

**ALL ABOUT JAZZ**

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I love surprises.

Wait.

Let me clarify that.

I'm not too keen on "You're being audited" surprises. Or "Fixing your transmission will cost you \$1400" surprises.

I love *good* surprises.

Like when you wake up on Sunday morning and everything outside is covered with snow. Or when you're 50 cents short for the laundromat and you find two quarters in the couch. It's moments like those that make me glad I'm alive.

So I guess it's *no* surprise that I love jazz.

Let your guard down with Billie Holiday and she'll strike. Beware Miles Davis when he knocks on the door to your heart; open up and he'll set a bomb off.

Yes, jazz is the art of the unexpected.

The jazz *business*, however, isn't all it's cracked up to be. Too many surprises of the nasty kind.

There are the vacuous press releases lauding one "genius" after another. They surprise me in their ability to so consistently say nothing.

There are countless emails about shows

3,000 miles away from my home office. I'm surprised daily by the fact that people think I can see them all.

And then there are the CDs. They're often good for a nasty surprise or two. Guh.

Sometimes, though, you find those proverbial quarters in the couch and it's all worth it again.

Like *Not By Coincidence – Live*, Michael Aarons' magnificent, unpredictable wake-up call to all that is staid and stuffy in the jazz idiom. I was surprised by Aarons' disc when it arrived unsolicited in the mail, but not as much as I was when I put it on and heard what he does with a guitar. To say he channels the Masters would do a disservice to his inventive approach.

Go, now (or, at least, as soon as you're finished reading this month's AAJme), to <http://www.michaelaarons.com/>

Drop him a line and tell him you want to buy his CD. Surprise him.

Surprise yourself.

— Aaron Wrixon



# FROM THE INSIDE OUT

**CHRIS M. SLAWECKI**

He's known as one of the founding jazz fathers of Hammond B-3 organ funk, but Jimmy Smith has always played the blues. Born in December 1928 in a suburb west of Philadelphia, Smith has been performing since he was 12, at that time in a song and dance act with his father. After a stint in the navy, Smith took advantage of the GI Bill to study bass, piano and music theory upon his service discharge. During this period Smith discovered the Hammond B-3 organ, an instrument that up until that time lay relatively unexplored from a jazz perspective. Smith taught himself how to make the B-3 swing and moan; in Smith's own words, he "tamed the beast". His combination of determination, talent, and irrepressible sense of groove make Smith one of the rare, elite instrumentalists who defined the modern sound of their instrument.

Smith established the classic Hammond B-3 jazz sound and remained the organ's definitive jazz stylist for decades thereafter. He enlisted first with Blue Note for whom he unleashed a string of classic party 'til dawn, smoky jazz throwdowns simmering with blues, gospel, soul, and funk. These classics include 1958's

*The Sermon*, with its stunning side-long title track, in the company of Lee Morgan, Art Blakey, Kenny Burrell, Lou Donaldson, and other masters of the blue groove; and *Midnight Special* and *Back At The Chicken Shack*, with an ensemble smaller in size but not in effect (a quartet with Burrell, drummer Donald Bailey, and Stanley Turrentine), both recorded on the same torrid August day in 1960.

Smith joined Verve Records in the mid-60s and recorded for the label up until 1973, releasing several albums orchestrated by Oliver Nelson and scoring with *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and other theme-oriented productions. He later briefly rejoined Blue Note and recorded for Milestone and several other labels before landing back at Verve in 1995 with the heat-seeking *Damn!*, cut with and across generations of sizzling jazzmen including Bernard "Pretty" Purdie, Nicholas Payton, Roy Hargrove, and Christian McBride.

Ron Goldstein, President of the Verve Music Group, tried to figure out how to handle Smith's debut for the label's Blue Thumb imprint and first new recording in over five years: "I figured the best way to swing

the spotlight back around to Jimmy was to have him cut something outside of the jazz marketplace. Why not the blues?"

Coinciding with the past year's painful Nasdaq market plunge, *dot com blues* is like one of those old soul/R&B reviews where the same crack band backed up about a dozen different groups, all of whom performed "Greatest Hits" segments with machine-gun precision. Smith's quartet with guitarist Russell Malone, bassist Reggie McBride and drummer Harvey Mason serve as the core band. Consistent with this approach, *dot com blues* features several vocalists and the assistance of Dr. John as composer, pianist, and lead vocalist on numerous tracks.

Smith features three guitarist/vocalists in straight-up blues, including "Strut", a simple Texas shuffle from Taj Mahal, and "Over & Over" from Keb' Mo'. But wizened B. B. King steals the guitar jamboree with his own composition, the timeless "Three O'Clock Blues", where his sweetly stinging guitar and defiant vocal practically roar, "You can call me MISTER King!"

Etta James swings sassy with her vocal on

Willie Dixon's classic "I Just Want To Make Love To You", with its lyrics reworked to fit a woman's perspective. Dr. John sings and plays piano on the opening track, his original "Only In It For The Money". In this rollicking blast of New Orleans, John's piano counterpunches Smith's organ smears like a body puncher pounding the heavy bag. First solo, first track, Smith sets the standard – this is gonna be one groovy blue and lowdown set.

Throughout, Smith seems content contributing to the mood instead of seeking the spotlight. The rest of his band also comes through. Guitarist Malone steps in style out on this leisurely, seven-minute-plus workout of the classic blues "C. C. Rider", not only as a soloist but also in his funky blue 'comping behind Smith's solo. Malone also rocks the fizzing, sloe gin blues of a title track and seems to deepen the flame of Smith's playing there too. Mason's snare lags just "behind the 4" in this remake of Smith's "Eight Counts For Rita", creating a New Orleans "second line" feel that seems to solidify Smith's influence on Medeski, Martin & Wood.

Perhaps because of the more compact

structure of “Rita”, compared to the more lengthy tunes, Smith’s playing seems most focused here. He also brightens with brilliant swaths this remake of “Mood Indigo” (Ellington), genteel and elegant in the face of the funky honky-tonk feel in the rest of this set.

Jimmy Smith’s *dot com blues* sounds and feels like a newly discovered Booker T. & The MGs set or like a legendary 1960s soul/R&B revue. It may not be all jazz all the time, but it plays comfortably and well. 🎧

**More labels than you can shake a stylus at.**

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# FLIGHTS OF FANTASY

BY DEREK TAYLOR

“The World’s Mightiest Jazz Catalog”: so asserts the Fantasy Jazz website. It’s no idle boast. With no less than 13 recording labels under its incorporated umbrella Fantasy’s vaults are bursting with an incredible wealth of musical riches. Virtually every major musician of Jazz’s last hundred years has recorded for one or more of its subsidiaries. Seizing the boon at their disposal, the folks at Fantasy have rightly instituted one of the most rigorous reissue programs in the entire music industry. And unlike other labels that return earlier albums to print only to have them fall out of circulation in just a few years, Fantasy is committed to keeping nearly everything it reissues in print. Even its line of limited edition Original Jazz Classics releases continues to buck the economic expectation that jazz recordings have an inherently limited shelf life in the music store racks.

This column is designed to recognize and revel in the incredible diversity of Fantasy’s holdings by plumbing the parameters of their vaults. As might be expected, with a scope as large as the label’s proprietorship there are also a fair number of albums reissued that fall

short of the designation 'classic'. To their credit the staff at Fantasy does not sacrifice diversity for the sake of profit.

It is my goal to foster interest in the perhaps lesser-known contributors that litter the label's rosters by focusing on a particular artist(s), a style, or a body of recordings each month. For example, most casual jazz fans are familiar with John Coltrane's transitional work for Prestige and/or Thelonious Monk's ripe harvest for Riverside. But odds are that far fewer have checked out the albums saxophonist Gil Melle waxed for the former or the output pianist Don Friedman yielded for the latter.

Reissues account for a sizeable percentage of jazz releases and offer integral insight in to what has come before. As the Reissues Editor for AAJ it's my job to focus attention on the reissue end of the jazz spectrum. This column is a natural outgrowth of my interests in this area. It is my hope that other writers on the AAJ roster who share similar interest will seek out other labels equally deserving of such specialized focus.

One caveat: this column is not meant as

a marketing tool for Fantasy or means of selling their product at the expense of critical objectivity. It is simply a celebration of a label that continues to preserve and circulate some of the most significant, and more importantly, enjoyable jazz available in recorded form. Through these entries it is my desire to raise awareness of music that is in my opinion worthy of wider exposure. I hope you will join me. 🎧



This is your computer.



This is your computer on  
Screen Themes.

Any questions?

# THINK ON YOUR FEET

BY PETER MADSEN

The following is a letter from an AAJ fan with some questions about scales and improvisation. I was asked to try and wrestle these questions to the ground and turn the answers into an article (or two). Check out 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

Well Michael, where to begin?

First I want to say it's great that you're trying to expand your horizons (always a

commendable endeavor) and I hope I can shed a little light on your new path.

First let's back up a moment and look at how musicians learn to improvise. I myself see two main ways. Let's call the first way the Charlie Parker method of learning to improvise. I'm sure Mr. Parker practiced, especially when he was younger, but his main way of learning was simply through experience, by listening to other great musicians around him. Through his incredible ears and gifted depth of creativity he picked out the hip ideas that other musicians were playing and then added his own to make those incredible new lines of his. He wasn't thinking a lot about scales or harmony, though of course he knew about harmony. He was mostly using his ears!

The second way that a musician can learn to improvise let's call the John Coltrane method of learning to improvise. Trane was the opposite of Bird. He didn't stop practicing and studying. He slept with his horn so that he could start practicing the moment he got out of bed. He practiced on the breaks at gigs and every other free moment he could find. He was a searcher. He searched for new scales

and modes from all over the world. He studied out of violin books and harp books. He used the Slonimsky book of scale patterns. Trane learned by studying as well as using his own incredible ears!

So, we have two very different ways of learning the mechanics of improvisation but, and here's the big but, when Bird or Trane got on the bandstand to perform, neither of them spent much time "thinking"! In performance they were both in the same state of incredible self-awareness. The mechanics became unimportant on the bandstand and the emotional side of their improvisations took precedence. They played from their heart and soul. This is the key to their greatness. They both had an incredible natural gift for being able to open themselves up to their inner creativity and let out their amazing ideas with wonderful ease, excitement, and wonder.

OK Michael I hear you. You still want to know the answers to your questions. Now, I love Frank Zappa, but I didn't read the article so I don't know the exact context he was talking about. But, most musicians don't usually think OK now I'm going to use a

mixolydian scale here for this section and a diminished scale there for another. This has been done of course (Miles Davis — *Kind of Blue* for example, and it sounds like Zappa also) but this isn't a very common way of setting up an improvisation section today. Also, this isn't the only way to set up an improvisation section. In fact, of all the hundreds of bands I've played in not one has ever said to me, "play a mixolydian scale here" or "let's only play a diminished scale there". Never! Not in a straight-ahead band or a free band or a funk group. I'm either taught a piece by ear or I'm given music with written notes and chord symbols and I can make my note choices using any of the many tools at my disposal. Scales are merely one choice. Other choices include playing arpeggios in thirds all the way up to the thirteenth of the chord, ideas based on the melody, alteration notes of dominant chords (flat 5, flat 9, sharp 5 and sharp 9), arpeggios in fourths, leading tones, intervals, trills, multiphonics (horn players), clusters (piano players), and various other devices depending on the style of the piece, the dissonance wanted, the tempo, etc.

OK so you still want to know if a bass player can play a diminished scale and a soloist play a mixolydian scale and still sound good together. The answer is absolutely. But I don't know many bass players who only make their lines out of just one scale. For a moment he might play a part of a diminished scale and then the next he might play an arpeggio of the chord in thirds starting on the root and walk up to the 7th or whatever. If Zappa played a G mixolydian scale on a G7 chord and his bass player used a G diminished scale (both which work for a G7 chord) it wouldn't be a major clash. But actually, the example that you gave wouldn't usually come about as most of the time it's the soloist that tends to play the more colorful or complicated or unusual scales (the diminished scale is much more colorful than the mixolydian mode as it has the flat 9, the sharp 9 and the flat five in it) and not the bass player, unless it's the bass player that is soloing. The most common function of the bass player is to play the foundations of the chords, keying on the roots so the tonality can be heard. They should support the soloist and not play too many complicated ideas so the

soloist can go where he or she wants. They try to keep an ear out to where the soloist is going and help if possible. This doesn't mean he has to play the same scale at the same time as the soloist. As a piano player I'm often playing very different scales than the bass player when I'm soloing. You see, jazz is often built in melodic and harmonic layers. The bass player tends to play the lower notes (both in pitch and of the chord), the harmony instrument(s) tend to play around with the changes (altering those 5ths and 9ths - often in the middle range) and the soloist is on top of that. So, you will hear different instruments playing different scales at the same time a lot, and sound quite good together.

