

FREDDIE HUBBARD – CAUGHT IN THE ACT

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J.J. Johnson

Yellowjackets

**Jazz & The
Popular Song**

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Sun Ra

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Ronnie Earl

John Lee Hooker

'People Cry When I Sing'



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'Hi, I'm The Boogie Man'

One of the last originals, blues legend John Lee Hooker has lived to tell about it. A man of few words, Hooker continues to reap the fruits of a life committed to music, leading the charge for the current blues surge. For anyone really listening, young and old alike, when you hear John Lee Hooker play "the real down blues," you get "the real thing." Let us all thank John Lee for hanging in there, for ignoring those who would "talk him down."

By Dan Ouellette

Cover photograph of John Lee Hooker by Stuart Brinin.

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A close-up portrait of John Lee Hooker. He is wearing a black fedora hat with a gold-colored ornament on the side. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a dark grey suit jacket over a bright red shirt and a colorful, patterned tie. He is holding a yellow electric guitar, with his left hand on the neck and his right hand near the body. The background is a textured, brownish-grey wall. There are some graphic elements: a white parallelogram in the top right corner and a red vertical bar on the right side. The name "John Lee Hooker" is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the bottom half of the image.

John Lee Hooker

By Dan Ouellette

Hi I'm the Boogie Man'

There's nothing
more disappointing
than living legends
who rest on their
laurels—they amble
onto the stage, drift
through the motions,
snatch the paycheck
and scam.

The audience expects cherry bombs; it settles for duds. The songs vaguely please, but their blood has been sucked dry. Fans still pour on the adulation, but the emperors ain't been wearing clothes for years.

Then there's blues icon John Lee Hooker, who turns a young and feisty 80 this summer. Even though he officially retired from the road a couple of years ago, there's no silencing the man or his deep-souled music. The blues has been good to Hooker. He's got financial security (thanks to a string of top-notch albums, including his 1989 million-selling comeback disc, *The Healer*) in addition to well-deserved recognition by fellow musicians and a new generation of listeners smitten by the numbing beauty of his guitar's shivery minor chords.

The blues has not only been a wellspring for Hooker, but also a fountain of youth. Prime example: a rare performance at the Fillmore in San Francisco in

early March to celebrate the fresh-off-the-presses CD *Don't Look Back*. The fragile-looking headliner rose from his chair and vigorously paced the stage during his end-of-the-show boogie. He pushed his Coast-to-Coast Blues Band deeper into the chugging rhythm and shook hands with the crowd crammed in front of the stage, most of whom were in their 20s and 30s.

"Yeah, yeah, lot of 'em were young, just school kids really gettin' into the blues," says Hooker, relaxing on his living-room couch a couple of days later. "They want to know about the real down blues. They're beginning to learn that the blues is the root of all music. I looked down at those kids rockin' and smilin', and, that's right, they put energy into me. There aren't that many older people at my shows. I'm still tryin' to figure that one out. But those young kids, they're into it. Heavy, too. One thing I can say is [whoever comes] gets the real thing."

Hooker's not bragging. He's speaking the truth—and in the business of singing the blues, integrity is the bottom line. He's been a blues man since his early days growing up in Clarksdale, Miss., on the Delta, where he learned,

grassroots style, that there's no substitute for a little bit of self-confidence and a hefty dose of perseverance.

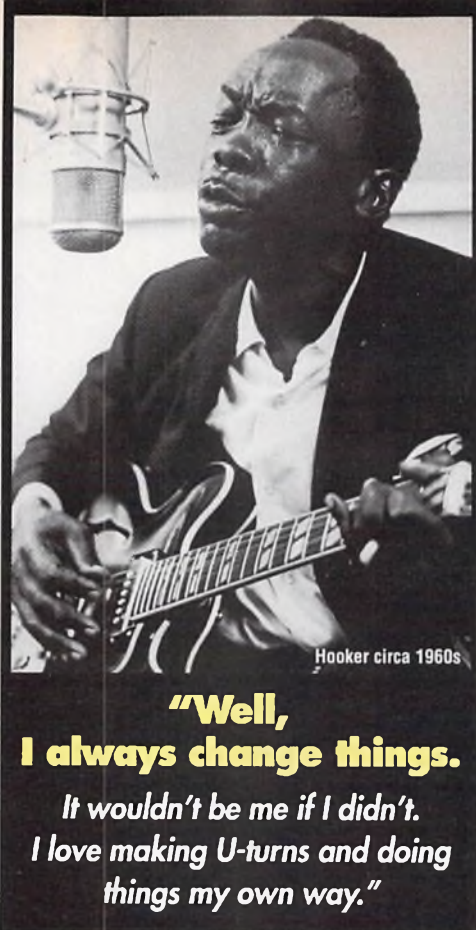
An undisputed master of the blues, Hooker is finally reaping the fruits of a life committed to music. That's reflected at his house in the suburbs south of San Francisco. He owns several cars—most of which are parked outside on his street's cul-de-sac—including a Lincoln Continental stretch limo and a brand new, jet-black Jaguar. Inside, he's got a mantle full of photos of himself with VIPs, including President Clinton.

On the floor lie two Epiphone guitars, including a John Lee Hooker special-edition model. He's breaking them in, testing the bend of the strings. He gets the guitars gratis, he notes proudly. "Same as these hats," he adds, taking off a black fedora with a silver two-quarter-note pin on the side of the crown and the words "The Hook" on the label inside. "This young guy from Chicago makes 'em and sends 'em to me."

Hooker's couch dwarfs him. He looks small, sunken into the pillows. He wears a conservative blue suit with a bright red shirt, suspenders, a loud tie and black socks with white stars. His downward-turned mouth makes him look tired, solemn, almost morose. But the first thing he says breaks the ice. He introduces himself with a jocular, almost boyish charm, mumbling in a bass tone, "Hi, I'm the Boogie Man." He smiles, his eyes sparkle and all traces of gruffness vanish.

Hooker is a man of few words. He has endured so many interviews over the years he's lost count of how many times he's had to explain why he sings the blues. However, he still likes to recount how he gravitated to the music. His stepfather, Will Moore, a Louisiana-born guitarist, filled the house with the sound of his gritty rhythmic blues. "I saw him play and decided that was what I wanted to do," recalls Hooker. "He helped me along the way to the style I'm playing today. I took it from him. It's too bad he couldn't have taken it himself. If he's somewhere listening—in heaven or wherever—he's saying, 'This is what I taught the kid.'"

Hooker played country dances with Moore in Clarksdale for several years until he decided to move up river to Memphis with guitar in hand. He was only 14. "I was just a blues kid running around away from home. I stayed there awhile, living at a



boarding house and playing my guitar for house parties." A year later Hooker was on the move again, this time to Cincinnati, where he worked as a janitor and a movie-theater usher during the day so that he could play the blues at nighttime house parties. A couple of years later, lured by better job prospects, Hooker landed in Detroit. "I worked in factories and steel mills, any work I could get. By that time, I was old enough to play in bars and nightclubs."

In the next several years, Hooker became part of the city's burgeoning blues scene, which was centered on Hastings Street, Detroit's equivalent to Maxwell Street in Chicago. "Those were the days," says Hooker, laughing as he reminisces about the street that he immortalized in the lyrics of "Boogie Chillen." "Wild, wild old street. Anything you want, they had it there. The club scene was good. All the blues bands would come to town and play there. Back then I didn't play on Hastings. I was over at the Apex Bar on Russell Street. But I was on Hastings all the time. Ain't no mo' Hastings Street. A freeway's there now."

Hooker was discovered by Elmer Barber, a Detroit record-store owner. "Elmer would take me back to his shop each night and record me on

blanks. He'd give me wine, I'd play and he'd cut the records. That's when I worked up 'Boogie Chillen.'"

Barber took Hooker to meet Buddy Besman, the owner of a tiny label called Sensation Records, which released "Boogie Chillen." "It got so big he couldn't handle it," Hooker recalls. "Buddy had to take it to another label, Modern Records. Now that was a big label, a big crooked label. That record just shot up. All over, wherever you went, you'd hear 'Boogie Chillen,' and then 'I'm In The Mood.'"

Released in 1948, "Boogie Chillen" sold a million copies. As was the case with most blues (and later r&b) musicians, Hooker didn't earn a penny. "Modern made money, but they didn't give it to me. They made tons. I got peanuts. I knew they were crooks, but I didn't know how to fight 'em. Those were rough days back then. If you were a blues singer, all the companies were crooks. I think most of those labels are gone now—Vee-Jay, Chess, ABC. It's a good thing. I'm with a good label now. Pointblank/Virgin treats me real good." Hooker pauses, then adds, "I've got a good lawyer now who makes sure they treat me good."

Back then, when his songs were becoming jukebox hits, the only way Hooker could make money was by taking his act on the road. His Oakland-based daughter Zakiya Hooker, who recently made her domestic debut with the soul-r&b collection *Flavors Of The Blues*, remembers when her dad graduated from the Detroit club scene. "He'd be on the road for two to three months at a time. He'd always come back home bearing gifts."

Hooker laughs. "Oh, yeah, I was Santa Claus. I'd always bring the kids somethin' to let 'em know their dad loved 'em."

Even though it took him a long time to recognize Zakiya's vocal talent (she laughingly tells a story of a disastrous studio session with her dad's band in the mid-'80s), today, Hooker is proud of her accomplishments. "Ooooooh, she's good. My main favorite on her new album is that song 'Stones In My Pathway.' They're all good, but that one is oooooh-mmmmm."

John Lee appears on Zakiya's album, dueting with her on the song "Bit By Love (Hard Times)," which turned out to be a true family collaboration. She laughs as she recalls the recording session, which took place at the studio in the house she shares



"A lot of people are playing the blues today. I see 'em. I hear 'em. They're playing the blues, but not the deep blues. Not like me.

People cry when I sing."

with producer/husband Ollan Christopher. "Daddy said he'd be happy to sing this song 'Hard Times' that we wrote. I didn't give him any lyrics because I knew he'd just make up words on the spot, anyway.

"Earlier in the week, I had been talking with Daddy about a new song he was working on, 'We all been bit by love.' I told him I liked it. Well, on the day he came over to record, we started playing 'Hard Times.' He picked up his guitar and started singing 'Bit By Love.' And that

was it. But it worked, better than what we originally planned."

The elder Hooker remembers with a laugh, "Well, I always change things. It wouldn't be me if I didn't. I love making U-turns and doing things my own way."

Hooker has made a life out of following his muse and developing an inimitable, idiosyncratic style. He plays a shimmering brand of blues rather than the urgent and explosive varieties of fellow legends and contemporaries Muddy Waters

and Howlin' Wolf. Guitar great Buddy Guy ranks Hooker right up there in the lofty upper echelon of blues gods. In fact, he says he owes more to Hooker than any other guitarist. "John Lee was my main influence because 'Boogie Chillen' was the first song I ever learned how to play," Guy says. "I heard that amplified guitar, and that was it. It turned my whole head around." At first, Guy tried in vain to learn the tune. "Then all of a sudden, I found it. I was afraid if I moved my fingers I would never find it again. I played 'Boogie Chillen' for six hours so I wouldn't forget how to play it."

Today, Guy is a good friend of Hooker's. "I'm so happy to see him around to achieve those awards that he deserved a long time ago. Whenever I win awards today, I always accept them in honor of guys like John Lee, Muddy and Wolf. Those are the people who deserve the recognition."

Blues slide guitarist Roy Rogers concurs. While these days he's cruising along with his own successful recording career (his most recent CD, *Rhythm & Groove*, is also on Pointblank), Rogers served as a member of Hooker's touring band from 1982-'86 and produced all of Hooker's mega-sellers in the late '80s and '90s, beginning with *The Healer*. "Lucky for me, I got the call to produce the comeback," says Rogers, who enlisted the support of several Hooker fans, including Bonnie Raitt, Robert Cray and Canned Heat. "They asked Van Morrison, but he couldn't. I loved working with John in the studio. He defines things. That's the way it should be. He's so strong, you just want to weave what you're playing around what he's doing."

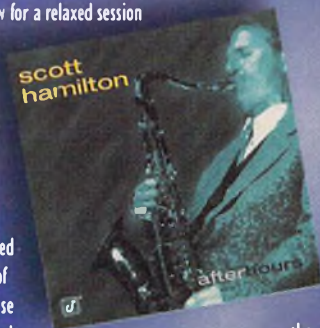
While Hooker takes great pride in being unpredictable in the

Scott Hamilton

After Hours

Playing what he plays best, tenor saxophonist Scott Hamilton is joined by renowned pianist Tommy Flanagan, bassist Lewis Nash and drummer Bob Cranshaw for a relaxed session of heartfelt ballads and soulful blues.

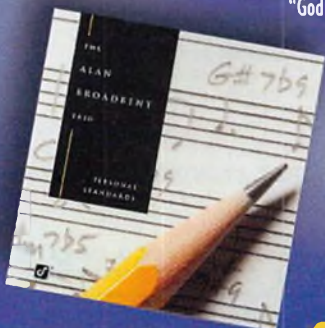
"After Hours...recalls the Hamilton-Flanagan Town Hall performance with a transcendent relaxation... individual egos have been subsumed into the common goal of allowing each bar, phrase and chorus to flow into the next, and the music is set free to express itself with joyous, unforced warmth." — Peter Straub



Rosemary Clooney

Mothers & Daughters

On the heels of *White Christmas*, her first #1 recording in her 50-plus years in show business, Rosemary Clooney now bestows the gift of *MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS*, a gorgeous new collection of songs celebrating the joy of motherhood. Includes "Thank Heaven For Little Girls," "God Bless The Child," and "Turnaround," (a duet with Keith Carradine).



Alan Broadbent

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studio, he also values efficient use of time. "Oh, yeah, I don't mess around. I do what I do. And I hardly ever make two takes. Carlos [Santana] and I work together a lot." Emulating the slight accent and hushed sweetness of Santana's voice, Hooker continues, "Carlos says, 'I don't know how you do it, but you get it. And it always comes out on the first take.'"

On Hooker's newest CD, *Don't Look Back*, the bluesman continues to advance his raw and hypnotic attack with swaying and surging power. For this sumptuous hot plate of steaming blues, he's in the good company of old friend Charles Brown, who contributes sparkling piano and organ support, and Van Morrison, who not only produces most of the album but also sits in. Hooker sticks to his standard menu of rollicking boogies (he is, after all, the King of the Boogie) and smoldering ballads rooted deep in the Mississippi Delta tradition.

Hooker opens with a flaming take on one of his old hits, "Dimples," which features Los Lobos leading the boogie charge. "It's a hot thing," Hooker says. "I like doin' the old tunes because the young kids have never heard 'em."

While he breaks into a run through "Spellbound" and a shuffle through "I Love You Honey," the best tracks are the slow-dripping tunes where Hooker—with his trademark talkin'-moanin'-stutterin'-mumblin'-chucklin' vocal delivery—taps into a deep reservoir of the blues. The beauty of the pack is "Blues Before Sunrise," which features Dirty Dozen Brass Band members Gregory Davis and

Roger Lewis on horns. Another highlight is Hooker's mesmerizing take on Jimi Hendrix's "Red House." "His dad asked me to sing that song on this album. He called me and asked me to do it. And I did it."

Morrison, who finally found space in his schedule to produce his hero's session, joins Hooker for emotive duets on four numbers, including the title tune of the former's latest CD, "The Healing Game," where the pair puts on a moving display of impromptu blues testifying. "I love ol' Van," says Hooker. "We lock in."

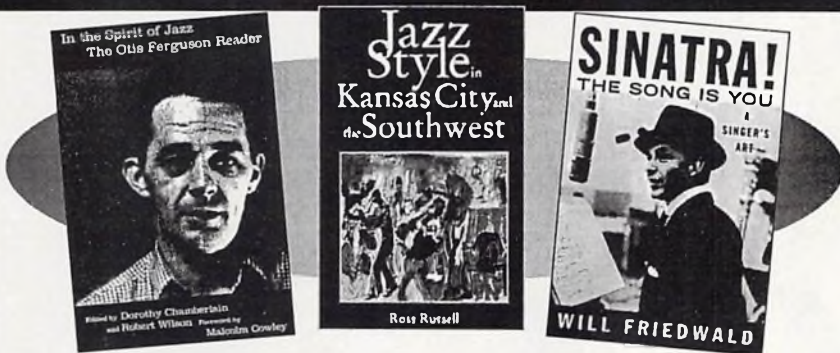
Even though Hooker's music fell out of style during the '70s, these days he's feeling the blues is on a roll. He says its popu-

larity is reminiscent of the '60s folk-music revival. "I used to hang out in Central Park with Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and play in coffeehouses with Brownie McGhee, Sonny Terry and Odetta."

