



# **ALL ABOUT JAZZ**

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Hear that?

That's the sound of me settling into a groove.

No, not with All About Jazz. Not anything so noble.

That was the sound of me settling into the groove I've created on my couch by spending most of my time lately in front of the television.

I used to be very anti-TV. Wouldn't touch it. The box sat in the corner of my living room, gathering dust. For a while there I even had it facing the wall.

Then a couple of things happened.

First, a local station showed a two-week-long marathon of the entire first season of *The Sopranos*. I got hooked. Then they announced you'd only be able to watch the *second* season on pay-TV. Oofa. Ditto with the third season. Reluctantly, I signed up to pay \$70 a month for every channel in God's Own Creation, because that's the only way to get the digital box I need to score my mafia fix.

Second, like a sheep in the field (or a pig at the trough, or a lamb to the slaughter — I'm not sure which yet) I sat through nearly

20 hours of Ken Burns' *Jazz*. Had I known the entire affair was less Ken Burns' *Jazz* and more *Ken Burns' jazz*, I might have passed. As it was, though, I slogged through the whole boggy marsh of it. There's a good chunk of time I'll never get back.

Now of course, I'm addicted to television. Worst of all, I'm hooked on that hideous *Survivor*.

I missed it the first time (see my sanctimonious "television is bad" rant only a few paragraphs above) but these days I find myself thinking in the shower about who's going to hissy-fit their way off the (continent-sized) island next week. The horror.

On the plus side, I've been cooking up ways to combine reality TV and jazz (bearing in mind, as I've recently learned, that no good jazz was made after 1960.)

Check this out: *Jazz Survivor*, with the Bebopin Tribe battling it out against the Moldyfig Tribe. Or *Temptation H-land*: put a bunch of hepcats on a rock with some heroin and see who caves first.

Or... Oh, sorry. Gotta go. Oprah's on. 🎧



# FROM THE INSIDE OUT

CHRIS M. SLAWECKI

Good autobiography explains the life of its subject. Great autobiography explains the life of its subject and more — not just what that life was, but also why and how that life came to be that way.

Sammy Davis Jr. (1925-1990) recounts one hell of a life in *Sammy: An Autobiography* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). His first memoir, *Yes I Can* (1965), a true American rags to riches story, was both popularly and critically acclaimed; for an encore he delivered *Why Me?* (1980), which brooded more troublesome issues such as his personal relationships with the Kennedy family, his wives, and others. Davis wrote both books with the husband and wife team of Burt and Jane Boyar, his friends for decades. Burt combined both texts with previously unpublished interviews, and wrote a new prologue and epilogue, for this new Autobiography. Davis succumbed to throat cancer in 1990 at age 64. Jane Boyer died in 1997.

Davis was a rare breed of entertainer. He could sing, dance, and do comedy and drama with soul and style, sort of the prototype Michael Jackson. Much has been

made, including much of this book review, of the fact that Davis was “burdened” as a performer by being both Jewish and Black (though he wryly notes he started out as a “Negro”) during a period where large expanses of America were less than enlightened on racial and religious tolerance. In the year 2000, ten years after Davis’ passing, a Jewish senator ran for the second highest office in the United States, and a Black man is serving as Secretary of State. *Sammy: An Autobiography* reminds us that things were not always so. It is not merely the autobiography of a talented Jewish, Black performer, even though that might be interesting enough. It is simply, triumphantly, an American autobiography.

Davis saw himself as born to the stage. He was not someone who entertained — he was an entertainer. The road and the stage were his home: “Although I had traveled ten states and played over fifty cities by the time I was four, I never felt I was without a home. We carried our roots with us: our same boxes of makeup in front of the mirrors, our same clothes hanging on iron pipe racks with our same shoes under them. Only the details

changed, like the face on the man sitting inside the stage door, or which floor our dressing room was on.”

As Davis searched for stardom, for the first several years with his father and family friend in The Will Mastin Trio, he was running from and running to many things. As a child, he appeared in a Warner Brothers film starring Ethel Waters, *Rufus Jones for President*. Davis played Rufus, a little boy who fell asleep on his mother’s lap and dreamt he was President. Davis recalls, “When Rufus Jones attended a cabinet meeting, there were signs saying ‘Check Yo’ Razors at the Door.’ He appointed a ‘Secretary in Charge of Crap Shooting’ and a Secretary of Agriculture to ‘make sure the watermelons come in good and the chickens is ready fo’ fryin’!” Davis’ depiction of several instances of racial intimidation and abuse are absolutely horrific; he endured some unspeakable horrors while serving in the Army during WWII, including being beaten and painted with the words “coon” and “I’m a nigger” in white paint by his own troops.

After he left the army, Davis and Elvis Presley were the original pair in consideration

for Stanley Kramer’s *The Defiant Ones*, which eventually starred Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier. But Elvis’ manager, Col. Parker, turned the deal down. Presley had to explain it to Davis: “The real reason is because he says that all those people out there who buy my albums, among them are lots who won’t want to see me chained to a colored guy and end up liking him.”

That same drive that drove Sammy Davis Jr. to stardom in many ways nearly drove him to death. “There had been no harm in the dream of a boy — ‘I’ve got to be a star’ — until it hardened and fastened itself onto a man as a necessity, blinding, obstructing maturity, preventing reevaluation,” he learned. “No white man could ever have been the enemy to me that I had been to myself; he was often guilty of unkindness and stupidity, but I had wasted my life and my talent to win a victory over that stupidity. I was the man who’d opened the door and let Hatred come in, and presented my case to a madman. I was the man who’d paid tribute to Hatred with every breath of my life.”

“All I really had was my talent,” he finally

decided. “Without that I wouldn’t be welcome at the White House, I wouldn’t be able to help anybody, not even myself. If God ever took away my talent I would be a nigger again.”

Davis comes clean with other flaws too. He struggled with the club performers’ equivalent of writers’ block, where he lost respect for himself because he knew he could do better, and lost respect for his audience because they did not. “Phoniness, the lack of respect, had become a habit, a reflex,” he wrote. “And there had been a transition within me, a shift of balance so slight that I hadn’t seen it happening and the ‘con man’ began creeping onstage until gradually but inevitably he overpowered the honest performer and I was no longer able to take off the coat. I had stopped playing the role and become the character.” And Davis seems to relish that he absolutely hated the idea of singing “The Candy Man” with The Mike Curb Congregation for M.G.M. Records, which became a Number One single. His immediate reaction: “I’ve heard the song. It’s horrible. It’s a timmy-two-shoes, it’s white bread, cute-ums, there’s no romance. Blechhh!”

Later, he charmingly reflects, “Unfortunately, I wasn’t born sixty years old. I had to work hard, fuck up a lot and consequently learned a lot.”

Davis explains his mid-life conversion to Judaism, which was introduced to him by Eddie Cantor, with profound insight on the similarities between Jewish and Black American cultures. While reading “A History of the Jews,” Davis remembers that “I got hung up on one paragraph: ‘The Jews would not die. Three centuries of prophetic teaching had given them an unwavering spirit of resignation and had created in them a will to live which no disaster could crush.’” 🌀

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# TAILGATE TROMBONES

BY DEREK TAYLOR

Kid Ory was around practically from the beginning, a cast iron cog in traditional jazz circles who weathered the music's waning periods of popularity and acted as a central revitalizing agent during its various resurgences. Ory came of age during the music's halcyon days. Saturated in the sights and sounds of his native New Orleans, the Creole flavors of his culture never left him. Modest tours in territory bands during his teens eventually led to now legendary stints with the likes of Jelly Roll Morton's Hot Peppers, King Oliver's Dixie Syncopators and Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives and Hot Sevens (the latter two leaders it should be noted blossomed under Ory's influence). In each setting the feral growl of his trombone provided a hair-raising hardiness with good-natured joviality.

Ory's sound eventually coalesced into a distinct style that influenced legions of brass players and was affectionately known as tailgate (a name according to Louis Armstrong originally derived from the type of wagon used by Ory as a traveling stage for his early band with Oliver). Applying all manner of mutes and

plungers and an ingenious arsenal of guttural barks and shouts his horn could scour paint off corrugated siding with the force of its joyous gusts or just as easily coax carnal feelings from the most jaded listener hearts. His sharply honed rhythmic and harmonic sense was perfectly suited to the improvisatory polyphony central in the New Orleans street band tradition. Equally adept at laying down a twisting rhythmic anchor in tandem with bass or drums or in rarer (and later) instances moving to the fore for a melodically-charged solo exhortation his skills were suited to virtually any traditional jazz setting from Dixieland, to Spirituals, to funeral marches to the Creole-tinged melodies that formed the crux of his repertoire.

With the rise of Swing in the 1930s traditional jazz took it on the chin both figuratively and financially and as public interest shifted to more commercialized sounds many New Orleans and Dixieland players including Ory retired. Ory sat out of the music scene for the next nine years working as a mail sorter in Sante Fe, New Mexico before eventually moving to Los Angeles where he

was 'rediscovered.' Tenure with the Ellington Orchestra followed. Shortly thereafter producer Neshui Ertegun who formed the Crescent Records imprint with the express purpose of documenting his comeback eventually approached him.

*1944/1945* collects these historically and artistically exceptional Crescent sides in a single package under the Good Time Jazz imprint, the label that would record much of Ory's output during the early to mid-1950s. The band in residence is filled with Ory's old comrades and attacks the songbook of New Orleans standards with unfettered brio to spare. Ory's unctuous trombone routinely spreads a slippery rhythmic lubricant against the dancing traps of Redd and Hall with the odd cowbell knock tossed in to spice things up. Running times are short, but each tune is packed to the gills with spirited solos primarily from the likes of Simeon and Howard on their respective sides. Wilson's keys are little submerged in the sonic sea, but every once in while sparkle through with a wily sheen. Highlights include the referential "Blues For Jimmie Noone," build on a boisterous solo

from Ory that mixes in the right measure of sadness for a dear friend departed, the emphatic shuffle beat of "Do What Ory Say" replete with sage advice from the maestro himself, and another Ory feature "Ory's Creole Trombone" brimming with colorful trombone breaks.

Turning the pages of time forward five years the succinctly titled *1954* visits Ory in the company of a tightly knit regular working band. Barring a few minor alterations it was the unit he would front for much of the 1950s. The album is lean on liners- a personal reminiscence and two tantalizing recipes from the 'Ory Creole Cookbook (Creole Gumbo Filé and Shrimp Jambalaya) comprise them- but meaty in terms of music. This latter component is one that carries through on all of the band's recordings for Good Time. The repertoire is pretty standard trad jazz fare including Tin Pan Alley tunes by the likes of Scott Joplin ("Maple Leaf Rag") and W.C. Handy ("Yellow Dog Blues") as well as the stray spiritual. But the program also includes one of Ory's most famous compositions "Muskrat Ramble," which the septet runs through at a leisurely pace.



Hall's drums lend a buoyant bounce to the rhythmic end beneath Garland's thick-fingered strums and the frontline of Ory, Alcorn and Probert digs in with some freshly layered harmonies. The horns, and for that matter the band in general is lovingly recorded and all of Ory's signature slurs and smears are scored in scintillating aural relief.

## Perfect victuals to accompany the piping hot musical gumbo the band serves up.

The eponymous *Kid Ory's Creole Jazz Band* recorded four months later replaces Newman with Kessel, but otherwise the group remains the same. This time around the recipe gleaned from Ory's cookbook is a particular mouth-watering rendition of Crawfish Bisque Creole. Perfect victuals to accompany the piping hot musical gumbo the band serves up. The program is again an assorted bag of New Orleans standards starting with Ory's own "Savoy Blues." Garland's expressive string stops

and the piquant lines of Probert's reed keep things percolating as Ory and Alcorn sail around the theme. Probert takes center stage on the casual breakdown of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" twirling above a fluid counterpoint of brass and drums before dropping back and allowing Alcorn to lead. Nanny goat bleats from Ory punctuate between Hall's snare rolls taking the tune out to invisible applause. "A Closer Walk With Thee" is afforded a surprisingly slow and tender preface by Alcorn, Kessel and the light accents of Hall before the band charging forward at full muster swaggers by with a much more ebullient close. "Shake That Thing" is similarly energized thanks to Ory's gravel-textured vocals and some jaw-dropping snarls shoot forth from his broad bell of his brass. The fast-paced syncopation of "Royal Garden Blues" and "Mississippi Mud" gives way to what may qualify as one of Ory's most extended workouts "Tin Roof Blues." The horns cycle through a string of insouciant choruses, each one the musical equivalent of an athlete in peak physical shape. A textbook take on "Indiana" with plenty of asides sends the band

packing for the nearest tavern secure in the knowledge of session well done.

Subtitled *The Legendary Kid*, the 1956 date signaled another shift in personnel with only the Alcorn and the stalwart Hall staying on. The new blood of Gomez, Reason, Davidson and Braud gives Ory's aggregation a comparatively lighter sound, but all the swing and sass remains at full strength. For those keeping count the recipe for this outing is a tasty prescription for Red Beans and Rice. "Mahogany Hall Stomp" opens things up and Ory gets straight to growling in a short but wonderful vibrato-varnished break. Alcorn also sounds in stellar form on this tune and on the following "Sugar Blues," which is largely a feature for Gomez and Reason. King Oliver's "Snag It" unfurls off a throbbing unison lead-in before solos by Gomez and a particularly potbellied Ory. Hall's small percussion accents and the banjo-like strums of Davidson further add to the back alley feel. Pace quickens on the flighty "At the Jazz Band Ball" and the innuendo-laden "Wang Wang Blues" finds the septet at its bawdy best. "Bye and Bye" and "Make Me a Pallet On the Floor" may fulfill the

traditional tune quotient for the session, but both are given the royal treatment and make for consistently thrilling listening. Ory waxed several other dates for Good Time, but these four titles rank among his finest for the label.