Come back next month and check out the rest of my answers! See you then and keep in touch by sending me an e-mail at [bodyjazz@hotmail.com](mailto:bodyjazz@hotmail.com). 🎧



# BOOKWORM

BY R.J. DELUKE

Like it or not, it's a "What have you done for me lately?" world in many respects. If that phrase has grown tiresome on you, consider Bill Kirchner in the world of jazz music. With him, it's more like "What haven't you done?" period.

The art form has gone through periods of struggle in the country where it was invented, but don't blame Kirchner. He's done his part. As a player, arranger, composer, educator, producer, author, and historian, he could easily be called jazz's Renaissance Man. He's produced both records and radio programs. He's written and arranged music for a variety of bands, including his own nonet. He's won a Grammy for Best Album notes for *Miles Davis and Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* and an Indie from the former National Association of Independent Record Distributors (now the Association for Independent Music) for the liner notes to *Big Band Renaissance: The Evolution of the Jazz Orchestra*, which he co-produced.

He's played sax with the likes of Mel Lewis, Tito Puente, Anita O'Day, Sheila Jordan, and many others. He teaches fledgling musicians

and conducts clinics. And he has two current recordings as a leader: *Trance Dance* (a 2-CD set with his Nonet) and *Some Enchanted Evening* (duets with pianists Michael Abene, Marc Copland, and Harold Danko), both on A-Records.

His latest accomplishment is one that also teaches, not just musicians but everyone. It's called *The Oxford Companion to Jazz* (Oxford University Press, 2000), a mammoth work of some 800 pages containing essays by top writers about the people, scenes, history, instruments, and impact of jazz worldwide. It's in bookstores now and will keep people reading, and learning, through cold winter nights and hot summer days at the beach. You don't need a bookmark, just an interest. The essays can be read in most any order and all provide valuable information. It won't get outdated.

All About Jazz discussed the book project recently with Kirchner, as well as his intriguing life covering all aspects of the music business. From his childhood getting hooked by the jazzy soundtrack to the *Peter Gunn* television series, to his emergence as a musician, to

his rise in the literary and historical fields, Kirchner has been a success story. (See [www.jazzsuite.com/kirchhome.html](http://www.jazzsuite.com/kirchhome.html))

Still, perhaps illustrating the status of jazz in the U.S., Kirchner says it's hard to find bookings for his band and that good record contracts go only to an "anointed few". He addresses these issues with eloquence.

Kirchner is affable and energetic. Knowledgeable? Fuggedaboutit. He's a walking font of knowledge. Everything he does, it seems, helps perpetuate the art form he so loves. In doing so, he helps the rest of us that love it too.

**All About Jazz:** You're a musician. When you were first growing up, with training, lessons that kind of thing—

**Bill Kirchner:** I started playing clarinet when I was 7 years old. And even before that, when I was 5, the *Peter Gunn* TV show with Henry Mancini scores was on the air and that was the first jazz and probably the first music that had any impact on me. So I think I was hooked even before I started playing. But I was definitely hooked throughout my childhood. When I was 11 years old I got

my parents to take me to a jazz festival in Pittsburgh that had, in one night, Earl Hines, Carmen McRae, Stan Getz with Gary Burton, John Coltrane's quartet and the Duke Ellington band. So, after that I think I was set for life.

**AAJ:** So you went into music in high school and beyond?

**BK:** Yeah. I was playing in high school stage band. I had a very good band director, so by the time I was in high school I was playing clarinet, saxophone and flute and starting to write arrangements and what have you.

**AAJ:** How about beyond high school?

**BK:** I went to school in New York City, but interestingly enough I didn't get a music degree. I was going for a BA in literature, but I was studying privately with Lee Konitz and Harold Danko, the pianist, and soaking up as much music as I could.

**AAJ:** At that point, you knew where you were going, or were you still torn?

**BK:** I guess I was still torn. I mean, it wasn't until I was in my early 20s and out of college that I really realized that music was what I was supposed to be doing for a career and there were a couple of players,

both great saxophonists, like Pat LaBarbera and Gregory Herbert, and they both gave me encouragement and a kick in the ass at the right time. So that really set me on my course.

**AAJ:** So, professionally, as a musician, where did you break in?

**BK:** After I got out of college I moved to [Washington] D.C. for five years and I was doing various things in Washington. For a while I was working at the Smithsonian jazz program for Martin Williams and J.R. Taylor. I was working on the NEA jazz oral history project as assistant curator. Martin Williams gave me my first record date. He asked me to write arrangements for an album's worth of music of James P. Johnson and Fats Waller that was performed live, in concert, by a band that included Bob Wilber and Dick Hyman and Dick Wellstood. So that was my first record.

So I was doing that and I was playing with different people who lived in Washington. A great composer and arranger named Mike Crotty, who had a big band, and also a lot of other great players in Washington, like Buck Hill, the tenor saxophone player; Nathen Page, the guitar player; Marshall Hawkins, the bass

player; Ken Navarro, the guitarist, who since then has become a 'smooth jazz' star. He lives in LA now. Washington was a great place just to play with some guys who were some really great players. It was a great place to get your act together. So I spent five years there and then I decided after that I had done everything I could do in Washington, so I moved back to New York in 1980.

**AAJ:** My next question was going to be: What led you to academia? But I can see with people like Martin Williams, it might seem natural.

**BK:** I don't really consider myself an academic. I've been teaching at the New School Jazz Program [New York City] as an adjunct for 10 years. But that's a couple of days a week. That's not a full-time position. At the New School Jazz Program there are about 70 of us who are adjuncts, including a lot of people who are very well known: Jimmy Owens, Benny Powell, Junior Mance, Reggie Workman (full-time), Joanne Brackeen and many others. We teach two or three courses a piece. But I really don't consider myself an academic.

**AAJ:** What led you to writing? Not

compositions, but liner notes, essays. How did you get into that field?

**BK:** When I was studying with Lee Konitz when I was in college. I was like, 19. And Lee told me that Dan Morgenstern, who at the time was editing Downbeat, was looking for transcribed solos to publish. So I had a couple transcriptions of Warne Marsh solos. So he said 'Go take them to Dan.' So, I took them to Dan and he looked at them. Actually, he never ran them, for whatever reasons, but at the time I had just gone to a concert that Lee had played in. Just for the heck of it I had written a review of that concert and I showed it to Dan. And he liked it. So, that was the first thing I ever had in print, at the age of 19.

Then I started writing for the next few years for Downbeat and what was then called Radio Free Jazz, which later became Jazz Times, and Jazz magazine and the Washington Post. As of the late 70s, when my own music career began to take off, at that point I said 'I can't do this anymore.' Because I felt like it was too much. Writing record reviews and articles on people and stuff like that just felt like too much of a conflict of interest. Because you

start to wonder. You have to be on the same bandstand with these people the next week or you're looking for gigs. And then you're wondering: is the club owner hiring me because I can play or because they think I can do something for them? So I just bagged all of that.

Then, fast forward to about the early 1990s. I started getting involved in jazz history-type projects. I got signed by the Smithsonian to do *Big Band Renaissance*, the five-CD box set of post-war Big Band recordings. I co-produced that and wrote the booklet. Then I started doing other liner note things and produced both reissues and new recordings and what have you. So I just kind of got back into that aspect of the business. But at the same time this was mostly concerned with jazz history projects. It felt like something I could do without feeling this kind of conflict of interest that I had felt years earlier. So that was my window back into that.

**AAJ:** Is that what you do most now, as far as the journalism side. More editing, compiling-type work?

**BK:** I do a lot of different type things.

Producing, compiling, doing liner notes. Editing the Companion was a four-year project. But also I have my own music projects active as a composer, arranger, as a player, as an educator. Also, I've done four NPR hour-long jazz profiles on Johnny Mandel, Benny Carter, Artie Shaw and Bob Brookmeyer. So, I've kept my hand in a lot of different areas of the business.

And last summer I was in LA for a week. I was a composer-in-residence with the American Jazz Philharmonic for a week.

**AAJ:** How did the anthology thing come to be? I've read the Miles compilation [*A Miles Davis Reader*, Smithsonian Institute Press, 1997] which I think is great. How did that kind of work, which is kind of what the Companion is also, come into being?

**BK:** About eight years ago, Lewis Porter had done a Lester Young reader for the Smithsonian. He had told me they were looking for someone to do a Miles reader. I said 'Well, I can do that.' So he put me in touch with the Smithsonian. I submitted a proposal to them and after some back and forth correspondence, we finally arrived at an

agreement and off I went. From start to finish, that took about five years before it finally came out.

**AAJ:** What kind of insight would you say being a player and a trained musician gives you on the writing side? Has it helped?

**BK:** Oh yeah. It gives you a view from the inside. Because I've actually been on bandstands with a huge number of people. I've played with people ranging from Benny Carter and Doc Cheatham and Clarence Hutchenrider to Muhal Richard Abrams and Jane Ira Bloom. Plus all the things I've done as a leader with my nonet and my small groups, and as a composer and arranger. Just all this experience really gives you a hands-on feel. You know what it is to play with a group. You know what it feels like to write music and have people play it. Whatever other projects I do as a jazz historian or a producer or whatever. I've been there, done that. There's no substitution for that kind of experience.

**AAJ:** Having said that, do bad reviews get under your skin? Do you have a different perspective?

**BK:** Luckily, I've gotten very few bad

reviews. Also, I know the field pretty well, as far as people writing their reviews. I know the people who know what they're talking about and the ones who don't. I understand the sources of the reviews better than a lot of people. Luckily, the press I've gotten over the years for whatever projects I've done, with rare exception, has been very good. So I've been lucky, I guess.

**AAJ:** How is the nonet coming? How much time do you get to do that, you seem so busy?

**BK:** Not enough. Part of the problem is it's harder than ever to get bookings.

**AAJ:** On the scene today there seems to be a lot of bickering lately about traditionalists versus those that want to stretch, people that hate the old fusion, people that think Wynton Marsalis and company are either right on the mark or way off the mark. What do you see from the business side of the music industry right now?

**BK:** You got an hour? [Laughter]. It's very complicated. One thing we can say with certainty is that anyone who knows the slightest thing about jazz has an opinion about Wynton Marsalis. I think one problem

that makes evaluating him very difficult is it's hard to separate his genuine accomplishments from the enormous amount of paid publicity that's been generated on his behalf. So I think as far as his standing ultimately in the course of jazz I think we're going to have to depend on the verdict of history for that.

**AAJ:** There's the school of thought that says those people are just digging up what's been done before and not doing anything new. I think that's a little harsh myself. The answer's probably somewhere in between.

**BK:** The ultimate goal of a jazz musician is to develop a personal voice. So has Wynton Marsalis developed a personal voice or not? It depends on whom you talk to. I think, frankly, that he displayed far more potential 20 years ago than he's actually realized. As a player and a composer, I don't think he's fully realized the potential that he had in either area. James Carville said something a few years ago. He said once you become famous your job is being famous. And I think Wynton Marsalis' job at this point is being famous.

**AAJ:** How about the whole school of neo-bop or whatever term you might want to put

on it? Do you think these younger musicians should be trying to stretch more?

**BK:** It depends on who you're talking about. One problem is there are a number of young players who've gotten too much too soon, long before they've matured and long before they're ready to handle it. And some of them have already gone by the wayside.

**AAJ:** The press and the record contracts early on and then it fades out.

**BK:** Yeah. I was just reading an interview with Bob Belden in *Jazz Times*. He said something interesting. He said that the hardest thing for a jazz musician is 'What happens after you turn 40?' He's got a very good point. It ultimately comes down to staying power.

**AAJ:** Do you see any music out in the vanguard that you like? There's a lot of World Music influences now.

**BK:** Yeah. There are people out there that are doing it. I'm heartened to see Dave Douglas' success, for example. I've been really impressed with Ingrid Jensen. I think she's an extraordinarily talented player who's really developing a voice of her own. And I think a

lot of what's going to be innovative in jazz is going to come about as a result of mixture with various kinds of World Music. Some of the freshest writing I've heard has been from Brazilians. People like Egberto Gismonti and Hermeto Pascoal. And there are various other kinds of world music. Music from Africa. Music from Asia. I think the Europeans are putting their own stamp on things now.

