



# ALL ABOUT JAZZ

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- 03** Jazz Ed. by David Liebman
- 04** Trane by Gregory Dudzienski
- 09** Jaki Byard by Derek Taylor
- 16** Django Reinhardt by Derek W. Brown
- 22** Larry Goldings by Chris Hovan
- 25** Lee Townsend by Mike Brannon
- 32** Reflections on Percy Heath by Rob Mariani
- 36** Marshall Lamm of Yoshi's by Dave Roberts
- 43** The Jazz Composers Collective by David R. Adler
- 46** CD Reviews

Coltrane has always been my main man, period. His music gets better and better over time. He played so well, so passionately, so sincerely, so perfectly. It's more than the normal nostalgia any individual feels for what influenced him or her at a certain crucial stage and in my case witnessed live during the 1960s. Trane's music is eternal and for the ages. Appreciation of what he did will grow as time goes on, as it does for Duke and Monk and others who were so advanced for their time, for all time.

But why should listeners and musicians, for whom Coltrane is just another legend who has passed on, listen to him in more than a casual way? It is precisely for the honesty and sincerity which Coltrane exuded at all stages of his brief career — these qualities are more important than ever as time goes on. We live in an age of fast communication and overload. It gets harder to discern the real from pretense. With Coltrane, no one can walk away without getting the point. It may not be easy, especially at the beginning, to get past the intensity of his statement, but the well runs deep and can be drawn upon forever. More

specifically for musicians who are players, the sound of Trane's horn along with his execution of ideas, feeling of the blues and harmonic depth are models of what we aspire towards. Can there be any greater praise?

The *All About Jazz* "Giants of Jazz" John Coltrane Page is a great place to start and to expand your knowledge of Coltrane, the man and his music. With essays, CD reviews, scholarship, interviews, web links, and other sources of information about every aspect of this extraordinary musical force and personality, you'll learn things about Trane which will deepen your listening and, if you are a musician, enhance your playing. Dig in, or should I say, link in, and enjoy! 🎧



# 'TRANE

BY GREGORY DUDZIENSKI

It has been said that John Coltrane reinvented jazz three times. During the years 1955-1967 he went through an incredible evolution that, with each new phase, redefined the customs and performance practices of the music. This article will discuss each of the three periods as well as give some recommendations as to specific recordings that illustrate each. Of course, the demarcations are arbitrary. Trane didn't wake up on the morning of January 1, 1960 and say: "OK, I'm done playing changes. Time for modal playing." Rather, it was an organic process of reexamining, redefining, and not allowing his art to become static. This sense of mission continues to be a great influence of the artists of today.

## **Be-Bop Roots to Giant Steps (1955-1959)**

This can be considered Trane's formative period. His sound and feel were influenced by Dexter Gordon and Lester Young and it is evident in this period especially. The recordings of Miles Davis' first great quintet such as *Workin'*, *Steamin'*, *Cookin'*, *Relaxin'* and *Round About Midnight*, as well as recordings with Thelonious Monk and a series of solo recordings on the Prestige label document this

period of development very well. During this time Trane was dealing mostly with standards, and with some original compositions, but it was all common practice harmony (i.e., ii-V7-I). The element that set him apart at this point was his approach to playing over these changes. Some background is necessary. Through the early 50's, Trane's playing was essentially diatonic and followed the "rules" for change playing. Some of the characteristics of this kind of playing include melodic motion by half step at the point of the chord change and a predominantly eighth note based rhythmic concept. For an excellent example of this type of playing, listen to his solo on the Sonny Rollins tune "Oleo" (*Relaxin with the Miles Davis Quintet*). As he progressed through the 50's, he was becoming more and more interested in harmony. Instead of being mainly concerned with the chords associated with the changes to a tune (although he never lost interest in this aspect of harmony), he was becoming more interested in the related scales. This led to his incorporation of these scales into his improvisations. Many times, the harmonic rhythm of a tune was such that in

order to "fit" the entire scale in it would have to be played very fast and often with an uneven metric feel (seven or nine notes over two beats, for instance). This practice resulted in a very cascade-like effect. In 1958 a reviewer, Ira Gitler, termed this type of playing "sheets of sound." For an example of this, listen to "Russian Lullaby" from the *Soul Trane* recording. Another recording that illustrates this type of playing is "Lush Life". It was also during this period that Trane recorded one of his first masterpieces, the great Blue Note recording *Blue Trane*. This is some of his very best early work. Check out "Moment's Notice" from that recording to hear some very inspired change playing.

