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## 24 Joshua Redman

### *Grows Up*

Since blasting onto the scene five years ago, the young jazz star has gotten married, moved to where the green outflanks the gray, reduced his work schedule, switched managers, assuaged some of his notorious self-doubt and produced himself for the first time.

By Jim Macnie

Cover photograph by Robert M. Ascroft, II

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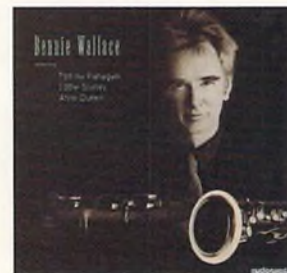
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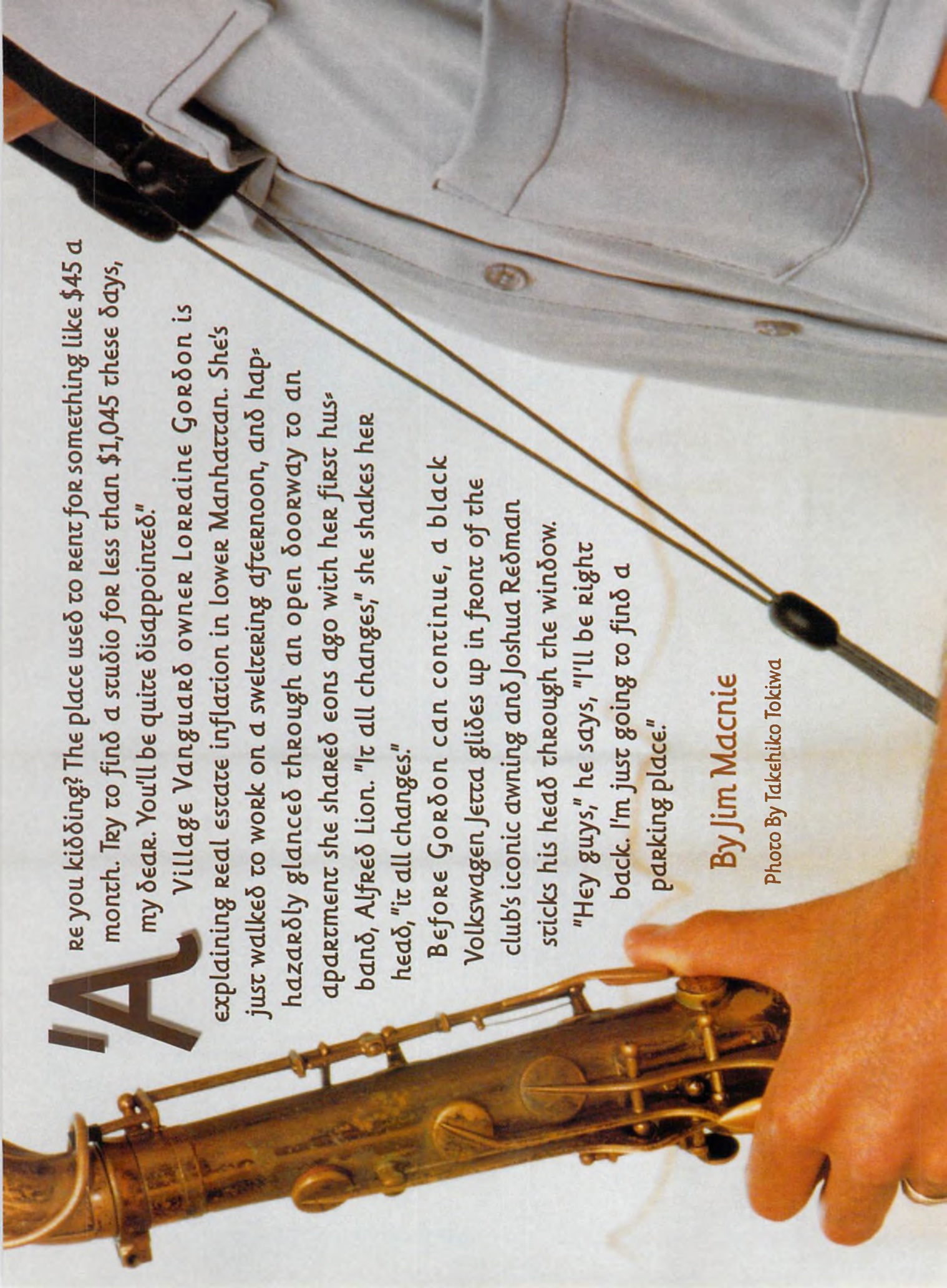


Bennie Wallace

Joshua Redman

# grows grip





Are you kidding? The place used to rent for something like \$45 a month. Try to find a studio for less than \$1,045 these days, my dear. You'll be quite disappointed."

Village Vanguard owner Lorraine Gordon is explaining real estate inflation in lower Manhattan. She's just walked to work on a sweltering afternoon, and has hardly glanced through an open doorway to an apartment she shared eons ago with her first husband, Alfred Lion. "It all changes," she shakes her head, "it all changes."

Before Gordon can continue, a black Volkswagen Jetta glides up in front of the club's iconic awning and Joshua Redman sticks his head through the window.

"Hey guys," he says, "I'll be right back. I'm just going to find a parking place."

**By Jim Macnie**

Photo By Takehiko Tokiwa

Redman knows about change. In the seven years since he first moved to New York, he's gone from anonymous wannabe—"just living on granola and playing jam sessions," he says—to major jazz star. The saxophonist has spent plenty of time in Gordon's hallowed club. He recorded his live disc, *Spirit Of The Moment*, there; its liner photo shows his quartet sitting around the boss's desk in the kitchen/office. And last winter he took the Vanguard's stage for the umpteenth time with a trio that included long-time compatriots Christian McBride and Brian Blade. With his new *Timeless Tales (For Changing Times)* just out, Redman will likely be back again pretty soon, packing the house as usual.

To get there, he'll have to drive down from the suburb he now calls home. Our Josh has made some adjustments in the past few years. He's gotten married, moved to where the green outflanks the gray, reduced his work schedule, switched managers, assuaged some of his notorious self-doubt, produced himself for the first time and kept some personal promises that had



crop. The designation led to a major label contract with Warner Bros., and his talent led to off-the-hook sales. In a splashy Arts & Leisure piece, the *New York Times* wondered whether he symbolized a new jazz archetype. A strong start to an auspicious career, no?

Redman knows the breaks came his way, but after plenty of time in the whirlwind, he realized it was time to hit the brakes a little, too. Up in Sleepy Hollow, ("if my old pals from Berkeley find out I'm living in a place called Sleepy Hollow they wouldn't let me through customs at San Francisco," he grimaces) he practices his horn, does a bit of running and is starting to enjoy the nature of nature.

"I'm not Paul Bunyon," he says. "I don't pitch tents or anything. But I'm getting into it. Exercise is great for your mind. I used to have to have a lot of fun with music, and was very serious about life. Now I'm serious about music and having fun with life."

Redman speaks of the decision to downpedal in almost therapeutic terms. "I got to the point where I wasn't enjoying music, and was dis-

"I like practicing. For a while, I didn't have time to. That's nuts."

fallen by the wayside. The shifts have suited him. *Timeless Tales* is his first album in two years. It's also his sharpest record to date.

"For three years I said I've gotta take some time off," he offers once inside the dark Vanguard walls. "And I finally did. In fact, I took a lot. So far, 1998 has been a sabbatical of sorts. Which isn't to say I was hanging out under the Williamsburg bridge. But the only work I've done this year was a bit of touring and making this record."

This calculated exhale is a reaction to the hubbub that has surrounded Redman since he blasted onto the jazz scene five years ago. A tale came with the talent back then, and the combination placed the saxophonist in an extraordinary media spotlight. When first we met him, Redman was a Harvard honor grad mulling over a stint at Yale Law School—an unusual pedigree for jazz dudes. He was the comparatively pragmatic son of the talented Dewey Redman, a sax player who earned his sizable rep in the prog-jazz community during the 1960s. The pair grew up without each other, Josh's dancer mom raising her boy in Berkeley, Calif., while the tenor-wielding dad pushed musical boundaries in New York. Redman was young, smart, dapper and affable. He also played the bejeezus out of his horn. Many critics swooned. So did the musicians who judged the Thelonious Monk Competition in Washington, D.C. In 1991 they voted him the cream of that year's

satisfied with the way I sounded. And the frustrations didn't come from working every night. I love to play. They came from the non-musical pressures of having a record out. Basically that means having no time after the gig because of promotion and career mandates—it gets crazy."

Jeff Levenson, Columbia's VP of jazz, worked with Redman at Warner Bros. for two years. They're pals. "Within the context of our world, very few stories get written the way Joshua's was," Levenson suggests. "And a meteoric rise is a very unusual situation to find yourself in, especially when your mandate is to be a creative person. There are those who look at him and see the reigning saxophone icon of his generation—the last guy to point us in some direction. However, there's a specific gravity attached to those observations, and I think Joshua was bearing the weight of all that. It was slowing him down a bit, so he took stock. That meant reevaluating his place in the business of jazz and within the context of being an artist. He's much more proactive about things right now, and that's called being a grown-up. I think he's entering a very fertile period."

For Redman, who claims that he's far and away his harshest critic, part of that fertility is due to old-fashioned work. "I like practicing," he says. "For a while I didn't have time to. That's nuts. In order to remain inspired for the shows, I have to

address the deficiencies of my playing. That means practice—me and the horn alone in a room. To tell the truth, it's something that I haven't done that much of. But the more I play, the more I realize I need to."

**T**hat sentiment flies in the face of the steady advances Redman's made on his instrument. He's always been an authoritative soloist, able to command an audience's attention. What's advanced of late is the fluidity of his lines. There are moments on *Timeless Tales* where he's leaping from idea to idea, gazelle style. Another thing: There's a guilelessness to Redman's sound. No matter how elaborate or determined the interaction, he delivers an overt gregariousness. He can be exclamatory, blurting out ideas that capitalize on his band's bounding energy. Or he can be soulful, languishing in the lap of a ballad till he figures out why he's so damned blue. With each approach, he's a convincer.

That emotional veracity is something Redman aspires to. "Music doesn't come from music, music comes from life," he continues. "Inspiration comes from interacting with other humans. That means taking walks, hanging out, going to parties, reading, playing sports ... the list is endless, right?"

That's why Redman keeps his eyes open when traveling the country. His acclaim has brought him to several virgin markets in America—unusual venues that are programming jazz in with other styles of entertainment. He says he's always surprised by the amount of new music halls cropping up in the heartlands.

"Every community is trying to develop a cultural center," he says, "and that's an opportunity for advancement. These days jazz is gaining a greater and greater cultural cache."

And do novices get his stuff? Is jazz still a foreign tongue to the general citizenry?

"I don't think they know about all the musical mechanics of it, but people sure understand the dynamics and emotion. Yeah, they get it. Jazz is high art, and I use that term proudly. But the danger is that if you constantly talk about it that way, a lot of people start thinking it's so elevated it has no relevance to them. So we need balance. It's important that we think of it as America's classical music. But it's also important that there are people saying jazz is an underground music, that it's the music of the day and has emotional relevance.

"People have found my music accessible, and that's been both a blessing and a curse. Obviously it's good to have a supportive audience, and I'm happy to have built a career out of playing the music I love. The downside is that because I've been relatively successful,

people are quick to assume intentions that are completely off the mark. Some have said that because my music is accessible, I must be compromising it—conforming it to appeal to people. Implicitly that means it lacks substance. I have no problem with people saying 'I don't like your music,' because I don't like a lot of my music myself—it's something I've struggled with from the start. But when people ascribe intention to my stuff, that's nuts. I am who I am and play the way I play, and the way I play has been and will be honest and from my soul. If in the process it has attracted people and I've become popular ... well, that's not my prime intention, but fine. To a lot of people, there's a



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natural opposition between great art and success. That's a dangerous mindset."

**T**imeless Tales (For Changing Times) is a disc Redman said he'd never make. "In the past we've shied away from anything that seemed overly conceptual," he reminds. "These days in the jazz industry there's a proliferation of so-called concept records, but the concept is geared around marketing, not music."

He's not wrong there. Concept discs abound of late, and many feel the gambit has reached a saturation point. A harangue on the subject was part of the August content of Bird Lives, a new jazz Web site ([www.birdlives.com](http://www.birdlives.com)). Exclusive preview snippets of Redman's new disc were also momentarily available to the site's visitors. They were perhaps surprised to learn that this time around Redman was not only addressing "How Deep Is The Ocean," but "Eleanor Rigby."

This tack is part of a trend. Modern pop tunes are everywhere in jazz this season. Christian McBride does Sly Stone's "Family Affair" on his latest disc. Sherman Irby blasts through Stevie Wonder's "Too High." Don Byron rocks Mandrill on *Nu Blaxploitation*. This, of course, comes after Herbie Hancock's valiant attempt to find the feeling in Don Henley and Kurt Cobain. Now, we have Mark Turner doing "She Said, She Said" and Brad Mehldau covering Radiohead.

Some of the above pieces are facile updates, some are stimulating slants. The original arrangements of non-original tunes on *Timeless Tales* are the best of the bunch, crumbling the logic of history, placing George Gershwin and Cole Porter next to Bob Dylan and Wonder. In some cases it's hard to tell the '40s from the '60s because Redman's remodeling is so significant. He puts a kaleidoscopic gentility to Joni Mitchell's "I Had A King"—a cut from her first record, *Song To A Seagull*. And it takes several moments to decode "The Times They Are A-Changing," because the leader has dressed it with so much new harmonic info. Redman swore he wouldn't present these tunes unless he could bring a decidedly unique perspective to them, and he has. Because of its thoughtful schemata, *Timeless Tales* is a rare case of intentions being matched by execution.

"Purity in music is about expression, not style," Redman says, opening the door for future readings of "How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?" and "California Girls." "I've always felt comfortable drawing on all my influences. Hopefully, we'll show the value of these songs, not by reproducing past versions, but by displaying how they can be integrated into a modern improvising conception. None of the pieces sound like the classic takes, that's for sure. And people with not so good ears may not recognize them."

Redman's cagey revisionism works by beating nostalgia at its own game. The arrangements are utterly refreshing. Anyone who can make "The Times They Are A-Changing" into jazz is doing something right. "When I chose it, I knew what some people would say," he chuckles. "You know, stuff like, 'That thing ain't even got a melody!'" The saxophonist also attempted a spin



on "Every Breath You Take," but it fell by the wayside because it just didn't feel right.

Sting's stalker anthem wasn't the only idea that didn't pan out. "King Of Pain" only made it halfway, and "Strawberry Fields Forever" never reached fruition, either. Instead, this Beatles devotee (fave discs: *Sgt. Pepper's*, *Revolver*, *Abbey Road*) traded it in for "Eleanor Rigby."

There are some musicians who claim that parallel interpretations instantly leap into their head when they hear a pop piece. Not Redman. Though he fully genuflects to the power of the imagination, he acknowledges that there's plenty of pencil sharpening going on behind any truly functional update of a classic. The mechanics of design are central to a project like *Timeless Tales*.

"By no means would I suggest these arrangements came to me in my sleep, or that they arrived fully intact. There's definitely a lot of craft—or lack of craft if you don't like it—that went into it. You've got to figure out how the pieces can sound natural. And inspiration is something that can't come from craft. The inspiration for these came the way it always comes: magically and without prompting. You can't summon it. Damn, if you could summon it, we'd all be killing every night."

