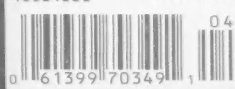


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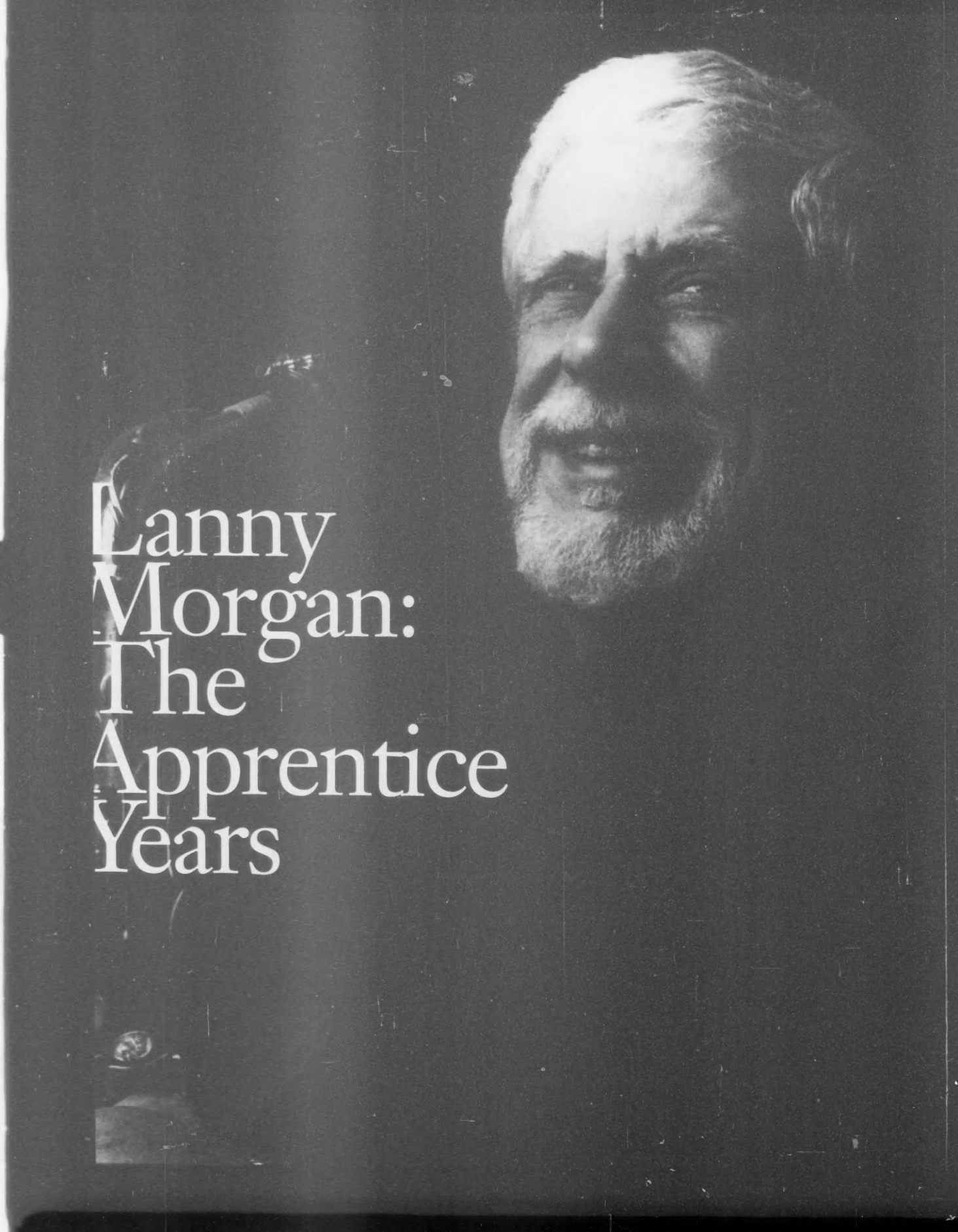
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Cover photo © 2004, Jan Persson

A black and white portrait of Lanny Morgan, an older man with a full white beard and hair, looking slightly to the right. The background is dark and textured.

Lanny
Morgan:
The
Apprentice
Years

We're sitting in a high-ceilinged room in a handsome Georgian building looking out over the Thames. It's a blissful May day and an eight is exercising on the river below us. They're pulling away strongly while a lone sculler takes his time, pottering along, enjoying the air. It's easy to forget that we're just miles away from the centre of London.

The room is awash with clothing and papers, and the other possessions of its temporary occupant, mostly spread out on the bed. The distinguished alto saxophonist Lanny Morgan is in residence and we're talking in his room at the Bull's Head pub in Barnes. The Bull has been presenting jazz on a daily basis for forty years or more and Morgan appears there regularly when he's on tour in Britain. Over the years, he has become a close friend of the pub's proprietor Dan Fleming who provides him with a base there, hence the confusion of clothes, instrument cases and tour schedules that surrounds us.

Morgan lives in Van Nuys, California, and is generally thought of as a West Coast musician. While it's true that much of his professional reputation stems from his time on the coast, Morgan is originally from Des Moines, Iowa, (born there in 1934) and cut his teeth in jazz with a number of road bands, most notably that of Maynard Ferguson (to whom we shall return in part two). Although he makes his living from a mixture of calls, from big band sessions to studio jobs and solo tours, Morgan, it seems to me, is at his happiest when blowing in a club with a compatible rhythm section. He's a stimulating soloist whose boppish inclinations have never deserted him and whose unquenchable desire to play is still manifest every time he performs.

Morgan began our conversation by lamenting the present playing situation in the Los Angeles area for someone like himself. "There are, possibly, four jazz clubs out there that are suitable for small groups and of course, they go round the cycle, and everybody takes their turn," he explained. When I was a kid, there used to be, like, seven to ten active, busy jazz clubs in Los Angeles. We had Jazz City, which is boarded up, Peacock Lane, it's a parking lot now, The Haig, which has been torn down, Tiffany's, that's no longer there, the Parisian Room (I played there with Supersax a lot), Zardi's, which is now a porno theatre, and The Lighthouse, which is still there but it's mostly a kid place. Every once in a while they'll book a jazz group.

"So what do I do? Actually, what I do is kind of a mish-mash," he laughed. "I do clinics and concerts with college bands. I come

here [to England] a couple of times a year. I'm a member of [drummer] Frank Capp's band and I do whatever work he has when I can.

"I do Bill Holman's band – I've been over here [to Europe] a couple of times with Bill's band. Once we did five countries in ten days, and then last year [2002] I came over with a Tribute to West Coast Jazz. It was Bud Shank and myself, Teddy Edwards and Bill Perkins, Mike Brignola (from Woody's band), Joe LaBarbera played drums, Pete Jolly and Chuck Berghofer. We did two concerts: one in Verona and one in Lyon (*for Lyon read Vienne*). Actually they were two of the best paying things I've ever done. I went back and told Bill Holman how much and he said, 'Jesus, how can they pay that kind of money?' Those things don't come along that often!"

Morgan's father was a bandleader. "He was Harold Morgan and I'm Harold Lansford Morgan – I'll never forgive them for either one of those names," he grimaced. "My dad had the staff band at WHO in Des Moines, Iowa, when Ronald Reagan was the sports newscaster. My mother wanted me to be either a concert violinist or a doctor. She didn't want me to do what my father did. She actually made him promise not to play his horns at home."

The family's move to California in 1944 came about almost surreptitiously, it seems. "We moved out there at the end of August, ostensibly for a visit [to Morgan's maternal grandmother] and then when September came around, and they enrolled me in school, I realized it wasn't just a visit. I was really heartbroken. As it turned out, it was a good thing.

"I came home from first grade with a violin and played that for sixteen years and then my dad started me on clarinet in Junior High School. I didn't start to play alto until I got out of High School. My dad was playing with this little band on weekends, like three horns, tenor, alto and trumpet, and the tenor player was a big bebop fan. My dad wrote out 'Ornithology' so I got a hold of that part and it was really interesting. By that time I had started listening to Gene Norman who had a thing called the 'East Side Show' every night – the first alto player I heard was Art Pepper. Walking to my violin lesson on Saturday mornings I was whistling 'Groovin' High' and I couldn't relate that to the violin.

"During the last year of high school, I knew I wanted to be a musician. I discovered the alto just about a month or two before I graduated. The saxophone really did it for me. My dad wasn't around for a while but he later came back and was all for it. I never had any formal lessons, not even from him. I used to go in my room and close the door and take Art Pepper's solos off records and try and take Stan Getz and

Bird off. At the same time I was taking harmony and arranging at Los Angeles City College so it all tied together. My dad (who was a very good Dixieland clarinet player) would hear me practicing and he'd say, 'you gotta play something with a melody' so I got that heat from him all the time. I tried to argue with him but finally I just let it go and did what I did.

"One day we went up for rehearsal for the All-City Orchestra, which I was a member of on violin, and Bob McDonald the jazz band teacher had kept the saxophones over. I knew I wanted to do that. Right after I got out of the High School I went to City College and auditioned for that band and failed. Flunked the audition because I didn't know anything about saxophone. I didn't even know what some of the keys were. I went to work in a department store and practiced night and day. Next semester I passed the audition.

"Bob Florence was in that band and there was a black trombone player, Lester Robinson, who passed away a few years ago. Later, (tenorist) Pete Christlieb was in the band. Bob had a quartet I was a member of – Ken Gregg was the bass player and Don Myerson was the drummer. It was patterned—too much so, I thought—on the Dave Brubeck Quartet. There were structured things, counterpoint and fugues, all good experience for me as it did get me into playing tunes that were not blues or 'I Got Rhythm.' Bob picked a lot of tunes that were difficult and even though I didn't play them very well, I was exposed to them. See, in those days, there were a lot of dances for fraternities and sororities in City College, and they would always hire a little band. So you'd go off and make \$20 or \$25. People danced to standards then, ballads like 'Polka Dots and Moonbeams,' so we would play a little bit on them. It was a good training ground."

Morgan laughs about another part of his musical apprenticeship when he played strip clubs while he was in college, remembering that "Harlem Nocturne" and "Night Train" were the favorite numbers with the "artists." "I worked a few strip joints when I was in college. One was called the York Club in Los Angeles. I remember they (the strippers) all had exotic names, like Lisette or Zelda. One was quite elderly...and her act involved a parrot sitting on top of this gong on a stand. When she gave it the cue, the parrot would fly away for a minute and then hit the gong with its beak, and climb back up on the top of the gong. On the music it said, 'begin when parrot hits gong' – this was only a 3-piece band, piano, drums and me, and I was playing tenor then. Well, of course, she gave it the cue and the first thing the parrot would do was to crap all over the gong. So we changed the music to say, 'Begin when parrot craps on the gong.'"



US Seventh Army Jazz Show, Jazz Three, Germany, 1958. Left to Right: Eddie Harris (ts); Lanny Morgan (as); Leo Wright (as); Merle Ellis (ts); Dick Van Cleave (bs). Courtesy of The Peter Vacher Collection.

Morgan tasted the rigors of the road straight from college with bandleader Charlie Barnet, a man who combined a whole-hearted commitment to the music with a hell-raiser's life style. "It was only about a three or four week tour but I idolized him because he was a pretty wild guy, he had all that money and was able to be just completely independent. He had his tall leader's stand and he had a band boy named Wilson who always kept a couple of fifths of booze underneath that stand for him.

"One time we played a country club in Great Falls, Montana, and this was a long narrow room with big plate glass windows looking out on the river. Charlie said, 'They want us to be kinda quiet 'cause the acoustics here are pretty live, so brass will play in buckets, saxophones, if you've got any rags, stuff 'em in your horns.' Charlie was playing his dance book, old stuff, so we played very soft, but they kept complaining, complaining. Finally this one guy came up and Charlie turned around, he says, 'Fuck 'em, take it out, we're going to blow the fucking place down.' So we took it out, and I swear to God, you could see the plate glass windows shaking. Of course, the people left. I don't know if he got paid for that gig or not, but I admired his spirit."

"You know that band was kind of non-descript, but we got to play that book, all of those old Paul Villipigue things, which were great, like 'Lonely Street,' and then 'Pompton Turnpike' which actually was a nice chart, and we played some of the modern things too. Gary Frommer was the drummer, a baritone player named Ernie Small was in the band, he

was on the Harry James band before, and Bob Edmondson and Richie Gilliam, trombones."

"The piano player in the band was Ike Carpenter and he'd had a pretty good band in the rhythm and blues days. He took the band up to Lake Tahoe and we stayed there for the three months of the summer, working under his name, at one of the casinos. We got to play behind Nat Cole, Mel Torme, a lot of people with very good music. It was mostly the same people from Charlie Barnet's band, except Gary Frommer had to go, he was Art Pepper's drummer at that time, and Don Payne, the bass player, he had to go back too, so they got some people to come down from San Francisco to join the band. Barre Phillips came in on bass and Bill Smith came down and played lead alto. I was playing tenor and alto."

Morgan's experiences in touring big bands were often short-lived or casual, a consequence of the changes then underway in popular music. Even so, the work was formative and reasonably lucrative. "There was a bandleader called Luis Arcaraz, they used to call him the Mexican Glenn Miller. He'd come up from Mexico two or three times a year, and I would always do it with him, sometimes I played alto, once I played baritone with him. It was a real salsa kind of band, very good too. He brought a couple of people up from Mexico, in the rhythm section and they would burn. We played a lot of Mexican dances, even going as far east from California as Denver. We had a ballroom called the Zenda Ballroom. It's since been torn down to make way for a freeway, that was the big Latin place

in Los Angeles. So I did about three tours with him and then there was a guy named Tommy Alexander, we did one album with him for Liberty. Actually it was quite a good record; I had a feature on 'All The Things You Are' written by a guy named Ken Downing from Tulsa who was quite a good writer, since passed away, and another thing on 'We'll Be Together Again.' I wasn't really very happy with either one of them but it was my first actual recording experience. I just wrote it off to being green and hope that no one ever listened to it!"

"I played second on that band. A guy named Bob Young played lead alto, Bill Trujillo was in that band - he went with Kenton after that. Then the band broke up and reformed and I played lead alto. Got a lot of valuable experience doing that. The leader...left us stranded in New York. No way to get home. No money. We all had to find gigs so I wound up doing a lot of work with Eddie Grady and the Commanders: they had four trombones, three trumpets, and two saxophones with Ernie Caceres as the other saxophone. Ernie played bass saxophone and baritone, and I played baritone and alto. Ernie was a good saxophone player. I worked with that band for probably two months and got enough money to get home. The lead trumpet player, who'd been on Tommy Alexander's band, drove us home, right across the country. He and his wife and his baby, with me sitting in the back seat. Later on Eddie Grady moved to the coast and I worked with him a little bit out there too."

"I'd become pretty good friends with Bill Perkins. He'd been on Bob Florence's band and he called from San Francisco in 1956 and said, 'Lanny, would you like to come on Stan Kenton's band?' I think Lennie Niehaus wants to leave so sit tight and I'll give you a call.' Finally he called me back and he said that Lennie had decided to stay a while longer. I had to have some money so I went on the road with Frankie Carle. I stayed there for three months while Lennie was deciding whether he was going to leave or not. Frankie would do a little jazz here and there but it was just whatever you could make of it. He was tolerant and lenient about that. I played lead alto - there were four saxes, I can't think of anyone you might know except Ralph Muzzillo who used to play lead trumpet with Benny Goodman's band, and Ernie Small on baritone. It really was a very good band."

"It didn't do my jazz reputation any good but it paid good and as an example of how Frankie treated the band, we had to go to Denver and we had our own Pullman car. Everybody had their own compartment. It was a two-day, two-night journey and when we got

there, they put our car on a siding so we could sleep as late as we wanted. We got up at eleven or twelve o'clock, got off and checked into the hotel, and went to a rehearsal."

"When I was on the road with Frankie Carle, I got a telegram from home which said, 'Call home regarding induction notice'. I had been drafted. I had to write them a letter and have Frankie Carle say that I was indispensable to him. I asked for enough time to finish this tour because I needed the money and wanted to put my affairs in order. On January 18th 1957, I went in the Army for two years. I went to Fort Ord, up near Carmel, near Monterey, it was about a minute's walk from the beach, such a beautiful place, and I tried to stay there as permanent personnel, as it was so close to home but they didn't have room for me so they sent me to the 4th Armored Division at Fort Hood, Texas. The armpit of the world! I was there for about four months."

"They don't induct you as a musician. I started one Basic Training program and got pneumonia, I was in the hospital for about six weeks, then I did another one, and at the end they called me to take the band audition. I hadn't touched my horn for four months - I had it with me but I hadn't played for all that time. Fortunately the person who auditioned me was Allan Beutler, who played baritone with Stan's band in the early 60s. I played a little bit for him and he said 'We'll get you in.' I got to play a lot of jazz at Fort Hood but then they sent us over to 7th Army in Stuttgart, where they had the big entertainment units. Five or six of us auditioned and I made it. They were just putting together a jazz show but it wouldn't be for a few months so I went out with a variety show called *Ain't Misbehavin'* and did that for three months."

"On the jazz show was Leo Wright, myself, Eddie Harris, Don Ellis and Cedar Walton. It was a big, seventeen-piece jazz band called Jazz Three. We traveled all over Western Europe playing military bases. Don Ellis did a lot of writing, plus we got some things from Eddie Sauter. Didn't have a uniform on for all that time hardly. Had a 24-hour pass every night. That jazz show lasted six months, then I went with the Seventh Army symphony which was a 104-piece orchestra—very good—they'd draft these guys in from all the big orchestras in the USA. I was with them for four months then I went back to my own unit. I got out on New Year's Eve, 1958."

Soloists and Sidemen: American Jazz Stories

By Peter Vacher (Northway)

<http://www.northwaybooks.com/>

The longer you've been reading *Coda*, the more developed your regard for Peter Vacher's writing is likely to be. His first published interview appeared in this journal in 1966; since then, his extended conversations have been appearing here and in a host of British and American publications. It has been his mission to interview as many of the swing and modern-era musicians as he could—usually as they passed through England, but with journeys to America and the continent as well—creating vivid portraits of sometimes neglected figures and adding significantly to jazz history. *Soloists and Sidemen* is a substantial selection of those interviews, 30 pieces that range from the celebrated, Art Farmer and Hank Jones, to the relatively obscure: Geezil Minerva (Ellington altoist) and Wilfred Middlebrooks (bassist to Ella Fitzgerald). Along the way Vacher explores regional scenes (his interview with Milt Buckner is an essential account of the early years of Detroit jazz) as well as the inner-workings of some great big bands (Willie Cook and Herbie Jones have contrasting views of how Ellington worked out lead trumpet parts). It's a fascinating read.

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Bardland: Shakespeare in Ellington's World

By JACK CHAMBERS

Duke Ellington's creative rebirth in 1956-1962 has all the trappings of an artistic pinnacle except for the one indisputable, certifiable, bona fide masterpiece that everyone can point to as its crystallization. Among several contenders, Ellington's Shakespearean suite might be the critical favourite. No one has ever disputed the genuinely inspired writing in the suite Ellington called *Such Sweet Thunder* (Columbia/Legacy 65568 [1999]). The twelve themes that Ellington and Billy Strayhorn composed, more than half an hour of music played almost flawlessly (in the definitive recorded version) by one of Ellington's greatest orchestras, are rich in orchestral devices and full of feeling.

Ellington's penchant for yoking together loosely connected pieces and calling them "suites" had more vindication here than in many other cases. His intention was to create a "tone parallel" to Shakespeare's works, themselves among the most disparate, sprawling effusions of human creativity ever known, and in so doing he in effect gave himself license to create a disparate, sprawling effusion in response. In that he succeeded magnificently.

Obvious as its strengths are, there is something missing, and I think it is captured by the old saw that here the whole is no more than the sum of its parts. When the parts are so splendid, they can blind even critical listeners to the overarching flaw, or at least that is how I rationalize my own blindness to it, which led me to overlook it for almost 50 years, from the

time the music was released in 1957. It was only when I looked harder at it for purposes of talking about it publicly (before the Duke Ellington Society, Chapter 40 in 2004) that I noticed the lack of finish, the anti-climax that results from the succession of minor climaxes without a cumulative effect. And it took a little longer for me to realize that Ellington himself seems to have laid the groundwork for organizing the pieces into a coherent suite, with sub-themes and musical motifs, but had apparently run out of time for implementing the grand scheme, speeding on to the next project or maybe merely the next gig, as he so often did, and leaving the pieces of the Shakespeare suite in a heap, like so many bricks in a hod forever awaiting the man with the trowel and mortar.

Ellington seems to have recognized its

incompleteness. After its debut —actually a double debut, as we will see— he never again performed the Shakespeare suite as an entity. He picked out a few pieces from time to time, but in spite of the inherent theatricality of the theme and his verbal flourishes by way of introduction and his obvious gusto for the subject matter, he never again treated it as a single, coherent, performable piece of music, that is, as a suite.

Hark, the Duke's Trumpets

Ellington's inspiration for transliterating Shakespeare into jazz came from a chance encounter, as unexpected in its way as was his fixation on God in his final years. In July 1956, Ellington was booked to play two concerts at the Shakespearean Festival in Stratford, Ontario. It did not seem special at the time. From 1956 until 1958, while Louis Applebaum was musical director, the Stratford Festival booked summer jazz and classical concerts as adjuncts to the dramatic offerings. Besides Ellington in 1956, Wilbur de Paris, Oscar Peterson, Dave Brubeck, and the Modern Jazz Quartet also played evening concerts, spaced out in July and August. In the time-honoured tradition, the jazz musicians played their one- or two-night stands and then hit the road for the next one a day or two away (although Peterson's performance left a permanent memento in a Verve recording that captured the head-banging competitiveness of his original Trio as no other record had to date). Not Ellington. He played, and then he carried with him for the rest of his days what he had seen and heard all around him in the quiet anglo-celtic town of 20,000 in south-western Ontario.

Ellington was often sensitive to the places he played in spite of their profusion. He arrived in Stratford from a resort ballroom in Bala, about 150 miles to the north, played non-consecutive nights on Wednesday and Friday, the 18th and 20th, with concerts on the alternate Thursday and Saturday nights at the Brant Inn in Burlington, just 70 miles east. (The Wednesday performance is preserved *Live at the 1957* [sic] *Stratford Festival*, Music & Arts CD-616 [1989].) Tom Patterson, the soft-spoken newspaperman whose persistence had persuaded the town council to risk a top-flight professional Shakespeare festival on the basis of the coincidence of the colonial namesake (not only Stratford itself, but the River Avon running through it), met Ellington and Harry Carney on their arrival, and was flattered when the Duke asked him to show him around. Ellington stayed in Stratford three days, commuting to the Brant Inn in the middle, and it is worth speculating that he might have altered his lifelong routine by

hauling himself out of bed for mid-afternoon matinee performances of *Henry V* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* on the Festival's main stage.

The Shakespeare Festival was (and is) a highbrow spectacle in the bourgeois heartland, and none if it was lost on Ellington. Stratford's thrust stage, modeled on the Elizabethan Globe, was new not only to Stratford but to the theatre world at large. It added to the excitement of the whole heady venture. Shakespeare had seldom been treated so well. His plays were directed by Sir Tyrone Guthrie and Michael Langham, costumed resplendently by Tanya Moiseiwitsch, and acted by a brilliant young company that included Lloyd Bochner, Christopher Plummer and William Shatner. Ellington loved it, so much so that he began finagling to be part of it. He opened his Stratford concerts with a new piece he called "Hark the Duke's Trumpets." The Shakespearean resonance of the title is Ellingtonian license; it is a fanfare played by trombones, not trumpets (later recorded as "Bassment"). More important, Ellington told everyone he met in Stratford and in the months that followed that he and Billy Strayhorn were preparing a jazz suite based on Shakespeare for a premiere at the Festival the next summer.

Such Sweet Thunder

The premiere happened, but not the way he envisioned it. When the Stratford program for 1957 was announced, Ellington was not included. He then had to persuade the program committee to bring him in as a late addition. As he explained in a CBC radio interview with Harry Rasky, "The Stratford Festival are not repeating any of the jazz artists this year that they had last year. But I've already informed Mr. Patterson that there's one hazard in allowing us to do the Shakespearean suite, which is called *Such Sweet Thunder*, and that is that we are liable to get publicity on it which will sort of throw them into the position of having to be more or less graceful and inviting us back this year."

