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**LES PAUL &
PAT MARTINO**

CYRUS CHESTNUT

BELA FLECK

**CLASSIC INTERVIEW:
SONNY SHARROCK**

**BLINDFOLD TEST:
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Agony And The Ecstasy

To the naked eye, Les Paul and Pat Martino share little more than a love for their respective guitars. Dig a little, and one finds a plethora of common ground, chief among them a shared personal history and ongoing struggles with mortality. Jim Macnie peers into the home of the legendary guitar craftsman to find two geniuses whose love of the music triumphs over adversity.

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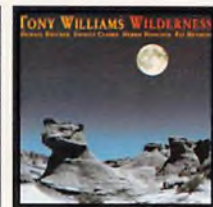
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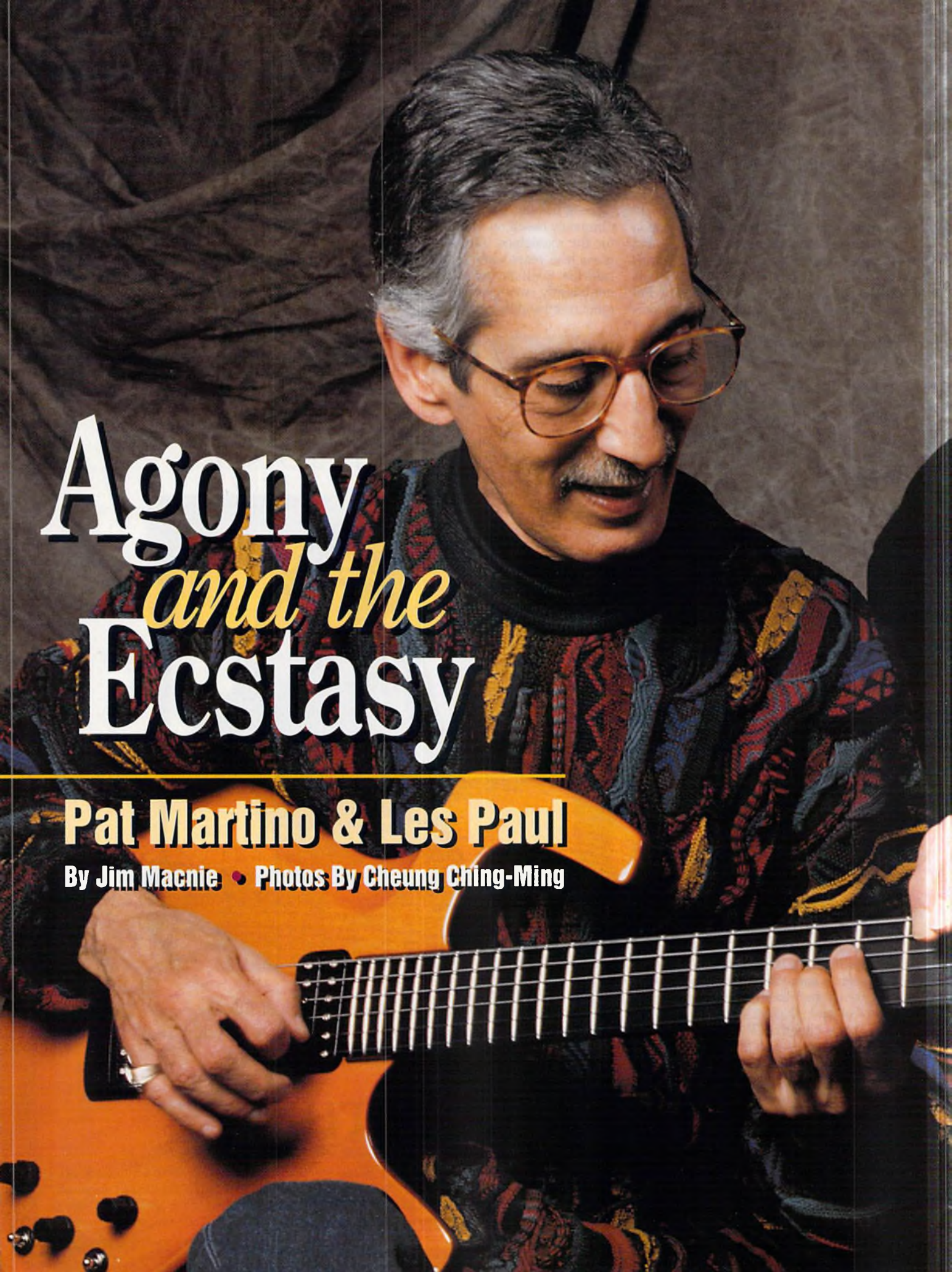


Tony Williams



Ellery Eskelin

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A close-up photograph of Pat Martino, an older man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a patterned sweater. He is playing a Les Paul electric guitar. The background is a dark, textured fabric.

Agony *and the* Ecstasy

Pat Martino & Les Paul

By Jim Macnie • Photos By Cheung Ching-Ming



There have to be a few parallels in place when Down Beat selects its double-interview subjects. In Les Paul and Pat Martino, we've found a pair of individualists from entirely different jazz generations who not only share a mastery of the same instrument, but whose lives have intermittently crossed paths for more than four decades.

They're pals, participants in a relationship that began when Pat's father took his grade-school son from Philadelphia to Atlantic City to meet the pop star who not only played the hell out of, but indeed invented, the solid-body electric guitar. Martino (then Pat Azzara) was impressing many in his South Philly community with an improvising prowess much deeper than that displayed by an ordinary child. A veteran of radio, TV and records, Paul was there entertaining crowds with his partner and wife, Mary Ford. The meeting was memorable, as you'll hear.

Pat went home with a blessing and some crucial inspiration. Martino left school in 10th grade because his capabilities on the instrument were immense, and his reputation on the scene



“When I got married, the first thing I told my wife was that I loved two things: her and the instrument. I have a way of communicating to people that I can’t find in the English language, but it’s in my guitar.” —Les Paul

Unfortunately, another parallel between the two is the fact that they’ve weathered some substantial health problems. In the late ’70s Martino’s bouts with dizzy spells, mood swings and seizures finally gave way to a severe hemorrhage, and a brain tumor being diagnosed. After a 1980 operation that saved his life, he was without a disturbingly large chunk of his memory, including the fact that he was a superb guitarist. His subsequent ascent back to being a skilled bandleader and soloist was a triumph of spirit and will. Indeed, this spring, Blue Note plans to release his first for the label, one that pairs him with various contempo string players.

Now 81, Paul’s fought and beat many of the typical bugaboos of aging. He wears a hearing aid, has had heart-bypass surgery and currently is afflicted with an intense form of arthritis. Imagine the surprise of arriving at his Mahwah home for this interview and finding him beaming like a kid in a Hard Rock Cafe tour jacket. He looks and acts about 30 years younger. Maybe that’s from his longstanding stint of Monday night gigs in Manhattan. During the ’80s, Fat Tuesdays was his home. After an extended break, during which his arthritis grew more intrusive, he’s back at one of the city’s key rooms, Iridium.

We spoke in Paul’s studio, which is also a slightly messy and definitely awe-inspiring museum for his many prototype instruments. That includes his first guitar, literally a length of two-by-fours with two screws, one string and a telephone mic to pick up the vibrations. It was made when he was a child in the mid-’20s; he was known then as the Wizard of Waukesha (Wis.).

between New York and Philly was one of a daring young improviser who had plenty, plenty soul. By the early 1960s, he was a vet himself —of bands led by Lloyd Price and Charles Earland, of concert dates by teen pop idols like Bobby Rydell and Frankie Avalon, and recording sessions with Willis “Gatortail” Jackson. One “Gatortail” date took place in Mahwah, N. J., in the home studio of Les Paul. Pat was a frequent visitor to Les’ house during the early 1960s. The two would often jam, impressing others.

JIM MACNIE: *Even though insiders are aware of your history together, it might be interesting for others to hear how you first met. Pat, your dad was the impetus behind you connecting with your hero at a young age, right?*

PAT MARTINO: No, I met Les Paul because I wanted to meet Les Paul. I forced my father to take me to see this guy. I didn’t believe what I heard on his records. In fact, I tried to copy it. It



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talkin’ jazz?



Stephen Scott ★ THE BEAUTIFUL THING

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would take less than the fingers on one hand to list the guitarists I was interested in, and he was the foremost. I sat in front of an old record player, pulled the plug out and let it slow down to see if I could figure out what he was doing. I was about 12 years old.

LES PAUL: Was your dad a musician?

PM: He was a once-in-a-while guitar player, and a once-in-a-while jockey. But most of the time he was a tailor; pressed lapels in South Philadelphia. He wanted to play, and studied for two weeks with Eddie Lang. So I was his dream, and he brought me to Atlantic City because I was enticed.

JM: Les, do you remember the meeting, or do you remember the myth of the meeting, which has taken on its own life over the years?

LP: Oh, no. I had a reason to remember. When Pat and his dad came in, and I heard Pat play, he was amazingly different than most guitarists I'd ever seen. In fact, no one I had heard played like this kid. Very clean, precise, extremely unusual. So I said, "How in the world did you learn to pick like that?" And he says, "Is it wrong?" I said, "Nooo! It's just something I'd never seen before." It left a deep impression on me. The characteristics of a musician usually remain printed the same through his life. He may change many times, but if you look to the center, you'll see: There is Bing Crosby, there is Sinatra, there is Art Tatum. Even though he may be influenced by Fats Waller at the time, you can't miss Tatum himself. That's what I heard in Pat back then.

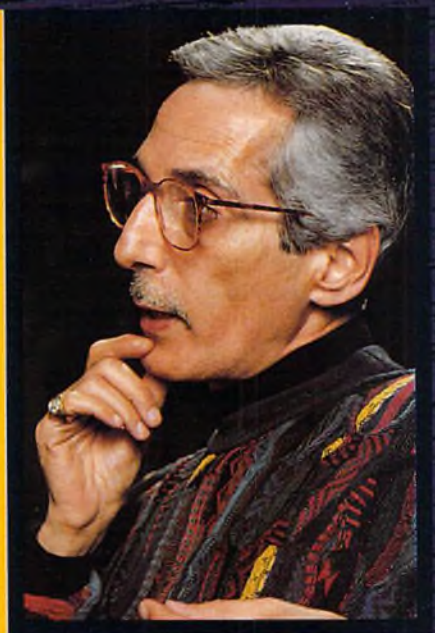
JM: Pat, did getting the blessing inspire you for the next period?

PM: Les reminded me of the purity of the nature of the guitar; he took it down to its ground roots, so I didn't have to be confused about guitar playing itself, and the evolution of technique, which was taking place around all of us during that time period.

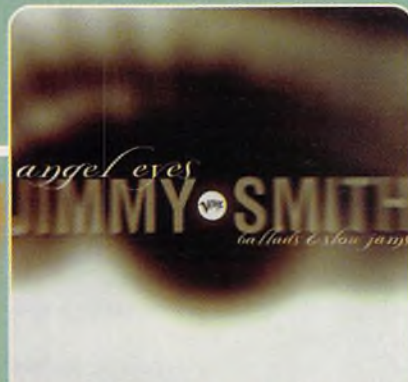
LP: I have a memory. We were uptown and Pat was at Small's Paradise. Wes [Montgomery] was across the street at Basie's. And [George] Benson and myself were out and about. At 8 o'clock in the morning we're standing on the corner outside of Basie's. Now here's a bunch of guitarists. ...

"When I had amnesia after the operations, I learned playing was second nature, I could do it again. But the big problem comes up quick: Where do you want to go with it?"

—Pat Martino



PM: Grant Green was there. ... It was the culture of the day, we all saw each other a lot. The substance of what art needed to have to evolve—is something that's missing today—maybe not missing, I remain optimistic, but it's different. The kids that are in school today are learning along the basis of step-time education as opposed to real-time interaction with one another. Because, culturally, some of the metropolitan areas don't allow it. Cities are tough. Us being able to stand on the corner at that



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Randy Weston ★ EARTH BIRTH

Randy Weston revisits his major compositions — for the first time with string arrangements by Melba Liston.

hour in the morning ... we'd all meet and talk it up.

LP: Your dad was so wise to take lessons from Eddie Lang. In case no one knows, Eddie's one of the first pioneers. Django [Reinhardt] even asked me about him over in Paris. He asked if I ever listened to Eddie Lang, and I told him he was my mentor way back when. Django agreed: Eddie was one of his influences. We learn so much if we're wise enough or lucky enough to listen to the right players. Not that there is an ultimate right way, but there is. Pat and I were talking about the right-hand sort of dictating what the left hand's going to do. I don't know that too many guitar players have that down yet.

PM: That's different for each of us. In many seminars and clinics, I've bluntly described the fact that my left hand is the graduate, my right hand is the dropout. My right hand gives me spontaneous combustion. It's always there, I don't have to worry about it, it's ambidextrous in terms of its pulsations. This other hand is very intellectual. It deals with divisions of the fingerboard, mathematical subdivisions. My right hand could care less how things should be done. It's the best of both worlds.

JM: *You guys both have a quality of playfulness in your work. Les, I recently heard a track of you pounding the guitar with your fist, a little comedy routine. And though Pat's pegged as Mr. Intellectual, he too has become a bit buoyant with his lines.*

PM: When I play I don't do so to experience the guitar—that's already been done. The guitar is my ticket in. My interest is social interaction. Once the music starts, subliminally it all comes out after the first few bars, kind of like second nature. So it's the fun and learning of interaction.

LP: Pat, if it don't go over on a certain night, do you blame yourself or blame the audience?

PM: Neither. I try to draw a significant amount of insight from the experience ... through patience. Reestablish my own self-esteem, do the best I can and fail to blame others.

LP: But there's a big difference between audiences. Monday night versus Saturday night, say. You should adjust to the audience. If it happens to be one that wants to hear the melody, you play it. And if people want you to go out, you go out. But you don't go out for the Saturday people. They're going out, and you've got to go in. It takes about eight bars in before you know what you're dealing with. I don't educate the audience, I adjust to them. Customer's always right.

PM: That I see as a blessing, and I'm not gifted with that blessing. I've often felt, "Why is it you have to come on the first night?" I think about who's sitting in the audience. The critics, record-company people, business reps, promotion. I don't have the ability to do what you're describing should be done, Les.

LP: That's why you can't go in with a fixed hand. One night you play "The Very Thought Of You" and another it's "The Hanging Of Charlie Burger." I told Mary we had to figure out a version of "How High The Moon" that fit Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. That was the key. So we went from town to town—Indianapolis, Columbus—finding out whether people are the same. They are. And we made an arrangement of the song that went over at the beginning and the end of the week. Took it to Capitol [Records]. They said, "What makes you think this is

going to be a hit?" Mary said, "He knows so." A year went by and Capitol wouldn't put it out. They said, "Les, there are 75 different versions of that song. They all died." I never told them that my jury was the people we'd played for. They finally put it out, and in two weeks it was number one.

JM: *You both share a love of hardware. Les is the inventor of course, and Pat has been smitten with the computer, using it to orchestrate new compositions since his comeback.*

PM: That's what I said before, about Les' effect on me. If it wasn't for the computer after my brain operations, I don't think I would have gotten back into the music at all. It was the saving grace for recovery and the depression that went with it in terms of slow motion and slackness. My therapist advised me to turn toward the computer after the surgery. A little Macintosh around 1981.

LP: In 1980 I went in for the bypass. Doctor said, "Promise me two things. One, be my friend. Two, work hard." I said, "I thought that's what got me in here." He said, "No, work never hurt anyone." So I went to my room, and wrote a list of things I enjoyed and didn't enjoy. I decided to go back and play the guitar in an intimate club where I was most happy. That's my

therapy. It keeps me sane and straight. You went to the computer, I went to the guitar. When you're down, Pat, do you turn to the

guitar to help you?

PM: That's hard to answer. One of the things that I find most difficult with the guitar is the moment I pick it up. I do need to force myself to pick it up. I have no interest in it until it's in my hands. And when I do, I have something by my side with it: a cup of coffee in the morning, say. Then I improvise. Then it turns into music, and then maybe something I want to write.

LP: I find the guitar is a great bartender, psychiatrist, wife, whatever. Real therapy. If I feel depressed, I'll pick it up and it will say, "Look, I've got something new for you, something to accomplish."

JM: *You're describing a sparring partner more than a blanket.*

LP: Yeah, it's not a hideaway.

PM: I've gone years without picking it up. 1980-'83, nothing. And then I put it down again in '85-'94. When I had amnesia after the operations, I learned playing was second nature, I could do it again. But the big problem comes up quick: Where do you want to go with it? In '94, when I got back into it, I wanted it to take me to far-range destinations, worldwide.

LP: I fell madly in love with the guitar. When I got married, the first thing I told my wife was that I loved two things: her and the instrument. I have a way of communicating to people that I can't find in the English language, but it's in my guitar. You can't go down and buy rhythm, can't go and buy a sense of humor, and you sure as hell can't by perfect pitch at Sam Ash. But what you can do is play that guitar and express yourself.

JM: *Pat, how's it going with your new album?*

PM: Great. But a challenge. Each track, different studio. Traveling around. It comes back to what I said before about the guitar being a vehicle into an experience. Every artist is like a different room in a house. One of the sessions, with Mike Stern, I wrote all the music. Same with Tuck Andress and Kevin



Each player shares a love of guitar hardware; but more, they share a quality of playfulness.

Eubanks. With Charlie Hunter and his eight-string guitar, we did Stevie Wonder's "Too High." Great tune. Cassandra Wilson and I did "Both Sides Now." A duet, guitar and voice.