As for the future of the blues? He returns to the subject of those youthful audiences coming out to catch him. "I tell you what: As years go by, the blues is gonna be even more popular. It looks real good to me right now. It's right on top, and the young people will be coming back for more. A lot of people are playing the blues today. I see 'em. I hear 'em. They're playing the blues, but not the deep blues. Not like me. People cry when I sing." **DB**

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EQUIPMENT

Currently, John Lee Hooker plays a black Sheridan 2 made by Epiphone. His newest guitar is a special edition King of the Boogie Epiphone. In addition, he plays a Gibson 335, given to him as a birthday gift by Carlos Santana, and a Les Paul. One of his favorite guitars is his single-cutaway Epiphone Zephyr built in 1962. Hooker uses DiMarco strings, light gauge so that he can bend them easily, and a Fender Twin Reverb amp.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DON'T LOOK BACK—Pointblank 42771
CHILL OUT—Pointblank 40107
BOOM BOOM—Pointblank 86553
MR. LUCKY—Pointblank/Charisma 86237
THE HEALER—Mobile Fidelity 567
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A NIGHT IN SAN FRANCISCO—Polydor 521290

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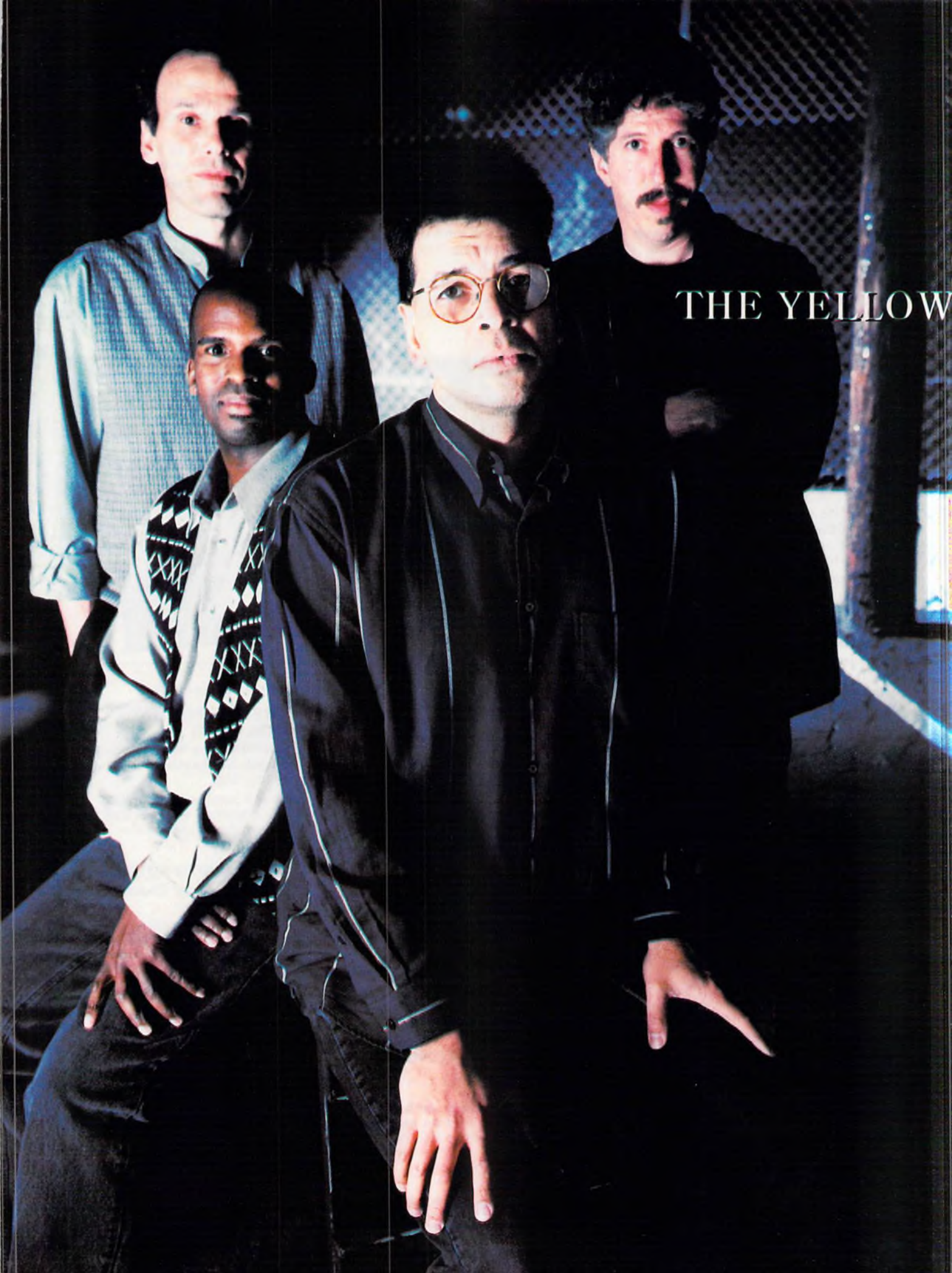
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THE YELLOW

JACKETS

'We Gave Up Writing for Airplay'

By Patrick Cole

The Yellowjackets, to hear them tell it, was the band that almost threw in the towel too soon. "We thought there wasn't much of a future left," recalls bassist Jimmy Haslip about the group's lowest moment in 1982, when guitarist Robben Ford, a promising addition, wanted to leave the group. "We had no plans to continue." Their second album, *Mirage À Trois*, had received good reviews, but the group—a trio of Haslip, keyboardist Russell Ferrante and drummer Ricky Lawson—didn't feel like they'd made a breakthrough. So they decided to go their separate ways and tour as sidemen with more prominent leaders. That attitude changed, however, when the album received a Grammy nomination for best contemporary jazz performance. "Then," Haslip remembers, "we knew something was happening."

Sure, something was happening, but was it meant to last? The band continued to work but had their doubts until 1989, when the answer came during a tour of England, a country where they previously couldn't buy a following at a corner market. This time, the band was riding a wave of success from the best-selling album *Four Corners*, and had released a respectable follow-up in *Politics*. They even played at London's famed Hammersmith Odeon theater. But what blew them away was a gig at a small venue called the Town & Country in London. The Yellowjackets, then composed of Haslip, Ferrante, drummer William Kennedy and saxophonist Marc Russo, hoped they could fill most of the 1,500 seats at the venue. "And when we showed up, it was like *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert*," says Haslip. "They had to turn

away about 800 people. It was absolutely amazing. We have proven that patience is a virtue."

Patience also meant success for this ever-evolving musical unit, once a stinging, r&b-heavy, hit fusion band, currently a more acoustic, world-beat-influenced, composition-oriented collective. Usually, a band that wants to play music their way and not the radio programmers' way flirts with demise. It's a common story: The record gets released, it's good, but it doesn't find an audience. And then, *snip!*—the label cuts them from the roster. The band jumps to another label, or it just simply fizzles out.

Not the Yellowjackets. Today, with a lineup that includes Haslip, Ferrante, Kennedy and reedman Bob Mintzer, they are survivors who have proven that ignoring formulas while harnessing the best of their potential and practicing some ferocious stick-to-itiveness equals longevity. The band is 17 years old and counting, and as they enter year 18, the Yellowjackets have just about got it all: a loyal, cult-like fan base tucked in villages and metropolises from Los Angeles to Lhasa; a couple of Grammy nominations; an inventive, unpredictable repertoire; world tours; endorsement deals; solo projects; a newsletter; and even a Website on the Internet that includes trivia for fans. All told, the "Jackets," as their fans call them, are certified long-distance runners in jazz.

But what about their record sales, and the related question of radio airplay? True, it's a struggle to find a station that plays "Freedomland" or your favorite tune from

LANDING ON THEIR FEET



Russell Ferrante

One key to the Yellowjackets' endurance is an uncanny ability to land on their feet. One March morning after their one-week engagement at Los Angeles' Catalina Bar & Grill (an 80-seat venue the L.A.-based band played for the first time in its history), keyboardist Russell Ferrante and bassist Jimmy Haslip explained how the band has kept together for nearly two decades. Dressed in jeans, high-top boots and Giorgio Armani specs, Haslip started by revealing how the band came together almost by accident. Ferrante appeared even more casual in shorts, sneakers and a T-shirt. He recounted the group's first big tremor, which occurred in 1987 with the release of *Four Corners*. That album marked the exit of Ricky Lawson as the timekeeper and the entry of Will Kennedy.



Bob Mintzer

"Will had more of a traditional overview of music as far as jazz goes," explains Haslip. "His dad was a jazz drummer, and he had been playing with [steel drummer] Andy Narell. Will had more of a polyrhythmic concept to his playing and Ricky was coming from more of a rhythm-and-blues background of 2/4 time. So you could see right there that was two different styles, but both were great musicians. William was more open to experimentation, which is what the band has always been trying to do: Experiment with music and come up with more unusual ways of playing. So William kind of fit that profile in a really interesting way."

Four Corners was more than just interesting. The album garnered the kind of critical acclaim that usually goes to artists destined for great things. Produced by the Yellowjackets and veteran producer David Hentschel, the recording featured inventive melodies, Latin rhythms, sequenced melodies along with strong improvisational performances, particularly by saxophonist Marc Russo and Ferrante. The Yellowjackets began to attract the eye of the mainstream press.

Just when the band thought it had found its new groove and was headed for smooth sailing, there was another defection. Russo started getting the urge to do his own thing. He was getting calls to do high-profile, high-paying gigs with Kenny Loggins. So he departed, and the band came up with Bob Mintzer, who was playing clubs in New York. His credentials were impeccable. He caught Haslip's eye while playing with the late bassist Jaco Pastorius. Mintzer had developed a reputation as a serious big-band composer and a soloist who could hold his own with contemporaries like Michael Brecker.

In 1989, the Yellowjackets started plotting songs for the next recording, *Greenhouse*, and it decided to give Mintzer the nod. Today, Ferrante and Haslip joke that Mintzer responded by asking how much they were willing to pay him. They obviously paid him enough. He showed up at Bill Schnee Studios in North Hollywood, Calif., to do the *Greenhouse* sessions. Besides playing sax, he also played the Electronic Wind Instrument, or EWI. "After doing the *Greenhouse* record, we did about a month in Japan and the Far East, and I really felt welcomed in the band for what I do, not only as a player but as a composer and arranger," says the soft-spoken Mintzer.

Originally, it was supposed to be a one-shot deal for Mintzer. But the consensus was that he was the right anchor to make the Jackets into a swinging quartet that could color a song with impressive solos, regardless of whether the mood was electric or acoustic.

—Patrick Cole



Will Kennedy

insistence on following their collective conscience. The recording, released in February, ventures into unique polyrhythms with some real hard swinging. The music may not rule the charts, but it definitely charts the band's course into sophisticated, improvisational jazz. "We fall in the cracks," concedes Ferrante.

When the Yellowjackets make music, it's almost like composing by committee. They look at their last album and the ones behind that one, and they try to make the next one different. In the case of *Blue Hats*, Kennedy's push for a polyrhythmic feel provided the impetus for the rest of the band to explore songs with a different beat. The rhythms for two songs, "Cape Town" and "Savannah," were inspired by a friend, Paul Tchonga, a native of Cameroon (and percussionist for Strunz & Farah). "It was kind of an investigation of the mind to try to acquire African rhythms," Kennedy explains. "I've been fascinated by them and the make-up of some of the basic African rhythms. I had to practice for a while before I was able to present them to the band. It just encouraged me to think differently in terms of the music. We just don't want to repeat ourselves album to album, and with these African rhythms, it's a path we haven't walked before."

When you trace the band's influences, it represents a melting pot of musical tastes. Ferrante grew up listening to jazz, but he listened to church music that his father played when he was a child. Mintzer was the Coltrane fanatic whose ears also soaked up as many big band recordings that he could get his hands on. Kennedy listened to r&b and funk bands such as Sly & The Family Stone and the Ohio Players. Haslip was a trumpet player as a child who migrated to the electric bass by high school. He calls himself "the rock guy" in the group.

Instead of clashing, these diverse influences mix well because no one member dominates the group. They all have an equal vote in choosing songs and the direction of the albums. Says Mintzer, who had normally worked under band leaders, "I was very attracted to being a member of the Yellowjackets because it's a democracy. The variety and scope of this band is extremely wide.

"We've become more mature as composers, and I think there is a mature and deep empathy between the players. It feels a lot more like a band. It enables us to take more chances. There is that sense of security that you can step out and try something and your band mates will be there to support you. If something's going on with the music, and it doesn't feel comfortable, everyone lends a sympathetic ear. It's a healthy relationship."

Politics. But when you look at their sales clip under the microscope, it's actually pretty good. The group's sales per compact disc range from a low of 80,000 to a high of nearly 200,000. In all, the quartet's 13 albums have sold over 1 million units. Yet other long-distance runners such as the Pat Metheny Group or David Sanborn can sell CDs in excess of 300,000 units. When you pop the timeworn question of whether you record from the heart or record for the charts, none of the Yellowjackets buzz away from that one. They'll gladly take fewer record sales. The business of purposely sculpting tunes for smooth-jazz listeners is

definitely not their thing.

"We gave up writing for airplay," says Haslip. "There is really no radio for our music. Radio has gotten so compartmentalized and you have the stations that will only play only a certain kind of music on most radio." But the group never banked on notoriety, anyway. Says Ferrante, "We weren't going to be instant matinee idols. We weren't going to be this large splash. Our music is not Michael Jackson or Michael Bolton, so we knew what he had to do was follow our creative hearts."

The Yellowjackets' current release, *Blue Hats*, represents the group's

And that's the way it's always been, says Ferrante, who has been with the band from the beginning. "In the case of the Pat Metheny Group or Spyro Gyra, it's really one person who leads the group, and then there are the sidemen. With the Yellowjackets, there is no leader. It's really four people equally invested in what the music is going to be like. Each member brings his ideas, and we put them all on the table and we start. It's like a big jigsaw puzzle."

What if the Jackets want to play with their own jigsaw puzzle as individuals and do solo projects? No problem. The members give each other space to do it outside the touring and recording schedule. Mintzer continues to make a name for himself recording big-band projects. Four years ago, Haslip released his first solo album, *Arc*, and has done studio sessions during his Yellowjackets tenure with Al Jarreau, Bruce Hornsby and Donald Fagan (of Steely Dan).

EQUIPMENT

Russell Ferrante plays a Steinway & Sons grand piano. His electronic setup includes a Roland 760 sampler, a Roland D550, a Korg 01W, a Mackie 1604 mixer and a Alesis ADAT digital tape deck.

Jimmy Haslip uses an MTD and a Tobias 6-string fretless bass for live performances. On *Blue Hats*, he used a 7-string custom made by MTD. Other basses used in his repertoire include a 5-string maple Tobias fretless, a Yamaha TRB series 5-string, a Tyler 5-string (fretted) and a Moon 4-string fretless. His choice of amp in the studio is either an SWR Baby Blue or Redhead. During live performance, he opts for two SM 400 SWR amplifiers, two Goliath 2x10 Junior speaker cabinets and two Goliath 4x10 speaker cabinets.

William Kennedy uses a custom-made Sonor drum kit with maple-light shells, an assortment of Paiste symbols, including a 12-inch Sound Formula Hi Hat, a 15-inch Sound Formula Full Crash, a 20-inch Signature Dry Dark Ride, an 18-inch Full Crash and a 20-inch 2000 Series Mellow China.

Bob Mintzer plays Selmer Mark VI tenor and soprano saxes and a Selmer bass clarinet. He also plays an Akai Electronic Wind Instrument that uses two Oberheim Matrix 1000 modules.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

BLUE HATS—Warner Bros. 46333
DREAMLAND—Warner Bros. 45944
COLLECTION—GRP 9809
RUN FOR YOUR LIFE—GRP 9689
LIKE A RIVER—GRP 9689
LIVE WIRES—GRP 9667
GREENHOUSE—GRP 9630
THE SPIN—MCA 6304
POLITICS—MCA 6236
FOUR CORNERS—MCA 5994
SHADES—MCA 5752
SAMURAI SAMBA—Warner Bros. 25204
MIRAGE A TROIS—Warner Bros. 23813
YELLOWJACKETS—Warner Bros. 3573

Bob Mintzer

BIG BAND TRANE—DMP 515
DEPARTURE—DMP 493
ONE MUSIC—DMP 488

Jimmy Haslip

ARC—GRP 9726

Kennedy is a much-in-demand session drummer, playing with everyone from Andy Narell to vocalist Diane Schuur. The whole group backed up vocalist Bobby McFerrin on his last release, *Bang Zoom*. Ferrante served as McFerrin's producer.