The Stratford organizers capitulated and brought Ellington to town for the premiere late in the season, but by then Ellington had already premiered it at Town Hall in New York, with considerable fanfare, on 28 April 1957, the day before his 58th birthday. When Rasky interviewed him, he was taking advantage of two weeks at Birdland (18 April-1 May) for rehearsing two movements that had been written months earlier in the flush of his Stratford visit and for working out new movements on the bandstand. "We started recording some of them before we finished writing others," he told Rasky. "You know, the eleventh tune was finished the day of the per-

formance," and when Rasky pressed him for details he named both "Sonnet for Hank Cinq" and "The Telecasters" as last-minute additions. In the end, there was a twelfth movement, a finale, "Circle of Fourths," that was not even ready in time for the Town Hall premiere. It was recorded in the studio with four other movements a week later (3 May) and included as the finale with the seven parts already recorded on the 35-minute, 12-track LP called *Such Sweet Thunder*, subtitled (in parentheses) *Dedicated to the Shakespearean Festival, Stratford, Ontario*.

The Stratford premiere took place more than four months after the first one at an afternoon concert on 5 September 1957. Apparently neither the Town Hall premiere nor the Stratford one was recorded. There are later live recordings that preserve a few of Ellington playing a few of his favorite movements ("Such Sweet Thunder," the strikingly romantic Hodges specialty "The Star-Crossed Lovers" and a couple of others) but the only performance of the complete suite remains the original studio recording. It is, despite the haste that surrounded it, a stunning one. The recording schedule was actually spread over ten months (August and December 1956, and two April 1957 sessions as well as the one in May), but the performances are uniformly brilliant, a reflection undoubtedly of the genuinely inspired composition of all the parts. From the first release, listeners recognized the parts as brilliant efflorescences of Ellingtonia. Some also recognized them as worthy Shakespearean in the variety of ensemble voicings and infallible casting of solo voices in character roles. Those were always Ellington's strengths, whether Shakespeare was involved or not, but they were seldom found in such sustained profusion.

A Truly Shakespearean Universality

The stars were aligned for an Ellington masterpiece in 1957. After a decade-long decline, Ellington had finally found his musical voice in a jazz world dominated by bebop and cool jazz. Blatant among the signs of rebirth was the orchestra's triumph at the Newport Jazz Festival in July 1956, where the raucous curfew-breaking performance led to dancing in the aisles and front-page headlines in major dailies. It was just two weeks after Newport that Ellington swaggered into Stratford. By then he had already sat for an impending *Time* cover profile (published in the 20 August issue), and he had secured a CBS-TV contract for his jazz fantasy *A Drum is a Woman* (music recorded September 1956, televised May 1957). "Ellington's second wind has been felt in the music business for months, and the major record companies have been bidding for

his remarkable signature," the *Time* profile announced. "This week he plans to sign (with Columbia) a contract designed to give him the broadest possible scope. He will have time to write more big works, both instrumental and dramatic." Little wonder, then, when he bumped into William Shakespeare at Stratford he embraced him as a kindred spirit.

Across the gap of almost 400 years that separated them, Shakespeare and Ellington shared an uncommon creative space. A London reviewer of Ellington's Palladium concert in 1933 had been the first to note the parallel. "His music has a truly Shakespearean universality," said the reviewer, "and as he sounded the gamut, girls wept and young chaps sank to their knees." William Shakespeare (1564-1616) had sidled into the bawdy domain of groundling skitcraft and given it scope and depth hitherto unimaginable. Ellington (1899-1974) had done something similar with nightclub kicklines and low-down blues. Both men had been pushed into fronting their troupes by dint of personal charisma, and both broke the seal on their creative juices out of a desperate need to keep the troupes working. Once those juices started flowing they proved to be indomitable and also unchanneled, overflowing across sub-genres and styles. And both men relied inordinately on native instinct and personal taste, which led their critics to conclude that they were unschooled in the finer points of their craft, a claim that shadows Shakespeare to this day, and Ellington too—never more than when he took Shakespeare into his own world.

Ellington recorded the first of the twelve movements of the Shakespeare suite three weeks after playing at Stratford, in the afterglow. It was "Half the Fun," a sensuous glide featuring Johnny Hodges over a *faux* Middle Eastern rhythm that conjured up Cleopatra sapping the vital juices of her imperial Roman lovers. In the studio ledger, the piece was originally called "Lately," and the suspicion lingers that Ellington did not design it for the suite but merely plucked it from his canned stockpile to add weight to his new pet project.

Similar suspicion surrounds "The Star-Crossed Lovers," recorded as "Pretty Girl" in December 1956 and then re-recorded the next May with its new title and the same arrangement with an added piano cadenza. (Listeners get a rare look at the orchestra working out the arrangement in a nine-minute sequence on the 1999 reissue that includes two rehearsal takes, two false starts and a final complete take.) It too is a Hodges feature, and one of the most unforgettable movements framed as Juliet's lament for her dead lover.

Both pieces came into existence outside of the time-line that Ellington and Strayhorn

recounted for the writing of the suite, which was otherwise neatly compressed. "We're very happy that we had a deadline, a short deadline on it, because... you could spend a whole lifetime preparing an unfinished work as far as trying to do something with Shakespeare," Ellington told Rasky. "We had a deadline and we knew that we had to do little things and we had to do them quickly. So we spent two months talking about it and then we spent three weeks actually writing it." Strayhorn said much the same thing five years later, in a CBC radio interview with Bob Smith in Vancouver. "When we were doing, for instance, the Shakespearean suite, well, the talk on that went on for weeks," he said. "We read all of Shakespeare, and, uh, [had] great discussions at midnight over various and sundry cups of coffee and tea and what-not. ...And the actual writing, of course, took no time. The actual writing took no time."

Ellington and the orchestra were stationed in New York for more than six weeks from about 8 April to 22 May, a rare occurrence. The first three of those weeks were devoted to writing the suite, as Ellington said, and recording the parts almost as soon as they were written at Columbia's Manhattan studio on 15 and 24 April and 3 May. But the two pieces written and recorded beforehand, "Half the Fun" and "The Star-Crossed Lovers," are no less integral in the conceptual framework of the suite than the others. "Half the Fun" virtually requires the Shakespearean context to vindicate its slithering Salome excesses. "The Star Crossed Lovers" has its excesses too, although they are not as alien in jazz because they flow from the old swing tradition when dancers snuggled at the end of the evening as Hodges played "Warm Valley" (1940) or "Day Dream" (1943). Played straight in a concert hall or jazz club in 1957 or after, "The Star-Crossed Lovers" and "Half the Fun" might seem odd. Contextualized by Cleopatra and by Juliet, they are gorgeous. If they did find their way into the suite by accident, there was a powerful serendipity at work to make them fit so perfectly.

Scenes and Sonnets

Knowing Shakespeare is hardly necessary for appreciating these or any of the other parts, but it definitely adds a dimension to the music. As composer, Ellington always took his inspiration from the outside world, and hearing his music almost always evokes an extra-musical setting of some kind. Listeners don't have to know what train he was on when he wrote "Daybreak Express" (1933) or "Happy-Go-Lucky Local" (1946), but it would be hard to get full value from them without imagining passenger trains winding across the landscape.

It isn't possible to know Harlem as it was when Ellington sketched it musically in "Harlem Air Shaft" (1940) and "A Tone Parallel to Harlem" (1952), but it is surely impossible to hear those compositions without imagining tenement smells and sidewalk confabs and church-going families in their Sunday-best. For Ellington, compositions were grounded in the world. Instead of self-referential titles like "C-Minor Prelude," he chose "Prelude to a Kiss"; not "Concerto for Cello and Orchestra" but "Concerto for Cootie"; not "Cantata No. 140" but "Canteen Bounce." His songs were sonic correlates for real experiences or, in the term he preferred, tone parallels to the visual world.

In the Shakespeare suite, the inspiration for the content was obviously literary, and for four of the movements so was the form. Ellington literally lifted the musical structure from literature for the four pieces called sonnets, which are unlike anything in jazz or any other musical genre. For the other eight movements, Ellington relied mainly on the conventional 32-bar form from American popular song that jazz has used as its staple since about 1928. The four sonnets occupy their own space, set apart from the other eight movements, which I will call 'scenes,' to convey their common purpose as dramatic portrayals of mood and character. I discuss the structurally unique sonnets on their own in a later section.

Shakespearean Words and Phrases

The months of discussion that preceded the actual writing seem to have been consumed by the problem of finding a tactic for rendering Shakespearean scenes and characters in jazz. "You have to adjust your perspective as to just what you're going to do and what you're to say and what you're going to say it about and how much of it you're supposed to be covering," Ellington said in the interview with Bob Smith. "Actually, in one album you're not going to parallel anything of Shakespeare. What do you need? A thousand writers and a thousand years to do it, you know, to cover Shakespeare. So we said we'll just devote one number to one Shakespearean word or one Shakespearean phrase."

Taken literally, it sounds simplistic to make melodies based on a word or phrase, but in fact what Ellington did in practice was to pick out keywords and key-phrases that crystallize dramatic action into three-to-four-minute sonic capsules. When he sticks to it, the result is brilliantly concise, almost a perfect realization of his goals.

Only four of the eight scenes actually take their titles from Shakespeare's words and phrases. Three of them match mood and

music brilliantly. "The Star-Crossed Lovers," a phrase from the Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*, captures the romantic tragedy of the double suicides of the young lovers from feuding families. "Madness in Great Ones" characterizes Prince Hamlet in the words of his uncle Claudius, the obvious cause of Hamlet's madness as his father's murderer and his mother's lover. Ellington chooses to dramatize not the corruption in the Danish court (Claudius's line in its entirety says, "Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go") but instead Hamlet's jangled psyche. It is a jarringly discordant composition, with the brass introducing staccato motifs on the off-beat that disrupt and finally wreck the playful swing of the reeds; Cat Anderson's climactic cadenza, which sounds like he is trying to blow his brains out, was never put to such strategic use. At the opposite pole for mood, "Up and Down, Up and Down (I Will Lead Them Up and Down)," based on Puck's promise that he will make fools of the coupling humans in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is airy, but every bit as ingenious in ensemble writing. The humans are mainly represented by a nursery-like motif for unison violin and clarinet (Ray Nance and Jimmy Hamilton). As the hobgoblin, Clark Terry on flugelhorn bobs across the simple surface with great good humor in what is the longest solo turn in the suite except for Hodges on "The Star-Crossed Lovers."

The fourth scene with a Shakespearean title is "Such Sweet Thunder," also a phrase from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Queen Hippolyta: "I never heard/ So musical a discord, such sweet thunder"). As a title, it is wonderfully apt for the piece it is attached to, but less so for the whole suite (and probably for that reason the whole is usually referred to as the Shakespeare suite rather than *Such Sweet Thunder*). The music of "Such Sweet Thunder" is indeed thunderous, a 12-bar blues based on a cracking drum cadence on the strong beats and a primitive vamp by the low horns. It is hotly declarative, almost a burlesque bump and grind, and, as such, an explosive opening for the suite. Unlike the other scenes, however, it is only tangentially Shakespearean. It has no connection to its source play. Originally titled "Cleo," it might have been intended as an evocation of Cleopatra's sexuality, which certainly works, but instead Ellington always introduced it as (at Juan les Pins in 1966) "the sweet swinging line of talk that Othello gave to Desdemona which swayed her into his direction." That does not work. It is far from pillow talk, by any criterion. Though it works perfectly as overture, it is one of the pieces that only loosely fits the thematic conception.

Photo by Don Hunstein. Courtesy Sony Canada, Columbia/Legacy



Ellington with Billy Strayhorn and Tom Whaley, Duke's copyist.

Ellington Words and Phrases

One of the victims of the short deadline, apparently, was the scheme for linking music to drama through Shakespearean keywords. The other four scenes have Ellingtonian titles, and they show signs of haste. "Half the Fun" celebrates Cleopatra's sensuality more subtly than "Cleo" would have (and may have dictated linking "Cleo" to Othello to avoid celebrating her twice), but the title is oddly flippant, and anachronistic to boot. (The word "fun" was coined a century after Shakespeare.) "The Telecasters," as a title, is an obvious abomination in this context. The music is a glorious feature for the trombone trio (Britt Woodman, Quentin Jackson, John Sanders) and baritone saxophone (Harry Carney). "We took the liberty of combining characters from two plays," Ellington said. "It seems that the three witches [from *Macbeth*] and Iago [from *Othello*] had something in common in that they all had something to say, so we call them the Telecasters." That is a lame rationalization for the title, and no better for trying to link three malevolent hags and a psychopathic villain to the legato mood of the music. "Circle of Fourths" is a wailing vehicle for Paul Gonsalves, the hero of Newport, evidently written as a flag-waving closer with little regard to the theme of the suite, but certainly

resonant as an exclamation point. In all three cases, the music is masterful, even if the links to Shakespeare are tentative.

The remaining scene, "Lady Mac," makes a useful warning against underestimating Ellington's involvement in the subject matter of the suite and the depth of his understanding of Shakespeare's characters. The breezy title suits Clark Terry's extraverted portrayal of Lady Macbeth, but the whole conception seems odd for the woman who goaded her husband into murdering a king and then went insane with guilt. But Ellington fully intended the paradox. "We portrayed some of her by using a jazz waltz," Ellington told Harry Rasky, when Rasky questioned the fit, "and in so doing we say that she was a lady of noble birth but we suspect that she had a little ragtime in her soul." Ellington's producer, Irving Townsend, looking back a few years later (1960), said, "Duke likes Lady Macbeth, whether you're supposed to like her or not, and he treats her right." In fact, instead of portraying Lady Macbeth in madness and decline, as she is at the end of the play, Ellington portrays her before her breakdown, as the temptress and socialite. But he leaves no doubt that he knows her fate. He ends "Lady Mac" with a thick, melodramatic chord that spells doom. It is a jarring note, and it completes the portrait in one deft stroke.

Ellington's Shakespeare

Ellington made it easy for critics to underestimate his grasp of his subject and his sincerity in taking it on. The flippant titles were only the beginning. Throughout his professional life, he found it hard to keep a straight face when he was asked to explain himself. Audiences might be forgiven for failing to realize that his comment about "Lady Mac" having "a little ragtime in her soul" was a conclusion he had come to after careful reflection. Or for this pronouncement on CBC radio: "We feel that Shakespeare was not only sage, and has a tremendous appeal right now to the intellectual, but as the jive boys say, Shakespeare was down, which means that he is dug by the craziest of cats." The comment came after Rasky questioned Ellington about ignoring Elizabethan devices in his homage to Shakespeare. To that, Ellington replied, with justifiable indignation, "We think that Shakespeare is just a little beyond chronology." Generations of playgoers would agree with that, of course, Harry Rasky among them. But Ellington was not one to hold the high ground for long. He immediately covered up by restating his case in "jive boy" terms, which says much the same thing but with such flippancy that it is easily discounted.



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In fact, Ellington was much better versed on Shakespeare than his critics or, for that matter, some of his admirers, including his producer Irving Townsend, gave him credit for. Don George, Ellington's occasional lyricist and one of the few outsiders admitted to Ellington's Sugar Hill apartment, raved about his well-stocked library, which conspicuously included "everything by Shakespeare, in many different versions." George added, "In all his copies of the Shakespearean plays, he had underlined parts that appealed to him, not only to be set to music but to be performed by him... Passage after passage in his books is underlined, indicating that there were far more ambitions in this man than the average human being could appreciate by just seeing the orchestra leader and composer."

Ellington's admiration for Shakespeare was no passing fancy. It is impossible to know when he started reading and annotating Shakespeare, but it is a good guess that it started, as did other literary interests, with Miss Boston, his English teacher at Garrison Junior High School in 1913-14 in Washington, whom he credited for many lessons. "I think she spent as much time in preaching race pride as she did in teaching English, which, ironically and very strangely, improved your English," he recalled 55 years later (quoted in Tucker 1991). Actors fascinated Ellington all his life, especially Shakespearean actors. One of the more exotic artifacts in the Duke Ellington Music Society archive is a three-minute tape made in Ellington's dressing room in Milan in 1966 in which Ellington plays arpeggios as the actor Victor Grassman recites Hamlet's soliloquy in Italian ("Essere, non essere..."). Richard Burton, the greatest Shakespearean actor of his day before he succumbed to Hollywood stardom, told Don George, "I actually appeared on stage with the Duke once in the Rainbow Grill. I was sitting in the audience with my daughter when the Duke called me up onto the stage. I said, 'What do you want me to do?' He said, 'You talk and I'll play.' I spoke Shakespeare, I spoke iambic pentameter and iambic hexameter, while Duke's fabulously infatuated brown fingers stroked the keys. It was a thrilling and extraordinary experience, one of the greatest theatrical experiences that I've ever had."

When Ellington pulled into Stratford on that fateful day in 1956, the sight of Shakespeare being treated as a contemporary hero gave him the inspiration for making a jazz analogue. The minute the inspiration hit, Ellington phoned Billy Strayhorn in New York with very specific instructions. "We read all of Shakespeare!" Strayhorn told Stanley Dance. "We had to interpret what he said, just as we had to interpret what Tchaikovsky was saying

[for the jazz version of *Nutcracker Suite* in 1960]. The only difference with Shakespeare was that we had to interpret his words. It took about the same amount of time too—about six months. We had all these books we used to carry around, and all those people all over the U.S. we used to see and talk to." Ellington also talked about "consultations with two or three Shakespearean actors and authorities." "We'd sit down and discuss for hours, you know, so forth and so on," he told Bob Smith. Haste came at the end, in the wrap-up. Preparation was fastidious, uncommonly so.

A Curious Mixture

At the moment when the final touches of the suite were being workshopped at Birdland, Harry Rasky asked Ellington how he thought "Shakespeare purists or even jazz purists will take to this curious mixture of the Bard and jazz." There was more than a sniff of disdain in Rasky's question, and perhaps it was his tone that led Ellington to defend his goals and, incidentally, reveal how carefully he had worked them out. Ellington replied: "We sometimes lean a little bit toward caricature, but other people I think have gone about the business of actually changing Shakespeare, which I think is a much more hazardous thing than what we've done. All we did is just little thumbnail sketches, you know, of very short periods, never at any time trying to parallel an entire play or an entire act or an entire character throughout, but just some little short space of time during a character's performance." Ellington's triumph in composing the scenes stems precisely from his ability to make three-dimensional portraits with a few deft musical strokes.

Neither Ellington's lifelong infatuation with the Bard nor the preparations he and Strayhorn had undertaken got mentioned in the publicity about the suite. The main medium for public relations on jazz projects, for better or worse, is the liner note that accompanies recordings. Irving Townsend assigned himself the task of annotating *Such Sweet Thunder*, and he made it a breezy sketch with anecdotes about haste and eccentricity. Townsend obviously took Ellington's jive talk literally, and he enlivened his own superficial descriptions with quotations from Ellington that added little or nothing of substance.

Townsend's proximity to Ellington as his Columbia producer obviously gave him no special insights when it came to the Shakespeare suite. In both his liner notes and his later comments, Townsend appears to have had no real idea of the preparations that went into it and little appreciation of how well it succeeded. Looking back a few years later on the projects he produced for Ellington, Townsend dismissed the Shakespeare suite

with lofty, Ivy-League disdain. "Ellington gathered together a series of short pieces descriptive of various impressions he had received from his quick course in the Bard, and we recorded them under such temporary titles as 'Cleo,' 'Puck,' and 'Hamlet,'" he recalled. "We all searched later for the final titles, and I found "Such Sweet Thunder" in Bartlett's Quotations." So the project, according to Townsend's recollections three years after recording it, was accidental (a compilation), superficial (the result of a cram course), arbitrary (titled after the fact), and ersatz (Bartlett as a scholarly short-cut).

Important as he was in revitalizing Ellington's career, Townsend might better have been left off the Shakespeare project not only as liner-note writer but also, dare one say it, as producer. The grossest discrepancy between Shakespearean title and Ellingtonian parallel, as noted above, comes on "Such Sweet Thunder"; it appears that Townsend, not Ellington or Strayhorn, was responsible for it. But the production flaws went deeper than that. The order of the movements on the original recording has no thematic or developmental basis, and that also appears to be Townsend's doing; at Stratford, for the only live performance of the entire suite, Ellington used an entirely different order (also, it must be admitted, with no thematic basis). The order is not just arbitrary; it actually detracts, and nowhere is that more evident than in the placement of the sonnets.

Suspended Animation

The four sonnets are clearly labeled in their titles—"Sonnet for Caesar," "Sonnet for Hank Cinq," "Sonnet for Sister Kate," "Sonnet in Search of a Moor." Even if they were not, their formal peculiarities would set them apart. They are through-composed and last exactly 28 bars. The melodies (so-called) are recited in their entirety by one instrumentalist. They are exacting and somewhat stiff, like technical exercises but soulful. In all four sonnets, every even-numbered bar ends with a tied note, and the last eight bars are played over stop-time rhythm and sustained chords. The melodies are played once only and last a little more than a minute, though the recorded versions vary from 1:24 to 3:00 depending upon their orchestral setting. They do not swing.

In the context of the whole suite, they feel like interludes, or four moments of suspended animation. Programming them close to one another in the sequence of the suite as they are on the original recording (tracks 2, 3, 5 and 8) is simply egregious. It both breaks up the flow—an interlude followed by another interlude?—and dilutes the singularity of each one by clustering their singularities. They need to be spaced out, at the very least, and spacing them judiciously might have put them to use as prefaces for thematically compatible movements, as I show below.

Ellington's sonnets are, literally, Shakespearean sonnets transliterated into music. Ellington was obviously fascinated by Shakespeare's sonnets. His rationale for the title "Circle of Fourths" was, he said, to celebrate "the four major parts of [Shakespeare's] artistic contribution," and he identified the parts as tragedy, comedy, history and the sonnets. But Shakespeare scholars conventionally divide his plays into tragedy, comedy, history and romance (*The Winter's Tale*, *Measure for Measure*, and two or three others, depending upon whether *Romeo and Juliet* goes here or in tragedy). The sonnets belong, naturally, with the poems, not the plays. Among the poems, they occupy formidable space. There are 154 of them, and Shakespeare was almost as masterful at sonnets as he was at drama. They are love poems, sometimes sexual ("The expense of spirit in a waste of shame/Is lust in action"), and often extravagantly flattering ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?/Thou art more lovely and more temperate"). The hottest ones are addressed to a woman known as the Dark Lady ("I will swear beauty herself is black/And all they [are] foul that thy complexion lack"). Ellington must have found them appealing on all these grounds.

As literary forms, sonnets are challenging. They are structurally rigid, and lesser poets than Shakespeare found them stifling. Though Ellington usually had little patience for formalism, he seems to have relished the

formal rigidities of the sonnet form. In that respect, again, he was just like Shakespeare, who readily bent conventions in his plays but in the sonnets conformed strictly to conventions, and did so with obvious relish. Shakespeare took no liberties with the sonnet, and neither did Ellington.

As far as the form goes, if you have seen one Shakespearean sonnet you have seen them all. Shakespearean sonnets comprise 14 lines divided into three quatrains and a final couplet. The lines must be iambic pentameter (five feet of alternating weak and strong stresses), and they must rhyme alternately until the final couplet, which rhymes successively. These features are marked in Sonnet CXXVIII below in the alternating end-rhymes of the quatrains (a b a b in the first, etc.) and the final couplet (g g), the punch line. Each of the 14 lines has ten syllables, paired into five feet (pentameter, where 'penta' is Greek for 5) of alternating weak and strong stress.

CXXVIII

How oft when thou, my music, music play'st,	a
Upon that bless'd wood whose motion sounds	b
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st	a
The wiry concord that my ear confounds,	b
Do I envy those jacks ¹ that nimble leap	c ¹ hammers
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,	d
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,	c
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand!	d
To be so tickled, they ² would change their state	e ² his lips
And situation with those dancing chips, ³	f ³ keys
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,	e
Making dead wood more bless'd than living lips.	f
Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,	g
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.	g

Sonnet CXXVIII is less well known than many others but it has the attraction, in this context, of a musical theme. Shakespeare's main image in the poem is an Elizabethan keyboard instrument, a primitive harpsichord. When his lover (whom he calls "my music," a pun on muse) presses the keys ("chips"), she then has to use her other hand to keep the hammers ("jacks") aligned after they pluck the strings. (The sound must have been primitive too, and sonneteer cannot resist telling his readers know that the "wiry concord" of the instrument sounds god-awful to his ears.) The gist of the poem is that Shakespeare wishes his lover would offer her palm ("the tender inward of thy hand") for him to kiss as readily as she offers it to the "jacks" (a pun as the word also means men or, really, guys). The last two lines, the rhyming couplet, are supposed to supply a surprise ending, and Shakespeare here comes up with the bright idea that instead of bothering with her palm he will go for her lips instead.

