Road Trip—Bobby McFerrin & Astral Project

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LESSONS FROM BAGS

The Milt Jackson Interview

by Jon Faddis

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Milt Jackson Tells How To Live With A Bebop Soul

By Jon Faddis

Photos By John Abbott

Milt Jackson and I first met in 1972 at the Nice Jazz Festival, when I was playing with Charles Mingus. The Modern Jazz Quartet was at the festival as well, and I considered myself blessed just to be in Milt's presence. I admired him then as I do now for his extraordinary musical abilities, his powerful intelligence and his wonderful wit. When he plays the vibes, I am always surprised by the purity of his sound and the clarity of his solos. He continues to amaze in a variety of settings—big band, small group or a cappella—with the emotional depth of his music and the unabashed energy and joy with which he performs.

Milt is both as down-to-earth and bluesy as one of his nicknames, "Bags," suggests. And he's as dignified and elegant as a Sunday preacher—as his other nickname, "the Reverend," testifies.

And he is *always* about bebop.

Milt tells some of the best jokes, the craziest stories (like the time Dizzy Gillespie sandwiched them both between a streetcar and a truck in Cleveland ... but that will have to wait for another time), and he makes some of the most delicious peach cobbler I have ever tasted. He's been known to bring dishes of it to gigs, resulting in a lot of "Mmmm-Hmmms," not just for his music but also for his cooking. He plays a fine game of pool, and on long airplane rides beats handheld computer games at poker and blackjack. He and I have shared stages the world over, and for well over a decade we both have come home to the same area of New Jersey, where we are neighbors. He is also a teacher of mine in many ways. Mostly, I am honored to say that we are friends, and I love him.

This interview is based on several conversations that took place at Milt's home in Teaneck, N.J., during the week of Aug. 9. These conversations among myself, Milt, Milt's graceful wife, Sandy (they met at Birdland in 1957)—and a friend or two who dropped by—were held around the dinner table and in the living room. Surrounded by stunning photo-portraits of some of the great jazz musicians (the MJQ, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis, Diz, Sonny Rollins and Jimmy Heath), we talked about music, including of course, the MJQ, Diz and some great new projects of Milt's. And we talked about the rest of life too—family, growing up, and food for both body and soul.

Milt has wrestled with a few health problems during the past few years. But, between mouthfuls of steak with special gravy and rice and veggies, Milt, now 76, would have you know that he is "feeling very well, coming along just fine, thank you." I am proud of his endurance.

For me, the magical thing about conversing with Milt is that the more I talk with the man, and the more I listen to his music, the more I realize how much I still have to learn from him.

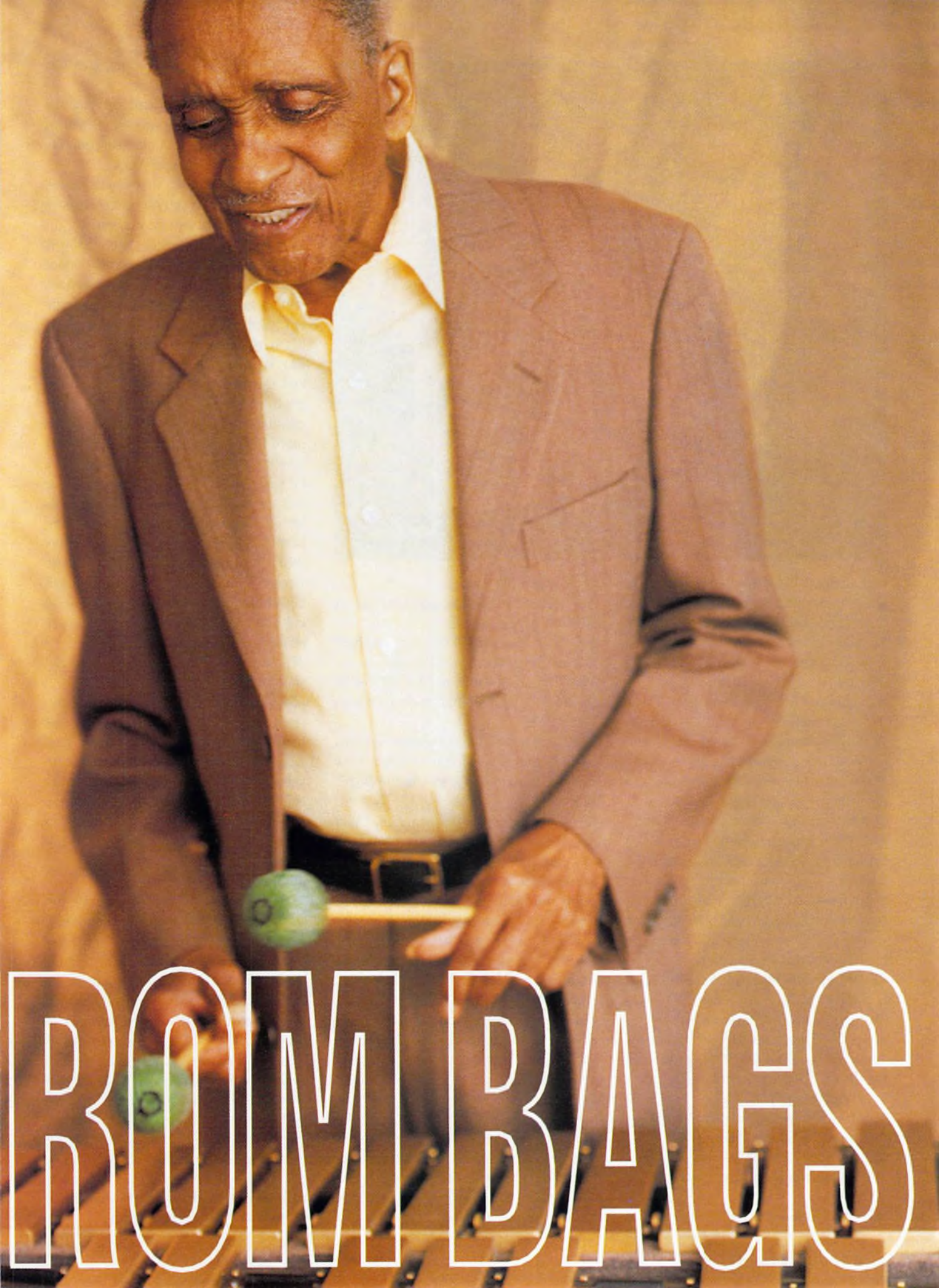
Jon Faddis: Bags, you're celebrating 60 years in the music business. What are some of your favorite memories as you look back over your career?

Milt Jackson: Coming into Dizzy's band as a soloist. And, believe it or not, playing one-nighters with [Dizzy's] band. I remember one time, in 1945, we did 90 one-nighters in a row!

JF: How did the gig with Dizzy come about?

MJ: It was in Detroit. We played at a joint called the Bizurti Bar. All the Detroit musicians, like Yusef [Lateef] and Willie Wells would go to this bar and jam all night. Dizzy had just left Billy Eckstine's band and he came in and he heard me play and said, "Man, why don't you come to New York? As a matter of fact, if you come to New York, I'll give you a gig." And

LESSONS


ROM BAGS

jon faddis and milt jackson: friends, neighbors and DB collectors

that's what I did. I packed my suitcase with my two little suits and took a train. Something else I will never forget. I had a $20 bill in my pocket. The fare was $18.63. So you can imagine what I had left!

JF: $1.37!

MJ: (*laughs*) So, when I got here, Dizzy had organized the big band. It had K.D. (Kenny Dorham) in it, by the way. Then for some reason, Diz disbanded the band. Then he turned around and reorganized it and added me as a featured soloist.

Sandy Jackson: Who was in the band?

MJ: Dave Burns, Elmon Wright, Cecil Payne. And we had Leo Parker playing baritone—boy, what a band!

SJ: Who was in the rhythm section?

MJ: Kenny Clarke, John Lewis, Ray Brown and myself. Ray and I joined the band about three weeks apart.

JF: What was your relationship with Dizzy like?

MJ: Oh, man! I fell in love with everything that Dizzy did. He was a teacher and there were so many things that he taught us. I learned a helluva lot from him—just being there.

JF: Do you have any stories about Dizzy that you would like to share?

MJ: (*grinning*) Yeah, I have a lot of them, but I don't think I'd like to share 'em. (*laughter*)

SJ: Most of them you can't even tell!

JF: You got that right!

MJ: I lived with Dizzy and Lorraine at 2040 7th Ave.

SJ: Lorraine kicked you out of their house ... but you can't tell that one.

MJ: It's funny. I had to move and I moved to Brooklyn and wound up staying with Sonny Stitt.

JF: Dizzy's big band rhythm section became the Modern Jazz Quartet. How many years did you spend with the MJQ?

MJ: 44.

JF: When was the last time that you played together?

MJ: Just after Connie [Kay] died in 1995. Because one year, we used Mickey Roker on drums and for some reason, John Lewis didn't like Mickey. And I never could figure it out because, to me, Mickey was always one of the most swinging drummers we had. There's a strange thing about John Lewis, though, which is that he's the only jazz musician I know of who deliberately suppressed swing. The quartet would be playing and suddenly hit a groove, and John would pull back from it. I never understood this because John had a way of playing the piano the way Erroll Garner played in the days of swing, and nobody could play like that. We had a way of swinging that was unsurpassed and I never understood why John suppressed these elements.

JF: The MJQ did a lot to bring a certain type of respect to the music.

MJ: I think the idea, at least my idea, was that we could bring another level of respect to the music and in doing so, captivate a much larger audience.

JF: Is there any place that you've played where you feel that you play better because of the audience or the environment?

MJ: Well, yeah. Europe. The reason is that the European audiences have more respect for our music than audiences here in America. Europeans have a higher regard for it.

JF: Why do you think that is?

MJ: Well, no matter what you're going to become, in Europe, as a student, you've got to take a year of music education. It's mandatory. That gives the Europeans more insight into our music. Americans take it more for granted than Europeans. I'll give you an example: The first tour that the MJQ took to Europe was in 1956. In fact, we left the Blackhawk in San Francisco and went straight to Europe. When we came back to the States, people wanted to know what these four black dudes had done to make so much noise in Europe. After that, the Americans started paying more attention to us.

JF: Do you find that, as you've aged, you start thinking differently about music?

MJ: I wouldn't say differently, but you start thinking about a lot of things that have developed and lean toward that direction, because as an artist, I like to keep up with what's going on, especially with the music from our era, the bebop era. I cannot deny that I'm more partial to that era than to any other era in my musical career.

JF: And what is it about bebop?

MJ: The fact that it was so different, the way that Charlie Parker, Dizzy and [Thelonious] Monk came up with the creation. It was such a different approach. And most of us youngsters got into it right away. I guess I was able to realize the value of what it meant to the musical world. A lot of the weight was left on Dizzy because Bird died at such an early age, and a lot of things that we would have learned from him, we had to get from the extension of Dizzy because we needed someone to carry on the tradition of what they started.

JF: What about some of your peers that took bebop in a different direction? Like Monk and Trane (John Coltrane)?

MJ: Well, Monk's conception of music in terms of his writing and playing was so different. He took things and changed them around. Monk also had a unique quality where his writing, particularly, wasn't articulate. He never used an eraser and he'd do a lot of scratching out, things like that. But he had one of the most unusual characteristics I know of in a musician. He could take an idea—actually, it would be a mistake—and he would sit there and toy with that idea so that it was no longer a mistake. He'd make it part of the piece. Very unique. Trane excited the players because his thing was an extension of Bird (Charlie Parker).

JF: You did a recording a few years ago called *Ain't But A Few Of Us Left*.

MJ: Doing that CD means that we're gradually losing so many originators of the music that I felt that I had to mention that fact. The youngsters aren't into the music the way we were, so that puts a special dimension on emphasizing bebop. 'Cause it is very special.

JF: Are there young vibes players who come over to hang out and talk music?

MJ: We have Dave Pike, who I always thought was a good player. More recently, of course, is Stefon Harris, who is developing very rapidly. Also Steve Nelson and Jay Hoggard.

JF: How about you? How did you get started with music? Would you talk a little bit about your childhood?

MJ: My mother was a very religious woman. And we did gospel music, A.J. and I.

SJ: A.J. is Alvin, his older brother.

JF: Do you have other brothers and sisters?

MJ: Yeah, I have four brothers. Ironic, 'cause the youngest one died first.

JF: Where were you in the birth order?

MJ: Next to A.J. He was the oldest, I was next, and when I was 7, we would sing gospel duets, and I played the accompaniment on the guitar. A lot of people don't know that guitar was my first instrument. Now let me tell you something *wild* about that. My father's guitar would be sitting in the corner and my mother would be cooking a steak, which was a rarity in those days for a black family. And she would take the hammer and would be beating on the steak to tenderize it, and I would use the rhythm from the hammer to solo on the guitar. That's how I got started.

JF: After you started guitar, then what?

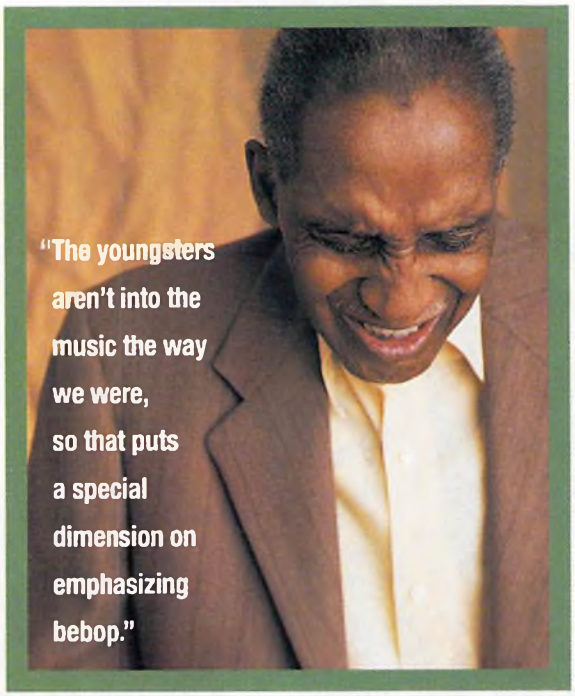
MJ: Well, that was about it. I didn't get piano lessons until I was 11. I had lessons when I was 11 and 12; then my mother couldn't afford to pay for any more lessons. Let me tell you something else. There were two leading gospel groups in Detroit at that time: the Flying Clouds, and the group that I was with, the Evangelist Singers. Every Sunday, all of us used to travel to Windsor, Canada. We'd give a concert at Elder Morton's Church of God and Christ and they would broadcast it on the radio, station CKLW. They'd take up a collection for us and I would make about $16. That was a lot of money in those days!

JF: Did anyone else in your family play any other instruments?

MJ: My mother tried to play the piano, but that didn't work. Now, my father played the guitar, but strictly by ear. He had no kind of formal training. A.J. later played bass with Charlie Shavers, Hines, Hines and Dad.

JF: How were you introduced to the vibes?

MJ: Mmmmm. Believe it or not, it was



by singing. I discovered that by using the speed control on the vibes, I could imitate the vibrato I used as a vocalist. Man, that fascinated me.

JF: Who are your favorite singers?

MJ: Oh, man, without question, Sarah Vaughan. Ella [Fitzgerald], Billie Holiday, Carmen McRae, Dinah Washington ... I just love singers! And there was this blues singer that sang with Jay McShann's band named Walter Brown. Helluva band!

SJ: Milt, who was that guy you used to play on the juke box every time? Charles Brown? Was it "Drifting Blues?"

MJ: Ray Brown and I used to go into this restaurant at night, after work. Me or Ray would get a dollar's worth of nickels and just put nickel after nickel in that juke box, and listen to him play "Drifting Blues" and "Merry Christmas, Baby." (*all laugh*)

SJ: The woman who owned the restaurant hated to see them, 'cause they kept playing the same thing, all night long.

JF: Milt, where did those first vibes originally come from?

MJ: When I was 16, my father put a down payment on my first set and I paid it off at $5 a week. I had a job delivering beauty supplies to barber shops and beauty parlors.

JF: So you started playing the vibes at 16?

SJ: But you started playing in high school. Tell Jon how you had played all the other instruments and your teacher introduced you to the vibes because you had finished before everyone else.

MJ: Well, we had a prescribed course and a whole semester in which to do it. Half the semester was gone and I had already finished. So the teacher said, "Why don't you take up the vibes? That'll give you something to do, plus keep you out of trouble."

JF: Do you remember the teacher's name?

MJ: Sure. Luis Cabrera, from Mexico.

JF: When you were coming up, how much of an influence did Lionel Hampton and Red Norvo have on you?

MJ: None, truthfully. My only inspiration from them came as far as playing the instrument itself. I was fascinated by the instrument.

JF: Do you keep in touch with Hamp at all?

MJ: You know, it's funny about Hamp.

Hamp always had this ego thing where he was the king and it wasn't easy to reach him.

JF: What would you say to a young musician that would really like to become a jazz musician, but who doesn't have the support of his or her parents?

MJ: If you love it enough, you pursue it, regardless of what your parents tell you. Because eventually, it will bring you your livelihood.

JF: Yet teachers and family help too, and family was and is obviously very important to you.

MJ: I realized the value of having a stable family life at an early age. Sandy and I have been married 41 years, and we have a daughter, Chyrise, who is 34. You've got to have a family that's sympathetic to what you're doing in order to survive. My parents always preached stability—having a job where you bring home a pay check every week.

JF: So you became a jazz musician?!?!

MJ: Yeah! I had a steady day job and played vibes in a club called the Twelve Horsemen that paid $3 a night. By leaving for New York, I got more of an outlet to do what I felt I needed to do.

JF: Did your parents understand?

MJ: They didn't at first. Coming back home for the first time with a big band, I had to show my mother what it was all about, because the only people they knew anything about were Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. So, one day, I brought Ella home for dinner. And my mother went and called up everyone and said her son was playing with Ella Fitzgerald. That was a *very* big thing to her.

JF: Sandy, what is your favorite recording of Milt's?

SJ: *The Ballad Artistry Of Milt Jackson.* It's a string album. Very romantic.

JF: Even at his age?!

SJ: Even at his age!! (*laughs*)

MJ: Damn!

JF: Don't worry, we'll edit that out ... (*louder laughter*). Bags, do you listen much to your own recordings?

MJ: Sometimes. Now, really only the newer ones. Occasionally, I'll pull out one of the classics.

JF: Do you have a favorite recording?

MJ: Well, I'd also have to say *The Ballad Artistry.* I've always been partial to big bands and strings. For example, all my string dates, the one with Jimmy Jones where we did "Feelings," I love those records. And most recently, the one that John Clayton wrote and conducted.

JF: That's a new recording with the Clayton–Hamilton Orchestra called *Explosive!* (Qwest, see Sept. '99 "CD Reviews"). Why did you decide to do another big band recording?

MJ: Well, I've always loved big band music and John Clayton is a heck of a writer. He also has what I call a special charisma for conducting and writing that type of music.

JF: Last thing. I hear that you're working on a new book. When is it going to be released?

MJ: First of all, the worst thing that you can do is put a timetable on it. Because the way that I'm writing it isn't like a journalist or a writer, you know? I write as I feel it and it takes much longer that way. And I've been approached by several publishing companies who've asked me when the book will be finished.

JF: Is there a title for the book?

MJ: *Bags' Groove.*

JF: Amen to that. **DB**

ON THE ROAD WITH BOBBY

Steve Masakowski pulls out of the Motel 6 parking lot. He nearly kills all the members of Astral Project, not to mention the driver of the Volvo he just cut off.

"Whoa, bro!" David Torkanowsky pleads from the shotgun seat of the band's 15-seat Ford rental van. "That was the closest one yet."

Masakowski's passengers shrug off the near collision with nonchalance. Apparently, they're used to the hazards of road travel.

Torkanowsky turns around and sees the expression of frozen terror on the face of a visitor along for the ride. He quickly breaks the ice. "I just want you to know, that funk you smell emanating from inside this van ain't coming from us," he says, fresh out of the shower and already about a minute late for tonight's gig at the Summer Festival in Ann Arbor, Mich. "It was left behind by the previous occupants of this vehicle," whom the keyboardist describes as members of a rock band who couldn't tell the difference between hygiene and Gene Krupa.