### **Giant Steps (1959-1960)**

The recording *Giant Steps* was the culmination of Trane's harmonic study of the '50s. Throughout the late fifties, Coltrane was exploring different ways of playing the harmonic progressions of the various tunes he was working on. These tunes were comprised mostly of varying types of ii-V7 progressions. The ii-V7-I was the most standard type of harmonic progression during this time. For

example, in the key of C major, instead of sounding four bars of just C major, a composer would write: D minor 7th for a bar, G7 for a bar, and finally C major for the remaining two bars. This harmonic progression adds interest as well as "tonicizes" the key of C, i.e. leads the ear to C. Coltrane took this progression and tonicized a total of three keys "on the way" to C. While the typical progression would look like this:

Dmin7 | G7 | Cmaj7 | Cmaj7 |

Trane adds some more colorful twists. The new progression looks like this:

Dmin7 Eb7| Abmaj7 B7| Emaj7 G7| Cmaj7 |

Trane passes through three separate keys, starting in C (the Dmin7 is functioning in the key of C) he moves through AbMaj and Emaj while leading us to C major. Instead of only playing ideas that function in C major, he plays ideas that function in C, Ab, E and C again. The use of three key centers, all a major third apart, gives a very symmetrical as well as colorful sound. For examples, listen to "Giant Steps" and "Countdown", from the *Giant Steps* album as well as "Satellite" and the bridge section of "Body and Soul" from the *Coltrane's*

*Sound* album. Another fine example is “Fifth House” from *Coltrane Jazz*. “Fifth House” is especially interesting because you can hear Trane superimposing the “Giant Step Cycle”, as it has come to be known, over a pedal or static “drone-like” bass note. This period, like all of Trane’s periods, is really a study unto itself.

For an excellent study of this type of harmonic progression, see Walt Weiskopf’s outstanding book: *Coltrane, A Player’s Guide to his Harmony* (Jamey Aebersold Jazz, Inc.) It is a very technical book, geared to advanced musicians, but the first chapters are a great description of the deep logic that is inherent in this harmony. This innovation alone changed the way chord changes were played forever.

### **Modalism and the “Classic Quartet” (1960-1965)**

Following the intense harmonic study of the *Giant Steps* period, Trane began to shift his focus away from harmony. In the late 50s, he rejoined Miles for a handful of recordings including **Milestones**, and **Kind of Blue**. On these recordings, a huge change in conception is noticeable. Compare his playing on *Workin’ with the Miles Davis Quintet* to his playing

on *Milestones*. While *Kind of Blue* is generally accepted as the beginning of modalism in jazz, the title track of *Milestones* (recorded a year earlier) gives us the first example of this kind of playing. What is modalism? In jazz prior to 1960, the repertoire was based on standards (the popular music of the day such as Cole Porter and George Gershwin) and original compositions that followed common practice harmony as described above. Even *Giant Steps* and its related tunes are derived from this type of harmony. With modalism, tunes were not built on chords or chord progressions, but on modes. Modes are different scales that somehow relate to the major scale.

If a C Major scale is played, from C to C, that results in a major scale or Ionian mode. If it is played from D to D, with the same notes, a Dorian mode is formed. There are many types of modes and an explanation of all of them is beyond the scope of this article. The important thing to remember is that instead of rapidly moving chord progressions we are now dealing with, more or less, static harmony. *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis is a wonderful introduction to

modalism in jazz.

Coltrane formed his working quartet in the early ‘60s. After several personnel changes, he settled on the group of McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass and Elvin Jones on drums. The repertoire of this quartet was very heavily weighted to modal playing. As discussed above, the biggest feature of modal music is static harmony. Trane’s quartet used this element to explore many new concepts that have come to be common performance practices. These practices include harmonic and scalar superimposition, a more pronounced rhythmical drive and a much higher level of intensity over a longer period of time. The group played in a very intense manner, with solos sometimes lasting 30-40 minutes. There are many stories of the Coltrane Quartet playing two live sets and only playing two tunes, often “boiling down” to an extended duet between Coltrane and drummer Elvin Jones. A world music influence can also be heard on many of these recordings including “India”, “Africa/Brass” and “Ole” to name just a few. A good way to hear the influence of modalism on Trane’s playing is to first listen to

“My Favorite Things” from the Atlantic album of the same name and then go on to some recordings on the Impulse label such as *The Complete Village Vanguard Recordings, Live at Birdland, Africa/Brass*, and *Coltrane*. On these, especially on the live recordings, it is easy to hear the quartet moving in its own direction. Even during this period of his evolution, Trane never lost his deep sense of lyricism. Three recordings from this period illustrate this: *Ballads, John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman*, and *Duke Ellington and John Coltrane*. These recordings were made as an attempt by Trane and his producer to reach a wider audience. At the time, Trane’s audience was becoming very “elite”. The further he explored; the fewer listeners were able to “keep up”. On these recordings, he played standards and some “non-modal” things. Hearing his fluency on these recordings is insightful because it shows that even considering the direction he was taking, he remained in total control of his playing. History shows that Coltrane was not exclusionary and these three recordings were an attempt to reach out. Listen to *Ballads* and hear the deep sense of melody and lyricism

that is present here. On a personal note, the recordings of this quartet from this period continue to be the most inspirational in my collection. I feel that the repeated listening and study of this period of Trane’s playing form the basis of my own ideas about playing the saxophone and jazz in general. Much of the vocabulary heard today can be directly traced to this type of playing. In fact much of what is considered part and parcel of playing jazz today, either on changes or modally, has its roots in the Classic Coltrane Quartet. This is not to say that everything played today is plagiarism. Some artists that have expanded on this vocabulary and, in my opinion, taken the “next step” include Joe Lovano, David Liebman, Steve Grossman, and Michael Brecker, to give a very short list. One record stands out in this period. In 1964 the quartet recorded *Crescent*. This recording captures the very best of this quartet. Modal playing, playing on changes, group interaction, lyricism, melodic improvisation, all are on this recording. I will leave the highly technical discussion of this type of playing for another article. The best way to understand this music is to listen.