In the *Jazz Companion*, Mike Zwerin wrote an essay on jazz in Europe. He called jazz the real World Music. And I think he's got a very good point. It's being played and listened to all over the world. Everybody who's doing it is putting their own individual stamp on it. I think that's where the growth is really going to be coming from, from these various kinds of hybrids. And jazz has always been a hybrid. Jazz has been multicultural long before the term became a cliché.

**AAJ:** Let's get over to the book. It's massive. It must have been extremely daunting when you first got into it.

**BK:** Oh yeah.

**AAJ:** You said it took four years? And those are all fresh articles, correct?

**BK:** Absolutely. Everything was specially commissioned for the book.

**AAJ:** You spoke a little bit about it in your intro, but when you first looked at this mountain of a project, what did you think?

**BK:** Well, I thought it was doable. Until you have the actual experience of going through something like that, you have no idea what it's going to entail. But, actually I'm very pleased with the job that everybody did for me. Everybody displayed a high level of commitment and conscientiousness and I can truthfully say, as far as the essays in there, I don't think there's less than a first-rate one on the bunch.

**AAJ:** Was there anything you had to leave out?

**BK:** No. I decided on topics ahead of time and went for it. There are always more topics you could put in, but that's not the same as leaving something out. I decided the parameters up-front and just made the phone calls.

**AAJ:** What kind of process was that, deciding how it's going to be laid out and what it was going to cover?

**BK:** I basically just made a list of topics I thought should be in there. And then got some good suggestions from Sheldon Meyer at Oxford and from Dan Morgenstern and Gary Giddins. By the time I had gotten their suggestions I had a pretty good handle on what I thought needed to be in there.

**AAJ:** It touches on individual instruments and styles and some of the important folks over the years. Was it intended to be a jazz history?

**BK:** It's intended to be, basically, a survey of 100 years worth of music. There's a lot of history involved in it, of course. So, do I call it a history book? Well in part, yes, but not exclusively. It's intended to be a book that could be picked up by anybody, ranging from somebody who's an absolute novice to someone who's extremely knowledgeable. And I think there's information in there that anybody can benefit by. No matter what your level of expertise is, you're going to learn quite a bit from reading this book.

**AAJ:** But you're not trying to cover every base... like: this happened, then that happened, and this person and that person...

**BK:** Well, you cover as much as you can within the parameters of the book. There's no way that everything can be covered, but I think the amount that we did cover is very, very substantial. You can learn quite a bit about the usual suspects, but there's quite a bit of other people in there who are less well-known who get covered as well. Just to pick one example, Joel E. Siegel's essay on singers, "Between Blues and Bebop," he talked about some well-known singers, but he also talked about people like Valaida Snow or Annette Hanshaw, whom you seldom read about. In the miscellaneous instruments category, Christopher Washburne deals with a lot of people who are pretty obscure, but who made important contributions and that's true throughout the book.

**AAJ:** I like the idea of going into the separate instruments, because they all have a lineage and a history. If you talk to somebody who's a trombone player, they know. A sax player, they can tell you from Coleman Hawkins on through. I thought that was a nice way to approach the topic of jazz. It doesn't necessarily start from Year One and come up;

it starts from the instruments themselves and how they fit in.

**BK:** Absolutely. There are concurrent threads running throughout the book. There are individual bios of people. There are chronological topics, then there are the instruments. And also dealing with separate scenes, such as Japan, or Africa, or Europe, or Canada, or Australia, or Brazil. There are different threads running throughout the book, often in several different ways.

**AAJ:** I particularly enjoyed one comment in your intro about thanking the inventor of e-mail.

**BK:** Oh god, yes. I don't know how I would have gotten this book without e-mail. People would send me their drafts, then I would get back to them with comments, they would incorporate the comments and send me another draft. Sometimes that would do it. Sometimes there would be additional comments or something. If it hadn't been for e-mail, this would have been 10 times as laborious a process as it actually was.

**AAJ:** I don't think you would have ever slept.

**BK:** Uh-uh. That, or it would have taken a helluva lot longer. Because I was dealing with people all over the world.

**AAJ:** You mentioned the Miles book took five years and this one four. Was that a factor? Back when you did the Miles book you didn't have that kind of communication.

**BK:** There are various reasons. With the Miles book, it was an anthology of previously published stuff, so I had to go through the extremely laborious process and tedious and time-consuming process of getting permissions to re-print. Some of those took seemingly forever. With this [*The Companion*], it was starting from scratch. I would go to people and say, 'Write this and send it in. Once it's OK, you get paid.' End of story. I had much more control over the process with this one. I didn't have to go looking for permissions from people.

**AAJ:** The response was good from the people you asked?

**BK:** Yeah. I didn't get turned down by many people. Fewer than I expected. I was very happy with the affirmative responses that I got.

**AAJ:** Anyone you were surprised you were able to enlist?

**BK:** No, not really. There were some people I didn't know before. A lot of the people I did know before, to varying degrees. There were some people I was meeting for the first time. Somebody like Mike Zwerin, I'd been reading his writings for years, but that was the first time we met. There were a few others like that, and then there were a few people who were recommended to me by other contributors. I was just happy to get everybody that I got.

**AAJ:** So you're obviously pleased with the product.

**BK:** Yes, very.

**AAJ:** It's huge, but I think it will make an impression on people. So today, are you a composer, arranger, writer, historian?

**BK:** All of the above. Composer, arranger, saxophonist, bandleader, jazz historian, record producer, radio producer, educator. Partly that's by choice; partly that's by necessity. I mean, unless you're one of the anointed few who gets the fat record contracts and the promotional pushes and all the lucrative bookings, it's what one must do to make a living as a

jazz musician. There are a number of people I know who have taken similar paths for similar reasons. Richard Sudhalter, Bob Belden, Loren Schoenberg, Kenny Washington, myself and others. We've all taken these multifarious paths, and that's part of what you've got to do to make a living as a jazz musician in the beginning of the 21st Century.

**AAJ:** The future of jazz in general. You and many others, your livelihood depends on that. Does that look good to you? Do you see problems for the music in general?

**BK:** Put it this way: I'm old enough to remember in the late 60s when people were going around, with absolute seriousness, saying 'Jazz is dead.' So it's 30-some years later and it's still around. I don't know how well it's doing. You read the reports of jazz record sales as a percentage of the overall market. A decade ago it was about 4 or 5 percent, now it's less than 2. So I don't know what that means. Of those, probably at least half, or more, are reissues. So, it's in a period of transition, to be sure. And I think jazz is going to be around for a long time. What form it's going to take? I don't know any more

than anyone else. I think it's continuing to grow, but I think the nature of its growth is changing. Whereas in the past, we kind of depended on and expected the appearance, about once every 10 years, of a new seminal figure. A Louis Armstrong, a Duke Ellington, a Lester Young, a Charlie Parker, a Miles Davis, a John Coltrane.

I think the growth is going to come in a more subtle and less spectacular way from a variety of sources, and a variety of people. And it's not going to come from a handful of giants, the way it has in the past. There hasn't been a single musician since Coltrane died who's had the kind of impact that Coltrane had on virtually every aspect of the music. And some 30 years later I think people are getting accustomed to the fact that that's the way it's going to be and the music is going to grow in a different way. I think they're getting accustomed to that and accepting it. Whereas, until recently, many people were in a panic.

**AAJ:** Waiting for the next prophet.

**BK:** Exactly. The music is on the move; it's just in a different way. The influences are coming from all over the place. Mike Zwerin

in his essay on jazz in Europe said something good. He said it's moving closer to the ground. I think that's a very good point.

**AAJ:** I think projects like yours help it, and people like you help it.

**BK:** Thank you.

**AAJ:** If you suddenly had the opportunity to play more and compose and concentrate on performing, would that be what you'd prefer?

**BK:** Probably, yes. Although I wouldn't want to cut everything else loose. Part of it is simple self-preservation. You know that even when things get good in a certain area, you know the bottom can suddenly drop out without warning, So I think it's just prudent to keep as many balls in the air, if I may use a juggling metaphor. I think it's good to keep all those balls in the air as much as possible, because things can change overnight in any given area.

**AAJ:** I admire your energy. You've gotten a lot of awards in various fields, are there any you hold above others?

**BK:** I've never quite thought of it that way. I've got a Grammy, I've got a NAIRD Indie award. I'm pleased with having both of those.

But the main reward is just doing it. I feel like I've hit home runs in all these areas that I've been involved in, and I'm very proud of that. I think the reward is doing work that you're proud of.

**AAJ:** Future projects?

**BK:** Oh a couple of book projects that are in the wind and some other music projects of my own that are also in formation. Basically, keeping out there in as many different ways as possible. It's like John Hicks, the pianist, said: 'If you're not appearing, you're disappearing.' So the main job of all of us in this business is to keep appearing. 🎵

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# ASS-BUSTER, ESQ.

BY AARON WRIXON

In from the cold Canadian November shuffles a lumbering hulk of a man with a smile warm enough to melt the icicles off the eaves.

He greets you, says “Hi, I’m Kevin Breit”, makes pleasant small talk, and then sits in gracious anticipation of the questions you have for him about the passion that makes his oversized heart beat.

**All About Jazz:** How long has Supergenerous been around? Have you called the band Supergenerous since the two of you got together?

**Kevin Breit:** At the start it was always Kevin Breit and Cyro Baptista. We’ve been around as Supergenerous for about 2 years. In that time we’ve played maybe 5 gigs, but we’ve worked a lot together. And we’ve known each other for years.

**AJ:** So you hooked up on Holly Cole’s *Temptation* record?

**KB:** Well, no. We never met. We did 3 or 4 records together without ever meeting. Which is not uncommon. I mean, I’ve done records with amazing people and it looks like I’ve played with them, but I never did. I was always an overdub. Cyro was always an overdub

too — that's the nature of percussion these days. People put it on as a last sweetener some times.

We met doing a Cassandra Wilson gig in New York. That was the beginning of the end.

**AAJ:** Would you consider Baptista a kindred spirit? Listening to the new record — and this shows more than on some of the previous work you've done — I feel you two have a really similar approach to percussion and to the guitar.

**KB:** Yeah. We come from totally different places, but I think we have the same appreciation for music. There's not much I'll mention that he doesn't like, or that he'll mention that I don't like.

Kindred spirits? Well, we're almost a generation apart in age — he's 50, and I'm late 30s — but it's unbelievable how much we have in common when the red light goes on.

**AAJ:** Does that play out in a live setting?

**KB:** More. When you're in the studio, you have to contain yourself. We wanted to make a record that was song-oriented. It wasn't two guys jamming — we didn't think that would be very interesting. But live... It's very visual.

And because of that you can take a theme and go, and do whatever you want with it. And we do.

That said, this record wasn't as reserved as most records are. You know, people go into the studio and.... That's very common in this business. I don't know how many groups are cleaner, or lose a bit of their grit in the studio.

We're not as bad as that. The record has some of that dirt there. Live, things are just longer, more played out. More dramatic.

**AAJ:** I think what you do live has been translated quite well on this Supergenerous record. You did a good job of putting that on tape.

**KB:** Thanks. I'm not as intimidated as I used to be in the studio. I'm getting better. A run-through now is the same as a take with the light on, you know? I don't freeze up. I've done enough of it, but it's taken me a long time to feel comfortable. There's always something that comes along that throws you off, you know? You don't like the studio, or you don't like your sound, and you're not getting it.

But I find now that it's a becoming a bit of

a trend to have a performance in the studio. I don't know if you know what I mean, but it's now become somewhat fashionable to play. Most of the 80s, for sure, and a good part of the 90s, was these epic records that took 2 months to record. Now, people are returning to "Well, we banged it off in a week."

**AAJ:** You've spent a lot of time in studios doing session work.

**KB:** Yeah. One time I got called to play on somebody's record, and then it just started growing from there. I think I had a bit of a reputation for being quirky. I didn't think I was that quirky, but that's a word I used to hear a lot. It was great though, because I got to do pretty much whatever I wanted.

I met people, and through them I met other people.

**AAJ:** Holly Cole to Craig Street to Cassandra Wilson to Cyro Baptista.

**KB:** Exactly.

**AAJ:** The sound you bring to people's records seems very viscous to me. Almost buttery.

**KB:** Mellifluous. That's a new one I heard the other day.

**AAJ:** Like on “Sao Paolo Slim” or some of the work on Holly Cole’s *Dark Dear Heart*. I read somewhere that you’re totally self-taught. Where does that style come from?