Music in Iambic Pentameter

Ellington takes this rigid literary form and renders it into a rigid musical form that matches it point for point. Ellington varies the mood of the four sonnets, but mood is indicated mainly by the orchestral accompaniment rather than by the sonnet soloists, who obviously have enough to contend with making sure the accents fall on 2 and 4 (the strong iambic syllables), sustaining notes at the end of every second bar (equivalent to the rhyme-words), and raising the range over stop-time and/or suspended chords in the last four bars (25-28), the counterpart of the rhyming couplet.

Playing the music under all these constraints is a challenge, even for Ellington's virtuoso soloists, and the tension is clearly audible in all four sonnets. It accounts for a large part of the esthetic delight. The sonnets as Ellington conceives them are small marvels of technical brilliance, atmospheric and eccentric, fresh and somehow unexpected even after numerous listenings. They have delighted two generations of listeners whether or not they knew (or cared) about the precision with which Ellington transliterated the literary form. Townsend, in his liner note,

simply says that “they are scored to coincide with the fourteen-line sonnet form,” and lets it go at that. Rightly so, in one sense. But it surely adds another twist to Ellington’s genius, an unexpected one, to see how masterfully he succeeded in transposing one art form to another.

Sonnet In Search of a Moor

by Duke Ellington

“Sonnet in Search of a Moor” by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, with Sonnet cxxviii by William Shakespeare. Transcribed by Martin Loomer.

The perfect concurrence of musical and literary form becomes obvious in a Shakespeare sing-along. In the illustration, “Sonnet in Search of a Moor” transcribes the sonnet melody as played by bassist Jimmy Woode, with Sonnet CXXVIII laid into the transcription as if it were the lyric. All of the coincident ingenuities are graphically evident— rhymes and tied notes, full notes (when they occur at all) on two and four, the complexity of the last four bars. Yet, for all its complexities, singing the words of the sonnet while listening to the music is dead easy, because Ellington’s transliteration is note-perfect. In fact, any of Shakespeare’s 154 sonnets would fit as lyrics for any of Ellington’s four melodies.

Jazz musicians develop a feel for four-bar and eight-bar structures, and for multiples that add up to 12 and 32. Ellington’s sonnets, as 28-bar constructions organized in two-bar segments, demand a different feel. Ellington assigned the challenge of playing the sonnets to the most astute technicians in his band. “Sonnet to Hank Cinq,” its title a glib reference to *Henry V*, the warrior-king who defeated Joan of Arc at Agincourt, features Britt Woodman in an astounding performance that requires octave leaps and sudden transitions. “The changes of tempo,” Ellington says, “have to do with the changes of pace and the map as a result of wars.” At the other extreme, “Sonnet for Caesar” features Jimmy Hamilton in an almost motionless line that might be the musical equivalent to a marble bust of the Roman emperor; the drama is supplied by ominous drumbeats and solemn chords behind Hamilton’s decorous line, symbolizing the unrest leading to assassination. Quentin Jackson plays “Sonnet for Sister Kate” on plunger-muted trombone. It is an appropriately humorous por-

trait of Katharina, the shrew of *The Taming of the Shrew* (nicknamed “Kate” in the play and in Ellington’s title, and also by Cole Porter in *Kiss Me, Kate*); the recording is flawed by a wooden reading of the opening lines, in which Jackson is almost audibly counting the beats, and by a minor disruption of the strict meter when he slips in some glisses between beats, probably from force of habit. Good as it is, it deserved another take. Finally, Jimmy Woode’s turn on “Sonnet in Search of a Moor,” with his bass more resonant by the contrast of upper-register trills from piano and three clarinets, starts relaxed and ends up strained. The complexity of mood was fully intended by Ellington, and he signaled it cleverly in the title (though the ambiguity went unnoticed in Townsend’s program notes). As Ellington explained it to Bob Smith, “The sonnet to a Moor was a triple entendre, because you had to decide whether we were talking about Othello [the Moor of Venice], or whether we were talking about love [amour], or we were talking about the moors where the three witches were, you know.” And the melody carries it off, starting playfully and darkening as it goes on, an uneasy alternation, not unlike the plays known as ‘romances’ with their mix of comedy and tragedy.

The Parts and the Whole

The thematic gamut of the four sonnets again raises questions about the way they were used in the suite as a whole— or, really, not used. There is one sonnet for each of Shakespeare’s four subjects in the plays: history, tragedy, comedy and (with a small stretch) romance. So they could have been deployed, as I said earlier, as interludes for introducing scenes from the same subject. Ellington may have intended them to be used that way, and simply lost sight of the grand plan in his haste to finish this project and get onto the next (the telecast of *A Drum Is a Woman*, whose importance he grossly overvalued). So it turned out that the sonnets have no structural role in the suite as a whole, and their thematic range appears to be merely an accident. While they are good enough on their own to attract listeners, they could have been used to shape the suite into a more cohesive whole.

Apart from the first and last movements, the declamatory “Such Sweet Thunder” and the synoptic “Circle of Fourths,” Ellington did not leave any hints about an order for the parts, and even those two movements were played out of order at the Stratford premiere, the only known full performance other than the original LP. In the table, the order on the original LP and the order at Stratford is shown beside the titles. The left column organizes the titles thematically, with one of the sonnets preceding scenes from the same subject, thus imposing a kind of implicit order on the suite, as they seem so perfectly suited for.

thematic order	on original LP	at Stratford 1957
OVERTURE		
1. Such Sweet Thunder	1	7
HISTORY		
2. Sonnet for Hank Cinq	3	2
3. Half the Fun	11	unlisted
4. The Telecasters	6	3
COMEDY		
5. Sonnet for Sister Kate	8	8
6. Up and Down, Up and Down	7	9
ROMANCE		
7. Sonnet in Search of a Moor	5	6
8. The Star-Crossed Lovers	9	10
TRAGEDY		
9. Sonnet for Caesar	2	1
10. Lady Mac	4	4
11. Madness in Great Ones	10	11
FINALE		
12. Circle of Fourths	12	5

In the thematic order, "Sonnet for Hank Cinq" follows the overture and prefaces the history scenes, and then "Sonnet for Sister Kate" re-sets the stage, in a sense, for comedy, and so on through romance and tragedy to the finale. In a stage presentation, the linked themes would require spoken transitions, and it is easy to imagine Ellington, the most verbal of bandleaders, delivering those with panache. In notes and interviews and the few scattered performances, he devised a patter for many of the parts — about the ragtime in Lady Mac's soul, Othello's "sweet and swinging story," Hamlet's craziness ("in those days crazy didn't mean the same thing it does now"), and so on— that might be cobbled together into an accompanying text that is essentially Ellingtonian.

Suite Fragments in the Afterglow

Without internal structure, either this one or any other, the Shakespeare suite went unperformed except for fragments, isolated pieces that caught Ellington's fancy, if only momentarily. Of the sonnets, only "Sonnet to Hank Cinq" was ever played in performance after the debut performances in 1957. It remained in the book as a feature for Britt Woodman until 1960, when he quit the band. The other sonnets were ignored, perhaps because they were difficult or perhaps because their lack of swing fit uneasily into the expected fare at one-nighters. Ellington did compose one more sonnet some years later, simply called "Sonnet," for the 1968 *Degas* soundtrack, where it fades after one minute; trumpeter Willie Cook is the soloist, and it too was never played again.

The scenes fared only slightly better. Only "The Star-Crossed Lovers" was played frequently, and it stayed in the book until 1970, when Hodges died. "Such Sweet Thunder," with its bumptious rock rhythm, was played regularly until 1960. In the summer of 1966, apparently in response to requests on a French tour, Ellington revived "Such Sweet Thunder," "Madness in Great Ones" and "Half the Fun" and played them as a sequence with "The Star-Crossed Lovers" for a month or two.

The Shakespeare suite might have fared better if the Stratford Festival had continued to provide the stimulus, but the Festival went out of the jazz business soon after Ellington premiered the suite there. After that, Ellington would return to Stratford three more times. In 1963 he spent some time there writing incidental music for *Timon of Athens*, an awkward play dominated by set pieces (banquets with dancing girls, marching armies, static characters with a lot of posturing, which Ellington called "skillipoop, the art of making what you're doing look better than what you are supposed to be doing"); director Michael Langham probably hoped that Ellington's music would add pizzazz to the play. Three years later, in May 1966, Ellington played a concert at Stratford. No program survives, but it is possible that his revival of the four Shakespearean scenes was done for Stratford and kept in the repertoire when he got to France. Ellington's last appearance at Stratford came on 7 July 1968, when he staged a Sacred Concert there.

So the Shakespeare suite, as a suite, did not outlive its Stratford premiere in 1957. As an entity, it provided Ellington with two concerts — two one-night stands, albeit auspicious ones, at Town Hall and at the Stratford Festival. But no more. Of course, looking at it as concert fare unfairly limits its actual life-span. As listening fare, the recorded version has proven to be one of Ellington's most successful recordings, admired by reviewers, popular with listeners beyond the jazz core, continuously in print since its first release nearly fifty years ago. That seems inevitable, looking back at the circumstances. It was conceived in a buoyant moment when both the composer and his orchestra were riding a wave of popular and artistic success. The link to Shakespeare gave Ellington lofty themes to work with and rich characters. But as wonderful as it is, in the end we have to wonder if it might have amounted to

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Dexter Gordon Reissued

Dexter Gordon's Complete Prestige Recordings

BY BENJAMIN FRANKLIN V

Some musicians' careers may conveniently be evaluated according to record company affiliations. The career of Charlie Parker as leader may be structured, broadly, on his recordings for Dial, Savoy, and Mercury/Clef/Norgran/Verve. That of Thelonious Monk, on recordings for Blue Note, Prestige, Riverside, and Columbia. That of Wes Montgomery, on recordings for Riverside, Verve, and A&M. Dexter Gordon is another. After recording some of the most remarkable music of the 1940s for Savoy and Dial and being silent for much of the 1950s, he was affiliated mainly with Blue Note, Prestige, SteepleChase, and Columbia.

Gordon's 1940s recordings are so significant that Ira Gitler, in *Jazz Masters of the Forties* (1966), titles a chapter "Dexter Gordon and the Tenor Saxophonists," declaring him, essentially, the major and most influential tenor saxophonist of the decade when bebop developed and flourished. This is understandable. After sounding, on his first session as leader, like Lester Young, Gordon quickly found his own voice in the Billy Eckstine band that highlighted the leader's vocals but included some of the prime movers of the fledgling bebop movement: Gene Ammons, Art Blakey, Dizzy Gillespie, Fats Navarro, Leo Parker, and Sonny Stitt, among others. Soon thereafter, Gordon was recognized as one of the most important new tenor saxophonists.

After recording ten times as leader in the 40s, beginning in 1943, Gordon led only three dates in the 50s, all inferior to his earlier work. But for half a decade beginning in 1961 (and also in 1978-1979), he led a series of impressive sessions for Blue Note. These were warmly received because of the music, obviously, but also perhaps, initially, because they marked the return to prominence of a musician once exalted but then sadly lost. At least when I heard the first of these releases when they were issued, I was prepared to like them because of the quality of Gordon's recordings from the 1940s. The Blue Notes did not and do not disappoint.

Later, when Gordon took up residence in Copenhagen in the early 1970s, he played frequently, with both studio and live performances issued, mostly on SteepleChase. These constitute a significant body of work, showcasing, as they do, a major player in his maturity.

When Gordon repatriated himself to New York in 1976, he was received as a hero of sorts: playing at the Village Vanguard to enthusiastic audiences, recording for Columbia, being written about rapturously. Although some writers thought the Columbia recordings evidence of Gordon's undiminished powers, I demurred then and disagree now. To me, these recordings generally lack inspiration.

So what of the Prestige recordings, all of which, including seventeen performances appearing for the first time, have now been released as an 11-CD boxed set, *The Complete Prestige Recordings* (Prestige 11PRCD-4442-2)? With the exceptions noted below, Gordon's Prestige recordings date from 1969-1972. On balance, they strike me as less impressive than the Blue Notes,

slightly superior to the SteepleChases, and significantly more impressive than the Columbias. One Prestige release of which I am aware is absent from the set. This is Gordon's 1969 session released as *A Day in Copenhagen*, initially on MPS and then on Prestige. I assume that Prestige bought the rights for one-time use and therefore no longer has access to this material.

The first selection, long available on Wardell Gray's *Memorial Album* and elsewhere, is crucial: though "Move" was recorded in 1950, at the Hula Hut Club in Los Angeles, Gordon plays as he frequently did in the 1940s. An up-tempo blowing session primarily for Gray (the leader), Clark Terry, and Gordon, Gray and Gordon are the major, most impressive soloists. Though similar in some ways, there is no confusing them. Gray plays fairly frantically; Gordon, less so, though he becomes increasingly impassioned as his long solo progresses. While playing on the beat, he seems unhurried; while playing mainly in the middle register, his notes are inventive; while playing flowingly, he honks a few times; while showing the influence (still) of Lester Young especially in slurred notes, he demonstrates his own voice; while faithful to the harmony of Denzil Best's composition, he quotes from "Let's Fall in Love." This is a bravura performance by Gordon, one similar to his earlier tenor battles with Gray on "The Chase" (1947) and with Teddy Edwards on "Hornin' In" and "The Duel" (also 1947). At tenor battles, Gordon was a master, as probably first suggested on one with Gene Ammons on "Blowing the Blues Away" with Billy Eckstine in 1944.

Everyone's playing on the album *The Resurgence of Dexter Gordon*, recorded for

Jazzland in 1960, seems relatively uninspired. Neither trumpeter Martin Banks nor trombonist Richard Boone is of Gordon's stature, though pianist Dolo Coker plays well throughout. What of Gordon? Having this session follow "Move" makes him seem less impressive than he is, though he occasionally sounds tentative and generally much less impressive than on the 1950 recording. Perhaps this is understandable given his realities. For much of the 1950s he used drugs, ultimately spending several years in prison as a result. He recorded the Jazzland album soon after his 1960 release; it was his first recording since 1955. As "Move" captures Gordon's 1940s greatness in 1950, *Resurgence* reflects Gordon's 1950s difficulties in 1960. He plays less impressively here, by far, than anywhere in the boxed set.

Five years later as a sideman with Booker Ervin on an album titled *Setting the Pace*, Gordon (still under contract to Blue Note) demonstrates the mastery exhibited on the Blue Note recordings. On tenor battles on the title selection and "Dexter's Deck" (both Gordon compositions that he recorded for Savoy in the 1940s), he also proves that his controlled, generally legato performance at a brisk tempo on "Move" was no aberration. It would be a hallmark of his career. On these 1965 recordings, Ervin is to Wardell Gray as Gordon is to his 1950 self: two different-sounding, compatible tenor saxophonists eager to test the other. Perhaps sensing this, Gordon quotes from "Twisted," Gray's most famous composition. Although Ervin and Gordon dominate these two exciting performances, they are backed by the first-rate rhythm section of Jaki Byard, Reggie Workman, and Alan Dawson.

The three sessions just discussed—"Move," *Resurgence*, and *Setting the Pace*—lie outside what most listeners would think of as Gordon's Prestige recordings. Why? Because all were recorded before the 1969-1972 period when he was under contract to Prestige as leader, because on two of the three he is a sideman, and on one he plays generally unimpressively. The remainder of the selections in the boxed set are from the *real* Prestige years.

On his first 1969 session for Prestige, Gordon teams with yet another tenor saxophonist, James Moody, on three of nine selections that were issued as *The Tower of Power* and *More Power*: "Montmartre," "Lady Bird," and "Sticky Wicket." (The boxed set contains an alternate take of each selection, two previously unissued.) Both men stretch out on these mid-tempo selections that average about nine minutes, though Moody "sounds out of sorts," as annotator Ted Panken correctly observes, possibly because the superior




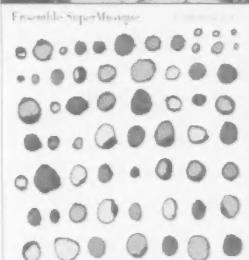

Gordon intimidates him. Moody is less extroverted than Gray and Ervin; because he is also less aggressive than Gordon, his playing showcases Gordon in a new position on his Prestige recordings with another substantial horn player: as the dominant voice. But whether Gordon is more or less assertive than Moody, his style remains fixed, and it is his own. He does not alter it because of context.

Two days after this session, Gordon recorded with the rhythm section of the Moody date—Barry Harris, Buster Williams, and Albert Heath—which is similar in quality to that of the Ervin recording, with Harris more boppish than Byard. Gordon wrote most of the tunes. Some of the selections were released on the same albums as those from the Moody session. The boxed set also includes a previously unissued tune, "Dinner for One Please, James," and four previously unissued alternate takes.

As the only horn, Gordon seems to revel in freedom, though Harris solos regularly; Williams, less so; Heath, occasionally. Perhaps not surprisingly, Gordon appears most comfortable on his own compositions, such as "Stanley the Steamer," a blues he first recorded in 1955, and the pretty ballad "The Rainbow People," which became a staple in his repertoire for five years beginning in 1969. For all his deftness in tenor battles, he usually plays ballads beautifully, as in these instances. A rich tone enhances all his playing, but especially at slow tempo.

In May 1969, Gordon appeared at the Famous Ballroom in Baltimore. Only recently were seven selections issued by Prestige: on *L.T.D.* (2001) and *XXI* (2002). The performances are long, ranging from nine minutes ("In a Sentimental Mood") to twenty-four minutes ("Rhythm-a-Ning"). They also range in mood from fairly somber ("In a Sentimental Mood") to introspective ("Misty") to buoyant ("Love for Sale") to jubilant ("Blues Up and Down"). Gordon stretches out on them all. He is backed by a serviceable pickup rhythm section of Bobby Timmons, Victor Gaskin, and Percy Brice. Timmons plays well as both a soloist and accompanist, but surprises by not playing particularly soulfully, in the manner of "Moanin'," "This Here" and "Dat There," for which he is most famous. Unfortunately, because the microphone does not adequately project his playing, he seems somewhat physically removed from the proceedings. I would characterize these performances as on a par with Gordon's typically high-quality live sessions on SteepleChase.

In June 1970, Gordon played at the Montreux festival in Switzerland. Inspired by the tunes, the venue, the audience, the number of significant musicians at the festival, or

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his trio—led by Junior Mance—Gordon is at his best on an inspired, impeccable program: two originals, two compositions by Thelonious Monk, an Ellington standard, and “Body and Soul.”

He rips into the first selection, his composition “Fried Bananas,” with results as rewarding as those of his playing on “Move” in 1950. The passion of this performance sets up the next selection, the ruminative “Sophisticated Lady.” Here, Gordon plays superbly, especially in his noodling cadenza. Another highlight: the solo by Mance, in my estimation one of the most undervalued or taken-for-granted significant pianists of the second half of the twentieth century. “Rhythmn-a-Ning” is even more impassioned and faster than “Fried Bananas.” Again Gordon excels, prodded by Mance’s forceful comping and Martin Rivera and Oliver Jackson’s propulsive support. Following all solos, the audience applauds enthusiastically, not at all in the perfunctory manner of most applause following a solo.

With Gordon in such fine form, his playing on “Body and Soul” disappoints slightly, partly because of what strikes me as the inappropriate long quotation from “Nancy (With the Laughing Face).” His cadenza, though, is stunning. “Blue Monk” does not disappoint. It provides ample evidence—should evidence be needed—that Gordon plays the blues masterfully, especially in the middle groove. Along the way, he bows stylistically in the direction of Harry Edison’s repeated notes. Mance’s solo is the equal of Gordon’s. The set concludes with what is probably the first recorded performance of Gordon’s “The Panther,” which features a funky Mance solo.

Because “The Panther” was the first selection at Gordon’s next recording session three weeks later in New York, in the boxed set the studio performance follows the one from Montreux. While both are impressive, the studio performance seems a little more restrained, not surprisingly. (The vinyl release of this session is titled *The Panther*.) But something surprises: pianist Tommy Flanagan plays as funkily as Mance. Funk is not a mode seemingly natural for Flanagan, as it is for Mance. Like the studio version of “The Panther,” that of “Body and Soul” is more restrained than Gordon’s performance of it at Montreux. This might help explain the superiority of the later version, on which Gordon is more lyrical and introspective, though again he quotes from “Nancy (With the Laughing Face).” Flanagan’s delicate solo seems ideal.

Gordon’s “Valse Robin” and “Mrs. Miniver” provide good contexts for solos, though neither melody is particularly memorable. “The Christmas Song” (Mel Tormé-Robert Wells) though, is beautiful, regardless

of the season. The harmonies seem guaranteed to inspire superior playing by superior musicians, as is the case here. Gordon is the dominant voice, though once again Flanagan’s pithy playing enhances the performance while serving as a foil to Gordon’s extroversion. The quartet plays this tune fairly “straight,” with little stretching out. The session concludes with a rousing “Blues Walk” (Clifford Brown), which is almost as effective as “Blue Monk” at Montreux. The boxed set includes three previously unissued alternate takes of selections from this date.

In July 1970, Gordon and Gene Ammons co-lead a date at the North Park Hotel in Chicago, their first recording together since their days with Billy Eckstine in the 1940s. There were afternoon and evening sessions, with different rhythm sections. Ultimately, a dozen tunes were recorded, some released as *The Chase*. At the afternoon session, each leader performed independent of the other: “Polka Dots and Moonbeams” and “Wee Dot” are by Gordon; “The Happy Blues,” by Ammons. (Despite Gordon’s absence, the Ammons feature is included in the boxed set.) Gordon’s first tune is tepid, perhaps reflecting the early hour; he is more inspired on the second.

The evening session begins inauspiciously with a long, generally lugubrious medley, with Ammons soloing on two tunes; Gordon, on two others. Because both men have recorded many gorgeous ballads, the quality of this performance is surprising. Perhaps they were bidding time before the next selection, a tenor duel on “The Chase.” The results are what one would expect: passionate, up-tempo playing with numerous quotes by Gordon and fewer by Ammons, who employs some Lester Young devices. The saxophonists inspire themselves and the audience. The proceedings conclude with “Lonesome Lover Blues” (two takes, one previously unissued), with a Vi Redd vocal. Predictably, she encourages Ammons and Gordon with the words, “Blow, Mr. Gene; blow Mr. Dexter, too,” precisely as Billy Eckstine exhorted them on “Blowing the Blues Away” in 1944. While they do not blow the blues away, they blow hard on the blues. Engaging though they are on the CD, they must have thrilling to see and hear in person.

A month later in New York, Gordon recorded with Wynton Kelly, Sam Jones, and Roy Brooks. Selections were issued on *The Jumpin’ Blues*. Of the eleven performances, five are issued for the first time in the boxed set. The session is relaxed, straight-ahead, unspectacular. Gordon’s “Evergreenish” seems ordinary, though again he interprets “Rhythmn-a-Ning” energetically. He performs the medium-groove “For Sentimental Reasons” sensitively. Tadd Dameron’s “If You

Could See Me Now” is perhaps the prettiest, most enduring ballad of the bebop era. The simplicity of this performance makes it the highlight of the session. Gordon takes few liberties, preferring to embellish the melody, permitting tone and a judicious selection of notes to convey meaning. The final two tunes are associated with Charlie Parker: “Star Eyes” and “The Jumping Blues.” Of them, the latter is the more engaging. The melody serves primarily to set up rewarding solos by Gordon, Kelly, and Jones.

Not since the appearance of Martin Banks on *The Resurgence of Dexter Gordon* does a trumpeter appear with Gordon on Prestige until the studio session of June 1972, which features Freddie Hubbard. Some of this material appeared on *Tangerine*, some on *Generation*. The boxed set includes a previously unreleased alternate take. This is a controlled session, beginning with “Milestones,” the first, less well-known of two Miles Davis compositions of this title, though this earlier version has also been credited to John Lewis. Dory Previn’s “Scared to Be Alone” seems an unlikely composition for jazz improvisation, though Gordon and Hubbard do well with little. Gordon’s sprightly “The Group” is more effective, though Hubbard seems strained in parts of his solo. Hubbard sits out on “Days of Wine and Roses.” On this ballad-with-a-bounce, Gordon is masterful. It is the most impressive performance of the session. Yet Monk’s “We See” is also good. The quirky melody instantly attracts; both Gordon and Hubbard excel.