Listen to the communication, to the heavy emotions, to the perfect calm, the peace, and the aggression. For me, it is some of the most emotionally moving music there is.

### **The Late Period (1965-1967)**

This is the most difficult period of Coltrane’s development to appreciate. The late period is very abstract. It took some of the basic elements of music and challenged them. Time feel, for example, had up to this point been more or less clearly stated in a “swinging” way. In most of Trane’s later work the pulse was very free and open. It did not remain constant throughout the piece. There is a sense of momentum that seems to relate in a direct way to the emotional intensity. Harmonically there was another step taken. Before, the group was dealing with some kind of harmonic framework even if it was just one chord. Now the pieces were harmonically free — no preset harmonic structure. This freedom can be looked at as an expansion of the modal concept. Trane was moving toward more and more expressive freedom; logically, to go from one chord to no chords makes sense. His ensembles grew in this time period also. His quartet

was augmented by many horn players for some pieces. *Ascension* on the Impulse label illustrates this aspect of the late period very well. The inaugural album of the late period was *Meditations*. This consisted of several “movements” that sound chaotic, but are, on deep listening, quite structured. The melodies on this recording remain some of the most intensely lyrical on record. When listening to these recording, look deep for the beauty. The most accessible aspect of these recordings is the energy. In fact, this “school” of playing has come to be known in some circles as “Energy Music” for that very reason.

The music of Coltrane’s late period is very visceral. It is very difficult to write about this period because the music that came from it is such an experience. To try to describe the emotional depth of a piece like *Meditations* or *Ascension* in the same way one would describe scalar relationships is hopelessly inadequate. I will say this: while it took me personally many years of deep listening to really come to appreciate the impact of Coltrane’s late period it was worth the time. When looking at an artist like Coltrane, we must look at his entire

body of work. Remember, this is the same player who gave us *Blue Trane*, *Giant Steps*, *My Favorite Things*, *Impressions*, etc. We must respect the artistic vision that drives someone like Trane, even if we cannot personally relate to where that vision led him. Some representational recordings are *Meditations*, *Ascension*, *Kulu Se Mama*, and *Om*. These all include the classic quartet augmented by guests. Some other recordings worth checking out are the excellent Tenor/Drum duet of *Interstellar Space* (Coltrane and Rashied Ali), and recordings of Trane with his “second quartet” (Alice Coltrane on piano, Rashied Ali on drums and Jimmy Garrison on bass) such as *Expression* and *Stellar Regions*. These recordings all differ in scope, but are unified by Trane’s sense of constant exploration.

### **Final Thoughts**

This article has been meant only as an overview. There are numerous recordings, events, and issues that have been omitted. There is much written about John Coltrane and his music. What I hope is to have given the initiate a starting place to experience the music of this great artist as well as shown an

outline that may inspire further study of all the periods of Trane’s music. John Coltrane has directly influenced most jazz that we listen to. To have a clear understanding of his evolution will only help to appreciate the music of today. 🎧

## **SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY**

### **Early Period**

*Workin’ With the Miles Davis Quintet* — Miles Davis, *’Round About Midnight* — Miles Davis, *Blue Trane*, *Tenor Madness* — Sonny Rollins, *Soultrane*, *Lush Life*

### **Giant Steps Period**

*Giant Steps*, *Coltrane’s Sound*, *Coltrane Jazz*

### **Modal Period**

*Kind of Blue* — Miles Davis, *My Favorite Things*, *Live at Birdland*, *The Complete Village Vanguard Recordings*, *Ballads*, *John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman*, *Duke Ellington and John Coltrane*, *Coltrane*, *Crescent*, *A Love Supreme*, *The John Coltrane Quartet Plays*

### **Late Period**

*Meditations*, *Ascension*, *Kulu Se Mama*, *Interstellar Space*, *Stellar Regions*, *Expression*



# IVORY LEGACY

BY DEREK TAYLOR

The piano is one of the seminal instruments in the evolution of jazz. Tracing a lineage from the music's earliest Ragtime origins to the present day of mutable stylistic boundaries and constant creative revision pianists have been at the forefront of preservation from the start, none arguably more so than Jaki Byard. The product of a musical family Byard was a precocious youth weaned on the musical giants of the Swing Era, but in his 20s, after a stretch in the Army, he fell under the infectious influence of be-bop. Piano was his first instrument but a rich and varied musical education both in academic settings and on the road added a veritable arsenal of others to his repertoire including all the members of the saxophone family, trombone, violin, bass and drums.

He harbored a similar approach to improvisation and composition treating the whole history of jazz as his stomping grounds. Acquiring exceptional facility with all manner of 'styles' from the earliest stride forms to fully abstracted free jazz all of these elements could, and often did crop up in Byard's playing within a single piece of music. His career

was equally varied beginning with sojourns in swing bands like those of Earl Bostic, moving to be-bop combos under his own direction and continuing with later tenures in the bands of Charles Mingus and Booker Ervin. He recorded his first album as a leader, *Blues For Smoke* for Candid in late 1960. Several months later he embarked on what would turn into a lengthy and fertile association with Prestige.

