cardboard album sleeves. Single-sheet paper inserts provide recording dates, but little else, and are full of errors, such as a J.J. Johnson songwriting credit for (sic) "I Could Wright A Book." Sound enhancement is unpredictable. On Dizzy Gillespie's *Groovin' High*, the quintet sparkles with improved separation and presence, but the big band track "Our Delight" has acquired a new fuzz from the drums and bass. Most of these discs are available as (cheaper, 16-bit) CDs, so, except for the packaging, added value is questionable, even where bonus tracks have been tossed in.

Lester Young: *The Immortal Lester Young* (Savoy Jazz 78817; 43:35: ★★★★★) Pure, vintage Lester, from 1945 and 1949, with three small groups: a Basie rhythm section and two sextets. Lester lounges across the barlines of "Ghost Of A Chance" and "Blues 'n' Bells"; guitarist Freddie Green plunks four-to-the-bar on the marvelous "Blue Lester." "Ain't She Sweet"-style horn riffs push the soloists on the ebullient "Exercise In Swing," highlighting Johnny Guarnieri's lickety-split tinkling and Hank D'Amico's liquid clarinet. Three Basie full-band bonus tracks.

Dizzy Gillespie: *Groovin' High* (78814; 36:38: ★★★★★½); *The Champ* (78815; 35:40: ★★½) A great introduction to the spectacular trumpet man at the top of his game, one he had only recently helped write the rules to. *Groovin' High* (1945-'47) offers dazzling quintet tracks with Bird, bop vocal humor (call: "Oop Bob Sh'Bam" ... response: "A Klook-A-Mop") and five big-band tracks, including "Our Delight" and "Emanon." *The Champ* (1951, '52) backpedals from the bop revolution to crowdpleasing ballad solos, novelties, violin backgrounds and vocals, with Joe Carroll's out-of-tune crooning a particular offender. John Coltrane's tenor is heard on "Birk's Works" and "Tin Tin Deo."

Charlie Parker: *Newly Discovered Sides By The Immortal Charlie Parker* (78809; 26:42: ★★★) Less than a half-hour long, these three 1948-'49 airchecks from New York's Royal Roost feature Bird chirping six tunes in a crowded, noisy nest, with bassist Tommy Potter, pianist Al Haig and drummer Max Roach.



Art Pepper: superbly contrary intelligence

Miles Davis, Kenny Dorham, Lucky Thompson and Milt Jackson join him on various tracks. Bird, fleet and burly-toned, is resplendent on "Groovin' High"; Miles squeezes off a solo on "Hot House" that is more fluid than usual for this period; Dorham is shapely on "Slow Boat To China."

J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding: *Jay & Kai* (78818; 43:32: ★★★★★½) The first, and one of the best, of many collaborations by the two trombonists ('53, '54), notable not only for their sweet harmonies and interplay on the leads, but Johnson's pearly solos, Winding's blattier ones and the needle-fine, single-noters of light-fingered guitarist Billy Bauer. A dramatic, multifaceted composition by Charles Mingus (bassist on the date), "Reflections" also makes this one special. Two bonus tracks with Kai only.

Dexter Gordon: *Dexter Rides Again* (78812; 36:11: ★★★★★) Three New York dates from 1945, 1946 and 1947 open with a chase between Dex and the undervalued baritone saxophonist Leo Parker playing the Wardell Gray role. Bud Powell and Max Roach play on "Long Tall Dexter," the title cut and others. They go for broke, as Dexter digs in with a dry, Lestorian tone, logical flow of ideas and a fierce will to bop.

Art Pepper: *Surf Ride* (78819; 49:57: ★★★★★) You'll like the surfer girl cover art, you'll love the music. Here's Pepper on his first recordings as a leader ('52, '53), which also feature light-footed and sympathetic duo tangles with tenor man Jack Montrose. Pepper, whose gig at Hollywood's Surf Club provided the title, is sharp, fleet and brimming with ideas; his vinegary tone and superbly contrary intelligence are immediately recognizable. West Coast classics. Four alternate-take bonus tracks.