JM: Both of you have triumphed over devastating physical ailments.

PM: In 1987 in Pittsburgh I almost died; I was bleeding to death. I didn't want to get out of bed. A blood hemorrhage in my stomach. I was supposed to be doing a master class at Duquesne University. A policeman forced me to make the decision. "Will you let the paramedics take you?" I was tired of it. Being so fragile. The cop, maybe 60 years old, and

pure Pittsburgh said, "C'mon we don't have all day over here, get out of that bed. I've got kids to go home to." And I said, "OK, let's go." So I take it that cop was God. These days I open my eyes, and say, "Thank you for this day."

LP: Do you sing in the shower?

PM: Sure. I just don't expect the good feeling to come from any material object. That's why I can't relate to the guitar containing my happiness.

LP: When I wake up I say, "Oh God, I've got to get out of bed." And as tough as it is to force myself up, I do. I'm usually in the room alone, so I can swear. And I don't sing in the shower. But I want to.

PM: Here's a line: "Hey, hey, you've got to get up if you want to get down."

JM: Les, you've had bypass surgery and ear problems and big-time arthritis. What motivates you to get back in action?

LP: Daily routine. I look at the mail during breakfast, but the first thing I do is go to my heat-treatment machine and take care of my hands. They're frozen; they don't move. The fingers are frozen. So when I play, it's flat-fingered. Two are good, but two are out to lunch. So I had to learn to play over again—play with two fingers. If someone wanted to hear an F chord barred the way Gene Autry plays, I couldn't do it. It's a challenge. But what's great is that I've found better ways of doing things. I was doing things the hard way before. Just because you have four fingers doesn't mean you have to use them. And you find out that two fingers get in your way less than four. So in many cases, playing with two is a plus. Sometimes the alternate way is for the better.

JM: Did the period of adjustment drive you crazy? What were the frustrations of your fragile moments?

LP: Well, the pain ... when you're onstage performing and you pull down on the strings and you wince ... you pull back, quick. A few cogs are missing in the wheel when you go to play a phrase and can't get it all. "Ba-bo-ba-ba-bop-clunk-bo-bop." Something is missing in the middle. But you find a way around it. When I told the Arthritis Foundation, they were shocked. "You mean you just let these fingers freeze up on you?" But they're better off that way. See? [bats his fingers back and forth] They don't go nowhere. Hey boy, when I hit a note now, it stays hit. That old dog/new tricks thing isn't true. At my age ... it's not true. You can do anything if you put your mind to it. Which isn't to say that I'd like to see Perry Como or Sinatra at his age come out and try to make a comeback. And here I am, out on that stage ... well, I'm doing it for a very selfish reason. For my health, and the will to live. I thank people for helping me survive. They're not listening to my arteries harden, but they are helping with the therapy they give me. But people shouldn't applaud unless it's good.

PM: The vehicle is imagination.

LP: Right now, if you could have your computer or a guitar, Pat, which would you take?

PM: Guitar. Computers are professional obsolescence.

LP: I don't like a computer because it's very demanding and it eats up all your time; and, in fact, it's worse to hunch over a computer 24 hours a day and become addicted than passive TV. Get out with people, be creative. I've got one, but you can't get me to go over there near it. Not that it's not good, or not tomorrow. But ...

JM: Les' description of his hand pain was pretty vivid. Pat, what was your recovery like? Could you remember your own music

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at all? When you were getting better, could you play the guitar?

PM: At first I couldn't. I got involved with the computer briefly, and started writing music on it with a system called Music Works. Simple songs. I was bored to death with the computer as therapy, so I needed more therapy. A different instrument. The guitar. Entertaining myself from depression was the goal, trying to recover from the trauma.

LP: What did they do for your depression?

PM: They literally had me on Prozac. The only thing I take now is vitamins. I gave up all medications, gave up cigarettes, and replaced it with enjoying life.

LP: Do you ever smoke marijuana?

PM: Nope, gave it up.

LP: You used to?

PM: I smoked grass a lot.

LP: Did it help you?

PM: In some ways, it did.

LP: I never smoked marijuana.

PM: They came up with a diagnosis, told me where the seizures were coming from, and after the depression became gigantic, I had to make a decision.

LP: Pat, did you once tell me that you practiced your picking technique 40 hours straight? That long and hard?

PM: Could have been. In the '60s, I used

to play until I would pass out, 18 hours a day straight through. When I did *Baiyina* in '68, I was up for three or four days with no sleep at all, writing that music.

LP: What about your wife or girlfriend? Weren't you neglecting her?

PM: I know, and that's one of the reasons we parted. We were married for 16 years. Our relationship was tinged by the misdiagnosis; we were both under the impression that I was manic depressive. I was in a locked ward in Mount Sinai Hospital in New York when we got divorced. It reached a point where it was impossible for her to endure anymore. And I understood.

LP: And now you have no symptoms?

PM: None whatsoever. I'm feeling great.

LP: I like Pat because he's pleasant to be around. Sweet. To see a guy come up from that little runny-nosed kid, 12 years old. You went through a lot and we worried about you. We'd go down to the Key Club in Newark to see Pat, and George Benson would be playing across the street. Oh mercy, if you don't think that's a treat to be sitting in your car and hear both players at work in the clubs at the same time. How old are you Pat?

PM: I'm 29. I'll be 28 in a few months.

[laughs] I'm actually 52.

LP: Damn kid. Jimminy Christmas.

DB

EQUIPMENT

The guitar Les brings to the gigs at Iridium is a 1980 Gibson Les Paul Heritage. Ampwise, it's a Fender Twin Reverb "that's been neutered. I want good, heavy speakers inside—JBLs." It's Gibson Les Paul strings for the living legend: .46-gauge on the bottom, and .11 on the top.

"Throughout the years, I've used high-action," says Pat. "This is the lowest action I've ever experienced. I used GHS strings. flat-wound. The gauges are usually .16, .18, .26, .28, .36, .48, .58."

"I haven't used a .58 since I was a kid," Les chimes in.

Pat's guitar is a Ken Parker. The instrument he uses has a different neck than the stock model, "made for a heavier tension," he says. "Ken went out of his way to do this for me, and I'm quite thankful." Pat's amp is a Roland JC 120, and sometimes a small Marshall, a Marshall Acoustic with two 10-inch speakers in it.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Les Paul

THE LEGEND AND THE LEGACY—Capitol 91654

THE BEST OF THE CAPITOL MASTERS—
Capitol 99617

THE FABULOUS LES PAUL AND MARY FORD—
Columbia 11133

THE GUITAR ARTISTRY OF LES PAUL—
One Way 22085

MASTERS OF THE GUITAR TOGETHER—
Pair 1230 (with Chet Atkins)

Pat Martino

THE MAKER—Evidence 22121

NIGHTWINGS—Muse 5552

THE RETURN—Muse 5328

WE'LL BE TOGETHER AGAIN—Muse 5090

EXIT—Muse 5075

CONSCIOUSNESS—Muse 5039

DESPERADO—Fantasy/OJC 397

BAIYINA (THE CLEAR EVIDENCE)—Fantasy/OJC 355

EAST—Fantasy/OJC 248

EL HOMBRE—Fantasy/OJC 195

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BELA



Bluegrass renegade. World-beat butterfly. Roots warrior. And some might say jazz party crasher. Bela Fleck would probably concede most of those with a smile. But the banjoist is getting his jazz hybrid over to a new and growing audience.

The purists who scoff at the idea of a banjo-led group in jazz would be at odds with Chick Corea and Branford Marsalis, both of whom have appeared with Fleck and his Flecktones in concert and on record. (Fleck also appears with Charlie Haden on Ginger Baker's recent *Falling Off The Roof*.) Marsalis has appeared on Flecktone albums since 1992's *UFO Tofu*. "Bela's bad, man," Marsalis says. "There's a certain intellectual sensibility that great music shares, no matter what the idiom, and Bela just has that thing. When you

hear the music, you say, 'Yeah, I'm down,' and that's the true test for me. For musicians and people that spend all their time listening to music earnestly, the first time you hear that sound, you say, 'Aw, there's something I haven't heard before.'"

Fleck says the novelty of the banjo in jazz has opened as many doors as it has closed. "There are people who say, 'Banjo, get out of here,' and people who say, 'Well, that's interesting.' The banjo is originally an African instrument, and originally a jazz instrument. A lot of people forget that the banjo really has a very natural place in jazz. It was there at the very beginning, and faded out. I think the instrument, sonically, belongs in the music, because it sounds great and lends an earthiness to the music that is very special."

"Well, it was one of the original jazz instruments, but it was mostly a strum-

ming, picking instrument," offers Marsalis. "It wasn't an instrumental-soloist instrument. Even banjo solos were just like, 'chink, chinka chink,' which is not what Bela's doing at all. He's *playing* the goddamn thing."

Fleck first gravitated toward the banjo after hearing the *Beverly Hillbillies* theme on television as a kid growing up in New York. "That sent a shiver through my spine. I was attracted to that sound, and it had a big impact on me," he recalls clearly. He got his first banjo when he was 15, and soon got another shiver when he heard the music of alto saxist Charlie Parker. "I just could not believe it. There was a rhythmic intensity, and the way that he phrased and played was very forward-leaning." About a year later he heard "Spain" off Return To Forever's *Light As A Feather*. "It was like all this light was

FLECK

by Robin Tolleson

PARTY CRASHER

shining in on me—"There are other chords you can play, you can put chords together this way, you can do licks like this, and you can solo in jazz on an instrument that doesn't have a lot of sustain." The Rhodes electric piano Corea plays on that cut has a crunchy sound, and it made me think maybe that kind of music *could* also be played on a banjo."

Fleck saw Return To Forever the next year at the Beacon in New York. "I was watching Stanley [Clarke] and Al [Di Meola] moving freely up and down the necks of their instruments in a way that I had never seen anybody do on a banjo. And yet it was strings and frets just like I had. The revelation to me was, there's no reason why a person couldn't do all this on the banjo. You just have to find the paths, you just have to learn the neck. Later, I got turned on to Pat Martino, who also had that rhythmic urgency and intensity."

After graduating from LaGuardia High School of Music and Art in New York City, Fleck found himself attracted to more modern, what he calls "psychotic bluegrass bands."

He moved to Boston to play with a group called Tasty Licks, and remembers his jazz studies there with Billy Novick. "Billy kept saying, 'Leave some space. You don't have to play all the notes. Learn to phrase, lay back on the beat. Don't always push it. Develop your ideas, think about what you're doing.' He didn't give me a lot of the theoretical knowledge; what he gave me was on a more conceptual level. Build a solo, don't just play licks. Think the whole solo into something. I still try to do that."

In 1981, Fleck joined a band called New Grass Revival, which was preparing to move to Nashville. "Fantastic musicians, and they had a very openminded approach to bluegrass, so it fit. I was in that band for nine years, and when I was home off the road I was always trying to read through the fakebook and figure out

what a G minor 7th chord was, or an 11th chord, or a minor chord with a major 7th. Learning up and down the neck and trying to figure out how to get better on the instrument.

"I have a working knowledge of theory, but the best thing I have to offer is a natural ear for certain kinds of harmony and jazz voicings just because I've listened to a lot," he says. "I haven't done the kind of homework and studied people's solos like the great jazz players have done.

"The banjo is originally an African instrument, and originally a jazz instrument. A lot of people forget that the banjo really has a very natural place in jazz."

I do amass a lot of knowledge, but it's from all over. And yet, I'm very proud when people consider me a jazz musician, because it's a very special place to exist in life. Jazz is about a lifelong commitment to a music."

In 1988 Fleck received a phone call in Nashville from Victor Lamonte Wooten. "He played his bass over the phone for me, and my world was rocked. Suddenly, I had found somebody to play the music I always wanted to play," Fleck says. "At that point, I had assimilated a lot of what acoustic music and bluegrass music and roots musics had to offer—the earthiness and power and strength. And in a lot of ways it worked out even better that I spent all those years playing these different kinds of musics. When I finally got to approach jazz, or whatever it is that I'm playing, I had something a little bit

different to bring to it."

The new album by Bela, Victor and his brother Roy Wooten (drumitar wizard, a.k.a. Future Man), the double-CD *Live Art*, is the fifth Flecktones release, and is really like the ultimate "grade A" bootleg. It's taken from board tapes done over the last three years, including a cut from the first night Corea played live with the band, their first night with Marsalis, a "Sinister Minister" reunion with former Flecktone harmonica and keyboard man Howard Levy, and performances by Bruce Hornsby and multi-reedman Paul McCandless. "It's the show tape that we always wished we had, where we felt like it was great versions of the songs and good people sitting in."

As producer of the project, Fleck occasionally includes the bus door slamming or a backstage snippet to make *Live Art* sound rougher, more like a home recording. "That stuff makes it fun," he says. "It was feeling a little bit canned, and we didn't want that: We have such clear sounds that if you're not careful it doesn't sound like a live album. But that's what our stuff sounds like through the direct boxes and onto tape. The fact that the drums are digital means that you don't get the usual sound leakage all over the stage. And because we use an earphone monitor system, the stage volume is really soft. So there ends up being a lot more separation and clarity than you would expect from any live tape. That makes the band sound sort of surprising live, too, because it really bursts out of the speakers at you."

The great performances on *Live Art* don't surprise Fleck at all. "We're so precision-oriented that a lot of times [in the studio] we'll do a whole bunch of takes. But one of the things about live music is that you don't have the opportunity to over-obsess that you do in the studio, sit and tweak every note and get worried about everything. On the live gig you just play, and you're playing to an



Fleck with his Flecktones (l-r)—Victor Wooten, Fleck and "Futureman" Roy Wooten: Everybody gets to try their own conception to own their music.

audience, which brings out the best in the musicians."

Wooten, Future Man and Fleck have now been together for eight years—it's a true "band" relationship, underscored by respect. "It's interesting that our music generally comes together with very little discussion," explains Fleck. "We just start playing, and everybody plays away. I've had to learn *not* to speak up, because if I shut up, generally it'll turn out better. I was trying to explain that to somebody

who sat it with us recently. I told him to bring some tunes, and we'd play them and he'd play with us. But I said, 'Really try and just let the guys find their own parts. Just resist trying to tell them what to play, because they're going to find something really good, and it's sort of the band concept.'

"Everybody gets to try their own conception before anybody says anything. If there's a problem, if it's not coming together, then the writer or other people

in the band might say, 'You know, maybe you should try this,' but that's the last resort. This way allows every person in the group to have ownership of their parts and of their approach to the songs. I mean, nobody wants to be told what to play."

Fleck, 38, finds himself getting involved in more world music-type projects, including the fascinating *Tabula Rasa*, featuring slide player V.M. Bhatt and Chinese erhu player Jie-Being Chen, and a collaboration with South African musicians on *A Place Of Hope*. "The idea of connecting the dots and having great musicians from different parts of the world get together is very sound and something that we love to do. Whenever we go to a new country, we learn some music from that country and play it at the show, and that really helps to bridge the gaps. It's like, we're trying to learn, too. Let's share."

DB

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EQUIPMENT

Bela Fleck plays Deering electric banjos with GHS strings.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

TALES FROM THE ACOUSTIC PLANET—Warner Bros. 45854

DRIVE—Rounder 0255

PLACES—Rounder 11522

with the Flecktones

LIVE ART—Warner Bros. 46247

UFO TOFU—Warner Bros. 45016

THREE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST—

Warner Bros. 45328

FLIGHT OF THE COSMIC HIPPO—Warner Bros. 26562

BELA FLECK & THE FLECKTONES—

Warner Bros. 26124

with Ginger Baker

FALLING OFF THE ROOF—Atlantic 82900

with V.M. Bhatt & Jie-Bing Chen

TABULA RASA—Water Lily Acoustics 44

with Bruce Hornsby

HOT HOUSE—RCA 66584

HARBOR LIGHTS—RCA 66114

with the New Grass Revival

DEVIATION—Rounder 0196

LIVE—Sugar Hill 3771

CYRUS CHESTNUT

For the LOVE of GOD

By Jonathan Eig

Some people still think of jazz as the devil's music. They remember that jazz sprung from brothels and speakeasies, where men tended to consume music, booze and women as if all three were disposable products. The songs seemed to inspire depravity among listeners, who danced to the rhythm's passionate throb and let nature take its course from there. And all too often, musicians fell under the spell, too, succumbing to lives of violence, addiction, adultery or madness.

That's how jazz earned its devilish reputation, but in truth the music itself is far from sinful. Cyrus Chestnut, for one, is out to challenge such unenlightened thinking. The gifted young pianist, whose music swings and sways with the soulful pulse of the gospel church, knows that jazz has always been a deeply religious music. Before Buddy Bolden ever trumpeted for a New Orleans whore house, jazz, blues and ragtime had established deep roots in the churches built for African slaves on Southern plantations. It was here, as LeRoi Jones explained in his book *Blues People*, that slaves first found a place they could express themselves. "The first instrumental voicings of New Orleans jazz seem to have come from the arrangement of the singing voices in the early Negro churches, as well as the models for the 'riffs' and 'breaks' of later jazz music," Jones wrote in 1963.

Today, jazz has become a much more sophisticated music, taught on college campuses, performed in symphony halls and respected as one of America's most original and serious art forms. Yet even while its reputation as devil music has subsided, the influence of religion on

jazz is often overlooked. Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus blended swing and prayer to produce some of their most powerful music. Without its intense spirituality, John Coltrane's work may well have lacked much of its ability to move listeners. Today, Chestnut is one of a handful of jazz musicians who not only remember the music's true origins but also infuse their own thoroughly modern sound with the influence of the church.

