

Tony Williams' Last Interview

DOWN BEAT

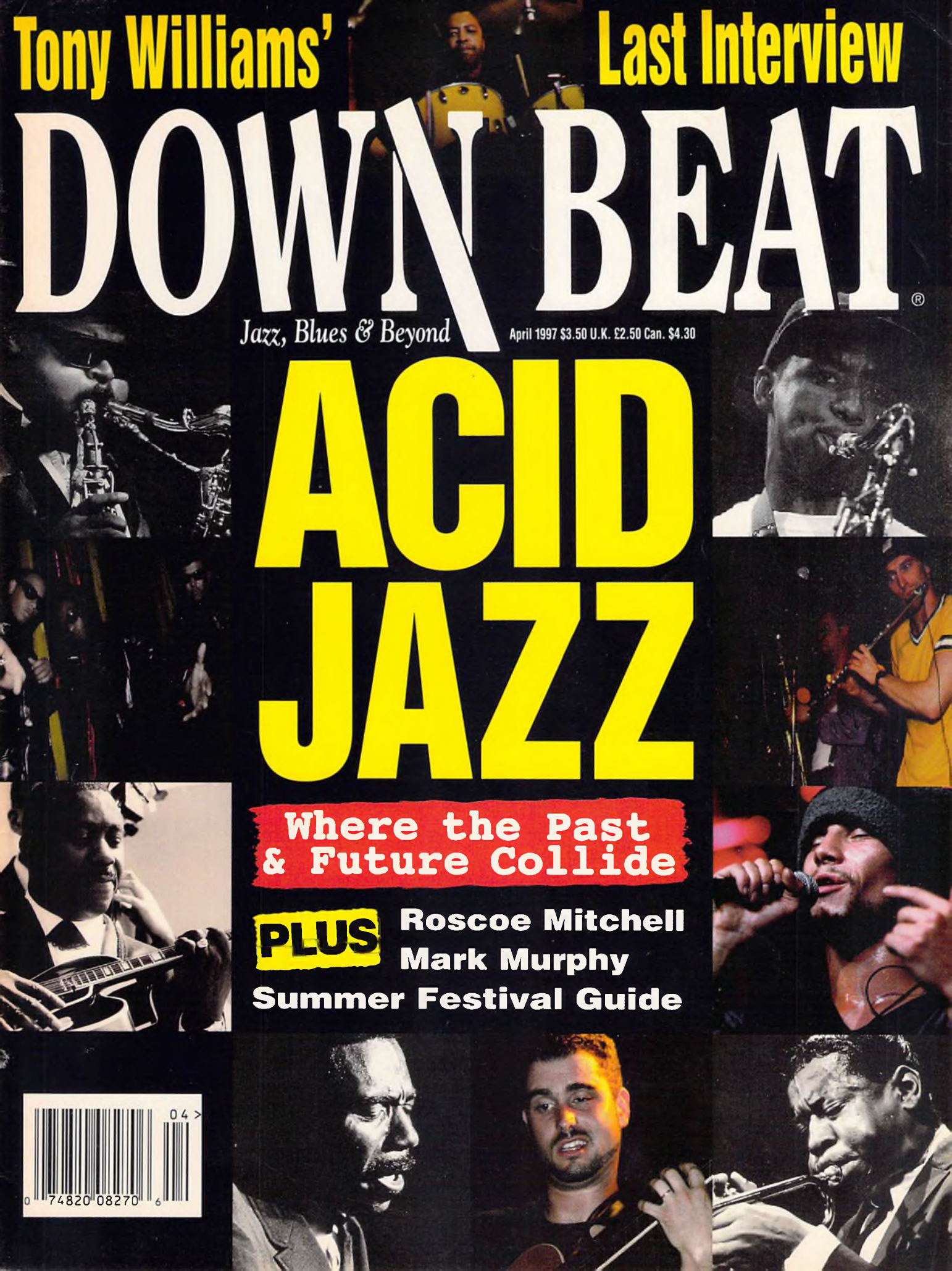
Jazz, Blues & Beyond

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ACID JAZZ

Where the Past
& Future Collide

PLUS Roscoe Mitchell
Mark Murphy
Summer Festival Guide





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Three years ago, the British-born fusion between hip-hop and jazz seemed like a neat media phenomena. Now, acid jazz has established a young, diverse constituency with CD releases by groups with names like Buckshot LeFonque, Us3, Jamiroquai, Groove Collective and Incognito, along with reissues of classic jazz recordings that helped inspire the movement.

By Martin Johnson

Cover photography (counter-clockwise from top): Tony Williams by Ken Franckling, Rahsaan Roland Kirk by Jon Randolph, Us3 by Steve Eichner, Wes Montgomery by Ted Williams, Jimmy Smith by Ron Howard, Charlie Hunter by Hyou Vielz, Lee Morgan from Down Beat archives, Jason Kay by Hyou Vielz, Groove Collective by Alan Nahigian, Branford Marsalis by Hyou Vielz.

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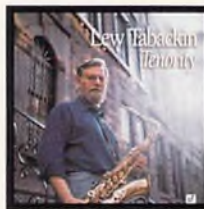
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Kirk Lightsey

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Where the Past & Future Collide

ACID

BY MARTIN JOHNSON

NEW YORK'S BIRDLAND HAS GONE THROUGH MANY INCARNATIONS SINCE CHARLIE PARKER DUBBED IT "THE JAZZ CORNER OF THE WORLD." IT HAS HOSTED

many styles of jazz, most involving leading or up-and-coming musicians. This wintry Monday night is no exception as trumpeter Russell Gunn, whose resume boasts sideman gigs with Wynton Marsalis and Oliver Lake, leads his hip-hop jazz sextet, an outfit of three horns, piano, bass and drums that at a glance looks "down" only in wardrobe. However, when they hit, the music reveals a previously unimagined mix of Lee Morgan's *Live At The Lighthouse* and KRS-ONE's *By Any Means Necessary*. Over staunch backbeats, the horns launch into fiery solos.

"Hip-hop is my first love," explains Gunn. "I was a rapper before I was a trumpeter." He is also a big lover of Clifford Brown, Miles Davis and Booker Little, and he strives to combine both jazz and hip-hop influences into his music. "We try to get to the essence of both," he says. "Your emotions shouldn't change as we move from one to the other."


Three years ago, the fusion between hip-hop and jazz seemed like one of those neat media phenomena that, along with on-line services and supermodels, might ultimately characterize the early and mid-'90s. Except acid jazz kept going, and going, and going. It has now established a young and diverse constituency and is likely the fastest-growing segment of the jazz nation. Record labels have taken note: New releases by Buckshot LeFonque, Us3, Jamiroquai and Incognito are getting the big publicity budgets, and many of the jazz majors as well as several independents have begun reissue series targeted at this new audience.

Acid jazz—a term that almost everyone involved with the music despises—was born on a lark in the late '80s when Giles Peterson, a British DJ (and now record producer), used it to describe his mix for that evening: a program of soul-jazz, jazzy

hip-hop, '70s soul classics, jazz-funk and new releases influenced by such sounds. That panoply still qualifies as a reasonable definition for the music. Much of it is what almost anyone would call jazz (classic Jimmy Smith, Lee Morgan and Wes Montgomery recordings), yet some of it hardly falls under even the broadest definition of jazz (the street-soul sounds of British funk bands like Brand New Heavies, Raw Stylus and Young Disciples). Of course, it's worth remembering that we live in a time where a whole genre of radio stations call the music of Sade, Vanessa Williams and Kenny G. "jazz," so parochial attitudes may not get us very far. Still, regardless of its distance from Ellington, there is much more palpable swing in most acid jazz than in any smooth jazz.

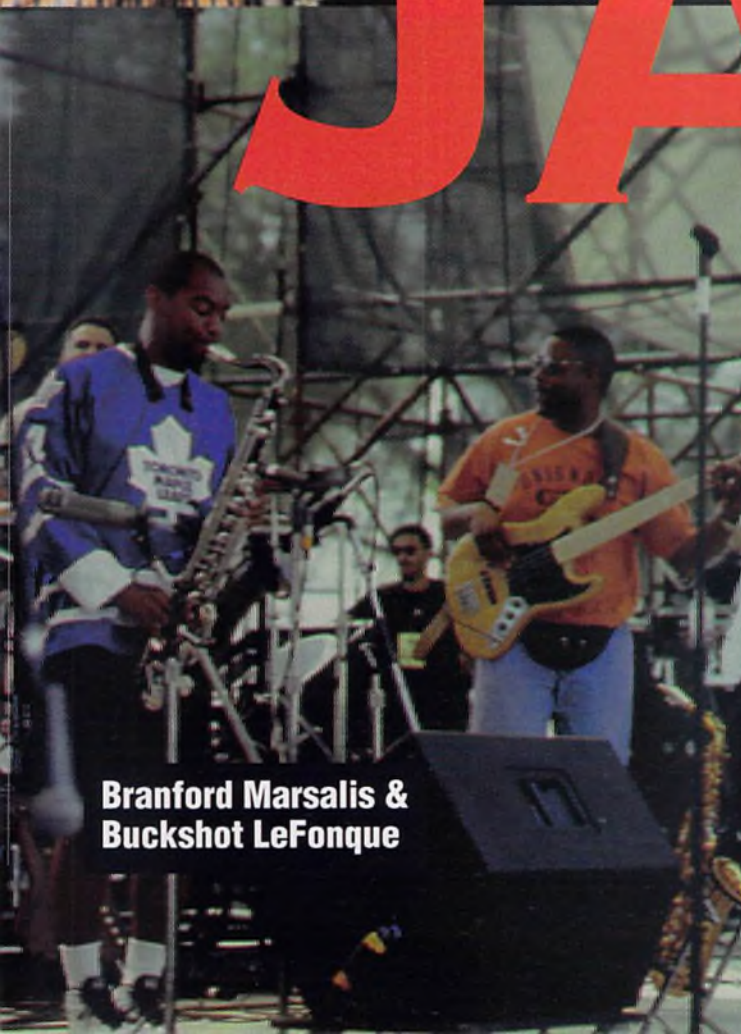
Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the acid-jazz movement is how it has brought a new generation to jazz. This crew has boosted the likes of Charlie Hunter, Medeski Martin & Wood and Cassandra Wilson to sales figures unusual for a jazz artist. Younger and scruffier than the mainstream jazz crowd, they're hearing jazz in a new venue: the club. The club of the '90s doesn't mean an upscale nightclub with live music à la New York's Blue Note or Chicago's Jazz Showcase, but casual hangouts with a creative DJ. For those of you thinking *Saturday Night Fever*, you're wrong in the style of the music, but right in the motivation.

Today's 25-year-olds grew up in post-industrial America, an era of downsized expectations. Those mid-level rungs in the service economy may be about as good as it gets for some. This economic uncertainty yields a level of musical allegiance much more akin to classic jazz fans who routinely argue over the impact of *Bitches Brew* or the effect of Lincoln Center on their music than to smooth jazz fans who simply use music as valium. The new jazz constituency got here in part by following their own agenda through pop music and have no intention of discarding their fondness for it. For them, the club represents an necessary escape from bleak economic realities. It's a crucial chance to bond with others who don't want Jennifer Aniston and her "Must-See TV" pals speaking for their generation. Yet for all

A photograph of the band Jamiroquai. On the left, a man in a bright orange jacket. In the center, a man with long dreadlocks in a white jacket. In the foreground, a man in a black hat and a man with long hair in a light blue shirt. On the right, a man in a black jacket with a Ferrari logo. The background features a sign that says "RESTAURANT" and another that says "Dead or Alive".

Jamiroquai

JAZZ

A photograph of Branford Marsalis and Buckshot LeFonque performing on a stage. Branford Marsalis is on the left, wearing a blue and white jacket, playing the saxophone. Buckshot LeFonque is in the center, wearing an orange shirt, playing a yellow electric guitar. There are other musicians and equipment visible in the background.

Branford Marsalis & Buckshot LeFonque

A photograph of the band Us3. In the foreground, a man in a shiny silver jacket. To his right, a man wearing sunglasses. In the background, a tall skyscraper is visible against a blue sky.

Us3

this highbrow attitude, jazz's new constituency differs sharply from the classic jazz audience that disdains almost all aspects of current pop culture. In these smaller, more intimate clubs—many of which double by day as cafes or espresso bars—the sounds range from Cannonball Adderley to Reuben Wilson, from acid jazz to world music with a good bit of related dance music styles in the mix.

Maurice Bernstein and Jonathan Rudnick helped establish the first major beachhead for acid jazz or club jazz in the United States in 1990 when they began a New York club scene called Giant Step. "We wanted to allow a new generation to create its own spin on jazz," says Bernstein, "rather than have it defined to them by its elders." It was a roving party that featured hip music, DJs and occasional live music. "It's a place where musicians can play to an audience of their peers," Bernstein says. It worked; the party quickly grew into a major business. The duo now run their own management agency handling several bands (some of whom were nurtured in their club) and a label, Giant Step, which is distributed by GRP. Their flagship band, Groove Collective, has released two fine recordings and is a fixture on the New York City music scene. Their pioneering efforts were abetted by the efforts of longtime jazz iconoclast/saxophonist Steve Coleman, who has worked his own mix of jazz and other musics for over a decade, and GURU's Jazzmatazz project, which brought together jazz and hip-hop players for two CD volumes on EMI.

Reissue producers like Blue Note's Michael Cuscuna and Verve's Arich Morrison acknowledge the club scene as a major influence on their Rare Groove and Talkin' Verve series, respectively. "There's a lot of fine material that wasn't considered reissuable until it became popular with the DJs," says Cuscuna. "It's great since John Patton and Reuben Wilson



Incognito's

PHOTO BY HUGO WELZ



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acid jazz

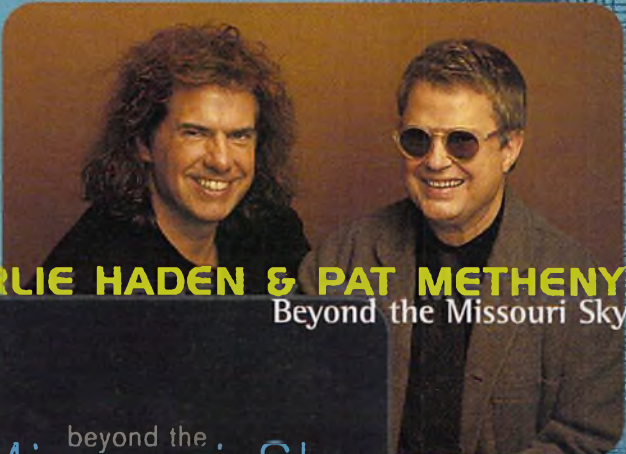
Maysa Leak & Bluey Maunick

are still out there playing." Cuscuna was particularly cheered by the diversity of styles now in demand. "There's some hard-bop, some soul-jazz and some rare jazz-funk," he notes.