**KB:** Just from playing in a lot of different situations. I didn’t develop technique from a metronome. I developed technique from having to learn sometimes 3 or 4 different repertoires in a week to earn a living. I would learn, like, 50 Elvis Presley songs, or R&B or Motown stuff.

Not only that, but I hear slide guitar a certain way. The examples you mentioned are similar. They’re very floaty. For me it’s a calling card to be as floaty as possible. But I also try to be as true to the school as I can, as opposed to putting myself in the third person and saying “What would Kevin Breit do here?” I don’t think that way. I think “Well, the song’s in G. And there’s an interesting bridge, and there’s holes in the melody. What should I play?” I imagine that certain things could have gone a different way, depending on who the singer was or what the song was like, but I like being sort of floaty.

As far as being self-taught goes, it’s no big

deal. Especially today. Not to date myself or anything, but I picked up a guitar magazine today, and you should see some of the things they’ve got now! There’s a machine where you can slow down solos and they keep their pitch! When I was learning, I had a record player that you could play at 16 RPM, and I would slow records down and put them on tape so I could listen to them over and over again. Things like Coltrane solos. I remember my father saying “If only WE had that technology in my day.” In his day you heard it once on radio and hoped you got it.

Ed Bickert [a well-respected Canadian guitarist] is a great example of that time. He lived on a farm. And when he got it once, that was it. He had to take in as much as he could and savor it. Guys who came out of that time were amazing musicians. Their read on something and their memory of something had to become so great because they never got it again. Today you can sample a phrase and hear it a thousand times, so if you can’t become self-taught today... I don’t know why anybody would go to a teacher today! Really. Because you can get them on video.

**AAJ:** If you wanted to you could spend the money for lessons on CDs.

**KB:** I think the way to go is to go see a lot of people, and go back to the times when guys were hanging out with better players, and you’re picking their brains. That’s the way to go. Don’t do what everybody else is doing. Don’t get the Number 1 selling video. Go get somebody you dug in a bar and say “Can I shoot you some money and talk to you about what you do?” You’ll definitely become more stylized.

**AAJ:** That’s very iconoclastic. Which is interesting, because to me your playing seems to have the most relish when you’re tearing apart songs like “Last Train to Clarksville” or “One-Trick Pony” or “Love is all Around”. It’s funny that you speak so much about not taking the beaten path at the same time that you’re skewering these songs that have become icons in a way.

**KB:** I think it’s more about trying to serve the song. We did a version of “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” with Cassandra, and, really, she reharmonizes so much that she doesn’t even sing the melody. That came,

though, from her absolute love of the Hank Williams version. I saw her cry when she was listening to it. Her rendition came from complete respect for the original. A lot of people might not think that, but what was so important to her were those words, which are so heavy.

And I think that it made so much sense for us to do “Love is All Around” because Cyro learned to speak English from watching the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*. It was an American show, and he used to watch the show religiously because he wanted to move to America.

And it’s every musician’s favorite show, because you go home late at night and you’re eating your Kraft Dinner or your fourth-day pasta or chili and you’re watching Mary at 3 in the morning.

I never thought we were being clever, or “Oh we really fucked that song up”, or that we were going to make people think we really “hip-ified” that song. No! I love that song!

**AAJ:** There is so much of “you” in that Supergenerous disc.

**KB:** I think it should be that way. It’s nice

to make a record that doesn’t sound like a soundtrack, like it’s different artists. We really wanted to make a record where you could tell it was the two of us on every track. We didn’t want it to sound slick — which we could never do anyway. We’re unable to make a slick record; there’s just too much chaos going on. That’s a high compliment you saying that. I wanted it to be unified.

**AAJ:** Earlier tonight you called what you do “instrumental music”.

**KB:** Well, it has to go somewhere in the record store. Because we’re on Blue Note it gets put in the jazz section, and that’s fine with me. So far, the press on this has been incredible. Everybody’s been really positive where I thought they’d kill us.

But I didn’t even think Blue Note would put it out, but they loved it. And everybody that’s reviewed the CD... They shouldn’t like it, really. It’s not a jazz record.

**AAJ:** There’s a big leap between Stefon Harris, for example, and your “Whistling in the Rain” or “God’s Parking Lot”. That’s some pretty tough stuff for a record that’s supposed to be jazz.

**KB:** Or “Marisa O’Brien”. You’re right. One thing that ties it together with stuff like Stefon Harris, or Greg Osby, or Jason Moran, or Brian Blade, is that it is improvisational, and it’s based on harmonic structure, not blues structure. I don’t look at what we do as being very heady. It’s not cerebral, and I don’t think those artists are very cerebral either. I don’t think they’re trying to make cerebral records; I don’t think they’re trying to be clever.

I think we have a home at Blue Note. I can see why we’re there. Now I can. I didn’t really when we were making it. But after seeing what they have on the roster, and seeing how supportive they’ve been of us, I’m like... great!

**AAJ:** But there are “jazz” ties there as well. You’ve worked two tunes associated with Ellington into the record — “Take the A Train” and “Caravan”.

**KB:** The Supergenerous record was supposed to be a 100% Ellington record when everybody was doing the 100th birthday of Duke Ellington. Cyro and I were sending tapes back and forth of our favorite Ellington tunes, but by the time things came around we just thought that the time had passed. If it came

out people would have said “Enough already!” But we thought “Let’s do something anyway.”

“A Train” has always been so beautiful, but no-one’s ever really played it that slow. It’s a really slow read of it. We made it a little bit tender.

And “Caravan”, it sounds like a caravan somewhere in India I guess. But I’ll tell you, when I was playing it my eyes were closed. And I bet if I’d opened them, Cyro’s would have been closed too. There’s a sincerity there. I thought we were doing them justice. I actually thought after that Duke Ellington would have liked them.

We were very sincere about them. And that goes all the songs on the CD. They meant something to us. And definitely “Home on the Range”. I loved doing these songs. They made total sense. I couldn’t imagine the record without those songs on it.

**AAJ:** How much did Craig Street play a role in putting the record together?

**KB:** He has a very unique style. He’s similar to Lee Townsend [who has produced, among others, Bill Frisell], in that the two of them really get the vibe. They get the concept.

They’re not the kind of guys who tell you that you should be playing a B-flat over D. You have that together already. They make sure that it’s going down the same road. You know how we were talking about a record being a whole? Craig Street is the perfect guy for that. He’s not heavy-handed. He makes sure it stays on the same road. “What are we going for on this record? What’s our approach?” He has the approach. Every record I’ve ever done with him, his job is usually done before I get in the studio. He’s hired the guys. He’s the first guy in the building and the last guy out of the building. He’s there for every painful twist. When you go out to clear your head, he’s still there. He doesn’t leave! He stays there, because it’s his baby too, you know? He works really hard that guy. He deserves more than he gets, I think.

**AAJ:** You could say the same thing about you. You’ve been busting your ass.

**KB:** I’m an ass-buster. [Laughs.] No, I’ve been busting my ass, but there’s no such thing as sitting on your laurels. It’s hard. It’s really difficult. Everybody’s scrambling to get something complete, or to make ends meet.

Both financially, and getting your head and your heart together. I bust my ass because it’s the most rewarding. You know what I mean... You do it. You said [before the interview started] that you’re on a writing tear because you’re inspired. How many people can say that about their lives? It’s great. It’s worth not knowing that you can take a holiday in June. It’s worth not knowing that you can spend Christmas with your family. New Year’s Eve, for example, is famous for musicians not being able to spend time with their families. But you can’t! You have to make a living! But it’s great if you’re playing music you like to do. It’s easy. The hard part is finding out what you like to do.

I like being a musician. Great. What does that mean. OK. I like being a musician. Doing..... what? Instrumental music! Good, good, good! What else? I like playing with.... great musicians! Great! Great! I like playing... at this club. Great! We’re narrowing it down. Get a gig at that club!

It sounds like I’ve got it figured out, but I don’t. It’s what I feel right now. You’ve got to make ends meet somehow, but getting

your head together is most important. If you're happy, you bust your ass for as long as you're doing it. And hopefully you'll never retire. Hopefully.

**AAJ:** Cheers to that! 🍷

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# THE LITTLE MONSTER

BY JASON WEST

Listen to a recording of Christian McBride (he released four in the 90s, in addition to his latest offering *Sci-Fi*, Verve 2000) and you'll hear why Ray Brown playfully refers to him as the "Little Monster," calling McBride "the best thing that's happened to the bass in the last 10 years". Tales of McBride's technical facility, melodic fluidity, and burning sense of swing are spreading among jazz musicians, and audiences alike. Yet, McBride speaks freely not only with his bass. His youth, insight, and candor make him an ideal role model for aspiring musicians and for the jazz tradition, which he learned to love as young boy growing up in Philadelphia.

On December 11, 2000, following a week of SuperBass appearances at Jazz Alley in Seattle, I spoke with McBride in the Experience Music Project Museum's Liquid Lounge. During our hour-long conversation McBride talked openly and easily on a myriad of subjects, including performing in SuperBass, rapping with "extraterrestrial" composer and saxophonist Wayne Shorter, recording with pianist and producer George Duke, and jamming with the godfather of soul James

Brown. In addition, McBride touched on his favorite recordings, his recent compositions, the advantages of practicing “airbass”, and the rewards of growing up with an open-minded, music-loving uncle – rewards that continues to this day.

**All About Jazz:** I was looking over your website ([www.christianmcbride.com](http://www.christianmcbride.com)) and you have so many things to talk about, it’s amazing all the things you’ve got here, with your recordings, and your writing – you did a preface for a book – you’re composing, you’ve appeared on various panel discussions. You’re 28-years-old and your bio is very impressive. Are you a work-a-holic?

**Christian McBride:** I don’t think I’m a work-a-holic. I actually think that I could work a lot harder than I do.

**AAJ:** Really?

**CM:** My work load hasn’t really been that heavy, only for the last year-and-a-half maybe, it’s gotten really packed and I like it like that. I don’t think that I can get enough work. The more work I get, the happier I am.

**AAJ:** And I know you must practice and rehearse. How often do you get to practice in

an average day?

**CM:** Well, practicing in the traditional sense of the work I don’t get a chance to do much at all any more. Only because I’m traveling so much I don’t have access to my instrument on an immediate basis. I usually don’t even see my instrument until a couple hours before show time. So my practice routine might only consist of a few minutes with just some warm-ups or something like that. But, I’m always playing air bass, so I think that helps me a lot too.

**AAJ:** Are you serious? Playing air bass helps you? How does that help?

**CM:** I think I know my instrument well enough that I can just play airbass and kind of figure it out. ‘Cause I can go like this [plays air bass] and I know how it’s going to sound on my instrument.

**AAJ:** Wow.

**CM:** But a lot of guys do that.

**AAJ:** Really?

**CM:** Yeah. I don’t think my routine is really that special.

**AAJ:** I saw you for the first time a couple months ago at Jazz Alley with your quartet. I

remember you came onstage and read some of unfavorable previews written about you by the local press. It was funny because the writers clearly didn’t know the first thing about you or your music. Do you get this all over the place, I mean, is this a regular occurrence where you find journalists writing out of their ass?

**CM:** I think anybody who is really serious about conveying their deepest innermost feelings to an audience probably has a big problem with the press. I firmly believe that most writers, not all writers, they don’t know where our inspiration comes from; they don’t know what we are really doing. They kind of judge us from what they know, what they hear and what they like. They don’t take the time to talk to the artist or really find out what makes that artist do what they do. So yeah, most of them write out of their ass, but I realize that so I don’t get that affected by it.

**AAJ:** So to do a better job, you would suggest journalists actually talk to the artist?

**CM:** Yeah, it’s real simple. For example, if someone gave me a CD to review, just on general principle I would try to do some research on that artist or try to talk to that

artist just to try to find out where they are and what inspired that particular CD, because I don't want to make any judgements or assume anything, you know. I don't want to disrespect that artist's work.

**AAJ:** This group SuperBass, how long has this been going on?

**CM:** About seven years, actually. Well, Ray [Brown] and John [Clayton] have been playing together for a very long time. John was one of Ray's students in the 70s when Ray was doing some teaching at UCLA.