On his first three major-label CD releases—*Revelation*, *The Dark Before the Dawn* and *Earth Stories*—Chestnut's bluesy swagger and emotional frankness only hinted at his deep spirituality. The gospel truth has come to the forefront, however, on his most recent album, *Blessed Quietness*, a collection of unaccompanied hymns, spirituals and Christmas carols. It's impossible to say whether *Blessed Quietness* is a swinging gospel album or a religious-oriented jazz album because Chestnut doesn't hew to any formula or label. He comes across as a smart and innovative arranger whose personality and faith give life to a heartfelt recording.

"I just recently found out that my grandfather was a church musician," says Chestnut, 34. "He was a minister, and he played piano. He taught my father to play piano, and it continued on with my father teaching me. My father never told me about my grandfather's music until a few days ago. I guess I never really asked. But it was a pleasant thing to find out."

For as long as he can remember, the Chestnut home was filled with hymns, spirituals and a smattering of jazz that included records by Baby Cortez and Jimmy Smith. His father, McDonald Chestnut, a retired post office employee, remembers that Cyrus was reaching for the piano keys before he could walk.

"After he got a little older I started

teaching him and I taught him until he was seven," the elder Chestnut says. "Then we gave him over to a regular teacher."

From there, Chestnut's musical education followed a route exceptional only for its high quality: He attended the Peabody Preparatory Institute and the Berklee College of Music, where he received the Eubie Blake Fellowship in 1982, the Oscar Peterson Scholarship in 1983 and the Quincy Jones Scholarship in 1984. From there, he went on to play



ALAN HANIGAN

with Jon Hendricks, Wynton Marsalis and Betty Carter.

Like most serious students, he immersed himself in the history of the music, from Jelly Roll Morton to Earl Hines to Bud Powell to Wynton Kelly to Hank Jones. But unlike many students, he aimed not to imitate the masters but to glean from them. In Chestnut's case, that meant adding their lessons to the lessons already absorbed from growing up in the church. Jazz and gospel both grew out of the blues, notes Chestnut, who says

he recognizes the call of the blues in the work of gospel artists such as Clara Ward, Charles Taylor and Shirley Caesar.

"I always liked to do research on history," he says. "It's not my attempt to recreate history but to be an interpreter. Not to necessarily play their exact solos but to get an understanding of their musical point of view. What I'm attempting to do is mix it all around and use it as a foundation to create what's inside me. I'm all about forward motion. Got to keep moving forward."

A heavysset man with gentle eyes and the face of a child, Chestnut is soft-spoken and not given to self-analysis. Usually, when someone asks him to ponder the deeper meanings of his music, he responds by saying he only wants to bring happiness and smiles to those who listen. If people want to scrutinize what he does, that's their business.

"Some people try to theorize everything until they lose the enjoyment," he says. "Before you go and analyze it, just put the CD on, and listen to it and



KEN FRANCKLING

Sometimes I think I shouldn't be playing gospel in the nightclubs, but that wouldn't be me. So I'll sit in the Village Vanguard and play a hymn, and I can go away from every performance feeling good about who I am."

react to it. Then if you want to figure out what kind of motif is being played, what kind of rhythmic figure, that's fine."

Chestnut, who has studied, written and performed classical pieces, is certainly equipped to perform a thorough examination. His chops, capable of Bud Powell's lightning speed and Count Basie's deft touch, offer plenty of material for analysis. But Chestnut returns again and again to the notion of pleasing his audience. He admits, in fact, that he fantasizes about performing in front of a stadium-sized crowd.

"This may sound like a tall order," he says, "but Mariah Carey can fill an arena of 50,000 or 100,000. Someday I'd like to be able to do that myself. Can you imagine 50,000 people at a sold-out performance just to see yours truly?" And what would it take to attract such a crowd? "It would be too easy to stray off your concept just to attract large numbers of people. I'm not about that. Betty Carter used to tell us you want to win people over by playing skillfully, not with gimmicks. God willing, I want to fill up an arena with people coming to hear me not clowning but doing my best."

He's not about to compromise his art for commercial success, and he's also not about to drop the spiritual side of his music.

"Growing up, gospel music was what I heard in the house. It's a great part of me, and I'm very happy about it. When I go out and play, people want to know who I am. Who I am on the bandstand and off is the same, so I don't hold anything back. Sometimes I think I shouldn't be playing gospel in the nightclubs, but that wouldn't be me. So I'll sit in the Village Vanguard and play a hymn, and I can go away from every performance feeling good about who I am."

Chestnut grew up playing at the Mt. Calvary Star Baptist Church in Baltimore, where his parents, McDonald and Flossie, had been active for years. Cyrus, their

only child, says he learned rhythm because church music has to groove. He learned to improvise and to listen as he accompanied the praise service where members of the congregation would rise spontaneously to testify about their faith.

"I've always loved that groove," he says. "It goes back to the Mt. Calvary Star Baptist Church. I can't explain the feeling. I'd be playing, there'd be the clapping of hands, the stomping of feet on the wood floor. Everybody's time would seem to lock up. It's so special, like a foundation. I always try to go for that type of groove in whatever I play."

McDonald Chestnut says he worried a bit when his son fell under the sway of jazz music, because some of the older members of the church still felt the music was somehow sacrilegious. But after years of hearing young Cyrus play, most members of the church have been converted. Just as Chestnut allows hymns to slip into his sets at the Village Vanguard, he likes to let jazz harmonies work their way into the hymns he plays in church. When he isn't on the road, Chestnut still returns to play at several churches in the Baltimore area. The music keeps young people interested, helps the prayer service seem fresh and reminds people that each person should express his love of God according to whatever tools he is given. "Cyrus is making good on both ends of it," his father says.

To which vocalist Jon Hendricks says, "Amen." Hendricks, another musician who follows his roots back to the gospel source, counts himself a big fan of the young pianist.

"Cyrus never left the church, and if he's smart he never will," Hendricks says. "The church is the origin of the music. The nearer you are to the origin, it stands to reason you're going to have a firmer grasp on the music. For example, Milt Jackson's sound is sanctified, and his parents went to a sanctified church. Bags

can strike a groove better than anybody, and that's the sanctified church thing. Look at Ray Charles. Change the lyrics back before he made them secular and you've got the sound of the sanctified choirs swinging themselves into bad health. That's what you hear in Cyrus. He's not going to disappear because he's deeply rooted in the music."

Chestnut, meanwhile, feels he still has a lot of growing to do. His practice routine includes tons of arpeggios and scales, all played with an emphasis on improving his finger and arm strength. The more strength he attains, he says, the more he can make the piano sound the way he wants and avoid broken notes. He also hopes to improve his left hand to make his stride sound more solid.

When he's on the road, Chestnut says, he tries to arrive on the set early to practice before and during soundchecks. And lately, he's been on the road a lot. He's been touring relentlessly with his trio (Steve Kirby on bass and Alvester Garnett on drums) in addition to playing a few solo dates. He's also been traveling as musical director for Kathleen Battle's latest tour (Chestnut played piano on Battle's 1995 jazz-meets-classical recording *So Many Stars*). In another supporting role, he recently recorded with singer Dee Dee Bridgewater. Even if he were not a devoted follower of the church and happily married man, such a schedule would leave no time for sinning, Chestnut jokes.

In truth, it's the music that preserves Chestnut's serenity because it allows him to worship at any time, no matter where he travels. "I believe the ability to play music is a gift from God, and every time I play I'm thankful," he says. "As it was given to me, I want to give it back as well. Whether it's 11 in the morning or 4 in the morning, every time I sit down to play, for me, is worship and expression." **DB**

EQUIPMENT

Cyrus Chestnut prefers Steinway pianos. He owns a 1934 Knabe 6-foot grand piano, a Roland D-70 electric piano and Encore software for windows.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

BLESSED QUIETNESS—Atlantic Jazz 82948
EARTH STORIES—Atlantic 82876
THE DARK BEFORE THE DAWN—Atlantic Jazz 82719
REVELATION—Atlantic Jazz 82518
ANOTHER DIRECTION—Evidence 22135
NUT—Evidence 22152
 with various others
GETTIN' TO IT—Verve 523 989 (Christian McBride)
TESTIMONIAL—Atlantic Jazz 82755 (Carl Allen)
SO MANY STARS—Sony Classical 68473
 (Kathleen Battle)
TWO BY TWO, VOLUME II—Justin Time 81
 (Dave Young)
IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MELODY—Verve 513 870
 (Betty Carter)
BLACK PEARL—Columbia 44216 (Donald Harrison & Terence Blanchard)
 soundtracks
KANSAS CITY—Verve 529 554 (various artists)



Fanfare For The Working Band:

Is It A Funeral Parade?

By John Corbett

"That's where you test your concepts, playing in regular ensembles, at nightclubs where you could play for months at a time."

—Donald Byrd

The following piece is the first in an ongoing series on one of the major challenges that today's working jazz musicians face: staying together as a band long enough to establish a group identity.

It's a familiar situation, a composite sketch drawn from our collective experience as current jazz listeners. A young musician—say a bassist—snags a record deal and makes plans to go into the studio, but opts not to record with the band of young unknowns he's actively cultivated for the last two years, but with some better-known players "suggested" by the label.

To prepare for the recording, the musicians come together for a two-night stint at a club, run through the potential tunes, try to quickly conjure a group feel, straighten out the kinks in the rhythm section, zero in on the horn arrangements and add any personal touches to the standards they've chosen. Shortly thereafter (not too long for fear of losing the aura of togetherness they've created in their short-term memory banks), they storm the studios and in a day or two they come up with a market-worthy record.

What's lost—or at best only approximated—in the process is ironically something highly prized in the history of jazz judgement: the band. The big question is whether the idea of the band is even a plausible notion in 1997, or whether jazz has become an instant art, a musical Shake 'n' Bake where the industry chooses ingredients, throws 'em together, lets 'em mix it up a bit, puts it in the oven and (presto!) serves it up. What hangs in the balance is the delicate chemical reaction that takes place when the flavors are allowed to blend. Everyone knows that soups and stews taste better the second day, and insofar as the culinary metaphor makes musical sense, the working band is the proverbial crock-pot. But perhaps it's not economically feasible to have subtle flavors in a fast-food world. Maybe it's the quick joy of the hot griddle we crave—flipping out discs like so many McBurgers.

The nagging question of the band remains: What are the consequences for jazz without working ensembles? Are we cut adrift in a sea of jam sessions? Local rhythm sections supporting international stars in a never-ending string of one-night stands? Name-based ad hoc groupings brought together once every five years? Superficial label-stable bands assembled by committee, custom cut to appeal to a specific demographic? Or is it possible to create the conditions in which an ensemble can achieve that sought-after, more-than-sum-of-its-parts identity, in spite of the waning financial and institutional support systems of the new millennium? Are there perhaps positive sides to the situation? New ways to

view the basic unit of jazz?

A working ensemble naturally doesn't have the market spunk of a supergroup; it's harder to sell something by the same names over and over. But surely this takes its toll on the music. There must be a reason that, when weather permits, musicians work steadily with the same collaborators on an ongoing basis. Recall that when Thelonious Monk was recording for Riverside in the '50s (after Prestige had sold his contract due to meager sales), he played a series of long runs at the Five Spot with the same group. And when we say long runs, we don't mean every Wednesday for a month; we mean many weeks, multiple sets a night, six nights of the week. Records from the period offer ample evidence of how thoroughly the spices had been allowed to combine in Monk's kitchen, and at the center of it all was his band: coherent, cohesive, comfortable; so in tune with each other and with such a base of shared experience that they could take chances occasional partners and new acquaintances can't or won't.

"That's where you test your concepts, playing in regular ensembles, at nightclubs where you could play for months at a time," says trumpeter Donald Byrd, who sees the dearth of playing possibilities for bands as being linked, on one hand, to the way jazz has become big-business and, on the other, to the standardization and accreditation of jazz academia, which churns out "a high level of mediocrity." "It's extremely important. Now there's no place for someone to try their stuff out. I worked at the Five Spot for 10 weeks! Café Bohemia, I could have played there forever. Minton's, you could work there forever. You could get your shit together! Now there's no place to nurture, to grow. With all this middle-management—agents, publicists, with all their 'stables of people'—they don't give a fuck about the music!" Long-term engagements were the jazz academy in the '50s, and while he was installed at the Café Bohemia in 1955 with pianist George Wallington's working group, Byrd recalls that "all the other trumpet players came and jumped all over my ass—Kenny Dorham, Clifford Brown, Miles Davis, Chet Baker." Talk about an education.

The era of long-term residencies is over. There's nary a club in the world offering that sort of ongoing jazz workshop and public woodshed to a straightahead jazz group, let alone someone like Cecil Taylor or Ornette Coleman, both of whom led bands in residencies at the Five Spot, as well. (In fact, one of the interesting aspects of this issue is that it has equal significance to any musician, regardless of how mainstream or vanguard they are, since it concerns the interactive mechanics of living music, a feature



"There are still working bands ... not only here, but in Europe. It's feasible that they can work if they can get around. Of course, you've got to move around. Can't do it staying in one place."

—George Coleman

ALAN HANCOCK

The Chicago-based trio of drummer Hamid Drake, bassist Kent Kessler and reed player Ken Vandermark. Says Drake, "That's the benefit of playing together a lot: There's a type of everydayness, but there's still the mystery."

shared by jazz and improvised music of any species.)

The numerous clubs that dotted Chicago's South Side in the '50s and into the '60s, presenting live music nightly, are all but gone; now, if a band is lucky it might land a six-night engagement at the Jazz Showcase (though often local rhythm sections support incoming big names at Joe Segal's straightahead shrine). Even in New York there are only rare occasions for long stints, like bassist Ray Brown's 70th birthday at the Blue Note, a two-week run; but even in this special situation he had to be working with various different special guests each night, not a single, steady group.

Trumpeter Dave Douglas sees today's notion of the working band in a historical light. "The music has developed in a way that it's not as essential—the economics haven't made it practical for a long time, and rather than sit still the music had to keep developing." He cites Cecil Taylor as a good example of someone whose music, forced out of the public ear for years at a time, continues to evolve outside of the working ensemble environment. Regardless, Douglas acknowledges the notion's centrality to his own music: "I'm always writing for my working ensembles. Working every night is how you get the music together. And even for studio records, there's still the band concept and band sound—we're on the same page."

Douglas' solution to the problem—a common tactic these days—is simple:

Rather than play indefinitely with a single ensemble, he rotates several markedly different groups, drumming up new material, recording and touring with his Tiny Bell Trio, then perhaps turning to his sextet or his string group to do the same for a spell. After venturing forth with these and/or other ensembles instigated by different bandleaders—in Douglas' specific case, Myra Melford and John Zorn—and any additional intermittent groups and one-off gigs, he might return to Tiny Bell for another round.

This clearly helps get more work, since in a given period clubs are more likely to book different bands led by one person than they are to repeat the same ensemble. "You have to approach it differently," Douglas explains. "You can't expect to have a working band that plays eight months a year—there's only maybe one or two bands that can do that. There are the economics of it, and besides, no one wants to commit to a leader like that these days. For Wayne Shorter, working with the Miles Davis Band was probably like working for IBM—working for a leader was like working for a corporation."

So bandleaders have to learn to juggle. Or, as violinist Mark Feldman (a highly experienced session musician both in and outside of jazz, and a member of Douglas' string group) puts it: "If you want to stay in creative music and not play weddings or have a day job, it seems like you have



"You can't expect to have a working band that plays eight months a year—there's only maybe one or two bands that can do that. There are the economics of it and besides, no one wants to commit to a leader like that these days."

—Dave Douglas

ALAN HANDEMAN



MARITY PEREZ

to have a few things going." Today's jazz leaders are more like temporary nodes or shifting focal points than the CEO; members of any given group spend lots of time apart from it, leading their own ensembles, writing, learning, expanding. Douglas says he likes the wealth of experience this brings into play, as well as the way that bandmembers come back to each group refreshed. Though he admits it's not for everyone, this methodology also suits Douglas' personality: "That's how I think. I like to keep different things going on parallel tracks."

While the working band concept of years past may have altered since the advent of modern jazz, it's still kicking around. "There are still working bands out here," reminds tenor saxophonist George Coleman from his home base in New York. "Not only here, but in Europe, it's feasible that they can work if they can get around. Of course, you've got to move around. Can't do it staying in one place." Since most clubs are unwilling to book the same act nightly for a stretch, groups are forced to hit the road, traveling to places where an audience is ostensibly hungrier for their foreign sound.

In fact, touring is the one ongoing form of work a band can still get, and barnstorming can bring out very specific things in a band. "You're playing to

different audiences and getting to know one another," specifies Coleman, who, over his extensive career, has worked both with regionally based bands like Chicago's MJT+3 and with touring groups. "Even back in the ['60s and '70s], I was in lots of different bands. When it came time to move, I'd move. I was with Max [Roach] about a year. Miles about a year. Lionel Hampton about a year. And in all these situations I learned something different."

This is a good check on our nostalgia for the nuclear jazz family, since, in fact, an overwhelming number of classic records were the product of bands collected for the purposes of a particular recording, not as enduring ensembles. For Coleman the most important element is the relationships developed over time, not just playing together night after night; such continuity is exemplified by the 40-year collaboration he's had with bassist Jamil Nasser and pianist Harold Mabern. "People who play together a lot—maybe not even in a permanent group—jell and mold together," he sums.