The club scene has given jazz a presence on the fringes of pop culture, an essential place to be in the '90s. While megastars like Celine Dion, U2 and Mariah Carey continue to sell a gazillion records every time out, for the last six years (roughly since Soundscan took over the Billboard charts, making them more of an accurate reflection of sales) the top echelon of the pop charts has been dominated by recordings from groups with constituencies on the periphery of the mainstream who have a breakout recording that crosses over. It happened last year with the intelligent, eclectic rocker Beck and the smart, whimsical rappers the Fugees. That very same process boosted Us3's "Cantaloupe Island," a rap over Herbie Hancock's "Cantaloupe Island," into the top 20 in 1994.

The acid-jazz movement has also given jazz an important presence among the dance musics. No longer just the boom-boom-boom of the disco era, dance music has diversified into many toned-down, nuanced sub-genres like ambient groove (slow, dub reggae-inflected), drum 'n' bass (chattering electronic percussion over melodic basslines and cool synthesizer fills) and trip-hop (a panoply of reggae, minor-key jazz, subdued hip-hop and scratchy rock)—all of which can easily lead one into jazz. (Acid jazz's hip quotient and accessibility helped lead to the Red Hot + Cool project three years ago, which brought rappers, funksters and hip jazz musicians together in various collaborations.) The presence among the dance musics makes it easier for the uninitiated to find their way into jazz. A compilation that includes tunes a young listener heard at a club is a lot more inviting than wandering into the jazz section of a record store and hoping to choose the right Miles Davis recording.

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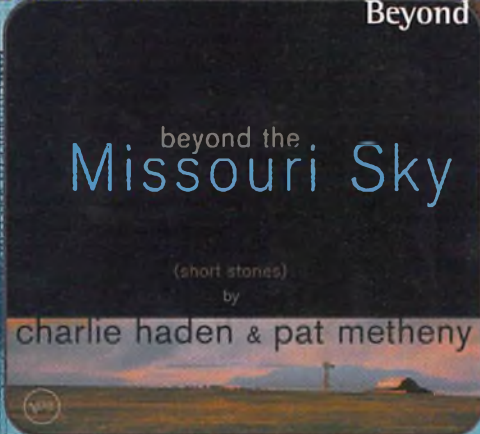
CHARLIE HADEN & PAT METHENY
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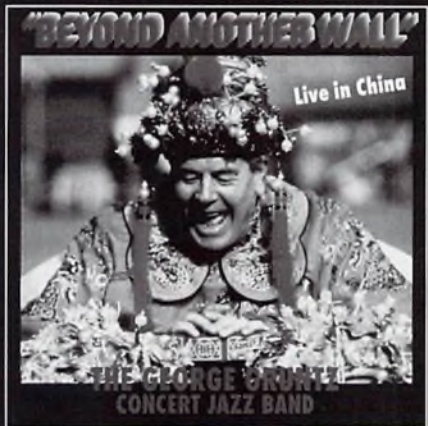
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But what does acid jazz 1997 sound like? Incognito, Buckshot LeFonque, Jamiroquai and Us3 are this season's most likely to cross over. Each has had some commercial success in the past, and their range shows the different approaches to this new club jazz. It's hard to miss the jazz-funk influence on Incognito and how Bluey Maunick extends it into related soul and r&b. Us3 began as a clever compilation of samples from the Blue Note vaults—especially Art Blakey, Horace Silver, Herbie Hancock, Lou Donaldson and Grant Green—but has grown into a band with its own style rooted in the classics. Jamiroquai has melded the sort of classic soul that most lovers of early-'70s jazz would adore (Stevie Wonder, Stax and Philly International) into an of-the-moment urgent funk with a jazzy edge. And Buckshot LeFonque began as a Branford Marsalis studio collaboration with DJ Premier from the group Gangstarr, but time on the road has made it into much more than a casual hip-hop/jazz hybrid.

Bluey Maunick formed Incognito in London 16 years ago and deliberately chose the name to hint that the group could avoid easy categorization. However, over the years and especially the last few, the band has become known for its energetic, sprawling live shows with a 10-piece band and three, sometimes four, vocalists. Incognito's last two recordings, *Beneath The Surface* and *Remixed*, show off the range of their styles and interests. A suave, easygoing collection of songs about newfound love; *Beneath The Surface* has a burnished, dark sound typical of recent r&b and highlighted by the creamy vocals of Maysa Leek (who returns to the group after a hiatus during which she did a recording of her own). *Remixed* takes the clubgoer on a jumped-up, 70-minute romp through a variety of dance styles. Maunick explained that as the band toured the world, he found that

DJs consistently bring new approaches to their tunes. "We thought it would add a different edge to our music," Maunick says. "It gives the sense of how the music is heard in a club environment." With this in mind, Maunick gathered the ones he liked best for release. The remixes feature elements of drum 'n' bass, house and hip-hop.

Many British retro-funksters sound like soul neo-classicists losing, rather than finding, their voice in a canon of Philly International, Stax and late-era Motown. With their third recording, *Travelling Without Moving*, Jamiroquai has begun to assert their own distinctive voice. The band is led by vocalist Jason Kay, a son of a jazz singer and dancer Karen Kay; he has a voice reminiscent of Stevie Wonder, but on his first two recordings, *Emergency On Planet Earth* and *Return Of The Space Cowboy*, the band was only capable of glib knockoffs of early-'70s soul. However, they were great live. Following the *Space Cowboy* tour, the band holed up to work on the new recording together. "We wanted stronger songs," Kay says. "I wanted this album to have memorable choruses and hooks that really dig into you." The band articulates an urgent sound that captures the fluidity of their idols but with a strong present tense to the music.

It's not surprising that the stateside pair in this quartet of groups are more hip-hop influenced. Buckshot LeFonque and Us3 both started as studio projects that grew into bands. Both groups spent a lot of time on the road following their first recordings and grew into bands. That increased rapport is apparent on both Us3's *Broadway & 52nd* and Buckshot's *Music Evolution*. Marsalis finds motivation in Buckshot's ability to bring together a wide variety of musics. "It forces you to adapt to musical sounds that you may not be familiar with," he says. Marsalis called the first Buckshot record a "pop" project, but this time he's

avoiding labels altogether. "I'm not going to play that game," he says. "When I listen to Soundgarden, Pearl Jam or Busta Rhymes, I don't change into a different set of ears."

Marsalis says he hopes that his group's eclectic approach helps ease people's fear of the unknown. "We are more separate than together in this country," he notes. "We're divided by class, race, religion, and everyone surrounds themselves with what they know."

Us3's new disc balances the classic Blue Note samples that dominated their debut, *Hand On the Torch*, newer Blue Note samples like Bobby McFerrin's "Thinkin' About Your Body" and live playing, a facet developed during their tour. Reedmen like Steve Williamson contribute to the infectious mix.

According to founding member Geoff Wilkinson, Us3 was never intended as a group, but a studio project with his erstwhile partner Mel Simpson plus a revolving cast of rappers and instrumentalists.

Wilkinson conceived of the project while working as a jazz DJ on the British club scene. He says he played a lot of Lee Morgan and Art Blakey. "It's very soulful music, and the recording quality, passion and emotional intensity are unlike anything else on record."

"The first Blue Note record I ever bought was Art Blakey's *Mosaic*. On the title cut, one minute it's stroking you, then the next it's like hitting you in the face. I was really moved by that kind of range."

Wilkinson says the new recording, *52nd & Broadway*, made a conscious attempt not to be "Blue Note's Greatest Hits Volume 2." To that end, there is less reliance on wholesale sampling and more horn solos, something that may have grown out of the band's extensive touring. The new disc employs two new rappers, KCB and Shabbam Sahdeeq, who Wilkinson says are more rhythmically precise and better writers than their predecessors.

Although each of these four recordings is a fine intro to the new wing of jazz, compilations may offer the best place to start. Instinct has released a wide variety of This Is Acid Jazz and Best Of Acid Jazz volumes that compile various acid jazz and street-soul sounds from the U.K. Island's 4th & B'way imprint has released a series called *Rebirth Of Cool* that offers more left-of-center blends of jazz with trip-hop, drum 'n' bass and other underground sounds. The German label Compost's *Future Sound Of Jazz* series melds drum 'n' bass and similar sounds with jazz. Conversely, New Breed's *Fat Jazzy Grooves* series has captured the more laid-back, low-key aspects of the acid-jazz trend. Blue Note's *The New Groove*, an innovative collection

of hip-hop and classic jazz tunes, was inspired by the success of Us3's first disc. Blue Note's *Rare Groove* series focuses on reissues of Reuben Wilson, John Patton, Donald Byrd and others. Verve's series has included compilations of Wes Montgomery, Cal Tjader, Jimmy Smith and Rahsaan Roland Kirk as well as a couple of various-artists collections. Fantasy, after several years of licensing its catalog to Bay Area indies like Luv N Haight, has started its own *Legends of Acid Jazz* series with compilations of artists like Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Bernard Purdie and Idris Muhammad.

We've come a long way since the late '80s, when jazz's mainstream was exclusive, favoring certain elements of the music's history above all other sounds. The groups here have succeeded in articulating an inclusive approach. And

the scene continues to grow. Chicago's *Liquid Soul* has caught fire, and Toronto's *Jacksoul* has won a following north of the border, especially in Vancouver, where the legion of acid-jazz fans continues to grow. San Francisco thrives with labels like Ubiquity and venues like the Up & Down Club. In Atlanta, *Speech* (formerly of *Arrested Development*) hosted some acid-jazz nights at a local cafe. And Telarc recently released *Bluezeum*, a hip-hop jazz project from a California-based collective.

Much as we may want it, Clifford Brown is probably never going to hit the pop top 10 and convert heathens into jazz fans. Charlie Hunter might. His prospects, and those of other groups on the acid-jazz scene, seemed about as distant as Brownie's five years ago. Now, they're worth betting on. **DB**

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Buckshot LeFonque

MUSIC EVOLUTION—Columbia 67584

BUCKSHOT LeFONQUE—Columbia 57323

Incognito

BENEATH THE SURFACE—Verve Forecast 534 395

REMIXED—Verve Forecast 532 309

100 DEGREES AND RISING—Verve Forecast 528 000

POSITIVITY—Verve Forecast 522 036

Jamiroquai

TRAVELLING WITHOUT MOVING—Columbia 67903

EMERGENCY ON PLANET EARTH—Columbia 53825

Us3

BROADWAY & 52ND—Blue Note 30027

HAND ON THE TORCH—Blue Note 80883

The Groove Collective

THE GROOVE COLLECTIVE—Reprise 45541

Liquid Soul

LIQUID SOUL—Ark21 72438 54573

reissues and compilations

Talkin' Verve: *Roots Of Acid Jazz*

DIZZY GILLESPIE—Verve 533 846

COOL—Verve 553 246 (various artists)

Legends of Acid Jazz

DON PATTERSON/BOOKER ERVIN—Prestige 24178

BOOGALOO JOE JONES—Prestige 24167

BERNARD PURDIE—Prestige 24176

GENE AMMONS—Prestige (no catalog number yet)

CHARLES EARLAND—Prestige (no catalog number yet)

JACK McDUFF—Prestige (no catalog number yet)

Blue Note Rare Groove

STREET LADY—Blue Note 853923 (Donald Byrd)

PLACES AND SPACES—Blue Note 85426

(Donald Byrd)

COMMON TOUCH—Blue Note 854719

(Stanley Turrentine)

EASY WALKER—Blue Note 829908 (Stanley Turrentine)

BLUE MODE—Blue Note 829906 (Reuben Wilson)

LOVE BUG—Blue Note 829905 (Reuben Wilson)

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Tony Williams: The Final Interview

by Michael Point

At press time, we learned of the sudden death of Tony Williams, who suffered a heart attack on Feb. 23 after undergoing routine gall bladder surgery. The following article, which was already in place for this issue, is based on *Down Beat's* last interview with Williams. A full obituary will appear in our next issue. —ed.

**"NOBODY
EVER PLAYED
AS WELL
WITH ME AS
TONY DID."**

— Miles Davis

He was the only guy in my band who ever told me, 'Why don't you practice?' I was missing notes and shit and trying to keep up with his young ass," Miles writes.

"I enjoy learning things," Williams states first and foremost. "I always have. If there's one single thing that my career's been about, it's my desire to learn more about music and how it's made."

Williams, always an astute student, has become a teacher with the release of *Wilderness*, an ambitious project that showcases his composing talents with the same flair that his past recordings have displayed his drumming dexterity (see "CD Reviews" Mar. '97). Combining

All you need to know about Tony Williams can be found in Miles Davis' caustic, cut-no-slack autobiography. Dissing his friends, fans, relatives and fellow musicians alike with barbed wit, Miles trashes the talent of a litany of jazz legends, but there's never a disparaging word muttered about Williams. Instead, Miles volunteers some exceedingly rare self-deprecation when discussing the drummer he brought into his band as a teenager.

"I was learning something new every night with that group. One reason was that Tony Williams was such a progressive drummer.

Williams' orchestral compositions with quintet pieces, *Wilderness* dramatically expands the drummer's musical reach while also serving to disprove a long-held musical prejudice.

"Drummers don't write—or, at least, that's what everybody believes," Williams says with more than a little exasperation. "That's other drummers. I'm a musician who plays drums. And I write."

The creation of *Wilderness*, however, was much more demanding than just coming up with a couple of new tunes. "It's bigger than anything I've done, but it's a logical extension of what I've been studying for years," Williams says. "I've studied all my musical life, but learning is only good if you do something constructive with it."

Williams has had his share of legendary learning experiences, and he's made the most of them. If the past is truly prelude to the present, not to mention the future, his educational evolution should provide insight to his development as a complete musician. Some of the musical extrapolations are more conspicuous than others, but all are essential elements of the Williams sound, circa 1997.

The 51-year-old Williams, born in Chicago, was raised in Boston and hit the professional stage at age eight. He was taking private lessons as a young teen from Berklee legend Alan Dawson.

Williams immediately put the education Dawson gave him into action, playing regularly on the Boston club circuit with a wide variety of musicians, including a steady gig with Sam Rivers, where he explored Third Stream sounds, probably the first public expression of some of the musical sensibilities found on *Wilderness*.

The classical core of *Wilderness* is embellished with classic jazz touches, many the product of Williams' exposure to his first learning experiences. The depth and diversity of those experiences color *Wilderness* with veteran virtuosity, both in the writing and the playing.

Williams was playing in the house band backing a touring Jackie McLean when his educational horizons expanded again. McLean convinced Williams, after getting his mother's permission, to relocate to



New York City in 1962 and join his quintet. The master class work began in earnest the next year when Miles Davis recruited him at the age of 17 to anchor one of the most inventive and accomplished ensembles in modern jazz. Playing alongside Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and Ron Carter, Williams recorded more than a dozen albums with the Davis group, helping reconfigure the shape of jazz in the process.

