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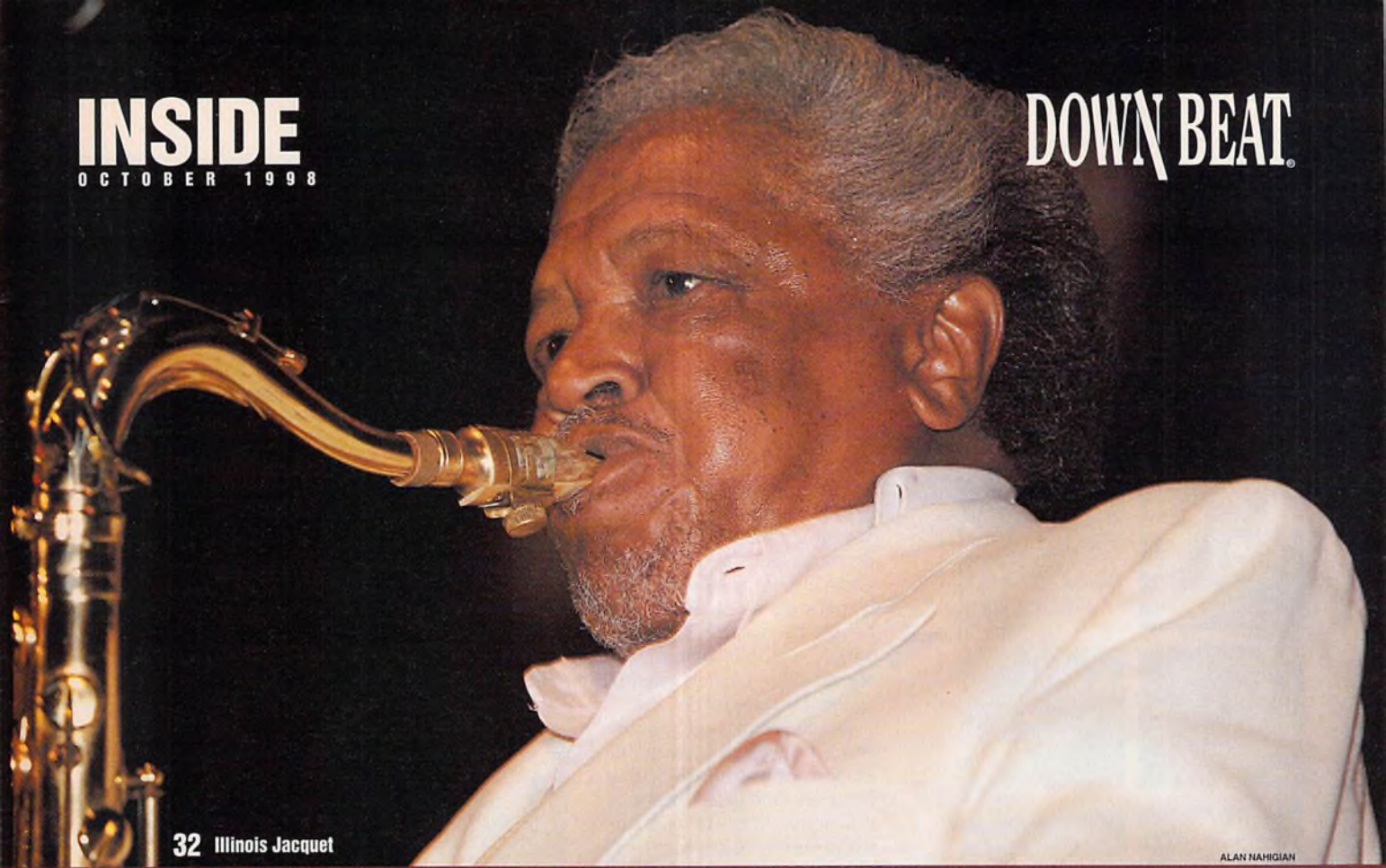
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By Ted Panken

For close to half a century, pianist and composer Randy Weston has paid homage to his ancestors here and abroad, illuminating African narratives and philosophy from a perspective drenched in jazz.

Cover photograph © Carol Friedman

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RANDY WESTON

makes grand gestures. At the piano, he envelops the keyboard with his huge hands and virtuosic authority. And when he speaks, he makes big statements: "Most of the music of the Western Hemisphere comes out of African traditional music."

For close to half a century, Weston has paid homage to his ancestors here and abroad, illuminating African narratives and philosophy from a perspective drenched in jazz. "I try to tell stories through music, stories about our heritage, so people can get a deeper understanding of who we are," says Weston, a giant in physical form and spiritual weight, a humble scholar-griot of magisterial bearing.

At 72, the 6-foot-7-inch Weston looks like he'd be equally at home invoking musical spirits and teaching basketball's power forwards the finer points of driving the baseline. But Weston leaves the scoring to the experts—namely, arranger Melba Liston—and chooses to focus his energies on composing, performing, recording and deep, informed reflection.

Weston works closely with Liston, a longtime friend and collaborator responsible for the evocative sounds of his large ensembles. Liston arranged all of the material for the March recording of Weston's new CD, *Khepera*, a suite dedicated to Cheikh Anta Diop, progenitor of the thesis that world civilization has its origins in Africa. Weston performs "African Sunrise," another Liston arrangement, in September at the Chicago Jazz Festival.

African Soul

By Ted Panken

Photo by Carol Friedman

Weston thrives on big projects of historic proportions. He enjoys the challenge of playing multiple concerts in the same town; he rose to one such occasion as artist-in-residence at the 1995 Montreal Jazz Festival, where he appeared with a different group each night over five days. He gathers hordes of musicians together to perform his works, like he did this March for three nights at the Kennedy Center with the dynastic Master Gnawan Musicians from Morocco—Weston's creative muses of the last 30 years—plus his quintet. He recently received a commission from the Doris Duke Foundation to compose music for the singular choreographer Martha Clarke to be performed in the year 2000.

The scope of Weston's 1998 activities mirrors the progression

orchestral approach to the 88 keys is fundamental to his concept, reflecting an enduring passion for Art Tatum ("the master of masters") and other early piano heroes like Willie "the Lion" Smith, Luckey Roberts and Nat Cole—manifested in a dangerous left hand. He notes that Tatum incorporated the harmonic extensions that became integral within jazz after Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk. "Tatum was completely advanced in the '20s and '30s," Weston observes. "Most of the musicians who are credited with creating modern music listened to him. You can hear everybody when you hear Art Tatum.

"After Tatum," he continues, "it's Monk and Ellington." Their stark intervals and evocative timbres are the first principles of Weston's distinctive vocabulary. He phrases with a singular beat,



“THERE’S ALWAYS THE EMPHASIS ON THE DIFFERENCES IN US, BUT I’M LOOKING FOR THE SIMILAR.”

of his roots-based, forward-thinking esthetic. "What I do is only an extension of the '20s and '30s, when due to segregation, it was a total black community of music and culture," he notes. "You didn't go to the theater to listen to jazz. You listened to the whole black experience. A show might have the Duke Ellington big band, tap dancers, comedians, singers, vocal quartets. I cannot emphasize how important that was for me. My dad always told me, 'Africa is the past, the present and the future.' Which means you have to understand what your ancestors did. From my ancestors comes the truth. Music cannot lie."

Weston's ancestral piano tree is comprehensive; his comments reveal much about the antecedents of his sound. An

dancing through idiomatic African rhythmic figures with exquisite timing, inflecting lines with touch ranging from hammer to caress. Like his mentors, he knows how to transform notes and sounds into memorable melodies that tell compelling tales, whether the vehicle is an elegant standard-form '50s classic with definite changes and clear rhythms like "Hi-Fly," "Little Niles" and "Berkshire Blues," or a later African-influenced composition painting vivid pictures with more spatial, indefinite harmonies, like "In Memory Of," "Blue Moses" and "Chalabati Blues."

"I think Randy has reached a place where ideas transcend notes," his musical director, Talib Kibwe, marvels. "Everything he does musically is an expression of his life. We've done some

tunes, even recently, where I'll ask him, 'Man, what changes did you play there?' He'll have to look at the piano to see what he's doing. It will be a very heavy altered chord, a chord that's very abstract with different inversions—flat fives and nines and sharp 11s. But he's so beyond looking at music that way, it's just a sound to him.

"There's a whole story behind the tunes. See, a lot of guys give you the music, run it down, and show you letter 'A' with some 16th-note triplets. It's analytical. Randy never does that. He'll show me a tune, and might say, 'OK, this piece is called "Blue In Tunisia." This was my experience when I went to Tunisia in 1963.' He'll talk about a piece of music from that kind of perspective."

The teenage Weston first heard Monk on 52nd Street in a band led by Coleman Hawkins, his earliest idol. "I was looking for something on the piano anyhow," he recalls. "I grew up in Brooklyn with the great bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik, whose father was Sudanese. He also played the oud, and when we were kids he'd take me to Atlantic Avenue in downtown Brooklyn to hear musicians play the instruments of North Africa and the Middle East, instruments where you could play eighth notes, in between the notes. I would try to play like that on the piano, but Monk was already doing it. Monk brought the mystery back into music, a kind of magic, a way of saying you can play music beautiful by going this way. Music became universal.

"Ellington is the master. Though I listened to Duke's orchestra from the beginning, I didn't hear his piano much until later years. Like Monk, he was always creating new, wonderful sounds from the piano. His introductions, the things he could do in four to eight bars to bring in the band, were incredible. Nat 'King' Cole for me was utter beauty. His touch was fantastic, every note a jewel. And Count Basie was my very first influence, a master of space and a master of the blues, which is the essence of our music."

Gillespie showed Weston, already intimate with calypso, how to articulate stride piano and bebop tropes in African language. "Dizzy brought back the drum," says Weston. "The hand drum was outlawed here, which is one reason why I think we put the drums into pianos and trumpets and trombones and the English language. Hearing Chano Pozo with Dizzy Gillespie's Orchestra in 1947 turned me around, and I've been working with hand drums ever since. Chano was Cuban, but you could hear pure Africa in his drum sound. It was a marriage, a complete circle. Dizzy used to come to Brooklyn a lot, and I had an opportunity to see him and listen to him. I learned so much. Dizzy was writing music about the ancient African

empires, but he was such a great comedian that people didn't realize what he was doing."

Indirectly, Gillespie's responsible for Weston's fruitful partnership with Liston. "I went to hear Dizzy's orchestra at Birdland one night, and I saw Melba Liston playing trombone," he remembers. "I'd never seen a woman play a trombone before. She had an incredible, big sound, plus Dizzy featured one of her arrangements, 'My Reverie.' It was so deep and beautiful that when the band came off the bandstand I decided I wanted to say hello. I guess it was meant to be. When we collaborate, I can play a particular melody on the piano or give her a cassette, explain the stories, say which instrument I may want to feature, then she's got it. She can write something after that

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melody that sounds just like I wrote it. She is able to get inside what I want to do, very original, very fresh."

Weston began playing professionally in 1949, making a career of his avocation. Trying to escape a New York atmosphere increasingly devastated by heroin, he spent the following summer cooking breakfast and cleaning rooms at a Berkshires resort. Fortuitously, he met the pathbreaking jazz historian Marshall Stearns, who was giving lectures on jazz history. "Marshall was the first critic I encountered who started out in West Africa rather than New Orleans," Weston recalls. "We became close, and he encouraged me to perform the history of jazz with him. He was a true jazz scholar with a pan-African concept—true in the sense that he did his homework. I stayed a few extra weeks at the end of that first summer when it was very quiet, sat at the piano, and that's when I composed 'Pam's Waltz' and 'Little Niles.' Throughout the '50s, I had a tremendous flow of musical ideas."

Already predisposed to African perspectives from his Garveyite father's admonitions, Weston in the '50s took advantage of a connection with friends who worked at the United Nations and met visiting officials from different African nations. "I'd always ask about the music," Weston remembers. "They might give me a tape or a book, and I slowly started to learn. That was the inspiration for *Uhuru Africa*. My father always told me to be around the best minds I could find, no matter what the subject matter. I found people who could construct a serious history of who we are and what we come from. People like Dr. Willis James, who specialized in field hollers. From that direct information, I was able to extract the similarities in what we do. There's always the emphasis on the differences in us, but I'm looking for the similar."

That credo was Weston's mantra on two apothecic 10-day trips to Lagos, Nigeria, in 1961 and 1963, during which he discovered highlife music, met Nigerian drummer-guitarist-clubowner Bobby Benson and played with young West African musicians, including Fela Ransome Kuti, then a trumpeter. (Weston celebrated the sojourn on 1963's *Highlife* and the self-produced 1964 classic *African Cookbook*.) In 1967, the State Department sent Weston's sextet, including drummer Ed Blackwell, to Africa for a three-month tour that turned into a six-year residence in Tangier, Morocco, where Weston ran his own club, African Rhythms.



Weston with musical director Talib Kibwe at a recent performance of *Uhuru Africa*

“MY DAD ALWAYS TOLD ME, ‘AFRICA IS THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE.’”

1985 Dakar encounter with Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senegalese historian/philosopher/linguist/chemist whose investigations into the African origins of ancient Egyptian and Ethiopian civilizations and the influence of Egypt on world culture had inspired Weston for years.

"*Khepera* is kind of mystical, kind of magical," he muses. "I don't know why it happened at this particular time. Maybe from meeting Cheikh Anta's family in Paris, and more people who knew him. He was a brilliant, warm, wonderful man. When I phoned and asked if I could visit, he answered, 'I know your music; come by and see me.' I was in total shock! I met him at his laboratory the next morning, and he spent an hour explaining his ideas. I had already read his books, so I was attracted to the man before I met him, but this sealed it."

You could say Weston's compositions and piano explorations have become meta-musical metaphors of a world view. "That's true," he says. "And I understand my role better, I think. After being in Africa, around traditional people like Gwanan people. I've absorbed a certain amount of African spirituality into the music, and stopped turning out a lot of things. I became more involved with trying to learn more, trying to play a certain way—which I still haven't found."

When Weston extols Africa, to paraphrase Valerie Wilmer, it's as serious as his life. "Randy's musical side is one half of it, his

"I went on a spiritual trip back home," Weston recalls. "I wanted to hear where I came from, why I play like I play, why we play music like we do. We went to about 18 countries, and wherever we went we asked to experience the traditional music of the people. Hearing the traditional music was like hearing jazz and blues and the black church all at the same time. All the music in Africa has a powerful spiritual base, coming from a respect for nature, for the Creator, with deep meanings and serious laws. There's no separation between the religious and the secular. There's a rhythm for everything that happens in life; every rhythm tells a story. Despite slavery, despite leaving the continent for a few hundred years, we're still able to create other kinds of music in other environments because of that strong spiritual base, which is Mother Africa."

Weaving stories within the framework of those diasporic cultural transformations is the heart of Weston's art, never more so than on *Khepera*. It took shape in the afterglow of Weston's

spiritual side is the other half, and both halves are inseparable," says Benny Powell, Weston's trombonist for 15 years. "I think he's a brave man to stick by his convictions. He doesn't go by what's popular—he never did. His many years in Africa have changed his music. In European music, the rhythm supports the melody, but in African music the rhythm is predominant. Sometimes the Gnawans have been playing rhythms, and I've said to myself, 'Now, what is he going to put with that and make it come out right?' In a few minutes, Randy's playing the perfect stuff. As he once said to me, 'B.P., I'm just trying to put the magic back.'"

Every Weston performance—whether in a nightclub, an elementary school auditorium, the Kennedy Center—addresses that element of ritual that imparts magic force to music. "In Africa, traditional people will tell you that you've been chosen by the ancestors," he explains. "In the West, we tend to emphasize how great we are, this or that one is a great musician. But in Africa, playing well is only one part of the story. You have to be respected by the community, to be clean in mind and spirit. If you play music, you may have to try to cure someone, and if you don't play the right note, if your heart is not in the right place, you can injure that person. African music is as old as Africa, which preceded Europe and Western civilization. The music began there, and it began as a way of thanking the Creator for the food, the drink, the tree that they cut down to make the drum out of. It takes it on another level." **DB**

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For The Love Of Big Band

Phil Collins threw the pop world a changeup this summer. He put his singing on the backburner and hit the road with his own big band.