One can assume that the members of this New Orleans-based jazz quintet have no trouble making such a distinction. Their main handicap isn't nearly as disturbing, but it's amusing nonetheless: getting lost on the way to, and from, gigs.

"Do I take a left here?" guitarist Masakowski asks from the driver's seat a few minutes later as he approaches a T-intersection.

Calmly attempting to remember the route they took to soundcheck just a few hours earlier, bassist James Singleton speaks up from one of the van's three back seats. "Well, you can go left here. But I think if we go straight ahead, we'll get there faster. Either way, we'll get there."

After going one way, then turning back around again, Astral Project finally makes it to the venue. Bobby McFerrin stands waiting on the loading dock outside the stage door. "Now *this* is how I like to do it," McFerrin says, smiling at his old friends. "Show up for the gig and walk right out on stage."

Once on stage, Astral Project has no problem navigating the many turns their improvised music takes. They don't need a map to find their way through their ever-evolving tunes, many of which they've been playing more than 20 years together. They anticipate each other's moves expertly. And even if they do experience an occasional collision, they bounce right off each other like bumper cars. No one gets hurt. And while the funk onstage gets thick at times, it festers with no detectable odor.

Tonight, though, things are a little different. It's the second-to-last show in a series of seven gigs with McFerrin, who regularly sat in with Astral Project some two decades ago—long before fame labelled him "the 'Don't Worry, Be Happy' guy." From the moment the singer launches into a fast scatted intro to "I Mean You," it becomes clear that when McFerrin plays with Astral Project, he drives the van.

Over the next 90 minutes, McFerrin proceeds to play every band role imaginable, singing lyrics, scatting horn lines with tenor saxophonist Tony Dagradi, trading licks with Masakowski, sharing the piano bench with Torkanowsky and clicking out mouth percussion behind Johnny Vidacovich's drums. For a while, he lays out almost entirely; then, mid-set, he takes center stage for 15 minutes of his astounding one-man vocal acrobatics. He holds the audience in the palm of his hand.

Loading up the van after the gig, the members of Astral Project readily admit that it's Bobby's show. But they show no resentment toward him, as players often do toward star guest vocalists. They treat him like he's just another one of the guys. Yet he travels separately—he probably knows about the safety hazards of riding in the van.

Dagradi's at the wheel tonight. He's having trouble backing out of a tricky parking space; the rear outdoor wall of the theater doesn't provide the smelly Ford much turning space.

"Let *me* do it," says Torkanowsky, again riding shotgun.

"No, *I* got it," insists Dagradi, inching closer and closer to the concrete barrier.

Bam!

Tork has smacked the passenger door with his fist. Realizing the prank, Dagradi punches Tork in the left arm, hard; a much larger man, Tork laughs and fends him off with ease. After a quick Chinese fire drill, Tork takes the wheel and Astral Project blasts off—only to get lost again on the way back to the Motel 6.

The next morning, they load the van and head to their next and final gig of this tour, in Cleveland. Between several stops along the way (usually to check a map or turn back for a missed exit), Astral Project tells what it's been like to jam with Bobby this time around.

The Bobby portion of the tour started in June with about an hour of rehearsal the night before their first show together, at Ravinia Festival in suburban Chicago (see "Caught" Oct. '99). "Most of that was just to visit, like, 'Hey, man, remember when we did this?'" Tork says. "We had a little cheap sound system, and Bobby couldn't really hear himself sing. We ran through a couple of things, maybe if only to know that the chemistry would still be there. But we certainly didn't rehearse anything specific."

"For the first couple of gigs, we just had a sheet of all the tunes that we had

MCFERRIN & ASTRAL PROJECT

BY ED ENRIGHT

MARIUS CHIRA

THAT FUNK INSIDE THE VAN

collectively remembered," Singleton offers. "Slowly, a format developed. On all of the gigs except one, Bobby wanted to start with something hot. So we played an uptempo version of the Monk tune 'I Mean You,' which is basically the only thing we agreed upon before we went on the bandstand at Ravinia."

Do they sense that the music has evolved over the course of the tour?

"Once we went through that first rehearsal, the music was just there," Dagradi says. "Every night was different, but there wasn't any evolution in the expertise of how it was done; that was there the first night."

"The first three nights, Bobby looked Tony in the eye and said, 'You call it,'" Singleton says.

"The main thing about Bobby is that he really likes to remain unpredictable," Tork says. "I think that makes the best jazz, when you don't know what's going to happen. He likes it that way."

Once on the subject of McFerrin's unpredictable onstage ways, Dagradi relates a story that dates back 20 years to a gig at Tyler's in New Orleans. "Bobby would do astounding things just to challenge himself. Do you remember Skylab? Skylab was about to fall into the atmosphere. He improvised this incredible 10- or 15-minute monologue with music about Skylab. His thing over the years has naturally evolved, but he was doing so many things back then that no one had done before."

Singleton remembers the level of comfort and familiarity they shared with Bobby at that time. "A lot of the sets we were playing at the Absynth Bar would start off completely improvised. We'd walk two blocks away to the Wildlife and Fisheries building down in the French Quarter, sit on the steps and smoke a joint and start a groove right there. We'd walk back to the club with that groove, and walk up on the bandstand and start playing."

"Which is quite honestly what we hoped these gigs would turn into," Tork says. "And they have at moments, for sure, but it takes more than a few gigs for that to happen."


james singleton

MARIUS CHIBA


bobby mcferrin

MARIUS CHIBA


steve masakowski

RONALD HEARD

"I remember one night, we all went across the river to a Vietnamese restaurant, and I was sitting next to Bobby," Singleton says. "The Weather Report record *Night Passage* had just come out, and I mentioned to him how much I loved that tune. And he did the whole tune, just sitting there at the dinner table. He has a great way of quickly internalizing things he really likes. And I was really grateful that he did some of our tunes on this tour," including a couple from Astral Project's latest CD, *Voodoo Bop* (Compass). "One night we did 'Bongo Joe,' and almost every night he's done Masakowski's composition 'Sombre Le Noche.'"

Masakowski observes: "I think more than anything else, he's really like another instrument in the group."

Astral Project was the first group that McFerrin ever sang with. The story begins in New Orleans in the late 1970s, with McFerrin and his wife sitting in the Old Absynth Club, listening to Luther Kent & Trick Bag.

"The rhythm section was the Project, and after Luther Kent was done, Astral Project had their own set," McFerrin remembers. "And I approached Tony and asked if I could sit in because, you know, I was looking for a gig. He said OK. I don't remember the name of the tune ... a jazz standard. I remember it was a song without words, and I just sang the line and took a solo or something. And after the tune was over, Tony asked me if I wanted to sing another one. Up to that point, I'd only had piano bar experience, singing and playing piano.

"Then we did a couple of Jazz & Heritage festivals in '79, and they invited me back in '80 and '81, or '82. I think that was the last time we worked together."

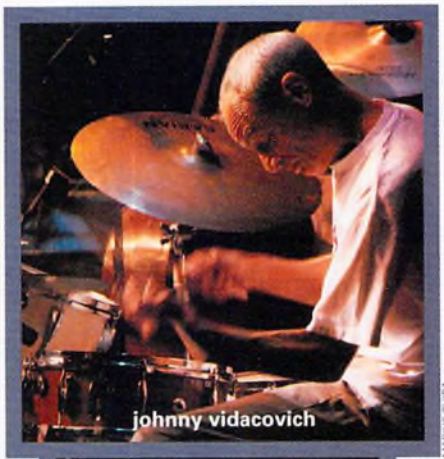
The last time, that is, until earlier this year, when Astral Project played an engagement in Minneapolis, where McFerrin has been creative chair of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra for the past five years. They invited McFerrin, who ended up sitting in with them for a bit. McFerrin had so much fun that he

asked his manager to call their manager and try to set something up together.

What was it like for McFerrin to reunite with his old mates after so long?

"I wondered about that," he says. "I was having fun with them before, but that was so long ago. Would it be the same? 'Cause we've all gone through changes and stuff. ... You know what it was like? It was like slipping on an old shoe, really comfortable. It was like no time had passed: We just got up on stage at Ravinia and started playing. It was wonderful. What can I say? I've asked them if they're interested in doing more dates at some point. But with my schedule, it would be at least a year, I'm sure. But who knows? Some date might creep in there somewhere."

McFerrin acknowledges that the music certainly has taken its diversions, if not a true evolution, over the course of the tour. He likens the experience to a series of shows he did with Chick Corea earlier this decade. "The night before the first [Chick] concert, we got together and talked about what we might do, put together a list. At the soundcheck we played through some of the tunes. So for the first half of the concert, we played those tunes. And then for the second half, Chick just started playing, noodling at the piano, and I picked up on it. The rest of the tour from then on was basically taken from that noodle he did. Same thing with this band: We got together just to get connected again, but then we were free to play after that."


johnny vidacovich
MARIUS CHIRA


tony dagradi
MARIUS CHIRA


david torkanowsky
MARIUS CHIRA

And play they do.

"We're here to have fun," Tork says. "Bobby makes us feel like we're allowing him into our sandbox, and he's happy to be there."

Everyone in the van agrees that the highpoints of these shows have been when McFerrin interacts one-on-one with individual band members. "One night we were in Indianapolis playing 'Moondance,' and Bobby signalled that everyone else lay out except him and Steve," Singleton recalls. "They got into this beautiful spontaneous composition. And Bobby's sound people instruct the lighting crew that when Bobby goes up to one of us and appears to be interacting with us individually, to cut all the lights and focus on those two."

"It's very disconcerting having your words represent what I do," Masakowski interrupts from the driver's seat.

"They don't, and never will," Singleton assures him.

Dagradi has something serious to say. "One thing I felt about Bobby was that he approaches everything from a very high place. He would come up to me on stage, and after a solo, he would just put his hand on my shoulder for a while, and it was like, 'Wow!' He always smiled at you after a solo. I felt it was very uplifting."

McFerrin, a very religious man, found the experience equally inspiring. "One thing I like is when Tony and I are playing, and I'm standing right next to him," he says. "I actually like being that close and look at his face and the way he breathes. And when we trade things together, that to me is very cool. The highs for me are just standing by each member of the band, playing off of that energy, standing behind Johnny when he plays, watching Steve's fingers on the guitar board. To me, those are the moments: inviting that energy and that person to feed off of it and play with it."

During these one-on-one moments, it becomes obvious how much control McFerrin has over the EQ of his "horn," so to speak. "It's amazing how he can contract facial cavities to change the timbre of his instrument," Tork observes. "And he's got such an incredible range, from baritone up to soprano."

"And his information is right on, too," Dagradi adds. "I had to adjust because I knew he was in tune. I had to come up to him."

"Why don't you say something, bro?" Tork yells to Vidacovich, who has sat the whole ride in the far backseat reading *The Art Of War*. "You're supposed to be the *spokesperson* of this band, and you haven't *said* a goddamned thing."

The drummer pauses. The van rolls onward, around Lake Erie, toward its final destination, Cleveland, where a crew from WBGO (Newark, N.J.) will tape the concert for broadcast on National Public Radio in October. Vidacovich carefully chooses his words. He starts into the friendliest N'Awlins drawl you ever heard. "Every night is like a listening feast," he begins. "The way Bobby takes me through these trips of sound. I would sit behind the drums and let my right hand follow the sound. Periodically, I would get this rush of sound in my ear, and suddenly it would be a game: Where is he? What's he going to do? He has so many colors and textures that he can throw out, and so many trips and characters. So for me, it's just listen, listen, listen, and play a little bit; a big listen/play trip.

"And every night, he doesn't bore you. He doesn't repeat himself. He's not predictable. Surprises come every few minutes. Probably tonight will come some kind of peak, so I'll be looking for it."

The band pulls up in front of Cleveland's Omni International Hotel, which promises to smell a hell of a lot better than the inside of the van.

"The only challenge is getting to where the fun happens," Vidacovich concludes. "That's the work about being on the road. With somebody like Bobby, it's like sitting down and having a conversation with an old friend. It's like *My Dinner With Andre* on the stage. People come to see it, and they're made comfortable by the immediacy of our relationship. He's a Zen master of music." **DB**

equipment

Tony Dagradi plays Selmer Mark VI tenor and soprano saxes outfitted with Otto Link metal mouthpieces. On tenor, he plays Rico Royal #3 reeds, and on soprano he uses Vandoren #3 reeds.

Steve Masakowski plays a 7-string guitar custom-built by Salvadore Giordina. He uses D'Addario strings and Boss SE-70 effects. He prefers Fender Hot Rod DeVille amps.

Johnny Vidacovich plays Fortune Drums by Dale Flanagan. He uses Aquarian heads, Sabian cymbals, Regal Tip sticks and Calato brushes.

Dave Torkanowsky plays Yamaha pianos.

James Singleton plays an acoustic bass of unknown origin. He uses a Schertler bridge pickup and a Countryman lavalier mic; D'Addario strings; Walter Woods amp; and a Carbow (French) bow.

The Funk-Punk Sax-Folk Connection

By Don Zulaica

Clad in a sweatshirt and denim shorts, Ani DiFranco approaches Maceo Parker's dressing room at the Greek Theater in Berkeley, Calif. First, a meek "Is this it?" comes from the hallway, then she saunters in, looking like a college freshman finding her first class. Disarmingly unassuming, DiFranco's eyes find Parker, and she immediately loses 20 years. Suddenly it's Christmas morning, her ear-to-ear grin unashamedly lost in reverence. After all, not every day do you ask a musical hero to go on tour with you, and the combination on the road actually works.

Parker has wielded his funky saxophone for the likes of James Brown, George Clinton and Fred Wesley, so it comes as a surprise that he would take his touring band on a short North American summer tour with DiFranco and her full Righteous Babe entourage. Whose idea was this, anyhow?

"I know, how would a little chick like me even come up with that idea?" DiFranco laughs. "Well, I've come to a really wonderful place in my life where the shows are big enough that I can start making my own choices about who I'd like to travel with. I just felt life is too short, you know? Why not call up your heroes and see what they're doing in a couple months, because you never know. And it worked. Either that or he lost a bet."

Ani DiFranco and Maceo Parker make a curious combination: one of the forefathers of funk with a celebrated punk-folk icon.

PHOTOS BY DON ZULAICA

Maceo Parker and Ani DiFranco Make A Curious Touring Combination

But between DiFranco's personal poetics and Parker's downright grooviness, lies a common and singular passion for performing. They're both bent on making you laugh, cry and shake something before the night is over, and they'll leave every last ounce of sweat on stage to get the job done.

Parker is the old guard, carrying a palpably regal, yet unpretentious aura. Relaxed and perfectly natty in black slacks and white dress shirt, he is a quietly confident and gracious gentleman—who has lived a little.

DiFranco, although she might shrug off the hype because it's been written about ad nauseum, put the "do" in do-it-yourself. Playing acoustic guitar in local bars before she was 10, the Buffalo, N.Y., native's volcanic grassroots rise to fame has seen the major labels courting her to no avail. Through her passionately introspective songs, monstrous stage presence and sheer business gumption, she and her 14-person Righteous Babe Records staff have sold well over 2 million units from the 14-album catalog. Not bad for an independent singer/songwriter.

DiFranco's appreciation for everything funk runs deep, as she remembers the first time she heard Parker. "I think you just grow up in this country and funk music is such a force. It's such an important ... " She interrupts herself and turns to Parker. "You should cover your ears.

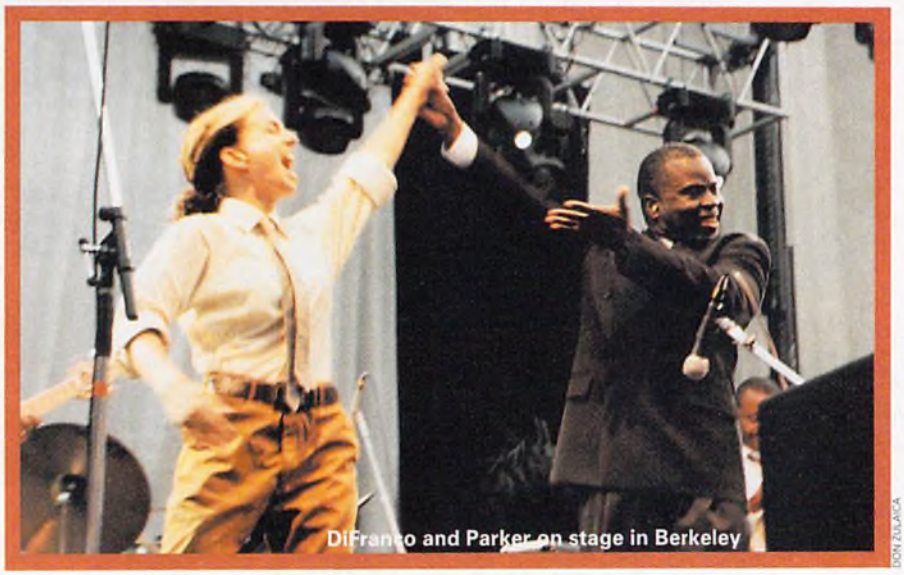
"The first record of Maceo's that I heard was *Life On Planet Groove*, which is one of the best live records ever made. It has such a vibe and such an energy. I memorized it from front to finish." Parker's almost embarrassed smile is somewhat deceiving, as if he was aware of what he was getting into when he joined the tour. It was probably quickly obvious he had a fan on his hands with DiFranco, but amusingly, his knowledge of her work was, well, non-existent.

In fact, Parker hadn't heard any of DiFranco's music until they first met. "I knew the name, but that was it," he says. "Then we had this first date, we were going over some stuff at sound check, and then out walked this little bitty person."

DiFranco laughs as Parker continues, "And I don't want to keep saying little or small, and sometimes I want to say little thing, pixie, and all that stuff—but she has all the energy you could ask for. I can just tell from the small time that we've been together that she really loves entertaining and performing—same as me—and you know how some people just seem to really belong on the stage. That's really what I love about her.

"This is the first time I can say this," Parker says. "Of all the people I've worked with, all these years, here I really feel close knit, like a family. I really do love her, the band and the whole crew."

The mutual admiration backstage is also evident on stage, with DiFranco's band bumping and grinding stage left throughout Parker's entire set. ("I've got to play after *Maceo Parker*?" asks DiFranco's drummer, Daren Hahn, as he shakes his head.) On some major tours, egos and competition get in the way. Not here. "Speaking for myself and my band, we have an absolute reverence for what Maceo and his whole band does," says DiFranco, who joined Parker's band on stage for several songs during the Greek Theater show. "Just an incredible group of musicians. To me, music and competition just do not belong in the same sentence. It's more like a constructive pressure." DiFranco's fans have had pretty big ears themselves, taking very well to Parker's funky prophecies, and perhaps aptly picking up on DiFranco's desire to sponge.


DiFranco and Parker on stage in Berkeley

DON ZULAICA

"It's who can get more and learn more and really go in deeper with another musician that they've never met," she says, "or really draw more out of the experience. It's almost like the most humble person wins, you know? Because they'll be most open to what's going on around them, and that's what feeds you as a musician."

Speaking of being fed, Parker has a gastronomical take when specifically discussing the musical differences between the two groups. "I look at entertaining and this whole spectrum of entertainers like a buffet," he explains. "You know, you stand in front of the buffet and go around and around and choose this, don't choose that—whatever you feel like at the time. And I like it that way, that it's structured where people can sort of pick and choose from the buffet, what they want to do this weekend, next weekend or mid-week. I'm just happy to be part of that buffet. You know you're going to have something to eat."

DiFranco concurs. "Somebody was asking me recently, 'Well, what do you feel that you would have in common with somebody like Maceo Parker?'" she sardonically quips. "'What would you get out of each other?' We're doing the same thing, it just manifests itself in different ways. I'm more song-oriented and Maceo may be more groove-oriented. But there's a shared love of performance.

"You just give it all up, whatever 'it' is. That instinct is maybe more important than what 'it' is on any given night. That's your mission. That's what originally drew me to Maceo as a performer, just going to a show and realizing this guy holds nothing back. He just plays until the last bead of sweat drips off and falls over. To me, that's what performing is all about."