But Williams, in the center of a jazz situation most musicians only dream about, was dreaming of other things. It was time for a change. He had been signed to Blue Note, a label known for producing mainstream jazz albums. Williams soon changed that. His debut, *Lifetime*, was an unabashedly avant-garde release, full of youthful energy and



DANA UDAIN '92

intelligent free-jazz. He followed it with *Spring*, featuring five original compositions and powerful playing by Rivers, announcing his presence on the scene as a fully mature talent capable of much more than just powering a rhythm section. The albums also served as a preview of Williams' intention and ability to explore as many facets of music as he could.

The Davis band was rewriting jazz history nightly, but, by the late '60s, Williams' musical muse had called again. A major element was John McLaughlin, a young guitarist Williams had introduced to Davis, who subsequently used him on his *In A Silent Way* sessions. Williams, along with organist Larry Young, took McLaughlin with him to form the Tony Williams Lifetime in 1969. The flame-

throwing, furious trio rocked harder than the reigning rock bands without losing its innate jazz sensibilities. It was the true origin of fusion, but its creators didn't know, nor care.

"Everybody talks about Lifetime being the first fusion band, but it was really sort of a throwback to what was going on when I started out in Boston," Williams relates. "I played with a lot of organ trios because that was one of the big sounds there, and that's what the original Lifetime really was." The group's recorded debut, *Emergency!* buzzing and crackling with barely controlled energy, was a sonic disaster but an artistic masterpiece.

Gathering Pat Metheny, Herbie Hancock, Stanley Clarke and Michael Brecker—all of whom have had high-profile fusion experiences in their vast

and varied careers—for *Wilderness* means many fans' initial expectations will naturally be fusion-oriented. Williams professes to have never even thought of the possibility. "Fusion, at least in its old jazz-rock form, was never mentioned by anybody," he says.

A second edition of Lifetime, first with bassist Jack Bruce and then guitarist Allan Holdsworth, expanded the group's sound and instrumentation. But it soon faded from view as well.

Bouncing back with a more mainstream sound in the '80s, Williams re-established himself with a no-nonsense band, including trumpeter Wallace Roney, saxist Billy Pierce, pianist Mulgrew Miller and bassist Charnett Moffett (later replaced by Bob Hurst and then Ira Coleman). The group's enlightened

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approach was featured on six albums in its first seven years. But just leading his own band wasn't enough for Williams. "I had years of studying to my credit, and I didn't want to sit on that learning," the drummer explains. "I've taken lessons all my life just because I wanted to, but it seemed a waste not to take advantage of what I've learned."

Williams also learned a lot about his fellow musicians when he decided to devote his time and energy to seriously studying composition. "I remember when I started taking serious compositional classes, people were always asking me why I was doing it," Williams says. "They seemed to believe that since I had a record out I didn't need to do anything else. I don't understand that attitude at all. To me, being a musician is like being a doctor: You've got to keep up with all the changes, and the more you learn about your profession, the better off you are."

Thus, the advent of Tony Williams, composer. Williams' songwriting wasn't exactly a secret. The Davis group recorded several of his compositions, and other samples of his writing had already appeared on his albums and Wynton Marsalis' debut, Branford's *Renaissance* and other high-profile recordings. Williams also wrote a piece for the Kronos Quartet as part of a festival tribute to his career. In addition, almost all of his later group recordings have been filled with Williams tunes.

Wilderness, however, is Williams' first orchestral endeavor, and he rightly regards it as a significant step in his

ongoing musical evolution. With a 30-piece orchestra performing the music, which is intercut with tunes played by Williams, Metheny, Hancock, Brecker and Clarke, *Wilderness* is definitely a magnum opus. Williams, however, sees it as just a logical progression of his career path.

"I think my playing has been orchestral throughout the years, and this is another way of expressing that. But I primarily see it as the ultimate accomplishment of a musician. Composing makes me feel like I've finally gotten all the way up the ladder as a musician."

The final product is infused with virtuosic musicianship while colored strongly by Williams' chosen approach to

classicism. "I specifically wanted it to have an Americana sound," he states. "If there are any obvious influences, they would be Aaron Copland, Gershwin, Elgar and 19th-century composers in that vein."

Giving *Wilderness* an identifiable Americana sound was essential to Williams' artistic vision. "The story is about a journey a person takes to a new world, to uncharted territory," he explains. "I wanted to capture the spirit of the American immigrants who came here in 1898-1920. They didn't know what they were going to encounter, but they were open to the experience."

Williams has justifiable pride in the success of *Wilderness*, but he's dedicated to elevating his art still higher. "I'd really like to get my writing ability up to the same level as my playing," he says. "The only way to do that is by serious study and a lot of practice."

DB

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SINCE I HAD A RECORD OUT I DIDN'T
NEED TO DO ANYTHING ELSE. I DON'T
UNDERSTAND THAT ATTITUDE AT ALL"

EQUIPMENT

Tony Williams plays a custom Drum Workshop kit with Zildjian cymbals and drumsticks. His standard setup is an 18" x 24" kick; 9" x 13" and 10" x 13" rack toms; 14" x 14", 14" x 16" and 14" x 18" floor toms; and a 6.5" x 14" x 12" split-lug snare. His cymbals include two 15" K bottom hats, an 18" medium-thin crash, a 15" A custom crash, a 22" A custom ride, an 8" Avedis splash mounted above an 18" Avedis, and an 18" preaged K dry ride with a 10" Avedis splash mounted above. All hardware is black. He uses a Rok 'n' Soc throne, Shure mics, XL Specialty cases, and Mackie and Tascam audio equipment.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

WILDERNESS—ARK 21 54571
TOKYO LIVE, VOL. 1—Blue Note 99031
FOREIGN INTRIGUE—Blue Note 46289
NATIVE HEART—Blue Note 93170 (out of print)
STORY OF NEPTUNE—Blue Note 98169
LIFETIME: THE COLLECTION—Columbia 47484
SPRING—Blue Note 46135
EMERGENCY—Polydor 849068
ANGEL STREET—Blue Note 48494 (out of print)
CIVILIZATION—Blue Note 85138 (out of print)
BELIEVE IT—Columbia 33836 (out of print)
THE OLD BUM'S RUSH—Polydor 5040 (out of print)
TURN IT OVER—Polydor 4021 (out of print)
LIFETIME—Blue Note 84180 (out of print)

with Miles Davis

THE COMPLETE CONCERT 1964—Columbia 2-48821
SEVEN STEPS TO HEAVEN—Columbia 48827
E.S.P.—Columbia 46863

MILES SMILES—Columbia 48849
SORCERER—Columbia 52974
NEFERTITI—Columbia 46113
MILES IN THE SKY—Columbia 48954
FILLES DE KILIMANJARO—Columbia 46116
THE COMPLETE LIVE AT THE PLUGGED NICKEL—
Columbia 8-66955
IN A SILENT WAY—Columbia 40580

with various others

RENAISSANCE—Columbia 40711 (Branford Marsalis)
TURANDOT—Toshiba TOJC 5731 (Bob Belden Ensemble;
out of print)
WYNTON MARSALIS—Columbia 64418
MAIDEN VOYAGE—Blue Note 84195 (Herbie Hancock)
OUT TO LUNCH—Blue Note 84163 (Eric Dolphy)
DON'T STOP THE CARNIVAL—Milestone 55005
(Sonny Rollins)
THE SOOTHSAYER—Blue Note 84443 (Wayne Shorter)

Mark Murphy

THE START OF SOMETHING

by Dan Ouellette

Mark Murphy remembers the scene well. The veteran jazz vocalist was playing a small pub in South London while touring his Tribute to Miles Davis show in the late '80s. The house was packed with youngsters, which befuddled Murphy. Even though the audience energy was high that night, he had no idea what was in store when he launched into his vocal rendition of "Milestones," which he had recorded over a quarter of a century earlier on his *Rah!* album.

"Everybody in the house got on their feet and screamed," Murphy says. "I had no idea what was going on. But shortly thereafter I met Giles Peterson, the London DJ who created the whole youth acid jazz market in England in the late '80s. He and his friends took me to the Electric Ballroom. He cued up 'Milestones,' and that's when I saw the kids going crazy. They were doing this fast jitterbug dance thing. I was knocked out."

It's taken a few more years for the rest of the jazz world to get caught up to speed on Murphy, the hippest of hip male jazz singers, who last year finally reached the lofty plateau of best Male Jazz Vocalist in Down Beat's 1996 Readers Poll. The award not only marked the culmination of a roller-coaster career ride over the last four decades, but also opened the door for the 64-year-old cool cat of vocalese to vault into phase two of his jazz adventures.

"I had this idea six years ago for an album with a youth jazz approach," Murphy explains with the same style of

fervored passion, humor and dynamics he employs when performing. "It took me three or four years to do the record because I had no moola, and then it took another two years of shopping it first to major labels and then to small companies. And even then there were no serious takers. But as soon as the results of the Down Beat poll came out, I began to get calls from [Murphy lowers his voice to a secretive whisper and dramatically utters one word at a time] ... *very important people.*"

Actually, Murphy concedes, by the time he was fielding a slew of inquiries regarding his CD demo (with the working title *Song For The Geese*), he was

in serious negotiations with BMG Austrian subsidiary Reverso Musikproduktionages. The hearty set features a gem of a rendition of Stephen Sondheim's "I Remember (Sky)," a rousing, off-the-cuff, hip-scatting take on "Baltimore Oriole" and an upbeat zip through Steely Dan's "Do It Again." Murphy is supported by his Seattle-based trio (pianist Marc Seales, bassist Doug Miller and drummer John Bishop), a Take 6-like vocal choir (Roger Treece, Sandra Anderson and Lincoln Briney) and other guests.

Murphy can hardly conceal his elation that the deal—a multi-record package, including a guaranteed second BMG





PHOTO BY LUDAN, DIRECTOR: DAVID PISTON

across the room into the reject pile.”

Murphy guesses that by the time BMG releases *Song For The Geese*, the order of songs will be resequenced and perhaps even the title will be changed. But he exudes an air of nonchalance because all indicators point to 1997 as the year where long-overdue recognition will be realized.

Murphy's on a roll. Early this year, he left his San Francisco home for an eight-month road trip. One of his first stops: New York's Birdland, where he played his first club gig in the city in nearly five years. In addition to the RCA Victor album, he has another CD, *Dim The Lights*, a superb duo recording made two years ago with pianist Benny Green, set to be released soon on the Calgary-based label Millennium Records.

Plus, biographer Will Friedwald is putting the finishing touches on the liner notes for a Blue Note release tentatively titled *Best Of The Capitol Years*, a compilation culled by jazz writer Jim Gavin from Murphy's three albums recorded for the label from 1958 to 1960 (including *This Could Be The Start Of Something*, which featured his hit single of Steve Allen's tune, "This Could Be The Start Of Something Big"). And Murphy is hopeful that *Crazy Rhythms*, a twofer GRP compilation of his first and second albums, *Meet Mark Murphy* (1956) and *Let Yourself Go* (1957) on Decca, will finally be back on track after being derailed by personnel changes at the label last year.

Even though he says that he was "miracled" by the late-'80s London acid-jazz scene that has revitalized his career, Murphy, who has garnered six Grammy nominations, was hardly idle during the less-noteworthy years. As a recording artist, he's been prolific, releasing over 40 albums, including a string of 19 CDs for Muse Records throughout the '70s, '80s and early '90s. (With producer Joel Dorn recently purchasing Muse from Joe Fields and re-releasing some of the catalog on his fledgling 32 Records label, there's a good chance more Murphy material will be on the way.)

Murphy gained his early vocal jazz experience as a teenager in Syracuse, N.Y., singing bebop in a band led by his older brother. In 1952, Sammy Davis Jr. caught him and arranged for Murphy to perform on *The Tonight Show*, hosted at the time by Steve Allen.

After his recording stint with Decca and Capitol, Murphy signed with Riverside, where he released several records including the 1961 classic *Rah!* With his 1963 single "Fly Me To The Moon," Murphy was voted New Star of the Year in Down Beat's year-end Readers Poll. However, his success proved to be short-lived. During a European tour, the Beatles blasted onto

the airwaves and brought the male jazz vocal movement to a grinding halt.

"The whole record business did a flip-flop overnight," Murphy recalls. "I was literally stranded in London, so, since that's where it was all happening, I decided to stay and try to make a living. But I watched that whole Beatles scene pass by on my black-and-white TV screen because I couldn't relate harmonically to that music. I couldn't contribute to that era."

Murphy eked out singing gigs wherever he could find them, but even those scant few jobs disappeared by the end of the '60s. He resorted to working as an actor, doing gangster shows on TV and even playing the lead role in a pilot film on the life of Christ. During that time he also did radio work. "I made my living by writing transcriptions of music for the BBC," says Murphy. "I got all my big band and string arranging experiences from that job. I also sang with the Dutch Metropole Orchestra then, too." (*The Dream, Mark Murphy & Metropole Orchestra*, a compilation of Murphy's collaborations with the orchestra from 1967 through 1993, was released in Europe in 1995 on the Jive Music label.)

In 1972, after putting his jazz book away for nearly 10 years, Murphy returned to the States and resurrected his career, taking inspiration from such jazz musicians as vocalist Eddie Jefferson and saxophonist Richie Cole. With his bracing and fluid tenor vocals, bent-note phrasing and off-the-cuff rhythmic leaps, Murphy steadily regained an audience. His perseverance was rewarded with a double dose of late-'70s/early-'80s hit albums on Muse, *Stolen Moments* (1978) and *Bop For Kerouac* (1981).

While "Stolen Moments" is arguably his best-known vocal treatment of classic jazz instrumental, especially with the youth-jazz crowd, over the years Murphy has also penned lyrics to compositions by Wayne Shorter ("Beauty And The Beast"), Herbie Hancock ("Cantaloupe Island"), Lee Morgan ("Ceora"), John Coltrane ("Naima"), Freddie Hubbard ("Red Clay") and Pat Metheny ("September Fifteenth").

During the '80s, Murphy often found himself on the fringe of the mainstream jazz scene. But he also had his share of successes. His 1987 Milestone album *Night Mood* showcased Murphy exploring the Brazilian music of Ivan Lins. Another Milestone disc, *September Ballads* (1988), was an all-ballad session of tunes by such contemporary composers as Michael Franks and Metheny. Then there were his three Muse albums of Nat King Cole songs and two more in tribute to Beat writer Jack Kerouac, *Bop For Kerouac* (1981) and *Kerouac: Then And Now* (1989).

