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**Ku-umba
Frank Lacy**

**The
Baddest
Sideman
In Jazz**

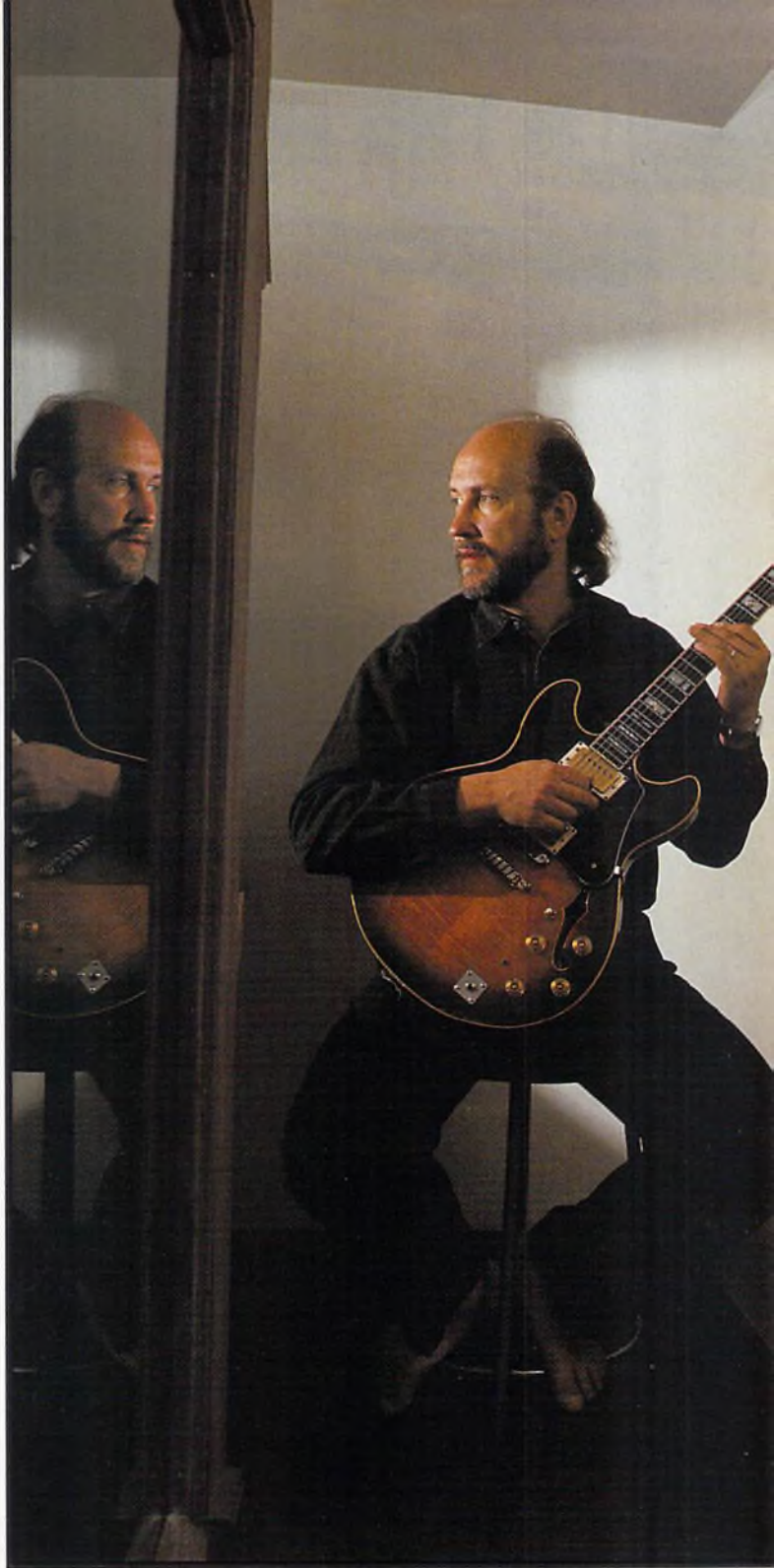


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He's a multi-instrumentalist, ferocious individualist and one of the most captivating players currently greasing a slide. He's the most in-demand 'bone man for many of the jazz heavies of New York. But he has no big-label recording contract. And although he's first-call, Ku-umba Frank Lacy says he'd leave all those groups behind to become a full-time bandleader.

By John Corbett

Cover photograph of Ku-umba Frank Lacy by John Abbott.



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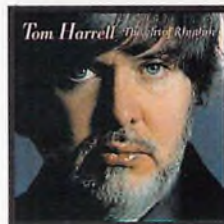
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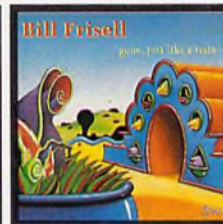
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Ku-umba Frank Lacy

The Baddest Sideman In Jazz

Afternoon rehearsal for the Roy Hargrove Big Band, preparing for a concert at Chicago's Symphony Center. The star trumpeter conducts and instructs, but from the way one of the trombonists comports himself, he might as well be fronting the band. Brushing aside dangling dreadlocks, the trombonist calls for a tune-up; later, during a take of Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo's "Manteca," he demands more attention to definition in

the brass section's syncopations, hollering out the rhythm the way he wants it, nodding approval when they get it; finally he gives the young drummer a spot tutorial, citing Art Blakey:

"Bu said, 'It's what you do *before* the hit, *before* the accent!'"

Story By John Corbett
Photos By John Abbott





“I’m the most widely idiomatically recorded musician of my generation. No one can dispute it!”

Some leaders might chafe at such an aggressive sideman, but Hargrove’s smart. He’s not just tolerating an upstart, he’s relying on a trusted aide. A guy who’s learned about composing from Henry Threadgill. About spirituality from Illinois Jacquet. About confidence from Blakey. As the band starts to break, Hargrove looks at the trombonist and asks if everything seems cool. That’s Ku-umba Frank Lacy he’s tapping, the most in-demand ‘bone man for many of the jazz heavies of New York, font of big and small band experience, ear for arrangements, composer, multi-instrumentalist, ferocious individualist and one of the most captivating players currently greasing a slide. Hargrove’s so hip to Lacy he’s drafted him for all three of his bands—his big band, his Afro-Cuban ensemble Crisol and his new sextet. During the concert, the trumpeter’s rationale is clear: Lacy’s soloing and composition “Requiem” literally pop out of the set, raising the stakes on what could have been an ordinary bill, revving up the sessioning men and blowing away the hum-drum blues.

“Roy is like my little brother, man,” Lacy says the next afternoon, reflecting on his fellow Texan. “Anything I could say is OK with Roy. I’m learning from him, he’s learning from me. And he’s gonna be on the scene for a while.” Relaxing for a day at his girlfriend’s place in Chicago’s Hyde Park, the wiry trombonist seems exhausted. He’s just in from a fest in Cuba, looking at a week in New York with Steve Turre, then back out on the road with Hargrove, big band dates with Oliver Lake, and so on. But it’s all professional work of the highest quality, and it’s earning him props from everywhere: He’s a featured member of the Mingus Big Band and the McCoy Tyner Big Band, and he’s won TDWR for trombone in Down Beat’s Critics Poll five years running.

“I don’t even feel like I’m in the ‘90s, I feel like I’m in the ‘60s,” the 39-year-old suggests, in an upbeat moment. (At other times, a bitter streak creeps into his voice, particularly as he tells the story of a record label returning a suggestion of having him record for them with the blanket statement that they don’t sign trombonists.) “I’ve been playing with everyone. I don’t feel like ‘the music ain’t what it used to be.’ The guys I’ve played with, I’m happy; the guys I’m playing with, I’m having fun. I’m gonna boast this, ‘cause I know it’s true: I’m the most widely idiomatically recorded musician of my generation. No one can dispute it!”

He may be at the top of his pecking order, but Lacy doesn’t have a big-label contract, and he doesn’t consistently lead his own bands, though he’s got a trio, a quartet, a quintet, plans for a sextet, tunes for an octet, a big band called Vibe Tribe, an African Band, an electric group and a pop r&b band called Awareness (“straight out of the ‘70s Con Funk Shun thing”). His three records out front are on the obscure Tutu label. Is he content as a sideman, adding his input from the peanut gallery? Hell no. He’s first-call, but Lacy says he’d leave all those groups behind to be a leader, full-time. “That’s what I want to do. Music from my perspective needs to be heard. Playing with all these other bands is getting to be like a day-gig. Music can get to be like a day-gig, too, I don’t care what people say. I would just like to work my bands.”

Lacy was born and raised in Settegast, in the musically rich Fifth Ward area of Houston, and he’s very proud of his Big Star heritage.

“I think in Texas we have the most diverse range of jazz: avant garde, blues, straightahead, great trombonists—Matthew Gee was from Houston—great trumpet players, we had our funk-jazz guys, vocalists. We have it all.” Lacy’s father, who appears with him on his 1991 record *Tonal Weights & Blue Fire*, is a respected guitarist and teacher who studied with W.E.B. Dubois; Frank Sr. played locally with Arnett Cobb, Russell Jacquet, Don Wilkerson and even got the first shot at being in James Brown’s early band, but turned it down to raise his 12 children, of whom Frank Jr. is number six. “I remember one time, when I just started playing jazz, I got this record,” recalls Lacy, “and I took it to my mom and said: ‘Mama, do I know this man? I think I used to see him around.’ She said: ‘Yeah, he used to practice with your Daddy.’ It was Wes Montgomery.”

Starting out on trumpet, Lacy had problems hitting high notes.


"My band director, seventh grade, said, 'Frank, I'm going to put you on the baritone horn, 'cause colored boys lips are a little too big to play the trumpet.' I went and told my father, and he said, 'Son, that isn't really true, but retain the memory of how you played the trumpet. You'll come back to it.'" He has, too; Lacy plays trumpet, flugel, french horn, tuba, euphonium and piano. And he sings. "I'm more or less a classical euphonium player, because that's what I excelled on. But in high school I became more interested in the scientific sphere. My parents looked at me pretty bewildered when I told them I wanted to major in physics."

Lacy got a physics degree from TSU before deciding to throw his horn in the ring at the end of the '70s and enroll at Berklee School of Music; he says his mom cried tears of joy when he told her he wanted to do music full-time. At Berklee, he concentrated on composing, as well as learning to spell at dazzling tempi. "A lot of the guys were really into playing the changes, bebop, which I was studying, too. But I went there for the writing courses. I think a lot of my cohorts didn't take that as seriously as I did. Berklee can teach a *cat* how to write." And he means the furry kind, not jazz cats. For a taste of his writing, check "O My Seh Yeh," which opens and closes Crisol's Grammy-nominated CD *Habana*. Lacy takes his composing seriously, like a responsibility. "Threadgill said to me: 'Look, Frank, I'm gonna be in your shit! You been around me, studied with me, so you've gotta write now. I'm like the youngest writer 'round here now, none of you guys can write! I'm gonna be in your shit, Frank, because you know the deal now.'" He shakes his head. "Think about it: Can you hum a melody on a tune by any of my cohorts?"

"Guys stopped studying, started reading their own press, and as my former band director would say, they think they're the baddest thing since Luden's cough drops," he laughs. "I'm a scientist, I like to study." Of late, he's been studying Yusef Lateef's *Respository Of Scales And Melodic Patterns*. "Guys always talk about Nicolas Slominsky. Slominsky's cool, but in the jazz idiomatic context, check out that Lateef book."

After 15 years on both straightahead and vanguard fronts, Lacy feels that taking reviews too seriously is a major problem. "I think a lot of jazz musicians read their press too much. They don't say it to the other jazz musicians, but you know they do! I was playing with Bobby Watson—on the CD, I was just playing trombone, and he added a guest artist on trumpet. The tune that the record company was pushing featured the trumpet. Since I knew the tune on trumpet, I played it at the club. We played, and the next day I opened the *Village Voice*, and Gary Giddins said: 'Come hear Bobby Watson. Led by the acerbic alto, his band has always been jumping. With the addition of trombonist Frank Lacy it'll be a special added treat, but as of late his trombone playing has been undermined by his somewhat self-indulgent trumpet solos.' So I go to the gig that night, and right before we start, Bobby says, 'Man, why don't you just not bring the trumpet this week?'"

Behind the mouthpiece, Lacy is possessed of a huge sound—the product of what he calls "fierce" marching band competitions in high school ("we had to fill the Astrodome and the Superdome with sound!")—swaggering phrasing and a remarkably open mind, so much more surprising given his tenure at Berklee, where so many of the straight-and-narrow lions were suckled. His classmates included Branford Marsalis, Jeff "Tain" Watts, Marvin "Smitty" Smith, Wallace Roney, Greg Osby, Donald Harrison and Kevin Eubanks. But an older saxophonist named Curtis Rivers introduced Lacy to the outcats. "He took me to the side and said: 'Man, I like your spirit, I like the way you play, I like your rhythm, so I'm gonna turn you on to some things.' We used to work this security guard job, and he turned me on to the Art Ensemble, Ari Brown, David Murray, Woody


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**“Everybody’s
trying to play the
trombone
like a saxophone
or a trumpet.
It’s a *slide*
instrument!”**

Shaw, Threadgill, Malachi Thompson. ‘Watch it, ‘cause once you cop these things it’s gonna give you some added stuff.’ And these other guys, they never even check them out.”

Catholicity and flexibility are what give Lacy his competitive edge. He’s been in the David Murray Big Band, and Lester Bowie’s Brass Fantasy, and Threadgill’s Sextett, but even in a straight setting he’s likely to play a very extended solo, blurring the lines and testing the threshold that separates “out” from “in.” He’s even applied some of his physics education, as he eagerly demonstrates, jumping up and playing air trombone, swaying vertically up and down like a dipping-bird, pointing the imaginary bell high into the air, then face forward, then down at the floor: “It’s about rarefaction of the sound.”