And although she has a reverence for Parker's history as a performer, DiFranco quickly dispels the notion of the term "legend" implying past tense. "Usually when people talk about legends, they kind of mean—well, they're done," she says. "They're done, but boy did they do good. But when I think of Maceo Parker, I think of legendary funk master and horn player and jazz interpreter, but not 'legend' in the term that he's done. He's still doing it. And that, to me, makes a really legendary person." **DB**

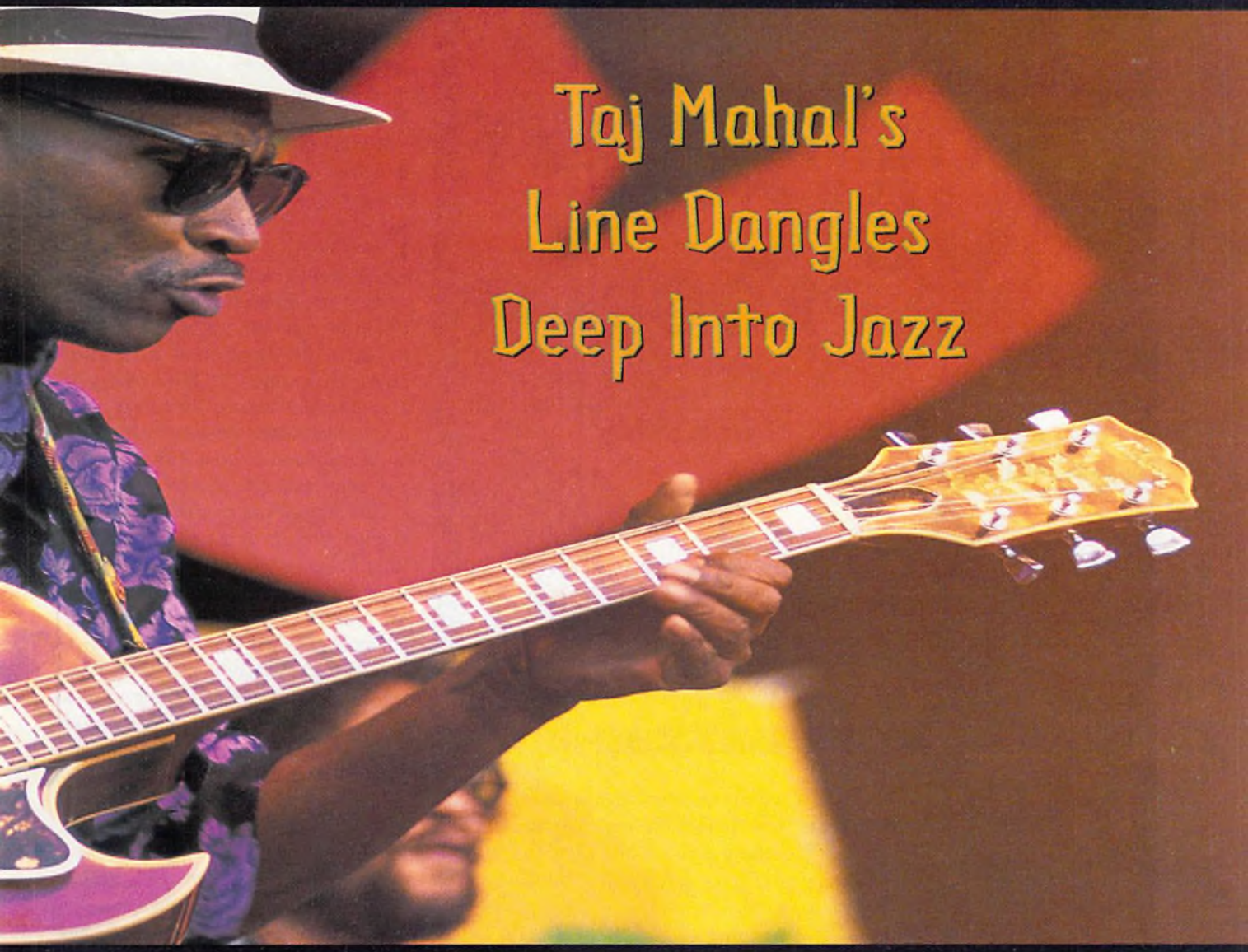
Still Fishin'

By John Ephland
Photo By Stuart Brinin

Taj Mahal has caught some rare fish during his time as a professional musician. In a world of slotted niches, the 57-year-old Mahal has combined blues, rock, world music, jazz, r&b, gospel, funk and just about anything else that moves into a cauldron held together by his inimitable voice and fiery imagination. He always seems to have his line dangling into deep, rich musical waters; and given his penchant for musical adventures, Mahal's theme song should be one he's been performing practically his whole career: "Fishin' Blues."

The stream-of-consciousness-talkin' Mahal can run amok as he discusses all kinds of musical inspirations and directions. And when he zeroes in on jazz, which has been swimming through his life since birth, the multi-instrumentalist/singer/composer/bandleader approaches the music with serious respect.

As Mahal starts talking about Southern tradition, he jumps into a discourse on jazz pedigree, albeit with a social consciousness. "How come it was that, starting in the 1940s, I'm listening to Les Paul, Illinois Jacquet, Chu Berry, Charlie Mingus, Gene Krupa, Gerry Mulligan, all these guys playing music together," he says. "Yet in America, there is this separateness. Only now are we coming out of the dark ages. Underneath it all, American kids were embracing black music, and that jazz was some kind of cousin to the blues; the songs were some kind of stories.



Taj Mahal's Line Dangles Deep Into Jazz

"I remember listening to Bobby Timmons, Eddie Marshall, Horace Silver. I liked that hot-blooded jazz, not the cool, snotty classical types. I remember listening to the radio all the time. There were shows on that played the music of the Modern Jazz Quartet, Mingus, Ellington, Basie, Lunceford, Parker, Diz. It was all a living culture that was moving."

Perhaps paying the highest compliment to an art form, Mahal adds, "The pinnacle of what you were playing then was jazz."

Think Gatemouth Brown, Johnny Copeland, T-Bone Walker and big-band B.B. King, and you may get close to what the gravelly-voiced, big and burly Mahal is capable of when jazz gets hold of his blues soul. Sure, jazz musicians are always playing blues. The reverse isn't all that common. Survivors Gatemouth and King continue to swing, keeping their blues-jazz flames bright and hot. Add Mahal to that list. Like King, he visits jazz less often and is known primarily as a blues musician. And yet, Mahal can't stay away too long. Referring to his 1998 Grammy-winning album *Señor Blues* and its title track by Horace Silver, he states, "Since the '70s, I've moved more to where jazz is. This song gives me an opportunity to reach into something else."

Something else, indeed. Mahal's "reaching" predates such powerful jazz-rock-blues big band documents as 1971's *The Real Thing*. Born in Harlem, he grew up the oldest of nine kids in Springfield, Mass., surrounded by the music of his gospel-singing schoolteacher mother and West Indian jazz composer/arranger father. As Mahal says in the liner notes to the recent three-CD retrospective, *In Progress & In Motion 1965–1998*, "Jazz, and I mean the most sophisticated jazz, was [also] in the house. At a young age, I could tell Ben Webster from Lester Young from Illinois Jacquet. I understood the dialogue between Thelonious Monk and Charlie Rouse."

Mahal's upbringing is one to envy. "I was lucky enough to have parents bigger than any one kind of music," he says. "Even though I have Southern and Caribbean roots, my background also crossed with indigenous European and African influences. I was also listening to classical music. My parents introduced me to gospel, spiritual singing, to Ella, Sarah, Mahalia Jackson, Ray Charles.

"The most interesting thing I noticed growing up," Mahal says, "was people coming out of the South trying to throw

off the trappings of the South: the clothes, food and especially the music. I didn't understand why it was so easy to drop the tradition, 'cause where I grew up, a lot of people grew up with a lot of traditions.

"Having some kind of connection with their past, a living tradition of bringing it forward; not as looking back."

Born Henry St. Claire Fredericks, Mahal took his tradition to heart when he took his career as a professional musician to the next level. "I started out in 1965. It became clear to me that it wasn't about playing good music, or that you could grow as a musician," he says. "I won't say that I didn't want to have a hit; but what mattered to me was the connection with musicians and people around the world."

This musical and personal philosophy resulted initially in the short-lived '60s Rising Sons band with Ry Cooder and Jesse Ed Davis, and has continued over the years in collaborations with, among others, the Pointer Sisters, Eric Clapton, Bonnie Raitt, Babatunde Olatunji, John Lee Hooker, the Neville Brothers, Miles Davis, and Howard Johnson with a slew of jazz musicians for the live big-band jamboree *The Real Thing*.

One to always push boundaries, Mahal looked to Charles Mingus as a musical mentor. "I loved his big band," he exclaims. "Rather than get stuck, I learned to always stretch the borders."

What prompted Mahal to return to his early influence of Horace Silver in '98? "With Horace, it's all about rhythm and sounds. That Cape Verdean thing, along with European classical music and blues. He represents that 'go for the full hit, or just stay home and wallpaper your house' attitude. You can still find those roots and sound of jazz around in the Caribbean. Or Nigeria, Ghana, where you can hear that same type of improvisation." Mahal refers to a recent collaborator as evidence. "I think of someone like Toumani Diabate. He doesn't play the same kind of notes as Illinois [Jacquet], but it's that same desire to develop the melody, to chase it, with nothing in front of you."

Diabate hails from Mali, in West Africa, a part of world near and dear to Mahal. He plays the 21-string harp-lute, commonly known as the kora, and he and Mahal have grown to become kindred musical spirits. Together, the two recently recorded an album with six

other musicians from Mali, titled *Kulanjan* (see Page 66). And while it may not be jazz, it is definitely improvisation in the spirit of jazz and blues.

Then there's Mahal's collaboration with Miles Davis in 1990.

"It was during the recording for the soundtrack for a Jack Nitzsche movie, *The Hot Spot*," Mahal relates. "We were all there, hanging around the recording studio: John Lee Hooker, Roy Rogers, Tim Drummond, Miles and myself. And all these suits come in, and we think, 'Oh, no.' Well, Miles knew exactly what to do. Later on, we end up watching Miles with John Lee, as they get into some deep conversation. There was no heavy ego shit. Miles was doin' all the listening!

"Later, I get a picture with Miles, and he says (*Mahal, starting to crack up, does his best Davis impersonation*), 'This is my smile for the week.' "

It should come as no surprise that Mahal's path would eventually cross Davis'. Davis wrote the book on rules to be broken. Mahal is like a step-child: He has also turned down some musical blind alleys in search for the "What if?"

Mahal's no purist. Referring to his Rising Sons band, Mahal declares, "I wouldn't say we were blues purists; the word 'pure' doesn't apply to anything as flexibly impure as the blues."

The same could be said for that mongrel called jazz, which explains why jazz won't leave Mahal's soul. It's a keeper, as the hook is simply in too tight. **DB**

equipment

Taj Mahal plays a Gibson Howard Roberts guitar with a Mesa Boogie guitar amp (Mark 2B model) that he's been using the past 10 years. He also uses a Roland JC-120 guitar amp.

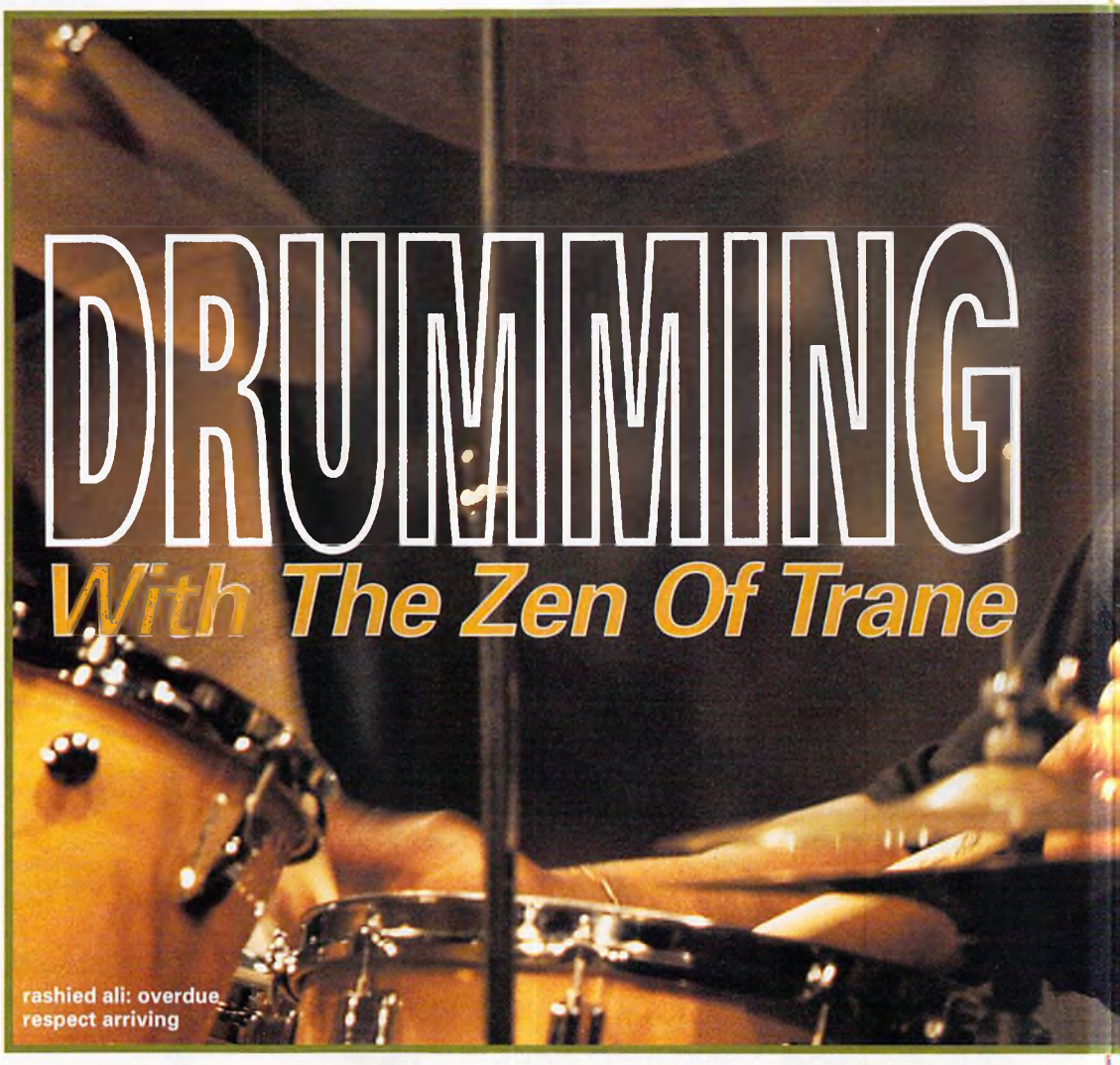
selected discography

IN PROGRESS & IN MOTION 1965-1998—Columbia/Legacy 64919 (includes music from various labels)
SEÑOR BLUES—Private Music 82151
PHANTOM BLUES—Private Music 82139 (with Eric Clapton, Bonnie Raitt, et al.)
LIVE AT RONNIE SCOTT'S LONDON—DRG 91441 (w/Wayne Henderson, Carey Williams, et al.)
DANCING THE BLUES—Private Music 82112 (w/Etta James)
LIKE NEVER BEFORE—Private Music 2081
MULE BONE—Gramavision 79432
TAJ—Gramavision 79433

with Toumani Diabate
KULANJAN—Hannibal 1444

other projects
THE HOT SPOT—Verve 46813 (soundtrack w/Miles Davis, John Lee Hooker, Roy Rogers)
FOLLOW THE DRINKING GOURD—Rabbit Ears/BMG 74041-70736 (children's story w/Morgan Freeman)

DRUMMING
With The Zen Of Trane


rashied ali: overdue respect arriving

"Playing with Coltrane was a learning stage for me. That's when I knew what I wanted to do."

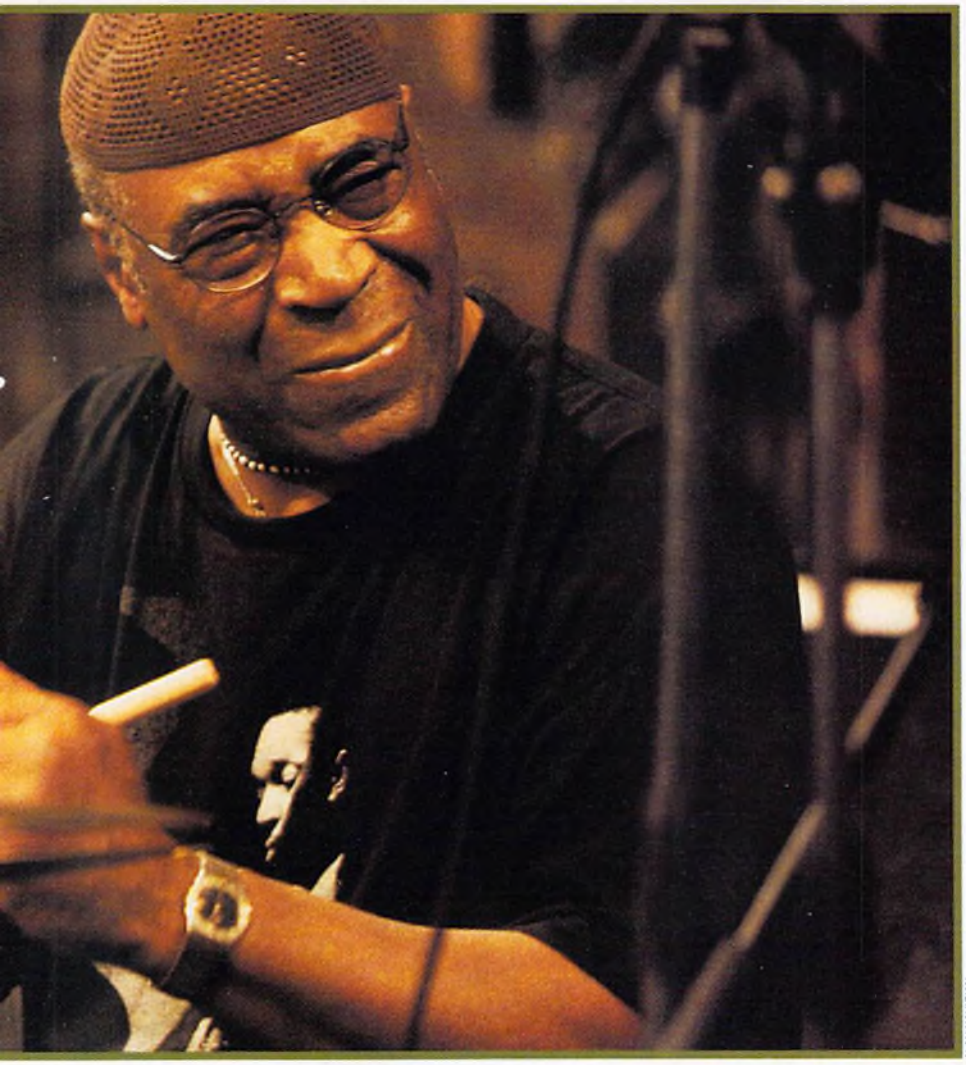
With Zen-like lucidity, John Coltrane provided **Rashied Ali** the influential teachings that allowed the drummer to construct elaborate multidirectional rhythms during some of the saxophonist's most terrifyingly beautiful post-*A Love Supreme* exorcisms.

"Trane just turned me on to myself," says Ali during a leisurely, yet spirited telephone conversation. "This is something I'm still dealing with. He gave me this book called *Light, Right On The Path* that deals with your inner self. He just wanted to bring the best out of me."

When Ali beamed aboard Coltrane's Sun Ship, he was just beginning to develop his own signature style that would later influence a legion of drummers in genres ranging from free-jazz to punk. "Playing with Coltrane was a learning stage for me. That's when I knew what I wanted to do," Ali says. "Trane really put me in the position to look at [my playing] and to understand what I was doing. I was playing [free-jazz], but didn't really understand what it was that I was doing. Now I use those multidirectional rhythms in whatever I play. I don't care if I'm playing rock & roll, fatback, bossa nova, or whatever else. I can play it with that free intensity type of thing. And everybody can be comfortable with it, because I did it with so many people.