On his bold Kerouac projects, Murphy unleashed a dazzling display of rambling,

project of Murphy and Danish trombonist Erling Kroner interpreting Astor Piazzolla material, with U.S. releases coming out on RCA Victor—was sealed. But the mercurial Murphy, who speaks in machine-gun bursts of energy, spins on a dime and offers a kernel of cautionary advice for would-be contract-seekers: "Record companies have us by the B-A-L-L-S. You've got to remember that those Monday morning listening parties are full of coffee and Benzedrine and whatever else these guys have been doing on the weekend. You're lucky if you get a two-minute attention span. So you can't program your ballads first, because these guys will toss your demo

hip-daddy-o, stream-of-consciousness vocalese. "Basically I was looking for another way to do a bebop album," he says. "I never met Jack, and I never expected I'd become a Kerouacian, but I am one of the lucky people still alive who did see Lord Buckley perform." Murphy had read Kerouac's classic *On The Road* during the '50s, but didn't fully appreciate the Beat writer's style of prosody until he returned from England and feasted on a steady diet of Kerouac books. "What really turned me on about this guy was that he wrote like an improvising musician. Then I noticed that he had documented in writing the entire era of the '50s and '60s that I matured in."

What started out as an experiment in capturing Kerouac's spirit of wordplay turned into some of Murphy's most organic, inspirational and spur-of-the-moment material. "I really connected to him," says Murphy, who credits keyboardist Bill Mays for helping to bring the projects to fruition. "Jack and I shared birthdays. He was born 10 years earlier. I went to the graveyard in Lowell, Massachusetts [his hometown]. I put my hand on his gravestone, and it was vibrating."

Meanwhile, Murphy was also sowing vocal seeds throughout the Bay Area, where he moved in 1977, as a mentor to several aspiring San Francisco female

"I do appreciate how a lot of younger writers have been giving me the kind of respect I feel I deserve, but there's a lot more to my music than the uptempo stuff. I love doing ballads. That's when I feel I can communicate one-to-one with listeners. People tell me that it's as if I'm singing directly to them."

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vocalists including Madeline Eastman, Kitty Margolis and Ann Dyer. "I met Mark in the late '70s and early '80s when I was just starting," says Margolis, whose third CD is scheduled for release late this spring on Mad-Kat Records. "Listening to his *Mark Murphy Sings* album [1975] revolutionized my way of thinking about singing jazz. When I met him, I was pretty green and didn't have much confidence in what I was doing. But he'd always go to my shows and was so encouraging, which is very rare."

Murphy, who teaches jazz vocals at a university in Graz, Austria, for several months each year as an artist-in-residence (a gig friend and collaborator Sheila Jordan scored for him in 1991), is pleased that he's made an impact with fellow vocalists. "I never had kids of my own, but watching Kitty, Madeline and Ann all develop as jazz vocalists has been what I imagine it must be like seeing your children grow and progress."

Then there's Kurt Elling, the young Chicago vocalist and Blue Note recording artist who some people feel has stolen Murphy's style hook, line and sinker. Murphy, who worked with Elling in his vocal clinics at the Green Mill in Chicago, downplays that critique. "People accuse him of sounding just like me," Murphy notes. "But I don't think that's true at all. I do know that he likes that Kerouacian space I used to work in. But I've moved on to other places in my vocalizing. I saw Kurt perform his first set in San Francisco a few years ago. I think he's developing really nicely, especially as he writes his own material."

As for becoming a hero with the youth jazz movement, Murphy can't explain it. But he is grateful. Two acid jazz DJs in Vienna, Samir Köck and Werner Geier, were instrumental in helping Murphy get his BMG contract, and the Tokyo-based dance jazz group U.F.O. gave him a big



ALAN HARTIGIAN

push when it asked him to render "Stolen Moments" on one CD and commissioned him to write and sing his own lyrics (a piece called "Future Light") on another.

"Giles [Peterson] likes my Latin tunes and uptempo numbers," Murphy says. "But he starts yawning during my ballads. So it's definitely that dance thing at work with my popularity. There's a dance thread throughout my career."

Murphy's even had several of his tunes choreographed, including his hip, jazz-rap piece "Dingwall's" (a spoken-word thank you to the acid-jazz crowd for embracing his music) from his 1992 Muse album *What A Way To Go*. A woman from the dance company Decidedly Jazz Danceworks in Calgary choreographed an entire show of Murphy material. "We'd love to put that out as a video someday," Murphy says. "But like everything, we're searching for an angel to help finance the project."

So, with all this attention by a younger audience, you'd think that Murphy would subscribe to the notion that there's less of

a generation gap in the jazz world today that there had been previously. "Well, I've got to disagree," he says. "Believe me, my story is a miracle. The whole record business is run by 27-year-olds now. If they're not specialized in the acid-jazz field, then they've never heard of me. I do appreciate how a lot of younger writers have been giving me the kind of respect I feel I deserve, but there's a lot more to my music than the uptempo stuff."

Murphy pauses to reflect and continues, "I love doing ballads. That's when I feel I can communicate one-to-one with listeners. People tell me that it's as if

I'm singing directly to them. I've been a part of marriages and divorce settlements, child conceptions and wakes. My fans keep my albums for years. They come up to me at my live shows with these scratchy LPs and ask me to sign them. I never sold a million albums, but those I did sell are still out there.

"Shirley [Horn], Sheila [Jordan] and I seem to be the last of our generation. But the gold is that when you reach maturity as vocalists, you begin to sing your life. You're not just performing. You're putting your life into your songs." **DB**

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EQUIPMENT

Mark Murphy prefers Sennheiser microphones.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

SONG FOR THE GEESE (tentative title)—
RCA Victor/BMG (no catalog number yet)
DIM THE LIGHTS—Millennium (no catalog number yet)
I'LL CLOSE MY EYES—Muse 5436
KEROUAC: THEN AND NOW—Muse 5359
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST—Muse 5355
SEPTEMBER BALLADS—Milestone 9154
NIGHT MOOD—Milestone 9145
MARK MURPHY SINGS NAT'S CHOICE: THE COMPLETE NAT KING COLE SONGBOOK, VOL. 1 & 2—Muse 6001
BRAZIL SONG—Muse 5297
ARTISTRY OF—Muse 5286
BOP FOR KEROUAC—Muse 5253
STOLEN MOMENTS—Muse 5152
MARK MURPHY SINGS DOROTHY FIELDS AND CY COLEMAN—Audiophile 132
THAT'S HOW I LOVE THE BLUES—Fantasy/OJC 367
RAH!—Fantasy/OJC 141

Roscoe Mitchell's

BIG WORD

By John Corbett

Charter yourself a quick cruise back through the three decades of recorded work by Roscoe Mitchell and you're bound to notice its incredible variety. From jazz to funk, blues and classical, and more. But Mitchell is more than an eclecticist. He's got no use for titles, tags, labels or bags because he's a citizen of sound. "I can relate to anything in music that's good," Mitchell explains succinctly. "I would advise any of the younger musicians not to be stuck in certain portions of music. That takes dedication. You've got to understand the big word 'music.' Then you can let go of the different categories."

Although he's already heaped his plate with a diversity of orientations, the reed and woodwind expert and founding member of Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) has recently started studying baroque flute, taking lessons and learning the difficult, very different fingering. "I'm 56 years old, man. A lot of musicians died much younger than I did. For me to be sitting around 20, 30 years longer than them, not interested in anything, that's not paying proper honor, in a way."

Perhaps the most common assertion made about Mitchell is that he is a structuralist, a composer and saxophonist with a pronounced experimental and conceptual bent. Of course, in the jazz world there's an immediate wariness of anything calculated, inorganic, cold-blooded or unemotive—check the party-line on Anthony Braxton, for example.

"I think you have to be familiar with both sides," argues Mitchell. "You can go along with being emotional all your life, if you want, but you can also check out being non-emotional. And that can give

you that point in the middle that you can only have if you understand both sides. But everything has structure, so you can't get away from that. Anything you've heard where you said, 'Wow, that's a great piece of music,' if you look at it, there's some kind of structure there.

"The word 'music' is so big," he continues. "There's so much to study about it. For instance, if you study improvisation you've got to look at it as paralleling composition—it's basically the same process you're going after except you're trying to do it spontaneously. In order to really do it spontaneously, you have to control many things. When you're writing something, you have options, many ways you can go, and you have the time to do that if you want. You have to still have that situation if you're improvising. That's the challenge: to learn as much as you can about the word 'music.' That way you are able to create spontaneous composition and understand why you did it. In music, you work really hard. Every now and then something will happen like magic and you can do anything you want to, but generally that's not the way it is. You have to work on it."

Mitchell's approach to improvising—and music in general—is based on study, on evaluation and analysis, not on wanton abandonment. He has little patience for people who don't want to analyze their own free play. "That's stupid. All the great composers, they played their pieces, and if they didn't like them, you know what they did? They changed them. Music is something that you study. I heard musicians say a long time ago, 'Let's just play in the moment.' Play *what* in the moment? The same old personality over and over again? That's not that interesting. That don't have anything to do with the big

word 'music.' That's no fun: let's close our eyes, 'Oh you're great,' and all of this. No, man."

Like certain other post-bebop saxophonists, such as Ornette Coleman and Jackie McLean, Mitchell often uses startlingly off intonation. "Sometimes you may need a bit of the sound with the note to project a certain image. Maybe it's not just the note itself that you want to project. I study a lot of things like that, in terms of being able to sustain situations that don't necessarily depend on melody, for instance. And I might look at the instrument and consider the overall history of what it has done and can do. The saxophone itself: People said, 'Oh no, this is not the instrument to be in the orchestra, it's a bastard instrument,' and so on. But if you look at it, the vocabulary is enormous.

"All these different instruments have a personality of their own," says the voracious multi-instrumentalist. "Conceptualizing all these different percussion instruments I've collected over the years, putting them together in a way so that they come at you totally unrelated to the others. I'm in a situation where a roll even becomes too much, in terms of the mind being able to relate to that as something that it recognizes. Music that is totally stimulating, totally engaging, so that you would actually be sitting on the edge of your seat. Hey, these are big goals," he chuckles earnestly. "And I've got to be able to work with George Lewis, to take that saxophone and make it sound like a computer if I have to. Or take it with Jodie Christian and pay some sort of homage to the great tenor



"The word 'music' is so big. There's so much to study about it. ... I heard musicians say a long time ago, 'Let's just play in the moment.' Play *what* in the moment? ... That don't have anything to do with the big word 'music.'"

Citizen of SOUND

Roscoe Mitchell began his life in creative music in 1961 after returning to Chicago from a stint in Europe as an Army musician. While in the service he had encountered records of Ornette Coleman, who he admits he "didn't quite understand, because I was caught up in Art Blakey, the Messengers, things like that." Another early brush with free-jazz came in the form of Albert Ayler, who Mitchell heard play in barracks jam sessions when joint parades brought their military bands together in Germany. (He never played with Ayler, as has sometimes been reported.) "When I first heard him, he had an enormous sound on the instrument. I knew that. Some of what he was playing I didn't understand until a blues got played; when he played the first couple of choruses relatively straight, that started to make a connection for me."

Back in the Windy City, Mitchell joined Muhal Richard Abrams' legendary large ensemble the Experimental Band, and began leading small groups of his own, playing music deeply indebted to the quartet music of Ornette Coleman. He remembers this as a fertile era in Chicago jazz, with plenty of activity and places to play, including a weekly session at Wilson Junior College, where many future AACM members, including Henry Threadgill and Joseph Jarman, were students. "For a lot of us, we would go to Muhal's house after school. There we'd study composition, and we were writing for the big band, so we had a place to air out the compositions we were writing, get help with them. It was a great opportunity in Chicago at that time to learn about music."

In 1966, Mitchell was the first AACM musician to record; his groundbreaking *Sound* (see Page 56) opened a new chapter in jazz history, integrating ideas as old as Jelly Roll Morton and as new as the New Thing. This inevitably led to concerts away from home, the first being a tour of California (with trumpeter Lester Bowie and drummer Phillip Wilson). "All we had to do was sell a record every now and then to get money for food, gas, tolls," he recalls.

By the late '60s, Mitchell's quartet had transformed itself into the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and in '69 the urge to ramble took that hugely important band to Europe. "I always remember myself as wanting to go somewhere, and after I left Chicago I began to feel more of a yearning for the country than the city." Much of the AACM departed at this time. In '71, the Art Ensemble returned to the United States. Mitchell fulfilled his yearning by moving to a farm in the Michigan countryside before moving to his current home close to Madison, Wis.

—John Corbett



saxophonists. The baroque flute, my god, it's a whole language. That's enjoyment for me, to look back a couple of months and see where I've come to from where I was."

Indeed, Mitchell has been involved in a great assortment of projects. Some examples: Pre-Art Ensemble of Chicago pastichery on "Ornette" (1966); intensely abstract inventions for solo alto saxophone on "Nonaah" (1974); "The Maze"'s sprawling percussion-only octet (1978); classical textured orchestral topologies on "Sketches From Bamboo" (1979); a penchant for funk and fanfare

on "Jo Jar" (1981); rapping over hip-hop beats on "You Wastin' My Time" (1983); "The Reverend Frank Wright"'s brutal, free-energy blowing (1987); diffuse audio art with Steve Sylvester's bicycle-propelled bull-roarers and wind-wands on *Songs In The Wind* (1990); tart sax with conventional jazz quartet on *Hey Donald* (1995).

At present, in addition to practicing baroque flute and bass recorder (he's now joined the American Recorder Society), Mitchell is preparing orchestral music for a piece commissioned by Petr Kotik, anticipating the release of a new two-CD set of solo music on Delmark and looking forward to recording an expanded version of his group Note Factory for ECM. The Art Ensemble continues to perform (for the last few years, without fellow saxophonist Joseph Jarman), though it's grown into something perilously close to a caricature of itself. Mitchell complains about AEC's lack of acknowledgement in its own land. "The States still haven't recognized the Art Ensemble of Chicago for what it's done—none of the elite blacks, nobody in the States. In Europe, Japan, Australia, the Art Ensemble works much more. That's the way it's shaped up to be." Nevertheless, when given an opportunity, as they are at Yoshi's in San Francisco, he says the crowds come out. "The Art Ensemble doesn't have a current record, but every concert is sold out. And I've noticed that it's like that with me, too. My events are all sold out. I think that gleam is coming back in people's eyes.

"All these people who have been shunned by the media, they've been working on their music. So now, they're like ferocious terrors; give these people a chance, man, you'd be surprised, 'cause that's all they know! That was the philosophy: work on the music. There's nothing wrong with Joshua Redman getting some exposure, but some of these

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JUNE 23-JULY 11

other people should be getting exposure, too. That way you know it's healthy, people get a chance to make a choice. Just because you listen to Joshua Redman doesn't mean you won't listen to George Lewis."