Later that month, Gordon returned to the studio for a session that produced tunes released on *Tangerine* and *Ca’Purange*. Trumpeter Thad Jones replaces Hubbard; Hank Jones, Stanley Clarke, and Louis Hayes replace Cedar Walton, Buster Williams, and Billy Higgins. With two exceptions, energy pervades this date, as it does not on the previous, safe session. Vigor is noticeable from the first notes of “Ca’Purange.” It continues on “Tangerine,” on Gordon’s “What It Was” (with a shuffle beat), and especially on Sonny Rollins’ “Airegin.” The last of these is especially impressive. On it, Gordon’s tone seems a little harder than usual, yet his solo is logical and forceful, as is Jones’s briefer statement. Even Gordon’s “Oh! Karen O,” a relaxed blues, is forceful. Here, both of the main soloists play beautifully. Why this is Gordon’s only recording of this piece seems a mystery. The other ballad, “The First Time Ever I saw Your Face,” is quite slow and fairly somnolent, with Debussy touches. Gordon’s “August Blues” is undistinguished.

Gordon concluded his affiliation with Prestige in July 1972, at Montreux, where he

had great success with Junior Mance two years earlier. As happened at the North Park Hotel in Chicago in July 1970, here in Switzerland Gordon plays with two different groups on the same day. He appears as leader of five tunes with Hampton Hawes, Bob Cranshaw, and Kenny Clarke. (Four selections were released as *Blues à la Suisse*; the boxed set includes a previously unissued performance.) Unfortunately, Hawes plays an electric piano, which seemed ubiquitous in the 1970s. Such is the case on Jimmy Heath's "Gingerbread Boy." While Gordon performs passionately, Hawes's sound—while comping and soloing—seems inappropriate: it undercuts Gordon's muscular playing; it is an inadequate foundation for a solid structure. I admit to bias: from the beginning of its common appearance in jazz performances, the electric piano struck me then as tinny, insubstantial, unmodulated, and distracting. I continue responding to it in this manner.

"Blues à la Suisse" is a brisk blues with effective Gordon; it is similar in mood to "Secret Love," which bears little resemblance to Doris Day's hit recording of this composition. Two ballads conclude the program. Gordon introduces "Some Other Spring" attractively, with thirty-five seconds of unaccompanied playing, without hinting at the melody. Perfect. This is the tempo perhaps best suited for Gordon in his maturity: slow. He cares about notes and nuance and beauty, as he demonstrates on this performance and elsewhere, but not always. The final selection on the quartet session, Gordon's "Tivoli" (evocative of both "Alfie" and "Emily"), is an exception to this statement. Its tempo is relatively slow, but possibly because of the undistinguished melody, the performance is not the equal of "Some Other Spring." Prestige had too much material for the original vinyl release. It wisely omitted "Tivoli."

Gordon's appearance at Montreux and on Prestige recordings concludes with "Treu Bleu," a composition of the nominal leader, Gene Ammons, which was issued on *Gene Ammons and Friends at Montreux*. In addition to Ammons, Cannonball Adderley, Nat Adderley, and Kenneth Nash join the Gordon quartet, creating, in essence, the Ammons octet for an all-star jam session. The solo sequence is Gordon (who warms to the task), Nat Adderley (who falters badly at the end of his solo), Ammons (rousing), Cannonball Adderley (initially sly, then wailing), then trading of fours followed by a restatement of the theme.

With "Treu Bleu" in 1972, Gordon's career on Prestige comes full circle: he is a sideman on a blowing session, as is the case on his first Prestige recording, "Move," with Wardell Gray's sextet in 1950. In between,

Gordon created music for Prestige that helps establish his reputation as one of the great tenor saxophonists. True, if his career had ended in 1950—as it almost did—he would still have a stellar reputation, as indicated by his recordings and by Ira Gitler's focus on him in *Jazz Masters of the Forties*. Yet he recorded into 1987, though the decade of the 1950s was largely a waste. He was consistently at his post-1950s best on Blue Note, but the Prestige recordings are of generally high quality. To me, the high point—among many highs—is the Montreux session with Junior Mance; the low point—among few lows—is *The Resurgence of Dexter Gordon*. Having all these recordings—including many previously unreleased performances—available in one place demonstrates the value of CD technology and attests to the wisdom of the executives at Fantasy, the parent company of Prestige.

Dexter Gordon's *Nights at the Keystone* (Mosaic Select 014)

By LAURENCE SVIRCHEV

Dexter Gordon loved to make inventively sweet introductions to concert audiences. They were short ditties, sometimes in rhyme. His showmanship seemed designed to set the audience at ease about the song to come. Deep-voiced and articulating slowly, here is how he introduces *It's You or No One*: "For me, / It's got to be, / Can't you, / C?" It's a nicely-told musical joke that also resolves a key question for the band. Gordon, as usual, opens the composition with the melody, but he rapidly throws in a one-liner from *Surrey with the Fringe on Top*, the part of the lyric that goes "Chicken, geese, and

ducks better scurry." And then it's off for the ride of a solo.

The ride, mostly fast tempo runs or ballad romances, continues through 19 cuts. Gordon frequently threw in delightful quotes from other compositions and some may consider this device to be clichéd. I'd argue differently. His use of quotes has nothing to do with running low on improvisational ammunition, but rather from his deep appreciation of melody and his profound knowledge of the lyrics of songs. Gordon's music grew out of the bop revolution when lyrics mightily influenced the way jazz musicians played. Gordon's appreciation of spoken- and sung-words helped form not only his melodic eloquence but his emotional warmth on the horn.

Most of the cuts are over twelve minutes long with extended tenor sax and piano workouts and few bass and drum solos. The counter-balance to hearing Gordon's seeming endless inventions is that the arrangements take on a certain repetition: melody, tenor solo, piano solo, reprise of melody and out. Perhaps this is because the cuts were culled from the live recordings over several tenures at the Keystone Korner in 1978-79.

But each cut taken on its own is a gem. Pianist George Cables not only provides the antithesis to Gordon's steadiness, but also renders the gems polished and sophisticated, with a sheen of abstraction. Take his solo, with no supporting rhythm section, on "As Time Goes By." He deconstructs the basic melody into short segments played at slow tempo. In between the segments are fast runs frequently broken up by stop-time intervals. Each run gets longer until there is high tension in the music. Then he returns to a full melody statement, the rest of the band kicks in, and the ballad becomes a love song again.

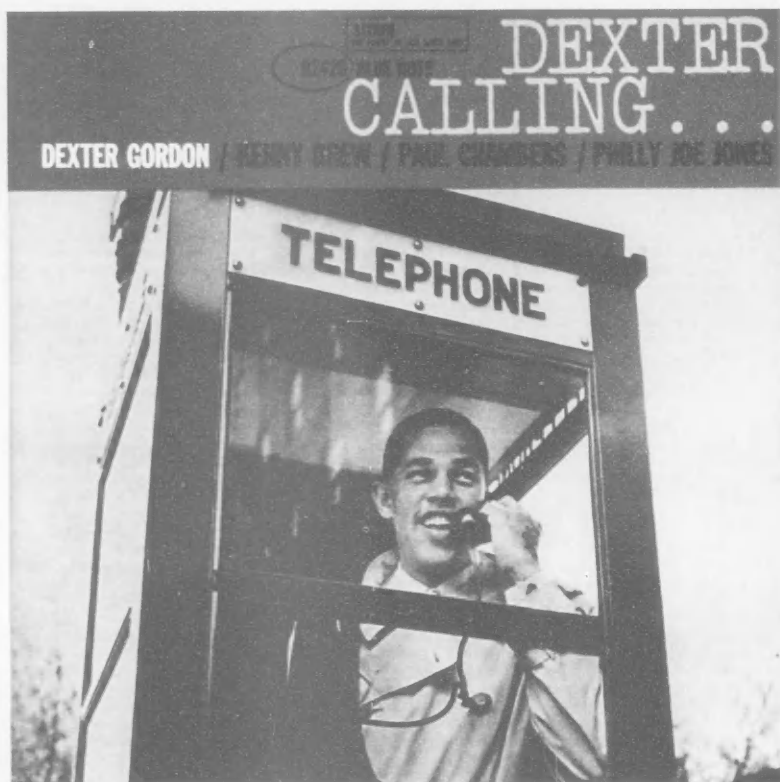
Overall, this is one of the music sets that can make a listener happy there is no longer a needle to wear out the LP grooves. If your name is Sam, you'll find yourself frequently muttering to yourself, "Play it again."



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Dexter Gordon's Blue Notes and a Further Note

BY STUART BROOMER

While the *Complete Prestige Recordings* and the Mosaic reissue of the Keynote Sessions will get the lion's share of attention, Blue Note has recently reissued three of their Dexter Gordon titles in the Rudy Van Gelder series with the usual upgraded sound. Gordon made some of the best recordings of his career for Blue Note between 1961 and 1965.

The very best of those—the quartets of *Go* (Blue Note 98794), from 1962 with Sonny Clark, and *Our Man in Paris* (80914), from 1963 with Bud Powell and Kenny Clarke—have already appeared in the RVG series. The recent issues begin with *Doin' Alright* (96503), Gordon's first Blue Note session, from May 6, 1961. It's an amiable hard-bop quintet that sets Gordon amidst Freddie Hubbard, Horace Parlan, George Tucker and Al Harewood. Gordon, despite his long West Coast sinecure, is clearly a master at work, and you feel a welcoming regard from the band.

Dexter Calling (Blue Note 92420), from just three days later, ups the ante. It's a quartet session with the superb accompanying unit of Kenny Drew, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones (the backing trio of *Blue Train*), and Gordon rises to the implicit challenge. "Soul Sister," "I Want More," and "Ernie's Tune" (the last both complex and extraordinarily pretty) were all drawn from Gordon's score for the LA production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection*. Gordon was an orator, at his best when he controlled the flow as he could in a quartet, and like his other Blue Note quartets (*A Swingin' Affair* is yet another), this is Gordon at his peak.

One Flight Up (Blue Note 96505) is a Paris quintet recording from 1964 with the emphasis on the casual originals and extended blowing that would characterize Gordon's live performances. Donald Byrd's contribution, "Tanya," runs 18 minutes; Kenny Drew's "Coppin' the Haven" and Gordon's "Kong Neptune" 11 minutes each. The modally-based tunes highlight the influence of Coltrane on Gordon, an intriguing case of reciprocal influence. Though the session is not of the very first order, there's positive chemistry among bassist Neils-Henning Orsted Pedersen and the expatriates, Art Taylor completing the band.

A further note: Dexter Gordon is one of those artists who appear in unexpected places. I first noticed him in the early '60s in a film about drug addiction. Gordon was an inmate standing in the background in a prison yard playing his tenor. I think it was a documentary about Synanon, but a search of the Internet Movie Data Base turns up *Unchained*, a 1955 drama shot at California's Chino prison in which Gordon, a real inmate, turns up playing anonymously in the prison band. If my memory is at all accurate then there are two such film appearances. Recently in *The Herbert Huncke Reader*, the collected writings of the proto-beat who had an immense early influence on Burroughs and Ginsberg, I read the following in Jerome Boynton's "Biographical Sketch": "He was close enough to the scene to pull several small burglaries with jazz great Dexter Gordon. Together they broke into cars, stole fur coats, and sold them to prostitutes they knew in Harlem." Later in his career, Gordon not only embodied the classic jazz musician in his resurgence, but went on to his largest fame playing jazz musicians in films, as Dale Turner—a hybrid of Lester Young and Bud Powell—in *Round Midnight*, and as one of the catatonics in *Awakenings*. There's a parable there, for all of Gordon's (usually public) reawakenings. It's entirely apt that he re-emerged in 1961 leading the on-stage band in a production of *The Connection*. Reality and representation, art and crime, blur into one.

Listening to the recent welter of Gordon reissues suggests a certain relation between Gordon's life and the increasing frequency of his extended "quotations," interpolated melodies in the midst of his improvisation. Part of it is the harmonic fluency of the best boppers, the ability to make something fit harmonically, however unlikely or comic the quote and the terrain. In the case of Gordon, though (and likely Parker and Powell), I'd suggest this artful quotation is something more. These are "cover stories" or alibis—doubles, deceptions, duplicities, lies, a brilliant analogue of the verbal ability to invent and falsify. They dovetail nicely with the notion of jazz as a language.

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FEATURE REVIEWS

WOODY HERMAN ON MOSAIC

By DUCK BAKER

The Woody Herman bands of the mid to late 40's represent the last high water mark of the Big Band Era, and the greatest legacy of one of the best loved of all bandleaders. After about a decade of apprenticeship as a sideman and heading up unexceptional outfits, Herman got into gear just after the war, when most bandleaders were pulling their groups off the road. And he did it by aiming for sheer musical excellence, something that's supposed to be anathema on the marketplace. Starting in 1945, Herman led a series of "Herds" that helped redefine the big band sound. Crucial was the balance represented by great arrangers like Ralph Burns and Neil Hefti, and great soloists like Bill Harris and Flip Phillips. The rosters of the first Herds included any number of players who went on to greater things in the years to come, Conte Condoli, Shorty Rogers, Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Serge Chaloff, John LaPorta, Billy Bauer and Jimmy Rowles being among the more obvious. There were also a couple of swing era veterans who made enormous contributions in Red Norvo and Dave Tough, and at the other end there was Sonny Berman, whose heroin habit cut short a promising career before it really got going.

The Complete Columbia Recordings of Woody Herman and His Orchestra and Woodchoppers (Mosaic MD7-223), a seven CD set, does contain a high number of previously unissued tracks (over 40), but readers who already own the classic sides should not expect too much from these, which is to say there's no unheard "Four Brothers" or anything comparable. Does the extra take of "Caledonia" add that much to what we knew from the three that have been out there? And even though Herman was a very fine singer, listeners who don't do well with period pop fare are not likely to warm up to the vocal tracks, which account for a high percentage of the new material here. I do agree with annotator Loren Schoenberg that Herman's lesser efforts from this period were better than most bands' best, and his point that we shouldn't be judgmental about soloists who repeat ideas from take to take is also well taken, though this is also another indicator that the unheard takes are not essential listening except for specialists. All of that said, this listener did enjoy the exercise of comparing the alternates, particularly with Schoenberg's notes as a roadmap. He consistently delivers insights that even the most dedicated of Herman heads will find stimulating and which should prove invaluable to younger listeners trying to get a

handle on what was so special about the music when it happened.

Also included in this set is the band's brave recording of Stravinsky's "Ebony Concerto" with the composer conducting. One might say that they couldn't quite bring it off, and one certainly can say that no

classical ensemble of the time stood a chance, but hearing this piece in the context of the Herman Band's recordings makes more sense than hearing it lumped in with other period Stravinsky. If it was a failure it was a glorious one.

Though this set is not for everyone it is certainly a worthy tribute to one of our greatest bandleaders, served up with all the style we expect from Mosaic.

TAL FARLOW'S VERVE SESSIONS

By DUCK BAKER

The case of Tal Farlow is an odd one. No one apart from Charlie Christian contributed more to the development of modern jazz guitar, and he was recognized as one of its major exponents from 1952 to 1959, the period covered by the seven CDs of *The Complete Verve Tal Farlow Sessions*

(Mosaic MD7-224). Farlow retired from the fray while at the height of his popularity and despite a comeback attempt or two in later years never fully regained the attention of the jazz world. He was important as a pioneer of high-end guitar technique, especially regarding the use of false harmonics and densely voiced chords made possible by his huge hands, not to mention the sheer velocity of his single-note lines. He was also the pivotal figure in moving away from the driving style popularized by Charlie Christian, which depended mostly on downstrokes with the plectrum, towards the use of up and down strokes, and even more on legato techniques. Guitarists have admired Farlow's technical prowess ever since, but his greater importance lies in the fact that he was a very interesting improviser. Any time you start feeling that know what's coming next he's likely to pull out some insane lick that completely spins you around.

It's curious that Farlow made his first splash in the same setting as Charles Mingus, the trio led by vibraphonist Red Norvo (Farlow was "featured" in the trio, which sort of left Mingus out in the cold, a detail unlikely to have gone unnoticed by the bassist, who certainly didn't wax nostalgic about the group when he wrote his autobiography). A few rare Decca sides by

this group lead off, and they are a fair indicator both of the abilities of the young guitarist and of a cutesy group approach that doesn't date particularly well. As soon as we hit the first Farlow-led session here, it's as if the guitarist was set free, though in fact he continued to utilize more worked-out arrangements than were the norm for the hotter modern styles. Not that a soloist as hot as Farlow could be called a cool-schooler, but the instrumental settings definitely aren't hard bop, so listeners whose taste runs that way should sample the music before taking on this much of it. Listeners who like lightly swinging modern fare that falls between swing, mainstream and cool approaches can proceed with confidence, but for guitar devotees this set is truly, in the words of annotator Howard Arlen, the "Holy Grail of jazz guitar."

Special mention should be made of the trio sides that feature bassist Vinnie Burke and pianist Eddie Costa, for several reasons. One is that some of this material has been difficult to track down for a long time. Another is that it has special interest as the record of a working group, and repeated listens show how well attuned its members were. Lastly, Costa, who died in 1962 in his early 30's, was a player whom Coda readers should investigate, a unique pianist (and interesting vibist) who bore superficial resemblance to many contemporaries but really had his own style. Costa and Farlow were a great match, as is shown here and even more vividly on the live recordings that appeared on vinyl on the Xanadu label as "Fuerst Set" and "Second Set."

Again, not for every taste, but essential for anyone who likes the instrument, and a worthy reminder of a significant and unjustly forgotten figure.

The above recordings are available solely through Mosaic Records, 35 Melrose Place, Stamford, CT 06902; (203) 327-7111. www.mosaicrecords.com

TORONTO TONES

By JERRY D'SOUZA

An interesting range of styles and approach mark these releases. Some find their groove in post-bop, others on the unfettered path of free improvisation or the ardor of Latin jazz. The last belongs to **Hilario Duran** who now makes Toronto his home. His *New Danzon* (Alma Records ACD 14622) is a mix of originals, Latin standards and one Charlie Parker tune. Duran is an interesting pianist whose sense of style and approach invests his music with a cohesive strength. He has a sure sense for melody that he extends into logical probes with the groove his calling card. His playing is robust on "Yemaya Olodo" which he balances with a nice sensitivity as he dovetails the tempo and

strikes rich chords. There are mood shifts, as in the calmer waters of "Velas," but once again he illuminates his path with choice notes that fall into enticing pattern.

Also on *Alma* is the **Roberto Occhipinti Ensemble's *The Cusp*** (ACD 12502). Occhipinti takes a diverse route, bringing in several different attributes including music from Mali, West Africa and Cuba, classical and rock. He has a fine band to lend focus to his vision and that is why this record succeeds on a high level. The ensemble works in precise cohesion, and the solos add that adjunct which gives a tune its sinew. The latter is pronounced on "Voodoo Chile," an elliptical orb that muscles the Hendrix tune. But a touch of softness comes when needed, "Ana Maria" being filled with that attribute most beautifully.

Drums, guitar and bass translate into Barry Romberg, Lorne Lofsky and Kieran Overs, known collectively as **Inside Out**. They have a CD of standards with one original tune from Lofsky on *What Is This Thing?* (Romhog 106). The trio lights a quiet fire, comfortable in each other's company. Lofsky is clean and precise, keeping his path focused and shading his excursions with colors that beckon but don't blind. And he can swing lightly and with precision as "All Blues" shows, even as the base is stirred by Romberg and Overs. It is perhaps fitting that his composition is called "One for Ed," a tribute to the great guitar player Ed Bickert. He wears his heart on his sleeve and turns in an enriching performance. This record is one that will reward a quiet evening.

There is no grudging the **Mike Murley Quintet** some *Extra Time* (Cornerstone CRST CD 123), as they come up with an entertaining program that is not bereft of outstanding musicianship. The call rises from the first note that Murley blows, the herald that stamps the class of the band. Murley has a strong presence voicing articulately, divining his path with astute sense. He lends depth and dimension to his journey, one that is well-complemented by John MacLeod's flugelhorn on "Creature of Habit" with an interesting perspective and Dave Restivo who propels the theme forward on the piano. The atmosphere on "Santiago Reflections" is soft and glowing as Murley turns in a ballad that radiates eloquence. A quirky mood inveigles "The Split 2," squiggles emanating from the horns, the arco of Jim Vivian's bass taking over and then the sweetness of Murley's horn that finds its soul mate in MacLeod. The line sidles and shifts, trods the straight and narrow and cries in anguish, all of which rivet.

The **Al Henderson Quintet's *Fathers and Sons*** (Cornerstone CRST CD 124) has six long tunes that resonate and swing. There is a comely air to them even when they move back in time with the arrangements. The latter serves them well when they find "Darwin's Ghost," as Pat LaBarbera on tenor and Alex Dean on alto unleash a rambunctious mood spurred by drummer Barry Romberg and bassist Henderson. But the beat is shunted by

the pirouetting piano of Richard Whiteman which takes it back to the dance hall and the shimmy. At the other end of the spectrum sits "Marcus M." in an unhurried spell of power, the horns rooted deep and strong, sprouting the melody and then building the branches on the wings of fertile imagination.

Nancy Walker shows what happens *When She Dreams* (Justin Time JTR 8505-2) as she brings in a set of original compositions. Walker's writing uses pretty shades and filigrees that are nice on the surface but do not always cut deep. In consequence, the moods she evokes tend to flit by rather than leave an impress and linger. If there is an imperative it comes from Kirk MacDonald, the tensility of his tenor and the changes he injects give "Thirty" a likeable facet. There is a more commanding take on "Blues for the Hatchet Man". MacDonald curls in, raising the tempo gradually into a whirlwind, with Walker then taking flight. There isn't much else that resonates.

Inspiration encompasses the Songs of Spirituality that mark *Come Sunday* (Justin Time JTR 8503-2) from **P. J. Perry** and **Doug Riley**. The spirituals here have varied flavor but Perry and Riley bring them to their full essence. Even as the two savor the gentler moments, they can also bristle and burn. Could there be a better way to merit a hallelujah than to preach a "Sermonette"? The hot gospel fervor rains down from the sax of Perry, the melody molten and flowing into the piano of Riley whose ministrations sing with a funky lyricism. Two original compositions that elevate the mood come in "Freedom" and "A Waltz." The melodies have an instant lure essayed to the hilt by Perry. Riley uses the B3 Hammond on the latter, rolling into the niches with instinctive ease.

Time for some open-ended playing and it comes from the **Lina Allemano Four** on *Concentric* (Lumo Records LM 2003-1). Allemano brings a wide perspective to her composing and trumpet playing. She is clean and clear, her notes ringing like a bell but she is not beyond injecting slabs of fire that dart out and ignite. She carves her path with finesse; not a note is let loose without purpose or impression. Her trumpet rings a clarion call on "Trundle," introspective in mood yet with a grip that never slips. Allemano has a worthy cohort in guitarist David Occhipinti. He is a stylist cut in the same mould and that entwining defines the best moments. But whichever way you look at it, this is exceptional music.

BLUE NOTE REISSUES

BY DUCK BAKER

Recent Blue Note reissues that deserve special attention include some fine dates from the time when hard bop still held center stage but shared it with newer styles. **Art Blakey** was

one of the definitive hard boppers, a figure with whom Coda readers may be supposed to be familiar. But it's no exaggeration to say that unless you know *Free For All* (Blue Note 92426) you don't really know Art Blakey. He goes much further here than anywhere else on record, as if he wanted to prove just once that Philly Joe or Elvin Jones were never a bit badder than he was. He practically leaves his brilliant front line (Freddie Hubbard, Curtis Fuller, Wayne Shorter) gasping on the title track, then turns around and plays almost nothing but backbeats on "Hammer Head," for some reason, though the horn players sound stronger here — maybe he was scaring them earlier. Another burner, "The Core," and a wild take on bossa with "Pensativa" round out this revelatory 1964 session. *Buhaina's Delight* (BN 92425) was a classic outing by essentially the same group from three years earlier. The leader was in wonderful if not supersonic form, and the program is great, featuring top-notch tunes from Shorter, Fuller and Cedar Walton and an arrangement of "Moon River" that makes you wonder whether the moon in question might be orbiting Saturn or Jupiter.