Far less known than Ory, Big Jim Robinson was actually only five years his junior. Robinson never garnered the wide spread notoriety or reach beyond traditional jazz circles, but his contributions to the music are nevertheless manifold. First learning trombone while stationed in France during the First World War Robinson quickly assimilated the rudiments of New Orleans style into his playing and when he returned home took up fruitful gigs in the bands of several of his peers. Laying low like Ory and others during the Swing Era, Robinson refreshed his talents during the New Orleans revival of the 1940s eventually hooking up with George Lewis through a mutual stretch in Bunk Johnson's band. Lewis eventually left Johnson, taking Robinson with him. The trombonist spent the next decade as the linchpin of Lewis' group.

Robinson's style, while indicative of the tailgate tradition in New Orleans jazz, is below

the surface very different from Ory's. While no doubt influenced by Ory (everyone was to at least some degree directly or indirectly) his style was much less extroverted making use of far fewer vocal and expanded techniques. His lines were often utilitarian by design buttressing the rhythmic end of a band with little pomp or flash, but still with a healthy use of slurs, smears and slides. Solos were also a rarity and Robinson nearly always favored a supporting role rarely falling prey to flatulence or bombast on his brass. But even with his predilection for the background his talents were readily discernable to his colleagues many of whom enlisted his stoic sound as a sideman on their own recordings.

The vast majority of recordings by Lewis (who incidentally recorded prolifically during the 1940s and 50s) include Robinson in the line-up. *The Beverly Caverns Sessions, Volumes 1 and 2* are two such documents which deliver not only a bird's eye view of the band as a whole in their prime as well as their element in front of an appreciative Hollywood audience, but also of Robinson in particular doing what he did best. Lewis is predictably the principal

soloist on both sets, but the rest of the ensemble gets in plenty of licks during the collectively improvised breaks. The band starts Volume 1 off with the old spiritual warhorse "Down By the Riverside" moving on to brilliant readings of "Dallas Blues" and "Four or Five Times." On the latter piece Lewis wrings a dusky deep tone from his reed and Howard shouts out an impassioned vocal. "Tin Roof Blues" spreads out over an eight-minute duration with Robinson embellishing loose rhythmic commentary beneath Lewis' singing melodic line before a rare sliding solo turn. Marrero and Pavageau lay down a chugging momentum on strings. Watkins takes a soulful and sanctified vocal on "Lord, You've Been So Good To Me" accentuated by horns and flexes his aged pipes again on the closing "When the Saints Go Marching In." Filling the space between are rousing readings of classics like "Bugle Boy March" and "Darling Nellie Gray" that set members of the audience to audibly shouting and jumping.

*Volume 2* is more of the same, but with an almost completely different songbook of New Orleans standards as the fodder for the group's

collective inventions. Lewis' preferred sign-off "When the Saints Go Marching In" is the only overlap and this time out it's Howard handling the lyrics instead of Watkins. The excitement so apparent in the first installment is a little diminished in this second set, but the band still sounds in stellar form. Lewis's mahogany-toned clarinet again takes the majority of leads, but Howard and Robinson still chime in with numerous colorful improvisations on the ensemble breaks as on their swirling interplay throughout "12th Street Rag" and "St. Louis Blues." "Bourbon Street Blues" perfectly evokes the royal mood of a prototypical street band over the martial cadence of Watkins drums and cymbal crashes, while "Panama" sounds more like typical riverboat fare recalling the rapid currents of the Mississippi through the torrential ensemble interplay. During the latter Robinson turns it up a few notches, working his slide and blasting out a sparse but spirited counterpoint to Lewis' mercurial phrasings. Both volumes are well worth investigating.

While Robinson's appearances as a bandleader were rare compared to his prolific

work as a sideman he did find the time and opportunity on occasion to front his own groups.

### Even in the driver's seat he knows he's best in a supportive role.

Two albums for the Riverside label showcase him best in this capacity. Both were part of the label's 'New Orleans Living Legends' series, a line designed to revisit many of the past masters of traditional jazz and each allowed the aging trombonist artistic freedom both in choosing sidemen and material. Convening a cadre of old compatriots Robinson still seems ill at ease bucking the New Orleans traditional template and leaves the majority of solo space to Cagnolatti and Cottrell. Even in the driver's seat he seems cognizant that his prowess is best put to action in a supportive role, though there are still many grand solos heard from his horn.

Both albums were recorded at the same

sessions, but employ decidedly different material. *Plays Blues and Spirituals* centers on the older entries Robinson's repertoire, but stretches playing time out on many of the numbers to allow for expanded exploration. The band on board has a lighter more spacious sound than the one Robinson worked in for Lewis and the players make use of their dimensions to excellent effect. Bassist Pavageau is the only left over from that earlier group and the solid anchor of his bass keeps the band's bottom end from slipping. "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," which saunters in via a vocal by bassist Pavageau's wife Annie contains a particularly stunning exposition by Robinson. "Tin Roof Blues" again taken in extended time also has a smoldering solo from the leader. Drummer Williams sits out for most of "Jeunes Amis Blues" leaving only Guesnon's brittle banjo and Pavageau to keep time for Cottrell's clarinet before the eventual entrance of brass. Both spirituals are brief in duration, but pack in a wonderful succession of ensemble improvisations. "Toulouse Street Lament" initially serves as a feature for Cottrell again backed initially by the team of Guesnon

and Pavageau. Robinson's muted slurs add counterpoint prior to a bright string of phrases by Cagnolatti and a carefully crafted comment from the leader and the obligatory ensemble close. This is New Orleans jazz with a palpable modern edge, which demonstrates that even on the most traditional material Robinson could still throw in a few unexpected tricks.

The self-titled *Jim Robinson's New Orleans Band* takes a similarly narrow thematic bend, but uses it as a springboard for a wide array of applications. Focusing on the songbook of the legendary Sam Morgan Band, one of Robinson's earliest employers and by his own admission in the liners "the best band he ever played with and one of the best he ever heard." Enlisting the aid of a curator at the Tulane Jazz Archives Robinson was able to piece together the tunes of his old mentor from recordings of old 78s he waxed with the band for Columbia. The band opens with "Ice Cream" one of Robinson's most famous features. The trombonist cuts to the melodic core of the piece slurring out a zestful solo before the other members including Cottrell, Guesnon and Pavageau move in with pronouncements of

their own. Pavageau's slap string statement is especially animated. Williams kicks up a sirocco of rhythmic energy with his booming bass drum on "Boogaloosa Strut" as the horns gyrate above around Robinson's lubricious slides. Robinson again reigns supreme on "Ja-Da" pushing his partners forward with brawny gusto before trading phrases with Cottrell. The spirits of the brass bands pervades on "Bugle Boy March" while the Blues run thick as molasses through the sorrowful "Whenever Your Lonely." One final jaunt through joyful syncopation "Somebody Else Is Taking My Place" sheds more light on just how tight this ensemble could sound in unison.

Despite being nearly analogous in age and both maturing at the epicenter of traditional jazz Kid Ory and Jim Robinson experienced markedly different careers in the music. Ory was a leader and innovator almost from the start, quickly moving through the ranks of musicians to take a preordained place at the forefront of the style. Robinson's path was trod largely out of the limelight, contributing to numerous bands from a supportive stance

and etching his legendary status in the music through more modest means. Both men reside in the upper echelon as masters of the tailgate trombone technique that is so much a signature part of New Orleans jazz. Listeners looking for evidence to corroborate the shared stature of these near mythic musicians need look no further than the individual recordings each made for various imprints under the Fantasy family of labels. 🎧

# THINK ON YOUR FEET

BY PETER MADSEN

Welcome back to part 2 of an article in response to a question from Michael, a loyal AAJ reader with some interesting questions that I was asked to write about. Once again here's the letter:

I have a question, which might make a good topic for an article — maybe. In an old interview with Frank Zappa I read a while back, he talks a bit about his guitar playing and some of the nuts and bolts of his group's improvisations. He makes an interesting remark about how in an improv; the soloist (i.e. Frank himself) might think, "let's play a mixolydian scale here" at the exact moment that his bassist might think, "oh, let's play a diminished scale here". Basically he's saying that this would not be a desirable effect in his guitar solo pieces and that coordinating the harmonic setting/events of the improvisation is an important part of his performances.

Now, I fully realize that 'way out' kind of jazz would be full of clashing harmonies as Frank is describing...in fact, consonance may even be something freer players would want to avoid. My question is at what point

in jazz do we start to hear players no longer playing in complete 'scalar agreement' with one another? I'm not talking necessarily about total dissonance or atonality or bitonality...I'm talking about one guy playing mixolydian and another guy playing dorian with the same root, possibly by 'mistake' during an improv. (Also, let's exclude from discussion any incidental use of chromatic scales...)

Did this kind of thing happen in pre-free jazz? Or did it happen later? When a hard bop group saw Cmaj7 on the lead sheet, did that mean they could only play one set of notes at that chord change? Or did Cmaj7 imply a number of possible scales (with a C root) from which each player could play from, regardless of what the rest of the band is doing?

Michael, a rock guy trying to expand his horizons

OK Michael, let's start out part 2 by talking a little about "way out" jazz as you call it. First of all since the late forties there have been experiments with free improvisation, meaning using something other than chords as

the foundation for improvisation. Most music then and now is based on chord symbols as the basis for improvisation. But a few creative souls have tried getting rid of the chord symbols and improvised freely using other ideas as the basis for improvisation. Pianist Lennie Tristano at a 1947 recording session told an engineer to keep the tape rolling as he had his band improvise a couple of pieces using no set chordal pattern or song of any kind. The music they played was actually quite beautiful and not very dissonant at all. The amazingly creative bandleader and composer Sun Ra used open sections in the music of his orchestra also around this time. And of course the king of free improvisation that influenced everyone from John Coltrane to Sonny Rollins was the great Ornette Coleman. His compositions from the late fifties were very bebop oriented in the melodies that he wrote but they had no chord changes. Improvisations were based on the soloist's individual taste and creativity. Ornette used what he called harmolodics, which in oversimplified fashion meant that each person in the band could play in any key and switch keys whenever they

wanted as long as the line they played made musical sense. This new style of improvisation became the revolutionary cry for freedom in music. But don't be mistaken and think that free or open music is easy to play or that people can just play what they want. And also don't think that there is only dissonance in this very difficult kind of music. Some open music is very beautiful, just listen to any of the wondrous free improvisations of the great Paul Bley on the ECM label. In all music there is a mixture of consonance and dissonance. They are two sides of the same coin. You need them both to make good music. I've played a lot of open music and to me this

There's another kind of way out jazz they you might be referring to and this is the music that was developed in the 1960's by John Coltrane in his exploration of modes as a tool for improvisation. The idea of using modes in jazz was first used and written about by composer George Russell when he wrote a piece for Dizzy Gillespie's band called "Cubana Be" in 1947 as well as the book he wrote about his 'Lydian Chromatic' concept a few years later. Of course it was Miles Davis who

first popularized the idea of using modes with his *Kind Of Blue* album in 1959. But *Kind Of Blue* was not very 'out there' at all as everyone on the album (Bill Evans, Cannonball, Coltrane etc.) pretty much played within the keys that the chord changes called for. It was Coltrane who really developed the idea to it's extreme over the next half dozen years or so. Coltrane discovered that he could use Ornette's idea of playing in any key at any time when improvising over chord changes as well. This idea worked great using modes as the basis for creating his lines and of course this worked best when playing compositions with only a few chord changes that would often last for 8 or 16 bars at a time. So the chords would remain static and Coltrane would play modes in many different keys over these static chords. Some of the keys would be more related to the chords sounding more consonant and others would be very unrelated and of course be very dissonant.

Michael you were also asking about pre-free jazz improvisers. To me we need to talk about pre and post bebop improvisers. You see it was some of the beboppers who brought a more

intellectual approach to jazz. Musicians like Monk and Dizzy would often talk about music theory and try to search for more advanced ideas to add into their music. Before so called bebop (not a term developed by the musicians themselves) most musicians approached improvisation usually by using their ears. They really didn't think much about the mixolydian mode or the diminished scale or even about chord changes. They heard songs in tonal areas and then improvised by ear. Most songs were not so complicated and so it wasn't difficult to play by ear. Of course there were always composers like Billy Strayhorn or Duke Ellington that tried to write some challenging harmonies in some of their pieces and there were a few advanced players like the incomparable Art Tatum who could play as much advanced harmony as any jazz player alive in the 1930's. When Charlie Parker was a young man he came to New York and took a job as a dishwasher in a club that Tatum was regularly performing just to hear him as much as possible and Tatum surely had a great influence on advancing Bird's ear for harmony as well as for playing super fast lines. But it

wasn't until the early 1940's that musicians really found a desire to study harmony and scales in any depth.

The hard bop players of the 1950's took this new knowledge and added another twist into the mix — funk. They kind of took all this knowledge and went to church. Of course this meant using less complicated ideas as well and going back to simpler ideas found in the blues. So Michael the answer to your question about hard bop players seeing a C Major 7 chord and being limited to playing only a certain scale or certain notes the answer is no. First because they were not just thinking about scales. They had other choices like arpeggios or other intervals to use as improvising tools as I said before. Also many hard-bop musicians would even play the blues scale over the C Major 7 chord as it helped to give a more soulful sound to even a standard. Check it out!

Well Michael I hope I've answered your questions in a somewhat understandable way and look forward to tackling some more! Please feel free to send me an e-mail at [bodyjazz@hotmail.com](mailto:bodyjazz@hotmail.com) See you next month! 🎷

**i**want**mymtv**

**BY STAN RA**

If we took a close look into the CD collections of let's say, a thousand teenagers, jazz CDs would most likely be a rarity. Why is it that jazz music seems to be dying among the teens of the new millennium? What is it about the music that doesn't appeal to the kids? We'll take a look into the reasons why my peers won't give jazz a chance, and what they think can be done to make jazz more appealing to kids.