Collins had performed once with a big band on an eight-show European tour that included a performance at the 1996 Montreux Jazz Festival directed by Quincy Jones. That project later aired as part of a PBS television documentary. So it wasn't a *completely* unprecedented move. But the majority of listeners who know the 47-year-old Collins as Genesis-drummer-turned-pop-sensation probably never heard it coming.

A longtime fan of Count Basie and Buddy Rich, Collins formed the 21-piece brass-heavy outfit by bringing together members of his rock band and professional jazz players. He called on ace arrangers like John Clayton and Sammy Nestico to do the charts. And then he sweated through learning the drum parts: Not only does the British-born Collins not read music; he had never really played swing before.

The group played with power and precision at this summer's Taste of Chicago, one stop on their 29-date U.S.-European tour. Instead of traditional big band fare, the arrangements focused mainly on Genesis tunes and songs normally associated with Collins—tunes like "Sussudio," "Invisible Touch," "I Don't Care Anymore," "In The Air Tonight," "Hold On My Heart," "Dance On A Volcano" and "That's All"—all reworked harmonically and swung in a fairly straightforward manner. Although at one point in the show, r&b/gospel vocalist Oleta Adams sang a mini-set of blues and standards, and later guest soloist/alto saxist Gerald Albright lent a smooth and contemporary tone to "Georgia On My Mind," for the most part it was pure Phil Collins, who only emerged from behind the kit to sing an encore of "The Way You Look Tonight" and "Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me."

We caught up with Collins after the two-and-a-half-hour show backstage at the Petrillo Band Shell.

BY ED ENRIGHT

ED ENRIGHT: You had an especially appreciative audience here tonight. But overall, how has the tour been received so far?

PHIL COLLINS: The pop audience can be unforgiving sometimes. They come not knowing what to expect. They've been told I'm not going to sing, they've been told it's an instrumental evening, big band, and they've seen it on PBS. They've heard interviews where I've specified this. I come on at the beginning of the show and I say, "I'm not going to sing"—and still it doesn't quite sink in. But I'm just having the most fun, I think. Apart from drumming with Eric Clapton's band, I think I'm having the most fun I've had for years and years.

EE: What do you find so rewarding about it? What is it about the big band that appeals to you?

PC: I get so much pleasure from doing it every night. I think, in simple terms, it's like ... [imitates a drum figure from Sinatra At The Sands that cues the Count Basie band's entrance] *brrrllllrr llrrllllrrrr ... BWEHHH, BA-NA-DAT!!!* It's that whole thing of "setting it up." It's like a good joke with a great punch line. You know what's going to happen, and so does the audience, the listener. If I'm listening to [Basie band drummer] Sonny Payne—I just want to do that. I know that's not what [big band jazz] is all about, but that's really what hooked me in. That and the Buddy Rich *West Side Story* album.

In fact, toward the end of Buddy's life, we met at a Grammy salute to jazz. I was asked if I wanted to play the drums, to be

the third drummer between Tony Williams and Buddy, and I said yes, although I was way out of my depth. I actually withdrew from it at rehearsal. I said, "You've got one drummer too many, and that's me." Tony Williams later became a good friend of mine. I

was going to produce a record for him, but as fate would have it, he died before I had the chance.

There's something about the sound of a big band. It's a shit-hot band. The horn players [including Collins' own Vine Street Horns plus trumpeter and retired educator Ron Modell and several graduates of his jazz program at Northern Illinois University], they're all great, and I'm really learning a lot. I've really worked hard at it this time. Last time I worked harder at it, but I hadn't done it. It was a bit heavy. The PBS thing was taken from the word "go." They just filmed it, fly on the wall, from the beginning of the rehearsals through to the first gig. When I listen back to it, it's a bit heavy. I'd learned 30 percent of how to play the brushes. I had the other 70 percent to go! I want to go out on the stage and be able to play full-stop and get it better every night.

EE: How do you practice getting that touch, that nuance of feel required for big band drumming?

PC: I did two weeks on my own. I don't play an awful lot. I play on my records, and I play on anybody else's records when I'm asked, but I don't play much on the road. I went to the session where they recorded the new charts we got—Sammy Nestico and John Clayton did several new charts—and I met the drummer who plays for



PHIL COLLINS: JEFFREY M. HARRIS

me. He played and I listened, and I took it away and I learned it. I sat in my basement and I played along to it and I wrote it out phonetically. See my charts? As you know, I don't read. It's just stuff with the horn line: *Paaap!* like that. [points to a sketch of what looks like eighth-note rhythms] This wouldn't make any sense to you—only to me. So I spent two weeks doing that.

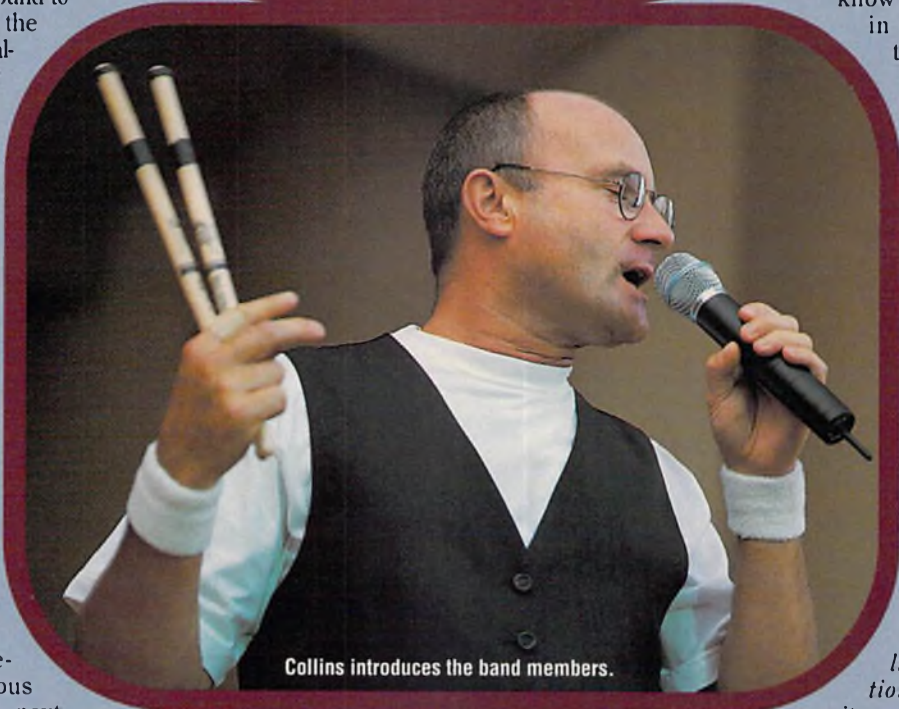
I've got my Clayton Cameron brushes with me. He sent me a tape and a pair of brushes two years ago when Tony Bennett came out on the road with us as featured guest vocalist. I didn't get around to watching the video at the time. This time I actually studied it. I just rehearsed and practiced. I know it doesn't sound long, but it was two weeks doing nothing else. And then the small band came over, just the basics, and we rehearsed a week like that. Then the big band came over for 10 days. Then we were on the road. Apart from the first night, which was the first time we'd played in front of people, it's been great. And I will do this till I drop now. This is something I'm really serious about. And of course, next time I come to America, people will see it advertised and know what it is. Hopefully jazz fans will come.

EE: *How do you expect the more hard-core, serious jazz fans to respond?*

PC: When we did this thing two years ago in Spain, I didn't see the reviews, and if I had I wouldn't have been able to stand them, of course. Apparently they had a go at us, less than flattering. It came home to me that there's a lot of snobbery in jazz, and I think it would be good if people took it the other way around. I'm trying to bring jazz to a bigger audi-



The horns, with guest soloist Gerald Albright (left)



Collins introduces the band members.



Luis Conte mans the congas.

ence. I'm not trying to make money off it. It actually should be considered the opposite: Isn't it nice that this rock star, who doesn't need to do this, is doing this to bring it to a lot of people and people are going to buy Count Basie and Duke Ellington records and CDs by the new big bands because he's turning young kids on to it? I hope some people do think like that. But in any form of the arts there's always that kind of snobbery. So far, I see some old, knowledgeable faces out there, and I get great pleasure from that. I would like the pop audience to enjoy it, but I know somehow they won't

in the end. They'll like the feel of it, but it's the other stuff. ... I mean, what do you laugh at when you see *Monty Python's Flying Circus*? Is it the funny stuff, or is it the silly walks? Whereas really, the other stuff is the really funny stuff. If you can get people to watch and listen and enjoy it, that's the main thing. I'd like to think that eventually the jazz audience will come around.

EE: *You've indicated that you're not doing this project to make a profit. What's it like to put this production together, to finance it, compared to a rock & roll production?*

PC: Well, we couldn't do it without a sponsor, that's for sure. Private Issue [credit card] came to the rescue. I would've had to lose a half a million dollars to do it, which I was thinking about doing. I mean, I've got more money than I'll ever need to use, so I was thinking: Do I keep the half million dollars and buy a hundred suits, or do I go out and do something I want to do? So I was considering going out and doing it, but fortunately we got a sponsor. Without them we couldn't have done it in such a way. But the crew, they're my crew.

They're rough guys and they're loving it! They see these 20 musicians, all nice people, going out and playing. It's a labor of love for all of my guys because they get a great thrill, and so does my manager, looking out at the audience and seeing people who are digging it.

EE: *Why did you choose to focus on Genesis tunes and Phil Collins hits instead of doing an entire program of big band standards?*

PC: Originally, I wanted to play a lot of standards, but [trumpeter] Harry Kim and my manager said, "Why don't you just hire a band and play in the front room if that's what you want to do? Other

***"I'm trying
to bring jazz
to a bigger
audience.
I'm not trying
to make
money off it."***

bands play it better. You'll never play 'Lil' Darlin' better than them." Which is true, of course, but I wanted to be in that chair doing it. Of course, he was dead right. He said we should do something that nobody else has done, which is material that nobody else has played.

EE: *Let's talk about some of your jazz and big band drumming influences besides Buddy Rich and Sonny Payne.*

PC: The last four or five years I've really been studying these "Legends Of Jazz Drumming" videos. People like Sid Catlett, Jo Jones—I'm seeing a lot of guys for the first time on these videos, which is great. Elvin Jones ... I saw his spot at Ronnie Scott's [the London jazz club] one time.

EE: *Have you spent much time at Ronnie Scott's?*

PC: Well, Brand X played there, my fusion jazz group. We played there for two weeks with [saxophonist] Charles McPherson. We were terrible and not

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subtle at all, but it was great playing there. Just the *vibe* of playing there. I saw the Buddy Rich band there, too. I tried to see Charlie Watts' band, but I couldn't get in!

EE: *Speaking of Charlie, have you listened to any pop artists or rock artists who've set a precedent for leading a big band? There was Charlie, Brian Setzer ...*

PC: Brian, I haven't heard that band. The only band I've heard is Charlie's band. Actually, for this PBS documentary, they interviewed Charlie, and he's interspersed throughout it. It's funny, because I didn't know they'd done it, so when I saw it, I suddenly hear Charlie Watts saying, "Well, what he's going to have to do is learn how to play brushes first." Then they cut to me saying, "Brushes! It's not my language!"

EE: *How does it feel now that you've been doing it a while?*

PC: I speak "pidgin brushes." You know how people speak Pidgin French? I speak pidgin brushes. I'm learning. It's fantastic when you see guys playing and you think, how do they speak like that? It's all making sense gradually.

I guess somebody like me jumps in at the deep end. I don't *want* to jump in at

the deep end, but unfortunately I'm well-known, so I can't really creep in the back door at this. Therefore, all my mistakes are being made very publicly. So I just have to grin and bear that. A jazz reviewer in L.A. said, "Learning every beat of Sammy Nestico's charts isn't the whole picture. It's playing it in seamless preci-

"I will do this till I drop now."

sion." That is, like good film music. And I know that! I'm trying my best, man! I knew he was a jazz man because he mentioned Sammy Nestico in glowing terms. But he did say at the end that "if Mr. Collins is serious about this and he matures in this style, he will be a very good spokesman for the big band." I took that to be a compliment. Not good

enough yet, but almost!

I read a preview the other day that said they'd heard through the grapevine that instead of swing jazz, this was more smooth jazz. Quincy said in L.A. when he came to see it, "It's quite an *aggressive* band." I think it sounds fine, but it feels very aggressive to me.

EE: *Tell me more about the role Quincy played in helping you get this together.*

PC: It's been a little bit magnified. I did a charity show in L.A., Carousel of Hope, for diabetes. In our set we did "The Way You Look Tonight." After the show, Quincy, who I've known for 10 years, came up and said, "I didn't know you could sing that shit." I said, "Thank you very much. It's a beautiful song." There's lots of things I can do that people don't know about, I guess, like play the drums. So he called me a few weeks later and said, "Would you like to sing on my album?" That was *Q's Jook Joint* [1995]. He gave me a choice of songs, and I chose "Do Nothin'." I sang it in Switzerland and he was in L.A., but we were talking quite regularly about how we would do it. Then it went from that conversation to maybe doing an album together: Wouldn't it be great, him pro-



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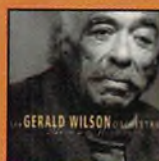
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ducing an album of jazz standards with me singing? It's still something we'd like to do. And I said I've always wanted to take a big band out. And he said, "However I can help you, I'll help you."

Now, running parallel with that, I did an *MTV Unplugged* program in '94, and in that show my rock band did a couple jazz-influenced tunes that I'd written, with me playing the drums. And the audience went bananas, because I was playing the drums, but also because they had never heard anything like this. It is weird, but people do respond when they hear something that's kind of exciting and they're not exposed to it regularly. And I thought, "People *do* want to hear this, and I *do* want to do it."

Then, in 1996, Claude Nobs at Montreux—whom I've known for years because he's my record company boss in Switzerland—he said, "You have a whole night to yourself. We've got Quincy coming for his 50th anniversary of music. He's having his own night. What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I haven't got a band, any kind of band. It would be fun to do a big band, but it's a bit too much of a thing to put together right now." He said, "Oh, it's no problem. Quincy will help you." He recommended some guys to play, and suddenly, it was happening. Quincy at that point agreed to conduct. I sang three or four songs on his night. He was giving up his rehearsal time to be with us, which I thought was great. We rehearsed in Montreux, then we went to London, did the Queen and Mandela concert, then two shows at the Monaco sporting club, which paid for the whole tour. Then he went off and we flew without a pilot, but he caught up and he did the last two Montreux shows. So he did four out of the eight shows. But he's always been very supportive. In L.A., just on this tour, he made a big speech about the whole thing with the sponsors and what I was doing, and then he came at the end to conduct two tunes, "Do Nothing" and "Sussudio." He lectured the audience about how great it was that they stayed there and listened. Some people left because I wasn't singing.