Freddie Hubbard's *Breaking Point* (BN90845) marked his '64 departure from Blakey to lead his own group, and it's just too bad that Freddie didn't keep this unit (with James Spaulding, Ronnie Mathews, Eddie Khan and Joe Chambers) together for another 40 years. Both hornmen are in good form throughout and the rhythm section is excellent. Mathews comps and solos nicely and Chambers is just beautiful—dig his work behind Spaulding on the opener. If only these two could have gotten constant exposure while Mr. Hubbard kept on this path... Back in the real world, the very interesting *Blue Spirits* (BN 94317) shows that a couple of years later the leader was still playing great trumpet and writing fascinating tunes. Most of the record comes from two early 1965 dates designed to showcase Freddie's ability to write for four horns. Spaulding and euphonium player Kiane Zawadi remain constant, with Joe Henderson and Hank Mobley dividing time on tenor. More importantly, the first date featured drummer Clifford Jarvis and Big Black on Congas while the second had only Pete LaRocca, whose lighter, more flexible style worked better. All in all this is a very rewarding record that deserves wider recognition, rounded out by two tracks with yet another line-up from the following year, Henderson returning alongside altoist/bassoonist Hosea Taylor and a fascinating rhythm section, Herbie Hancock, Reggie Workman, and Elvin Jones. The final "True Colors" is a trip, featuring the wildest bassoon solo of all time and Herbie on celeste.

Jackie McLean's best work for the label is generally thought of as being a couple of years earlier than 1965's *Action* (BN 96499), but this is still a great record. Trumpeter Charles Tolliver was an excellent front line partner and the rhythm tandem of Cecil McBee and Billy Higgins was almost ideal, but the difference

maker was Bobby Hutcherson, who was still playing in that wonderful style he developed in the early 60's only to abandon by the decade's end. Bobby's vibes, as was noted so often at the time, seemed to provide the perfect spare harmonic backdrop for the music of this period. Inspired soloing, strong compositions, and great group interplay make this one a must.

This same accolade applies with even greater force to **Andrew Hill's *Black Fire*** (BN 96501). This was Hill's first record for the label and it set the standard for all the classics that followed, from "Judgment" to "Point of Departure" to the recently unearthed "Dance with Death." The pianist's penchant for asymmetrical structures, fragmented melody, even more fragmented improvisations, and unusual harmonic progressions were all in evidence. Richard Davis and Roy Haynes really lift the music, with Joe Henderson joining in on five of the original seven tracks (there are also two alternates). That this was no casual studio association is apparent from the way Henderson digs in.

It took this writer a long time to catch up with **McCoy Tyner's *Tender Moments*** (BN 96509), the title and cover photo having lulled me into thinking that it was an exposition of the pianist's more introspective side. But Tyner was an interesting hard bopper before immigrating to Modal-land, and this late 1967 outing shows how well he could combine the two approaches. The nine-piece group assembled here includes trumpet, trombone, tenor and alto saxophones, French horn and tuba. The dense scoring is an even bigger attraction than the fine soloing and attractive, varied compositions, but best of all is the way this one-shot studio group came together to bring the music to life.

FRODE GJERSTAD: SITUATIONS

BY STUART BROOMER

Norwegian altoist and clarinetist Frode Gjerstad warrants special attention, a musician whose consistent energy, focus and emotional directness are among the on-going pleasures of free music. He shares with the late Jimmy Lyons both an innate lyricism and a developmental approach to long solos—a balance of feeling and form that makes him a natural for trio play (he has worked in one with Johnny Dyani and John Stevens and in another with William Parker and Rashid Bakr), both providing linear focus and driving deep into the rhythmic dialogue of bass and drums. Three recent CDs focus his significant talent in different ways. He makes the most of a situation, and recent encounters have created some remarkable music, demonstrating both his mastery of free jazz and the special forms of current British improvised music.

The Welsh Chapel (Cadence CJR 1161) places Gjerstad with one of the stellar pairings of English free improv, **John Edwards** and **Mark Sanders**. The bassist and drummer have a profound familiarity with one another's musical terrain, an ability to construct complex landscapes that both interact with a lead voice and develop their own instinctive directions. It's a kind of loose/tight feel, marked by Sanders' balance of tension and relaxation. In this series of group improvisations, Gjerstad is particularly expressive in the extended upper register in the early going on "Part 3," finding an emotional range that would usually signal climax and remaining there until it becomes almost tranquil. In fact, it's Gjerstad's capacity to transform his collection of bleats and cries, squawks and whirrings into sustained, almost meditative work that marks him as a player of the first order.

That principle of dialogue is paramount on **Nearly a D** (Emanem 4087), Gjerstad's duet with **Derek Bailey**. While many of Bailey's duet CDs seem like exercises in distance (special meaning to "stereo separation"), this one is adamant about dialogue, reminiscent in some ways of Bailey's duets with Steve Lacy. While Gjerstad is often a direct improviser, he seems to have achieved a special omni-directionality here, engaging specifics that arise in the Bailey scatter style. By the end of the opening "Bells," the two achieve an abstract synchronicity. So close are the thought patterns the music enters phases of simultaneous echo in which one does not distinguish initiating and following patterns. Gjerstad is also remarkable in bending into Bailey's harmonics on "Stairs," pressing the range of the beautiful. Together the two seem to be borrowing one another's very sounds. Successive pieces grow shorter as the bonds grow closer.

Gjerstad's regular Norwegian trio of bassist Oyvind Storesund and drummer Paul Nilssen-Love join him on **Sharp Knives Cut Deeper** (Splasc(h) CDH 850.2), where they're in turn joined by another long-time associate, **Peter Brötzmann**. As in the Bailey session, Gjerstad is a fine match with a better-known partner, functioning at Brötzmann's emotive level just as he accommodates Bailey's level of abstraction. The four-part "Sharp Knives Cut Deeper" is moody, insistent work beginning as a duet between clarinet and bass clarinet on a tautly melancholy theme. As the rhythm section joins in, it launches extraordinary solos and dialogues. Before the first episode is over the group has found a controlled intensity that few bands ever achieve, the two horns fuelled by one another and Nilssen-Love's rampaging drums. The group has strong roots in free jazz, a tradition that springs to new life in the course of this CD.

These all deserve to be widely heard.

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Jessica Jones Quartet Nod

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Across 7 Street is a quintet of musicians who used to congregate at the NYC club called Smalls and now are recording for the label that has taken that name. They appeared on an Impulse CD *Jazz Underground: Live at Smalls* some time ago but were given very little space. For the vast majority of us, then, this group is a discovery, and it is really an exciting one. Tenor saxophonist Chris Byars and trombonist John Mosca share the front line over an intriguing rhythm team comprised of Sacha Perry, Ari Roland and Danny Rosenfeld. Perry, whose harmonic sense is quite evolved and original, seems especially valuable. Though one hears general influences like Monk and Elmo Hope, Perry is very much his own man. Actually the pianist he reminds me of most would be the young Argonne Thornton in his pre-Sadik Hakim days, but this is more for a quirky, almost stumbling kind of phrasing than for any of the notes he plays. Mosca is the one player here who might be familiar; he's been with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra all the back to Thad and Mel days, and now directs the unit. He and Byars are both impressive soloists who prove that it's quite possible for contemporary players to find new ways to play in what is essentially a very advanced hard bop style. Both score with solo construction that's anything but obvious, and both enjoy interpolating sly quotations into their soliloquies.

Roland, Byers and Perry contribute to the all-original program. All three can really write and their styles are complementary. Special mention should be made of Roland and Rosenfeld's work. These guys really tune in to each other and to what's going on around them. In fact, good as the writing and soloing are, the group feeling is what stands out the most about this record.

Also impressive is the new release from tenor saxophonist/pianist Jessica Jones, who like her husband, tenor Tony Jones, is a product of the mid-70's Berkeley, California scene that also gave us Steve Bernstein and Peter Apfelbaum, among others. The Joneses are joined by their regular quartet members Ken Filiano on bass and Derrek Phillips on drums, but six of eight tracks also feature other players, starting with an appearance by pianist Connie Crothers for her knocked-out, Lennie-like line "Bird's Word." When they play as a tenor tandem it can be hard to keep up with which Jones is which; they share a kind of pained quality in their instrumental sound and a stylistic debt to both the Tristano school and to free jazz players, an interesting combination of influences. The second track is a very hip

quartet reworking of Jackie McLean's "Little Melonie." Then we change gears again for "Happiness Is," which features lyrics reminiscent of Sun Ra while Crothers returns on piano along with two more guests, Joseph Jarman on alto and Mark Taylor on French horn. Young Levi Jones contributes the vocal here, and later we hear his sister Candace sing "These Foolish Things" to good effect. It's a kick to hear Jarman and Crothers together, but neither steals the limelight from the main actors.

Amazingly, all of the stylistic shifts are managed without a hitch, and though some listeners will no doubt find some tracks more successful than others, it would be a hard call for this writer. Hopefully Jones and her quartet will continue to explore all the facets of the music they work with on this fine record.

Duck Baker

Ken Aldcroft Group

Kirby Sideroad

Trio Records TRP-006

Typically elegant and perceptive in understatement, Canadian guitarist/composer Ken Aldcroft impresses with the slow burn and the long stretch. At first listen, the two discs comprising *Kirby Sideroad* are very much of a mood, all twilight indigos with glimmers of light in the distance as conveyed in the slightly spooky cover photograph of a darkened road and field. While there is a sense of the witching hour approaching—call it music for driving home late at night, preferably in late autumn—there is ample variety to charge the atmosphere without breaking it. It begins with fairly dramatic bop in the title track, with an ominous, circling guitar figure. Alto saxophonist Evan Shaw is provocative company, however, kicking "A Strained Hello" back and forth between an easy-swinging blues and more urgent music. There's ample room for Shaw, bassist Wes Neal and drummer Joe Sorbaro to nudge and comment upon the music, whether enhancing the atmospherics or, in "Not Far from Home," leaving pensiveness behind to groove. After "A Country Mile," where Aldcroft plays against his own plangent loops, he even gives the trio a chance to burn without him in "From a Pause." Fans of Bill Frisell, Terje Rypdal and Robert Fripp will find their entry points the fastest, yet Aldcroft is his own man.

Randal McIlroy

Jimmy Amadie with Phil Woods

Live at Red Rock Studio

TP Recordings CD-1537

www.jimmyamadie.com

This meeting of Amadie and Woods is in some ways more than 40 years overdue, but those decades have allowed them to attain a state of mutual bop grace via incredibly different paths. Woods, now in his early 70s, has recorded hundreds of times. Amadie is in his late 60s; this is his fourth album. The mother of all tendonitis has prevented Amadie from being a prolific performer or recording artist, but not from being an excellent pianist. He plays with

a focused abandon, somewhere between Monk and Mose Allison, which gives him plenty of waterfront, and he covers it nicely. The band sound often conjures up what was best in all those storied Blue Note dates of yore.

Though these sessions were Amadie's and Woods' first encounter, there's nothing tentative about any of this music. The rhythm section deserves credit for acting as handmaidens in this regard. Steve Gilmore and Bill Goodwin have long served Woods meritoriously, and were Amadie's preferred colleagues for his previous trio album. Four of the eight tunes here are rendered by the trio, the other four with Woods. Three are Amadie originals, all nice, thoughtful tunes with some interesting twists.

Don't look for radical breaking of new musical ground here, but revel in the level of musicianship and the falling-off-a-log-easy feel of the band. The music is in good hands with practitioners like these, and even those things we've heard before are a treat to hear again when done in such sublime fashion.

Patrick Hinely

Buyu Ambroise

Blues in Red

Justin Time JTR-8506-2

Born in Port-au-Prince and now living in what some consider the Mecca for jazz, New York, tenor saxophonist Alix "Buyu" Ambroise blends a fine sensibility for jazz with Haitian rhythms for an interesting, and often compelling record. Ambroise has a deep, warm tone and an agile mind as well, which give shape and dimension to this journey. Traditional Haitian music, however, is the dominant voice and its many facets leave an indelible mark. The beat inveigles itself into "Kouzen," the Latin percussion of Emedin Rivera setting the pulse and then entwining with a jaunty Ambrose. Another folk tune takes shape as a waltz on "Minis Azaka," getting its lifeblood from Ambroise, who twirls along the melodic line before extending the theme with hard-edged lines. These are just two of the traditional tunes, and they reverberate with a heady passion. There is also the deep feeling that a ballad brings, and the big voice of the tenor in tandem with the lithe grace of Alix "Tit" Pascal's guitar on "Konviksyon," a juxtaposition that illumines the concept behind the composition, the struggle for a people's right to be heard. At a tangent to the rest is their take on "Caravan," a big, burly rendition that rumbles along, fired by drummer Obed Calvaire on the drums and egged on by trombonist Dion Tucker, with pianist Frederic Las Fargeas adding a temperate, melodic interlude.

Jerry D'Souza

Jeff Arnal/ Dietrich Eichmann

temperature dropped again

Leo LR 390

Jeff Arnal/Gordon Beferman/Seth Misterka

Rara Avis

Generate Records 09

Eichmann's piano almost always sounds pre-

pared in some way or another, making it that much closer to a percussion instrument for much of *the temperature dropped again*. His glittery clunks aren't as sharply rhythmic as Chris Burn's solo stuff, but he's got just as large an arsenal of extended piano technique and, like Burn, his tone is often imbued with a touch of darkness. As Eichmann plumbs the lower registers of the piano on "half pint," Arnal unleashes some zig-zagging pitter patters on wood blocks. In fact, the most distinctive element of Arnal's style, at least as revealed on these two discs, is an especially bright pop! that he coaxes out of unsuspecting blocks. Big mallet work appears on "bermuda triangle boat trip" and a strange pattern, like chopping a metal pipe into smaller and smaller tones, greets Eichmann's fabulous, methodically-developed piano line during "l'écureuil ivrogne." Arnal plays what he plays well, and seems confident, but his playing lacks a sense of urgency or fever, making much of this music sound dispassionate, despite Eichmann's most convincing efforts.

The trio with Beferman on electric piano and Misterka on various saxophones is full of considered interactions, the music moving more by drift than any instrumentalists' intentions. Misterka gets easily riled up on sax when he's been playing for anything over two minutes: several tunes start out very nicely, but end up at the same places we've already been. "Conspirators," for example, begins with lip-snarling syncopation—a refreshingly clear sax voicing, straight piano dashes and crisp drum snaps. For improvised music timing is everything, and to get the synchronization displayed at the start of this track reveals a powerful intuitive current running through these three musicians. But by the second minute it's all out of hand and the band doesn't seem to know how to wrangle the music back into fertile territory without starting over. Tentative actions build up to irresolvable climaxes that stop the development of the music, like on "Hive." The big-toned saxing on "Basement Scientist," however, shows that Misterka has some strong chops, and Arnal fills in the introduction with deep tom-tom rolls that slow down naturally, like they're going uphill. Beferman's "electric piano" confuses me: sometimes it sounds like a grand, sometimes prepared, sometimes genuinely electric, sometimes like a guitar. Whatever the case, his playing is generally lively and welcome. It's the ensemble's sound and direction that could use some work. With no tunes over eight minutes long, I'd like to hear this ensemble stretch out into longer improvisations, pushing themselves to explore the less comfortable terrain, even if only to discover how to avoid it in the future. More risk, less stagnation. Arnal does sound like he's hitting everything just how he wants to on both albums, but now that he can do what he wants to do, he needs to want to do more.

Andrew Choate

Django Bates

You Live And Learn ... (apparently)

Lost Marble 001

General Pinochet, government profligacy, corrupt politicians, mad cow disease, consumerism—English composer/keyboard player Django Bates, winner of the 1997 Jazzpar Prize, deals with all these and more on his first album since 1998's *Quiet Nights*. And yet, for all Bates' acute awareness of human venality, his musical and lyrical wit prevent the overall effect from being dark and depressing and the tone is instead, for the most part, resigned and ironic.

The songs are sung by Swedish singer Josefine Lindstrand, whose voice is light and intriguingly other-worldly, and the music played by Bates' regular band Human Chain, which includes saxophonist Iain Ballamy, augmented here and there by the Smith (string) Quartet, guitarist Jim Mullen and saxophonist David Sanborn, which often thrillingly, and wrongfootingly, incorporates free and contemporary jazz, samba, rap, soul, rock, TV themes—and, indeed, football chants.

Three of the twelve tracks are intriguing covers: "My Way", on which Bates' strangely off-kilter arrangement undercuts the self-aggrandizing of the lyrics, with Lindstrand at moments communicating something closer to terror than the complacency that irritates in most versions of the song; David Bowie's enigmatic "Life On Mars;" and Gilbert O'Sullivan's "Alone Again (Naturally)," a song so bleak that one is left wondering how the hell it ever became a middle-of-the-road chart smash for its composer in 1972. Of Bates' compositions, a personal favorite is the hilarious "Football" which explains the national game in terms so naive ("You kick the ball with your foot—that's why they call it football" is one example) that paradoxically they imbue the sport with an air of impenetrable mystery and exoticism.

Trevor Hodggett

Serge Baghdassarians/ Boris Baltschun/ Alessandro Bosetti/ Michel Doneda

Strom

Potlatch P204

If you've ever wondered how to make good on the dictum "Don't fret the reaper, reap the fretter," *Strom* is a good headstart. A catalog of whipping hisses, thin tubes of shaken air, and expanding shafts of breath from Alessandro Bosetti (soprano sax) and Michel Doneda (soprano and soprano saxes) bob against domestic electronic malfunctions—think lawn mower, electric toothbrush, printer—musicalized by Serge Baghdassarians (guitar and mixing desk) and Boris Baltschun (sampler.) The extremely high-pitched improv of sine waves, feedback, and reed-biting is amply on display here, but the dynamic more closely resembles the richness of Voice Crack than the monologic of Toshimaru Nakamura. The longest track on *Strom*, "Strömung II," very gradually reaches an incredible pitch of intensity during the seventh minute, halfway through the cut,

when what sounds like a donkey mew explodes, pushing the improvisation one step past the threshold of navigable sound into a suddenly-agreed-upon quiet, and just a little rhythmic pulse of blipping static flutters faintly. Slowly more breath emerges, and metal brushes charcoal in a whirlpool; air is let out of a balloon as a most deliberate fixation. The tremolo hum during "Strömung IV" sets the pace for the creepy suspense and masterful evocation of induced, realized, and lingering panic to be found during "Strömung V." Impatience will get you nowhere here; your attention will be worthily devoured.

Andrew Choate

Jaap Blonk, Koichi Makigami, Paul Dutton, Phil Minton, David Moss

Five Men Singing

Victo CD 032

At the time of writing, nominal pop singer Björk is amazing critics for stripping her music back to the essential of the voice, a daring gambit in an age when the typical "unplugged" session means bulking up on the session players to cover for the missing electronics. Veteran vocal artists such as the gentlemen assembled for *Five Men Singing* must be shaking their heads; they discovered long ago, surely, that the first instrument expresses the most. While Blonk, Makigami, Dutton, Minton and Moss are credited individually among the 10 compositions—with another written by Bob Cobbing—there is no effort in the packaging to identify who does what. Nor does it matter. From the ascending affirmation of "No Drone Rising" to open the set, this is a thrilling communal music that is empathetic and generous, while as unpredictable as life itself. Early into "Haiku Sonic," for example, there's a childlike joy in strange gargling and farting sounds—hey, try this!—before the music changes to ghost wails and screams. "Tough and Rumble" climbs from below the bedrock, with low growls and throat singing anchoring high muezzin calls. Add Noh theatre insinuation, unclassified animal cross talk and the freest interpretation of the human beatbox and you begin to get the idea. Let the singers explain the rest.

Randal McIlroy

Peter Brötzmann/ Han Bennink

Still Quite Popular After All Those Years

Brö 04 (LP)

www.ereimite.com

The presence of the LP isn't always just in the sound. I'd been looking at a first pressing of Albert Ayler's *Spiritual Unity*, with its silk-screened cover, when this 180 gram LP arrived, complete with hand silk-screened covers of artwork by the musicians. It seemed to sing across time to the Ayler record. It's the first recording of the Brötzmann/Bennink partnership since 1980, a 2004 performance at the Loft in Cologne that has a consistent conversational intimacy between these two senior masters of free jazz, European chapter. Brötzmann

plays clarinet on half of the six tracks, with a warm vocal sonority that leaps out of the grooves, while Bennink matches and feeds his impassioned discourse. The palpable humanity of the music is matched by the presence of the artifact. Limited to an edition of 999, the LP is available through the Ereimite web-site.

Stuart Broomer

John Butcher

Cavern with Nightlife

Weight of Wax WOW 01

Like many of Butcher's albums, *Cavern with Nightlife* is a musical notebook, offering two very different performances recorded during a 2002 tour of Japan. The first half-hour comprises four saxophone solos recorded in the extraordinarily resonant acoustic of Oya Stone Museum, a huge disused quarry inside a mountain. Butcher is always intent, but never obsessive: he's a specialist in the fresh start, both between and within improvisations. Sometimes he works with tiny droplets of sound, as if throwing pebbles into a well; other times, he spools out endless, vibrating ribbons of sound, or sets the cavern resonating with a foghorn blast. On "Mustard Bath," the most striking piece, he sets the ears tingling with a long, flaring trill, before turning to basketball-court squeaks and slidewhistle smears. The album is rounded out by "Practical Luxury," a twenty-minute duet with "no-input mixing board" specialist Toshimaru Nakamura recorded in a Tokyo club. This was their first meeting; confronted with Nakamura's high, wafer-thin drones, clots of static and odd bursts of searing noise, Butcher sounds both fascinated and sometimes uncertain. He sticks to tenor throughout, concentrating on tiny bubblings and fraying, but also engaging Nakamura on his own territory by making use of amplified sax and swooping feedback. The results are spare, exquisite, slightly tentative music—less satisfying than the solo pieces, to be sure, but strangely memorable nonetheless.

Nate Dorward

Eugene Chadbourne

*The History of the Chadbournes: Honky-Tonk
Im Nacht Lokal*

Leo CD LR 405

In drawing a crossroads where modern improvisation meets country music of the old-time variety, Eugene Chadbourne has provided this Canadian magazine with a reason to drop the name of eminent Canadian songwriter Stompin' Tom Connors, whose "Ketchup Loves Potatoes" is on the program for this anthology of live work. In the outside shapes of country music, however—even with the acknowledgement that Chadbourne cares more for a raw version of the music, without Nashville's sugar and chrome—the distinction between interpretation and parody can be fine indeed. Far too often, the slack thrashing and Chadbourne's corny singing bear horrible echoes of hippies smirking (see "Up Against the Wall, You Redneck Mother"). Spirits lift presently, with a

trio of Chadbourne (who doubles guitar and banjo throughout), Chris Cornetto (keyboards, trumpet and electronics) and Billy Kettle (drums) moving within a gripping and rather melancholy weirdness that's traditionally the property of The Residents; "Tennessee Border" is ragged and nagging. A later group with Walter Daniels (harmonica), Barry Mitterhoff (mandolin) and Roy Paci (trumpet, jaw harp) connects via a straighter line. Loretta Lynn's "I've Thought of Leaving Too" is decorated affectingly with trumpet and harp, and "Needlecase" shows reverence for a lovely instrumental tune that asks for little interference. Without the benefit of familiarity with Chadbourne's long career, and despite admiration for the funny and wise artist exposed in the wry liner essay, this is hard going.

Randal McIlroy

Dave Douglas/ Louis Sclavis/ Peggy Lee/

Dylan van der Schyff

Bow River Falls

Premonition Records 0765

Proverb: "The best people meet in the best places." That seems to be the case with Douglas (USA), Sclavis (France), Lee and van der Schyff (Canada). Each musician tours intercontinentally and all four have musical pass-

ports that render them immune to being policed by the border check-points of stylistic differences. They have only played once before as an ensemble (1998), yet the musicality of *Bow River Falls* makes it seem as if they have been a working band for a long time. This symbiotism is particularly evident in the players harmonic relations while they are playing. On the other hand, the voice of each player is as starkly differentiated as the mountains, lakes, and rivers in the Canadian Rockies (the Banff Centre) where the CD was recorded.

The compositions are coherent and aesthetically wonderful landscapes of rhythm and improvisation that resound with beauty, melancholy, and emotional longing. The combination of cello (Lee), clarinet/bass-clarinet (Sclavis) and trumpet (Douglas) frequently lends the music a dark tone that enhances introspection. Yet there are also compositions that zip along at a brisk, celebratory pace. Van der Schyff is the percussionist who holds it all together, either by force of straight-ahead swing drumming with odd meters, or with chimes and computer-generated soundscapes.

Close listening will divine African, Balkan, Jazz, and New Music influences that come straight out of band member's individual experiences. Yet for all that, *Bow River Falls* will cer-

tainly be placed in the "Jazz" section of the retail stores. But its proper classification is the Ellington-esque "Beyond-Category."