One cold January morning I started my survey amongst some friends and classmates in my school. Questions that I asked included, "Why don't you listen to jazz?", "What do you think of when you hear jazz?", and "Name some jazz musicians." Upon asking those questions I was very surprised by what people had to say. The answers that came for each question were quite interesting and a few were disappointing.

"So, why don't you listen to jazz?" I asked.

"It's so boring and slow and how can you listen to music without any words? You're so weird Stan." replied a friend.

The general consensus among everyone I talked to was that jazz was a slow, boring kind



of music. While I could disagree very strongly, I understood where they were coming from. Someone pointed out to me that when jazz is heard in public, for instance TV or in the movies, ballads and medium/slow tempo swing is being used. Therefore this is the only kind of jazz that a majority of teens are exposed to.

Although some students noted that they had heard up-tempo songs of John Coltrane

People wanted to sing along but said that jazz didn't have that to offer to them.

and Charlie Parker, they still found the music boring. I found that people wanted to hear words in a song so they could sing along and such, but they said that jazz didn't have that to offer to them.

In addition to jazz music being boring and slow, students stated that they didn't know of any jazz musicians or new jazz CDs that even come out. Basically stating that, jazz isn't getting enough media attention in mainstream America.

"If jazz videos were on TRL (Total Request Live, an MTV music video show), I would go out and buy jazz CDs." That statement by student Stephanie Carnation sums the problem up the best. Many people showed interest in listening to jazz but none knew where they could find out about jazz CDs or the local jazz radio station.

Jazz has seems to have an image attached to it of old people in smoky bars. In my opinion the problem isn't the smoky clubs, but the old people. The music is seen as for older folks, for those who were around during the sixties and earlier. While I was talking to some of my peers they all seemed to say that jazz had a very elderly and boring image. Many of them said that jazz needed to make an effort to reach out to young people.

Although jazz seems to be dying in mainstream media, especially in America, there is still hope for the music. The demand for it may not be so great amongst a large amount of teens but on the other hand there are those who are in demand for the music. That demand will keep it going. Hopefully with more publicity in the media, and more specials on jazz (Like

Ken Burn's documentary), jazz will remain an influential and important music. 🎵

*Stan Ra is a sophomore at Neshaminy High School in Langhorne, Pennsylvania. He plays the alto and baritone saxophone, flute, clarinet, and is learning to play the piano.*

# BASIC BLACK

BY ALLEN HUOTARI

Some musicians seem to suddenly rise to prominence, apparently out of nowhere, achieving notoriety with the relative ease of a casual stroll down the street.

But more often, musicians slowly, gradually, find their way into a broader public ear through arduously building a body of work, deliberately honing their craft, and continually striving to establish their voice.

Then again, there are others who simply seem to have been there all the time.

Take Jim Black for instance. If you have been even tangentially interested in modern jazz over the past 5 to 6 years, odds are pretty darned good that more than one recording featuring this exceptionally gifted musician have found their way into your collection or that you have seen and heard him in live performance.

Although appearing on just a handful of recordings from 1989-1993, since 1994 Jim Black has contributed his distinctive approach to playing the drums to approximately 40 recordings with folks like Ellery Eskelin and Andrea Parkins, Tim Berne (as a member of Bloodcount with Chris Speed and Michael

Formanek), and Dave Douglas (as a member of Tiny Bell Trio with Brad Shepik).

There have also been meritorious contributions to projects fronted by guitarist Ben Monder, trumpeter Cuong Vu, keyboardist Jamie Saft, saxophonist Donny McCaslin, and pianists Uri Caine and Satoko Fujii. to name but a few.

Also worthy of mention is Mr. Black's aiding and abetting saxophonist/clarinetist (and long time friend, conspirator, collaborator) Chris Speed in Yeah No (for three CDs on the Songlines label).

Finally, of course, are the bands co-fronted by Messrs. Speed and Black, namely Human Feel (on hiatus of unspecified duration) and Pachora.

Now with the recent release of *AlasNoAxis* (Winter & Winter), Jim Black offers up his long anticipated debut as recording leader. Accompanying him are the aforementioned Chris Speed, bassist Skuli Sverisson, and guitarist Hilmar Jensson.

In brief, *AlasNoAxis* is by turns delightful, captivating, exhilarating, and haunting. Incorporating a variety of musical styles, these

tunes (composed by Mr. Black specifically for this ensemble) effectively run a gamut of moods — from the sheer emotional thrill of riding a skateboard downhill on an icy street into oncoming traffic, to those thoughtful, quiet, introspective moments that bear subliminal disquiet as tranquility imperceptibly shifts to uncertainty.

Of *AlasNoAxis*, All About Jazz contributor Derek Taylor writes:

“From the Pachinko funk of the frenetically paced “Nion” to the Indian drones of “Icon” these four players chart a course riddled with impulsive spontaneity... These marriages of rock-rooted emotional immediacy and freely improvised forms create a new and thrilling breed of fusion. Welding calm and dissonance may be nothing revolutionary in free jazz, but the ways in which Black and company incorporate these seemingly diametric elements points to enticing new directions. Most intriguingly this auspicious release makes the probability of future Black-guided excursions a virtual certainty.”

To conclude, AAJ contributor Nils Jacobson has speculated, “Who knows where the music

of Jim Black will head in the future?”

Although Jim Black would probably suggest that not even he knows an answer to that question, the release of *AlasNoAxis* indicates that at least he's begun to formulate one.

Due to the wonderfulness of mobile communications technologies (had to get a hi-tech plug in somewhere), this interview was conducted via e-mail using laptop computer and cell phone during January 2001 in the midst of the Eskelin/Parkins/Black tour of Europe.

**All About Jazz:** Would you please tell the AAJ readers about where you were born, raised, and what your earliest musical memories are? What led you to choose drums and percussion as instrument(s) of choice?

**Jim Black:** I was hatched in Daley City, California and spent my childhood migrating between Seattle and the San Francisco area, depending on where was father was working within the United Airlines system as a ramp serviceman.

Early musical memories... I remember being 4 years old, jamming for days on a guitar that my father made for me out of a cardboard

toilet seat cover box, complete with rubber bands attached as strings. Also playing my drumset which consisted of dumped out plastic toy buckets, more cardboard boxes, and the 'cymbal' - a plunger with a blanket covering the handle where I would place my mother's circular electric broiler pan drippings catcher. I would beat on for hours, playing with my collection of cardboard cutout records from the back of Post Sugar Crisp and Alpha Bits boxes, featuring the works of a group called The Sugar Bears and the Jackson Five (!?) I want to see how the contract read between Motown and Post cereal...

When I was eight, we finally settled in Seattle for good and a couple of years later I got my first snare drum to play in my elementary school band, the tenor sax being my second choice had the music store run out of snare drum rentals. Choosing the drums was pretty much a no-brainer for me... it simply was and is to this day really fun to play. The first drumset showed up a year later under the Xmas tree and I was hooked. During these times my father started cranking Gene Krupa with Benny Goodman on the stereo at home

to impress me and subtly terrorize my mom. Both my parents totally supported my musical activities and encouraged me to practice and take lessons.

Our family eventually moved to the then small city of Bellevue, WA, where I spent my junior high and high school years submerged in music programs. My junior high drummer-competitor-friend Pat Kylen got me into Led Zeppelin, Hendrix, the Who, the Doors, and Rush as we would have double drumset freejams like the Grateful Dead in his basement. Because of this move to Bellevue, I was able to hook up with a big band of 12-18 year olds called "HB Radke and Friends", which at 14 years gave me my first professional experiences such as getting yelled at on stage for dragging, and being paid tens of dollars playing for weddings, hotel functions and on local TV shows as something "cute". It was also invaluable to have my ass kicked on stage by musicians way more experienced than me, which is an alternative yet effective way to learn how to play in short period of time. This also was the band where I met Chris Speed, Andrew D'Angelo, Brad Shepik, and

John Silverman — and almost twenty years later...still talking and playing together.

I was fortunate to have friends with more experience than myself around to expose me to new music. I remember Silverman taking me to see Ornette Coleman's Prime Time, which was so beyond me at that time but it seemed just too cool with Jamaaladeen Tacuma on bass and Ornette in something that looked like an orange dress. Another trumpet playing friend, Damon Bacheller, who played me my first Miles and Weather Report, encouraged me to go to Berklee in Boston and to take music on as a career.

**AAJ:** Was there any pivotal moment where you decided (or discovered) that you simply had to become a professional musician?

**JB:** As far as making a profession out of playing, because of these early gigging experiences, I realized that it was wasn't so hard to make a buck playing music... it just meant that you would probably have to play all the time in many different situations where the music was secondary to money — which still seemed more attractive than breaking my back everyday like my dad working in

airline cargo pits. So I decided to let my instincts guide me into this strange and semi-dysfunctional relationship of music and how to make a living with it.

In hindsight, I'm glad the "what ifs" and the "riskiness" didn't deter me from pursuing music — too often the general feeling of fear in this society kills so many dreams and ambitions. I think as older experienced players and humans, we literally owe it to people younger and less experienced than us to give support, inspiration and information where and when we can — to pass it on the way we got it.

**AAJ:** You've taught at Berklee and your upcoming schedule shows teaching at Banff. When you are teaching, is there any one fundamental message or principle that you try to communicate to your students? That is, if there is one thing you want your students to learn and walk away with, what would it be?

**JB:** Have an open mind, keep an open mind... and look deep inside yourself to uncover those inherently unique, creative ideas and impulses that are buried inside each of us, and then cultivate, nurture and give form to

these ideas in whatever ways possible.

**AAJ:** You've studied privately with Joe Hunt, Jeff Hamilton, and Jeff Watts. What have you learned from these gentlemen that has provided you with the most guidance or had the most impact on your career?

**JB:** The learning process for me has been a cumulative experience from the beginning to the ongoing present. Every one of my instructors, band leaders, sidepersons, etc. have helped me grow musically — adding in those missing pieces of this ever evolving musical puzzle and can continue to inspire and influence years after the actual experience.

I never was a model student — I tended to take what I needed and try to figure the rest on my own — it seemed more creative and natural for me this way. So whole courses of study and complete methods, or even weekly lessons felt a bit like unnecessary homework for me. That is not to say I didn't work for countless hours on my lessons and learning the instrument — just that at some point I had to take issue with the absoluteness of practicing drum lessons by myself and would essentially play hookey with them by spending more time

jamming with records and my friends... which to me was more like the real-time application of my study. (What good was the ability to play fast broken triplets between my hi-hat, bass drum, and 5th tom-tom, while standing on my head BUT not be able to keep time on a simple Latin tune with my band... let alone just listen and think about playing musically first.)

Maybe it's in the nature of the instrument, with all the limbs moving and things to hit that gives drum pedagogy a license to gaze at it's own technical navel, but nowadays there are more instruction books and teachers who are approaching drums with an "it's music first approach" — I was saved by Bob Moses' "Drum Wisdom" book when I started college, because it dealt with concepts and possibilities that transcended the actual instrument — great advice for any player.

So a single lesson with Jeff Watts meant the world to me — illuminating all the things I wondered about how he approached his unique way of terrorizing the kit with Wynton Marsalis' quartet in the 80's. A week in a jazz camp with Jeff Hamilton, where he passed on some

brush beats Philly Joe Jones had showed him — which I absorbed and naturally mutated into my own way of playing traditional jazz brushes. Joe Hunt simply listening to me play fast time and remarking that “something didn’t sound quite right” and if we could figure out what it was... Ian Froman, currently living in NY and playing in the international scene, helping me weekly at Berklee by asking me if I could approach everything that I played “in a different way” — getting me to open my own creative valves.

Then add in all the gigs, road trips, head trips, crazy travel, hanging and rapping with freaky and beautiful friends and strangers, and getting the opportunity to listen to so many inspired and inspiring concerts — which are equally important to anyone’s education. When do you stop learning?

**AAJ:** How often do you practice/rehearse and for how long? Do you ever force yourself to practice/rehearse when you really don’t feel like it? If so, how do you motivate yourself?

**JB:** As far as the bands I play in, we will rehearse as long as necessary to get the written material under our grip — which can

take anywhere from 20 minutes at a sound check to four 5 hour rehearsals for a complex record date. I would recommend learning to read, hear, and interpret written music for the ability to process a lot of complicated written material in a short amount of time — it allows you to walk onto many different gigs and get to making music faster. After that, it’s about interaction, improvisation and the playing together that make the music take shape and become valuable.

**These days, most of the actual playing of my instrument takes place in front of an audience.**

These days most of the actual playing of my instrument takes place in front of an audience, but there periods where I go back and practice alone to develop technically and conceptually. There is always a way to practice or work on music and composition anywhere you are — especially if you are stuck on a train for six hours a day on tour. Most of my

musical epiphanies happen while nowhere near the drums. As far as motivation — if there is a place you envision yourself arriving at musically, compositionally, or in regards to improvising, then the only way to achieve this to make a conscious effort to move toward it — the desire should be there — if there is no desire, then why do it? Do something else, whether it be cooking or talking walks, until the desire for movement and growth returns. As I get older, I have found it easier to allow my musical activities to blend together with the curiosity, creativity and exploration of my daily life — to not separate the music part from the human part. I love the jump cut nature of daily life with all it’s interruptions, distractions, and unexpected turns — all of which I have to allow to be part of the musical process — a telephone call ruins new creative thought, then, crazy taxi ride to gig, boom, now you are stage and have to go deep into the music, then... social time!... yakking away, boom, distracted by interesting music blaring from the stereo speakers at the club... my attention is constantly shifting and having to pick up in the same spot another time...

mostly, this feels comfortable and natural.