"I've never lost faith, even though the avant-garde was taking a blink at times," he continues. "But I was always active during that bleak time. I love playing open and free." Even when Ali wasn't sparring with firespitters the likes of Leroy Jenkins, Frank Lowe and Archie Shepp, he rocked the cathartic spirits with the likes of bass phenom Jaco Pastorius, guitarist Jorma Kaukonen of Jefferson Airplane and guitarist Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth.

Ali may not be signed to a major label, but he's steadily putting out a stream of head-turning albums. With his repertory ensemble Prima Materia, he's explored and reconfigured the music of Coltrane and Ayler, which has resulted in three explosive albums. Most recently, Knitting Factory Records has released *Rings Of Saturn*, a collection of scorching duets with tenor saxo-



ALAN NAHIGIAN

phonist Louie Belogenis. The record extends both the legacies of Ali's famous duets with Coltrane on *Interstellar Space* and his other noteworthy duets with Frank Lowe and Leroy Jenkins. With Belogenis, who's also a member of Prima Materia, Ali has found a kindred spirit with both the musicality and stamina to engage in full-throttle improvisations. The music is explicitly free, but it has a noticeable compositional flair, probably due to the full year of preparation before recording the album.

"We did a lot of playing, [like being] in the gym," Ali says. "Practicing, playing and trying to get a feel for each other and the music. We would get together once or twice a week, and finally we decided to turn on the recorder. Everything was thought out and well-placed before we even played it, but it was definitely improvised free. I think the names of the songs are very clear as to how those tunes came about."

After surviving the marginalization of free-jazz for 30 years, Ali is happy to witness what he calls a renaissance in both the music and the media's attention toward it. "There's a bunch of very good young musicians who are coming up and hearing this stuff," Ali attests. "I was amazed at the strength the music has now, because so many younger musicians out there are playing free-jazz. And I don't even know where they heard this stuff. I mean they had to work hard to hear this kind of music. You couldn't turn on your radio and listen to this."

Now that free-jazz has forged a firm establishment with its own heroes—not to mention building healthy alliances with punk, electronica and hip-hop—Ali's overdue respect as one of jazz's most distinctive and indefatigable musicians is finally arriving. "I think any struggle makes the subject stronger," Ali says. "I've been playing professionally in New York for 36 years. Now, I've really mastered my style of playing open and free. Now, I'm able to do that 100 percent." —*John Murph*

reviews

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

Tom Harrell

Time's Mirror

RCA 63524-2

★★★

With a long trail of press blurbs and a considerable body of recordings trailing him wherever he goes, Tom Harrell offers a CD that is both ambitious in size and retrospective in content: a full-scale big band setting for the trumpeter's compositions and arrangements dating from 1964 ("Chasin' The Bird") to the present ("Daily News").

His story has been so unique in jazz that even mainstream journalists have found it intriguing, as the articles from Esquire, Newsweek and The New Yorker that fill his press kit attest. But the urge to make a unique story into a mythic one has tempted some into a bit of critical affirmative action that has confused elements of a superior talent with those of genius. *Time's Mirror* is a fine and attractive album of work by Harrell the arranger that provokes much warm and low-key solo work from Harrell the player. He favors flugelhorn to trumpet by a 2-to-1 ratio, thus emphasizing the warmth. But the voicings, blends and overall feeling of the music, while skilfully assembled, are conventionally middle of the road.

Here's the run down: "Scales" opens with a non-sequitur fanfare, then shifts to a mid-tempo 1969 Harrell tune that is essentially, well, a scale exercise. The calm, even temper of his flugelhorn recalls Chet Baker more than others he's been compared to. "Autumn Leaves" (on which Harrell takes no solo) starts as a Jackie Gleason Capitol version might, with an attractive trombone blend. Tenor saxist Alex Foster then takes a fulsome solo, but no Harrell.

"Daily News" integrates soloist and ensemble in a tight weave. The orchestration keeps the chord progressions moving swiftly and Harrell follows with graceful responses. Harrell's one-chorus chart on "Dream" is slow and lavishly voiced to the point where the simple tune is obliged to carry a bit too much harmonic weight. There are no solos to speak of.

Parker's "Chasin' The Bird" is an easygoing chart with good reed ensembles. Harrell's trumpet is as soft and airy as his flugelhorn. The contrapuntal section voices at the end are effective. Flute and muted trumpet form the lead voice on "São Paulo," a pleasant but unmemorable Latin piece. Harrell is back on flugelhorn for a gentle but thoughtful statement. A Gil Evans aura hangs over "Time's Mirror," blending perfectly with Harrell's lyricism for what is probably the program's high moment. —*John McDonough*

Time's Mirror: Shapes; Autumn Leaves; Daily News; Dream; Chasin' The Bird; São Paulo; Time's Mirror; Train Shuffle. (50:45)

Personnel: Tom Harrell, Earl Gardner, Joe Magnarelli, Chris Rogers, David Weiss, James Zollar, trumpets & flugelhorns; Conrad Herwig, Mike Fahn, Curtis Hasselbring, Douglas Purviance, trombones; Craig Bailey, Mark Gross, Alex Foster, Don Braden, David Schumacher, saxophones; Xavier Davis, piano; Kenny Davis, bass; Carl Allen, drums.

Ponga

Ponga

Loosegroove 18

★★★★

More serious goof-off music from the nominal leader, Wayne Horvitz. At times reminiscent of some early Weather Report (with an end-of-the-millennium edge), this music could be called jazz fission, with its blistering mix of rag-tag funk, improvised music and drum 'n' bass. OK, so Weather Report didn't have all this to work from, mainly because they were too busy laying the seeds for a lot of it over 25 years ago.

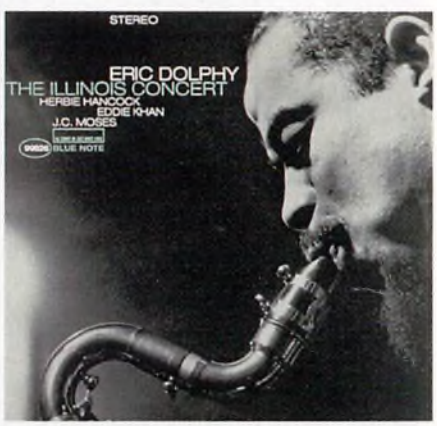
What makes *Ponga* different, and different from earlier Horvitz projects, is the adult/kid monster vibe that permeates everything here. That there's weirdness to *Ponga* is obvious: The long pause in the middle of "Bookin'," which also features some fancy-dancing brushwork from drummer Bobby Previte against one of those ominous keyboard storms; or the sparkling acoustic piano free-for-all that merges with some tidy, jazzy stickwork from Previte (who is once again surrounded by electronic percolators) on "Liberace In Space" (an alternate title could have been "Liberace On Speed"). I also like the Fender Rhodes work that starts "Awesome Wells" off like some kind of Fat Albert Saturday morning cartoon show, and the lickety-split drum work Previte turns in on "Pick Up The Pieces Of Saturn."

Part of what makes this music so much fun is knowing how "jazzy" Horvitz and Previte are, and how they infect everything that they throw out, and that's thrown at them. With Seattle alternative saxophonist Skerik and keyboardist Dave Palmer, this quartet is a true blending of musical worlds.

There are shades of Horvitz's previous projects, like The President, but this is less a band led by anyone than a band playing music completely improvised with no chit-chat ahead of time. It shows sometimes in this mix of live and studio material: Some of the jams seem to go nowhere or go on for too long, with little or no rhythmic drive. And yet, the talent here mixed with the requisite spirit of adventure turn *Ponga* into a delightful two-headed ... make that four-headed beast. —*John Ephland*

Ponga: Pimba; Pick Up The Pieces Of Saturn; Naugahide; Blowtorch; Awesome Wells; Ponga Amore; Liberace In Space; Bookin'. (54:21)

Personnel: Wayne Horvitz, Dave Palmer, keyboards; Bobby Previte, drums; Skerik, saxophone.



Eric Dolphy

The Illinois Concert

Blue Note 99826

★★★★

I've been moved by Eric Dolphy's wondrous *cris de coeur* since the moment I heard them—Oliver Nelson's *Blues And The Abstract Truth*, if memory serves—but I've also felt his ultimate strength was as a second banana. That puts me at odds with the woodwind master's many true believers, zealots who find his every utterance an essential missive. But check the settings, and check the eloquence. From Mingus' Candid dates to Trane's Vanguard rodeos to Gunther Schuller's orchestrated

pieces, plenty of Dolphy's most radiant solos were born at the behest of another leader. Riding shotgun, his playing became more specific and more meaningful.

That opinion, however, isn't going to make me play this gem any less. What Blue Note's come up with here is an ideal portrait of Dolphy's many strengths, and as those strengths play out, specificity and meaning is nudged to the side by ambition and scope. A long lost live date, recorded by the University of Illinois campus radio station in March of '63, *The Illinois Concert* finds the reed player thriving sans the support of another horn player, a strategy that sometimes diffused Dolphy's extrapolations. But here the extended solos are obsessive enough to seem pithy. The 20 minutes he spends cavorting through "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise" manages a strategic focus. And his alto maneuvers on "Iron Man" are simultaneously impulsive and organized. Over the course of an hour, he steers his muse into spots that juice his multiplicity of approaches.

Dolphy received formal bass clarinet training on Buddy Collette's suggestion; it helped to crystallize his approach to the instrument and gave his expressionism a unique fluency. The solo medley of "Something Sweet, Something Tender" and "God Bless The Child" may be one of the most striking bass clarinet recitals in his discography. Timbre, dynamics, balance, schematics—as he puts a personal spin on Billie's bittersweet opus, it's clear that he's one of the instrument's virtuosos.

But it's the quartet tracks that kick the most. Like most bandleaders Dolphy was used to pickup bands, and plenty of gigs during the last years of his life used a revolving door of personnel. On "Iron Man," Herbie Hancock, Eddie Khan and J.C. Moses insist that accord can be created in a moment's notice. It's one of the leader's more muscular tracks; the ongoing lunge and thrust between the drummer and pianist (who's 23 years old on this outing) is as animated as jazz gets. And if the mic had better caught Dolphy's flute on "South Street Exit," it too would pack a wallop.

When a brass ensemble is added to the show's final two pieces, "Red Planet" and "G.W.," the turf changes again (the record program includes the full concert, tracked in order of performance). The players are used mainly on the piece's intro and outros, and their feisty swells and grand colors entice immediately. Dolphy didn't lead many horn sections, and these echo his *Africa/Brass* charts while alluding to the blues polyphony of Mingus' larger units. And continuity of style is obvious: the agitated momentum of "G.W." makes it feel like it might swing into *Out To Lunch*'s "Gazzelloni" at any second.

Unreleased material that comes trickling out of nowhere years after its creation is usually considered peripheral. Blue Note's previous Dolphy bon bon, 1987's *Other Aspects*, was a nifty if minor collection of oddities. With *The Illinois Concert* the label has come up with a gold nugget, pretty much essential for anyone who ever got goose pimples listening to the saxophonist's far cry. —*Jim Macnie*

The Illinois Concert: Softly As In A Morning Sunrise; Something Sweet, Something Tender; God Bless The Child; South Street Exit; Iron Man; Red Planet; G.W. (69:14)
Personnel: Eric Dolphy, alto sax, flute, bass clarinet; Herbie Hancock, piano; Eddie Khan, bass; J.C. Moses, drums.

Bill Frisell
Elvis Costello
Burt Bacharach
The Sweetest Punch
Decca 314559865-2

★★½

What a droll idea, to take a relatively new record—Elvis Costello and Burt Bacharach's *Painted From Memory* from last

the hot box

CDs / CRITICS ▶	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	John Ephland
Tom Harrell *Time's Mirror*	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★1/2
Ponga *Ponga*	1/2★	★★★	★★★1/2	★★★★
Eric Dolphy *The Illinois Concert*	★★★★	★★★★1/2	★★★★	★★★1/2
Bill Frisell/Elvis Costello/ Burt Bacharach *The Sweetest Punch*	★★★1/2	★★1/2	★★1/2	★★★★1/2

critics' comments

Tom Harrell, *Time's Mirror*

His most ambitious record so far is also his finest. We can always use big band discs that fuse experimentation and coherence, and better yet, this music escapes the eau de schoolbook that fatally wound so many large ensemble arrangements. —*Jim Macnie*

Elegance and clarity—two overriding virtues of Harrell's large ensemble arranging—boldly interpreted on *Time's Mirror* by a gathering of eminent New Yorkers. Lush in places but richly textured, there's some intriguing twist lurking here in each track. —*John Corbett*

This one stands out among big band dates for two reasons: the arrangements and Harrell's horn. There's lots of burnished, busy brass bleeding into the arrangements on *Time's Mirror*, brass that might otherwise crowd out a trumpet soloist. In Harrell's case, it doesn't seem to matter, since he is listed as arranger as well: The band serves as his horn when he's not playing. —*John Ephland*

Ponga, *Ponga*

A rating in this case can do little more than acknowledge the existence of this execrable clamor, offered apparently for serious consideration without even a saving wink of irony or jest. There is nothing here to warrant the attention of a sophisticated jazz audience, save for the talents of drummer Bobby Previte. —*John McDonough*

If The President was about melody, and Zony Mash a trigonometry-tinged homage to the Meters, then the wily Ponga is Sun Ra's *Magic City* as dreamed up by the Orb. Known respectively for their expertise in ambience and fascination with polyrhythms, Horvitz and Previte wax utterly musical in this sprawling technosphere. —*Jim Macnie*

Truisms of our age: When people set out to be the most superbad funky they usually fail, and when they try desperately to be freaky they often come off as hipster poseurs. Ponga want most of all to be funky-freaky and they tend to overreach themselves in the process. —*John Corbett*

Eric Dolphy, *The Illinois Concert*

The great eccentric seems in prime form here, though he remains an acquired taste I have yet to fully acquire. But the bass clarinet managed to give Dolphy's quirky logic an often lovely voice, as "God Bless The Child" suggests. On alto he often seemed just another slap-dash avant-gardist. But on bass clarinet he wrote with a magic marker. —*John McDonough*

Any opportunity to hear Dolphy in this period, especially playing as splendidly as he was in this concert, is cause for applause, but there's the added treat of drummer J.C. Moses, who plays with tremendous focus and intensity here, and Hancock, who is fantastically inventive. —*John Corbett*

The sound of Eric Dolphy's bass clarinet is one of the loneliest sounds in jazz. This recording, a mono mix from a live show off the beaten jazz path, only accents that fact. The playing all around is very good. The most noticeable feature throughout has to be Dolphy's avant push and pull with the band's more straightahead approach. —*John Ephland*

Bill Frisell/Elvis Costello/Burt Bacharach, *The Sweetest Punch*

I can't say whether any of these Bacharach tunes will add to his canon. But some are characteristically awry and unexpected in the classic manner. The performances themselves are often compelling, though after 15 tracks a little more punch might have been welcome. —*John McDonough*

Without improv to push them forward, the glistening arrangements seem bland and overly perfect in some way. That's from a "jazz" perspective I guess; if I was coming from the mind set of say, a Banana Republic shopper, the soundtrackesque tracks would be rather charming indeed. —*Jim Macnie*

What a great idea! And what a great band! This one should make people want to hear Costello and Bacharach's *Painted From Memory*. While the melodies aren't as engaging as an "Alfie" or "Wanting Things," this is still very tuneful music. —*John Ephland*

year—and right away make a companion piece of instrumental versions. Well, Bill Frisell loves drollery, the whimsical is his metier, and here he's hip-deep in his element. He also loves slicing into strong melodies, and with Bacharach's tunes he's got plenty to operate on.

One main problem: repetitiveness—since Frisell chose to follow the form of the songs rather closely, those places where the lyrics or the sound of the voice was the focal point on *Painted From Memory* seem to drag on *The Sweetest Punch*, like pop backing tracks in need of a singer.

As a piece *The Sweetest Punch* gets boring, and doesn't reward a direct listen. In its duller spots (the gauzy "This House Is Now Empty" and "The Long Division," "What's Her Name Today?" and for that matter all the other parts where saxophonist Billy Drewes is featured), it could even function as Muzak. Pleasantly arranged, more original than usual, played by a crack band, but background music nonetheless.

Three tracks solve things by reverting to vocals; one is sung by Costello (who sounds much better on the moving version of "Toledo" here than he did on the original record, where his intonation and phrasing limitations were sometimes unbearable), one is sung by Cassandra Wilson and one features them jointly.

Timbrally, Costello's voice has some of the same huskiness as Wilson's voice; on first pass, I mistook her version of "Painted From Memory" for the Brit singing falsetto. This closeness actually makes them awkward partners, and "I Still Have That Other Girl" accurately reflects that fact.

There are some inventive, even surprising textures, like the low brass parts on the title track (and its reprise, which makes a little space for trumpeter Ron Miles to blow), the rich voicings on "In The Darkest Place," the pretty acoustic guitar and clarinet duet on "My Thief," the quirky arrangement on the reprise of "Painted From Memory" (though all this reprising adds to the feeling of repetitiveness), and the way Frisell almost breaks into "Hey Jude" in his welcome, harder-edged solo on "Such Unlikely Lovers."

But on the whole, *The Sweetest Punch* is a project that could have used pruning, at the very least. —*John Corbett*

The Sweetest Punch: The Sweetest Punch; Toledo; Such Unlikely Lovers; This House Is Empty Now; Painted From Memory; What's Her Name Today?; In The Darkest Place; The Sweetest Punch (Excerpt); My Thief; I Still Have That Other Girl; Painted From Memory (Reprise); The Long Division; Tears At The Birthday Party; I Still Have That Other Girl (Reprise); God Give Me Strength. (64:27)

Personnel: Bill Frisell, electric and acoustic guitar; Don Byron, clarinet, bass clarinet; Billy Drewes, alto saxophone; Curtis Fowlkes, trombone; Ron Miles, trumpet; Viktor Krauss, bass; Brian Blade, drums, percussion; Elvis Costello (2, 10), Cassandra Wilson (5, 10), vocals.

Caetano Veloso

Livro

Nonesuch 79557

★★★★★

When adoring fans mobbed Brazilian singer Caetano Veloso at a Chicago-area appearance earlier this summer, the image recalled classic Frank Sinatra. But the two singers have other affinities that are deeper than this adulation. During his best years, Sinatra was dedicated to presenting the American popular song as a work of serious art. Veloso always championed once-forgotten baiao forms and embraced rock & roll when it was reviled in his country. Both Sinatra and Veloso consistently respected their African-derived sources and sung about the need for racial harmony. Most importantly, though, Veloso has the inventive spirit that Sinatra's imitators lack.

Livro is one of Veloso's best recordings and North American jazz listeners will be able to connect it to the familiar traditions that Antonio Carlos Jobim and Joao Gilberto built. On the opening "Os Passistas" and closing "Pra Ninguem," he sings on top of samba rhythm patterns with a cool delivery that evokes bossa nova. Between these songs, Veloso is all over his own map. Using the amazing percussion ensembles of his native Bahia region, the inflections Veloso brings to each line respond to a sensational drive from the drummers on "Minha Voz, Minha Vida." His near-whisper and string section perfectly segues into the electro-funk of "Livros." Veloso makes a convincing case for melding modern classical polytonality with dance-club beats on "Doideca." And on "O Navio Negreiro" Veloso shows why rap is by no means an English-only domain. Credit is also due cellist/arranger Jaques Morelenbaum for his work in making it all gel.