Mitchell's is an ethic of continuous artistic expansion and refinement. "This is it, this is my life. And I'm grateful that I've met people who have helped me. I've been allowed to explore music. That's a big thing. Allowed to be yourself in music—check that out! That's *something* these days. I went to get some credit for something," the Midwesterner muses. "The guy asked me: 'Well, how long have you been on your job?' And I said, '30 years.' Who's been on the job for 30 years?"

Big job, big word, big life: music. **DB**

EQUIPMENT

Roscoe Mitchell endorses Selmer saxophones, the latest models on soprano, soprano, alto, tenor and a bass sax he got in the early '70s. His mouthpieces on the two highest horns are Selmer, on alto Yanagisawa, tenor and bass Vandoren. His reeds are 2½ Vandorens. "Some of these young guys play 5s, 15s; I'm trying to get more for less!"

He plays a Gemeinhardt piccolo, a baroque flute made by Thomas Boehm and a Miwazawa flute.

He has a huge collection of percussion instruments from all over the world: "I'm in flea markets, used stores, constantly looking for percussion sounds, so I've got copper pots, different cowbells. It's enormous, I can't even walk into it anymore."

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 AFTER FALLEN LEAVES—Silkheart 126
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 ROSCOE MITCHELL AND THE SOUND AND SPACE
 ENSEMBLES—Black Saint 120070
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 nessa 20 (out of print)
 MORE CUTOUTS—Cacma 1003 (out of print)
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 ROSCOE MITCHELL QUARTET—Sackville 2009
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Chick Corea & Friends

Remembering Bud Powell
Stretch 9012

★★★★½

Chick Corea and his compatriots here spent the summer of '96 gigging around the world, pushing microscopes into every nook and cranny of the Bud Powell songbook. They were impressive as they worked a vibe that more directly echoed Miles' second quintet.

The music was stimulating—in fact, it was the most emotional and resourceful Josh Redman this reviewer has heard to date—but once the heads were left in the dust, the interaction seemed to substitute the harmonic web of Wayne Shorter for the frenzied bop vernacular. After two more live shows it didn't matter what lingo won out, the intra-ensemble conversation was extraordinary. In short, it was some of the most fertile give-and-take of the year. Here, on the recorded version, the level of exchange is the same, and some of the missing bop boldness even shows up. Chick's nod to his mentor is superb.

The hero of the date is Roy Haynes, who could set an igloo on fire. Every measure of *Remembering Bud Powell* is enhanced by the drummer's provocations. On "Willow Grove" he's enthusiasm incarnate, lyrically nudging the band into an artistic frenzy. During "Dusk In Sandi" his brushes have a sensual insistence, giving bandmates Corea and Christian McBride the buoyancy needed to wax poetic. Though the bassist turns in a nifty bowed solo, the piece is a vehicle for the leader, whose darting phrases oddly make the ballad play like a mid-tempo piece.

Thankfully, concept is downplayed here. Corea's out to assert that Powell's pieces are gems just as they are. So the art comes via skillful solos, like Redman's master stroke on "I'll Keep Loving You" and Roney's forthright blast of sound on "Willow Grove." Or no solos at all: The melody "Glass Enclosure" is treated as a triumphant fanfare. Kudos should go to producer Corea or recorder Bernie Kirsh; the crisp sound on the disc—a novel tone, to be sure—has thoroughly captured the energy of the studio. Of course, energy—and always, always invention—

is what Powell was about.

By fully embracing an unflagging team spirit, Corea and chums underscore this energy and invention throughout their homage. Whether you're a novice or a fanatic, this Bud's for you.

—Jim Macnie

Remembering Bud Powell—*Bouncin' With Bud; Mediocre; Willow Grove; Dusk In Sandi; Oblivion; Bud Powell; I'll Keep Loving You; Glass Enclosure; Tempus Fugit; Celia.* (73:51 minutes)

Personnel—Corea, piano; Joshua Redman, tenor saxophone; Kenny Garrett, alto saxophone; Wallace Roney, trumpet; Christian McBride, bass; Roy Haynes, drums.



Kenny Wheeler

Angel Song
ECM 21607

★★★★½

Kenny Wheeler: eloquent trumpet stylist, significant composer, hell of an arranger. Case in point: *Angel Song*, a marvelous example of group rapport. This first-time-ever quartet sounds like a band, a group of musicians who know each others' moves by heart. This kind of musical telepathy comes in handy on *Angel Song*, an album filled with pauses, start-ups, out-and-out improvs, full and partial

choruses, not to mention charts galore.

Two things seem to be happening here: One, the players exist as individuals yet are submerged into Wheeler's music. Secondly, the music becomes a blend of the written and unwritten, a swirl of composed and improvised music. Musicians seem to finish each others' sentences, gracefully, poetically.

Rhythmically, Wheeler's ECM material tends to be driven more by bassists than drummers. That there's no drummer here only serves to point up the strength of Wheeler's writing, prompting the listener to notice his lines, in ensemble passages and for each player. Holland is most familiar with Wheeler's music, having worked with him extensively since the late '60s. When necessary, his precise and indispensable pulse guides everyone. And yet, somehow, the bassist not only provides a center of gravity to this airy group of improvisers, he also plays incredibly melodic passages, pausing behind soloists, soloing himself, and essentially sounding like a traffic cop with a rich arsenal of note choices. (These are typical Holland devices with Wheeler's music.) Wheeler has a fondness for playing in 3/4; all the more to fold his many twist-and-turn arrangements in on themselves. Listen to the haunting "Nicolette" or the gently swinging "Kind Folk," as Holland more than obliges in this regard.

Saxophonist Lee Konitz's seasoned, lilting tone is an exquisite complement to Wheeler's sometimes bright, sometimes tender horn lines, whether in chorus form or in complementary solos. Bill Frisell, forgoing any rough-and-ready electric maneuvers, instead plays the web-spinner, his atmospheric chords and single notes at times doubling and tripling Konitz and Wheeler's lines even as he envelops them.

It's difficult to isolate any one tune for discussion, because *Angel Song* plays like a suite (similar to previous Wheeler recordings). The compositions are less notable for melodic

THE HOT BOX

CDs	CRITICS	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
CHICK COREA & FRIENDS <i>Remembering Bud Powell</i>		★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½
KENNY WHEELER <i>Angel Song</i>		★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½
WADADA LEO SMITH <i>Tao-Njia</i>		★	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★
CHARLIE HADEN & PAT METHENY <i>Beyond The Missouri Sky</i>		★★★★	★★½	★★★	★★★★

hooks (the sweet jazz waltz "Kind Folk" and relatively uptempo swinger "Onno" are exceptions); again, *Angel Song's* strengths lie in the group interplay and individual voices that come as a result. Listen to the prayerful "Present Past" and you'll hear both individual and solo treatments of the theme, interspersed along with, among others, Holland's most enchanting solo of the album. Likewise, its haunting reprise, "Past Present," features evocative solos from Konitz and Frisell bracketed by repeated extended theme lines. This music penetrates deeply simply because it is allowed to be itself, unforced, "guided" by Wheeler's superb pen.

Sonically, each distinct musical personality has been recorded with an eloquence and poise that rises up and through that famous ECM reverb (a tad dryer than usual). What a treat it is to hear four heavyweights playing original music as if it were their own, egos held in reserve. One gets the impression that Wheeler's genius for arranging was in fact driven by these particular musicians, who alone were to be the vehicles for this very soulful music. Everyone and everything has its place in this recording. —John Ephland

Angel Song—Nicolette; *Present Past*; *Kind Folk*; *Unti*; *Angel Song*; *Onno*; *Nonetheless*; *Past Present*; *Kind Of Gentle*. (70:06)

Personnel—Wheeler, trumpet, flugelhorn; Lee Konitz, alto saxophone; Bill Frisell, guitar; Dave Holland, double-bass.



Wadada Leo Smith

Tao-Njia
Tzadik 7017

★★★★½

Trumpeter and flugelhornist Wadada Leo Smith has been an infrequent recording artist since the years of Kabell, the label he ran while based in New Haven in the '70s. Smith's wonderful solo disc *Kulture Jazz* (ECM) appeared in '93, but otherwise his fans have had to satisfy themselves on reissued material on Black Saint and Chief, the rest of his important discography slipping into the vinyl museum. That's an awful fate for the work of such an elegant, often profound musician—early member of Chicago's AACM, now the Dizzy Gillespie chair at CalArts—but perhaps this outstanding record on John Zorn's fine Tzadik label will start to right the scales.

Tao Njia's three pieces are gentle, deceptively spacious compositions loaded with the gestural oomph of a master calligrapher. One might call them "chamberish," but that would be to miss their stylistic breadth, their Asian classical overtones and the force of Smith's soloing. "Another

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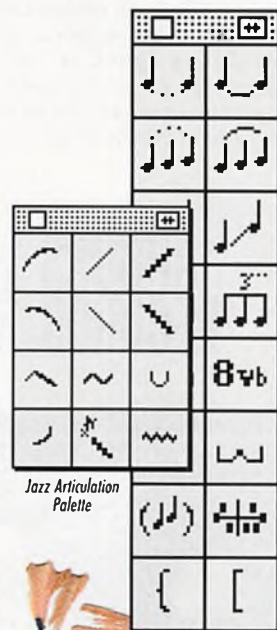
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Wave More Waves" features undulant bass percussion and frame drum, over which Smith paints lines in dashing strokes, his multitracked horns creating a contemplative interior monologue or bursting emotively into tonally static vibraphone and tubular-bell harmonies. "Double Thunderbolt" is a suite in six brief movements, dedicated to Don Cherry, whose influence is clear not only in Smith's horn playing and his multi-instrumentalism, but in the international scope of his musical vision as well. Two sections find Smith intertwining wood flutes with David Philipson, while on the first of two parts titled "Symphony For Improvisers" there's chiming percussion with poetry (writ and read, in English and Japanese, by Harumi Makino Smith). But the three sections of unaccompanied Wadada demonstrate why he should be considered one of the great trumpet voices of creative music: huge and open sound, ingenuity with different mutes, traces of Cherry and Bill Dixon (slurs, unvoiced air sounds), a signature distorted, flutter techniques, but also hearty melodic sense and wide intervallic leaps. The closing section, "A Falcon Ascends In A Moonbow Lightbeam," is more scurrying, offering an energetic cadence.

Tao-Njia's 21-minute title track is written for mixed contemporary chamber ensemble, and the California E.A.R. Unit gives it a warm, precise reading. Filled with delicate timbres, it is a measured composition; deliberate in motion, it's harmonically very sophisticated with clusters of activity that aggregate around held tones. Smith is cast as trumpet soloist, but he's integrated into the fabric of the sound (he also includes a

short interlude of prerecorded thumb piano). At the 15-minute point, he and violinist Robin Lorentz engage in a heated exchange, while sustained vibraphone glows underneath.

Given such a rich and rewarding offering, it's a joy to have Mr. Smith back on the record-making front. Hope he's back to stay.

—John Corbett

Tao-Njia—*Another Wave More Waves; Double Thunderbolt; Memorial For Don Cherry; Tao-Njia.* (43:14)

Personnel—Smith, trumpet, flugelhorn, bamboo flute (2), nohkan flute (2); David Philipson, percussion, bansuri (2), mbira (3); Mike Noda, vibraphone, k timpani, tubular bells (1,3); Harumi Makino Smith, voice (2); track 3: Stephen Lucky Mosko, conductor; Dorothy Stone, flutes, piccolo; Martin Walker, clarinet, bass clarinet; Vicki Ray, piano, celesta; Robin Lorentz, violin; Erika Duke, cello.



Charlie Haden & Pat Metheny

Beyond The Missouri Sky

Verve 537 130

★★★★

The first duet session between Charlie Haden and Pat Metheny may not shake up the world. But it could put it to sleep. Sleep is a wonderful state, mind you. And getting there is half the fun. The inducements to drowse are palpable here. Almost hypnotically slow and whispered, the 13 "short stories" of *Beyond The Missouri Sky* have a cumulative lulling effect that induces relaxation at the least, and total stupor at best. That it puts you under with such gentle sensuality and melodic intelligence is part of the music's own quiet and decidedly unrushed charm and integrity.

The press release that arrived with the advance CD lists only Haden and Metheny on hand, leaving me to assume that the cloud-like accompanying chords that drift in around track six (Jim Webb's "The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress") are provided by either a computer or a crew of unidentified string players. It's the kind of music that uncertain phrases like "aural landscape," where feeling is more apparent than form, were born to describe. Metheny has no fear of silence as he feels his way carefully through this self-described mix of hillbilly and raw jazz material, as seen through an impressionistic sensibility.

The most arresting piece, to my ears, is the last one, "Spiritual," a monumental original in miniature by Charlie Haden's son, Josh, who has filled it with thick, rich, chocolatey major chords that practically stick to Metheny's fingers as he plays. They are no less lyrical or moving for being more or less predictable. The backbeat percussionist is unidentified.

—John McDonough

Beyond The Missouri Sky—Waltz For Ruth; Our Spanish Love Song; Message To A Friend; Two For The Road; First Song; The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress; Precipus Jewel; He's Gone Away; Moon Song; Tears Of Rain; Cinema Paradiso Main Theme (1, 2); Spiritual. (69:29)

Personnel—Haden, bass; Metheny, guitar.

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Kirk Lightsey

Goodbye Mr. Evans

Evidence 22165

★★★★½

Still among the best-kept secrets in jazz, pianist Kirk Lightsey continues to record very tasteful, consistently strong albums. Warm and heartfelt, *Goodbye Mr. Evans* reaches standards set by Lightsey's role models, fellow

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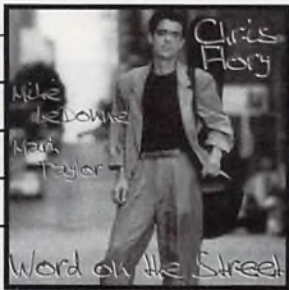
Detroit pianists Tommy Flanagan and Hank Jones. Jimmy Heath's "A New Blue" illustrates Lightsey's knack for embracing an attractive melody, then reiterating and embellishing it over the swinging, seductive vamp laid down by drummer Famoudou Don Moye and bassist Tibor Elekes. Lightsey's playing is full of paradoxes: bluesy but elegant, and light but assertive. "Habiba," an original he's recorded frequently, is played at a mid-tempo groove with the same qualities plus more adventurous drumming from Moye.

The drummer's presence recalls the controlled aggression of his collaborations with Lightsey in the Leaders and the Leaders Trio. This performance may seem conventional to fans of Moye's work with the Art Ensemble of Chicago, but he manages to sound inventive and unpredictable without disrupting the flow and gracefulness of Lightsey's trio. The trio's reflective reading of Phil Woods' "Goodbye Mr. Evans" just about glows. Lightsey keeps the piece interesting over its length by varying moods through tension and release. That Lightsey continues to be overlooked reconfirms how difficult it's become to attain deserved recognition without the backing of a multinational entertainment conglomerate.