Byard's debut on New Jazz, Prestige's subsidiary for arguably more adventurous strains of the music, is upon surface comparison more conservative than his later recordings for the label proper. But deeper delving reveals how fresh and unfettered even his first excursion was in relation to the much of the label's existing catalog. The disc's first track "Cinco Y Quatro" grooves off a thick ostinato line from Carter. The bassist's miking is muddy (as was often the case with Carter), but Haynes sticks ring out crisply and his muttering grunts of encouragement on the beat add further the piece's propulsive feel. Byard recalls the questing fluidity of Mary Lou Williams in his juxtaposition of a repeating figure over which he embellishes with

rhapsodically charged progressions. Haynes' keeps the meter shifting and Carter is unflagging in his role as anchor.

"Mellow Septet" is actually a fragment from a larger suite-like composition and as such while there's a fine and lengthy solo from Byard, the piece ends up sounding somewhat unfinished. On "Garnerin' A Bit," the pianist pays humorous homage to Errol Garner over the swishing brushwork of Haynes and the brief, but harmonically rich reading of Coltrane's "Giant Steps" replete with a breakneck stride section offers tribute to another of his peers. Haynes' cavernous mallets and Carter's scribbling bow open the Gershwin ballad medley "Bess You Is My Woman/It Ain't Necessarily So" and Byard demonstrates beautifully in the satiny solo that follows that he has a tender romantic side too. Closing with "D.D.L.J" a final acronymic affirmation of his assurance at the keys in concert with Haynes' precision drum breaks Byard seems to be saying fear not that this initial meeting is ended, the best is yet to come.

Nearly a year later Byard returned to Van Gelder headquarters to wax *Hi-Fly*, his second

date for New Jazz. Reconvening Carter and enlisting the aid of drummer La Roca, who was at the time (and for that matter continues to be) a forward thinking percussion technician he choose to raise the bare of creativity by way of the chosen material for the session rather than tinkering with the trio format of his earlier outing. An examination of the songbook for the date reveals once again just how broad Byard's reach was when it came compositional diversity. Opening with a deftly arranged version of the Randy Weston penned standard "Hi-Fly" the trio moves from gentle dissonance to supple groove in the space of seconds. Switching gears to a dedicatory piece for his deceased dog Byard seizes on a rolling momentum throughout "Tillie Butterball." Carter and La Roca hang back in support but still lend the tune a muscular push.

James P. Johnson's classic "Yamecrow" is referenced in part next. Gleaning a single phrase from the larger suite Byard injects a potent dose of his own harmonic variants into the piece and comes up with an underlying framework that is delightfully off-kilter and

ready made for spirited improvisation. Shorn from one of his own suites "There Are Many Worlds" (which strangely echoes Sun Ra's nomenclature in its title) is similarly rife with spontaneous harmonic and melodic opportunities. "Here to Hear" wends through a web of emotionally rich elements adding an eerie echo via Carter's arco undercurrents. It is easily the most 'avant garde' selection on the disc. Referencing three highly individualistic composers with the final three pieces Byard touches on Shearing, Monk and Pettiford in quick succession and puts his own India ink stamp on each. "Round Midnight" is the most intriguing of the trilogy if only to hear in detail how Byard translates Monk's angular edges into his own keyboard cosmology.

Advancing ahead almost another three years, Byard's next session for Prestige, *Out Front!*, was waxed for the parent label, his association with the New Jazz end of the operation having ended. Prestige producer Don Schlitten was brought on board to assist in the planning and execution of the date and it's clear that he was amenable to Byard moving in a different direction than previously

undertaken. Up to this point in his career with Prestige Byard had only showcased sections of his composed suites as individual tunes. For the first time a full suite was featured in the form of "European Episode."

The date and disc are neatly divided between four tracks and four more intricate numbers that involve full quintet with added horns. It's these latter pieces that are marginally more interesting as Williams and Ervin, both of whom were seasoned associates of Byard; add significantly to the ensemble scope and sound. Cranshaw and Perkins aren't quite up to the caliber of Carter and Haynes in terms of jibing with Byard's 'turn on a dime' eclecticism. But they still manage to offer up flexible support on demand. "Out Front" reflects the rhythmic drive and diversity of Herbie Nichols in the ways in which Perkins spins off some solid stick work against Byard's dancing chords. On the delicate "Two Different Worlds" the trio taps into a liberal share of heart-on-sleeve sentiment without resorting to maudlin excess and Byard is at his most nakedly lyrical.