Unlike many of today’s hot shots, he’s learned from music after Ornette Coleman, and he’s seriously studied the concepts of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) and the Black Artists Group. “I would say 80 percent of the trombone players don’t even check out that other stream!” he says, eyes growing intense and wild as they often do when he’s soloing. “Oliver Lake, or Julius Hemphill, when he was alive, would never call Steve Turre or Robin Eubanks, because those guys never checked that stream out. I mean, if nothing else, there’s *work* in that stream! You can pay your bills!” But Lacy is acutely aware of changes that have affected the jazz avant garde in recent years, including a few of his old bosses. “The AACM cats who play in New York, man, they’ve gotten weak. Even Henry. It’s watered down. They used to be bad, but over the years, the record deals, trying to be cool with the record producer. ...” Then he blurts: “But [Hamiet] Bluiett’s still got the juice! He’s a scientist, too!”

“I think cats ain’t hungry no more,” Lacy opines. “I’m still struggling, man. I remember when Wallace Roney was my size. Cat does a few albums, now he’s blown up to almost 200 pounds.” Gotta starve to make art? “There’s a fine line between what we consider the starving artist and what we consider the fat-cat artist. I don’t mean the starving artist, ‘cause I’m *not* starving. But there’s a certain hunger as far as the struggle for recognition. There’s a struggle to get your own voice out there, that’s a hunger. That’s a starving musician, in another sense. Integrity. Stick to your guns. There’s a certain confidence in yourself as a being, which goes deeper than music, to how you look at things spiritually. You do it and you don’t care; the power is inside.”

A free concept coupled with unimpeachable chops—Lacy stands out from his mainstream contemporaries like a Picasso at K-Mart. “That’s what I’ve been bringing to Roy’s sextet,” he says, smiling through his greying beard. “Roy even freed up now.” But despite his hectic schedule, he feels alienated by the saxophonic status quo: “That straightahead stream don’t even hire trombone players. I got to work! Thank god Art Blakey hired trombone players.” Lacy was Blakey’s musical director from ‘88 to ‘90. “It’s usually a quartet or quintet with alto, tenor—man, I’m so fuckin’ tired of hearing piano, bass, drums, sax, trumpet. Please! Nobody even thought about a quartet with tenor saxophone and tenor trombone. They just don’t hear the trombone in their music.”

Though he can deliver the bebop goods, Lacy feels compelled to look back past bop into his main horn’s history. “Process this, man: J.J. [Johnson], Curtis [Fuller] and Slide [Hampton] have fucked everybody up. I mean, *they* were great, but everyone’s trying to sound like J.J., Curtis and Slide. As far as playing straightahead jazz, don’t give *me* the contract, give it to Slide or Curtis. I’d rather hear them than hear myself play straightahead. In my band, I do that, too, but I have another stream and I mix the two.”

“Everybody’s trying to play the trombone like a saxophone or a trumpet,” he complains. “It’s a *slide* instrument! Tricky Sam Nanton, Lawrence Brown, Jack Teagarden, the tailgate style. This really flipped me out: I was playing with Illinois Jacquet’s big band in ‘86, ‘87. This band was incredible. That new-jack swing? I got to hear it. And play it! The average age of the band was like 70, I was in my mid-20s. Eddie Barefield, who was something like 82, said: ‘Man, you’re the greatest trombone player I’ve heard in the past 50 years.’ And for years, I thought, what the hell? I know he doesn’t drink! But now I think I see it, it’s a certain style, McCoy told me about it, from long ago.”

Lacy says he thinks of the trombone as "the stringed instrument of the brass family." "It has positions, just like positions on a violin. That's what trombone players have forgotten. You can't really say first and second valve is D-concert. It's not built on a piston style. It's like: Somewhere in this position lies the correct tuning of the note."

Gutsy, vibrant, daring, imaginative, nasty—Lacy's playing never loses track of what makes jazz exciting. "You got a thing in New York, everybody wants to play clean. Carnegie Hall Band: Jon Faddis, plays too much like a laser for me. He's good, but he's from the West Coast, and that band has a West Coast style. OK, he made big money down there at Carnegie Hall, but ... [*Lacy's voice grows agitated*] ... dude can't beat the Mingus band! McCoy Tyner got two Grammys. They can say what they want—even Wynton Marsalis is big, oh yeah, he's gettin' all this big play at Lincoln Center, [*he taps dramatically on the table*] but let him come up against McCoy Tyner Big Band or Mingus: We will wipe him out! They're the museum bands of New York City. I call it the day-gig big band. Nine



to five rehearsal! Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday ... and the band still sounds like that!!!!"

Lacy's extremely outspoken, but maybe the anonymity of being a sideman has shielded him, allowed him to say—and play—whatever he felt. "We've done so long without anything, so now we're able to do anything with nothing," he surmises. "But it's a cloak, like on *Star Trek*, the Romulans have that cloaking device. I guess I'm coming out of a cloak now, so I better put my deflectors on to withstand those phasers. Comin' out of cloak. But I've got to say, I don't give a fuck. I'm gonna do what I feel I have to do, let the chips fall where they may." **DB**

EQUIPMENT

Ku-umba Frank Lacy plays a Bach Stradivarius 42-G trombone; he uses a 6 1/2 AL mouthpiece, with a personally drilled back bore to open out the sound. He's got a "mixture of a flugelhorn and cornet, Olds, late-'60s model," as well as a large-bore Bach trumpet, with a 3C mouthpiece. "I have a french horn in F, but I have a slide that I can attach a B-flat to it," he says. "I used to have an alto trombone. I've got to buy one again, because," he leans down to the tape recorder, "*they don't give me any endorsements!* And I'm looking to buy a euphonium, bass trombone, tuba and a better french horn, because *they don't give me any endorsements!*"

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

(Though Ku-umba Frank Lacy's discography as a leader pales in comparison to that of, say, Steve Lacy, his discography as a sideman is enormous. The following is a mere sampling of titles.)

TONAL WEIGHTS & BLUE FIRE—Tutu 888 112
SONGS FROM POKER—Tutu 888 150
SETTEGAST STRUT—Tutu 888 162

with Roy Hargrove

HABANA—Verve 537 563
APPROACHING STANDARDS—Novus 01241 63178

with the Mingus Big Band

QUE VIVA MINGUS!—Dreyfus 36593
LIVE IN TIME—Dreyfus 36583
NOSTALGIA IN TIMES SQUARE—Dreyfus 36559

with Lester Bowie

AVANT POP—ECM 1326
SERIOUS FUN—DIW 834/8035
MY WAY—DIW 835

with David Murray

DAVID MURRAY BIG BAND—DIW 851
SOUTH OF THE BORDER—DIW 897

with McCoy Tyner

THE TURNING POINT—Verve 513 573
JOURNEY—Verve 519 941

with various others

CHIPPIN' IN—Timeless 340 (Art Blakey)
FLEUR CARNIVORE—ECM/WATT 23121 (Carla Bley)
SHUTTLE—Sound Hills 8052 (Ronnie Burrage)
SIDE BY SIDE—enja 5065 (Marty Ehrlich)
ART—Blue Note 827645 (Ralph Peterson)
EASILY SLIP INTO ANOTHER WORLD—Novus 83025 (Henry Threadgill Sextet)
TAILOR MADE—Columbia 53416 (Bobby Watson)
LOW PROFILE—enja 8050 (Michael Formanek)

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Sco's
go go

John Scofield
Gets Down
With Medeski
Martin & Wood



Scene One: Almost 20 years ago. A wonderful dive in Cambridge, Mass., called the Willow. The band is playing a tune called "Fat Dancer." John Scofield is the leader. He's also the composer and guitarist. In that last role, he rides a lightly lofting arc of rhythm concocted by bassist Steve Swallow and drummer Adam Nussbaum. The playing evokes the title's image: a bottom-heavy bounce that allows the guitar to veer between wobbling and grace. Scofield's been associated with fusion groups, but this unit is designed to swing. Yet in the middle of the tune, Nussbaum and Swallow flex their muscles, and all of a sudden it's syncopation time. A whole new persona leaps out, Scofield seizing the moment with some fraggged riffs that augment the offerings of his mates. My listening partner turns to me and says, "Arlrlight, they're getting funky on us."



W

ith intermittent regularity, John Scofield has been getting funky on us since day one. His late '70s stint with Billy Cobham stressed the power of the groove. His Gramavision work of the mid-'80s was geared to put a personal spin on in-the-pocket lessons learned at the hand of Miles Davis. The recent *Hand Jive* and *Groove Elation* discs were organ outings that emphasized a sweet-and-sticky throbbing. So it's little surprise that after a record of hushed orchestrations—the much-celebrated *Quiet*—the guitarist's current project moves on over and shakes a tail feather. What's impressive is that those feathers create such a striking plume.

On the cleverly titled *A Go Go* (see "CD Reviews," p. 48), Scofield stands in a dimly lit alley, mulling over contrasts. The somewhat noirish music the disc delivers is both gnarly and refined, commercial yet artistic, contrived but natural. As mentioned, Sco's no stranger to snaky grooves. But this chank-a-chank little studio session with the youthful trio Medeski Martin & Wood offers tunes that will likely be deemed the funkier stuff he's ever recorded. Together, the foursome mess with the music's elements, mixing foreground and background, creating a compact sound built on sinuous threads of action. The process is without fissures, making the guitarist seem an integral part of the band rather than the boss du jour. In a way, *A Go Go*'s 10 tunes could be considered postmodern jukebox songs—an unholy pairing of the MGs and the Meters. Drop in your quarter, and stand back for a big shot of swirling syncopation from the future. Grazing in the grass is a gas, baby, can you dig it?

By choosing to record with the trio of bassist Chris Wood (top), keyboardist John Medeski and drummer Billy Martin, guitarist John Scofield has hooked his wagon to one of the hottest bands in the jazz marketplace.



By Jim Macnie

We asked John Scofield for a vibe on the funkier drummers he's worked with. He tried to explain what each brought to the music:

■ Johnny Vidacovich: "Johnny V.?! More than you could imagine, man. I first heard in New Orleans in '78 or '79, and that's where I first understood the funky New Orleans thing. We'd play 'Freedom Jazz Dance' with him putting the second line on it, and it rocked. I didn't know how applicable it was. All of a sudden all these records from different people, from Ahmad Jamal to dixieland to the Meters, came together in my mind. It was very important for me to play with him."



Billy Martin

■ Dennis Chambers: "He can kill. I'd been with Miles and he'd helped me go in this funk direction, so I wanted a drummer who could play the stuff right. Dennis was right out of P-Funk at that point. He was funk with a jazz sensibility: Touch, groove and a desire to make something happen all the time. He's like three guys in one. That go-go beat on 'Blue Matter' is still one of my faves."

■ Idris Muhammad: "I didn't even know he was from New Orleans at first. I just recognized a certain swing in his playing. I think he's taken his roots and applied them to modern jazz. He stopped

being a studio drummer and let loose on improvising. He's different from Ed Blackwell, different from anybody—an unsung hero."

■ Billy Stewart: "People forget he played with Maceo [Parker], when Maceo came out on his own. Hey, never mind that, Bill played an HBO special with James Brown! He's got some shit for you in the funk world, but he's Bill Stewart, a swinging guy all the way. I wouldn't want to play with any funk drummer who couldn't swing."

■ Billy Martin: "When I got together with him, every note was easy. We agreed on every note. What to do seemed obvious between us; we almost didn't have to talk. The amount of listening he does is incredible. And he responds quick. This music is nowhere if you're on automatic pilot." —J.M.

Give The Drummers Some

Note this summer.

Somewhere in the middle of *A Go Go's* "Southern Pacific," Scofield plinks out a staccato riff and Billy Martin's snare drum cracks with a similar repetition. The sounds are near doppelgangers of each other. A natural synergy takes place between the foursome. In many places on the record, solos about to lift off instead slither behind a rock somewhere; they wait, and not long, for another line to crawl out and bask in the sun. On *A Go Go*, all the traffic orbits around itself.

Producer Lee Townsend believes this kind of interplay is what makes the music implode rather than explode. "I like clarity in terms of intention, but not tightness in the sense of reining people in," he says. "We got the best of both worlds here, and I think the architecture of the tunes was one of the reasons that came about."

Scofield wrote the tunes with Medeski Martin & Wood in mind. He credits their deep rapport for the eloquence at hand. "These three guys are great at taking something and putting a vibe on it," he explains. "As a unit, they gave these songs a personal slant. Even though there's freedom in it, they provide a definite character. There's something they're going for, and it's not just jamming. I can't say much more than that because it's music, and who knows, right? Adjectives don't really make it."

Well, some do. And sustaining an analytical stance helps, too. Pushed a bit, Sco agrees there's such a thing as giving musicians too much information. The idea is this: If you're standing with a team you trust, don't overload them with 50 ideas.

"Yeah, that's right," he jumps in. "Give 'em two and let 'em come back with the other 48. Interpretation was everything this time around, and keeping it simple at the start was key. You've got to write in a way that allows things to happen. If the project is about improvising, you've got to set it up—that's what the greatest jazz has been about."

Johnny Vidacovich, the New Orleans drummer who sometimes plays with the guitarist, appreciates Sco's prowess when it comes to funkifying it up. "As a teenager, Scofield enjoyed soul music," says Vidacovich. "I think for him, playing this stuff right is a matter of digging back. When you start out, you're basically shaking your ass. Then you learn things and the knowledge goes right up your spine to your brain. It's a matter of getting back to the physical place, that dancing place. He's really remembered the fun of music."

a *Go Go* isn't an isolated incident. Funk is creeping back on the jazz agenda these days. There's Medeski Martin & Wood. And T.J. Kirk has its own whip-crack take on pop tunes.

"This has been a part of my sound since the beginning," Scofield assures on a wintry New York morning. "When I was a kid, I hated bubble gum music and loved James Brown. Being a guitar player and knowing the blues and B.B. King and all that stuff ... that's simply how it was when I was learning. When Miles played with a backbeat, people listened more. I love rock & roll, and understand the rhythmic allure of that music. Drummers have always been crucial to my music."