**AAJ:** Have you also taken lessons from Ray?

**CM:** Spiritually. I've never taken any lessons from Ray, no, but like I said, Ray and John have been doing a lot of two bass concerts for a long time. And then, in '93, Ray asked me to join him, and that's how SuperBass started. We've been doing it now, for maybe two weeks out of every year ever since.

**AAJ:** Ray Brown, in my mind, is up at the top.

**CM:** He's a living legend.

**AAJ:** Have you listened to as much of his stuff as you could possibly listen to?

**CM:** Well you're talking about a man who

has recording credits that would fill up this entire museum, you know, I don't think you could possibly listen to everything Ray Brown has ever done in a lifetime. There's just too much available, you know. But I try to soak up as much as I can every time I'm around him. And it's not just about his bass playing either. Ray has a certain insight – I mean the man is 74-years-old – so that kind of wisdom and knowledge, you don't really have to hear him play to learn something from him. I love being around Ray.

**AAJ:** I was talking to his current piano player, Larry Fuller, and it's kind of interesting, he said Ray's got a book of around 90 tunes.

**CM:** Yeah. Interesting story, just a couple nights ago Ray had all the songs in his band book on a piece of paper, and it was a good 80 or 90 songs, and I remember asking, "Ray, do you actually play all of these?" and without hesitation he said "Yeah, you know, you gotta mix it up." I thought, wow, no wonder his brain is still so quick. Ray Brown and Roy Haynes: those are two just – Roy Haynes is maybe in some cases even a little more amazing than Ray, because Roy Haynes is

75-years-old, and Roy doesn't spend as much time immersed in music as Ray Brown does. I mean, you know, Roy Haynes likes to sit around and drink whiskey and tell stories all day long; he won't even touch the drums all day long. I'm not even sure if he has a set of drums in his house. But then he'll sit on the drum kit and play the most amazing stuff you ever want to hear in your life. He sounds, you know, the fact that a man who is 75-years-old who started playing bebop with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and then playing with Coltrane and Sarah Vaughn and Pat Metheny, and went through the whole avant-garde thing in the 70s – he's just still playing as great as ever, man. It's just amazing. So Ray Brown and Roy Haynes are, to me, they're on another planet.

**AAJ:** You know what I really dig about Ray Brown's music are those little intros and exits that he creates in the arrangements. I know that you do some composing, too. Have you picked up some stuff from him, composing-wise?

**CM:** Well, Ray's writing is a direct link to big band writing. Like his trio is a very small big

band, so he approaches his group from a big band point of view, as did Oscar Peterson's trio which of course Ray was a part of for all those years. For what I'm doing I haven't had much of a need for that type of format, but certainly I believe Ray's writing skills are a blueprint for basic – if you want to be a good composer, the kind of things Ray does in his trio are a blueprint for young composers really trying to figure out what's going on, and like I said – these groups like Ray's trio, Oscar Peterson's trio, Ahmad Jamal's trio – all that's a direct link to the big band era.

**AAJ:** Now with your composing, I know that you draw on a whole bunch of different things, especially the soul-funk Motown sound. Talk about your first influences as a composer.

**CM:** Well, actually as far as my own composing is concerned, I don't think R&B has played too pivotal of a role, because if you look at most of the compositions that I've written, a lot of them really aren't that directly related to funk. I think that with my third CD *A Family Affair*, a lot of people kind of interpreted that CD the wrong way. A lot of people see it as funk CD; they see it as

an attempt to sellout, if you will, believe it or not. But, most of the compositions I write were influenced heavily by Wayne Shorter, Freddie Hubbard, Joe Zawinul, Bobby Hutcherson – he's another big inspiration – Pat Metheny is a big inspiration. So a lot of the people that I'm influenced by are more modern jazz composers than R&B. There's really only a handful of composers I think in R&B that really have the kind of substance in their music that can really catch a jazz musician's ear. Stevie Wonder is definitely – he's beyond category. What made Motown work, I think, was just the overall chemistry between the lead artist, the Temptations or Diana Ross and the Supremes or whoever, and the band and the production. It wasn't so much about instrumental songwriting, you know. A lot of Motown stuff is really great, but it doesn't have much play in what I'm doing right now. James Brown, of course, what made his music so fantastic was the rhythm. There's really not a whole lot of melody involved in James Brown's music, at least after a certain point, but the rhythmic foundation was just so groundbreaking. From 1965 on, there can

never be any popular music that is not in some small part influenced by James Brown. It's impossible.

**AAJ:** Well let me ask you about James Brown because I read on your website that you're working on this *Soul On Top* project that sounds really amazing. What's the status of that and getting that out and working with James?

**CM:** *Soul On Top* was the jazz record that James did with Louis Bellson's big band in 1969.

**AAJ:** So it came out then?

**CM:** Yeah, with Ray Brown, ironically, playing bass. Oliver Nelson did all of the arrangements. That record didn't really make a lot of noise when it was first released, because in 1969 James Brown was at his peak as far as the funk was concerned, so for James Brown to do a jazz record, that kind of got lost in the cracks, you know. So, I guess about four years ago, Harry [Winehart?], who worked at Polygram, which is now Universal, called me up and he said, "Christian I think it would be a good idea to try to reissue this *Soul On Top* record." So we went into the studio and we

remixed it – we found two extra cuts – and it’s all ready for release. But, the only problem was they couldn’t figure out, because it was a jazz record, if they wanted to release it on Verve or if they wanted to release it on Polydor, which was James Brown’s label in the 70s. So there was this fight back and forth about what label to release it on, and as of now, I still don’t know exactly when they’re going to put that out, but speaking to Harry on a somewhat regular basis, they’re not going to leave it in the can especially when it’s all remixed – I wrote new liner notes for it, so it will be out sooner or later.

**AAJ:** Have you recorded with James Brown?

**CM:** No, I’ve never recorded with James Brown, but I have had a chance to get to know him pretty good, and I did play with him at his birthday bash in 1997.

**AAJ:** Wow. Okay. Well, let me talk about another guy you mentioned earlier and that’s Wayne Shorter. You wrote a tune called “Wayne’s World” and on your website you talk about – I think it’s a great thing – you mention your favorite recordings, which is really interesting to me because you explain

why these recordings are your favorite, and it’s just the kind of thing that I think people like myself – jazz fans – are really interested in. In there you mention High Life, Wayne’s CD and you say only Wayne Shorter could have made this CD. Why is that?

**CM:** Well, have you ever spoken to Wayne?

**AAJ:** No.

**CM:** Wayne Shorter almost doesn’t even use the King’s English in the traditional way. You know, he doesn’t speak slang, but he doesn’t speak everyday English either. You almost have to decipher Wayne Shorter when he’s talking, and I think that kind of extraterrestrial way of thinking comes out in his writing. Plus, Wayne Shorter is a huge movie historian, like classic movies, you know, Clark Gable, Ava Gardner, he’s really heavy into that, science fiction movies. So he approaches music almost with a movie in mind and I know that particularly since the 70s, the Weather Report era, when his compositional writing style became much more expansive, I think *High Life*, was like, in a way probably like his dream record, because he had the full orchestra and it’s just, all of the stuff on it, I just know from being

around Wayne, not that I’ve been around him that much, but the times I have been around him I just know that he’s always seeing, you know, he’s always visualizing when he’s writing. There’s a subplot going on in the songs he writes and I just don’t believe anybody thinks – I don’t think anyone is that thorough when they’re composing, and that’s why I believe that Wayne is the only one that could have made a record like that.

**AAJ:** I’ve heard that a lot of jazz musicians are inspired by Wayne Shorter and his compositions, and when he made that record with Herbie Hancock, *1+1*, what were your thoughts when you listened to that? What went through your mind when you first put that on?

**CM:** I think Herbie and Wayne are like one person, you know. I think if there is someone who has actually mastered Wayne Shorter’s personality, like someone who cannot get stumped by Wayne Shorter, it’s Herbie Hancock. I’ve seen the two together only a few times. I’ll tell you a great story man; it was so heavy I couldn’t even stay. Last year at the Thelonious Monk Institute in Washington

DC, they always have this big gala concert at the end of the competition, so Herbie's on the board of the Thelonious Monk Institute and they usually always have Wayne Shorter come out. So everybody, after the concert's over, we all have dinner and they have a little party for all of the clinicians and everybody. And, by the way, Herbie Hancock is the champion hanger, you know; he can hang all night. He has an unbelievable gas tank. He'll hang till 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning, talking, telling stories, you know. So, I'm sitting there, and it's like 3 o'clock in the morning, and it's myself, Herbie Hancock, Jimmy Heath, T.S. Monk, and a couple of the people from the institute and Wayne Shorter and his wife Carolina, and as time went on people just started going to sleep. They'd say, "Okay, we're going to turn in." Finally, at around quarter to five, the only ones left are Herbie and Wayne, and I remember Herbie said, "So how are you doing, Wayne?" and Wayne said, "I'm good Herbie. What's going on with you?" And as bad as I really wanted to be a fly on the wall just to see those two guys bond, I just knew that their friendship and their connection is just so

spiritual I didn't want to be in the way, so I excused myself, I said "Look, I'll see you guys later," but I remember just kind of laying back at the door just kind of peeking in to see what they were talking about. But when I heard that record *1+1*, ...I think people still have these expectation that when Herbie and Wayne get together it's going to be some kind of subconscious tribute to Miles Davis, because I know a lot of people who were disappointed by that record. They say, "Aw, well, you know, they're not really stretching out; it's too monotone; there's no exciting moments in the record." But, I don't know, I guess just because of the love I have for those two individually as well as their bond, anything they do is all right with me.

**AAJ:** You know, another guy that you mention in your website is George Duke. I didn't know anything about George Duke, and you claim he's an overlooked musician.

**CM:** In the 70s George Duke was one of the hottest acts, most respected musicians in the world, but I guess with the whole resurgence of acoustic jazz in the 80s and what's known as the young lions era a lot of people from

George's era kind of got overlooked. But I always loved George Duke because I knew of his history playing with Cannonball Adderley and Nancy Wilson and Joe Williams and all the fusion stuff he did with Stanley Clarke and Billy Cobham, so I was always a big fan of George Duke. But just talking to a lot of musicians, particularly my generation, a lot of my peers, you ask them "Who's George Duke?" and they'll say he's the producer who plays piano. I think of George Duke as the pianist who is also a producer, because he didn't start out producing – I mean he became a star producing Dionne Warwick, his own records, Anita Baker. But George is one of the baddest, man.

**AAJ:** As a piano player...

**CM:** As a pianist, yeah. So when I worked with him on my CD *A Family Affair* and on his CD *After Hours* – and especially *After Hours* because he didn't play on my CD – but when I played on his CD I got a chance to just watch him play and orchestrate. As a matter of fact, he recorded a Bill Evans tune on *After Hours* called "My Bells" and in the liner notes George Duke says, absolutely, how big an influence

Bill Evans is on his playing. Now this is Bill Evans, you know, everybody thinks of George Duke as this rock, funk, smooth jazz guy who tries to produce hit records, but he comes straight from the jazz tradition. I know it's kind of hard to tell that from a lot of the records he done over the last 20 years, but this is what I mean about not trying to pass judgement on an artist and really try to figure out who that person really is.

**AAJ:** I read about how your father and great uncle were also bass players, so I imagine the holidays at the McBride household must be one big jam session.

**CM:** [laughing] ...On the turntable. No there's not a whole lot of jamming. I've never jammed with both my dad and my great uncle at the same time. Well, I didn't grow up with my dad in the first place, so I never really saw him on a consistent basis, but I saw him enough that I got his influence to play bass. But, my great uncle is really the one – I mean my dad lit the flame but my great uncle stoked it – he was the one that instigated my love for jazz and my love for the tradition of jazz and playing bass. One thing that I am really

grateful for, more and more everyday, the more people I meet, the more reviews I read, I come to appreciate this about my great uncle more than anything else and that is when I was 11-years-old and he was first teaching me about jazz, he never taught me to really respect a certain type of jazz more than another. He was into Louis Armstrong; he was into Weather Report; he was into Ornette Coleman; he was into Pharoah Sanders; he was into Archie Schepp; he was into King Curtis. Every style of jazz he had an appreciation for. He might not have liked it, but he never taught me not to like it. A lot of jazz traditionalists, they have a very political outlook toward jazz, you know, "Fusion, that's not noble. Don't listen to fusion. That's not jazz; that's what ruined jazz in the first place." Just from the things they say, I know that they probably never heard a Weather Report record. I mean, how can you not like Weather Report or Return to Forever, for example, especially the early recording with Flora Purim and Airto, and Joe Farrell – or *Bitches Brew* or *In a Silent Way* – how can you not like those records? So my uncle never taught me

to have a real bias opinion of different styles of jazz.