EQUIPMENT

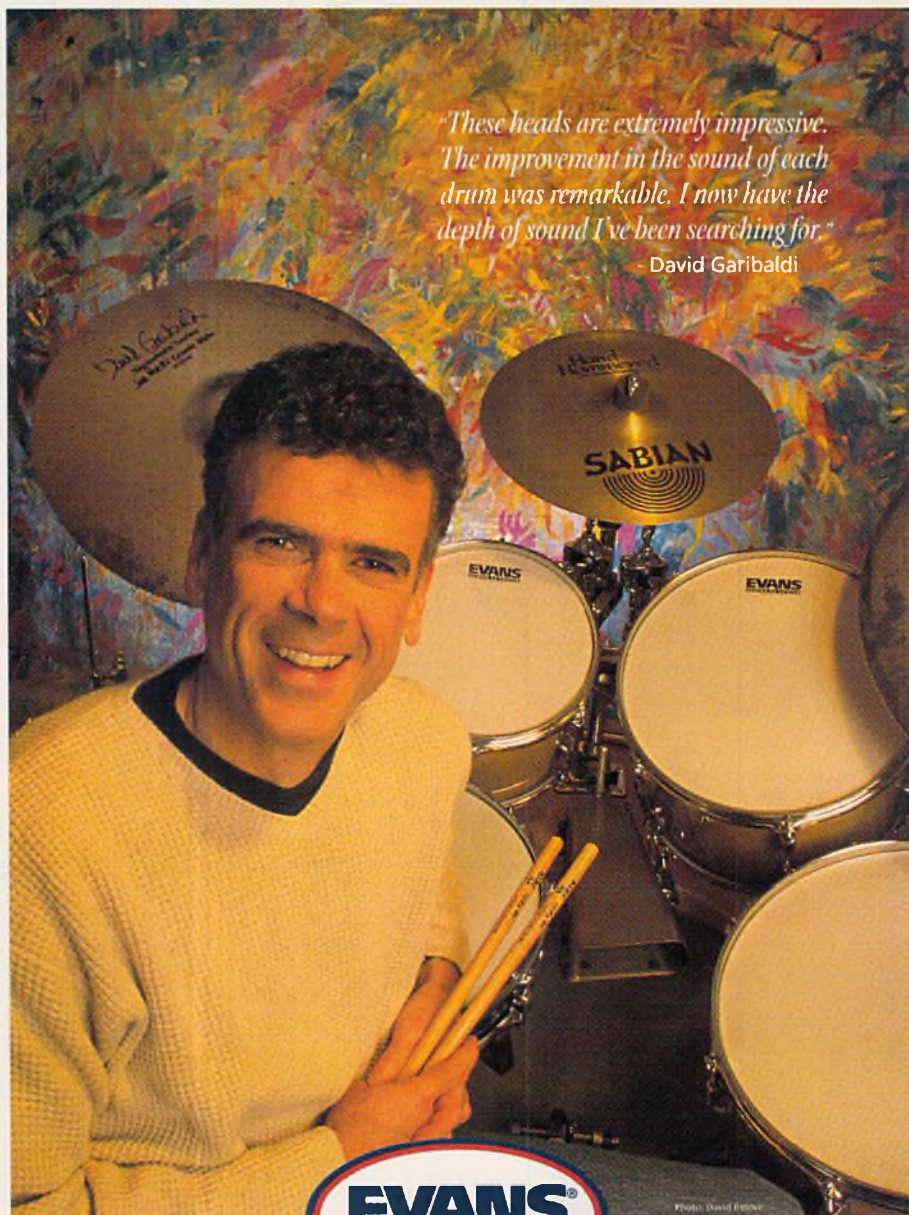
When performing with the big band, Phil Collins plays a white pearl Gretsch drum kit with 20x16 bass drum, 18x18 floor tom, 16x16 floor tom, 14x12 rack tom, 12x10 rack tom, 10x8 rack tom and Ludwig Radio King snare drum. His cymbals are Sabians, including 16-inch, 18-inch and 20-inch H-H crashes, 22-inch dry ride, 21-inch ride sizzle and 15-inch AA hi-hats. His top drumheads are Remo coated Ambassadors, and the bottoms are Remo clear Ambassadors. He uses Pro-Mark Phil Collins signature sticks and Regal Tip brushes.

EE: Do you have plans to record this group?

PG: We've recorded six of the eight shows from the last tour, and we've videoed two. We're also recording seven or eight nights of the European tour and videoing two shows in Montreux. So there will be a live video and also definitely a live album. There could have been one before, although I'm glad there wasn't because I've learned so much since that tour. I'd much rather this tour be represented than that. It got

to a point where we were closer to this tour than we were to that tour, so we thought we'd wait and put one out before the end of the year or the beginning of next year.

Plans are afoot to go through the material at the end of the tour, then get someone to mix it. To me, I want this record to sound like a Count Basie record! *Sinatra At The Sands*, that's what I want it to sound like. I want it to have that magic. **DB**



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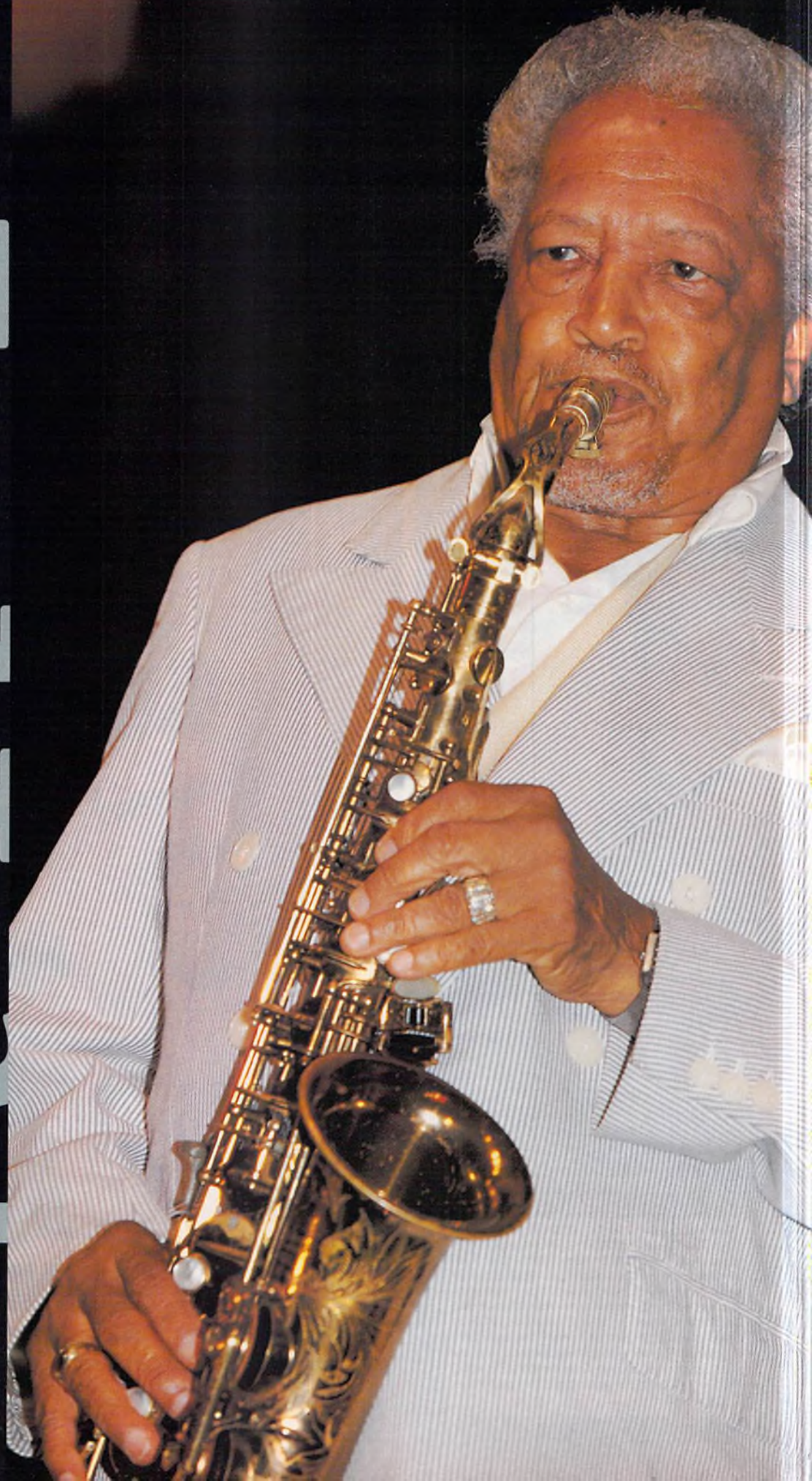


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ELITE





Jacquet

'If You Can't Tap YouR Feet, Something's Wrong.'

Back in the 1950s and '60s, I spent hours flipping through the bins at Paul's Recorded Music in Wilmette, Ill., agonizing over how to apportion my small treasury. Through high school and college, I had noticed a copy of *Jazz At The Philharmonic* resting sadly unsold in Paul's anthology section. One day in 1972, I pulled it out for a listen.

The album opened with "The Blues," a JATP jam session track. Two or three other customers were browsing in the back of the store as it kicked off. Illinois Jacquet's tenor saxophone solo started. The browsers paused to listen. "What is that?" one asked. Paul showed him the jacket. Another, fishing in the rock & roll stocks, appeared a minute later. "Man, that's something else," he said with a noticeably acquisitive look.

By Jacquet's third or fourth chorus, the phone rang. The caller asked for an album. Paul laid down the receiver and rustled through the day's shipments. Jacquet was now rolling full-throttle with the others riffing on his tail. Paul picked up the phone: "Yes, it's in." But the music the caller was hearing over the phone had displaced any concern for the other album. "Hey, look, could you hold that until I get over there?" the caller asked. "I wanna get that."

I don't recall who got the album, but we were all properly amused to suddenly be bidding over a record that had been under our noses for more than a decade. But that was the astonishing power of Jacquet—the ability to seize an audience and pin it to the mat, even over the telephone.

This fall, the scarcity of those JATP sessions will finally be answered as Verve puts it all back in the bins with its long-awaited boxed edition collecting the complete JATP concert history, a history Jacquet did so much to define and establish.

At 75 and counting, Jacquet is still making history, these days with what may well be the best big band swing ensemble in captivity. Last fall, he was in Salzburg, Austria, for his 75th birthday concert and part of a tour of Eastern Europe, and then on to Miami for a week on the S.S. Norway and the famous Floating Jazz Festival. In July, Jacquet played to a crowd of more than 5,000 swing dancers and listeners in the plaza of Lincoln Center, handing an explosive climax to New York's 10th-annual Mid-Summer Nights Swing series. In between, the band played other festivals, dances and private functions.

In March, Jacquet's orchestra got Chicago's Symphony Center (formerly Orchestra Hall) jumping, leaving the audience delighted, even a bit surprised. The jazz fan of the '90s, after all, expects music to be beyond such elemental forces as simple swing. But Jacquet has a rare group: an authentic swing band in the mold of fondly remembered but seldom heard ensembles of yesteryear. Yes, Count Basie, Woody Herman and a few other brand-name

BY JOHN McDONOUGH
PHOTOS BY ALAN NAHIGIAN

bands still play without their founders. And Louie Bellson, 74, is leading a crack contemporary band. But generations of musicians have come, gone and advanced these groups far from their origins. Jacquet, on the other hand, is an original of the period who has kept the elemental elements in tact. He is also a latecomer who awoke to lead a big band in the mid-'80s, 40 years after the big band era went to sleep. He has built his band the way he remembered them and, like a jitterbugging Rip Van Winkle, has exempted himself from the evolution toward concert music.

"The band is like I play," Jacquet says with excusable pride. "I've been with Basie, Cab [Calloway] and [Lionel] Hampton. I loved Duke [Ellington]. We play from the experience I've gotten from the bands I've played with."

Crowd response, like that in Chicago and New York, is common for Jacquet. He understands movement in jazz.

"If it wasn't for dancing, you would never have had jazz," he says. "If you can't tap your feet, something's wrong. The band must swing. You've got to follow the tradition of what was successful with big bands. You can't be great in a concert if you can't be great in a dance. We don't [move] away from the natural flow and the natural way of playing that to me never gets old, because it's like 100 years ahead of its time. We're not trying to be way out. We're not too old-fashioned."

Such talk may sound like diehard cultural fundamentalism. But the proof is in the listener's ear and sensibility. When the Jacquet orchestra glided into the common staple "One O'Clock Jump," the song's "natural flow" was heard in a way not apparent since Basie's band played it 35 years ago. It came to life, the old power still aglow. He retrieved lesser-known Basie gems like "Tickle Toe" and "Doggin' Around." These date back to the late-'30s Basie band, from a time when Jacquet was a high school student in Houston, playing drums in the school orchestra and alto saxophone in the marching band. By the time he joined Basie in 1945, many of those charts were retired.

But today he plays them as music of his own experience, not as repertory pieces. When his saxophone section, led by the warm, cutting clarity of Joey Cavaseno, bounds into Eddie Barefield's chart on "Stompin' At The Savoy," it sings with a brightness and dash that is pure, pulsing sunlight.

Any talk of Jacquet must include "Flying Home," the 1942 milestone that sealed for life the partnership between Hampton and Jacquet. Not many jazz musicians today have one tune they *have* to play for every audience. Some might regard such an obligation as a curse. To Jacquet, though, it's a gift—one that came his way in Chicago.

"I have a great feel for the city because it was the first big city after I left the South where I spent time," he says. "I was with Hampton at the Grand Terrace on 39th Street [actually 317 35th St.], and we were there for a year off and on. Dexter [Gordon] joined the band and couldn't even play. I taught him. He was so

bad sitting in the end chair, they had to put him right next to me. And I sat there and taught him how to play. That was when the 'Flying Home' solo came to me and where I developed it."

Jacquet attributes divine intervention for the solo. "Jazz to me is a spiritual music," he explains. "Part of a spiritual adventure that I began in Catholic school when I was 4 years old. I learned about God and about the spirituality of life. It kept me away from habits that you run into when you're young. I used that experience. I believed in it then, and I believe in it now. In Chicago I was in the big time for the first time, and I asked God for something that would sustain me. And he gave me that solo on 'Flying Home.'

"When I asked Him for that solo, I realized I got what I asked for. I couldn't afford to let Him down. You ask God for something and He says, 'OK, I give you something and go out and do something with it.' You must treat that gift with respect."

Jacquet left Hampton in 1943 as a star sideman, and spent



Jacquet and band at the Mid-Summer Nights Swing series finale, in Lincoln Center's outdoor plaza

the next three years with Cab Calloway (appearing in the film *Stormy Weather*) and Basie. But as the bands declined, Jacquet shot to headliner status as a star of Jazz At The Philharmonic. "I played the first JATP concert in July 1944," he recalls. "Nat Cole asked me to do a benefit with him for Norman Granz. We didn't know we were being recorded."

Granz took those first JATP recordings to several major record companies, but none showed any interest. Months later the tiny Asch label bought a subsequent

concert that Granz recorded in Los Angeles in March 1945. This featured the original "How High The Moon," which became a JATP signature, featuring Jacquet, Charlie Ventura, Willie Smith, Gene Krupa and others. They were to be the first JATP records to reach the market on three 12-inch, 78-rpm discs. The 1944 concert came out in 1947 as volumes 4, 5 and 7. Jacquet rejoined JATP in New York for further recording in May and June of 1946. The Carnegie Hall concert of Sept. 27, 1947, produced the definitive Jacquet-JATP performance in a sequence of tunes with Flip Phillips called "Perdido," "Mordido" and "Endido." This was Jacquet's last JATP concert performance until 1955. Since 1957, he has not been involved in JATP reunions, and he doesn't plan on participating in future ones.

"That'll never happen," he says. "I didn't enjoy it then. I didn't start out to play music as battles and cutting sessions like that, and I was not enjoying that way of presenting myself. It started out all right [in 1944], but then it became more commercial and became a formula. The money was good, though, and the time was what it was."

The last jam session he participated in was on June 18, 1993, a special exception he allowed, being that it was on the South Lawn of the White House. And even then, he turned his tenor over to President Clinton for the final number. (The event was telecast as part of a Public Television series of White House performances.)

Since the summer of 1983, Jacquet's focus has been on his

big band. The evolution of this group began earlier that year in the unlikely environs of Cambridge, Mass., on the Harvard campus, where Jacquet worked as the first jazz artist-in-residence. His job: Build a seminar of student musicians into a real band.

"They were an inspiration to me because they were sincere," he says. "I'm not a teacher, and these kids were probably the smartest anywhere. But they listened and observed everything and were respectful. The first thing I did was tell the saxophone players to get rid of their plastic reeds. I brought my own book, because I didn't want them playing exercises. I would find the leader in each section and build from there. When you blend a section, the leader sets the sound the others will hear and follow. To me the first alto is the most important part of the band. I would play some lead on alto parts so they could hear the way I wanted it to sound. They already knew how to play the notes. The thing was getting them to phrase as an Illinois Jacquet ensemble. That's why they were there, really, for the experience of working toward what a conductor wants. It's a process of imitation."

Whatever his impact on them might have been, theirs on him was probably greater. "When I saw what these youngsters could do," he says, "I decided to return to New York and form a big band."

Jacquet was the ultimate late bloomer. Here he was, at 61, leading the first big band of his career at a time when Basie, Herman, Benny Goodman and others were literally dying off after a lifetime at it. After scoring the biggest opening week at the Village Vanguard in the club's 50-year history, he recorded *Jacquet's Got It!* in 1987. The all-star date found Jon Faddis, Marshall Royal (lead alto on Jacquet's original "Flying Home" session with Hampton), Irv Stokes, Barefield, Rudy Rutherford and Milt Hinton in the sections. The result was a big band of classic elegance.

With about 100 arrangements in the book, the band seems due for another album. But Jacquet is in no hurry. "I want to make a record Duke would be proud of."