Scene Two: 1985 or '86. Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel, Providence, R.I. The venue is a rock & roll club, though everyone from Big Joe Turner to Emmylou Harris has come through. Not many jazzers, however. Sun Ra a few times, Jaco one obliterated evening, and John Scofield. Sco leads a band that bashes out r&b phrases over a whumping backbeat. Drummer Dennis Chambers, formally of George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic axis, handles things in that department. During one particularly frenzied passage, Chambers ramrods his kick drum and hi-hat, supercharging the action.

Scofield turns to his comrade with a huge smile. It's as if the guitarist has just been told he holds this week's winning Powerball ticket.

*b*y choosing to record with organist John Medeski, drummer Billy Martin and bassist Chris Wood, Scofield has hooked his wagon to one of the hottest bands in the jazz marketplace. The ensemble has transcended the traditionally limited jazz audience by touring incessantly (see "Band Of Gypsies" Feb. '97). Like an indie rock band, they have combed the world, gigging in both prestige venues and nowhere shitholes. The sizable following they've cultivated—which has a neo-hippie aura—is generally wowed by two of the music's cornerstones: elaborate grooves and expressionistic freak-outs. Medeski Martin & Wood deals in omnisciences, their approach subverting the standard hierarchy as far as a lead instrument goes. Claiming Air and Ahmad Jamal's 1960s trio as influences, they tacitly demand democracy or death. Their major-label debut is due from Blue

Wayne Horvitz's Zony Mash tries to explode the Meters' esthetic. New Orleans' Astral Project ensemble blends swing and syncopation. And the opening track to Josh Redman's *Freedom In The Groove* couldn't slither much more slickly. Factor in a couple of oddball crossover dudes like Boney James and Bela Fleck and you've got a mini trend. As far as Sco's concerned, the confluence of improv and syncopation makes sense.

"I wanted to be a jazz guy and learn about swing. I sat around listening to Trane and Parker and knew they swung; put a backbeat on their stuff and it sounded fucked up, right? It's just that I had the fortune of coming up during the fusion era—that became a big part of my vocabulary. Figuring out a way to take it somewhere else has always been on my mind."

When brainstorming this project, Scofield knew he wanted to base it on overt funk beats. He'd totally dug Medeski Martin & Wood's *Shack-man*, but had never seen them live. He spoke with Townsend, who concurred a collaboration with the trio could be significant. He was well aware of the guitarist's interest in drummers.

"Years ago, when I first caught them, Billy [Martin]'s drumming was what affected me most," recalls Townsend. "I've never heard a drummer who could be so tight and loose at the same time."

Dedication was key to generating a balance. "We're sidemen on the project, but we had things to do with bringing something out of the music," reflects Martin. "It's not like we're all reading the paper between takes. We put our heart into it. If you listen close, you'll hear everyone holding each other up."

"Sco has an affinity for this stuff. The rhythmic DNA for the date was decoded from the first few notes he played. The rapport is there because he accepted us for who we are—that's the reason the music flows."

It's uncertain yet whether the four-some will play live dates (Scofield will perform the *A Go Go* material with Bill Stewart, Larry Goldings and James Genus). Medeski Martin & Wood will be wrapped up with their own disc. But two worlds collided on *A Go Go*, and both believe pithiness is next to godliness. That tack kept things limber and ignited.

"The most happening jazz-rock is related to bop," concludes Scofield. "It's got that intricacy and integrity. When it's not happening, it's not there. People responded differently to Miles' stuff than they did to Spyro Gyra, although the same fans might like both. I'm just saying that jazz-rock can be really great."

Final Scene: the Jazz Standard, one of Manhattan's newest clubs, the first week of '98. Sco's in the house checking Steve

Wilson's quartet, which features Leon Parker on drums. The band spends most of the set stretching themes until they snap. Abstraction feeds open-ended tempos. Sco sits passively in his seat until Parker gets some solo time, and turns his beats toward African rhythmic cycles and sneaky Caribbean cadences. The guitarist's shoulders begin to twitch, and the rear section of those Dockers starts to sway as well. The bug has got him again. **DB**

EQUIPMENT

John Scofield plays an Ibanez AS-200 electric guitar with D'Addario strings. His effects include a Roland CE-3 analog chorus pedal, a Pro-Co Rat distortion pedal, an Ibanez analog chorus pedal and an Ibanez three-band EQ.

John Medeski plays a Hammond B-3 organ with Leslie speaker, a 140 Wuritzer electric piano and a Yamaha D6 clavinet.

Billy Martin plays a Rodgers Holiday drum kit, Zildjian cymbals, Regal Tip BG sticks and Pete Engelhart Metal Percussion.

Chris Wood plays a Piretzschner acoustic bass and a Musicman electric bass. He uses Goetz acoustic bass strings and D'Addario electric bass strings. He also uses a Walter Woods amp.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

A GO GO—Verve 539 979
QUIET—Verve 533 185
HAND JIVE—Blue Note 27327
GROOVE ELATION—Blue Note 32801
OUT LIKE A LIGHT—enja 4038
BLUE MATTER—Gramavision 79403
WHO'S WHO—RCA 3071



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By Pat Cole

THE FAST TIMES OF

You'd think that Maynard Ferguson—who has been there, done that, played this, played that, roused critics, dazzled fans, performed on movie soundtracks, earned millions, befriended stars, chased dames, sojourned to Thailand, met kings and played for queens—wouldn't have any regrets. Yet Ferguson cringes when he searches his mind and finds that one time he turned down a golden opportunity. No, make that a platinum opportunity:

"I remember the night when I was playing at Birdland, and Duke Ellington walked in wearing that cap of his and with all his elegance," recalls Ferguson. "The Duke then came backstage, and I was there with my band. Then Duke said, 'MAAAY-

narrrrd,'" Ferguson drawls in a flawless mimic of the legendary bandleader, "'when are you going to give up all this foolishness and come with me?' Wow, it was a compliment, you know? Man, nobody else in the world would know how to say it that way. That's the one thing I miss. I would have liked to have played with Ellington."

So would anyone—even Ferguson, 69, whose career has been a treasure chest of jazz experiences. He can still claim as his collaborators and road mates a virtual Who's Who of jazz figures of the 20th century: John Coltrane. Oscar Peterson. Gil Evans. Miles Davis—and all the other usual suspects. After 60 years of playing trumpet, he has little to prove to anyone. Even before his prime, Mister Screech hit notes that didn't exist until he found them. His name is cemented in the history of jazz. Ferguson has had the whole ball of wax and then some.

So when's the retirement party? Scratch that. Ferguson is already thinking about where to tour in the next millenium.

Photo By Mike Gudbaur

MAYNARD FERGUSON



BY ANDREW LEVITZ

"It was an outrageous time. Charlie Barnet used to drive around in his convertible and shoot 15 sign posts in a row. This was our leader, this was our disciplinarian!"

This year, Ferguson is on the run harder than most young lions wish they could. His 10-man ensemble, the Big Bop Nouveau Band, will hit about 50 cities by October. The band (which boasts a distinguished alumni, including the likes of Chick Corea and Peter Erskine) features a host of young musicians who are nearly a third his age. For Ferguson, it's a mission, not an obligation. "I think God meant for me to do this," he says.

Ferguson reminisced about his brilliant career during a stop earlier this year at what is known as musical instruments heaven, the National Association of Music Merchants convention in Los Angeles. Ferguson, a gracious man who hasn't lost his purebred Canadian congeniality, talks like the guy next door with a memory as long as the equator. After all these years, Ferguson looks good, feels good and smells good. On this rainy afternoon, he has doused himself with a sweet cologne. He has had a brisk walk, and his clothes are colorful and hip. He now calls Ojai, Calif., an oasis of orchards and mountains about 90 miles north of Los Angeles, his home after claiming hitching posts in New York, England and India during the past 40 years. Sure, he's grown a paunch, and that dark hair has turned into a mat of platinum pasta. But the belly is that source of fire behind the mouthpiece. His hair seems to say that with age comes wisdom and mastery of what he calls "God's instrument."

"I actually like the road," he starts out. Even though he's anticipating a six o'clock wake-up call the following morning, Ferguson looks relaxed as he sits on a leather sofa, smiling as his dimples expand and his cheeks bulge. "People ask me if it is tough being on the road. I remember watching Dizzy Gillespie being asked about how you deal with marriage when you're on the road. He said that most marriages that end up in divorce have only one honeymoon. Then he said, 'I've had about 136 honeymoons—when I come back off the road!' I thought that was a good answer. And the road isn't as tough as it used to be, you know?"

Playing with Ferguson is meant to be fun. He relies on the

guys in the Nouveau band to keep him young. And in recent years, he has trekked to some 200 universities around the world, giving the youngsters pointers on the art of the horn. Ferguson, whose dad was an educator, remembers that early in his career, artistry came first and teaching came second. "I said, 'None of that teacher thing for me,'" Ferguson says with a laugh. "I'm an artist, a performer, you know. And somewhere up there, he's smiling now because I can teach."

Ferguson credits his parents for nurturing his musical development when he was a youngster growing up in Montreal. When he thinks back on what were the best times in his career, those formative years are the ones that really bring back the sweet memories. Ferguson was in a 14-piece local band that opened for big acts ranging from Count Basie to Woody Herman. "I got a lot of attention," he recalls.

That was only the beginning of his road to fame and good times. As a youngster, he was hired by Charlie Barnet to play in his band. The young Ferguson learned how to grow up and have fun the way that musicians do. "I had never drank," says Ferguson. "And Tiny Kahn, who weighed about 280 pounds, and Ray Wexler, who was the lead trumpeter and a genius of a trumpet player, discovered that I had never said a four-letter word. So they both sat on me and wouldn't get up—this was on the bus!—until I said a word, well you can't use it in this article! It was an outrageous

time. Barnet used to drive around in his convertible and shoot 15 sign posts in a row. This was our leader, this was our disciplinarian!"

Ferguson switched leaders when he joined Stan Kenton's band in 1950. "I learned from him, and he was a great band-leader," Ferguson recalls. "One of the things I say all the time that's missing from jazz education is that it needs an astronaut training room, you know what I mean? Some kids don't have that. Just by observing guys like Jimmy Dorsey and Charlie Barnet, I had a lot of good role models."

Working with the Kenton band meant a move from the cold of Canada to the cool of Los Angeles. Sunshine. The movie business. Convertibles. During that time, Ferguson was on contract with Paramount Pictures, where he played on dozens of film scores. He partied with the beautiful people. Peter Lawford. Zsa Zsa Gabor. He drove a Jaguar convertible. Yet even after having just about everything a musician could have wanted, the one thing he didn't have was his own band. So he moved to New York and started his own group, the Birdland Dreamband.

When Ferguson looks back, he realizes that being a band-leader was his destiny. But with the musician's life came the normal temptations. Women, booze and drugs were the norm. "I think I was luckier than most guys," Ferguson says. "I never got into anything too bad all the time I played." Some of his peers and fans raised eyebrows when they learned that Ferguson had become friends with the late Timothy Leary. The two even played ice hockey together when they lived in Millbrook, N.Y. But Leary, Ferguson says, was just a fan of his music.

"I never became heavily involved in the experiments, that was too far off," Ferguson says. "He did have a marvelous brain, even though some people will think of him negatively. Timothy would just like to play 'My Funny Valentine' the way a jazz pianist plays solo piano. He practiced that thing all the time. Everybody who was around him was saying they were getting tired of that song!"

These days, Ferguson's life is fast-paced, but it also has a spiritual anchor. Teaching and performing internationally is an integral part of his career. For years, he has spent six weeks a year teaching music to students at the Sri Satha Sai Baba Institute of Higher Learning in India. After the turbulent 1960s, during which Ferguson lived in a music culture that accepted hard drinking and drug use, he and his wife decided to go to India with his family after getting turned on to Ravi Shankar's music. "The neat thing about Sai Baba is that he's accepting of all religions," Ferguson explains. "He doesn't exclude any other faiths, and that's nice. And when you go to him, he doesn't say, 'Turn over your bank account, and I'll show you God,' like the others. There is none of that!"

Ferguson's playing took him to Thailand last year after a Thai musician told the king about the trumpeter's legendary chops. So King Bhumibol of Thailand flew Ferguson and his band to the country to perform. "He's my favorite royalty," he says, "because he likes to play. You can jam with him until two o'clock in the morning. As it turned out, he had a bunch of my albums. Now, I've become very respected at the Thai restaurant in Ojai where I live."

Ferguson is beyond the respect issue. After six decades of playing, he knows what he can do, and there is little he hasn't done. He is content with his Grammy nomination 20 years ago for his CD *Conquistador*, which contained his hit big band version of the theme song to the motion picture *Rocky*. And his albums continue to sell around the world. "The most important thing is to enjoy myself, to please myself with my music," Ferguson says.

And if he had to do the last 70 years over again, would he do anything differently? "Nothing, except that one thing," he says with a chuckle. "I would have taken that offer from Duke Ellington." **DB**

EQUIPMENT

Maynard Ferguson plays the Holton ST307 and ST308 Signature trumpets. The 307 has a .458-inch bore, and the 308 has a .459-inch bore. He uses custom-made Monette mouthpieces. He also plays Courtois 154 flugelhorn and TR395 Holton slide-and-valve trombone, as well as a Yanagisawa soprano saxophone.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

THESE CATS CAN SWING!—Concord Jazz 4669
STORM—Avenue Jazz 71705
LIVE FROM LONDON—Avenue Jazz 71631
I LIKE JAZZ: THE ESSENCE OF
MAYNARD FERGUSON—Columbia/Legacy 52928
THE BIRDLAND DREAMBAND—RCA/Bluebird 6455
CARNIVAL—Columbia 35480
CHAMELEON—Columbia 46112
CONQUISTADOR—Columbia 34457
M.F. HORN 1&2—Columbia 33660
MAYNARD FERGUSON—Columbia 36978
BODY AND TIDAL—Jazz Alliance 10027
FOOTPATH CAFE—Jazz Alliance 10028
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CD REVIEWS

APRIL 1998

KEY
 Excellent ★★★★★
 Very Good ★★★★
 Good ★★★
 Fair ★★
 Poor ★



Harry Edison

Live At The Iridium
 Telarc 83425

★★★

Harry Edison headlines this edition of the Golden Horns, that ensemble of swing and early bop survivors that has become to those periods what Preservation Hall is (or was) to old New Orleans. While the music might have been truer to its hot roots, there are few clinkers or quivering intonations here. Note for note, the music is mostly on the mark.