When the group looks back, they have no regrets about the path they've taken. They have a repertoire of more than 130 songs. Even the Berklee College of Music in Boston teaches two courses about the Yellowjackets' work. And they continue to

build on their catalogue. Already, they're thinking about the next album they'll record after they finish a world tour this year. The group no doubt will be looking for a way to say something new with the material. "Anything is possible with this band," says Mintzer, who thinks a big-band arrangement is a possibility for the future. "We've worked with bagpipes and even orchestras. The sky is the limit. I think the Jackets will use whatever kind of ensemble is available to facilitate a particular idea." **DB**

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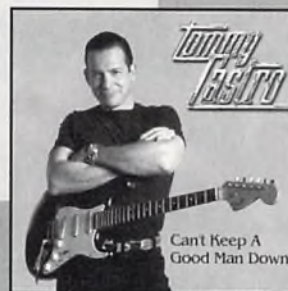
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JERRY MITCHELL

J.J. Johnson's *Changing Perspectives*

by Ed Enright

The pre-eminent trombonist in jazz has found a new perspective on work, one that's inspired him to crank out an impressive amount of new compositions and studio recordings in recent months. At 72, J.J. Johnson has a boyish fascination with computer technology and an intense urge to write music. He keeps his zeal on track and his wheels out of the mud by sticking to a time-tested philosophy of personal fulfillment: to face each day one at a time.

"Don't bite off big chunks, don't worry about next week," Johnson repeats, like a mantra. "I don't know how long this creative juice can last, but I hope it hangs

in there." Johnson, who has four albums worth of recorded material in the can, had just spent the entire morning listening to playbacks in his home studio in Indianapolis when we finally caught up with him. His enthusiasm for music and life belied his decades of experience at both.

ED ENRIGHT: *Tell me a little about your next project.*

JJ JOHNSON: It's a brass project that I'd love to talk about. You got three hours? I get carried away when I talk about this thing because it's so dear to me. The whole idea for this large brass orchestra

CD began in 1956, when I first composed *Poem For Brass*. That was the origins of that kind of conceptualizing. Then it went on from there. It graduated from *Poem For Brass*—with the same instrumentation, by the way—to Dizzy Gillespie's *Perceptions*, which I wrote in 1961 for Dizzy with Gunther [Schuller]. Dizzy liked *Poem For Brass* and went to Norman Granz and said, "Hey, Norman. I want you to commission J.J. to write a piece for me along the lines of *Poem For Brass*, but featuring Dizzy Gillespie." Which is how *Perceptions* came about. There's been a long gap where I've had this in my head: "Boy, I hope I get another

chance to write for all that brass and harp and percussion and stuff." And here it is! All these years later, my dream is coming true to once again do a big brass number. No strings at all! No woodwind section! It's what it says: *The Brass Orchestra*. I've been listening to it, and it's difficult at first: You can hardly stand it because you sweated over it and heard it a thousand times in the mixdown. But I've given it a little breathing room, and it's starting to sound pretty good.

EE: Does this project feature other high-profile jazz musicians as well?

JJ: Yes, especially trombonists, as players and as arrangers. Slide Hampton, he's dynamite, and he contributed some arrangements, did some conducting and handled some of the orchestrating. Steve Turre played lead trombone on one piece. And Robin Eubanks wrote one of his odd-meter things, which I wanted. I told him, "Robin, go far out with your bizaarre-style, oddball stuff." It's called "Cross Currents." He's featured a lot on one or two cuts.

EE: I heard you've recorded a new version of "Why Indianapolis, Why Not Indianapolis?" which originally appeared on the album *Live At The Village Vanguard*. Is that part of the brass project as well?

JJ: Yes, it's a big production-type arrangement of that.

EE: Will this be the first studio version?

JJ: The quintet did it live, so this is just an expanded, more elaborate, more orchestral, if you will, version of "Why Indianapolis, Why Not Indianapolis?" The solo tenor saxophonist, Dan Faulk, has a very high profile.

We did the expanded version at the Harvard "Salute To J.J.," and it was super. We closed the show with that. The audience loved it and it was fun to do. It's really an exciting piece, kind of up-tempo. And Dan does a Coltrane-type thing, you know, sheets of sound. Then I join in à la dixieland clambake on every bridge. Every bridge, on purpose and by design. I intrude on his solo. It was fun when we did it in a live performance with the quintet, because invariably you'd look up and read the faces in the audience: "Why is he playing? Dan's playing! Why is J.J. playing?" [laughs] It's kind of fun.

EE: What's the rest of the lineup on *The Brass Orchestra*?

JJ: There are six trumpets, including a strong jazz player, Eddie Henderson, and Jon Faddis, who was superman just like Dizzy was superman on *Perceptions*. There are four trombones, including Slide, Robin, Steve Turre and myself as principal soloist. We have four french horns, two euphonium and two tubas. Dan Faulk is on tenor sax, Renee Rosnes on piano, Rufus Reid on bass and Victor Lewis on drums. There's also some percussion and a harpist, and that's the whole shot.

EE: Tell me about some of the other

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recordings you've made that haven't been released yet.

JJ: There's a quintet recording that we made in late 1995, produced by Jean-Philippe Allard, that's still on the shelf. It's called *Nina May*, which I named after my late mother. Then there's another CD's worth of material recorded during *The Brass Orchestra* sessions, and still another quintet album that was recorded after that includes Wayne Shorter, Marcus Belgrave and Jimmy Heath as special guests.

EE: What about live performances? What's your travel schedule been like lately?

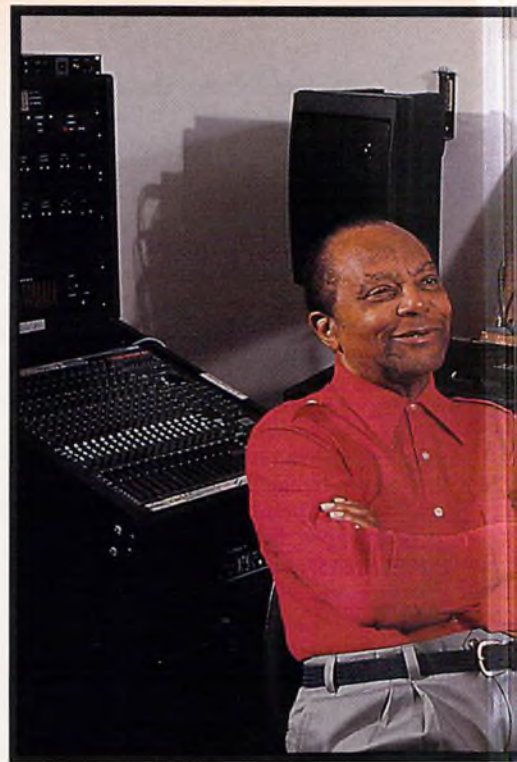
JJ: My last live performance was a quintet gig in November, and currently I don't have any live performances scheduled.

EE: Why not?

JJ: It's not generally known by John Doe what it takes for a major-league musician to stay on top of his game, to stay in peak form and to give what the audience expects. They've just left home, and played your CD, and they come to the club expecting to hear the same thing. It's not generally known, the demands it makes on the player. I said that to say this: I have been a slave to the trombone for 54 years. In order to keep my chops in shape, in order to keep my game at its peak, my volley and my serve at its peak, man, it takes *daily* long tones before breakfast,

daily scales and arpeggios, *daily* working with Jamey Aebersold's play-along tapes, a daily regimen that is almost militaristic. I can't say that everyone subscribes to that kind of regimen to keep their game together. But I, J.J. Johnson, know no other way than to follow that strict regimen. And 54 years of that kind of keeping your chops in shape and that kind of regimen, I think that's enough of that. I'm just weary of just being a *slave* to that trombone. It makes great demands on me to meet the expectations of the guy who paid \$18 to hear me perform. When I get up there on the stage, I need to give him his \$18 worth.

For me to deliver, man, it takes a regimen that's like being in the army. I practice long tones before I even brush my teeth daily! Including Christmas, New Year's and Thanksgiving. It's not, "This is Thanksgiving, I don't have to do it." Uh-uh. I learned that years ago from the lead trombonist in the Indianapolis YMCA band, when I first learned to play the trombone as a kid. I never forgot what he told me one day. He said, "J.J., it doesn't matter that you practice an hour today, two hours tomorrow, then three days you don't practice at all, then you practice 20 minutes one day. J.J., what counts is you play some *every day*—Christmas,



Thanksgiving, New Year's included—even if it's 10 minutes. What counts is the *every day*-ness of it." You know what? He was right. It has served me well. That admonition and that advice by that guy has served me well. I don't have to practice five, eight hours a day. But I do have to practice *every day*. And I've been doing that for 54 years.

That was Charles Laughton. I've never forgotten what he said. All I can say is it served me well. That might not serve other guys so well; everyone has his own method of keeping his game in peak form. I've learned that talking to different people whose opinions I respect. Different major-league players—Urbie Green, Jimmy Cleveland, Slide Hampton—each guy has a different method of keeping on top of his game.

EE: How does it feel to stay at home now?

JJ: I'm beginning to like the average "John Doe" J.J. Johnson a lot better than the performing jazz artist J.J. Johnson. I wasn't always at peace with the latter. My wide mood swings were drastically affected by the quality of my live performances, and especially in the last three to five years.

EE: How are you holding up? You still sound great, and you appear to be in very good health.

JJ: I have had a most exciting, satisfying career as a jazz performer. In addition to the debt of gratitude that I owe to my personal manager, Mary Ann Topper and the Jazz Tree, I want to thank *Down Beat* magazine and its legions of fans all over the world for their loyal support and encouragement through the years.

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with Verve/Polygram. I hope to compose, arrange and orchestrate—and not just for the purpose of recording CDs, but just for the fun of it. This music isn't classical, it's not jazz, it's just music I create, and I enjoy it and get satisfaction writing it.

I have plans to "wallow" in MIDI. I'm a vintage mad bebop electronics fanatic! I'm at my computer, on the Internet. I found out there's tons of stuff out there, like MIDI files that you can download. I've downloaded tons of stuff. On some of these sites, if you've got the right hookups, you can hear the MIDI files played on your computer. By the way—if anyone is interested—my Web page is <http://www.calvert.com/jj.html>. A

EQUIPMENT

J.J. Johnson plays a Yamaha .691 trombone, with a normal tenor bore. He also plays a custom-made trombone of his own design with a conical bore that flares out to a 12.5-inch bell. For composing by computer, Johnson uses two different music-notation software programs: Finale and Mosaic.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

TANGENCE—Verve 526 558
LET'S HANG OUT—Verve 514 454
VIVIAN—Concord Jazz 4523
STANDARDS: LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD—Antilles 510 059
QUINTERGY: LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD—Antilles 422 848 214
SAY WHEN—RCA/Bluebird 6277
THE EMINENT J.J. JOHNSON, VOLS. 1&2—Blue Note 81505/81506
THE TROMBONE MASTER—Columbia 44443
J.J. JOHNSON AT THE CAFE BOHEMIA—Fresh Sound 143
TROMBONE BY THREE—Fantasy/OJC 091
THE BIRTH OF THE THIRD STREAM—Columbia 64929 (includes *POEM FOR BRASS*)
PERCEPTIONS—Verve (out of print)

generous fan by the name of Matt Calvert created the page for me. And I can be e-mailed at jay315@ix.netcom.com.

I hope to write a jazz trombone method book. And I'll do some private teaching and/or tutoring beginning in 1998.

I'm 72 and a half. Don't leave off my half, man—give me my half! I feel good. I tell people, and I'm glad they take it in the right spirit: I deserve to feel as good as I feel! You know why? I work at it! I earned it! I walk daily—well, *almost* daily. I do calisthenics every morning at least 15 or

20 minutes. I keep it short so I'll be sure I don't miss a morning. I eat raw egg whites three times a week, I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't do any other dastardly things. I try to keep a positive outlook, I feel good about things in general. I have no axes to grind about anybody. I don't know anybody I want to put down. Man, I love Slide Hampton, I love Robin Eubanks, Steve Turre. Man, those guys have their finger right on the pulse of the trombone panorama. I know that I'm leaving things in good hands. **DB**

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Is Pop Worthy?

Jazz & The Contemporary Song

by Dave Helland

Jazz and pop music have been entwined since the dawn of this century. Like red beans and rice, ragtime and jazz went together. Big bands swung tunes written

for Broadway and Hollywood, serving them up for dancers. Beboppers didn't just apply their concepts to the harmonic ingredients of the American Popular Song, they actually played the songs themselves.

But how often do you hear jazz musicians transform contemporary pop material into jazz these days? Recent releases like Herbie Hancock's *The New Standard*, David Murray's *Dark Star: The Music Of The Grateful Dead*, Fareed Haque's *Deja Vu* and Charlie Haden and Pat Metheny's *Beyond The Missouri Sky* (with its Jimmy Webb tune and themes from the movie *Cinema Paradiso*) showcase tunes that should be part of the canon of the American Popular Song. Call it: *Volume II—The Beatles And Beyond*.

But these recordings are glaring exceptions to the pattern of today's releases: primarily, the session leader's compositions and a standard or two. What so many CDs of the past decade are missing is the vitality of new material, the tunes that the audience and the musicians themselves grew up with but haven't heard jazzed to death. Rarely do players—of whatever age—do to the music of Carole King, Paul Simon or Andrew Lloyd Webber what they do so regularly to Bronislau Kaper's "On Green Dolphin Street" or Joseph Kosma's "Autumn Leaves," stripping the song down to its basic components and then reimagining its harmonic and rhythmic forms.

Musicians and producers offer a variety of reasons why few contemporary pop tunes have joined the classic American Popular Song in the jazz canon. They don't write them like they used to; the pop tunes of today are musically weak. The jazz canon has been codified, its standards set in the choices made by players such as Art Tatum, Chet Baker and Dexter Gordon. There's no real demand for jazz versions of tunes that made *Billboard's* Top 10 in the past 35 years.

You can make these arguments, but you would be wrong. A handful of jazz musicians have shown the vitality of today's pop music by doing what jazz musicians have always done: They reacted to the music around them by putting their personal stamp on what is in the air. And, in a flat market for jazz records, they've created a niche in college-radio and Adult Alternative Album formats.

The American Popular Song was the pop music of its day, the tunes people danced to or simply whistled as they came out of the theater. But in the past 30 years,

the biggest pop hits have been written by singer/songwriters or by tunesmiths for a specific singer. A singer/songwriter often has little formal musical training, while the pop diva is backed by a well-trained writing team. Either way, a quirky structure, narrow harmonic range or sentiments lacking in nuance doesn't mean that the melody isn't memorable—whistle-able—nor that people don't fall in love listening to it. And this is the opening for what jazz musicians have always done: to use a song not as a role to play but as a launching pad for virtuosic display and a vehicle for communicating emotion.

But judging by their recorded output, most musicians and producers would disagree. Certainly, there are plenty of jazzy, pop-instrumental versions of recent rock or r&b hits—the approach taken on Everette Harp's recently released "cover" of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On?*—and funky organ combos vamping on r&b tunes abound. But rarely do musicians young or old do what Gary Burton has done with the theme from television's *Frasier* on his latest album, *Departure*; Brad Mehldau with the Beatles' "Blackbird" on last year's *The Art Of The Trio*; or Jacky Terrasson with "For Once In My Life" on his eponymous debut.

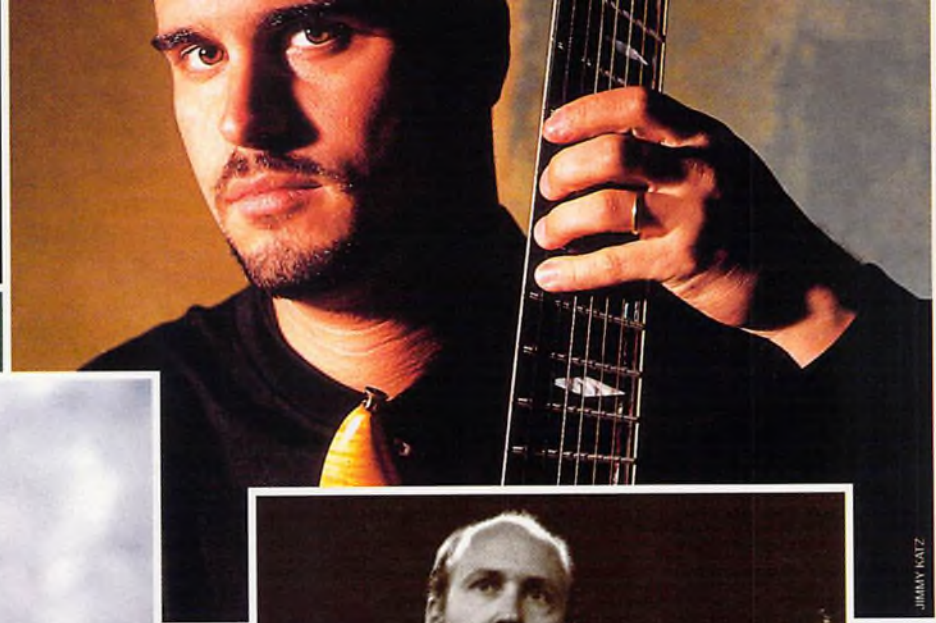
"Tunes today would take too much effort to make into jazz; and if you put too much thought into it, you have to ask, is it really worth it," explains guitarist John Scofield, who grew up musically on standards as well as rock and blues.

"When we separate out hard-rock and rap, there's not that much left except sweeping, syrupy ballads that don't lend themselves to a jazz treatment," agrees producer Michael Cuscuna. "They need to be done theatrically, overdone. I don't think there is a lot of material out there that does translate itself."