**AAJ:** And that's something you respect on a daily basis?

**CM:** Oh yeah, completely.

**AAJ:** I know that from the records that you call your favorites, you have a taste for different things, and I think that's a challenge to a lot of people who like one kind of jazz, to open up their ears to something else.

**CM:** Well, were you at the [Jazz Alley] show when somebody started heckling – they didn't heckle him, but – you know, Ray is always asking me to bring in the more modern stuff into the SuperBass group. So a couple of years ago when we did the first SuperBass record Ray said, "McBride, I want you to write something funky for the trio, you know, like R&B-type funky." I said, "Really? Okay." So I wrote this song called "Brown Funk" which actually showed up on my *A Family Affair* CD. This time I wrote an arrangement of "Papa Was a Rolling Stone."

**AAJ:** Okay.

**CM:** So, I can't remember if it was last night or Saturday night, we were playing "Papa

Was a Rolling Stone” and the audience started singing along, you know, everybody knows the song. They got to the hook, and the whole club [sings] “Papa was a rolling stone.” After we finished playing it, there was this old couple sitting in the front, you know, I’m sure a lot of people who followed Ray Brown since the 40s and the 50s don’t know or care who the Temptations are. So while we were playing “Papa Was a Rolling Stone” they were sitting there like “What the hell is this? This isn’t jazz. This isn’t ‘My Romance.’ This isn’t ‘My Funny Valentine.’” So we finished playing it and these people sitting in front yelled out “Why don’t you play something for the old people, Ray?” And Ray gets on the microphone and Ray says, “Let me tell you something,” and I’m thinking, “Uh oh, don’t cuss ‘em out Pops.” They’re innocent. They just need something that they can identify with.” And so Ray says, “Well, listen, we will play something for you, but you got to understand I’m 74 years old; John is 48 years old; Christian is 28 years old. There’s a lot of experimentation going on in this band, and any band that is that diverse in their make up is going to do a lot of different

things, and we can’t play music just for old people all the time. If I played music that only I could identify with, I’d be old in my way of thinking.” He broke it down really nicely, and I admire that about him, because a lot of musicians don’t think like that. They like what they like and that’s it. They decide at a certain point that they’re going to stop growing.

**AAJ:** Well, let’s rap it up and talk about the EMP museum and what you saw and what you liked and what you have suggestions about.

**CM:** Man, you know what I liked.

**AAJ:** Did you like Funk Blast in Artist Journey?

**CM:** Aw man, ?uestlove called me I guess about a month ago – I guess he was here with D’Angelo – so he said, “Christian, man, you got to check out the James Brown ride. It blows the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland out of the water.” He said – just the whole place – Cleveland had nothing on this. I was like, “Wow, it’s that bad?” He’s like, “Man, it’s bad.” I had always heard about the reunion concert with James Brown and the old JBs, Cameo, Chaka Khan and everybody, so I couldn’t wait to see it. And those guys are still playing

– Jabo [John “Jabo” Starks] is still funky. I mean, I don’t have any reason to think he wouldn’t be, but man – Jabo and Melvin Parker, Fred Wesley, Maceo [Parker], Bootsy [Collins], Catfish. Aw man, they show them in the studio doing “Super Bad” – sounds just like the record.

We were up in that room jamming. What do you call that room?

**AAJ:** The Sound Lab.

**CM:** Sound Lab, yeah. Great concept, man, I mean that and the Jimi Hendrix room, that’s kind of all we really had time to check out, but the concept is amazing. 🎧



# THE POWER OF THE PENGUIN

BY NILS JACOBSON

Since the maiden voyage of the *Penguin Guide* in 1992, co-authors Richard Cook and Brian Morton have crusaded to update their tome every two years. (And yes, Herbie Hancock's 1964 classic *Maiden Voyage* graduates this time around to full five-star crown status.) Their never-ending mission has resulted in the welcome inclusion of new, up-to-date material in the most recent edition—as well as regular gripes from jazz fans who feel left in the dust holding the previous versions. Well, my solution to that problem is quite straightforward: go to the bookstore and get yourself the update. Rabid collectors (and beginners too, of course) ought to be willing to sacrifice the cost of a couple of CD's in order to read intelligent reviews of the majority of jazz CDs on the market. (In this particular case, you'll need £20 if you're unwilling to wait for the March 2001 U.S. release date.)

Cook and Morton limit their attention in this 1700+ page guide to material readily available in the CD format. That of course ignores out-of-print recordings, LP-only releases, and certain limited editions not likely

to offer long-term availability. It's hard to gripe about completeness, though, given the amazing depth of the *Penguin Guide*. Unlike other jazz reference works, this guide focuses on a discussion of the recordings themselves, mostly to the exclusion of the biographical data or stylistic overviews which are found in other guides. But the sheer number of records discussed, as well as the individual attention most receive, tends to make the *Penguin Guide* worthwhile. (A welcome new feature in the revised version is a brief—usually 1-2 sentence—biography presented in advance of the reviews of a given artist.)

The “completely revised and updated” *Fifth Edition Penguin Guide* contains a lot of deletions, a number of changes, and a swarm of additions. To dwell briefly on the rating system, Hancock's promotion to top-of-the-line crown status stands alongside Duke Ellington's mammoth oeuvre of uncrowned records. Alexander Von Schlippenbach's trio loses the crown it earned for *Pakistani Pomade* and fails to gain one in compensation for the 1990 masterpiece *Elf Bagatellen*. There aren't too many alterations in the exalted

realm, which Cook and Morton describe as “more a personal indulgence” than some kind of objective recognition. That characterization should be obvious anyway, given the rarity of the crown's appearance in any of their Guides.

It's humorous to also spend a moment examining the records which plumbed the depths of their rating system. In the A-C pages, for example, guitarist George Benson earned a 1.5-star rating (“not worth bothering with”) for his *Shape of Things to Come*; guitarist Charlie Byrd earned one for *The Charlie Byrd Christmas Album* (“fine for those who like this sort of thing”); and saxophonist Richie Cole garnered one for *Popbop* (“as disastrous as the title suggests”).

But the real rewards of the *Penguin Guide* lie not in its factual presentation or subjective ratings system, but in the intelligent running commentary offered by Cook and Morton. The duo is remarkably perceptive and facile distinguishing styles within the huge bulk of recordings discussed. Their descriptions appear with a welcome degree of panache. Personal reflections stand alongside apropos comparisons to other work, including material

from outside the jazz canon. Cook and Morton demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of modern classical composers, for example, that often reflects itself poignantly in their analysis. Unfortunately they do seem a bit out-of-tune with developments in the world of rock and so-called popular music. Their description of John Zorn's classic harmolodic thrashfest *Spy vs. Spy*, for example, omits even the slightest reference to punk, hardcore, or thrash metal (whatever you want to call the second primary ingredient mixed in equal proportions on this disc with the ideas of Ornette Coleman).

The only “fair” criticism one can lay on an otherwise magnificent record guide (the authors are human, too) is an apparent bias toward free jazz, the avant-garde, etc. Rather than pay close attention to the swinging jazz in the canon, one has the feeling Cook and Morton would prefer to discuss radical developments post-1960. Admittedly this apparent favoritism may simply be due to the paucity of older material on CD, but nonetheless the *Penguin Guide* does seem dwell a bit on “out” playing. It's not a problem at all

for me, but it could interfere for a listener with more interest in traditional material.

Anyway, criticizing the critics can be a dangerously self-referential process. Perhaps it's better for me just to offer a simple "thumbs-up." You can see if the Penguin Guide works for you. 🎵

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# CDREVIEWS: PUBLISHER'S PICKS 2000

## *Perceptual*

### **Brian Blade Fellowship**

#### **Blue Note**

Far from your typical young jazz artist, drummer Brian Blade seems almost bent on avoiding classification. He's been found in the studio and/or on the road with such disparate employers as Joshua Redman, Bob Dylan, Seal, and Joni Mitchell. With technical prowess of obvious proportions, Blade is equally reticent about flashy drum displays, content to merely color and prod the composition at hand. All of this is as much apparent in his sideman stints as it is with his two Blue Note dates as a leader, *Perceptual* being the latest offering by his collective known as The Brian Blade Fellowship.

A more varied and ultimately satisfying affair than the group's 1998 debut, *Perceptual* is still nonetheless a dark and brooding journey that has as its underlying theme society's current lack of humanity and value for young lives,



keyboardist Jon Cowherd's "Reconciliation" being directly influenced by the shootings in Paducah, Kentucky. Much of what comprises this hour-long recital is of a restrained and pensive nature and those hoping for lengthy drum solos and the typical "burn-out" type of improvisations will have to look elsewhere. In fact, very little of the material here swings in the conventional sense, save for sections of "Steadfast" and the 5/4 lilt of "Crooked Creek."

The one new addition to this group since the last record is that of guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel and it's a curious one. I say this in consideration of the clear association between the spirit of this set and that of Rosenwinkel's own recent *The Enemies of Energy*. Stretching the comparisons even further, the Nordic strains of Jan Garbarek's musical personality (not to mention an overall chamber-like quality akin to the ECM mantra) are more than hinted at during the lengthy suite, "Variations of a Bloodline." All of this is not to suggest mere rote regurgitation on Blade's part, but to provide point of reference for the uninitiated.

In the final analysis, *Perceptual* is a very

likable and intoxicating brew that benefits from a collective sound that finds no one person in particular dominating the proceedings. The key will be for Blade, Rosenwinkel, and other purveyors of these latest musical developments to make sure they don't run aground much in the same way that the renaissance fostered by Marsalis and his ilk during the '80 led to many dead-end roads.

— Chris Hovan

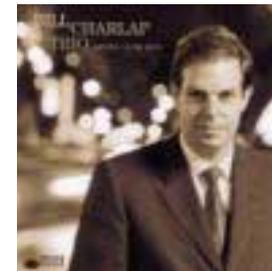
### ***Written In The Stars***

#### **Bill Charlap**

#### **Blue Note**

Able to paint with a rich and melodic pallet, while possessing a natural and bell-like tone, pianist Bill Charlap is a musician who is actively looking for new ways to express himself and compliment any musical situation. His sophisticated harmonic knowledge and sense of drama make him one of the most stimulating pianists around. It should come as no surprise that Charlap would pursue a career in music; his parents are the late Broadway composer Moose Charlap and vocalist Sandy Stewart. At the age of three, Bill began his

piano studies, his formal musical education including graduation from New York's High School of the Performing Arts. Over the past several years, Charlap has gained valuable experience through work with Gerry Mulligan, Benny Carter, Louis Bellson, Shelia Jordan, and Tony Bennett, among many others. He has



been a key member of the Phil Woods Quintet since 1995, the year he also began to record as a leader for the Criss Cross label.

Over the course of Charlap's three Criss

Cross dates one could sense the development of a truly exceptional artist and to say that these records, especially the inspirational *Distant Star*, are among the state-of-the-art when it comes to piano trio jazz is simply indulging in understatement. His first major label set, *Written In the Stars*, doesn't quite scale the heights of Charlap's Criss Cross sides but it comes pretty darn close. Musically there's much to get excited about. Tin Pan Alley standards make up the program

as usual, but it's the interpretations that put things over the top. For example, "Blue Skies" is voiced by the bass and piano, its melody displaced and reshaped in angular phrases. "Where Or When" becomes a very attractive waltz and "One For My Baby" takes on a reflective calm like no other previous version ever has.

Don't expect moments of technical flash from Charlap. He has nothing to prove and he's more interested in milking everything he can from the melody and timbre of the moment. Of course, he can hard bop as intensely as the rest of them (a point he has proven via his sideman appearances on *Criss Cross*), but chooses to be more thoughtful in his own trio work. If there were one bone to pick with this album it would have to be concerning the engineering. The bass is simply too high up in the mix and the drums come across as sterile, with no room ambiance or reverberation to add to the overall sound (just listen to Kenny Washington on just about anything else he's ever recorded to get a truer picture of his sound). It's a small point of contention, however, with what is overall a very winning

release.