**AAJ:** Clearly many factors can contribute to inspiring a musician: the music of others, visual stimuli (literature, cinema, sculpture, painting, nature), working with interesting peers, maybe even food. Is there any one catalytic element that seems to provide you with the most inspiration?

**JB:** Staying awake and aware of my own conditionings, socially and musically. I'm happy to say that after all these years of conditioning to be a "proper" musician and to think in a type of Orwellian "musicthink", I am relatively free of my past mental trappings which inhibited my abilities as a composer, as a player, and even the simple enjoyment of being able to listen to music without pre or post judging it as "serious/valid" or not. I remember coming to terms with this about six years ago — afterwards, playing started to feel like as if I was a kid again jamming in my bedroom to records — very liberating. Addressing my fears and insecurities about playing the drums, performing, and my feeling of being obligated to compose in a certain way... reckoning with my ego and ambitions in

regards to money, success, business, the scene, and these whack ideas which creep into your head about "what you are supposed to be" and "what you are supposed to achieve before you die"... eek.

Real life and music have never been more integrated and seamless to me... it feels casual. I continue to play and work hard because I love being creative. Music alone, for me, is inspiring enough just as is — I still absolutely love to listen to it — any of it — and this drives me on.

**AAJ:** Aside from musicians you regularly collaborate with (e.g., Berne, Eskelin, Douglas, Speed, etc.) who would you cite as your influences? Please elaborate. As quick follow up, is drummer/composer/improviser Chris Cutler an influence/inspiration?

**JB:** I like to allow myself to be influenced by anyone or anything that gives me feeds me creative ideas. I don't mean to sound like I'm dodging a question, but this more true now than ever before. This week, a visit to the Kunsthaus Wien to see the painting and city planning works of Hundertwasser — you talk about inspiring... for me he is the definition of

what 'integrity' is in regards to one's art and self... the sound of Cartman's voice, singing songs in an episode of South Park, is lodged in my brain, too. Also this week, performing with Ellery Eskelin and Andrea Parkins — listening to them night after night on stage playing solo, gracefully kicking ass — wonderful... also Tricky's new EP where track four contains a special message for the Polygram label... yeah.

I have never seen Chris Cutler live and only know one recording with himself and Fred Frith playing duo in Verona... which was really fun to listen to, even though I couldn't tell who was doing what.

**AAJ:** What do you feel you've learned from working with Bloodcount, Tiny Bell Trio, Ellery Eskelin/Andrea Parkins, and Uri Caine's Mahler Project that you could NOT have learned anywhere else?

**JB:** This last part ("that you could NOT have learned anywhere else") doesn't make sense to me, because eventually something would have taught me those lessons...

Playing with many different bands has become essential to my growth as a musician.

The musical knowledge from one situation influences the next, and so on. This seems obvious enough but I love how it can radically influence and change my musical ideas, push my physical abilities as a drummer, and the way in which it continually opens my ears to new perceptions. In a soundbite style: playing with Berne's Bloodcount forced me to express myself quietly, sending me searching for other sounds and textures...Ellery Eskelin's music left me stranded on a number of conceptual islands, which I had to figure how to get off...Ben Monder's music helped me overcome my uneasiness with complex time signatures and forms... the list goes on, and hopefully never stops.

**AAJ:** Since you composed the pieces on *AlasNoAxis* specifically for this band, could you please describe what unique or specific qualities each of the musicians in *AlasNoAxis* brings to the band?

**JB:** In a nutshell — Chris Speed for his sound. Period. Hilmar Jensson for his shameless abilities as a guitarist and sound sculptor, as well as his sensitivity. Skuli Sverrisson for his low frequency oscillation

exploration and his thirst for sounds not yet unearthed.

**AAJ:** If one of these musicians were to depart, would *AlasNoAxis* cease to exist or would it simply evolve/mutate?

**JB:** Evolve? Possibly. Mutate, for sure. Cease to exist? We have barely done a week of gigs... I'm not going there yet.

**AAJ:** One of the most refreshing (others might say surprising if not shocking) aspects of *AlasNoAxis* is the significant "rock" content. Although some may dismiss this as simply the Seattle factor, it would seem (at least to me) to transcend this reference. What rock bands are inspirational to you and why?

**JB:** That "rock" sound is a sound that I love, one I haven't had the opportunity to explore yet in my regular musical activities. The idea of a "Seattle factor" is reaching a little, but I used to play in guitar rock bands back there in high school and college — so it's presence is an undeniable part of my musical background (always seething at surface.) I also wrote most of the music for this band on the guitar, so there you have it. I also like the aggressive nature of the sound — distortion

makes me feel good.

Some of my current favorite bands are Melt Banana, Blonde Redhead, Sonic Youth, Beck, and Radiohead, all for different reasons, but the main one being that I really like to just listen to their music. I loved Nirvana (Kurt's voice still freaks me out...), as well as My Bloody Valentine. Others in the scene that move me would be Björk, Tricky, Busta Rhymes, Stereolab and the Flaming Lips, to name a few.

I also admire the collective and co-operative nature of these bands — and being a member of more than one myself, I can identify with these attitudes. Truly collective bands in the 'jazz' world are rare, but can work. The jazz scene tends to promote individual names and bandleaders versus collective group names and identities. Fortunately, I am starting to see a larger audience develop that cares first about actually listening to music regardless of what category or camp it is in or from, thereby helping to blur the lines between the scenes drawn by the promoters, media, record stores, and many musicians. The collectives in jazz that survive, are no different than in the indie/rock world — it takes commitment and



personal investment... everyone has to put their own individual ego second and respect and work with all of the member's ideas and opinions...someone in the band has to run with the business ball and get gigs... disagreements and resolutions are normal and expected — but the invaluable music, that could not have been produced in any other way, is worth the collective effort.

In terms of their influence on my writing — I still hear these bands as a particular type of sound which breeds something different in my ear, after it joins in the mix with all the other hundred bits of sound flying around in there mutating. The simple ideas of balance and variation are key in getting them organized back into tangible form — which is the fun part for me creatively. I know it's finished when I listen to a piece and actually like it.

**AAJ:** What aspect of making *AlasNoAxis* was the most fun? What was the most difficult? What have you learned that you will carry forward to the next recording?

**JB:** Most fun: recording in the snow covered woods in upstate New York, with some deer watching us rock out through a large glass

window that looked into the converted barn that we recorded in.

**Most difficult:** The eternally developing technique of trying to verbally coax my musical desires out of a band as a leader—without squishing the improvisational talents of the members. They totally dealt.

**AAJ:** As follow up, what areas of your own playing/composing do you feel need improvement?

**JB:** It's not so much about improving — only moving sideways to something different... The question for me would be how to keep moving deeper into what unique thing I alone can bring out of myself as a writer... and then develop a relationship with it.

**AAJ:** I see from your homepage that you and Skuli Sverrisson plan to include G3 Powerbook in the "instrumentation" for *AlasNoAxis*. What is your interest or objective in using the computer? Are you interested in using the computer as an instrument? As another musician to interact with? Both? Neither?

**JB:** Hmm, where to start? As of today, I want the laptop to be an extension of

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what I hear in terms of timbre and texture when I play drums and percussion. It's like having an unlimited palette of colors and sounds that still fall subject to one's own take on improvisation, composition and most importantly for me, taste. I have always loved electronics and the computer provides a limitless 'playland' to explore and experiment. I don't plan on being a laptop and sound sculpting master, like some of my favorites — Jim O'Rourke, Pita, Oval, Panasonic, Ryoji Ikeda, Stilluppsteypa, Microstoria, Anthony Burr, Skuli Sverrisson... but I would like to take my twenty-something years of musical experience and translate my ideas into sound, using this medium. I am currently performing laptop duos with alto saxophone/bass clarinet shredder Andrew D'Angelo in New York, where there is no preparation, only taking our improvisational impulses and having to find the appropriate sound and way to get it out of laptop using various programs and sound processors. It can be musically crass and vulgar... it can be kinda heavy and serious, but the laptop has an immediately accessible, innocent, and creative impulse reaction quality

to it... which allows anyone without technical and instrumental skills, but with lots of ideas, to get up on stage and play music... kinda like the drums?!

**AAJ:** Could you please provide details on your other quartet, Beat Table?

**JB:** At this time, that idea is mutating into a pretty different future project, so aside from an improv gig, there is no news. There are so many people to play with! It's more of an issue of time and the thoroughness I want to approach my projects with...

**AAJ:** How did you come to work with Satoko Fujii and Natsuke Tamura?

**JB:** I met them at a party... they made delicious vegetarian sushi rolls, I was turned on. The beauty of playing with them was having not heard them play before we started recording CDs together. I really admire their commitment to their musical beliefs in spite of living in such musically conservative 'jazz' scene — although they are helping to change that.

**AAJ:** What musicians would you most like to work with that you've never worked with before?

**JB:** Well, there's so many musicians that I would... Björk. Pretty unique huh?

**AAJ:** What recording(s) as a sideman do you wish more people would be exposed to? Why?

**JB:** Interesting question — without thinking, I would say Chris Speed's Yeah No recordings. We worked hard as a band producing all of those discs and I think there are some really original ideas and music on those discs that could stand to be heard more, the recordings as well as live shows. We still have yet to perform in Europe... fans over there tell me the CDs are very hard to get. I think it's a matter of time, continuing to build our audience, here and overseas, making our presence known to the media and working hard to get it out there on the road... just like every band, everywhere.

**AAJ:** What's the funniest or most embarrassing thing that's happened to you while performing or recording?

**JB:** Recording my first CD ever, in Seattle, when I was nineteen. It was a new age album, when 'new age' was the rage, where the leader dug the fact I could badly emulate a drum machine (go figure). The studio was

in a hollowed out small hillside, close to a waterfront, constructed of wood on the inside. This wood contained termites and was due for its regular bug bombing. During a take, while trying to ever so deftly reproduce the stiffness of a 1986 cheesy drum machine pattern, a termite fell down from the black abyss above me in the drum booth. Five minutes later both the drums and myself were covered in small vibrating termites — bouncing off the cymbals, etc. When a very, very large one finally landed on my snare drum with a loud ‘pap’ — I just lost it... screaming out of the booth. One good bug bombing and a chocolate shake later, I felt better, as I inhaled the freshly poisoned air of the studio, as I brushed and picked (yuck) maybe 60 or so dead insects off and out of the kit.

**AAJ:** What projects can we expect to hear from you in 2001 and 2002?

**JB:** On the horizon is another AlasNoAxis CD to be recorded in Iceland in May, and released by September or October... Pachora just signed with Winter and Winter also, so plans for another CD are in the works for late spring... Check our websites if you want to

know the latest info — [www.jimblack.com](http://www.jimblack.com) and [www.pachora.com](http://www.pachora.com).

**AAJ:** To conclude, a purely hypothetical question: if you were to cook dinner for the staff of AAJ (or could take them to dinner) what would you serve (or where would you take them)?

**JB:** Because of the French trip/tip I have been on lately, I would serve up a petite but satisfying three-course French meal.

As a starter — a slightly broiled round of goat cheese, sprinkled with fresh herbs and served on a bed of baby lettuce greens with a side of poached figs in red wine, accompanied by sourdough toast points, finished with a drizzle of fruity olive oil and fresh cracked pepper.

As a main course — a vegetable plate consisting of fresh baby carrots and French green beans, drizzled with a white wine and Dijon mustard vinaigrette, two fresh steamed artichoke hearts with a sauté of mixed forest mushrooms, garlic and parsley spooned on top, and rounded out with a small portion of traditional potatoes gratin.

For dessert — individual apple tarte tatin,

served with crème fraîche.

For the wine, a ‘96 or ‘97 Haut-Médoc Cru Bourgeois, from Chateau D’ Arzac (a surprising sherry color and dark berry taste)

Espresso, a tiny piece of dark chocolate (85% cocoa) and a good calvados brandy... and then...a nap... ☺

# BURNED BY BURNS

BY DAVID R. ADLER

Virtually every jazz critic has had a problem or two with the content of Ken Burns's 19-hour PBS documentary *Jazz*. Most of the criticism has focused on the fact that many jazz greats go unmentioned. The film's blind spots are unfortunate, but some are inevitable, and their impact on the accuracy of the film as a whole is not uniform. But Burns's omissions begin to matter a lot more in his tenth and final episode, "A Masterpiece By Midnight," for here the recent past, present, and future of jazz finally emerge as the topics at hand. Up to this point, Burns has done a respectable job of introducing pre-1960 jazz history to a wide audience. In Episode Ten, however, he gives viewers a disastrously skewed portrait of the creative lineage that has produced much of today's best jazz.

The problem can be reduced to Burns's treatment of two major figures: Miles Davis and Cecil Taylor. Together they stand in as representatives, respectively, of the fusion and avant-garde movements that evolved over the course of the last three decades or so. It's hard to say which fares worse in Burns's cursory treatment, but let's first consider fusion.

In subtle ways, Miles is depicted as a sellout, and even a vain imbecile, for pursuing the direction that led to Bitches Brew and beyond. The writer Gerald Early offers his opinion that Miles's later bands tended to "fall apart," musically speaking, and the pronouncement stands without rebuttal. Does no one recall the band that graced Black Beauty, the 1970 concert album recently released by Columbia for the first time? Chick Corea, Steve Grossman, Dave Holland, Jack DeJohnette, and Airto Moreira couldn't make a band fall apart if they tried. More important, this record and others like it are the furthest thing from a commercial ploy designed to appeal to the masses. Quite the contrary, the 70s albums document what is arguably the least accessible music of Miles's career. While it's not surprising that Burns presents, with little or no countervailing opinion, the dim view of later Miles propounded over the years by Wynton Marsalis and Stanley Crouch, that doesn't make it any less of a disgrace.