—Jon Andrews

Goodbye Mr. Evans—*A New Blue; In Your Own Sweet Way; From Chopin To Chopin; Medley: Freedom Jazz Dance, Pinocchio, Temptation, Giant Steps; Four In One; Habiba; Goodbye Mr. Evans. (66:01)*

Personnel—Lightsey, piano; Tibor Elekes, bass; Famoudou Don Moye, drums, percussion.



Vic Juris

Music Of Alec Wilder
Double-Time 118

★★★½

Chris Flory

Word On The Street
Double-Time 119

★★½

In today's jazz, older musicians are usually more progressive than younger ones, a generational role reversal that's glaringly obvious when one compares two recent releases by guitarists Vic Juris and Chris Flory. Juris, who came of age in the heyday of free-jazz and fusion, takes a postmodern, semi-abstract approach to the mainstream compositions of the late Alec Wilder, while Flory, a product of the

past decade's neo-bop movement, reproduces the organ-combo sound of the '60s with the literal fidelity of a museum curator.

It's strange to hear the works of Wilder, a part-time classicist and staunch upholder of traditional Tin Pan Alley values, fractured into edgy modal blowing vehicles. But Juris and company respect the music's integrity, intoning the melodies as written before veering off into cubist improvisations that preserve Wilder's air of sophisticated melancholy. Juris' chiming tone and legato phrasing give his comping chords an organ-like sound; his solo lines undulate smoothly between bop and fusion scales, conveying an obliquely contemporary feel. Saxophonist Dave Liebman and trumpeter Tim Hagans share Juris' eely facility and inside-out

sensibility, joining in a three-way mind meld of poised, thoughtful, cliché-free interplay. Bassist Steve Laspina echoes the polished fluidity of the lead voices, leaving drummer Jeff Hirshfield to provide contrast with choppy, jumpy, slightly displaced rhythms. The album maintains a brooding atmosphere through uptempo numbers like "Where Is The One" and ballads like "Blackberry Winter," sticking to the same moody groove even after the horns drop out on the three final tracks.

If there's any different between Flory's *Word On The Street* and the organ-trio albums of 30 years ago, it's that the commercial pop influences that so typified the genre have been thoroughly purged, replaced by material associated with Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Frank Sinatra,

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Billie Holiday, et al. Otherwise, it's déjà vu all over again, as Flory, organist Mike LeDonne and drummer Mark Taylor revisit familiar territory with polished predictability. The tunes are mostly well-chosen, avoiding hackneyed standards in favor of lesser-known pieces like Billy Strayhorn's "Snibor" and Ray Noble's "The Touch Of Your Lips." There's a Latin tinge ("Comes Love"), a torchy ballad ("Crazy, He Calls Me") and a bluesy workout ("Going To Meetin'"), but it's all performed with the by-the-book precision of a graduation recital.
—Larry Birnbaum

Music Of Alec Wilder—*Where Is The One; Goodbye John; Winter Of My Discontent; Moon And Sand; Blackberry Winter; A Long Night; Lady Sings The Blues; That's My Girl; While We're Young; Homework; Such A Lonely Girl Am I; Little Circles.* (68:22)

Personnel—Juris, guitar; Tim Hagans, trumpet, flugelhorn; Dave Liebman, tenor and soprano saxophones; Steve

LaSpina, bass; Jeff Hirshfield, drums.

Word On The Street—*When You Grow Too Old To Dream; Snibor; Comes Love; Crazy, He Calls Me; Taps Miller; You Don't Know Me At All; I'm A Fool To Want You; Going To Meetin'; Don't You Know I Care; The Touch Of Your Lips.* (61:36)

Personnel—Flory, guitar; Mike LeDonne, organ; Mark Taylor, drums.



Jazz Passengers

Individually Twisted

32 Records 32007

★★★

The Jazz Passengers attempt a risky straddle, hoping to retain jazz listeners while appealing to a broader audience with this vocal-oriented mix of jazz standards and offbeat love

songs. Adding '70s rock diva Deborah Harry as vocalist, they aim for listeners who favored Blondie and Elvis Costello records, but whose tastes have diversified. *Individually Twisted* won't completely satisfy either the jazz or pop camps.

Individually Twisted's emphasis on vocals detracts from the Passengers' strengths—the ensemble's grooves and interplay, and the quality of its soloists, including Roy Nathanson, Curtis Fowlkes and Bill Ware. Fowlkes in particular has a reduced role, though he adds a strong, bluesy trombone solo to "Angel Eyes." Nathanson leads the way on alto, adding touches of goofy humor. Vibraphonist Ware percolates as he holds the music together, leading the rhythm section, comping effectively behind the vocalists and, along with Nathanson, establishing the melodies.

Harry compensates for limited vocal range with attitude. She projects a brassy, worldly persona, but lacks the instrument necessary to succeed with "Angel Eyes" or "L'il Darlin'." Her reprise of "The Tide Is High" is curiously lethargic. Elvis Costello sings the clever, downcast "Aubergine" and duets with Harry on the campy "Doncha Go 'Way Mad." It's ironic and unsettling to hear "New Wave" icons banter like Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé.
—Jon Andrews

Individually Twisted—*Babble A La Roy; Maybe I'm Lost; L'il Darlin'; Angel Eyes; Pork Chop; Aubergine; Olé; Imitation Of A Kiss; Jive Samba (Part II); Doncha Go 'Way Mad; The Tide Is High; It Came From Outer Space/Star Dust.* (46:12)

Personnel—Roy Nathanson, alto, soprano and tenor saxophones; Curtis Fowlkes, trombone; Rob Thomas, violin; Brad Jones, bass; Bill Ware, vibraphone; E.J. Rodriguez, drums; Deborah Harry, Elvis Costello (6, 10), vocals; Marc Ribot (3, 10), Chris Stein (11), guitar; Adam Dorn, percussion (9); Arnold Nathanson, saxophone (12).

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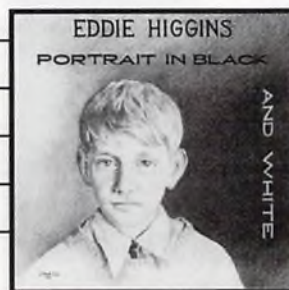
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Eddie Higgins

Portrait In Black And White

Sunnyside 1072D

★★★½

Lynne Arriale

With Words Unspoken

dmp 518

★★★★

Piano trios reduce the jazz band to its minimum instrumentation, and therefore provide a unique opportunity to study how form is collectively evolved in an improvisational context. But perhaps more importantly, piano trios participate in one's mood rather than impose themselves upon it.

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These two albums exemplify the format's allure. Eddie Higgins and Lynne Arriale share a touch both percussive and silken and a foundation in classical music as well as a disciplined approach to elegance and an affinity for Jobim. But the fact that they come from different generations is audible. Higgins was the resident pianist at Chicago's London House in the '50s and earned a small but loyal following through recordings on the long-defunct VeeJay label. Then he moved to Florida and dropped off everyone's radar screens until he began recording for Sunnyside in 1991.

Lynne Arriale earned a master's degree in classical music from the Wisconsin Conservatory, and won the Great American Jazz Piano Competition in 1993. She has gained a moderate level of visibility over the past three years through her relationship with dmp, a jazz label that aggressively promotes its claim to superior audio quality through 20-bit recording.

Higgins' renditions of songs like "Lullaby Of The Leaves" and "Danny Boy" sound like the definitive jazz text from which other versions are departures. It is not that he lacks individuality. His phrasing and chord choices are always interesting. It's just that he's so polished and so respectful of every song's denotation. Arriale plays harder. Her album opens with clamorous, hammering Monk ("Think Of One") and full-tilt Gillespie ("Woody 'n You"). She also plays softer. Over nine revelatory minutes, Jimmy Rowles' "The Peacocks" unfolds like a night flower.

What Higgins and Arriale have in common and how they diverge is revealed in the only song the two recordings share, Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Zingaro." It means "gypsy," and the title is ironic because it is a song about someone haunted by memories of an old love affair, someone trapped in the past and incapable of movement. Jobim's melody, appropriately restricted in its motion, is based on repeated phrases taken through subtle variations over small intervals. Higgins gives it a precise and gently articulate reading. The bass and drums of Don Wilner and James Martin fall into a bright regular rhythm, and Higgins concludes with a long ascending line that retraces the theme's intervals.

Higgins does a great song justice, but Arriale finds a way into its mystery. She allows the melody's repetitions to suspend themselves in an ambiguity that implies the emotional gypsy in all of us, while Drew Gress and Steve Davis float apart, scattering patterns of private connotation. *With Words Unspoken* provides a much more personal and detailed sonic experience of three instruments, and Arriale also benefits from more creative bandmates. (Gress is a brooding poet; Don Wilner is a proficient technician.)

But both of these recordings improve the more time you spend with them as only fine piano trios can. —Thomas Conrad

Portrait In Black And White—*Lullaby Of The Leaves*: Danny Boy; *What Is This Thing Called Love*; *Liebesleid*; *Refrato Em Branco E Preto* (Zingaro); *Siciliano*; *Just In Time*; *Pavane*; *The Dolphin/Someone To Light Up My Life*; *Dance Only With Me*; *Vocalise*. (65:32)

Personnel—Higgins, piano; Don Wilner, bass; James Martin, drums.

With Words Unspoken—*Think Of One*; *Woody 'n You*; *With Words Unspoken*; *Windswept*; *The Peacocks*; *A Promise Broken*; *Zingaro*; *I Loves You Porgy*; *Where Or When*. (60:43)

Personnel—Arriale, piano; Drew Gress, bass; Steve Davis, drums.



Leroy Jones

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Columbia 67643

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New Orleans Nightcrawlers

New Orleans Nightcrawlers
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tribute, and next waxes with Doc Cheatham. The Preservation Hall Jazz Band is experiencing new vitality. Now Leroy Jones, with his second CD, also tips his hat to the gigantic talent of Armstrong.

Like Payton and Wendell Brunius, the outstanding trumpeter with PHJB, Jones is a modernist who can musically look back to earlier days. But should he? Is there fertile soil in this decided backward glance? When he offers "West End Blues," mimicking the great one, he pales, but in a heartfelt version of "Wonderful World," he convinces.

Look, Jones can play. He has a fat sound, agile technique capable of fast, supple shifts in direction, and a trained tongue that can articulate each one of a series of notes, or stop on a dime. He swings hard, too, and sports a pretty fair, attractively grainy voice. On *Props*, such tracks as "Sleepy Time," "Struttin'" and "Someday" exhibit these attributes. The brief dirge, "Lamentation," is stunning in its emotion.

Then there's "You Must Not Be," a funky '60s blues in the Lee Morgan tradition. Here, Jones plays like *that* departed master, smearing phrases, sweeping from low to high with no fumbles; in a word, he cooks. It makes you wonder who Jones really is, how he really wants to play.

Harry Connick fits in well here, offering pleasing Monk-isms (slammed chords, angular lines) within the NO context. The others in the supporting crew deliver journeyman performances.

The men in the Nightcrawlers are a different breed, tackling the quasi-modern parade-band cast of groups like the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, playing everything from New Orleans-style jazz

to funk. The rambunctious outfit plays the classic style with veracity: "Just A Little While" and the slow drag of "Thursday Morning" prove that.

But mostly the musicians like to fool with stuff: The hearty "Bourbon Street" is given a second-line punch, and at one point, the rhythm drops out and the horns riff; "Blueberry Hill" has two distinct moods. "Tchfunkta" (naturally) and "Noise" are funk goodies.

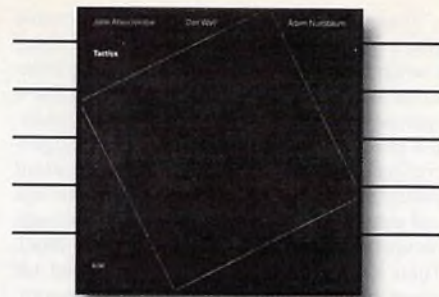
These guys can solo, too. Trombonist Craig Klein's plunger-muted horn brings life to "Thursday," while tenorist Eric Traub is imploring. Trumpeter Kevin Clark is aces on "Martin's Mambo."
—Zan Stewart

Props For Pops—*Props For Pops; Struttin' With Some Barbeque; West End Blues; Someday You'll Be Sorry; When It's Sleepy Time Down South; Jeepers Creepers; You Must Not Be Hearin' Straight; The Preacher; Ain't Misbehavin'; Baby Won't You Please Come Home; What A Wonderful World; Whoppin' Blues; Louie's Lamentation; Armstrong's Parade.* (62:21)

Personnel—Jones, trumpet, flugelhorn, vocals; Craig Klein, trombone; Harry Connick Jr., (1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 13), Glenn Patscha (2, 6, 7, 14), Thaddeus Richard (3, 8, 10, 12), piano; Reginald Veal (1, 4-5, 9, 11, 13), Kerry Lewis (2, 3, 6-8, 10, 12, 14), bass; Gerald French (2, 3, 6-8, 10, 12, 14), Shannon Powell (1, 4, 5, 9, 11, 13), drums.

New Orleans Nightcrawlers—*Parlor For The 'Crawlers; Bourbon St. Parade; Tchfunkta; Keep On Gwine; Noise; Martin's Mambo; Blueberry Hill; Just A Little While To Stay Here; Sidewalk Strut; Thursday Morning Revival.* (55:09 minutes)

Personnel—Kevin Clark (arranger), Barney Floyd, trumpet; Craig Klein, Steve Suter (3, 5-7, 9, 10), Jerry Dallman (1, 2, 4, 8), trombone; Eric Traub, Jason Mingledorff, Ken "Snakebite" Jacobs, saxes, clarinets; Peter Kaplan, snare drum; Frank Oxley, bass drum; Matt Perrine, sousaphone, arranger; Tom McDermott, co-founder/arranger.



John Abercrombie Trio

Tactics
ECM 21623

★★★★½

Each new album from Abercrombie provides a reason to celebrate the whole of his discography, which is as impressive as that of any living jazz guitarist. (Most of his albums, of course, are in the ECM catalog.) On the first live recording made by his organ trio with Dan Wall and Adam Nussbaum, he once again commands attention as the rare guitarist who can conjure personality and complex emotions from the subtlety of musical sounds. In NYC's Visiones club, engineer David Baker succeeds in capturing the natural pungency of Abercrombie's guitar tone, a switch from ECM's Jan Erik Kongshaug's emphasis of crystalline sonic properties.