Each of these songs contains a kernel that sparked Redman's imagination. One begged for the melody phrased a different way. Another contained a harmonic sequence he felt he could vary. There were a couple that had certain rhythms implied—he wanted to investigate them further. The result is an upgrade in the band's interplay. The quartet features Mehldau, Brian Blade and Larry Grenadier. Redman's thought long and hard about the essences of jazz, and he knows that a graceful cluster of percolating information is always at the heart of the

music. This, more than any of his past discs, shows maturity in that area.

"At its best this band is flowing, natural and organic," he says. "The guys are brilliant players, but even more brilliant listeners, and that's what gets an ensemble to a place of instantaneous give-and-take. Instantaneous—but separated in time by a fraction of a second. There's a huge amount of collective improv that's happening here. Some people will get pissed at me for saying that, because it's a buzzword for free-jazz. But that's happening with us. I can point out places in what are technically my solos, where Brad basically dictates where the solo goes. Same with Brian. That's why I play jazz."

"The more you get to know each other, the better the dialogue gets," Blade says. "The ability to make a cohesive group statement is what I'm interested in. Hopefully, I provide a floor for Brad, Larry and Joshua to dance on. And I know they do the same for me. When we're really going, it's all just a tango."

"Jazz is not about individual aggrandizement," Redman offers. "It's not about getting your rocks off in your solo. We all know how to do that, and it sometimes serves a purpose. But these songs deserved better than playing their melodies and then having a series of people going off alone. They deserved a more collective treatment."

The shadows of the Vanguard are becoming kind of oppressive, so we decide to head back into daylight and take a run by Tower Records. Strolling down the first aisle, I spot an ad for the movie *Blues Brothers 2000*, in which Redman makes a cameo appearance along with other heroes like B.B. King and Junior Wells. Neither of us says anything. He grabs a shopping basket when we walk through the door, and it's only moments before there are five or six discs in there. After gorging on some early Stevie Wonder sale items ("Gotta replace the LPs on these," he says sternly), we head upstairs to jazzville. The musing begins. What to buy, what to buy? Plomp: There goes Dave Douglas' *Moving Portrait*. And plomp: On the advice of his interviewer, there goes John Martyn's *Solid Air* as well. I nudge him out of the Trane section—his soprano workout on "Eleanor Rigby" has measurable echoes of the great man's gleaming catharsis on "My Favorite Things," and hey, enough's enough. He says he's looking for a particular Coltrane piece that's been eluding him for a while. Musicians always know some hidden secret about their heroes. Redman won't cop to whether he prefers Newk or Trane—impossible to decide, he shrugs. But he has cut "St. Thomas" and "I'm An Old Cowhand," and he does speak of the way that Rollins goaded great responses out of his myriad associates. The telepathic communication between players is virtually sacrosanct when you hear Redman go on about it.

"Some of the things we've been talking about today aren't always discussed verbally," he cautions. "Many of the musicians I've played with have ways of letting me know how they feel without speaking. One of the things I love about Christian McBride is the way he lets you know you're bullshitting. He won't ever tell you, he's too

nice. But just through his bass signals I know that I ain't playing shit. The great lessons in music are communicated through the music itself. It all happens on this non-tangible level, which is why clubs are crowded. People realize they're not going to get it all from reading the review, as great as the review might be. They want experience. They want to see us communicating. That's the part of music that defies the analysis. And that's where the true lessons are learned."

This sounds a long way away from a guy who was considering a career as a lawyer just a few years ago. Could he ever picture that reemerging on the horizon?

"I can picture just about anything," he laughs, "but it's a pretty absurd picture." **DB**

#### EQUIPMENT

Joshua Redman plays a Selmer Balanced Action tenor saxophone with an Otto Link hard-rubber mouthpiece and Vandoren V16 reeds. His alto is also a Selmer Balanced Action, which he outfits with Myer or Selmer mouthpieces and Vandoren Java reeds. He plays a Selmer Mark VI soprano with a Bari mouthpiece and Vandoren reeds.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*TIMELESS TALES (FOR CHANGING TIMES)*—Warner Bros. 47052  
*JOSHUA REDMAN*—Warner Bros. 45242  
*WISH*—Warner Bros. 45365  
*MOODSWING*—Warner Bros. 45643  
*SPIRIT OF THE MOMENT*—Warner Bros. 45923  
*FREEDOM IN THE GROOVE*—Warner Bros. 46330

#### with various others

*WARNER JAMS*—Warner Bros. 45919  
*WARNER JAMS VOL. II*—Warner Bros. 46212  
*REMEMBERING BUD POWELL*—Stretch 9012 (Chick Corea)  
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ALAN NARICIAN

**T**he year 1998 was a year of the groove, in great part thanks to Joe Zawinul. His *World Tour*, a two-CD set documenting 12 months of near-constant globe-trotting by the multinational Zawinul Syndicate, remains irresistible. And we've also heard with fresh ears the highly charged, deeply coursing Miles Davis music of *The Complete Bitches Brew*, which relied on a sheaf of Z's compositions to launch the jams.

Miles owes Zawinul? Well, sure. So do Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea, not known for multikeyboard fiddling until they joined Zawinul in Miles' bubbling *Brew*. Zawinul is, undeniably, the musician who perfected and popularized the rack-of-keyboards concept that a host of pianists have adapted. True, Sun Ra

set of that pioneering ensemble, which Z co-led for 15 years with Wayne Shorter, is rumored in the offing.

January marks 40 years to the month since Zawinul arrived in the United States from Austria. But reflecting on his career beginnings, the 66-year-old strongman is all about *now*.

"My prime is coming!" he exults, and readies for it by swimming and boxing, making music in his home studio and relaxing with his family (new grandson included) when he's not on the road. At his loft off Broadway downtown in New York City, he breaks out a bottle of slivovitz to chase the morning coffee, then starts in on his latest project: a one-time-only hour-long extravaganza memorializing the dead of the Austrian concentration

## JOE ZAWINUL

# 'My Prime Is Coming!'

got there first, but Z promoted and shaped the idea, even before the first go-round of electric fusion.

After 30 years, Z's groove cuts to the core. His band on *World Tour* is extraordinary, fusioners who truly fuse: electric guitarist Gary Paulson of Brooklyn, electric bassists Richard Bona of Cameroon or Victor Bailey of Philadelphia, drummer Paco Sery from the Ivory Coast, percussionist Manolo Badrena from Puerto Rico, and Zawinul, their fearless leader. Note that Bailey and Badrena are veterans of Zawinul's fabled Weather Report; a boxed

camp Mauthausen, 60 years after it opened.

"It was one of those 'cosmopolitan' camps," Zawinul explains in his still heavily accented English, with a vigorous and sad shake of his head. "The Nazis wiped out 122,000 people there: Russians, Jewish people, many gypsies, resistance fighters and Austrian social democrats. It was last August that I played on the graveyard there, solo." He unrolls plans drawn up by his youngest son and sound engineer, Ivan, and Vienna Philharmonic acoustics expert Karlheinz Muller to place the network of 50 speakers (weighing

BY HOWARD MANDEL

37 tons) that amplified multikeyboard improvisations throughout the site to a dumbstruck audience of some 8,000.

"Nobody was clapping when it was over," Zawinul reports, "which was appropriate, because this was a memorial. I prepared for nine or 10 months—spent nights in the camp, interviewed people who survived it, read books about it—because I was just three or four years old when this happened, seven when the war started, 13 when it ended. Since then I've visited Mauthausen and Auschwitz, too, many times. You can never get rid of this thing in your head. I just *had* to confront it.

"I put the whole musical plan together in about two weeks, using hundreds of sounds from the war library, all sampled—like the trains come in with prisoners, which spanned the speakers. Then the night of the concert I just sat down and played. As I improvised, one of the great Jewish poets of Austria, Eric Fried, read from letters that were smuggled out of the camp. We were visible in silhouette; there were holograms on the wall of the cliff behind us of thousands of names of the people who died there. For the end I wrote a hymn that I want to put out on record, because I think it's fantastic.

"I called the whole thing 'Never Again,' because it *must* never happen again, even though now it happens again in Kosovo. The production cost \$3.5 million, paid for by the Austrian government. I'm one of their cultural ambassadors," he says. "But I never did anything like this before."

That's not strictly true. Zawinul has previously presented his humanistic and specifically anti-war views through music that on the surface may seem glitzy, but is actually constructed of dark and subtle details, and in production inevitably grows large. Consider the brooding "Unknown Soldier," with its warning sirens and military tattoos, dating from *I Sing The Body Electric*, Weather Report's second album of 1972. There's also Weather Report's "Orphans," which featured a choir of 20 actual orphans.

More recently, in '95, Zawinul recorded *Stories Of The Danube* with the Czech Philharmonic Symphony conducted by Caspar Richter and soloists Amit Chatterjee (guitar, vocals), Arto Tunçboyacıyan (percussion, vocals) and Berhan Ocal (oud, vocals, percussion). This seven-movement symphony dramatizes the raucous history and end-to-end geography of the river of his birthplace, from a forest spring down the trails of the gypsies, from 900 years of the Ottoman Empire through the reign of Emperor Franz Joseph to the Second World War. Its performance was another extravaganza.

"We had 80,000 people on the shores of the Danube for its world premiere in the Bruckner fest," Zawinul recalls with glee. "80,000! The entire piece was choreographed with lasers. Night on the Danube, ships going by lit up with special slo-

gans—'No Borders,' things like that—and graphics. During the 'Gypsy' section seven barges heaped with straw were drawn down the river by catamarans, with people wearing big horseheads to represent the gypsy caravans. When that section is climaxing, they set fire to the straw, as if burning the gypsies' tents and wagons. Then for the World War II movement there was a bomb attack with fireworks, and gigantic aircraft searchlights looking in the sky."

The production of *My People*, Zawinul's 1996 album inspired by Duke Ellington's declaration that all people are "my people," involved only slightly less ambitious logistics. In it, he assembled collaborators from West Africa, Turkey, Israel, Anatolia, southern Siberia, Peru, India, Venezuela, Cuba, Poland, Guinea and the United States—Salif Keita, Alex Acuña, Trilok Gurtu and the Austrian sextet Broadlahn among them.

"I really like these big projects," Zawinul admits. "What I do with my band is also nice; I love it. But I'm a musician. I don't want to do the same things all the time."

At the Manhattan club S.O.B.'s last fall, he fronted his Syndicate before a mid-week less-than-full house. The modest size of the crowd didn't faze Zawinul; wearing his trademark skull cap, vocalizing through a MIDI device that enhanced his pitch via his keyboards, Zawinul just dug in and, yes, grooved so that everyone there simply *had* to start moving. Guitarist Paulson stood at one side of the stage, plucking out tight and spicy licks. Bailey was dead center, cool and slinky on bass guitar (Richard Bona, who'd just been signed by Columbia, was performing his Tribute to Jaco Pastorius set at the nearby Zinc Bar). Badrena sang with fervor, sweating and beating on congas in stands. Zawinul was breaking in traps drummer Kirk Covington, late of Tribal Tech, and wasn't making it easy. He demanded continuous eye contact of all his players, so as to be able to cue in spontaneous riffs and surprise stop-times.

"It really is fun," Zawinul says of gigging, a couple days later. "We play a festival in Europe for 15,000 people, then in a club for 200 people, and I like it, because you can see and you can hear. That's what I like about this live record, too," referring to *World Tour*. "We had eye contact with the people, and you can feel that. The way we groove it was pretty amazing. People may call it jazz or not jazz—but it's not smooth-jazz, definitely not rock & roll. It's improvised rhythmic music, and if I may say so myself, it's done masterfully."

He's never been falsely modest. "I've been doing this for 30 years," he mentions, "and a lot of things happened. OK, I made a record for Salif Keita (*Amen*, in 1991), but even before that, the best-known West African bands were huge fans of Weather Report; *Black Market* was the biggest record in West Africa, period, and those rhythms are what they've been playing in Africa, besides their traditional rhythms, ever since.

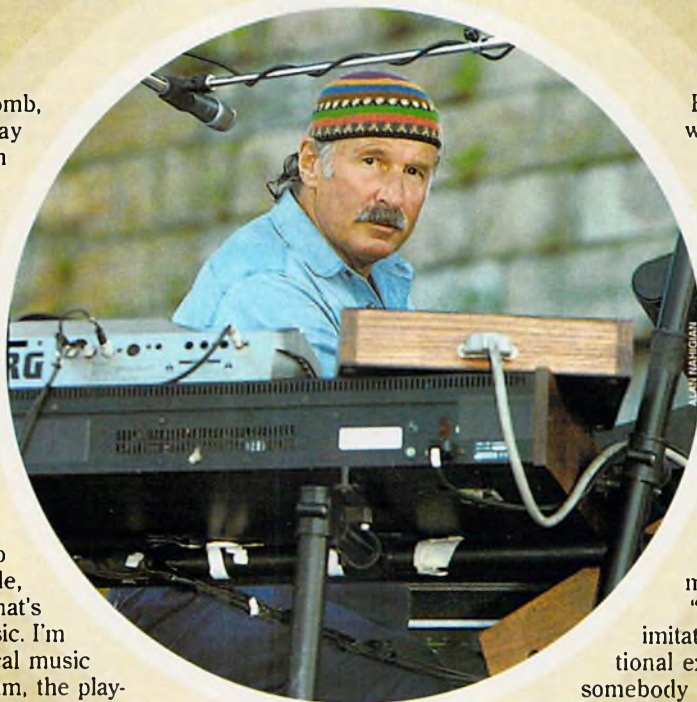
"Yeah, I'm singing some now, but singing has always been the primal instinct for me. And I've always thought you don't just sing notes with your voice. Really, for me, the instrument is meaningless.

"I'm told that 100 years ago classical music was fun. They had more rhythm, the players, and they were not so polished as now. Sometimes they used to play concerts in the streets. They were down-to-earth people, like you find if you read about Mozart. But now it seems like you have to wear a bow tie just to listen to that music."

Some people can play on the comb, between the fingers, and play more stuff than the musician with the fanciest equipment. For all my years of playing music—more than 61 years now—it's got to come as if you could sing it. [Louis] Armstrong, Ben Webster, Cootie Williams, Milt Jackson, B.B. King, all the great giants: There's always that feeling that what they're playing could be a song, sung.

"You know what I want to do?" Zawinul says, leaning close to confide. "I want to bring music back to the people, not take it away from them. That's what happened to classical music. I'm told that 100 years ago classical music was fun. They had more rhythm, the players, and they were not so polished as now. Sometimes they used to play concerts in the streets. They were down-to-earth people, like you find if you read about Mozart. But now it seems like you have to wear a bow tie just to listen to that music.

"Not *my* symphony. We've played it with the Czech Philharmonic six or seven times now, and you should hear it. These are some bad dudes, and they really *play* the music—the



He leans back. "I remember when I came to New York, every guy on the streets was a piano player. I remember hanging out with Phineas Newborn, Wynton Kelly, Barry Harris, Tommy Flanagan, Walter Davis Jr., Walter Bishop, Sonny Clark, Cedar Walton, Bobby Timmons, Bill Evans. ... All these guys could really play, and none of them played like the other ones did. And not just the piano players. Ben Webster played piano. Coleman Hawkins, we played Mozart with four hands. Musicians, man. They were awesome.

"Our music has to stay away from imitations, man. It cannot be an emotional experience if you try to play like somebody else, can it? Well, maybe it can be: I tried to play like Bud Powell, and that was very emotional. Maybe it is.

"But I mean that we have to be very careful our music doesn't get dusty, and it's important that the music not be monopolized by any one style or one giant figure, so that the real little guys get a chance to express themselves.

"You ask me what would I say to young people. I would say, 'If you really want something bad enough, you're going to get it.'

**"I've visited Mauthausen and Auschwitz, too, many times. You can never get rid of this thing in your head. I just *had* to confront it."**

audiences have responded.