Williams and Ervin leave the bench and

join the rhythm section for "Search Light" and "European Episode." The former is a mellow blues that has Byard setting the stage before Ervin steals it. Moving from smooth to coarse over a string of choruses his solo sets the tune to smoldering. Williams follows suit blowing measured muted gusts and the tune closes out to an imaginary standing ovation. "European Episode" is actually a series of six-interlocking (and as it turns out subtitled) segments, each with a separate theme inspired by facets of Byard's life ranging from travel to art to his son Gerald. Expanding on the melodic and harmonic variety opened up by the piece's duration and diversity a flood of the pianist's ideas are unleashed in precisely channeled waves. Like no other composition preceding it this one arguably comes closest yet to gauging the unquenchable experimentalism at the heart of Byard's musical essence. The two trio tracks, both standards, which follow can't help being anticlimactic, though the pianist's take on Strayhorn's timeless "Lush Life" offers another indelible exercise in reverential co-option. And he surprises yet again with "When Sunny Gets Blue" a surplus recording

from his first session that finds him hefting his alto sax and finally showing off some of his much hinted at multi-instrumentalism. Two more previously unissued tunes with the full quintet take the disc out.

Originally a 2 LP set, *Live!* was the end product of another meeting of the minds between Jaki Byard and producer Don Schlitten. Byard, who had recently secured an Easter weekend stint at a reputable New England jazz club called Lennie's on the Turnpike, informed Schlitten of the gig and a recording engineer was summarily dispatched to document the proceedings. Richard Davis, whom Byard collaborated with along with Dawson as Booker Ervin's rhythm section on several Prestige recordings (*The Freedom Book* & *The Space Book*), ended up being unavailable and bassist George Tucker was conscripted as a last minute replacement. As the fourth corner of the quartet the young Joe Farrell (who would later join Elvin Jones various aggregations for Blue Note) brought along his bag of horns and the ad hoc quartet was born.

The set-list of seven tunes emphasizes both the band's versatility and verve. Byard could

and often would change tack in the space of a second and his three partners meet the challenge of his infamous eclecticism head on. "Twelve" is a romping workout that cycles through a string of meters to Byard's ebullient shouts. Farrell eventually enters on soprano voicing alternately hot and cool against Tucker's taut walking line. Hanging up his horn on the ballad "Denise" Farrell sits out and Byard and Tucker share a series of tender phrases against a supple brush backdrop from Dawson. The drummer yields his kit to Farrell on his own "Thing What Is" moving over to luminous vibes. Farrell keeps good, if slightly static time and Dawson takes the space for some thrilling patterns with his mallets. Next, the quartet takes the old (and some might say tired) standard "Broadway" and inoculates it with a healthy dose of youthful bravado thanks to Farrell's tough tenor and a melodically opulent solo from Dawson. But the tune's real show stealing feature is a protracted and highly imaginative string workout from Tucker that sets his fingerboard to crackling with guitar-like strums and plucks.

Something of a no-brainer in terms of title,

"Alan's Got Rhythm" is another opportunity to hear Dawson on the vibes and Farrell resumes his guest residency behind the drum kit. Farrell's compositional pen yields the ballad "Cathy" and he pulls out the stops in terms of emotive delivery without slipping into sentimental schmaltz. Tucker is front and center again on the closing "Bass-ment Blues" helming the group for an astonishing series of choruses before the entrance of Farrell's flute signals a shift in solo honors and Byard's animated words bark out encouragement. Byard takes a rowdy stride-inflected turn and Tucker is afforded the final word. One of the most uniformly surprising things about this set is the unassuming way in which Byard relegates himself to an accompanist's role. Under his direction, his sidemen achieve equal footing and if anything are given even more solo space than their leader. Fortunately for posterity the tape machines were running.

Several years elapsed before his next effort for Prestige and judging from the rampant eclecticism of *Freedom Together*, the interim had allowed a legion of intriguing ideas, all seeking egress, to multiply in his head.

Whereas *Out Front!* had given listeners an audible, if cursory, glimpse of his talent on an instrument other than piano, this new record found him adopting an almost 'everything but the kitchen sink' type philosophy to the date's instrumentation. Weighing in on everything from celeste to saxophone and requiring his partners to double on instruments as well Byard seems intent on creating the broadest number of ensemble colors within the parameters of what is ostensibly a piano trio format.

The title track floats forward on a buoyant lounge-flavored groove of celeste, electric piano, elastic bass and shuffling drums. Davis moves up for a nimble solo punctuated by sparse drums and the eventual entrance of Dawson's vibes. Byard switches to drums sounding somewhat reticent around Davis' more assured thrumming. Various combinations ensue trailed by the vocal humming asides from the players before Byard's whispery saxophone prefaces a bustling drum statement by Dawson and the patchwork piece skids to a stop.

Vocalist Junior Parker joins in for "Getting

to Know You" and "Night Leaves." On the first piece his warm baritone blends well with Davis' bowed harmony and sparse cymbal play from Dawson. Byard intersperses lyrical fills and the piece takes on the properties of poem set to music. The second is chamber-like in conception with Davis' stringent cello harmonics offering sharp counterpoint to Parker's somber croon prior to a descent into free-form ensemble interplay. "Ode To Prez" unfolds the unusual instrumentation of electric piano, tympani, trap set and tenor. Dawson sets up a bouncing rhythmic vamp underneath and Byard's horn paints a raspy homage to Lester Young above. Davis is at the center of the classically grounded "Nocturne for Contrabass," another selection from one of Byard's larger works, which in this instance is also scored for lagerphone (a native Australian "instrument" which the liners describe as being comprised of broomstick and bottle caps), vibes and piano innards. Byard turns to his tenor for "Just You, Just Me" mixing it up with his partners on their usual instruments before returning to his own on the solo piano reading "Young At Heart." Taken together the

tracks are among the most varied in Byard's career, but any attempt at an overall Gestalt is ironically marred by the very extent of their diversity.