Around a table at Chicago's Lunar Cabaret, the two-year-old trio of drummer Hamid Drake, bassist Kent Kessler and reed player Ken Vandermark submit to an impromptu roundtable on the advantages of the working band. "For instance, Hamid, I think I play much better with you than I did at first," offers Vandermark.

The drummer agrees: "I think we play better now. A lot of it is about familiarity—you and Kent are still going to put some surprises out there, but my ear is much more refined. That's the benefit of playing together a lot: There's a type of everydayness, but there's still the mystery."

"You can't rely on newness anymore," suggests Kessler. "It pushes you to another level."

"But," adds Drake, "it boils down to commitment, to enjoying playing together."

"Yeah, there are a lot of bands that extend beyond the longing stage," concurs Vandermark. "A real group is about people committed to a united thing. That's why you want to be in this band, doing this thing," he says emphatically. "You may not be able to describe it completely, but when you get onstage you all know exactly what that 'thing' is."

If we are to examine the root of the problem, maybe a good place to start is not with the musicians—many of whom, like Drake, Kessler and Vandermark, would relish the chance to play together even more frequently and regularly—but in the listening habits of today's jazz audience. Those club owners who refuse to book the same band for long stretches aren't evil gatekeepers; they reflect the realities of the jazz world, the common understanding that folks won't come out to see the same group repeatedly. But

jazz constantly changes, sometimes in tiny but hugely significant increments.

Part of the fun of listening should come in the form of seeing an ensemble work over time, comparing concerts, looking for variation, growth, dialogue, narrative. Check in on a group, then go back, hear what they're up to a month later, a week later, the next evening, as often as possible. If they're good, that process will inevitably reveal something interesting.

Soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy played with Monk during one of his long stays at the Five Spot, and was struck by the variability of the music. "The people I've always admired, they played something different every time I heard them," he says. "Monk did that. Even when we played 'Epistrophy' every set, he played a different solo on it every set every night for the 16 weeks I was with him. He never let me down."

But as Donald Byrd says, jazz has become big business, and so many of today's jazz concerts are blockbusters—live jazz production has moved in the same direction as large art museum exhibitions, in hopes of drawing huge crowds to the one-time-only event. Unfortunately, the end product is that we can hardly pay the astronomical dough often required to see live performers once, let alone several times. So we submit, shell out the green, attend the one (hopefully golden) gig, and say we've "seen" the band.

But what have we seen ... or better, heard? At best, it's a snapshot of music on the move; at worst, the band itself stops evolving and adapts to the new kind of circumstance. With the premium on freshness and constant development gone and the hopes of summoning true group spirit only a fleeting thought among more pragmatic concerns, some bands begin to offer up the same thing each time out. That's when the dragon begins to eat its own tail. The vivacity and fascination of jazz quickly drains out of the system when the incentive to change, grow and learn is lost. And the audience is no dummy. It can feel the loss, the vanquished space where creativity once was.

But let's not play taps for the concept of the band just yet. As we've seen, there are inventive ways to circumnavigate the situation—touring, fragmenting and multiplying activity, even shifting the notion of what it means for a group to be "working."

The benefits of ongoing bandwork are clear, as are the cons of an atmosphere awash in "all-star" assemblies and first-contact novelty bands. Yet let's finally reflect back on that fictitious fellow getting it on with the industry lions in the studio. Maybe he'll make a second record—this time with his working band.

DB

CD REVIEWS

MARCH 1997



Lee Konitz/ Jimmy Giuffre

Lee Konitz Meets
Jimmy Giuffre
Verve 527 780

★★★★

This fascinating reissue package unearths four rather eccentric records that feature Konitz and/or Giuffre in divergent settings. One session, from which the collection gets its title, is more strictly jazz, while the other three intersect jazz solos with string and orchestral arrangements of different styles and temperaments. Taken together, they suggest a period in which there was give-and-take between cool jazz, classical and easy-listening.

The earliest record, *Free Forms*, was originally issued as a 10-inch under Ralph Burns' name in 1951. Despite the inclusion of Ray Brown on bass and Papa Jo Jones on drums, the music—all of it writ by Burns—is hardly of the hard-swinging variety; instead, it's louny exotica, the cheesiest in the two-disc set. Of course, to say something was "easy listening" used to be the kiss of death, but now it's a fashion statement par excellence. Either way, the arrangements are swank, with an unnamed woodwind section adding unusual colors amidst silken strings, cocktail piano and conga lounge percussion. Four of the tunes ("Lillith," "Vignette At Verney's," "Places, Please," "Spring Is") pop out from the background by virtue of Konitz's liquid alto, which is at once perfectly at home in the romantic terrain and also so supple and inventive as to elevate the proceedings to another level. Note: There are some bad sound-quality problems (degenerated tape or remastered from vinyl?) on these cuts.

If the Burns-meets-Konitz session is a novelty, Konitz's record of sax and strings with Bill Russo, the 1958 LP *An Image*, is a serious and wonderful affair. Again, the slippery, subtle phrasing of Konitz is well suited to string arrangements, particularly when they're as thoughtful and provocative as Russo's. Standards covered include "Round Midnight," "I Got It Bad" and a brooding, Bartokian "What's New," which includes startling high-violin accompaniment. Rather than simply use strings in their traditional pillowy lushness, Russo draws on classical string quartet music from Beethoven to

Webern; but there's also a hint of the drama of narrative film music, as well. Russo's two multi-movement suites, "Music For Alto Saxophone And Strings" and "An Image Of Man," are highlights; and listen to the piano bump and icy strings hover on "Blues For Our Children," co-credited to Russo and Konitz. Giuffre's two feature-length clarinet vehicles ("Piece For Clarinet And String Orchestra," "Mobiles"), recorded in '59, are also concerned with third-stream coordination of jazz soloism and classical orchestration. Like Konitz, Giuffre is able to inject vivacity into the stiffest places, and his gorgeous clarinet playing keeps these from being mere artifacts.

Finally, there are the Giuffre-arranged jazz sessions, also from '59, which feature a quintet of saxes, arranged "Four Brothers" style, with rhythm accompaniment (a cappella on "Darn That Dream"). Baritone is Giuffre's horn here, and he's equally bubbly on the big horn, though Konitz is spotlighted most often. With so many Tristanoites, the session has a light-footed, super-contrapuntal feel, all played with sensational ease and creativity. Bill Evans takes an especially crafty, bizarre little piano solo on Konitz's blues "Cork 'n' Bib."

In his exceptional liner text, which puts the set's far-flung musics in a focused context, Art Lange points out how important Warne Marsh's tenor solo on "The Song Is You" was for Anthony Braxton; one can see why, given how he pushes, gushes, disassembles and reassembles. Amazing lucidity in real-time. —John Corbett

Lee Konitz Meets Jimmy Giuffre—*Round Midnight; The Daffodil's Smile; I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good); Music For Alto Saxophone And Strings; What's New; Blues For Our Children; An Image Of Man; Terrisita; Lillith; Vignette At Verney's; Cameo; Places, Please; Tantaloon; Spring Is; Someday, Somewhere; Darn That Dream; Palo Alto; When Your Lover Has Gone; Cork 'n' Bib; Somp'm Outa' Nothin'; Someone To Watch Over Me; Uncharted; Moonlight In Vermont; The Song Is You; Piece For Clarinet And String Orchestra; Mobiles.* (71:23/79:34)

Personnel—Konitz, alto saxophone (except 25, 26); cuts 1–7: Gene Orloff, violin; Alan Shulman, cello; Billy Bauer,

guitar; Lou Stein, piano; cuts 8–15: Tony Miranda, french horn; (probably) Danny Bank, flute; Ray Brown, bass; Jo Jones, drums; cuts 16–24: Giuffre, baritone saxophone; Hal McKusick, alto saxophone; Ted Brown, Warne Marsh, tenor saxophone; Bill Evans, piano; Buddy Clark, bass; Ronnie Free, drums; cuts 25, 26: Giuffre, clarinet; string section of Südwestfunk Orchestra of Baden-Baden.



Lonnie Smith Trio

Foxy Lady
MusicMasters 65158

★★★½

Ditch the cheesy jacket design, the silly poem that serves as a kind of ode to Jimi Hendrix, the unnecessary photos, and you find some good, sometimes very good playing underneath this tribute to the guitarist.

The problem with Hendrix's music often stems from a too-literal interpretation. Those who are so close to the music may find new renderings of his material quaint, staid, hardly in the spirit of the guitarist himself. Listen to Gil Evans' flawed attempts to use Hendrix's songs as jazz vehicles and you hear all-too-familiar, static versions that make you wish you'd never heard the originals. Some of that literal interpretation permeates Lonnie Smith's *Foxy Lady*;

THE HOT BOX

CDs	CRITICS	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
LEE KONITZ & JIMMY GIUFFRE <i>Lee Konitz Meets Jimmy Giuffre</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★
LONNIE SMITH TRIO <i>Foxy Lady</i>		★★	★★	★★★	★★★½
CLAUDE BOLLING BIG BAND <i>A Drum is A Woman</i>		★★½	★★	★★½	★★★
BILLY DRUMMOND <i>Dubai</i>		★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

but, by and large, what we have here is something that sounds both playful and slightly irreverent (again, forget the packaging), if not outright funky.

The followup to the less-engaging *Purple Haze*, *Foxy Lady* presents more material from a two-day recording session that took place in March of 1994. Both albums sport guitarist John Abercrombie and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith. The organist's good-timey '60s feel lends a certain wild-and-wooly vibe to everything. Abercrombie, for the most part, wisely sidesteps any overt attempts to ape the psychedelic Hendrix's blue flame. Instead, Abercrombie lays back, amplifying Smith's heavy-handed chordal attacks and deft melodic touches, adding his own parlor-styled inventions alongside his trademark sonic edginess (e.g., "Third Stone From The Sun"). "Smitty"'s typical machine-gun attacks are given free rein (listen to the organist's "Jimi Meets Miles") even as he loosens up the groove à la Steve Gadd ("Castles Made Of Sand"). As a trio, there is more mesh than mess.

Foxy Lady, however, is saddled by an arrangement of the title tune that shows little imagination. "Foxy Lady" serves as a reminder that when jazz musicians try to play overt rock material, there's a tendency to fawn. In this case, the swinging rock shuffle sounds like a compromise instead of a launching pad. And the inclusion of "The Star Spangled Banner" as the tag to "Castles Made Of Sand" is dead weight, not to mention essentially a repeat (it also serves as the tag to the closer on *Purple Haze*).

Overall, however, the band manages to float, forgetting to bow down to St. James. The inventive arrangements and tasteful soloing on "Castles Made Of Sand" and "Third Stone From The Sun," in particular, are examples of jazz musicians sounding true to themselves, respectfully reinventing the music.

There must be a little anarchist streak in every jazz musician. When he is true to form, it comes out. Especially when tackling music like this. —John Ephland

Foxy Lady—*Foxy Lady; Castles Made Of Sand-Star Spangled Banner; Third Stone From The Sun; Jimi Meets Miles.* (56:28)

Personnel—Smith, organ; John Abercrombie, guitar; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums.



Claude Bolling Big Band

A Drum Is A Woman
Milan Jazz 35784

★★½

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I well remember my delight when I heard that the *U.S. Steel Hour* was to present an original Duke Ellington work on Wednesday night, May 8, 1957. When the moment came, I had my tape recorder ready and my thumb on the red button. I remember equally well my near-complete bewilderment when it was over. A few weeks later I erased the tape for a masterful "Beautiful Dreamer" by Louis Armstrong on the *Ed Sullivan Show*.

Now comes Claude Bolling, who has logged a wonderful batch of fresh Ellington interpretations with his orchestra over the last decade. Bolling & co. take on *A Drum Is A Woman*, a deservedly neglected folk fairy tale of jazz history. I've read that it was among Ellington's proudest achievements. It's certainly a personal work, and

revealing of his richly erotic view of the world and jazz. Perhaps it suggests also the risk an artist takes when he permits his work to become *too* personal at the cost of perspective.

At 14, I assumed the music was simply over my head. This was, after all, the great Ellington. Today a more mature me can see the extent to which I overestimated Ellington back then, and underestimated myself. The tale is a twist on Adam and Eve and concerns Carribee Joe, a stay-at-home jungle-couch potato whose drum symbolizes native origins; and Madam Zaji ("jazz" with the letters reversed, almost), a sexy, sophisticated temptress, who materializes from Joe's drum (as in Eve from Adam's rib) as a personification of jazz and who is swept out of Africa on a trade wind of wanderlust to New Orleans and points beyond. It has about as much to do with the history of jazz, or course, as Adam and Eve do with the origins of Homo sapiens. Even as allegory, it tells us nothing original or interesting.

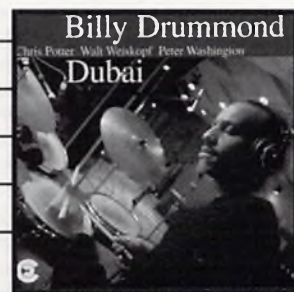
Yes, Duke's tongue is surely in his cheek through all of this, naturally. But attitude is not wit, which is on far-less ponderous display with "Pretty And The Wolf," a hip Duke fable in miniature from 1951.

Jack Tracy lavished 5 stars on the Ellington LP when it came out (*Down Beat*, May 2, 1957), and said, "It needs to be heard often." Ellington no doubt appreciated the stars, but was smart enough never to play it again. Which makes one wonder why Bolling would want to tackle it 40 years later for a series of performances in the Theatre National de Chaillot, where this was recorded last April.

His version follows the original record faithfully (not the rather scrambled LP reissue in the '70s). But the pickings are slim. Most of the music is incidental or subordinate to the storytelling, which is provided by Jeffrey Smith's narration and the various vocalists. Only "Ballet Of The Flyin' Saucers," a fast blues, stands on its own as class-A instrumental Ellington. Bolling's orchestra, which includes about eight of the players from the *Bolling Plays Ellington* albums of a decade ago, cannot be faulted for its performance, which is excellent—a near-flawless vehicle for a much-flawed and flimsy piece of Ellington whimsy. —John McDonough

A Drum Is A Woman—*A Drum Is A Woman; Rhythm Pum Te Dum; What Else Can You Do With A Drum; New Orleans; Hey, Buddy Bolden; Carribee Joe; Congo Square; A Drum Is A Woman Part 2; You Better Know It; Madam Zaji; Ballet Of The Flyin' Saucers; Zaji's Dream; Rhumbop; Carribee Joe Part 2; Final.* (55:51)

Personnel—Bolling, piano, conductor; Christian Martinez, Guy Bodel, Michel Delakian, Michel Bonnet, trumpet; Benny Vasseur, Damien Verherve, Jean-Christophe Vilain, Emile Vilain, trombones; Philippe Portejoie, Claude Tissendier, Pierre Schirrer, Romain Mayoral, Jean Eve, reeds; Romain Mayoral, violin (7, 12); Christine Icart, harp (11); Jean-Paul Charlap, guitar; Pierre Maingourd, bass; Vincent Cordelette, drums; Pierre-Michel Balthazar, percussion; Francine Romain, cantatrice; Laika, Jeffrey Smith, vocalists.



Billy Drummond Quartet

Dubai

Criss Cross 1120

★★★★

Last year was a good one for drumming bandleaders. The way that Matt Wilson's *As Wave Follows Wave* coaxed mucho eloquence out of Dewey Redman placed the disc on my top-10 list. And it wasn't a bad anum for two-reed front lines, either. Remember how sharp George Garzone's *Four's And Two's* sounded when it came out at the end of the summer? He's definitely found a soulmate in Joe Lovano.

Billy Drummond's most robust outing ever, *Dubai*, falls into both categories: a double saxophone disc with a drummer in charge. Like its precedents—Jack DeJohnette's Special Edition with David Murray and Arthur Blythe, the late-'50s Art Taylor ensemble that featured Frank Foster and Charlie Rouse, or Ornette's romps with the aforementioned Redman—it features a blend of daring and design. The parallel course run by both of those elements makes *Dubai* one of the smartest mainstream offerings of '96.

Drummond's a superb percussionist, but even longtime fans might not have anticipated such an eventful outing. Largely known as a New York-based sideman, the two previous records he made for the Dutch Criss Cross label (*Native Colours* and *The Gift*) are a tad conventional, the kind of discs that are usually described as "solid." Nothing wrong with that, but merely impressive playing fails to thrill after a spin or two, and thrilling the listener is one of *Dubai's* goals.

Drummond displayed his yen for tough young horn players previously; *The Gift* offered Seamus Blake working the graceful/gruff dichotomy. Here, Walt Weiskopf and Chris Potter double both the eloquence and energy of that album. On "Drumhead," the two romp around each other, blowing kisses, throwing jabs, clucking it up while kicking some savvy lines. Each has a fluid attack and a capability to make bluster sound like the reigning dialect of the day. They also make hay with assorted open spots.

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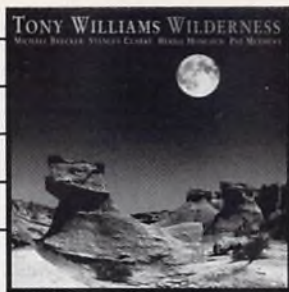
THE FACULTY JAZZ SINCE 1955
BLUE NOTE

Periodically, Drummond has his pulse take a powder, a chance for Weiskopf and Potter to step to the plate with myriad ideas. Bassist Peter Washington sure realizes the advantage to dropping out or challenging the logic of a certain time signature—his pliability on the date is imposing.