Kenny Clarke: *Bohemia After Dark* (78811; 41:48: ★★★★★) It's easy to hear why everyone got excited when this 1956

date came out, which introduced Cannonball and Nat Adderley. Though not as ferocious as later on, Cannonball chomps off phrases with his signature smears and bluesy twists. "Late Entry," mis-listed as track seven (it's number three), is a classic, tricky Adderley Brothers tune with a sudden-death ending. Horace Silver is all cool blues, and Clarke, who takes a few fours on "With Apologies To Oscar," stays mostly in the background, steady as he goes.

Flashback: Ozzie Cadena, who supervised many of the Savoy recordings, says his first choice as a trombone mate for J.J. Johnson wasn't Kai Winding, but Eddie Bert. "Eddie couldn't do it, because he had a contract with Discovery Records," recalls Cadena. "So I called Willie Dennis, a young guy who was working with Lennie Tristano. He said, 'I can't play with J.J. Johnson!' So a good contrast was Kai Winding."

Cadena culled the group for *Bohemia After Dark* from two bands working at the Cafe Bohemia. "Kenny Clarke called me about this young phenom [Cannonball Adderley] who was sitting in. I wanted to use Oscar Pettiford, but Oscar wanted me to fire Horace Silver. O.P. was a big man, and I didn't want to argue with him, so I got Paul Chambers." **DB**

Note regarding initial Savoy titles: Due to the fact that much of the material here covers music recorded for Savoy during the pre-33½-inch era, either no rating, a four-musical-note system (used from May 20, 1946, through our Dec. 15, 1950, issue) or a 10-point system (Jan. 26, 1951, through April 18, 1952) was used. Album titles were the result of reconfigured 78s, essentially combined reissues. The May 7, 1952, issue inaugurated the current ★★★★★ system, with music in both the 78 and the new 33½ formats now being rated. The 78 disc was reviewed alongside 33½ titles intermittently from the late '40s until the mid-'50s, when the longer format took over completely.

Leon Parker

by Jim Macnie

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.

You're not going to mistake Leon Parker's drumming with anyone else's. Ever since he showed up on the New York scene with a pared-down, virtually bantam-weight drum kit, he's turned heads with his ultra-vibrant less-is-more expressionism. Key in establishing the sound of Jacky Terrasson's trio, Parker has since moved on. 1994's *Above & Below* (Epicure) found him stressing a variety of post-African beats, from hambone to deep, deep swing (listen to the simple-yet-seductive drive he gives Bruce Barth's second enja outing, *In Focus*, or Allen Mezzquida's *A Good Thing* on Koch Jazz).

Belief (Columbia) finds Parker's instrumentation even more whittled away. "I'm not playing drums anymore, just percussion," he says of his second disc. "Just cymbals and hand drums. I have other drummers and percussionists in the band, and they take care of that."

This is Parker's first Blindfold Test. He decided in advance to give 5 stars to each offering.

Booker Ervin

"Mojo" (from *The Space Book*, Prestige, rec. 1965) Ervin, tenor saxophone; Jaki Byard, piano; Richard Davis, bass; Alan Dawson, drums.

Oh man ... I have no idea. But I know it's older music, and it's great. They don't make jazz like this anymore. This is the real shit. I don't know who the horn player is, I'm busy checking out the drummer. It's really, really swinging. Deeply. It sounds like Monk's rhythm section with another horn player. Damn. This is from my favorite period of jazz, the early '60s or mid-'60s, definitely. That's when jazz was jazz.

JM: It's Booker Ervin.

Wow [looking at the credits], Jaki's my favorite piano player. I should have gotten that. It's real jazz. Back then they were all telling a story from different perspectives. Different branches of the same tree. And the tree was rooted. Ervin, Coltrane, Jackie McLean were all different branches. I respect the way Alan Dawson plays; I don't know his stuff well enough to have an opinion. I haven't studied him.

Steve Coleman Group

"Another Level" (from *Motherland Pulse*, jMT, 1987) Coleman, alto saxophone; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums.