"Nobody remembers the original 'My Funny Valentine' or 'Body And Soul.' But, *voila*, it goes from garbage to gourmet simply because some hip jazz guy decided to put a ninth in the chord or some harmonic movement

Shown clockwise: Everette Harp, Wallace Roney, Charlie Hunter, John Scofield, Fareed Haque and Christian McBride

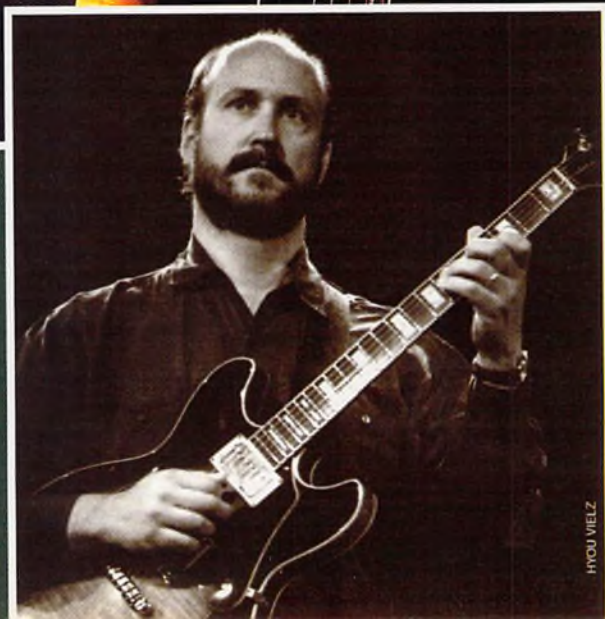




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"Tunes today would take too much effort to make into jazz; and if you put too much thought into it, you have to ask, is it really worth it."

—John Scofield

between the sheets," counters Bob Belden, who arranged tunes by Don Henley, Kurt Cobain, Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel for Hancock's *The New Standard*. "Jazz musicians have adapted pop material since they thought they could get away with it—except now."

But some musicians have made the effort to deal with more recent pop tunes. Guitarist Fareed Haque agrees that "many pop songs today are written more around a groove or a hook and not around a strong, elegant, beautiful melody. But then you do get a few composers of the pop music—Elvis Costello comes immediately to

mind—who do write really wonderful, strong melodies. Those are likely to be interpretable as jazz pieces. If the tune is only successful because of the arrangement, then it isn't a strong tune. That doesn't mean it isn't fun to listen to, it just is not a particularly strong tune."

Haque, who rearranged the entirety of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's best-selling *Deja Vu*, part of Blue Note's recently launched "Cover" series, found that some songs from *Deja Vu*, e.g., "Country Girl," "Carry On" and the title track, actually had interesting harmonies. The quartet that brought multi-part vocal harmony to rock combined wide-ranging musical tastes, from folk to classical, with a willingness to experiment with guitar tunings to create relatively sophisticated arrangements. "The problem with the American Popular Song and the jazz tradition is showcased by this album. Tunes with a hipper harmonic concept, or the flexibility that the harmony has, lend themselves to a very jazzy treatment right away. Just playing anything instrumentally does not make it jazz."

Saxophonist Don Braden agrees. "So many tunes are written to a formula. There's no real melody, the singer just melodramatics her way through the song," he says, coining a verb. "You can't make jazz out of that." Braden has covered several tunes by Stevie Wonder as well as Whitney Houston's hit "Saving All My Love For You" and Grover Washington Jr.'s pop instrumental "Winelight." But he admits the transformation isn't all that easy. "The trick is finding a good melody."

Then Braden extensively reworks the tune, through-composing new harmonies for each section of each chorus, turning a

simple AABA song into one with a harmony where every A and every B are different. But why go to all that trouble? You might as well write an original. "That's not really true. I could write my own tune, but no one will care about it at all. The industry doesn't give a fuck about Don Braden till I win an award. They'd rather hear me do the music of Michael Bolton."

But then there is the music of Stevie Wonder, who might be the closest thing to Gershwin the jazz world has today. His "Make Sure You're Sure," for instance, is in AABA form with lots of II-V chords. "It could have been written 40 or 50 years ago. Recording that was no different than playing 'My One And Only Love,'" explains Joshua Redman, who has also recorded James Brown's "I Got You" and Eric Clapton's "Tears From Heaven." "I thought they were great tunes. I had something to say when I played them, and they fit the context of the recording project. I wasn't making a political statement about pop tunes being a legitimate source of material for jazz, but it's fine if people think that since that's what I believe."

"Many musicians today are blinded by ideologies that have nothing to do with music," he concludes. "Certain people, on an intellectual basis, want to define this music and set strict intellectual parameters."

But no matter what you do to them, some musicians maintain, the tunes of the rock era aren't part of the jazz tradition. "The American Popular Song and jazz standards are the tunes that teach you how to play jazz properly. Those are the basic song forms you need to learn," says bassist Christian McBride, who has recorded with the legends of jazz but also has a goal of recording with James Brown.

Trumpeter Wallace Roney sees a more complex dynamic at work when selecting material. His album *Misterios* included the Beatles' "Michelle" and Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You." "When playing music, especially jazz, you're reflecting things around you. It's not like I really love Dolly Parton, but you heard Whitney Houston's version of that tune all the time. It became part of the environment." But Roney is no hard-liner on either side of the discussion. Certainly none of his subsequent releases has had such an adventuresome selection of tunes.

Using contemporary pop songs as the vehicle for jazz expression—as opposed to merely jazzy pop covers—is very much in the tradition. Wes Montgomery made beautiful jazz out of several of the Beatles' ballads. Thad Jones wrote a great arrangement of the O'Jays' "Money Money." Johnny Hodges recorded Petula Clark's "Don't Sleep In The Subway." Sonny Rollins' discography is full of

surprises, including Wonder's "Isn't She Lovely" and Parton's "Here We Go Again" from the movie *9 To 5*. Miles waxed David Crosby's "Guinnevere" and Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time."

"When you're playing music, especially jazz, you're reflecting things around you. It's not like I really love Dolly Parton, but you heard Whitney Houston's version of that tune ['I Will Always Love You'] all the time. It's become part of the environment."

—Wallace Roney

But does anyone want to hear jazz renditions of the current pop song—whether fans, radio programmers, producers or other jazz musicians? Jazz is, after all, a business as well as an art. Hand in hand with the desire to communicate is the need for a demand.

When keyboardist John Colianni recorded Kurt Cobain's "Heart-Shaped Box," he was surprised to find that his arrangement of the Nirvana tune garnered a measure of critical acclaim, college-radio air-play and even praise from Carl Jefferson, founder of Concord Jazz Records, the label Colianni recorded it for. It's still the most requested song at his concerts.

Colianni likens "Heart-Shaped Box"'s bittersweet quality to what he admires in Antonio Carlos Jobim, Teddy Wilson and Billie Holiday.

"There's an emotional expression that I'm not hearing in a lot of jazz today, a heartfelt, visceral kind of expression," says Colianni, who won the Monk Competition in '87 and was Mel Torme's accompanist/musical director from '91 to '95.

Recording this song was also a protest against the current jazz scene. "I think that the window of expression has become narrower in recent years because people are relying on a very small body of vehicles and expression. I see a lot of the same tunes on records, and I'm hearing a lot of the same licks."

Even if there isn't a demand for the approach taken by Colianni or Braden,

there should be, according to Barry Winograd, a bari saxist/band leader who hosts the weekly program "Jazz Transfusion" on Chicago's "adult rock station," WXRT. "Both as a musician and a programmer, the obvious thing is you've got this giant generation, the baby boomers, that needs to be introduced to jazz and is looking for new stuff most of the time. By playing songs and melodies they relate to even though they don't understand what the hell is going on jazzwise, they can go, 'Oh, wow,' and feel more comfortable."

Musicians as diverse as David Murray and Fared Haque have demonstrated that there are musically solid rock ballads that can be used in jazz. Braden and Belden have shown that good arrangements overcome what the tunes may be lacking.

The tradition, the esthetic if you will, of mainstream jazz rests on the musician's relation to his surroundings, whether in the abstract as an artist reflecting the times in which he or she lives or concretely by reacting to the rest of the band and the audience. One of the ways jazz musicians have always done this—whether it was Lester Young recording the Tin Pan Alley tunes he grew up with or Grant

Green and Hank Mobley recording the Beatles and Motown numbers they heard on juke boxes in the clubs they played—is by playing the contemporary popular song.

By overlooking the pop tunes they grew up with, musicians are neglecting a source of material that speaks directly to a potential audience that grew up with those same songs, who have an emotional connection to the songs even if they don't understand the process that is transforming them. That is more solidly in the jazz tradition than making records that "document" artistic progress or prove mastery of a craft, records that the jazz market is becoming increasingly bored with.

Guitarist Charlie Hunter's "cover" of Bob Marley's *Natty Dread* or Colianni's arrangement of Sound-garden's "Black Hole Sun" might prove to be more vital to jazz than any number of recent rehashes of Gershwin, Porter and Ellington.

"The genres, to me, have more in common than we like to think," concludes Colianni. "If a pop tune has a groove to it, rhythmically, that's good. If a jazz tune has a groove, that's good. The grooves are mostly based on 4/4 rhythm. It all comes out of the blues—both jazz and pop. It's all American music, and it's a lot closer than people like to admit."

DB

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Don Braden

AFTER DARK—CrissCross 1081 (includes "Creepin")
ORGANIC—Epicure 66873 (includes "Saving All My Love For You")

Gary Burton

DEPARTURE—Concord Jazz 4749 (includes "Tossed Salad And Scrambled Eggs")

John Colianni

AT MAYBECK—Concord Jazz 4643 (includes "Heart-Shaped Box")

Charlie Haden/Pat Metheny

BEYOND THE MISSOURI SKY—Verve 537 130 (includes "The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress" and two themes from *Cinema Paradiso*)

Herbie Hancock

THE NEW STANDARD—Verve 529 584 (includes songs by Don Henley, Sade and Peter Gabriel)

Fared Haque

DEJA VU—Blue Note 52419 (reworks the entire album)

Charlie Hunter

NATTY DREAD—Blue Note 52420 (reworks the entire album)

Everette Harp

WHAT'S GOING ON—Blue Note 53068 (reworks the entire album)

Brad Mehldau

THE ART OF THE TRIO VOL. 1—Warner Bros. 46260 (includes "Blackbird")

Bob Belden

STRAIGHT TO MY HEART (THE MUSIC OF STING)—Blue Note 95137

David Murray

DARK STAR: THE MUSIC OF THE GRATEFUL DEAD—Astor Place 4002

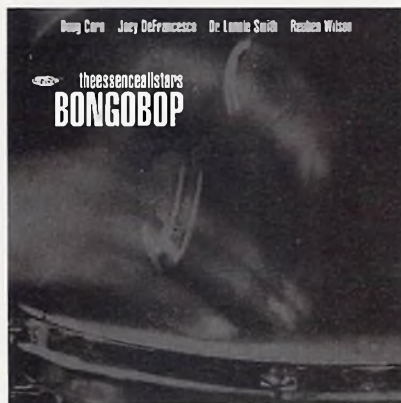
Joshua Redman

WISH—Warner Bros. 45365 (includes "Make Sure You're Sure" and "Tears From Heaven")

Wallace Roney

MISTERIOS—Warner Bros. 45641 (includes "Michelle" and "I Will Always Love You")

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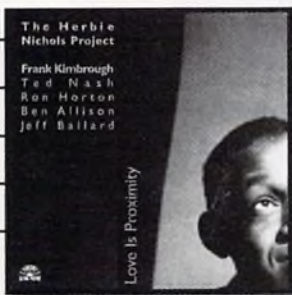
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Herbie Nichols Project

Love Is Proximity
 Soul Note 121313

★★★★

Jazz has been living in limbo for a generation. The search for "new standards," the fight to maintain the primacy of "old standards" and the tendency to scrap the notion of standards altogether leaves us with no certainty, no core, a fragmented prism of possibilities for creative, improvising musicians. One might say these are the best of times because the game finally seems to include everybody, not just swingers, but honkers and popmeisters as well.

Consider the Herbie Nichols Project's *Love Is Proximity*. The product of New York's Jazz Composers Collective—a non-profit, musician-run organization formed with the expressed purpose of performing the works of outstanding creative musicians—it reflects the substantial investment of leader/pianist Frank Kimbrough, who started transcribing Nichols' compositions as early as 1985. Joined six years later by bassist Ben Allison, Kimbrough formed this quintet, in part, to explore Nichols' music for larger ensembles.

A contemporary of Monk and Bud Powell, Nichols died in 1963. And as a testament to the staying power of his music, Kimbrough & co. offer up some engaging arrangements, imaginative solos and an overall feel that takes us beyond the standards/no standards straight-jacket. Two good examples can be heard in "Wildflower" and "Crisp Day/Blue Chopsticks," both of which use devices that alter tempo, mood, instrumentation. A weightless medley, "Crisp Day/Blue Chopsticks" actually begins with a passing reference to the children's melody "Chopsticks" and brings two numbers together in a spritely run through different changes sans bass, over the same keys and song forms, with polyphony galore and a perky drum solo from Jeff Ballard. "Wildflower" is heard in two versions here, the first by the quintet, the second as a piano solo. As the album's longest number, the first take showcases the extended, open-ended possibilities of Nichols' pen. At times, the band recalls mid-'60s Miles as it uses the musical form like clay, a plaything for improvisers charting their

respective courses through what, at bottom, becomes a dreamy blues meditation. Indeed, both renditions offer substantial reworkings of the original.

"Love, Gloom, Cash, Love" is another example of how Nichols' music can work for larger ensembles. A memorable waltz theme is applied to a fine horn arrangement with solos. Mention should also be made of another beautiful waltz, "Love Is Proximity" (recorded here for the first time!). Played in 9/4 and featuring strong solos from trumpeter Ron Horton and tenor saxophonist Ted Nash, "Love Is Proximity" (besides sporting a great title) showcases a *band* sound, a group empathy rare in this age of superstar collaborations, the rhythm section alone almost breathing through the soloists.

Listening to Nichols' Blue Note and Bethlehem piano trio recordings from the '50s next to *Love Is Proximity* is a lesson in recording styles and sounds—the former titles offer more textures, while the latter, despite the larger format, has more of a blended sound. Nichols' signatures—dixieland, West Indies folk music, his classical length and breadth, his playfulness and, most importantly, his sometimes idiosyncratic piano style—are missing, replaced by a kind of today's progressive-jazz quintet sound. (Incidentally, none of the Blue Note material is in print; only Bethlehem's reissue of *Love, Gloom, Cash, Love* is available.)

This isn't the first Nichols "tribute" in recent years, but it may be the best. As an alternate route to jazz expression, the Jazz Composers Collective's efforts show much promise. Mosaic's Michael Cuscuna's liner notes address a major challenge in this regard: "In an era when jazz repertory groups are threatening to ossify jazz with the financial subsidies and stilted performances that have comfortably strangled European classical music, this organization is striving to bring important, contemporary music to the

performance stage."

A message to all ossifiers: Be gone!

—John Ephland

Love Is Proximity—Trio: *Love, Gloom, Cash, Love; Wildflower; Infatuation Eyes; Crisp Day/Blue Chopsticks; Amoeba's Dance; Love Is Proximity; Wildflower 2; Spinning Song; Dance Line.* (63:46)

Personnel—Frank Kimbrough, piano; Ted Nash, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Ron Horton, trumpet; Ben Allison, bass; Jeff Ballard, drums.



Mark Whitfield

Forever Love
 Verve 533 921

★★★★

Articulating romantic feelings is one of jazz's stickiest wickets. Your sighs and whispers might seem a bit too kissyface to me; my version of sauciness might strike you as insolence. The breach is vast because sexual stomping grounds are utterly idiosyncratic. When it's hot and heavy time, one couple I know finds Robert Nighthawk's *Live On Maxwell Street* and Archie Shepp's *Fire Music* much more of a turn-on than an old staple of intimacy like *Kind Of Blue*.

With his latest disc, Mark Whitfield weighs

THE HOT BOX

CDs	CRITICS	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
HERBIE NICHOLS PROJECT <i>Love Is Proximity</i>		★★★★	★★★ 1/2	★★★	★★★★
MARK WHITFIELD <i>Forever Love</i>		★★★	★★ 1/2	★★★★	★★★
ROY HAYNES <i>True Or False</i>		★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★
LAMBERT, HENDRICKS & ROSS <i>The Hottest New Group In Jazz</i>		★★★ 1/2	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★ 1/2

in on the music d'amour. The guitarist's first ballads record places his natural lyricism in high relief: He fronts a string orchestra, interpreting well-known standards with patented ties to the kind of goose bumps that occur when the first bit of shoulder is exposed and the nibbling is about begin. Its idiosyncrasies are on zero—this is an album that plans on seducing the world by reiterating what "pretty" music should offer. But its convention also manages a singularity that floats in under the radar, raising its head via nuance, subtlety and other minute degrees of expression. Call it a stealth seduction.