It's as if when Edison was young and wild he was smart enough to look ahead and devise a style whose economies of requirement would never outlive his ability to perform them. Now in his 82nd year, his foresight, if that's what it was, serves him well.

Clark Terry, his frontline companion, is anything but economical, but, at 76, in no less in command. One secret, it becomes apparent here, is that both musicians have learned to let the microphone do the work once done by the lungs. In concentrating their resources on the finer detail work of phrasing and articulation, they give us smaller, more narrowly focused essences of their special voices.

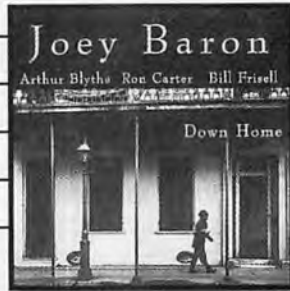
Two of the pieces are standing Edison showcases, each played with a Harmon mute that turns them into figurines of musical Limoges. "Helena's Theme" is a short little stop-time figure that Edison plays in an almost coy whisper. "I Wish I Knew" is another demure piece performed without significant variation from another recent version on Chiaroscuro Records. Terry takes on "Midgets" and "Sweets Bossa" with the Harmon, which tends to blur unnecessarily the distinction with Edison. Junior Mance provides expert support and good solo work, but his nine-minute "Emily" is too long, too languishing and too lacking in epiphanies to sustain much attention.

After all the features and set pieces, though, the two horns lock to real effect on only two tracks, blending behind a strong Frank Wess on "Mean Greens" and ripping into a hot "Doggin' Around" with both shoulders. If the rest of the playing showed half the ensemble life generated here, we'd have a CD to rave about. Instead, we tip our hat to a job nicely done.

—John McDonough

Live At The Iridium—*Helena's Theme; Mean Greens; Sweets Bossa; Doggin' Around; Emily; Midgets; I Wish I Knew; Centerpiece.* (61:46)

Personnel—Edison, Terry, trumpet, flugelhorn; Frank Wess, tenor saxophone, flute; Junior Mance, piano; Marcus McLaurine, bass; Dave Gibson, drums.



Joey Baron

Down Home
 Intuition 3502

★★★½

Funk ain't easy—I'll say that at the top. Riff tunes are a merciless conundrum, offering loads of blank space for improvisers to fill in, but giving them little melodic information to go on. And while those conditions would be a tacit green light to a wide-open-spaces crew, virtuoso drummer Joey Baron has long been into eloquence and earthiness. Some might say bawdiness. His last three discs as a leader were randy affairs, titled to conjure images of oral stimulation of the "ooh, baby, baby" kind. The high-strutting music they contained let you know that ecstasy comes in many torrid guises.

That earthiness is laced with grace on this disc of smart-guy r&b. *Down Home* is ass-shaking music that places poise a notch or three above raunch. With the drummer's Barondown

trio the recipe was reversed: Ellery Eskelin's tenor sax and Steve Swell's trombone were enlisted to assure a wealth of physicality. This new, hero-laden quartet—Bill Frisell, Arthur Blythe and Ron Carter are all on board—is geared to carouse and cavort. But it never loses its cool. Virginia native Baron has told interviewers that music should be fun, claiming his sound is "loose and slow, the way Southerners are slow." New Orleans regionalism (check that superb cover art) and jukebox soul are what *Down Home* intends to convey. It wants to be felt, not fretted over.

Baron's chosen the right crew for rendering such a plan. Blythe's recent MIA status only makes his tart tone and bluesy phrasing sound that much juicier when he reappears; and in a few ways, *Down Home* is his showcase. His passionate tone is still his signature. On "Little Boy" he wails thoughtfully, yet it's emotion that clings to your memory. His sound often has a bit of cheek to it, but here, and on "Aren't We All?" a tart, Tab Smith voluptuousness dominates. Speaking of tone, Frisell lays off the gizmos for this return to roots—it's refreshing. Though certainly no bluesman, he is one of the most imaginative improvisers of the last two decades; between his quizzical comping on "The Crock Pot" and his jittery solo on "What," he roughs up the style's clichés without displaying an iota of animosity.

That slight pulling of punches begets one bugaboo: The date could stand a bit more shit on its shoes. In part, blues has always been about tension, and though r&b's suave demeanor has often assuaged some of its ire, it has also found a way to use anxiety's underpinnings. It took a while before I bought into this music's interpretation of friction, initially deeming the session a beautiful bore. Twenty or so spins have proven that's not the case. Commitment and connection are part of each piece, and sparks do fly. But a tantrum or two might have bolstered the action.

That said, the "simplicity" offered up by the leader and the bassist is a paradox of sorts.

THE HOT BOX

CDs	CRITICS	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
HARRY "SWEETS" EDISON <i>Live At The Iridium</i>		★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
JOEY BARON <i>Down Home</i>		★★★½	★★	★★★½	★★★
MYRA MELFORD & HAN BENNINK <i>Eleven Ghosts</i>		½	★★★★	★★★	★★★★
KONITZ, MEHLDAU, HADEN <i>Alone Together</i>		★★★★½	★★★½	★★★★	★★★½

Complexity is everywhere on the date. Precision, too. Vamp tunes put a load of responsibility on ye olde rhythm section, and these two apostles of intricacy never blink when it comes to the job at hand. All credit to the guy with the sticks in his hands. An agent provocateur, Baron's nudged his crew toward reveling in simple pleasures.

—Jim Macnie

Down Home—*Mighty Fine; Little Boy; Wide Load; The Crock Pot; What; Listen To The Woman; Aren't We All?; Supposing.* (45:27)

Personnel—Baron, drums; Arthur Blythe, alto saxophone; Ron Carter, bass; Bill Frisell, guitar.



Myra Melford & Han Bennink

Eleven Ghosts
hatOLOGY 507

★★★★

Playing duets with Han Bennink is a dangerous game. He loves to engage in musical cutthroat, is ruthless with slow-moving improvisers, and has the chops to back up any martial-arts move thrown at him. You're lucky to make it out alive, and Myra Melford does herself proud on these "ghosts," which have languished in the can since they were recorded early in '94.

Some smarty-pantses are inevitably going to compare this pairing to the one with Bennink and Misha Mengelberg, but in a way that's neither fair nor relevant. The Dutch percussion/piano duo has been matching wits and playing their extended match of musical table-tennis since the early '60s, while Melford and Bennink have only played together a few times. And where Mengelberg's deft/daft use of nonsense and dada dead-ends fits Bennink's virtuoso non-sequiturs like a glove, Melford clearly comes at this encounter from a different perspective, not trying to move as fast as the quicksilver drummer, ignore him altogether or trip him up with fancy moves, but instead working at her own pace, setting her own agenda and sometimes coming up with very interesting results.

The running theme on *Eleven Ghosts* is the blues—perhaps a specter of Melford's studies with Chicago boogie-woogie specialist Erwin Helfer. The disc ends with a fragmented, gliss-happy take of Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag," a tune that first peeks its head out on the previous track, before that cut swallows it in the most aggressive free-energy piano playing of the date. Melford begins Leroy Carr's classic "How Long, How Long Blues" like a dirge, but Bennink bombs the funeral with a startling

smash, then kicks into a slow drag, ringing a bell in time with one of Melford's tremolos. "Some Relief" is yet another blues shorty, with Bennink providing perfect snare pops and rolls for the pianist's three trips through the changes. And this leads directly into a thunderous setup from Bennink at the start of "And Now Some Blues," which Melford counters with yet another easy blues, then some Cecil Taylorish bits, more blues and even some Cecil Taylorish blues bits.

Short track times allow for many different directions. "The First Mess" situates a repetitive piano figure slowly descending against Bennink's hyperactive rustle. On "Which Way Is That?" Melford starts by percussing on the struts and high-strings inside the piano, then

moves to the keys and later is found offering hard-bop chords in an amusing high-speed chase sequence. For his part, Bennink is explosive, entertaining and very well recorded. Not one to disavow absurdities like playing improvised music sans audience, in the middle of his unaccompanied track "Another Mess," the drummer asks the ultimate studio question: "To whom ... am I expressing myself?" Four years later, on *Eleven Ghosts*, the query finally finds an enthusiastic response.

—John Corbett

Eleven Ghosts—*The First Mess; How Long Blues; Frank Goes To; Another Mess; Which Way Is That?; Three Ghosts; Some Relief; And Now Some Blues; Now; And Now; The Maple Leaf Rag.* (48:42)

Personnel—Melford, piano; Bennink, drums.



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**Lee Konitz
Brad Mehldau
Charlie Haden**

Alone Together
Blue Note 57150

★★★½

Shades of yesteryear? You better believe it. The rare music on this new album sticks out like a broken bass drum head, a kind of reversal from much of what we hear as bona fide jazz these days, young lions or no.

Small gathering on live date. A recording that feels like a bootleg, but plays like the good recording it is. The tunes on *Alone Together* feel, suggest a kind of coherent rambling, what with the shortest number clocking in at 11 minutes. Lee Konitz, Brad Mehldau and Charlie

Haden play all these chestnuts with a feel for today, in their own sweet ways. You can almost feel the sunglasses sliding down your nose as you sit at your table in L.A.'s Jazz Bakery in this presumably recent performance (no year is given).

And yet, there is a certain limpness to this unrehearsed set, with tempos hovering around the mid-range (even the typically fleet-footed "Cherokee" is only slightly faster). But tempos and rhythm aren't driving this music, anyway. It's as if the tunes themselves were merely suits, only slightly veiling the true import of the music, namely, to listen, converse and listen again. The theme statements are cagey reharmonizations. Everything here evokes images of jazz as a music in no particular hurry, all members enjoying the act playing for itself, seemingly improvising no end. (In fact, the title track as well as the Charlie Parker staples "The Song Is You" and "What Is This Thing Called Love?" a.k.a. "Hot House" experience fade-outs during Konitz's elliptical returns to each theme at almost 13 and 11 minutes, respectively.)

The youngster Mehldau seems a natural for the other two mellow cats, barring his tendency to use an intense, locked-hand-type of soloing throughout, a style that generates the only real heat here, by the way. Konitz's haunting tone permeates everything, even when he's not playing, while Haden's deep bottom complements the others often to the point of being self-effacing.

For a group that's never played together, risking sounding like fools in public (let alone on tape), this trio is a nice reminder that (I'm gonna stick my neck out here) West Coast jazz, circa 1998, is alive and well. And with this

album, these guys bring new meaning to the words "alone together." —John Ephland

Alone Together—*Alone Together; The Song Is You; Cherokee; What Is This Thing Called Love?; 'Round Midnight; You Stepped Out Of A Dream.* (73:38)

Personnel—Konitz, alto saxophone; Mehldau, piano; Haden, bass.



Tom Harrell

The Art Of Rhythm
RCA Victor 68924

★★★½

While the title implies an ode to the world's diverse rhythmic styles, Tom Harrell's pretty arrangements, with their imaginative instrumentation, are what distinguish this CD. The trumpeter/flugelhornist wrote and arranged all the songs, and his



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Down Beat, March '98, ★★★★★½



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hard work shows. Oboe, bassoon, harmonium, percussion and acoustic guitar add colorful textures here and there. A steel-drum line dances over fat, sustained horns on "Caribe," and Greg Tardy's clarinet takes the lead on the opener, "Petals Danse," accompanied by tastefully voiced strings. It's not every day you hear a good jazz clarinet solo, and Tardy's floating lines make us wonder why.

The styles themselves are mostly conventional; this isn't the first time a jazz ensemble has played a bossa nova or samba, after all. But some rhythmic exceptions stand out, such as the staggered melody on "Oasis," where the horns repeat the same tone several times but shift it to different beats of the measure. The marching cadence on "Madrid" is also interesting, and Harrell plays one of his best solos here, chock full o' rhythmic and harmonic ingenuity. Each phrase is like a little song in itself, as Harrell clips off a simple idea abruptly, pauses to let it sink in, then presents several variations, as if marveling at the many ways to approach the song. The short phrases flow together toward the bridge, as Harrell shifts to longer, mellifluous phrases and at one point plays offbeat but evenly spaced single notes.

Harrell once said in an interview that "every note is beautiful," and his solos support that notion. Clarity and evenness of tone characterize his playing. He presents each thought with equal emphasis, nestled in a cushion of air, as if displaying each one in as clear a light as possible, free of distractions.

While this style emphasizes his masterful improvisations, I sometimes hanker for a wider palette of sounds in his playing. Harrell takes us

on a wild ride of ideas, but dynamically and texturally, it can resemble a ride through Kansas. Give us some vibrato, accents, trills ... some bells and whistles, if you will. Toward that aim, he gets most adventuresome in "Oasis" with a sensuous fall and some half-valved effects. This is one of Harrell's most memorable solos on the CD. He flits around in an ethereal dimension, seemingly independent from the rhythm section, but offering just the right complement to their pulsing foundation. His solo in "Petals Danse" is also notable, but for different reasons. Accompanied by Romero Lubambo's acoustic guitar only, he plays with a simple emotional honesty, and he seems willing to go out on a limb even at the risk of pinching an occasional note.

The Art Of Rhythm dishes up mellow music that makes you think, yet is palatable for polite dinner company. Harrell gives his bandmates plenty of blowing space, but even the most raucous soloists, like saxophonist Dewey Redman, seem to adopt Harrell's quiet restraint for this occasion. There are few pyrotechnics. Harrell and company demand our attention with thoughtful whispers.