Drummond's commitment to such nuance demands these changeups present themselves articulately. The tradeoffs on "Bananafish," where an implied rumba beat makes the horn players groove, but not enough to wax complacent, is masterful; it brims with the kind of inflection and certitude that Tony Williams made famous. Even during the two ballad features, "The Bat" and "Day Dream," he's working with color just as much as he is laying down structure.

There's a lot of focus on arrangements these days. A well-conceived viewpoint is the one thing that can turn a record of "solid" blowing into a thoughtful date of conception. The two-tenor approach differentiates this disc, but the ever-shifting rhythmic current guiding the music is also crucial to its character. By the time that Redman's Jarrett-era freebop number "Mushi Mushi" comes rolling along with its sleek, crazed cadence, a case has been made for Drummond's new persona: one of the hippest bandleaders now at work. "Making The Boss Look Good" proclaimed the headline of a recent Down Beat profile on the drummer (see "Tradin' Fours" Jan. '97). *Dubai* does just that. —*Jim Macnie*

Dubai—*The Best Thing For You; Dubai; The Bat; Drummed; Invisible Sun; Bananafish; Daydream; Mushi Mushi.* (51:12)
Personnel—Drummond, drums and cymbals; Chris Potter, tenor and soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Walt Weiskopf, tenor saxophone; Peter Washington, bass.



Tony Williams

Wilderness
 ARK 21 54571

★★★

Drummer Tony Williams has always appreciated and approached music from an expansive perspective. So it comes as no surprise that his latest project covers a wide range of terrain, from funky, beat-driven material to pastoral, neo-classical orchestral music.

As a youngster, Williams listened to Nat Cole and Count Basie as well as Chopin, Liszt and Wagner. He was also a pop-music enthusiast. Even while he pushed the jazz envelope with the Miles Davis Quintet in the mid-'60s, he kept current on the rock revolution and eventually moved on to form the seminal fusion band Lifetime. He also studied orchestration with

teachers from Julliard School of Music and classical composition at the University of California, Berkeley.

Rumor had it that Williams was assembling a hard-hitting rock band. Instead, he reemerges from a four-year hiatus as a solo studio recording artist with the ambitious *Wilderness*. It not only includes his first compositions written for a 30-piece orchestra but also a refreshing collection of new fusion tunes played by a star-studded quintet featuring keyboardist Herbie Hancock, guitarist Pat Metheny, tenor saxophonist Michael Brecker and bassist Stanley Clarke. On paper this date sounds like a winner.

However, Williams' eclecticism falls short of the mark primarily because the diverse styles fail to mesh. The mixed-bag project opens with the grand orchestral prelude "Wilderness Rising," then gets jolted into the funky zone with the jazz guys on "China Town" before turning back into lush territory with "Infant Wilderness." Variations on the "wilderness" and "China" funk themes disjunctively continue without enough common threads to hold the entire album together musically and thematically.

Taken on its own, Williams' orchestral work is impressive, especially when Hancock sprints across the keys. Likewise, the jazz-pop material succeeds, especially when Brecker and Metheny mix it up on "China Road." Clarke and Metheny both contribute exquisite compositions ("Harlem Mist '55" and "The Night You Were Born," respectively), the leader showcases his roiling drum work on "Wilderness Island" and the quintet launches into "Gambia," a pop-infused jazz cooker. As a whole, however, there's no cen-

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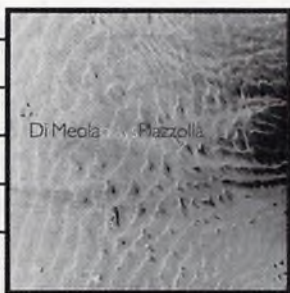
Concord Jazz

ter here that unifies Williams' musical vision.

—Dan Ouellette

Wilderness—*Wilderness Rising; China Town; Infant Wilderness; Harlem Mist '55; China Road; The Night You Were Born; Wilderness Voyager; Machu Picchu; China Moon; Wilderness Island; Sea Of Wilderness; Gambia; Cape Wilderness.* (65:10)

Personnel—Williams, drums; Michael Brecker, tenor saxophone; Pat Metheny, Lyle Workman, guitars; Herbie Hancock, John Van Tongeren, keyboards; Stanley Clarke, electric bass; David Garibaldi, percussion (2); Jack Smalley, conductor of 29-piece orchestra.



Al Di Meola

Di Meola Plays Piazzolla

BlueMoon 92744

★★½

Paco de Lucia/ Al Di Meola/ John McLaughlin

The Guitar Trio

Verve 533 215

★★★

Al Di Meola combines monster guitar chops with a flair for both the cute and the grandiose. His fans, who find the blend irresistible, should prepare to be seduced twice more. *The Guitar Trio* reconvenes the international supergroup that toured in the early '80s and made two successful Columbia albums—*Friday Night In San Francisco* (1980) and *Passion, Grace, And Fire* (1983). *Di Meola Plays Piazzolla* contains only two new tracks. The other eight were previously released on *World Sinfonia* (Tomato, 1991) or *Heart Of The Immigrants* (Mesa, 1993). Nine of the 10 pieces come from Argentinean tango composer Astor Piazzolla, who died in 1992. "Last Tango For Astor" is Di Meola's tribute to his friend, with whom he shared ancestral roots in Naples, Italy, and a taste for music "that goes right to the heart, but is complicated."

Di Meola, John McLaughlin and Paco de Lucia are three of the fastest guitarists on the planet. As a trio, they find synergies that carry them to previously uncharted regions of speed-freak guitar nirvana. Their collective attainment is astonishing, yet I don't care very much. When technical facility is this unremitting and relentless, the ear becomes jaded. The timbral similarities among the instruments in this guitar choir lack contrast,

and they are so sumptuous they cloy. Then there is the nagging question of how much substance supports the surface flash. The best piece is the only one not composed by a member of the trio. It is a heady moment when the hovering, familiar strains of "Manha De Carnaval" emerge as McLaughlin and Di Meola interlace, trading solos and counterpoint.

Piazzolla's tangos are both mannered and passionate. The two newly recorded pieces ("Oblivion" and "Verano Reflections") were taped in Di Meola's home studio, where he plays all the instruments. They are lavish with synthesized fanfares and guitar flourishes and melodramatic drum rolls. Several others, like "Tango II," are equally self-conscious gestures. Di Meola's quickness and precision notwithstanding. The most effective pieces are those like "Night Club 1960" and "Bordel 1900," where Di Meola and Dino Saluzzi restrain their impulses to decorate Piazzolla's yearning emotional truths. Saluzzi plays Astor Piazzolla's instrument, the bandoneon, a type of button accordion similar to a concertina. He makes its poignant tone dance in step with every Di Meola variation.

If you're looking for one, *The Guitar Trio*, with its myriad layers of sonorous acoustic details, is a killer hi-fi demonstration album. And it will surely stimulate many fledgling plectrists to burn their instruments—not on stage, like Jimi Hendrix, but quietly, in the backyard.

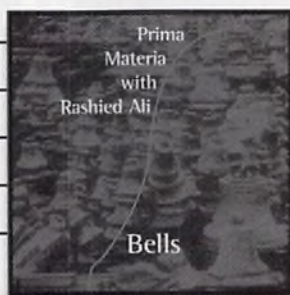
—Thomas Conrad

Di Meola Plays Piazzolla—*Oblivion; Cafe 1930; Tango Suite Part 1; Tango Suite Part 3; Verano Reflections; Night Club 1960; Tango II; Bordel 1900; Milonga Del Angel; Last Tango For Astor.* (59:54)

Personnel—Di Meola, guitars, synthesizer, unidentified instruments; Dino Saluzzi, bandoneon; Christopher Carrington, guitar; Arto Tunçboyacıyan, percussion; Gumbi Ortiz, percussion (3, 4, 10).

The Guitar Trio—*La Estiba; Beyond The Mirage; Midsummer Night; Manha De Carnaval; Letter From India; Espiritu; Le Monastere Dans Montagnes; Azzura; Cardeosa.* (53:07)

Personnel—de Lucia, McLaughlin, acoustic guitars; Di Meola, acoustic guitars, percussion, shaker.



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Bells

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★★★

Initially devoted to the music of John Coltrane, the Prima Materia quintet now turns to the work of Albert Ayler with an expanded version of the saxophonist's 1965 classic "Bells."

Listening to a new version of "Bells" reminds you that energy, not composition, is what made Ayler's music magical. Those old records draw their power from the half-crazed intensity and primal expression of the performances.

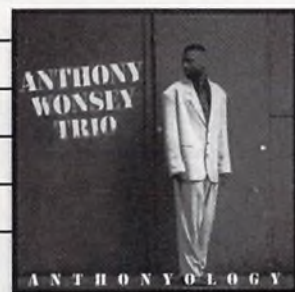
Six weeks of performances prepared Prima Materia for the physical demands the piece requires of the players' stamina and intensity. Over twice the length of Ayler's original, this version of "Bells" asks most of the drummer and saxophonists. On tenor, co-leader Louie Belogenis summons up Ayler's characteristic "overblowing" effects. He's not as charismatic or compelling a voice on tenor as Ayler, but he communicates the same fervor and energy. Allan Chase plays alto, and his few solos are almost impossibly swift and unpredictable. Chase left me wanting to hear more. Rashied Ali's drumming sets the exhilarating pace of the fastest sequences; but in the quieter third movement of "Bells," he supports Belogenis with sensitivity, particularity on cymbals.

Bells offers some remarkable playing, but doesn't command the listener's attention consistently over the extended playing time. Prima Materia's Coltrane-inspired CDs, especially *Peace On Earth* (Knitting Factory Works, 1994), are a more satisfying introduction to the group.

—Jon Andrews

Bells—*Bells.* (65:30)

Personnel—Ali, drums, percussion; Louis Belogenis, tenor saxophone; Allan Chase, alto saxophone; Greg Murphy, piano; Joe Gallant, bass.



Anthony Wonsey

Anthonyology

Evidence 22151

★★★★

Chicago native Wonsey may be just 24, but like Herbie Hancock when he first arrived on the scene, he plays a lot older. Instilling such touchstone influences as Wynton Kelly, Hank Jones and Mulgrew Miller, Wonsey has a most appealing modern mainstream style that mixes a dark, firm touch and considerable technique with an intuitive grasp of how to construct a melodic line. He's been heard with bands led by Nicholas Payton and drummer Carl Allen; with *Anthonyology*, he makes his propitious debut as a recording leader.

If you like contemporary, hard-driving piano à la Kelly and Miller, this disc is worth your attention. The program of originals (the leader has a gift for organizing notes on paper), standards and jazz classics is pleasingly rounded: uptempos, ballads, a waltz, medium tempos.

The leader is in superb company: McBride is the young bassist of the day because he is so giving, so unquestionably supportive, besides being a terror; and co-producer Allen (he and altoist Vincent Herring own Big Apple Productions, who set up this album) offers sizzling-to-subdued kit work, depending on what's called for.

Speed underpins McCoy Tyner's natty blues "Inception" and Clifford Brown's "Daahoud," both taken at around 288 m.m. (metronome marking). Wonsey is never overwhelmed by the hell-bent pace, offering smoothly shifting left-hand stabs while delivering long, flowing lines—some pattern-based—that seem to end with a personal melodic flourish. This is just one of his winning ways. Another is his ability to take a simple idea and express it rhythmically so that it sounds extraordinary. You hear this on his own medium-tempoed "Hey Jimmy" and Kelly's "Temperance," where that pianist's trademark bounce is mimicked by Wonsey. On the latter, McBride plays a succulent arco solo, the notes fat yet clean, recalling Paul Chambers, who recorded the tune with Kelly.

"Autumn Nocturne" and Wonsey's "Faces Of A Clown" show that this difficult aspect of jazz—the slow ballad—is not beyond Wonsey. He takes "Nocturne" at a 46 m.m. creep, and stays with that all-but-dragging tempo, offering tantalizing ideas of few notes but with substantial impact.

The recorded sound presents the band naturally, with bass and drums slightly under Wonsey, whose grand tone in both hands is captured excellently.

—Zan Stewart

Anthology—*Inception; In The Blue Of The Evening; Faces Of A Clown; Temperance; Conception; Black Fairy Tales; Autumn Nocturne; Hey Jimmy; Daahoud; It Might As Well Be Spring/Sweet Lorraine.* (56:42)

Personnel—Wonsey, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Carl Allen, drums.



Jim Beebe

A Sultry Serenade
Delmark 230

★★★

Traditional jazz, a.k.a. dixieland, has survived for decades in numerous suburban Holiday Inns and Ramadas that perk up like so many Brigadoons every year for the many trad festivals that attract a dedicated, if aging, following. But just because the music's been demystified over the years by clinging to a simple core repertoire (as do all genres, let's admit, including bop and beyond) doesn't mean it can't generate a dynamo of pep when well played, as it is here.

Jim Beebe's band comes straight out of the Jack Teagarden and Eddie Condon tradition, when the music shed its banjos, tubas and press rolls and became a professionalized branch of small-band swing. The music here mixes both its heritages. "Sultry Serenade" is Brit Woodman's old feature with Ellington's band with the intro from Jimmie Lunceford's 1936 "Organ Grinder's Swing" attached, and "Drummin' Man" gives Johnnie Faren a chance to celebrate Gene Krupa with some uncannily Krupaesque rim shots.

The ensembles, led by Connie Jones, possess all the easy, nicely rounded timbers of top swing virtuosos and don't try to reach into the mythic New Orleans past. Ancient texts like "Closer Walk With Thee" get smooth and polished workovers. Judi K. sings five numbers in a dark, smokey voice.

—John McDonough

A Sultry Serenade—*Sultry Serenade; Chicago; Canal St. Blues; Blue Prelude; The Joint Is Jumpin'; Sultry Serenade; Trav'lin Light; Bye & Bye; Drummin' Man; Buddy Bolden's Blues; Just A Closer Walk With Thee; Night Train.* (60:58)
Personnel—Beebe, trombone; Connie Jones, cornet; John Otto, clarinet and alto saxophone; Paul Asaro, piano; John Bany, bass; Johnnie Faren, drums; Judi K, vocals (3, 4, 6, 8, 10).



Brad Mehldau

The Art Of The Trio Vol. 1
Warner Bros. 46260

★★★★½

It might seem arrogant for a 26-year-old pianist to call his second recording *The Art Of The Trio Vol. 1*. But Brad Mehldau is already fully capable of confirming the endless expressive possibilities that are potential within the piano trio, the minimum complete jazz orchestra.

In a supporting role with Joshua Redman,

Mehldau's musical erudition and instrumental command were merely implicit. Here they are unmistakable. In a program of four standards, four distinctive originals and a Beatles song, he never displays chops for their own sake but moves among time signatures and ambiguous progressions of chords and liberated tonalities in order to craft brilliant fragments into wholes.

Not many young players would think to open an album with a piece as delicate as "Blame It On My Youth." But each time Brad Mehldau acknowledges the five notes of the theme, the emotional clarity in his touch makes you sit very still in your chair. He discovered the song in Bruce Weber's documentary on Chet Baker, *Let's Get Lost*. In the film, the contrasting images of Baker—movie star handsome in youth, emaciated near the end—are a moving, revelatory visual correlative to the song's resignation in the face of loss. Mehldau gets it all. Baker is not so much an influence for Mehldau as a point of tragic res-

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—Tony Gieske, The Hollywood Reporter

Don Preston
Hear Me Out

onance. He plays another song long associated with Baker, "I Fall In Love Too Easily," and you think of Keith Jarrett in the way that sudden inspiration shows in his right-hand, ringing affirmations, even in a song so sad. "Blackbird" is an example of how Mehldau can transform a song that he regards as already perfect by subtly dramatizing it with funk. The best original is "Ron's Place," a yearning waltz about a home away from home.

Larry Grenadier and Jorge Rossy make intelligent use of their solo space. But what fulfills the album's title is the way the bass and drums shift like tides under and around the piano while it floats across unresolved intervals and pays out luminous single lines.

The only disappointment is the recorded

sound. Piano trio albums live on the recording's ability to discriminate detail and nuance: the decays of the softest key strokes; a brush just touching a cymbal; the deep harmonics of the "E" string. (The paradigm that comes to mind is the work of engineer Jan Erik Kongshaug for Keith Jarrett.) Here, the piano lacks clean edges, the bass is slightly muddy, and the cymbals are recessed and spitty.

Nonetheless, I'm anxiously awaiting *The Art Of The Trio Vol. 2*. —Thomas Conrad

The Art Of The Trio Vol. 1—*Blame It On My Youth; I Didn't Know What Time It Was; Ron's Place; Blackbird; Lament For Linus; Mignon's Song; I Fall In Love Too Easily; Lucid; Nobody Else But Me.* (56:15)

Personnel—Mehldau, piano; Larry Grenadier, bass; Jorge Rossy, drums.



George Gruntz Trio

Mock-Lo-Motion

TCB 95552

★★★★

George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band

25 Years

TCB 96602

★★★½

Chocolate, clocks, mountain vistas, bank accounts, the Montreux fest and George Gruntz's Concert Jazz Band. Those are the things that spring to mind when Switzerland is mentioned. Gruntz, as we all must know, is the world-class arranger, composer and keyboardist who has captained CJB since the 1970s. His two recent releases should please most anyone who cares about modern jazz in the big band and piano trio settings.