"It's the same with any music concert—if you go and feel people are just playing the routine, reading the arrangements rather than improvising and *playing*, it falls flat. That's why I don't have a horn player anymore, because if I did I would have to play some melodies with the horn player so closely, phrase with the horn player just so, and to me, that would hold me back.

"I mean, with Weather Report it was fabulous, and Wayne is the best I've ever played with in terms of intuition. We *never* talked about what we were going to do, and it was *always* happening—I have hundreds of hours of tapes of duets, and it's never the same, always different, and we never talked about it, so that's clear. But when we played melodies we had to play them together, phrase them together—not the expression so much as the notes. Now I can play any melody, any head of a tune, totally different every night. I don't have to phrase it with somebody else. That leads the band into something else, and I prefer that.

"When I play melodies I have already played, sometimes I just want to groove along. I just come up with a different way to phrase it, and *that* makes a tune. It's like there's a different lyric in those tunes all the time, because every day has another lyric, and that gives the music a lot of feeling. Only the audience is the same everywhere—the same because we knock their socks off, so that they say, 'If this is jazz, we *like* jazz.' People who know what we do bring their kids, saying they've got to *hear* this type of music. Because let's face it, this is the greatest cultural event of the 20th century, jazz music. And we've got to keep on going for it."

Me, I wanted to be a jazz musician. I said to myself, 'This is the music I like, and this is the atmosphere I like.' Knowing that, things followed one after another.

"Also, I'd say: 'Don't practice so damn much.' Practice what it makes *sense* to practice, but then go out there and live life, so you have something to talk about.

"It's very important for the young musician not to be in a hurry; it's very bad there's so much economic pressure now that they feel they have to get out and hustle right away and keep hustling. Instead, I say, learn your craft, and learn how to live."

The young musicians who grasp that lesson, according to Joe Zawinul, won't ever have to struggle to get their grooves back, because they'll have them always, close at hand. **DB**

#### EQUIPMENT

Included in Joe Zawinul's massive equipment arsenal are a Korg M-1, Korg DUP-1, Korg DDD-1, Trinity Z-1, ARP Quadra, Ensoniq ASR-10, Prophet V, ARP 2600, Oberheim OB-8 and a Sonor drum kit.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

WORLD TOUR—Zebra 44010 (Zawinul Syndicate)  
 MY PEOPLE—Escapade Music 63651  
 STORIES OF THE DANUBE—Philips 454 143  
 LOST TRIBES—Columbia 46057 (Zawinul Syndicate)

#### with various others

AMEN—Mango 162 539 910 (Salif Keita, produced by Joe Zawinul)  
 THE COMPLETE BITCHES BREW SESSIONS (AUGUST 1969–FEBRUARY 1970)—Columbia/Legacy 65570 (Miles Davis)



# JOE WILLIAMS

# 'Basie

# Made Me A

# STAR'

BY DAVE HELLAND  
PHOTO BY HYOU VIELZ

Joe Williams' life work can be summed up in just three words: blues, ballads and Basie. But how to describe the man himself? "Dignified" hardly suffices. Try "Ellingtonesque." Or maybe rewrite "I Can't Get Started": Broadway, not Hollywood, almost gave Williams a chance to star.

Perhaps "sophisticated" fits his description. Williams has been invited to some of the most elegant homes from southern France to the East Side of Manhattan, from London's finest hotels to the U.S. Southwest's finest golf courses. "Presented at court" becomes "performed at the White House" while occupied by every resident from Nixon through Clinton (except Ford; he met Ford playing golf). And include the line, "When I golfed with Sinatra, I shot under par."

But Williams has already toyed enough with Ira Gershwin's lyrics. On Arturo Sandoval's *El Tren Latino*, the vocalist recounts his life without resorting to details, making this standard personal by changing just one line: "Basie made me a star," he sang. True, but Joe Williams made himself the finest male jazz singer the music has ever produced.

Now 80 years old. Williams was born Dec. 12, 1918, in Cordele, Ga., a logging town 50 miles south of Macon. "My mother said she'd kill me if I ever [went back]—as hard as she worked to get me out, to get away from that kind of atmosphere. The male was always in trouble down there. I know one thing: We were not in charge," he explains with characteristic understatement. His mother took him to Chicago at age 3. Musically, he was raised in the church, but his mother also took him to hear the symphony and opera.

At 14, Williams organized a gospel quartet, the Jubilee Temple Boys of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. Then he began singing with bands that played the dances, formal and not, that made up the social calendar of black society on Chicago's South Side. He also performed at long-since-demolished ballrooms and clubs like the Savoy and Warrick Hall, first with Johnny Long's band and then with groups led by Lionel Hampton, Coleman Hawkins, Andy Kirk and Jimmie Noone as well as boogie-woogie pianists Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson. He left Red Saunders in 1954 to join the Count Basie Orchestra on Christmas Day.

In the aftermath of World War II and the musicians union recording ban, singers had become the reigning royalty of musical entertainment. Basie had been unable to keep a big band together, and spent a couple years leading smaller groups, with which Williams had performed in Chicago. The big band Williams joined, a phoenix financed by Frank Sinatra, was just two years old. This "sophisticated blues band," in the words of the orchestra's trombonist Quentin "Butter" Jackson, would be Williams' vehicle to stardom and, in turn, Williams the force that put it back on the charts. Williams brought to the conventions of the blues a cosmopolitan delivery, both aural and visual, that matched the sophistication of the band.

The joint successes of Basie and Williams in show business rested firmly on three legs. First, the personal relationship they enjoyed. Williams was Basie's "No. 1 Son"; Williams always refers to "Mr. Basie." "I'll tell you what I learned from him: I'd be sitting next to Basie at the piano many nights, and if some-



Joe Williams (right) with Count Basie, the man who made him a star

COURTESY JAZZPAGES

body made a mistake, I'd look at Basie and he'd be looking the other way, he never saw it. But if you did something wonderful, he was right there. One leg would come up in the air, and he'd laugh, and if you did something extraordinary, he'd go 'ding-ding-ding' on the piano," Williams explains. "That, too, is a lesson, that you can't just take the good things from people—every now and then you have to take the bad things."

Then there was Williams' profound understanding of what it meant to be among 17 men swinging. Williams is of the old school; he has its classical vocabulary, its traditional skills. Crooning, to him, isn't some pop styling from between the World Wars; it's how to come across best on radio. He shares a couple of tips learned during a time when there were only a couple mics onstage: If you can't hear everyone else in the band, *you* are playing too loud. Sing in the spaces; don't try to overpower the band.

The third leg was Williams' demeanor, his style, the way he dressed and carried himself—his personality. "Nobody is a stranger to him. That was the way it was with most of the orchestra," explains trumpeter Sonny Cohn, who worked with Williams in Chicago with Red Saunders at Club DeLisa and again with the Basie band throughout his own 30-some-year tenure. "There were no strangers—we knew how to make people feel wanted."

Williams recalls an encounter after his Labor Day performance at the Montreux In New York Festival produced by his old friend Quincy Jones. "A guy says to me yesterday, 'Mr. Williams, my whole family, my father and mother, my wife and kids, we all love you. I just want you to know, you have no idea how many babies you've made.' This is a black guy. Black men don't like to come on to each other, talking like that, but he found a way to say it. It's a good feeling to have a man walk up with a baby in his arms, 'Here, you made this one.'"

Overnight success—after almost 20 years in show business—came in 1955 with the release of "Every Day I Have The Blues," a NARAS Hall of Fame recording and the first two-sided hit in the burgeoning rock & roll market. Williams was named Down Beat's New Star of 1956; his first major interview ran that year in an issue with Bill Haley & the Comets on the cover. But Williams hadn't

sprung full-grown from the brows of Basie's arrangers. He'd already become a national presence without leaving Chicago thanks to radio hookups in clubs that Hamp's band played as well as a recording of "Every Day" for Checker that became a big enough regional hit to enter the r&b charts.

Stanley Dance, who chronicled the Big Band Era in a series of published interviews, thought the recording ban delayed Williams' stardom by a decade. In 1943, wherever the Hampton band (with Dinah Washington) went, Williams admits people were "breaking down doors to get in, but with or without the ban, recording was a problem. Even then, the record business was phoney. Like race records—the same mindset, the same prejudices were all there. We had to deal with it. But one thing about it, [label honchos] couldn't perform, they couldn't even pat their foot in time. [Dealing with them], you be doin' the blues, baby."

The recording industry never did for Williams what it did for Sinatra, Bennett, Tormé or Como, relegating, for instance, "Every Day I Have The Blues" to the r&b and teenaged rock & roll markets. "As Ellington said, music is in the hands of salesmen," a theme he returned to over the course of several conversations. Of Morris Levy, the notorious head of Roulette for whom Williams recorded the excellent *Together*, he says only, "very creative. I always managed to owe him \$80,000."

The jazz vocals hall of fame is largely a sorority, with few male singers having equalled the artistry of Ella, Billie, Sarah and Carmen, and none their popularity. But to call Joe Williams the finest male jazz singer the music has ever produced is not to damn by faint praise. The mellow beauty of his voice, the unequalled clarity of his diction, the sureness of his swing and his equal ease with both ballads and blues place him in the first rank of all jazz singers and among the leading interpreters of the American popular song. Besides his masterwork *Count Basie Swings*, *Joe Williams Sings* with "Every Day," there is his album with the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis Orchestra, which includes great blues shouting, Ellington's "Come Sunday" and "It Don't Mean A Thing" plus Smokey Robinson's "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)." Two items that are sadly out-of-print but worth searching for are "April In Paris" with Coleman Hawkins, recorded live for RCA/Bluebird, and *Big Man* (Fantasy), Cannonball Adderley's folk opera that was headed for Broadway before the deal fell apart. Of his song choices over the decades, Williams explains, "A song will make you sing it, so to speak. You sing it because you can't help yourself."

Of his recent recordings, his version of "If I Had You" on *Here's To Life* and a collection of gospel songs, *Feel The Spirit*, stand out. "The church was the beginning of almost all of our lives," Williams says of himself and many of his colleagues. "That's where we come from, so it is normal that we should go back to it."

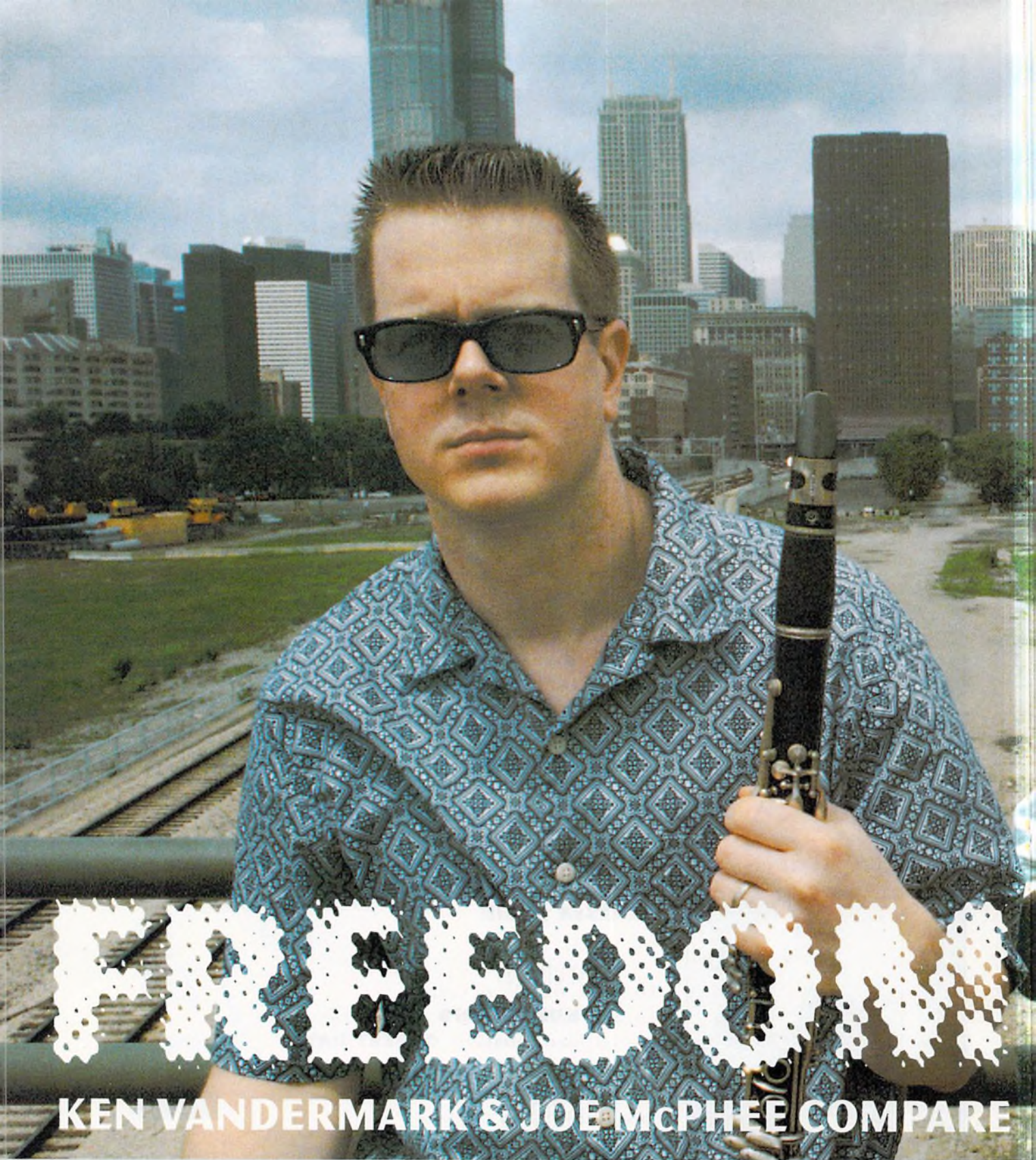
"I'm reminded of the passage, 'I go to prepare a place for you that wherever I go you may be also.' When [jazz musicians] go to the Middle East and to Africa, all over the world, we realize the musicians that have been there before: Duke Ellington, Buck Clayton, Dizzy—they're all gone, but they've been there before to prepare the way."

For jazz singers, Joe Williams has likewise shown the way, singing the blues, crooning ballads and swinging with the band of the man who made him a star.

