

SPECIAL BIG BAND ISSUE

JOE HENDERSON • ROY HARGROVE • EITHER/ORCHESTRA • GERALD WILSON

DOWN BEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

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**THEY'D
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**Today's
Basie and Mingus
Big Bands**



16 Count Basie & Charles Mingus

Doin' 'em Proud

Two of the biggest names in jazz, Basie and Mingus are the inspirations that help keep big band dreams alive for musician and fan alike. The Count Basie Orchestra and Charles Mingus Big Band are leading the charge surrounding the works of past jazz masters that also include names like Miller, Dorsey and Sun Ra. Indeed, the Count and Charles would be proud.

By John McDonough

Cover photograph of Count Basie by Giuseppe Pino. Cover photograph of Charles Mingus by Herb Snitzer.

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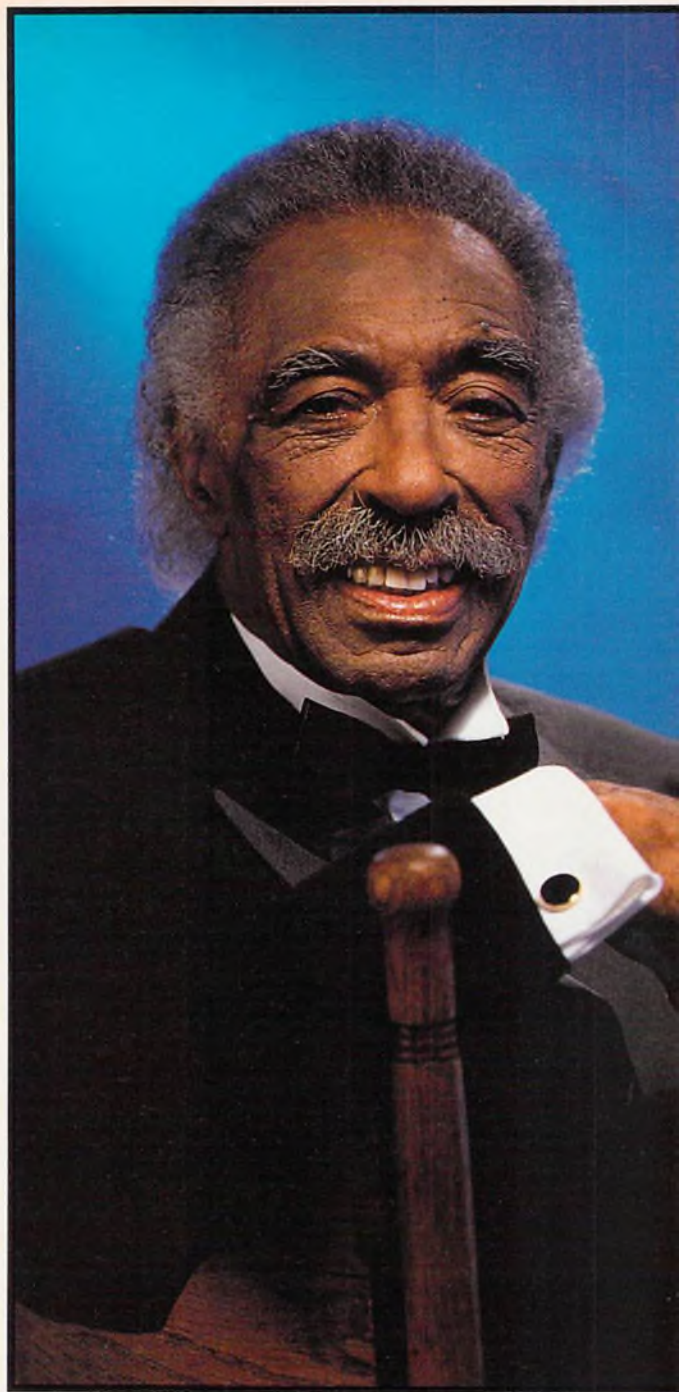
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Doin' 'em Proud

How the Min Thrive On Mo

While jazz may be a soloist's music, big band jazz has always been a symbiotic, ensemble partnership of individual interpretation and written text. While the interpreters may be mortal and their improvisations ephemeral, the text is down in black-and-white, as permanent as an ancient treasure map. It survives in perpetuity to tell the living where the dead buried their gold.

Today, many musicians, maps in hand, are busy panning for that old gold. For the men of the Count Basie Orchestra, now led by trombonist Grover Mitchell, the maps are clear and the music direct. Basie intended it that way, whether he realized it or not. For those who have presided over the Charles Mingus Big Band for the last five years, however, the excavation is more cryptic. Mingus' music was an experiment in progress when he was alive. And those who play it today are caught up in its ambiguities, its openness and its challenges. Mingus' maps lead you only so far—then you proceed on your wits.

WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS, 1964

Mingus and Basie Big Bands Are More Than Just Nostalgia

We still refer to this breed rather condescendingly as “ghost” bands, as if to imply a sense of unreality or sterility to anything that seems to serve the suspect cause of nostalgia. So, first a dash of that distasteful antidote to distortion: perspective. The Basie band, in a sense, began as a ghost of the Bennie Moten orchestra in 1935, just as Woody Herman was born out of Isham Jones, Tommy Dorsey out of Joe Haymes and Jimmy Dorsey out of the Dorsey Brothers band. But in those distant days when new management came in, the name on the shingle was promptly changed. Only because some of those names over the next decade rose to such mythic dimension did they become too valuable to change. Thus, the “ghost” band as we know it.

Today, though, the existence of orchestras playing under the names Basie and Mingus clearly are forcing us to expand our notions of ghosts. They scored first and second place, respectively, in the Big Band category of *Down Beat*'s 1996 Readers Poll, not only leaving other big-name legacy bands in

the dust, but beating out jazz orchestras named after (and led by) the living. Andy McKee, one of several musical directors of the Charles Mingus band, flat out rejects the “ghost” label for a very simple reason. “The band didn’t exist when Mingus was alive,” the 43-year-old bassist points out. “You can’t recreate something that never existed.”

“And I am passionate about this,” complains Aaron Woodward, 49, who is passionate about all things Basie. The “adopted” son of the Basie family and chief executive of Count Basie Enterprises says that his band “is a living, breathing thing that has continued to grow and evolve along basic principles which Basie nailed down during his life.”

No argument there. But bands bearing brand names like Basie, Shaw, Miller, Ellington, Dorsey, James and even Mingus work under a constitutional mandate—even if it’s more spiritual than real—that provides identity. It is nostalgic only to the extent that there are audiences still out there who remember the

original. The ultimate resting place of all popular art lies in the realm of history, where the sentimental subsidies of nostalgia yield to an unsympathetic objectivity, where all that counts is the music itself. That's when we learn whether it's destined for history's dustbins or its pedestals.

Woodward and Mitchell have no doubts where Basie is headed. There may be irony in the fact that although his music never dominated American music with the concentrated saturation of Miller's or Dorsey's, today it may be the healthiest of the old name bands still on the road.

"This band is touring 44 weeks a year," says Woodward, as if there's something remarkable about that. And these days there is. "We don't use pick-up musicians, we don't pay union scale, we don't double up in hotel rooms and we don't lay off 10 months of

continuity is important to Woodward. The Basie orchestra has played under three batons since the founder's death in April 1984: Thad Jones, Frank Foster and, for the last 17 months, Grover Mitchell. All played under Basie himself and learned his principles firsthand. Mitchell, 66, joined in 1962 (the prime of the Roulette years), left in 1970, then returned in 1980 and remained until Basie's death. "When he died," he recalls, "I knew there would be something of a leadership clamor. I just wanted to sidestep the politics then and wait until they seemed to need me."

Both Jones and Foster were top writers with their own agendas. And when a writer is obliged to speak in another's voice, a natural, creative tension accumulates over time. Some feel that in recent years the band's commitment to evolve along "modern" lines was displacing its established assets. Mitchell has pulled back on evolution and dug into the wealth of material

BASIE



"This band didn't happen by accident,"
says Grover Mitchell.

"You have to have a group of people to pass this on to, not just one person."

... I think Basie knew it would go on.

"He just hoped it would fall into the right hands."

[the legendary agent who got behind Basie in 1936] is one of the most underappreciated heroes in big band history," Woodward says. "His salesmanship and enthusiasm drove the booking strength that kept Basie, Woody, Duke, Harry James and all the others working to the end." Today, Dee Askew, an Alexander alum, serves as the band manager and is responsible for keeping the Basie band working. She fumes, along with Woodward and Mitchell, when some brain stem says, "Basie? Never heard of him. Can you send an audition tape?"

Constant work has given the Basie name continuity, and

the year or play once a week in a lower Manhattan cellar. Every man is a seasoned professional and a full-time member of this band. Seven of the current members played under Count Basie. There is a dedication among these players that this music will continue and evolve."

But survival has not come to the Basie band as a birthright of quality. We live in a crowded culture where even the best gets buried if it doesn't fight to get heard. Even when Basie was there to lend his celebrity to the concerts, public indifference would have spelled doom if it hadn't been for those who spent 10 hours a day on the phone wringing work from reluctant bookers. "Willard Alexander

that has lain dormant for decades. "Philosophically, I went back to the old concept and a lot of the music that I thought should be part of our standard repertoire," he says. "I'm not talking about the 1930s stuff like 'Taxi War Dance' or 'John's Idea.'

"There's tons of music written after 1952 by Ernie Wilkins, Neal Hefti and Quincy Jones. They kind of institutionalized those early principles, but in ensemble form that didn't depend on one soloist. Basie would emphasize over and over that this is an ensemble band."

This doesn't mean new material isn't being added. The band's next album will be an Ellington and Strayhorn program arranged by Alan Ferguson. And wouldn't it be a kick to hear the band doing a CD of Buck Clayton charts?

But one day the personal link with Basie will snap. And this worries Woodward. "But I think it's possible," he says, "for a musical spirit, if you will, to be passed on, nurtured and renewed generation after generation without distorting or destroying the original vision."

"This band didn't happen by accident," Mitchell adds. "You have to have a group of people to pass this on to, not just one person. It's like a council. New members have to come in and learn from the older ones. I think Basie knew it would go on. He just hoped it would fall into the right hands."

Another man who knew that his music would go on was Charles Mingus. The only difference was, virtually nobody else did, perhaps not even his widow, Sue Mingus. The Mingus Dynasty began more as an accident than a vision. The year the bassist died, 1979, she organized the group to play a two-day tribute program at Carnegie Hall and used only four horns and a rhythm. "It sounded so authentic and full of spirit," she recalls, "we just kept it going."



MINGUS

Could Mingus imagine his music without him?

You bet he could.

“He believed in reincarnation,”

says Sue Mingus.

“Before he died,

he sat in his

wheelchair and

told a friend that

he would probably

be reincarnated

as an unknown

cello player playing

Bach, Beethoven

and Mingus.”

know how to frame themselves. That’s my understanding of how Mingus’ original groups worked.”

Tenor saxophonist John Stubblefield, 51, is one of the current band’s few players who knows firsthand how Mingus worked. “I was associated with Mingus in 1973,” he says, “and it was always a workshop. That’s when I found out how difficult it was to play his music. I’ve played in many big bands, but Mingus was different—the time changes, the rhythmic changes, the fact that we approached it as a workshop. If he heard something in you he liked, he expected you to bring that to the table every night. When I was playing alto with him, he once told me that he had played with Charlie Parker and that he didn’t want me to be another Parker. He wanted me to play like me. He was the most honest bandleader I ever worked with in that respect. He expected you to be yourself and exemplify your best at all times. If you didn’t or you tried to fake with him, that’s when there’d be an explosion. We try to keep that individuality alive today.”

And this perhaps obscured Mingus the composer in his own

time. “The interesting thing was,” says Sue Mingus, “Charles always knew that he was primarily a composer. But the world did not perceive that because he was such a powerful figure on stage and his music was so identified with his personality. No one wanted to trespass into his territory. His music wasn’t like Duke Ellington’s, which everybody played. But Charles left the largest legacy in jazz after Ellington, and the Library of Congress has acquired all his compositions and papers. Charles is coming into his own gradually in a way that he was not understood in his lifetime. In the beginning, people thought it was impossible to have a Mingus band without Mingus. But I simply took my cue from Charles, because he always considered himself first and foremost a composer.”

“A couple of the pieces we do were never performed,” says McKee. “Certainly never recorded or even orchestrated. So the arrangements are done by guys in the band. This may mean adding introductions and embellishments. But it’s no slight to the integrity of Mingus, because he expected musicians to find their own paths through his work. That spirit of improvisation and freedom is entirely characteristic of Mingus’ method. This often will determine who will work out well in the band and who won’t. A player may be a tremendous musician but needs more structure to frame his work. This band needs musicians who

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authentic because it's his music, and that's enough. The young players now are exactly the kind of musicians Charles would be using were he alive."

There's not even a consistent conductor or musical director fronting the band. Trumpeter Jack Walrath, long an anchor of the Mingus Dynasty, is not regularly involved with the full band. "We have a number of musical directors," says Sue Mingus, "and I think Jack didn't like that idea. The reason we have it that way is because musicians are in and out of the band, and we would be out of luck if someone had to tour on his own for three weeks. None of this has happened according to any long-range design. It's been very organic." The pool of directors includes McKee, Lacy, and Steve Slagle.

But then maybe the real music director is Sue Mingus herself, who came from a musical family, played piano in her teens and studied composition. Although she knew little about jazz until she met her husband, her credentials have enabled her to fashion a creative role for herself in the band that goes beyond the CEO model Aaron Woodward has become to the Basie organization. "I have a loud mouth," she admits with a smile in a soft voice. "I choose the directors, commission the arrangements and watch

over everyone's shoulder. We're trying to keep it as full of risk as we can."

The distance separating the Count Basie and Charles Mingus bands is less than one might first think—certainly less than Aaron Woodward (who wondered how he could be sharing an article with Sue Mingus) assumes. Both reject the label "ghost" band. Yet, both are guided by a legendary spirit. Both insist that they play a living repertoire. And both are right because neither is locked down to a point in time or a litany of hits in the way more traditional ghost bands have been. The Basie and

Mingus bands were never expected to answer to fads and trends, and therefore never became trapped in a matrix of detail that must be interpreted literally night after night the way a fundamentalist reads the Bible. Today, that gives them an unprecedented freedom to program and even experiment that is denied to, say, the Glenn Miller band, which continues to face a tyranny of expectations surpassed only by Elvis impersonators.

And this freedom is redefining the nature of the ghost band. To paraphrase a Louis Armstrong song from the 1936 movie *Pennies From Heaven*, the skeletons in the closet are starting to dance. **DB**

EQUIPMENT

Grover Mitchell plays a King 3-B trombone with an old King 28 mouthpiece.

Andy McKee plays an antique string bass built in 1840 by August Bernadel. McKee uses Olive strings on the G and D positions, and Pirastro Flexocore for the A and E. He uses a Swiss-made Schertler pickup.

John Stubblefield plays a 1961 Selmer Mark VI tenor saxophone with a Phil Barone custom mouthpiece and a 2-1/2 Vandoren reed. He uses a Selmer Model H Soprano saxophone and mouthpiece with a 3-1/2 Queen soprano reed, a Selmer Omega clarinet with a Vandoren jazz mouthpiece, and a Pearl flute.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

post-Mingus

LIVE IN TIME—Dreyfus 36583

GUN SLINGING BIRD—Dreyfus 36575

NOSTALGIA IN TIMES SQUARE—Dreyfus 36559

EPITAPH—Columbia 2-45428

original Mingus

LEGENDARY PARIS CONCERTS—Revenge 32002

MINGUS DYNASTY—Columbia/Legacy 52922

MINGUS AH UM—Columbia/Legacy 40648

post-Basie

JAZZIN' (with Tito Puente & India)—Tropijazz 82032

(Grover Mitchell)

GROVER MITCHELL: WITH THE NEW YORK VOICES—

Jazz 1002 (due in early 1997)

LIVE AT EL MOROCCO—Telarc 83312 (Frank Foster)

BASIE'S BAG—Telarc 83358 (Frank Foster)

LIVE AT ORCHESTRA HALL... DETROIT—Telarc 83329

(Frank Foster with Joe Williams)

BIG BOSS BAND FEATURING THE COUNT BASIE

ORCHESTRA—Warner Bros. 26295 (George Benson)

BLUES FOR BASIE—Denon 73790 (Frank Foster)

original Basie

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David Demsey — Program Coordinator,

Saxophone, Improvisation

Armen Donelian — Jazz Ear Training

Conrad Herwig — Trombone, Small Ensemble

Vinson Hill — Piano, History & Styles, Piano Trio

Sy Johnson — Arranging, Repertory Ensemble

Vic Juris — Guitar, Small Ensemble

Noreen Lienhard — Jazz Vocal Ensemble, Piano Minor

Harold Mabern — Piano, Small Ensemble

Peter Malinverni — Piano, Small Ensemble

Nancy Marano — Voice, Vocal Lab

Chico Mendoza — Latin Jazz Ensemble

Paul Meyers — Guitar, Small Ensemble

John Riley — Drums, Small Ensemble

David Rogers — Trumpet, Improvisation

Norman Simmons — Piano, Small Ensemble

Gary Smulyan — Saxophone, Small Ensemble

Steve Wilson — Saxophone, Small Ensemble



Rufus Reid,
Director
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IT TINS' ON IN

JOE HENDERSON'S BIG BAND DREAM

BY BOB PARSONS

There's a buzz on the street at noon, June 24, 1996. Seventeen of New York's "finest" musicians, that is, arrive at the Hit Factory on 54th Street. Chick Corea, Al Foster and Christian McBride enter the lobby, where they gather with a throng of horn players that includes Jon Faddis, Byron Stripling, Dick Oatts and Conrad Herwig. Men and instruments ascend the elevator six floors to Studio 1, one of the largest (and most expensive) rooms in town, to begin the final sessions for *Joe Henderson Big Band*.

Three-time Grammy Award-winning tenor sax giant Joe Henderson has a dream: to play his music, his arrangements and his solos with his own big band. For 30 years, he's wanted the orchestra to be his saxophone. And today, *Joe Henderson Big Band* will become reality, a testament to his integrity, patience and fortitude.

Henderson, already a tenor saxophone star in 1966, introduced this vision to the New York scene when he and trumpeter Kenny Dorham started a rehearsal band that met two or three days a week. Slide Hampton recalls the time, when visiting a rehearsal at the Five Spot: "I was very impressed and inspired by Joe's arranging at that time, but when I heard the charts again recently, those charts sounded like they could have been written today. That music was very much ahead of its time."

Today, there is a definite vibe that this

band is here to make history. Oatts, Steve Wilson, Tim Ries, Charlie Pillow and Gary Smulyan warm up their saxes on one side of the room. Trumpeters Faddis, Stripling, Tony Kadlek, Ray Vega and Mike Mossman rip off a few high notes to loosen up. Trombonists Herwig, Larry Farrell, Keith O'Quinn and Dave Taylor take their places. Isolation booths separate Corea, McBride and Lewis Nash. Engineer Jim Anderson and executive producer Richard Seidel occupy video and sound central, respectively. It's time to rehearse.

Hampton, whose reputation stems from the Maynard Ferguson band of the '60s, rehearses his arrangement of "Inner Urge." "This tune is so different from anything I've ever done," Hampton says. "I wasn't sure what to do with it. So I worked from a lead sheet and a recording, played the tune on piano and trombone, and learned it enough so that I could let the tune dictate the direction that the orchestration should go." A strident trumpet flourish opens this chart.