Gruntz's considerable wit and imagination are attested to by the odds'n'ends from CJB shows between 1981 and '95 that have been collected on *25 Years* a.k.a. *Sins'N Wins'N Funs*. (Typically, CJB plays original material; several of the selections here are from outside the band.) It's entirely natural for Gruntz to seat players with idiosyncratic tendencies next to more conventional types, and he's keen on displaying the depth of talent available. There's Dave Taylor warming up to the role of "The Trombone Man," a zany jazz fairy tale with spoken recitation from Gruntz; and Ernest-Ludwig Petrowsky taking a free clarinet solo on a swinging rendition of Duke's "Rockin' In Rhythm." Tenor man Jerry Bergonzi, trumpeter Michael Philip Mossman and John Clark on french horn cut loose on Horace Silver's "Room 608." Tim Berne's stream-of-consciousness alto gooses Django Bates' "Dimple," and bandoneon player Dino Saluzzi joins Sheila Jordan and CJB on "The Berlin Tango," transporting listeners to a surreal cabaret. A number of other capable American and European soloists also get sufficient space in which to develop their improvisations while the rest of CJB provide textural heft.

Gruntz seldom works in a trio, so *Mock-Lo-Motion* is a real treat. Recorded during a tour of Switzerland and Germany almost two years ago, this "live" album has him with Mike "Giuseppi" Richmond and Adam Nussbaum on a half-dozen numbers; the Americans aren't strangers to Gruntz, having accompanied him on a conti-



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mental concert tour back in 1989. (Seek out their *Serious Fun* concert album, on enja.) They now evidence a stronger sense of camaraderie than before, taking longer solos as well. Their neopop is fully assured and characterized by suave fervor. Gruntz brings a leavening spirit of playfulness to his writing and playing on the title track and "One For Kids," in particular.

Franco Ambrosetti, who was in on CJB's founding in the '70s and helped out the Trio in '89, lends his warm flugelhorn playing to his compositions "Annalisa" and "Vodka-Pentatonic" and Gruntz's "You Should Know By Now." Ambrosetti's totally at ease with his three friends, and the generous applause from the audiences for all the musicians is well deserved.

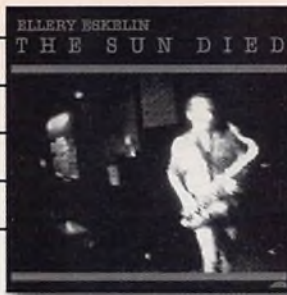
—Frank-John Hadley

Mock-Lo-Motion—*Mock-Lo-Motion; You Should Know By Now; One For Kids; Annalisa; Giuseppe's Blues; Vodka-Pentatonic.* (57:39)

Personnel—Gruntz, piano; Mike Richmond, bass; Adam Nussbaum, drums; Franco Ambrosetti, flugelhorn (2, 4, 6).

25 Years—*Leave On Yr Shoes; Reggae; Kinda Gruntzy/Rockin' In Rhythm; The Preacher; The Trombone Man; The Berlin Tango; Room 608; Dimple; The Yellow Rose Of Texas/C-Jam Blues; Plainsong; GG Deconne.* (71:33)

Personnel—Gruntz, acoustic and electric pianos; Palle Mikkelsen, Arturo Sandoval, Michael Philip Mossman, trumpet; Marvin Stamm, flugelhorn; Ray Anderson, Eje Thelin, Jimmy Knepper, trombones; Howard Johnson, tuba; Joe Dailey, euphonium; John Clark, french horn; Jerry Bergonzi, Alan Skidmore, Seamus Blake, tenor saxophone; Chris Hunter, Tim Berne, Sal Giorgianni, alto saxophone; Ernst-Ludwig Petrowsky, alto saxophone and clarinet; Dino Saluzzi, bandoneon; Pheeroan ak Laff, Peter Erskine, drums; Adam Nussbaum, hand jive; Mike Richmond, string bass; Kim Clarke, electric bass; Sheila Jordan, vocals; unidentified members of several editions of the George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band.



Ellery Eskelin

The Sun Died
Soul Note 121282

★★★★

Jazz Trash
Songlines 1506

★★★★½

You tend to associate Ellery Eskelin with small groups and open structures where the tenor saxophonist is free to explore and develop his ideas at length. At first, Eskelin's choice of Gene "Jug" Ammons as the subject of his tribute *The Sun Died* seems improbable. Despite widespread reexamination and recreation of the styles of the '50s and '60s, Ammons' once-popular brew of r&b/soul/jazz is rarely

cited today. On *The Sun Died*, Eskelin demonstrates an expansive, soulful sound on tenor, well suited to Ammons vehicles like the rowdy "Twistin' The Jug." If the wailing soulster is an uncharacteristic role for Eskelin, he plays it beautifully, pleading on the title track and testifying with fervor on "The Light." Finding a middle ground between freedom and r&b, the saxophonist achieves a stylistic synthesis you'd expect from Joe Lovano or David Murray.

Eskelin wisely avoids the trap of mimicking an Ammons session. In this update of the Ammons gospel, guitarist Marc Ribot contributes a striking performance, by turns funky, coarse and dissonant. Accessible, but uncompromised, *The Sun Died* challenges expectations, requiring a reconsideration of Eskelin as well as Ammons.

Jazz Trash presents Eskelin playing originals with his working trio, featuring Andrea Parkins' radical approach to accordion. Eskelin establishes tumbling, somewhat convoluted themes, shadowed by Parkins, before setting out on his own. In this format, his stamina and range on tenor are great assets. Parkins fills multiple roles, sometimes playing counterpoint to Eskelin's tenor, acting as a second horn, or adding drones and textures. This is an egalitarian trio, with equal weight given to the contributions of Eskelin, Parkins and drummer Jim Black. Some tunes appear to take shape only through improvisation, and the more structured tracks, like the Kurt Weill-influenced "100 Days" or the urgent "Trip Wire" are the most cohesive and impressive. *Jazz Trash* may be less approachable than *The Sun Died*, but it offers more in the way

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of unfettered improvisation. —Jon Andrews

The Sun Died—*Twistin' The Jug; The People's Choice; Canadian Sunset; Out Of It; Seed Shack; Ca' Purange (Jungle Soul); The Sun Died; Jivin' Around; Precious Memories; The Light.* (52:15)

Personnel—Eskelin, tenor saxophone; Marc Ribot, guitar; Kenny Wollesen, drums.

Jazz Trash—*Jazz Trash; Harmonia; Jargon; Interfaith; Untitled One; Rain; Trip Wire; 100 Days; 40 West.* (71:57)

Personnel—Eskelin, tenor saxophone; Andrea Parkins, accordion, sampler; Jim Black, drums.



Rachel Z

Room Of One's Own
NYC 6023

★★★★

Pianist/composer/arranger Rachel Z makes all the right moves on her NYC Records debut, a thoughtfully conceived, brilliantly executed and profoundly heartfelt project that pays homage to 10 triumphant women artists who have inspired her. Titled after the Virginia Woolf essay urging women to nurture their creative sensibilities, *Room Of One's Own* celebrates the courage, grace and resolve of such imaginative women as singers Billie Holiday and Joni Mitchell, dancer/choreographer Judith Jamison and writers Zora Neale Hurston and Murasaki Shikibu.

A reflective mood pervades the collection as Rachel Z tells stories on her piano. She embarks on piano runs that are hushed and pensive, fleet and oblique. On "Artemisia," dedicated to 17th-century painter Artemisia Gentileschi, she offers elegant and probing single-note lines. On "Feel The Power," dedicated to her opera-singing mother, she uncorks a dynamic ebb-and-flow stream of pianistic beauty and strength. And on the Mitchell-inspired "Talking To Electrons," she delivers dreamy piano swells as well as gentle turbulence.

For support, Rachel Z enlists several prominent women jazz musicians. Tracy Wormworth plays bass on several tracks, drummers Cindy Blackman and Terri Lyne Carrington take turns on the trap set, Maria Schneider conducts an eight-piece-brass-and-woodwind ensemble on two pieces, and violinist Regina Carter makes a remarkable cameo appearance on the lament for Holiday, "The Trail Of Her Blood In The Snow." Other noteworthy guests include bassist Charnett Moffett, percussionist Mino Cinelu and saxophonist George Garzone, who bounds in for the ride on tenor through the bright, brisk title tune and blows soprano trills on "Gently Sleeps The Pear Tree."

While she played keyboards during her re-

cent, high-profile stint with Wayne Shorter's electric group, Rachel Z keeps the proceedings here in the acoustic realm. She could have easily cut corners and applied a synthee to some of these tunes. Instead, she opts to use Wind Ensemble, the wind-instrument group on hand, which supplies burnished orchestral colors on four tracks, including the magnificent finale, "Ship Of Tears," arranged and conducted by Alvaro Cordero.

—Dan Ouellette

Room Of One's Own—*Artemisia; The Trail Of Her Blood In The Snow; Room Of One's Own; Dance Of The Lioness Cub; Feel The Power, Gently Sleeps The Pear Tree; Set Her Free; For The Concubine; Talking To Electrons; Ship Of Tears.* (57:25)

Personnel—Z, piano; Tracy Wormworth, Charnett Moffett, bass; Cindy Blackman, Terri Lyne Carrington, drums; George Garzone, soprano and tenor saxophones; Regina Carter, violin; Mino Cinelu, percussion; Melena Herrup, vocals; Dave Mann, alto and soprano saxophones; Donny McCaslin, tenor saxophone; Jim Hynes, trumpet flugelhorn; John Clark, Fred Griffen, french horn; Helen Campo, flute, alto flute; Charlie Pillow, oboe, english horn; Roger Rosenberg, clarinet, bass clarinet; Maria Schneider, Alvaro Cordero, conductors.



Eden Atwood

A Night In The Life
Concord Jazz 4730

★★★½

Suzanne Pittson

Blues And The Abstract Truth
Vineland 7753

★★★½

Ah, the eternal questions—among them: What do women want? and What makes a singer a jazz singer?

The latter is more suited to these pages, n'est-ce pas? What seems to be the most reasonable response is that a jazz singer approaches material the way a jazz instrumentalist does, employing phrasing and diction that personally interprets melodies and lyrics, that shows awareness of harmony, that makes the music move in that unique manner we call swing. Scat singing is another avenue of expression that sometimes indicates a jazz interpretation, though not always; and offering instrumental numbers vocally is yet another mode.

Singers Atwood and Pittson are two vocalists who, in their individual ways, each offer aspects of jazz singing; though Atwood's approach owes less to jazz than to cabaret.

The 27-year-old Memphis native who was

raised in Montana and lives in Chicago has a modest alto that suits her fondness for ballads. Here, on her fourth Concord release, she offers straightforward renditions, as you might expect in a cabaret club, like the Algonquin's Oak Room, where she's appeared. But hewing fairly closely to the letter of the tune does not mean unemotional, as Atwood proves with her regal treatment of "Lost In The Stars" and "I Could Have Told You," tunes that ponder the vastness of loss and aloneness. She's not as convincing on tunes that require a more mature (perhaps simply in years) singer: "Folks Who Live" and "Spring."

Atwood's jazz feeling, which is occasionally reminiscent of the grand Anita O'Day, comes out when she tackles tunes with a nice beat: the swaying "Willow," where she stretches out her words on the second chorus, and "If I Love Again," where she works both behind and ahead of the beat to create tension.

The singer's versions of "You Taught," a melody by McCoy Tyner graced with the final lyrics written by the magnificent Sammy Cahn, and "Moon River" are also quite strong. Atwood gets comfy backing from her trio, with Kahn evincing aspects of Red Garland and Bill Evans. Potter is a definite plus with his rangy solos.

San Francisco-based Pittson puts her cards on the table with the opening "Butch," Oliver Nelson's punchy blues: After singing her husband Jeff's crafty lyrics, she starts scatting. The same pattern is followed on "Out Of Nowhere," "You And The Night" and "Love For Sale." (The latter two open with tough, written-out improvisations delivered with verve simultaneously by Pittson and her husband.)

A holder of a master's in piano from San Francisco State University and a vocal teacher at nearby Sonoma State, Pittson is a gusty, informed scatter on this, her recording debut. She knows her chord changes, and many of her lines, as on "Butch" and "Love For Sale," have an appealing mix of melodicism and modernity. Some of her phrases, though, are not as sharp and her feel for the chords less precise, as on "Nowhere."

Pittson's jazz-rooted style gives a freshness to her melodic readings, and she takes welcome liberties with the themes of "In Love In Vain," "My Ship" and others. Happily, there's believability in her words. For sheer vocal prowess, there's the difficult title track, which Pittson negotiates flawlessly.

The singer, who is one to watch for, gets lots of help from her crew. Jeff Pittson is both a muscular, supportive accompanist and crack soloist; Swartz plays lines that ring and Clark offers ace time. Walrath's wry humor and general musical grace add unique color.

—Zan Stewart

A Night In The Life—*When The Sun Comes Out; I've Grown Accustomed To His Face; Willow Weep For Me; The Folks Who Live On The Hill; If I Love Again; I Could Have Told You; Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most; Medley: Lost In The Stars/So Many Stars; You Taught My Heart To Sing; Why Did I Choose You?; Moon River.* (58:48)

Personnel—Atwood, vocals; Jeremy Kahn, piano (1-6, 8-10); Larry Kohut, bass (1-3, 5-7, 8b-11); Joel Spencer, drums; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone (1, 3, 5, 7).

Blues And The Abstract Truth—*Butch And Butch; My Ship; You And The Night And The Music; In Love In Vain; Blues And The Abstract Truth; Out Of Nowhere; The Meaning Of The Blues; Love For Sale; Somewhere In Tokyo; Gingerbread*

Boy, (54:57)

Personnel—Pittson, vocals; Jack Walrath, trumpet, flugelhorn; Jeff Pittson, piano; Harvie Swartz, bass; Mike Clark, drums.



Tito Puente/India

Jazzin'

TropiJazz 82032

★★½

TropiJazz All Stars

TropiJazz All Stars

TropiJazz 62028

★½

It must have looked good on paper. First, Tito Puente's Latin Jazz Ensemble teams up with the Count Basie Orchestra to back India, New York's reigning salsa princess, on a jazzy, rhythmic foray into Anglo-pop. Then, an all-star band of Latin-jazz heavies including Puente, Eddie Palmieri, Michel Camilo, David Sanchez, Dave Valentin, Giovanni Hidalgo and Hilton Ruiz pull out all the stops in a special live performance. But somehow, the chemistry isn't there, the sessions don't quite gel and the music falls short of expectations.

Puente's contribution to *Jazzin'* is solid: His ensemble is tight and swinging, his collaborations with the Basie band are smooth and lustrous, and his solos display a percussive mastery undiminished by age. But the album is primarily a vehicle for India, whose pre-salsa experience in r&b hasn't prepared her for the role of jazz diva. She scats like Ella Fitzgerald on the cheery title track but can't approach Billie Holiday's or Dinah Washington's pathos on "Love For Sale" and "What A Difference A Day Made," or for that matter, Peggy Lee's on "Fever." Her pliant soprano is most effective on a pair of radio-ready pop songs with a Puente-less group led by vibist Vincent Montana Jr.

TropiJazz All Stars proves only that nothing exceeds like excess. Recorded at a private concert staged especially for this production, the Stars, under the leadership of emigre Cuban trombonist Juan Pablo Torres, sound nervous and underrehearsed, playing endless clichéd solos on hackneyed arrangements of derivative material. Moments of inspiration, like David

Sanchez's transcendent sax on "Straight Street" and Giovanni Hidalgo's hyperkinetic congas on "On Fire," are nearly lost in a sea of tedious bombast, and even the percussion jam on "Five Beat Mambo" falls flat. The album has a certain camp value, however; in 20 years it may be a collector's item.
—Larry Birnbaum

Jazzin'—*Jazzin'*; *Fever*; *Love For Sale*; *Crazy He Calls Me*; *To Be In Love*; *Take It Or Lose It*; *Wave*; *Going Out Of My Head*; *Love Me*; *What A Difference A Day Made*. (43:12)

Personnel—India, vocals; Puente, timbales, vibes, marimba; on tracks 1–3, 7: Mario Rivera, tenor saxophone; Jose Madera, conga; Johnny Rodriguez, bongos; Sonny Bravo, piano; Bobby Porcelli, alto saxophone; Mitch Frohman, baritone sax; Ray Vega, Ito Jerez, trumpet; John Benitez, bass; Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez, drums; Luisito Quintero, percussion; on tracks 4, 6, 8, 10: Grover Mitchell, Melvin Wanzo, Clarence Banks, Alvin Walker, trombone; Bill Hughes, bass trombone; Mike Williams, Bob Ojeda, Derrick Gardner, trumpet/flugelhorn; Scotty Barnhart, trumpet; Kenny Hing, Doug Miller, tenor saxophone/flute; Manny Boyd, Brad Leali, alto saxophone, flute; John Williams, bass clarinet; George Caldwell, piano; James Leary, bass; Rich Thompson, drums; Willie Mathews, guitar; on tracks 5, 9: Vincent Montana Jr., vibes; Hilton Ruiz, piano, synthesizer; Dave Valentin, flute (5, 7, 9); Patrick Sean McLain, bass (5); Bernd Schoenhart, guitar (9).

TropiJazz All Stars—*Show Intro*; *On Fire*; *Straight Street*; *Rumba De Cajon*; *Everyday I Have The Blues*; *Five Beat Mambo*; *Bembe*; *Suite 925–2828*. (72:27)

Personnel—Tito Puente, timbales, percussion; Hilton Ruiz, Michel Camilo (2), Eddie Palmieri (8), piano; David Sanchez, tenor saxophone (3); Dave Valentin, flute; Humberto Ramirez, Charlie Sepulveda, trumpet; J.P. Torres, trombone; John Benitez, bass; Giovanni Hidalgo, Richie Flores, congas, percussion; Johnny Almendra, percussion; Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez, drums; Jillian, vocal (5); Felipe Luciano, MC.