DB

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

<i>THEN AND NOW</i> —Sea Breeze 3028	<i>YEARS</i> —Verve 519 813
<i>BEST OF JOE WILLIAMS</i> —Blue Note 21146	<i>EVERY NIGHT: LIVE AT VINE STREET</i> —Verve 833 236
<i>FEEL THE SPIRIT</i> —Telarc 83362	
<i>HERE'S TO LIFE</i> —Telarc 83357	<i>I JUST WANT TO SING</i> —Delos 4004
<i>LIVE AT THE DETROIT ORCHESTRA HALL</i> —Telarc 83329 (with Basie)	<i>IN GOOD COMPANY</i> —Verve 837 932
<i>NIGHT AT COUNT BASIE'S</i> —Verve 8508	<i>JAZZ ROUND MIDNIGHT</i> —Verve 527 034
<i>A SWINGIN' NIGHT AT BIRDLAND</i> —Roulette 95335	<i>JOE WILLIAMS LIVE</i> —OJC 438
<i>AT NEWPORT '63/JUMP FOR JOY</i> —Collectables 2706	<i>JOE WILLIAMS SINGS</i> —Savoy 199
<i>EVERY DAY: BEST OF THE VERVE</i>	<i>PRESENTING JOE WILLIAMS AND THAD JONES/MEL LEWIS ORCHES-</i>
	<i>TRA</i> —Blue Note 30454
	<i>THAT HOLIDAY FEELING</i> —Verve 843 956



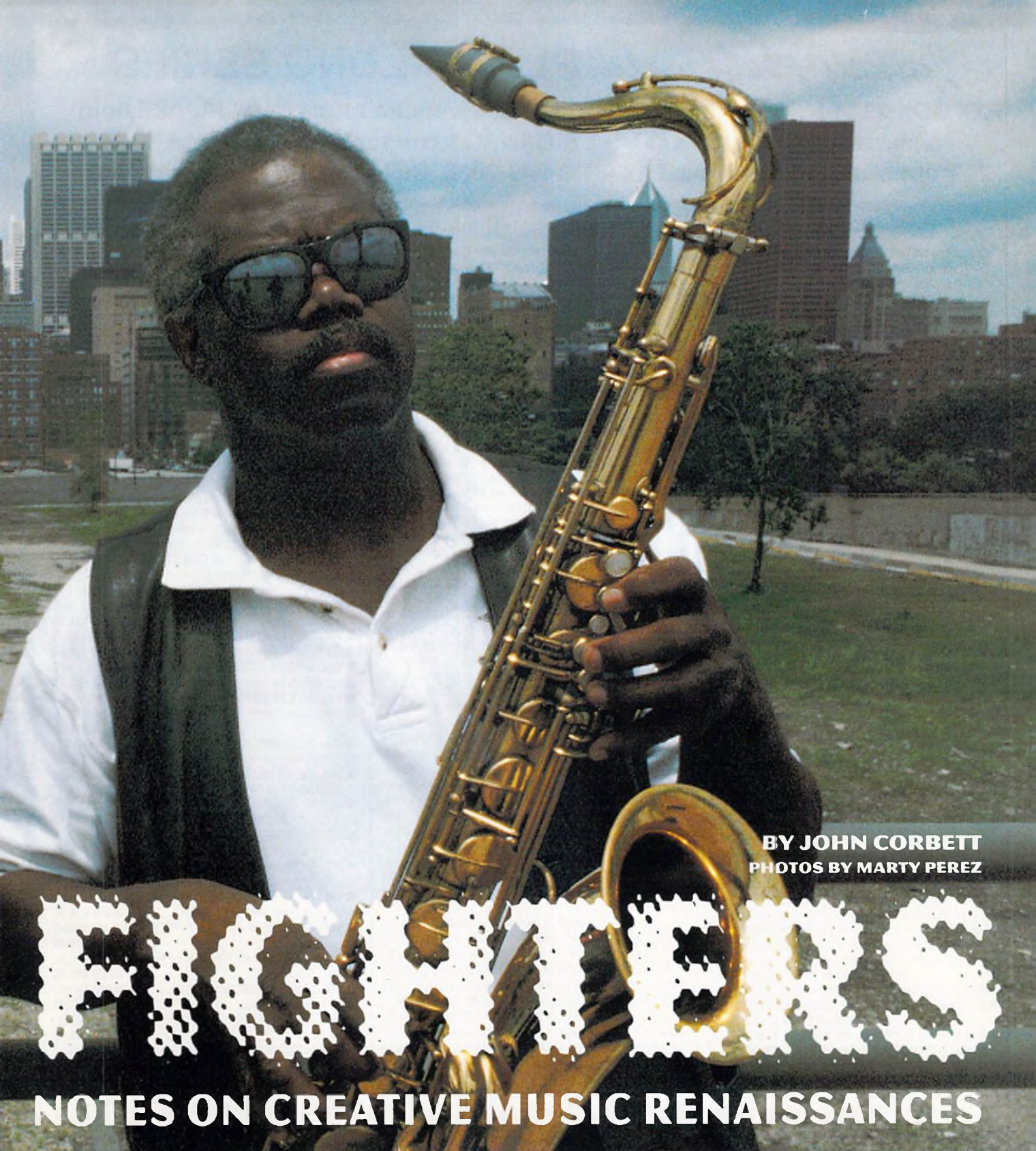
## KEN VANDERMARK & JOE MCPHEE COMPARE

**C**hicago. Summer of '98. The city is bustling with new jazz activity, no small part of it directly involving Ken Vandermark, a bright, articulate, unflinchingly committed tenor saxophonist, clarinetist, composer and bandleader whose presence has been a major defibrillator for the city since he set up shop here in 1989. But Vandermark's musical journey was sparked by another figure, multi-instrumentalist Joe McPhee.

Based in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., McPhee was already active in the late '60s, as New York City's originary free-jazz moment was transforming into the so-called "loft scene" of the subsequent

decade. McPhee barely played in New York; instead, working with tenor and soprano saxophones, pocket-cornet and valve-trombone, he made his mark with a series of records for the Swiss hat Hut label (specifically established as an outlet for McPhee's music), forging lasting musical relationships with a core group of European musicians.

McPhee's 1976 solo record *Tenor* was a revelation to young Vandermark. Twenty years after *Tenor* was recorded, McPhee and Vandermark finally performed together in Chicago in a glorious trio concert with bassist Kent Kessler, and since then they've



BY JOHN CORBETT  
PHOTOS BY MARTY PEREZ

# FIGHTERS

## NOTES ON CREATIVE MUSIC RENAISSANCES

collaborated again in various settings.

Relaxing at Vandermark's apartment, the two new yet old friends sat down to compare notes on markedly different backgrounds and startlingly compatible outlooks. A stuffed animal hiding next to the couch suggested an opening volley to McPhee.

**JOE MCPHEE:** To begin, Ken Vandermark, try to explain why I have a platypus on my head.

**KEN VANDERMARK:** Because you're crazy!

**JOHN CORBETT:** *Where did you fellows first meet?*

**JMP:** Ken and I met briefly in Vancouver in 1993. Ken was playing with his group, and I'd read an article in which he mentioned my name and the influence I'd had on his music. I was surprised that I'd influenced anybody's music. I went to the concert, and lo and behold, toward the end of the concert Ken introduced a piece of mine, "Goodbye Tom B." I'd never heard *anybody* play my music; I was absolutely thrilled!

**JC:** *Ken, you're part of a creative music renaissance here in Chicago, and you're very much associated with this scene, playing with a regular cast of characters week-in, week-out. Joe, there isn't much of a*



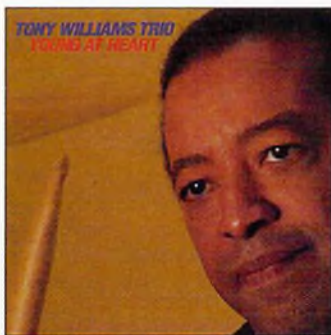
# CD REVIEWS

JANUARY 1999

KEY

Excellent  
Very Good  
Good  
Fair  
Poor

★★★★★  
★★★★  
★★★  
★★  
★



## Tony Williams Trio

**Young At Heart**  
Columbia 41089

★★★½

**Y**oung At Heart is touted as the last recording made by drummer Tony Williams before he died. Strange that it's on a label he hadn't recorded for since the 1970s. Originally released in Japan, *Young At Heart* features the rhythm section from one of Williams' crack '80s Blue Note quintets in a program of mainly standards, a Beatles tune and three from the band. Throughout the Williams-produced session, the musicianship is high and the recording quality superb.

Listeners can benefit from this trio's many years of playing together. The format works primarily because all three musicians are good listeners, and the musical passages seem inevitable, like when bassist Ira Coleman solos during "On Green Dolphin Street," or when the band inadvertently starts to walk together during "Young At Heart."

One concern at the outset was whether Williams would overpower his mates with machine-gun snare and large tom fills. Pianist Mulgrew Miller's "Promethean" opens the album and suggests the answer is "yes," the forceful melody seeming to encourage the leader to solo throughout the song. Not so as the band moves into one of the nicest arrangements of "Young At Heart" in recent years. Played at a lazy-river gait, the cadences, mood and gentle swing are infectious. It's a surprise to hear Williams pick up his brushes as the title track begins, having learned of his disregard for brushes because they lacked the power and volume that come with sticks on big drum heads. Clearly, it was the right choice. In fact, much of his playing here is delicate. Listen to Williams' "Neptune: Fear Not" for a study in the proper use of sticks on a ballad. As for the pianist, Miller's playing here, and throughout, is eloquent, restrained and swinging. His playing on "Green Dolphin Street" is a masterful blend of Wynton Kelly and Bill Evans, enveloped with a more stately touch.

And while I always appreciated Williams' sense of originality and the love he had for the Beatles, the originals combined with "Fool On

The Hill," the Michel Legrand composition "Summer Me, Winter Me" (a piano solo that ends the album, by Miller, apparently) and even Bobby Timmons' "This Here" are second-tier next to this trio's top-drawer treatments of everything else.

Finally, *Young At Heart* proved Williams to be more than capable of the sympathetic trio sound that always seemed a particular challenge. Indeed, this powerful, incredibly conversational percussionist's sound, having matured so early, captured the spirit of youth one last time.

—John Ephland

**Young At Heart:** Promethean; Young At Heart; On Green Dolphin Street; Farewell To Dogma; How My Heart Sings; Fool On The Hill; Neptune: Fear Not; You And The Night And The Music; Body And Soul; This Here; Summer Me, Winter Me. (69:26)

**Personnel:** Tony Williams, drums; Mulgrew Miller, piano; Ira Coleman, bass.



## Bluiett Baritone Nation

**Libation For The Baritone Saxophone Nation**  
Justin Time 8470

★★★

**I**remember hearing Charles Papasoff's six-bari International Baritone Conspiracy—with Hamiett Bluiett in it—in Victoriaville a few years back and wondering about the concept. Some sort of instrumental cartel was implied by that group's name—a down-and-out support group, raising the baritone self-image. Now Bluiett's stumping for national independence.

Frankly, it all smacks more of festival hype than it does of musical inspiration. Fests, like the Montreal International Jazz Festival where *Libation For The Baritone Saxophone Nation* was recorded in '97, love to book weird, improbable ensembles because they attract curiosity-seekers. Here's a sax quartet consisting all of one species, and while the baritone is capable of playing several different roles with its wide range, the results get rather wearisome in the end. By the time Bluiett says "You're witnessing the birth of the baritone saxophone" on

"Underwater Birth," itself a lovely, static changeup from lots of vamping, the gimmick is already threadbare.

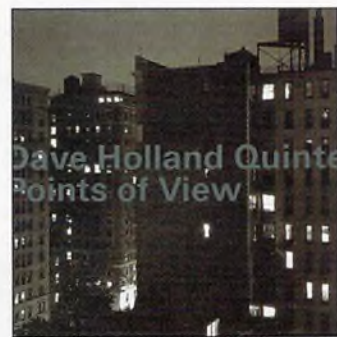
If Bluiett is looking to bust stereotypes and challenge preconceptions about the big horn, this record's not going to help much. At least half the disc relies on vamping ostinati, including the title track/member-intro, trumpeter E. J. Allen's "Discussion Among Friends," Sam Rivers' super "Revival," Alex Harding and Ronnie Burrage's soulful "KMA/QB" and the 19-minute of "J. B. Groove," credited to James Carter, the majority of which is naught more than a version of James Brown's "Give It Up Or Turnit A Loose." (An out-of-tempo section contrasts boldly with the funk, playing interestingly on the instruments' coloristic potential.) One or two horns anchor with bass riff honks or slap-tongue pops, drummer Ronnie Burrage paves them a funky path and someone else squeals or belches a solo. Trombonist Kumba Frank Lacy's "Settegast Strut" is the most satisfying compositional moment on the record, basing thicker charts on the rich overtone combinations of the long conic horns.

Personally, I love the fat, smearsy sound of the baritone and would gladly fight for its rights, but healthy national pride is based on acceptance of diversity. In this case a little more of that would have been welcome.

—John Corbett

**Libation For The Baritone Saxophone Nation:** Libation For The Baritone Nation; Discussion Among Friends; MPR-1; Revival; Settegast Strut; Underwater Birth; J. B. Groove; KMA/QB. (73:04)

**Personnel:** Hamiett Bluiett, James Carter, Alex Harding, Patience Higgins, baritone saxophones; Ronnie Burrage, drums.



## Dave Holland Quintet

**Points Of View**  
ECM 1663

★★★★

**T**hough he's helmed his share of hip sessions over the years, Dave Holland doesn't make the most titillating records in jazz. The bassist began his career as a leader with a stone classic, 1972's *Conference Of The Birds*, but the handful of ensemble discs that followed have

only partially captured that debut's graceful frenzy. Rightly regarded as a virtuoso improviser, esthetic integrationist and advocate of hip youngsters, the document that unifies all those skills in a fully compelling way has somehow eluded him. Until *Points Of View*, that is.

Holland opens his latest disc with a statement of purpose. "The Balance" is at once sweeping and pithy, ambitious and focused. In a nonchalant way, it bridges the gap between the dual interests of the leader's canon: thoughtful solos and elaborate frameworks. Synergy is crucial to such an equilibrium, and by uniting Steve Wilson's reeds, Steve Nelson's vibes, Robin Eubanks' trombone and Billy Kilson's drums, Holland has built a unit whose rapport is deep. Stressing a natural fluency, the band moves from quickstep swing to floating dreamscapes without doubting the substance of either. Refusing to treat any two passages the same, the players let you know they're fully engaged by the music everywhere along the line.

That attention to detail is obvious during the record's more intricate moments. Wilson's an ideal Holland associate because he expresses delirium in an orderly fashion. "Mr. B.," the bassist's nod to Ray Brown, is a limber mid-tempo bounce, but by the time it's the saxophonist's turn to solo, Kilson has nudged the piece from tranquil to turbulent. Negotiating the splashes, Wilson sails sleekly. And as the tension mounts, the music's transitions are lithe but distinct: In an instant the piece regains its original stance. Led by a gamesome Holland solo, the retreat back to groovesville is dashing, supple and assured.

Holland avoids pianos because his interest in

the wild blue yonder is resolute. By using vibes, he gets both a percussionist and a pianist while ducking the harmonic hoosegow. Nelson's a brainiac who can wiggle through any geometric structure. So when he peppers "Herbaceous" with a meteoric spray of notes, he sounds more like a reed player than he does a member of the rhythm section. Driven by Kilson, who comes off as an unholy blend of Jimmy Cobb and Billy Cobham, the vibist's solo authorizes the music to go anywhere.

Implication is the province of masters, and for each statement the band makes, another two or three are suggested. That kind of dexterity optimizes dimension and accounts for the disc's expansive feeling. The band juggles funk and swing: Eubanks' M-BASE'd "Metamorphos" declares groove while suggesting skittishness. And Holland's sauntering "Bedouin Trail" is a "Conference Of The Birds" update that hints of samba below its solemn facade.

What *Points Of View* doesn't fully account for is the danger machine the band represents on the bandstand. The production is slightly muted, beveling some of the music's sharper points. The three times I've seen the group live, with Chris Potter taking over Wilson's slot, the impact has been far more piercing. That said, there's no lack of commotion on the disc, which regularly peaks into the red zone while always keeping its cool.

—Jim Macnie

**Points Of View:** The Balance; Mr. B.; Bedouin Trail; Metamorphos; Ario; Herbaceous; The Benevolent One; Serenade. (71:58)

**Personnel:** Dave Holland, bass; Robin Eubanks, trombone; Steve Wilson, soprano and alto saxophones; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; Billy Kilson, drums.



## Eric Alexander John Hicks George Mraz Idris Muhammad

**Solid!**  
Milestone 9283

★★★★½

The concept of this CD is the absence of a concept.