"Jon Faddis was brought in at the insistence of Slide Hampton, and wrote those trumpet parts specifically for him," producer/arranger Bob Belden informs. "Joe's concept of the trumpet section is five lead players, so that any of the five can and do take the lead."

"I've had some of the people who played the fifth trumpet parts look and see some of these G's above the staff," Joe says. "I'm tuned-in to what their reaction is. You don't just give a part like that to any fifth trumpet player."

During the rehearsal for Belden's

arrangement of "Black Narcissus," a team of four music copyists prepares the parts for Slide's new arrangement of "Serenity." "The scene with the copyists is really amazing," Hampton says. "That's the way we used to do it years ago, but starting on the parts at noon for an evening recording—unbelievable!"

At 4:00 p.m., as the band gets ready to record "Isotope," Henderson makes his first appearance in the studio; he's been listening in the control room for some time. The band tackles this Henderson chart with the conviction only seasoned pros are able to achieve. Corea, Henderson and McBride all solo. Corea accompanies Henderson perfectly after his own eloquent improvisation; he shares Joe's penchant for angular lines. On the final statement of the melody, Faddis soars an octave above the band. "The music is so deep and the spontaneity of the rhythm section inspires the entire horn section," Oatts observes.

Henderson's chart on "Isotope" grew in length and complexity over the years. "This had gotten started in the '60s with the rehearsal band," Joe explains. "It was a blues. You put the melody down and a couple of background choruses, and you can play that tune at a gig—which is what we did on any number of occasions. I could also come to the next rehearsal, which may have been two or three days later, with some more music written and added it on to that. So it kind of kept going."

Joe's interest in this kind of arranging began when he was about 15 years old. "I was listening to the Stan Kenton band,

For 30 years, he's wanted the orchestra to be his saxophone.



MICHAEL YELZ

And today, Joe Henderson Big Band will become reality, a testament to his integrity, patience and fortitude.

and Bill Holman had brought in a lot of the charts. Frank Rosolino, Buddy Childers and Richie Kamuca were all in that band. At that time [1952-'54], I didn't really know what was going on there, I just knew that I liked it."

Henderson remembers the 1966 band as a workshop. "I kept rewriting and reworking," Joe says. "Understand that this was a rehearsal band, and the band was put together, from my point of view, to improve whatever skills I may have had,

or didn't have, for that matter, as an arranger. It was a work in progress."

The presence of Foster, on hand to play drums on "Black Narcissus," surprises Henderson. "I've been trying to get Al to do big band things for 10, 15 years," he says of his perennial sideman. "And I didn't know that Belden had gotten him for this session. Then he finally walks in the studio and I don't even know he's here! But I knew Al could do it." This sparse arrangement creates a pensive mood: The rhythm section begins alone, leading to five muted trumpets in cluster formation. Joe's lilting melody emerges out of the introduction followed by introspective solos from Corea, then Henderson.

After a dinner break, the band reconvenes at 6:30 to rehearse and record "Serenity." Hampton makes smooth, sweeping gestures as he conducts the slow opening section. A silent count-off brings the band into time for Joe's melodic statement. Henderson takes "Serenity" faster than the original *In 'N Out* version and plays with variations on the melody.

"Serenity," which has required a week of work for Hampton, utilizes lead trumpet work from both Faddis and Stripling. Ensemble interludes provide a stunning display of technique and collective musicianship. The saxophone section shines on a tough soli; the brass section hits with accuracy and swings. "Slide came down to the Iridium and heard us play this tune a few times with the trio to get a feeling for the tempo and character of the music," says Joe, recalling a recent gig at the Manhattan nightclub. "I couldn't be happier with the result."

Henderson is visibly pleased with the band and the new charts; he has delivered inspired solos on every track.

From Day One, we move into the intense drama that characterizes "Inner Urge," recorded at the start of the second day. The ensemble, with Earl Gardner now in the trumpet section, surges into action. Hampton has incorporated melodic patterns in the saxophone section reminiscent of Henderson's improvisation style, executed to perfection. Solos from Joe lead to a dense ensemble passage, and the entire band lifts upward with a chorale section leading to the pungently dissonant final chord.

"Step Lightly," Joe's grooving, 16-bar blues, comes next. "It took me literally hours to decide what not to write on this chart," Belden volunteers. "It's a simple tune, and it has got to remain that."

Some of the musicians here in Studio 1, particularly the bandleader, recognize "Step Lightly" as a familiar part of their own history. Recorded in 1963 by Blue Mitchell, Henderson played on the original



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RHYTHM SECTION: Kenny Drew, Jr. (piano), John Hicks (piano), Andy McKee (bass), Adam Cruz (drums), Tommy Campbell (drums)

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-DownBeat
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NEW RELEASE

Selections Include:
 Number 29, Boogie Stop Shuffle, Sue's Changes, Baby Take A Chance With Me feat. vocal by Ku-umba Frank Lacy, E's Flat, Ah's FLat Too, The Shoes Of The Fisherman's Wife Are Some Jive-Ass Slippers, Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting + 8 other tracks
 All compositions by Charles Mingus.



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DESIGN: RGD

MEMBER OF NAIRD

date and contributed the tune in a sextet arrangement. Mitchell recorded it again in 1964 with Foster and Corea. The flavor of the original is preserved by Belden's exact transcription of the 1963 sextet version, with invigorating brass punches added. The front line—Nicholas Payton, Steve Wilson and Joe—achieves a warm blend. The tune starts out with a medium 2 feel that moves toward swing for the solos. The chart concludes in an easy 2 feel with Henderson blowing over the vamp.

With the end of the session in sight, Joe waxes, "This is a project we had been planning to finish for about four years, but it got pushed back about three times. Instead of finishing the session, we got involved in the Miles project [*Musings For Miles*]. After that, we got involved with the Jobim project [*Double Rainbow*]. But the successes that came from those recordings were unmatched in my career. How can you be disappointed about receiving a couple of Grammys for an album [*Musing For Miles*] that you did?"

"I knew that with all of this activity I would not be able to put pen to paper and bring this to conclusion strictly adhering to my first vision of it."

"My job has been to make the situation what Joe wants it to be," says Belden. "Joe is very specific, but he expects you to understand what he wants without going over every single detail. If you miss what he's telling you, he won't go over it again."

But before things begin to wind up, the band tackles Henderson's "Recordame." Mike Mossman's mixture of rhythms on his arrangement requires some time and patience from the ensemble, which includes the rhythm team of pianist Helio Alves, bassist Nilson Matta and drummer Paulo Braga, brought in for an authentic Brazilian feel. Joe shares the melody with the band and quotes "If I Only Had A Brain" at the outset of his solo. Payton continues in turn, followed by Alves. "Man, I feel like I'm just getting warmed up!" Faddis exclaims after this demanding take. "If this is what session work was really like, I'd do it all the time."

It's 8:00 p.m., and *Joe Henderson Big Band* is totally in the can, 30 years to the month after Henderson and Dorham formed their rehearsal band. Three other Henderson composition/arrangements, recorded in March 1992 after a Lincoln Center concert, will appear on the new recording as well. "Without A Song," "Chelsea Bridge" and "A Shade Of Jade" featured many former members of the 1966 band along with special guest Freddie Hubbard.

Everybody made it for Joe Henderson. The whole session may have been a dream or a miracle. But not 15 minutes after the last note is performed, Nicholas Payton has already left the studio. "Nicholas literally flew in, played his solos and is

now catching a plane back to New Orleans," Belden explains. "Chris McBride and Chick Corea were only available on these days because they are right in the middle of a Bud Powell tribute tour. Al Foster is going to Europe tomorrow, and Lewis Nash is always on the road, so we were fortunate to get him, too."

Future records with the Joe Henderson Big Band? Joe says, "There's about another five or six charts that weren't used on this session that would be included. These arrangements would have been used if I had done all of the arranging. So perhaps if there is ever an attempt to do a 'Rocky II' we'll use those charts."

In an interview for the liner notes to *Joe Henderson Big Band*, Henderson told Bill Kirchner, "Things have changed so much. No one seems to want to get in there and hang in, for reasons of integrity, and work the stuff out until it comes out right. That's the tradition I came through. Everyone now wants to get famous and rich before they do their homework."

Indeed, Henderson's hard work has created magic. Something very rare in jazz history has taken place, thanks to his hanging in there over the years. In contrast to other greats, such as Louis Armstrong and Miles Davis, who "merely" contributed their inimitable horns to the big band date at hand, Joe Henderson has created an

orchestral environment for his sound. The combination of saxophone stylist with composer and arranger, all in one person, has made for an infectious atmosphere, inspiring the other arrangers, soloists, in short, everyone.

DB

EQUIPMENT

Joe Henderson plays an original-series (1954) Selmer Mark VI tenor saxophone, serial number 56923, with a Selmer Soloist mouthpiece, size D chamber. He uses La Voz medium-soft reeds.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

JOE HENDERSON BIG BAND—Verve 533 451
DOUBLE RAINBOW: THE MUSIC OF ANTONIO CARLOS JOBIM—Verve 527 222
SO NEAR, SO FAR (MUSINGS FOR MILES)—Verve 517 674
LUSH LIFE—Verve 511 779
THE STANDARD JOE—Red 123248
THE BLUE NOTE YEARS—Blue Note 4-89287
FOUR!—Verve 523 657
IN 'N OUT—Blue Note 29156
THE MILESTONE YEARS—Milestone 8-4413
RELAXIN' AT CAMARILLO—Fantasy/OJC 776
THE STATE OF THE TENOR: LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD—Blue Note 28879
TETRAGON—Fantasy/OJC 844

with various others

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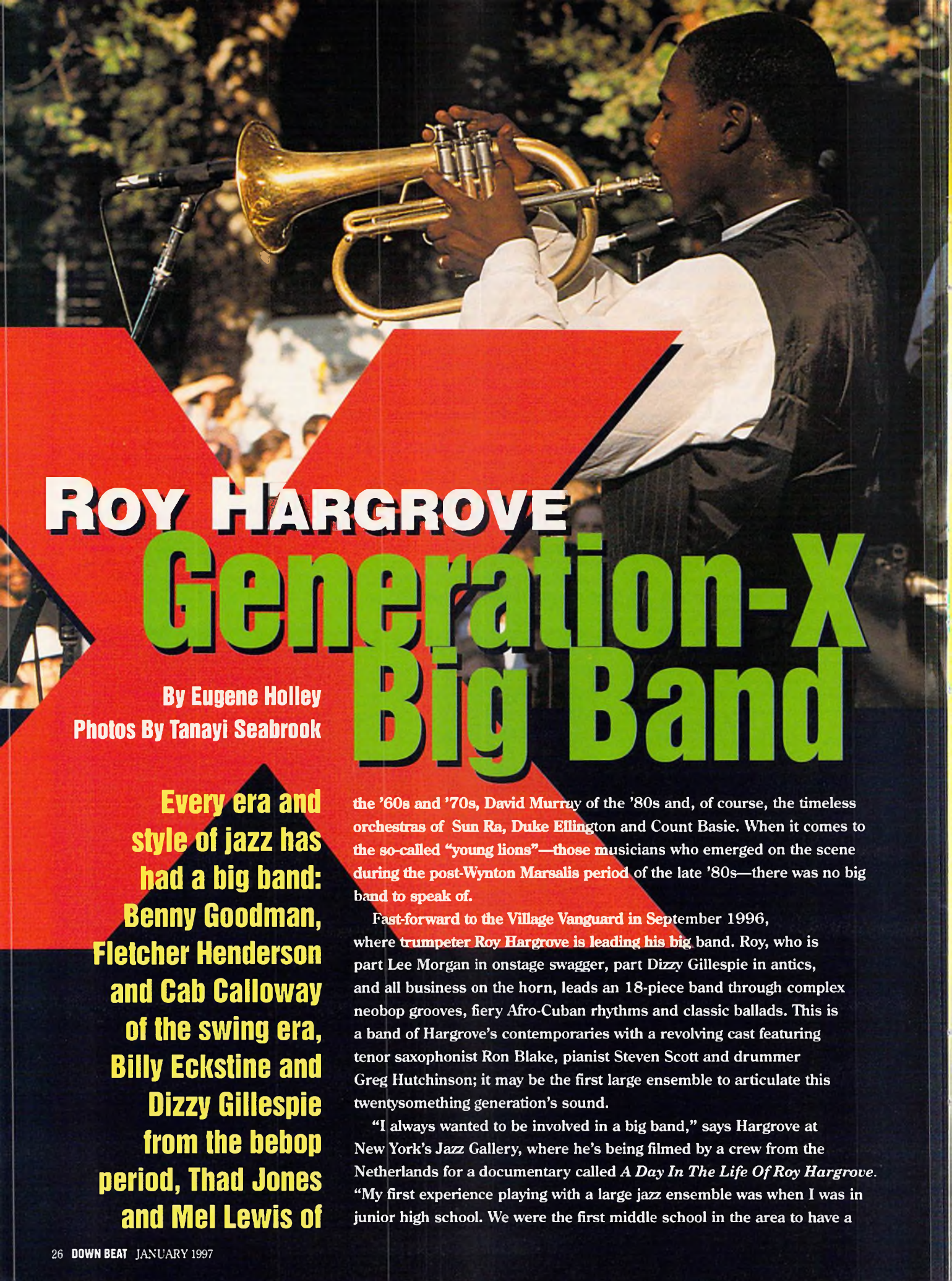
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ROY HARGROVE

Generation-X Big Band

By Eugene Holley

Photos By Tanayi Seabrook

Every era and style of jazz has had a big band: Benny Goodman, Fletcher Henderson and Cab Calloway of the swing era, Billy Eckstine and Dizzy Gillespie from the bebop period, Thad Jones and Mel Lewis of

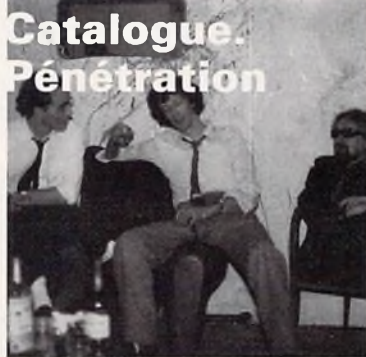
the '60s and '70s, David Murray of the '80s and, of course, the timeless orchestras of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington and Count Basie. When it comes to the so-called "young lions"—those musicians who emerged on the scene during the post-Wynton Marsalis period of the late '80s—there was no big band to speak of.

Fast-forward to the Village Vanguard in September 1996, where trumpeter Roy Hargrove is leading his big band. Roy, who is part Lee Morgan in onstage swagger, part Dizzy Gillespie in antics, and all business on the horn, leads an 18-piece band through complex neobop grooves, fiery Afro-Cuban rhythms and classic ballads. This is a band of Hargrove's contemporaries with a revolving cast featuring tenor saxophonist Ron Blake, pianist Steven Scott and drummer Greg Hutchinson; it may be the first large ensemble to articulate this twentysomething generation's sound.

"I always wanted to be involved in a big band," says Hargrove at New York's Jazz Gallery, where he's being filmed by a crew from the Netherlands for a documentary called *A Day In The Life Of Roy Hargrove*. "My first experience playing with a large jazz ensemble was when I was in junior high school. We were the first middle school in the area to have a



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The Roy Hargrove Big Band at the 1995 Panasonic Village Jazz Festival in Washington Square Park

jazz group. So, that sort of stayed with me on through my high school years, and I was writing arrangements. When I was going to Berklee, I played in Herb Pomeroy's recording band and also the Dizzy Gillespie Ensemble—those were big bands where I experienced playing in a section. So that stayed with me on up until I started working professionally.

"The way this band came to reality was Panasonic was sponsoring the Village Jazz Festival here in Washington Square Park in New York. [Producer] James Brown did an interview with me, and I told him that maybe one day, I would like to direct a big band, and he was booking the groups for the 1995 festival. He hooked it up for me to have a big band, and he was able to pay them a nice size of money—much more than you would get for a regular gig. That's what really got my foot in the door as far as having the cats making themselves available to do it."

The band took no prisoners that hot summer day, and soon the word was out. "Some people heard it, and [Village Vanguard owner] Lorraine Gordon heard about it, and she offered me one Monday night first, and then she gave me two Monday nights, and then she gave me a week! That's all I've done so far."

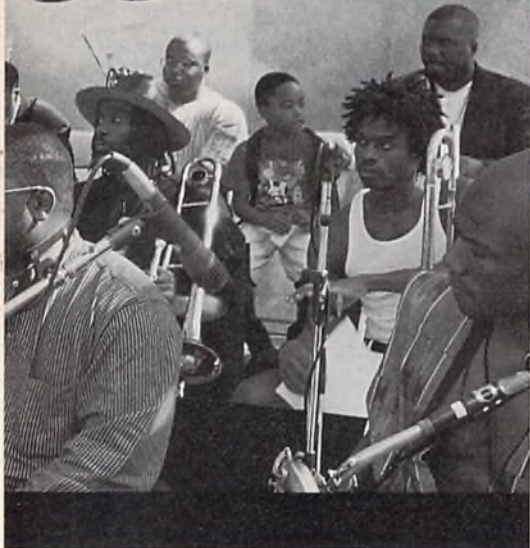
In this setting, Hargrove was smart enough to include different moods and grooves from a potpourri of material and to involve contributions from band members so that the material wouldn't get stale. "I wrote some arrangements of things I had recorded on my latest CD, *Family*: 'Trilogy,' 'September In The Rain' and 'The Nearness Of You.' And then there were other cats in the band that were arrangers as well. Like trombonist Kuumba Frank Lacy, he brought in a tune called 'Requiem.' And I played an arrangement by Bobby Watson, which

was a tune I had recorded the very first time I ever made a recording, called 'Conservation.'"

Because this generation does not have players or repertoire that can be considered "classic," Hargrove included elder statesmen who lent some of their musical wisdom on the bandstand. "Another thing was that we had some special guests to join us, like David 'Fathead' Newman. Before we did the gig at the Vanguard, I had the opportunity to go down to Havana, Cuba, in fall 1995, and by the grace of the Creator I was able to bring musicians back here to play with us at the Vanguard. ... It was great having cats like percussionist Miguel 'Anga' Diaz and pianist Chucho Valdés for the last week at the Vanguard."

As a trumpeter experimenting with Afro-Cuban rhythms, Hargrove gives his band that special crowd-pleasing Latin tinge. "I get most of my inspiration from Dizzy and Pops [Louis Armstrong]," Hargrove admits. "Buddy Rich also had a great band, so did Maynard Ferguson, and, of course, Duke Ellington and Count Basie, and Thad Jones and Mel Lewis. The one thing those leaders had in common was their ability to get the most out of their musicians, both musically and psychologically. That's definitely a part of it. My group has 18 pieces, so you have to think for 18 people. It can be difficult, but it's also very rewarding once you hit the bandstand and hear that music coming at you. The only thing that's difficult about it is the technical aspects that go beyond the music: getting everybody together and trying to maintain focus during rehearsal. If you've got that many cats in one room, it can go out of the window. But I've got a special technique. I've got a loud whistle that I do, and as soon as I do it, everybody is like, OK, what was that? Having all of

Festival



those people together, you really have to know what you're going to do. It's not about, should we do this? It's not about being timid, it's about being a rock. And that's really showed me the importance of leadership without being a total asshole about it. You want to be nice, but firm."

Saxophonist Sherman Irby met Hargrove during late-night jam sessions at New York's Smalls nightclub. Hargrove invited Irby, 28, to join the big band in Washington Square Park. "He was different than all the other bandleaders," Irby affirmed. "He gives you room to play. He doesn't try to stifle you. ... That's the way Roy does it: Everybody just plays, and they don't have a care in the world."