Another reason for Veloso's stature as the greatest pop singer in the Western Hemisphere is his perceptive lyrics, which are translated. He touches on mythology, pan-Americanism and his genuine love of literature. *Livro* also contains a translated passage of his perceptive memoir, *Verdade Tropical* (*Tropical Truth*). But it's when he croons "My voice, my life/My secret and my revelation/My hidden light" in Portuguese, that it becomes clear why so many of his midwestern fans lost control that night. —*Aaron Cohen*

Livro: Os Passistas; Livros; Onde O Rio E Mais Baiano; Manhata; Doideca; Voce E Minha; Um Tom; How Beautiful Could A Being Be; O Navio Negreiro; Nao Enche; Minha Voz, Minha Vida; Alexandre; Na Baixa do Sapateiro; Pra Ninguem. (54:12)

Personnel: Caetano Veloso, vocals, guitar, piano. Various other musicians include Jaques Morelenbaum, cello; Luiz Brasil, guitars; Marcelo Costa, percussion; Jorge Helder, bass; Marcelo Martins, alto saxophone; Jose Carlos Ramos, tenor saxophone; Daniel Garcia, tenor saxophone; Philip Doyle, French horn; Marcio Victor, percussion; Carlinhos Brown, percussion.

Count Basie Orchestra

Swing Shift

Mama 1027

★★★½

Grover Mitchell gives us a solid return to familiar form for the Basie band after a couple of unexpected detours into Ellingtonia

and a CD with Rosemary Clooney. While those projects did not dissappoint, this collection puts the band back into its element and with a flock of fresh, well-tailored charts to dig into, all crafted to play to the traditional Basie strengths. Even without any breakthrough brilliances to offer, it's the band's first CD under the Mitchell regime to offer the Basie style straight up and unblended.

Allyn Ferguson contributes eight of the CD's 14 titles, a few of which could end up becoming long standing post-Basie Basie classics. Among the brightest is "Rompin' And Rolling," a medium-fast riff piece framed in tight, punchy reed figures supported by a powerful rhythm section ruled by Butch Miles. Fine tenor too, presumably Kenny Hing's. Ferguson's "Burnin'" (no relation to the Basie–Oscar Peterson duet blues on the first Satch & Josh LP of the '70s) also gets the CD off to a strong start, with the rhythm section again sounding the keynote.

Of Bob Ojeda's four charts, "Four For Basie" takes us on a romp through the trumpet section in a style that Ernie Wilkins might have written for Harry James in the '50s. Everybody solos, though the trumpets are so evenly matched at so high a level, there is no "winner." Ojeda's "Road Runner" is another characteristic Basie sparkler, while his "Blues On The Top" takes the tempo down a couple of pegs for some grinding muted trumpet, presumably Ojeda himself, though no soloists were indicated on the advance CD reviewed here.

The Basie sound is a familiar one, and this has all the ensemble elements, including those big solid walls of brass that sometime seem more preoccupied with volume and density than swing. But these have been givens too long to gainsay now. One of the best recent additions to the band has been the return of Butch Miles, and he pays dividends through every bar. His solo piece, "Drum Thing," although well-crafted, is probably a bit long for a medium where only the ear is served and not the eye. Miles is of the old school, as exciting to watch as he is to hear.

—John McDonough

Swing Shift: Burnin'; Easy Go; Four For Basie; Lonesome Lover Blues; Swee' Pea; Walkin' Proud; Drum Thing; Warm Velvet; Blues For Royalty; The Very Thought Of You; Road Runner; Rompin' And Rolling; Blood Count; Blues On Top. (59:52)

Personnel: Grover Mitchell, director, trombone; William 'Scotty' Barnhart, Bob Ojeda, Michael Williams, Shawn Edmonds, trumpets; David Keim, Clarence Banks, Alvin Walker, William H. Hughes, trombones; Doug Miller, Kenny Hing, John Kelso, Brad Leali, John Williams, saxophones; Terence Conley, piano; James Leary, bass; Will Matthews, guitar; Butch Miles, drums; Chris Murrell, vocals.

Victor Wooten

Yin-Yang

Compass Records 42742

★★★

In keeping with its title, *Yin-Yang* balances two contrasting and complementary forces. Disc One, *Yin*, consists of chops-laden, mostly instrumental smooth-jazz and fusion. Disc Two, *Yang*, is harder edged and vocal, serving up '80s-style funk in the vein of Parliament-

Funkadelic or Prince. Both *Yin* and *Yang* feature first-rate production quality and a cast of virtuosic musicians, with the Wooten family at its core. Depending on the listener's perspective, though, *Yin* might sound saccharine sweet and *Yang* rather derivative.

Yin, as a whole, rings truer to these ears. The grooves are catchy and exhilarating, and Wooten highlights his bass in a way that shows a gift for melodicism as much as speed. His fluent technique is on display on songs such as "Resolution" (his own composition, not the Coltrane one), an ethereal piece where he covers nearly everything from bass line to melody and solo. "Zenergy" features his Flecktones compatriot Bela Fleck on banjo for a folksy flavor, and "Hip Bop" breaks out of the smooth-jazz mold altogether with drummer J.D. Blair's hard-driving beat and Joseph Wooten's soul-drenched organ. Kaila Wooten makes a recording debut at age 13 months on a cut called "Kaila Speaks." And Victor doesn't just throw his toddler a bone, he cleverly spins a bass melody that highlights the inflections of the sampled baby talk.

The *Yang* disc, while certainly not geared for jazzheads, is nevertheless a funky good time. One gets the impression that Wooten and company are playing in this style because they genuinely enjoy it; it's too musical to be called "selling out." Still, when Wooten philosophizes about finding oneself on "Think About That," one might question whether *Yang* is the deepest reflection of Wooten's own musical self. "You're always taught to fit in," he says in spoken-word monologue. "Well, what are we fitting into? You know, 'Don't color outside the lines.' Who drew the lines in the first place?"

Hmm, could the artist be ... the one formerly known as Prince? —*John Janowiak*

Yin (Disc 1, instrumental): Imagine This; Yinnin' & Yangin'; Hip Bop; Joe's Journey; The Urban Turban; Tali Lama; Zenergy; Kaila Speaks; Sacred Place; Resolution. (45:42)
Personnel: Victor Wooten, electric bass, steel string guitar (4), cello (4); Joseph Wooten, keyboards, acoustic piano, organ; Regi Wooten, guitars; JD Blair, drums and drum programming; Kelly Gravely, drums (1, 6); Steve Bailey, fretless bass (1); Jeff Coffin, tenor sax (1, 7); Rudy Wooten, sax (3); Roger "Rock" Williams, soprano sax (4); Kirk Whalum, tenor and soprano sax (5); Darrell Tibbs, percussion (1, 6, 9); Tali Ovadia, banjo (6); Jim Roberts, djembe, shaker (6); Carter Beauford, drums (7, 10); Bela Fleck, banjo (7); Stuart Duncan, fiddle (7); Peter Rowan, vocals (6); Kaila Wooten, vocal (8); Kathy Chiavola, vocal (10). Strings (on 4, 10): Buddy Spicher, Billy Contreras, Kurt Storey, Michael Kott, David Blazer.

Yang (Disc 2, vocal): Hormones In The Headphones; Yinin' & Yangin'; Kaila Raps; One; What Crime Is It?; Go Girl Go; Pretty Little Lady; Hero Singing My Song; Think About That. (44:24)
Personnel: Victor Wooten, electric and acoustic bass, vocals; Joseph Wooten, keyboards, acoustic piano, theremin; Regi Wooten, guitar; JD Blair, drums; Kelly Gravely, drums (7); Count Bass D, rap (2); Kaila Wooten, vocal (3); Allyson Taylor, vocal (4); Bootsy Collins, vocal (5); William "Oui-wey" Collins, vocals, bass (5); Tabitha Fair, vocal (8); Jonell Mosser, vocal (9); Rod McGaha, trumpet (4); Jennie Hoeft, drums (6); Kirk Whalum, tenor sax (8); Darrell Tibbs, percussion (8). Background vocals: Michael Kott, Dobehi "Doobie" Lachaden, Jonathan Morse, Andrea Pizzao, Aseem Hetep, Park Law, Mark "Zeke" Sellers, Joseph Wooten, Felicia Fett, Marci Chittwood, Holly Wooten, Dorothy Wooten.

Mike Stern

Play

Atlantic 83219-2P

★★★★

Simpatico guitarists can strike sparks when they work together. Witness recent collaborations of Pat Metheny with John Scofield and Jim Hall, and Pat Martino with six different six-stringers. Mike Stern was hooked up with Martino for two tracks on the latter project, so he knows the magic that can happen when like-minded players unite.

Given Stern's signature sound—a diamond-hard, single-note attack with a minimum of electronic distortion—the choice of Bill Frisell

might seem an odd one, but, as in love, sometimes opposites attract. Just how much is demonstrated on "Blue Tone," where Frisell's signature chiming, atmospheric sound provides a gauzy counterbalance to Stern's hard edge.

"All Heart" moves them closer to a common ground, one that sounds like it's situated just west of Cheyenne, deep in the heart of Frisell's usual big sky territory. Jim Beard provides some subtle shading on keyboards, and Stern turns in an achingly beautiful solo.

Their remaining two duets dance somewhere between the two extremes, with Stern's spidery lead lines twisting around Frisell's accompaniment in "Frizz" and both players exploring a multitude of tonal variations on the stripped-down quartet outing, "Big Kids."

The combination of Stern with John Scofield is something that has been 16 years in the making, ever since the two of them worked together briefly in one of Miles Davis' best post-comeback units. That lineup made one recording, 1983's *Star People*, and guitar fans have been waiting for Sco and Stern to reunite ever since.

Scofield's slippery style meshes so well with Stern's more staccato approach that it's sometimes difficult to determine whose amplifier is emitting which sound without the benefit of headphones. "Small World" drops the two guitarists down in the Crescent City, courtesy of Ben Perowsky's rolling second-line drumming, but it's the boppish "Outta Town" where this two-guitar concept really shines. Sco and Stern both have faultless articulation at any tempo, and the twisting theme pushes them to the limit as they crank up the intensity to trade choruses.

Stern's three solo outings could run the risk of paling by comparison to the all-star hookups, but Dennis Chambers keeps that from happening with powerhouse drumming that bows deeply in the direction of Billy Cobham. In fact, the jittery high-octane funk of "Link," propelled by Chambers and highlighted by a churning Bob Malach solo, is one of the best things on *Play*. —*James Hale*

Play: Play; Small World; Outta Town; Blue Tone; Tipatina's; All Heart; Frizz; Link; Goin' Under; Big Kids. (62:37)

Personnel: Mike Stern, Bill Frisell (4, 6, 7, 10), John Scofield (1-3), guitar; Bob Malach, tenor saxophone (3-5, 8, 9); Jim Beard, keyboards (1-3, 5, 6, 8, 9); Lincoln Goines, bass; Ben Perowsky (1-4, 6, 7, 10), Dennis Chambers (5, 8, 9), drums.

Bill Frisell

Good Dog, Happy Man

Nonesuch 79536

★★★½

Sweet, sentimental and atmospheric, Bill Frisell's songs conjure up a vanished America that exists only in the imagination. The guitarist's distinctive approach to American music borrows liberally from folk, pop, blues and country idioms to fashion an immediately recognizable, seamless weave. *Good Dog, Happy Man* augments the trio from his *Gone, Just Like A Train* CD with Wayne Horvitz's keyboards and Greg Leisz's dobro and steel guitars. These elements create texture and contrast to balance Frisell's clean, tart lines on electric and acoustic guitars. Leisz acts as a foil for the leader, much as Frisell supplied guitar textures and effects on countless dates early in his career.

In Frisell's heartland, you can imagine cheerful kids romping with well-behaved dogs on their way to the ice cream parlor. The sepia tint to the cover art hints at a certain nostalgia. "My Buffalo Girl" evokes the optimism of a familiar '60s pop song, with the twang of Leisz's guitar adding color. Frisell duets with Ry Cooder on a slow, lovely reading of "Shenandoah," which becomes the centerpiece of the CD. "Cadillac 1959" evolves from wistful reminiscence to a bluesy stomp featuring Frisell's most assertive solo of the session. Edgy and ominous, "Cold, Cold Ground" breaks the spell with a relentless vamp propelled by drummer Jim Keltner.

Frisell creates a sonic world where John Fahey and Howlin' Wolf co-exist peacefully with

the Temptations. One may wonder whether he's become overly familiar with this territory. Don't expect to hear conventional signifiers of jazz so much as songs in search of lyrics or a soundtrack in search of a movie. —*Jon Andrews*

Good Dog, Happy Man: Rain, Rain; Roscoe; Big Shoe; My Buffalo Girl; Shenandoah; Cadillac 1959; The Pioneers; Cold, Cold Ground; That Was Then; Monroe; Good Dog, Happy Man; Poem For Eva. (62:23)
Personnel: Bill Frisell, electric and acoustic guitars, loops, music boxes; Greg Leisz, pedal steel, dobro, lap steel, Weissenborn, National steel guitar, mandolin; Wayne Horvitz, organ, piano, samples; Viktor Krauss, bass; Jim Keltner, drums, percussion; Ry Cooder, electric guitar, Ripley guitar (5).

Stefon Harris
Black Action Figure
Blue Note 99546

★★★★

Noted jazz scholar Bob Dylan once sang, "I was so much older then. I'm younger than that now." Somewhere, 26-year old vibist Stefon Harris must have been listening intently. Harris' debut disc, the justifiably acclaimed *A Cloud of Red Dust*, was a wide-ranging and overtly serious project several years in the making. The playing was impressive throughout, but occasionally concept threatened to overwhelm creativity with Harris seemingly sacrificing a bit of passion for the sake of precision.

Black Action Figure, every bit as carefully constructed as its predecessor, nevertheless opens up Harris' sound, allowing his youthful energy and musical wit to embellish his stunning technique. If *A Cloud of Red Dust* came across as a recital so formal that some listeners felt they should be taking notes instead of tapping their toes, the light and lively *Black Action Figure*, solidly infused with first-take enthusiasm, has the feel of a perfectly produced club date.

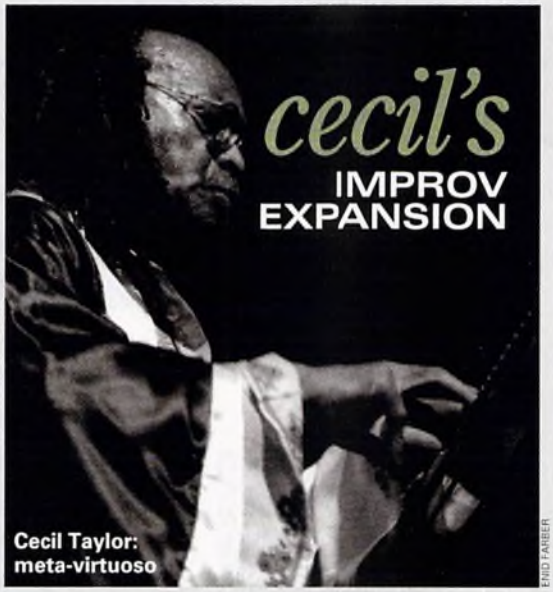
But make no mistake. *Black Action Figure* is no unfocused blowing session as Harris continues his expansive, but disciplined, explorations in fine style. The overall approach, however, is less circumscribed by African and Latin rhythms than his first recording and the subsequent sound, more powered by updated '60s grooves, is somehow fresher and more appealing. Harris, whose playing is frequently more percussive than pianistic, solos with long, fluid lines that may have originally sprung from a Bobby Hutcherson influence but have since musically morphed into Harris' own style.

Black Action Figure benefits greatly from the empathic ensemble work of the steady-gigging group of young talents that has coalesced around saxist Greg Osby, a musician who has been quietly establishing himself as a major mentor for some of the best and brightest hopes for 21st century jazz. In particular, pianist Jason Moran, Harris' close friend and musical alter ego, is a master of understatement who subtly underpins the vibist's more fragile constructions. In similar manner Osby and the rest of the band step ever so slightly to the side to support Harris in music that is obviously the product of intense and enlightened interaction among the core group.

And that music is savvy and satisfying throughout, whether it's the propulsive, in-your-face energy of "The Alchemist" or the elegant and evocative Abbey Lincoln tribute "Alovi," a near-perfect example of musical portraiture. "Feline Blues," a sly and supple portrait in its own right, uses trombonist Steve Turre's textural contrast to excellent effect while a bright and beautiful take on "You Stepped Out Of A Dream," one of several short segues between the major pieces, is just Harris and his sparkling vibes.

The album builds toward a climax in unusual style, opening with uptempo numbers such as the jaunty, almost march-like title track before downshifting for the closing "Chorale" and "Faded Beauty," a couple of warmly expressive

In the concerts documented on *Cecil Taylor In Berlin, 1988* (FMP) the meta-virtuoso pianist and language innovator, then 59, encountered the *creme de la creme* of European free improvisers. The experience spurred Taylor to broaden his view of improvisational possibility; his music of the '90s is expansive, open and inclusive of different vocabularies.



Cecil Taylor: meta-virtuoso

ENID FARBER

Taylor recorded three iterations of "Looking (Berlin Version)" in November 1989, a week before the Berlin Wall fell. The apotheotic ***Solo*** (FMP 28, 61:29; ★★★★★) is a triumph of motif-and-variation; the accumulated detail serves the witty narrative.

Feel Trio (FMP 25, 72:17; ★★★★★) with bassist William Parker and drummer Tony Oxley is a triangular improvisation in three movements with barely an extraneous moment. Oxley propels the flow in the 36-minute first section; part two is five minutes of canned lightning; the core of the more ruminative third section is a Taylor conversation with Parker.

Corona (FMP 31, 71:35; ★★★★) takes a while to get going, Taylor feinting and jabbing at tentative violinist Harald Kimmig. Around minute 28 Taylor weaves astonishing rhythmic patterns at ever-escalating velocities. The final 10-minute section is built around signature clusters that climb from rubato to warp-speed. But, the mix is muddy, and Kimmig and cellist Muneer Abdul Fataah never quite find the common inner pulse.

Celebrated Blazons (FMP 58, 56:41; ★★★★½) is a June 1990 Feel Trio Berlin concert. A 25-minute exploration by the trio emerges organically out of Taylor's piano responses to an opening chant. They exhale on a variation of Taylor's two-chord minor theme, then springboard into 20 ecstatic minutes; the concluding section builds from Taylor's elaboration of the chant over Parker's arco harmonics.

Double Holy House (FMP 55, 61:30; ★★★★★) and ***The Tree Of Life*** (FMP 98, 73:17; ★★★★½) are Berlin solo concerts from 1990 and '91. The former addresses Taylor's concerns with ritual and spoken word. It begins with a lyric rubato variation, then Taylor recites three evocative mythocentric poems to empathetic piano commentary. The latter draws heavily on Taylor's encyclopedic distillation of the tropes of the European canon from Beethoven to Webern.

On ***Always A Pleasure*** (FMP 69, 76:30; ★★★★★), a spring 1993 septet, Taylor contrasts the energy field constructs of earlier years with his elder statesman persona. After trumpeter Longineu Parsons beckons the spirits, tenorist Charles Gayle summons the furies in a 21-minute foray, spurred by long-time Taylorites Sirone (bass) and Rashid Bakr (drums); Taylor and cellist Tristan Honsinger dialogue through a whirlwind-to-contemplative emotional landscape, from which Taylor develops a tempestuous declamation over bass and drums. Sirone plays throughout with unflagging energy and clarity.

Soprano saxophonist Harri Sjöström's twisty phrasing and snake-charmer tone play a prominent role on ***Qu'a Yuba: Live At The Iridium, Vol. 1*** (Cadence, CJR-1092, 62:25; ★★★★½) and ***Vol. 2*** (CJR-1098, 47:12; ★★★★★), consecutive sets recorded at a New York nightclub in 1998. On bass is Dominic Duval, an interactive extended techniques master with a heightened melodic sensibility; Jackson Krall, the drummer, has his own take on the Sunny Murray school of ametrical rhythm-painting. It's a brainy, cohesive ensemble that articulates every detail with relaxed precision. **DB**

meditations. The uniformly gorgeous "Faded Beauty," despite its placement, is the album's centerpiece, tapping a bit of Harris' classical background while also illustrating what he's capable of doing in the future.