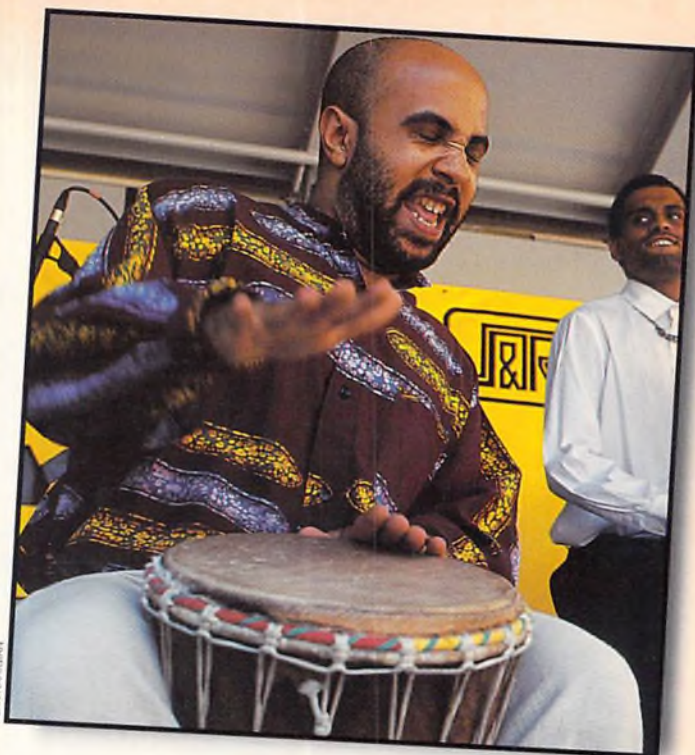
I like the controlled freedom. This one is more recent. It's nice to hear some free music; playing with Dewey Redman, I got a chance to play free. We should be playing like this a bit more, because it's part of the evolution. And now we've gone backwards, playing all inside and straight. We should play more like this ... I don't have anything free in my own stuff. I guess I haven't reached that point in my own evolution as a leader yet. Still exploring past ideas. But I enjoy it. I can guess who this might be ... oh man, I don't want to embarrass myself.

JM: It's Steve Coleman and Smitty.

I don't listen to him that much. I liked the piece though.

Don Cherry & Ed Blackwell

"Makondi" (from *El Corazón*, ECM, rec. 1982/1987) Cherry, Doussn' gouni; Blackwell, drums, wood drum, cowbell.



This is bad, whatever it is. I love it, this is the shit! This is where I'm at. I don't play as authentically as this, but whatever it is, this is a vibe I'm after. Somebody's clapping, the bass is working with the drummer. Sounds like a lot of people clapping. Oh yeah, this is heavy. Listen to that. I have no idea ... Ed Blackwell?

Alright! Yeah, Leon! You got one. Go, Ed. Mixing African and jazz is what we should be doing as jazz drummers. He did it with a true understanding and appreciation for both elements. The way most jazz drummers learn African and Latin is through a jazz interpretation. And if you try to play a traditional rhythm, you almost have to leave the jazz behind. But what he was playing blended the two as African Americans naturally would ... I think. Makes sense. I loved that one.

Carla Bley/Steve Swallow/Andy Sheppard

"Real Life Hits" (from *Songs With Legs*, ECM, 1995) Bley, piano; Swallow, electric bass; Sheppard, soprano saxophone.

I would call this controlled creativity, which is something I aspire to do in my music. It's got a theme underneath and the soloist is expressing himself. I like the combination of something to hold onto and something that takes you somewhere. I like this track. It's the pianist's record. He gives an intro and then the concept goes. Hmm, where does this part go, 'cause I don't really want to hear the guitar ... I liked the horn better. They're reading. This is a composer's perspective. It's very controlled, very. A bit too controlled, I think.

Danilo Perez

"Hot Bean Strut" (from *Panamonk*, Impulse!, 1996) Perez, piano; Avishai Cohen, bass; Jeff Walls, drums.

This is nice, real nice. I like this. This is music. Whoah! This is beautiful. Spirited, everybody's playing together. They sound like a band. That's important.

They're expressing something as a whole. Ow! Ah, shit. This is Danilo? He's bad, no doubt. That's the Impulse! one? That's real nice. Yeah, Danilo. From knowing him, I know his idea is to have a band and do the music right. The same thing all the greats had in mind, he wants to do: have a band, incorporate different musics. And he has the ability. I think a lot of musicians don't even think about that. I'd like to get this record.

DB