Another hiatus of almost a year ensued before Byard was back in the Van Gelder studio to tape *On the Spot!*, a quartet outing with trumpeter Jimmy Owens, Paul Chambers and Billy Higgins (see review link in sidebar). Counting on the strength of his group Byard took the opportunity afforded by the strength of his colleagues to step out from behind his piano stool and feature his saxophone on several pieces. As an extra bonus another number from the Lennie's on the Turnpike date from 65' was sandwiched into the session sequence on the album. Two months later he was back with another ambitious program, this time scored for septet with an emphasis on strings. The resulting record, simply entitled *Jaki Byard With Strings*, featured some of his most adventurous charts to date and an all-star cast of violinist Ray Nance, Ron Carter on cello, George Benson on guitar, Richard Davis on bass and old chum Alan Dawson covering the drum chair. The session was an ambitious,

if somewhat flawed undertaking, but paved a path to what would be the crowning treasure in Byard's Prestige output waxed several months later.

If one single musician could be said to possess an approach that approximated Byard's it was reedman Roland Kirk's. Kirk and Byard were kindred spirits, each man a master of many instruments and each a walking encyclopedia of jazz styles and improvisatory forms. Prior to his participation in The Jacki Byard Experience session Kirk had worked with Byard on numerous occasions in the past. Both men had been a integral elements of Charles Mingus' Jazz Workshop in the early 1960s and Byard had filled the piano chair on several of Kirk's albums including *Here Comes the Whistlerman* (Atlantic) and *Rip, Rig and Panic* (Mercury). By all accounts the opportunity to record again together for Prestige was seized upon enthusiastically. The resulting recording stands as one of the most consistently enjoyable and brilliantly rendered documents of late 60s jazz.

Comprising a pair of moldy standards, a pair of pieces by formidable pianists, a Byard

original and a traditional spiritual the program is a motley assemblage of tunes precisely designed to showcase the shared improvisatory genius of its two principle players. Kirk wastes no time in blowing the melodic hinges off a boisterous reading of Bud Powell's "Parisian Thoroughfare." Approximating first a foghorn on tenor and then a nimble wheeled trolley on manzello his swirling lines trade in terpsichorean exchange with Byard's bright comping. Byard, and Davis in full Flamenco strumming mode, each have a say and then it's Kirk again this time on tandem horns reeling out a rising siren wail before the tune spirals to a dissipating stop. Bucking expectations Byard throws in two duets, the first with Davis on "Hazy Eve" and the second with Kirk on "Memories of You." In the absence of bass and drums Byard and Kirk really get down to brass tacks during the latter testing which man can play the prettiest while still retaining an exploratory edge. "Shine On Me" is infused with a sanctified air over rolling drums, throbbing bass, two-fisted piano and Kirk's keening clarinet. Grafting a rough and tumble groove on to Monk's "Evidence" the four turn

the standard inside out while still managing to retain the oblique integrity of the original. Kirk's staccato stream of notes solo sets a standard for speedy invention that Byard soon matches and surpasses in his own fleet-fingered foray down the keyboard and it's this friendly kind of one-upsmanship that fuels the date's unified sense of purpose.

As if coming to terms with the reality that his catalog had reached an early apogee with his Kirk collaboration Byard made an unexpected move with his next record, *Solo*. Abandoning the ensemble format completely he focused his attention on creating a highly personalized recital that would capture both his erudite command of tradition and his unbridled exploratory passion. The record ended up being ideal summation of his creative efforts to date and set an early precedent for solo music that he would return to throughout his lengthy and influential career. Fortunately Fantasy opted to reissue both *Solo* and *With Strings* together as a two-fer in late 2000.

Jaki Byard's life was cut criminally short in early 1999 when he was found murdered in his Queens, New York apartment. The number

of recordings he left behind as a leader and sideman number well into the double digits and while this is little solace for a life lost prematurely his soul and spirit live on in the countless performances committed to tape. All are worth hearing, but there remains something uniquely inviting about his early body of work for Prestige, a creative stretch where his powers as a leader were continuing to coalesce and his music was accorded a regular and supportive avenue to reach the masses. 🎧

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# VIVE LE ROI!

BY DEREK W. BROWN

Django Reinhardt was not mentioned at all during Ken Burns' 19-hour documentary *Jazz*, a glaring oversight. Reinhardt (born January 23rd, 1910, Liverchies, Belgium; died May 15th, 1953, Samois-sur-Seine, France) was the most important European jazzman of his generation, the first to have an influence on American musicians. His colorful, imaginative improvisations have inspired generations of guitarists, from jazz players like Charlie Christian, Wes Montgomery, Barney Kessel and Joe Pass to rock and fusion guitarists like John McLaughlin, Carlos Santana, King Crimson's Robert Fripp and Andy Summers of The Police. Reinhardt's harmonic concepts were extremely advanced, astonishingly sophisticated for a musician who was completely self-taught and had no formal knowledge of musical theory. Several of his hauntingly beautiful original compositions — "Nuages," "Manoir des Mes Reves," "Melodie au Crepuscule" — have become standards.