With his big band ready to record live with members of the Cuban group Irakere New Year's Eve in Umbria, Italy, the dynamic sound of this Generation-X big band will finally be documented (look for a spring release on Verve). "For me, my concept of the big band is mostly a group where everybody has a familiar concept of how the music can sound. It should be very powerful. ... There are a lot of groups that just play it safe, but my concept is more like, every note has got to be like your last!" **DB**

EQUIPMENT

Roy Hargrove plays a Monette trumpet with a Monette mouthpiece. He also plays an Inderbinen flugelhorn with a Bach 3C mouthpiece.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

EXTENDED FAMILY—Verve 533 626
FAMILY—Verve 527 630
WITH THE TENORS OF OUR TIME—Verve 523 019
APPROACHING STANDARDS—Novus 3178
THE TOKYO SESSIONS—Novus 63164 (co-led with Antonio Hart)
OF KINDRED SOULS—Novus 63154
THE VIBE—Novus 63132
PUBLIC EYE—Novus 3113
DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH—Novus 3082

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CHICAGO, IL - Feb. 1 (Sat.) Northwestern University, Regenstein Hall (Music), 1955 S. Campus Dr., Entrance A
DALLAS, TX - Feb. 6 (Thurs.) University of North Texas (Denton), School of Music, Avenue C & Chestnut
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LOS ANGELES, CA - Feb. 15 (Sat.) California State University-Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff Street
LOS ANGELES, CA - Feb. 16 (Sun.) California State University-Fullerton, Performing Arts Center, 800 N. State College Blvd.

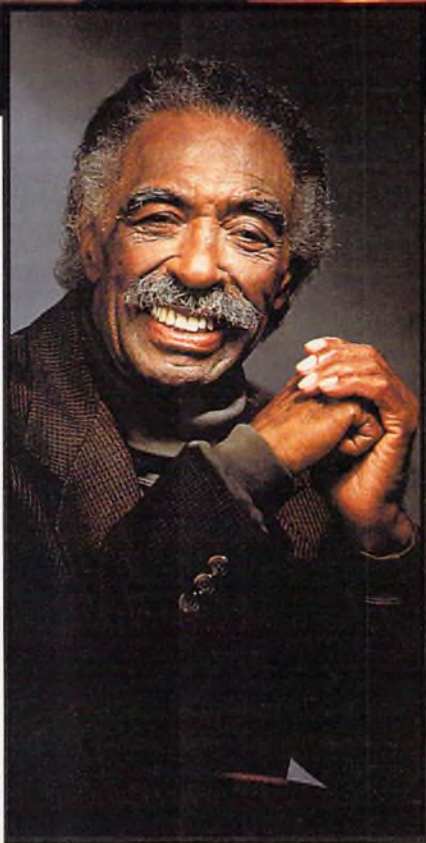
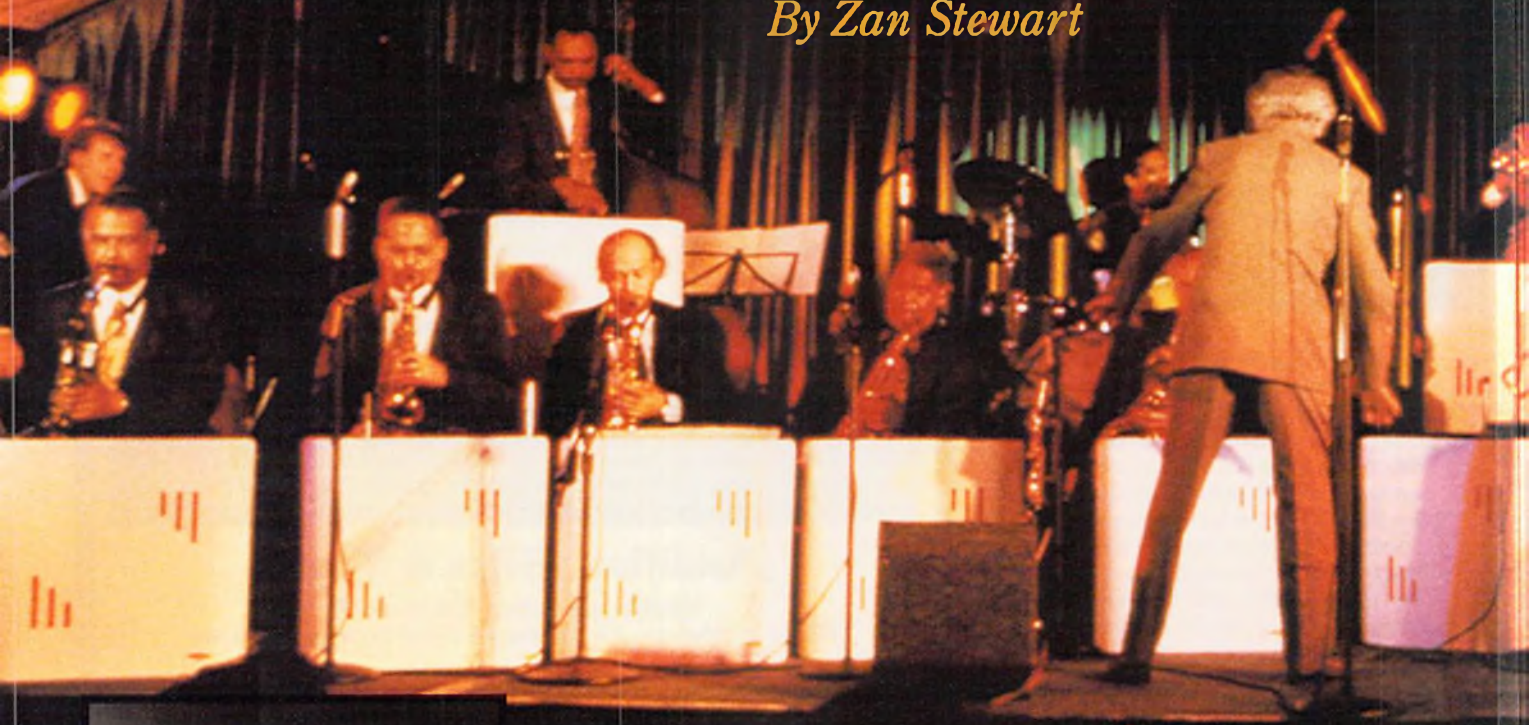
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Gerald Wilson's One-Two Punch

By Zan Stewart



No big band sounds like Gerald Wilson's. His writing for brass and winds, always thickly textured with distinctive harmonic choices, directs a succulent, definitely modern wall of sound at the listener.

His pieces swing with undeniable drive. His feel for rhythm goes unmatched. He runs a one-of-a-kind outfit with tight ensemble passages topped off by ace soloists like saxophonist Carl Randall and trumpeter Oscar Brashear.

The longtime leader, whose everyday attitude is a mixture of chest-puffing hubris, coy innocence and plain *joie de vivre*, knows it. "My music is different," Wilson says, sitting in his office at U.C.L.A.'s Schoenberg Hall, where he teaches a two-part jazz survey course.

Others know it, too. "You can always tell a Gerald Wilson arrangement," says vibist Terry Gibbs, whose 1960s Dream Band employed many of the same West Coast players that populated Wilson's bands of that period. "He has his own style."

But the lively, 76-year-old Wilson plays hard to get when asked about the source of his singular sound. "I think things like that are God-given," he says. "I invented it, and it's the way I hear it. I had already made up my mind before I joined Jimmie Lunceford in 1939 that there had to be something new in harmony." That "something new" is what Wilson says he's been offering in almost everything he's written since 1940, whether it be for Lunceford, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Lionel Hampton and a hundred others, or his own bands. He calls his theory, a concept built around eight-part harmony, "the Diminished Triangle." For a complete explanation of the subject, you'll have to wait for his book, which he's currently writing. But in



Gerald Wilson, shown here directing his orchestra, writes and arranges for the band using a harmonic concept he calls "the Diminished Triangle."

Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat Cole, Billie Holiday, Dinah Washington, Harry Belafonte, the list goes on.

Then there was his work for film—scenes in 1960's *Where The Boys Are* for one—and TV: segments of *Line-Up*, *The Redd Foxx Show* and many others.

Plus there have been the honors: the three Grammy nominations, including one in 1995 for *State Street Sweet*, and, in 1990, being named to a Jazz Masters Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Yes, somebody's been listening. And still is. Last spring, Wilson's band was one of three Los Angeles-based ensembles—the other two were led by Benny Carter and Buddy Collette—highlighted at concert in Washington, D.C., co-sponsored by the Library of Congress and the Ira and Lenore S. Gershwin Foundation. Wilson came to the bash heavily armed with a stomping version of "Summertime," a tune he had once arranged for Count Basie in the 1950, just before he disbanded and formed his octet.

This time, Wilson says, "I used all my new stuff. I decided when I was writing the score that I would interweave the melodies of 'Summertime' and 'It Ain't Necessarily So,' have them both played on guitar by my son, Anthony, and my grandson, Eric Otis. Then, from out of nowhere, emerges the melody to 'Bess, You Is My Woman Now.' It came off just beautifully."

The pop music of the Gershwins, Jerome Kern and Cole Porter, along with the vibrant jazz of the likes of Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Earl Hines and Duke Ellington, was what young Wilson heard growing up in Shelby, a small town in northwest Mississippi, not far from the river. And there was his older brother, also named Shelby, talking about jazz, and playing it on the piano.

"Shelby was really the big influence. He went to Tuskegee [Ala.] Institute, where [pianist] Teddy Wilson was a graduating classmate. Shelby had to have somebody to talk to about this music, and he talked to me."

Wilson's family moved to Detroit when he was 14, and he went to Cass Technical High School, where he studied music theory. He had started playing trumpet in grade school and continued at Cass, and it was his trumpet playing that landed him his seat in Lunceford's band in 1939, when he replaced Sy Oliver. Soon, though, the self-taught Wilson began to write, with prime examples being "Hi Spook" and "Yard Dog Mazurka," the latter co-written with Roger Segure.

Wilson left Lunceford in 1942, moved

the meantime, Wilson gives a few hints.

"Most bands hit you like this," he says, pushing one closed fist at a guest. "That's because they're still using four-part harmony, doubling voices and so on. Oh, they use the occasional augmented 11th or 13th, but it's mainly four or five-part harmony."

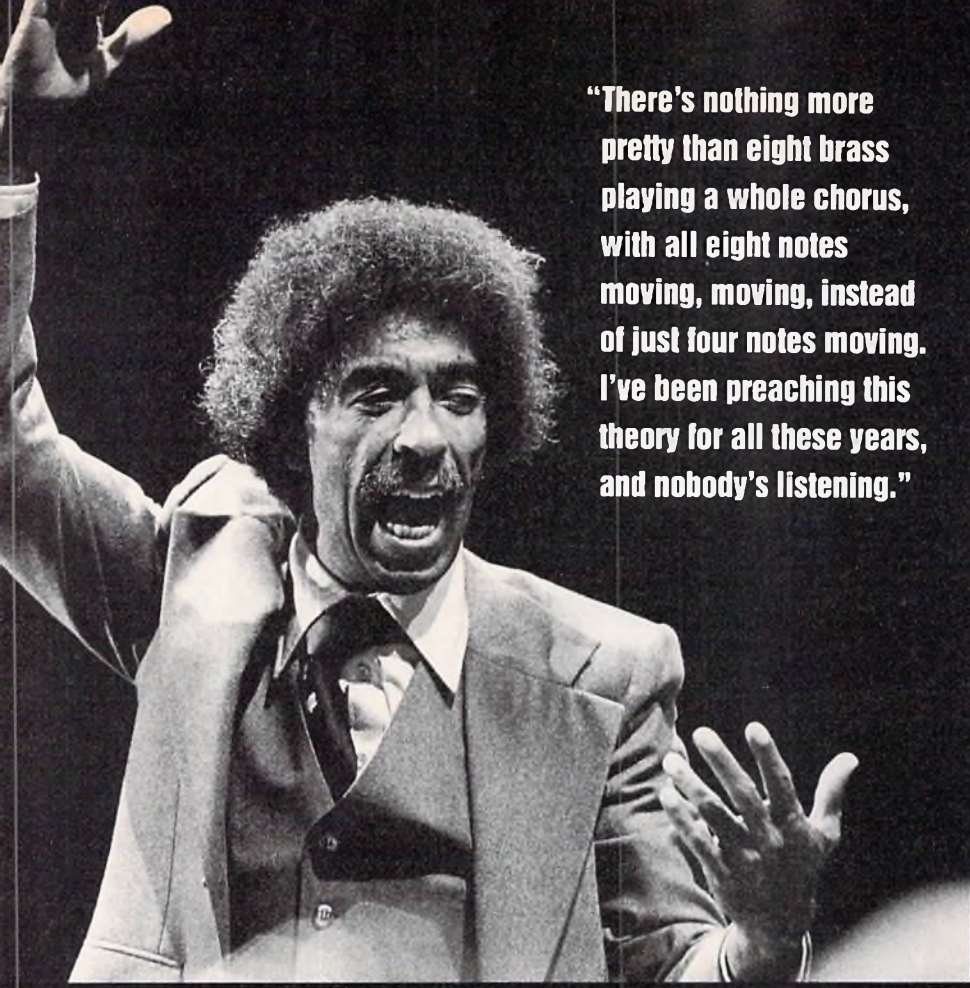
"Now, my band is going to hit you like this," and he pushes two closed fists forward. "That's because each player has a different note, and the basic note of the chord is in the root. There's nothing more pretty than eight brass playing a whole chorus, with all eight notes moving, moving, instead of just four notes moving. I've been preaching this theory for all these years, and nobody's listening."

Well, maybe yes, maybe no to the theory, but certainly to the music. Wilson's writing gained renown at the outset with Lunceford, specifically via his "Hi Spook" and "Yard Dog Mazurka," the opening of which, as Gunther Schuller put it in his 1989 tome, *The Swing Era*,

"Stan Kenton appropriated lock, stock and barrel a few years later for his 'Intermission Riff.'" Then there was his 1945 version of "Groovin' High," the first big band arrangement of that bebop classic.

In the '50s, there were Wilson's high-powered arrangements for Duke Ellington—"Feeling Kinda Blues" and "El Vitti" among them. In the early '60s, there was Wilson's L.A.-based band, offering steaming numbers like "The Wailer," "Moment Of Truth" and "Viva Tirado"—El Chicano's cover of the tune hit #28 on the Billboard pop charts in 1970, and it was recently done by rapper Kid Frost. He's roared into the '80s and '90s, as recordings like *Love You Madly*, *Jenna* and *State Street Sweet* along with regular live performances—in L.A., Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Europe—continue to keep his hard-hitting, energized music in front of a consistently impressed group of followers.

Along the way, Wilson wrote tamer, but nonetheless hip, charts for Ray Charles, Nancy Wilson, Johnny Hartman, Sarah



Gerald Wilson, circa 1985

"There's nothing more pretty than eight brass playing a whole chorus, with all eight notes moving, moving, instead of just four notes moving. I've been preaching this theory for all these years, and nobody's listening."

to Los Angeles, played with Les Hite and others, then spent two years in the Navy, where he performed in the U.S. Navy Band with alto saxophonist Willie Smith and trumpeter Clark Terry. Returning to Los Angeles, Wilson started his first band in 1944, and was on the road, doing swell, so it seemed, in 1946.

"We played Salt Lake, we played Dallas, we played St. Louis, we were on top," says Wilson. "We followed Duke Ellington into the Apollo. They wanted me back twice a year for five years. I was getting ready to do 12 weeks at the Paramount Theatre with Louis Jordan, who was really big."

But something didn't click for Wilson. He says it all happened too fast. "There was so much more I wanted to know," he says. "I had to get where I could study more, and I couldn't do it out there. I wanted to write other things, like for the movies." So he disbanded, and settled again in Los Angeles.

Work was seemingly plentiful. "I hadn't been home two weeks when I got a call from Duke Ellington. I wrote two numbers: 'You Gotta Crawl Before You Walk' and 'You're Just An Old Antidisestablishmentarianist.'" He also soon wrote for Basie, Gillespie, Holiday, Goodman and many others. And he did study, going over scores by many of the classicists, from Joaquin Rodrigo and Manuel de Falla to Aram Khachaturian and Moritz Moszkowski.

During the '50s, '60s and '70s, Wilson mixed writing for TV, for bands like Ellington—several of his charts were recorded by Duke for Capitol in 1954 and are available on a recent Mosaic reissue—and for singers such as Ray Charles, whose *Modern Sounds In Country And Western* sports Wilson's large-ensemble arrangements. But his main source of inspiration and pleasure was his band, reformed in 1961 with producer Albert Marx as his benefactor. The group featured L.A. notables such as saxophonists Teddy Edwards and Harold Land and trumpeter Carmell Jones (now in Kansas City). It recorded glorious albums for Pacific Jazz, two of which have been reissued, and played steadily in Los Angeles, traveling at one point to regale fans at the 1963 Monterey Jazz Festival. Wilson sometimes performed with the ensemble, though in the mid-'70s, he stopped playing due to dental problems.

About 10 years later, Wilson received a commission that, if pressed, he would describe as the high point of his career. Zubin Mehta, then musical director and conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, asked Wilson to write a 15-minute-plus piece to be played by the Philharmonic during its 1972 season. Wilson was thrilled.

"You know, I never got into music for recognition or money," he says. "I wanted

to feel comfortable with myself about my music. That was uppermost in my mind. I think that happened [with the Philharmonic piece, titled *Debut*: 5/21/72]. I wrote at my dining room table. My kids were playing in the living room with their friends. I was also doing my other work at the same time. In two weeks, I'm done. And I used every instrument that they had. And they played it. In fact, the first rehearsal was at Royce Hall [not far from Wilson's office on the U.C.L.A. campus]. I used every time signature I could think of, starting with 4/4, then 6/8, 9/8, 7/4, 5/4. It came out just like it knew it would. That was the day I realized I could compose anything I wanted."

This story, and many others from Wilson's music-packed life, is part of *Suite Memories*, a recently released spoken-word package that also includes a few choice instrumentals, such as 1945's "Groovin' High."

These days, when Wilson isn't writing or fronting the band, he can usually be found at U.C.L.A. There, he's either in his office talking to a student, teaching "The Development of Jazz," or working with the jazz band, which is part of the new Jazz Studies program directed by guitarist Kenny Burrell. Wilson has been teaching since 1970, when he began at Cal State University-Northridge. He also taught at Cal State-Los Angeles before joining the faculty of U.C.L.A. in 1991.

Working with students is nearly as inspiring as making music, says Wilson.

"It's really a privilege, an honor and an opportunity for a person like me to be around all of this youth," he begins. "It's another world the minute you walk on this campus. It's like energy is here. I have a big class, about 550 students, and I have fun with them because they are interested in jazz, and I'm able to give it to them in a manner that keeps them interested. I cover ragtime through swing in one section, bebop up through today in the other. It's really a kick."