— *Chris Hovan*

### ***More Beautiful Than Death*** **Either Orchestra** **Accurate**

The Either Orchestra is a ten piece jazz ensemble based in Massachusetts, which was founded by saxophonist Russ Gershon in 1985. Since its inception, the group has released a series of acclaimed recordings on the Accurate record label. This, their latest CD entitled *More Beautiful than Death*, features all original compositions, six of which were composed by leader Gershon. The tunes consist of modal vamps, funk and blues anthems, and calypso and latin rhythms, replete with meaty and intricate orchestrations. They feature four-part horn harmonies, which are, at times, utilized as a backdrop for Gershon's forceful, exploratory saxophone. The feeling is mid-sixties Blue Note, but with more emphasis



on thematic development within the written material. This is where Gershon excels. His music is fully conceived, and is fully executed by a band that is sympathetic to what he is trying to do. The band is capable of bringing Gershon's vision to light, through strong ensemble playing and individual contributions, particularly from Jaleel Shaw and Charlie Kohlase.

The set begins with "Amiak Abet Abet," which uses a Phrygian scale as a basis for its written material. It is predicated on a repetitive tonic vamp, which serves as a foundation for some interesting improvisations from Tom Halter and Jaleel Shaw. The title cut begins at rubato pace, and builds into a medium-swing, featuring some marvelous twists and turns within its orchestrations. "All Those Sobs" is nothing but a good old-fashioned blues played at medium-slow tempo, serving as a spotlight for Tom Halter's bright and bluesy trumpet. The set closes with "The Eighth Wonder," a funky groove with an unexpected cadence. The electric piano on this cut is surely a blast from the past bringing back fond memories of Cannonball's group with

Joe Zawinul.

The music on this disc brings together all of those critical elements needed to make a good jazz record: honesty and integrity, strength and conviction, not to mention pure heart and soul. It is highly recommended to those who want to listen simultaneously to where jazz has been in the past, as well as where it is going in the future.

— *Flibbert J. Goosty*

## ***Live In Chicago***

### **Kurt Elling**

### **Blue Note**



Kurt Elling and his trio should be on television. They appear regularly on Wednesdays at The Green Mill in Chicago, and his in-person performances are superb. Only the singer's fourth album in

five years, this one was recorded live July 14-16, 1999 with several influential guests. "My Foolish Heart," a carry-over from his last album, offers evidence of how different Elling's

in-person performances are from his studio sessions. The ensemble's arrangement of "My Foolish Heart" on *Live In Chicago* employs the same personnel, but is three times as long as the version recorded on *This Time It's Love*. Elling improvises the lyrics as well as the melody and toys with the song's emotional power. His trio works with him hand in glove to heat things up appropriately. In early 1996 only a few die-hard jazz fans knew who Kurt Elling was when he visited Los Angeles. By the time his informal mini-tour was over, the whole town was wrapped up in his firm vocal style, unique exploratory raves, impressive audience interaction, and ability to weave his unusual ideas evenly among the counterpoint of his ensemble. Isn't that what live performances are supposed to offer?

Reaching back into history, Elling and Jon Hendricks spin vocalese on "Don't Get Scared," coolly supplying all the tricks of the trade. On "Goin' to Chicago" Hendricks sings standard blues lyrics while Elling "goes off" with vocalese as if he were a spontaneous trumpeter filling phrase endings. Sting's composition "Oh My God" swings with a

dramatic spirit and a lyric message about world harmony. Lending a natural feeling, Kahil El'Zabar's hand drums bolster Elling's emotional fever. Scat singing Russell Ferrante's "Downtown" with as much animation as the Yellowjackets in concert, the singer works in unison with piano to a bebop arrangement. With one of his other specialties during "The Rent Party," Elling espouses beat poetry to introduce Von Freeman as he and the singer "converse;" then, Ed Peterson, who drives the mood emotionally wild and crazy; and finally Eddie Johnson, who wails it (as Elling describes it to the audience) "buttery and warm." The three tenors then jam with the ensemble and carry that mood over to the final track. Throughout the session, Laurence Hobgood matches Elling's intensity, tossing out a few muscular keyboard strikes. Equally vital to the live session's magnetic draw are lyrical bassist Rob Amster and scrambling drummer Michael Raynor. Every track on Elling's highly recommended latest album is a gem. The combination of his natural vocal timbre and the singer's "out there" postmodern ideas makes his future bright and ready for a wider

audience.

— *Jim Santella*

### **Live at Rocco**

### **Peter Erskine with Alan Pasqua & David Carpenter** **Fuzzy Music**

For nearly ten years Peter Erskine has been putting out exquisite piano trio music on the ECM label, in the company of pianist John Taylor and bassist Palle Daniellson. *Live at Rocco* is the double-disc debut of a new, equally exciting trio completed by pianist Alan Pasqua and bassist David Carpenter — both of whom, incidentally, have done stellar work with Allan Holdsworth. Erskine, Pasqua, and Carpenter have all had the fusion bug at one time or another, but the vibe here is straight-up acoustic, generally mellow, and gloriously melodic.

Pasqua, who wrote seven of the fifteen tunes, has a way with hooks — “To Love Again” and “Caribe” sound almost like finely crafted pop songs. “Taiowa”, the vamp-based “Jerry Goldsmith”, and the stately “Milagro” reveal Pasqua’s more adventurous side, while

“Greta” and “Children”, two ballads, whisper with fragility and tenderness. Carpenter’s sole original, “Riff Raff”, begins as a bass-driven groove and eases into bopping swing. Erskine contributes the sprightly “Bulgaria”, the hypnotic and soft “Life Today”, and the Jarrett-like “Autumn Rose”.

Impressionistic yet burning takes of “All of You” (Carpenter’s solo!) and the seldom played “How About You?” fit right in with the original material. And John Taylor’s “Pure and Simple”, the most swinging cut of the session, could have lent the album a fitting subtitle. Keeping it pure and simple was exactly the intention of these three strikingly complementary players.



— *David R. Adler*

### **Dusk** **Andrew Hill** **Palmetto**

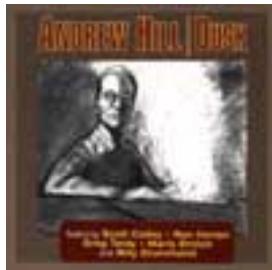
With the recent spate of deaths hitting the jazz community as hard as they have, you

have to be even more grateful that guys like Andrew Hill are still around. And not only is Hill alive and kicking but he’s still writing and playing with a vitality and freshness that continue to be his own exclusive property. *Dusk* proves to be a precious new chapter in Hill’s discography, coming some ten years after his last two reunion efforts for Blue Note.

As an outgrowth of the recent formation of Hill’s Point of Departure ensemble, *Dusk* does share some familiarities with the classic 1964 Blue Note album that gave the group its name, chiefly the instrumentation, which includes a front line of trumpet, alto sax, and tenor sax. But as a product of the new century, this up-to-the-minute endeavor packs its collective punch in a contemporary packaging that takes advantage of its indispensable contributors. The most vital element here is the anchoring provided by bassist Scott Colley and drummer Billy Drummond. As valuable as Richard Davis and Tony Williams were to *Point of Departure*, Colley and Drummond interact with Hill in a similar musical dialogue that is characteristic of true jazz improvisation of the highest order.

Hill’s music is not for the weak at heart,

as each composition is likely to offer its own set of challenges. For example, the speedy bass ostinato that propels the odd-metered “15/8” would trip up all but the most proficient technicians, yet it proves to be no obstacle for this ensemble. Greg Tardy makes strong



statements on the title track and “Sept,” where his fluid playing is marked by high register forays that make Joe Lovano an obvious

influence. A tribute to the late Thomas Chapin, “T.C.,” features warm and seductive bass clarinets as a strong lead voice, while the catchy “Ball Square” works through several grooves including a melody line that seems to be borrowed from McCoy Tyner’s “Blues on the Corner.”

Rounding out a sundry and idiosyncratic set, you’ll want to savor the solo piano tracks, “Tough Love” and the brief “Focus.” Both contain the type of dark lyricism that makes Hill a pianist in a class by himself. He may have not yet reached the level of historical reverence that has belatedly come

for Thelonious Monk, but Hill is guaranteed to be looked upon as one of this music’s most original artists, a point readily ascertained by a few concentrated exposures to this marvelous effort.

— Chris Hovan

### ***The Water Is Wide*** **Charles Lloyd** **ECM Records**

Tenor saxophonist Charles Lloyd pursues a slightly different angle on his new and seventh ECM release, *The Water Is Wide*. Lloyd continues to utilize the exemplary talents of drummer Billy Higgins and guitarist John Abercrombie, who both performed on the artist’s previous effort, *Voice In The Night*. While the saxophonist also enlists young wunderkind pianist Brad Mehldau and bassist Larry Grenadier who comprise two thirds of the pianist’s working trio.

Perhaps Lloyd is plotting a new course in contrast to his earlier – ethereal dreamscape style recordings as the saxophonist directs his strategies towards bluesy and moody renditions of Hoagy Carmichael’s “Georgia” and the

traditional “The Water Is Wide”, among other standards and Lloyd originals. Throughout, the saxophonist’s infamous Coltrane inspired angular attack and tantalizing inflections meld wonderfully with Mehldau’s warm, thoughtful phrasing and Abercrombie’s poignant undercurrents. Yet the combined — rhythmic — artistry of Billy Higgins and Larry Grenadier proves to be indispensable throughout this rather ubiquitous mix, which also includes Billy Strayhorn’s endearing “Lotus Blossom”, and Duke Ellington’s lesser known, “Heaven”.

The saxophonist’s rich melodious phrasing and soulful expressionism on Cecil McBee’s “Song Of Her” offers the optimum in softly executed sentiment and lush balladry whereas you can almost hear Billie Holiday’s voice seeping through Lloyd’s sultry and altogether deeply moving lines on his original composition, “Lady Day”.

Simply put, Charles Lloyd has rarely sounded



better as the musicians seemingly interrogate each other's souls during these sixty-eight enlightening minutes. Highly recommended.

— Glenn Astarita

## ***Facing Left***

### **Jason Moran**

#### **Blue Note**

As I remembered it from world history, it is rarely the revolutionaries that end up ruling after their coup. The same can be said of jazz revolutionaries. Buddy Bolden, perhaps the father of jazz, never recorded. Charlie Parker, father of the bebop revolution, died at age 34, never having attained mass popularity in his lifetime. Even the young lions of the 1980s who overthrew the fusion doldrums seem forever bound to be merely hard-bop repertory bands. It might not be the 'children' of Wynton Marsalis' neo-classicism that make jazz relevant again. I suggest that future jazz innovators for this new century will be musicians with an ear for today's popular music (think about Sonny Rollins love of a show tune) that can speak to modern listeners. Jason Moran, a classically trained

pianist whose street-jazz is descended from the revolution of Brooklyn's M-BASE, is poised to be a prime mover for a new jazz vogue.

Schooled at the piano of Jaki Byard, Andrew Hill, and Muhal Richard Abrams, Moran joined Greg Osby for the 1997 recording *Further Ado* and last year's New Directions band. Taking cues from his mentors, Moran chooses to



be an original voice. It's as if he were built out of genetic material taken from Thelonious Monk, Herbie Hancock, and Don Pullen. His second album as a leader

follows up last year's *Soundtrack To Human Motion*, a bold statement of original compositions. As hinted on *Soundtrack*, his promise is fully realized in a trio setting. As a composer he opts for dissonance not to distract, but to focus the listener. His notes, sometimes unresolved, speak of his precocious nature. Like Monk, he is developing his own language of jazz. But he is a Thelonious of his own time, covering the pop singer Bjork's "Joga" in the tradition of Keith Jarrett playing

from his standards albums. He also takes on hip-hop sampling, but not in mindless beats. He plays a loop of notes ("beats") embellishing upon the symmetry. He covers two seldom heard Ellington compositions, "Later" and "Wig-Wise" as perhaps proof that his concept of 21st century jazz is consistent with last centuries innovators. There's also two movie soundtrack covers: one from a Kurosawa film, the other a march from *Godfather II*. Strange but not odd, unique but thoroughly logical, Moran is poised to rule jazz for a long time to come.

— Mark Corroto

## ***¡Muy Divertido! (Very Entertaining!)***

### **Marc Ribot Y Los Cubanos Postizos Atlantic**

Surely a disc that lives up to its own title, *¡Muy Divertido! (Very Entertaining!)* is difficult to consider from a jazz perspective. So maybe it isn't jazz. Maybe it doesn't matter. But, then again, eccentric downtown guitarist Marc Ribot has made a career out of being unpredictable—and never less than totally interesting.