Having acknowledged Miles Davis's birthing of what came to be known as fusion, the film stops with a stunningly vague comment

about how more fusion bands soon emerged to follow Miles's example. None are named. Thus is the music of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Headhunters, Weather Report, and Return to Forever written out of the history of jazz. In fact, the 1970s as a whole basically never happened in Burns's view. It is left for Branford Marsalis, who knows better, to declare that "jazz just went away for a while."

During the course of the Miles discussion, Wynton Marsalis all but dismisses the electric guitar as a non-jazz instrument, closing off the possibility that Pat Metheny and John Scofield — both of whom drew considerable crowds while jazz was supposedly dead — made meaningful contributions to the music. The film, giving similar treatment to the electric bass (referred to ineptly in the script as "electronic" bass), also dispenses with the towering influence of Jaco Pastorius.

Turning to the avant-garde, Cecil Taylor emerges in Episode Ten as the only musician in the entire 19-hour epic who is directly and savagely criticized. Branford, in a seemingly out-of-context outburst, condemns a random remark of Taylor's as "self-indulgent bullshit,"

and Gene Lees is then trundled on-camera to reprimand Taylor for "changing the vocabulary rather than using the vocabulary." After hearing Taylor get roughed up in such a fashion, one recoils at the footage of Duke Ellington that immediately follows. One wants to celebrate Duke, but no longer on Burns's terms. Burns has cheapened the entirety of the music by this point. He owes Taylor, whom Howard Mandel recently called "the greatest living improvising pianist," a formal apology.

If neither fusion nor avant-garde musicians contributed anything of lasting significance, one might wonder: who has? Why, none other than the film's senior creative consultant, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, who is portrayed toward the end of Episode Ten as jazz's "saving grace." Forget all the pro- and anti-Wynton arguments, for they're not the point. Wynton's coronation in the film is not merely biased. It is not just aesthetically grating. It is unethical, given his integral role in the making of the very film that is praising him to the heavens. Furthermore, it misleads by suggesting that all worthy post-1980s jazz has adhered to Wynton's creative/ideological

imperatives.

A documentary is allowed to contain praise, just as it is allowed to contain critique. But Burns's film is radically lopsided in this regard. A tone of breathless enthusiasm permeates his first nine episodes. Critique suddenly surfaces in the tenth and final one, when the implications for present-day music-making become urgent. Responding to the charge that he short-changed modern jazz, Burns has explained that he is not an historian: "How could I presume to tell, (in) the current jazz scene, who's great... History begins 30 to 40 years out." This is disingenuous, for Episode Ten is replete with historical judgments and thinly veiled agendas.

Burns could have made a great documentary, but instead he made a good documentary with a very poor ending. 🎧

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# 'NUFF RESPECT!

BY ROBERT SPENCER

Since I first profiled Steve Lacy as an Unsung Hero a couple of years ago, he has continued — with a steady stream of concerts, reissues, and new releases — to cement his reputation as one of the foremost jazz composers and instrumentalists of the last fifty years.

I mentioned recently, while reviewing *Hooky* for AAJ, that Lacy “has never gotten his due.” A reviewer whose opinion I respect took issue with this, saying that Lacy gets his props all over. And that’s true. So to clear things up, this is what I mean: despite exposure in *Jazz Times*, *Down Beat*, and even the mighty *All About Jazz*, however, Lacy’s reputation has not become street knowledge. Lacy is not numbered among the pantheon with his own heroes Monk, Trane, Miles, and all the rest. Did Ken Burns mention him? Did Ken Burns devote a reverent segment to him and his multifarious straight horn?

He did not, friends. And all that is why it’s time to revisit Steve Lacy.

There has been a string of notable reissues of solo material from the Seventies: Jim Eigo’s glorious recording of Lacy’s appearance at

Environ in New York City in 1976, *Hooky*, a graceful Montreal performance from the same year brought to us by the superb label Emanem, and *Clinkers*, a 1977 performance from Switzerland from the equally superb hatOLOGY series from Hat Hut Records.

Each of these shares in the Lacy solo atmosphere of shimmering beauty, graceful gestures, and controlled chaos. Each is a look back at a pre-Burns, pre-Marsalis time when jazz was in its doldrums, and only men like Lacy were soldiering on, refusing to compromise their art to the commercial demands of the moment, and producing some magnificent music in the process. Music that lasts. Music that sounds fresh today, 25 years later. Music that will be fresh and beautiful in a hundred years, if they have the sense to take a break from the Mariah Carey Seminar and go searching in the archives. Lacy proves on these discs, again and again, that the saxophone is viable as a solo instrument. That it can sustain forward motion and symphonic fullness by itself. That some of the best music comes now and always has come from a willingness to explore the edges of form.

Then there's the small group work. Not only did we see the release a year or two ago of the marvelous document of the current Lacy group (Jean-Jacques Avenel, bass, and John Betsch, drums), *The Rent*, but also an incandescent quartet with Roswell Rudd (*Monk's Mood*) and a 1979 trio featuring Ronnie Boykins (the bassist from Saturn) and the late great Dennis Charles on drums. How these groups manage to be so tight and so loose is beyond me, but it's there.

The versatility and might of his horn. The tremendous range of his music, and the huge variety of settings he has constructed for it, from solo to full orchestra. The tensile strength and lasting power of his compositions. Even the influence he has had on younger players. All these should count to induct Mr. Lacy into the palace of the giants. Get with it, Ken Burns.

The Steve Lacy Trio, a group of seasoned professionals who can read each other's thoughts and produce some of the greatest small-group jazz the planet has ever heard, will be playing in assorted venues around the United States between February 20 and March

8. If you really love jazz, maybe I'll see you at one of them. 🎵



# SING! SING! SING!

BY MATHEW BAHL

“I don’t like being bored while I’m singing,” laughs René Marie.

The Virginia-based vocalist and MAXJAZZ recording artist is explaining why she sings jazz. “You don’t know what somebody’s going to say, musically, or what somebody’s going to do. If you go to a rock concert or pop, they want to hear the song exactly like it is on the radio. But a jazz audience is looking to hear it done a different way and I like that.”

The feeling appears to be mutual. René Marie made her national debut last May with the release of *How Can I Keep from Singing?* on the MAXJAZZ label. The album reached #1 on the Gavin Jazz Chart and prompted a stream of critical accolades. Marie has found herself singing for audiences all over the country and seems genuinely surprised by the positive response. “I am shocked that the CD has been so well received.”

That reception may be attributed in part to the fact that René Marie refuses to conform to any of the preset expectations people have for jazz singers. She embraces the jazz vocal tradition without ever allowing it to confine her. “The voice is so flexible,” Marie explains.

“You can do anything just about. I don’t think it should be limited.” Marie’s voice is a warm, supple and smooth instrument that seems to draw on a deep reservoir of inner strength. Blessed with excellent pitch and a superb rhythmic sense, she displays the same effortless command of her talent that distinguished her primary influences, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Marie’s singing does not have a trace of the self-consciousness that mars the work of some singers. “I’m not tied to intellectualizing what I’m doing. I’m basing it on how I feel at the time and what the band is doing.”

The band is very important to Marie. “I don’t feel comfortable separating myself from the musicians. I feel like I’m along with them not out front away from them.” For René Marie, jazz is about collaboration. “I’m really tuned into the group. I listen to them and,” she adds with a chuckle, “I appreciate it if they listen to me.”

Marie’s unaffected modesty in conversation seems at odds with the sheer authority of her singing. But then, that authority is somewhat surprising given that she has only been

singing jazz for about five years. More than the title of her CD, *How Can I Keep from Singing?* describes René Marie’s unusual journey onto the national jazz stage.

René grew up surrounded by music from an early age. “One of my earliest memories that I have as a girl is of my father playing Ravel’s ‘Boléro’ on the record player.” Her father also loved Bluegrass and Harry Belafonte. Like the rest of her generation, René listened to the Beatles, the Supremes and Peter, Paul & Mary. She studied piano for several years and, as a teenager, sang with a couple of local R&B groups. “Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to be a singer,” she explains, “but I don’t remember ever listening to jazz.” That changed with the release of the Billie Holiday biopic *Lady Sings the Blues*. “I was just dumbfounded with the lyrics and the music. It touched me deeply.”

Marriage at age 18 followed by motherhood detoured her plans for a singing career, but she did not abandon her love of music. “I did a lot of writing. I wrote lots of lullabies.” Her newfound passion for jazz also led her to the music of Ella Fitzgerald. “The clarity of her

voice. The innocent yearning of her ballads.” Marie’s enthusiasm and affection for Fitzgerald are readily apparent. “With Ella’s scattin’, I could feel my heart pounding and racing. I couldn’t believe how excited I got.”

Music remained a private passion until 1996 when her son dragged René to a local restaurant to hear a singer. He told her, “You can sing better than her, I know you can.” René recalls looking at her son and telling him in an excited voice, “Michael, I think you’re right, I think... I know I can sing better than that.” René and her sister-in-law, a pianist, worked up six tunes and went back to the same restaurant the following month. They asked to play during the break. “I must have been out of my mind,” René laughs, “but the audience was quiet and listening and the applause was really good.”

René started sitting in with local musicians. “I didn’t know how to hold a microphone. I didn’t know anything about a sound system. I didn’t know I had to tell the band a key.” She admits that, in the beginning, she imitated Ella and Sarah. “I listened to their stuff so much and memorized their phrasing, their

breathing, their scatting. Then I got bored.” Instead of just mimicking her idols, she began to learn from them. She also began listening closely to the voices of different instruments. She developed an approach to lyrics and scatting that incorporated the rhythmic accents of a drummer. She also allowed herself the freedom to improvise and take chances on a par with what the instrumentalists were doing around her.

She became a popular attraction in the Richmond, Virginia area. Under her married name, René Croan, she produced her own CD, *Renaissance*. However, it proved to be a difficult period. Her marriage of 23 years ended badly. “I had never been on my own. It was a real struggle emotionally.” She continued to work fulltime at a bank while traveling to gigs several hours away at night. Looking back, she says the experience improved her singing. “Pain makes everything clarified. It separates things.”

The turning point came in December 1998. With the encouragement and financial support of her mother and six siblings, René decided to concentrate on music fulltime. “My last day

of work, as I was walking out of the door, I remember being so scared, but I had this giddy feeling like I had been cut loose and was flying up in the sky.” Thirteen months later René Marie found herself in a New York City recording studio working with nationally known musicians like Mulgrew Miller and Gerald Clever under the supervision of producer Bruce Barth.

The resulting album, *How Can I Keep from Singing?*, is the work of a singer who has

### Marie seems to delight in bringing a fresh perspective to familiar or unexpected material.

learned to trust her own instincts. Marie seems to delight in bringing a fresh perspective to familiar or unexpected material. Take, for example, her version of “The Tennessee Waltz.” “I always thought the words to that song were really nothing but the Blues,” she explains. “So I put some grease and fat back up in there.” Her pairing of the spiritual “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child” and Nina Simone’s

“Four Women” is more personal. “Those lyrics speak to our history so much. I believe in my lineage all four of those women exist. It is not a stretch at all for me to say I’m Sweet Thing or I’m Safranga. I think that is probably the case for most black women. They know [all four women] or they are them. My strongest connection is with Aunt Sarah.”

The CD also contains three examples of Marie’s impressive talent for songwriting. The yearning “Hurry Sundown,” with its lovely bridge, the sexy “Take My Breath Away” and the lively “I Like You” are smart, well crafted tunes. Before the recording session Marie was concerned about how the musicians would react to her songs. “What if Mulgrew said,” she adopts a voice of mock disdain, “who wrote that!” However, she had nothing to worry about. As she stood in the vocal booth, she could see the musicians smiling as they played her songs. She remembers thinking, “I can’t believe these guys are smiling about music that I wrote.” “That,” she says happily, “was a good feeling.”

René Marie has not lost her love for the great standards that brought her to jazz in the

first place. Yet, she doesn't feel limited to that repertoire. "I like incorporating music from other cultures into jazz, not just American music. It's like eating. You like sweet and salty. Soft and crunchy. Sometimes mixed in all together. Anything that makes me think, peaks my interest or perks up my ear." When asked about the state of jazz singing, she defers by saying, "I'm still learning about myself and how I feel about my own singing." But asked what could be done to increase interest in jazz, she is emphatic. "Take your kids to live music. Don't let them think that real music has to sound to like that produced stuff on the radio. It's not. It's nothing like that."

Marie's own live performances this year will take her from the Blue Note in New York to the Plush Room in San Francisco and a number of points in between. She will also be traveling to Europe for her first overseas performances. Next month she returns to the studio to record a new CD for release this summer. The new album will feature five original tunes and, undoubtedly, some surprises as well.

René Marie is optimistic about the future. "It feels good. It really feels good. I've got a

lot of energy and I'm raring to go." Asked if she has any goals for her career, she pauses thoughtfully. "My goal is to avoid being in a niche," she says firmly. "I don't ever want to sound like a cliché." 🎧



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# GIANT STEP

BY DAVID R. ADLER

After nearly a decade in the trenches, Kurt Rosenwinkel is beginning to emerge as the next big thing in the world of jazz guitar. He has just released his second all-original Verve CD, *The Next Step*, a follow-up to last year's *The Enemies of Energy*. Two earlier standards albums, *Intuit* (Criss Cross, 1998) and the hard-to-find *East Coast Love Affair* (Fresh Sound, 1996) also attest to the scope of the young guitarist's jazz talents. All the while Rosenwinkel has maintained a busy schedule of sideman performances, live and on record, with Mark Turner, the Brian Blade Fellowship, Chris Cheek, Danilo Perez, Paul Motian's Electric Bebop Band, and more. Contemporary jazz giants such as Joshua Redman and Pat Metheny are loudly singing Rosenwinkel's praises.