His first flush of fame came with Le Quintette du Hot Club de France, the string band he formed with violinist Stephane Grappelli. The group came about by chance.

“You know, we both in the same hotel orchestra together, with [Louis] Vola the bassist,” Grappelly recalled in a 1978 interview for *Guitar Player* magazine. “And I was playing violin there. When the tango orchestra was on, Django used to disappear behind the stand, you see, with his guitar. And one day I broke a string — it started like that. I broke a string, and went behind to change it, and when I was tuning we started to play together. I remember we did “Dinah” to amuse ourselves. And we decided every day to do like Eddie Lang and Joe Venuti to amuse ourselves. We had nothing to do for a half an hour, so we played together. And we were terribly amused, because then I discovered the ability of that guy, the genius of the guy. So one day his brother [Joseph Reinhardt] came along — he was playing maybe a courtyard somewhere — and he had his guitar with him. He just arrived when we were playing, so he joined us. And in the course of the conversation, Vola brings his bass with him, and we forgot to go back to the stand! So the manager arrive and said, ‘What are you doing here?’ So every day, with Vola, the brother, Django and I, we used to

amuse ourselves while the tango orchestra was on.” Hughes Panassie, the publisher of *Jazz Hot* magazine, came to hear the “funny little combo,” as Grappelly called it, and decided to promote a concert. “And with the success,” Grappelly continued, “Django got a big head. He said, ‘When I am playing, I have my brother and Vola. But when you are playing, you have Vola, you have my brother, and me. So I want my cousin [Roger Chaput] to accompany me, as well.’ So we were five . . .” The Quintette du Hot Club de France was not an immediate success — their first recordings were rejected as “too modern” — but from 1935 to 1939 they were immensely popular. Several of their recordings — “Djangology,” “Limehouse Blues,” “Swing Guitars,” “Mystery Pacific,” “Minor Swing,” — were best sellers, and they played to sold out concerts in many European cities. The HCQ deserve to be remembered -their music was a kind of chamber jazz, full of warmth and Gallic romanticism. The group’s drummerless all-strings lineup could swing with the best of ‘em, but its chug-a-lug rhythms can seem quaint and cloying to modern ears if heard in large doses.

*Souvenirs* [London 820 591-2] remedies the problem by presenting a wide variety of performances originally recorded for the British Decca label in 1938, 1939 and 1946. The sound quality of these recordings is amazingly clear when considering their vintage; Decca’s engineers were noted for their attention to fidelity, and they recorded the quintet with a large number of microphones. The musicians were able to relax and play; it wasn’t necessary for them to attack their instruments in order to be heard. Reinhardt and Grappelly are heard with more clarity and definition than on the quintet’s earlier recordings, bringing their contrasting (and complementary) styles into sharper focus on a selection of standards (“Honeysuckle Rose,” Cole Porter’s “Night and Day,” “Sweet Georgia Brown”) and Reinhardt-Grappelly originals (“*Souvenirs*,” “Daphne,” “Stompin’ At Decca,” the swingin’ “HCQ Strut” and “My Sweet”). A duet from 1938, the original composition “Nocturne,” demonstrates the astounding level of communication between these two masters of improvisation. Though the two men couldn’t have been more different — Reinhardt, a Gypsy, was a rustic

outdoorsman who would be as happy fishing as playing guitar, while Grappelly was suave, cultivated and debonair — they were capable of a musical empathy that still amazes, nearly seventy years later. (Another good starter kit is Blue Note's *The Best of Django Reinhardt* [Blue Note/Capitol CDP 7243 8 37138 2 0], a single-disc anthology. Beginning with the frenetic "Limehouse Blues," *The Best of Django Reinhardt* features 18 selections from 1936 to 1948, including Django's breathtaking improvisation on George Kahn's "I'll See You In My Dreams"; the original version of "Nuages," a big hit in Vichy France; "Place de Brouckere," one of his big band numbers; and "Diminishing," one of his modern, bop-influenced pieces originally recorded by the reconstituted HCQ in 1947. And at around \$11.99 the price is attractive also!)

The quintet was broken up by the outbreak of the war in Europe; Reinhardt and Grappelly wouldn't see each other for more than six years, until January 1946. Three songs from the resulting session — Django's compositions "Love's Melody" and "Nuages," and George Gershwin's "Liza (All the Clouds'll Roll Away)"

— are included on *Souvenirs*. It was a joyous meeting. As Charles Delaunay wrote in his biography Django Reinhardt, ". . . they rediscovered the miraculous communion of old. Nothing seemed impossible. Stephane was delighted to have Django beside him once more; his inspiration flowed, as freely as ever, his instrument seemed to play itself. From time to time he cast a glance of confidence, of gratitude even, towards Django, who for his part was no less moved to find the man who could best express his ideas playing with him once again."