The band occupies his complete attention. Being a veteran of the glory days himself, he is respectful but not particularly interested in the current orchestras playing in the name of leaders who were his contemporaries.

"Mingus was my first bass player in L.A.," he reflects when asked about today's Mingus band. "The music that Mingus was playing only Mingus could do because his heart and soul were in it. There will never be another Basie or Ellington, even though they may use their name. I'd rather they leave it alone. I think the Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall bands are fine. They have good leaders in Wynton Marsalis and Jon Faddis. They can add something to what they're doing that's fresh. I've been offered to play with them a lot of times, but I just don't have the time. I'm trying to make my band as good as it can be. That's my job now."

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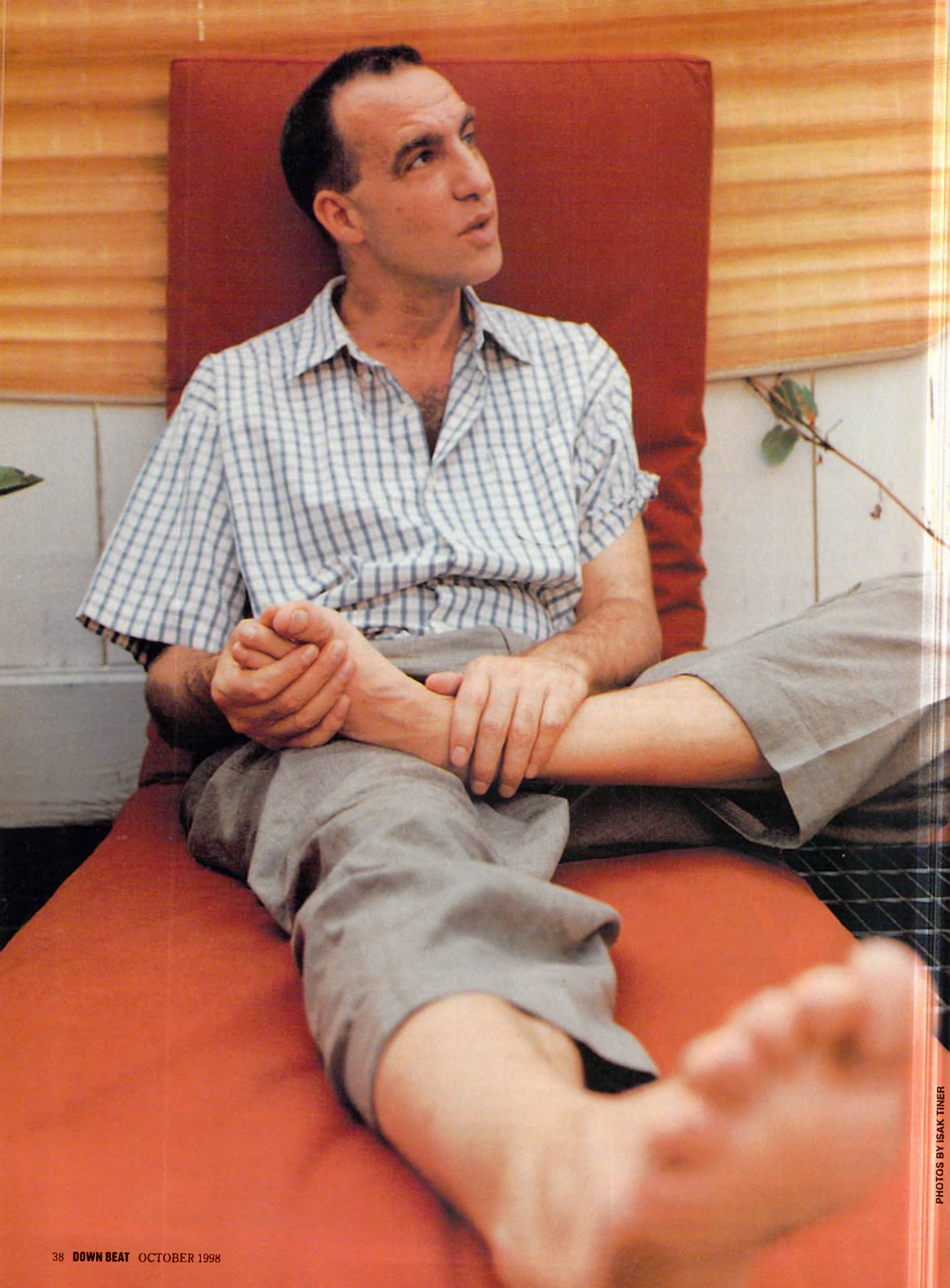
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EQUIPMENT

Illinois Jacquet plays Selmer Super 88 tenor and Mark VI alto saxophones exclusively. His mouthpiece is a special design that goes back to the Hampton days. "Dexter Gordon and I tried each other's mouthpieces on the bandstand one night," he says, "and we ended up trading." Jacquet uses Rico natural cane reeds, strength 3 and 3½.

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John Lurie

go fish

Music is sound. You can't see it, but sometimes the impossible is trounced by the power of art.

At the Bowery Ballroom in early June, the Lounge Lizards played some of the most vivid music ever made. Somewhere in the middle of one tumultuous piece, during a section where the 10-member ensemble fastened its lines in a way that allowed two or three tornadoes to share the stage, a woman in the audience did some poetic testifying. "It looks like snow blowing off some Himalayan peak," she uttered to no one in particular. Perhaps you can chalk it up to craving—the jam-packed lower Manhattan theater was a summer sweat box. But her comments weren't off by much. The piece was magisterial, solid in its girth, yet it delivered a blustery sense of flux.

The Lizards ended the tune by swooping around in sync, like a throng of blackbirds veering into a pre-planned left turn. Bull's-eye. Leader John Lurie was obviously happy with the way they hit the brakes—there was a slight smirk on those perpetually pursed lips of his. He ambled over to the microphone, stared at the audience while waiting out a pregnant pause, and offered a comment. "Uh, that's *mister* penis to you."

Quirkaphonic bandleaders like Lurie rarely get the respect they deserve, but he wasn't looking for deference. He was just introducing the tune. A few moments later he coughed up a tale about the suit he was wearing, and the Bergdorf Goodman tailor named Mino who measured him for it. "'Don't worry, Mr. Lurie, we know exactly what you want,'" recalled the lanky saxophonist. "Now I can't even move my legs."

That blend of wry humor and resourceful musicianship pretty much defines the Lounge Lizards these days. After two decades of esthetic and personnel shifts, the band has grown into one of our most commanding and entertaining orchestras.

The Bowery Ballroom show was illustrative of the group's current depth. Playing pieces from their new *Queen Of All Ears* album, the Lizards made a slew of disparate motifs seem an inspired consortium of sound. Dynamics were key. There were hushed moments for Jane Scarpantoni's cello ruminations and Evan Lurie's piano reveries, sections where Lurie and fellow saxophonist Michael Blake played hunt-and-peck, and cataclysmic multi-instrument eruptions that were both joyful and ferocious. At one point, the group halted a roadhouse blues to let an mbi'a (thumb piano) have its three-bar say. And later, a gush of hollers by the full band seemed the only way for the potboiling emotion to express itself. Avant yet accessible, they made their art pretty damn expressive.

Throughout, Lurie wandered the stage, smoking and leaning over his players' shoulders. Fretting is part of his job description.

"I'm basically up there flying the plane, trying to figure out what

the next moves are," he explains. "I've got a notebook with me, and I jot down things to fix for next time. There's nothing worse than having a bad gig, and nothing better than having a great one."

The thing is, there aren't many bad nights for the Lounge Lizards. Adamant about cohesion, dedicated to making the music's complexities seem like natural turns, Lurie has nudged his little big band to a place where fluency is a prime hallmark.

"We rehearse and rehearse," says Blake. "So the personality of the music is what audiences hear, not the mechanics of playing it. John's stuff is getting more complicated and subtle these days; it's often dense and dramatic. What we're ultimately trying to do is have the impulse and personality come across at once."

The 45-year-old Lurie calls himself a player-coach, and has said that he believes the Lizards to be closer in spirit to the Chieftains than Wynton Marsalis. "The music is supposed to be a ritual," he explains. "I'm so jealous of the Gnawa tribe in Morocco. The wives bring tea, they all play, they all dance. It's very social. The interesting part isn't how you put together a series of notes, but how you make the audience feel."

A few nights after the Bowery gig, a brief encounter with Lounge Lizards trumpeter Steve Bernstein reaffirmed the group's sense of audience-awareness. "You saw the Saturday show?" he asked excitedly. "Did you feel the vibe in that room!?"

The Lizards' longevity parallels the commitment and experience of its boss. The band has changed as Lurie's changed. Its current

incarnation is a far cry from the irony-laden combo that debuted as punk rock reigned the New York turf. The music of the original unit was tangential to those purposefully contentious sounds: provocative, rudimentary and one-dimensional. Over the years, Lurie's become much more eloquent and cosmopolitan. His intermittent career as an actor has taken him to far-flung locales, and the adventures have shaped his views.

A little over a decade ago in northern Africa, on the set of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation Of Christ*, the saxophonist fell in with local musicians. He describes the juncture as an epiphany that helped him recalibrate the band's trajectory.

When a pal brought a couple Jujukan musicians to Lurie's hotel one afternoon, the tumblers clicked. "We smoked all this keef, and they were playing and singing for us, and I asked if I could join in. And it released something in my playing for sure—something about the music touched me. Later, I was playing soprano in this room with incredible natural reverb. I was working on some multiphonic stuff, and for about a half hour I was on it, really on it, you know? My friend had taped it, and the stuff on *Voice Of Chunk* [1989] came from the ideas on that tape."

The Lizards' sound widened with *Chunk*. Wistful, angry, keen-

By Jim Macnie

ly melodic, the music was built on polyrhythms and refracted themes that playfully intersected each other, like Shannon Jackson's *Eye On You* taken to its ultimate conclusion. Lurie says that if someone wants to be in the Lounge Lizards, there are several genres, including African, tango and Balinese, they have to understand. Mingus' left hook and Steve Reich's poised patterns have become part of the mix as well. The compositions on the new *Queen Of All Ears* are some of his most fertile ever.

"I tend to write in a not very schooled way," he chuckles. "One line is in six, another in five, and instead of quantizing it like we used to, we now put it together without worry. I remember when it first stuck together: We had this breakthrough with Dougie Bowne, Erik Sanko and my brother Evan while trying to do 'One Big Yes' at a studio in Westbeth. It's a great feeling when it all jells."

Progress begets progress. The articulation that the band found ultimately voided some of the clichés of its past approach. The noirish moods and italicized irony that had long been part of the Lounge Lizards' schtick faded away.

"Me and Evan listened to the first record a while ago," recalls Lurie, "and we were rolling on the floor, killing ourselves laughing. There were so many things we tried to do that we couldn't. It's incredible how naive, energetic and dopey we were. But ultimately that's what the times were about. Trying to play beautiful or sincere was out of the question—might as well expect Johnny Rotten to sing like Johnny Hartman. It's 10 times more rewarding these days. We're still wise guys, but we have more to back it up with. Listeners really appreciate it."

That was obvious at the Bowery. Lunging into "The Birds Near Her House," from *Queen Of All Ears*, the band got the audience in a participatory mode. When the group yelping passage came around, one corner of the room bellowed back at the stage.

Queen Of All Ears had troubles seeing the light of day. It was initially slated for release on Luaka Bop, but the collaboration soured. Lurie then offered it to other major labels. Shrugsville. So it was back to autonomy and DIY. In the pre-Internet days of the early '90s, *Voice Of Chunk* had been offered via phone on Lurie's own Legarto label. The Strange and Beautiful Music imprint was born to accommodate his newest sounds.

"Maybe the fact that we couldn't get a deal should be part of the story," says the bandleader. "We have fans. We've been together for years. Labels have their heads up their asses. I went to Verve—I worked on the *Get Shorty* soundtrack for them, and it was nominated for a Grammy. They had just invested a ton of money in the *Kansas City* thing. The band's not even a band, just a collection of pretty good jazz musicians. The movie bombs, and nobody cares. I've got a great band, I can get press, but they won't call me back. It boggles my mind."

Lurie's latest film project is a wry series of hook, line and sinker expeditions called "Fishing With John." The thrust is simple: Various celebrity pals join the host in far-flung locales for some existential angling. And there's no question the banter is more important than the bait. Dennis Hopper sweats and speed-raps in Thailand, Matt Dillon glides down a river in Costa Rica, Tom Waits gets seasick and grumbles in Jamaica and old

pal Willem Dafoe freezes his ass off ice fishing in Maine.

The Independent Film Channel ran the six episodes in June, and its viewership was impressive enough to have Bravo schedule encore broadcasts for the fall. Renaissance man Lurie wrote and directed each show. The music is all his, too. From the title theme's Eno homage, to the crazed chorale of the "Fish Dance," to Waits rasping an impromptu sea chantey à la Captain Pissgums, to a graceful string quartet, the soundtrack illustrates Lurie's manifold interests. And his lone soprano playing with drummers Calvin Weston and Billy Martin is some of his most compelling work to date.

Lurie has applied himself to acting for a while now. His first non-indie role came in Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas* in 1983. But it was Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger Than Paradise* and *Down By Law* in the mid-'80s that gave his screen career some momentum. The *Fishing With John* series has been one of his hardest jobs ever. "Waits got pissed at me," he says. "Matt had a hard time relaxing, and, boy, Dennis is Dennis 24 hours a day. But what I like best about the show is the genuine palship it displays—it's sweet and for real. You know when you're 9 and you build a fort in the living room with pillows? It's very anti-macho, you know? That's the biggest statement it makes."

It's hard to miss the confluence between serious play and playful seriousness in Lurie's life. After talking to him about the Lounge Lizards, it's obvious he wants his music to have both dignity and joy.



Back to rapture. The woman who climbs the Himalayas as the Lizards romp at the Ballroom. Lurie losing himself in those Moroccan echoes. He speaks of being transported even while worrying about ensemble unity and financial perils.

"There are always hurdles to jump, shit that's always in your way," he says. "Is playing music hard? Not in its pure state. There were mystical experiences in my life I'm trying to express in my music that I can't explain verbally—I'd had those feelings before the band started. And we're better prepared to explain them. There's a great line about Coltrane. It's like what's-his-name, Leroi Jones, says on the cover of *Ascension*: 'Coltrane is a more fixed traveler now.' That's what it's all about for us. He was searching. So are we."

DB

EQUIPMENT

John Lurie plays a Selmer Super Balanced Action alto sax with Vandoren Java #4 reeds. He also plays a Conn soprano sax with #4 Vandoren reeds.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

<i>QUEEN OF ALL EARS</i> —Strange and Beautiful Music 0015	<i>THE LOUNGE LIZARDS</i> —Editions EG 1561
<i>FISHING WITH JOHN</i> —Strange and Beautiful Music 0014	<i>MANNY & LO/AFRICAN SWIM</i> —Strange and Beautiful Music 0016
<i>VOICE OF CHUNK</i> —Legarto	<i>EXCESS BAGGAGE</i> —Prophecy Entertainment 15010
<i>LIVE IN BERLIN 1991, VOLUME 1</i> —Intuition 2055	<i>BLUE IN THE FACE</i> —Luaka Bop/Warner Bros. 45921
<i>NO PAIN FOR CAKES</i> —Antilles 314 510 090	<i>MYSTERY TRAIN</i> —RCA Victor 60367
<i>BIG HEART/LIVE TOKYO</i> —Antilles 314 510 089	<i>DOWN BY LAW/VARIETY/STRANGER THAN PARADISE</i> —Strange and Beautiful Music 0011
<i>LIVE 1979–1981</i> —Roir 136	<i>MEN WITH STICKS</i> —Crammed Discs/Made To Measure 34
<i>GET SHORTY</i> —Antilles 314 529	

BLINDFOLD TEST

OCTOBER 1998

Kevin Mahogany

by Dave Helland

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.

Kevin Mahogany is an average-sized guy with a bigger than average voice. Whether he's belting the blues, as he did in the Robert Altman film *Kansas City*, or crooning a ballad, his voice is distinctive.

His latest release, *My Romance* (Warner Bros.), includes songs long part of the jazz repertoire such as "Lush Life" and "Stairway To The Stars," as well as tunes by James Taylor, Van Morrison and Lyle Lovett, with guest saxophonists Michael Brecker and Kirk Whalum. "First and foremost I'm a singer," he says. "They just happen to be jazz songs right now."