Laurence Svirchev

Paul Dunmall Moksha Big Band

I Wish You Peace

Cuneiform Rune 203

On the occasion of Paul Dunmall's 50th birthday in 2003, the BBC enabled him to record this three-part suite for a 14-piece big band with Brian Irvine conducting. The band includes all of Dunmall's partners from the quartet Mujician—pianist Keith Tippett, bassist Paul Rogers and drummer Tony Levin—expands the rhythm section with drummer Mark Sanders and guitarists John Adams and Philip Gibbs, then adds two trumpets, three trombones and two more tenor saxophonists. The result is a multi-directional group that provide a powerful backdrop for Dunmall's elegiac moods (Part One will invoke Coltrane and Sanders and the brooding power of *Ascension*) but which can also create the wonderful loose swing that figures prominently in Part Two and the playful abstract drift that underpins Part Three. There are also moments of delightfully sputtering improv from the guitarists and trombonist Paul Rutherford, all of it strongly integrated by both Dunmall's writing and the inspired spirit of collective improvisation. While Dunmall is a great, roaring, free-jazz tenor player, he's also gifted with a real vision of how large ensembles can work together creatively and the continuing potential of composition. His sense of history is acute (a series of blasts paraphrased from Coleman's *Free Jazz* ignite the finale of Part Two), but there's also plenty here to mark an original vision. Moods shift at will with each part, but the cumulative work is a potent maelstrom that throbs with the joy, promise and terror of life itself.

Kudos to Cuneiform, one of the very few American labels to release great English free jazz. If this were recorded by American musicians in New York or Chicago, it would have a far better chance of being widely recognized as the superior music that it is.

Stuart Broomer

Paul Dunmall Octet

Bridging: The Great Divide Live

Clean Feed CF017CD

Paul Dunmall Sextet

Shooterhill

FMR CD141 0104

For whatever reason it may be, Great Britain has always been a fertile breeding ground for tenor saxophonists. Think of Don Rendell, Ronny Scott and Tubby Hayes, unarguably the best of them from the mainstream jazz generation, then move on to Alan Skidmore and Tony Coe as transitional figures to get up to free improvisers like Evan Parker, Larry Stabbins, Simon Picard and John Butcher, and you have a lineage of musical personalities. To that list, one could also add Paul Dunmall, a

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strapping post-Coltranian tenorman in his own right (who also plays soprano and baritone, bagpipes and clarinet). A prolific recording artist of late, he turns them out by the cartful on his own Duns Limited edition label (close to 40 titles in less than four years), while appearing on a host of other labels, both at home and abroad. *Bridging* was recorded during the 2002 edition of the Jazz em Agosto festival in Lisbon. A sub-grouping out of pianist Keith Tippett's mammoth Tapestry Orchestra, also present there, the Dunmall Octet is heard for close to an hour in an all improvised suite which opens with a somewhat jarring bagpipe solo by the leader, an unexpected opener that would surely elicit a reaction from any unsuspecting listener. From there on in, it's a roller coaster ride from one feverish peak to the next, but with a few little respites along the way. At the core of this outfit is the co-op quartet Mujician (Dunmall, Tippett, bassist Paul Rogers and drummer Tony Levin—heard for eight minutes on "The Wind"), augmented on this occasion by the dual trombones of Malcolm Griffiths and Paul Rutherford, Gethin Liddington on trumpet and Simon Picard on tenor sax. Musically speaking, there's no mistaking what this is, i.e. unadulterated free jazz of the first ilk, carried out (and off) by a very committed crew.

And the same can be said for the *Shooterhill*. Once again, Dunmall is heard on tenor (no pipes this time) while Rutherford is the only other holdover from the octet; guitarist John Adams, bassist Roberto Bellatalla and drummer Mark Sanders are present, as is trumpeter John Corbett. Divided in three tracks running in the 18 to 20 minute range, this disc has its share of high octane collectives and brazen solos (Dunmall in particular), yet its intent is not that different from the other album: to play each moment to the fullest and with nary a safety net. Music of this kind has been abundantly heard before, and though one would be hard pressed to say that it really stands out from the crowd, it certainly has earned its place within it.

Marc Chénard

Ellery Eskelin

Ten

hatOLOGY 611

Ellery Eskelin

On The Road With Andrea Parkins & Jim Black (DVD)

<http://home.earthlink.net/~eskelin/dvd.html>

Ten celebrates the 10th anniversary of Eskelin's trio with Jim Black (drums) and Andrea Parkins (accordion, sampler, piano) with a variation on the theme: Eskelin re-jigged the band into a series of alter-units by inviting three guests (Marc Ribot, guitar, Melvin Gibbs, electric bass, and Jessica Constable, voice) to participate in the recording. Eskelin calls his new CD an "improv party" since there was no composed material. There's irony in his words, however. To my ears Eskelin's compositions rarely seem pre-composed. Rather they have the *feel* of

instant composition: I don't hear an essential difference in approach to music between, say, "You'll Know When You Get There..." on the 2000 *Secret Museum* and "Anyone's Guess" on the current CD. They both seem free of pre-intent, and have the resolute character of musicians whose goal is to reveal what has not been heard before. Nevertheless, *Ten* manifests an increase in intensity over Eskelin's previous ten CDs on the hat label. Parallel with this intensity he appears to play less, artfully insinuating himself into the patterns woven by his longtime band mates and guests. Eskelin's body of work keeps growing like his solos: there is always a story line counterbalanced by an air of mystery. You can never predict where he and band mates are going to end up. That makes him not an iconoclast, but rather one of the most creative and interesting of contemporary composers and tenor players.

The DVD *On the Road with...* is a self-produced companion piece to *Ten*. It's a diary-like portrait of Eskelin's trio 2003 tour of Europe: clips of rehearsals, train stations, wondering about the next meal, and backstage tomfoolery. Its most-complete music sequences are individual improvisations by Eskelin, Black, and Parkins (her solo is required viewing). The way she builds layers of music from her sampling equipment is extraordinary and demonstrates why she is one of the great synthesists). Overall, it's a wild video ride composed of off-kilter angles, reflections from mirrors, and bouncing unsteadiness, a charming visual reflection of Eskelin's idiosyncratic musical view of the world. Potential buyers need to know that the music's sound quality is not high fidelity. Formatting is in both NTSC and PAL, a nice touch that allows North Americans the ability to enjoy the DVD along with the rest of the world (see Eskelin's website for ordering).

Laurence Svirchev

Edouard Ferlet

Par Tous Les Temps

Sketch SKE 333041

Some music sinks into you. The music in pianist Edouard Ferlet's first solo album after two for Sketch in bassist Jean-Philippe Viret's trio hovers somewhere between foreground and background—not exactly furniture music, as Satie would have it, and hardly ambient, but waiting to be absorbed. What works extremely pleasantly as backdrop is not slow to reveal its charms, however. In that generally quiet way, he clearly enjoys sly musical puzzles. "Le Blues Qui Monte" could be his wry tribute to Gershwin's "Blue Preludes," a twilight reverie shaped along ascending/descending patterns. "Ping Pong" bounces on terse bass reports. "Capitaine Croche" gooses the mood, but even in urgency he is poised handsomely, with a confident touch. The deepest currents of his musical soul might just be found in "Illusion Optique," the gentle modulations of which suggest a more genteel form of systems music. No matter, though, when such beauty

needs no explanation. Listen for an elegant hidden track as well.

Randal McIlroy

Scott Fields Ensemble

Christangelfox

482 Music 482-1029

There are some musicians who stand out from the crowd, and guitarist Scott Fields certainly qualifies. Not that his music is overtly provocative or extreme, but there is an unquestionable singularity to his vision, one more readily identifiable as contemporary music rather than jazz or free form improv. A case in point is this single, flowing, fifty-nine minute piece performed by him, on acoustic guitar, Matt Turner on cello and Guillermo Gregorio, playing only straight b-flat clarinet. More than that, all musicians play percussion, striking what seem to be metal plates or tubing in ways reminiscent of Balinese gamelan ensembles (which the leader himself alludes to in his insightful notes). In so doing, one may well be reminded of John Cage's translation of Far Eastern musics into the contemporary classical vernacular; there's an underlying reflective, meditative quality to the work, which is spiked by the clattering percussion passages. While the bulk of the performance is improvised, written passages surface throughout, like signposts along the way of a mysterious journey in time, space and tone color. Accordingly these are never bright and bold, but subdued and dark, yet no less intense, like the deep ultramarine hue that adorns the cover.

Marc Chénard

Five Play

Five Play...plus

Arbors ARCD 19307

Five Play is a quintet drawn from DIVA, the all-woman jazz orchestra. They are formidable players and inspired arrangers who share the international language of jazz. Drummer/leader Sherrie Maricle stokes the fires as she does for DIVA. Her rhythm section mates are from Japan: Tomoko Ohno on piano and bassist Noriko Ueda. Karolina Strassmayer, who grew up in Austria, plays alto and flute while Anat Cohen, on clarinet and tenor, comes from Tel Aviv and a musical family. She has recently recorded with brothers Yuvai and Avishai. "Plus" refers to Jami Dauber and Barbara Laronga from DIVA who play trumpet and flugelhorn on many of the charts.

The program is eclectic, the arrangements full of surprises, and the playing joyful. There are jazz compositions: Hank Mobley's "Funk in a Deep Freeze," as cool as its title; Brubeck's "Theme from Mr. Broadway," with smooth unison passages; and Strassmayer's West Coast take on Chick Corea's "Bud Powell." Standards include high-flying and mellow clarinet work by Cohen on "That Old Feeling," and a pair of innovative charts by Ueda. "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" comes out swinging and "In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning" uses flute colors to illustrate that time of day. "If I Only Had a Brain" gives the rhythm sec-

tion a chance to shine while Richard Shemaria's amusing version of "Good Ship Lollipop" owes much more to Horace Silver than to Shirley Temple. It features Cohen on tenor and Dauber who plays conversational trumpet like the greats. This CD is a breath of fresh air! Five Play's last release, "On the Brink," was selected by Nat Hentoff as the best jazz recording of 1999. Please, let's not wait five more years.

Bill Falconer

Joe Fonda/ Joe McPhee / Cliff White/ Ben Karetnick
Heat Suite

Konnex KCD 5122

A great concert doesn't necessarily produce a good record. Even though I wasn't at the August, 2002 concert documented on *Heat Suite*, I get the sense that the show was richly satisfying for those in attendance; unfortunately, that gratification doesn't translate to the CD-listening experience. The playing is spirited enough, but as an album, it lacks the sort of focus that keeps you attentive: this music needs the visual action and personal ambience of a concert to make it engaging.

Still, the release does have its positive sides. Karetnick's drumming consistently sparks enthusiasm. Like McPhee's assured lines on pocket trumpet, Karetnick's energy and poise bestow authority to the proceedings. When McPhee joins the band during the fifth minute of "Part 1," the band's sound suddenly comes together, uniting everyone's concentration. The trumpet can evoke a level of solemnity that other instruments simply can't muster, and McPhee's prowess in this respect is amply displayed throughout the four-part suite. Cliff White's sax smokes during "Part 2," bleeding into Karetnick's pounding rolls and jabs of percussion, and alternating a swinging attack with quick ricochets of sharp notes. For most of "Part 3," Fonda's bass is out front; his harmonics and vocal utterances add a welcome hue. Recorded at the Unitarian Meeting House in Amherst, MA, the room sound is big with a slight echo. If you sit yourself down and pretend that you're at the performance, you have a better chance of getting into the music than if you put the disc on and expect the music to come to you.

Andrew Choate

Satoko Fujii

Sketches

NATSAT 0013

Satoko Fujii Trio

Illusion Suite

Libra Records 104-000

Anyone following the contemporary improv/jazz scene has surely come across the name of the ubiquitous Japanese pianist Satoko Fujii. In less than 10 years, her discography has grown at an almost exponential rate, with CDs issued in her native country, Europe and the U.S. The first disc here stands as only her second all-solo outing. In this con-

text, it is possible to fully focus on her evolving compositional and performing styles, in which definite classical influences (primarily impressionist) are offset by occasional timbral explorations within the instrument, not to forget the equally striking contrasts between far-Eastern modalism and some blues-drenched harmonies or passing neo-Tayloresque outbursts. But on the whole, this is a more subdued disc than we are accustomed to hear from her, most notably from her two big bands or the more electrically oriented quartets under her own leadership or that of her partner, trumpeter Natsuki Tamura. For all intents and purposes then, this album enables her to explore the sheer sonic beauty of the grand piano.

Her latest trio release, *Illusion Suite*, is much more in keeping with her usual fare. With her regular cohorts, bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Jim Black, this is strikingly similar to the earlier *Towards to West*, on Enja. Like its predecessor, this one contains a 30-minute plus suite that ebbs and flows in all sorts of quirky and unexpected ways, then three middle length cuts to round off this 51 minute side. While comparisons can be dicey, one still can't help but make connections with Myra Melford's trio of years past (minus the overt blues connotations or signature tremolos). A work in progress indeed, but a work that's arrived, too.

Marc Chénard

Vinny Golia

One, Three, Two

Jazz'hallo TS018-019

Nels Cline/Vinny Golia

The Entire Time

Nine Winds CD0259

Of late, the very, very multi-instrumentalist Vinny Golia has been appearing on other labels than his own, one case being his duets with Swiss reedist Daniel F. Schmid, *Birdology* on Leo. Equally so, this two-disc offering on the Flemish Jazz-hallo label captures Golia's quintet on one of its rare European tours, the performances here occurring only a day or two after the 9-11 tragedy. Having just gotten out of the country in time and not willing to forego their commitment, the band played on... and on. In fact, the first half of this package is one continuous set of over 70 minutes, comprising four pieces of over 15 minutes and a short 50 second extro; four more pieces are also stitched together in the same way, with a separate eight-minute encore ("Bridges made of Water") rounding off that set. Anyone familiar with Golia's musical coterie will recognize the sidemen here, starting with the Cline brothers (Nels on guitar, Alex on drums), and rounded off by bassist Scott Walton and trombonist Michael Vlatkovitch (the latter subbing for trumpeter John Fumo). This is very much a free-boppish blowing date, albeit not in the usual mainstream sense of the term; while these players can swing hard to a steady beat, they can veer off into very open-ended areas, both energetic and introspective. For all intents and purposes, a deftly played roun-and-tum-

ble set of music delivered by a cast of seasoned practitioners.

Acquainted with each other for a good 30 years, reedman Golia and guitarist Nels Cline have issued their first 'official' duet recording. In his liner notes that provide background on their long-time musical friendship and some info on each of the nine tracks, Cline mentions a first recording made some 20 years ago (unissued), but after 26 or so years, they finally managed to get one out there in the marketplace. With numerous shared experiences, chiefly in Golia's own quintet and large orchestra, it stands to reason that they would be able to achieve a pretty good rapport with one another, which they indeed do. Apart from one brief theme dedicated to Oliver Lake and another track inspired by Roland Kirk, the remainder is all freely improvised. Using seven different horns (including a couple of ethnic aerophones), Golia is true to himself in providing a palette of timbres, as is Cline who uses both acoustic and electric guitars, the latter both with and without effects. Most of the pieces build gradually from very sparse openings and gain momentum and density as they progress, the reedman launching into his trademark flurries of notes, the guitarist either flying over the strings or creating denser sonic weaves with his hardware. Yet, nothing comes across as predictable or stereotyped in their duos; they remain always inventive, never gratuitous and most of all well attuned. At the end of his notes, Cline expresses the wish to do a follow-up, this time around compositions. Let's hope that it won't take another 26 years.

Marc Chénard

Phil Hargreaves/ Caroline Kraabel

Where We Were

Leo CD LR407

These duets were recorded over a period of four years in several different locations throughout Liverpool: an anechoic chamber, a tunnel, a street, a dome-shaped library, a pub, etc. Hargreaves and Kraabel then mixed all the hours of tape using computer software to create a single 50 minute piece of music that blends the ambiances, extraneous sounds and improvised moments together. It's a delightful listen. However, as nice as the saxophone (and brief flute) playing is, that's not really what draws one repeatedly back to the disc. Instead, it's the feeling of stepping into a journey that two musical friends took together all over a city for a number of years: we get to tag along on their fun in a way that makes us feel at home even as they venture beyond their own.

The varied atmospheres make room for multiple horn attacks—drones, yips down a well, staccato vocal bounces, etc.—as the gifted duo mine their playful instrumental breadth and traverse their town. Even when you can't tell where they are, the different kinds of silences that surround their sounds tell a vivid story. *Where We Were* is an invitation to an intimate musical adventure shared all over a city's public spaces.

Andrew Choate

Steve Harris/ZAUM

Above Our Heads the Sky Splits Open

Siam SLAMCD 258

Improvisational music tends to smile most kindly on the small unit—risk too many egos and dissent leads to clutter—which makes the greater bustle of ZAUM all the more impressive. Nominally a quintet of Steve Harris (drums, founder), Cathy Stevens (viola, six-string violoncello), Geoff Hearn (tenor and soprano saxophones), Karen Wilmhurst (clarinet, bass clarinet) and Udo Dzierzanowski (guitar), the England-based group is expanded with Matthew Olczak (guitar), Adrian Newton (samples and live sampling) and four independent string players known as Chrome Strings. With so many sounds shifting, however, this is a group music that plays down the precedence of the distinct solo voice for slow-burning and sometimes sinister group unanimity. In the unsettling “Trans,” Harris opts for a sparse drum sound that suggests Moroccan patterns before brain-seizure sounds of unexplained provenance spur searing guitar and tenor. With its electric viola and high-sustain guitar, “Called to Rise” recalls *Larks’ Tongues in Aspic*-era King Crimson in a more peaceful moment of searching. Colors peek—a hum of strings, a searchlight clarinet, some raw tenor—but only to invite deeper listening.

Randal McIlroy

John Heward Trio

Let Them Pass (Laissez-passer)

Drimala DR 04-347

This is Heward’s first release as a leader, but it’s very close in spirit to the Montreal drummer’s recent work with Joe McPhee and Dominic Duval, or earlier projects with Glenn Spearman. The trio includes Joe Giardullo on numerous reeds and bassist Michael Bisio, and they’re highly empathetic on this series of seven improvised pieces. The title comes from the phrase used to approve new immigrants to North America, and the extended piece is inspired by the group’s conversations about their parents’ and grandparents’ experience. It’s work of depth and power—each piece a deeply felt and well-defined unit, usually distinguished by a special texture. Giardullo’s tenor suggests both a hurricane’s calm centre and its dense, recirculating swirl, but he contributes just as much when he turns to bass clarinet, piccolo or alto flute, sometimes invoking rain forests of sound. He and Bisio can explore a shared vocabulary of high, whistling harmonics, while the bassist is elsewhere effective both as *arco* soloist and rhythmic force. Heward often develops throbbing, hypnotic rhythms (like the complex, “primitive” polyrhythms that he creates with Bisio in “Let Them Pass Three”), leading a listener ever deeper into these probing dialogues.

Stuart Broomer

Susie Ibarra

Folkloriko

Tzadik TZ7098

Anyone concerned that jazz has dead-ended

after its first century need only open their ears to the possibilities inherent in importing influences from India and Asia. Like Vijay Iyer, Fred Ho and others, drummer Susie Ibarra has successfully synthesized cross-cultural sounds without degrading the authenticity of either her jazz language or ethnic influences. She has successfully bridged her early free jazz drumming with William Parker and David S. Ware, and the kulintang tradition of her Filipino heritage.

Her most ambitious recording yet, *Folkloriko* opens by spanning Africa, the Caribbean and the Far East. The bright, resonant sound of Ibarra’s wooden kulintang percussion flows into partner Roberto Rodríguez’s dark cajon – flitting rhythm over insistent pulse. At 4:30, the tone shifts abruptly to metallic jangle, as Ibarra switches to Tibetan cymbals and Rodríguez shakes bells. It is like a ritual cleansing of negative energy, and it sets the scene effectively for Ibarra’s nine-movement suite, *Lakbay*. Commissioned by the Smithsonian in 2002, *Lakbay* is designed to symbolize a day in the life of a Filipino migrant worker in the California of Ibarra’s birth. Its central theme – expressed in the opening “Gawain Ng Pamilya” and reprised in the eighth movement – is a ponderous rhythm that rises and falls in both tempo and intensity. The second movement introduces the trio, and particularly the skittering, soaring violin of Jennifer Choi. Throughout the suite, Choi plays with the abandon of a classically trained player suddenly loosed among music that encourages expression, and she is at her best when slashing at her instrument over the probing piano of Craig Taborn and Ibarra’s driving drum patterns. On “Merienda,” Choi joins Wadada Leo Smith in an animated dialogue that rises above the sampled noise of a crowd. The effect, like that of *Lakbay* as a whole, is a mirror of humanity, filled with cries, sighs and the sounds of people scraping out a life.

James Hale

Fred Lonberg-Holm

Dialogs

Emanem 4109

Improvising cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm’s second solo release, *Dialogs*, augments his sonic arsenal with an added interest in little machines: motors, speakers, amps, piezos (crude, cheap contact mics.) Unfortunately, the tracks that feature these little machines the most, like “Dialog 2” and “Dialog 4,” obscure Lonberg-Holm’s vast and exquisite array of extended cello techniques rather than complement them. “Dialog 2” begins with a painful 9 second feedback screech which is instantly repelling, and the smaller refrains of piercing feedback later in this track only serve to boost the distaste. It’s on these few tracks that he seems to be more interested in sounds produced in the proximity of the cello rather than through it, however distantly or extraordinarily, which is a shame for such a creative and virtuosic cellist. Compared to the gluttonous fury of cello attacks displayed on 1996’s *Personal*

Scratch, his first solo release, these offerings are a surprising disappointment.

Thankfully, several of the numbers on *Dialogs* rekindle the spirit of that recording by relying less on little machines and more on peripheral acoustic accoutrements and accidents, simultaneously emphasizing the centrality and variety of actual cello noises. “Dialog 7” is full of hard, deliberate draggings of the bow which produce cathedral-big tones; melodies creep into the large, strong sound, outlining echoes of folk hymns against chordal walls. The whistling on “Dialog 5” works much better than feedback as a sound to play the cello off of, and the ramshackle gutbucket bass imitation pleases even as it baffles. And not all of the machinic additions prove fruitless, as the hard pressure of hair against gut, bow against string, during “Dialog 6” blends the fun of a wooden resonating box with whirring, buzzing torpedoes of sound.

Andrew Choate

Tom McIntosh

With Malice Toward None

IPO Recording ipoc 1005

www.iporecordings.com

Benny Golson

Terminal 1

Concord CCD-2259

With Malice Toward None may well qualify as the most accomplished mainstream-modern leader-debut in years, though McIntosh was 76 years old when it was recorded. McIntosh’s name may be most familiar from his composing credits. He provided the “new” for Dizzy Gillespie’s *Something Old, Something New*, and his work has also been recorded by Milt Jackson, Tommy Flanagan, and the Jones-Lewis Orchestra. He was also trombonist in the Jazztet. After decades of film and TV composing and jazz education, McIntosh returns with a program of old (“Cup Bearers,” “Balanced Scales Equal Justice,” and the title tune) and new compositions, among them “The MVP,” inspired by Gillespie’s interests in Cuban and Brazilian musics, and “Ruptures in the Rapture,” a stunning blues variation on “My Blue Heaven” that develops its eerie, floating dissonances over 16 minutes. The permutating band includes a host of McIntosh’s senior associates, all still in good form: Jimmy Owens, Richard Davis, Buster Williams, James Moody, Benny Golson, Kenny Barron and Roger Kellaway. Younger players include drummer Ben Perowsky, vibraphonist Stefan Harris, pianist Helen Sung and guitarist Bill Washer. It’s an inspired blend of older and younger players, and it’s also an inspired mix of thoughtful writing and strong soloists, with Moody and Golson lighting up “I’m Out No Hating.”

Terminal 1 is a more conventional disc, with Golson leading a quintet with trumpeter Eddie Henderson, bassist Buster Williams, drummer Carl Allen, and pianist Mike LeDonne. Made to commemorate Golson’s appearance in Steven Spielberg’s *Terminal*, it’s also a commemoration of a great career, with Golson and compa-

ny revisiting some of his classic compositions—"Killer Joe" and "Blues March"—as well as new tunes—including the pulsing title track and a fine ballad, "Park Avenue Petite." There are also good accounts of Don Redman's "Cherry," "Sweet Georgia Brown" and a lovely version of Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way." With good material and a strong rhythm section, the horns simply do what they do best. Golson still plays with the muscular throatiness and bustling inventiveness that have usually marked his work, and Henderson is a fine complement, a lyrical player whose personality is strongest on ballads, but who is never less than an intense, committed player. It's a very good hard bop date—"old school."