If you leaf through old Down Beats from the late '50s, you'll find hardly a one without reviews of Prestige or Blue Note blowing sessions. No band, no book, no theme, no leader—just a rhythm section and a couple of horns turned loose. The ratings were always in that often non-committal zone of 3 to 4 stars. In

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# THE HOT BOX

CDs	CRITICS	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
<b>TONY WILLIAMS TRIO</b> <i>Young At Heart</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★1/2
<b>BLUIETT BARITONE NATION</b> <i>Libation For The Baritone Saxophone Nation</i>		★★	★★★	★★	★★★★1/2
<b>DAVE HOLLAND QUINTET</b> <i>Points Of View</i>		★★★★	★★★★1/2	★★★★	★★★★1/2
<b>ERIC ALEXANDER/JOHN HICKS/ GEORGE MRAZ/IDRIS MUHAMMAD</b> <i>Solid!</i>		★★★★1/2	★★★	★★★	★★★★

## CRITICS' COMMENTS

### TONY WILLIAMS TRIO, *Young At Heart*

A piano trio of rare firmness and compactness. Mulgrew Miller shines on his own "Promethean" and reprises relatively recent etchings of "Body And Soul" and "Summer Me, Winter Me." Williams shows he could be the most tactful and tactile of drummers.—JMD

Elegant, warm, peaceful trios. Williams was buoyant and supportive to the end. Mulgrew Miller, tasteful and thoughtful as usual. Only one pebble in the shoe: Why "Fool On The Hill"?—JC

What a way to go out! From the opening flutter of the leader's cymbals to the loopy boogaloo near the end, this is some of the most animated swing Williams ever cut. It reminds that his ferociousness was seldom without grace. And it's the best trio disc Mulgrew Miller has ever made.—JM

### BLUIETT BARITONE NATION, *Libation For The Baritone Saxophone Nation*

The old '60s avant garde is still trying to get the act together in this slash-and-burn festival of flatulence. There are, in fact, astute interludes of cohesiveness and drive ("J.B. Groove"), but too often undermined in a context of mayhem and boredom.—JMD

Can't say that Bluiett and company don't blow with conviction, but what a tired formula: vamp and honk, vamp and shriek, vamp and howl. The umpteenth spinoff of the WSQ's funky side is exactly what you think it's going to be: a live date that was a better gig than it is a record.—JM

Bluiett takes the WSQ concept one step further. Maybe it's what he had in mind all along, but the sound is surprisingly similar in execution, not as bottom-heavy as one would think. It's interesting to hear how the four horns free each other up to explore other ranges of the horn simply because they are all there. "covering" for each other. And, with Burrage's drums, all the bases seem to be covered. There's lots of soul here, especially on slower numbers like "MPP-1" and the fun, swingin' "Revival." Still, an acquired taste.—JE

### DAVE HOLLAND QUINTET, *Points Of View*

Immaculate ensemble blends provide a diversity of cool colors within a strong overriding sensibility and structure. Arguably, a spiritual descendant of '30s Ellington miniatures. Some fine melodic material, too ("Serenade").—JMD

Robin Eubanks! What tromboneliness—check him out alone at the beginning of the "Caravan"-ish "Bedouin Trail." Outstanding. Holland's very groove-conscious quintet concept is enjoyable, and Steve Nelson's vibes provide change of color without softening focus too much. It's not without compositional dull spots, though, like Holland's "Ario" and Steve Wilson's two tunes, which significantly drag the end of the disc.—JC

*Points Of View* is endowed with simple elegance. Each track stands alone, and is also of a piece. There's a great deal of soloing, but a unity that reflects years of playing together. Vibes, trombone, alto and soprano saxes and a highly sympathetic drummer meld with the leader's bass to create a stunning album of originals.—JE

### ERIC ALEXANDER/JOHN HICKS/GEORGE MRAZ/IDRIS MUHAMMAD, *Solid!*

I'm most drawn to Alexander here: His muscular tone and unambiguous phrasing sound stronger than ever. Sturdy material, most of it Blue Note and Prestige hard-bop songbooks, including "Fire Waltz." Rather than Joe Locke's vibes, I would have preferred to hear the saxophonist tackle Mal Waldron's gorgeous melody.—JC

Clearly defined hard-bop made for a market smitten with by-the-numbers precision and punch. And further proof that, for better or worse, Eric Alexander has every element of the style down cold.—JM

This set of standards penned by various heavyweights of jazz is played with gusto, style and weight. And, along with a nice collection of ballads, it swings like mad. For those not familiar with the youthful tenorist Alexander, *Solid!* might just be a revelation. Also, the list of tunes selected is inspired, devoid as it is of so many jazz standards heard all too often. Incidentally, Hicks' solo on Fred Lacey's ballad "Theme For Ernie" is a delight.—JE

reviewing John Coltrane's first LP as a leader for this magazine, Don Gold wondered "if anyone can be identified as a 'leader' on such a date" (Jan. 23, 1958).

This CD has been created in that tradition (even down to the exclamation point in the title), partly because 1999 is Prestige's 50th birthday and partly out of opportunity, which was how the originals usually got made. Most of the titles hark back to the time when guys like Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins and Coltrane were the young lions. The difference is most of the lions now are in their 50s, with Eric Alexander the only youngster among the principals.

Alexander is a superior post-bop, post-Coltrane tenor of the Joshua Redman generation who plays with size, warmth and a powerful rhythmic lift at faster tempos. He steers a conciliatory course here between the hard-bop of the old Prestige sessions of the '50s and everything that came after, from which he draws only sparingly ("Little Melonae"). He phrases gracefully, both in tempo and in frequent double-tempo passages. But no cut better catches his finest qualities in full cry and swing than "Four." He interprets Ellington's "Star Crossed Lovers," warmly, in the way Johnny Hodges originally did, without using it as a launching platform. Similarly, his second chorus on "Theme For Ernie" is a lovely variation more than an improvisation.

John Hicks is a journeyman player who consistently swings while proving an attentive and acute counterbalance on piano. But he seems to savor the extra time that ballads give him to pick and probe with the resources of the keyboard. Jim Rotondi's trumpet fills out a couple of ensembles but takes no solos. And vibist Joe Locke has "Fire Waltz" to himself in a nice cameo. —John McDonough

**Solid!**: Solid: Little Melonae; Theme For Ernie; Fire Waltz; Four; Star Crossed Lovers; My Conception; Light Blue; Straight Street. (60:35)

**Personnel**: Eric Alexander, tenor saxophone; John Hicks, piano; George Mraz, bass; Idris Muhammad, drums; Jim Rotondi, trumpet (2, 8); Joe Locke, vibraphone (4).



## Etta Jones

### My Buddy HighNote 026

★★★

Taken together—and over the years they have been virtually inseparable—vocalist Etta Jones and tenor saxophonist Houston Person are emblematic of the soulful merger of jazz and rhythm and blues. And this bridge is

given added stanchions when the two veteran musicians pay tribute to bandleader/composer Buddy Johnson.

The only wonder here is why it took so long for Jones to record a collection of songs written and popularized by Johnson. In 1944, when Johnson's pregnant sister Ella was preparing to take a leave from his band as the vocalist, Jones earned the spot after winning an Apollo Theater amateur contest in which Johnson's band served as the backing group. Jones performed with the band for about a year, and in the succeeding years she often appeared with them as a guest.

Some of the tunes on *My Buddy* were obviously part of Johnson's repertoire in the '40s. Jones knows them so well that it would be forgivable if she took the songs for granted. This relaxed approach is evident on the first couple of selections, but she gives "Save Your Love For Me" a fresh coat of varnish. And Person's unhurried tones are perfectly pitched to dry each luscious syllable Jones drops.

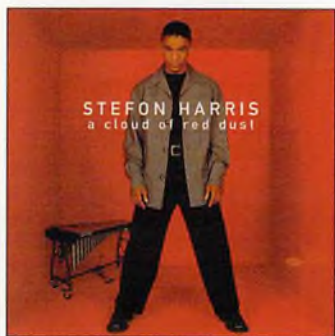
The duo's finest moment is delivered on the timeless chestnut "Since I Fell For You" (I am old enough to recall both Johnson's and Lenny Welch's versions). Most memorable is Jones' vocal effect in which certain notes are slightly warbled (or are they partly yodeled?). If the tune isn't lifted to the sublime, it certainly isn't run of the mill.

Jones wraps "I Wonder Where Our Love Has Gone" in raunchiness. While the interpretation has a pensive, longing edge, it steers clear of being overly syrupy and sentimental. Like her mentor, to whom this collection is an admirable tribute, Jones evokes a worldly chanteuse who is not world-weary. Just when you think she's on the verge of drowning in her own tears, she hits a note and strikes a pose to let you know that her fine brown frame ain't gone to fat yet.

—Herb Boyd

**My Buddy:** When My Man Comes Home; They All Say I'm The Biggest Fool; Save Your Love For Me; Let's Beat Out Some Love; Since I Fell For You; Baby I'm Yours; Fine Brown Frame; I Wonder Where Our Love Has Gone; Please Mr. Johnson; Hittin' On Me. (52:14)

**Personnel:** Etta Jones, vocals; Houston Person, tenor saxophone; Norman Simmons, piano; John Webber, bass; Kenny Washington, drums.



## Stefon Harris

### A Cloud Of Red Dust

Blue Note 23487

★★★

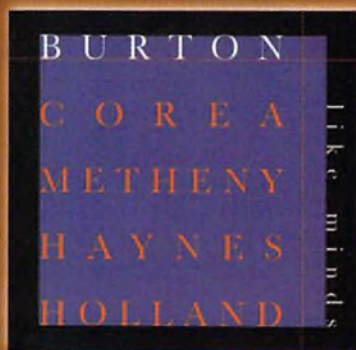
I've been knocked out by the originality of 25-year-old vibraphonist Stefon Harris, so I was hotly anticipating his debut album.

Unfortunately, like many young players with a million ideas, he's tried to pack too much into this project, with the result that his best qualities are sometimes masked or muted. None of his solos comes up to the level of his live performances, with their daring clusters, intervallic leaps and thematic continuity. And the album's arrangements, though formally sophisticated and extremely well-played, are cluttered with far too much piano mixed into their thick, saxophone/flute/vibes lines and African- and Cuban-inspired percussion.

In spite of all this, there is some great playing. The opening, uptempo cut, "Sophistry," features a different rhythmic backdrop for each section, with Harris contributing a solo of appealing clarity and doubled-up speed. On

Bobby Hutcherson's "For You Mom & Dad," the disc's only non-original, the young vibist acknowledges his debt to his elder with a joyful, soaring outing. Trombonist Steve Turre guests to good advantage on a jaunty blues, "Jamo," which has a pleasantly looser feeling than the other cuts, and Jason Moran offers a splashy, intuitive piano solo as well.

Elsewhere, Harris' high concept gets in his way. Four short, impressionistic ethnic interludes add precious little, though the balafon on "Sacred Forest" and Kimati Dinizulu's one-string harp on "One String Blues" are pleasant enough. The lyrics to the shimmering ballad, "In The Garden Of Thought," sung by June Gardner, stray from innocence to mawkishness. Now that Harris has gotten through the



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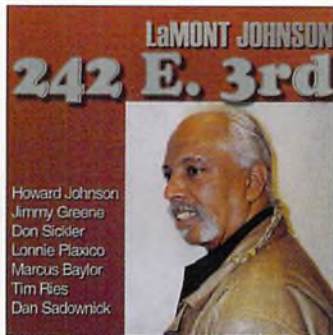
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trauma of his first major label release, maybe next time he will relax and really sing, as we know he can.  
—Paul de Barros

**A Cloud Of Red Dust:** Sophistry; And This Too Shall Pass; Nature Music; In The Garden Of Thought; Drum Storm; The Prophet; Sacred Forest; A Cloud Of Red Dust; One String Blues; Jamo; For You Mom & Dad. (48:38)

**Personnel:** Stefan Harris, vibraphone, balafon, orchestra bells, percussion; Mulgrew Miller (1, 2, 8, 11), Jason Moran (3-6, 10), piano; Dwayne Burno, bass; Alvester Garnett, drums; Kimati Dinizulu, percussion, one-string harp (9); Greg Osby (1, 2, 6, 8), Steve Wilson (6, 11), alto saxophone; Wilson, soprano saxophone (4, 8); Steve Turre, trombone (4, 6, 10), conch shells (6); Kaoru Watanabe, flute (1, 2, 6, 8, 11); June Gardner, vocal (4).



## LaMont Johnson

242 E. 3rd  
MasterScores 29806

★★★

California pianist LaMont Johnson, once a stalwart of the New York scene, has prospered on the periphery of the jazz world in recent years, charting his own private musical path as he devoted much of his time and attention to Scientology. With *242 E. 3rd*, Johnson steps back toward the spotlight with his most diverse and accomplished recording yet.

Johnson is best known for his work with Jackie McLean in the mid-'60s, a period where the saxist took his hard-bop sound into more experimental areas with scintillating success. Johnson's current sound is more rooted in basic bop sensibilities, with a few impressionistic embellishments, and is often more a product of composition than improvisation. The result is straightahead playing marked by a commendable clarity and coherence, if admittedly sometimes less creative than desired. Johnson's work as a composer and arranger—all the tunes are originals—is equally poised and polished as he brings a harmonic brightness to almost everything, creating a fresh, almost shiny, sound that pleasantly resonates even while reprising familiar lines and phrases.

Johnson is invariably democratic in the allocation of solo space, and his supporting cast makes the most of the opportunity, all the way from Howard Johnson's bottom register work-out on the opening "Jesters' Game" through Don Sickler's Latin trumpet foray on the extended "Tio Hespano" to Tim Ries' funky flute and the hard-honking tenor work by saxist Jimmy Greene on the concluding "Fang Dancer." Johnson, seemingly as comfortable in

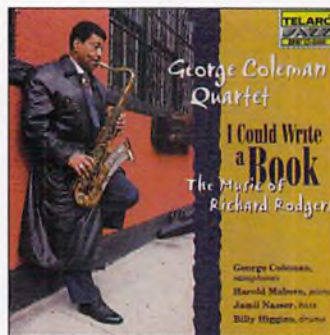
his role as composer/arranger/bandleader as he is desirous of spotlighting his playing, is clean and concise with his solos; occasionally, such as on "I'm Gonna Get Me Some," he attacks the music energetically.

The album, conceived as a tribute to Slugs, the '60s Lower East Side hotspot, gets most of the music right but fails in capturing the free-wheeling feel of the times and the venue due to its polished and precise presentation, something the late-night jams were never known for. But it's doubtful anyone but habitual patrons of the club will care that the concept doesn't quite connect, since the music so often does. Ultimately the album (whose title was the address of Slugs) isn't a revelatory reintroduction to Johnson but instead more of a reminder he's still very much alive and capable.

—Michael Point

**242 E. 3rd:** Jester's Game; 242 E. 3rd; Chismatic; I'm Gonna Get Me Some; Tio Hispano; Membrane Solace; Anachronism; BeBe Djhain; Vision On A Chaise; Fang Dancer. (64:30)

**Personnel:** LaMont Johnson, piano; Howard Johnson, tuba; Jimmy Greene, tenor saxophone; Don Sickler, trumpet; Tim Ries, alto flute; Lonnie Plaxico, bass; Marcus Baylor, drums; Dany Sadownick, congas.



## George Coleman

I Could Write a Book

Telarc 83439

★★★★

George Coleman supposedly was cased out of the Miles Davis Quintet nearly 35 years ago to make room for Wayne Shorter because it was said that he played too well, too cleanly.

Despite that odd reasoning, it's difficult to argue with history. The Davis quintet went on to greatness. It needn't be noted, however, that the Davis group including Coleman also had many superb moments. And Coleman may still be too good, too clean.