Joe Williams

"How Sweet It Is To Be Loved By You" (from *Presenting Joe Williams & The Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra*, Blue Note, 1966) Williams, vocals; Jones, trumpet/arrangement; Lewis, drums; and orchestra.

Joe Williams—the phrasing was what gave it away. Joe has a distinctive way of phrasing. I think Joe is kind of like Ella [Fitzgerald]: There aren't too many bad performances, meaning less than 5 stars. This is 5 stars, definitely. I like the arrangement: It swings, you can feel the groove. Remember, dance music has always been jazz, jazz has always been dance music, and this one was no different.

Frank Sinatra

"One For My Baby" (from *The Capitol Years*, Capitol, 1958) Sinatra, vocals; Bill Miller, piano.

The phrasing is not Frank. In fact, now that I listen to it, the phrasing sounds like Bing Crosby.

DH: *It is Sinatra, who was a Crosby fan early on.*

[hearty laughter] That's what I'm hearing. Most people wouldn't hear the tone and phrasing that we associate with Frank Sinatra in this because it's not there, the sound we're used to hearing. For that recording I'd give it 3 stars. It sounded like a demo.

Judy Garland

"Somewhere Over The Rainbow" (from *Judy At Carnegie Hall*, Capitol, 1961) Garland, vocals; with orchestra directed by Mort Lindsey.

It's Judy Garland. At the very beginning there's a little gravel in her voice, but it's very real. For the emotion of her singing, you can't deny it's good. I don't want to slam anybody, but you hear a little tiredness, a little crack at the end, little flaws and imperfections you didn't hear early on. I'd give it 3½ stars.

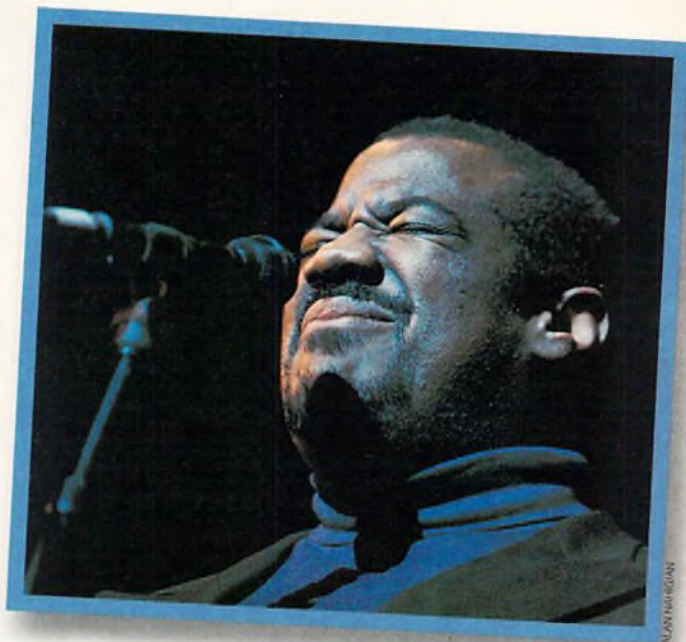
Ray Charles/Betty Carter

"Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye" (from *Ray Charles & Betty Carter*, ABC, 1961) Charles, piano/vocals; Carter, vocals; orchestra arranged and conducted by Marty Paich.

I know this voice; where do I know this voice from? It's a nice arrangement for the time, but you wouldn't hear it on commercial radio today. Now when I hear the female voice, I don't know. I think 3 stars. Maybe when it came out it was 5.

DH: *It's Ray Charles and Betty Carter.*

There are a couple little turns that he does, that he's always



done, so it doesn't matter how his voice sounds, you heard them. Young Ray Charles did them, older Ray Charles is still doing them. You hear those little things.

Louis Armstrong

"I Was Doing All Right" (from *The George Gershwin & Cole Porter Songbook*, Verve, 1957) Armstrong, trumpet/vocals; Oscar Peterson, piano; Herb Ellis, guitar; Ray Brown, bass; Louie Bellson, drums.

Louis Armstrong. We listen to him as an icon now. We think of him as the father of jazz, and not just instrumental but vocal jazz also. I listen today out of awe and respect to the icon of the industry. When this was released, you might say, 'That's different. He's got that gravelly voice. I don't know if I really like it.' He wasn't a crooner, as was popular then. He had that edge that was natural for him, which made it unique in itself. That's a different kind of cool to me. I'll give this 4 or 4½ stars for vocal performance. I like the voice—the intonation, the phrasing, the style were all covered well. You don't hear little fumbles here and there. There was no breaking up; and everything was flowing naturally.

Kurt Elling

"Never Never Land" (from *Close Your Eyes*, Blue Note, 1995) Elling, vocals; Laurence Hobgood, keyboards; Edward Petersen, tenor sax; Paul Wertico, drums.

Is it Mark Murphy? No, then it's Kurt Elling. There are things that Mark did, the half steps, the tonal steps—but it's cool, I like it. Oh, boy. I'm in trouble now, man. I was thinking Mark Murphy, but the voice is lower. Mark doesn't sing that low. 4 stars.

Sting

"It Ain't Necessarily So" (from *Joe Henderson's Porgy & Bess*, Verve, 1997) Sting, vocals; Henderson, tenor sax; Conrad Herwig, trombone; John Scofield, guitar; Stefan Harris, vibes; Tommy Flanagan, piano; Dave Holland, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

You got me real paranoid here. He's not trying to do it as smooth as I would sing it, smooth across the lines and across the phrases. It sounds to me like somebody I know from back home, David Bassey, who had a group called the City Lights Jazz Orchestra. This is not a jazz singer, at least not to me. 3 stars. I wouldn't have guessed Sting. He did a credible job, but I knew he wasn't a jazz singer, not at all. The arrangement was good for his voice, but it was pretty straight, for lack of a better word, as compared to how most jazz singers would have sung it.

DB

CAUGHT
OCTOBER 1998



Diva: kinetic energy and an immense sound

MICHAEL RICHTER

Big Bands Battle at Bern

As the 1998 International Jazz Festival at Bern, Switzerland, got underway this May, you couldn't help but notice that a big band cutting contest was in the making.

Diva, "No Man's Band," surprised everyone with an immense sound. Led by drummer Sheri Maricle, Diva's set included superb solos by Laura Dwyer (alto saxophone), Deborah Weisz (trombone), Clair Daly (baritone saxophone) and spicy trumpeting by Jami Dauber, Tanya Darby and Kim Bosanti. Nick Perott's bass lead on "The Man I Love" and vocalist Terri Thornton's gutsy ballads transformed a conservative audience into an enthusiastic mob demanding double encores.

Second to hit was John Lewis, conducting the Swiss Jazz School Big Band through a tribute to Dizzy Gillespie. The performance featured Johnny Griffin on tenor, George Roberts on alto, Ron Kyzer on trumpet and Stewy von Wattenwyl on piano. Opening with Dizzy's theme song, "I Waited For You,"

SWISS JAZZ WATCH

the band rolled throughout the night with the student rhythm section holding pace. Lewis directed the band through intricate charts last performed in Europe while the pianist was a member of Gillespie's 1948 tour. Lewis provided an intoxicating nightcap accompanied by Ron Carter, the usually stoic bass man beaming a smile during their exchange on "Sweet Georgia Brown."

The Royal Canadian Swing Band provided a tribute to Benny Goodman's 1938 Carnegie Hall concert. Led by Goodman band alumni Peter Appleyard (vocals), pianist John Bunch and clarinetist Walt Levinsky, the band set down a swinging evening of Goodman hits.

The final big band performance of the festival was the Illinois Jacquet Big Band, which offered a nostalgic performance that included renditions of "Flying Home" and Louis Armstrong's "On The Sunny Side Of The Street." Joined by

guest trumpeter Clark Terry during the final number, the band left their stirring set on a high swing; however, they couldn't match the kinetic energy manifested by Diva.

This year's annual International Jazz Festival Bern Three-Key Award was presented to Lewis and Jacquet. Both received the Festival's Three-Key sculpture and a monetary award from the Swiss Bank Society.

Of course, big bands were not the only sounds from the five-day festival. The Gene Harris/Frank Wess and Cecil Payne/Ron Carter quintets wowed crowds, and the McCoy Tyner/George Coleman Quartet headlined the Gala Night show. Joe Henderson brought his George Gershwin tribute to town, featuring John Scofield, Tommy Flanagan, Conrad Herwig, Pete Sims and George Mraz; and bands such as the Kenny Neal Blues Band and Cornell Dupree and Stuff laid down the blues. For added inspiration, the Sensational Nightingales belted some soul-searing gospel.

—Keith Brickhouse

BEYOND

The Raw & The Cookin', Part II

by John Corbett

On a variety of recent issues and reissues, one captures a glimpse of the endless horizon of music from the early days of electrical recording. The era of the '30s and '40s saw profuse recording activity worldwide, some of it designed for release on commercial 78-rpm records, some undertaken by ethnographers in the field who were busy tagging and bagging musical traditions from thither and yon. Decades down the line, some of those folkloric research projects are being reclaimed as glorious listening experiences, available for public consumption.

Various artists: Peter Was A Fisherman (Rounder 1114; 67:04) ★★★★★ Funded by the Carnegie Corp., anthropologists Melville and Frances Herskovits spent the summer of '39 in Trinidad making a collection of field recordings that would eventually fuel Melville's influential work on the survival of African cultural traits in the New World. Though the recordings are sometimes rough, the songs (sung in English, patois and Yoruba) are absolutely fascinating. Many of the cuts are hymns, including Henry Williams' beautiful version of "What A Friend We Have In Jesus," with rhythmic hyperventilation designed to prime the pump for spirit possession. There are secular songs, too, like "Yan Mi, Yan Mi," a quick, very explicit debate over whether or not to have sex. This disc offers a much more complex view of Caribbean Creole musical culture than the post-Belafronte one that's usually offered.

L. H. Corrêa de Azevedo: Music Of Ceará And Minas Gerais (Ryko 10404; 63:27) ★★★★★ In the early '40s, musicologist and composer Corrêa de Azevedo set out to explore theretofore undocumented musics of his native Brazil for the Library of Congress' Archive of American Folk-Song. This 27-track collection draws from recordings made in the northeastern state of Ceará and, most interestingly, from the central state of Minas Gerais—the latter of which, while virtually unrecognized at the time, would later gain world recognition through the work of Milton Nascimento. Again, hi-fi sound it ain't; it was recorded on glass and aluminum discs under trying circumstances. But the music is an early indication of the immense musical wave Brazil has splashed on the rest of the planet since that time.

Various artists: Southern Journey Vol. 12—Georgia Sea Islands (Rounder 1712; 58:18) ★★★★★; Various: Southern Journey Vol. 13—Earliest Times (Rounder 1713; 51:53) ★★½ In 1935, intrepid folk documentarian Alan Lomax (who later aided Corrêa de Azevedo in his Brazilian quest) traveled to the Georgia Sea Islands off the southeastern U.S. coast, along with Zora Neale Hurston, to investigate some of the region's rich song traditions. He returned 25 years later and made these incredible field recordings, many with the same singers he'd met in his first trip. These collections bear testament to the unique music of the Islands, a thoroughly syncretic mix of Anglo-Euro and African elements. The gospelish *Vol. 12* covers biblical songs and spirituals, with outstanding singing led by John Davis, Bessie Jones, Willis Proctor and others. *Vol. 13* is subtitled "Songs For Everyday Living" and features some of the same love-



Jenks "Tex" Carman: the dixie cowboy

ly, deeply etched voices singing sea chanteys, ring shouts, work and funeral songs, with clapping, percussion and, on "Reg'lar, Reg'lar, Rollin' Under," a surprise appearance by Ed Young's fife and drum band from Mississippi.

Jenks "Tex" Carman: Chippeha! (Revenant 207; 59:23) ★★★★★ Of course, some of the rawest, most exotic music ever made has been manufactured in the heart of the American music industry. Take these sides from '47-'57 by "Tex" Carman, part-Cherokee singer/songwriter/guitarist ironically known as "the dixie cowboy." Carman sings and swings some country ditties, some novelty numbers, some Hawaiian songs, all the while playing slide horizontally, like a steel guitar, but standing up with it slung around his neck. He's a magician when it comes to sound effects, and any guitarist searching for new ideas should certainly tune him in, even now. **DB**

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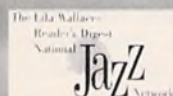


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Western Jazz Presenters Network

- Sept. 27 Carlsbad Arts and Humanities Council NM
- Sept. 28-9 New Mexico State Univ., Las Cruces NM
- Oct. 1 Mimbres Arts Council, Silver City NM
- Oct. 2 New Mexico Technical Institute, Socorro NM
- Oct. 3 Cibola Arts Council, Grants NM
- Oct. 4 Taos Art Association NM
- Oct. 5-6 Outpost Productions, Albuquerque NM
- Oct. 7 San Juan College, Farmington NM
- Oct. 9 (noon) California Plaza Presents, LA CA
- Oct. 9 Cal State Northridge CA
- Oct. 10 San Jose Jazz Society, San Jose CA
- Oct. 11 Tucson Jazz Society AZ
- Oct. 23 Pacific NW Jazz Alliance, Bellingham WA
- Oct. 24 Victoria Jazz Society, Victoria BC
- Oct. 25 Coastal Jazz & Blues Soc., Vancouver BC
- Oct. 26 Kuumbwa Jazz Center, Santa Cruz CA
- Oct. 29 Earshot Jazz, Seattle WA
- Oct. 30 San Francisco Jazz Festival CA
- Nov. 7 Southern Ohio Museum, Portsmouth OH
- Nov. 9 Antioch College OH
- Nov. 10 Murphy's, Toledo OH
- Nov. 11 Bluffton College OH
- Nov. 12 Miami University, Hamilton OH
- Nov. 14 Folly Theater, Kansas City KS
- Nov. 19 Penn State College, State College PA
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Hear Charles on his latest Arabeque release "Manhattan Nocturne"



WESTAF

This program was made possible with generous support from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest National Jazz Network, a program of the New England Foundation for the Arts in cooperation with Western States Arts Federation.

REISSUES

Sweatin' The Details

by Thomas Conrad

Among major-label jazz reissue programs, no one sweats the details like Columbia/Legacy. They use 20-bit Super Bit Mapping in the digital transfers for optimized audio quality. They reprint the original liner notes but also commission new ones from major jazz critics. They restore edited material and include copious alternate takes. They offer previously uncirculated photography from the recording sessions. They even provide facsimiles of the original LP back covers. Columbia/Legacy reissues are, in short, the best way to own the music they contain.

Charles Mingus: *The Complete 1959 Columbia Recordings* (Columbia/Legacy 65145; 72:34/59:41/38:47) ★★★★★ Imagine the unsuspecting jazz fan who, almost 40 years ago, buys *Mingus Ah Um*, takes it home, throws it on the turntable and experiences the opening two tracks for the first time. Did he think it could get any better than "Better Git It In Your Soul" and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat"?

The passionate opening calls and responses of "Better Git It" lead into wake-the-dead tenor saxophone solos from the mountaintop by John Handy and Booker Ervin. "Pork Pie Hat," one of the most moving eulogies in jazz literature, was written on the day Mingus learned of Lester Young's death, seven weeks before this session was recorded. The flutter-tonguing in Handy's lament is like held-back sobs. *Mingus Ah Um* does not contain anything else on the level of these first two tracks, but what album does? It is one of the indispensable Mingus recordings, and the digitally remixed late-'50s sound is startling in its clarity.

The other album from which this collection is drawn is *Mingus Dynasty*. It was recorded six months after *Ah Um* in the same 30th Street Studio in New York, yet the sound is distinctly inferior. The ensembles are pale and vague, and solo instruments are thin and brittle. But the riches of inner detail in Mingus' scoring for 10-piece ensemble document his growth as a composer. "Far Wells, Mill Valley" consists of intricate countermelodies and tone row scales and pedal point rhythmic patterns and seamless segues from written parts to improvisation. "Diane" is a complex atonal interaction of multiple melodic themes. It touches an emotional resonance almost as profound as "Pork Pie Hat," especially when Mingus' bass and Roland Hanna's piano emerge together from the ensemble glissando.

The third CD in the collection contains six alternate takes from the two sessions.