DB

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

SUITE MEMORIES—MAMA Foundation 1014
STATE STREET SWEET—MAMA Foundation 1010
JENNA—Discovery 70964
I LOVE YOU MADLY—Discovery 70947
PORTRAITS—Pacific Jazz 7 93414
MOMENT OF TRUTH—Pacific Jazz 92928

anthologies

MASTERS OF JAZZ, VOL. 4 (BIG BANDS OF THE '50s AND '60s)—Rhino 2 72471
BIG BAND RENAISSANCE: EVOLUTION OF THE JAZZ ORCHESTRA—Smithsonian 108

as arranger

JIMMIE LUNCEFORD 1940-41—Classics 622
MASTERPIECES 9—Jazz Archives 158242
 (with Jimmie Lunceford)
THE COMPLETE CAPITOL RECORDINGS OF DUKE ELLINGTON—Mosaic 5-150
DIZZY GILLESPIE: THE COMPLETE RCA VICTOR RECORDINGS—Bluebird 66528

as trumpeter

CARL'S BLUES—Fantasy/OJC 423 (Curtis Counce)
MAN OF MANY PARTS—Fantasy/OJC 239 (Buddy Collette)



Reper

Imagine the jazz scene in the '30s or '40s. Wynton Marsalis is making a triumphal tour (of course, I'm not talking about the '30s and '40s of this century, but the next), maybe celebrating his golden anniversary in jazz or reaching his 75th year.

As he has throughout his long and illustrious career, Marsalis is playing the classic compositions of jazz, the works of Ellington and Strayhorn, Monk and Morton, Armstrong and Henderson. These works have long been available in standard editions from the Smithsonian Masterworks series and other sources, and they form the basis, along with his own works written for the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (such as *Blood On The Fields*) of the well-established jazz repertory movement. His itinerary begins at Lincoln Center and includes subscription-series concerts with not just the major ensembles connected with the Atlanta, San Francisco, Boston and Chicago symphonies, but also the jazz repertory orchestras in Des Moines, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Tucson and Little Rock.

The backbone of this scenario is the idea that the repertory orchestra plays the great works of jazz in the manner in which they were originally recorded. The rationale behind it can be summarized in Gunther Schuller's observation that a music that is no longer performed live is doomed to extinction. But jazz is "the sound of surprise" as well as "America's classical music." A repertory orchestra, with its standardized texts and solos copied note-for-note from recordings, surely embodies "classical" at the expense of "surprise."

And then you go to Chicago's Orchestra Hall and look down from the balcony to watch Jon Faddis lead the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band with its "old bottles/new wine"

“When institutions like Carnegie Hall or the Smithsonian or Lincoln Center decide to start a jazz program, I think it is definitely paying tribute to those [pioneering] musicians who went through all that crap they had to go through.”

—Jon Faddis
Carnegie Hall Jazz Band

By Dave Helland

Repertory Big Bands

Jazz's Future-Past



"Is anybody writing music like Ellington, is anybody as creative as Gillespie? I think if jazz is to be saved, then the performer and the content will come along and do it. ... It's not just that Dizzy is not up there on the stage; nobody with Dizzy's gifts is."

—Bill Russo
Chicago Jazz Ensemble

approach to repertory. Dick Oatts turns red as he reaches for notes in his soprano-sax solo on "Sing, Sing, Sing," propelled by Kenny Washington's Elvin Jones-styled drumming. Trumpeter Byron Stripling swaggers as he plays a jungle-style solo with a plunger mute on "The Mooch." And Faddis demonstrates the sense of humor he shared with his mentor Dizzy Gillespie as he tells jokes and offers up a composition of startling depth and pinpoint precision—Dizzy's "The Short One"—dedicated to bari sax player Gary Smulyan. A future dominated by repertory orks suddenly doesn't look so predictable after all.

But Faddis isn't comfortable with the tag "repertory" for the group he's led since

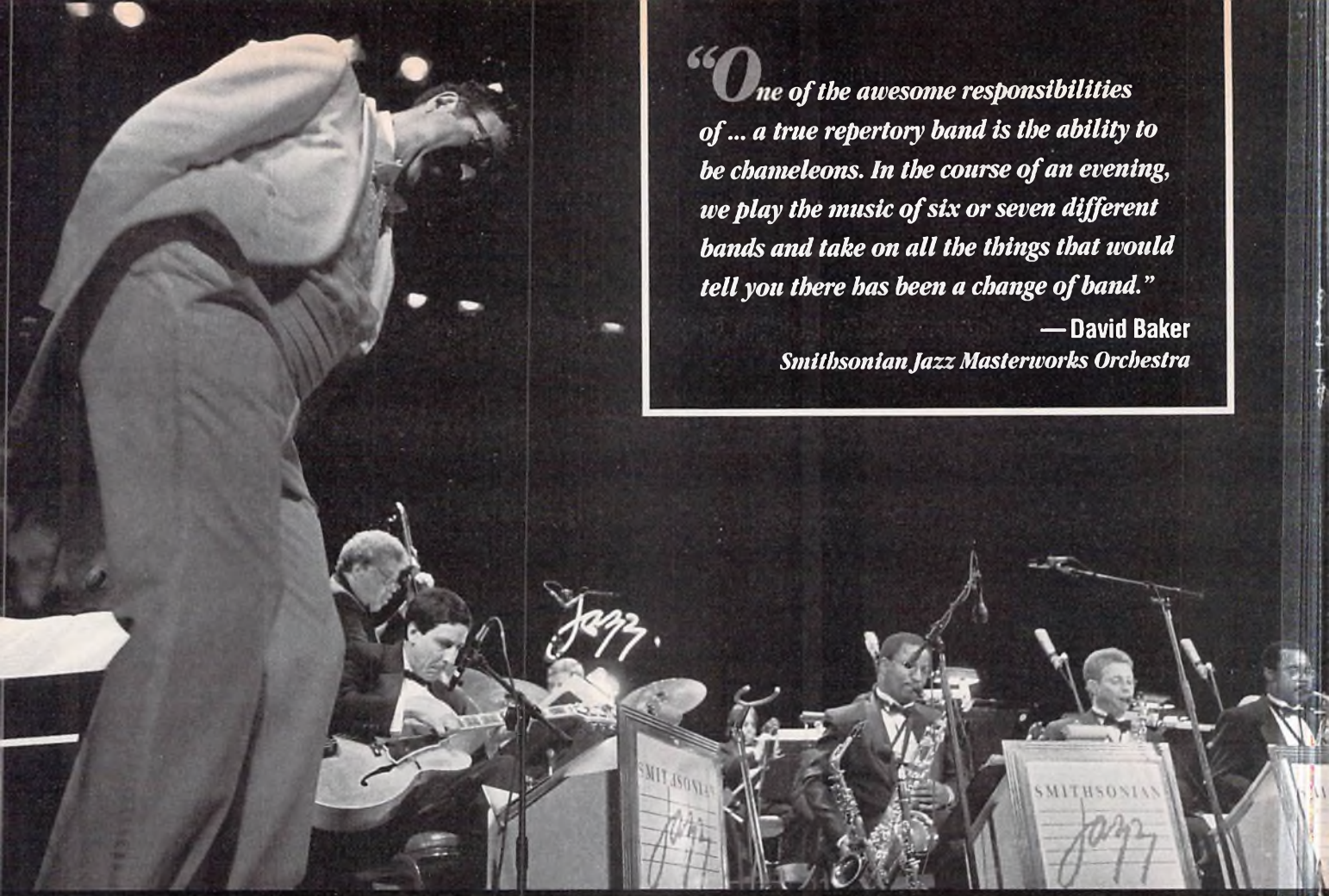
its inception in 1992. Their four-concert seasons, taped for broadcast on NPR's *Jazz Set*, have included concerts devoted to *rearrangements* of Ellington, Strayhorn and Goodman. For another tribute, Dick Hyman orchestrated Erroll Garner's playing for big band. Their tribute to Miles Davis included numerous alumni of the trumpeter's bands. And during the Wein-produced JVC Jazz Festival, the group engages in an annual battle-of-the-bands with the Lincoln Center ork.

"One of our goals is to try and do the classical jazz repertoire in our own way," Faddis explains. "We have a group of arrangers we use to help us develop our sound. We go through an arrangement and work things out as far as phrasing and

dynamics and make it sound like we have been playing it on the road for 20 years and still enjoy playing it.

"I would like to pattern the phraseology of the Carnegie Hall orchestra after Count Basie: very tight and precise. I like a certain tightness, and when that is achieved, then I want the musicians to relax and have fun with it. Once we get all the notes, know where all the dynamics are, where all the balances are, then that's when it starts to loosen."

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Faddis in the big band world. Horn sections are keyed into the way the lead trumpeter (which Faddis is) locks into the drummer. So it stands to reason that Faddis—with his background



“One of the awesome responsibilities of ... a true repertory band is the ability to be chameleons. In the course of an evening, we play the music of six or seven different bands and take on all the things that would tell you there has been a change of band.”

**— David Baker
Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra**

in the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis band, organizing Dizzy Gillespie's last big band, and with Bobby Watson, Illinois Jacquet and a host of others—is also heard with the Smithsonian and Lincoln Center orchestras.

“My experience in having played with a couple repertory bands is if you come up with arrangements of ‘One O’Clock Jump’ or ‘Take The ‘A’ Train,’ musicians have heard that their whole life. And they tend to say, I know this, I know my part, I don’t have to do anything more. That’s not really the case at all. It becomes—to me—a very, very, very difficult process to get that musician to get deeper into it and play in maybe a different style than he is accustomed to playing.”

As jazz forges more and more ties with the European classical establishment in this country, Faddis feels there is something to be learned from “the long hairs.” “They always demanded and received a certain amount of respect, and they were always very serious about the music. With jazz, when you see some of the old pictures of Cab Calloway’s band, Ellington’s band—those cats were sharp, but they didn’t always have the respect because of the time that they lived in: Jim Crow, discrimination, all that.

“Now it’s the ‘90s. There is still some of that institutional racism; it still exists. But because of what Louis Armstrong, Duke

Ellington, Roy Eldridge, Cab Calloway and Coleman Hawkins—all the great musicians, Lionel Hampton with Benny Goodman—because of what they went through, socially but also musically, it makes it a lot easier for us. When institutions like Carnegie Hall or the Smithsonian or Lincoln Center decide to start a jazz program, I think it is definitely paying tribute to those musicians who went through all that crap they had to go through.”

Uptown at the Green Mill, on the same night the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band played Orchestra Hall, Bill Russo’s Chicago Jazz Ensemble performs with a score of horn players, percussionists and singers. During the course of one set, they play everything from Jelly Roll Morton’s “Dead Man Blues” to Basie’s “Going To Chicago” to “23° North—82° North,” written by Russo for the Kenton band, as well as “Southport,” a section of Russo’s work-in-progress *Chicago Suite #2*. The Mill is packed, mainly with kids who look young enough to be Russo’s grandchildren, some in leather with punked-up hair styles and others in matching ensembles who look like they just stepped out of a sorority house.

“The hardest piece is ‘Take The ‘A’ Train,’” says Russo, echoing Faddis’

comments. Gunther Schuller’s transcription “is so elegant, so specific in every detail, that to play it correctly takes an enormous amount of attention and focus.”

So, for instance, what the patrons of the Mill heard when the band played “Goin’ To Chicago” were the trumpet and clarinet solos originally recorded by Buck Clayton and Lester Young. “We preserve the solos that are historically significant, or when I don’t think we can do better, or when the solos are so much a part of the piece.”

Besides simply keeping earlier jazz styles alive through their performance as well as uncover some neglected talents, the repertory movement might answer some questions about what jazz is and what is really important in its evolution from entertainment to art. It could, for instance, redress the imbalance between improvisation and composition, between jazz’s “surprising” and “classical” sides. But more immediately, jazz repertory can begin to solve the dilemma posed by the passing of the true giants of jazz. How do you widen the audience for the music of Ellington or Gillespie as composers when Duke and Dizzy the performers are no longer around?

“The real question, which is folded in there: Is anybody writing music like Ellington, is anybody as creative as Gillespie?” counters Russo. “I think if jazz

is to be saved, then the performer and the content will come along and do it. If everybody is trying to play fast and loud, and the emphasis is on improvisation rather than good music, or improvisation versus composition, or form versus content, then that is part of the problem. It's not just that Dizzy is not up there on the stage; nobody with Dizzy's gifts is [up there], although those people are around.

"The repertory movement, far more than anything else in my mind, serves to remind us of a healthier time when people like Ellington would write great music and people would like it," Russo continues. "But we have to get a bigger repertory of great music."

One of the awesome responsibilities of any repertory band that is a true repertory band is the ability to be chameleons," explains David Baker, founding director of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra with Gunther Schuller and head of the jazz program at Indiana University. "In the course of an evening, we play the music of six or seven different bands and take on all the things that would tell you there has been a change of band even though the people look the same."

"One of the things I have to talk about early in the season as new people come into the band is the difference in, say, vibrato from band to band. Or in one band the trumpet players play all the notes short or lean toward a certain approach. The Basie band tends, even at a fast tempo, to be laid-back and relaxed, while the Kenton band was brassy, more on top of things."

The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra is unique not only in that it is associated with a museum (the National Museum of American History) rather than a performance center or an educational institution, but also that it was established by an act of Congress. It serves as the Smithsonian's house band, playing concerts around the country in connection with the institute's 150th anniversary and the opening of its traveling shows of Ellingtonia as well as presenting a concert season in Washington, D.C.

"One thing that is different about our band: Right from the beginning, we turned it into a didactic situation more like Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts. If we are doing a program of big band music, I take five minutes to set the stage. I talk about World War II, that in 1941 there were 70 bands with radio shows, that in the period between 1939 and 1942 there were over 300 bands represented in the Down Beat, Metronome and Esquire polls. I try to set the mood by having people understand that what we are going to do is take them back in time."

But the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra doesn't always go that far back in time. Baker hopes to present a concert

of George Russell's music next season and can envision playing the music of Muhal Richard Abrams' Experimental Band. "Any time we have at least 20 years between us and the recordings, that's enough time to really make decisions whether the music is going to stand the test of time, whether it's important, whether—and this can seem somewhat capricious and arbitrary—whether it belongs in the category of 'classic.'"

Let's go back to the imaginary 2030s and '40s and count the house. Marsalis' tour stops are well-received by audiences largely made up of aging jazz fans who were introduced to the music in their youth when they played in junior high and high school jazz bands. The youngest members of the audience are students at the local jazz conservatory who are preparing for the rounds of competitions that are the gateway to a career with a jazz repertory orchestra.

Is this what the trends we've listened to in jazz for the past decade—the young lions, music education and the jazz repertory movement—will lead to? Geriatrics, the newly well-to-do and students listening to the compositions of long-dead black men played by conservatory-trained professionals supported by government grants and private philanthropies? That jazz will have become a museum music?

"I think that is a possible scenario; that might well be part of the fabric of the music 20 years from now," admits Baker. "But what I think will keep it from ever going off the deep end is that the people who are really serious about jazz, its practitioners and particularly people in education circles, have to be like the Janus mask. They have to be looking forward and backward at the same time.

"It is a damn dumb mistake to start trying to box music in and say it stopped in the '50s or '60s or '90s. This is a serious mistake, and my trouble with people who try to force it into this kind of box is that they have lost their sense of historical perspective altogether." Baker compares it to the practice of freezing the deceased so they can be thawed and healed by physicians of the future: "Cryogenics—hell, I sure hope they don't try that with jazz music."

DB

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

CDs by repertory big bands worth checking out:

American Jazz Orchestra

MUSIC OF JIMMY LUNCFORD—Musicmasters 65072

Carnegie Hall Jazz Band

CARNEGIE HALL JAZZ BAND—Blue Note 36728

Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra

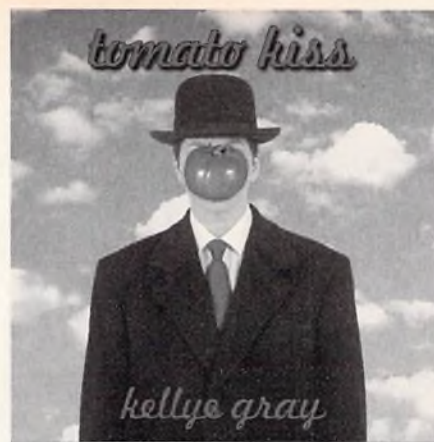
THEY CAME TO SWING—Columbia 66379

PORTRAITS BY ELLINGTON—Columbia 53145

Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra

BIG BAND TREASURES, LIVE—Smithsonian RJ44

Note: The Chicago Jazz Ensemble has a recording in the can, but they haven't yet signed with a label. Any takers?



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10 Years and/or Still Evolving

By Fred Bouchard



Saxophonist Russ Gershon (far left) and his 10-piece Either/Orchestra recently celebrated their 10th anniversary as a band.

Either/Orchestra, that band of bad boys from Cambridge, Mass., stands on one shoulder of tradition and another of the avant garde. Duke Ellington head-nods and Willem Breuker freak-outs shake up the repertoire and inspire the soloists. Grand bashes emerging from chaos (Mingus-like "17 December," free-for-all "Miles Away") rub in the bursting book (70 active charts) alongside finely crafted, meticulously detailed charts.

Composers represented on Either/Orchestra's decade retrospective, *Across The Omniverse*, indicate the diversity of its sourcebook: Duke Ellington, Johnny Hodges, Juan Tizol, Gigi Gryce, Sonny Simmons, John Lennon, Burt Bacharach, Billy Skinner, John Tchicai, Richie Beirach and nine tunes by six band members (see

"CD Reviews" Oct. '96).

"Sun Ra will always be a hidden inspiration," says Russ Gershon, saxophonist and founding father of the 10-piece outfit. "His lifelong philosophy of do-it-yourself, out-is-in, it's-showtime!, his insistence at being uncategorizable and his tight, cultish community." Sometimes Sun Ra-isms crept into turn-on-a-dime charts and uproarious crescendos.

Gershon's attitude toward Either/Orchestra's success is almost aw-shucks. The '80s were ripe for cross-breeding Boston's music-school types with rockers and free spirits. "It was serendipity," says Gershon, "finding guys at Berklee like Russ Jewell, Dan Fox, John Turner, John Dirac and Mike Rivard over the years." New England Conservatory unveiled John Medeski, Josh Roseman, Michael Shea

and Lello Molinari. When Josh called to tell me he was going to tour Europe, he had two words for me: *Curtis Hasselbring*. Curtis has turned out to be a major contributor." The many non-school players—Charlie Kohlhase, Jerry Deupree, Andrew D'Angelo to name but three—undercut any resemblance to bands out of those schools.

The early years ('86-'89) rocked hard with Dirac's smokin' guitar and Medeski's transcendental B-3 and grooves laid down by Rivard and Deupree under pairs of trumpets and trombones and three saxes. That curious cross-breeding of styles led from fusions funkified ("Nutty"/"Ode To Billy Joe" and "Circle In The Round"/"I Got It Bad") to "classified" ("There's A Bus That's Leaving Soon For Alban Berg's House"). Rugged if roughcut charts,



KEVIN WINTER/RETNA

assertively if not always precisely played, were certainly lived and read freshly, in the moment. Later on Nieske, Rivard and Medeski drove the band into jazzier realms with more grace and precision.

"The jazz world has come around to us," says Gershon, philosophically. "We were ahead of the '80s neo-classical movement; we were trying to reconcile blues and groove-based jazz with avant garde and swing and bop. I'm a non-digital synthesizer. I like to put things together to see what happens. I looked for people who were open enough to resolve those musical dichotomies internally. Either/Orchestra's brass sections have always had two players who were yin/yang, in/out stylistically [e.g., trumpeters John Carlson and Tom Halter, trombonists Hasselbring and Jewell]."

Band members also believe in the power of chance-taking. Current and emeritus members came up with the following soundbytes about Either/Orchestra lore, legend and spirit.