Even in a jazz scene packed with strong players, Rosenwinkel stands out for his emerging brilliance. Put simply, there is nothing obvious about his music. As a composer, he steadfastly avoids clichés and yet his melodies, even at their most complex, stick in one's memory. As a guitarist, he's developed a glistening, highly original sound

that he often augments with his own wordless vocalizing. He can swing like a horn player but he plays the whole guitar — rapidly strumming a chord near the bridge, for instance, to achieve a crashing sonic effect. And unlike virtually all jazz guitarists, he has employed alternate tunings, which enable him to play lines that literally no one has played.

But perhaps most importantly, Rosenwinkel has an idiosyncratic musical personality that animates all his work, making it truly distinctive. Listen to “The Polish Song,” an acoustic ballad from *The Enemies of Energy* that he sings in a fabricated nonsense language, and you’ll hear it to maximum effect. Rosenwinkel’s got something different going on in his head, something he didn’t learn at Berklee, something that flows from his deepest self. Even when he’s soloing at full-tilt, he embraces a kind of imperfection and risk-taking that marks only the greatest of players. A telling anecdote: When this writer met Rosenwinkel at his Brooklyn apartment for a lesson in mid 1999, the rising guitar star was moved to spin a few tracks from one of his favorite albums, *Philosophy of the World* (RCA)

by The Shaggs, a late 60s band comprised of three sisters who could barely play or sing. Something about the primitive honesty of this cult classic speaks to Rosenwinkel, and this says something important about his art. At a time when jazz education has produced technical knowledge and ability in abundance, Rosenwinkel, despite his extensive schooling, keeps alive the spirit of the unschooled.

**All About Jazz:** You’ve just released *The Next Step*, but I’d like to talk for a minute about the previous record, *The Enemies of Energy*. You recorded it back in 1996 and it went unreleased until 2000. Can you take us through the events that led to the album’s finally being picked up by Verve? And did such a belated release raise artistic issues for you?

**Kurt Rosenwinkel:** When we recorded *Enemies* I wasn’t signed. But we knew we had to record it because the music needed to be manifested. We did it with the help of a lot of friends. The whole purpose was to have something of a high enough quality that it could exist in the major label realm. That was a very intentional thing on my part, and I’m glad I did it, because that’s what happened.

But it cost a lot more money to get that production quality.

I began shopping it around to labels, and finally, after a long time, I got signed to Impulse. And I made a record for Impulse with the same band. That was in 1998. Then Verve and Impulse merged. I got sent to Verve, and when I did, they saw that here’s this artist who has two records: one that he did himself, one for Impulse. They looked at both those records and decided that they’d prefer to put out *Enemies*.

**AAJ:** Before the merger, did you present Impulse with *Enemies* and did they say no? Or was it more a matter of Impulse telling you to give them something from scratch?

**KR:** It was more the latter. They said, “We’re interested in you as an artist, make us a record.” Which was great, and we did it. So there’s one in the can, unreleased.

**AAJ:** Will you release it at some point?

**KR:** I hope so, I really like it! And there’s no artistic reason why it wasn’t released.

**AAJ:** Do you see yourself doing another standards record like *Intuit* or *East Coast Love Affair*?

**KR:** Yeah. I'd really like to.

**AAJ:** *Enemies* is much more of a studio record than *The Next Step*, which is more along the lines of a live jazz album. What were the artistic impulses that led you to make such different albums?

**KR:** It's very simple, a natural progression. It's how we grew as a band. This is the nature of the music that we're playing now. That's not to say that in the future we won't make another more studio-oriented record. The making of *The Next Step* wasn't really a matter of responding to the last one in any way. It's a four-year development between the two, and it brought us toward a more live sound.

**AAJ:** Your quartet has played not only under your name, but also occasionally under Mark Turner's name as well, no?

**KR:** Sort of. There are distinctions. Mark's band is now me, Nasheet Waits [drums], and Reid Anderson [bass]. My band is Mark, Ben Street [bass], and Jeff Ballard [drums]. The reason why my name and Mark's have appeared interchangeably at times is that last year, we launched a joint band so we could present an attractive option for promoters. Since neither

of us have the kind of star power to command some of the bookings we're going for, we decided to join forces so we could tour. We got tour support from both Verve and Mark's label, Warner Bros., which was a first. Musically it was totally fine, because our musics have a lot of simpatico.

**AAJ:** But what I'm referring to is when Mark played the Vanguard back in mid 1999, when he used your band, with Street and Ballard. Was that part of the "joining forces" that you just mentioned?

**KR:** Not exactly. That actually presented a lot of problems, because it showed Mark that he really needed to define his own group. At that time he was looking for it and wasn't finding it. So for that engagement at the Vanguard, he decided to try it with my band. It worked in theory but not in practice. Or maybe the opposite [laughs]. Now we know we each need to have our own groups.

**AAJ:** Your vocalizations seem to be more and more audible on the recordings you make and appear on. Verve's press release for *The Next Step* goes so far as to state that the vocalizations are an integral part of your

sound. Do you see it that way? Are you consciously featuring your vocals, or are you simply singing your phrases the way many other players do?

**KR:** It started as a natural thing, like lots of players do, as you said. But I'd go into the studio and come away with the feeling that my sound had not been captured. For a long time I felt that I never got my sound on records. Then I realized that the vocal is actually part of the sound. I needed to discover that. So I began to be more conscious of it and bring it out more. I started using a microphone on gigs, really exploring it as a possibility. In the last several years I've started to work with it in the studio. So it's very deliberate. It's miked in the studio and very carefully mixed, because it has to be at that point between conscious and subconscious.

**AAJ:** Do you work on your singing, or is it something that you just allow to develop, as your improvising on the guitar develops?

**KR:** Sometimes I try to exercise my voice a little bit if I know I'm going to be singing. I might focus on my voice just a bit, to warm up. I don't know any singer-type warm-ups. I

just try to sing more strongly and go from the bottom register of the guitar to the top, going chromatically.

**AAJ:** The most famous example of simultaneous playing and singing is George Benson, but he's coming more from a traditional scat-singing concept. Your style is very different, no?

**KR:** He's an actual vocalist, and I'm not. With Benson there's actually two things going on, voice and guitar, both totally central. With me the vocal is more just a part of the guitar sound I'm going for.

**AAJ:** You've been working with alternate tunings for guitar, and you've said that often in an alternate tuning you don't know what chords and notes you're playing. What kinds of notational challenges does this pose when you bring an alternate tuning piece to your band?

**KR:** It's a minor technical problem. I just use a tuner to figure out what note I'm playing, and write it down, and go from there. 🎸

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# CD REVIEWS

## *When Skies Are Grey...*

**Ron Carter**

**Blue Note**

While a Latin jazz element is his focus for this project, veteran Ron Carter's recordings always hold the mainstream of jazz in high regard. A quiet session that swings, the bassist's latest album swirls through the tradition with a light conga tinge. Bob Freedman's intricate arrangements place the bassist in roles ranging from opening obbligato to soothing melody and focused improvisation. Pianist Stephen Scott brings a fresh approach to the session, particularly on Ray Bryant's "Cubano Chant", where he stretches out with a free hand. Bongos and drum set trade fours before Harvey Mason launches an extended solo. The session doesn't place Mason out front, however, because of the intended quiet mood. Instead, the veteran drummer supports strongly with crisp articulation, light sticking, and swirling brushes.



The Latin element, while not overly applied, colors each arrangement with its rhythmic, dance-like quality. With a clear focus on mainstream jazz, Carter has produced another prize-winning album. His four originals pique the senses in different ways. Carter's "Caminando" could easily represent the album's title because of its somber mood and tranquil, quasi-tango transitions. His "Mi Tempo" is a provocative piece without piano. Walking bass alternates with lyrical melodic phrases as Carter nudges a Latin tinge along the way. Drum set and conga fills provide a spicy flavor.

In his interview with All About Jazz last year, Carter said, "...I like to create a rhythm that will make the band take a different direction". Firmly in control throughout the session, the bassist makes all the right moves. Due out February 13th, *When Skies Are Grey...*, the bassist tops the new list for best of the year.

— *Jim Santella*

## ***I Can See Clearly Now***

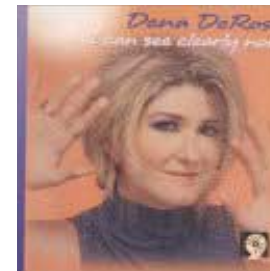
**Dena DeRose**

### **Sharp Nine**

Without any doubt, pianist/vocalist Dena DeRose has come up with another winner and possibly her finest album yet to date. That's saying a lot too because her previous two sessions for Sharp Nine, *Introducing Dena DeRose* and *Another World*, have been critically lauded while also setting a new standard among the female jazzers cum hip vocalist crowd. Even if DeRose had never discovered her vocal talents, her skills as a pianist would have led to a successful career as a jazz artist. But thank heavens she did get those pipes ringing because this is where she excels and leaves all competing peers behind at the starting gate.

While standards again constitute the bulk of the program, DeRose has a way of seeing things, catching subtle nuances, and recasting melodies in a way that has previously escaped other interpreters. For instance, there's that ingenious drop in tempo and swift return to form on a lively "Detour Ahead" that echoes the line "wake up, slow down". Need

more proof? Look no further than a totally fresh peek at the title track, with sexy and elongated phrases so expressively supported by vibist Joe Locke. DeRose even comes up with a new angle—singing along with her piano lines in a unique style that recalls similar techniques by George Benson and



the late Major Holley. It adds a lovely touch to "I've Never Been In Love Before" and "The Touch of Your Lips".

As with DeRose's past efforts, she finds capable support in a

crack rhythm team that includes bassist Dwayne Burno, and drummers Matt Wilson and Mark Taylor. Guests include the aforementioned Locke, trumpeter Jim Rotondi, and saxophonist Joel Frahm. And to make sure Miss DeRose's labors are not negated by technical tribulations, engineer Mike Marciano renders the session with the kind of focus and warmth that is needed for vocals and has now become one of the trademarks of a Sharp Nine production. It cannot be

overstated that DeRose's time has come and it should be nothing but blue skies from here on out.

— *Chris Hovan*

## ***Tuba Sounds***

### **Ray Draper**

#### **Prestige**

"A Promise Derailed." Such of phrase could easily have been etched on Ray Draper's tombstone to describe the tubaist's trials in life and music. Killed in a botched robbery at the tragic age of 42, his troubles both personal and musical hounded him for much of his life. But reading the original liners to this reissue penned by Ira Gitler it's difficult to prognosticate such a future for Draper. Member of the All-City High School Symphony, a budding playwright and composer, and front man of a recording date for Prestige- all of these things point to bright and promising prospects as a musician. A careful inventory of Draper's sidemen also speaks to his precocious talent. Even back in '57 McLean and Waldron were heavy hitters and the relative newcomers Young, DeBrest, and Dixon are also solid recruits. Taped at Rudy Van G's original



Hackensack studio (his parent's living room) the fidelity adds even further to the fine proceedings.

The tunes on the date are a well-chosen mix of originals with a single standard thrown in as a nod to tradition. Draper's potbellied horn is surprisingly agile on the changes, particularly on his own numbers "Jackie's Dolly" and "Mimi's Interlude". Plump and viscous, it's a sound that skates along the bedrock of the bass register while still managing to fire off quick salvos of notes. Young stays fairly understated, but still chimes in occasionally with fine solos, as on the latter composition and some intriguing exchanges, as on the opening "Terry Anne". McLean's devilish alto, brimming with youthful bravado, routinely dances rings around the leader's fleshy figures. The rhythm section is usually relegated to its regular chores, but Waldron finds space both for a tune and several solo breaks.

Draper recorded several other dates as a leader and parlayed some work as a sideman for employers like McLean, Coltrane and others throughout the remainder of the 50s. The 60s and 70s also afforded him sporadic dates with

folks like Archie Shepp but the occasional returns to music were always short-lived. Listening in on the promise he so evidently displays here it's a shame Draper wasn't able to persevere.

— *Derek Taylor*

### ***As One*** **Larry Goldings Trio** **Palmetto**

The words “graceful” and “organist” can almost never be used in the same sentence. But the agile fingering of Larry Goldings is anything but the coarse, gritty soul music that you hear everywhere. His follow-up to the 1999 *Moonbird* trio session and the Peter Bernstein-led 1997 trio *Earth Tones* (Criss Cross) is his best work to date. Like the prior trios, this band is made up of Goldings, guitarist Peter Bernstein, and drummer Bill Stewart. The three musicians have been



playing together since 1988 and it shows. Stewart, who recently toured with guitarist Pat Metheny's trio, made two critically acclaimed records for Blue Note *Snide Remarks* (1995) and *Telepathy* (1997), and has been the drummer of choice for John Scofield this past decade. Guitarist Peter Bernstein a regular with both organist Mel Rhyne and saxophonist Lou

Donaldson has a fluid light touch that favors this trios lyrical side.

Goldings has had an impressive list of instructors and mentors including Keith Jarrett, Jaki Byard, Ran Blake, and Sir Roland Hanna. He joined Jim Hall's band and stayed for three years, also taking gigs with Maceo Parker, and John Scofield. His prior recordings always seem to begin with the core musicians heard here. Except for side projects here and there, these three musicians have built their careers around each other. Every time Goldings has wandered off, be it last years hip-hop influenced VooDoo Dogs or a acoustical piano date with Paul Motian and Larry Grenadier, he has produced less than exciting material. All the reason to stick with a great lineup.