—John Janowiak

The Art Of Rhythm—*Petals Danse; Madrid; Oasis; Caribe; Doo Bop; Exit In; Recitation; Las Almas; Cinco Quatro; Samba Do Amor.* (64:57)

Personnel—Harrell, trumpet, flugelhorn; Greg Tardy, clarinet (1, 3, 6, 8); tenor sax (2-5, 7); Romero Lubambo, acoustic guitar (1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 10); Mike Stern, electric guitar (6, 10); Dewey Redman, tenor saxophone (3-5); Gary Smulyan, bass clarinet (2, 3); baritone saxophone (3, 4); Leon Parker, drums (3-5, 7); gran cassa (2); Duduka Da Fonseca, drums (6, 8, 9, 10); Ugonna Okegwo, bass (2-5, 7); David Finck, bass (6, 8, 9, 10); Andy Gonzalez, bass (3, 4); Valtinho Anastacio, congas, percussion (6, 8, 9, 10);

Danilo Perez, piano (3, 5), harmonium (3); Adam Cruz, cowbell (3), steel drum (4); Milton Cardona, congas (3, 4); Natalie Cushman, shaker (3, 4), clave (4); Bryan Carroll, marimba (2); Yoron Israel, percussion (2); David Kasso, oboe (6); Makanda Ken McIntyre, bassoon (7); David Sanchez, soprano saxophone (9); Regina Carter, violin (1, 7); Ron Lawrence, viola (1, 7); Akua Dixon, cello (1).



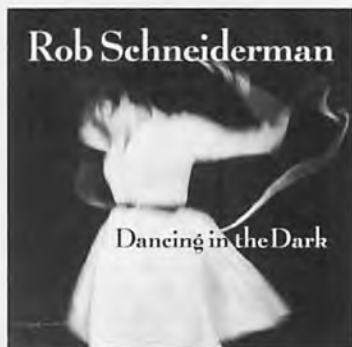
Mingus Big Band

¡Que Viva Mingus!
Disques Dreyfus 36593

★★★★

More than previously realized (especially when it's said variously that Charles Mingus "transcended categories," as Sue Mingus alludes to in the liner notes), this titan of a composer occasionally embraced L.A.'s Mexican music. Growing up in Watts and parented by his indigenous stepmother,

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Mingus heard Mexican music of the day. In her town, Mingus also took in the preacher-hollerin' Sunday sets that sparked the fire and brimstone dynamics between a band of bass, trombone, tambourines, drums and the call-and-response congregation.

While Mingus first heard Duke Ellington's "East St. Louis Toodle-oo" at age eight on the airwaves, Mexican popular music, on the radio too with brass sections and dominant guitars, was literally in the air. Two years older, his step-brother Odel Carson played Spanish guitar. The other major influence on young Mingus came from his father, who insisted on training in European classical music, no different than what the best of his peers—Buddy Collette, Chico Hamilton, Dexter Gordon—pursued playing in the Los Angeles Junior Philharmonic.

Though this music as an influence on Mingus is never much spoken about, *!Que Viva Mingus!* renews the possibility. This is reminiscent of William Carlos Williams, who titled poems in Spanish but remained remiss in acknowledging the debt to his first language spoken by a Puertorriqueña mother and grandmother.

Even with John Benitez on Mingus' bass and horn players Ronnie Cuber, Steve Turre, David Sanchez, and percussionists Steve Barrios, Milton Cardona and Adam Cruz, the arrangements in the main (except for La Conja's vocals) overlook one feature prominent in the musics loved by a good number of Los Angelesños, including Mingus: atonal dissonant voicings.

If the 1978 LP *Cumbia And Jazz Fusion* provides a reasonable criteria for Mingus' rendering of the Latin genre of jazz, choruses and solos taken by the horn section characteristically stagger the harmonies into dissonance. Additionally, hard-edged tempo shifts provide dramatic breaks in mood. The title cut from this album is the first composition on *!Que Viva!* On the original "Cumbia," Mingus' voicings quickly move from hook solos into the guttural ominous tones of an organ, to several bars of full-band anthem-like spaciousness. His band then bops into a quick dance groove before the permutations erupt. On *!Que Viva!*, appropriately tuned into his Mexican roots, Turre blows through a shell (as his counterparts did before Cortez), with its haunting hollow sound. Mingus loved the ominous and haunting, but there are few moments of this apart from sections of "Far Wells Mill Valley" and "Ysabel's Table Dance." Overall, this recording comes off quite jolly.

The Mingus Big Band work bomba, mambo, Afro-Cuban and other essential "Latino" rhythms. On most cuts they aptly shift from solos (really fine by David Kikoski, Randy Brecker, Ryan Kisor, Cuber, Sanchez and the percussionists) or an all-band Ellington-type of groove into pleasurable cacophony. On "Los Mariachis," echos of Gil Evans seem to sway the tack. Benitez takes a cue and pulls it Caribbean way with the percussionists. "Dizzy's Moods" paints a musical portrait of the trickster who integrated jazz and Latin jazz organically. The Chico O'Farrell arrangement of "Slippers" bears his stamp, while "Eat That Chicken" comes off comedic and more in a Fats Waller and Eugene Sedric mode than in Mingus' (with Roland Kirk), even though Mingus tipped his brim to them. Mingus' spoken words, especially on "Eat That Chicken," were very much a

protest in the age of all-out protests.

The repertory Mingus Big Band, actually three rotating bands, has been performing to packed houses for six years. Under the watchful eye of Sue Mingus, they play Mingus. But, being a democratic collective, these accomplished musicians have rightfully made the Mingus Big Band their own. Sue Mingus documents this process for each tune in the liner notes. She writes that Earl McIntyre, in reorchestrating "Moods In Mambo," instructed the band to "think Charles Ives." That's why the music on *!Que Viva Mingus!* sounds more like New York than L.A. Nevertheless, and keeping in mind that Charles Mingus came from the City of Angels, check out the old LPs from the library and hear for yourself. Or, consider Fats Navarro asking Mingus: "You play Cuban music?" and Mingus answering, "I know some Mexican tunes." —Zoë Anglesey

!Que Viva Mingus!—Cumbia & Jazz Fusion; Tijuana Gift Shop; Moods In Mambo; Los Mariachis; Far Wells Mill Valley; Dizzy Moods; Slippers; Love Chant; Eat That Chicken (Paella); Ysabel's Table Dance. (74:06)

Personnel—Randy Brecker (1-10), Earl Gardner (1-10), Alex Sipiagin (1, 3, 5-10), Ryan Kisor (2, 4), trumpet; Kumba Frank Lacy (1-10), Clark Gayton (2-4, 6-9), trombone; Earl McIntyre, bass trombone (1, 2, 4, 5), tuba (2, 6-10); Steve Turre, trombone (1, 5, 10), shells (1); Dave Taylor, bass trombone (3); John Stubblefield, tenor (1, 2-4, 6-10), flute (2, 5); Seamus Blake, tenor (2, 3, 6, 8-10), soprano (2) saxophone; Mark Shim, tenor saxophone (1, 5, 7); David Sanchez (4), Ronnie Cuber (1-10), baritone saxophone; Steve Slagle, alto saxophone (1-5), flute (2, 3), lead flute (6-10), soprano saxophone (1); Chris Potter, alto (1, 3-10), soprano (3) saxophone; Vincent Herring, alto saxophone (3); David Kikoski (1, 2, 4-10), piano; Andy McKee (1, 5, 10), John Benitez (2-4, 6-9), bass; Adam Cruz (2-4, 6-9), Gene Jackson (1, 5, 10), drums; Steve Berrios, percus-

sion (1-7, 9); Milton Cardona, congas (1-5); La Conja, castanets, vocals (10).



Harry Connick Jr.

To See You
Columbia 68787

★★★

It's certainly good to know that romance is once more a topic of discussion and that film-drama, literature and various musical genres are sampling the theme, though with mixed results. *To See You* is exemplary of the mixed results. To be sure, the mood is precisely set with lush strings billowing behind nearly every phrase, well-structured arrangements, intoxicatingly beautiful saxophone solos and Connick's Velveeta-smooth baritone. Everything is in place, but the songs fail to deliver.

Not only are the melodies forgettable, the lyrics are often senseless and rarely cohere to compose a fascinating or refreshing vignette. The neat little stories of unrequited love, of passionate longing that many of us learned from Lorenz Hart, Cole Porter, Johnny Mercer and Sammy Cahn, are nonexistent—and maybe that's part of the problem. Relying on his compositions, lyrics and all, was not the best decision.

There are some redeeming moments, however, particularly on the title tune where the lyrics possess a semblance of flow and don't seem forced. "Heart Beyond Repair" has an exquisite opening with the piano and saxophone playing in unison. Tenor saxophonist Charles Goold has a large, breathy tone reminiscent of Ben Webster, and his reedy effect provides that rough edge to subdue some of the date's overwrought schmaltz. Things seem to work best for Connick when he keeps it nice and simple, and avoids such laughable rhymes as "voracious and spacious." "In Love Again" is another splendid break from Connick's generally fey approach. Again, Goold is golden, and Reginald Veal reveals a portion of his considerable prowess.

Connick almost succeeds in creating a romantic scene that a listener might return to from time to time to stay in touch with her feelings, but sometimes it takes more than a notion.

—Herb Boyd

To See You—Let Me Love Tonight; To See You; Let's Just Kiss; Heart Beyond Repair; Once; Learn To Love; Love Me Some You; Much Love; In Love Again; Loved By Me. (50:55)
Personnel—Connick, vocals, piano; Reginald Veal, bass; Charles Goold, tenor saxophone; Arthur "Bam Bam" Latin, drums; string orchestra.

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Bill Frisell

Gone, Just Like A Train Nonesuch 79479

★★★★½

It's time we stopped identifying Bill Frisell as a jazz guitarist. He still plays jazz as we know it from time to time, but *Gone, Just Like A Train* confirms that he's invented and populated his own genre. Like last year's extraordinary *Nashville* release, this CD looks beyond jazz for inspiration. Over the years, Frisell has also plundered the idioms of blues, country, rock and folk to develop a sort of musical esperanto. Call it American guitar music, for want of a better term. His guitar-playing and writing have become inseparable. A Frisell guitar-riff may be unmistakable, but also ambiguous and elusive.

Significantly, he's not working with jazz musicians this time out. For percussive support,

Frisell employs longtime rock/pop drummer Jim Keltner, a veteran of sessions with Bob Dylan, Randy Newman and John Hiatt, all explorers of American pop songs. Keltner contributes a steady foundation, percussive accents, and an unapologetic backbeat. From the *Nashville* CD, country & western and bluegrass bassist Viktor Krauss returns. On aggressive tracks like the dark, somewhat pensive "Blues For Los Angeles" and "Lookout For Hope," Keltner and Krauss quickly lock into a deep, relentless groove that propels Frisell's gritty, blues-inflected guitar lines. This new version of "Lookout For Hope" carries an undercurrent of malevolence that adds to the tension as the guitarist's solo progresses into a feral howl.

The versatility of the rhythm section provides a considerable advantage as the trio mixes and matches disparate musical elements. "Gone, Like A Train" begins as a thoughtful quasi-tango, but culminates with the guitarist "rocking out" over a frat-rock rhythm. Upbeat and bouncy, "Raccoon Cat" is Frisell's tribute to rockabilly, while "Egg Radio" combines a reggae beat with a melody evocative of Smokey Robinson's "Tracks Of My Tears."

What I like best about *Gone, Just Like A Train* is the way that Bill Frisell creates, and entices the listener into, a distinctive musical world, at once strange and familiar. A tune like the chipper, off-kilter "Pleased To Meet You" may be determinedly odd, but ingratiating all the same. (Just try to stop humming it.) Frisell's warm evocations of homespun Americana can't altogether be separated from a certain sourness or darkness. —Jon Andrews

Gone, Just Like A Train—Blues For Los Angeles; Verona; Godson Song; Girl Asks Boy (Part 1); Pleased To Meet You; Lookout For Hope; Nature's Symphony; Egg Radio; Ballroom; Girl Asks Boy (Part 2); Sherlock, Jr.; Gone, Just Like A Train; The Wile And Kid; Raccoon Cat; Lonesome. (69:58)

Personnel—Frisell, electric and acoustic guitars; Viktor Krauss, bass; Jim Keltner, drums, percussion.



John Scofield

A Go Go Verve 539 979

★★★★½

As the title suggests, this second Verve recording by guitarist John Scofield is a throw-down, electro-funkified party jam. Call it plectric because Scofield's pick is capable of deriving an array of arresting sounds, from a gourd-like resonance that emerges toward the end of the title tune to the coo-coo clock effects on the coda of "Chank."

But mostly the date is one long, uninterrupted damn-near ultra disco bash, and Scofield has in Billy Martin, John Medeski and Chris Wood some ornery cusses, really nasty sidemen who don't care how deep the funk is—they will go there and manipulate it for all it's worth. And the groove is a concoction of scratchy, raspy on "Boozer" with one of those familiar melodies that you just can't quite recall.

On "Southern Pacific" the group finds an accommodating pocket that allows Scofield to display those wares that were so prominent during his days with Miles and Gary Burton. Whether ripping off delightful chunks of arpeggios or milking a dazzling eighth note until it wobbles, Scofield is a sound wizard, and he knows how to insinuate without intruding on the tight motion of rhythm that is the province of Martin, Medeski and Wood. Throughout, Medeski's organ exudes a colorful spectrum of intensities, each carefully modulated to extend or enhance a Scofield decision, even if it's completely atmospheric as on "Kubrick."

"Chicken Dog" with its concise phrasing and sparkling mood may be the best of the lot, though it too does not veer far from the pervasive party line. I know it's hard to release a groove once it gets filthy hot and tasty as green onions, but a ballad or two might have at least allowed a moment to air out the unrelieved neo-funk of the occasion. —Herb Boyd

A Go Go—A Go Go; Chank; Boozer; Southern Pacific; Jeep On 35; Kubrick; Green Tea; Hottentot; Chicken Dog; Deadzy. (51:02)

Personnel—Scofield, electric and acoustic guitars, whistle; Billy Martin, drums and tambourine; John Medeski, organ, wurliizer, clavinet, piano; Chris Wood, acoustic and electric bass.