MATT WILSON (DRUMS, 1990-95) "We tried a lot of things, and weren't afraid to experiment and fail. In a theater in Galesburg, Ill., after a [conservative] first set, a few elderly women came up to us, took cassettes and CDs out of their purse, and requested [our very far-out] 'Miles Away!' In Stillwater, Okla., at Eskimo Joe's, when we were playing real free, cowboys in Stetsons and big-buckle jeans were head-noddin' and digging it. I like to think we opened a lot of people up to some new music!"

KEN FREUNDLICH (KEYBOARDS, 1985-'88) "The band was a huge learning experience, expanding my views about music. I thought of myself as a pianist, but I was forced to play synthesizer [because of bad gig pianos, Gershon's demanding charts]. I never thought of myself as a writer/arranger until Russ gave me the chance to write for seven horns and all kinds of ideas. Russ' idea of what an arrangement could be was ever-evolving—we'd start in one groove and end up in a different solar system."

TOM HALTER (TRUMPET, 1985-PRESENT): "I had plenty of traditional in-your-face big band experience from UNLV onward. It was pretty exciting, but when it came time to solo, they just pushed your button, and it was 24 bars and out. With Either/Orchestra, we push each other's buttons, stretch out, be ourselves. Like with Duke, you get to spin your yarn; [like with Gil Evans], you can shape where the music goes."

CHARLIE KOHLHASE (BARI, ALTO SAX, 1986-PRESENT): "The band helped me get my face out there; when I call up club owners about my quintet, they actually remember!"

Gershon, on the eve of the arrival of his firstborn with his wife, Alessandra, ponders the future of Either/Orchestra. Indeed, the lure of the hearth over the road has influenced a quietus of bookings, despite a few select gigs, like First Night, 1997, in Providence, R.I. Gershon says that, in 1985, married or seriously involved band members totaled near zero; these days, the total is near 100 percent.

"We're in a brief hiatus," admits Gershon. "but our great book and tradition will springboard our next incarnation. I want to bring the band back to first principles: excitement for players, accessibility for audience, a visceral approach to barrier-breaking. We've gotten away from these as our music has become

more complex and scheduling demands press down. A band's evolution tends to go from 90 percent rehearsal and 10 percent gigs to the inverse: I'd like to get us back to a workshop status."

To link Either/Orchestra to Accurate Records is inevitable: Band was the impetus for label. Like the band, Gershon runs it cooperatively. "I tell the artist what I think will work, then I make them work," he says. "They get involved in manufacturing, design, promo—soup to nuts. It's been educational, a real instruction in the music biz."

Like Either/Orchestra, Accurate has thrived on serendipity. "Once Either/Orchestra put out a few albums, demo tapes started coming in and have never stopped from bandleaders around town—Billy Skinner, Henry Cook, Dennis Warren. I realized how much Boston musicians needed a label to get them out into the market." Today, many of the label's 50-plus titles have direct Either/Orchestra connections and personnel: Morphine, Dominique Eade, Allan Chase, Charlie Kohlase, Garrison Fewell and Medeski Martin & Wood.

Gershon's gigging with two bands that may record soon: One's a quartet with Either/Orchestra's original rhythm section (Dirac, Deupree, Rivard) *not* called Neither/Norchestra; the other's called the Intimate Ensemble with only bassist Larry Roland and drummer Syd Smart. "I want to challenge myself as a player/composer for smaller groups, widen exposure to great jazz repertory," he explains, "improve the world's A&R chops and bring something new back to Either/Orchestra."

DB

TRIVIA

What's In A Name? Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's life opus provided Either/Orchestra's metaphysically challenging name.

Lone Ranger: Trumpeter Tom Halter is the only member (besides leader Russ Gershon) still in E/O since its inception.

Fretless: E/O fielded 11 men while guitarist John Dirac was in the band; since he left in 1989, they always play with 10.

Firsts: Gig: Young Adults Reading Room at Cambridge Public Library, 12/17/85. Home Stage: Ryle's Upstairs, 1986-'90. Rock Club: The Rat, Boston, 1986. New York Club: Sweet Basil, 1987. Festival: Cambridge Jazz Festival, 1986.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

10th ANNIVERSARY CONCERT—Accurate 3282 (due out in 1997)
ACROSS THE OMNIVERSE—Accurate 3272 (2CDs, 1986-1995)
THE BRAUNT—Accurate 3262
THE CALCULUS OF PLEASURE—Accurate 3252
THE HALF-LIFE OF DESIRE—Accurate 3242
RADIUM—Accurate 3232
DIAL "E" FOR EITHER/ORCHESTRA—Accurate 2222



Branford Marsalis

The Dark Keys
Columbia 68786

★★★★

Maybe Leno Land was Branford's bridge. When Marsalis lit out for *The Tonight Show* in 1992, he made mention of the fact that being ensconced in Hollywood would give him plenty of time to 'shed. The solitary vibe—away from the bustling New York scene that he was such an influential and charismatic part of at the time—paralleled the famous move that Sonny Rollins made back in the early '60s, when his "office" was the Williamsburg Bridge on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Anyone with a cable clicker in their hand knows that Branford's now split the show, and anyone who picks up *The Dark Keys* will likely realize that though bopping through pop tunes on-camera (and intermittently fooling with the pan-stylistic r&b of the Buckshot LeFonque group in concert), he must have been investigating the tougher stuff at home. This is his most aggressive jazz disc ever, full of improvs ardent and freewheeling enough to be reminiscent of Rollins' best trio work.

The Dark Keys is a chess game held inside a boxing ring. Working without a pianist allows the band plenty of free wheeling, both harmonically and melodically; Marsalis leads his cohorts on a romp teeming with discriminating rhythmic moves. The trio played a week at the Village Vanguard prior to cutting the disc last July; at the club the music had a frolicsome personality with dead-serious musicianship guiding its trajectory. A highly developed group sound is felt immediately on the disc—through an ever shifting series of discrete tunes, the playing sustains a deep sense of continuity while coming off as a whimsy incarnate. It has as much head as it does body.

This blend underscores *The Dark Keys'* most valuable asset: uniting the excursive and expressive sound of progressive players while still managing a rhythmic grooviness vital enough to present a mainstream demeanor. The bounce behind "Hesitation" (take a bow Reginald Veal) and the low-down vibe of "Blutain" (high fives to the composer, Jeff Watts) are guidelines to some wild-assed blowing. But as adventurous as the stuff comes off, its sophisticated cadences always have their

arms open wide. Dig ecstatic uptempo swing? Marsalis' ribbing of the racist Cincinnati Reds owner, "Schott Happens," is a blast of tenor lingo that comes off like a proclamation. It repeatedly crests with fleet phrases and rampant swaths of sound, with an infectiousness enhanced to Watts' ride cymbal.

The trio program is judiciously broken up by a pair of tunes that unites Branford with two other hot reed players of the day, Joe Lovano and Kenny Garrett. Both are equipped to step up the action. Lovano is a gruff floater on "Sentinel," Garrett a cutthroat adventurer on "Judas Iscariot." When each braids his lines with those of the leader, the already emphatic feel of the band becomes commanding. To a degree, Branford's passionate sound sets the emotional agenda. Even when he's alone with the rhythm section, as he is floating through "A Thousand Autumns," the depth of his sentiment is unmissable. "Autumns" is just as charged a lament as, say, Air's "Through A Keyhole, Darkly." Almost as abstract, too.

That supple nature is part of many tunes here. The blues is the base for much of the material, though Branford sometimes shrouds that from us with some of his most deliberate and consequential improvs of his recorded career. Imagine an obsessive who is also the life of the party, and you've got a grip on what kind of character Marsalis is artfully forwarding on *The Dark Keys*. —Jim Macnie

The Dark Keys—*The Dark Keys*; *Hesitation*; *A Thousand Autumns*; *Sentinel*; *Lykeif*; *Judas Iscariot*; *Blutain*; *Schott Happens*. (62:05)

Personnel—Marsalis, tenor and soprano saxophones; Reginald Veal, bass; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums; Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone (4); Kenny Garrett, alto saxophone (6).



Sun Ra
The Singles
Evidence 22164

★★★★½

Prepare yourself: This is one of the major archival projects of the decade. The enormity of Sun Ra's discography is legendary—he recorded more than 70 records for his own company Saturn, and nearly that many again for other labels. But this excursion into Ra's extensive and virtually unknown work as a

producer of seven-inch, 45-rpm singles lets listeners in on several heretofore shrouded zones in his seemingly boundless musical omniverse. Not one of these records was a jukebox smash—how could it be when Ra had them pressed in batches as small as 50 and sold them from the stage at concerts? But the story these singles tell is unique and utterly fascinating.

The collection proceeds chronologically, starting in Chicago with Ra's forays into doo-wop and r&b in the mid-'50s, touching down in New York in the '60s and finally landing in 1982 with an Arkestra recording made at the Ra home in Philadelphia. What is particularly revealing is the extent of Ra's work with poppier genres; the straightness of harmony vocal groups like the Cosmic Rays and the Nu Sounds will startle Arkestra fans weaned on his outre big-band experimentation, though careful listening uncovers the Ra slant in his piano backing and band arrangements. Juanita Rogers' "Teenager's Letter Of Promise," with Lynn Hollings on echoed-out narration, is a prime piece of wacko '50s kitsch, and the Qualities' holiday single, "Happy New Year 'To You!" backed with "It's Christmas Time," is as sweet as it is weird. The only anomalous inclusions in the set are four blues tracks by Lacy Gibson, released on Saturn subsidiary Repeato, which don't feature Ra or any of the Arkestra members.

Ra's work within black-pop idioms was contemporaneous with his development of the Arkestra and substantive expansion of the vocabulary of the jazz big band. There's plenty of hard-core Ra compositional ingenuity in this set, too, including singles-only versions of more familiar Arkestral material like "Saturn," "Supersonic Jazz" and a previously unissued version of "Medicine For A Nightmare" that was uncovered in the process of assembling the collection. A single cut in 1960, "Blues Set," includes an unusually mainstream alto solo from Marshall Allen, while the 1967 recording "The Bridge," with recitation by Mobarak Mahmood, is an all-out zonkers concept piece, backed with a great, robot-like version of the classic space-chant "Rocket #9." As for Ra's innovative electronics work, check out his Solar Sound Instrument on "Blues On Planet Mars" or the drum computer and synth of "Disco 2100," which sounds like warped Kraftwerk.

None of the tracks on either disc have appeared on CD, or for that matter on I.P. before this compilation, with the exception of two completely lude, crazed cuts ("Hot Skillet Mama" and "Muck Muck") by Yochanan—an eccentric r&b figure who makes Screamin' Jay Hawkins sound placid by comparison—that miraculously showed up last year on a sampler called *Blowin' Through Yokohama* (Atomic Passion). Two more extraterrestrial cuts by Yochanan ("The Sun Man Speaks" and "Message To Earthman") are accompanied by previously unreleased alternate takes. Thirteen of the set's tracks were mastered directly from the original tapes (provided by Ra business

partner Alton Abraham), while the rest are taken from hyper-rare vinyl provided by collectors worldwide.

The Singles adds multiple new dimensions to our understanding of the scope and depth of Sun Ra's celestial vision. It is the definition of a stellar collection. —John Corbett

The Singles—A Foggy Day; Daddy's Gonna Tell You No Lie; Dreaming; Daddy's Gonna Tell You No Lie; Bye Bye; Somebody's In Love; Medicine For A Nightmare; Saturn; Supersonic Jazz; Happy New Year To You!; It's Christmas Time; Muck Muck (Matt Matt); Hot Skillet Mama; Great Balls Of Fire; Hours Alter; Teenager's Letter Of Promises; I'm So Glad You Love Me; The Sun One; The Sun Man Speaks; The Sun Man Speaks; October; Adventure In Space; Message To Earthman; Message To Earthman; State Street; The Blue Set; Big City Blues; Tell Her To Come On Home; I'm Making Believe; The Bridge; Rocket #9; Blues On Planet Mars; Saturn Moon; The Sky Is Crying; She's My Baby; I Am Gonna Unmask The Batman; I Want An Easy Woman; I'm Gonna Unmask The Batman; The Perfect Man; Journey To Saturn; Enlightenment; Love In Outer Space; Mayan Temple; Disco 2100; Sky Blues; Rough House Blues; Cosmo-Extensions; Quest; Outer Space Plateau. (73.35/75.16)

Personnel—various vocalists and vocal groups, including The Nu Sounds (1), The Cosmic Rays (2-6), The Qualities (10, 11), Yochanan (12, 13, 18-20, 23, 24), Juanita Rogers and Lynn Hollings (16, 17), Little Mack (28, 29) and Lucy Gibson (34-37); numerous incarnations of the Sun Ra Arkestra, 1955-1982.



Ginger Baker Trio

Falling Off The Roof

Atlantic 82900

★★★★½

Falling Off The Roof gets its title from an accident drummer Ginger Baker suffered while doing some home repairs. Not your typical jazz album title, but then this isn't your "typical" jazz album. Recorded in December '95 and March of last year, *Falling Off The Roof* sports the return of bassist Charlie Haden and guitarist Bill Frisell (first heard together as a trio on Baker's *Going Back Home*, from '94).

There's much to savor, as the one-time rock drummer once again demonstrates how much he has to offer in a strictly jazz vein. Hearing the former Cream trapsman play brushes next to Frisell's acoustic guitar on Haden's "Our Spanish Love Song" is a surprising study in simpatico understatement. The song is played true to form as a Spanish ballad, with few frills and much sensitivity. Their rendition would find great appeal among the greying, romantic set. Another example of great group empathy can be heard on Baker's medium swinger "C.B.C. Mimps." The drummer deftly tracks Haden's softly punctuated soloing, followed by

exchanges Baker takes with Haden and Frisell.

As with *Going Back Home*, the original material offers more surprises. Monk's "Bemsha Swing" and Charlie Parker's "Au Privave" swing but sound innocuous, giving nothing these standards haven't received by others. On the other hand, Frisell's "Skeleton" demonstrates more of the creatively controlled abandon these artists are capable of. A brooding meander through what seems like a cemetery at night, the music is free to roam without constraints. Baker's sing-song swinger "Vino Vecchio" features some very tasty, peppy rat-atat soloing from the drummer amidst Frisell's soaring sustains.

For the most part, Frisell's guitar sound is bereft of devices and faintly reminiscent of influences like Jim Hall. Not so on "The Day The Sun Come Out." This great piece of high-energy interplay serves as a kind of no-man's land for aging rockers. This duo jam, laced with stylistic signatures, gives Frisell and Baker room to let their avant impulses mingle without regard for volume, or Haden's relatively subdued bass. More idiosyncracies are offered up with banjo player Bela Fleck, who appears on three tunes. Fleck's work is tasteful, if reserved. His banjo is a good sonic addition to the friendly, marching rock of "Amarillo Barbados," the bop of "Au Privave" and the honky tonk of "Taney County."

Haden's "Sunday At The Hillcrest," one of many blues numbers here, features another guest, guitarist Jerry Hahn. The band's favorite swing groove seems to be at medium tempo, which is where this number finds Frisell, Hahn and Haden in solos that blend, contrast, walk and, in an attractive four-chord cadenza, take the song out with Frisell leading the charge.

At times, Baker's swing seems a tad busy. His African tom-tom approach and busy snare, while highly syncopated, often push the beat unnecessarily and dwarf the sound of his cohorts, both of whom tend to rely on a more elastic pulse, one capable of dragging behind or laying on the beat. At times, it's as if they were negotiating the rhythms independently.

Still, there's a nice, warm, gauzy feel to *Falling Off The Roof* (produced by Baker and Malcolm Cecil). These one- and two-take col-

laborations, while lacking the focus and stronger material found on *Going Back Home*, still offer great examples of diverse musical worlds capable of dishing up magical moments at the drop of a hat. Or a drummer, for that matter. —John Ephland

Falling Off The Roof—*Falling Off The Roof*: Amarillo Barbados; Bemsha Swing; Sunday At The Hillcrest; Au Privave; Our Spanish Love Song; C.B.C. Mimps; Skeleton; Vino Vecchio; The Day The Sun Come Out; Taney County. (57:57)

Personnel—Baker, drums; Charlie Haden, bass; Bill Frisell, guitar; Bela Fleck, banjo (2, 5, 11); Jerry Hahn, guitar (4).



Benny Carter & Phil Woods

Another Time, Another Place

Evening Star 104

★★★★

The royalty of alto saxophonology holds court here for nearly two hours and 20 minutes on this two-disc package recorded last March at the Regattabar in Cambridge, Mass. The object is good conversation, not mortal combat. Carter is in very good, but not quite great, form here. He sails into his solos on the wings of one elegant break after another, but tosses off some risky flourishes with less than his usual flawlessness and confidence. About 1:22 into "Another Time, Another Place," for instance, he seems to freeze on one

THE HOT BOX

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BRANFORD MARSALIS <i>The Dark Keys</i>		★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★
SUN RA <i>The Singles</i>		★★½	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½
GINGER BAKER TRIO <i>Falling Off The Roof</i>		★★★★½	★★★	★★½	★★★★½
BENNY CARTER & PHIL WOODS <i>Another Time, Another Place</i>		★★★★	★★★★½	★★★	★★★★½

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knotty little pirouette.

But these are relatively minor reservations. His constructions are alert, teasing, a bit staccato and often daring, forever dodging expectation and cliché within a style whose formality never permits, for the sake of cheap surprise, easy and obvious iconoclasm. Carter surprises us the hard way, with subtlety. His ballads are especially attractive. He slinks through "Willow Weep For Me" like a feline temptress. And "Mood Indigo" is full of richly textured blues.

Woods is uniformly strong throughout, quoting "Get Happy" and "Ornithology" with wit and logic on "Sometimes I'm Happy" and "Dolphin Street," respectively, and barking out a few unexpected bars of big toned, barrel-house alto on Carter's "Rock Me To Sleep." But it's when the two horns intersect in their ensembles that Carter and Woods respond not only to the music but to each other. There is both heat and light in twos and fours traded on Carter's "The Courtship." And "Sunny Side Of The Street" and an express-tempo run through "Speak Low" get downright wild when the two altos play against each other as the pulse drops out and Sherman Ferguson launches into a drum solo. Pianist Chris Neville provides first-class support all the way, nowhere more than on the satin-lined funkiness he spreads out on "Willow."

There are no vocals, no round of individual features pieces and no expendable tracks. Carter and Woods play on every piece, and the titles are a choice mix of originals and standards.

—John McDonough

Another Time, Another Place—*Sometimes I'm Happy; Spring Will Be A Little Late This Year; Rock Me To Sleep; Another Time, Another Place; Willow Weep For Me; Shiny Stockings; The Courtship; On The Sunny Side Of The Street; On Green Dolphin Street; A Walkin' Thing; Janet; Speak Low; Petite Chanson; Just Squeeze Me; Mood Indigo; How High The Moon.* (72:19/65:28)
Persannel—Carter, Woods, alto saxophone; Chris Neville, piano; John Lockwood, bass; Sherman Ferguson, drums.



Medeski Martin & Wood

Shack-man
Gramavision 79514

★★★

John Medeski says of his band, "We're trying to bring the aesthetic of jazz down to earth for younger generations to relate to." In the last 25 years, countless jazz musicians have been seduced by this same dream. The impulse is understandable. Rock stars—

many with limited imaginative and technical resources—fill football stadiums, while serious practitioners of the “aesthetic jazz” scramble for gigs in small clubs. What would happen if a jazz group found a way to tap the magic of instant accessibility?