The trio plays exacting balanced music from a tame take on “The Thrill Is Gone” to the bop influenced “Calls”. They seem as unselfish as the Modern Jazz Quartet, not tilting the axis of each track in favor of one musician or another. They take on The Zombie's “Time Of The Season”, a staple sixties rock anthem with the coolness and hip-sway of the original. Two tracks “Mynah” and “Glass” diverge from

the formula. The latter is a three-minute solo-improvised piece with lots of weird effects. The former is a Bill Stewart piece from *Telepathy*, a page from Medeski, Martin, and Wood's groove book that hopefully is a signal of new territory for the band.

The trio play jazz so hip and with such an insider's groove there seems to be no reason to add pieces and parts to this already whole lineup.

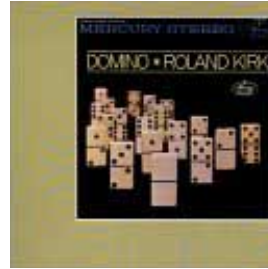
— Mark Corroto

## ***Domino***

**Roland Kirk**

### **Verve Master Edition**

When Roland Kirk (pre-Rahsaan) issued *Domino* in 1962, the album contained 10 tracks, which amounted to just over half an hour of music. On this reissue there are 25 tracks and nearly 80 minutes of music. What's more, the 15 bonus tracks feature a 22-year-old Herbie Hancock, who did not appear on the original *Domino* at all. (Getting left on the cutting-room floor must not have thrilled the young pianist.) Bassist Vernon Martin is featured throughout all the sessions. Six of the original 10 tracks feature Andrew Hill on piano and Henry Duncan on drums, both of whom are replaced on the remaining four by Wynton Kelly and Roy Haynes, respectively. Haynes stays on for the tracks that feature Hancock. (No other Hancock/Haynes collaborations come to mind.) So in addition to what this reissue says about Kirk's enormous talents, it is also



of historical interest for its stellar cast of supporting players.

Kirk's arsenal includes two unusual instruments, the manzello (sort of like a soprano sax) and the stritch (like a mellow alto), in addition to tenor, flute, and the occasional siren whistle, usually to introduce a piano solo. His simultaneous two- and three-horn work led some to dismiss him as a gimmick player, which was absurd, for what's astonishing about the technique is its sheer musicality in Kirk's hands. Need to ratchet up the intensity over a pedal point or during a solo? Add another horn or two and you've got an instant one-man shout chorus. (Check out his faster-than-usual reading of J.J. Johnson's "Lament" for a good example of this.) And mind you, this is not mere noisemaking — his note choices, whether unisons or two- and three-part harmonies, make perfect sense.

Indeed, for a musician often thought of as incurably odd and left-of-center, Kirk's rootedness in tradition couldn't be clearer on *Domino*. On tenor he sounds not unlike Sonny Rollins and his flute work surely influenced Thomas Chapin. On the fast minor blues

“Rolando” he plays a stritch solo full of exemplary post-bop lines. “E.D.”, the last of the original 10 tracks, is a furiously fast reworking of “Tea for Two”. At least at this stage, Kirk’s playing was far more inside than Ornette Coleman’s, for instance.

Perhaps this reissue will prompt a reappraisal of Kirk’s importance. As someone who took the tradition seriously and yet created something entirely new from it, he has a great deal to say to today’s like-minded younger generation of players.

— *David R. Adler*

## ***Rob McConnell Tentet***

### **Rob McConnell**

#### **Justin Time**

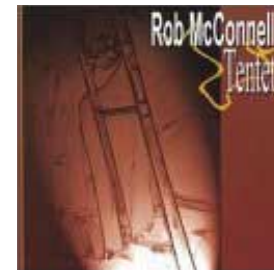
After decades of recording on a number of labels, including most recently a long stint with Concord, Rob McConnell is releasing once again another one of his almost annual CDs. At the start of the millennium, he is recording for the first time on the Canadian label, Justin Time, appropriately enough.

Recording Rob McConnell Tentet in Toronto, McConnell still reminds his listeners of the reasons for his groups’ distinctiveness: fresh, swinging arrangements that belie the relatively few musicians executing his richly colored sound. That sound remains intact in his “tentet.”

Plunging into the fun with a right-on-the-beat start of “Old Devil Moon”, McConnell continues to delight his listeners with subtle, unanticipated accents and unison horn lines in an arranged variation on the tune. “Speak Low”, with its long and slowly deepening brass tones over drum-and-bass propulsion, strips away the horn lines to allow bassist Wallace to speak low of the true basis for

the tune: its lightly unconventional rhythm. Dizzy Gillespie and John Lewis’ “Two Bass Hit” reveals the power of the band. But it really is the foundation for the tentet’s saxophonists, P. J. Perry, Mike Murley, and Alex Dean, to do battle, armed only by their instruments and their talent.

“Everything I Love”, a tune inspired by Paul Desmond, is valuable as an arrangement that tests the group’s cohesion in the same way that Neal Hefti’s “Girl Talk” does—with a solid group unity that delves into each note in anticipation of the beat and without ostentation. “Everything I Love” allows for a McConnell solo as well, as he explores the harmonic underpinnings with a vibrant tone and an effortless, melodic improvisational approach. Percy Faith’s “Maybe September” glides through kaleidoscopic changes behind a luxuriant tenor sax statement of the theme which is similar to the film noir references of Charlie Haden’s Quartet West.



Even within the consistency of McConnell's patented arrangements and instrumentation, unlike any others, Rob McConnell Tentet contains a diversity of mood. With or without the Boss Brass, McConnell's allegiance to the gorgeousness of a brass choir-like sound remains intact.

— *Don Williamson*

### **Vol. 1: *The Quintets***

**Lennie Niehaus**

**Fantasy/OJC**

Cool jazz has always represented the tweed jacket and horn-rimmed glasses approach to the music and has often been criticized for stealing jazz away from smoky bars to college lecture halls and living room hi-fis.



A style that could only have been conceived during the optimistic bliss of the Eisenhower administration and the warm breezes of California, cool jazz was doomed to be overrun by the turbulent 60s and the angry, socially conscious music that was its byproduct. Indeed, cool jazz disappeared as quickly as it started and truly represents an anomaly; no one is really doing anything today quite like those guys were in the fifties.

One would be hard pressed to find an album more representative of West Coast jazz than this one. For starters, the cover features three guys who, except for the horns, look like

college professors working on math problems (many critics of cool jazz say that it's too intellectual and studied). The men in question are Lennie Niehaus, Jack Montrose, and Bob Gordon; musicians who, while not that well known, were key to delineating a West Coast sound. Niehaus was first and foremost an arranger for the Stan Kenton band. His crisp charts for the front line, mask the fact that a piano is absent from the first quintet. Instead of sounding hollow, the musicians fill the empty space with great depth and imagination. Niehaus, who sounds like a more restless Lee Konitz, plays swift cat and mouse games with Montrose and Gordon, especially on "Whose Blues". Gordon (who lived a tragically short life) always manages to blow the paint off of the walls on every session he's at and this one is no exception.

The second set of quintet cuts are less inspired. Montrose and Gordon are replaced by Hawes and Williamson and the interesting counterpoint of the three horns is lost. Niehaus plays with the same enthusiasm, but Williamson sounds a bit hesitant. Only when Williamson switches to trumpet for one cut do



they reach the same level of accomplishment as before. Manne, a standard bearer for West Coast jazz, provides snappy brushwork on both sessions.

Greeted with either indifference or scorn by many, West Coast jazz deserves wider attention than it has been given. Reissues like this one may help convince listeners to give this pleasant genre a second look.

— David Rickert

## ***Creation Dream — The Songs of Bruce Cockburn***

**Michael Occhipinti**

**True North**

Canadian guitarist/composer and co-leader of the “NOJO” large ensemble, Michael Occhipinti pays homage to fellow countryman and celebrated folk singer, Bruce Cockburn



on *Creation Dream—The Songs of Bruce Cockburn*.

With this release, the guitarist garners some additional support from frequent collaborator, clarinetist Don Byron, along with a

sympathetic cast of top-notch Canadian jazz musicians, while Cockburn, strums his acoustic guitar on one track, “Pacing The Cage”.

The musicians inject or perhaps transpose the themes and finely crafted lyricism of Cockburn into a jazz-based set, brimming with softly executed statements, tender choruses and effective soloing by violinist and leader Hugh Marsh, trumpeter Kevin Turcotte, and Byron, who appears on three tracks. On

pieces such as “Mistress of Storms”, Byron and Occhipinti engage in rapid fire yet subtly stated unison lines as they segue into a tenacious swing vamp, marked by the guitarist’s interesting chord voicing and tuneful melodies.

Violinist Hugh Marsh injects warm, sonorous motifs into “Wondering Where the Lions Are (Giftbearer)”, as the band embarks upon an understated Caribbean groove amid Occhipinti’s unconventional phrasing and clever melding of roughly hewn statements performed on electric guitar. Marsh eventually picks up the tempo with a blistering solo.

Occhipinti alters the momentum and elevates the intensity a bit during the rock/shuffle groove titled, “Creation Dream”. Here, the artist exhibits his distinctive style yet rekindles memories of the late jazz/blues/rockabilly guitarist Danny Gatton. Occhipinti also fuses avant-garde chord progressions with fiery licks and glistening dynamics. The band surges onward with a rather playful take on “Rumours of Glory”, while they pursue radiant dreamscapes on “Homme Brulant”.

It is evident that Michael Occhipinti and



Co. have poured their respective souls into this thoroughly convincing project. The band exuberantly extracts and reinvents the man's music, in altogether attractive fashion!

— *Glenn Astarita*

## ***The Long Haul***

### **One 4 All**

#### **Criss Cross**

Working within the broad parameters of hard-swinging, harmonically sophisticated small-band styles from the 40s, 50s, and 60s, the music of the sextet One 4 All also reflects the experiences of the individual members outside of their cooperative band. An incomplete but telling list of leaders who have employed and influenced various members of the crew includes Cecil Payne, George Coleman, Art Blakey, Jackie McLean, Junior Cook, Slide Hampton, and Louis Hayes.

On *The Long Haul*, the band's second



release for Criss Criss (and fourth overall), they stake their claim to the tradition. The record comprises impressive material (six out of eight cuts were written by various band members) and arrangements, four primary soloists with something distinctive to say, and a rhythm section that responds to every exigency and shoots off

sparks of its own. Most of all, aside from the skill and technique involved, the music possesses a fervency that is genuine. These guys love playing together and it shows.

The disc's opening cut, "A Cry For Understanding", composed by John Farnsworth, encompasses the band's virtues. A slow, somber introduction convincingly executed by tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander and the rhythm section leads to all of the horns playing the theme at a brisk tempo. Alexander's solo is a fine example of his continuing development. His full-bodied sound spreads out and takes up space without being overbearing, and he stays in absolute control while deliberately working through a variety of ideas that add up to a complete, satisfying whole. In comparison, trombonist Steve Davis' approach is somewhat spare, skillfully playing off and interacting with pianist David Hazeltine's chords and the snap of drummer Joe Farnsworth's snare drum accents. During a commanding, live wire turn, trumpeter Jim Rotondi frequently phrases on top the beat and occasionally takes brief, fruitful detours. In the unenviable position

of following the three horns, Hazeltine, ever mindful of Farnsworth's and bassist Ray Drummond's pulse, at first seems casual and then gradually hardens his touch, becoming more expansive and forceful. Backed only by Farnsworth's brushes, Drummond completes the cycle of solos, integrating a snippet of the song "Wade In The Water", into a smart, efficient statement.

Alexander's rollicking tune "Stash", the band's first venture into the time signature of 5/4, is another of the disc's standout cuts. It moves forward in a nice, lopsided manner, with the horns brazenly stating the melody, then giving way to a string of compact solos. First up is Alexander, who is clearly inspired by the odd meter, starting off with short, soulful phrases. When Hazeltine and Farnsworth signal a change in emphasis, he takes off in a series of sprints which ends in barrage of overblowing. Rotondi burns through the rhythmic thicket with ease, making his lines rhyme with call and response patterns. Initially taking more care than usual in placing his notes and letting the rhythm section fill in space, Davis' solo gradually gains

footing while working against the weight of Hazeltine's stabbing chords. Over Drummond and Hazeltine's vamp, Farnsworth slyly mixes rhythms that alternately refer to the pulse and create unrelated waves of percussive sound.

— *David A. Orthmann*

## ***The Next Step***

### **Kurt Rosenwinkel**

#### **Verve**

When you stop to think about it, there are relatively few guitarists on the current jazz scene working to go beyond the boundaries of a mainstream manifesto. Sure, you've got talented youngsters such as Russell Malone, Peter Bernstein, and many others functioning within the tradition. But even as endowed as these guys are, they have not chosen to see outside of the box in the same manner that Pat Metheny and Bill Frisell have. This is not to dismiss the talents of anyone with something important to say regardless of the medium, just to put into context the fresh perspective of Kurt Rosenwinkel, a major talent who has dwelled in obscurity for far too long. A regular of the downtown crowd and mainstay at the New York jazz club Smalls, Rosenwinkel has the ability through a major label recording contract to now bring to a



wider audience the sound that has heretofore only caught the ears of a privileged few.

Following up on a debut set for Criss Cross and his first Verve side, *The Enemies of Energy*, Kurt's *The Next Step* is so aptly titled that it's downright scary. This proves to be the perfect forum for the guitarist and composer as he lets it all hang out over the course of eight clever originals. What's so hip is that as quirky and downright odd as Rosenwinkel's tunes can be, they also have a beguiling quality that rings true. After just a few introductory spins, I spent the rest of the day with the lead off tune "Zhivago" turning around in my brain. Additionally, the axiom that a working band develops along lines quite superior to that of your typical jam session is brought home due to the fact that Rosenwinkel has been seen regularly with this group for some time and his relationship with tenor saxophonist Mark Turner goes back to 1994.