The mediagenic Harris has been Young Lionized as much as any player on the scene and while there is nothing more exasperating to a veteran jazz player than to be overlooked because of the ongoing fascination with young talent, there's little as exciting to jazz fans than to see such a still-evolving artist take a giant step forward in his musical maturation. Harris, by simply having more fun this time, has done just that, proving that occasionally there is indeed substance, even significance, beneath the stylish hype. *—Michael Point*

Black Action Figure: Club Madness; Feline Blues; There Is No Greater Love; Of Things To Come; After The Day Is Done; Conversations At The Mess; Black Action Figure; Collage; You Stepped Out Of A Dream; Alovi; Bass Vibes; The Alchemist; Chorale; Faded Beauty; Musical Silence. (56:57)
Personnel: Stefon Harris, vibes; Jason Moran, piano; Greg Osby, alto sax; Tarus Mateen, bass; Eric Harland, drums; Gary Thomas, alto flute and tenor sax; Steve Turre, trombone.

Dave Douglas
Songs For Wandering Souls
Winter & Winter 910 042-2

★★★½

For many listeners, the debut recording by Tiny Bell Trio (released on Songlines in 1994) was their introduction to Dave Douglas, Jim Black and Brad Shepik—three of the most distinctive instrumentalists to emerge this decade. The trio's ability to improvise together on Balkan folksongs, Kurt Weill and Douglas' slalom-course originals was invigorating and encouraging. Here were three individuals whose language was as bracing and novel as the first wave of beboppers. Their unvarnished sound and open communication transmitted a genuine sense of excitement.

Their fourth album together (released under the trumpeter's name), *Songs For Wandering Souls* finds them pursuing the same eclectic mix of material (eight Douglas compositions, a Rahsaan Roland Kirk piece and one by Robert Schumann), but a certain predictability has dulled the edge of surprise. The manic energy that characterized the band's

early work has been supplanted with more of a measured intensity.

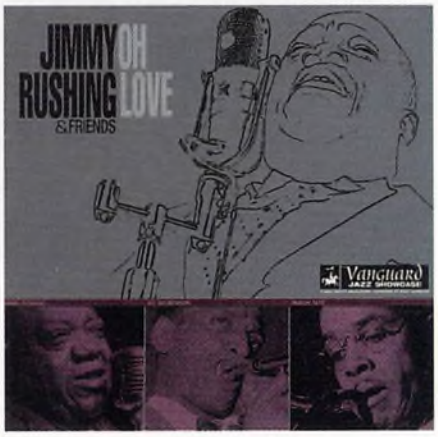
Which is not to say that *Songs For Wandering Souls* doesn't have any of the riotous, high-speed interplay or heart-stirring balladic soloing that are the trio's trademarks. The former is in ample supply on "Gowanus," a veritable showcase for Douglas' repertoire of intervallic leaps, single-note punctuation points and slurred asides, and on the set-closing "Ferrous," which is highlighted by some propulsive work by Shepik, sounding like John McLaughlin circa 1969.

The tender side of the band is held largely in check, though they wring plenty of emotion out of Douglas' pretty "At Dusk," and the trumpeter shines throughout one of his favorite Schumann pieces.

As usual, the best elements of a Tiny Bell Trio recording are not the grand gestures, but the smaller bits of business. Most memorable is the way the band members pass around and reinterpret the rising-and-falling guitar lick that gives "Loopy" its title, Douglas' bravado cadenza that opens "Wandering Souls" and Black's bottomless bag of percussion tricks.

Perhaps Tiny Bell Trio was destined to disappoint over the long haul because of the very novelty of its approach. While the band is a long way from wearing out its welcome, its moves are becoming a little easier to anticipate with each outing. —*James Hale*

Songs For Wandering Souls: Sam Hill; At Dusk; Prolix; Loopy; One Shot; Breath-A-Thon; Nicht So Schnell, Mit Viel Ton Zu Spielen; Gowanus; Wandering Souls; Ferrous. (56:18)
Personnel: Dave Douglas, trumpet; Brad Shepik, guitar; Jim Black, drums.



Jimmy Rushing & Friends

Oh Love

Vanguard 79606

★★★★

Oh yes, Jimmy Rushing was a giant of 20th century American music. He was our finest male blues singer and probably just Louis Armstrong surpassed his capacity for swinging in jazz settings. Mr. Five by Five worked his high-pitched vocal magic for almost 50 years—from pre-Depression times in Walter Page's Blue Devils on through splendid, career-making affiliations with the orchestras of Bennie Moten (1929–'35) and Count Basie (1935–'48) right up to the year before his death in 1972 when he cut the magnificent RCA LP *The You & Me That Used To Be.* It's criminal how record companies have neglected to keep most of Rushing's inestimably valuable solo recordings from his last decades in print. Things are finally looking up: Vanguard has rectified this injustice in part by digging into the vaults and remounting a handful of his many jewels for the first of two collections in the Vanguard Jazz Showcase reissue series.

We'll take what we can get. Six songs resurface from Rushing's *Goin' To Chicago* album, five get plucked off his *If This Ain't The Blues* and one number represents *Listen To The Blues* (all three of these stellar records from 1956 or '58 were produced by John Hammond). Rushing's high-pitched, inimitable singing retains the expressive qualities of the Basie era even as it sounds rougher and edgier than before. He is firmly in charge of tone, timing, phrasing and accents, and he puts out megavolts of energy. On "How Long Blues," Rushing's voice carries a strain of meditative sadness that gives added eloquence to his understated style. His reworking of "Goin' To Chicago Blues," which he used to do with Basie, is, make no mistake, remarkable. So is his read on the bluesy swing flag-waver "Boogie Woogie," his clarion call to jitterbug the night away. It's clear, too, from hearing his versions of, say, "Dinah"

and "Pennies From Heaven," that he has a most uncanny feel for pop songs as well as blues. He's never susceptible to nostalgia or weak sentiment.

Three different groups of top-rate swinging musicians, including fellow Basie alumni Buddy Tate and Jo Jones on all 12 tracks, may be in the singer's shadow much of the time, but they collectively buoy up the proceedings anyway; only Marlowe Morris' organ sounds dated today, its chugging pointing to the skating rink. There's an enjoyable instrumental on the program, "If This Ain't The Blues," where Texan Roy Gaines plays some stellar blues guitar, but, shoot, its eight-plus minutes really should have been given instead to a couple more of those buried song-treasures featuring the great singer. *—Frank-John Hadley*

Oh Love: Boogie Woogie; I Want A Little Girl; How Long Blues; It's Hard To Laugh A Smile; Goin' To Chicago Blues; I Can't Understand; Pennies From Heaven; Oh Love; If This Ain't The Blues; Dinah; How You Want Your Lovin' Done; Leave Me. (58:42)
Personnel: Jimmy Rushing, vocals; Emmett Berry (4, 6-10), Pat Jenkins (1-3, 5, 11, 12), trumpets; Rudy Powell, alto saxophone and clarinet (4); Buddy Tate, tenor saxophone; Ben Richardson, clarinet and alto saxophone (1-3, 5, 11, 12); Lawrence Brown (4), Vic Dickinson (6-10), Henderson Chambers (1-3, 5, 11, 12), trombones; Roy Gaines (6-10), Freddie Green (4), guitars; Marlowe Morris, organ (6-10); Pete Johnson (4), Charlie Johnson (6-10), Sam Price (1-3, 5, 11, 12), piano; Walter Page (1-5, 11, 12), Aaron Bell (6-10), bass; Jo Jones, drums.

Taj Mahal
Toumani Diabate
Kulanjan
Hannibal 1444

★★★★

Blues guitarist Taj Mahal is no stranger to cross-cultural projects. A long-time proponent of West African music, he's worked in the past with such greats as instrumentalist Ali Farka Toure. On the recent *Kulanjan*, Mahal joins up with Malian kora player Toumani Diabate's six-member group. In the liner notes, both musicians agree that the project is the result of a back-to-ancient-roots vision. No question about their idealism, but that's not the sole reason why the collaboration succeeds.

To be sure, the blues has its origins in West Africa and the translated Wasulunkean, Bambaran and Maninkan lyrics show that some themes remain universal. But over the past few

centuries, the distinctively American idiom and the developments across the ocean have taken very divergent paths. What makes *Kulanjan* such a joy is how the musicians play off of these contrasts. On "Queen Bee" and "Take This Hammer," Mahal's roughly gentle singing voice is a perfect response to vocalist Ramatou Diakite's much higher-pitched siren call (sung in the Wasulunke language). On other tracks, the differences in the stringed instruments are heightened; Mahal's minimalist guitar lines punctuate Diabate's kora group's arpeggio flourishes. Sometimes the approaches directly flow together, such as the zydeco piano lines that merge with Lasana Diabate's Mande balafon (ancestor to the xylophone) on "Guede Man Na." It's also a telling sign of respect that, unlike some other U.S.-meets-Africa discs, Mahal and Diabate contribute an equal number of compositions. *—Aaron Cohen*

Kulanjan: Queen Bee; Tunkaranke; Ol' Georgie Buck; Kulanjan; Fanta; Guede Man Na; Catfish Blues; K'an Ben; Take This Hammer; Atlanta Kaira; Mississippi-Mali Blues; Sahara. (59:02)
Personnel: Taj Mahal, guitar, vocals; Toumani Diabate, kora; Kassemady Diabate, vocals; Ramatou Diakite, vocals; Bassekou Kouyate, bass ngoni, small ngoni; Dougouye Koulibaly, kamalengoni (hunter's harp); Lasana Diabate, balafon; Ballake Sissoko, kora.

Arturo O'Farrill

Blood Lines

Milestone 9294-2

★★★½

Arturo O'Farrill, son of legendary Cuban composer/bandleader Chico O'Farrill and the longtime pianist in his band, has had much to do with his father's dramatic re-emergence as a major mover and shaker on the Latin jazz scene. As music director he's infused a more contemporary sensibility to the music, providing an edge without sacrificing any of the core values. It's the sort of roots-oriented cross-cultural synthesis possible only when a musician with ears wide open has the multiplicity of talents necessary to successfully dig beneath the surface of assorted, and sometimes, contradictory styles.

The younger O'Farrill uses his debut disc as a leader to more fully display his pianistic abilities, showcasing a keyboard style as eclectic as can be imagined. Traditional Afro-Cuban stylings, moody Bill Evans impressionism, post-bop energy and even a little classical romanticism flow together in a well-played program that touches on O'Farrill's primary influences. It also serves as a condensation of some of his big band ideas, as well as an opportunity to walk outside the lines a bit.

O'Farrill begins with a concise trio reading of Coltrane's "Moment's Notice," with his fluid solos careening across George Mraz's sturdy bass lines. It's a strong opening statement that effectively nails down O'Farrill's grasp of jazz tradition while also allowing him to demonstrate his personal approach to it. Santi Debriano's "Brava" and the sublime Cuban standard "Siboney" provide some ethnic touches while Carla Bley's "Walking Batterie Woman," a souvenir from O'Farrill's early days on the progressive scene, supplies a starting point for more quirky outside inventions.

Randy Weston's "Little Susan," written for O'Farrill's wife, is one of the disc's most successful pieces as percussionist Jerry Gonzalez joins in a quartet also featuring drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez, putting yet more bounce in the pianist's jaunty attack. O'Farrill goes it on his own with the concluding "Darn That Dream," transforming a solo rendition into a catalog of stylistic possibilities. It's admirable and enjoyable from first note to last, proving O'Farrill the equal of almost any of the

by frank-john hadley

Samplin' the blues

Compilations and samplers come packed with music from all sorts of heroes and characters. As a rule, they're a better fit for neophytes trying to determine what interests them for further investigation than for lifelong blues buffs.

Big Jay McNeely: swingin' sax-madman

DOWN BEAT ARCHIVES

Blues Routes **(Smithsonian Folkways 40118; 68:52)** ★★★½ The "Folk Masters" series on public radio between 1990 and '96 featured more than 70 concerts at Carnegie Hall or Virginia's Wolf Trap by blues artists and other proponents of rootsy African-American music. Here are 17 highlights. Sammy Price wears his heart on his sleeve when tickling the ivories for "Harlem Parlor Blues," and slide guitar expert Joe Louis Walker takes his blues band into a deep groove while "Bluesifyin'."

Bob Corritore: ***All-Star Blues Sessions*** **(HMG/Hightone 1009; 57:01)** ★★★ Corritore is Phoenix's blues man around town, a club co-owner, DJ and talented harmonica player who likes to have various dignitaries enter the local recording studio when they pass through south-central Arizona. This collection of numbers has Corritore and his band lighting fires under Bo Diddley, Jimmy Rogers, Nappy Brown and others. High spots: Brown gets intensely personal singing the ballad "Driftin' Blues" and Robert Jr. Lockwood has a ball probing Wes Montgomery's "Naptown Blues."

Telarc's Got The Blues **(Telarc 83468; 70:06)** ★★ This low-price sampler, holding 14 tracks, hits the mark with Chicago blues exemplars Junior Wells and Luther "Guitar Junior" Johnson (joined by his Magic Rockers and the Muddy Waters Tribute Band on a tune apiece). The Memphis Horns with ol' Stax soul singer William Bell leave a lasting impression, too. But Maria Muldaur, Pinetop Perkins, Hubert Sumlin and several more don't deliver the goods.

Jump, Jive & Swing! **(Rhino 75666; 49:17)** ★★★★ One of the better collections of jump blues currently in print. Paragons of post-war fun like bandleader Wynonie Harris ("Good Rockin' Tonight"), sax madman Big Jay McNeely ("Deacon's Hop") and former Kansas City singing bartender Joe Turner ("Shake, Rattle & Roll") are represented. So are little-remembered yet divine frolickers such as Bullmoose Jackson ("...Haul Off And Love Me"), Little Johnny Jones ("Hoy Hoy") and Rudy Greene ("Juicy Fruit").

Essential Blues III **(House of Blues 1451; 53:43/61:41)** ★★★ This brisk-selling series, a perfectly decent place to get introduced to blues, continues with a double-album that contains 31 numbers licensed from many different labels. There's everything from Mississippi John Hurt's country blues "Corrina Corrina" and Johnny Adams' soul stirring "Up And Down World" to Jimmy Reed's sweet styled "You've Got Me Dizzy" and Luther Allison's high-energy version of the Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

Tangled Up In Blues—Songs Of Bob Dylan **(House of Blues 1458; 62:33)** ★★★½ Assorted blues, soul and roots artists doing Dylan tunes might have been a real stinkeroo. Instead, producer John Snyder shows he knows which way the wind blows and he's come up with a winner. "Everything Is Broken" benefits from Delta man R. L. Burnside's homespun matter-of-factness. Isaac Hayes balances kitsch and believable lustiness when making bedroom eyes on "Lay Lady Lay." **DB**

more widely known Latin jazz keyboard stars.

First recordings invariably lack stylistic focus and O'Farrill's lives up to the tradition. But it also perpetuates a more important tradition, that of an enormously gifted and well-schooled musician staking out the parameters of his music before undertaking more substantial and significant exploration. The next O'Farrill effort could well be a major event, so deftly does he integrate influences, but in the meantime *Blood Lines* offers its own delights.

—Michael Point

Blood Lines: Moment's Notice; Brava; Chinas Y Criollas; Pure Emotion; Ya Yo; Little Susan; Arturo's Closet; Siboney; Walking Batterie Woman; Darn That Dream. (55:49)

Personnel: Arturo O'Farrill, piano; George Mraz, bass (1, 2, 4, 6, 7); Andy Gonzalez, bass (3, 5, 8, 9); Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez, drums; Papo Vasquez, trombone (5, 7); Jerry Gonzalez, congas and percussion (3, 6, 8).

Horace Silver

Jazz Has A Sense Of Humor

Verve IMPD-293

★★★

Maybe it's his age (he recently turned 71), but this clearly isn't the same Horace Silver who made all those classic Blue Note albums in the '50s and '60s.

No one is claiming that he should stand still, rehashing the past. And it's not unexpected that, at his age, he might lose a step or two occasionally in the imagination department. But while his playing still has pep and a funky edge, it lacks the rhythmic intensity found on his great recordings. That hard-charging force seems to have been replaced by some cutesy interpolations—Dexter Gordon could get away with them; Silver doesn't make them work.

The tunes he writes now are catchy in their sameness, but a long way from the memorable works that made him famous ("The Preacher," "Opus De Funk," "Song For My Father"). And those old quirky titles ("Filthy McNasty," "Juicy Lucy," "Calcutta Cutie") have turned into "I Love Annie's Fanny," a nice sentiment but a bit problematic and perhaps ill-advised in this era of political correctness.

His front-line horns, Ryan Kisor and Jimmy Greene, are fine, strong, young players, although not in the same league as trumpeters Art Farmer, Donald Byrd, Blue Mitchell or Woody Shaw and tenor saxophonists Joe

by frank-john hadley

soul preacher MEN & WOMAN

In the street language of black Americans during the '60s and '70s "soul" meant a special spirit, feeling and quality of funkiness. Musically it identified the sophisticated church-derived strain of pop music that came to fruition in the recording studios of Atlantic, Curtom, Motown and Stax.

Curtis Mayfield: *Roots* (Rhino 75569; 53:23) ★★★½ A well regarded writer and singer with the Impressions, Mayfield wanted this second album of his solo career, in 1971, to address what he said in the liner notes was "the way we as all people deal with our lives." The seven songs are seductive, but also have delightful edges to them, with his distinctive falsetto telling of the need for African-American solidarity, global peace, love and sexual healing. The melodic arc and pulse of "Underground" presage "Superfly," and his honeyed, deeply expressive voice contrasts fascinatingly with the dark rhythmic undertow of the blues "Now You're Gone."

King Curtis: *Plays The Great Memphis Hits & King Size Soul* (Koch 8015; 61:04) ★★★½ The premier r&b sax player of the time struts his stuff on two Atco studio albums from 1967, combined here on a single disc. Possessing an innate ability to make his horn sing the emotional core of a lyric, Curtis personalizes *Great Memphis Hits* associated with Otis Redding, Eddie Floyd, William Bell and other exemplars of the Stax sound. The members of the Memphis/Muscle Shoals rhythm and horn sections (dubbed the Kingpins) handle their parts with forceful yet unobtrusive personality. *King Size Soul* finds Curtis and company casting a similar spell on tunes recently placed on the pop singles chart by Stevie Wonder ("I Was Made To Love Her"), Bobbie Gentry ("Ode To Billy Joe") and other stars.

Solomon Burke: *King Solomon & I Wish I Knew* (Koch 8016; 67:05) ★★★½ With his expansive range and remarkable self-control, Burke sang each of the songs on these two 1968 Atlantic albums as though his storytelling offered wisdom absolutely crucial to the listener's life. His Sunday morning renderings of, in particular, the slightly sad-hearted country song "Time Is A Thief" and fellow sermonizer Joe Tex's "Meet Me In Church" are riveting for how invitingly the flow of his singing matches with the movement of the music. Backed by first-call Atlantic Records or Muscle Shoals musicians, Burke even sings his heart out on "By The Time I Get To Phoenix," a hit for Glen Campbell.


dusty springfield: sure and sensitive

PAUL HOWES

Dusty Springfield: *Dusty In Memphis* (Rhino 75580; 76:00) ★★★★ *Dusty In Memphis* co-producer Arif Mardin nailed it when he described this genuine pop-soul masterwork from 1969 as "a meeting of great pop songs and soul with funky arrangements." Employing a voice sensitive to gradations of feeling and sure in phrasing, Springfield got to the heart of 11 songs, most coming from the best pop songwriting teams of the day, including Goffin & King ("So Much Love") and Bacharach & David ("In The Land Of Make Believe"). The tunes actually fit together as an album-long appraisal of unrequited love. The London-born singer is perhaps at her most commanding on the international smash "Son Of A Preacher Man," which has priceless guitar licks from Reggie Young. More is less: 14 bonus songs, the majority comprising an Atlantic album never released before, pale next to the *Memphis* material. **DB**

Henderson, Hank Mobley, Clifford Jordan or Junior Cook. Though they have yet to fully find their own voices, they can play. The thing that's sad to say is that they quite consistently outshine their leader here. —*Will Smith*

Jazz Has a Sense of Humor: Satisfaction Guaranteed; The Mama Suite (Part I: Not Enough Mama; Part II: Too Much Mama, Part III: Just Right Mama); Philley Millie; Ah-Ma-Tell; I Love Annie's Fanny, Gloria; Where Do I Go From Here? (47:36)
Personnel: Horace Silver, piano; Ryan Kisor, trumpet; Jimmy Greene, tenor and soprano saxophones; John Webber, bass; Willie Jones III, drums.