Thelonious Monk: *Monk Alone: The Complete Columbia Solo Studio*

Recordings, 1962-1968 (Columbia/Legacy 65495; 70:09/76:03) ★★★★★ The solo piano works of Monk are like paintings by Rouault: made from thick crude lines, stark and pure in their power, unapologetically *there*. This collection contains all the solo performances that were scattered, one or two at a time, through Monk's small-group studio recordings on Columbia. It also provides all the music from *Solo Monk*, the last of the three albums on which he played unaccompanied, and his only one for Columbia. Finally, there are 14 takes here (of 37 total) that have never before seen the light of day.

On pieces like "I Should Care," Monk's high octave tremolos clang like the bells of the Apocalypse. Yet his art is the opposite of somber, as demonstrated by the deadpan dissonant ironies of "Just A Gigolo." There are unearthed treasures among the previously unissued tracks, like the three takes of "Everything Happens To Me" (all like final summations) and a defiantly deliberate "Darn That Dream." Solo Monk is so concentrated and so rich that it is best taken in small doses, but it is wonderful to have these 37 epic statements in one place.



Herbie Hancock (left) with Chick Corea: fusion bandleaders on tour as an unplugged duo in the late '70s

Chet Baker With Strings (Columbia/Legacy 65562; 46:15) ★★★ ½ By 1953, when he was 24, Chet Baker had already become popular enough to record with a string section. For this session, nine of Hollywood's best violinists were added to an ensemble that included Zoot Sims, Bud Shank, Russ Freeman, Joe Mondragon and Shelly Manne. Johnny Mandel, Marty Paich, Shorty Rogers and Jack Montrose contributed arrangements.

The dim, blurred monophonic sound accentuates the feeling that this music comes from far away in time. Some of the uniformly short performances, like "I Married An Angel" (chart by Paich) and "I Love You" (chart by Mandel), with their sweetly lilting strings, are the quaintest of period pieces. Yet Baker plays with a purity of tone and an effortless conceptual sym-

metry that will surprise those who only know the sublime existential falterings of his late work. There are moments, like on Russ Freeman's "The Wind" and "You Don't Know What Love Is," when you sense the qualities with which Baker seduced a generation: wistful *faux* innocence, eroticism and decadence.

An Evening With Herbie Hancock & Chick Corea (Columbia/Legacy 65551; 39:20/52:02) ★★★ The music on this two-CD set (originally a double LP, never before available on disc in the U.S.) was recorded at four stops on a duo piano tour by Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea in February 1978. Bob Belden's liner notes make much of the fact that these two pianists had already achieved enormous commercial success with their electric fusion bands, and that their decision to tour as an acoustic duo signaled the return of jazz to its roots in the late '70s.

Hancock and Corea may have left their batteries of electric keyboards and synthesizers behind, but they carried over many of the unfortunate tendencies they acquired

in their electric bands: tasteless technical bravura and empty grandstand gesture. There are nice moments, to be sure, like when the jointly derived melody of "Someday My Prince Will Come" suddenly appears in the dense mutually woven introductory tapestry. But the exhausting self-indulgence of pieces like "Button Up," while no doubt fun for the players, shows why piano duos are mercifully rare. **DB**

Original Down Beat ratings:

- *Mingus Ah Um*: ★★★★★ (11/26/59)
- *Mingus Dynasty*: ★★★★★ (9/15/60)
- *Solo Monk*: ★★★ (7/29/65)
- *Chet Baker With Strings*: ★★ (7/14/54)
- *An Evening With Herbie Hancock & Chick Corea*: ★★★★★ (6/7/79)

JAZZ

So You Want To Lead A Band?

by John McDonough

That fantasy was once the top prize offered by Sammy Kaye on his weekly radio and TV shows to some lucky dilettante in the audience. Today, alas, it's more a curse, professionally speaking, than a fantasy. But to a few brave souls, it's also a cause, pursued for love and likely to cost money. Herewith, a handful of crusaders do indeed want to lead a band.

The Chicago Jazz Ensemble (Chase Music Group 8052; 61:33) ★★★★★ The music on the debut CD of William Russo's Chicago Jazz Ensemble plays the high cards in its deck with savvy, including the work of its talented featured trumpeter Orbert Davis (Russo's "The Horn Blower" is a compendium

"Second Line" from *The New Orleans Suite* features some bright and fluent clarinet work from Larry Combs, normally heard as first chair in the Chicago Symphony, as well as in harmony with vocalist Carol Loverde on "Translucency."

Bill Holman: *Further Adventurers* (Koch Jazz 6903; 55:52) ★★★ On the opening strains of Holman's 35-minute suite *Further Adventurers*, bone-chilling string voicings (like the kind that Bernard Herrmann used to invent for Alfred Hitchcock) make it sound like an evocative film score. Somehow, it finds its way into some loose, punchy big band jazz, some lyrical trumpet, and back again to the strings. And that's just in Part I. The remaining three sections are equally inclusive and multicolored, shifting sections and dynamics, and bringing us along a step at a time, sometimes with jarring abruptness. The unidentified alto soloist on Part II, which is pegged to a gentle muted trombone theme, is especially elegant. "Moon Of Manakoorah" is a light piece by Alfred Newman, and "Issues And Answers" is like a suite unto itself with more from the aforesaid altoist. The Netherlands Metropole Orchestra gives

ceptive and scene-setting introductions, the best being "Try A Little Tenderness." Konitz's melodic statements and variations on beauties like "Poor Butterfly" and "Come Sunday" are transparently pure. "Subconscious Lee" is the one anomaly, with Konitz playing against some driving brass and reeds.

Ernie Krivda & the Fat Tuesday Big Band: *Perdido* (Koch Jazz 7852; 65:31) ★★★★★ Nothing here but a good band working over a flock of standard charts by Thad Jones, Bob Florence, Marty Paich, Ernie Wilkins and others that seem to have been around forever but have never gone stale or out of style. Oliver Nelson's turn on "In A Mellowtone" is straight and uncluttered with a soli section that the reeds attack with plenty of vigor and edge. Lee Bush's rhythm guitar keeps everyone in a tight rhythmic groove, especially pianist Mark Kieswetter on "Perdido." Leader Ernie Krivda's tenor has a relatively light and smooth sound but no shortage of passion or push. And Matt Shulman and Brad Goode make one clarion trumpet duo on "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise." The tempos are medium to up nearly all the way, which is really the only



Chicago Jazz Ensemble: high cards played with savvy

of his skills and pristine sound), trombonist Audrey Morrison and the composing and conducting resources of its leader, whose writing has been in the air since his years with Stan Kenton in the early '50s. The centerpiece here is his *Chicago Suite No. 1*, five sketches, each named for some local institution. This gives the music program-like implications that are Mr. Russo's business, not ours particularly. It's all steeped in the heritage of Duke Ellington, from the muted brass passages in "The Blue Note" to the lovely brooding clarinets of "Studs," named for author Studs Terkel. "The Pershing" (as in the South Side hotel) finds the sections playing tag around Brandon McCune's bass before Eddie Johnson's alternately suave and gritty tenor moves in. The last five pieces constitute a little Ellington suite reviving the kind of mostly offbeat material that validates the whole repertory orchestra idea.

Holman's charts all the shine and precision a composer could want, even though as a body of work it doesn't really rise above the genre of a pumped-up jazz concert piece.

Lee Konitz: *Saxophone Dreams* (Koch Jazz 6900; 50:04) ★★★½ This is a pretty CD to settle in with some evening and unwind to. The Netherlands Metropole Orchestra is not the active ingredient here, but accompanist to the languid alto solos of Lee Konitz, who infuses these mostly familiar melodies with the kind of warmth and civility they deserve. As a work of substantive mood music, it succeeds amazingly well and recalls the smart pop work Johnny Hodges used to undertake occasionally on LPs like *The Prettiest Gershwin*, to which Konitz's dry sound and scholarly temperament are equally well suited. Rob Pronk contributes most of the arrangements and offers several short but per-

way to experience a swing band full of beans like this one.

Rob Parton's Jazztech Big Band: *Fascinatin' Rhythm* (Ropa Jazz 1033; 64:08) ★★★½ Here is the fourth CD in seven years by the Rob Parton band, which plays on a regular basis around Chicago and has the comfort and confidence with material that comes with familiarity. Unlike other bands that rely on a fairly standard inventory of published charts, Parton has been able to generate some first-class writing from within. Of special interest is Tony Garcia's "Jumpin' At The Westside," which has a couple of unexpected interludes of ensemble interplay during a rhythm drop-out, plus knowing solo work on trombone by the author. Other originals include "Donny's Tempo" and "Taylor's Waltz." Vocalist Kristy Parton also takes a stylish turn on "A Foggy Day" worth hearing. **DB**

exhilarating treatment of Fats Waller's "Jitterbug Waltz." Abrams is invaluable, giving a rumbling, tumultuous edge to Hill's "Symmetry," but adding joyful, flowing solos to "Jitterbug Waltz" and Dolphy's "Iron Man." *At The Berliner Jazztage* is nearly as good. Investigate Shaw's charismatic solo on Joe Chambers' "Hello To The Wind," or Larry Young's "Obsequious," which features bristling exchanges between Shaw and Slide Hampton. —Jon Andrews

Bemsha Swing: Bemsha Swing; Ginseng People; Well You Needn't; Eric; United; Nutty; In A Capricornian Way; Star Eyes; Theloniously Speaking. (55:04/54:04)
Personnel: Shaw, trumpet; Geri Allen, piano; Robert Hurst, bass; Roy Brooks, drums.

Two More Pieces Of The Puzzle: Hello To The Wind; Obsequious; Jean Marie; In The Land Of The Blacks (Bilad As Sudan); Iron Man; Jitterbug Waltz; Symmetry; Diversion One; Song Of Songs; Diversion Two. (48:48/41:50)
Personnel: Shaw, trumpet, cornet, flugelhorn, percussion; Rene McLean, alto saxophone, flute, percussion (1-4); Frank Foster, tenor and soprano saxophones (1-4); Anthony Braxton, clarinet (6), alto saxophone (7), soprano saxophone (9); Arthur Blythe, alto saxophone (5, 9); Slide Hampton, trombone (1-4); Ronnie Mathews (1-4); Muhl Richard Abrams (5-10), piano; Stafford James (1-4), Cecil McBee (5-10), bass; Louis Hayes (1-4), Joe Chambers (5, 7), Victor Lewis (6, 9), drums.



Arturo Sandoval

Hot House
 N2K 10023

★★★★½

With Sandoval's trumpet either exploring the outer limits or establishing a bright and brilliant core, *Hot House* is a fiesta of Latin rhythm, everything from danceable cha-chas to sensuous mambos to beautiful boleros, but, sadly, no sambas. "Only You (No Se Tu)" is a muy simpatico bolero, and vocalist Patti Austin's treatment is soft and smoky, as if she were setting the stage for a scene of romantic intrigue in an Argentina nightclub. An encore from her would have made the date even more delightful.

Other boleros are equally enchanting. It is easy to envision a moonlit night on "Closely Dancing," with a melody reminiscent of "Here's That Rainy Day." Ed Calle's alto sax and the electric guitar of Rene Toledo are swirling partners to Sandoval's mellow lines, and together they create an irresistibly lilting tango. And if you've got eyes and the feet for one more bolero, "New Images" is just what the dance master ordered. Again, Toledo is exquisitely expressive.

Completing the tour of Latin America is

"Funky Cha-Cha," which flows imperceptibly into the group's salsa-laced version of Tadd Dameron's "Hot House." Much of the fire here belongs to Michael Brecker, whose solo provides enough light and heat for the entire ensemble, though Sandoval is by no means content to bask in his glow.

"Mam-Bop" is also aptly named. A melange of familiar bebop filigree, including a phrase or two from "Salt Peanuts," is etched against a relentless mambo beat. Charles McNeil's tenor sax is the commanding voice on this homage to Perez Prado.

On a tribute to Tito Puente, the familiar refrain from the timbales is unmistakably the man himself. Sandoval at first accentuates the

melody, sharing it with Tito and conga player Manuel Castrillo, but soon the moment is exclusively his: When Sandoval wants the brass ring, he cannot be denied. —Herb Boyd

Hot House: Funky Cha-Cha; Rhythm Of Our World; Hot House; Only You (No Se Tu); Sandunga; Tito; Closely Dancing; Mam-Bop; New Images; Cuban American Medley; Brassmen's Holiday. (58:55)

Personnel: Sandoval, trumpet and flugelhorn; Jason Cardner, trumpet; Ed Calle, alto and baritone saxophones; Charles McNeil, Michael Brecker (1, 3), tenor saxophone; Dana Teboe, Joe Barati, trombone; John Stephens, piano; Tim Divine, synthesizer; Oskar Cartaya, Dennis Marks, bass; Willie Jones III, drums; Manuel Castrillo, congas, timbales, guiro, bongos; Rey Ruiz, Patti Austin (4), vocals; Edwin Bonilla, cowbell, timbales, maracas; Rene Toledo, acoustic and electric guitar; Tito Puente (6, 10, 11), timbales.

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Don Sebesky

**I Remember Bill:
A Tribute To Bill Evans**
RCA Victor 68929

★★★★

A versatile and often quite moving arranger (and composer), Don Sebesky always brings a touch of class to even his most commercial projects. Since this is a labor of love, not a work for hire, the writing is exemplary, with many moments that glow.

As usual, Sebesky emphasizes the softer colors of the orchestral palette: soprano saxes, flutes, clarinets, muted bones and trumpets, giving his writing that gossamer, floating quality. But as those are the timbres that match the innovative pianist's musical personality, he's on solid ground.

Sebesky has selected the numbers with care, picking from Evans' originals, tunes associated with *Kind Of Blue* and numbers he liked to play, and they all evoke the lovely melodicism that was a core part of jazz in the '50s and '60s.

"All The Things You Are" offers a typically pithy-toned Lee Konitz improv replete with his stark-then-warm ideas and a Larry Coryell outing that finds intense passages followed by chords that ring distinctively. Then there are some delicious orchestrations of an Evans solo, played by soprano saxes, then muted brass, more sopranos and tuba, all delivered in between Morell's drum whaps.

Another skillful use of the pianist's improv is on "So What," where the durable line is played by brass, bass, bass clarinet and more. Here, Dave Samuels' vibes are sandwiched neatly between snippets of Evans' choruses from the Davis record, played by the band. Joe Lovano displays his inherent lyricism and such trademarks as guttural outbursts from horn bottom that vault suddenly to horn top, and Tom Harrell sounds almost shy in spare, romantic statements. Lovano and Harrell also score on "Waltz" and "Autumn."

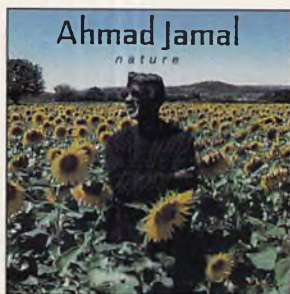
Sebesky's perky "Bill, Not Gil" and "T.T.T.T.," another mover, happily showcase Bob Brookmeyer's resilient and swinging valve trombone artistry as well as Eddie Daniels' golden-toned, nimble-fingered work. "Peace Piece," hardly moving at all, finds Hubert Laws' flute suitably mellow and warm.

Vocals by John Pizzarelli, Jeanie Bryson and the New York Voices light up "Remember Bill" (aided by a tender Toots Thielemans solo), "Blue In Green" and "Very Early," respectively. A brief interview with the master is a fitting close to these proceedings. —Zan Stewart

I Remember Bill: Waltz For Debby; I Remember Bill; So What; Quiet Now; All The Things You Are; Peace Piece; Bill, Not Gil; Very Early; T.T.T.T. (Twelve Tone Tune Two); Autumn

Leaves; Blue In Green; I'm Getting Sentimental Over You; Epilogue; Bill Evans Interview. (78:32)

Personnel: Sebesky, arranger, conductor; John Miller, conductor. Featured players include: Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone (1, 3, 10); Lee Konitz, alto saxophone (5, 12); Tom Harrell, trumpet (3); flugelhorn (1, 10); Toots Thielemans, harmonica (2,8); Hubert Laws, flute (6, 11); Eddie Daniels, clarinet (4, 7, 9, 13); John Pizzarelli, guitar (2, 4), vocal (2); Larry Coryell, guitar (1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12); Bob Brookmeyer, valve trombone (7, 9); Dave Samuels, vibraphone (3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11); Jeanie Bryson, vocal (11); New York Voices, vocals (8); Marc Johnson (1, 3, 7, 9, 10), Eddie Gomez (2, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12), bass; Marty Morell (2, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12), Joe LaBarbera (1, 3, 7, 9, 10), Dennis Mackrel (5, 7, 8, 10), drums; Sue Evans (3), Joe Passaro (6), percussion; plus orchestral brass, woodwinds and strings.