Medeski, Martin and Wood are making a concerted effort to find out. Their credentials as jazz musicians are beyond reproach (names like the New England Conservatory, John Zorn, Dewey Redman and Either/Orchestra appear on their respective resumes). Yet their passionate desire is to be a “groove band.” On *Shack-man*, their fourth album, tunes like “Strance Of The Spirit Red Gator” and “Is There Anybody Here That Loves My Jesus” epitomize their methods. Drummer Martin sets up a wicked funk shuffle, Wood twitches

nasty bass ostinatos around the beat and Medeski’s keyboards superimpose simple repeated figures leading to insidious hypnotic variations. The strongest pieces (like “Spy Kiss”) are the ones where Wood shifts to guitar and throws surprising shards of light against the band’s dark steaming swamp.

Beneath the relentless momentums, there are unexpected musical subtleties. Shifting tonal centers and tiny keyboard details create sinister vampire innuendos on “Dracula.” On the closing “Kenny,” Wood and Martin (on brushes) implacably alter their cross-rhythms to spur Medeski’s extended B-3 workout (the closest *Shack-man* comes to a “solo”).

Such moments establish that this band has evolved beyond acid jazz. But MMW’s “groove” contains limited opportunities for further development. The heady blend of genres no longer sounds quite as fresh as when it was new, three albums ago. Despite the group’s musicianship and cohesion and commitment, *Shack-man* leaves unanswered the most daunting of questions: Are attempts to blend jazz with diverse popular elements (hip-hop, r&b, neo-punk, etc.) futile quests for a cruel illusion? Would not those who desire only to dance and drink ‘til they fall down prefer their boogie undiluted by the distractions of musical content? And would not the jazz audience prefer implicit meters and random punctuations to the stasis of MMW’s endless vamps?

—Thomas Conrad

Shack-man—*Is The Anybody Here That Loves My Jesus; Think; Dracula; Bubble House; Henduck; Strance Of The Spirit Red Gator; Spy Kiss; Lieblood; Jelly Belly; Night*

Marchers; Kenny. (54:49)

Personnel—John Medeski, Hammond B-3 organ, Clavinet, Wurliizer electric piano, Planet T. toy piano, Yamaha CSO I II; Billy Martin, drums, percussion; Chris Wood, acoustic and electric basses, guitar.



Dick de Graff/ Tony Lakatos

New York Straight Ahead
Challenge 70033

★★★★

Dick de Graff

Sailing
Challenge 70024

★★★

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Many jazz fans in the States are familiar with Willem Breuker's Kollektief, pianists Jasper van't Hof and Misha Mengelberg, percussionist Han Bennink and trumpeter Ack Van Rooyen. But few know about another topnotch Dutch musician by the name of Dick de Graff. He's a saxophonist in his early 40s who's played with Kenny Wheeler, Chet Baker and the big band of John Clayton. He has two new releases that, taken together, serve as an attractive introduction to his music.

On *Sailing*, de Graff and four European comrades focus their energies on a program of five de Graff compositions and four standards in a Holland studio. Frustratingly though, the arrangements don't allocate the saxophonist any more solo space than they do young pianist Eric Legnini or trumpeter Gerard Presencer, and the listener's left hungry for a longer look at de Graff's apparently sizable talent. (No putdown of Legnini and Presencer intended; they're both good, assured players.) Only on a version of Mal Waldron's "Soul Eyes" does de Graff get room to really hold our attention with his warm, full tone, thoughtful pacing and mounting of substantive ideas on phrases that slowly burn to the heart.

New York Straight Ahead finds de Graff in Brooklyn for a session co-featuring Hungarian saxophonist Tony Lakatos, still another talented musician in search of wider recognition. The two hit it off. Their sopranos sing with alacrity on Lakatos' "Vintage," and they create a probing mood akin to early '60s Ornette Coleman playing tenors on "In The Air," one of two lustrous songs composed by pianist Marc



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van Roon. Not incidentally, de Graff's friend from back home plays with self-confidence throughout the album, a good fit with the New York rhythm team of Billy Hart and Santi Di Briano.

Each saxophonist gets several songs to himself and displays the power of personal magnetism. Using his sweet-yet-tart-toned soprano, de Graff brings ingenuity to his study of Horace Silver's melody on "Peace." Tenorman Lakatos works hard to make his phrases reveal inflected emotions of hope and regret on the ballad "It Might As Well Be Spring." De Graff appears to be handier at generating and resolving tension than the Hungarian, but let's not split hairs, because they've come up with one of the more pleasing albums from Europe this year.

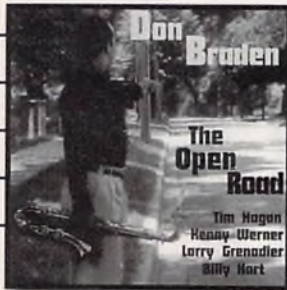
—Frank-John Hadley

New York Straight Ahead—*Another Two Ways; B Flat Brother; Vintage; December; New York Straight Ahead; It Might As Well Be Spring; In The Air; Peace; Grand Slam.* (58:57)

Personnel—de Graff, Lakatos, tenor and soprano saxophones; Marc van Roon, piano; Santi Di Briano, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

Sailing—*Sailing; Nedley; Black Nile; Soul Eyes; Ouagadougou; Public Enemy; Tilt; I Should Care; Voyage.* (60:41)

Personnel—de Graff, tenor saxophone; Gerard Presencer, trumpet and flugelhorn; Eric Legnini, piano; Thomas Bramerie, bass; Jean-Pierre Arnaud, drums.



Don Braden

The Open Road Double-Time 114

★★★★

The young modern mainstream tenor vet with the bold sound and fertile imagination is not kidding with his title: Everything here is deliciously stretched, altered and liberated.

Braden's previous musically brimming efforts—from 1991's *Wish List* to last year's *Organic*—don't really prepare us for the contemporary, exploratory stance he embraces here. Reharmonizations abound: "April In Paris" gets a wild one, as does "Maiden Voyage" and "Someday." For "Scrapple," Bird's mix of "Honeysuckle Rose" and a "Rhythm"-changes bridge, the chords are simply ignored, à la Ornette. "Alone" is played fast in a tenor/bass/drums format that encourages openness. Despite the taken liberties, Braden and company almost always make this music compelling, accessible—several selections are most tuneful—and, more important, sensible. The album gives us another view on where

jazz has been, where it might be going.

The fact that Braden has brought along his rhythm-section cohorts from Tom Harrell's quintet is a definite plus, for the four play with the experience, wisdom and intuition that comes with working together for two years-plus. Hagans, who, like the leader, is establishing himself as a distinctive voice, can evince a sometimes overwhelming amount of edge and chordal disdain. Here, though, he is less rambunctious, and provides the leader with a solo stance that is rich in contrast.

The minor-blues title track and the medium-uptempo "Storm" are characteristic of the proceedings. On the latter, Braden evokes a song-like quality while exploring the tune's expansive harmony, his lines—sometimes brief, often lengthy—are full of hearty swing. Hagans' statements have an unusual architecture: His lines are long, often with repeated notes in the middle, and his juicy sound buoys his note choices. Braden is most adventurous on "Alone," where he is pushed by Hart's insistent beat and goes far beyond the tune's structure.

The slow tunes are lovely. On "Someday," Werner creates rings of luminous sound with tender traces of melody, and the leader is warm and inviting on the riveting "Sundown" and "Thought," where Grenadier's big pulse is a perfect foil.

—Zan Stewart

The Open Road—*The Open Road; Sundown; April In Paris; I Thought About You; Maiden Voyage; The Storm; Alone Together; Someday My Prince Will Come; Scrapple From The Apple; Lush Life.* (67:32)

Personnel—Braden, tenor saxophone; Tim Hagans, trumpet (1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9); Kenny Werner, piano (1-3, 5, 6,

8-10); Larry Grenadier, bass (1-9); Billy Hart, drums (1-3, 5-9).



Betty Carter

I'm Yours, You're Mine Verve 533 182

★★★★½

This may be the easiest-to-like Betty Carter album since she sang with Ray Charles 35 years ago. Even those who find her mannerisms over-the-top should slide right into *I'm Yours, You're Mine*. It is not exactly that Betty is mellowing. She remains the most instrumentally conceived of jazz vocalists, capable of melodic improvisations as unpredictable as any saxophonist this side of Ornette. But on this recording (her fifth for Verve and her first in the studio in three years), she sounds so at

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Boston Globe

FRED HERSCH

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peace with herself. She lingers in the glow of an after-midnight atmosphere and takes her time with seven special songs and, of course, transforms them. The cumulative effect is narcotic.

Carter finds young players who always sound exceptional when they play with her. The tenor saxophone of Mark Shim and the piano of Xavier Davis are of one piece with the unexpected shiftings of this music. When Shim and Carter take turns on "Close Your Eyes," they complete one another's emotions in a shared register, Shim's notes fluid, Carter's husky. Davis sets Carter up again and again with perfectly timed introductions and then sustains her with intuitive, glistening fills.

There are no weak tracks. Jule Styne's "This Time" establishes the rapt mood, with Carter gliding on the buoyancy of the double basses. The title track, by Carter and Curtis Lundy, is a slow burn without words until almost nine minutes into this remarkable nine-and-a-half minute song. She reinvents the meanings of "Close Your Eyes" and "East Of The Sun." "September Song" is often sentimentalized. Here it becomes something stark and serious when Carter takes forever to breathe the opening line—the one about the long wait between May and December.

A major reason why this album sounds so alive is the work of engineer Joe Ferla. He does not recreate the deep, three-dimensional soundstage advocated by many audiophiles. Instead, he puts the listener in the front row, almost close enough to touch each player. Ferla provides an intimate experience of each instrument's detail and nuance, including the most pliant instrument in the band—Carter's voice.

How many singers can you name who have made one of their strongest recordings in their 66th year?
—Thomas Conrad

I'm Yours, You're Mine—This Time: *I'm Yours, You're Mine*; *Lonely House*; *Close Your Eyes*; *Useless Landscape*; *East Of The Sun*; *September Song*. (54:27)
Personnel—Carter, vocals; Mark Shim, tenor saxophone;

Andre Hayward, trombone; Xavier Davis, piano; Curtis Lundy (1, 2, 4-6), Matt Hughes (1, 3, 7), bass; Gregory Hutchinson, drums.



Jon Jang

Two Flowers On A Stem

Soul Note 121253

★★★★★

Masterfully blending his jazz influences (e.g., Mingus and Ellington) with his Chinese heritage and political awareness, pianist Jon Jang fashions a personal, uncompromising conception of jazz. Exotic and elegant, *Two Flowers On A Stem* takes Jang away from the large-scale settings of his Pan-Asian Arkestra, as he opts for the intimacy and warmth of a sextet packed with such high-powered players as saxophonist David Murray and flutist James Newton.

The performances of the established members of the group are predictably wonderful, but the wild card here is Chen Jiebing, who plays the traditional two-stringed erhu. Jiebing's erhu establishes many of Jang's folk-influenced themes, and the timbre of her instrument is truly unique, sounding plaintive, evocative and a bit spooky.

This is not "world music," per se. Instead,

Jang has released an enchanting synthesis of genres that sacrifices none of the swing or personal expression of jazz. An electrifying treatment of Mingus' "Meditations On Integration" contains episodes of highly empathic collective improvisation along with a blazing interchange between Murray (on bass clarinet) and Newton. What makes this CD so distinctive, and so memorable, is Jang's ability to find the ideal place within his sextet's "jazz" context for tradition-inspired Chinese elements. The eerily evocative sound of Jiebing's erhu intertwines beautifully with Jang's fragile piano melodies and the voices of flute, tenor sax and bass clarinet.

Two Flowers On A Stem would be worth hearing just for Newton's trademark devices and extended technique, and Murray, who pleads, mourns, swaggers and screams, each where appropriate.
—Jon Andrews

Two Flowers On A Stem—*Two Flowers On A Stem*; *Meditations On Integration*; *Eleanor Bumpurs*; *The Procession/Women Shaman Of Alishan*; *Variation On A Sorrow Song Of Mengjiang Nu*; *Butterfly Lovers Song*. (62:23)

Personnel—Jang, piano; James Newton, flute; David Murray, tenor saxophone and bass clarinet; Chen Jiebing, erhu; Santi Debriano, bass, gong; Jabali Billy Hart, drums.



Morrison/Fame/ Allison/Sidran

Tell Me Something The Songs Of Mose Allison

Verve 533 203

★★½

Great concept, good tune choices and Georgie Fame's three spots are gems, especially the mellow and meditative "Was," from wisely considered, late-period Mose. But will someone please tell Van Morrison he's singing out of tune? (And that it makes a difference.) Come on, guys. If you're going to pay tribute to a man who has been crafting ironic little masterpieces out of loaded phrases for four decades, have a little respect. The worst offenses are on ballads, particularly on the last note of the last song, "Perfect Moment," where Van is so far from Mose (who sings on two cuts) you can literally hear the "beats" of the dissonance between them. "I Don't Know Much" comes off like one of those TV specials, where the stars sing and dance badly—but it's all OK, because they're just stars having fun.

No doubt encouraged by the surprise success of his collaboration with Fame, *How Long*

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Has This Been Going On, which included two Allison tunes, Morrison has the spirit of this "feel good" music down, but he needs to get the letter, too. What a contrast between his blathering and the flutey, buoyant, emotionally connected singing of Fame, who has digested the pathos of the material and given it a lift of his own. "City Home," "Back On The Corner" and "Was" make you wish this had been an all-Georgie project. Sidran, whose mercury-breathed flips of phrase, sardonic delivery and dry, linear piano have always bordered on Allison impersonation, anyway, gets the inflections right, but there's something celebratory and show-bizzy in Ben that misses Allison's flat-out fatalism. Pee Wee Ellis' horn arrangements are tight and lively; his and Leo Green's tenor saxophone solos suitably sinful; Guy Barker smartly struts on trumpet. There are a couple of production oddities: No song times are given (perhaps to downplay the skimpy total of 35 minutes?) and the studio set-up on the title tune is so different from the others that it really jumps out at you.

—Paul de Barros

Tell Me Something—*One Of These Days; You Can Count On Me (To Do My Part); If You Live; Was; Look Here; City Home; No Trouble Livin'; Benediction; Back On The Corner; Tell Me Something; I Don't Want Much; News Nightclub; Perfect Moment.* (35:33)

Personnel—Van Morrison (1, 2, 8, 10-13), *Georgie Fame* (6, 8, 9), Mose Allison (11, 13), *Bed* Sidran (3, 5, 7, 8), vocals; Guy Barker, trumpet (1, 2, 9, 12); Leo Green (2), Pee Wee Ellis (9, 10, 12), tenor saxophone; Sidran (1-3, 5-10, 12), Allison (11, 13), piano; *Fame* (1-10, 12), Hammond organ; Robin Aspland, Wurlitzer piano (4); Alec Dankworth, bass; Ralph Salmans, drums; Morrison, harmonica (1); Ellis, horn arrangements (2, 9, 12).



Jack Sheldon

Jack Is Back!
Butterfly 7702

★★★

Jack Sheldon Sings
Butterfly 7701

★★★½

Jack Sheldon's husky, Louis Prima-like voice is a sound one must learn to appreciate. And I confess I still have a bit to learn, even after exposure to these two CDs on which his singing is the principal business at hand. Sheldon began in the '50s as a first-rate trumpeter on the Los Angeles scene, then developed into an all-around entertainer with acting, singing and

comedy gigs to his credit. In the context of his full range of talents, the singing assumes its more proper perspective.

He is certainly still a first-degree trumpet talent, and there's enough of it on display here to make these two CDs a solid middle-of-the-road offering, and a package his fans will enjoy. The *Grove Dictionary Of Jazz* tells us his trumpet is reminiscent of Miles Davis, but you won't know it here. These blue-chip standards are treated more in the Louis Armstrong tradition, with vocals and lyrical, often dramatic trumpet solos woven through a big-band fabric. "Hello Dolly" and "Mack The Knife" (L.A. singer Polly Podewell replaces Lotti Lenya in the lyric) are straight-out bows to Louis. And

Bunny Berigan hovers over "I Can't Get Started" as Sheldon fashions it into a magisterial salute to the trumpet legend.

The two collections share a common pop-standard premise and are not significantly different in approach or quality, with Tom Kubis providing nearly all the charts, except for a couple of Bill Holmans, a Bob Florence and Sheldon on *Jack Sheldon Sings*. "Lady Be Good" is a tight and swift Basie-ish run by Kubis that opens to some fine, though unidentified, tenor. *Jack Is Back!* has a couple of Sheldon songs ("Fool" with a fine Kubis chart, and "Too Blue") and a duet full of good fun on "How About You" with Merv Griffin, whose TV show Sheldon played for years. —John McDonough

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Personnel—Sheldon, trumpet and vocals; George Graham, Wayne Bergeron, Ron Stout, Stan Martin, trumpet; Alex Iles, Andy Martin, Mike Fahn, Bruce Wagner, trombone; Sal Lozano, Danny House, Tom Kubis, Jerry Pinter, Jennifer Hall, saxophones; Tom Ranier, piano; Trey Henry, bass; Ray Brinker, drums.

Jack Is Back!—There's No Fool Like An Old Fool; Here's That Rainy Day; Have You Met Miss Jones; A Ghost Of A Chance; Just In Time; Too Blue; Stars Fell On Alabama; How About You; Come Fly With Me; The Man I Love; Satin Doll; New York, New York. (53:59)

Personnel—Sheldon, trumpet and vocals; George Graham, Wayne Bergeron, Ron King, Stan Martin, trumpet; Alex Iles, Andy Martin, Bob McChesney, Bob Sanders, trombone; Sal Lozano, Mike Whitman, Bill Liston, Gordon Goodwin, Brian Williams, saxophones; Tom Ranier, piano; Trey Henry, bass; Ray Brinker, drums.



Klaus König Orchestra

Reviews

enja 9061

★★★½

Time Fragments

enja 8076

★★★★

Magazines should pay time and a half for Klaus König reviews. He is labor-intensive. You tear your hair out trying to follow the time-based schematic guides to the seven intricate structures that constitute *Time Fragments*. Even the listings for personnel and instrumentation are a pain in the ass. Yet, *Time Fragments*, for all its surreal juxtapositions, is child's play compared to *Reviews*. *Reviews* induces writer's block. Read on to learn why.

These two albums are Parts IV and V of a five-suite cycle. The first three sections, recorded between 1988 and 1992, are named *Times Of Devastation*, *At The End Of The Universe* and *The Song Of Songs*. König's vast ambition is not inconsistent with the deadpan self-parody of his grandiose titles. *Time Fragments* is seven experiments in the manipulation of time and motivic variation. *Reviews* is a 74-minute musical/narrative montage based on a libretto (spoken by David Moss and/or sung by the Bobs) put together exclusively out of quotations from reviews of König's work. The quotations come from both concert and

album reviews originally published in European and American magazines. The liner notes happily confess that the reviewers' words "are torn out of their original context, reconfigured, paraphrased or creatively embellished, and so fail to reflect the views of their authors." Tellingly, this most improbable of album concepts is dedicated to Frank Zappa.

It is helpful to hear *Time Fragments* before experiencing *Reviews*, because the earlier album establishes that König is much more than a comedian. *Time Fragments* is an academic dissertation on such subjects as the multidimensionality of musical time, the interactive possibilities of precise notation and improvisation, and the relationships between such esthetic/historical dichotomies as Henry Threadgill/Gustav Mahler and Scott Joplin/Maurice Ravel. Thankfully, it sounds like none of the above. It sounds like one fresh revelation after another. König's clean, clear writing draws a huge variety of colors, moods and velocities from his 12-piece ensemble. He also gets striking effects, like the segue from the subtle grace of "Once Upon A Time" (with Kenny Wheeler's molten-gold flugelhorn) to "Call That Going, Call That On" (with Frank Gratkowski's alto saxophone abrasions). Or like the moment in "Mean Wile," when you first hear the basic tune from which all seven "studies" are derived.