Stuart Broomer

Joel Miller

Mandala

Effendi FND 046

There is sheer pleasure in numbers and there are 14 of them on this outing from Montreal tenor saxophonist Joel Miller. Mandala means magic circle and the circle described here encompasses a perception that is vivid as it opens the door to a marvelous exposition of the art of music and of writing, both of which bring their immediacy to bear on the musicians. Miller is loquacious on the saxophones and finds a soul mate in New York guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel, but there's no denying the others—including trumpeter Bill Mahar and drummer Thom Gossage—their place in this vital musical document. There is so much going on here in the way the music travels, in the way it shapes up, the tangent and the trajectory nestling against the straight and the defined. The compositions are soaked in melodies that capture the soul, but they are dissected and probed and then made whole again in one captivating sweep. An outstanding album by any means!

Jerry D'Souza

Mulgrew Miller

Live At Yoshi's Volume One

MaxJazz MXJ 208

If you had to make the pitch-meeting speech to a record-company executive for Mulgrew Miller, it would go something like this: "Early McCoy meets Cedar Walton." But there's a lot of Memphis in Miller, the maximalism and ferocious swing of Phineas Newborn and Harold Mabern, and, boy, can Miller pump the left hand. Yet pigeonholing him in a style isn't fair. Miller is swinging and versatile, an ideal sideman. He can play fast, right-hand runs, as he does on Horace Silver's "Peace," and they're not note perfect. That's okay, because Miller is interested in more than just virtuoso display—namely, the blues, emotional warmth and the one. He's elemental, not because he's economical (far from it), but because his style is a core sample of the bedrock of the jazz mainstream: swing, the blues, bebop, the church and Tin Pan Alley. As a result, Miller doesn't do anything on this record that pianists

haven't done for 50 years, but Miller brings so much personality and wit to the proceedings that "Live at Yoshi's" never sounds old-fashioned. He's not above a bit of showboating, as the double-parallel fast runs on the extended tag of "I Cried for You" demonstrate, and that's part of the charm of this very swinging, very genuine CD.

John Chacona

Roscoe Mitchell

Solo 3

Mutable 17515

"I started working on one CD, but I started getting more and more material, and I thought that at this point in my career, one solo CD is not enough," says Roscoe Mitchell in the liner essay for Solo 3. "I'd better put out three CDs, because time is going on by."

Such determination is not expected from someone a few years on the far side of 60. Then again, only a few years ago Mitchell was stretching his formidable multi-woodwind skills by studying the Japanese shakuhachi, and citing the hard work thereby as a tribute to the efforts of jazz pioneers past to advance the form. The triple-disc Solo 3 sounds nothing like a stroll through old glories, much less a prelude to retirement. Performed solo, with only a few prearranged pieces and overdubbed works among the 38 tracks, this is a daunting yet inconsistent production. The high points are diamond-brilliant; the demands often outstrip the rewards.

The first disc, Tech Ritter and the Megabytes, honors the artist who has developed solo improvisation into structure. Two versions of the title track use combinations of bass, tenor, alto and soprano saxophones. Two soprano solos, recorded live in Europe in 2000, are furious in their intelligence and insistence. With an index of sounds and instrumental understanding beneath his wily fingers, and circular breathing besides, Mitchell isn't afraid to sound metallic or citric sour, the spent notes cast aside like so many exhausted lemon drops. "1999/2002," for flute and percussion cage, offers meditative relief.

Solar Flares for Alto Saxophone frames 10 solo performances. Years of one-man concerts taught him how to keep the ideas buoyant and flowing according to their own logic. It's worth a reminder, however, that for all the horns he plays with the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Mitchell is a masterful alto saxophonist, with a slightly dry tone that lends itself to the drama of his adventures. There is a progression of exploration through the program, from high-range investigation to the percussive possibilities of fingers on keys. Occasionally, though, as in the penultimate "Methane Snow," Mitchell seems more committed to exercise than communication.

Disc three is The Percussion Cage and Music on the Go, where Mitchell works from inside his ever-growing collection of percussion instruments. True to the respect for the most unlikely sound sources that dates to the

AECO's first use of "little instruments"—though the collection would not stay little for long—Mitchell disdains racket and flash. Indeed, there is an air of ritual intent, a caressing in honor. It does not always carry over, however, and it is a relief when he uncages himself long enough to offer some slightly sour soprano to under the reverie.

Randal McIlroy

Matthias Müller

Bhavan

JazzHausMusik JHM 126

"Industrial music" was easier to define 35 years ago, at least in the former West Germany. Working in a factory district in their native Düsseldorf, Kraftwerk used conventional instruments and comparatively crude electronic devices to emulate the sound of big steel in the big smoke. Evoking the zeitgeist of the Ruhr region today, trombonist/composer Matthias Müller plays what he describes on his website as "the sound of post-industrial Germany...dirty, straightforward, tough—but full of wit and heart." Others can better judge the accuracy of the dialect, but there's no doubting Bhavan's singular impact. Jazz-rock is a flimsy term to try to describe the blend of composition and improvisation, solo bravura and quiet exploration, and the healthy sonic chafing between leader Matthias Müller's dark-hued trombone and the endlessly resourceful playing of guitarist Andreas Wahl. With reed player Jan Klare and drummer Peter Eisold they make a music of many reference points, including jazz tradition. Check "CFK," which is set in rock insistence and a nagging, bluesy sequence, but also embraces a dash of New Orleans polyphony. Both horn players use electronics to change their voices, beginning with the tolling trombone lines that open "Prologue," but bop doesn't faze them in the least. "Untitled/Undefined" could be their theme tune, with a vivid, stuttering alto break after a tough twin-horn chart. Virtually all human life is here, and it has an attitude.

Randal McIlroy

John O'Gallagher/Masa Kamaguchi/ Jay Rosen

Rules of Invisibility, Volume 1

Creative Improvised Music Projects CIMP #304

A classic can stand up to a little ribbing. Here, "All the Things You Are" becomes "You Ain't All That," the indelible tune mainly an insinuation in an open, swinging trio. Every CIMP recording these ears have heard seems to owe much to Robert D. Rusch's production strategies—not in the audio-verité approach to recording music live in the studio in the most natural settings, but in his concern for true group feel—and on this occasion everyone sounds happy and eager, if not necessarily feisty. John O'Gallagher is a fine saxophonist who invests great care in tone across the scale, with an appealing burnished voice that persists through the most torrid attacks. His soprano is a lovely thing, whether perky in

"Point Time" or musing gracefully in "Folksong." Rusch notes he chose favored drummer Jay Rosen "to force the issue, if necessary, to a level of excellence which he and I both aim for," and there's no denying his propulsion. From here, the CIMP sound continues to mute the contribution of bass players; Masa Kamaguchi is on the case, but you'll need to listen closely.

Randal McIlroy

Evan Parker Electro-Acoustic Ensemble

Memory/Vision

ECM 1862 B0002290

Evan Parker Trio & Peter Brötzmann Trio

The Bishop's Move

Victo CD 093

With each successive recording of the Electro-Acoustic Ensemble, Evan Parker has added musicians to the mix, beginning with a sextet for *Toward the Margins*, then expanding to a septet for *Drawn Inward* and now arriving at nine pieces with *Memory/Vision*. Each expansion has worked on a mirror principle. The group began as the Parker/Guy/ Lytton Trio matched with three people doing live electronics/sound processing: Phillipp Wachsmann, Walter Prati and Marco Vecchi (though cross penetrating—Wachsmann also played viola, Lytton used electronics). The second added Lawrence Casserley providing a kind of electronic overview, processing on top of the electronic/acoustic interface. Added to the mix this time are Spanish pianist Agusti Fernandez and sound-processor Joel Ryan. *Memory/Vision* is a single continuous piece, 70 minutes in length (CD indices divide it into seven sections for reference purposes). It's inspired by the work of Charles Arthur Musès and his ideas on chronotopology and resonance. It's a work of great complexity, including in its elements the Ensemble's previous recordings (some of which already incorporated members' recordings previous to them). What is initially astonishing is its sheer sonic brilliance, the quality and quantity of sounds created by the ensemble, both acoustically and electronically. The combinations of reeds, strings and electronics are consistently mysterious in their resonance, ranging from the ethereal to the menacing, creating a utopic soundscape. Fernandez is a wonderful addition to the palette, a rhythmically vital musician who makes highly creative use of piano harp and preparation in the initial segment and "part three." What is also remarkable is the way the core trio of Parker-Guy-Lytton—capable of astonishing density—manage to individually pare back their contribution to prevent sonic overload in the electronic elaborations. With each expansion, the music becomes both more gestural and more complex.

The Bishop's Move is as spur-of-the-moment as *Memory/Vision* is carefully designed. A meeting of Europe's free-jazz tenor giants, it combines the Parker trio (Lytton and Alex von Schlippenbach) with Peter Brötzmann's trio (William Parker and Hamid Drake) in a single epic performance of 73'30"

that was the highlight of the 2003 Victo Festival. In a sense it's two trio sets—first Parker's, then Brötzmann's—bracketed and divided by meetings of the two bands. It's tumultuous music, the presence of the other band prodding each group, and in many ways it's the sum of the groups' strengths and differences, as in the beautiful combination of Lytton's densely playful, abstract drumming and Drake's more determinedly (and determining) rhythmic work. Schlippenbach thrives on the rhythmic stimulus and the group achieves its zenith in mid-performance with Evan Parker's soprano wriggling amidst combined drums, bass (William Parker's drive finds its appropriate setting) and piano in a thrilling update of Coltrane's hypnotic mode. Whatever their common sources, there are also inspiring differences between Parker's horns and Brötzmann's rougher, raw, emotive sounds, particularly in the contrasts between the former's soprano and the latter's tarogato. This is two great bands making a third.

Each of these CDs (pieces) is music of tremendous scale, essential hearing.

Stuart Broomer

Evan Parker/Alexander von Schlippenbach/ Paul Lytton

America 2003

Psi 04.06/7

Sten Sandell/David Stackenas/ Evan Parker/Barry Guy/Paul Lytton

Gubbröra

Psi 04.10

The two-disc *America 2003* features selections from two performances by the amalgamated version of Parker's two longstanding trios that drove across America in 2003. At several times during the recording there are sections where the tones of these lifelong improvisors harken back to much older periods of jazz, but they do it in such a way that they incorporate the feel rather than mimic the style. Parker's sax sounds like he's channeling the vibe of a late night set at a 1950s bar during "No one wanted to be an artist but every man wanted to be paid for his labours" and Schlippenbach's piano stomping chords get darn near traditional on "Are you strong enough for heavy work?" The first half of the latter tune is a duo with Lytton, who cracks wood and redefines carpentry and metallurgy according to the laws of percussion. The blend of aesthetics between Lytton and Schlippenbach reaches optimal levels of satisfaction and experimentation here. Lytton's long duo with Parker during the opening minutes of "I had a friend among the angels" is an especially heartwarming display of musical friendship, camaraderie, daring, and encouragement.

The way Lytton interacts with Schlippenbach during "Rejoicing in their hearts over the journey" puts in relief the differences between how Paul Lovens plays in his trio with these guys and how Lytton chooses to work with them: Lytton sets less emphasis from split-second moment to split-second moment on getting

inside everyone's tiny rhythms and instead focuses on building a multidirectional infrastructure for Parker and Schlippenbach to navigate and shape as they see fit. Schlippenbach attacks and reattacks piano key clusters and cluster-phrases here like a writer writing, listening, editing and re-editing a sentence – all the variations work, but he doesn't move on until he gets the right one. A bopish lyricism creeps out of Parker around the seventeen minute mark of this number, and the sound couldn't be more telling or embraceable: this is where jazz lives. "Perhaps this was his chance" best represents the unique, confident dynamism of this ensemble: contributions from each instrumentalist nimbly maneuver inside the incipient flow of song as everyone independently contributes at whatever interval is necessary, disregarding the conventions and habits of improvisations that seek equal input from all members within each tune.

The thirty-three minute improv on *Gubbröra* between Parker, Guy (bass), Lytton, Stackenas (guitars), and Sandell (piano, voice, electronics) overflows with the anticipation and excitement of such an outstanding group of musicians organized to play together in a new ensemble together for the first time – and fulfill, surpass, and destroy expectations they do. Guy is particularly responsive here, jousting and coaxing as much as possible out of his newfound cohorts. While it's generally not that difficult to pick out who is doing what, the music attains resplendent heights when those kinds of distinctions are ignored and you allow yourself to be carried in its current. Skirmishes and collisions abound against a backdrop of delicate and precise musical intention. So many new configurations of improvisors spring up for one-off concerts each year that when an ensemble of this high a caliber, producing this exquisite a show appears, all efforts should be made to maintain the collaboration.

The remainder of the disc is given over to two fifteen-minute+ improvisations between Stackenas and Sandell, nicely balancing the weight of the quintet improv with a closer perspective on the styles of the improvisors added into the mix of the older trio. Sandell often howls at the moment before or the moment after he strikes piano keys and strings, as if announcing and reacting to his own dual impulses, while Stackenas' guitar buzzes and trickles against the dark and big drama of these bangs. Improvised music sure is healthy, even though the state of the world is not.

Andrew Choate

Present Tense with Paul Dunmall

Infinity Calling

Foxy Productions Foxy 203

There are surely many ways into the music made by the British group Present Tense, but a bit of whimsy will do it no harm. Imagine, then, the hip little combo playing in the shadows of your local when dissension begins to take hold. Gradually, timbres shiver as the musicians switch to electronics, calling into play

modern sequencers and loops and dusting off an old ring modulator in the process, but you keep grooving regardless. Well, it's a start, and it applies best to "Augermentative"—a nod to Brian Auger, you suspect, and thus likely a tip of the beret to a previous generation's exploration of invention from the hip. At other times, Ben Williams' keyboard textures and shadings marry keyboard technique with a thrilling understanding of the possibilities of electronics. When Brian Eno complained long ago that too many people approached the synthesizer as "an extended Farfisa organ," the word got to Williams. Yet there are riches here that reside in the shadows and the small detail, with Phillip Gibbs using conventional and fretless electric guitars for scrabbling texture ("Memory Refit") and fearless soloing ("Ring Fence") alike. Drummer Marco Anderson leaves his kit sounds with electronics and percussion, with the spooky beginning to "An Act of Mindless Charity" deriving, one suspects, from his keening Tibetan bowls. Saxophonist Paul Dunmall's prominent billing is no mere act of veneration. He rallies to every challenge, favouring the tougher, deeper soul of his tenor, although the ruminations of "C-Thing" are reminiscent in a good way of Jan Garbarek, all handsome dark shapes.

Randal McIlroy

Brian Priestley

Who Knows?

33 Records 33Jazz 108

A man of many talents, the British Mr. Priestley: pianist, composer, writer, broadcaster, arranger, researcher and organizer of a neat quintet playing "uncovered Ellington" on this disc. Well, mostly uncovered. Has anyone even heard of the title track, for instance? Or how about "East by East," a lovely blues composition not used by Ellington in his recording of the Far East Suite and found in the Smithsonian Institution's archives by Priestley. Then there's "Almost Cried," an alternative version of music used by Ellington in a movie soundtrack, and "And My Love," an inspiring song from Ellington's final sacred concert. The disc opens with one of my favorite Ellington pieces that so far as is known no one else ever recorded and Ellington did only once—the funky "Blue Pepper." Here it features the ebullient trumpet of Bruce Adams, a disciple of Cootie Williams and Cat Anderson, veteran of the British band Echoes of Ellington, but also a sensitive improviser in his own right. American Frank Griffiths, who moved to the UK to teach, is on tenor and clarinet and has a great outing on "Don't You Know I Care?" The bassist is Simon Woolf (good solo on "Who Knows?") and the drummer that great young British discovery Steve Brown, so much in demand by visiting Americans, whose sensitive and appropriate backing enhances every track here. Priestley duets with himself (dubbed in) on "Johnny Come Lately" and has a fine solo on "Azure." The one non-Ellington piece is Priestley's composition "That's What

He Says" which refers to Charles Mingus, briefly in Ellington's band (when told Mingus stated that he belonged to the school of Ellington, Duke replied, "Well, that's what he says."). Priestley ends the disc with a moving version of "Lotus Blossom," the only really well-known number in the program. This is altogether a highly successful, enterprising, and fascinating collection of Ellingtonia, well played, well presented and well enjoyed.

Frank Rutter

The Ryga Rosnes Quartet

Deep Cove

CBC Records TRCD 3012

There are some collaborations that come out of the germ of an idea, and grow into a large musical landscape. This recording is one of those, with Vancouver altoist Campbell Ryga co-leading a quartet (even if it was a makeshift one) with pianist Renee Rosnes. Rosnes, who has established herself as a pianist who resonates with harmonic awareness and a sense of phrasing, has a fine complement in Ryga, whose palette is imbued with deep hues. They bring contrast and resemblance, partners in diversity and in uniformity. This is seen in the charming "For Norma and George" with Ryga investing the melody with a facile lilt before Rosnes takes over, shifting the tempo a notch slower and then building and pushing the parameters. Bounce and sparkle mark "Deep Cove" and Rosnes and Ryga are closer in harmonic sense on this alluring tune. Thelonious Monk's "We See" bounds out on the verve injected by Rosnes and Ryga, but their explorations are never less than imaginative in the shaping of the boundaries, enhanced here by the rhythm section of Neil Swainson on bass and Rudy Putschauer on drums. The music is mainstream, with a rich emotional core that transcends the ordinary, owing as much to the composition as it does to the playing.

Jerry D'Souza

Maria Schneider Orchestra

Concert in the Garden

maria-schneider.com (ArtistShare)

Influences? When one considers the bulk of Ms. Schneider's contributions at this point it may be somewhat superfluous, but Duke Pearson comes to mind immediately, at least for me. Her most recent CD digs deeply into the connections between large ensemble jazz and various other ethnic traditions that have illuminated and expanded those avenues for a score of years now.

You want *saudade*? You've got it.

You want flamenco? You've got it.

And, if a fresh perspective is desired, you have that too. Pianist Frank Kimbrough is the most prominently featured soloist, with richly textured contributions on three out of the five tracks. With a cast that includes vocalist Luciana Souza, guitarist Ben Monder, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, accordionist Gary Versace, trombonist Larry Farrell, and saxophonists Rich Perry, Charles Pillow, and Donny

McCaslin, this is music that nudges up against "boundaries." The compositions and arrangements are the stars, not the soloists, but Versace and Kimbrough interact on the title selection like brothers.

This, my friends, is state-of-the-art ensemble jazz. The use of voice, accordion and the percussion of Gonzalo Grau and Jeff Ballard create a palette very different than Ms. Schneider's previous recordings. As she says: "I'm a storyteller—in life that's true, and in music too."

Bill Barton

Second Outlet (Luc Houtkamp, Cor Fuhler, Martin Blume)

Burnt Sienna

Nuscope CD1015

Not unlike the world of business, music is an area characterized by a free-flowing commerce across borders and continents. Such could be said of the present recording, a Dutch-German music collaboration issued on a Texas-based label specialized in cutting-edges improvisational music produced on both sides of the Big Pond. In this ten-cut, hour-plus release, the trio (a format which seems to be one preferred by label head Russ Summers) consists of uncompromising sound explorers, two of whom are keenly interested in the integration of live electronics with acoustic instruments. Indeed, tenor saxophonist Luc Houtkamp generates sounds through a computer while pianist Cor Fuhler is credited as using preparations on his instrument (though unspecified in the liner notes). In musical terms, the disc's annotator, analog sythezist Thomas Lehn, rightly points out that the trio operates with two identities, one acoustic (with the saxman leading the way), the other more strictly electronic, with the reedman moving over to the controls of his laptop. Percussionist Blume, for his part, provides a kind of link between those two worlds, laying out a variety of textures from his kit rather than the usual pulses or beats traditionally assigned to the drums. All told, this is a music of detail rather than broad gesture, but which can also project itself more forcibly, especially when Houtkamp sticks to his main axe. That said, the best way to appreciate this outing is to do so by keeping one's thinking cap on.

Marc Chénard

Scott Robinson

Jazz Ambassador: Scott Robinson plays the Compositions of Louis Armstrong

Arbors ARCD 19275

With his oversized heart and grin, Louis Armstrong was a natural ambassador. He traveled the world for the State Department and was recognized in *Life Magazine's* millennium list of 100 people as "the international jazz ambassador, America's greatest gift to the world." This CD is a tribute to Armstrong's compositional talent by a latter-day envoy, multi-instrumentalist and rare instrument expert Scott Robinson, who made a State Department tour of Africa in 2001 in connec-

tion with the Armstrong centennial. Sidemen include Larry Ham (piano) and Pat O'Leary (bass) who were also on that trip.

Robinson's intent was "not to make any attempt to recreate his style of performance, just treating his tunes as tunes ...coming up with kind of personalized treatments." And personalize he does! He matches instruments to tunes: bass sax on three of Armstrong's blues: "Potato Head," "Gully Low" and "Wild Man," funky organ on the last two for color. "Cornet Chop Suey" suggests bop to Robinson who acers the tune with his double-bell echo cornet. The C-melody sets the mood and period for "Lazy 'Sippi Steamer Going Home," a pretty tune. "Hear Me Talkin' to You," written with Don Redman, is a fast-paced bari feature, while "Someday You'll Be Sorry" becomes a bossa nova. African drums flavor "Swing That Music," the only track recorded in Ghana. The closer, "Tears," comes as a surprise, as the group plays free, recognizing, in Robinson's words, that "Louis was the first 'out' cat!"

Armstrong's performances were always virtuosic, always fresh. That's exactly what Robinson has given us with his interpretation of the Armstrong compositional legacy.

Bill Falconer

Jim Snidero featuring Eric Alexander

Close Up

Milestone MCD-9341

Jim Snidero is an innovative alto player and arranger. His 2003 Milestone release *Strings* broke new ground, using interaction to liberate the string section from its usual accompanying role. In *Close Up* he applies his creative talents to small group mainstream jazz. Snidero's rhythm section includes bassist Paul Gill and drummer Billy Drummond from the previous CD and his long-time associate, David Hazeltine, on piano. "I Should Care" is an up-tempo Hazeltine chart with solos by the pianist, Snidero and Drummond that combine dexterity and taste. The only other standard, "Prisoner of Love," showcases Snidero who plays with the passion you would expect from a player whose first teacher was Phil Woods. Snidero's Latin-tinged "Windswept" is a study in dynamics and emotions featuring Hazeltine. Eric Alexander, the adventurous young tenor player, joins the group for five varied Snidero originals, adding further color to the charts as well as some creative solos, particularly on a pair of blues. "Nippon Blue" is soulful and reminiscent of "Afro Blue," while "Blues for the Moment" is upbeat with a fiery contribution from Hazeltine. "Reality" is a high-flying jazz waltz. The title tune is funky and happy while the boppish "Smash" is

probably the only tune ever dedicated to a sledgehammer! Snidero has described his approach to creativity as "not to do it just for yourself, but to have something that touches people." This philosophy has served him well on his last two CDs, and it will be interesting to see what he does next.

Bill Falconer

Surd

Live at Glenn Miller Café

Ayley ayCD-020

Nordic band Surd recorded this CD at the Stockholm club in mid-2004. Filip Augustsson's brief bass intro commences the album, soon joined by the other instrumentalists, in a honking, rhythmically acute rendition of Steve Lacy's "38." The guitar and saxophone together create rough unison lines, a carefully deliberated, composed chaos best characterized as free jazz. The same approach holds for "3 6 4 U," a composition by saxophonist Fredrik Nordstrom. Nordstrom's playing is intense and passionate, with a gritty, breathy sound recalling the split-tone sound of Pharoah Sanders. He gives a more delicate approach on his composition "Head P," written as a tribute to the rock band Portishead. Special attention should be paid to guitarist David Stackenas' playing here - the arpeggio figure that he sticks to for the majority of the composition has a trebly desperation about it, and it eventually settles into sonic tempering, never seeming to jar away from key. The band reaches its most sustained creativity on the extended collective improvisation "Bye, Bye Teddy."