Ahmad Jamal

Nature
Atlantic 83115

★★★

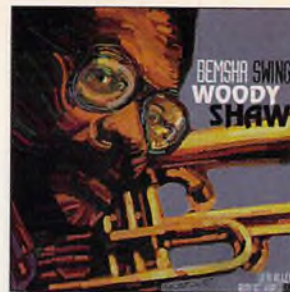
The unequivocal highlight and joy of *Nature*, part three of Ahmad Jamal's Essence series, is the presence of Othello Molineaux. From the opening number, "If I Had You Again," to its reprise at the close, the resonate blend of Molineaux's pans with Jamal's lush piano is both distinctive and quite appealing. They are like synchronized swimmers or divers with their unison attack, particularly on "Like Someone In Love" and "Fantastic Vehicle."

Molineaux is a talented improviser, and the alleged limitations of the pans are not apparent as he spins off long, intricate lines that possess all the drama and leaps of Jamal's piano. More of this and less of the leader's interest in merely exploring the dynamics of his instrument would have improved things considerably. By the way, where was that deft use of silence and pregnant pauses, followed by explosive breaks, that has typified Jamal's style over the years? Only during the coda of the last tune was there any semblance of these successful elements.

"Devil's In My Den" has some of Jamal's penchant for lavish, florid exposition, and he is nearly peerless in organizing an assortment of differing tonal images. Even so, his spatial prowess, his way of suspending passages and allowing the drummer and bassist to carry the moment, is minimized on *Nature*, whereas it was clearly in evidence in the previous editions of the series. Some of the lean, spare technique, at least on this tune, is ably filled by tenor saxophonist Stanley Turrentine, who makes no other appearance. —Herb Boyd

Nature: If I Find You Again; Like Someone In Love; Chaperon; Devil's In My Den; And We Were Lovers; Fantastic Vehicle; The End Of A Love Affair; Cabin In The Sky; If I Find You Again. (48:08)

Personnel: Jamal, piano; James Chamack, bass; Othello Molineaux, steel drum; Idris Muhammad, drums; Stanley Turrentine, tenor saxophone (4).



Woody Shaw

Bemsha Swing
Blue Note 29029

★★★★½

**Two More Pieces
Of The Puzzle**
32 Records 32069

★★★★

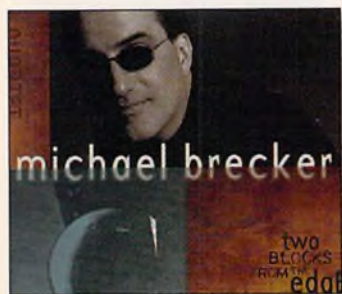
It's testimony to the lasting appeal of Woody Shaw's music that, a decade after his passing, "new" and newly reissued Shaw CDs are appearing in the stores. *Bemsha Swing* is among Shaw's last recordings, a 1986 live date documented by drummer Roy Brooks. It's a curiosity for a number of reasons, including the program's concentration on music written or inspired by Thelonious Monk, and the presence of pianist Geri Allen and bassist Robert Hurst alongside Brooks and Shaw.

The threshold question is how Shaw played in this late stage of his career. The trumpeter easily occupies the center of attention on *Bemsha Swing*, playing with confidence and asserting command over the proceedings. His tone is clear and strong, and his signature riffs are well represented. Sound quality is adequate, with Shaw's trumpet positioned well upfront in the mix.

For highlights, Shaw's elegant "In A Capricornian Way" delivers his most lyrical, expressive playing of the night, and on Wayne Shorter's "United," he sounds particularly bright and enthusiastic. The emphasis on Monk is a little mystifying, as the quartet shows no special affinity for Monk's tunes. Shaw adeptly negotiates Monk's rhythms, seemingly without extending himself. Allen sounds a little tentative with the Monk material, but much more at ease with "Star Eyes" and "In A Capricornian Way." One can't place *Bemsha Swing* in the first echelon of Shaw's recordings, but it will reward listeners who followed the trumpeter's career.

Many of Shaw's LPs were initially released by the Muse label, and 32 Records is diligently repackaging and reissuing his catalog. *Two More Pieces Of The Puzzle* is the first CD reissue of *The Woody Shaw Concert Ensemble At The Berliner Jazztage* (1976) and *The Iron Men* (1977). *The Iron Men* is especially noteworthy, as Shaw leads an elite group including Anthony Braxton and Mual Richard Abrams through a program honoring Eric Dolphy (an early supporter of Shaw), Andrew Hill and some of their contemporaries. Shaw's solos are consistently thoughtful and well-organized. Braxton adds blissful clarinet to an

Personnel: Wilson, guitar; John D'Earth, trumpet; Art Baron, trombone; Jerry Dodgion, Ted Nash, Joe Temperley, reeds; Bennie Wallace, tenor saxophone; Mike LeDonne, piano, B-3; Danton Boller, bass; Jeff Ballard, drums.



Michael Brecker Quartet

Two Blocks from the Edge
Impulse! 260

★★★★½

There are two opposite and equally valid ways to interpret this album. On one level, it's Michael Brecker in top form, blowing the tenor licks that spawned thousands of imitators, who no doubt already salivate at the mere mention of this album. On another level, it's largely a straightforward, ready-for-contem-

por-jazz-radio product that will leave other listeners hungry for more innovation.

First, the good news: Success hasn't stolen one hour from Brecker's practice regimen, it seems. From the double-time flurries in "Madame Toulouse" to the Indian cries of "Delta City Blues," Brecker's chops are as powerful as ever, and diehard fans will not be disappointed. On "El Nino," a catchy, Latin-tinged number with a title that screams for airplay, he takes things slightly outside at one point, landing on some raunchy split tones just long enough to get our attention, but not long enough to scare off radio programmers. I'm also drawn to a phrase in "El Nino" where he repeats the same note several times, giving each a different inflection with scoops and swoops of the embouchure. Even when he falls back on clichés, at least they're his clichés, and if anyone has a right to imitate Michael Brecker, it's Michael Brecker. (Another perk: This CD is 100 percent EWI-free. While Brecker is the undisputed champion of that wacky gizmo, it's a gimmick whose time has come and gone.)

Brecker has been accused of having no soul, but to be fair, I suspect he really does cast a reflection in the mirror. No, let's not paint him as the Count Dracula of the music world. Leave that honor to Marilyn Manson. On the one hand, I can see what his detractors mean; there's something discomfitingly deliberate about his playing at times, as if he wrote out his solo in advance and is reading it down like the consummate studio pro we all know he is. But honestly, there's little ill wind to be blown about his soloing here. His statement on the title track is a tour de force, ven-

turing further outside than I can ever remember hearing him play. And his a cappella introduction to "Delta City Blues" is an example of musical humor, range and, yes, down-and-dirty soul.

If anything comes across as a little sterile on *Two Blocks From The Edge*, it lies in the rhythm section. Sure, they're each talented on their respective instruments, and any student of jazz would be awestruck by their calculated professionalism. But with only a few exceptions, their mostly straightahead backdrop leaves this critic with a case of the humdrums. A couple of instances are outright annoying, like the unrelenting tambourine on "Madame Toulouse" and Joey Calderazzo's equally relentless piano vamp during Jeff "Tain" Watts' solo on "The Impaler." Throw in an insipid ballad like "Cat's Cradle," and it's almost enough to send a record-shopper fleeing for the cutout bin. Almost.

So here we have a critic with two brains. The first, thrilled with Brecker blowing at his best, awards five stars. The second, stricken with a spell of the same-ol' same-ol's, is stingy and will only give it one star. So we split the difference at three, plus a half-star for Brecker's enduring status as chops-meister supreme. Not that he needs stars to sell this CD anyway. To no one's surprise, it's already climbed up the jazz charts. —John Janowiak

Two Blocks From The Edge: Madame Toulouse; Two Blocks From The Edge; Bye George; El Nino; Cat's Cradle; The Impaler; How Long 'Til The Sun; Delta City Blues. (55:47)

Personnel: Brecker, tenor saxophone; Joey Calderazzo, piano; James Genus, bass; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums; Don Alias, percussion.

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peak with the tragic beauty of "You Don't Know What Love Is." Martino's guitar lines seem to drift over the rhythm bed created by Goldstein, and when the two converge, the effect can be exquisite. Only a perfunctory reading of "Send In The Clowns" misses the mark. The sustained chords of the electric piano help support the rainy, somewhat forlorn ambience.

—Jon Andrews

Stone Blue: *Uptown Down; Stone Blue; With All The People; 13 To Go; Boundaries; Never Say Goodbye; Mac Tough; Joyous Lake; Two Weighs Out.* (60:04)

Personnel: Martino, guitar; Eric Alexander, tenor saxophone; Delmar Brown, keyboards; James Genus, electric bass; Kenwood Dennard, drums, percussion.

We'll Be Together Again: *Open Road; Lament; We'll Be Together Again; You Don't Know What Love Is; Dreamsville; Send In The Clowns; Willow Weep For Me.* (44:05)

Personnel: Martino, guitar. Gil Goldstein, electric piano.



Chucho Valdés

Bele Bele En La Habana
Blue Note 23082

★★★★½

Jesús "Chucho" Valdés has been known to American audiences since the late '70s as the leader and principal composer/arranger of the Cuban Latin-jazz-classical fusion band Irakere. It's only in the past couple of years, however, that he's emerged as perhaps the most brilliant jazz piano virtuoso since Art Tatum. Has he improved that much over the years, or have we simply not been paying attention?

Perhaps it's just that the 57-year-old Valdés

has only recently begun to promote himself as a solo artist. *Bele Bele En La Habana* is actually his second album on Blue Note, but it's much better produced than the live-in-London session the label quietly released in 1993, capturing his blinding speed and exquisite touch in all their sonic glory. Recorded in Toronto with his Havana quartet (including bassist Alain Pérez Rodríguez, percussionist Roberto Vizcaino Guillot and drummer Raúl Piñeda Roque), it emphasizes the Cuban rather than the jazz side of his repertoire, showcasing his razzle-dazzle technique instead of his ability to swing.

The album opens on a less-than-auspicious note with Valdés' own "Son Montuno": Propelled by Piñeda's hyperkinetic, Dave Weckl-style drumming, the tune is virtually pure flash, with Valdés erupting into a display of keyboard pyrotechnics that makes "Flight Of The Bumblebee" sound like "Chopsticks." Valdés gives Gershwin's "But Not For Me" a florid mambo treatment but sticks mainly to Latin standards like Rafael Hernandez's familiar "El Cumbanchero," which he shatters into kaleidoscopic fragments. He's at his best on strictly Cuban material like the classic "Tres Lindas Cubanos," which he plays as a stately danzón, or the driving descarga "Con Poco Coco," composed by his father, mambo-era bandleader Bebo Valdés.

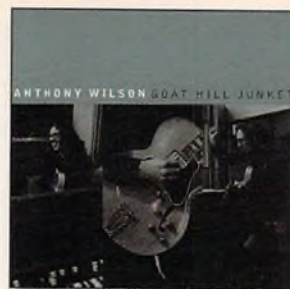
Valdés spices the material with modern-jazz chords and blues riffs but draws primarily from the Cuban piano heritage of Ernesto Lecuona, Lili Martínez and Peruchin; even his Cecil Taylor-ish free-jazz outbursts grow out of this tradition. The tightly locked Afro-Cuban beats are galvanizing but leave little room for swing; Valdés really can play jazz, but here he's just jazzy.

As a pianist, Valdés is vulnerable to the same criticisms Tatum was subjected to: that he's highly conventional, adds nothing to the music's vocabulary and is basically an embellisher. But what an embellisher! With greased-lightning arpeggios, turbo-glide dynamics, mind-boggling cross-rhythms and glisses too glitzy for Liberace, his technique offers more than mere entertainment. Like Tatum's, it's art.

—Larry Birnbaum

Bele Bele En La Habana: *Son Montuno; Lorraine; But Not For Me; Con Poco Coco; El Cumbanchero; Tres Lindas Cubanos; La Siteria; Los Caminos.* (56:16)

Personnel: Valdés, piano; Alain Pérez Rodríguez, acoustic bass, vocals; Roberto Vizcaino Guillot, congas, cowbell, chekeré, batá drum, chimes, güiro; Raúl Piñeda Roque, trap drums.



Anthony Wilson

Goat Hill Junket
MAMA 1022

★★★★½

It's in the genes. The son of renowned big band maestro Gerald Wilson proves with his sophomore outing, the melodically rich *Goat Hill Junket*, that his impressive debut last year was no fluke. The 30-year-old composer/arranger/bandleader/guitarist takes a delightful stroll down the mainstream with his 10-piece ensemble, featuring several New York horn players such as trombonist Art Baron and the star of the show, tenor saxophonist Bennie Wallace.

This is classic jazz—not a retro statement, but swing-propelled music that stands on its own elegant and relaxed beauty. Wilson emphasizes lyrical material, including standards such as "Here's That Rainy Day" given a lush and moving treatment and fine originals such as the grooving opener "W-2 Blues," hued with the soft-toned touch of the leader's soothing guitar runs. Particularly noteworthy are Wilson's ambitious arrangements, which, while neither overly risky or surprising, have enough tempo and time shifts to make for an engaging listen. Plus, instead of the around-the-horn jam approach to improvisation, Wilson carefully assigns choruses.

Wallace is superb. He contributes the whimsical and invigorating "It Has Happened To Me," with its Monkish angular lines that the horns take for a ride, and ends the set with a great performance soaring his way with soulful fervor through the romantic-reflective "Stairway To The Stars."

As for the leader's solo excursions, he too makes a strong showing, especially on the slow dance "Georgia Waltz," which opens into an uptempo 4/4 time swing section fueled by his blues-streaked glee, and "Hell's Belles," a tango-flamed number graced by his lilting licks. However, for the most part, Wilson's guitar playing stays in the conventional zone. In other words, he opts for the caress when in some cases a sting might have sounded better. Given his background in pop music sensibilities, it is surprising that he doesn't unleash himself more often. Maybe next time.

But, hey, this is only Wilson's second album. He presents a choice disc that forecasts more good things to come. Based on what we've heard so far, expect Wilson, one of the more creative jazz artists of the young generation, to be one notch better on his next collection.

—Dan Ouellette

Goat Hill Junket: *W-2 Blues; Here's That Rainy Day; The Cherry Tree; It Has Happened To Me; Georgia Waltz; Hell's Belles; Flossie Lou; Stairway To The Stars.* (64:05)

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it lobbies for a democratic decorum where mood is king, and helpers have as much say as stars. As the guitarist coozies up to the strings on his own "October Song," or darts around the swells of brass on "Whisper Not," his playing becomes just another part of the orchestration.

There are overly aggressive arrangers who telegraph a feeling of dissatisfaction with a piece's original structure. Hall's not one. Throughout the disc, the core logic of the tunes is acknowledged, if not stressed. It's just that as his charts yield to the power of filigree with such expertise, something novel emerges. Distinguished by the same kind of gentility and smarts that mark his guitar work, this sometimes forlorn, sometimes sassy treatise on embellishment is one of this composer-arranger's most persuasive moments.

—Jim Macnie

By Arrangement: *Django*; *Waltz For Debby*; *Ruby My Dear*; *Goodbye*; *Art Song*; *October Song*; *Wendy*; *The Wind*; *Whisper Not*. (60:55)

Personnel: Hall, guitar; Scott Colley, bass; Terry Clarke, drums; Tom Harrell, flugelhorn (3, 5, 7, 8); Joe Lovano, clarinet, soprano sax; Pat Metheny, acoustic guitar (1); the New York Voices (2, 8); Greg Osby, alto saxophone (8).



Pat Martino & Joyous Lake

Stone Blue
Blue Note 53082

★★★★½

Pat Martino

We'll Be Together Again
32 Records 32071

★★★★

Pat Martino's path has taken so many twists and turns that no development should surprise us. Who would have predicted a reunion of the guitarist's 1976 fusion group, which recorded just one eponymous album?