Whitfield's playing has had an undeniable eloquence ever since he hit the national scene with his 1990 Warner debut, *The Marksman*. Bountiful chops combined with a determined sense of swing managed to raise his profile quickly. But ever since, the guitarist has been skipping through the idioms of jazz—a blues disc here, a blowing disc there, falling prey to the stock expression of each style. *Forever Love* is a blessing, however. Significantly, it moves him away from the currently overpopulated zone of hard bop, a place where he feels most comfortable, and his usual patterns often have full say. The new setting helps Whitfield intercept the expected, coercing him to be keenly aware of melody. Instead of hip licks, his solos become well considered phrases. Bottom line? Playing with the orchestra prods the guitarist to pull an end run around the commonplace.

The change is most obvious in the depth of Whitfield's single string playing. Guitarists who revel in subtlety—Jim Hall, for example—fret over the weight each note will receive. Previously, that notion has perplexed Whitfield. Here he sounds much wiser, taking time to bask in the tone of his instrument and its relationship to Dale Oehler's handsome charts. On "Some Other Time," where vocalist Diana Krall demurely rustles through the changes, the guitarist moves judiciously. Ever lithe, he forwards a taut vulnerability that paces such venerable soloist/strings outings such as Art Farmer's *Gentle Eyes*.

The disc's accompanied guitar tracks also make a case for Whitfield's augmented grace. "My One And Only Love" is a meditation that genuflects to melody while creating some associated filigree. "Some Other Spring" blossoms as a pithy tone poem, full of colors that surround the theme.

Each listings of track cite the previous version of the tune that inspired Whitfield's interpretation. All are by vocalists. The guitarist is conscious of the emotional narrative achieved by singers like Sinatra, Dinah Washington and Nat Cole. Striving for the polish of such classics, he emphasizes restraint. By the time the sounds of *Forever Love* drift away, this protégé of Benson and acolyte of Wes has expounded on a type of romance whose charm is both bitersweet and sensual—fire music where the embers are just as alluring as the flame.

—Jim Macnie

Forever Love—*You Don't Know What Love Is; Some Other Time; My One And Only Love; Nature Boy; It Never Entered My Mind; Some Other Spring; Early Autumn; Forever; I Wanna Talk About You; Only The Lonely.* (59:58)

Personnel—Whitfield, electric and acoustic guitars; Jim Pryor, piano; Roland Guerin, bass; Donald Edward, drums; Diana Krall, vocals (2, 7); 21-piece string orchestra arranged and conducted by Dale Oehler.

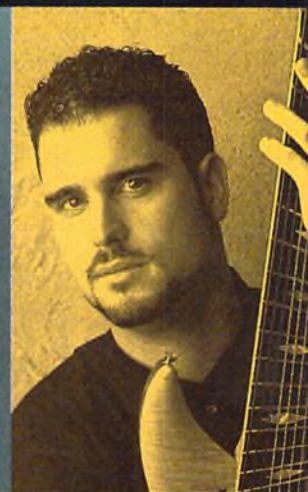
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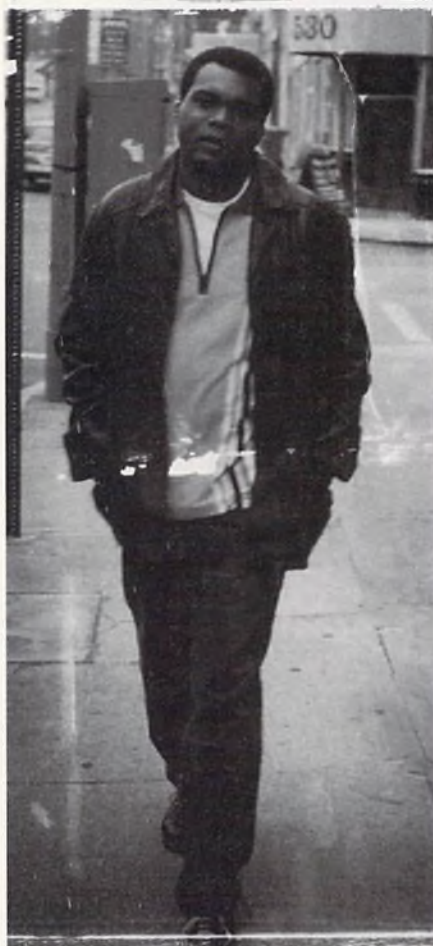
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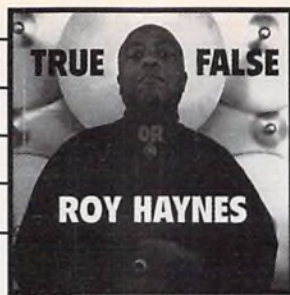
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Roy Haynes

True Or False
 Evidence 22171

★★★★

Drum kit as fountain of youth. On a recent panel discussion, octogenarian drummer/big band leader Barrett Deems turned to Marian McPartland and beamed: "I can't die, 'cause I won't be able to fit my drums in the coffin!" Maybe the act of percussing puts a player so in touch with time that he or she can step out of it. Or perhaps it's just that drummers have to be in shape. Anyway, it's a damned miracle how buoyant, fresh and full of youth Roy Haynes is at age 71. Spry, sly and willing to kick the youngster in the ass.

On this date, recorded live in France in '86 (11 years younger and just as bursting with swing!), Haynes is playing with sidemen who were in diapers when he was playing with Bird, Sarah Vaughan, Monk, subbing for Elvin Jones with John Coltrane. And still, it's *his drumming*, not the youth of his support, that raises the rather familiar material out of mainstream hard-bop routine to another level. Support! What's that when a band has such immense power behind a renovated old tune like "Limehouse Blues"?

To be fair, Haynes and bassist Ed Howard have a real synergism, driving things along like sheepdogs in a field. But the clobbering power of Haynes' tom work, his brilliant snare rolls on the short title snippet, the ingenious ideas he trades at the outro of Charlie Parker's "Big Foot"—these leave no doubt who's in charge. In his liner notes to *True Or False*, Howard Mandel asks rhetorically what's the difference between Roy and Elvin? Listen to the end of this Bird tune for the clear answer: Haynes certainly insinuates the pulse when necessary, but he's not averse to stating it, either. And overtly, with definition and precision.

In spots, tenor saxist Ralph Moore hangs preciously to the hem of Coltrane. His first steps on "In A Sentimental Mood" a mite too directly recall the Ellington/Coltrane version, and his playing on Chick Corea's rhythmically intriguing "Psalm" is a bit verbatim Trane. But he's got a real presence, developmental sense in his solos and a very agreeable, gritty sound. Moore might not surprise you, but he won't let you down, either. David Kikoski also acquires himself well, daring to swim against the Haynes flow a bit on Wayne Shorter's "Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum"—this kind of move helps keep everything from feeling like it draws its life from the drumset. Then again, even if it did

that, *True Or False* would be a mighty lively record all the same. —John Corbett

True Or False—*Limehouse Blues; In A Sentimental Mood; Big Foot; Psalm; True Or False; Played Twice; Bud Powell; Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum; The Everywhere Calypso.* (63:05)
Personnel—Haynes, drums; David Kikoski, piano; Ralph Moore, tenor saxophone; Ed Howard, bass.



Lambert, Hendricks & Ross

The Hottest New Group In Jazz
 Columbia/Legacy 64933

★★★½

The late '50s produced the last great leap forward in group vocalizing. While the Four Lads and Four Aces generated hits, the Hi-Lo's and the Four Freshman penetrated a higher level of harmonic sophistication. But Lambert, Hendricks & Ross went them one better and became the finest exponents of a tiny offshoot of '50s jazz called vocalese. It was as dazzling in its virtuosity as it was ultimately shallow in its concept. It remained an exclusive preserve because few singers could meet the demands of the form, which for all its dazzle was essentially a novelty where one group of its kind was enough to meet demand and interest.

This two-CD set gathers the group's complete Columbia works of three LPs from 1959-'61 (*The Hottest New Group In Jazz*, *Lambert, Hendricks & Ross Sing Ellington and High Flying With The Ike Isaacs Trio*). In addition, there are six previously unissued tracks added at the end.

The old reviews raved, and even today the sheer vocal athletics involved are astounding. Annie Ross is a titanic vocalist whose range and articulation is matched by an uncanny ability to hit targeted notes with a startling instrumental timber full of shimmer and gravel. But when you move beyond all this, you confront the fact that the material from which they drew was so inherently instrumental in concept (with its rhythmic gymnastics, false fingerings and semitones), that forcing lyrics onto such music could rarely produce anything more emotionally substantial than crowd-pleasing, musical tongue-twisters.

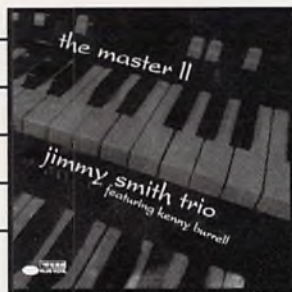
More straightforwardly lyrical, the swing era tended to produce the kind of tunes most easily transposed into song, which is why "Charleston Alley" from the 1941 Charlie Barnet book remains a solid I.H.&R piece of songsmithing. And slower pieces such as Gildo Mahones'

"Blue" and Ellington's "Mood Indigo" have an inherent lyricism that makes them lyric-friendly.

Probably more famous, though, is "Twisted," which remains supremely hip in its attitude but is also a textbook study in the awkwardness of trying to shove syllables down the throat of a bebop improvisation. LH&R loved speed, and when words failed, Jon Hendricks and Dave Lambert proved good but not great scat singers ("Everybody's Boppin'"). They had the time but not the gift for instrumental onomatopoeia that Ella Fitzgerald possessed. —John McDonough

The Hottest New Group In Jazz—*Charleston Alley; Moanin'; Twisted; Cloudburst; Gimme That Wine; Sermonette; Summertime; Everybody's Boppin'; Cottontail; All Too Soon; Happy Anatomy; Rock In My Bed; Main Stem; I Don't Know What Kind Of Blues I've Got; Things Ain't What They Used To Be; Midnight Indigo; What Am I Here For?; In A Mellow Tone; Caravan; Come On Home; The New A B C; Farmer's Market; Cookin' At The Continental; With Malice Toward None; Hi-Fly; Home Cookin'; Halloween Spooks; Popity Bop; Blue; Mr. P.C.; Walkin'; This Here (Dis Hyunh); Swinging 'Till The Girls Come Home; Twist City; Just A Little Bit Of Twist; Night In Tunisia (2 takes). (61:20/62:01)*

Personnel—Dave Lambert, Jon Hendricks, Annie Ross, vocals; with Harry "Sweets" Edison (1-9), trumpet; Pony Poindexter, alto saxophone; Gildo Mahones, piano; Ike Hayes, Ron Carter, W. Yancey, bass; Walter Bolden, Jimmy Wadsworth, Stu Martin, drums.



Jimmy Smith

The Master II
Blue Note 55466

★★½

Got My Mojo Workin'/Hoochie Cooche Man
Verve 533 828

★★★½

The dance-jazz craze has been good to Hammond B-3 maestro Jimmy Smith. Young jazz fans craving for fat, juicy grooves not only brought '60s soul-jazz out of retirement, they couldn't get enough of the organ, an instrument that had been cast off as obsolete by the '70s synth fad.

Late last year, Verve released the groove-jazz high priest's latest studio album, *Angel Eyes*, a so-so collection of blues-drenched, soul-smoldering ballads, with trumpeters Nicholas Payton and Roy Hargrove making noteworthy appearances. Blue Note has also capitalized on Smith's popularity by releasing two live discs originally issued by the Japanese label Somethin' Else. Both collections capture Smith

in Osaka on Christmas Eve and Day in 1993 on a trademark trio date with his guitarist of choice, Kenny Burrell, and drummer Jimmie Smith (no relation). The first CD, *The Master*, issued in 1994, featured the trio humming through several of the organist's hits. The second CD, the recently released *The Master II*, pales in comparison.

This unimaginative set is packed with standards, including such timeworn tunes as "Summertime" and "Mack The Knife." Sure, Burrell swings with delicious soft tones, drummer Smith anchors the beat and the leader frequently erupts into those sudden and exhilarating organ flourishes that have been a hallmark of his career. But for much of this set, it feels like the trio is trudging through the motions. Both the Rodgers and Hart ballad "My Romance" and Thad Jones' tune "A Child Is Born" stall. And while Smith's magic B-3 touch is still beefed up with the blues on T-Bone

Walker's "Stormy Monday," there's nothing earthshakingly remarkable about the rendition. The only redeeming quality to *The Master II* is hearing Smith go into a B-3 trance where it sounds like he's even surprising himself with the swells of his organ ecstasy. Those off-mic growly shouts—"Wooah!" "Wow!" "Aaaah!" "Ha ha ha!"—are great.

There's so much more life and raw energy in Smith's playing on the latest Verve twofer reissue CD, *Got My Mojo Workin'/Hoochie Cooche Man*. Originally recorded in 1965 and 1966 at Rudy Van Gelder's famed Engelwood Cliffs studio, both sessions find Smith in tip-top B-3 shape, pulling out all the stops (pun intended) by pumping out percolating foot-pedal and left-hand bass lines and scorching lightning-fast right-hand runs. He also gets support from a robust horn section conducted by Oliver Nelson, who arranged most of the collection. Nelson gets Smith to play off the

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May 27 to June 1**

horns, deepening the grooves on such bubbling blues tunes as "Got My Mojo Working" and "Ain't That Just Like A Woman," and such frisky swinging numbers as Strayhorn's "Johnny Come Lately" and Ellington's "C-Jam Blues." A special highlight moment: when the fast-and-furious Smith and the big band blast into Nelson's own "Blues And The Abstract Truth."

Smith appears with a quartet (including Burrell on guitar and Grady Tate on drums) on what was once *Mojo's* A-side, which showcases the B-3 ace not only ripping up the keyboards but also croaking out the vocals on a bracing version of "Hi-Heel Sneakers." While Smith's organ playing is compelling throughout, the collection suffers from half-baked takes on pop hits of the day: a couple unsatisfactory greasy-blues spins through the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" (both takes) and a straight run through Len Barry's "1-2-3."

—Dan Ouellette

The Master II—*Summertime; Laura; My Romance; Mack The Knife; A Child Is Born; Stormy Monday.* (43:00)

Personnel—Smith, organ; Kenny Burrell, guitar; Jimmie Smith, drums.

Got My Mojo Workin'/Hoochie Coochie Man—*Hi-Heel Sneakers; (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction; 1-2-3; Mustard Greens; Got My Mojo Working; Johnny Come Lately; C-Jam Blues; Hobson's Hop; I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man; One Mint Julep; Ain't That Just Like A Woman?; Boom Boom; Blues And The Abstract Truth; TNT; (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction (alt. take).* (79:45)

Personnel—Smith, organ, vocals; with various others, including the Oliver Nelson Orchestra; Kenny Burrell, guitar; Grady Tate, drums; Phil Wood, alto saxophone.



Fareed Haque

Deja Vu

Blue Note 52419

★★★½

Charlie Hunter Quartet

Natty Dread

Blue Note 52420

★★★

Blue Note's new "Cover Series" presents young jazz artists reinterpreting classic rock, soul and reggae albums of the

1970s (see pp. 34-37). Is it postmodern conceptualism or just shrewd crossover marketing? Maybe both, as evidenced by intriguing, entertaining albums by guitarists Haque and Hunter from the series' first batch. (Also included is a "cover" of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* by saxophonist Everette Harp.)

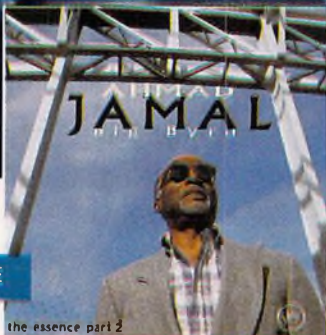
Each player recasts his selection in his own distinctive style while preserving at least a semblance of its original flavor. But while it's titillating to hear their fresh approaches to familiar tunes, it's questionable whether the material itself can bear the weight of such sophisticated treatment. Gershwin or Porter, it ain't.

Haque's eclectic blend of jazz, classical, flamenco and various world genres is well suited to CSN&Y's chiming folk-rock style. With an electro-acoustic ensemble that includes an assortment of guitars and percussion as well as accordion, cello and synthesizers, he layers airy, intricate textures whose heaves and swells capture the wistful yearning of the original vocal harmonies. Extraneous influences add intensity—Miles Davis-style funk on "Carry On," Delta blues on "Almost Cut My Hair," salsa on "Deja Vu"—but without vocals, the songs' bland chord progressions drift along dreamily, the elaborate embellishments and virtuoso guitar picking by Haque and David Onderdonk providing vivid color but not much momentum. The most engaging track, "Woodstock," has a stronger melody than the rest (perhaps because it was written by Joni Mitchell rather

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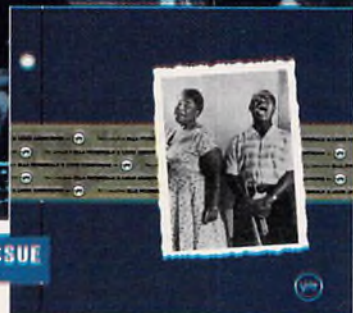
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NEW REISSUE

than Crosby, Stills, Nash or Young).