Reviews is unique in the recorded jazz canon. That König undertook such a project is astonishing; that he pulls it off is hilarious. Narrator David Moss booms out the critical clichés and mixed metaphors ("... the ideas move uncertainly and are rarely surprising ... the band performs marvelously, with precision and enthusiasm ... be warned: you can't tap your feet to this one ..."). The orchestra responds with either exaggerated examples that confirm the critics' complaints ("... even the basic ingredients are not particularly edifying ..."), or defiant riffs that contradict them ("... the band seemed pale, off-hand, stolid ..."). Meanwhile, while Moss hams it up, the Bobs turn appropriated journalistic phrases into the unlikeliest of shoo-bee-doo-bee refrains ("... he moves along a boundary—never crosses over; the tension comes from knowing he could ..."). When the Bobs sing "at times stylistically approaching the musical thinking of a Gil Evans," the ensemble slides into a perfect parody of a muted, somber Gil Evans figure. For the final track, "The Day After," the Bobs chirp "Good critic ... good critic" and "Bad critic ... bad critic" over the sound of a house pet panting.

The cleverness of *Reviews* is undeniable, but the joke gets old. The two straight instrumental pieces ("Mission To The Stars" and "Harry Laughs Still") come as welcome relief, because König and the ensemble and the strong soloists (Frank Gratkowski, Mark Feldman, John D'Earth) are allowed to shine through, sans verbiage.

As an elaborate act of revenge by a jazz musician against his critics, *Reviews* is without precedent—which brings us back to the writer's block, and the request for time and a half. This was a desperately difficult review to write. I kept seeing my words, grotesquely twisted, in Klaus König's next libretto.

—Thomas Conrad

Reviews—*Sniffing Attitudes*; *Harry Laughs*; *Who's That*

Guy?; Mission To The Stars; Multiple Choice; A Matter Of Taste; Tuba Boons; Harry Laughs Still; Black Polo Necks; Avantgarde Noise Pollution; Who Would Have Thought That; The Day After. (74:37)

Personnel—König, composer, conductor; David Moss, narrator; The Bobs (Janie Bob Scott, Matthew Bob Stull, Joe Bob Finetti, Richard Bob Greene), vocals; Reiner Winterschladen, trumpet; John D'Earth, trumpet, flugelhorn; Frank Gratkowski, alto saxophone, flute, piccolo flute; Matthias Schubert, tenor saxophone; Wollie Kaiser, soprano, tenor and bass saxophones, contrabass clarinet; Claudio Puntin, clarinet; Ray Anderson, Jörg Huke, trombone; Michel Massot, tuba; Mark Feldman, violin; Dieter Manderscheid, bass; Gerry Hemingway, drums.

Time Fragments—Waltzin' Over T'Yours; Once Upon A Time; Call That Going, Call That On; Mean Wile; Does Time Go By?; Later That Night That Knight Laid Her; Fine Nelly In Fin Alley. (54:03)

Personnel—König, conductor, composer; Kenny Wheeler, trumpet, flugelhorn; Reiner Winterschladen, trumpet; Frank Gratkowski, alto and soprano saxophones, flute; Matthias Schubert, tenor saxophone, oboe; Wollie Kaiser, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Robert Dick, flute, piccolo flute; Jörg Huke, trombone; Michel Godard, tuba; Mark Feldman, violin; Stefan Bauer, marimbaphone; Mark Dresser, bass; Gerry Hemingway, drums.



George Garzone

Four's And Two's
NYC 6024

★★★★

Steve Grover

In The G Zone
SGM 1

★★★½

Remember the two-tenor blowing session? With *Four's And Two's*, George Garzone does his part to revive that neglected format. He enlists as his counterpart Joe Lovano, whose relationship with Garzone goes back to their days at Berklee, where Garzone considered Lovano a role model.

Part of the fun is contrasting Garzone's and Lovano's approaches to the material, made up largely of Garzone compositions and vehicles for blowing. Garzone favors the higher register of the tenor sax, and he presents an airy tone and exceptionally fluent phrasing while flying through "One Time" and "Have You Met Miss Jones." He plays mostly straightahead, not pushing the envelope as he might with his trio, the Fringe.

Lovano continues to develop his distinctive language for the tenor, comparatively gruff and very colorful. His exchanges with Garzone on

the title track and on the duet "In A Sentimental Mood" are highlights of the CD. The tenors benefit from a solid rhythm section including Joey Calderazzo on piano and Bill Stewart on drums. Listeners who investigate *Four's And Two's* to hear Lovano will carry away a new or renewed appreciation of Garzone's strengths as well.

Garzone's tenor is a primary voice on Steve Grover's *In The G Zone*, a promising introduction to the Maine-based drummer/composer who won the 1994 Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz/BMI Jazz Composers competition. He's a sensitive, subtle accompanist and an interesting but infrequent soloist. Grover skillfully creates settings that allow his soloists to shine, as on the melancholy "Ballad For

C" and the bright "The World Is Forever Changing," which showcase flugelhorn work from Dave Ballou and piano from Tim Ray, respectively. With its variety of lineups and styles, *In The G Zone* is diverse, but uneven. The most intriguing combination is the trio of Garzone, Grover and guitarist Tony Gaboury, which plays on "Song Of Hope," a tender ballad with a warm, soulful solo from Garzone. (SGM Records: 11 Bowman St., Farmingdale ME 04344)

—Jon Andrews

Four's And Two's—*One Time; Tutti Italiani; Have You Met Miss Jones; In Memory Of Leanne Nichols; The Mingus That I Knew; Four's And Two's; To My Papa; Snow Place Like Home; In A Sentimental Mood.* (60:57)

Personnel—Garzone, Joe Lovano, tenor (1-3, 5, 6, 9) and soprano saxophones (8); Joey Calderazzo, piano; John Lockwood, bass; Bill Stewart, drums.

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In The G Zone—*Twelve Bars Repeated; Ballad For C; Deep Blue Z; The World Is Forever Changing; MJC; Spherical; New Waltz; Song Of Hope; Untitled; In The G Zone.* (74:26 minutes)

Personnel—Grover, drums; George Garzone, tenor saxophone (1, 3, 5-10); Tony Gaboury, guitar (1, 3, 6-10); Dave Ballou, trumpet (1, 5, 7, 10), flugelhorn (2); Tim Ray, piano (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 10); Dave Clark, bass (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 10).

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Don Byron

Bug Music
Nonesuch 79438

★★★★

Don Byron Quintet

No-Vibe Zone
Knitting Factory Works 191

★★★½

President's Breakfast

Bar.B.Que Dali
Disclexia 028

★★★

From swing to space, from classical to klezmer, no jazz player covers more territory than clarinetist Don Byron. Three recent releases find him all over the stylistic map: On *Bug Music*, he faithfully replicates the music of Duke Ellington, late-'30s combo leader John Kirby and loony tunesmith Raymond Scott; on *No-Vibe Zone*, he leads his

own quintet through a searching set of post-modern explorations; and on *Bar.B.Que Dali*, he joins the San Francisco Bay Area band President's Breakfast in a buzzing, grinding investigation of industrial textures.

Bug Music could be construed as Byron's response to Wynton Marsalis; to wit, you don't have to be a neo-con to play old transcriptions. In fact, Byron's recreations of early Ellingtonia ("Cotton Club Stomp," "The Dicty Glide") are livelier and more authentic than Marsalis', perhaps because Byron shares Duke's sense of humor. Oddly enough, his note-perfect copies of Scott's semi-jazz, semi-classical quintet recordings, widely known from vintage cartoon soundtracks, are stiffer and less swinging than the zany originals. Most revelatory is the music of Kirby, who was influenced by both Ellington and Scott but who, despite his popularity, was dissed by critics and forgotten by historians. In Byron's hands, tunes like "Frasquita Serenade" and "Bounce Of The Sugarplum Fairy" bubble with broad wit, offering a delectably off-kilter alternative to sober-sided traditionalism.

Slipping and sliding between avant garde and mainstream, *No-Vibe Zone* might have been titled *Now He Swings, Now He Squawks*. Recorded live at New York's Knitting Factory, it lacks the focus of a studio session, with several numbers lasting 15 minutes or more. The improvisations go inside and out, but mostly they just go on, without enough structure to make them cohere. Pianist Uri Caine and guitarist David Gilmore flutter from soothing harmony to squalling noise, while drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith bashes out high-energy rhythms. Byron supplies most of the invention, cleverly elaborating on themes as abstruse as Ornette Coleman's "WRU" or as mellifluous as Johnny Mercer's "Tangerine" in timbres alternately squeaky and clean. Dropping quotes from Scott Joplin rags and cowboys songs, he finds humor amid the driest abstractions.

On *Bar.B.Que Dali*, Byron appears as a guest with the rhythm section of President's Breakfast, an avant-dub band on the order of Tackhead or Material. For this collaboration, instigated by Breakfast's drummer/leader (and Byron's former classmate) Click Dark, the group forsakes funky rhythms in favor of improvised atmospherics. Using conventional instruments as well as prepared piano and assorted electronic gizmos, the musicians chortle, groan and bleat, creating Edgard Varèse-like soundscapes that at times suggest a vacuum cleaner at a ping-pong tournament or a Nintendo game in a barnyard. Byron plays lead on tracks like "That'll Show 'Em" and "Escalators" but mostly bumbles bass clarinet. The music sustains interest without much recourse to melody, harmony or tempo, but a little of it goes a long way. —Larry Birnbaum

Bug Music—*The Dicty Glide; Frisquita Serenade; St. Louis Blues; Wandering Where; Bounce Of The Sugarplum Fairy; Charlie's Prelude; Royal Garden Blues; Siberian Sleighride; The Penguin; The Quintet Plays Carmen; Powerhouse; Tobacco Auctioneer; War Dance For Wooden Indians; Cotton Club Stomp; Blue Bubbles; SNIDOR.* (51:06)

Personnel—Byron, clarinet, baritone saxophone (1, 14), vocals (4); Steve Wilson, alto saxophone (1-7, 14); Bob DeBellis, tenor saxophone (1, 8-14); Charles Lewis (1-3, 5, 6, 8-14), Steve Bernstein (1, 4, 7, 14), James Zollar (1, 14), trumpet; Craig Harris, trombone (1, 14); Uri Caine, piano, vocals (4); Paul Meyer, banjo (1, 14); David



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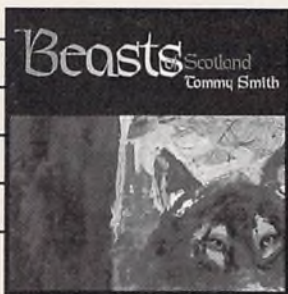
Gilmore, guitar (16); Kenny Davis, bass (1-14, 16); Pheroan akaLaff 1, 14), Billy Hart (2-7, 16), Joey Baron (8-13), drums; Dean Bowman, vocals (14).

No-Vibe Zone—WRU:SEX/WORK; Next Love: The Allure Of Entanglement; Tangerine: Tuskegee Strutter's Ball. (67:51)

Personnel—Byron, clarinet; David Gilmore, guitar; Uri Caine, piano; Kenny Davis, bass; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums.

Bar. B. Que Dali—That'll Show 'Em; Genie-oose Waves; Stratospheres; It's Hot; Dig Down Deep; Bit My Tongue; Ththtptph: Escalators; Macon Book; Porcupines And Grapetruit; Prindle Goth; Take 5.2; It's Too Hot Not Ta. (60:18)

Personnel—Byron, clarinet, bass clarinet, percussion, radio; Click Dark, drums, percussion; Dred Scott, piano, prepared piano, percussion; Nate Pitts, bass, effects; Will Bernard, guitar, prepared guitar, effects.



Tommy Smith

Beasts Of Scotland

Honest 5054

★★★★

Just 29, Smith the Scot remains a chrysalis. He's still surrounded by a strong skin of Coltrane, but it's one he's definitely shedding, and a new, singular man seems sure to emerge. Here, the saxophonist/composer, writing to poems about animal life by acclaimed Scottish poet Edwin Morgan, offers atmospheric moods that shift deftly to the unexpected. His compositional sense turns his sextet into an orchestra.

"Spider" begins with slow, hammered beats—you can see a tarantula taking its measured steps. But then the work moves to medium-uptempo and swings rigorously. Smith's not done, though: The tune concludes with soft, orchestral passages. "Seal" is almost new age-ish at the outset, then takes on a free-based impressionistic cast. "Golden Eagle" employs a tension-release rhythmic format that sets up fine solos from the leader and his ardent crew.

Smith's some saxman as well. Possessing a shining, powerful tone and a masterful technique, he creates melodies, not riffs, even if the tempo is outrageous, as on "Wildcat." Barker is a trickster, sliding around the beat but swinging, a sort of boppish Tim Hagans. Hamilton has punch, and ideas, and the others reveal no less. —Zan Stewart

Beasts Of Scotland—Golden Eagle; Salmon; Midge; Wolf; Red Deer; Gannet; Conger Eel; Spider; Seal; Wildcat. (77:37)

Personnel—Smith, tenor and soprano saxophones; Guy Barker, trumpet, flugelhorn; Andy Panayi, flute, alto saxophone; Steve Hamilton, piano, synthesizer; Alec Dankworth, bass; Tom Gordon, drums, percussion.



Marcus Printup

UNveiled

Blue Note 37302

★★½

When Ezra Pound implored artists to "Make it new!" early in this century, jazz had barely been invented. But no other art form imposes Pound's imperative upon its practitioners as fiercely as jazz. When jazz fails to surprise, it loses its sting. Music that is truly improvised must live on the moment's leading edge.

Marcus Printup is a very fast young trumpet player with clean articulation and a sweet, glossy sound. Everything he plays implies a polished, intelligent plan. But every decision he makes feels expected when it arrives. Paradoxically, Printup is most relevant on older pieces like Miles Davis' "Dig" and Benny

Golson's "Stablemates." They contain quick tempos, tricky keys and hairpin turns. He throws them both down without breaking a sweat, and it's fun. But his own tunes are generic. "Eclipse" sounds like any one of 10 oblique Miles modes. "When Forever Is Over"—a fair title for a song about the end of a relationship—could be one of a dozen forgettable love songs.

When Printup plays, every break, every phrase ending, every flourish, every run, every resolution feels vaguely familiar. Jazz is the most flexible of disciplines. It can tolerate false starts, rough edges, blind alleys. But its power to hold us rapt is blunted if either of two qualities is missing: a sense of discovery or the pressure of passion. Printup is borrowing rather than inventing himself, and he does not sound deeply committed to the process.

The problem is not that Printup's work is based on traditional forms. Tenor saxophonist Stephen Riley (who was 19 when this recording was made) comes out of Lester Young's driest evanescence. But he uses Young to establish the legitimacy of his own context, then evolves it. His solo on "When Forever Is Over" is striking in its languid, whispery decadence. Watch for him: He already has a fresh take on history. —Thomas Conrad

UNveiled—Eclipse; When Forever Is Over; Dig; Say It Again; Leave Your Name And Number; UNveiled; Stablemates; Soulful J; M & M; Yes Or No; Amazing Grace. (64:14)

Personnel—Printup, trumpet; Stephen Riley, tenor saxophone; Marcus Roberts, piano; Reuben Rogers, bass; Jason Marsalis, drums.

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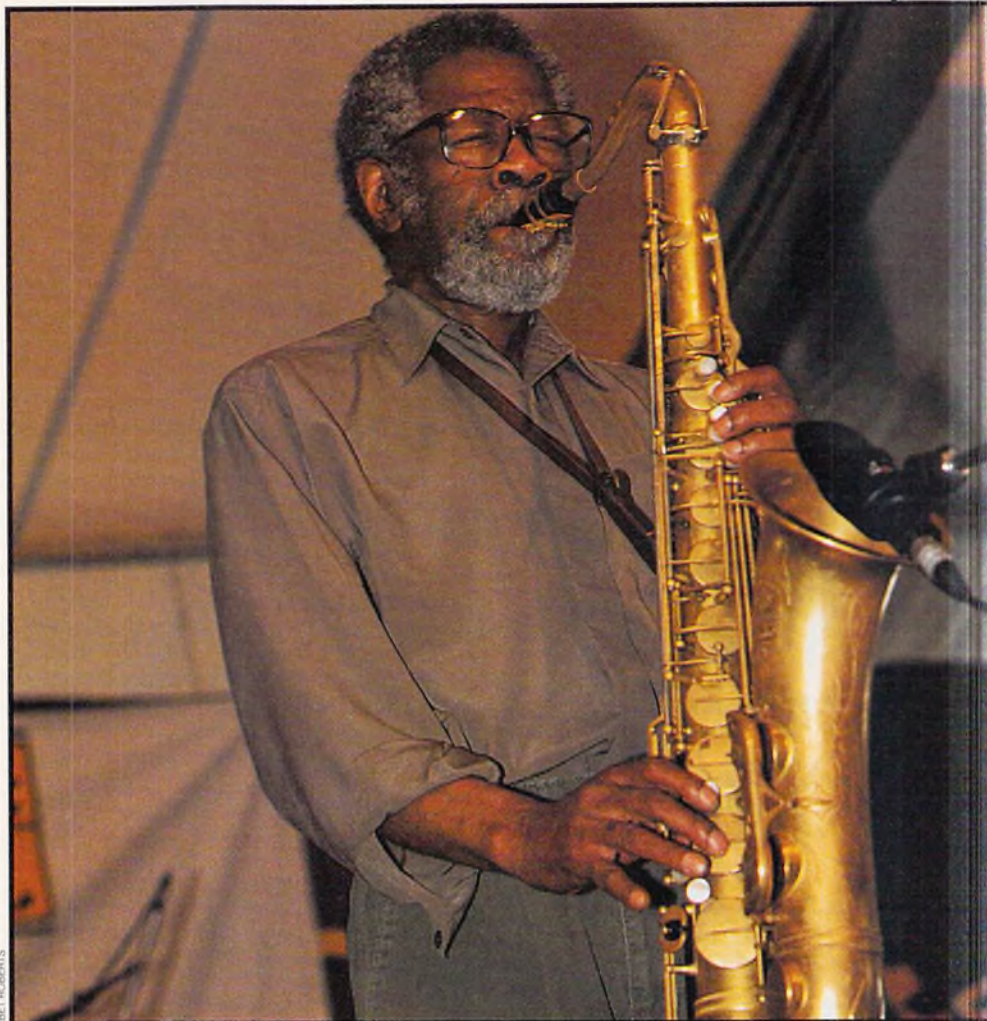
by Frank-John Hadley

For many of us, few things in life are more exhilarating than a crackerjack big band swinging with all its might. Riffs rush through ear canals and implode in our heads. We feel thrillingly alive, as though hurled upside-down at 60 miles an hour through a 100-foot loop on that wild rollercoaster. The calm breezes of the reeds and brass can get to you as well. The recent releases discussed below aim to trigger the adrenaline and/or pacify the soul.