Ali Farka Toure
Niafunke
Hannibal 1443
★★★★½

Salif Keita
Papa
Metro Blue 99070
★★★★

Ancient and modern mores are key elements in the wave of terrific Malian musicians who have been captivating the world for the past decade. Mali's pop stars and folk purists both draw on oral traditions as well as a collective memory of centuries-old stringed instruments and musical forms. After the nation became independent in the '60s, state-sponsored orchestras provided the training that big bands used to offer in the United States. Two of the most famous Malian musicians, Ali Farka Toure and Salif Keita, have recently released discs that reinforce their deserved reputations.

Toure has often been compared to such blues guitarists as John Lee Hooker for his mind-boggling finger dexterity, haunting voice and emotional depth. All of these analogies are legit, but throughout *Niafunke* his scope is fixed much closer to the Niger River than the Mississippi. He took five years off from recording to concentrate on his musical roots, and set up a mobile studio deep in the country's interior for this session. The results are fantastic. His tense and shifting guitar lines while the percussionists deliver a steady march on "Tulumba" are surprising even after multiple listenings. Toure's technique on both electric and acoustic guitar is startling and so is his skill on njarka violin. "Pieter Botha," the final track, proves that spontaneous solo composition is not the exclu-

sive domain of contemporary free-jazz improvisers. Despite what may have been trying conditions, the sound quality is excellent.

While Toure has focused on secluding himself to plunge into the source of Malian music, vocalist Salif Keita continues to embrace ideas from the Western Hemisphere's pop idioms. Even though some obstinate fans and musicians have raised the issue of supposed commercialism, that charge is absurd. On *Papa*, Keita fully blends the inflections of American soul singers with the flow of classical Malian Maninka vocal training. He also creates a fine balance among sessions in Bamako that feature such traditionalists as kora master Toumani Diabate and percussionist Mohamed Kouyate with funkier New York recordings that include organist John Medeski and guitarist Vernon Reid. His lyrics often confront death and yearning, but his voice conveys genuine transcendence. *—Aaron Cohen*

Niafunke: Ali's Here; Allah Uya; Mali Dje; Saukare; Hilly Yoro; Tulumba; Instrumental; ASCO; Jangali Famata; Howkouna; Cousins; Pieter Botha. (52:32)
Personnel: Ali Farka Toure, vocals, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, njarka violin (9), percussion (4); Affel Bocoum, acoustic guitar, vocals (5,9); Souleye Kane, djembe (1-3, 5, 6, 9, 10); Hammer Sankare, calabash, vocals (1,2,5,6,8-10); Omar Toure, congas, vocals (5,8,9,11); Guidado Diallo, njarka violin (2,4,10); Yoro Cisse, njurkle traditional guitar (2, 10); Djeneba Doukore, vocals; Fatoumata Traore, vocals (2,3,4, 10); Hamidou Sare, vocals.

Papa: Bolon; Mama; Ananamin (It's Been So Long); Sada; Tolon Wilile (The Party Is On); Tomorrow (Sadio); Abede; Papa; Together (Gnokon Fe). (51:27)
Personnel: Salif Keita, vocals, guitar; Toumani Diabate, kora; Souleymane Doumbia, percussion; Mohamed Kouyate, talking drum; Adama Coulibaly, m'simby; Keletigui Diabate, balafon; Ousmane Kouyate, guitar; Eric Bono, programmer; John Medeski, organ; Henry Schroy, bass; Curtis Watts, drums; Ben Perowski, drums; Monica Wilson, cello; Natalie Jackson, vocals; Grace Jones, vocals; Vernon Reid, guitar; Jean-Philippe Rykiel, keyboards; Sydney Thiam, percussion.

Various Artists
Chicago/The Blues/Today!
Vanguard 172
★★★★★

Sam Charters, writer and former a&r director at Prestige, was transfixed by all the exciting blues he was hearing in taverns on the South Side of Chicago in 1965 and decided to do something about it. He coaxed many of the finest players in town to record for what would turn out to be a series of three LPs released the following year. Embraced by young white record-buyers, the records instigated a blues boom and stand the test of time as genuine classics. With Vanguard finally reissuing the *Chicago/The Blues/Today!* albums together in a handsome triple-disc package (complete with Charter's original liner notes and new ones by him and writer Ed Ward) there's cause for celebration. The music glows as brightly as it did when first released.

First up on Disc One is Junior Wells and his outfit with Buddy Guy. Eloquent in subtleties of phrasing and syncopation, the 30-year-old harmonica prodigy and singer plays Sonny Boy Williamson's "Help Me" in heartfelt homage to his mentor while Guy's stealthy, understated rhythm guitar also reaches the very heart of the tune. Three more tunes by Wells and company are just as compelling. Next, J. B. Hutto's ravished singing and controlled yet declaratory slide guitar make "Married Woman Blues" and four more sound as though his life were on the line. The masterful blues 'n' boogie pianist Otis Spann then takes over for five enjoyable numbers, all the help he needs supplied by expert drummer S. P. Leary.

Disc Two keeps the winning streak going. In a voice that's both desolate and resilient, young Jimmy Cotton sings about hard luck on the slow, methodical "West Helena Blues" and four others; on harmonica, he releases inner ache while guitarist James Madison, Spann and

by jay weiser


RON HOWARD

SATCHMO'S word

"When I start to writing, especially, to someone whom I really 'want to write to, huh,' girl, I can write until times get better ..." Everyone knows Louis Armstrong the trumpeter and singer, but most have forgotten Armstrong the writer. In *Louis Armstrong, In His Own Words: Selected Writings By Louis Armstrong* (Oxford University Press), Duke University music professor Thomas Brothers has collected and incisively commented on many of Armstrong's most important writings.

Undeterred by a brutal schedule of one-nighters and a fifth-grade education, Armstrong wrote two published autobiographies, numerous unpublished autobiographical pieces, at least 35 magazine articles and thousands of letters. Armstrong never went anywhere without his typewriter, dictionary and thesaurus. He was an absorbing but difficult writer, creating his own system of punctuation, capitalization and grammar in order to reproduce the African-American cadences of his voice.

Like his autobiography, *Satchmo*, this book often looks back to early 20th century New Orleans. But *In His Own Words* is also an important memoir of the 1920s and early 1930s jazz scene in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, and of the post-World War I Great Migration that brought hundreds of thousands of African-Americans north. It was a world of big supper clubs, big bands and gangsters fighting over his contract. At one performance, "One of the 'Gangsters took a chair and 'hit a 'woman over the 'head with it, And the 'Chair "Crumbled up all in a lot of little 'pieces. Some of the 'pieces 'hit my 'horn. But 'even 'that could not make me 'leave the 'Bandstand, you 'know? The 'Captain must go 'down with the 'Ship.""

Armstrong's view of the world is comic, unsentimental and all-seeing. Often politically incorrect by today's standards, he discusses race relations, praises marijuana and compares African-Americans with Jews. He justifies his numerous extramarital affairs with advice from Black Benny from New Orleans: "Always remember, no matter how many times you get Married. 'Always have another woman for a Sweetheart on the outside."

Unfortunately, the book provides little insight into Armstrong's music. The Hot Fives and Hot Sevens changed the course of jazz history in the 1920s, but instead of analyzing the performances, he discusses the making of the records, such as how "Struttin' With Some Barbecue" was conceived in a barbecue place at 48th and State streets in Chicago.

Louis Armstrong, In His Own Words is essential reading on the life of this legendary figure and the early jazz scene. But readers seeking musical insights should look elsewhere. **DB**

by ted panken

DUKE'S COLUMBIA gems

ellington: rollicking in rhythm

DOWN BEAT ARCHIVES

Between 1956 and 1962, Duke Ellington recorded 20 LPs for Columbia. These five reissues (plus one compilation) offer fresh perspectives on that work to even the most comprehensive Ellingtonians.

Ellington At Newport, 1956 (Complete) **(C2K-64932; 68:55/60:10)** ★★★★★ Ellington's rollicking best-seller heretofore comprised a studio recreation of "Newport Jazz Festival Suite" (in which the whole band has their say) with live performances of "Diminuendo And Crescendo In Blue" (with Paul Gonsalves' legendary 27-chorus solo) and Johnny Hodges' magisterial "Jeep's Blues." Producer Phil Schaap gives us, in meticulously crafted stereo, the summer 1956 concert in real-time, followed by the post-concert studio production numbers. Two previously unreleased discoveries are a fiery, if ragged concert performance of "Festival" and an alternate studio "Jeep's Blues" that stands with Hodges' greatest work.

Such Sweet Thunder **(CK-65568; 76:55)** ★★★★★ This suite of 12 magnificently orchestrated Ellington–Strayhorn miniature "tone-parallels" to pivotal characters and dramatic situations in the plays of Shakespeare has elicited numerous comparisons of Ellington to his subject. Schaap's production is a sonic marvel, restoring the tapes to stereo as initially intended, extracting every dynamic tint of color on the Ellingtonal canvas. The 35 minutes of alternate takes and unrelated contemporaneous material will please collectors, but make the full document a tad disjunct.

Anatomy Of A Murder **(CK-65569; 76:08)** ★★★★ Though in his excellent liner notes Wynton Marsalis writes, "This album is the most mature sound of the band," it's an open question whether Ellington's response to the 1959 Otto Preminger masterpiece is his apotheosis. Yes, he wrote a soundtrack of keen character portrayals, miniatures of clear-sighted empathy that utilize the full palette of Ellingtonal texture. But there's a slightly offputting fragmentary feel to the core of the original album that makes this seem a connoisseurs' document—less interesting to the unobsessed than the companion releases. The 41 minutes of bonus tracks include fascinating moments—a 10-minute radio interview, numerous variants of the core themes—but lots of detritus.

First Time! The Count Meets The Duke **(CK-65571; 73:50)** ★★★★★ With the "atomic" Count Basie Orchestra at his disposal, expanding his sound palette to 30 pieces, Ellington has a field day; recorded in one afternoon-into-morning session with no rehearsal, it's a reciprocal homage on which all members swing in sync. Hear Lawrence Brown quote Dickie Wells on "Battle Royal," Frank Foster and Paul Gonsalves duelling tenors over 14 brass on "Jumpin' At The Woodside," Butter Jackson plungering over a luscious five-trombone cushion on Thad Jones' "To You," emphatic trumpet dialogues between Sonny Cohn and Ray Nance on "A-Train" and Thad Jones and Cat Anderson on "Wild Man Moore," Basie and Ellington's signifying duets on "BDB" and "Segue In C." Great alternate takes augment an aural feast.

Black, Brown & Beige **(with Mahalia Jackson) (CK-65566; 73:23)** ★★★★★ That Ellington embraced a panoramic template of secular and sacred concerns was never more evident than on the landmark extended form composition "Black, Brown & Beige." This 1958 version is stripped to essentials—variations on "Work Song" and "Come Sunday." Mahalia Jackson channels the spirit in Ellington's lyric to the latter, and on an album-concluding orchestrated reading of the 23rd Psalm that conveys awe and abiding faith. The bonus tracks include a full alternate performance of the suite and a heart-stopping a cappella Jackson reading of "Come Sunday."

The Duke: Duke Ellington And His Orchestra—The Columbia Years **(C3K-65841; 74:21/75:13/75:23)** ★★★★★ A "best-of" compilation of salient Ellingtonia spanning 1927 to 1962, culled from the massive Columbia holdings by French pianist-producer Henri Renaud. On the first two discs, Renaud paces the program in terms of tempos and dynamics, avoiding the obvious wherever possible. The sound is excellent on Disc One, on which Renaud addresses the impossible task of selecting a representative 25 gems from Ellington's fertile 1927–1940 Brunswick period, emphasizing instrumental full band numbers; there's only one Ivie Anderson vehicle and a single combo feature. Disc Two (1947–'52), bridging the 78 and LP eras, surveys Ellington's fascinating transitional years during the rise of bebop and the decline of big bands; the great bassist Oscar Pettiford brings Blantonian thrust to the 1947 selections. Disc Three (1956–'62) is less satisfactory; one CD can barely skim the surface of Ellington's massive (20 LPs) output in this period; there's too much Ellington revivalism and not enough new flowers from the kaleidoscopic garden he planted in his early autumn. Which is curmudgeonly nitpicking; it's big fun, every bit of it. **DB**

Leary match his emotional honesty every step of the way. As singer and guitarist, Otis Rush shows remarkable command of inflection, detailing a world of desire and loss on "It's A Mean Old World" and "I Can't Quit You Baby." Veteran Homesick James' voice has an edge of desperation to it and his slide work is in the letter and spirit of his cousin and former employer Elmore James: He and his Dusters do a convincing version of James' "Dust My Broom" and three more. Leading off Disc Three, Johnny Young adds just the right emotional color to the words he sings and the notes he plays on mandolin and guitar. His cohorts include harp player Walter Horton, whose feature number later on, "Rockin' My Boogie," is the one jumbled performance on the entire set despite some good harmonica fills from young white acolyte Charlie Musselwhite. Last but not least, Johnny Shines, whose singing is laced with bitter irony, joins fellow Delta expatriate Horton and a rhythm section in churning up believable drama with "Black Spider Blues" and five others.

In sum, *Chicago/The Blues/Today!* remains essential listening for anyone the least bit interested in Chicago blues. Or timeless music in general. —*Frank-John Hadley*

Chicago/The Blues/Today!: The Junior Wells Chicago Blues Band: Help Me; It Hurts Me Too; Messin' With The Kid; Vietcong Blues; All Night Long; J. B. Hutto And His Hawks: Going Ahead; Please Help; Too Much Alcohol; Married Woman Blues; That's The Truth; Otis Spann's South Side Piano: Marie; Burning Fire; S. P. Blues; Sometimes I Wonder; Spann's Stomp; The Jimmy Cotton Blues Quartet: Cotton Crop Blues; The Blues Keep Falling; Love Me Or Leave; Rocket 88; West Helena Blues; The Otis Rush Blues Band: Everything's Going To Turn Out Alright; It's A Mean Old World; I Can't Quit You Baby; Rock; It's My Own Fault; Homesick James And His Dusters: Dust My Broom; Somebody Been Talkin'; Set A Date; So Mean To Me; Johnny Young's South Side Blues Band: One More Time; Kid Man Blues; My Black Mare; Stealin' Back; I Got Mine In Time; Tighten Up On It; The Johnny Shines Blues Band: Dynaflow Blues; Black Spider Blues; Layin' Down My Shoes And Clothes; If I Get Lucky; Mr. Boweevil; Hey, Hey; Big Walter Horton's Blues Harp Band with Memphis Charlie: Rockin' My Boogie.

Personnel: ***Disc One:*** The Junior Wells Band (1-5): Junior Wells, harmonica, vocals; Buddy Guy, guitar; Jack Myers, bass; Fred Below, drums; J.B. Hutto and His Hawks (6-10): J.B. Hutto, guitar, vocals; Herman Hassell, bass; Frank Kirkland, drums; Otis Spann's South Side Piano (11-15): Otis Spann, piano; S. P. Leary, drums.

Disc Two: The Jimmy Cotton Blues Quartet (1-5): Jimmy Cotton, harmonica, vocals; James Madison, guitar; Otis Spann, piano; S. P. Leary, drums; The Otis Rush Blues Band (6-10): Otis Rush, guitar, vocals; Robert "Sax" Crowder, alto saxophone; Luther Tucker, rhythm guitar; Roger Jones, bass; Willie Lion, drums; Homesick James and His Dusters (11-14): Homesick James Williamson, guitar, vocals; Willie Dixon, bass; Frank Kirkland, drums.

Disc Three: Johnny Young's South Side Blues Band (1-6): Johnny Young, guitar, mandolin, vocals; Walter Horton, harmonica; Hayes Ware, bass; Elga Edmonds, drums; The Johnny Shines Blues Band (7-10, 12-13): Johnny Shines, guitar, vocals; Walter Horton, harmonica; Floyd Jones, bass; Frank Kirkland, drums; Big Walter Horton's Blues Harp Band with Memphis Charlie (11): Walter Horton, lead harmonica; "Memphis Charlie" Musselwhite, second harmonica; Johnny Shines, guitar; Floyd Jones, bass; Frank Kirkland, drums.

Donald Brown

Enchanté!

Space Time Records BG 9910

★★★★

Pete Yellin

Mellow Soul

Metropolitan Records 1111

★★★★

These albums by should-be-better-known vets-educators document the vitality of the contemporary acoustic jazz scene in Manhattan and beyond as well-in terms of both playing and writing. The money made may not be big, but aesthetic values remain high.

Donald Brown, a member of the Jazz

Messengers from 1981–'83, is a man with several albums under his belt. A mainstay of the jazz program at the University of Tennessee, he mainly employs a sextet on *Enchanté!*, stretching to an octet at one point.

Brown writes music so you want to listen to it. "Don't Explain" is rendered by alluring combinations of flute, bass, piano, vibes and trumpet; the Frenchman Stéphane Belmondo plays the latter with decided verve, mixing bristling tones with those that are less jarring. For the theme of the pretty Brown bossa, "Strangers In Paradise," vibist Steve Nelson is surrounded by flute, trumpet and piano; improvising, the vibist issues fleet notes that tumble forth, as well as those that seem rooted in place. An ornate intro, dominated by Bill Easley's clarinet, ushers in Billy Strayhorn's "Day Dream"; Easley's solo is replete with ripe notes. Later, Brown swaggers over Billy Higgins' ever-percolating beat.

"A Dance For Marie-Do" is an uplifting calypso, where guitar, flute, vibes and piano are blended intoxicatingly. Bobby Troup's poignant "You're Looking At Me" is a vehicle for the leader's Duke-meets-Bud, technically astute, singing piano. Also aces are Duke Pearson's "Big Bertha," given a kick-butt, little big band treatment, and the deftly essayed Thad Jones waltz, "Quiet Lady."

Pete Yellin, who's done stints with Joe Henderson and Buddy Rich and worked in the Broadway pits, is head of jazz studies at Long Island University. The altoist's recent albums have been strong; *Mellow Soul* keeps the momentum going.

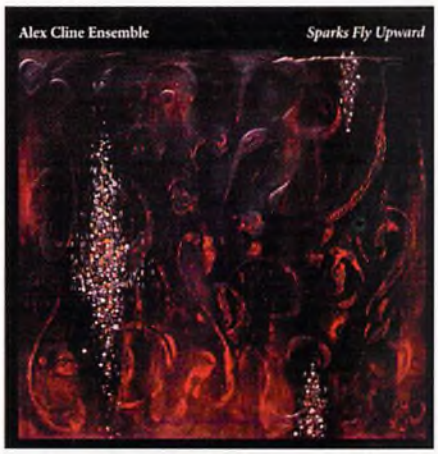
The music, including five Yellin opuses, has a '60s–'90s flavor and favors melody over innovation, though this isn't museum stuff by any means. Yellin's medium-slow, atmospheric "Shaw Thing," with its undulating feel, is one of many winners here. Yellin scores with provocative, jagged-then-smooth soprano passages. Trumpeter Eddie Henderson's ideas are tender, then animated. Chick Corea, making a very rare rhythm section appearance, employs dancing-then-shimmering chords, powerfully attacked statements and space.

The title track, with hints of "Naima," "Star Eyes" and "Green Dolphin Street," both sways and struts. Yellin has a distinctive parched tone; he plays with contemporaneity and warmth. Next, Corea lays out mellifluous, modern right hand exuberances, interspersed with booming left-hand chords; then bassist Harvie Swartz initiates a fat-toned effort.