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Meantime

Welcome: Mother Earth
Justin Time 80

★★★

Sonny Greenwich

Spirit In The Air
Kleo 3

★★★½

Based in eastern Canada, guitarist Sonny Greenwich may be an elusive figure for U.S. audiences. Since stints with Miles Davis, John Handy and Hank Mobley in the late '60s, he's appeared infrequently south of the border, and locating his Canadian CDs may require some diligence. He's worth the effort. Greenwich admits to the influence of horn players and singers, and his approach to electric and acoustic guitars includes a pure tone and clean, articulate phrasing. His curiosity and eagerness to experiment extend to world musics and guitar synthesizer.

Welcome: Mother Earth spans generations as well as genres, matching Greenwich with his son and fellow guitarist Sonny Greenwich Jr. With bassist Al Baculis, they form the nucleus of the eclectic group Meantime, essaying hip-hop fusion, jazz, blues and even ambient music with varying degrees of success. The two guitarists offer a clear contrast in styles, as the younger man draws on a guitar vocabulary shaped by the rock world with some tendency to wailing, arena-rock excess. Greenwich Sr. sounds a little out of place amid the street sounds and martial rhythms of his "Cruisin' The Hood," but he's completely comfortable with the twists and turns of "Detour" and the laid-back blues of "Two In One."

Greenwich Sr.'s *Spirit In The Air* presents buoyant, often pretty tunes with tasteful guitar lines creating introspective, spiritual moods. Greenwich's musical inquisitiveness leads him into tracks as diverse as "El Niño," a mellow samba; "Free Form," a challenging group improvisation on Greenwich's theme; and "Raga," a non-traditional piece driven by racing tablas. I'd have liked to hear more of the understated blues feeling that Greenwich brought to his strong duet CD with Paul Bley, *Outside In* (Justin Time, 1995). Still, *Spirit In The Air* remains accessible and melodic with an undercurrent of mystery. (Kleo Records: 183 Meloche, Vaudreuil, Quebec, Canada J7V 8P2)

—Jon Andrews

Welcome: Mother Earth—Cruisin' The Hood; Lugnut; Down By The Farm Intro; Down By The Farm; Tortoise Shell Sky; Detour; Two In One; Welcome: Mother Earth. (60:05)

Personnel—Greenwich, Sonny Greenwich Jr., guitars; Al Baculis, electric bass, vocal (4); James Gelfand, keyboards; Jim Hillman, drums.

Spirit In The Air—El Niño, Free Form; Black Beauty; Far Country; Raga; Spirit In The Air. (59:45)

Personnel—Greenwich, guitar, keyboards; James Gelfand, piano, keyboards; Ron Seguin, bass; Jim Hillman, drums; Lazaro Rene, Ernie Nelson, percussion, voice; Guy Thouin, tablas.



Carol Sloane

The Songs Sinatra Sang
Concord Jazz 4725

★★★★★

Out Of The Blue
Koch Jazz 3-7810

★★★★★

Out Of The Blue (originally issued on Columbia and recorded 36 years ago) was Sloane's debut disc, coming hot on the heels of a surprisingly successful appearance at Newport. Having spent two years on the road with Larry Elgart's band and subbing for a while in the challenging vocal trio of Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, she was found to be well endowed, which this first album assuredly demonstrates.

Although spending a lot of time in the lower ranges of her pipes, Sloane had the capacity to soar to great heights, as on "Deep Purple" and the all-too-short "Night And Day." Her choice of material gives a hint of her listening habits and her earlier stints with a Providence, R.I., dance band, followed by several years of cocktail lounges (remember, this was in the late '50s and early '60s, when music like this could be heard in such places). All the arrangements are by Bill Finegan, except "Prelude To A Kiss" and "Night And Day," which bear the Bob Brookmeyer trademark. Finegan is most adept at blending voices with instruments, as he does to great advantage on "Who Cares."

Sloane's new work reveals a maturer but no less seminal voice. On these tunes associated with Sinatra, she offers her own very personal recreation while still paying homage to one of her idols. Her nine-minute version of "One For My Baby" is stunning, with the spare, complementary piano of Bill Charlap and the crying tenor sax of Frank Wess weaving in and out of

splendidly enunciated lyrics.

Like Sinatra, Sloane includes several little-known verses to "At Long Last Love," "In The Wee Small Hours" (her voice almost cracking with real emotion) and "The Night We Called It A Day." She also chooses to close out the set with a way-slowed-down reading of "Young At Heart," a vocal-piano duet, totally unlike her mentor's famous rendition.

Sloane's intonation and broad range put her among a select few vocalists whom musicians consider their equals. On both recordings, she is surrounded by some of jazz's finest practitioners, each contributing mightily to the overall production.

—Francesca Nemko

The Songs Sinatra Sang—I've Got You Under My Skin; In The Still Of The Night; One For My Baby; At Long Last Love; I'll Be Around; Fly Me To The Moon; In The Wee Small Hours Of The Morning; You Make Me Feel So Young; The Night We Called It A Day; You Go To My Head; I Fall In Love Too Easily; The Best Is Yet To Come; Young At Heart. (61:14)

Personnel—Sloane, vocals; Bill Charlap, piano; Frank Wess, tenor saxophone, flute; tracks 1, 2, 4, 6, 10, 12: Byron Stripling, Greg Gisbert, trumpet; Steve Turre, trombone; Bill Easley, tenor, alto, soprano saxophones; Scott Robinson, baritone, bass saxophones; bass clarinet; Ben Brown, bass; Dennis Mackrel, drums; tracks 3, 5, 7, 9, 11: Sean Smith, bass; Ron Vincent, drums.

Out Of The Blue—Prelude To A Kiss; Aren't You Glad You're You; Little Girl Blue; Who Cares; My Ship; Will You Still Be Mine; The More I See You; Deep Purple; Life Is Just A Bowl Of Cherries; My Silent Love; Night And Day; I Want You To Be The First To Know; April In My Heart. (38:08)

Personnel—Sloane, vocals; Bernie Leighton, piano; Art Davis, George Duvivier, bass; Walter Perkins, drums; Barry Galbraith, Jim Hall, guitar; Nick Travis, trumpet; Clark Terry, trumpet; flugelhorn; Bob Brookmeyer, trombone.



Joe Maneri

Dahabenzapple
hat ART 6188

★★★½

Let The Horse Go
Leo 232

★★★½

Joe Maneri insists that you pay attention. Guided by his investigations of microtonality, this quartet's music demands much from the audience. Maneri's system provides up to 72 notes to the octave, and this helps account for his distinctive, personal sound on reeds. Consider the breathy, slurred monologue that opens "Dahabenzapple." On alto sax, Maneri groans and growls, sounding off-balance, almost tipsy. Later on the same track, he introduces

a Middle Eastern melody over the drone of strings. His rhythm section is not restricted to timekeeping, and rhythms are implied more often than expressed.

Maneri values the interaction of the collective. Reeds, violin and arco bass all strive for speech-like inflections, somewhat blurring the distinctions between individual voices and creating the effect of a three-way conversation.

Dahabenzapple features veteran bassist Cecil McBee joining Maneri's working group. The bassist excels in multiple roles, acting as a solo voice, establishing a rhythm, or joining with violin to establish drone textures. During the mournful title track, McBee rarely plays a recognizable bass line.

Three overlongly pieces comprise the concert, and the compositions loosely guide the interplay. In the course of each 20-minute track, a sense of sameness eventually sets in, despite Maneri's tactic of alternating saxophones and clarinet.

As Maneri indicates in liner notes to *Let The Horse Go*, part of his method is to have the notes and the melody sound "a little bit off." Violinist Mat Maneri knows the method well, and he's both versatile and effective, shadowing or playing counterpoint to the senior Maneri's reeds, and soloing with an unusual "horn-like" quality. *Let The Horse Go* may be preferable for the additional variety associated with a greater number of compositions. Most of *Dahabenzapple's* virtues and flaws are present here as well. For this studio session, Maneri's regular bassist John Lockwood rejoins the group, enhancing the feeling of give-and-take within a close-knit collective.

Choose *Dahabenzapple* to hear McBee or opt for *Let The Horse Go* for greater variety.

—Jon Andrews

Dahabenzapple—*Dahabenzapple: The Love You're Giving Us; Dedication.* (66:23)

Personnel—Maneri, tenor and alto saxophones, clarinet, piano (2); Mat Maneri, violin; Cecil McBee, bass; Randy Peterson, drums.

Let The Horse Go—*The Beginning; Let The Horse Go; The New Clock; Whittle Off The Middle; Slip; The Middle; Whew!; Leaving This Place; Bird Tag; Is It Naughty Enough?; The End.* (56:13)

Personnel—Maneri, tenor and alto saxophones, clarinet; Mat Maneri, violin; Randy Peterson, drums; John Lockwood, bass.



Egberto Gismonti Trio

ZigZag
ECM 1582

★★★★

Raiz de Pedra

Diário De Bordo
Tiptoe/enja 888 882

★★★

Stateside postmodernists may grope toward a fusion of classical, jazz and world musics, but Gismonti has already been there, done that. His music is a category in itself, combining the prickly moodiness of Euro-jazz and the rhythmic vitality of his native Brazil, with hardly a trace of blues or swing. Leading his own group, he creates airy, abstract textures on guitar or piano, dispelling occasional wisps of sentimentality with a rigorous technique so dry it's almost dour. As guest pianist with Raiz de Pedra, he spikes the Brazilian fusion band's perkier, more conventionally melodic music with jagged runs and jangling chords.

With the departure of cellist Jacques Morelenbaum, Gismonti is down to a spare string trio on *ZigZag*, throwing his own playing into stark relief. But the rich, woody tone and extended range of his 10- and 14-string guitars, meshing closely with Nando Carneiro's standard guitar and Zeca Assumpção's upright bass, produce a surprisingly full-bodied sound. On the turbulent title track he uses harp-like glisses to suggest running water; on the Spanish-flavored "Mestiço & Caboclo," he rhapsodizes with a virtuosity that would make John Fahey gasp.

Even in his most tempestuous cascades, Gismonti maintains a classicist's reserve, bursting with ideas all the while holding his emotions in check. In general, he's more passionate on piano, oozing melancholy on "Um Anjo" or kicking up his heels on "Forrobojó." But though the music on *ZigZag* is always stimulating and often delightful, its appeal is primarily intellectual.

Raiz de Pedra is a sextet from Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil's southernmost state, but their sound is closer to the fusion of Return to Forever than to the heavily Europeanized *gaucha* music of their native region. Gismonti plays piano on three tracks of *Diário De Bordo*, roiling the smooth waters of "Ó Quem Tai!," prancing up and down the keyboard on "Amigos De Longe" and ruminating wistfully on "Levando A Vida." On its own, the band is, by and large, breezy and tuneful, with saxophonist Márcio Tubino, guitarist Pedro Tagliani and pianist Conrado Pecoits trading lyrical solos over sprightly samba rhythms on catchy numbers like "Linha Azul" and "As Histórias De Domingos."

—Larry Birnbaum

ZigZag—*ZigZag; Mestiço & Caboclo; Orixás; Carta De Amor; Um Anjo; Forrobojó.* (54:35)

Personnel—Gismonti, 10- and 14-string guitars (1-4), piano (5, 6); Nando Carneiro, guitar(1-4), synthesizer(5,6); Zeca Assumpção, acoustic bass.

Diário De Bordo—*Ó Quem Tai!; São Sepé; Linha Azul; Amigos De Longe; As Histórias De Domingos; Munique; Levando A Vida; Tempos De Minuano; O Navio.* (46:42 minutes)

Personnel—Márcio Tubino, tenor, alto and soprano saxophones, flute, surdo, caxixis, voice; Pedro Tagliani, electric, acoustic and synth guitars, cavaquinho, triangle, surdo, voice; César Audi, drums, surdo, voice, effects; Carlo Mombelli, bass, fretless bass; Fernando do Ó, percussion, bombo leguero, voice, effects; Conrado Pecoits (2, 3, 5, 6), Egberto Gismonti (1, 4, 7), piano; Domingos Pereira, berimbau (5).

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JAZZ

Strung-Out Jazz

by Dan Ouellette

Jazz guitar performances run the gamut from smooth-toned and melodic to sharp-edged and comic in this latest batch of releases by veterans and youngsters, traditionalists and renegades.

Kenny Burrell & The Jazz Heritage All-Stars: *Live At The Blue Note* (Concord Jazz 4731; 64:22; ★★★) Kenny Burrell's a solid guitarist who consistently delivers tasty mainstream fare. On his latest CD, Burrell scores again with this set recorded at the Blue Note. He and his band delve into reliable material from several eras of jazz, ranging from a big, swinging take on Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer" to an even more thrilling spin through Chick Corea's "Tones For Joan's Bones." While Burrell takes his share of smooth, relaxed guitar solos (especially on his delicious rendering of the Gershwins' "Embraceable You"), he allows his band plenty of room to move. Vocal outings by Vanessa Rubin, Jeanie Bryson, and Burrell himself (on his "Dear Ella") are so-so.

Mark Whitfield: *Forever Love* (Verve 533 921; 59:57; ★★★½) Romance is alive and well on Mark Whitfield's low-lights outing of classic ballads that he beautifully renders with warm-toned, tender guitar embraces. It's an exquisite collection with lots of plusses: the 21-string orchestra that applies lush colors to several numbers, vocalist Diana Krall joining Whitfield for a couple of slow dances (including the lovely "Some Other Time") and the leader giving passionate, show-stopping solo acoustic guitar performances (including "My One And Only Love"). The sole original, "Forever," given a slightly moire upbeat treatment than the other tunes, feels a tad out of place. But overall Whitfield hits the mark with this quietly enchanting album.

Mark Elf: *The Eternal Triangle* (Jen Bay 0002; 58:48; ★★★) It took guitarist Mark Elf eight years to self-release this album, which is a satisfying jaunt through a straight-ahead swinging and bopping session. He's in good company with his support team composed of pianist Hank Jones, tenor saxophonist Jimmy Heath, bassist Ray Drummond and drummer Ben Riley. Material is mostly standard issue (Stitt, Dameron, Golson, Ellington, Kern), but Elf's having a blast picking out fleet lines on the full-sail tunes like Freddie Redd's "So Samba" and employing the tender touch on relaxed numbers like Duke's "Prelude To A Kiss." Elf also unveils two impressive originals, "Tea Cup" and "The Elf," which both swing vigorously.

Harald Haerter/Dewey Redman: *Mostly Live* (enja/Tiptoe 888 825; 64:04; ★★★) The Harald Haerter Quartet is a two-guitar group featuring the inspired per-



Kenny Burrell: big, swinging takes

formances of the leader and Philipp Schaufelberger. Throw into the mix saxophonist Dewey Redman, whose playing is spirited on the selected tracks he guests on, and you've got a superb collection recorded live at various European venues. While the two guitarist only swap extended solos on one track here (the swinging cooker "Spur Of The Moment"), they improvise freely on three short interludes. Their individual flights are just as captivating. Haerter plays with riveting intensity on both "Cosmic" and "Variation On Mute," while Schaufelberger shines with his quirky, Frisell-like voicings and phrasings on inventive reworkings of two Monk tunes, "Misterioso" and "Children Song." Best cut: the blistering attack on Redman's "Walls Bridges."

Joe Morris Ensemble: *Elsewhere* (Homestead 233; 60:28; ★★★½) On Joe Morris' latest CD, he propels the action into the free zone with exhilarating billows of improvisation. He soars into fleet single-note flights, paints pointillistic canvases, accents his phrases with explosive intensity, unleashes frenzied and fractured melodies, and infuses the proceedings with a subtle blues touch. This quartet set, which also features the dazzling piano tumbles of Matthew Shipp and the overtime rhythmic rumblings of bassist William Parker and drummer Whit Dickey, is at stretches gripping and scattershot. The roiling material early in the going gets a little too dense at times, but when the ensemble takes a few brief respites from the sonic blasts on the title track, the music begins to breathe. Morris is at his best on "Violet," offering probing and pensive lines.

Bill DeArango: *Anything Went* (GM Recordings 3027; 63:42; ★★★) Bill DeArango recorded with Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, Ike Quebec and Ben Webster in the '40s, but retired from the full-time rigors of the jazz scene in the early '50s. He's gigged and recorded sporadically since then, but DeArango returns with brio on his first recorded appearance as leader in over 40 years. With tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano and Schuller brothers Ed and George on bass and drums, respectively, DeArango launches into free, but melodically rich adventures. The most predictable of the batch is a pleasing take on "Bye Bye Blackbird." But the standout tracks feature DeArango using his octave pedal, which allows him to play with distinctively rich bass tones. Also noteworthy are the four invigorating improv duets with Lovano interspersed throughout the collection.

Zeena Parkins/Elliott Sharp: *psycho-acoustic <BLACKBURST>* (Victo 044; 53:16; ★★★) Using a variety of digital gadgets and synthesized doodads, original Zorn Cobra mates Zeena Parkins (electric harp, bass clarinet) and Elliott Sharp (double guitar-bass) spin maddening webs of sound that are, well, far-out, man. From cartoonish romps (how about a party of Tazmanian devils grunting in your walls?) to sci-fi soundscapes (alas, without a theremin), Parkins and Sharp serve up improvised platters of sonic smudges, skitterings and sawings. Highlight: Sharp's ping-pongy doodlings and haunting bell-like harmonics on the slushy, percussive "Too Mass Chain." **DB**

BEYOND

Book Listening

by Larry Birnbaum

Ellipsis Arts, an eclectic world-music label from Roslyn, Long Island, has helped pioneer the CD-book set, with a disc either bound into a smaller hardcover book or boxed together with a larger paperback. The quality of the company's recent book-CDs varies widely—from great music, beautifully illustrated and thoughtfully annotated, to slickly packaged mediocrity. The concept may be doomed to rapid obsolescence, but you still can't display a CD-ROM on a coffee table.