Tenor remains Coleman's main axe, with soprano and alto coming in a distant second and third. On tenor, Coleman speaks with the best of them. On alto, the sound is thinner and loses its distinctive edge. His soprano is better, yet lacks the force of the tenor. And a force it is. Try "Have You Met Miss Jones," for instance, or "Lover," or "I Didn't Know What Time It Was," or "My Funny Valentine." Coleman hasn't lost a step on the young lions.

This CD, subtitled *The Music Of Richard Rodgers*, has a richly textured approach.

Coleman is nearly without peer as a master at using dynamics to build his solos to logical conclusions. And he has a solid rhythmic stance, even on the ballads. If you want to compare him to another underrated stylist, try Hank Mobley—not so much in sound as in overall consistency and polish.

The rhythm section? Hard to beat: Coleman's Memphis brethren, Harold Mabern and Jamil Nasser, as well as the ubiquitous Billy Higgins, a Californian who fits in with everyone. Mabern remains underrecognized by listeners but not by musicians.

The generous Coleman puts his horns aside to give Nasser the limelight on "People Will Say We're In Love," with tasteful piano and drum support. The medley's three songs feature, in order, Coleman's alto, Mabern and Nasser. "Thou Swell" is just tenor and drums.

What would garner a higher rating? Coleman playing some smoking originals and jazz classics along with standards.  
—Will Smith

**I Could Write A Book:** Falling In Love With Love; My Funny Valentine; Lover; Bewitched; I Didn't Know What Time It Was; My Favorite Things; Have You Met Miss Jones; People Will Say We're In Love; I Could Write A Book; Medley: There's A Small Hotel, Where Or When, The Sweetest Sounds; Thou Swell. (59:34)

**Personnel:** George Coleman, soprano saxophone (4, 6), alto saxophone (1, 10), tenor saxophone (2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11); Harold Mabern, piano; Jamil Nasser, bass; Billy Higgins, drums.



## Cesaria Evora

Miss Perfumado

Nonesuch 79509

★★★★

Here's to late bloomers. Cesaria Evora was pushing 50 in 1992, when this album made her a star in France and Portugal, then spawned an international following. Hailing from the Cape Verde Islands off the coast of West Africa, Evora is master of an indigenous style known as the morna, a romantic blend of dialectic Portuguese vocals, gently strumming guitars and lilting piano frills. While subsequent work has been issued in the United States, this marks the stateside debut of the Barefoot Diva's career-catalyzing classic, originally released on Lusafica.

World music is one way to describe the morna, but universal music might be a better description. Like the blues, its melodies carry a primal familiarity that can draw almost anyone under their spell. And without understanding a lick of Portuguese (though thankfully, transla-

tions are provided), Evora's talent is obvious. It's tempting to evoke the image of sitting in an equatorial paradise with an ocean breeze tousling our hair as we sip mint juleps and have our feet massaged by lovely maidens, but in fact the Cape Verde Islands are a group of parched, dusty rocks that would more likely pelt Saharan sand into our eyes. No doubt the melancholy of this music stems from the awfulness of such a locale, yet sentimentality is apparent when Evora sings "Sodade" and expresses longing for the Verdean island of Sao Nicolau. Her voice—clear, confident and charged with nuance—speaks just as intriguingly about the wonderful people of Angola ("Angola"), urging workers to strike ("Cumpade Ciznone") and rolling in the sand with her lover ("Bia").

Nothing on *Miss Perfumado* could be called jazz or even jazz-influenced, but the morna's airy esthetic offers a pleasant vacation from the chink-a-chink of a hi-hat. And there's plenty of musicianship to appreciate. Multi-instrumentalist Paulino Vieira steps out with many a brief ad lib solo, and Malaquias Costa bows a moving violin fill on "Tortura." Pristine recording quality adds to *Miss Perfumado's* status as a world-class album. Right down to the handclaps on "Angola," everything sounds as if it's in the next room. Then, of course, there's Evora's voice. For all the Sinatra tributes that are bound to come out, if only one jazz CD will be partly inspired by Cesaria Evora. —John Janowiak

**Miss Perfumado:** Sodade; Bia; Cumpade Ciznone; Direito Di Nasce; Luz Dum Estrela; Angola; Miss Perfumado; Vida Tem Um So Vida; Morabeza; Recordai; Lua Nha Testemunha; Barbincor; Tortura. (63:21)

**Personnel:** Cesaria Evora, vocals; Paulino Vieira, acoustic guitar, caquinho, piano, harmonica, percussion; Toy Vieira, acoustic guitar, cavaquinho, piano, vocals; Malaquias Costa, violin, percussion; Escabes, reco-reco.



## Cyrus Chestnut

Cyrus Chestnut  
Atlantic 83140

★★★½

**P**ut together a rhythm section of Cyrus Chestnut, Ron Carter and Billy Higgins, and it's hard to miss. Throw in a couple of standards featuring r&b singer Anita Baker, and it's entertainment palatable for the entire family, with the obvious exception of angst-ridden teenagers. Add guest appearances by James Carter, Joe Lovano and Lewis Nash, and there are bound to be a few sparks flying. The total package is nothing less, and little more, than artful musicians playing fine-polished straightahead jazz.

Chestnut's original compositions, which make up most of the album's tunes, would have sounded right at home had they been written 35

years ago, and even then, they wouldn't have seemed especially cutting edge. They serve well as blowing vehicles, though, showcasing the improvisational talents of Chestnut and his crack team. "Miss Thing," one of the peppier originals, features a hot alto solo by Carter, who also doubles Chestnut's melody to great effect. Chestnut himself steps out remarkably on "Any Way You Can," a medium-tempo, 6/8 number reminiscent of Coltrane's "Lonnie's Lament." His solo is so graceful and seemingly effortless that it's easy to miss some of his trickier passages, such as when he plays a series of flute-like arpeggios on his right hand and percussive chords simultaneously on the left. Higgins, as usual, proves to be a master of accompaniment, picking up on Chestnut's rhythmic ideas and helping him build to a denouement.

Baker sings on "Summertime" and "My Favorite Things," and though her style is more jazzy than jazz, she holds her own with these heavies. Chestnut features himself on a couple of a cappella numbers, the ragtime "Nutman's Invention #2" and the gospel-induced "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," but these come off a bit superfluous. The best performance is saved for last: "Sharp" is a beboppish thrill ride that begins with a call and response between saxes and rhythm, then leads to a cutting contest between Lovano and Carter. —John Janowiak

**Cyrus Chestnut:** Miss Thing; Summertime; The Journey; Elegant Flower; Nutman's Invention #2; My Favorite Things; Any Way You Can; Mother's Blues; Great Is Thy Faithfulness; Strolling In Central Park; Sharp. (60:21)

**Personnel:** Cyrus Chestnut, piano, Fender Rhodes (2); Ron Carter, bass; Billy Higgins, drums; Lewis Nash, drums (2, 6); James Carter, alto saxophone (1, 3, 11); Anita Baker, vocals (2, 6); Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone (7, 11).

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## Bennie Wallace

**Bennie Wallace**  
AudioQuest 1051

★★★★½

**W**ithin a small zone where two counter-cultures overlap, the jazz community and the audiophile community, the AudioQuest label gets special respect. Simply put, AQ has been responsible for some of the best sounding recordings ever made of small acoustic jazz ensembles. And AQ albums typically contain compelling music.

The man behind both achievements is producer Joe Harley. His touch with direct-to-two-track analog recordings is almost mystical, and his ability to create conditions in the studio that foster creativity has drawn albums of lasting value from people like Kei Akagi (*Mirror Puzzle*, 1994), James Newton (*Suite For Frida Kahlo*, 1994) and Bennie Wallace (*The Old Songs*, 1993).

It was therefore a major disappointment among the label's followers when, two years ago, AQ stopped recording jazz and concentrated on more commercially viable blues. The release of this new eponymously titled CD by Bennie Wallace is important, not only because it marks the return of AQ to the jazz format, but because it is the label's strongest album ever.

Bennie Wallace is a modernist who understands the past. When he opens "Chelsea Bridge" with his gigantic, up-from-the-guts tenor saxophone sound, he is unmistakably at home in an earlier milieu's romanticism. But Wallace's methods—his slanting inflections and asymmetrical phrasing and tendency to state a melody through essential fragments—create tensions that pull against the quaint spirit of his vintage material.

Those finely balanced tensions, along with the languid late-night tone, give this album its continuity. Wallace touches the essences of four Ellington/Strayhorn pieces, a Cole Porter tune, a standard from the '30s that Louis Armstrong sang ("Moon Song") and "Over The Rainbow." But his intervallic leaps and quick splintering runs distort nostalgia through the lens of a contemporary perspective, with its relativities and ironies.

In a session without a weak track, there are three in a row on a rare level of interpretive realization. On "Over The Rainbow" Wallace starts with a sublime ascent as though floating over rainbows were not only natural, but effortless. Even when he begins to slowly break the lines into pieces, he stays true to the song's poignance. Porter's "So In Love" has an exotic opening vamp, a solo from Tommy Flanagan

like breaking sunlight, and Wallace's fervent extensions. Wallace slides sideways into "Prelude To A Kiss," set up by the poise of Flanagan's intro. He understands Ellington's melodic concept through twists and displaced accents and tangential arpeggios. Then he finds himself alone for an extended coda that never leaves the song but explores a plethora of its far-flung implications before Flanagan finally settles a few whispered chords to take him out.

A major reason why this session is such a proportioned, finished whole is the way that the rhythm section wraps a flattering frame around every Wallace excursion. Tommy Flanagan, who rarely serves as a sideman these days, shows that he is still the ultimate accompanist, self-effacing yet always infusing the music with grace. Eddie Gomez and Alvin Queen are subtle and light, yet propulsive.

Engineered by Roger Rhodes, this may be the most refined evolution to date of the "Joe Harley Sound"—a sonic portrait combining warmth and exactitude whose crystalline transparency allows us to see deep into the pool of the music.

—Thomas Conrad

**Bennie Wallace:** Beyond The Bluebird; Serenade To Sweden; Little Surprises; Moon Song; Over The Rainbow; So In Love; Prelude To A Kiss; UMMG; Chelsea Bridge. (53:53)

**Personnel:** Bennie Wallace, tenor saxophone; Tommy Flanagan, piano; Eddie Gomez, bass; Alvin Queen, drums.



## Fred Hersch & Bill Frisell

**Songs We Know**  
Nonesuch 79468

★★★★½

**T**he jazz duo—from the Louis Armstrong-Earl Hines get-togethers onward—remains the most intimate form of improvisational sharing. It's more about blending and two-way communion than about solo extemporizing and spotlight seeking.

As in a marriage, each partner in this Fred Hersch-Bill Frisell musical merger shares some of the blame for its weaknesses. Hersch uses occasional brittle dissonance and some Monkisms in his mostly failed attempt to avoid the stylistic domination of Bill Evans. And Frisell loses his distinctiveness on this type of material. It's to his credit, however, that he wisely shuns much of the twangy thing that makes up his style—it just wouldn't have worked the way things are set up here.

This collection of standards, a couple of jazz

classics and a widely known Brazilian work, is most effective on "It Might As Well Be Spring," "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise," "Blue Monk," "My Little Suede Shoes" and, in especially cogent fashion, "Yesterdays." On the aforementioned tunes, there's a meeting of the minds within largely lyrical frameworks, as well as some inspired intersecting lines.

Things go less well on "Someday My Prince Will Come," "What Is This Thing Called Love?" and, particularly, "I Got Rhythm," where a certain corniness is allowed to enter.

Perhaps what Hersch and Frisell should have done was to work largely with original tunes, then really throw into the mix a combination of their stylistic differences: Let Frisell bend notes around Hersch's rhapsodic flourishes, as Hersch has done here and there with his use of discordant elements. The point is that as great as standards can be, they work here as an improvisational straitjacket for Frisell and as a lyrical noose for Hersch.

—Will Smith

**Songs We Know:** It Might As Well Be Spring; There Is No Greater Love; Someday My Prince Will Come; Softly As In A Morning Sunrise; Blue Monk; My One and Only Love; My Little Suede Shoes; Yesterdays; I Got Rhythm; Wave; What Is This Thing Called Love? (57:37)

**Personnel:** Fred Hersch, piano; Bill Frisell, acoustic, electric guitars.



## Gerry Mulligan All-Star Tribute Band

**Thank You, Gerry!**  
Arkadia Jazz 71191

★★★★½

## Three Baritone Saxophone Band

**Plays Mulligan**  
Dreyfus Jazz 36588

★★★★

**D**espite similar programs of Gerry Mulligan classics and assorted others, these two albums commemorate the hallowed baritonist, composer, arranger and jazz thinker with quite different approaches, both of which succeed nicely.

The sextet has a light, airy sound, very much in the Mulligan vein, helped, no doubt, by the fact that five of the participants had long associations with him. Also, musical director Ted

Rosenthal employs various Mulligan trademarks such as collective improvisation.

The delights of this disc are many: the tender "Theme For Jobim" with captivating melody statements from the burry-toned Bob Brookmeyer; Lee Konitz, whose sound both pleads and coos; then those two plus Randy Brecker in an exquisite ensemble passage. At one point, the three improvise simultaneously, with nary a clash. The medium-groove blues "Elevation" has a neat format: One horn and one rhythm trade off, from a chorus to two-bar fragments, eventually also blowing together. "Line For Lyons" has a similarly enthralling set-up.

Brecker's graceful, unhurried statements on "My Funny Valentine" mix sweet and tart notes. Then Rosenthal enters, at one point repeating arpeggios hauntingly, at others delivering almost chilling figures that resolve dulcetly. On "Walkin' Shoes," bassist Dean Johnson offers ringing, crisply articulated notes, followed by Konitz, who blends a supple, sure-footed swing with quiet melodic gems. He's talking to us.

Brookmeyer, another former swinger who now likes to explore, does just that on "Bark For Barksdale" and "Rocker," while on "Moonlight In Vermont" he concentrates on lyricism and scores. Crisp yet comfy rhythm work sets up everything we hear.

The three baritones, given their collective timbral weight, celebrate the honoree in the fashion of a little big band, with leader Ronnie Cuber's charts having a pleasing heft and hard drive. Themes are played in unison or harmony, background lines appear behind many solos and shout-like ensemble passages lead to the closing melody statements.

"Blue Port," "Bernie's Tune" and "Elevation" all have considerable swagger. "Blue Port" is one of many where the horns all solo. Bop-based Nick Brignola stretches, looking for new ways to swing; Cuber employs a like manner, generating heat with his rhythmically charged phrases; Gary Smulyan, the post-bopper, issues long lines full of hip ideas that are craftily resolved. "Bernie's Tune" has a deft shout chorus, as does the buoyant "Line For Lyons," where the baris work with a Mulligan-like ethereality.

Lower-keyed are the lovely "Theme For Jobim" and Johnny Mandel's "I Want To Live," a 16-bar slow blues variant. On "I Want To Live," Cuber plays the mournful theme, then improvises in his expressive, loose mode, and includes some well-chosen double times. "Festive Minor"

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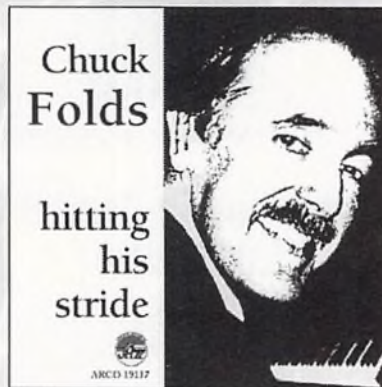
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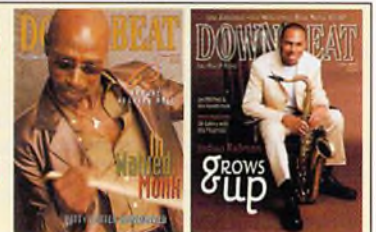
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is all Andy McKee's, his big, pliant bass notes and head-on swing always a pleasure. Drummer Joe Farnsworth trades fours on "Blue Port" and elsewhere cooks with panache.