On this, his second hip trip to Cuban climes with his group, Los Cubanos Postizos, the landscape is engaging and strikingly pretty. But it's dirty too, and just a wee bit disquieting, always suggesting danger around every corner. Imagine one of Alex Cox's south-of-the-border films and you get the idea.

Here, Ribot fronts what amounts to a cantina rock band that knows its Willie Bobo and Ry Cooder as well as the more noble natives of the music, undoubtedly unknown to most non-Cuban



listeners. The string holding it all together is Ribot's genuine seriousness and love for the music—despite the deadpan recitation at one point that goes “The hills of New Jersey are beautiful...”

Ribot's guitar is something else again. Though it never seems to dominate the catchy rhythms, occasional vocals or aggressively funky beats, Ribot is clearly out front sporting some of the loveliest playing he's ever done. He's content to strum his three-

chord parts during the melody. But he solos throughout around feelings and moods, rather than technique and style. As a result, Ribot concocts compact and tuneful statements centered on basic, repetitive motifs that perfectly suit the character of the music.

The rockish opener “Dame Un Cachito Pa'Huele” (one of three tunes by Arsenio Rodriguez, subject of Ribot's tribute on the first Cubanos Postizos disc) finds Ribot mixing a bit of grungy surf twang with an utterly creative, melodic twist. He does it again, coming full circle on the set's closer, “Carmela Dame La Llave,” so you never forget it's all about having fun.

Two of his tasty originals also sport some of his best playing: the moody Wes Montgomery stroll through “El Gaucho Rojo” and the Latin funk of “Baile Baile Baile” (where he perfects the appealing metallic soundscapes Bobo-guitarist Sonny Henry used to do). Other highlights include the early-Santana-like “El Divorcio” and Rodriguez's snaky, low-riding “Jagüey.”

Restless Ribot varies the menu with all sorts of spicy flavors on *Muy Divertido!*

(*Very Entertaining!*), never settling in one place for longer than the fun will last. He crafts interesting uses of vocals and, most appealingly, organ to keep the whole party a little off kilter too. The first time it's a fiesta. But each time you come back—and this listener found it hard to resist, Ribot reveals some magical musical gifts that go well beyond Cuban territories.

— Douglas Payne

### **Tourist**

### **St. Germain**

### **Blue Note**

I knew nothing about St. Germain but saw *Tourist* atop the jazz charts and without hesitation called to get a copy. An album selling that well that I've never even heard of is reason enough for at least a cursory listen.

*Tourist* arrived and immediately after putting it on, I realized that this new CD was going to be exploring my mind for a few non-stop weeks as a worldly tourist with plenty of future return engagements. The adventure begins with the energetic seven-minute “Rose Rouge” from which the lyric “I Want You To

Get Together” entices a call to action. This sentiment seems to call out to my very own senses, asking them to join together and continue the joyous ride. They hear the beckon and proceed through the graceful chill out number “Montego Bay Spleen” with it’s Wes Montgomery guitar noodling (provided eloquently by Jamaican guitarist Ernest Ranglin) and a fat down tempo beat.

So, now you’ve sunk into a deep melted mood within the inner depths of your mind and the third track “So Flute” busts out and rides the crest of a thick techno and dub infused groove for eight and a half minutes, leaving you overwhelmed with aural pleasure. From there, we step back again as a saxophone blossoms amidst a swinging hip-hop beat and we’re off to “Land of…” before the funky upbeat Brazilian groove on “Latin Note” rescues us with a festive fusionary delight.

Are you with me? If you’ve ventured this far without any noticeable regret, you will not only be fully immersed as a newfound tourist but will eagerly await the next sonic wave. Will it be subtle or bold or smooth or fat? The answer comes in another one of the album’s

peaks; track numero six. It is entitled “Sure Thing” which contains elements from “Harry’s Philosophy” (Miles Davis and John Lee Hooker) and layers a cool bluesy swirl atop the voice of John Lee Hooker. This cascading groove extends into the momentous dub and techno loops of “Pont Des Arts” and you begin to hope that the tour never ends. But even great things come to an end and after nine sumptuous tracks this tour does too.

Tourist was written, produced, and mixed by the mysterious St. Germain, and he also takes on the role of conductor for the other musicians involved in this project.

The songs on Tourist range from five to



nine minutes. Each one distinctively sets a unique mood, one that usually sweeps you away from the one you were just visiting but with a common thread that awakens an unquenching desire to repeat this process over and over again letting its luster shine brighter with each successive spin.

Will the real St. Germain make himself

known? First, there’s the legend.

At the court of Louis XV in 18th Century France, there was a character that amazed everyone by pretending to be several centuries old.

He went by the name of Saint Germain.

Then there’s Ludovic Navarre, a.k.a. St. Germain and pioneer of the French Touch (the new electronic music of France), who is not pretending in the least.

To me, St. Germain embodies the essence of the real new protégés of contemporary jazz. Not playing electric versions of the same old thematic jazz but instead incorporating varied styles and sometimes samples as a base and then melding them together with an improvisational series of soundscapes.

His mix of techno, jazz, blues, ambient, house and dub seems to transcend the ages and speaks directly to the emotion of your soul.

So, if you enjoy musical hybrids and sound collages that touch upon many distinct moods, then become a Tourist with Ludovic as your faithful guide.

— Rob Evanoff

## ***Bump***

### **John Scofield**

#### **Verve**

Ever since he signed with the Verve label a few years back, guitarist John Scofield has been on the upswing of the trendy movement we'll call, for lack of a better term, the "groove jazz" scene. He scored really big with *A Go Go*; his critically acclaimed 1998 collaboration with the supergroup Medeski, Martin, and



Wood. Now *Bump* enters the ring and it becomes immediately evident from the opening strains of "Three Sisters" that this one's going to be another knockout.

Damn near as funky and danceable as its predecessor, *Bump* pushes the envelope just a bit further with a mild "techno" flavor thrown into the proverbial bubbling and boiling stew. A case in point, the saucy jambalaya of "Beep Beep" includes drummer Eric Kalb's "Nawlins second-line" groove, Scofield's overdubbed acoustic and electric guitars, and keyboard samples akin to Bill Laswell's industrial twang.

The hooks abound, with Scofield's writing cagey enough and adequately varied to insure your alertness, from the sullen moodiness of "Kilgeffen" to "Swinganova's" sprightly samba beat.

Hangin' with some of the homeboys of the younger set, Scofield draws on a number of different rhythm combinations, with players on hand from such groups as Deep Banana Blackout, Sex Mob, and Soul Coughing, along with the return of MMW's Chris Wood on bass. As an added bonus for those of you with the computer peripherals to handle it, this enhanced disc sports a 10-minute segment featuring an interview spot with Scofield and footage in the recording studio. Of course, even without the added visuals, the ear candy's sweet enough to keep you "bumpin'" for hours.

— *Chris Hovan*

#### ***Emit***

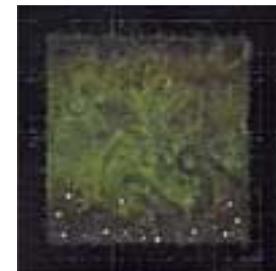
### **Chris Speed**

#### **Songlines**

With his fourth solo CD, saxophonist/clarinetist Chris Speed continues his distinct assault on modern jazz. *Emit* may in fact

represent the artist's finest achievement as a leader thus far. Along with three of his longtime band mates from the peppery Balkan based band, "Pachora", Speed and trumpeter Cuong Vu make for an auspicious front line horn section in concert with the all world rhythmic pairing of bassist Skuli Sverrisson and drummer Jim Black.

Basically there's not one track to be found that might hint at anything resembling filler material. The band cross-pollinates Middle Eastern themes with a Caribbean vibe on the fervent opener, titled "Constance and Georgia". Speed and Vu render perky lines and sweet melodies amid fluctuating rhythms, flirtatious call and response dialogue, and jovial deconstruction of the primary motif. Black



and Sverrisson surge onward with the intensity of a freight train on "Suggestible". The soloist's combine ballsy improv with intriguing melodies while Speed, performing on clarinet, rides atop the often-maniacal pulse and Sverrisson's

limber lines. Whereas, on “Tangents”, Jim Black demonstrates yet again why he is one of the finest drummers in jazz, evidenced by his polyrhythmic onslaughts and ability to maintain the tempo without losing a beat. On this piece, the band provides polychromatic vistas, as the lead soloists render airy yet complex unison choruses in conjunction with a rhythm section who seem hell bent on ripping the walls apart. Here, raw power attains a fruitful coexistence with innocence and beauty!

— Glenn Astarita

## ***Brothers II***

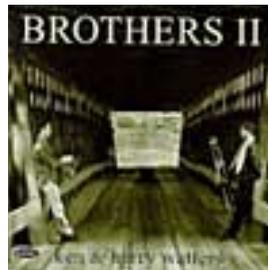
**Ken and Harry Watters**

**Summit Records 266**

*Brothers II* is the follow-up to brass masters Watters debut recording *Brothers* (Summit 234). The music performed, in a word, is mainstream, immediately accessible and listenable. This is not to say that the listener is not challenged... far from that. Beginning with the trumpet/trombone leadership sans reeds, this music demands the listener’s attention.

The effect is stunning. The Watters brothers’ ensemble playing is superfluid. The absence of reeds accentuates the flowing, pouring nature of the trumpet/trombone coupling. This attribute is illustrated best on the disc opener, “Everything’s Alright” from Jesus Christ Superstar. A brilliant improvisational choice, “Everything’s Alright” begins with a playful, almost sinister waltz time that licks at the complex emotions of the song’s content, instilling anxiety. The Watters’ brass pours over this agitated rhythm, soothing the nerves and psyche. Jazz has rarely captured so perfectly the lyrics in instrumental form.

Add to all of this the fact that the Watters brothers flow from one genre to the next with no effort. They begin in the Contemporary stream of “Everything’s Alright” and the original “Somerset Road”, move to the Traditional deep pool of “Days of Wine and Roses”, and on to the Hard Bop white water of “There is No Greater Love.” A World Music nod is made



with the Caribbean-flavored “Port-au-Prince”. A fine rhythm section ably supports the brothers, traversing the genres as effectively as the leaders. The overall tone of the disc is one of casual refinement. These guys make it look easy.

*Brothers II* is a solid mainstream offering, chock full of pleasant surprises. This pair is one to keep our eyes on. Warmly recommended.

— C. Michael Bailey

## ***Passages***

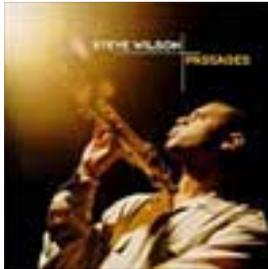
**Steve Wilson**

**Stretch**

Steve Wilson’s second Stretch release is a triumph. It’s more focused than 1998’s *Generations*, in that Wilson employs his regular working band this time around consisting of pianist Bruce Barth, bassist Ed Howard, drummer Adam Cruz, and guest trumpeter Nicholas Payton. All the music is, in a word, alive. There are nine Wilson originals, including one by Barth (“The Lexter,” among the best), and one by Keith Jarrett (“Days and Nights Waiting”). Every track is full

of color — melodically, harmonically, and rhythmically. The band delivers crackling, bright swing on “Turnin’ the Corner” and “The Lexter”; mournful alto-flute balladry on “Grace”; ambitious odd-metered grooving on “Q-B-Rab”; and tender soprano/piano duo work on the title track. Barth plays Rhodes on two of the cuts, thus joining the growing number of pianists contributing to that instrument’s new vogue: Simon, Moran, Mehldau, Kikoski, Terrasson.

Another subtle yet strong presence on the album is that of latin percussion. Cruz plays caxixi exclusively on “Song for Anna,” blending with Wilson’s flute and Barth’s Rhodes in a way that strongly evokes Chick Corea’s Again and Again band. “Eye of the Beholder” features Cruz on steel pans, giving the piece a passing scent of early Tribal Tech. And three short percussion interludes — “Roots & Herbs,” “Wilsonian’s Grain,” and “Wilsonian’s Grain (Reprise)” — evoke the



playful sensibility of percussionist Leon Parker, with whom Wilson has recently worked.

All these different elements are held together by a highly cohesive group sound that can only have been honed on the bandstand. The tracks just work — technically precise when they need to be, raw and spontaneous too, drawing from discernable influences yet never derivative or *cliché*.

— *David R. Adler*

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