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JUNE 22-JULY 10



John McLaughlin

The Heart Of Things

Verve 539 153

★★½

Leni Stern

Black Guitar

L.S. 419

★★★

Perhaps you really can't go home again after all. *The Heart Of Things* marks John McLaughlin's full return to the style of jazz-rock fusion that made him a legend, but the results disappoint. In the decade since the last incarnation of Mahavishnu was dissolved, the guitarist has focused on projects involving acoustic formats or the Free Spirits organ trio. This band is the outgrowth of his collaboration with drummer Dennis Chambers and keyboardist Jim Beard, among others, on two (more successful) tracks of 1995's *The Promise*.

Despite some good individual performances, most notably by Chambers, *The Heart Of Things* suffers from bland, uninvolved compositions and a curiously muted performance by McLaughlin, who works primarily with MIDI and electric guitars. McLaughlin favors rapid-fire strings of notes, but there's little bite or expression to his playing. Saxophonist Gary Thomas occupies a somewhat constrained role, reminiscent of the way Wayne Shorter was underutilized on the later Weather Report albums. You expect Thomas to catch fire, but it rarely happens.

You certainly can't fault the rhythm section, including Chambers and bassist Matthew Garrison, which works hard to inject some adrenaline into the *The Heart Of Things*. "Seven Sisters" and "Mr. D.C." are among the powerful performances by the underappreciated Chambers, who understands that the role of a fusion drummer is to provide non-stop excitement and energy, after the fashion of Tony Williams or Billy Cobham.

Given the superiority of McLaughlin's often excellent acoustic projects (e.g., *Que Alegria* and *Time Remembered*), one can't help wonder whether this recording was a concession to demands that he play electric guitar. Might we all be happier if he played acoustic guitar exclusively? Is that what's really at the heart of things?

Instead of reconnecting with an old audience, Leni Stern is reaching out to an entirely new one. In recent years, the guitarist has experimented with adding vocals to her perfor-

mances. She takes the plunge on *Black Guitar*, singing lead vocals on a great majority of the tracks. Soft and a little breathy, Stern's voice is appropriate to often poignant songs like "City Sing For Me," written or co-written by producer Larry John McNally, a sometime collaborator of Bonnie Raitt. Be advised that *Black Guitar* is not a jazz album with some songs thrown in for balance. Here, we venture into the introspective domain of the singer/songwriter, where hushed, somewhat confessional vocals and storytelling are central to a lowkey, intimate experience. Instrumental accompaniment plays a distinctly secondary role. That means that opportunities to hear Stern play Stratocaster are limited to her too-brief solos and a handful of fine instrumentals, including "Sandbox" and "Silverline."

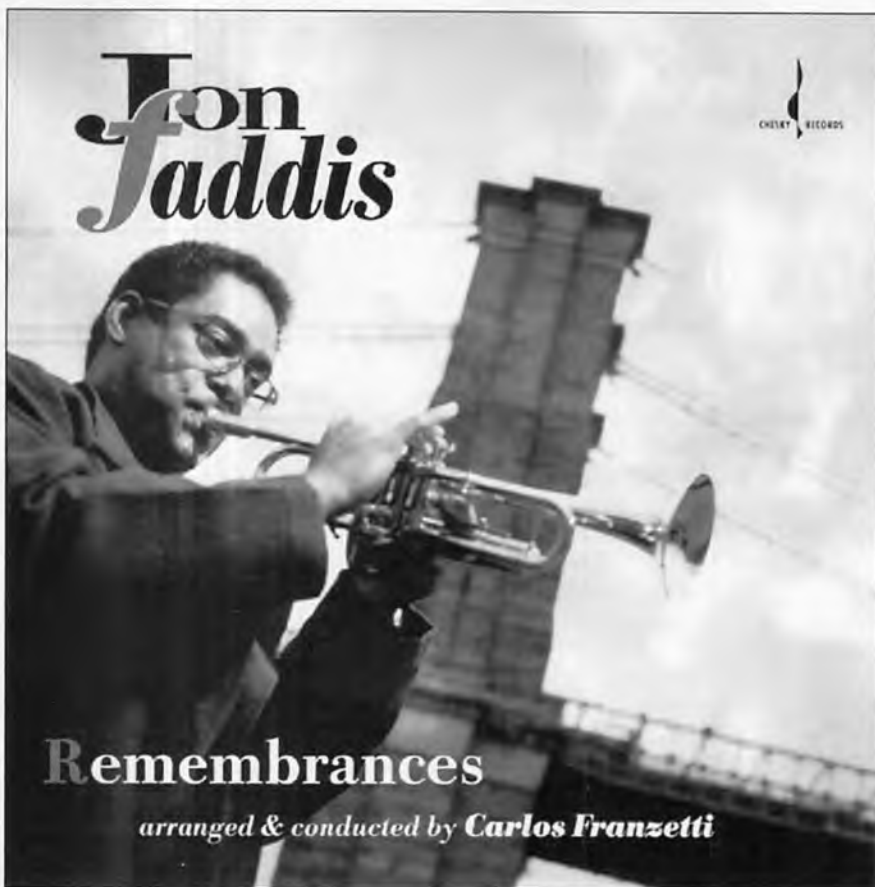
Black Guitar would have been improved by adjusting the balance to emphasize instrumentals over vocals. A sameness of mood soon pervades the nine songs, and greater variety is needed. When you hear Stern's clean, blues-inflected soloing on "Sandbox" and her expressive playing on "Silverline," you can't deny that Stern's guitar playing is her greatest asset, one that deserves top priority in her recordings.

—Jon Andrews

The Heart Of Things—Acid Jazz: *Seven Sisters*; *Mr. D.C.*; *Fallen Angels*; *Healing Hands*; *When Love Is Far Away*. (47:20)
Personnel—McLaughlin, electric, acoustic and MIDI guitars; Gary Thomas, tenor and soprano saxophones, flute; Jim Beard, synthesizers, acoustic piano; Matthew Garrison, bass guitar; Dennis Chambers, drums; Victor Williams, percussion; Jean-Paul Celea, acoustic bass (1).

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Personnel—*Stern*, electric and acoustic guitars, vocals; *Larry John McNally*, electric and acoustic guitars, vocals (1-11, 13); *Tim LeFebvre*, bass; *Dennis Chambers* (1, 2, 5-7, 10-12, 14), *Lionel Cordew* (3, 4, 8, 9, 13), drums; *Don Alias* (4), *Denny McDermott* (5, 9-11, 13), *Malcolm Pollack* (3), percussion; *George Whitty*, B-3 organ (6, 8, 9); *David Mann*, alto saxophone (11, 13); *Lisa Michel*, background vocals (2, 3, 9, 11).



Eric Reed

Pure Imagination
 Impulse! 244

★★★★

Obviously, Eric Reed is a pianist who believes it's possible to distill new wine from well-worn vintage tunes. Reed's act may be one of faith, but he succeeds quite mar-

velously, especially where he chooses to redress these tried and true standards with shifting tempos, and surprising bobs and weaves.

This mode of operation is evident from the overture, a cleverly reworked "Maria." Unlike the "Maria" you've come to know, the young lady is given an assortment of differing looks—a Latin tinge, a burst of bebop, and, most compellingly, a funky nuance here and there. And "42nd Street" has not jumped like this since its glorious heyday. Reed gives it such dash and panache that his interpolation of "It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing" is both logical and required. In contrast to the slow, meditative "Pure Imagination," it's pure breakneck celerity.

"Send In The Clowns" discloses a full-bodied Reed, two-fisted and daring, and he's not shy about throwing his entire arsenal into the mix. The delineation is multifaceted as he filters the tune through a sensitive, intimate prism, revealing ever new harmonic and melodic possibilities. And then there's "My Man's Gone Now," and then there's, well, it's more of the lovely sameness, rich moments of the jazz condition, to which Reginald Veal and Gregory Hutchinson are well acquainted and ably abet. Reed is at the very apex of his game—a veritable young Tatum—and it's hard to imagine he can top this, but it's good bet he will, and soon.

—Herb Boyd

Pure Imagination—*Overture*, *Maria*, *Hello*, *Young Lovers*; *Pure Imagination*; *42nd Street*; *Send In The Clowns*; *My Man's Gone Now/Gone, Gone, Gone*; *Nice Work If You Can Get It*; *You'll Never Walk Alone*; *I Got Rhythm*; *Finale ("Last Trip")*. (49:10)

Personnel—*Reed*, piano; *Reginald Veal*, acoustic bass; *Gregory Hutchinson*, drums.



Evan Parker/ Ned Rothenberg

Monkey Puzzle
 Leo 247

★★★★½

Evan Parker/ Eddie Prevost

Most Materiall
 Matchless 33

★★★★½

History will bear this out: Evan Parker is the most important saxophone innovator since the late '60s. The London-based soprano and tenor player has created a new universe of sounds—and techniques for reproducing and varying those sounds—which he has investigated with an inventor's combination of ingenuity and persistence. Like John Coltrane before him, Parker's intense study forces new generations of improvisers to square off with his formidable achievements in their quest to discover or create a voice of their own.

Parker's playing constantly reveals new things, he fills each musical gesture with fascinating micro-level details, and he's eager to subject himself to unfamiliar and challenging circumstances, as is clear from several projects that put him in the ring with sound engineers, whom he allows to tamper with the acoustic improviser's signal.

Two recent duo efforts—a small part of his prodigious output in recent times—illustrate Parker's ongoing development. His partner on *Most Materiall*, percussionist Eddie Prevost, has been evolving a unique, complex group sound with the British unit AMM for over three decades, but he's also made jazz records, leading quartets and trios, and he's an extremely sensitive, responsive duo mate. The two-disc set offers tracks that are extensive (only one under 10 minutes, barely), allowing the players to really dig in. Prevost is an orderly, clear free improviser—his rolling malleted toms on "Nil Novum" are met by ferocious momentum-soprano that streams linearly into outrageous combo high multiphonics and mid-range straight tones that sound like they're coming from different sound-sources altogether. "Rejecting Simple Enumeration" combines Prevost's bowed and stroked cymbals with relatively static, long-tone matching sax, while "Chastise Me, But Listen" is a free-jazz hit for tenor and kit, Parker's tensile tenor coiling up and springing like a venomous snake. Tremend-

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ously varied, gorgeously recorded, *Most Material* rewards repeated listens.

Parker's duets with New York reed player Rothenberg on *Monkey Puzzle* are of quite a different nature. As might be expected, there's something more horn-specific about the date; also a seasoned soloist, clearly inspired by Parker, Rothenberg has worked out a very different language of extended techniques. Like Parker, Rothenberg bases some of his moves around circular breathing—a novel gesture in Raissaan Roland Kirk's day, now a normal part of the saxophonic regimen—and he's a whiz with multiphonics. But the two virtuosos keep from making *Monkey Puzzle* into a pro-shop reed convention by force of musicality.

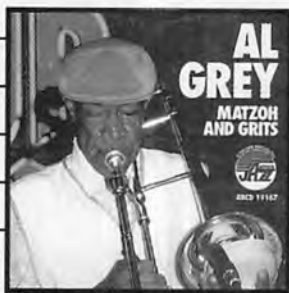
Alto and soprano notes swirl together like a school of silvery fish on "For Dinmut." "For Bynthorne" is a slower-moving being, with tenor and alto interrelating deliberately, openly; the two horn players settle on a strong pulse on "For Chifonie," and together their pseudopolyphonies make them sound like a virtual sax orchestra—double your pleasure, logarithmically expand your fun! The first track sports a bass clarinet drone under spectral soprano; Rothenberg plays pedal parts—ostinati, drones, repeated figures—here and there across the record, forming a captivating contrast with the organic mutations of Parker.

A hugely exciting encounter that should utter-ly floor fellow saxophonists, this disc offers yet more evidence of the seriousness, openness and collaborative spirit of Mr. Parker. —John Corbett

Monkey Puzzle—For *Ximenes*; For *Araucaria*; For *Bynthorne*; For *Afrit*; For *Dinmut*; For *Custos*; For *Rufus*; For *Chifonie*. (60:22)

Personnel—Parker, soprano and tenor saxophones; Rothenberg, bass clarinet, alto saxophone.

Most Material—*Double Truth (Of Reason And Revelation)*; *Knowledge Is Power*; *Rejecting Simple Enumeration*; *That More Might Have Been Done*; *Or Sooner*; *Nil Novum*; *Skill Gave Rise To Chance*; *And Chance To Skill*; *Not So Much For The Sake Of Arguing As For The Sake Of Living*; *Let Us Attend To Present Business*; *Chastise Me*; *But Listen*. (76:18/61:59)
Personnel—Parker, soprano and tenor saxophones; Prevost, percussion.



Al Grey

Matzoh And Grits

Arbors 19167

★★★

Al Grey's lusty, leathery trombone seems to be on its best behavior here in the presence of Cleve Guyton's diminutive flute, an odd consort for this trombonist whose big, booming plunger voice could send tremors through the bands of Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie and Count Basie.

Toned down, however, other virtues emerge—

a bit of cleverness here, a little high toned elegance or wit there. Together this is what we get through much of in this quiet, unusual, though in the end, modest CD. Unusual because one doesn't think of Grey in terms of quiet, meditative sessions, which is what this largely adds up to.

Yes, the quiet is occasionally broken and the scale shifted when the tempo straightens up and Grey spreads his wings, and his slide, on, say, "Jumpin' With Symphony Sid," where the trademarked growls and bluster bubble up. Or a jaunty if brief "Cotton Tail" in which Grey surrenders his horn in favor of a couple of scat vocal choruses, which don't seem to advance a particularly strong case for Grey as a singer. The proceedings really seem to hit stride around "Things Ain't What They Used to Be," which is, after all, the ninth of 11 cuts. "Caravan" has plenty of verve, too, even if Bobby Durham's two-minute drum turn is a minute too long.

In the meantime, there's Joe Cohn's cleanly articulated and generally superior guitar work to occupy our thoughts, although when it takes nearly six minutes to get through a mere two choruses of "My Romance," the patience of even the keenest Cohn fan is put to the test.