Hunter's quartet applies a variety of rhythms to Marley's compositions: funk, Latin, Afro-beat, New Orleans second line—everything but reggae. Here, the strength of the songwriting is both an asset and a drawback: classics like "Lively Up Yourself" and "Natty Dread" are more memorable than malleable; it's the not-so-catchy tunes, like "Rebel Music" and "Talkin' Blues," that lend themselves to challenging adaptations. Hunter generally views the material through the prism of contemporary soul- or acid-jazz, an emphasis underscored when he runs his 8-string guitar through a Leslie speaker to mimic an organ.

But he breaks from the formula on "No Woman, No Cry," which he interprets à la Ry Cooder or Keith Richards, following the introductory strains of the "Tennessee Waltz"! Saxophonists Calder Spanier and Kenny Brooks play Caribbean-tinged Jazz Messenger harmonies and lively modal-funk solos, but overall the arrangements are less creative than merely clever. —Larry Birnbaum

Deja Vu—Teach Your Children (intro); Carry On; Teach Your Children; Interlude-Fareed Bops; Almost Cut My Hair; Helpless; Woodstock; *Deja Vu*; Our House; 4+20; Country Girl; Interlude; Everybody I Love You. (49:00)
Personnel—Haque, Dave Onderdonk, David Chelimsky (8), guitars; Jonathan Paul, bass, sitar-guitar; Kim Schwartz, sitar-guitar (13); Joe Bianco, drums, percussion; Tim Mulvenna, Joe Rendon (8), percussion; Carlos Villalobos, percussion, drum programming, bass (2, 3, 6-10); Ron Perillo, electric piano (2, 11); Elizabeth Conant, accordion (3, 6); Larry Gray, cello (6, 9).

Natty Dread—Lively Up Yourself; No Woman, No Cry; Them Belly Full; Rebel Music; So Jah Seh; Natty Dread; Bend Down Low; Talkin' Blues; Revolution. (43:03 minutes)
Personnel—Hunter, 8-string guitar; Calder Spanier, alto saxophone; Kenny Brooks, tenor saxophone; Scott Amendola, drums.



Henry Threadgill & Make A Move

Where's Your Cup?
Columbia 67617

★★★★½

No one hears like Henry Threadgill. For his newest ensemble, called Make A Move, he hears dark colors and deep densities.

Oddly enough, he hears an accordion. In the hands of Tony Cedras, its shivering sustains fill every air space in this music. The electric stringed instruments of Brandon Ross and Stomu Takeishi are layered on top of it. Sometimes Threadgill sets his own reeds in bright contrast to the thick backdrop, like a spotlight beam over a night swamp ("100 Year Old Game"), and sometimes his horn is submerged in the confluence of sounds ("Laughing Club").

In such a mix, typical Threadgill elements are less clearly discriminated than in his earlier bands, Air and the Sextett and Very Very Circus. But they are here to be tripped over. It is perhaps paradoxical to seek recurrent elements in Threadgill's art, founded on the ever-unexpected. But it is precisely the unpredictability that identifies him, the askew voicings and jarring motivic juxtapositions, the crazy quilt of musical genres and disconcerting stop-times.

Most of all, Threadgill is recognizable in the way the elaborate "given" of the composed ensemble texture heightens the contributions of each soloist. Here the distinction between written and improvised is subordinate. Sometimes this music moves like a dirge ("Feels Like It"), a ponderous planned flowing in which the probes of Ross' guitar and the responses of Threadgill's dry, precise flute never depart far from the ensemble. There are wilder pieces, like "The Flew," where Threadgill cries and Ross slashes and J.T. Lewis whips a liberated drum solo for the 10-

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minute duration. But these, too, are clearly guided by the shaping intention of Threadgill the auteur.

Cedras' accordion is not a Threadgillian novelty but a whole territory of fresh texture and color. (Hear him take the lead, following Ross and Threadgill on "Go To Far," maintaining the level of intellectual content and the emotional tension.) Brandon Ross, who has served in a limited atmospheric role with Cassandra Wilson, functions brilliantly within Threadgill's ceaseless challenges. Drummer J.T. Lewis is major news. He does not motivate these proceedings in any conventional percussive sense, but is woven through them as strands of energy and firm marks of punctuation and points of light from his glistening cymbals.

But it feels inappropriate to describe *Where's Your Cup?* player by player. In this music, relationships among voices elaborately define a rich varied whole. Threadgill has stated, "I'm not a stylist. I get dissatisfied when I start seeing my procedures too much, and I have to move on." The pleasure we take in the work of most artists derives from revisiting their "procedures," which we have come to understand and love. Threadgill is different. He forces us to participate anew in his every adventure, to grow into hearing like him.

—Thomas Conrad

Where's Your Cup?—100 Year Old Game; Laughing Club; Where's Your Cup?; And This; Feels Like It; The Flew; Go To Far. (66:22)

Personnel—Threadgill, alto saxophone, flute; Brandon Ross, electrical and classical guitars; Tony Cedras, accordion, harmonium; Stomu Takeishi, five-string fretless bass; J.T. Lewis, drums.



Ken Peplowski

The Other Portrait
Concord Jazz 42043

★★★★

Allan Vache

Swing And Other Things
Arbors Jazz 19171

★★★★½

If you want to test the metal of an Artie Shaw collector, ask him to show you his copy of *Modern Music For Clarinet*. Then watch the blank expression on his face. Columbia Masterworks ML 4260 is one of the more obscure LPs in existence, and definitely the Button Gwinnett of the Shaw discogra-

phy. It's obscure because Shaw showed his listeners a side of his musical life in which he took great pride but which they had little interest in hearing.

I think of Shaw as I listen to Ken Peplowski's superb performance on *The Other Portrait*, an album destined, I suspect, to become his ML 4260—a noble orphan. It is a résumé of remarkable virtuosity and breadth. Any musician who begins with a solo performance of "Milestones" and "Anthropology" that embodies all the sweetness and heat of the best jazz, then swerves abruptly into five short movements of Witold Lutoslawski's "Dance Preludes" with the Bulgarian National Symphony is trying to tell us something. To wit: Don't be too quick to pin a label on me.

Yet, across such disparate genres as Ellington ("Single Petal Of A Rose") and Milhaud ("Concerto For Clarinet And Orchestra"), Peplowski achieves a surprising focus by reaching far enough outside the standard repertoires so that the listener can come to the material without immoderate preconceptions. Thus Strayhorn's "Duet" (gracefully arranged for trombones) and Milhaud strike a comfortable parity through his lucid clarinet. The weakest link is a tenor piece called "Cadenza," an empty and academic showcase by Plamen Djurov that only an Anthony Braxton fan could love. But one of Peplowski's purposes here is clearly to break out of his typecasting in the New York mainstream ghetto. Thus, he not only tackles Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman," but does so in an orchestral context. It should widen his credibility. We live in a period of jazz unusually rich in Olympian clarinetists, from Kenny Davern to Eddie Daniels, and this CD undeniably confirms Peplowski's status in the front ranks of the pack.

For bright, swinging clarinet of the classic school there is much to choose from right now: Davern's new *Breezin' Along*, Harry Skoler's *Reflections On The Art Of Swing* and this delightful sextet set from Allan Vache, *Swing And Other Things*. Vache is the proprietor of a big, rich, round tone across all registers and swings with a fierce, caution-to-the-wind abandon. At fast tempos on "June Night," "Limehouse Blues," "Hi Ya, Sophia" and others, the pull between the creative freedom and ensemble exactness generates a powerful and fascinating tension and cohesion. On the one duet ("He Loves And She Loves"), he and pianist Johnny Varro strike up the kind of rarefied elegance Benny Goodman and Jimmy Rowles used to get.

Small group swing is a devilishly precision mechanism governed by strict balances and formalities that the listener is reminded of only when they are jarred out of position. Such music offers no camouflage in which to cover errors and suffers fakers without mercy. Vache's associates here are about as good as they come and fuse into a wonderfully cohesive ensemble. The clarinetist's brother, cornetist Warren, cameos on a bright "Cheek To Cheek" at the end. —John McDonough

The Other Portrait—Milestones; Anthropology; Dance Preludes; Single Petal Of A Rose; Concerto For Clarinet & Orchestra; Cadenza; Lonely Woman; Duet. (65:52)
Personnel—Peplowski, clarinet, tenor saxophone; Ben Aronov, piano; Greg Cohen, bass; Chuck Redd, drums; Bulgarian National Symphony, Ljubomir Denev, conductor (2-6, 8-14).

Swing And Other Things—June Night; Nancy; Topsy;

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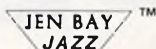


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Just One Of Those Things; Indian Summer; Rachel's Dream; Autumn Leaves; Limehouse Blues; You Turned The Tables On Me; Hi Ya, Sophia; Time After Time; He Loves And She Loves; Cheek To Cheek. (67:35)
Personnel—Vache, clarinet; Warren Vache, cornet (13); Bucky Pizzarelli, guitar; John Cocuzzi, vibraphone; Johnny Varro, piano; Frank Tate, bass; Ed Metz Jr., drums.



Norma Winstone

Well Kept Secret
 Koch Jazz 7836

★★★★

Azimuth

**How It Was Then ...
 Never Again**
 ECM 21538

★★★★

These albums display the two poles of Norma Winstone's art. She is known (to the extent that she is known) for her wordless improvisations in avant ensembles like Azimuth. But she is also a sensitive and understated interpreter of the standard repertoire. *Well Kept Secret* is the most traditional set she has ever recorded. The pianist is a paradigm among accompanists for singers, Jimmy Rowles. *How It Was Then ... Never Again* is all fresh sound-space. No one "accompanies" anyone in Azimuth. This British trio, with Kenny Wheeler on trumpet and Winstone's husband John Taylor on piano, contains coequal conspirators.

There are special stimulations that occur when singers capable of communicating without words choose to sing standards. It has to do with the tension of barely staying in the envelope. The program on *Well Kept Secret* includes strong but not overdone classics. Winstone traces them so lightly and airily that at first you don't notice the liberties. She lets "A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing" pool and gently spill, yet she is always in control, subtly reshaping it with aslant phrasing and odd intervals.

By late 1933, Jimmy Rowles' health was so fragile that he had to pick his spots with great care. But his gentle fills imply just enough harmony and tempo, prompting Winstone's glides and turns. Rowles and bassist George Mraz often switch positions, with the latter on lead while Rowles softly colors the background. Mraz is Winstone's only partner on the best piece, "It Amazes Me." Her emotional content is always implicit except here, where wonderment overflows her natural reticence.

The primary impact of *How It Was Then ...*

comes from experiencing the sound of each of these players so indelibly etched in musical space by ECM engineer Jan Erik Kongshaug. Unencumbered by rhythm sections or competing ensemble activities, the three voices are portrayed in stark detail and purity. Kenny Wheeler's trumpet and flugelhorn: bold golden splashes, veering linear abstractions, the paradox of moods simultaneously plaintive and buoyant. John Taylor's piano: a touch also bold, but in the service of luminous ringing freedoms. Norma Winstone's instrument: an unfettered intelligence spinning tales with language (e.g., the title track, an improbable blues) or without (Bobo Stenson's "Mindiatty").

Azimuth has not recorded in 12 years, since *Azimuth '85*. They sound like no one else. Beneath the somber, austere surface of this music, there is richness and variety, from the hypnotic pulse patterns of "Full Circle" to Wheeler's radical overdubbed implosion of "How Deep Is The Ocean" (the group's only recorded standard) to original songs ("Looking On"), all so poignant that surely others will someday sing them.

—Thomas Conrad

Well Kept Secret—*Where Or When; A Timeless Place; I Dream Too Much; It Amazes Me; Prelude To A Kiss; Joy Spring; Remind Me; A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing; Dream Of You; Morning Star. (49:48)*

Personnel—Winstone, vocals; Jimmy Rowles, piano; George Mraz, bass; Joe La Barbera, drums; Stacy Rowles, flugelhorn (10).

How It Was Then ... Never Again—*How It Was Then; Looking On; Whirlpool; Full Circle; How Deep Is The Ocean; Stango; Mindiaty; Wintersweet. (45:00)*

Personnel—Norma Winstone, voice; Kenny Wheeler, trumpet, flugelhorn; John Taylor, piano.



Michel Camilo

Thru My Eyes
 TropiJazz 82067

★★★★

At the drop of the first chord, pianist Michel Camilo begins his evocation of such stellar fellow keyboardists as Ahmad Jamal ("Poinciana"), Herbie Hancock ("Watermelon Man"), Horace Silver ("Song For My Father") and Chick Corea ("Armando's Rhumba"). Then he and his intrepid trio pay tribute to a number of jazz and Latin music immortals—Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, Tito Puente and Mario Bauza.

It is always risky to perform tunes so readily identifiable with famous artists, especially when they play the same instrument, but Camilo knows how to conjure the pianists without sabotaging his own sense of interpretation. And

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this musical intuition is distributed lavishly on nearly every tune, reaching a suite-like climax on Mongo Santamaria's "Afro Blue" and Gillespie's "Manteca."

Camilo, a native of the Dominican Republic, is thoroughly steeped in all the Latin rhythms—salsa, samba, bomba, rumba and merengue—and, depending on the tune, they play a fundamental role in propelling the florid runs of his solos. During the several choruses on "Afro Blue" it is possible to hear at least four distinct approaches that open with a choppy, discursive interpretation, followed by an extended blues riff that segues into a straight-ahead, bebop-ish mode. Right in the middle of all this is an eight-bar camp that resembles a Yoruban chant. It's what critics would call a tour de force, with emphasis on the tour because Camilo is all over the place.

A similar virtuosity is evident on "Manteca," and Camilo turns the rhythm around so many times it is simply amazing that he retains his focus. Astonishing, too, is the ability of his cohorts to keep pace. Bassist Anthony Jackson and percussionists Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez and Cliff Almond have several dazzling moments of essential "ritmo." And, as Felipe Luciano points out in the liner notes, Jackson gives just the right montuno bounce or Afro-Antillian resonance to "Armando's Rumba." Since its creation, "Manteca" has existed as a drummer's paradise, and Almond exploits it to the fullest, utilizing every surface within reach.

There is a festive quality to most of the tunes on *Thru My Eyes*, and undergirding the entire project is a luxurious sound and potent musical technique from a pianist who has labored long in the big-band vineyards. The experience has served him well. —Herb Boyd

Thru My Eyes—Poinciana; Perdido; Watermelon Man; A Night In Tunisia; Song For My Father; Armando's Rumba; St. Thomas; Oye Como Va; Afro Blue; Mambo Inn; My Little Suede Shoes; Manteca. (63:05)

Personnel—Camilo, piano; Anthony Jackson, contrabass guitar (3, 6, 8, 10-12); Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez (2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10), Cliff Almond (1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12), drums; Lincoln Goines (1, 7, 9), John Patitucci (2, 4, 5), acoustic bass.



Vandermark 5

Single Piece Flow

Atavistic 47

★★★★

Barrage Double Trio

Utility Hitter

Quinnah Q09

★★★½

Ken Vandermark is tireless. On any given night he could be leading his own free-wheeling ensembles, jamming with visiting European heavyweights or barnstorming with the snappy-as-pressed-trousers Crown Royals r&b revue. Vandermark's two recent discs illustrate how he continues to coalesce his manifold experiences into a distinctive multi-reed voice.

Each track on the Vandermark 5's *Single Piece Flow* contains a written tribute to a source of inspiration, and "Careen"'s dedication to the comic kung-fu movie star Jackie Chan is the most pertinent. Like a good Hong Kong film plot, Vandermark's themes are often based around endearing riffs that are never merely cute and provide a lively framework for each performer's agility. Vandermark has become an adroit clarinetist, playing beautifully alongside Tim Mulvena's sparse drumming on the unusually dark "Fence." Bassist Kent Kessler and saxophonist Mars Williams are part of Vandermark's regular circle, and their level of communication has become notably refined; Kessler is adept at honing spacious notes, and Williams (who navigates through free-jazz and r&b realms of his own in the NRG Ensemble and Liquid Soul) sounds perfectly comfortable wailing alongside Vandermark above the tight changes. Jeb Bishop, a relative newcomer to the coterie, contributes apt disjointed trombone solos along with an incisive guitar technique. While the quintet's sudden shifts in tone from an unconstrained circus to subdued exploration could have easily become contrived, the Vandermark 5 handle these turns with evident integrity.