In a contemporary setting, Martino's revived Joyous Lake band skillfully exposes the hidden connections between soul-jazz and jazz-rock fusion. Tracks like "Uptown Down" and "All The People" use repetition to burn their infectious hooks into the listener's consciousness. Those who characterize Martino as an ascetic Zen master of guitar overlook years spent on the chitlin' circuit with the likes of Jack McDuff, and later with Willis Jackson. This music grooves, though with uncommon intelligence. As Martino's notes explain, his compositions

evoke times and places from his past, and also people, like McDuff and the late Michael Hedges.

Keyboardist Delmar Brown and drummer Kenwood Dennard return from the original quartet, augmented by underrated electric bassist James Genus and tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander. Grooves defined by Genus and decorated by Brown and Dennard frame Martino's solos, which can be tart and understated, but also highly expressive. You hear his roots in soul and the blues come through on "Mac Tough" and "With All The People," and he possesses the ability to entrance the listener with long, evolving solos. Alexander, who's usually heard in straightahead settings, makes the most of the generous solo space given him. Displaying a light, airy tone on the tenor, he

crafts agile, fluent solos over the racing beats of "With All The People" and "Boundaries." In the guise of a stylish, accomplished fusion project, *Stone Blue* offers some of Martino's most personal music.

In the Martino canon, *We'll Be Together Again* is both atypical and obscure. Recorded the same year as the original *Joyous Lake* (to be reissued by 32 Records in early 1999), this project pairs Martino's guitar with Gil Goldstein's electric piano for a series of lyrical, pensive duets. "Open Road," the sole original on the CD, establishes a mood of melancholy restlessness. Martino's approach to J.J. Johnson's "Lament" and Henry Mancini's "Dreamsville" strikes the ideal balance, expressing tenderness without melodrama. The guitarist's work is always tasteful and incisive, but he reaches a



Cara Timbrell of the Lamont Woodwind department.

Bar Lines are there to be crossed.

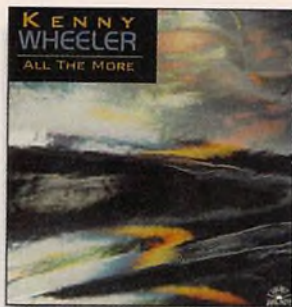
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Kenny Wheeler

All The More
Soul Note 121236

★★★★

There aren't too many composers—jazz or otherwise—these days who can write lush, romantic music that holds my interest. Most often it either feels disingenuous and calculated, too safe, too rapidly florid or it just lacks the musical intelligence that made the great romantics great. Kenny Wheeler is one of the few who can be lovely and meaningful, too. Gifted with a supreme melodic imagination and the deep understanding of harmony to complement it, his music is at once unapologetically pretty and entirely captivating.

The Canadian-born, London-based trumpet player has been releasing records on a wider range of labels than he had in an earlier era,

when he contained himself more exclusively to ECM. This Soul Note CD has, in fact, been in the can since 1993 (the Italian label reportedly has a real problem with backlogged items slated for release), but it still sounds very fresh. Working with a stripped-down quartet, Wheeler's instrumentation here hearkens back to his first ECM date, 1975's *Gnu High*, with Keith Jarrett, Dave Holland and Jack DeJohnette. It reminds one how unusual it is to hear a brass-led group without another horn—no doubt they're so scarce because hardly any trumpeters are confident enough to sustain such a revealing lineup. But Wheeler's playing is another highlight of *All The More*; he's forceful and driving on the title track, and elegantly singing on "Introduction To No Particular Song" and the rhythmically subtle "Nonetheless" (credited to drummer Joe LaBarbera on the tray-card, but discussed as a Wheeler piece—which it certainly sounds like—in the liner notes).

Wheeler's been working with pianist John Taylor since even before they teamed up with singer Norma Winstone to form Azimuth in '77. Taylor's prowess is indisputable, and while I've heard him fall victim to the aforementioned perils of romancing-the-known, he's extremely tasteful on this date, comping heartily and providing more than mere support. The music gels with LaBarbera's solid backing and the startling bass of Furio di Castri, whose big sound jumps out from the outset of "Phrase One" and whose outstanding time feel is evident on up-tempo sections of "Mark Time."

Sweet and tuneful, but still for real, Wheeler's charts, his band and his playing are inspiring. Listen in on a life that's both lush and alive.

—John Corbett

All The More: Phrase One; All The More; Mark Time; Introduction To No Particular Song; The Imminent Immigrant; Nonetheless; Kind Of Bill; Summer Night. (63:04)

Personnel: Wheeler, trumpet, flugelhorn; John Taylor, piano; Furio di Castri, bass; Joe LaBarbera, drums.



Jim Hall

By Arrangement
Telarc 83436

★★★★

Some musicians become cautious late in life, whittling the grand concepts of youth to a more approachable scale. But Jim Hall's moves have been refined from the get-go. So maybe it's only right that an esthetic built on small combo interplay now bends toward an extended palette. *By Arrangement*, a follow-up to the 67-year-old guitarist's much heralded *Textures* disc, is a program of cagey orchestrations for both brass and strings. And though poise sets the tone, the record's bursting with ideas.

Time has only enhanced Hall's imagination. The guitarist is masterful at letting his thoughts unfurl before assigning them musical parameters, the reason why most of his designs are marked by a sense of adventure. Though based in Manhattan, he and his family also spend time in more rural New York environments. Not surprisingly, much of *By Arrangement* has a pastoral feel, the sound of provocative whimsy.

The disc is loaded with standards, but these updates are daring enough to revitalize their essence. Gorgeous or not, "Waltz For Debby" had been played out for me. But slipped between a mercurial "Django" and a poignant "Ruby My Dear," Hall's spin exploits key elements, reminding that the simple can be profound. Stoked by the New York Voices' cream-puff harmonies, and threaded with the leader's supple improvis, the tune is resuscitated. By the time it closes with the vocalists' calliope references, Hall has squeezed some abstract pop out of a dusty jazz antique. Fans of Sunflower-era Brian Wilson might take special notice.

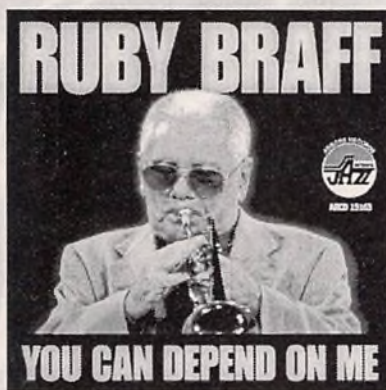
Though featured soloists dot the proceedings, none achieves the boss's eloquence. Pat Metheny's addition to the opening twist on "Django" (rhymes with tango) gives the track some valuable insistence. Joe Lovano's reeds sound utterly in sync with the bantam boogaloo of Gordon Jenkins' "Goodbye," but it's hard to overestimate the kaleidoscopic beauty of Hall's playing. As he flits through the conclusion of "Ruby My Dear," you realize he must have pre-planned his lines to adhere to the arrangement. Yet they're defined only by impulse.

In a way, *By Arrangement* isn't about launch-in solos. The antithesis of a me-me-me record,

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Garrison-styled jam with "Latin Shuffle," and offer slow gospel to a reinvented Sly Stone classic, "Everyday People."

MMW continues as a younger generation's answer to Henry Mancini. Their soundtrack-oriented style puts the emphasis on mood, style and attitude. But with *Combustication*, what was fun movie music has suddenly become funhouse, crazyquilt movie music, scaled down and updated for late-'90s consumption.

—John Ephland

Combustication: *Sugarcraft; Just Like I Pictured It; Start/Stop; Nocturne; Hey-Hee-Hi-Ho; Whatever Happened To Gus; Latin Shuffle; Everyday People; Coconut Boogaloo; Church Of Logic; No Ke Ano Ahiah; Hypnotized.* (68:46)
Personnel: John Medeski, keyboards; Chris Wood, basses, bass drum; Billy Martin, drums and percussion; DJ Logic, turntable (1, 3, 10); Steve Cannon, spoken word (6).



Louie Bellson

The Art Of The Chart
 Concord Jazz 4800

★★★★

Precision is a nasty little word in some jazz circles. It emphasizes the group over the individual. It hints at a submission to order in a music that values freedom of expression. It denotes discipline over soul. But sometimes precision has a sheer physical beauty to it that commands its own special awe. A case in point is Louie Bellson.

He moves through these dozen ensembles putting sticks to drums with the precision and grace of Astaire applying feet to floors. There is a quality of dance in Bellson's terse, elegant exchanges with the band on fleet pieces such as "Quiet Riot" and "With Bells On" (Bill Holman and Thad Jones charts respectively that somehow share almost identical intros). The ring of rim shots hangs still in the air over churning snare patterns ("Your Wake Up Call"), and the boom of the bass drum punctuates peppery breaks with size and presence. Beneath the courtly, off-handed insouciance lies a rigid musicality and a superbly tuned set of Remos.

But Bellson is much more than a great drummer. He is a big band architect of the first order, who has been turning out contemporary big band swing albums like this since 1953. All have been studio bands with a continuity of personnel and creative vision. Composer/arrangers such as Tommy Newsom, Bill Holman, Bob Florence, Thad Jones, Jack Hayes and, most of all, Bellson himself have provided a steady flow of original material that has kept the band in a consistent and creatively dynamic groove longer than any now playing. Taken together, they constitute a formidable—and underappreciated—body of work.

This set is so squarely in the Bellson big band tradition, it's practically a self-tribute, showcasing its arranging brain trust of the last 25 years. A few are remakes from past Bellson dates. Rickey Woodward's tenor and Bellson's shuffle-with-backbeat charge full bore into Newsom's take on "The Intimacy Of The Blues," and the reed section shines on "Quiet Riot," both done previously on Bellson's first Pablo LP in 1975. And Pete Christlieb, who's been with Bellson since 1966, is fresh on Thad Jones' quirky "With Bells On" from a 1985 Bosco LP.

The other titles, to my knowledge, are either new or previously unrecorded (Jones' "To C.P. With Love," Ernie Wilkins' "3x5+16"). Newsom, who was prominently featured in the old Tonight Show band, provides six of the 12

charts, mostly on Bellson tunes. "The Admiral" is a fine outing for baritonist Jack Nimitz, and "Ike, Mike and Spike" is a wonderful, tightly wrapped package of trombone and sax section writing, with a brief wink to "King Porter Stomp" at the end.

—John McDonough

The Art Of The Chart: *Berne, Baby, Berne!; The Intimacy of the Blues; To C.P. With Love; Summer Love; Who Brings You The Good News?; Your Wake Up Call; Conte; With Bells On; Quiet Riot; The Admiral; Ike, Mike And Spike.* 3x5+16. (64:25)

Personnel: Conte Candoli, George Graham, Walt Johnson, Carl Saunders, Frank Szabo, trumpets; George Bohanon, Andy Martin, Dave Ryan, Mike Wimberly, Jimmy Zito, trombones; Sal Lozano, Ray Reed, Pete Christlieb, Rickey Woodward, Jack Nimitz, saxophones; Mike Lang, Ross Tompkins (2), piano; Chuck Berghofer, bass; Jack Arnold, percussion; Bellson, drums.

trio fascination

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THE FINEST JAZZ SINCE 1945
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Medeski Martin & Wood

Combustication
Blue Note 93011

★★★½

With this Blue Note debut under their belts, and after their telling encounter with John Scofield earlier this year (*A Go Go*; see April '98), Medeski Martin & Wood seems to be on the verge. Of what, is hard to tell.

The best stuff on *Combustication* comes when the band starts to let go, mixing it up in ways that have little to do with their perceived modus operandi: dance music, organ-based jazz or just being "groovy." Their insertion of what a compact disc blip sounds like at the end of "Church Of Logic" is probably a first. Likewise, their open-ended lethargy on "No Ke Ano Ahiahi" is fetching, straddling the subterranean mood started in earnest with "Church Of Logic" and finishing with the album closer, "Hypnotized."

When their slack-based, shuffle-funk beat permeates *Combustication* (e.g., "Sugarcraft," "Start/Stop," "Coconut Boogaloo," "Hypnotized"), the music threatens to go in circles, like a tired dog chasing his tail. This rhythmic concept, so determinative of the band's sound, isn't strong enough to repeat itself from album to album. That's why clever-to-imaginative twists and turns like "Church Of Logic" are so appealing, and breakout numbers like "Latin Shuffle" are so refreshing: These guys don't need to be a chops-oriented band as long as they have new arrangements that surprise and Medeski decides to jump on other instruments besides his tried-and-true Hammond B-3 and Wurliitzer ("Just Like I Pictured It," featuring his overdubbed acoustic piano laced with synth strings, delights like a long, tall, cool one).

Something runs through much of the material here that gives off the musical feeling of being half-asleep/half-awake: Most of the tempos hover around medium-to-slow; sound effects, devices and selected personnel are used (turntablist DJ Logic is employed on three tunes, a spoken-word piece for "Whatever Happened To Gus" for one); and a certain mannered, sometimes scary dementia sticks to many numbers like humidity ("Nocturne"). They do break away at one point on a McCoy Tyner/Elvin Jones/Jimmy

THE HOT BOX

CDs	CRITICS	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
MEDESKI MARTIN & WOOD <i>Combustication</i>		★★½	★★★½	★★★★	★★★½
LOUIE BELLSON <i>The Art Of The Chart</i>		★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★
KENNY WHEELER <i>All The More</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★½	★★★★
JIM HALL <i>By Arrangement</i>		★★★½	★★★	★★★★	★★★★

CRITICS' COMMENTS

MEDESKI MARTIN & WOOD, *Combustication*

The organ should be a "Miscellaneous Instrument" in the polls. Also, better to compete with the immortals than sing about them. —JMD

Newoldfangled funky goodness that shakes some action and sometimes gets a little too long-in-the-tooth. DJ Logic's off-kilter collaging is a welcome dose of energy—sign him up! Medeski chooses particularly cool organ/keyboard sounds, and Steve Cannon's hepster dream-speech sends weirdness needles into the red. "Nocturne" hints at what they could do if Martin dropped the Meters/JBs-derived safety-net more often. —JC

Their triumph is due to a keen relationship between funk and frolic. On this latest dispatch, the groove protects the precociousness without downplaying any of the highjinks. And with DJ Logic latched on, those highjinks border on psychedelic. —JM

LOUIE BELLSON, *The Art Of The Chart*

Big Band Explosion!, replete with explicit and accurate exclamation point. Don't look for subtlety or understatement. Brash, brassy TV big-band sound, screeching trumpets, Tommy Newsom's unidirectional, boorish arrangements built to suit (exception: Bob Florence's peppy "Your Wake Up Call"). No execution difficulties, but as for the musicality—the "art," if you will—it's hard to pick out amid all the exclamation points. —JC

The precision is seductive—God knows there are too many sloppy big bands in action these days. But the session needs a few rocks in its bed. The overly sunny department tacitly expresses emotional restrictions. —JM

Bellson takes a less-is-more approach to drumleading. Tight arrangements keep his band reined in for maximum impact. Unfortunately, the near-perfect brass blowing creates a dull sameness from cut to cut. —JE

KENNY WHEELER, *All The More*

Lyricism is its own best reward. —JMD

This quartet date reminds that the trumpeter has a sharp attack to go with those dreamy tunes Evan Parker praises in his liner notes. At certain points Wheeler's horn takes on a Lee Morgan brashness—something I'd forgotten it was capable of. —JM

This is straight Wheeler, heavy on the chops, with less emphasis on composition (although, the album flows seamlessly from beginning to end). And while there are no truly memorable Wheeler tunes here, it's that tone one remembers long after the playing has stopped. —JE

JIM HALL, *By Arrangement*

Jazz on velvet: quiet, meditating, midnight music; typically thoughtful Jim Hall. —JMD

Hall's adventurousness allows for a full range of highs and lows. Highs: the opening gambit with Metheny and counterintuitive arrangement of "Django," the daring orchestration of "Ruby My Dear" and Rojas' effortless theme statement, Lovano's excellent contribution, and the prominence of Hall's own guitar. Downers: the New York Voices, some awkward string parts and the better part of Hall's soupy "October Song." —JC

Hall is understandably mellowing with age, but he continues to make connections with jazz's (relatively) younger generations. "Django," with Pat Metheny sharing acoustic guitar duties, is a highlight. Interesting arrangement of "Goodbye" with Joe Lovano. The silly group chants on "Whisper Not" have to be a first. —JE