When he plays and when Grey isn't making himself scarce, this CD offers it rewards.

—John McDonough

Matzoh And Grits—*Exactly My Sentiments*; *Grey Rose Shores*; *A Day In The Life Of A Fool*; *Jumpin' With Symphony Sid*; *I Got It Bad*; *Matzoh And Grits*; *Cotton Tail*; *Polka Dots And Moonbeams*; *Things Ain't What They Used To Be*; *My Romance*; *Caravan*. (59:11)

Personnel—Grey, trombone; Cleve Guyton, flute, alto saxophone; Joe Cohn, guitar; Randolph Noel, piano; J.J. Wiggins, bass; Bobby Durham, drums.

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ALLEGRO AFIM



Howard Johnson & Gravity

Right Now!
Verve 537 801

★★★½

A group consisting of six tubas and a rhythm trio may strike some as a gimmick, but there's nothing gimmicky about Howard Johnson's Gravity, a highly polished, sleekly arranged ensemble that, if not for its unusually low register, could easily pass for just another top-drawer brass band. Gravity's rich sonorities sometimes suggest Charles Mingus or Gil Evans (both former Johnson employers), while the nimble, high-register tuba solos often evoke trumpets or trombones. Besides his impeccable straightahead credentials, however, Johnson also possesses an eclectic, populist streak, displayed most prominently here on three funky tracks featuring vocals by Taj Mahal. Although these are nicely done, they contribute to the album's slightly unfocused feel.

The title track, a Charles Tolliver composition, alternates between strutting hard-bop and squawking free-jazz, with Johnson triple-tonguing his way through a virtuosic solo. Herbie Hancock's "Tell Me A Bedtime Story" glows with burnished fusion colors, as Johnson plays the shrill lead on pennywhistle. Slide Hampton's "Frame For The Blues" spotlights trombone-like tuba solos by Johnson, Earl McIntyre and Dave Bergeron, while on "Svengali's Summer/Waltz," the sputtering, fluttering tubas occasionally reach up into trumpet range. Ironically, Johnson makes more of the lower register on the two tracks where he plays a mean, moaning baritone saxophone.

Pianist Ray Chew comps admirably, and string bassist James Cammack is solid, but one wonders why the tubas couldn't have also handled the bass lines. Drummer Kenwood Dennard, though, often distracts with loudly insensitive beats. As for Taj Mahal, his voice is now more reminiscent of Ray Charles—especially on the Louis Jordan classic "Don't Let The Sun Catch You Cryin'"—than the roughhewn bluesmen he emulated in his youth. Soulful as his singing may be, it seems to belong to a different, less jazzy album altogether. —Larry Birnbaum

Right Now!— *Right Now; It's Getting Harder To Survive; Tell Me A Bedtime Story; Frame For The Blues; Don't Let The Sun Catch You Cryin'; Ma-Ma; Svengali's Summer/Waltz; Fever; O Raggedy Man.* (61:13)

Personnel—Johnson, tuba, pennywhistle (3), baritone saxophone (6,9), vocal (2); Dave Bergeron, Joe Daley, Earl McIntyre, Carl Kleinstuber, Bob Stewart, Nedra Johnson (7), tubas; Ray Chew, piano; James Cammack, bass; Kenwood Dennard, drums; Taj Mahal, vocal (2, 5, 8).

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JAZZ

Pleasure Reeding

by Paul de Barros

Jazz musicians have continually expanded the saxophone's expressive range, most recently in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a broad palette of techniques and textures were introduced, including more (and better) use of the altissimo range, blowing air through the horn with no reed vibration, popping and kissing notes, multiphonics and overtones produced by overblowing, false fingering and/or singing while blowing, and circular breathing.

Roscoe Mitchell: *Sound Songs* (Delmark 2DE-493; 61:00/61:21: ★★★★★)

Roscoe Mitchell, one of the first saxophonists to break new ground, here luxuriates in a carefully composed set with (his own) flute and percussion overdubs. Mitchell's sour and severe, mildly overblown tone on alto squints skeptically at expectations that the sax (or jazz, for that matter) be inherently "romantic." Yet, the expanding and contracting emotional tornado he creates with circular breathing ("Full Frontal Saxophone") and the tactile, sculptural space he carves around flute and gong ("Fallen Heroes") have a classic, elegant beauty that surpasses romance. Roscoe's disjunctive narratives, which cast doubt on each declarative assertion with impatient counter-assertions, are the very definition of the postmodern era.

Julius Hemphill Sextet: *At Dr.*

King's Table (New World 80524; 55:46: ★★★★★) Like Mitchell, Julius Hemphill was a contrary cuss, but one with a yen for the blues and big charts. This well-rehearsed tribute group led by reed man Marty Ehrlich (with Sam Furnace, Andy Laster, Gene Ghee, Andrew White and Alex Harding) shows where the raunchy soul of the World Saxophone Quartet lives now, as well as the Ellingtonian direction of Hemphill's late writing. The wide chords on "Fixation" are gorgeous, perhaps a little too gorgeous, if that's possible, a sentimentalization of Hemphill's sly and iconoclastic spirit. Nevertheless, this disc will get a lot of airplay in my living room.

Rova: *The Works* (Volume 2) (Black Saint 120186; 66:15: ★★★★★) The Rova

Saxophone Quartet has become so polished and accomplished that it would be easy to take them for granted. Don't. Of these three extended, new compositions, Jon Raskin's half-hour-long "Appearances Aren't Always What They Seem" is a gem, moving from aggressive, muscular rhythm figures to wobbling group vibrato and a transcendent, slow-mo section of staggered, stoned-dropping-in-the-pond long tones. Fred Ho's energetic, ideological programme piece is OK, but obvious; Tim Berne's "The Visible Man" scurries through a succession of complexly related ideas, including a light, dancing



Roscoe Mitchell: an expanding and contracting emotional tornado

ensemble section that nicely illustrates the influence of electronic music on saxophone techniques.

Vinny Golia Quintet: *Dante No Longer Repents* (Music & Arts; 66:31: ★★½)

Golia, who plays every reed from baritone saxophone to piccolo with a bright presence and tumbling momentum, here sails into a swinging, freewheeling jazz set—with Rob Blakeslee (trumpet), Tad Weed (piano), Michael Bisio (bass) and Billy Mintz (drums)—inspired as much by Ornette Coleman's early group improv as by Golia's first mentor, Anthony Braxton. Vinny's extended technique on clarinet and bass clarinet, broad soprano tone, bristling baritone lines, and general sense of surprise and story are pure delight. Occasionally, Golia is

too patient with the ensemble's dithering, but when this stuff gets moving, hang on!

Jerome Richardson: *Jazz Station Runaway* (TCB 97402; 62:29: ★★½)

Though Jerome Richardson's style developed long before the '60s, the assured snap of his phrasing and his veteran sense of swing have long been valued in the studios, giving the lie to the modernist fallacy that up-to-the-minute technique equals great music, or vice-versa. Richardson's first recording as a leader in 29 years features catchy, carefully detailed arrangements of eight originals, two Dukes and a Dizzy Reece that safely land this side of '60s jazz-lite. The guitar-based rhythm section alternately includes Russell Malone and Howard Alden (plus George Mraz, bass; Lewis Nash, drums; and the marvelous Dave Hazeltine, piano). As a soloist, Richardson comes out of Bird, with references to Cannonball and Johnny Hodges ("Warm Valley") and a vertical, skippity-hoppiness all his own.

David Murray with Dave Burrell: *Windward Passages* (Black Saint 120165; 69:02: ★★½)

Spiritual and majestic, with a subtle underpinning of stride and ragtime, this one opens with a tune so beautiful and perfect, "Sorrow Song," you think you've heard it before. The pair then work their way through a hymn, two takes of "Naima"—one ravishing and dramatic, the other more quiet—an East African dance rhythm, some frantic dual improv, and even Jelly Roll Morton's "The Crave." The only clinker is Burrell's flat-footed vocal on "Cela Me Va," which spoils the lovely cabaret lyric Monika Larsson delivers first. Murray is in splendid form, careening fluidly and masterfully through all registers on bass clarinet and tenor sax.

Scott Robinson: *Thinking Big* (Arbors 19179; 62:08: ★★½)

Today, only four (or five) of the prolific saxophone clan get invitations to the party, but Scott Robinson, the solid baritone saxophonist with Maria Schneider, fraternizes indiscriminately with the whole damn family, from contrabass to soprano, with a little contrabass sarrusophone (a largely unplayable brass double-reed) and theremin thrown in. The selections lean toward two-beat vintage ("Oh! Sister, Ain't That Hot?"); and while the arrangements are crisp, honest and original, the project comes off as both earnest and a bit of a stunt. Robinson's lyrical bass saxophone on "Sleepy Time Gal" is surprisingly sweet, however, and the vocal-like warbling of the theremin on Duke Ellington's seldom-played "On A Turquoise Cloud" is so crazy I like it. **DB**

BEYOND

Gidget Lives!

by Frank-John Hadley

Instrumental rock & roll combos of the early '60s provided a sense of fun that helped assuage the climate of fear generated by chest-beater Nikita Khrushchev and the Bomb. Songs inspired by the NASA space program, hot rods and surfing were all the rage in Young America in the months before the Beatles and the Rolling Stones reached these shores. In England, the Shadows were the instrumental band after skiffle waned and before Mersey-beat picked up steam. Thanks in large part to the soundtrack of the *Pulp Fiction* film, those tremolo-drenched guitars and primal beats from yesteryear are getting noticed again.

Various Artists: Kahuna Classics (K-Tel 6256; 73:58; ★★★★★) A money-saving alternative to Rhino's boss multi-disc *Cowabunga! The Surf Box*, this collection has 32 surf numbers that just might encourage you to think about heading out to the beach at Malibu for a seaside luau. Many famous tunes are present, among them the Beach Boys' "Surfer Girl," the Sufaris' "Surfer Joe" and Dick Dale & the Del-Tones' "Misirlou." Also present are a number of classics that are little known outside surfer circles, including the Revels' twistin' "Church Key," the Pharos' south-of-the-border "Pintor" and the Ready Men's breakneck "Disintegration." Perfect waves everywhere. Only surf purists will be troubled by the appearance of three "new stereo recordings": two Jan & Dean numbers and the Rivingtons' "Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow."

The Tornadoes: The Very Best Of The Tornadoes (Music Club 50029; 38:40; ★★★★★) Using distortion, sound effects and other novel recording techniques, U.K. producer Joe Meek constructed the organ-fueled international hit "Telstar" (five million copies sold!) on the basic rhythm track laid down by pop star Billy Fury's competent backup combo, the Tornadoes. "Telstar" and the minor chart blip "Ridin' The Wind" highlight this collection of 15 cheesy instrumentals, every one informed by Meek's peculiar sonic wizardry.

The Astronauts: Surfin' With The Astronauts/Everything Is A-OK! (Collectables 2707; 68:16; ★★★★★) The 'Nauts, an undervalued guitar-dominated surf band from landlocked Colorado, rode the big wave with a dozen reverb-laden beach tunes on the 1963 LP that's revived here along with a less interesting "five" album consisting of pop (Bobby Darin's

"Dream Lover") and r&b (Jimmy Reed's "Big Boss Man") covers. "Baja" is the Astronauts' claim to surf immortality, with their tune "Kuk" close behind; the quintet handles the likes of Dick Dale's "Let's Go Trippin'" and the Beach Boys' "Surfin' USA" with an earnest, likable professionalism. (Collectable Records: Box 35, Narberth, PA 19072)

The Ventures: Wild Again (GNP Crescendo 2252; 79:47; ★★★★★) These ageless gods of instrumental rock, who today enjoy superstar status in Japan, wax their longboards for another go at it on their first American release in 13 years, recording not long before drummer Mel Taylor passed in 1996. Guitarists Don Wilson, Bob Bogle and Gerry McGee (the first launched the



The Astronauts go surfin'? Cowabunga!

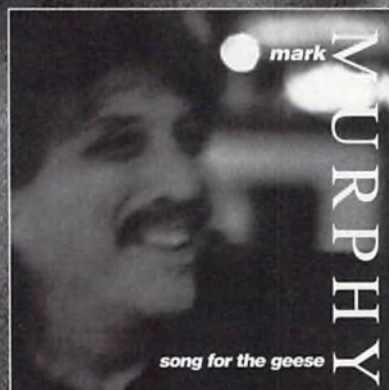
band in 1960; McGee signed on several years later) still possess their formidable gifts for generating twangy suspense, going to it on a generous 20-track program. Lonnie Mack's "Wham" and "The James Bond Theme" receive fresh infusions of energy, and Bob Bogle's lead bass playing on the "Lonely Surfer" rattles your molars in a pleasurable way. Another highlight is the first of two lightning-quick surf-guitar medleys. On the down side, the songs fusing classical themes with rock are trite, and the occasional sops to modernity (electronic keyboards, various production touches) are unflattering.

Various Artists: Twang! (Ark 21 33928; 45:48; ★★★★★) This "Tribute to Hank Marvin & the Shadows" has a contingent of British and American rock guitarists reveling in low, rumbling riffs on a program of old Shadows numbers. Deep Purple's Richie Blackmore plays "Apache" with thunderous glee, and the original Fleetwood Mac's Peter Green returns to action after a long period of self-exile on a lyrical treatment of "Midnight." Neil Young teams up with BTO's Randy Bachman to recreate "Spring Is Nearly Here" from their childhood memories, and Steve Stevens ably performs "Savage" on Spanish guitars and overdubbed percussion. **DB**



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REISSUES

Quintessence, And Then Some

by Jon Andrews

Some records define their time. The tunes create associations and lodge permanently in the listener's subconscious. Occasionally, a group creates a convergence of talent that thrills equally both the audiences and the critical community. For a time, everything clicks. Despite the passage of time, changes in tastes and departures by personnel, the ideal remains, frozen in time and preserved on record. For most jazz listeners, the quintet of Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams touched perfection. This boxed set comprehensively documents their time together.