With song performances averaging close to 10 minutes, Abercrombie gets plenty of space in which to stretch. But all the while his playing is lucid, controlled, almost mathematically precise, and he's never ever excessive or false with the musical drama he instills in his compositions, standards, and song contributions from Nussbaum or Wall. There is prima facie evidence of Jim Hall-like lyricism in his bursts of notes, and his guitar creates intriguing sonorities when heard with Wall's Hammond B-3 and Nussbaum's cymbals and drums.

Abercrombie's group is at once traditional and radical on *Tactics*. The guitarist and organist make musical and emotional connections with their time as young players in Jimmy Smith/Wes Montgomery-inspired organ trios—dig the magnificent blues and funk grit they churn out performing "Bo Diddy" at Visiones. But their knowledge of harmony is so vast and their desire for musical freedom so great, they just cannot and will not lock themselves into organ-trio conventionalism and cliché. Especially noteworthy is the live version of Abercrombie's "Dear Rain," which the trio had recorded in the studio four years ago on their *While We're Young* album. Resisting tempo, the celestial music floats on the wings of spontaneous imagination and technical ease in a fashion that brings to mind Coltrane; the title, after all, is a compression of the saxophonist's "Dear Lord" and "After The Rain." The trio's shift from "Dear Rain" into "Mr. Magoo," a Wall composition, is imperceptible and perfect. All the songs on the album seem to have a certain coherence and connectedness. The music flows wonderfully. The attentive listener can tell that Abercrombie, Wall and

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—Frank-John Hadley

Tactics—Sweet Sixteen; Last Waltz; Bo Diddy; You And The Night And The Music; Chumbida; Dear Rain; Mr. Magoo; Long Ago And Far Away. (76:26)

Personnel—Abercrombie, guitars; Dan Wall, organ; Adam Nussbaum, drums.



John Serry

Enchantress

Telarc 83392

★★★½

Among the talented pianists long deserving of wider recognition is John Serry, who some may recall for his feature albums and his recordings with Auracle in the late '70s/early '80s. No less an observer than Leonard Feather predicted the pianist would someday belong to jazz's "upper echelon." It hasn't panned out that way, though, and Serry's made his mark in the worlds of film scoring and music education. But now, he's making a concerted effort to raise his profile as a jazz musician with this new CD.

Enchantress shows the full range of Serry's skills, from torrential eloquence to smiling affability to soft-lighted tenderness. He has a strong sense of melody, his touch is confident, his ideas are sensible, and his playing is beautifully controlled without being stiff and stifling. Serry is responsible for writing all 10 songs here, and he's bundled them up in his own tidy arrangements.

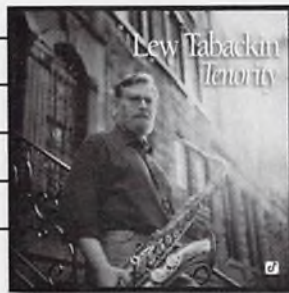
The pianist fans the flames of "Free Hand" with a neo-bop excitement that's matched by saxophonist Ralph Bowen and the sprinting rhythm section. Yet, the tune, just four minutes long and the shortest track on the album, is something of an anomaly. More typical is "Dyt It," with its aggressive sections balanced by a big-hearted melody suggestive of Mike Post's "Theme From Hill Street Blues." Pop-jazz listeners can enjoy "Dyt It" without straining their cerebrum too much, while discriminating jazz types can latch onto its substantive music. "Dance One" also pleases both ways, high on jazz caloric content but also possessing the sort of friendly aura favored by the pop-jazz crowd.

For sure, Serry has a romantic bent. He inches along a light line between true tenderness and gooey sentiment on "Seamless," "Heart Felt" and "As Was" especially. He keeps his balance despite Gerry Niewood's confectionery saxophones almost tugging him down on the wrong side.

—Frank-John Hadley

Enchantress—Dyt It; Seamless; Enchantress; As Was; Precious; Free Hand; Heart Felt; Dance One; Shortly; The Image. (62:09)

Personnel—Serry, piano; Gerry Niewood, soprano and tenor saxophones, flute; Ralph Bowen, alto and tenor saxophones (3, 6, 8); Tom Brigandi, acoustic bass and Yamaha six-string electric bass; John Riley, drums.



Lew Tabackin

Tenority

Concord Jazz 4733

★★★½

If Tabackin were 30 years younger, and a little less professorial-looking, he'd be a marketer's dream: His modern mainstream sound, spanning the stylistic gamut from Ben Webster to John Coltrane, is right on the cutting edge of today's retro-bop movement. Unfortunately, his ripe tone and expressive phrasing give his age away; he's just too accomplished to pass for a Wunderkind.

Here, Tabackin plays masterly tenor sax (no flute) in quartet, quintet, trio and solo settings, dominating sidemen like pianist Don Friedman and trumpeter Randy Brecker on a set mostly of standards. With Friedman, he turns Gershwin's "Soon" into a turbocharged modal breakdown à la Coltrane's "Giant Steps," paints the "Autumn Nocturne" in the robust colors of the swing era and recasts the corny "Me And My Shadow" as a witty post-bop romp.

With Brecker, he takes a Sonny Rollins-like "Sentimental Journey," opening and closing with tongue-in-cheek avant-garde glitters, and puts his own determined stamp on Thelonious Monk's gem-hard "Trinkle Tinkle." Backed only by Peter Washington on bass and Mark Taylor, Tabackin's English protégé on drums, he sprints through Irving Berlin's "The Best Thing For You" with the up-to-the-minute facility of a Kenny Garrett; unaccompanied, he twists "You Don't Know What Love Is" into a tour de force of impassioned prowess.

Long on integrity, if not originality, Tabackin places his formidable technique at the service of his emotions, investing every phrase with meaning. Slightly staid by the standards of his own generation, he makes his younger sidemen sound almost square by comparison.

—Larry Birnbaum

Tenority—Soon; Autumn Nocturne; Me And My Shadow; Fashion's Flower; Chasin' The Carrot; Sentimental Journey; Trinkle Tinkle; The Best Thing For You; You Stopped Out Of A Dream; You Don't Know What Love Is. (63:09)

Personnel—Tabackin, tenor saxophone; Peter Washington, bass; Mark Taylor, drums; Don Friedman, piano (1-5); Randy Brecker, trumpet (5-7).

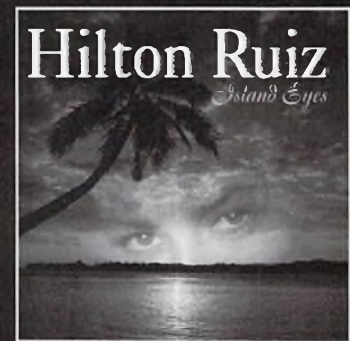
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JAZZ

European Frontier Mentality

by John Corbett

No generalization about European jazz can hold water—the scenes are just too diverse. If you follow your ears you'll soon realize that the music is subject to as many different recastings as befits such a polyglot continent. A vibrant big-band tradition is supported by radio (unlike the U.S.), mainstream combos swing like a kid in a playground, ensembles work at the crossroads of written and open organization. Meanwhile individual players ensure that the conventions of instrumental technique retain their elasticity.



Bobo Stenson: pulling heartstrings

barrelhouse and his own sweetly warped persona into the mix.

Roger Smith: *Unexpected Turns* (Emanem 4014; 69:46; ★★★★★) Though it's not well known, there's more than one great free improvising guitarist in England; Smith made his first solo record more than 15 years ago, and he was a member of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble before drummer John Stevens died. *Unexpected Turns*, his second solo effort, showcases the extremely unusual vocabulary he's plucked up for himself on nylon-string classical guitar. Jagged arpeggios, aggressive flamenco strumming, brutal or willfully clunky attack and a deeply perverse sense of humor (check the most slapstick jazzy cut, "Guitarus Interruptus," ending with a phone ring, or losing a pick in the sound-hole on "Unexpected Turn 2") mean that it's not music for the precious or feint of heart.

But attentive listening reveals a stunning musical intelligence.

Badland: *Badland (Bruce's Fingers 14; 54:56; ★★★★★)* If one chief complaint about '60s free-jazz was its lack of dynamic variation—all blow, no low—a host of younger Europeans are harnessing the full range of expressive options. The British trio Badland, for instance, can engage in delicate spontaneous interplay or volcanic eruption, often both in the course of one short piece. Hear Mark Sanders' great command of percussive pulsed and unpulsed options (he's in and out of time on "The Hatching Muscle"), bassist Simon H. Fell's impressive extended techniques, and Simon Rose's versatile tenor and alto sax. "Hyena's Finger" rises instantly from near-silence to fever pitch. The band tackles tuneage, too—there's a meaty reading of Duke Ellington's "Come Sunday" and two views of Ornette Coleman's "Sadness."

Chris Abelen Quintet: *Dance Of The Penguins* (BVHAAS 9608; 41:49; ★★★★★) On his debut as a frontman, Dutch trombonist Abelen's terse, potent compositions serve as seed bed for his band's economical improvisations, and his deft players cultivate some very special flora, indeed. Most exciting is tenor saxist Tobias Delius, who's been on the scene awhile but doesn't care much about recording. He's got a Ben Webster/Archie Shepp sound: big, breathy, supple, able to toy most delightfully with time. Delius is featured over pedal tones on "Delay," just before Corrie van Binsbergen breaks out with a nasty electric guitar solo. Charles Huffstadt's march drums on "Who's Next" recall Henry Threadgill's Sextett, but this group's got a wholly original sound. The leader's a fine melodist, as well, and bassist Wilbert de Jooede wields an enviable high-action, matte-timbre sound. **DB**

George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band: *The MPS Years* (MPS 533 552; 74:07; ★★★★★) Swiss pianist Gruntz kicked off this big band in 1971, and this collection is drawn from five LPs spanning from the group's inception to 1980. Serving both as a showcase for Gruntz's arranging and as a clearinghouse for great soloists from all walks of jazz, GGCJB's m.o. has been to create sections built out of multiple individuals, rather than padding the second and third seats with anonymous horns. The feel is thus at once professional and highly personal. Consider the personnel here alone, which includes band cofounders drummer Daniel Humair, trumpeter Franco Ambrosetti and his saxophonist father Flavio and a staggering list of European and American greats: reed players Dexter Gordon, Joe Henderson and Ernst-Ludwig Petrowsky; trumpeters Woody Shaw and Tom Harrell; trombonists Jimmy Knepper, Albert Mangelsdorff, Eje Thelin; guitarist John Scofield; drummers Elvin Jones and Peter Erskine. This very nice selection includes the whimsical (Gruntz's mad-prof synth intro to "Triple Hip Trip") and elegiac (Herb Geller's oboe on the theme to Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman"). Only drag: Jasper van't Hof's wishy-washy keyboards on Joe Henderson's otherwise solid "Black Narcissus."

Joe Zawinul and the Austrian All Stars: *His Majesty Swinging Nephews 1954-1957* (RST 91549; 66:50; ★★★★★) Historically fascinating, rare juvenilia from the future Weather Reporter, all recorded before Zawinul's studies at Berklee and emigration to the States. Like so much of Northern and Central Europe in the '50s, the overwhelming influence was West Coast; alto saxist Hans Salomon and tenor Karl Drewo dovetail together in search of Konitz/Marsh counterpoint. Zawinul's only composition on this compilation is "Mekka" (two quite different versions), and

on it one can hear why he emerged from the pack; his short solo on the '54 take is particularly precise and full of spunk. A piano trio context finds Zawinul at the helm on three cuts from '57. Some material is remastered from 78s, though the sound is surprisingly good.

Bobo Stenson/Anders Jormin/ Jon Christensen: *Reflections* (ECM 21516; 50:17; ★★★★★); Per Henrik Wallin: *Deep In A Dream* (Dragon 290; 68:43; ★★ ★★) Two warm Swedish pianists, giving lie to the myth of the frigid sensibility of Northern Europe. Bobo Stenson and bassist Anders Jormin have a musical partnership (also as part of Charles Lloyd's quartet) elegantly displayed in conjunction with ECM mainstay Christensen, the Norwegian master of sensitive cymbalism. Stenson often conjures smooth Bill Evans, nowhere more than on George Gershwin's "My Man's Gone Now"—he can pull heartstrings with bittersweet chords or stroke the ears lovingly with soft, swift runs. Jormin is a treasure, everything a bassist should be. His earthen tone, complete command of harmonics and dynamic variation and unflinching note selection are trademarks, and he's equally prominent, not just support, particularly on his own pieces "NOT" and "Q." (The bass cognoscenti should be all over Jormin's 1991 solo disc *Alone*, on Dragon.) With a rumbling rhythmic sensibility more out of Monk (comparisons to Dutchman Misha Mengelberg wouldn't be far off, though the Swede is more apt to spin virtuosic quick lines), Wallin is a superb pianist who's never gotten his proper due; it doesn't help that nearly all his catalog is out of print. *Deep In A Dream* is a never-before-issued 1985 recording made at an informal private performance, and it's possessed of a wonderfully relaxed atmosphere. Aside from a few originals, it's all standards. Wallin jumps from style to style, tossing bits of J.S. Bach,

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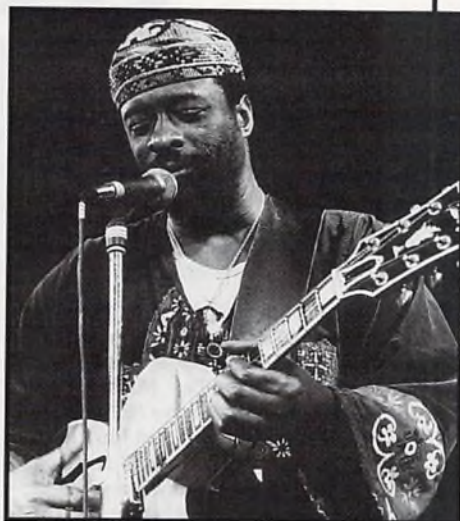
by Dan Ouellette

While the word eclectic sometimes connotes music that's unfocused and trite, it's the most apt term to describe heightened postmodern jazz that defies easy categorization. The following CDs feature restless improvisers who employ, to varying degrees of success, a mix & match stylistic approach, pushing the boundaries of jazz miles beyond the mainstream.

Spanish Fly: *Fly By Night* (Accurate 5024; 49:14: ★★★★★½) Leading the parade of jazz upstarts is the adventurous trio Spanish Fly, which, on paper, flies in the face of mainstream jazz simply by its unusual instrumental configuration. Steven Bernstein leads the way on trumpet, Marcus Rojas blows tuba bass lines and Dave Tronzo supplies both slippery and solid footing on slide guitar. The band's unpredictable tunes are compositionally brilliant and improvisationally exciting as trio members stretch way beyond the constrictive head-solo-head format of standard jazz performance. They effortlessly dip in and out of a melange of disparate styles, creating a gutbucket-and-grunge jazz derived from sweet country, shard rock, Americana folk, country blues and urban-funk influences. The "Insert Tongue Here" suite is both gripping and jovial, and the five-movement "Fly By Night" score commissioned by the San Francisco Ballet is thoroughly engaging.