Caveat: There's scant info as to the order of soloists. Individual players all, there's still enough similarity in tone and style to make them difficult to distinguish at times. A breakdown is needed.

—Zan Stewart

**Thank You, Gerry!**: Bark For Barksdale; Theme For Jobim; Elevation; My Funny Valentine; Rocker; Walkin' Shoes; Moonlight In Vermont; Line For Lyons; Festive Minor; Bernie's Tune; Curtains. (68:27)

**Personnel**: Lee Konitz, alto saxophone; Bob Brookmeyer, valve trombone; Randy Brecker, trumpet, flugelhorn; Ted Rosenthal, piano; Dean Johnson, bass; Ron Vincent, drums.

**Three Baritone Saxophone Band Plays Mulligan**: Line For Lyons; Blue Port; I Want To Live; Walkin' Shoes; Elevation; Black Nighttown; Bernie's Tune; Festive Minor; Theme For Jobim; Five Brothers; Lonesome Boulevard; Waltz For Geraldus. (61:05)

**Personnel**: Ronnie Cuber, Nick Brignola, Gary Smulyan, baritone saxophone; Andy McKee, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

and it brings together young and old. The youthful Joel Futterman's discursive, bright piano is augmented by occasional turns on soprano and Indian flutes, while the New Orleans veteran "Kidd" Jordan cooks throughout on tenor, weaving any number of stories on his horn, some terrifying and seemingly manic, others showcasing his saxophonic reach for conventional tonality. The other vet, Alvin Fielder, is a paradox: Both a ball of polyrhythmic fire and a gentle presence here, his touch is just right (check out his brush work on "Plato's Reverie").

All seven selections were written by the trio, and, like much "new music," was probably better heard by this audience in November 1997. (Drimala Records may only be obtained at [www.drimala.com](http://www.drimala.com))

—John Ephland

**Southern Extreme**: Southern Extreme; Mississippi Sweet; No Train North; Plato's Reverie; You Are My Truth; Kidd's Blues; Renaissance And Reprise. (68:53)

**Personnel**: Joel Futterman, piano, curved soprano saxophone, E<sub>6</sub> and B<sub>7</sub> Indian flutes; Edward "Kidd" Jordan, tenor saxophone; Alvin Fielder, drums; Philip Egert, spoken poem (1).

Nock's "Sanpaku" is a lively, uptempo swinger in 3 that's over before it really begins. More unison lines for White and Handy on another uptempo swinging waltz, "Three In One," set the stage for the album, opening things on a bright note and featuring Handy's trademark trills and White's combination of plucks and struts. "Projections" is a somewhat mysterious waltz theme played gently, while the waltz "Senora Nancye," the bluesy "All The Way To The West" and especially "A Song Of Uranus" are the album's true cookers.

*Projections'* sound quality is generally very good, each instrument heard clearly, if perhaps, for Nock and drummer Larry Hancock, a little too discreetly.

—John Ephland

**Projections**: Three In One; Projections; A Song Of Uranus; Senora Nancye; Dance To The Lady; Sanpaku; Eros; All The Way To The West. By God, Virginia. (45:18)

**Personnel**: John Handy, alto saxophone, saxello, flute; Michael White, violin; Mike Nock, piano; Bruce Cale, bass; Larry Hancock, drums, tambourine.



## Joel Futterman/ Kidd Jordan Trio with Alvin Fielder

**Southern Extreme**  
Drimala 98-001-01

★★★

One of the interesting things about this recording is the way the mix of instruments weaves in and out of the listener's range. Drums are present, then fade, but only in subtle ways. And while the horn and piano playing, particularly on an extended number like "Mississippi Sweet" (clocking in at a hefty 21:30), seem omnipresent, there is an auditory illusion to them that refuses to let the drums vanish, even when they aren't being played.

Much of what passes for jazz and improvised music is music played at the same level with everyone heard primarily in the foreground. *Southern Extreme* is an exception (aided, no doubt, by being a live recording). Perhaps it helps that there are only three members to this band, but the three-dimensionality to this material is furthered along by its experimental nature as well. As the liner notes say, "This recording is a document of an art and music collaboration ... in which Mississippi State University art students created large murals in response to the live music performed by the Trio."

*Southern Extreme* is the trio's third album.



## John Handy Concert Ensemble

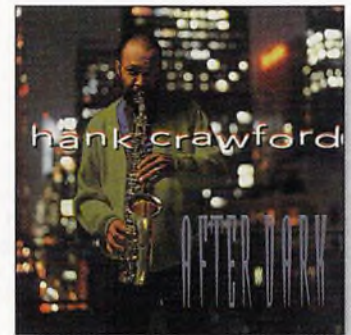
**Projections**  
Koch Jazz 7865

★★★½

This is the fourth John Handy CD reissued from his late-'60s Columbia period (all by Koch Jazz). And like the previous three, *Projections* represents yet another departure for the alto saxophonist, this time with his Concert Ensemble (although it's hard to tell if *Projections* was actually a concert).

Among the most significant aspects to this period for Handy was his ongoing collaborations with childhood friend violinist Michael White. At the time, White's presence on violin was, for many in jazz, a new revelation, and one that helped draw attention to Handy's new conception for what a jazz group could play and how they played it. White's deft combination of lush arco, frantic arpeggios and plucked notes made for an interesting contrast and blend with Handy's high-register alto.

The most familiar tune here is Handy's "Dance To The Lady," its sunny waltz theme reminiscent of Rahaan Roland Kirk at his most rhapsodic. Handy seems to like to waltz, given the number offered on *Projections*. Pianist Mike



## Hank Crawford

**After Dark**  
Milestone 9279

★★½

Hank Crawford's sound has come to represent the alto sax in the funk-laced popular realms of jazz. Just think about David Sanborn and his clones. All stem from Hank and his shrill, gospel- and blues-tinged tone.

He wails along in a close-to-the-melody, homespun fashion, but doesn't take listeners to places where they've never been. The problem is that Crawford just gives you too much of the same old. It works, somehow, when he teams with Jimmy McGriff, but on his own it's tiresome in large doses.

Pianist/organist Danny Mixon, on the other hand, moves things along to some interesting spaces, creating the most pleasurable work with dizzying solos that cover the jazz spectrum. And guitarist Melvin Sparks is also worth hearing.

This music is best when Crawford and company stay on his ("Mother Nature" and "Beale Street After Dark") or Sparks' ("Git It!") originals and works much less well on the sugary ballads and gospelish pop tunes.

—Will Smith

**After Dark**: My Babe; Share Your Love With Me; Git It!; Tain't Nobody's Bizness If I Do; Our Day Will Come; Mother Nature; That's All; St. Louis Blues; Beale Street After Dark; Amazing Grace. (62:40)

**Personnel**: Hank Crawford, alto saxophone; Danny Mixon, piano, organ; Melvin Sparks, guitar; Stanley Banks (2-4, 7, 8), Wilbur Bascomb, bass; Bernard Purdie, drums.

# JAZZ

## Women Who Rule

by John Janowiak

**N**o, this isn't the next Lilith Fair lineup, just a compendium of some of the better female vocalists to release CDs lately. Representing a variety of styles and levels of experience, they're each accompanied by distinguished rhythm sections and sidemen.

**Ethel Ennis: *If Women Ruled The World* (Savoy Jazz/Denon Records 18088; 60:04) ★★ ★★**

If Ethel Ennis ruled the world, we'd bow to a wise, benevolent dictator with attitude. Having performed decades ago with Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington and, heck, just about everybody who was anybody, she recently re-emerged on the scene after a long absence. Rough-cut and idiosyncratic, her voice runs deep, exuding the personality of a sage who has lived many lives. Her song choices serve her well. She draws entirely from female composer-musicians here, including Billie Holiday, Tracy Chapman, Des'ree and a triumvirate of Joans—Mitchell, Osborne and Armatrading. In her own composition, "Hey You," she gives an endearing spoken-word performance. ("Sometimes I look at life as a pencil," she says. "You gotta have a point in life, and you gotta be kind of focused for clear communication. You gotta be sharp.") Her partners in world-domination are trumpeter Ingrid Jensen and saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom. Humble servants include pianist-arranger Marc Copland and, alternately, drummers Dennis Chambers and Billy Hart.

**Jay Clayton: *Circle Dancing* (Sunnyside 1076; 64:52) ★★ ★★** Largely eschewing the standards and straightahead styles that many vocalists rest on, Clayton deserves credit for tackling challenging originals in a fresh, adventuresome manner. Also distinctive, her scattings steer clear of hackneyed strings of eighth notes. With a light touch

that extends into the upper reaches of her voice, she tends to sculpt broad tones with nuanced curves, an occasionally rolling tongue and well-situated pockets of space. In another departure from tradition, she makes use of overdubbing and electronic effects. Warning: May be a tad "out there" for more conservative listeners. For others, it'll be just plain satisfying.

**Trudy Desmond: *My One and Only—A Gershwin Celebration* (Justin Time 8468; 59:11) ★★ ★½** In a more conventional vein, Desmond is a singer's singer, with a warm voice, graceful feel, superb command and an expressive vibrato. She articu-

Thomas make for an appealing duo, particularly in their calls and responses on Pharoah Sanders' hypnotic musical sermon "The Creator Has A Master Plan." And, seeming to mimic Slam Stewart, they playfully "zuzz" the melody to Avery Sharpe's "Uncle From Ghana" in tandem with a bowed bass. David Murray plays a riveting tenor solo on the title track. As for Brown's solos, they're always enthusiastic, if not always sharply defined.

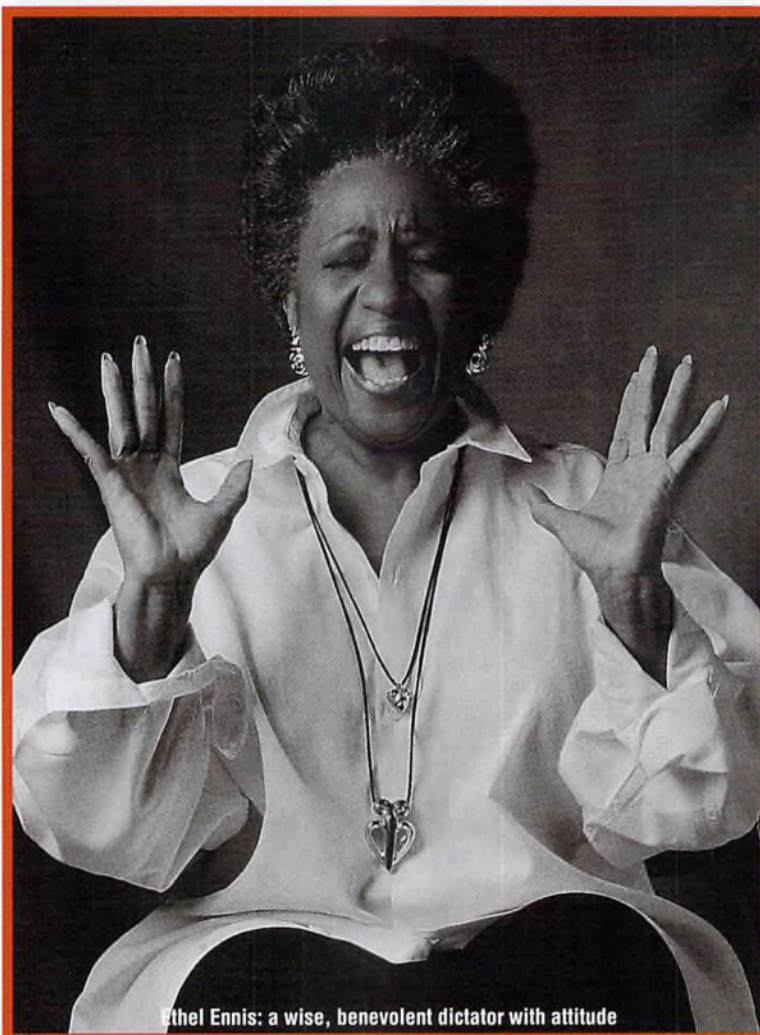
**Nancy Kelly: *Singin' & Swingin'* (Amherst 4421; 52:15) ★★ ★** For those looking for good old-fashioned, toe-tapping swing, Kelly is one vocalist to check out. Granted, there's no envelope-pushing going

on here, just professional renditions of familiar songs like "Til There Was You" and Fats Waller's "The Joint Is Jumpin'." At times the material veers toward Las Vegas-style corn, and it could do without the cheesy synthesized organ sound on a couple of tracks. But overall, the bouncy energy contained in these songs is infectious and more uplifting than a pot of coffee. And Kelly has chops galore. One has to appreciate a singer who can quote Deep Purple's "Smoke On The Water" and War's "Spill The Wine" in the same breath, while remaining consistent with her music's straightahead, little-big-band style.

**Sherri Roberts: *Dreamsville* (Brownstone 9811; 56:38) ★★ ★½** Showtunes and standards interpreted by an adept, if languid, torch singer. She's backed by a snappy rhythm section that includes bassist Harvie Swartz and drummer Danny Gottlieb. Saxophonist Chris Potter is the featured guest.

**Nnenna Freelon: *Maiden Voyage* (Concord 4794; 66:32) ★★ ★½**

Freelon could be to jazz singing what Robert Cray is to urban blues: polished, assertive and packaged for wide consumption, yet lacking a certain degree of grit. Still, she gives us a taste of unbridled passion on a Latinized version of "I Won't Dance." And there's no doubt this CD is excellently recorded with a fine lineup, which includes bassist Avishai Cohen and drummer Danny Gottlieb, who seems to be getting around a lot lately. Bob Mintzer plays some tasty fills and solos on bass clarinet and soprano sax, and Herbie Hancock makes an appearance on the title track, which is, of course, his song to begin with. **DB**



Ethel Ennis: a wise, benevolent dictator with attitude

lates "Fascinatin' Rhythm" and "Promenade (Walking The Dog)" with remarkable speed and accuracy. The disc is well-recorded and brings Desmond's voice to the forefront with its sparse arrangements, such as the bass-and-bongo accompaniment in "I Got Rhythm," which is interestingly served up as a ballad.

**Jeri Brown: *Zaius* (Justin Time 117; 56:36) ★★ ★½** A spiritual, Afrocentric vibe characterizes this work, which features the under-recognized king of jazz yodeling, Leon Thomas, as a prominent guest. Brown and

# BEYOND

## A World Of Their Own

by Jon Andrews

The story of 20th century music is a tale of collisions between different cultures. As the world rapidly shrinks, the Internet and related technologies facilitate multicultural experiments. Musical cross-fertilization never lacks controversy, as critics may allege commercial motivation and "polyester syncretization." Absent confusion as to authenticity, who's to say that an artist's investigation of music from different cultures isn't a valid form of expression?

**Los Angeles Guitar Quartet: *L.A.G.Q.*** (Sony Classical 60274; 60:44) ★★★★★ L.A.G.Q. has established its reputation through a spirited approach to repertoire for four nylon-string guitars. This CD constitutes a virtual world tour, encountering a range of diverse musical influences. For "Africa Suite," the players evoke the sounds of African percussion, such as djembe and mbira, using the bodies of their instruments and preparing the strings. With meshed interplay, rhythmic interest and a lilting South African melody, the suite inevitably recalls the Kronos Quartet's *Pieces Of Africa* CD. The verve of flamenco informs "A Furiosa," an exuberant Brazilian maxixe, Chilean composer Horacio Salinas' "Fiesta" and Chick Corea's "Spain." Guest Leo Chelyapov's bittersweet clarinet work is at the heart of the traditional "Klezmer Dances."