Williams, Kessler and three other sympathetic musicians join Vandermark on the

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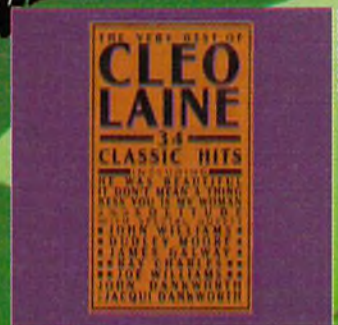
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Barrage Double Trio *Utility Hitter* disc, which draws on Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* double-group assembly as a blueprint. Divided into the "Chicago Trio" and "Boston Trio," percussionist Hamid Drake and Kessler propel Williams in the left channel while Vandermark plays in the other speaker with bassist Nat McBride and drummer Curt Newton (who are also the core of guitarist Joe Morris' excellent *Symbolic Gesture* trio CD). The tracks alternate between Vandermark's diverse compositions—which range from linear tunes with shuffle beats to extended suites—and shorter bursts of collective free improvisation. It takes considerable nerve to emulate a legendary configuration, and Barrage Double Trio demonstrates that the experiment should be tried more often. Kessler and McBride provide inspired counterpoint on their own and the combined rhythm sections provide rock-solid foundations to Vandermark and Williams' overtones. While the group's intensity wavers in a few spots, these moments are worthwhile risks that are inherent in such an adventurous package.

—Aaron Cohen

Single Piece Flow—*Careen; Momentum; Fence; Data Janitor; The Mark Inside; Wood-Skin-Metal; Billboard; Limited Edition.* (58:11)

Personnel—Ken Vandermark, Mars Williams, reeds; Jeb Bishop, trombone, guitar; Kent Kessler, bass; Tim Mulvena, drums.

Utility Hitter—*Over And Both; Chicago Trio; Agamemnon Sleeps; Bass Duo; Turn Your Head; Tenor Duo; There Is No Reason; Drum Duo; East River Suite; Boston Trio; Polarity.* (67:56)

Personnel—Nate McBride, acoustic and electric basses; Hamid Drake, trap set, hand drums; Curt Newton, trap set, percussion; Ken Vandermark, tenor saxophone, clarinet, bass clarinet; Kent Kessler, acoustic bass; Mars Williams, tenor, alto and soprano saxophones, clarinet.



Antonio Hart

Here I Stand
Impulse! 208

★★★★

Hart could have cribbed the title from Jackie McLean's Blue Note date, *New And Old Gospel*, and been right on the money. His Impulse! debut—after several solid dates for RCA/Novus, none that equal this date—offers a multiplicity of modern moods played by trios to octets that are distinctly musical, decidedly inventive and, save for one track, quite appealing. Most of the tunes are the leader's and are not only well written, they're craftily arranged, particularly the four octet cuts that give Hart a larger tonal palette to work from.

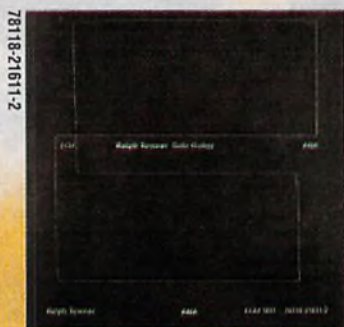
As far as the performances go, the opener, "The Community," sets the standard to which the subsequent selections must rise: Hart blows his butt off, mixing tart dissonance

with swinging sweetness, staying contemporary yet retaining the warm essence of earlier eras of mainstream jazz. In this solo, the altoist shows his maturity, interacting keenly with his rhythm section as he builds steadily with compelling lines to a fomenting, crying peak. There isn't a let down to this high level until the final number, where poet Jessica Care Moore recites an OK tome much too rapidly to be easily heard, especially over some drum-machine nonsense. But elsewhere, Hart's in A-1 shape.

The evergreen "Flamingo," taken at a medium-groove tempo, is old-timey but cooking for sure, and boasts Hart's ripe alto sound. Simplicity scores here, typified by Shirley Scott's meaty organ carrying-on. "True Friends" has a nice reggae wobble, a succulent Hart soprano improv and a deft-yet-subtle, written out-chorus that surrounds James Hurt's choice piano notes.

"Brother Nasheet" is another example of Hart's composing/arranging talents; it starts a bit darkly then warms, like the sun emerging from behind grey clouds. Hart's natty soprano spot offers notes that ring all day, others that chase each other like marbles spilling from an open-mouthed jar. "Riots" has a free-leaning basis and seems an ideal prelude to "Millennium," another dense number. "Ven Devorame Otra Vez" is a vibrant Afro-Cuban number that shows how surefooted Hart is in that genre. "Like My Own" is a sturdy, slow blues that lets both Scott—with locked hands—and Hart tell emotional tales.

Hart is assisted by an impressive crew throughout, a team he credits with allowing him to make an album he's completely proud



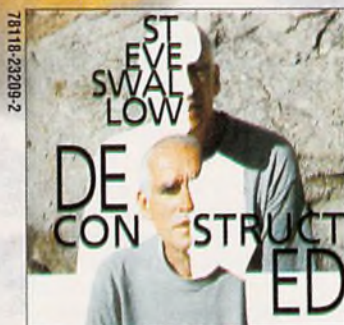
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of, and with damn good reason. The fellow wants to stand apart from others, be distinctive. This will help.
—Zan Stewart

Here I Stand—*The Community; True Friends; Flamingo; Brother Nasheet; Ven Devorame Otra Vez; "Riots...The Voice Of The Unheard"; Millenium; Like My Own; The Words Don't Fit In My Mouth.* (55:49)

Personnel—Hart, alto and soprano saxophones, arranger; Nasheet Waits, drums (1-4, 6-8); John Benitez (1-2, 4-7), John Ormond (8, 9), acoustic and electric basses; James Hurt (1-2, 4-7, 9), Shirley Scott (3, 8), piano, organ; Robin Eubanks, trombone (2, 4-6, 9); Mark Gross, alto saxophone, flute (2, 4, 6); Patrick Rickman, trumpet (4-6); Amadou Diallo, tenor saxophone (2, 4-6); Jay Brandford, baritone saxophone (5); Pernell Saturino, percussion (2, 5); Jessica Care Moore, vocal (9).



McKinfolk

Live At The SereNgeti
McKinney Arts/Rebirth 240

★★★

Detroit's McKinney family has bred as many jazz musicians as New Orleans' Marsalis without achieving anything like the same recognition, possibly because its members haven't polished their techniques to the same glossy level. But what they lack in luster they make up for in rough-hewn authenticity, playing with an idiosyncratic vitality that's truer to the jazz tradition than the formulaic virtuosity of many international stars.

Here, several principals of the McKinney clan—notably pianist Harold McKinney, trombonist Kiane Zawadi and drummer Earl "Shams" Muhammad—join guests like saxophonist Wendell Harrison, trumpeter Marcus Belgrave and bassist Reggie Workman in a ragged, sprawling live session that oozes with deep-dyed soul.

Muhammad's hard, choppy drumming gives the music a disjointed feel, leaving Workman's surging bass to anchor the rhythm section. McKinney's clanging piano, with its distinctive double-handed chromatic runs, spans the stylistic gamut from swing to avant garde, while the horns play bluesy, modal hard-bop with a raveled edge and a bawling tone. The material, all by McKinney or Zawadi, ranges from the Horace Silver-like "Wide And Blue" to the Charlie Parker-style "Like What Is This" (featuring a sleek trumpet solo by Jimmy Owens) to the Coltrane-esque "Waltz For Ima" (with a silvery clarinet solo by Harrison). The finale, "Libra Ahora," is a jazz

mambo that's embarrassingly out of clave, but even here, passionate conviction manages to compensate for sloppy execution.

—Larry Birnbaum

Live At The SereNgeti—*Wide And Blue; Like What Is This; Waltz For Ima; Juba; Conjure Man; Libra Ahora.* (62:40)

Personnel—Harold McKinney, piano; Wendell Harrison, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Marcus Belgrave, Jimmy Owens (2), trumpet; Kiane Zawadi, trombone, baritone horn; Reginald Workman, bass; Earl "Shams" Muhammad, Gayelynn McKinney (5), drums; Francisco Mora, percussion (5); Jahra Michelle McKinney, Sienna McKinney, Jore McKinney (4), vocals.



Frank Rosolino

Fond Memories Of ...
Double-Time 113

★★★

If the title of this CD were not so demoniacally ironic and inappropriate, it might be possible to discuss it without reminding ourselves that Frank Rosolino is jazz's O.J. Simpson—an outstanding talent who fulfilled his every potential only to be remembered for a single horrendously evil act that stands in shocking contrast to the brightness of his music his friends and fans so admired. In 1978, a depressed Rosolino murdered his children and then killed himself. *Fond Memories Of ...* indeed! Like Simpson, Rosolino was not what he seemed to be, attestations here to his "warmth" and "charm" notwithstanding.

From the '50s through the '70s, he was a much-admired member of the Hollywood studio scene and probably the most prominent of the trombonists in the West Coast jazz picture. This album catches him in top form in 1973 and 1975 with a European rhythm section and two ballads with strings. His rhythmic variety and ability to shape consistently fresh lines match the stamina he possesses for long solos. He blows for nearly eight minutes straight on a fast "All The Things You Are" without falling into any noticeable ruts.

It is on medium and brisk tempos, which make up most of the material here, that his accuracy and articulation are shown to best advantage in fleeting double-time clusters and in the frequent triplets that break his phrasing. If his playing lacks anything, it is a sense of warmth. Look beyond the exactitude of his attack, and you will find a dry, vibratoless staccato that is most apparent on the one slow ballad, "Violets," but makes itself felt throughout.

The rhythm section is alive and kicking all the way, with Louis Van Dyke's piano especially confident.
—John McDonough

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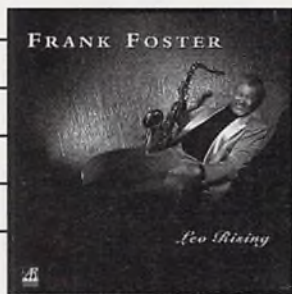
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Fond Memories Of ...—*All The Things You Are; My Funny Valentine; I Love You; Violets; Corcovado; Autumn Leaves; Free For All.* (63:44)

Personnel—Rosolino, trombone; Louis Van Dyke, piano; Jacques Schols, bass; John Engels, drums; the Metropole Orchestra (4, 5).



Frank Foster

Leo Rising
Arabesque Jazz 0124

★★★

Given today's retrograde jazz climate, it isn't too surprising that 68-year-old tenor saxophonist Frank Foster sounds younger than sidemen half his age or less. Not that he plays like a kid: His tone is ripe and robust, his phrasing assured and his command of the postwar jazz idiom utterly authoritative. But while he's no innovator, he's always stayed on the progressive side of the mainstream; he's never stopped growing, and now—like more than a few other old masters—he's blowing better than ever.

On his first domestic album as a leader in 25 years, Foster is backed by pianist Stephen Scott, bassist Christian McBride and drummer Lewis Nash. The opener "You're Only As Old As You Look" is a Horace Silver-like straight-ahead blues, but though Foster swaggers through the changes with greasy, wide-bodied panache, the rhythm section plods along stiffly, as if playing for a drawing room rather than a roadhouse. "Simone," a 6/8 modal tune modeled loosely after John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things," shows a similar disparity, with Foster wailing expansively over the trio's comparatively wooden accompaniment.

When trumpeter Derrick Gardner joins in on the title track, the band begins to cook at last, swinging smartly through tricky metrical shifts behind Foster's eely Trane-style soprano sax. Back on tenor, Foster sets the standard "Last Night When We Were Young" (one of only two non-original compositions) to a sprightly bossa beat, alternating broad melodic strokes with fleet post-bop curlicues. The finale, "Derrickster-ity," is performed in a vintage bebop style, with Foster snaking smoothly around hairpin turns and Gardner crackling with the fluid fire of a latter-day Fats Navarro. Here the rhythm section is buoyant in support, but when the horns lay out, the energy level takes a quantum leap downward.

—Larry Birnbaum

Leo Rising—*You're Only As Old As You Look; Simone; Gray Thursday; Cidade Alto; Leo Rising; When April Comes Again; Last Night When We Were Young; Derricksterity.* (62:40)

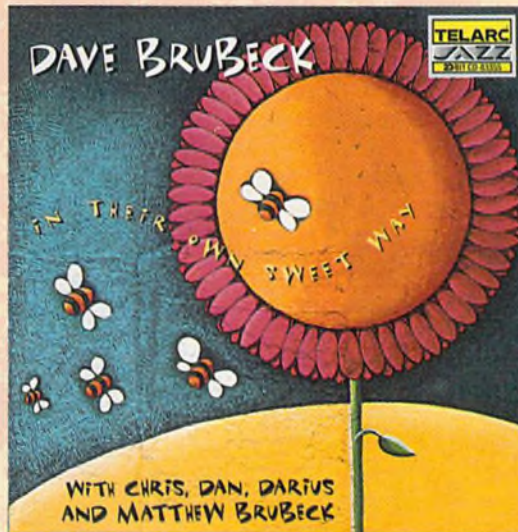
Personnel—Foster, tenor and soprano saxophones; Stephen Scott, piano; Christian McBride, bass; Lewis Nash, drums; Derrick Gardner, trumpet (5, 8).

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JAZZ

Drum Roles

by Jon Andrews

With more and more drummers leading ensembles, it's fascinating to compare the various roles they assume in their groups, acting as composers, dictators, team players, virtuosos or all of the above. The quality, quantity and variety of these drummer-led sessions command some extra attention.

Ralph Peterson Fo'tet: *The Fo'tet Plays Monk* (Evidence 22174; 57:45: ★★★★★)

Peterson's take on the Monk canon stands out for its instrumentation (no keyboard, drums upfront) and the leader's fresh insights into Monk's tunes. The Fo'tet takes Monk "on the road," giving "Jackie-ing" a New Orleans march rhythm, and adding Latin, Caribbean and African elements to other tracks. Vibraphonist Bryan Carrott adds rhythmic interest and contributes a fine solo to a dreamy version of "Light Blue." The Fo'tet negotiates the twists and tempo shifts of "Brilliant Corners" with apparent ease. Peterson's drums are the centerpiece—he's a commanding presence, but he never overpowers the material, and he stays true to Monk's rhythmic sensibility.

Ed Blackwell Trio: *Walls-Bridges* (Black Saint 120153; 78:53: ★★★★★)

Walls-Bridges documents Blackwell in concert several months before his death. Happily, the drummer sounds vigorous and energized. On "Half Nelson," Blackwell attacks the drum set, rolling and accenting with enthusiasm. Working with Dewey Redman on tenor sax and under-appreciated Cameron Brown on bass, Blackwell acts as a collaborator, instigator and equal partner. The session could easily have been credited to Redman, who contributes four tunes, surveying the sounds of Ornette Coleman, open-ended improvisation, the world-music fusion of Old and New Dreams and the blues. Redman solos effectively and at length, and Blackwell frequently displays the qualities that put him in Down Beat's Hall of Fame.

Bob Moses: *Devotion* (Soul Note 121173; 70:36: ★★★★★) Recorded in 1979, but allowed to gather dust, *Devotion* deserved a better fate. This is a solid, straight-ahead quintet session from top-notch players well acquainted with each other. Modest in scope compared to Moses' later, large-scale projects, *Devotion* is thoroughly enjoyable for spirited interplay and intriguing tunes like Moses' exotic "Snake



Victor Lewis: a dominating, constantly shifting attack

& Pygmy Pic." The interaction between Moses and bassist Steve Swallow is predictably strong, and pianist Steve Kuhn's playing on this date is unusually assertive and forceful. Moses composed six of the tunes, and he provides sympathetic, varied support throughout the session, which still sounds fresh.

UFB/Jerry Granelli: *Broken Circle* (Intuition 3501; 62:28: ★★★) A subtle, sensitive accompanist, Granelli allows guitarist Christian Kögel and Kai Bruckner the limelight. The first half of *Broken Circle* effectively reconsiders jazz standards (Coltrane, Mingus) and pop tunes (Prince, Peter Gabriel). Mingus' "Boogie Stop Shuffle" gets a Texas blues treatment, and Coltrane's "Lonnie's Lament" offers tasteful acoustic and electric guitars supported by Granelli's delicate work with brushes. The second half is given to "Song Of A Good Name," an impressionistic suite inspired by Native American themes. The suite sounds unfinished, as some interesting themes and evocative atmospheres aren't fully developed, giving the transitory feeling of a soundtrack.

Hamid Drake-Michael Zerang Duo: *Ash The Sun* (Okkadisk 12008; 71:17: ★★★★★) Two percussionists with a roomful of drums can generate enough variety and color to hold the listener's attention for 70+ minutes. Drake and Zerang have explored world-percussion musics together for several years, and their near-telepathic linkage creates tracks like "The Children Of Clark Street" and "River Dance," where they seem to think and act as one. Drake often leads with tabla or drum set, with Zerang responding on frame drums. "Dreaming Of Winter" suggests trance-like music with a

meditative soundscape including gongs, bells and chimes. This set should appeal to listeners who enjoy the percussion adventures of Glen Velez and Trilok Gurtu.