Stephen Broomer

McCoy Tyner

Counterpoints: Live in Tokyo

Milestone MCD-9339

Incredible! Not just the music but the fact that it has been buried in the vaults for over a quarter century. These previously unreleased tracks were recorded by the supertrio of McCoy Tyner, Ron Carter and Tony Williams at a "Live Under the Sky" Festival in Tokyo in July of 1978. Carter and Williams, who along with Herbie Hancock made up the stellar Miles Davis rhythm section of the mid-sixties, had recorded with Tyner a year earlier on his "Supertrios" release. This session, which includes four Tyner compositions and "Prelude to a Kiss," is emotional and you'll be captured by the technical mastery and power of all three players. There are two Tyner solos, "Aisha" and "Sama Layuca," that illustrate why he never felt the need to take up electric piano! On the latter, there's a sequence where it seems like there's got to be more than one pianist. "Prelude," a duet with Carter, is equally intense. The opening and closing trio tracks combine innovation and drama. "The Greeting" brings to mind the ocean's roar through Tyner's crashing chords and Williams' busy scattering of drum magic. "Iki Masho (Let's Go)" is new in a sense. It was introduced at the festival but remained unplayed and unnamed until now. The chart draws you in as it opens with a repeated modal figure and ends with Tyner on the edge of silence at the upper reaches of his instrument. Plenty of building and contrast in between and there's proof during Carter's rhythmic solo of Tyner's ability to comp with delicacy. *Passion Dance* (Milestone LP M-9091), should be well worth looking for. It contains the rest of the material recorded the

same evening and was released promptly in 1979. However, *Counterpoints: Live in Tokyo* is as good as it gets.

Bill Falconer

Fred van Hove

Spraak & Roll

WIMproacht/negen 030004

Together with Alex von Schlippenbach and Irene Schweizer, Flemish pianist Fred van Hove rounds off what one could call the Holy Trinity of European free improvising keyboardists. But unlike the former, who has never discarded his more jazzy sensibilities, and the latter, who has been courting it more frequently in recent years, van Hove has basically steered clear from it in his thirty year plus journey into Free Music. More pointedly, he has sublimated it by using Cecil Taylor as a starting point. In this latest solo offering, the first in four years, van Hove remains true to himself while offering the listener contrasting perspectives in his art. Disc one of this double package is a compendium of 15 short to middle length pieces spanning the two to seven minute range. Throughout, references to any familiar harmonic or melodic patterns or licks, even set rhythmic pulses, are eschewed. Yet, this does not mean that his approach is entirely gratuitous: rather than looking at materials used, one should consider the playing strategies he employs, one being gestural, the other timbral. In the first case, which seems to characterize the bulk of the pieces, he skitters over the keyboard, eliciting clusters or short burst of single notes; in the latter, he alters the piano's sound with preparation, in a more random rather than set Cagian approach. In "BLLS" he seem to play one off the other, whereas the final track "KLLKN" constitutes a study of resonance through the sustain pedal, a cut unlike any other heard in this set. On the second disc, the proposition is totally different. After the opening tracks "Roll on" and "Roll over," the pièce de résistance, an unrelenting "Roll Over," clocks in at around 46 minutes. Unquestionably, the Taylor influence shows through in all three tracks, harmonies suggested by deep pedal tones and slowly building and ebbing intensities. Interestingly enough, during last Spring's FIMAV festival in Victoriaville van Hove covered this very ground in the second part of his solo concert. At close to two hours and ten minutes, this is a lot of piano playing, and van Hove offers the listener few breaks along the way, but anyone acquainted with him is aware of his thoroughly demanding yet uncompromising artistry.

Marc Chénard

Denny Zeitlin

Slickrock

MaxJazz MXJ 209

On *Slickrock*, psychiatrist/pianist Denny Zeitlin shows off a wealth of interesting ideas, but seldom settles for one when three will do. It's too much of a good thing and just a bit self-conscious, too. The thing is, Zeitlin's ideas - and

his chops - are often strong enough to stand alone. Sure, the dreamy waltz interpretation of "Sweet Georgia Brown" is interesting, but was it necessary to apply that approach to this ancient chestnut of all tunes? Then Zeitlin follows it with a gem: a racehorse version of "E.S.P." that blows

away the hovering mystery of Miles' version to reveal its modal cooker roots. Buster Williams and drummer Matt Wilson are terrific partners, stalking Zeitlin every step of the way. Everything the pianist throws at them, they catch, as on Part Two of the concluding "Slickrock" suite. Williams is just unconscious here—fast, firm and flexible. But the down-tempo cuts lack tension and a long sense of line, and are often lethargic. At the risk of practicing without a license, I'd say that *Slickrock* occasionally shows evidence of too much superego and sometimes of too much ego. A bit more id might have helped.

John Chacona

REISSUE & ARCHIVAL RECORDINGS

Joe Harriott Quintet

Swings High
Cadillac SGC/MELCD 203

Mike Osborne Trio/ Quintet

Border Crossing/ Marcel's Muse
Ogun OGCD 015

There can be little doubt that jazz music in essence is an American art form. Throughout its history there have been many practitioners, if not all innovators, then at least individuals who have furthered its ever evolving characteristics. The two British alto saxophonists under review were undoubtedly influenced by Bird and Ornette, but also brought to the music a certain Britishness, qualities that set them apart from the copyists and who created for themselves voices of distinction.

Much has been written recently about Joe Harriott (see *Coda* 316) so long winded descriptions of his history are not required. This CD from 1967 is a fine example of him playing in a superb quintet that features his preferred rhythm section of Pat Smythe (piano), Coleridge Goode (bass) and Phil Seaman (drums), plus the relatively unknown bop trumpeter Stu Hamer. The program of eight pieces include two ballads—"Polka Dots and Moonbeams" and "A Time for Love"—both of which capture Harriott's fiercely lyrical quality, the rest originals by himself, Dizzy Reece and Pat Smythe. Hamer's confident trumpet playing shines throughout. A most peculiar aspect of this recording is that it harkens back to a period predating Harriott's experiments with the avant garde (1960-64)

and Indo-Jazz Fusions (1965-67), and shows his command of the language that Charlie Parker concocted. The recording is not of the highest quality, the sound being somewhat tinny, but all the music is captured clearly.

One similarity between these alto players is a certain stridency in their approach, and in Mike Osborne's case—unwavering, giving his music an urgency even at slower tempos. This important reissue of two LPs on one CD illustrates his music in two quite different settings. The first seven tunes are recorded live at the Peanuts Club in September 1974, an important London venue in this period, where this trio, completed by the incredible duo of Harry Miller (bass) and Louis Moholo (drums), performed on a regular basis. The music is as expected: loose, free-wheeling and clearly Ornette inspired, allowing the listener to experience the open minded adventure that existed at the time. The latter four, somewhat extended compositions (9:07 - 10:13), recorded in May 1977, have a more formal character, and feature the marvelous trumpet playing of Marc Charig, who furnishes its content with a brassy lyrical fluidity. The group is completed by guitarist Jeff Green, drummer Peter Nykyruj and once again the inimitable Harry Miller.

Both of these reissues are documents that represent superior, if somewhat underrated, British players, and it seems inconceivable that they are not held in the same esteem as their American counterparts. Or could it be they do not have counterparts!

Bill Smith

Soft Machine

Live in Paris May 2nd, 1972
Cuneiform Records Rune 195

The posthumous career of England's singular electric jazz ensemble continues, with the re-release of a live Soft Machine set that appeared previously in 1995 through One Way Records. For historians, these live recordings from May 1972 offer precious insight into a group burning in transition. By now, the Softs were well distant from their pop beginnings, and the new sound was established already as a tightrope walk between suites of knotty or droll themes and improvisation, with recurring tension between, on one side, Elton Dean's insinuating alto sax and saxello and his urge to break free, and, on the other, the programmatic approach and heavy wattage of bass guitarist Hugh Hopper and sole enduring original, keyboard player Mike Ratledge. There had been changes in the drummer's chair, however. Phil Howard lasted long enough to record the first half of 5 in the studio before he was replaced by John Marshall, the first of many new Softs to come from England's other fusion favorites, Ian Carr's Nucleus. The new lineup recorded the second half of 5 before the restless Dean moved on to other projects. His successor, Karl Jenkins would come to steer the Softs toward a smoother sound—softly machined, yes—that left little room for combustion.

Most of the music from 5 gets an airing,

and while those original chilly designs are not appreciably warmer in concert, the vitality is undeniable. On alto, Dean breathes extra menace into the sinister "As If." Moving to a second electric piano, he nudges Ratledge with urgent comping in "Drop." Music from the band's expansive *Third* had been in the book for several years by then, but the musicians wring surprises. The first theme in Ratledge's blues-based suite, "Slightly All the Time," for example, doesn't arrive until both keyboardists have toyed with the melody. Hopper and Marshall stay deep in the same pocket, and strike an unexpectedly funky accord below the metallic Fender Rhodes chatter of the improvised "And Sevens." Newcomers should look for Sony U.K.'s smart two-on-one disc of *Fourth* and 5. More ardent listeners put off by the number of Soft Machine anthologies on the market can invest with confidence.

Randal McIlroy

CHASING THE PAST

A COLUMN BY STUART BROOMER

DON PULLEN

Don Pullen was a consummate pianist, whether demonstrating his mastery of familiar idioms as an accompanist to Sarah Vaughan or breaking new ground in his 1960s work with Giuseppe Logan and Milford Graves. He breathed new life into Charles Mingus's music during a mid-70s tenure and created great rhythmic dialogues in African-Brazilian Connection before his death in 1995. His *Solo Piano Album*, recorded in Toronto in 1975 for Sackville, is an early masterpiece. His music was a personal compound of the soulful (rich in gospel, blues and funk roots) and the adventurous, stretching out on extraordinary pin-wheeling keyboard gymnastics.

Don Pullen (Mosaic Select 13) gathers four of his finest CDs, all recorded for Blue Note between 1986 and 1990. The first two—*Breakthrough* and *Song Everlasting*—are late documents of the Don Pullen-George Adams Quartet, the tight-knit band that began in 1978 with Mingus alumni Adams on tenor and Dannie Richmond on drums, with Cameron Brown on bass. It's a superb exposition of shared values ranging from funky backbeats to heartfelt lyricism to wonderful outside excursions like "The Necessary Blues," which seems to stretch toward Messiaen and Ayler in Pullen and Adams' respective solo turns.

The other two recordings included are piano trio dates. The first, *New Beginnings*, has Pullen joined by Gary Peacock and Tony Williams, perhaps the most creative rhythm section Pullen

ever worked with, and the combination of his rhythmic acuity and inventiveness with Williams' is staggering at times, as are the lyrical, expansive bass lines and solos that Peacock contributes. *Random Thoughts* has Pullen joined by the younger—and more conservative—team of James Genus and Lewis Nash in a program of the pianist's compositions. There's a concentrated passion and force here, rarely heard in piano trios, and rendered programmatic in titles like "Endangered Species: African American Youth." The set ends with a spectacular Pullen solo from the *New Beginnings* session. In all, it's a fine collection by a talent that demands to be remembered.

All recordings are available solely through Mosaic Records, 35 Melrose Place, Stamford, CT 06902; (203) 327-7111. www.mosaicrecords.com

JIMMY SMITH

It's odd how doing a reissue column will suggest resemblances otherwise overlooked, like the similarities between Don Pullen and Jimmy Smith, usually consigned to the almost mutually exclusive camps of the avant-garde and funk. Heard in close proximity, there's a remarkably similar balance of soulfulness and highly personal keyboard pyrotechnics—they're just distributed differently and in different contexts and combinations. **Jimmy Smith: A Retrospective** (Blue Note 73165) is a four-CD compilation of the organist's Blue Note work, ranging from his 1956 debut to his great 1963 sessions, just before his departure from the label. Smith was largely responsible for the organ's rise to prominence in jazz, its most virtuosic advocate and a musician who could merge bop, R & B, and swing in a joyous, burbling explosion. He could even find a convincing way to play Monk on organ, as in "Hackensack," with Kenny Burrell and Philly Joe Jones. There's a hearty helping of Smith in the trios and quartets that were his mainstay, including plenty of encounters with his principal associates, Stanley Turrentine, Burrell, Eddie McFadden and Donald Bailey, but the hottest moments come in his all-star jams with hard-bop luminaries: "Groovy Date" (Hank Mobley, Donald Byrd, Lou Donaldson and Art Blakey), "The Sermon" (with Lee Morgan, Donaldson, Tina Brooks, Burrell and Blakey) and "Sista Rebecca" (Jackie McLean, Blue Mitchell and Ike Quebec). Like earlier titles in the Retrospective series (*Joe Henderson*, *Horace Silver*, *Grant Green*) this is a detailed portrait of an essential musician during his most creative period.

BLUE NOTE CONNOISSEURS

This limited edition reissue series continues to pull more obscure gems from the Blue Note vaults, most seeing their first release on CD. There's much great trumpeting here on the cusp of post-bop and free.

Andrew Hill's *Dance with Death* (Blue Note 73160) comes from 1968, and like everything from the pianist is of considerable interest. It's more conservative than most of Hill's earlier

Blue Note dates, but there's still arresting music here, hard-edged post bop with exploratory, complex changes played by Joe Farrell, Charles Tolliver, Victor Sproles and Billy Higgins, a masterful partner for Hill's vital rhythmic language. More musicians should follow Anthony Braxton's lead and explore Hill's compositions in depth.

Sam Rivers' *Contours* (73163) from 1965 was his second Blue Note date, with a quintet that sets Rivers' tenor, soprano and flute with some extraordinary support from the other corpsmen of the Blue Note modified free style. Freddie Hubbard is spectacular here, demonstrating as he did with Coleman, Coltrane and Dolphy that he was free jazz's most technically adroit trumpeter as well as its most reluctant. Here he stands toe-to-toe with another blistering saxophonist, mining a terrain no other trumpeter had found. Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Joe Chambers provide fluid, stimulating group dialogue.

Larry Young's *Of Love and Peace* (73162), recorded in 1966, features an overlooked trumpeter on the edge of free jazz, Eddie Gale, here clearly taking up the Hubbard technical challenge and generating the most excitement on a date that mixes Young's effervescent Hammond with wailing collective ensembles that include James Spaulding and Herbert Morgan on reeds and two drummers, Wilson Moorman III and Jerry Thomas. Few of those are household names even among free jazz and Blue Note devotees, but this is great thundering, emotive music, plucked from the intersection of free jazz and hard bop. The extended jam on Morton Gould's "Pavanne" sets the tone for an innovative mix of instruments, methods and material.

Most unusual is **Horace Silver's *United States of Mind*** (73157), a two-CD collation of three separate LPs (*That Healin' Feelin'*, *Total Response* and *All*) that feature his early 70s quintets with electric piano, sometimes added guitar and added voices, including Salome and Andy Bey and Silver himself. Odd that such a seemingly commercial shift would actually result in poor sales, but there was more than commerce on Silver's mind as he merged his familiar hard-bop lexicon with messages of peace, love and understanding. While it was clearly more than Silver's audience wanted then, this is consistently well-made music with an army of fine hard-boppers like Randy Brecker, Cecil Bridgewater, George Coleman and Harold Vick. A fascinating turn in jazz's desire to communicate, it has since found its audience among acid jazz club devotees. Silver's vocal version of his earlier "Peace," first heard here, has been a hit for Norah Jones.

FANTASY 20-bits

Coleman Hawkins' *The Hawk Flies High* (Riverside RITB-233) might have passed as a definition of "mainstream" at one time, a superb—yes, definitive—1957 blowing session by a septet that speaks a common language of

late swing and calmed-down bop and includes other giants like J.J. Johnson, Oscar Pettiford and Jo Jones. One amazing highlight is Idrees Sulieman's opening solo on the extended blues "Juicy Fruit," the trumpeter using circular breathing to sustain a note for about a minute while Hank Jones uses repeated chords as accompaniment. Must hearing.

Art Blakey's 1963 *Ugetsu* (Riverside RITB-9464) is the last of his celebrated Birdland recordings, this one featuring the marvelous sextet version of the Messengers with Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter, Curtis Fuller, Cedar Walton and Reggie Workman, probably a peak for power, musicianship and adventurousness in the ensemble's illustrious history and Blakey's last truly great band. The bristling set celebrates a tour of Japan with Walton's title track and Shorter's "On the Ginza," and there are other potent concoctions by Fuller and Shorter. "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" features Shorter's effectively off-side (even micro-tonal) ballad style, leading to a surprising brass fanfare and a cadenza with interesting overblown harmonics.

Also added to the U.S. series: **Miles Davis' *Collectors' Items*** (Prestige PRTB-7044) includes four tracks from a 1953 session with both Charlie Parker and Sonny Rollins on tenors, an inspired boppish set that includes a fine account of "Round Midnight." The other three tunes were produced by a 1956 quintet with Rollins, Tommy Flanagan and Art Taylor, only Paul Chambers appearing from the far more famous "regular" quintet which two months later would cover two of the same tunes—"Vierd Blues" and "In Your Own Sweet Way." **Dave Brubeck's** early masterpiece, ***Jazz at the College of the Pacific*** (Fantasy FTB-3223) consists of six standards, each a launching pad for Paul Desmond's sparkling lyric gifts. **Joe Pass's *Blues for Fred*** (Pablo PATB-2310-931) is a 1988 solo recording devoted to songs introduced by Fred Astaire, with two original blues added. It's an extraordinary collection of standards to have been debuted by a single artist, including "Night and Day," "They Can't Take That Away from Me," "Dancing in the Dark," "Oh Lady, Be Good," "A Foggy Day" and "The Way You Look Tonight," and Pass certainly does them justice, with some of the same light virtuosity that distinguished Astaire's dancing.

VERVE LPRS

The latest batch of Verve's LP Reproductions includes some very fine (and very different) keyboard trios.

Bill Evans' *California Here I Come* (Verve B0002681) has almost nothing to do with California other than the Al Jolson-associated title ditty, here given the kind of dark, abstract rendering that Evans once managed to impose on "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town." It's one of Evans' many dates from the Village Vanguard, this from 1967 with perhaps the most combatively busy version of an Evans trio I've heard, with Eddie Gomez and Philly Joe Jones usually playing as much as the leader. It's both dis-

tracting and stimulating—Evans is a model of grace under pressure—with fine accounts of “Turn Out the Lights,” “If You Could See Me Now” and “Emily.” Originally a two-LP set, the disc runs 75 minutes.

Ahmad Jamal's *Chamber Music of the New Jazz* (Verve B0002682) is a largely neglected masterpiece, an early model of Jamal's tightly arranged, minimalist trio with bassist Israel Crosby and the very under-recorded guitarist Ray Crawford (whose tiny discography includes Gil Evans and Tom Waits). Crawford is a perfect partner for Jamal, gifted with a talent for the same spare lyricism as well as providing some unique upper-register rhythm guitar that's almost bongo-like.

For something very different from either of the foregoing, turn to the well-oiled machinery of **Oscar Peterson's** classic trio with Ed Thigpen and Ray Brown swinging buoyantly through ***A Jazz Portrait of Frank Sinatra*** (Verve B0002684), with signature Sinatra tunes like “Learnin’ the Blues,” “Witchcraft,” and “How About You?” getting an effective and appropriately light touch.

Though **Jimmy Smith's** early Verve years were marked by big band recordings, he could

still turn in the wonderfully funky small-group performances on which he had built his reputation. ***The Boss*** (Verve B0002685) is a very good 1968 date from Paschal's La Carousel in Atlanta, with George Benson and Donald Bailey. Smith and Benson are two of a kind, from the deep blues of “Some of My Best Friends Are Blues” to the bouncing “Tuxedo Junction.”

Also newly available is **Lorez Alexandria's *Alexandria the Great*** (Verve B0002686), a 1964 Impulse recording by a very fine if little-known jazz singer (I don't use the term loosely), gifted with the rare melodic, rhythmic and timbral fluency that should immediately place her in what someone once noted as the front row of the second rank (a useful category: the writer was looking for a spot for Johnny Griffin), just behind the sustained greatness of Billie, Sarah, Ella and Betty. She's actually deserving of the accompaniment provided here by Bud Shank, Victor Feldman, Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers, Jimmy Cobb and Ray Crawford (is this an avalanche?).

OTHER RECOMMENDED TITLES

The Complete Roulette Dinah Washington Sessions (Mosaic MD5-227) collects her recordings from March 1962 to her death in

December 1963. Accompaniments range from vocal groups and lush orchestration to big band to just piano and flute for an intimate rehearsal medley, but Washington's rich, gorgeous voice and expressive depth are present throughout. The range of material is broad, from contemporary throwaways to classics like “These Foolish Things” to Washington's own stunning “You Made Us Human,” but it all has the stamp of a great singer.

Rex Stewart and the Henry Chaix Orchestra's *Baden 1966 and Montreux 1971* (Sackville SKCD2-2061) is great late swing. The first of these sessions sets the great Ellingtonian's voice and cornet in the midst of Chaix' effective arrangements and tightly-rehearsed octet for repertoire like “Happy-Go-Lucky Local” and “St Louis Blues” as well as originals like “Love Do I” and “Headshrinker's Blues.” The second set, previously unreleased, has the Chaix sextet playing a wonderful series of Fats Waller medleys. They bring the buoyantly effervescent Chaix piano to the fore.

Thank You Stuart

The publication of this issue of CODA marks the end of another era in this magazine's storied history. As many longtime readers know, Stuart Broomer has been the editor-in-chief since the original publishing team of John Norris and Bill Smith sold CODA to Warwick Magazines in 2000. Issue 320 marks the end of Stuart's tenure as editor, as he will be stepping down in order to look after his many other professional responsibilities.

Like many people who have been involved with CODA over the years Stuart's association goes back decades, to when he first wrote for the magazine as a young man in the 1960s. Stuart assumed the reins as editor with issue 298 and guided the magazine through the ownership change. He put his stamp on the magazine with his critical instincts and editorial skills while upholding the magazine's reputation as a beacon of integrity in the jazz community. Under Stuart's editorship the magazine was twice nominated for Best Periodical Covering Jazz by the Jazz Journalists Association, the only magazine not published in the U.S. to be so nominated. On behalf of Warwick Magazines publisher Jim Williamson, and of course the CODA readers, we would like to thank Stuart for his years of service and wish him well in all his future pursuits.

I have had the privilege of working with Stuart on CODA for over two years now and gaining from his insight. Beginning with issue 321 I will be assuming the editorship of CODA. I am thrilled and more than a little humbled at this challenge. There is a lot to look forward to in 2005 as we will be making a number of exciting changes to the magazine. The May/June issue will have a bold new look as well as new editorial sections and features. Our goal is to make CODA a resource that you, the jazz fan, will come to appreciate and rely on even more than now. We encourage your feedback and I look forward to hearing from readers in the coming months.

Daryl Angier

Incoming Editor/Associate Publisher

Continued from page 17.

more. Each piece is self-fulfilling, often brilliantly so. And that, as it stands, is all there is. There is an unfinished air to it. The whole is not greater than the parts. Listeners find themselves supplying rationales and themes long after Ellington has snapped his fingers and moved on.

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JUST IN TIME DELIVERS

Music to Your Ears



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On this new live recording, great Canadian bassist **Dave Young** is joined by **Gary Williamson** on piano, **Kevin Turcotte**, trumpet, **Perry White**, saxophones and **Terry Clarke** on drums. This solid core of Toronto-based jazz versatility serves up a stirring tribute to the musical genius of the late composer, band-leader and bassist Charles Mingus. The players integrate perfectly for performances of six Mingus compositions and two tunes written by Dave Young. After an extensive body of work (including seven CDs previously released on Justin Time) this recording stands proudly with the rest of Young's enduring achievements.

David Clayton-Thomas "Aurora"

Ex Blood, Sweat & Tears vocalist and front man **David Clayton-Thomas** returned to Toronto last summer to record *Aurora* with a top-notch jazz quartet. David turned to his long-time friend **Doug Riley** to co-produce the album. With **Terry Clarke**, **George Koller**, **Rob Pilch** and **Jake Langley**, the pair have delivered a splendid collection: jazz standards, blues, Louis Armstrong, Hoagy Carmichael and Billie Holiday tracks and even Joni Mitchell material.



Quadro Nuevo "Mocca Flor"

Orient and occident coalesce in the music on **Quadro Nuevo's** new CD, *Mocca Flor*. Neapolitan mandolins, Balkan swing and Arabesque melodies merge with accordion rhythms into oriental tango. The magic of Klezmer and a bold melancholic saxophone add spice to old European coffee house music. Magical fairy tales in sound unfold, whose adventure begins somewhere between Paris and Istanbul, Palermo and Cairo, Berlin and Piraeus. Also available by Quadro Nuevo on Justin Time: *Canzone della strada* (2004).

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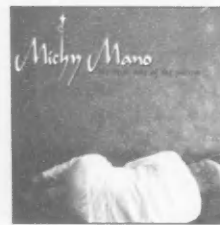
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