Brian Ales: *Creature Of Habit* (Intuition 3162; 53:18: ★★★★★) Guitarist Brian Ales' captivating second CD belongs in both world music and jazz bins. Even though his percussive, ambient soundscapes are full of such ethnic instruments as the bandoneon (Argentina), talking drums (Africa), tabla and dumbek (India) and gaida (Bulgaria), each piece has an integrity of its own instead of being a hodgepodge of contrived music. Improvisational jazz serves as the common denominator. While the bright "Happy Town" and the mysterious "Waltz Fatale" are highlights, the best comes last when Ales leads a 10-piece group (percussion and horns) through the fascinating seven-part piece "Aho Dze." Bonus points for Ales' short guitar meditations throughout.

Third Rail: *South Delta Space Age* (Antilles 533 965; 51:48: ★★★★★) The great James Blood Ulmer leads this power-packed, steaming machine called Third Rail, which churns up a hip, free-spirited batch of numbers fueled with jazz and soaked in blues, rap, soul, rock and funk. The phat beats are charged (courtesy of bassist Bill Laswell and drummer Ziggy Modeliste), and there's plenty of open space for Bernie Worrell's improvisational explosions on organ and clavinet. But Ulmer, with his distinctive blues-toned, quak-



Blood Ulmer: a power-packed steam machine

ing guitar voicings and equally inimitable raspy vocals, commands center stage. His mesmerizing take on hip-hopper Schooly D's "Dusted" opens the disc and unlatches the door for the booming partytime funk fest, highlighted by "Funk All Night," "Itchin'" and "First Blood."

Joel Harrison: *3+3=7* (Nine Winds 0187; 55:52: ★★★★★½) New math gives birth to new jazz. Guitarist Joel Harrison proves the sum is greater than its parts with collective improvisation. With two different ensembles each comprising three guitarists and three drummer/percussionists, Harrison launches into a colorful, multi-textured jazz blend layered with elements of rock, world music, avant garde and new classical music. The band members ramrod and muse, bash and romance, grate and croon on their instruments. "Someday Earth" skips and bounces with a genial spirit, "Cold Day In New York" grips with violent beauty, and "Broderick Crawford's Throat" bursts with intensity and hilarity. Some group improv is better than others, with the end piece "Skin Frontier" taking top honors for its raga-country allure.

Babkas: *Fratelli* (Songlines 1513; 65:48: ★★★★★½) Improvcore trio Babkas pushes jazz to the fringe on its latest CD thrill ride, which gets powered into orbit by turbulent free-blowing, whimsical tempo-shiftings and riveting fractured melodies. Alto saxist Briggan Krauss, guitarist Brad Schoepach and drummer Aaron Alexander also settle back to earth on a couple of pensive numbers, "Sappho" and "Bhat." But most tracks feature fast, furious and imaginative improvisational interplay. Trace stylistic elements scattered throughout are rock, new classical, Middle Eastern and Indian music, and even a hint of Mancini's "Pink Panther" theme in the loping section of "Friday The 13th." Getting the nod as the choice track of the pack is "Rodeonitz," where the band gallops with off-kilter bebop vigor. **DB**

REISSUES

Attractive Opposites

by John Corbett

One of the most important American independents, Delmark Records spent the '60s promoting the extreme poles of the jazz spectrum. While label founder Bob Koester's affinities were for blues and traditional jazz of various sorts, which he assiduously recorded, he was also the only producer in Chicago with the sense to document the city's most adventurous sounds, coming from the members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). This was smart business; Koester once boasted that the AACM wanted their music released so desperately they'd agreed to a royalties deal that awarded them only a few pennies per record sold. So Delmark has milked a free-music cash cow for the past 30 years.

The records—which are finally making their way onto CD as Delmark's vinyl reserves dwindle—stand as some of the most influential new American jazz to walk through the door since Ornette Coleman turned the key. All we can wonder is when in the world they'll get around to reissuing Anthony Braxton's inaugural solo sax outing *For Alto*?

Roscoe Mitchell Sextet: *Sound* (Delmark 408; 67:45; ★★★★★) The AACM's opening volley, this 1966 record is a classic—not only did it introduce the world to Mitchell, trumpeter Lester Bowie and bassist Malachi Favors (all eventual members of the Art Ensemble), but it dealt with musical space and jazz structure in an altogether innovative way. The bluesy, pert theme to "Ornette" (accompanied by a previously unissued alternate version) shows the direct inspiration of its namesake; there's playful, joyous soloing by tenor saxist Maurice McIntyre fueled by propulsive drumming with sudden dropouts by Alvin Fielder, and interweaving bass and cello, the latter courtesy Lester Lashley (who elsewhere plays trombone). The title cut, which appears here in two full takes that were edited and combined to form the sidelong version on the LP, has a lovely arrangement that anticipates the writing of Henry Threadgill and Ed Wilkerson Jr. Its in-depth solos are so sparsely accompanied that the music opens up and out in a way Mingus—another prime influence—wouldn't have sat still for. The incisive, intelligent humor that characterizes Roscoe at his best appears on the most radical piece from *Sound*, "The Little Suite." Here are the seeds for restructuralism: march theme, unorthodox instrumentation (recorder, Bowie's sassy harmonica, "little instruments"), a healthy mix of



Muhai Richard Abrams: lyrical, impressionistic

free and scripted playing, no string of solos. Now, as then, this is essential listening.

Joseph Jarman: *As If It Were The Seasons* (417; 44:53; ★★★★★) Multi-reed player Jarman's second Delmark album (recorded in '68) takes the spatial implications further, stretching out into two lengthy excursions that feature Thurman Barker's colorful percussion, Charles Clark's bass, cello and zither (listed as koto, but sounds more like autoharp) and Jarman's various winds. Inside a shimmering sound garden on the title cut, Jarman blows a hint of the theme on alto, and later singer Sherri Scott states it outright. Aerobic, but possessed of a rich voice, she was better than many of the AACM's vocalists. "Song For Christopher" is built on an unfinished score sketch by Christopher Gaddy, pianist in Jarman's quartet who had died earlier in the year. It augments the band with five more horns and Muhai Richard Abrams on piano and oboe; particularly thrilling is Fred Anderson's unmistakable rolling-boil tenor, which climaxes the energy-filled free play.

Muhai Richard Abrams: *Young At Heart/Wise In Time* (423; 51:19; ★★★★★) Though AACM patriarch Abrams had already recorded with MJT+3 and had been leading the Experimental Band since 1961, this 1969 recording offers his first piano solo on wax, and it's the first record to expose Threadgill. "Wise In Time" spotlights Abrams' working quintet, with Barker, Lashley (bass only), Leo Smith on trumpet and flugel (and an obstacle course of "little instrument" whiz bangs). Springing up in a matrix of unpulsed, open improvising, the whole-note theme floats over a burning tempo, and Threadgill blows an extended alto solo using equal parts logic and fire—a sculpture built out of blue flames. Abrams' 30-minute solo ("Young At Heart") is lyrical, impressionistic, shifting from bursts of cluster and clamor or stride and swings back to the dominant mood of contemplation and resolution. A horrendous piano and occasional distortion (disintegrating master tapes?)

don't add to the experience.

Earl Hines: *At Home* (212; ★★★★★) No instrument problem here, as this relaxed solo recital—recorded the same year as Abrams—utilized the ornate, gorgeous sounding Steinway bestowed on Hines by fan Scott Newhall. Like Abrams, Hines had an abiding interest in the unexpected—he often used quick direction changes to offer new inroads into a familiar tune, as he does in the middle of a bouncy "You Are Too Beautiful." Hines could turn ornamentation into oratory, spinning rococo detail into engrossing narrative; listen to the trills and chills on his own "Minor Nothing," the elegance of "Love At Night Is Out Of Sight." Relaxin' in his living room, Hines even sang a bit, offering a gallant, delightful "It Happens To Be Me" in remembrance of Nat King Cole. Nonstop creativity. Fatha definitely knew best.

Albert Nicholas-Art Hodes Quartet: *The New Orleans-Chicago Connection* (207; ★★★★★) **George Lewis/Don Ewell: *Reunion* (220; ★★★½)** Two trad sessions teaming up legendary clarinetists (Nicholas, Lewis) and pianists (Hodes, Ewell). There's much to marvel at in Hodes' playing—a two-fisted solo on "Blues My Naughty Sweetie Gave To Me," delicious comping all around—but the focal point in this '59 date is Nicholas' astonishing sound, the fluidity and lightness of his phrasing. A New Orleans master musician, Nicholas never got stuck in a revivalist rut—his growling and soaring is as fresh and open-sounding as an AACMer (albeit lovingly adherent to melodic convention), and Fred Kohlman's drumming lends the proceedings a swing feel that rubs off on the others. (Bonus: The CD contains nine alternate versions and a take of "Careless Love" never before issued.)

Reunion, recorded live in front of a small audience in '66, is more dyed-in-the-wool preservative in tone. Lewis' rhythms are more jagged and bumpy than Nicholas'; in combination with trombonist Jim Robinson's gut-bucketry he can come off as corny. Ewell's unstymied piano helps lighten things, but the real news here—and it's worth the ticket price—is drummer Cic Frazier, whose genuine N'awlins woodblocks, cowbells (birthplace of "little instruments") and thumping bass pulse are impossible to ignore or frown upon. Frazier's press rolls are instant inspiration: tight like that! **DB**

Initial **Down Beat** ratings:

- *Sound*: ★★★★★ (6/15/67 issue)
- *As If It Were The Seasons*: ★★★★★ (3/6/69)
- *Young At Heart/Wise In Time*: ★★★★★ (12/9/71)
- *At Home*: ★★★★★ (5/13/71)

BLINDFOLD TEST

APRIL 1997

Kenny Barron

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.

At 53, pianist/composer Kenny Barron already has the aura of an old master. Coming up in the '60s and '70s, he helped define the modern mainstream in the bands of Dizzy Gillespie, Freddie Hubbard, Yusef Lateef, Ron Carter and others. But he's never stopped growing, and today he's as comfortable playing Brazilian music as bebop. His well-rounded approach and luminous technique have made him much in demand, and he's recorded prolifically both as leader and sideman.

Born in Philadelphia, Barron studied piano with Ray Bryant's sister, moved to New York and began working with James Moody, Lee Morgan, Lou Donaldson and Roy Haynes. Through the years, he's also played with Milt Jackson, Jimmy Heath, Stan Getz and Buddy Rich. In the '80s he was a member of the group Sphere, with Charlie Rouse, Buster Williams and Ben Riley. Since 1973, he's taught at Rutgers University in New Jersey. His most recent album, *Swamp Sally* (Verve; see "CD Reviews" Nov. '96), is a duo with percussionist Mino Cinelu. Barron's also recorded two forthcoming albums for Verve, one with a quintet including John Stubblefield, Eddie Henderson, David Williams and Victor Lewis, and one with his regular working trio including Ben Riley and Ray Drummond.

This was his second Blindfold Test.

Tommy Flanagan

"But Beautiful" (from Flanagan's *Shanigans*, Storyville, 1994) Flanagan, piano; Jesper Lundgaard, bass; Lewis Nash, drums.

I have to confess that I have no idea who that is. However, I think it's somebody older. It's definitely not one of the young lions. The ideas and the touch really suggest somebody at least 50. I want to say Barris Harris, but I don't hear Barry's lines. He sounds very relaxed. It sounds like a live recording. I would give it 4 stars. I hear a lot of familiar things, but I can't identify it.

Cyrus Chestnut Trio

"Brazilian Flower" (from *Nut*, Evidence, 1996) Chestnut, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Carl Allen, drums.

It's sound like "Nica's Dream," but it isn't. Again, I don't recognize the pianist, but it sounds like somebody younger—the harmonic concept, the lines. It's very well recorded. I want to say Jacky Terrasson—it sounds like the kind of arrangement he would work out—but there are a lot of things he does that I don't hear. It's not Stephen Scott? This is very relaxed, with a nice feeling. It's a very thoughtful solo. So I would rate that 4 stars.

Harold Mabern Trio

"Straight Street" (from *Straight Street*, DIW/Columbia, 1991) Mabern, piano; Ron Carter, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums; John Coltrane, composer.

I know this tune. It's "Straight Street," by John Coltrane. The pianist has really got a nice feeling on this, and I take my hat off to him for trying to tackle this song, because it's a hard one, believe me. Sometimes it sounds like he's making the changes, and sometimes it sounds like he's not, but that could be because he's trying other directions. The harmonic structure doesn't sound well defined to me. On some occasions it sounds a little nebulous, but he's certainly got a nice feeling, and the rhythm section sounds good. I'd give it 3½ stars.



Bill Evans

"Very Early" (from *The Secret Sessions*, Milestone, rec. 1966/1996) Evans, piano; Teddy Kolick, bass; Amie Wise, drums.

I know the song, "Very Early," by Bill Evans. I think that's Bill. This is live, and the sound quality isn't that good, so that makes me think it's that new record, *Secret Sessions*. I like it—4 stars. I've always liked Bill Evans, especially his harmonic sense, his lines, his use of space. I've always liked his playing. He wasn't fiery in the sense that some other players are, but he certainly had an influence on me, very much so.

D.D. Jackson

"DD Blues" (from *Rhythm-Dance*, Justin Time, 1996) Jackson, piano; John Geggie, bass; Jean Martin, drums.

I hear that kind of Don Pullen stuff in there. There's this guy I heard about from Boston who plays with David Murray sometimes. I don't know his name. Is that him?

LB: *You're right. It's D.D. Jackson.*

He's got a lot of chops, a lot of fire. It's very exciting. I'd definitely give that 4 stars. I really like it. It's different. For a minute, it had some Oscar Peterson stuff, and then he turned left and I heard the Don Pullen influence. He's got imagination, and I like that.

Sir Roland Hanna

"Oleo" (from *Al Maybeck*, Concord Jazz, 1994) Hanna, piano.

"Oleo." It's live. This piano player has a lot of chops, but the style is totally unfamiliar to me. For a minute, I got the feeling that things weren't really being developed, so it was kind of deceptive. For a minute, things just plodded along, and all of a sudden there's this explosion of technique. I'd give it 3 stars. If I were to hazard a guess, I'd say Donald Brown.

Odean Pope Trio

"Portrait" (from *Ninety-six*, enja, 1994) Pope, tenor saxophone; Tyrone Brown, bass; Mickey Roker, drums.

In terms of just the sound of the saxophone, it sounds like Sonny Rollins. He's influenced by Sonny, but the ideas are definitely not Sonny's. It could be Odean Pope. I played with Odean when I was a teenager, but the only time I see him now is when he's on the road with Max Roach. I'd give that 4 stars. Odean is definitely a different kind of player.

DB