Lou Grassi Saxtet: *Quick Wits* (CIMP 123; 72:37: ★★★★★) Lou Grassi's (five-piece) saxtet sounds like a much larger ensemble, raucous and full of life. Composer/saxophonist Philip Johnston may be the most recognizable name on the date here (three players come from his Big Trouble band), and his roaring "Freezing Lightning" sets the tone for the album with the three-sax frontline suggesting a locomotive driven by Grassi's ferocious, loud drumming. Johnston's "Unpredictable You" illustrates well the conversational give-and-take among the saxophonists, with the feisty, hard-hitting Grassi joining in the argument. Grassi acts as circus ringleader, presiding over often turbulent group improvisations within structure.

Victor Lewis: *Eeeyyess!* (enja 9311; 57:03: ★★★★★) Lewis' quintet plays energetic, hard-swinging modern bop, with the composer calling the shots and propelling the action from the drum set. With trumpeter Terrell Stafford and pianist Stephen Scott on board, the resemblance to Lewis and Bobby Watson's *Horizon* seems intentional. Tunes like the ebullient title track and James Williams' infectious "Alter Ego" would have fit well on *Horizon*'s set list. "Stamina" features a dominating, constantly shifting attack from the leader. Seamus Blake shows lots of promise on saxophones, but overuses electronic echo treatments. Consistently tight, dynamic music, but when you get to Lewis' moping recitation "Here's To, You Babe," I just say, "Nnooo!" **DB**

BEYOND

Rich Rural Roots

by Frank-John Hadley

Country music? God-awful, sappy lyrics glued to arid, prepackaged melodies and rhythms, right? Yes and no. Twangy twaddle performed by smiley gals and handsome hunks wearing cowboy hats does rule Nashville, but there are an encouraging number of non-faking traditionalists and renegades with record deals who avoid platitudes and display conviction, vigor, imagination and individuality when delivering their songs of heartbreak and blue-collar travail. Billy Joe Shaver, Mary Chapin Carpenter and Junior Brown are the progeny of country's trailblazers, those great men and women responsible for investing their contributions to traditional Southern music with straight-from-the-heart plain speech. Keep an open mind, then, and lend an ear to the following recent reissues featuring many of those historic heroes.

Charlie Rich: *Feel Like Going Home: The Essential Charlie Rich* (Epic/Legacy 64762; 49:20/55:22: ★★★★★½) The memory of Rich, who passed away two years ago at 62, is well served by this 36-track career retrospective, which begins with the 1960 chart hit "Lonely Weekends" and surveys his recorded work for various labels right up to his studio curtain call in 1991, *Pictures And Paintings*.

The "Silver Fox" sang his intelligent lyrics with fluent confidence and authentic blues feeling, no matter how sugary and formulaic the pop backdrops got, and he played good blues and jazz piano. One could argue that Rich was less a country artist than a 20th-century Renaissance man conversant with gospel, rockabilly, soul, pure country and the country-pop sound ("countryopolitan") as well as blues and jazz. Co-produced by Peter Guralnick, *Feel Like Going Home* includes a 15-page booklet containing song information and remembrances by family and friends.

Flatt & Scruggs: *The Essential Flatt & Scruggs: 'Tis Sweet To Be Remembered...* (Epic/Legacy 64877; 43:02/42:05: ★★★★★) Bluegrass was the creation of Bill Monroe & his Blue Grass Boys, and the most famous edition of that fabled group had Earl Scruggs employing his radical three-finger banjo-picking technique and Lester Flatt pickin' guitar and singing. After leaving Monroe and recording briefly with Mercury, the two hitched on with Columbia in 1950 for an 18-year run, and this 34-song collection documents their casual virtuosity and unstudied ebullience there as leaders of the Foggy Mountain Boys. "The Ballad Of



feel like going home
the essential
charlie rich

From Charlie Rich's *Feel Like Going Home*: a fluent confidence and authentic blues feeling

Jed Clampett" (Theme from *The Beverly Hillbillies*) and "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" (Theme from *Bonnie And Clyde*) are the numbers that dazzled middle-class America in the '60s.

Various Artists: *Roots Of Country: The Story Of Country Music* (Friedman/Fairfax Publishers; 44:09/41:27/41:20/ 42:57: ★★★★★) Sixty tracks on four CDs covering the years 1923-'85, along with a 15-page "session notes" booklet and a decently researched and written 144-page hardbound book, compose this bulging boxed-set overview of country music. Many bona fide legends like Hank Williams, Bob Wills, Johnny Cash, Bill Monroe and Patsy Cline—not a few of whom drew inspiration from jazz and/or blues—serve up a single song apiece, and so do several slightly lesser notables.

Who's missing? Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bill Anderson, Tom T. Hall, Charlie Rich, Flatt & Scruggs, about all the stars spawned after 1969. Nearly every country form is touched on, from old-timey to folk, from cowboy to bluegrass, from country gospel to country dance, from hillbilly to honky tonk, from novelty songs to instrumentals, from cajun to western swing, from country rock to Nashville country-pop. This recommended but by no means definitive examination of the "white man's blues" is available at all bookstores, easily ordered if not found on the shelves.

The Carter Family: *Give Me The Roses While I Live* (Rounder 1069; 46:00: ★★★★★) Rounder Records has been releasing the many Victor sides by the vastly influential Carters (the "First Family of Country Music"), and this sixth volume in their ongoing series captures A.P. Carter (on fiddle), his wife, Sara (handling lead vocals, guitar and banjo), and Sara's cousin Maybelle (singing alto and playing auto-harp, "drop-thumb" guitar, etc.) on the 15 "Carterized" folk or church songs comprising their 1932 and '33 sessions. The old-timey cast to the Carter Family's music may be too quaint-sounding for some present-day listeners, but all the same there is considerable grace and warmth to the flow of their singing and playing. **DB**

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REISSUES

Those Commendable Commodores

by John McDonough

Sixty years ago Milt Gabler sank a milepost into the proverbial roadside of history when he founded the country's first label devoted wholly to jazz, Commodore Records.

In the '50s he and his associate Jack Crystal (comedian Billy Crystal's uncle) assembled the best of them onto LPs before Commodore came to an end with Crystal's death in 1963. Gabler held onto the masters, though, leasing them to a succession of labels for reissue. Mainstream (1964) was the first and the worst. Atlantic (1972) did much better but was shortlived. Columbia Special Products (1979) issued 27 great LPs loaded with rare alternates. And finally in 1988, Mosaic collected the whole shebang in three box sets totaling 70 LPs.

Now Commodore has a new parent. Gabler, today 88 and living in New Rochelle, N.Y., sold out to GRP (a unit of Uni Corporation, formerly MCA and before that Decca), which is relaunching Commodore yet again in an offering of eight CDs, including two doubles. (All but the Jelly Roll Morton CD are reviewed here.)

Commodore was born of a cult-like conviction that big bands were for the ickies (the unhop, in period lingo) and that the only true jazz was traditional and hot. It wasn't so wild a dream back when jazz was barely 21 and had yet to lose its innocence to modernism, none of which you'll find here.

Few catalogs have been reissued as often or reviewed more frequently in these pages as Commodore. Most of the originals were made before Down Beat adopted a rating system, but some of the comments made in the magazine might be of interest in what follows.

Various Artists: *The Commodore Story* (Commodore 2-400; 66:31/71:24; ★★★★★½) This two-CD anthology surely touches all the Commodore bases and presumably serves as an overture of what's to come. It's a highly varied mix.

The two biggest sellers of Commodore history are here: Billie Holiday's mysterious and lingering "Strange Fruit" and Eddie Heywood's original and loping piano slant on "Begin The Beguine." Chu Berry and Roy Eldridge challenge Coleman Hawkins for ownership of "Body And Soul" in a fresh and open performance.

Back in August 1940, Down Beat badly underestimated Hawk's ballad "Dedication," but said "Smack," from the same date, was "great in every respect, purely hot, and destined to live long as jazz classics." Both are here and still alive and kicking as jazz clas-



Billie Holiday: indispensable recordings of some very moving performances

sics, as is a harmonically sophisticated "Indiana" (1944) by tenor man Don Byas, one of Commodore's unintended concessions to the coming modernism. The single most sensational cut after 50-odd years probably remains a highly agitated "World Is Waiting For The Sunrise" with Mel Powell at strike-force power and a pseudonymous and fiercely vehement Benny Goodman.

Billie Holiday: *The Complete* (401; 76:41/68:44; ★★★★★) "Good and not so good," wrote Paul Eduard Miller in the July 1939 Down Beat about Billie Holiday's first Commodore session. The "not so good" he had in mind was the original "Strange Fruit," a "ballyhooed tune, which, via gory wordage and hardly any melody, expounds an anti-lynching campaign." The ballyhoo centered on the fact that (1) Congress had recently voted down a federal anti-lynching bill; and that (2) Holiday had been singing "Strange Fruit," but Columbia, knowing that lynch mobs buy records, too, wouldn't record it. So Gabler volunteered Commodore.

In a sense, "Strange Fruit" and its companion piece, "Fine And Mellow," foreshadow the Decca era for Billie: more formal arrangements, few solos and art-song tempos. All that's missing are the strings. By 1944, when 38 of her 45 Commodore performances were made, the songs were very good and the performances often very moving. But it doesn't take long to realize that she had slid into a formulaic typecasting of victimiana that was limiting her. Nevertheless, these records are so basic to Holiday's work, they remain indispensable.

Lester Young: *The "Kansas City" Sessions* (402; 61:15; ★★★★★½) Lester Young made two dates for Commodore, the first in 1938, the other in 1944. Both are here complete. On the first he played clarinet, something he did so seldom that the session has since acquired a mystique that considerably overshadows his confidence and range of expression on the horn. Only the delicate, china-doll inwardness of the music makes it seem as graceful and pure as it is. Even his

tenor sounds breathy and atomized. The 1944 sides are prime, full-bodied Lester at his most outgoing—less subtle than the '38 Pres but full of heroic swoops and dives that punctuate long, broken-wave lines like knots in a sleek wood grain. Trumpeter Bill Coleman is in the Clayton mold and Dickie Wells would now be considered avant garde in his iconoclasm.

Pee Wee Russell: *Jazz Original* (404; 71:29; ★★★★★) This cross section of Pee Wee Russell from 1938-'44 is a relaxed and mellow program with the clarinetist in trio and quartet formats on more than half the cuts. Russell, once a journeyman clarinetist, was emerging in 1938 in an odd style of hot growls, warbles, wails, shimmers and squawks. In the low register on the various "D.A. Blues" or the break on "Squeeze Me," he sounds like an ill animal. At medium-fast tempos he could swing with conventional precision but often played off-center, becoming a counter-irritant to the pulse ("Rosetta").

Wild Bill Davison: *The Commodore Master Takes* (405; 74:23; ★★★★★½) If Russell had his ambiguities, Wild Bill Davison assaulted you with a warrior's certainty of purpose. Everything of value about him here is in his snarling sound, which has the dead weight and raspy texture of pig iron. His range is narrow and his ideas lack cleverness and insight. But his trumpet expels a dragon's breath of sound in a slugging, jabbing attack that is anything but mellow and flat out unimaginable if you haven't heard it. In April 1944, Down Beat called "That's A Plenty" the finest Commodore platter yet ... a 12-inch side of dynamic power and energy! What a record!" **DB**

Initial Down Beat reissue ratings:

- *The Complete Billie Holiday*: ★★★★★ (1972 Atlantic reissue); 1979 Columbia reissue: ★★★★★ (12/79 issue)
- *The "Kansas City" Sessions*: ★★★★★ (1962 Commodore reissue) (5/10/62); 1964 Mainstream reissue: ★★★★★½ (8/13/64); 1979 Columbia reissue: ★★★★★ (12/79)

BLINDFOLD TEST

JUNE 1997

Ronnie Earl

by Frank-John Hadley

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 long last signed to a major label, Ronnie Earl is a world-class blues guitarist who has slowly but surely become fluent in the jazz language. As his playing has taken on a greater sophistication, its emotional properties have increased tenfold. Earl's philosophy of music is simple and blunt: "I play what I feel. I need the soul, and if I don't have that, I can't play."

After apprenticing with Rhode Island's Sugar Ray & The Blue Tones, Earl, 44, gained international notice in the '80s playing with Roomful of Blues. Leading the Broadcasters since 1988, he has recorded a number of feature albums for Black Top, Antone's Audioquest and Bullseye Blues. Earl & The Broadcasters' *Grateful Heart*, on the latter label, won the 44th Annual Down Beat Critics Poll for "Blues Album of the Year" last year, while this instrumental band topped the "Blues Group—TDWR" category. Earl & The Broadcasters' new Verve release is *The Colour Of Love*, with Hank Crawford and Gregg Allman among the special guests.

This is Earl's first Blindfold Test.

Ray Charles

"Sinner's Prayer" (from *Blues + Jazz*, Rhino, 1994/rec. 1953 for Atlantic) Charles, vocal, piano; Mickey Baker, guitar; Lloyd Trotman, bass; Connie Kay, drums; Candido, conga; Freddie Mitchell & Pinky Williams, tenor saxophone; Dave McRae, baritone saxophone.

[Earl recognizes Charles instantly] This is "Sinner's Prayer," written by Lowell Fulson, who's a wonderful writer. This is one of my all-time favorite songs! 5 stars. For me, Ray Charles and Robert Johnson and Otis Rush were the heaviest blues people. But Ray is my main man, and that's why you see "Fathead" Newman and Hank Crawford on my records. His singing and piano playing are just incredible, and so many people know him for other things—"Georgia On My Mind" and the Pepsi commercial—but he was and is an incredible blues player. Later, he used gospel and blues together, which is his trademark. But this is the Atlantic stuff, with "Fathead" and Hank.

Robert Jr. Lockwood

"I'm A Steady Rollin' Man" (from *Plays Robert & Robert*, Evidence, 1993/rec. 1981 in Paris) Lockwood, 12-string guitar, vocals.

[Earl recognizes Lockwood immediately] Robert Jr. Lockwood is doing Robert Johnson's "I'm A Steady Rollin' Man" on a 12-string in Paris. Robert Jr. Lockwood is my musical and spiritual grandfather. He is the greatest living blues guitarist and also an incredible innovator. He wrote the book on backing up harmonica, doing all the Chess records as Little Walter's band leader. He's a beautiful singer and I don't think he gets enough credit for that. He writes great jazz tunes, and, of course, he can play his stepfather [Robert Johnson] better than anyone in the world—and he has the right. When I see him play alone, I get the chills. This is as good as it gets, 100 stars.

Jimmy McGriff

"T'Ain't Nobody's Bizness If I Do" (from *The Dream Team*, Milestone, 1997) McGriff, organ; Mel Brown, guitar; David "Fathead" Newman, tenor saxophone; Red Holloway, alto saxophone; Bernard Purdie, drums.

Mel Brown. You would not have got a lot of people that would



have known that. It's McGriff, "Fathead" and maybe Purdie on "T'Ain't Nobody's Bizness If I Do." I love it. I love it! Mel Brown is a very dear friend of mine and one of my teachers. We've spent a lot of time in Texas together. He's great. The world should know more about him. He's been on the scene for years. I used to see him in Bobby Bland's band, and he'd let me sit in. Mel Brown can play everything: jazz and blues. He really knows how to bend those notes, with that feeling. McGriff is a master of blues organ, and "Fathead"'s the man on tenor, so this is just what it says: "The Dream Team." 5 stars.

Grant Green

"My Favorite Things" (from *Malador*, Blue Note, 1990/rec. 1965) Green, guitar; McCoy Tyner, piano; Bob Cranshaw, bass; Elvin Jones, drums.

Grant Green is one of my favorite jazz guitarists. He had a beautiful, beautiful tone. He's very interesting in that he didn't play a lot of chords. I was always moved by his tone and his melody, and I think he was an influence on George Benson. He didn't play a million notes, but he got the feeling, and he's a big influence on me. I don't go in for the master technicians. There it is: that beautiful tone and attack and articulation. Here's another 5 stars. Of course, Coltrane made "My Favorite Things" famous, and he's got Coltrane's sidemen on there: Elvin and McCoy. When you first started the track, I knew right away it was McCoy.

T-Bone Walker

"Mean Old World" (from *The Complete Recordings Of T-Bone Walker, 1940-1954*, Mosaic, 1990/rec. 1942 for Capitol) Walker, guitar, vocal; Freddie Slack, piano; Jud De Naut, bass; Dave Coleman, drums.

That was T-Bone Walker. I like to say he set the plate for everybody to eat on. He's the first electric blues guitar player. [Earl shakes his head.] It's just beautiful, and to think that he was playing on Black Diamond strings, thick strings you buy in drug stores, and able to bend like that. He invented a style. T-Bone's an innovator—that's the highest prize I could ever give. Later on came B.B. King with a little bit more bending, but T-Bone was the man. That's an old version of "Mean Old World," from either Black & White or Capitol. I have a [Gibson] ES5. I love that guitar, and I got it from one of my best friends, Duke Robillard, to get that T-Bone sound. 100 stars.

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