**Anouar Brahem: *Thimar*** (ECM 78118-21641; 54:38) ★★★★★ Grounded in the classical music of Tunisia, Brahem is a master of the oud, a predecessor of the lute popular in Arabic music. *Thimar* places him in the most Western framework yet, an improvising trio with Dave Holland on bass and John Surman on soprano sax and bass clarinet. In this drumless setting, players' roles constantly shift, giving Holland considerable freedom

to play melodies or more conventional basslines. The interplay between his deep, resonant lines and Brahem's ornate inventions on the oud is captivating. On "Badhra" and "Al Hizam Al Dhabi," the twang of Brahem's oud contrasts with Surman's smooth, serpentine melodies on soprano.

tronic sounds of groups like the Orb and Mouth Music. His half-crazed energy and loopy sense of humor unify this set. Bennett performs "Tongues Of Kali" and "Ud The Doudouk" on violin and pipes with a giddy, whirling fervor, joining with synth-driven dance grooves, and culminating in a multicul-



Los Angeles Guitar Quartet: a virtual world tour

**Alan Stivel: *1 Douar*** (Dreyfus 36 209; 59:09) ★★★★★ A zealous avatar of Celtic culture and Celtic harp in particular, Stivel preserves tradition, but also keeps his music up-to-date. *1 Douar* (One World) unites Stivel with a world music all-star team, including Youssou N'Dour, Khaled, Paddy Moloney and members of the Afro-Celtic Sound System. Stivel and his guests share vocals over contemporary beats, informed by African rhythms and powered by synthesizers. "Ever," a collaboration with John Cale, effectively combines taut, aggressive electric guitars with traditional pipes over martial drumming. *1 Douar* disappoints to the extent that its emphasis on Stivel's vocals relegates Celtic harp to a peripheral role, often lost in the potent mix of pipes, guitars and electronics.

**Martyn Bennett: *Bothy Culture*** (Rykodisc 10381; 58:30) ★★★★★½ Although Bennett is well-schooled in traditional Scottish pipes and violin, *Bothy Culture* also reflects the contemporary elec-

tural stomp for the Gaelic/rave crowd. "Aye?" transforms into tight, aggressive jazz fusion on which Bennett's incisive violin work suggests the sound of Jean-Luc Ponty.

**Robert Rich: *Seven Veils*** (Hearts Of Space 11086) ★★★★★ Long fascinated by ethnic musics, trance states and microtonality, Rich devises music that reflects his absorption of non-Western musical forms without explicit references to his sources. Most tracks are darkly contemplative or ritualistic, usually evocative of Middle Eastern music. Rich constructs a foundation using hand drums, adding melodic flutes and finally layers of texture with lap-steel guitar and electronics. With "Coils" and "Ibn Sina," he repeats flute and synth patterns for a mesmerizing backdrop, directing attention to polyrhythms generated by frame drums, dumbeks and electronic percussion. Guitarist David Torn appears on "Alhambra" and "Book Of Ecstasy," promptly diverting the listener's attention with urgent, serpentine guitar lines reminiscent of Terje Rypdal. **DB**



hatLOGY 519

Lauren Newton  
Filigree

Recorded in the early eighties here is already everything which seems to be idiosyncratic about Lauren Newton's singing: the wide range of tones, timbres and emotions, the ability to build up atmospheres, in which others can find themselves taking part, as well as the talent to integrate the voice within a framework of instrumentalists.



hatLOGY 522

Matthew Shipp  
Horn Quartet  
Strata

M. Shipp, facing the shady forms, plays curves as though the light defines the shadow, but the shadow regenerates the light's absence. Psalm—soft, buoyant, round and tempestuous, like round, perfect, beautiful black walnuts bouncing in an atmosphere of milk. Rain on the mint leaves, cool, sun behind; mint leaves aloft, divine sleep casts the mint leaves across the sea, against the prow of our Shipp) like hermetic devices.



hatLOGY 524

Rajesh Mehta Solos  
& Duos Featuring  
Paul Loyens Orka

The Indian-born, currently Amsterdam-based American Mehta has expanded the timbral and textural palette of the trumpet dramatically, by opening up a whole cosmos of unheard-of tone colours, microtonal possibilities and subtly shaded noises. Mehta achieves this not only by unorthodox playing techniques and by incorporating the neglected bass trumpet, but also by making use of the "hybrid trumpet".

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# REISSUES

## Xanadu Revisited

by Zan Stewart

**D**on Schlitten has made lots of jazz albums. Starting in 1955, when he co-founded Signal Records, and then later at Prestige, Muse, Columbia and others, the Bronx native produced such notables as Red Rodney, Dexter Gordon and Lucky Thompson.

In 1975, Schlitten realized a dream when he began Xanadu Records, which was active until the late '80s. Here, Schlitten documented such artists as Gordon, Kenny Barron, Barry Harris and Jimmy Raney. The albums are long out of print as LPs, but via an arrangement between Schlitten and Classic Records, an audiophile label in Los Angeles, many Xanadu titles are now available on Classic's Prevue subsidiary. Here we look at four Xanadu CDs, which exhibit the wealth of artistry that was on the label.

Schlitten was also active licensing and reissuing obscure though significant albums from such labels as Beacon, Jaro and Jazzline. Four such items are also included. Thanks to keen remastering by engineer Krieg Wunderlich, these recordings generally boast ace sound.

**Jimmy Raney: *Live In Tokyo*** (PR 14; 42:05) ★★★★★½ From the heartily swinging opener "Just Friends" to the jack-rabbit-paced closer, this is great guitar indeed. Raney, who died in 1995, made this one 20 years before, and was at a zenith, working with the dynamo pair of bassist Sam Jones and drummer Leroy Williams. Bop-influenced but with his own viewpoint, Raney sports a lilting tone, a ton of technique and endless, intriguing ideas. Other gems: the rigorous "Anthropology" and the unaccompanied "Stella By Starlight."

**Elmo Hope: *The Beacon & Celebrity Recordings*** (PR 15; 54:30) ★★★★★ Pianist Hope, who died in 1967 at age 44, remained underrated despite a ferocious talent not unlike that of his childhood friend, Bud Powell. This CD, a compilation of two trio LPs made in the early '60s, basically employs bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Philly Joe Jones in delivering 12 bebop-based numbers. These include the flowing "Crazy," the feverish "Mo Is On" and the more somber "Chips." Hope plays vigorously, offering clean passages that combine intensity and warmth.

**J.R. Monterose: *The Message*** (PR 4; 37:51) ★★★★★ Originally done in 1959 for Jaro and then issued on Xanadu as *Straight Ahead*, this is a classic by the one-time Mingus tenorman who had a distinctive sound and buoyant solo style. In the solid company of Tommy Flanagan, Jimmy Garrison and Pete LaRoca, Monterose romps over "Straight Ahead" (an inventive takeoff on "Get Happy"), the motoring-along blues "Green Street Scene" and the punchy "Short Bridge."

**Tommy Flanagan: *Trio & Sextet*** (PR 11; 43:30) ★★★★★½ This 1961 date for Jazzline puts the superb pianist, mostly heard—then as now—in trio settings, in a three-horn context. The magisterial trumpeter Kenny Dorham, unjustly underknown tenorman



Tommy Flanagan: ideas that call you back again and again

Frank Haynes and fat-toned trombonist Curtis Fuller neatly flesh out KD's blues "An Oscar For Oscar," Sonny Rollins' "Grand Street" and others. Flanagan, a Powell disciple with a quiet passion to his work, plays the kind of fresh, well-chosen ideas that call you back again and again.

**Barry Harris: *Plays Tadd Dameron*** (PR 12; 42:31) ★★★★★½ Who wouldn't want to hear new versions of such timeless Tadd melodies as "Hot House," "Soultrane," "Ladybird" and "If You Could See Me Now,"

especially in the hands of the masterful pianist? Harris, another Bud devotee, has a light, ringing sound and an immaculate solo approach, swinging with subtlety. Backed by bassist Gene Taylor and drummer Leroy Williams, he gently examines the slow songs, singing through the keys, and gives the medium and uptempos the kind of happy roughhousing they warrant.

**Jimmy Heath: *Picture Of Heath*** (PR 2; 41:53) ★★★★★ In 1975, saxophonist Heath made his first-ever quartet date for Xanadu; this was a long overdue opportunity for the jazz vet to spotlight both writing and playing chops on one album. As always, the results with this first-rate artist are top-drawer. In the company of pianist Harris, bassist Sam Jones and drummer Billy Higgins, Heath plays a big-toned tenor and sweet-sounding soprano, cooking things up on the brisk blues "For Minors Only" and "CTA," becoming suitably reflective for "Body And Soul."

**Lucky Thompson: *Brown Rose*** (PR 10; 37:26) ★★★★★ Thompson, a genuine jazz great who is reportedly still alive and living in Seattle, has been incognito for more than two decades. This 1956 Paris date shows why his absence is so unfortunate. A wonderfully breathy-toned tenorman with a modern improv approach, Thompson is unique. These 12 octet tracks, mostly Thompson originals, are deliciously orchestrated à la Dameron. "To You Dear One" is typical of the sumptuous ballads, while "Quick As A Flash" has brisk, intricate lines from Lucky.

**Kenny Barron: *At The Piano*** (PR 3; 50:41) ★★★★★ Made in 1981, when the pianist was already a vet of bands led by Dizzy and Freddie Hubbard, this solo album reveals Barron in full glory, displaying protean technique, sound and imagination. "Bud-Like" works off the rhythmic rumble of Powell's "Un Poco Loco"; "Calypso," as it should, sports a bubbling Caribbean core. Monk's "Rhythm-A-Ning" flies by, replete with juicy passages. "Enchanted Flower" is minimal, almost New Age-ish, while "Body And Soul" (hit a bit hard) and "Star Crossed Lovers" are the ballads. **DB**

Original Down Beat ratings:

- Jimmy Raney, *Live In Tokyo*: ★★★★★ (6/16/77)
- Elmo Hope, *Here's Hope*: ★★★★★ (4/12/62)
- Tommy Flanagan *Trio*: ★★★★★ (4/13/61)
- Lucky Thompson, *Brown Rose*: ★★★★★ (12/12/56)

# BLINDFOLD TEST

JANUARY 1999

## Bobby Hutcherson

by Dan Ouellette

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.

In Down Beat's third Blindfold Test in front of an audience at last fall's Monterey Jazz Festival, vibes player Bobby Hutcherson not only scored high marks in responding to the music played for him, but also had the packed crowd in the Night Club venue on the festival grounds in stitches. An artist in residence at Monterey, Hutcherson performed as a showcase artist in addition to delivering his entertaining opinions.

Born in Pasadena in 1941, Hutcherson started playing piano at age 9 but switched to the vibraphone at 13 after hearing a record with Milt Jackson. He earned high marks for his appearance on Eric Dolphy's 1964 album *Out To Lunch* and went on to freelance with Archie Shepp, Hank Mobley and Jackie McLean. Hailed for his fleet, percussive mallet attack and cool tones, he recorded several records for Blue Note in the '60s (some of which are only now being reissued for the first time on CD) and later cut discs for Orrin Keepnews' Landmark label. He recently signed with Verve, which releases *Skyline*, featuring bandmates Kenny Garrett, Geri Allen, Christian McBride and Al Foster, early this year.

This was Hutcherson's second Blindfold Test.

## Lionel Hampton

"Jivin' The Vibres" (from *Volume 2: The Jumpin' Jive. The All-Star Groups: 1937-'39*, Bluebird, rec. 1937/1990) Hampton, vibes; Ziggy Elman, trumpet; Hymie Schertzer, George Koenig, alto sax; Vido Musso, Arthur Rollini, tenor sax; Jess Stacy, piano; Allen Reuss, guitar; Harry Goodman, bass; Gene Krupa, drums.

I'll say Lionel Hampton. Hamp can't help but sketch out these little underlying things while the rest of the ensemble plays. If you know Hamp, he can't stop playing. Hamp plays with a lot of whole tone scales on several chords. And he rolls a lot of triplets into a whole tone. On a scale of 1 to 5, I'd give him 15 stars. Twenty, 40, 100 stars for Lionel Hampton.

## Terry Gibbs Dream Band

"The Big Cat" (from *The Big Cat*, Contemporary, rec. 1961/1991) Gibbs, vibes; and his orchestra.

Terry Gibbs and his big band. Terry's great at playing octaves. When you're playing with a big band, the vibes don't really sing out when you hit one note at a time. So you have to play octaves. 5 stars.

## Stefon Harris

"A Cloud Of Red Dust" (from *A Cloud Of Red Dust*, Blue Note, 1998) Harris, vibes; Mulgrew Miller, piano; Greg Osby, alto sax; Steve Wilson, soprano sax; Kaoru Watanabe, flute; Dwayne Burno, bass; Alvester Garnett, drums; Kimati Dinizulu, percussion.

I don't know who this is. But I heard some of my licks in there. Maybe it's me, but I don't remember playing this. I'll say 4 stars. Maybe 3. The vibes player is definitely a dedicated and serious musician. Who is this?

DO: *Stefon Harris*.

That makes total sense. Every time I go to New York, Stefon's



out in the audience listening to every note I play. Even when we were recording the new album, he was in the engineer's room.

## Milt Jackson

"Off Minor" (from *The Prophet Speaks*, Qwest, 1994) Jackson, vibes; Cedar Walton, piano; Joshua Redman, tenor sax; John Clayton, bass; Billy Higgins, drums.

Milt. He's so unbelievably gifted. He has such a big, glorious sound. He knows how to play a fill with an unbelievable amount of swing. There's no stiffness in his playing. He understands the complete concept of bebop and playing diatonically—playing within the scale and not going outside the chord.

Milt was responsible for me playing the vibes. I was walking down a street in Pasadena and I heard the record *Giants Of Jazz*, with Milt, Miles, Monk, Kenny Clarke and Percy Heath. They were playing "Bemsha Swing." Boy, I marched right into that record store, bought the album and wore it out. This was heaven. I decided this was what I wanted to do in my life.

Star rating? Has to be 50 stars. Milt would kill me if I gave him anything less.

## Monte Croft

"Punt" (from *Survival Of The Spirit*, Columbia, 1990) Croft, vibes; Bruce Barth, piano; Lance Bryant, tenor sax; Peter Washington, bass; Gene Jackson, drums.

This is obviously Monk-influenced. Whoever this is, he has a really funny personality. He's probably shy but at the same time really funny. This guy is very sensitive and overall a nice person. And, I could be totally wrong, but I'll bet he doesn't cuss. 5 stars. While he's shy, he's not ashamed to unzip himself. Can I make a guess as to who this is? Steve Nelson? No? Who? Monte Croft? What's he like? Is he shy? Does he cuss?

## Red Norvo

"Jivin' The Jeep" (from *Best Of Big Bands: Red Norvo*, Columbia/Legacy, rec. 1937/1993) Norvo, vibes; and his orchestra.

That sounds like a lot of fun. I like this. I'll guess Red Norvo. Red used to come to my high school and play at assemblies. All of us kids just marveled at him. Red was like Hamp in that he never looked at the vibes when he played. He always looked at the audience. He played a slap mallet that had a great big sand bag at the end. When he performed, it was so obvious that he was having a blast. This tune has that happiness. It's busting out of him. 50 stars for Red, too. He's a beautiful man. **DB**