Miles Davis Quintet 1965-'68: *The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* (Columbia/Legacy 67398; 72:35/73:33/76:35/70:51/74:21/73:26: ★★★★★½) This six-CD collection spans the interval between January 1965 and June 1968, where in the Miles Davis Quintet recorded material sufficient for five full LPs and sides of two others, along with discarded masters to fill out the compilations that followed. Included are the albums *E.S.P.*, *Miles Smiles*, *Nefertiti*, *Sorcerer* and *Miles In The Sky* in their entirety, along with sides making up one-half of *Water Babies* and one-half of *Filles de Kilimanjaro*. Numerous other tracks previously appeared in the compilations *Circle In The Round* and *Directions*, the latter of which has yet to be reissued on CD. There are few revelations among the 13 previously unissued tracks, which include several alternate takes, two rehearsals of Herbie Hancock tunes that were rejected by Davis, and "Thisness," an intriguing Davis original discovered posthumously in his personal archives.

Unlike Columbia's Miles Davis & Gil Evans box, released in 1996, these recordings are presented in a strict, ruthlessly chronological order. This could be disconcerting for listeners who have memorized (and loved) the sequence of the original, classic albums. The bifurcation of *Filles de Kilimanjaro* may also trouble those who cherish that album. (The later sessions with Chick Corea and Dave Holland will appear in a future boxed set.) Painful as it may be for some, this hard logic gives new meaning to orphaned tracks like "Water Babies," "Circle In The Round" and "Sanctuary" that are now given their rightful context within more familiar material.

Most of this music has been available for years in various formats. Who should buy *The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings*? For anyone interested in Miles Davis, in Wayne Shorter, in jazz during this period or its impact on the present day, this box contains essential music. Thornier issues exist

for diehard Davis fans who may already have bought these recordings two or three times, particularly in light of the cost of this purchase.

Classic recordings like "Dolores," "Freedom Jazz Dance" and "Prince Of Darkness" are plentiful; and set in their appropriate context, displaced tunes like Shorter's "Water Babies" and "Sweet Pea" fit right in. Among the highlights: Shorter's "Footprints" (from *Miles Smiles*), surely one of the most performed of his tunes, shaped by Carter's hypnotic bass vamp and minimalist accompaniment by Hancock; Davis' "Agitation" (*E.S.P.*), ignited by Williams' solo intro, contrasts the fire of Davis' muted trumpet with the ice of Shorter's tenor. Then, there's Shorter's aching, beautiful performance of his "Nefertiti" (*Nefertiti*), followed by a sighing refrain from the horns and complemented by Williams' progressively active, finally triumphal drumming; the graceful acrobatics of "Water Babies" (*Water Babies*) and the eerie atmosphere of "Tout de Suite" (*Filles de Kilimanjaro*).

Shorter's arrival served as the catalyst for this group, which continued until the career aspirations of its members and Davis' "new directions in jazz" led to the departures of Williams and Carter during the sessions for 1968's *Filles de Kilimanjaro*. Confronted with the polar extremes of traditional repertoire (which had occupied Davis' set lists for years), and the sometimes anarchic approach of the free-jazz movement, the trumpeter's quintet found a third path, one that retained the melodicism and structure of the past while selectively embracing elements of the "New Thing." In 1965, the first year represented in this collection, Shorter and Williams recorded side projects for Blue Note (*The All Seeing Eye* and *Spring*, respectively) that explored open-ended compositions and turbulent soloing. That same year, former Davis sideman John Coltrane's quest took a new, adventurous turn with daring LPs like *Meditations* and *Ascension*, a development that was not lost on the trumpeter.

Working with a significantly younger crew of musicians wrenched Davis out of a somewhat stagnant situation. As these sessions progress, Davis seems increasingly open to the directions his colleagues are pointing, ultimately adding innovative elements of his own. Here, as on the 1965 Plugged Nickel sessions (recorded after *E.S.P.*, but before 1966's *Miles Smiles*), he sounds invigorated by the challenges posed by compositions like "Orbits." He's surprisingly malleable, but his sound, whether a piercing blast or a muted cry, remains instantly recognizable, distinctive. Shorter contributed an amazing 17 compositions



The 1960s Miles Davis Quintet: touching perfection

during this period, including the aforementioned "Footprints," "Pinocchio," "Nefertiti" and "Water Babies." Aside from quantity, these are among the most beautiful, exotic and memorable tunes Davis ever recorded. Shorter's fecundity is even more remarkable when you realize that he also recorded five albums replete with original compositions for Blue Note during this period, but repeated only "Footprints."

An important transition occurs midway through this set, one that was transparent to listeners of the time. During the December 1967 sessions, Davis started experimenting with strikingly different elements, including electric keyboards and guitars, rock rhythms and use of the studio as a compositional tool. His first forays, "Circle In The Round" and "Water On The Pond," were not released until 1979 and 1980, respectively. Now expanded to its original 33:32 length, Davis' "Circle In The Round" uses repetition, Joe Beck's electric rhythm guitar, Hancock's celeste and a trance-like rhythm to realize a fascinating, if unsuccessful, project. Along with "Water On The Pond," these sessions



JOHN PERSSON

point to the rock rhythms of *Miles In The Sky*, the studio assemblies, electronic instruments and vamps of the *Bitches Brew* period and beyond. The experiments continued with the additions of guitarists Bucky Pizzarelli and George Benson, and, for the *Miles In The Sky* sessions, the addition of electric keyboard and electric bass. Curiously, the early 1968 sessions seem the most dated, and the least cogent. Davis and his cohorts are clearly anticipating and stalking another New Thing, achieving greater success with the later *Filles de Kilimanjaro* sessions.

With a reissue program of this magnitude, one expects an upgrade in sound quality in keeping with the latest digital innovations. Better sound sometimes justifies repurchasing music; though, as *Down Beat* contributor John Corbett has cautioned, "There's always a better copy." Compared to previous domestic and Japanese CD issues, the sound in this package is noticeably better. Expect to hear improved stereo separation between trumpet and tenor saxophone, and a tighter sound to Carter's bass. Williams' cymbals sound crisper, Hancock's piano seems a bit

brighter, and Shorter's tenor has more depth and presence. There's added clarity when Davis hits the high notes, and bass and drums seem more prominent in the mix.

Final packaging for the boxed set was not available at presstime. Liner notes by Todd Coolman and Bob Belden, along with an overview by Michael Cuscuna, offer detailed and frequently insightful analyses of the quintet's activities, as well as the aural documents. Until now, Coolman was best known for playing the bass, most notably in the company of James Moody. Here, he's responsible for describing the big picture, including the historical context, the backgrounds of the players and the events that shaped the music. Coolman does a commendable job, though his notes sometimes focus on details while ignoring larger issues. For example, Coolman names seven bassists who filled in for Ron Carter on the road, but doesn't discuss Carter's shift to electric bass in the studio, or his eventual departure from the quintet.

Belden, who co-produced this reissue with Cuscuna, offers a track-by-track com-

mentary, including more-than-customary attention to the structure and studio assembly of the pieces. Students of harmony will love Belden's nuts-and-bolts discussion; less technically inclined listeners may feel lost at times. Belden consistently mines interesting nuggets of information, as he explains the construction of "Circle In The Round," or the evolution of Hancock's "Madness." He also provides some color as to what transpired in the studio, observing that *Miles Smiles* is composed entirely of first (and only) takes, and describing Hancock's unsuccessful efforts to rehearse his compositions for Davis' approval.

Without diminishing the quality of the notes, it would have been nice to read more of the firsthand perspectives of participants in these sessions. I wanted to know how it felt to be in the studio with the band when these tracks were recorded. Coolman's and Belden's notes prompt, and leave unanswered, a number of tantalizing questions. For example, both writers suggest that Gil Evans was involved in the 1968 sessions, acting as a "prominent collaborator/contributor" by influencing "Stuff" and possibly composing "Petit Machins," but further elaboration is needed. I also wanted to know more about the selection process that determined which tracks were worthy of immediate release. Were the remaining tracks abandoned because of dissatisfaction on the part of the artists? Or, as the pace of innovative recordings accelerated, did Davis simply prefer to release newer material?

The last question is important because an in-depth boxed set like *The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* invites the listener to second-guess the producers, artists, et al., as to which excised tracks deserved release, which alternate takes are preferable to the masters, and how the albums should have been sequenced. Substituting one's own value judgments for those of the professionals is part of the fun, but it helps to know who's being second-guessed. The question also revives issues that have been debated since the reissue craze began. Is it fair to the artists to release work that they may have deemed substandard? Does it diminish the luster of tracks like "Fall" and "Pinocchio" to include rehearsals, second alternates and unsuccessful tracks like "Sidecar II"?

With so much perfection at hand, why only 4½ stars? Although I can't praise the 1965 through 1967 masters enough, *Miles In The Sky* hasn't aged as well. Too few of the numerous archival tracks achieve the same pinnacles as the other five originally issued albums. Clearly, the set is most valuable to the Miles Davis enthusiasts who can glean new insights from the odds and ends, or who must own everything this quintet recorded.

DB

Initial *Down Beat* ratings:

- *E.S.P.*: ★★★★★½ (12/30/65 issue)
- *Miles Smiles*: ★★★★★½ (6/29/67)
- *Sorcerer*: ★★★★★ (1/25/68)
- *Miles In The Sky*: ★★★★★½ (10/3/68)
- *Filles de Kilimanjaro*: ★★★★★ (5/29/69)

BLINDFOLD TEST

APRIL 1998

Renee Rosnes

by Larry Birnbaum

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information about the recordings is given to the artist prior to the test.

Since arriving in New York from her native Canada in 1986, Renee Rosnes has steadily built a reputation as one of the top pianists, composers and bandleaders of jazz's younger generation. Respectful of tradition yet unbound by convention, she uses her solid mainstream technique as a launching pad for bold adventures. A recent set at New York's Sweet Basil with her current working band (saxophonist Chris Potter, bassist Scott Colley and her husband, drummer Billy Drummond) found Rosnes in post-Coltrane modal territory, churning up high-energy rhythms on tunes from her fifth and latest Blue Note album, *As We Are Now*.

Born 36 years ago in Regina, Saskatchewan, Rosnes attended the University of Toronto, then moved to Vancouver before heading for the Big Apple. Soon she was working with Joe Henderson, Wayne Shorter, J.J. Johnson, Ralph Peterson, James Moody and Jon Faddis. She became the regular pianist with Faddis' Carnegie Hall Jazz Band and also performed with Wynton Marsalis' Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. She began leading her own groups and in 1989 cut her first, self-titled album as a leader, with Herbie Hancock and Branford Marsalis. Her subsequent albums have featured Joe Henderson, Nicholas Payton and Jack DeJohnette. Rosnes continues to play gigs with Henderson, Bobby Hutcherson and others, as well as studio dates with the likes of Marian McPartland and Howard Alden.

This was her first Down Beat Blindfold Test.

Marian McPartland

"Groove Yard" (from *In My Life*, Concord Jazz, 1993) McPartland, piano; Gary Mazzaroppi, bass; Glenn Davis, drums.

I enjoyed that. The beginning opened up with a really nice stride bit, and I thought that the time feel was really nice; it felt like it was swinging. And then when the bass and drums came in, I felt when the improvising started that possibly the pianist was a little younger than what I originally thought. I don't know—something about the time feel and in the blowing, and also some of the runs seemed a little more modern. It's obviously a newer recording. I really don't have a clue who it is, though. I would say 4 stars.

L.B.: *It's someone you've worked with lately.*

It's Marian. Wow! Marian is always looking for new things, and she's always developing, so I'm not surprised that I thought it was a younger player when she started to improvise, because I heard a lot of modernisms in her playing. And the stride, it definitely makes sense.

Herbie Hancock/Wayne Shorter

"Joanna's Theme" (from *1+1*, Verve, 1997) Hancock, piano, composer; Shorter, soprano saxophone.

Two of my all-time favorites, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, from their new duet album. I can't remember the name of that particular cut, but I was able to hear them play live, and even as great as it is on the recording, when you hear them live, they're both just stretching so much that they inevitably take the music and the listener on a journey every



time they play. And they're such masters at emoting; when they play, you just feel the passion. What can I say? It's just great. I know that Wayne composed that tune, but I can't remember the name of it. They also did it on Wayne's *Native Dancer* album. I'd give it 5 stars.

Marilyn Crispell/Gary Peacock/ Paul Motian

"Cartoon" (from *Nothing Ever Was*, Anyway: Music Of Annette Peacock, ECM, 1997) Crispell, piano; Peacock, bass; Motian, drums.

That was a spirited piece—a lot of freedom. I'm not sure who that was, but it might have been some old Geri Allen or Marilyn Crispell. I'm not really familiar with Marilyn's work, but I kind of know what style she plays in. I like that freedom. It's nice, especially when you can tell that the players are really listening to each other and playing off one another. That's what makes it work. And though I haven't done a lot of things that are as free as that is, I like to explore. The drummer had a real crisp thing happening, but I don't know who it is. I'd give it 3½ stars.

Geri Allen

"Our Gang" (from *The Nurturer*, Blue Note, 1991) Allen, piano; Kenny Garrett, alto saxophone; Marcus Belgrave, trumpet; Robert Hurst, bass, composer; Jeff Watts, drums; Eli Fountain, percussion.

I liked that composition; it sounded like it was influenced by Ornette [Coleman]. I don't know if Ornette wrote it, but it sounds Ornette-ish. Was it Don Cherry? Steve Coleman? Greg Osby? Let's go to the piano. Was it Geri Allen? I'm trying to think who that would be on trumpet. That wasn't Wallace [Roney]? Graham Haynes? And the saxophone, I really thought that was Steve Coleman. I liked it; it held my attention all the way through. It's one of those pieces I'd probably like to hear more than once. Was it a composition of Geri's? This must be old. There were a lot of textures going on, a lot of communication. I really enjoyed Geri's rhythmic flow; she can go in and out of things, harmonically and rhythmically. She has a great freedom in her playing, which I enjoy. I'll give that 4 stars. **DB**