Various Artists: *Jali Kunda* (Ellipsis Arts 3510; 74:54: ★★★★★½) This project represents a musical homecoming for Jali Foday Musa Suso, the Chicago-based Gambian kora player best known for his work with American musicians like Herbie Hancock. Here, Suso and producer Bill Laswell capture traditional Mandinka vocal, kora and balafon music in Gambia, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau with state-of-the-art fidelity. Gorgeous photos by Daniel Lainé and illuminating notes by Suso highlight the accompanying 96-page book, which is padded with puffy essays by Robert Palmer, Amiri Baraka and others. The field recordings, featuring ensembles of master griots unknown outside West Africa, are



Jali Foday Musa Suso: a musical homecoming

brilliant, but Suso's own studio collaborations with Laswell, Philip Glass and Pharoah Sanders sound cheesy by comparison.

Various Artists: *Gravikords, Whirlies & Pyrophones* (3530; 72:23: ★★★★★) Assembled by Bart Hopkin, who publishes the journal *Experimental Musical Instruments*, this collection celebrates the wacky world of musical gizmos and their inventors, from Russia's Leon Theremin to Jamaica's Sugar Belly. There are twice as many entries in the 96-page book as there are tracks on the CD,

perhaps because many of the instruments look more interesting than they sound. Often these glass harmonicas, clay drums, bamboo flutes, bicycle-wheel guitars and car-horn organs, played in minimalist or new-age style, simply add timbral variation to the sounds of synthesizers or conventional acoustic instruments. A delightful exception are Qubais Reed Ghazala's artfully short-circuited household gadgets, which mimic a pond of bullfrogs.

Various Artists: *Klezmer Music: A Marriage Of Heaven And Earth* (4090; 58:04: ★★★★★½) Klezmer, the wedding music of Eastern European Jews, has enjoyed a decade-long revival, spawning reinterpretations that range from strictly traditional to avant garde. These recent recordings include the classical inflections of the Chicago Klezmer Ensemble, the gypsy rhythms of Di Naye Kapelye, the antique instrumentation of Budowitz, the Coltrane-esque modulations of Andy Statman and the circus-style space jam of Naftule's Dream. All share a schmaltzy spirit of bittersweet nostalgia, conjured up by laughing clarinets and weeping fiddles.

Various Artists: *Deep In The Heart Of Tuva* (4050; 65:55: ★★★★★) From the steppes of Tuva, near Mongolia, comes the unlikely musical fad of the '90s—throat singing, which uses overtones to produce several vocal pitches at once. Progressing from the sublime to the ridiculous, the album begins with pure throat singing by masters like Oleg Kuular and Oorzhak Khanashtarool, whose whistling harmonics resound eerily over grinding bass tones, then moves on to folkloric instrumentals, collaborations with Russian and Bulgarian women's choirs and finally to the blues stylings of San Francisco's Paul "Earthquake" Pena, who applies throat-singing techniques to the music of John Lee Hooker.

Various Artists: *The Heart Of Dharma* (4050; 62:16: ★★★★★½) Produced by David Lewiston, the Alan Lomax of ethnic music, this superb album of Tibetan Buddhist chanting includes four choral prayers from the Drepung Monastery and a vocal/instrumental rite from the Khampagar Monastery. The monks' deep groaning generates ethereal overtones that hover in the air while austere melodies slowly rise to climactic peaks. The final chant is punctuated by Tibetan oboes, trumpets and percussion, creating effects that might have blown Edgard Varèse's mind. It's both musically and spiritually enlightening.

Glen Velez: *Rhythmcolor Exotica* (4140; 58:33: ★★) This CD's mini-book tries to cloak frame drums (tambourines, etc.) in an aura of ancient mystery, but the music of frame drummer Glen Velez and his Handance Ensemble is thoroughly contemporary. Drawing from various world-percussion traditions, Velez lays down complex patterns using cycles of 4, 5, 7 and 41 beats. But with little harmonic or melodic development, the textures remain relatively static, less hypnotic than merely tedious.

DB

10

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by michael longo



REISSUES

Victorious Jazz?

by John Corbett

Some would argue that you shouldn't judge a disc by its package, that the only important ingredient in a record is the way it sounds. The music may be the first consideration, but when you're dealing with reissued material—particularly stuff that's already been out on the market a few times—it's reasonable to scrutinize the whole enchilada: the musical selection,

detail and completeness of historical information, right down to the product design and sound of the remastering. BMG's new RCA Victor reissue series seeks to bring old things to light, dredging the vaults for nifty unfamiliar and known quantities alike. (We'll refrain from reviewing the Coleman Hawkins collection, *Body & Soul*, which consists of material that's been compiled ad nauseum.)

But the series lacks any overall coherence; and in certain cases, slipshod packaging (including ads for other discs in the series annoyingly plastered underneath the clear CD tray) gets in the way of the total potential experience. The performances themselves would have received higher ratings. Classic music deserves a classier presentation.

Sonny Rollins: *The Bridge* (68518; 40:44; ★★★½) Rollins' "first comeback" from '62 has already appeared on CD (*The Quartets Featuring Jim Hall*), replete with extra material which is for some reason not included here. The music is unquestionably masterful, with the lean rhythm section of Bob Cranshaw on bass and Ben Riley on drums (Harry T. Saunders on "God Bless The Child"), and Hall and Rollins working magic together. But the accompanying photos are not all from the period at hand (both earlier and later), and in fact the cover shot is from the '70s, initially making me wonder whether it was actually *The Bridge* or some sort of compilation.

Charles Mingus: *New Tijuana Moods* (68591; 68:21; ★★★★★) Trumpeter Clarence Shaw disappeared after recording with Mingus on *Tijuana Moods* in '57 (he later resurfaced as Gene Shaw and recorded a couple of obscure records for Argo), but his outstanding playing on that date secured him a spot in jazz lore. It's also a record that features alto saxist Shafi Hadi and some of Mingus' most important compositions. But the way it's re-packaged here is also confusing, since the four alternate takes that make it "new"—assembled out of unusual partial versions that remained in the can—were produced by Ed Michel in the mid-'70s; though it is only possible to deduce



Johnny Hodges: best of the bunch

that through his liner notes since there's no such info in the credits. And as well as being ugly, the photos here, too, are anachronistic.

Duke Ellington: *Sophisticated Lady* (68516; 59:04; ★★★★★) While some releases in the series are single albums, there are also items like this Ellington sampler, which boils down the popular *Blanton-Webster Band* and *Black, Brown And Beige* three-CD sets to a single disc. It's a chronologically organized selection of some of Duke's best and most widely known versions of "Take The 'A' Train," "The 'C' Jam Blues," "Caravan" and "Mood Indigo" (among others), recorded in the years '40-'46. On the whole, this package makes sense (i.e., it's good to have a cheaper survey available for neophyte Ellingtonians), though the photos are from the '50s.

Dizzy Gillespie: *Dizzier And Dizzier* (68517; 49:42; ★★½) This summation of the trumpet star circa '46-'49 seems almost intentionally misleading, and in fact it is probable that someone who bought last year's *The Complete RCA Victor Recordings* (two-CD set will be duped into shelling out for this collection culled from the exact same recordings. (At least the Ellington reduces six discs to one.) *Dizzier And Dizzier* uses a modified version of the same Ira Gitler liner text as the other set, too. As for the music, it's delicious, playful bebop, with vocalists including Kenny "Pancho" Hagood, Johnny Hartman, Joe Carroll and, of course, Diz. But *again* with the photos—note that Gillespie didn't play his up-pointing horn 'til 1953.

Paul Desmond/Gerry Mulligan: *Two Of A Mind* (68513; 40:50; ★★½) The full records reissued in RCA's series are less problematic, though they all adhere to the series' cover concept and thus don't reproduce the original artwork. Nevertheless, a rediscovery like this 1962 recording of ingenious alto saxist Desmond and baritone great Mulligan is a big plus in the series' column; rather than go solely for their time-honored cash cows, they wisely chose to dig up this lovely, forgotten

record. With Mel Lewis and Connie Kay alternating on drums, the affair has a sureness of swing that perfectly buoys the horn's gentle counterpoint.

Chet Baker: *The Italian Sessions* (68590; 55:20; ★★★½) Another interesting unearthing from '62, this disc contains eight tracks recorded while West Coast trumpeter Baker was living in Europe. Though the sessions took place in Italy, his band was actually the French quartet of tenor saxist and flautist Bobby Jaspar plus Italian pianist Amadeo Tommasi. Most striking is how far out-front Baker is; there's little of his trademark coyness—

he's biting, surging and damn powerful. Swiss-born drummer Daniel Humair is a joy, as well, and undersung guitarist René Thomas sounds super, working through tunes by Charlie Parker, Rollins, Thelonious Monk, Oscar Pettiford, some standards and Tommasi's Miles-style chamber blues "Ballata In Forma Di Blues."

Johnny Hodges: *Triple Play* (68592; 50:19; ★★★★★) In the tradition of his '50s records, Hodges made some great small-band music in the '60s, including dates for Impulse! and this RCA record, recorded in '67 as Hodges' health was in decline. Along with crystal-clear remastering, three unreleased tracks ("Monkey On A Limb," "Big Boy Blues" and Hodges' slinky "Figurine") are included. The three different bands included Ray Nance on cornet, Lawrence Brown on trombone, Paul Gonsalves and Jimmy Hamilton on tenors, Roy Eldridge and Cat Anderson on trumpets; Les Spann's electric soul-jazz guitar on "For Jammers Only" provides an out-of-the-blue(s) moment. *Triple Play's* the best total package of the bunch.

Benny Goodman Quartet: *Together Again* (68593; 41:27; ★★★★★) In 1963, more than 25 years since its mayfly-like birth and demise, this crucial interracial band re-assembled for Victor. The full quartet—Gene Krupa on drums, Teddy Wilson on piano and Lionel Hampton on vibes—retains its instant charm: Dynamo Krupa is a jack-in-the-box of swing, Goodman's tone only enriched with age, Wilson is a paragon of taste and Hampton radiates happiness. The remastering is particularly friendly here, though the different recording techniques of the '60s make the group sound lighter than on their original sides. **DB**

Initial **Down Beat** ratings:

- *The Bridge*: ★★★★★ (7/5/62 issue)
- *Tijuana Moods*: ★★★★★ (8/30/62)
- *Two Of A Mind*: ★★★★★ (1/17/63)
- *Triple Play*: ★★★★★½ (5/30/68)
- *Together Again*: ★★★★★ (3/26/64)

BLINDFOLD TEST

MARCH 1997

John Abercrombie

by Larry Birnbaum

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.

Swimming against the tide, John Abercrombie keeps post-fusion guitar relevant in the neo-bop era. He straddles the boundaries between freedom and structure, his dark, slippery lines ringing with mystery and melancholy in contexts ranging from trios to big bands. And though he's known for his spaced-out meditations, his music is firmly grounded in mainstream jazz.

Born 52 years ago in Port Chester, N.Y., Abercrombie studied at the Berklee School of Music in Boston, where he also played in an organ trio led by Johnny "Hammond" Smith. Later he worked with Jeremy Steig, Gil Evans, Gato Barbieri, Dave Liebman, Billy Cobham, Ralph Towner and Kenny Wheeler, among others. He cut his first album as a leader, *Timeless*, for ECM in 1974, with Jan Hammer and Jack DeJohnette. He's maintained his association with both the label and drummer ever since, recording with DeJohnette's New Directions band and with their Gateway trio with bassist Dave Holland. Abercrombie's latest album is *Tactics* (ECM), with organist Dan Wall and drummer Adam Nussbaum.

This was his third Blindfold Test.

George Benson

"P Park" (from *That's Right*, GRP, 1996) Benson, guitar; Paul Paterson, bass; Michael Bland, drums; Eric Leeds, saxophone; Ricky Peterson, keyboards.

Great groove. I like it a lot; I just don't know who it is. It could be George Benson. Those licks sound like George. If that's not George Benson, it's one of his clones. I heard a guy playing live on television who sounded exactly like George Benson; he even played a George Benson guitar. But that's George; I can tell by the vibrato. I don't know what record it is, but he sounds great. Essentially, there's not much going on, but the groove is fantastic. It's not much of a composition, just an excuse to play over one or two chords, but nobody can do that stuff better than him. 5 stars, as many as you can give him. Not so much for the composition—that's pretty boring—but the groove is fantastic, and the guitar playing is great.

Al Di Meola

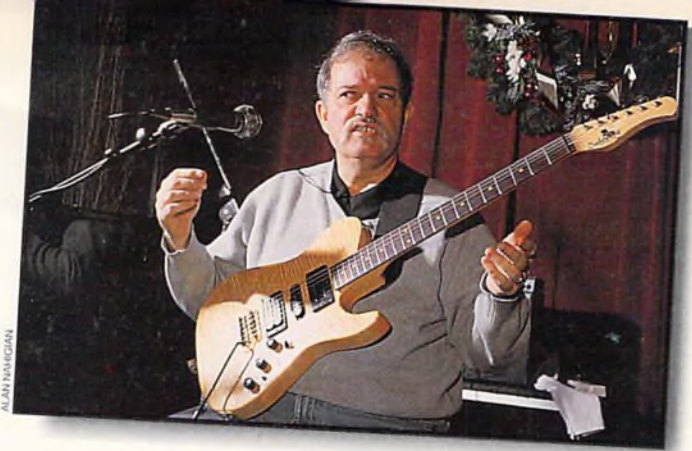
"Precious Little You" (from *Orange And Blue*, BlueMoon, 1994) Di Meola, guitars, harp, synthesizer, flute, percussion; Mario Parmisano, piano; Marc Johnson, bass; Manu Katché, drums; Henan Romero, strummed piano strings.

It's not ringing a bell. It's somebody who's more pop-oriented. With all the synthesizers, the sound of it is not what I like to listen to, but the guitar is very nice and warm. It could be one of a number of people. The only thing that comes to mind would be one of the guys from the West Coast, Lee Ritenour or somebody. This kind of music doesn't have a lot of personality—it's a little saccharine—so I don't know what to make of it. The guitar playing is nice but not that interesting, and the music sort of sounds like a shopping mall. On the strength of the guitar playing, I'd have to give it 2 stars. Some people would probably really like it; I just think it's kind of faceless.

Kenny Burrell

"Black And Tan Fantasy" (from *Then Along Came Kenny*, Evidence, 1996) Burrell, guitar.

It sounds like a much older piece, almost like something that



comes from Eddie Lang or Carl Kress—a very early period of guitar—but the recording sounds too modern. What comes to mind first is Larry Coryell, because I've heard him play things like this. It's not one of the guys I'm used to listening to a lot. The only other thing I could think of would be a guy like George Van Eps. [pauses] Kenny Burrell. I've heard Kenny play some things like this, but the Kenny Burrell I hear is usually playing electric guitar with a real round tone. It's such a specific sound and phrasing. But this kind of a piece on acoustic guitar is not what I'm used to hearing him play. I prefer hearing Kenny play electric guitar, but that was still a nice thing to hear, and the way he was strumming and playing really created that old ragtime guitar sound I used to hear guys like Eddie Lang, Carl Kress and Lonnie Johnson play on records. I'd give it 5 stars because it's Kenny Burrell, and I just love his playing.

Bill Frisell/Kermit Driscoll/Joey Baron

"Rag" (from *Live*, Gramavision, 1995) Frisell, guitar; Driscoll, bass; Baron, drums.

It's Bill Frisell and his trio with Kermit Driscoll and Joey Baron. I've heard them play this tune, but I don't remember the name of it. This is a great little trio. Bill has his own style; it's so different from any other improvised jazz guitar you'll hear. He's not a linear player, but he can play that way. He's really found his own way to play and improvise, and he sticks to it. His music has always had a strong country or cowboy feeling, like sitting around a campfire, and lots of humor. His music sounds very American but at the same time very out, like an abstract Tex Ritter. I can't tell what Joey Baron's doing; it sounds like he's using a bellows or something. Let's give it 4½ stars, just because I like what Bill does. And he's such an individual that I can usually tell it's him when he's tuning up; of course, sometimes when he plays it sounds like he's tuning up. But he's immediately recognizable, and that's what I love about him.

Jim Hall

"Consequently" (from *Something Special*, MusicMasters, 1993) Hall, guitar, composer; Larry Goldings, piano; Steve LaSpina, bass.

Nice line. It's Jim. I'm getting Jim Hall from the song; it must be his song. This is him with Larry Goldings and Steve LaSpina. I never heard this record; I knew they did one. I've heard Jim write some things like this. They're like atonal blues, kind of a blues but with this twisted, intervallic line based off of some diminished scale or something. Jim plays so compositionally, and he composes really great, too. He plays like he writes; he's thinking player. I guess he'd be my all-time favorite, so 100,000 stars—all the stars in the universe. When I first heard the album he did with Sonny Rollins, *The Bridge*, that just turned my head around completely. It was like a whole nother way to play the guitar. It was still from the transition, but it sounded more modern, contrapuntal and streamlined. This is great—makes me want to go home and write a tune like this. With Jim, you really hear the guitar sound, because he plays so soft. It's nice when you can hear the body of the guitar resonate and not just he pickups and the amp.