There's something to be found in each of the guitarist's lines (and the nuances keep appearing after many exposures), yet it wouldn't hurt to touch on a few points of intrigue. "Filter" is a prototypical chart, full

of jagged melodies that dictate phrase length and bar lines. Collective banter between Turner and Rosenwinkel becomes heated, leading to a dramatic solo statement from drummer Jeff Ballard. Several tunes find Kurt singing along with his guitar lines, adding another dimension to such cuts as the previously mentioned "Zhivago". Man of many hats, Rosenwinkel puts down the guitar and sits at the piano for the title romp, changing gears at its conclusion with a catchy shuffle beat.

Only time will tell, but it seems fairly certain that Kurt Rosenwinkel stands on the verge of becoming the next major innovator in the lineage of jazz guitarists, picking up where Bill Frisell left off and taking us far into the 21st century.

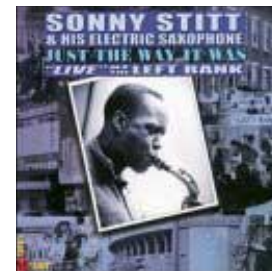
— Chris Hovan

## ***"Live" At The Left Bank***

**Sonny Stitt**

**Label M**

The electric saxophone was a good idea that just didn't work out. Sonny Stitt is able to play "alto", "tenor" or a combination of the two synchronized in perfect harmony. The baritone sax effect is added to "The Shadow of Your Smile" and "Blues Up and Down". His skills on the saxophone aren't in the least diminished by this innovation. Stitt could play bebop with the dexterity and understanding that only a few could manage. The instrument's sound, of course, isn't natural. A reedy tone that blends the qualities of the kazoo, pipe



organ, and harmonica with saxophone, Stitt's electronic instrument still leaves no doubt that he's playing bebop alto. Don Patterson and Billy James contribute to the session's spirit.

They're tight. As a result, Stitt's bop lines roll off complete and natural. The recorded sound is fine and the mood is all about intensity.

Sonny Stitt could make bebop take the room by storm, even on a Sunday afternoon. No wonder Joel Dorn gets so excited about these things. Jazz took a left turn in the late 1940s when this new music hatched. Sonny Stitt was still making it work for club audiences when this was taped in 1971. Times have changed, but the excitement and wonder are still there. This “secret treasure” combines both the ferocious charm that emanated from Stitt’s horn and the ambience he created when working before an enthusiastic audience.

— *Jim Santella*

***À Paris***  
**Jacky Terrasson**  
**Blue Note**

During a tour of Europe last summer, a number of American-based jazz musicians of Jacky Terrasson’s generation settled in a small remote town in France to record an album. The studio had been converted from a winery. The camaraderie of the musicians developed from the fact that the closest town was 20 miles away. The result of the collaboration is *À Paris*,

Terrasson’s tribute to the music he heard while he was growing up in the City Of Light.

After a stunning and influential recording debut on Blue Note in 1994, Terrasson has

proceeded to thrill audiences with his percussive and seemingly conflicted style on the piano. Combines force with sudden quietude, rumbling percussion with rubato ruminative stretches, melodic sweetness with angular improvisation, perambulating relaxation with unpredicted acceleration,



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Terrasson teases with anticipation and surprise.

Such is not the case on *Á Paris*.

Instead of surprise, Terrasson honors the melodic form of French songs popularized by singers like Edith Piaf, Barbara, Jacques Brel or Charles Trenet. Such a deference includes containing the songs within the three- or four-minute length of the typical recordings he heard on the record player in his home. One of the songs spanning the longest track length is Terrasson's first recorded composition, "I Love You More".

In contrast, Terrasson's interprets chanteuse Barbara's song, "Nantes," as a music-boxed, childhood song of only two minutes that slowly envelopes the listener and then abruptly ends.

Terrasson's now-classic arrangement of "I Love Paris" has evolved on *Á Paris* into a funkier version with a strong bass line from Ugonna Okegwo. Yet, after starting on the piano, Terrasson performs the slowed middle section on Fender Rhodes — an instrument gaining more of his recording attention lately, especially on his last album, *What It Is*.

Terrasson has assembled a diverse group of

musicians for his project, including his original trio of Okegwo and Leon Parker on three tunes. However, the bulk of the recording is done by French bassist Remi Vignolo and Stefon Harris' drummer, Terreon Gully. Since Harris was performing in Europe at the same time, he was able to appear on *Á Paris*' final track, *Métro*, a medium-tempo, minute-and-a-half imitation of the sound of the Parisian subway as it careens through the tunnels beneath the city. In fact, Terrasson is scheduled to appear on Harris' next CD.

The salient ingredient of *Á Paris*, though, is the singability of the music. Terrasson's trio calms down the chauvinistic French national anthem, "La Marseillaise," into a waltz that could be sung soothingly without bombast or force. Terrasson's (as well as Little Jimmy Scott's) harmonica player, Gregoire Marat, adds a sense of melodrama to Jacques Brel's "Ne Me Quitte Pas" ("If You Go Away"). Interestingly, Terrasson opposes the urgency of the harmonica with blues-influenced modulations and exploding bombs of unanticipated strikes before calming into a straightforward melodic exposition on the

piano.

French guitarist Bireli Lagrène joins Terrasson on three tracks, most notably leading the development of the title tune, "Á Paris". Performing a gorgeous ballad unfolding over Terrasson's half-note changes before the two of them glide into a middle-section blues. They delicately trade phrases in gypsy-like references of flatted fifths and flatted seconds in a minor scale. Terrasson and Lagrène have fun with "Que Reste — T'il de Nos Amous?" ("I Wish You Love"), as Lagrène assumes the rhythm guitar part behind Terrasson's light-hearted improvisation on Fender Rhodes.

The first two tunes on the album convey the variability of Terrasson's styles. He adds a spiritual element to Edith Piaf's "Plaisir d'amour," somewhat akin to the hand-clappable "Oh Happy Day". And yet on Francis Poulenc's "Les Chemins de L'amour", Terrasson substitutes horizontal flow over bar lines for startling percussiveness to reveal the melodic potential of the song.

— Don Williamson

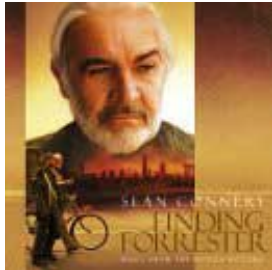
## Soundtrack To Finding Forrester

Various Artists

Columbia/Legacy

Reissued material by Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman and Bill Frisell for a film score? It works out perfectly as accompaniment to the film's changes in scene and mood. Creative music to accompany a creative motion picture. While remaining unobtrusive throughout the wholesome saga, this music contributes to the film's intentions from a distance.

The music of Davis' 1970s-era rebirth gently nudges the film's central character towards his social and intellectual discoveries. A 16-year-old kid from the Bronx with unusually gifted talents for creative writing and for basketball



is continually reminded of his roots through the majesty of Davis' horn. African percussion, mysterious strings and keyboards, earthy woodwinds, and handclaps add

considerably to the scene's visions of high-rise apartments, urban graffiti, and public

disrespect for authority. Our pride in the music echoes the character's acceptance of his surroundings. Bill Frisell's guitar enters during times when the youngster becomes faced with unfamiliar, outside pursuits. The gentle stroke of Frisell's guitar urges the teenager to remain strong in the face of opposition. The guitarist's creative quartets also serve to assuage the fears of Sean Connery's character and to offer him the self-confidence he needs to finish what he's started. In the end, the film's storyline takes its characters on unexpected roads with the help of these classic jazz recordings.

— Jim Santella

## The Prestige Legacy Vol. 1: The High Priests

Various Artists

Prestige

This appropriately titled disc, the first in what will presumably be a continuing series of retrospective compilations, gathers seminal work by the four bop Brahmins of the Prestige label—Rollins, Davis, Coltrane and Monk. Each one of sixteen tracks is a cornerstone classic in jazz history, but curiously the uniformly stellar nature of the material points to an inherent problem with the project: the albums from which these tracks are culled are all essential in their own right. *Sonny Rollins With the Modern Jazz Quartet*, *Monk, Walkin'*, *Coltrane, Traneing In*, *Soultrane* — not to sound cliché, but these are records that belong in every jazz collection. This series seems geared primarily to folks not wishing to break the bank acquiring all sixteen LPs or jazz aficionados seeking the ideal vehicle by which to convert their friends and family to their obsession. For listeners



from these demographic segments it should be considered the aural equivalent of a gleaming golden ticket in a bar of Wonka chocolate.

Starting the tour with Miles Davis' "Down" and the now legendary supporting cast of Rollins, MJQ mainstays Lewis and Heath, and Roy Haynes on sticks things kick off auspiciously. Listening to this tune and it's follow-up, Rollins' infectious syncopated "Mambo Bounce", it's hard to fathom the reputation Prestige had as a second class label prone to slapdash blowing sessions. Instances of noticeable roughness do creep up in these pieces, but it's tempered with a rollicking confidence that's rare even in the most carefully rehearsed studio settings. Monk's pair of three-minute masterpieces "Little Rootie Tootie" and "Bemsha Swing" are similarly spellbinding thanks mainly to the pianist's already intensely original ivory hunting and the presence of either Blakey or Roach in the drum chair. Blakey's signature press rolls incite the action on "Tootie" while Roach takes the honors on "Bemsha" stretching the beat to a near snapping point.

Two more from Davis turn the hands of

time forward to 1953. "Compulsion" is arguably most famous for the addition of Charlie Parker (under the transparent moniker of Charlie Chan) on tenor and "When Lights Are Low" reconvenes the rhythm team of Lewis and Heath, this time with Roach carving out the rhythms behind the kit. Four tunes from 1954 follow Monk's early reading of the near extemporaneous "Let's Call This" including a brief solo run through of "Just A Gigolo" that is filled with just the right measure of shyness tinged with sadness. Coltrane takes things out on the tail end with four more beginning with briskly rendered "Sunday" and winding down with the ballad "You Say You Care", backed by his favorite rhythm section of the moment, Garland, Chambers, and Taylor. On the latter, the early influence of Dexter Gordon is nakedly apparent both in his phrasing and tone.

As a reasonably priced sampler designed to pave the way for further purchases, this compilation definitely fits the bill. Pick this up for the friend or relative who's still on the fence about the artistry of jazz.

— Derek Taylor

## ***Let's Get Lost: The Songs of Jimmy McHugh*** **Wesla Whitfield**

### **HighNote**

Although not in the same class as innovators like Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Cole Porter, or Harold Arlen, the composer Jimmy McHugh (1894-1969) achieved, by any standard, the songwriting trifecta. His songs were of exceeding musical merit, they enjoyed huge commercial success, and they have endured the test of time. In his seminal book, *American Popular Song*, Alec Wilder observed that Mr. McHugh "wrote a great many songs, among them some



of the best pop songs ever written". In *The Unsung Songwriters*, his survey of Tin Pan Alley songwriters published last year, Warren W. Vaché noted that Mr. McHugh's songs "have become fixtures in the jazz catalog . . . and will probably remain an integral segment of our musical heritage". Yet, for all that, Mr. McHugh's songs are rarely associated with him.



The singer Wesla Whitfield seeks to remedy that situation on her latest recording, *Let's Get Lost: The Songs of Jimmy McHugh*.

At the beginning of the new century, Wesla Whitfield has emerged as one of the finest living interpreters of songs from the beginning of the last century. Like Rosemary Clooney and Sylvia Syms, Ms. Whitfield is a jazz-influenced storyteller rather than an improviser. Her dry, acidic voice has a way of sharpening the edges of a song. Never content to simply define a song by its tempo, Ms. Whitfield extracts meaning from every word. She focuses the listener's attention on lyrics in a way that can make you think you are hearing the words to a warhorse like "I Can't Believe That You're In Love With Me" for the first time. She mines all the wit from Johnny Mercer's lyric for "You're the One for Me" without ever sounding like she is trying to be witty. Ms. Whitfield also has the gift of taking antiquated expressions like "You're a Sweetheart" or "that doggone moon above" (from "Don't Blame Me") and making them sound natural and even poignant. With her tendency to hold long, sustained notes with no vibrato and her clear-eyed approach

to lyrics, Ms. Whitfield's ballad singing strongly recalls the late Irene Kral.

As always, anchoring this collection is Ms. Whitfield's pianist, arranger and husband, Mike Greensill. Both as an accompanist and an arranger, Mr. Greensill seems to have a deep understanding of exactly the kind of support his wife requires. He plays with a light touch and an attentive ear. His smart, superbly crafted arrangements make good use of not only the reeds but also the rest of the excellent rhythm section. Mr. Greensill also explores the many gradations of tempo that exist between slow and fast on this generally well-paced CD.

Like all of Ms. Whitfield's recordings, *Let's Get Lost* is a mixture of the familiar and the forgotten. Even veteran song hounds will be surprised by the three beautiful and obscure ballads unearthed here: "Warm and Willing", "They Really Don't Know You", and "It's Me, Remember". There are also a number of rarely heard verses reunited with their more often encountered choruses. Throughout his long career, Mr. McHugh wrote with some very talented lyricists including Frank Loesser,

Ted Koehler, Harold Adamson, and his most prominent partner, Dorothy Fields. The album allows the composer's unique "voice" to be heard by not drawing too heavily from any one of these collaborations.

*Let's Get Lost* is not by any means ground breaking or revelatory. However, it is a thoughtful and satisfying examination of the music of a songwriter whose best work surprisingly reflects Tin Pan Alley's vision of itself: bright, optimistic, and most importantly, hummable.

— *Mathew Bahl*