"Folklore," Vincent Herring's "I Got Rhythm" variation, is a mock alto battle between Yellin and the composer; drummer Carl Allen heartily gets into the fray. The dulcetly rendered "Warm Valley" (with vibrant Peter Leitch guitar), the vigorous "LIU House Blues," the thick-themed "You're My Everything" and the snappy shuffle, "Dr. J," are also memorable. —*Zan Stewart*

Enchanté!: Strangers In Paradise; Diane; Day Dream; Quiet Lady; A Dance for Marie-Do; You're Looking At Me; Big Bertha; Don't Explain; Like Someone In Love; Enchanté!. (74:43)
Personnel: Donald Brown, piano, arranger; Stéphane Belmondo, trumpet, flugelhorn; Bill Easley, alto saxophone, clarinet, flute; Steve Nelson, vibes; Essiet Essiet, bass; Billy Higgins, drums; Mark Boling, guitar (1,5,8); Daniel Sadownick, percussion (1,3,5).

Mellow Soul: Mellow Soul; LIU House Blues; You're My Everything; Shaw Thing; Folklore; Warm Valley; Song For Lynn; The Touch Of Your Lips; Dr. J. (63:49)
Personnel: Pete Yellin, alto, soprano saxophones; Vincent Herring, saxophones; Eddie Henderson, trumpet; Peter Leitch, guitar; Chick Corea, piano; Harvie Swartz, bass; Carl Allen, drums; Louis Bauzo, percussion.



Alex Cline Ensemble

Sparks Fly Upward

Cryptogramophone 102

★★★★

An unconventional percussionist, Alex Cline creates music beyond categorization. With an unusual lineup including Jeff Gauthier's violin and Aina Kemanis' voice, this ensemble establishes a moody, ethereal environment. *Sparks Fly Upward* offers haunting, spacious constructions in much the same vein as the group's 1987 debut, *The Lamp And The Star* (ECM). Cline uses silence well, subtly adding colors, or, less subtly, jarring the listener with percussive explosions. Rather than settle into drum patterns, he frequently uses the cymbals for shimmering or grating textures. On the other hand, for "Audacity," a tribute to Tony Williams, Cline summons up the fury and firepower of the Tony Williams Lifetime. Guitarist G. E. Stinson contributes a snaky, roaring solo quite unlike his work with Shadowfax.

Apart from that anomalous, but exciting track, the listener more often hears Gauthier's violin intertwined with Kemanis' soaring vocals, shaded by guitar or keyboard textures. Kemanis' voice is used effectively with or without text. It's puzzling that she's recorded so infrequently in the years since her debut with Barre Phillips. Credit producer Peter Erskine for the crystalline sound and beautifully recorded drums. The sonic ambience suggests a cathedral, in keeping with the spiritual intimations and elegiac nature of the compositions. The long title track, dedicated to the memory of Andrei Tarkovsky, joins wrenching, turbulent passages for violin and percussion with passages of serenity and stillness, reminiscent of Arvo Pärt's "Tabula Rasa" with its themes of death and transfiguration. "Sonnet 9" brings a sense of closure and resolution to Cline's darkly contemplative music. —*Jon Andrews*

Sparks Fly Upward: Rose Window; Pieces Of A Mirror; Sparks Fly Upward; Arroyo Taiko; Audacity; Sonnet 9. (73:24)
Personnel: Alex Cline, percussion, kantele; Aina Kemanis, voice; Jeff Gauthier, violins; Wayne Peet, keyboards; G. E. Stinson, electric guitars; Michael Elizondo, bass.

Myra Melford
Above Blue
Arabesque Jazz 142

★★★★

Consider *Above Blue* a catalog of Myra Melford's inspirations. One can hear in the pianist's colorful compositions jazz influences such as Ornette Coleman, Henry Threadgill and Don Pullen, but her themes are also informed by "non-jazz" sources such as klezmer, tango and chamber music. Her quintet, The Same River, Twice, unpacks these themes and develops them through improvisation, often in smaller units. The versatility of the players, particularly Chris Speed (doubling on tenor and clarinet) and cellist Erik Friedlander, allows for intriguing voicings and combinations. True to Melford's ideal of constant flow, the setting can change quickly in the course of a single track.

With its infectious riff and swaggering rhythm, "Yet Can Spring" (dedicated to Pullen) is likely the group's showstopper. Speed's searching tenor solo evokes George Adams, while Melford's thoughtful, complex turn suggests Pullen's mannerisms and signature glisses. "A White Flower Grows In The Quietness" evolves from bustling rhythms reminiscent of Threadgill's circus music to airy chamber interludes featuring Melford's bright, elegant piano lines and Speed's clarinet. The title track offers a winding melody recalling klezmer, with spirited solos by Friedlander and trumpeter Dave Douglas. Douglas' work is consistently strong on this CD, particularly in his exchanges with Friedlander and Speed and on the introspective "Here Is Only Moment."

Above Blue argues that Melford has entered her prime as both a pianist and a composer. In this busy year, she's concurrently led (or co-led) three bands. It would be good to hear the others on record, especially Equal Interest, her trio with Leroy Jenkins and Joseph Jarman.

—Jon Andrews

Above Blue: Two But Live; A White Flower Grows In The Quietness; Yet Can Spring; Here Is Only Moment; Above Blue; Be Melting Snow; Through Storm's Embrace; Still In After's Shadow. (66:12)
Personnel: Myra Melford, piano; Dave Douglas, trumpet; Chris Speed, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Erik Friedlander, cello; Michael Sarin, drums.

Andy Milne's Cosmic Dapp Theory
New Age Of Aquarius
Contrology 03

★★★½

It has been almost a decade since Andy Milne left Montreal for New York and a short-term gig with Cassandra Wilson. A long-term gig with Steve Coleman's Five Elements later, Milne is finally emerging with his own music, heavily influenced by his tenure as

M-Base house pianist but reflecting his own cross-border view of America.

A lithe, muscular player, Milne has recruited a powerful, supportive rhythm section with rock-steady drummer Mark Prince and meaty bassist Rich Brown, and an exceptionally musical rapper in Kokayi.

In addition to a melodic sensibility strongly informed by Herbie Hancock, Milne's musical trademark is a malleable rhythmic base, which upshifts or downshifts in mid-song, or changes direction entirely. "The Millennium Bomb" features one of these dramatic course corrections, with the tempo notching up to lay the groundwork for a fluid, hyperkinetic guitar solo by co-producer Sean Rickman, another Coleman alumnus. On "Bermuda Triangle" the tempo never settles down at all, stretching like taffy to create the sound of a world falling apart behind Milne's rippling piano solo.

Kokayi's raps fit well into Milne's squirmy approach because he never seems handcuffed to one rhythmic delivery pattern. Addressing the plight of street kids on "It Takes A Village" and contemporary culture as represented by Howard Stern and Jerry Springer, his lyrics are as hard-hitting as any rapper's, yet his voice is more flexible than most in the field. But, while his swipes at the state of the union hit a universal note, two views of the recording industry—the second half of a live performance of Joni Mitchell's "Free Man In Paris" and the edgy "Gettin' Paid"—seem cloaked in personal frustration.

Overall, the landscape Milne and his bandmates create is as unsettled as the end of the century itself, although as the sprightly melody and stuttering groove of "Why 2 K?" reminds us, what's the point of sweating it when we can dance? *—James Hale*

New Age Of Aquarius: It Takes A Village; Bermuda Triangle; Free Man In Paris; Strictly Stern; The Phoenix Cycle; Generations; Gettin' Paid; Why 2 K?; Jerry's Kids; The Millennium Bomb; End Rap. (54:08)
Personnel: Andy Milne, piano and keyboards; Kokayi, Vinia Mojica (3), vocals; Mark Prince, drums; Gregoire Maret, harmonica (2, 5, 6); Rich Brown (1,2, 4-11), Patrice Blanchard (3), bass; Sean Rickman, guitar (10).

Gregg Field
The Art Of Swing
DCC Compact Classics
Lauren Records DZS172

★★½

For an album dedicated to Count Basie and made up entirely of Sammy Nestico arrangements, most of which were performed by Basie, this is a surprisingly timid affair, considering especially the crack lineup of top Los Angeles players, including Snooky Young, Pete Christlieb and others. One suspects that the personnel is collective, since six trumpets and eight saxes make for large sections and Young solos on only "The Blues Machine."

In any case, we are left wanting more than the fine craftsmanship and letter perfect studio sound that one would take for granted anyway. The tempos are lackadaisical, save for the final track, "The Heat's On." And Nestico's trademarked blends—muted trombone against the reeds ("Wonderful World"), flute and muted trumpets ("88 Basie Street"), and so on—are transparently familiar by now to anyone who's ever played in a university band. His most engaging work as arranger/composer is the extended reed soli on "The Blues Machine," which gets a rousing reading here.

But much of the rest of the material is bland and soulless. What is there to "Small Talk" that would warrant it's inclusion here? Got me. And "Who's Sorry Now," which I don't think Basie ever recorded, is so oddly indirect in its approach to the melody, they could easily have called it by another name and saved the royalty payments.

The yeast in the musical dough is generally Christlieb, who is always worth hearing. And Pete Jolly fills out some of the cuts with good straight-on piano solos. Beyond that and despite the reputations of the crafters, there seems less here to meet the ear than meets the eye.

—John McDonough

The Art of Swing: The Blues Machine; Small Talk; Fascinating Rhythm; It's A Wonderful World; Satin Doll; Who's Sorry Now; Samantha; 88 Basie Street; Smack Dab In The Middle; Pleasin'; The Heat's On! (55:48)
Personnel: Gregg Field, drums; Snooky Young, Wayne Bergeron, Ron Stout, Derrell Gardner, Kevin Richardson; Gary Holopoff, trumpets; Andy Martin, Alex Iles, Bruce Otto, Bob Smith, Charlie Morillas, trombones; Sal Lozano, Pete Christlieb, Jay Migliori, Kim Richmond, Tom McClure, Ernie Delfante, Alan Waldow, Bill Baker, saxophones; Pete Jolly, piano; Chuck Berghofer, bass.

James Hurt

Dark Grooves•Mystical Rhythms

Blue Note 95104

★★½

A young pianist from Memphis who has been turning up as a sideman on an increasing number of recordings by players blending jazz and hip-hop elements, James Hurt shows on this debut album that perhaps he wasn't quite ready for leadership.

The title is largely on the mark. The grooves are mostly dark all right but the so-called mystical rhythms are a bit too repetitive. As a result, the grooves rapidly wear thin. It all seems aimed at putting listeners in a trance—like new age hip-hop (or Windham Hill gets soulful).

Bassist Francois Moutin and drummer Ari Hoenig, both very good and the rhythm guys on the majority of the tracks, set up their grooves—be they funky, Latin or whatever—and Hurt sails over the churning backgrounds. While it works at times, too often it's like soulful noodling and the background becomes more interesting than Hurt's mining of the groove.

The problem is that Hurt's style is a pastiche of stylistic references to McCoy Tyner, the late Phineas Newborn (also from Memphis), Herbie Hancock and some early Cecil Taylor. On top of that he adds trills, percussive Latin clave figures and other repeated phrasing. Often it seems like he finds a phrase, almost by accident, then stays with it until it runs out of steam and goes on to another. So the music surges along in a disjointed fashion.

Hurt has been on the New York scene since 1994. It's clear that he can spin out some attractive lines, but they don't hold up over the course of his tunes here. What he does may work when he is backing horn players in his sideman duties, but it's an entirely different thing in the glare of leadership reality.

Other than Hurt, the player most often in the solo spotlight is tenor saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart, a musician with some chops and stylistic connections to John Coltrane and, to a smaller degree, Sonny Rollins. Elizabeth Kantumanou is featured in some wordless singing (a la Flora Purim) on "Waterfall," tenor saxophonist Greg Tardy gets a little space on "Venus" and Antonio Hart plays soprano sax with a Mideastern feel on "Pyramids."

—Will Smith

Dark Grooves•Mystical Rhythms: Neptune; The Tree Of Life; Waterfall; Mars; Jupiter; Eleven Dreams; Venus; Dark Nines; Faith; Pyramids; Orion's View; Sun Day. (58.26)
Personnel: James Hurt, piano, percussion; Russell Gunn, trumpet (7); Robin Eubanks, trombone (7); Antonio Hart, alto (3) and soprano (10) saxophones; Abraham Burton (3), Sherman Irby (7), alto saxophones; Jacques Schwarz-Bart (2-5, 8, 12), Greg Tardy (7), tenor saxophones; Francois Moutin, Eric Revis (3, 7, 10), bass; Ari Hoenig, Eric McPherson (3), Dana Murray (7), Nasheet Waits (10), drums; Elizabeth Kantumanou, vocals (3).

chick corea's electric piano solo on '500 miles high'

Chick Corea's electric piano solo on "500 Miles High" is a natural outgrowth of his melodic vocabulary. Recently reissued on Return To Forever's *Light As A Feather* (Verve), Corea's solo is framed in the group's fresh approach to Latin grooves and filled with the language of a modern approach to improvised lines, reinforcing the pianist's melodic inventiveness as a composer and improviser.

Corea makes extensive use of pentatonic scales. He combines two scales closely related to the Gm7 harmony in the opening statement by playing a C pentatonic fragment in bars 2 and 3 followed by an F pentatonic in measures 3 and 4. Note the A♭ pentatonic line in bar 8. Corea builds the scale on the third of the E7 altered chord, the leading tone of the Am7 chord that follows. Other examples of pentatonic scales occur in measures 5–6, 9–10, 19–22, 38 and 42.

Corea uses chromaticism to build tension in bars 25 and 26, where whole-step relationships ascend chromatically and ornamented approach tones and passing tones are used extensively. Note the passing tones on beat three of measure 23 and the approach tones in bars 31 and 32. Measures 40 and 41 also contain similar figures.

Corea balances the chromaticism and pentatonic lines with clearly arpeggiated chord outlines (bars 7, 14, 23, 24, 42, 45 and 50) as well as with obvious chord/scale combinations. The line in bars 35–36 is based on the dominant diminished scale. The descending sequence in measure 58 is based on the G dorian scale.

Corea's trademark rhythmic sophistication is evident throughout the solo, particularly in bars 46-49, where repeated notes sound like single-stroke drum rolls. In measures 51–54 and 59–60, the dotted eighth-note value created by accents and ties sets up a polyrhythm against the quarter-note pulse. Although the complex density of notes in bars 25–26 and 46–49 requires some notational approximation, Corea's rhythmic precision and the way his lines hook up with Airto Moreira's ride cymbal are remarkable.

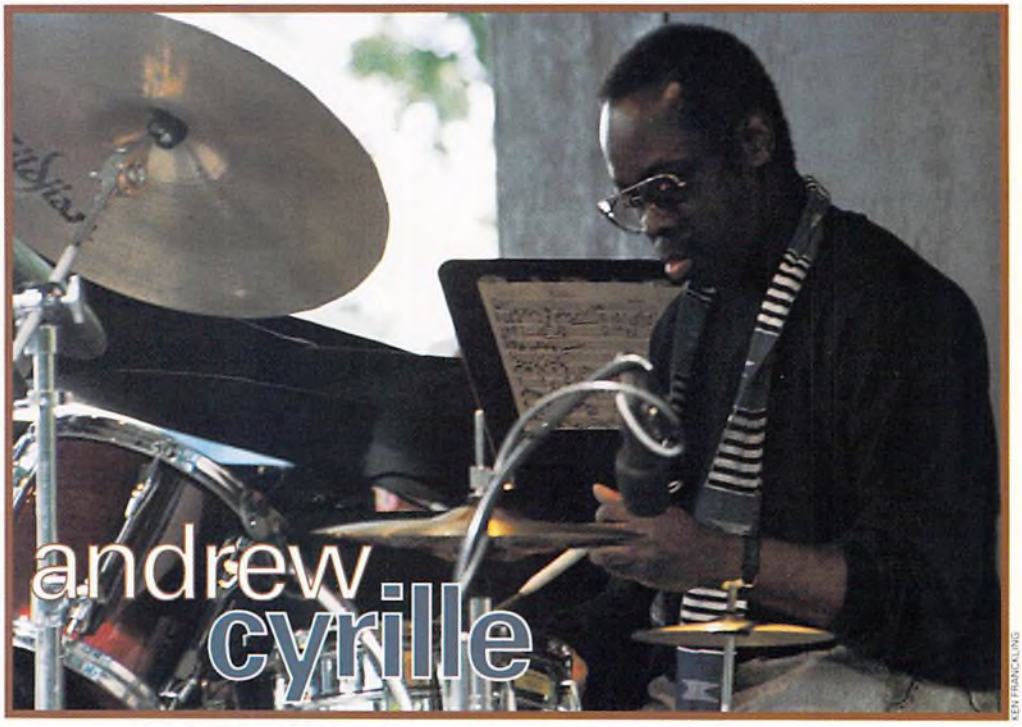
Corea's solo represents an imaginative, balanced and compositional use of post-bebop vocabulary. **DB**

Don Glanden is an assistant professor at University of the Arts in Philadelphia. His second CD, *Only Believe*, is available on Cadence Jazz Records. Glanden has performed with Ernie Watts and Donald Byrd.

by don glanden

blindfold test

Whether leading his ensembles or propelling Cecil Taylor, Muhal Richard Abrams, David Murray and a host of creative music grandmasters in imaginative directions, drummer **Andrew Cyrille** unfailingly contributes his blend of analytic intelligence, consummate craft, uncanny intuition and boundless enthusiasm for free-wheeling improvisation to any situation. That's how he approached a marathon Blindfold Test, conducted at Chelsea's Euphoria Studios. This was his second Blindfold Test.



KEN FRANCKLING

Milford Graves

"Ultimate High Priest" (from *Real Deal*, DIW, 1991) Graves, drums.

[*immediately*] That's my man, Milford. The recording is very good. You can tell from the sliding tonality Milford gets from the way he tunes the drums and the way he strikes them. It's almost like a rubber sound. A lot of what he hears comes out of the sound of the tabla also. Fantastic polyrhythms, energy, creativity, clarity. Good chops. 5 stars.

Tony Williams

"Sister Cheryl" (from *Live In Tokyo*, Blue Note, 1992) Williams, drums; Mulgrew Miller, piano; Wallace Roney, trumpet; Bill Pierce, saxophone; Ira Coleman, bass.

It was a very spiritual sounding solo, very smooth—melody drums. He had good control, very good dynamic shapes—the highs and the lows, the space. Not a lot of flash and technical splash. Was it Idris Muhammad with some kind of arrangement by, say, John Hicks on piano? [*after being told*] I'm surprised, because Tony usually plays with a lot more rhythmic complexity. In this case, I think Tony wanted to reach some people in another way, not in his usual way of playing the drums. 4 stars.

Idris Muhammad–George Coleman

"Night And Day" (from *Right Now*, Cannonball, 1997) Muhammad, drums; Coleman, tenor sax.

Sounds like [Ed] Blackwell because of the high tuning of the drums, but Blackwell's rhythmic inflections are different. Blackwell played a lot of different polyrhythms, especially in the solos. This guy played polyrhythms, but not as independently coordinated or as complex as Blackwell would play them. The drummer interpreted "Night And Day" with the language of the drums, and it was very clear that the tune was right on the money. [*after being told*] Right on. 4 stars.

Max Roach–Anthony Braxton

"Spirit Possession" (from *Birth & Rebirth*, Black Saint, 1978) Roach, drums; Braxton, saxophone.

[*immediately*] Max Roach! Braxton played saxophone. You know it's Max because of the weight of his sound and the high tuning of the drums, say, in comparison to Art Blakey. In this particular piece I heard him play in several different meters; his independent coordination was always excellent. It's amazing how Max thinks of some of those original rhythms, and the clarity and weight he imparts to them. 5 stars.

Cecil Taylor–Tony Oxley

"Stylobate 2" (from *Leaf Palm Hand*, FMP, 1988) Taylor, piano; Oxley, drums.

I don't even want to say the guy's name! [*laughs*] He means so much to me, part of my life for many years. Cecil Taylor, of course, on the piano. The drummer seemed to be matching color textures with Cecil's panorama of sound colors, textures and dynamics rather than playing his own contrasting rhythm. I can't say anything was wrong with the way this drummer played; he listened very closely to Cecil, and there was a certain synthesis and unison. Sometimes unisons are good, but they aren't necessarily the most interesting listening. Could it be Tony Oxley? For the drummer, 3½ stars. **DB**

For more of the Andrew Cyrille "Blindfold Test," go to the Magazine section of Downbeatjazz.com.

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 is given to the artist prior to the test.

by ted panken