Joe Henderson Big Band (Verve 533 451; 60:09: ★★★★★) Thirty years since his first rehearsal band, Henderson finally has recorded an album's worth of his favorite songs with a big band (actually two ensembles packed with all-stars—see Page 22). The consummate tenor master takes bold, consistently passionate improvisations everywhere, his distinctive sound packed with a very special blend of animation and relaxation. "Black Narcissus" and "Chelsea Bridge" are where his lyrical bent is revealed in all its noble splendor. "A Shade Of Jade" features Joe sparring with other musicians. Freddie Hubbard, Chick Corea, Christian McBride and other members of the big band execute the luminous arrangements of Henderson, Slide Hampton, Bob Belden and Michael Philip Mossman with obvious delight at being part of the special proceedings.

Roy Weigand Big Band: *Whatever Floats Your Boat Bone* (Sea Breeze 2081; 67:19: ★★★½) Trombonist Weigand, an alumnus of the Herman and Kenton orchestras, steers his 20-piece band through trumpeter Howie Shear's cheerfully confident arrangements of "Angel Eyes," "Summertime," "Spain" and others. The West Coast-based band has a large and glossy sound, its ensembles are in balance, and the soloists are effective, especially Shear, big band stalwart Jack Nimitz on bari, and the leader, who improvises with a warm, round tone. The drummer driving Weigand's gang is the undervalued Bob Leatherbarrow.

The United Women's Orchestra: *United Women's Orchestra* (UWO 9601; 53:53: ★★★½) Exploding any lingering stereotypes about Europeans and women as second-class jazz citizens, Hazel Leach and Christina Fuchs' modernist orchestra of 18 musicians (and, in spots, singer Francine Diddierens) handles original repertoire with a self-possession belying their recent formation out of workshops in Holland. The forward-looking music, much more than a conduit for able soloists, impresses most for the muted glow of the interestingly voiced brass and low-register



Joe Henderson: consistently passionate

reeds. The resulting soft pastel colors give the arrangements an alluring emotional ambiguity. (Contact address: Boulevard Heuvelink 194, 6828 KX Arnhem, The Netherlands.)

Maynard Ferguson: *One More Trip To Birdland* (Concord Jazz 4729; 53:04: ★★★) Father Time has yet to frown on trumpeter Ferguson, who still launches his Holton MF Horn into distant galaxies with disciplined abandon. He and his little big band of talented collegians, Big Bop Nouveau, entertain here with all the exuberant fun they can work up, racing through new arrangements of "Birdland" and "Manteca" and enlivening two friendly compositions from trombonist/guitarist Tom Garling, "You Got It" and "The Vibe." Sax player Matt Wallace takes an unexpectedly convincing turn as singer on the popular standard "She Was Too Good To Me."

Dee Dee Bridgewater: *Prelude To A Kiss—The Duke Ellington Album* (Philips 446 717; 52:18: ★★) Bridgewater tries to make the most of the interpretive oppor-

tunities offered in the classic songbook of Ellington while supported in the studio by the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, several jazz notables and a couple of Third Worlders. But the lightly felicitous nature of her singing encroaches on the cloying and theatrical. The strings take things deep into sentimental goo. The bombastic instrumental "Night Creature," 15 minutes long, sounds like it belongs on a *Martini Madness* compilation CD. Ellington as redesigned for rich folks.

NDR Bigband: *Bravissimo* (ACT 9232; 72:41: ★★★½) The tremendous shouting power of the Nord Deutscher Rundfunk Bigband is generously displayed on this collection of a dozen tracks recorded between 1980 and '95. Excitement generated by sections fits within the arrangements, stimulating soloists Howard Johnson (playing bari on "Blue Monk") and Christof Lauer (tenor on "Descent") as well as guests Johnny Griffin ("The Cat") and Albert Mangelsdorff ("Supraconductivity"). The band almost tramples Gary Burton ("Country Roads"), but they do chill out for the at-times jittery musings of Chet Baker ("Django").

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BEYOND

Diamonds In The Dust

by Dan Ouellette

Like it or not, so-called acid/dance/new jazz is not about to vanish. In fact, a few years from now it will be fully recognized as one more vital species under the jazz sun. Steeped in grooves and charged by improvisational energy, this increasingly popular music is helping to school young generations in the jazz tradition.

Us3: *Broadway & 52nd* (Blue Note 30027; 61:19: ★★★½) The groove is nonstop on Us3's latest. Once again producer/mixer Geoff Wilkinson dips into the Blue Note vault to borrow beat samples, rappers KCB and Shabaam Sahdeeq wax eloquent with news from the street and a rotating crew of musicians fills the gaps with strong improvisational flights. Highlights include trumpeter Alexander Pope Norris delivering a fiery solo on "Come On Everybody (Get Down)" and Ed Jones uncoiling sinuous soprano saxophone lines on "Snakes."

Ronny Jordan: *Light To Dark* (4th & Broadway/Island 162 531 060; 52:57:★★) Uninspired soloing, too much glossy synth and too many soft-and-warm concessions mar the latest outing by mellow-toned guitarist Ronny Jordan, one of acid jazz's early instrumental heroes. Even though the bass is phat enough to beat down several thick walls, the groove rarely gets wide. "The Law" stands as the most noteworthy track because of its haunting rhythm and Jordan's low mixed, harsh-edged guitar lines. Otherwise, dig out an old breezin' recording by George Benson, who at least performed his own vocals.

Bluezeum: *Portrait Of A Groove* (Telarc 83331; 51:42: ★★★½) This impressive sample-free session of "jazzzoetry" and "smoove" music meshes hip-hop vibes with jazz sensibilities. While vocalists Adwin Brown and Vann Johnson sing in the pop/r&b zone, the band drives the funky-to-swing beat and pushes the jazz agenda with inventive solos. The surprise track arrives at the close with the avant-inflected "Soundscape," where free, spacey improvisational interplay eclipses the dance rhythms.

Bop City: *Hip Strut* (Hip Bop 8013; 44:49: ★★★½) The scales are tipped in favor of jazz on this hip-hop project as compositions by Jackie McLean, Tadd Dameron, Bud Powell, Nat Adderley and Ahmad Jamal provide fertile soil for three rap lyricists. Their so-so rhymes don't dominate. The musicians do. Bop City co-leader David McMurray blows with saxophone soul and gusto and contributes his own buoyant composition, "Bopcity." The rest of the band, especially guest guitarist David Fiuczynski, get lots of room to spread their wings. Recommended for jazz neophytes.



David Fiuczynski of Bop City: fertile soil

Jazz Powers 2: *The Sound Of London* (Instinct 339; 54:40: ★½) London gave birth to the acid-jazz movement. But based on this compilation, what's going down there now is a lame excuse for 21st-century jazz that's more retro (70s fusion and contemporary lite) than forward-looking. Unobtrusive solos, disco-y beats and polite funk relegate this disc to background mush. Glimmers include Double Visions' "Chunky Funky Vibe" and saxophonist Mike Smith's "Budda Bee Budda Boom."

Mushroom Jazz (OM Records 005; 45:24: ★★★) For a twist on the acid jazz trip, there's the steady, hypnotic stream of mushroom jazz mixed by San Francisco-Chicago DJ Mark Farina. The jazz here mostly serves as background coloring for the mesmerizing dance beats Farina concocts with his scratches, loops and samples. Catchy riffs and vamps occasionally rise to the top of the mind-expanding, multi-layered mix. Highlight: Farina's groovy mix of Lalomie Washburn's bluesy "Music Use It." For the adventurous, *Mushroom Jazz* includes a second CD-ROM disc for creating your own funky mix.

Better Daze: *One Street Over* (Ubiquity 017; 62:16: ★★★½) An abundance of jazz-infused grooves recommend the debut disc by Better Daze, an innovative San Francisco-based team helmed by multi-instrumentalist Paul Sriver and keyboardist/turntable ace Andrew Jervis. They offset a shortage of instrumental virtuosity with a variety of rich sonic textures, fine vocals by various guests and global rhythms that range from funk (the catchy "Concrete") to Latin (the cooking "New Moon Mamba").

The Rebirth Of Cool Four—On Higher Sound (4th & Broadway/Island 162 531 074; 77:14 ★★) While this is volume four of the commercially successful acid-jazz/new-groove compilation series, only half of these 15 dance-oriented tracks can fairly be linked to jazz. A couple diamonds in the dust: the remarkable tempo-shifting musical pastiche "To Forgive But Not Forget" by Outside and the loping, whimsical "Surfin'" by Ernest Ranglin. **DB**

REISSUES

Sessionophilia

by John Corbett

Aficionados fall into two basic camps when it comes to jazz recordings. First, there are the discocentrics: a species of listener that treats each record's release as the prime event, loves the object as a cultural artifact, and lingers over the sequence of tracks, original mix and cover design. Then there are the sessionophiles: a category of fan that considers the studio or concert context the main to-do, desperately hunts down unissued tracks and alternative takes to complete the picture of a recording session.

Particularly with their wonderful Blue Note compilations, Mosaic plays to the sessionophiles. While they may not sport—or for that matter, even reproduce—the original covers, these boxed-sets come designed for the historically scrupulous, with copious extra material, recordings plotted out by session in chronological order and with lots of great photos of each specific date by Blue Note lensman Francis Wolff.

The Complete Blue Note/UA Curtis Fuller Sessions (Mosaic 3-166; 73:16/59:10/59:44: ★★★★★½) Detroit-born trombonist Curtis Fuller may have initially been enamored of bebop pioneer J.J. Johnson, but his sound couldn't have been much different: a thick-toned, timbrally rich player, he was less concerned with the speed-for-speed's-sake mentality than in crafting coherent, tuneful, sometimes heavily quotational solos. In the two years from 1957-'59, Fuller led four solid sessions for Blue Note and one for United Artists, all spring-fed from the mount of hard-bop. Although the Mosaic box includes only one previously unreleased track, the records themselves have either been out of print for eons or have only been available as Japanese imports. In addition to releasing the first three of Fuller's records (*The Opener*, *Bone & Bari* and *Curtis Fuller Vol. 3*, the last of which is erroneously listed in the Mosaic set as *Curtis Fuller-Art Farmer*) in stereo for the first time ever, the set includes *Two Bones*, which was never released outside of Japan.

Most of Fuller's records coupled him with one other horn. Lovers of the deep sax will especially appreciate *Bone & Bari*, which pairs him with baritonist Tate Houston, locking together over a perfect rhythm section (Paul Chambers on bass, Art Taylor on drums and frequent Fuller collaborator Sonny Clark on piano). *The Opener* joins the trombonist with tenor saxist Hank Mobley—"Oscalypso" places the two over an ultra-funky Chambers bassline—while *Vol. 3* very effectively teams him up with Farmer's lithe



Curtis Fuller: spring-fed from the mount of hard-bop

trumpet. The final sparring partner for Fuller is fellow-boneman Slide Hampton on *Two Bones*, a record originally designed to feature Bob Brookmeyer on a twin valve-trombone concept, an idea (according to the liner notes) rejected by Blue Note on account of the latter's skin color.

The extremely rare UA record *Sliding Easy* groups Fuller with Mobley and trumpeter Lee Morgan, pianist Tommy Flanagan, drummer Elvin Jones and bassist Chambers; it's a remarkably different sounding session (no Rudy Van Gelder signature here), still killin', with arrangements by Benny Golson and Gigi Gryce.

The Complete Blue Note Sam Rivers Sessions (Mosaic 3-167; 69:20/66:42/62:24: ★★★★★½) As well as playing on records by Tony Williams, Larry Young, Bobby Hutcherson and Andrew Hill, multiple reed player and flautist Sam Rivers led four sessions for Blue Note between 1964 and 1967. Three of them came out at the time: *Fuschia Swing Song*, *Contours* and *A New Conception*, while the final session, *Dimensions And Extensions*, was issued a decade later as part of a two-LP set under Andrew Hill's name.

These four dates are certainly among Rivers' crowning achievements. Fiery, intricate and open, they anticipate the subsequent years he spent fostering the so-called "loft scene" in New York, but their structural integrity distinguishes them from the concurrent ESP-style expressionist free-jazz. *Fuschia Swing Song* ('64) features Williams on drums and Ron Carter on bass, with the ever-wonderful Jaki Byard on terse piano and Rivers on tenor sax exclusively. "Luminous Monolith" (presented here with an excellent alternate take) is a total burner; Rivers blows a fearsome solo, and the cut's unusually placed rhythm-section drop-outs increase its tension-and-release drama. Three different alternate takes of "Downstairs Blues Upstairs" are included, perfect for A/B-ing with the released version.

Rivers' *Contours* ('65) quintet features bassist Carter, trumpeter Freddie Hubbard,

pianist Herbie Hancock and drummer Joe Chambers playing outward-bound but hard-swinging music consisting of melodically and formally complex Rivers-penned tunes. Alongside Hubbard's quick, lively trumpet, Rivers plays incisive soprano on "Point Of Many Returns," and he turns to flute (Hubbard muted) on "Euterpe" and is back to tenor on the fascinating "Dance Of The Tripedal" and "Mellifluous Cacophony." *Dimensions An Extensions* ('67) utilizes a denser front line—James Spaulding on alto sax and flute, Donald Byrd on trumpet, Julian Priester on trombone—with Steve Ellington on drums and a young Cecil McBee on bass. Again, Rivers' compositions are

spellbinding; he breaks things up in unorthodox ways, providing room for solos but is acutely attentive to the overall shape of a piece. His soprano solo on "Paen" compellingly extends the implications of Coltrane. But most revealing is perhaps Rivers' all-standards session, ironically titled *A New Conception* ('66), a lean date, still full of flame-throwing horns and rhythmic energy, but thoroughly steeped in the tradition of straightahead, changes-based jazz.

Flashback: About his decision to make a record of standards, Rivers recalls: "I've always looked at music as adding to my experiences. I came up in standards, the rabbit into the briar patch, so I wanted to tap into that aspect. I had lots of compositions of my own—I'm a composer 18 hours a day. My classical training is as extensive as my jazz; Schönberg was like elevator music to me by then. But I'd also learned all the tunes in the fake book with interesting changes."

Rivers stipulates that he wasn't interested in simply blowing free over the top of the changes, but thoroughly exploring them: "I'm a pianist—I learned all my changes on the piano. Dizzy Gillespie used to say: 'Sam, you're one of the only musicians I know who plays *all* of the changes!' I'm playing bar-by-bar—you can always learn something new about any changes."

Drummer Joe Chambers has an unpleasant recollection of the Rivers *Contours* date. "I got my drums stolen on the way to that session," he recalls. "I was in a five-story walkup in a not-too-high-class neighborhood. By the time I got my snare drum down, the rest of my set was gone. I had to scramble and get another set, which came from Jimmy Cobb; and the sessions I made immediately after that for Blue Note were on rented drums." **DB**

Initial **Down Beat** ratings:

- *The Opener*: ★★★ (12/26/57 issue)
- *Sliding Easy*: ★★★ (1/7/60)
- *Contours*: ★★★★★½ (4/6/67)
- *A New Conception*: ★★★★★½ (4/4/68)

BLINDFOLD TEST

JANUARY 1997

James Moody

by Dave Holland

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.

It comes as a surprise to hear James Moody say, "I don't like playing in big bands." Having entered the national jazz scene in the '40s as part of Dizzy Gillespie's big band, he adds, "I don't have that feeling and I don't read that much music except with my own group." But aside from his work in Dizzy's bands both big and small—and in events such as the recreation of Dizzy's big band at last fall's Chicago Jazz Festival—this multi-reed player's career has been set in combos.

Still adventurous after all these years on alto and tenor saxes as well as flute, Moody will read a ballad passionately but without sentimentality, or twist and turn its melody and harmony.

Moody's most recent recordings are *Moody's Party: Live At The Blue Note* (Telarc) and *Young At Heart* (Warner Bros.), a tribute to Frank Sinatra on which Moody sings the title track.

Jane Bunnett

"Pannonica" (from *The Water Is Wide, Evidence, 1993*) Bunnett, *flute*; Don Pullen, *piano*; Kieran Overs, *bass*.

I've got mixed emotions. For a hot minute I thought it might be Frank Wess [because of] the vibrato and sound, then it changed. I don't think Frank would put that thing on the end. And then, damn, I thought it was Elise Woods. One thing for sure, I know it wasn't Hubert [Laws] and it wasn't James Newton. I have mixed emotions about this group. I have to say 2½ stars or 3 stars.

Jesse Davis & James Carter

"Moten Swing" (from *Kansas City, Verve, 1995*) soloists: Davis, *alto saxophone*; Carter, *tenor saxophone*.

Whoever the alto player was, he likes Phil Woods and somebody like Bob Wilber. At one point, the tenor player sounded like Buddy Tate, but then he went off somewhere else. In the last part, the vibrato sounded like Zoot Sims.

DH: Does it sound like an old recording to you or something new?

It sounded old to me, say like when Zoot [Sims] and Al [Cohn] played, but it could be some young guys just playing that. For the alto player, the way he was playing, 3 or 3½ stars. He was swinging, playing what he was feeling. The band thing didn't move me at all. The tenor player was OK. You can tell he wanted to play more when he growled like that. I guess he really wasn't finished, but what can you do when you only have eight bars?

Either/Orchestra

"The Brunt" (from *The Brunt, Accurate, 1994*) Curtis Hasselbring, *composer*; Russ Gershon, *tenor saxophone*; Charles Kohlhase, *baritone saxophone*; Chris Taylor, *keyboards*.

Sounds to me like somebody that just likes [scats even, unswinging tones], that rhythm and the major scale [scats]. Like something from a movie, something very chaotic. You can't sit down and listen to that and feel mellowed out, tranquil. It's like jumping from one language to another: a little French, a little German, a little Italian. I give this guy credit to notate the thing



to get the sound that he wanted, but the sound isn't killing me—maybe it is. I'll give them 1 for putting it down. That takes a lot of work.

Lucky Thompson

"Dancing Sunbeam" (from *Tricotism, Impulse!, 1956*) Thompson, *tenor saxophone*; Skeeter Best, *guitar*; Oscar Pettiford, *bass*.

That sounds like Lucky Thompson. Lucky was bad. He could play some stuff, and that was a good while back. He didn't take anything from anybody from a standpoint of all he wanted was to be a man and play. I'm sorry to have to bring race into it, but because of the race thing, he's a bag person now in Seattle, because he wouldn't take any crap from anybody. 5 stars for Lucky.

Mario Bauza & The Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra

"Zambai" (from *944 Columbus, Messidor, 1993*) Bauza, *leader/composer*; soloists: Enrique Fernandez, *flute*; Manny Duran, *flugelhorn*.

I don't want to say Tito Puente; I mean this arrangement is hip, but Tito's band is hipper than that. Could that have been Mario Bauza's band? Mario is bad. He influenced Dizzy a lot. For Mario man, 5 stars; for his band, 3.

GRP All-Star Band

"Some Other Blues" (from *All Blues, GRP, 1994*) soloists: Chuck Findley, *trumpet*; Bob Mintzer, *tenor saxophone*; Nelson Rangel, *flute*; Russell Ferrante, *piano*; Tom Scott, *arranger*.

That's a Coltrane composition. I don't know who the tenor player was, but he sounded beautiful. This sounded like one of those school bands but with professional soloists. It sounded good, man, really good. 5 stars. The flute on top, that's nice.

I don't care who you are, musicians feel things differently. OK, the younger musician will feel something different than the older one. Not saying it's not good, because it is. I remember when I was coming up, I heard older people saying these young guys, they play too many notes. I don't think anyone has a license to say how many notes a person should play. Because if a young person can play fleetingly and he can play and then has to do that, let him do that. As he grows he will change and do what he has to do. I said when I get older, I'm never going to tell a young kid, you play too many notes. No, you play as many notes as you want, because that is your way of growing. You don't tell a young colt, don't run and jump around and run into the fence. He does that. After that, he becomes a champion. See what I mean? **DB**