But Reinhardt regarded the reunion as a step backward. He was a progressive musician, and his style continued to evolve over time. He was a favorite collaborator of American swing musicians visiting Paris, performing and recording with Barney Bigard, Rex Stewart and Dicky Wells of the Duke Ellington Orchestra; Bill Coleman; Benny Carter; Peanuts Hucko of the Glenn Miller Orchestra; Mel Powell; and Eddie South (a violinist known as "the black angel of the violin"), among others. He absorbed a great deal from these musicians (an exchange that undoubtedly went both

ways), and the Gypsy elements of his guitar style had begun to disappear by 1939. He had grown bored with the string band format and reorganized the quintet after returning to Paris, replacing the violin with clarinet, adding drums, and eliminating one of the rhythm guitars. In the early forties he also worked with several big bands, often with impressive results.

In November of 1946 Django joined Duke Ellington's orchestra as a guest soloist — playing an electric guitar for the first time — for a brief tour of the U.S., visiting Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City and Pittsburgh, with the last shows of the tour at New York's Carnegie Hall. (One performance is documented on *Ellington: The Great Chicago Concerts* [MusicMasters Jazz 01612-65110-2].)

After the tour he stayed in New York City for a two-month residency at the Café Society Uptown. On his nights off Reinhardt would visit Manhattan's legendary 52nd Street. In the early forties musicians like alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis, guitarist Charlie Christian, drummer Kenny Clarke and the pianists Mary

Lou Williams and Thelonious Monk had been regulars in the 52nd Street clubs and the after-hours joints further uptown. Many of them had grown tired of the big band circuit and were looking for playing situations that allowed more opportunities to improvise at length; a new kind of small-group jazz began to ferment in the smoke-filled ambience of the nightclubs, and it came to be called bebop.

European audiences in general, however, didn't much care for Django's contemporary bop-influenced music. At the time they thought (and some self-appointed 'experts' in Djangology still believe) that his adaptation of the electric guitar had taken some of the urgency and edge off of his music, that his creative peak was back in the thirties. They demanded (and, in some cases, got what they wished for: reunions with Grappelly and the Quintette du Hot Club de France. These reunion appearances and recording sessions was simply a matter of financial necessity — bookings for Django's new quintet were hard to come by, and promoters paid handsomely for nostalgia.

Fortunately some record labels and booking agents had the foresight to show the man

a little respect. Three albums in particular document Django coming to terms with bop and electric guitar:

Although the sound quality isn't all that terrific — the CD was mastered from some ancient transcription acetates of Radio Telediffusion Francais broadcasts — the performances really shine on GNP Crescendo's *The Quintette of the Hot Club of France — Django Reinhardt & Stephane Grappelli* [GNPD 9053]. The first dozen titles are from a November 1947 Quintette reunion. As it wasn't a proper recording session the group plays as if performing in a saloon, kicking ass and breathing fire into HCQ evergreens like "Tears," "Daphne" and "Dinah" (occasionally losing the beat on the older numbers). But the real gems are Django's haunting ballad "Manoir des Mes Reves" ("castle of my dreams," literally translated), the Reinhardt-Grappelly composition "R-Vingt Six" and the HCQ's swinging hyperkinetic take on Jerome Kern's "Ol' Man River." Django spins out some rather impressionistic solos and pushes the band on with driving chords and contrapuntal chord riffology that just can't be beat.

The final eight selections are another RTF broadcast from Geneva, Switzerland, October 25th 1949. Django is featured on electric guitar, accompanied by piano, bass, drums, and clarinet or alto sax (played by Andre Ekyan, a favored collaborator). Django, like Ellington, would reinterpret his older compositions to reflect contemporary changes. "Nuages," his big hit from the early forties, is given a slow, torchy ballad treatment. Other highlights include the originals "Black Night" (recorded with the reunited HCQ as "Diminishing") and "Micro," Reinhardt's arrangement of Edvard Grieg's "Norwegian Dance No. 2" and a stompin' version of Ellington's "C Jam Blues."

*Brussels and Paris* [DRG 8473] contains the best of Django's late period work. All of the selections feature him playing electric guitar in a five-piece format, but several were recorded with expanded lineups that included trumpet and alto sax. Reinhardt composed and recorded several strongly bop-influenced pieces between 1947 and 1953, including "Del Salle," "Babik (Bi-Bop)," "Impromptu," "Fleche d'Or," "Nuit de Saint-Germain-des-Pres" and

the ballads “Vamp” and “Anouman.” He was able to incorporate the harmonic complexities and wide melodic intervals of bebop without forsaking the essentially romantic (and European) character of his music. “Le Soir,” “Chez Moi,” “I Cover the Waterfront” and “Deccaphonie,” also featured on Brussels and Paris, were the last four tunes that Django ever recorded. The session, held on April 8th 1953 — Django died of a brain hemorrhage on May 15th — was also the only time he recorded without a second melody instrument, e.g., clarinet or violin. Pianist Martial Solal and vibraphonist Sadi “Fats” Lalemand accompanied him in addition to Pierre Michelot on bass and drummer Pierre Lemarchand, his regular rhythm section.

*Peche a La Mouche* [Verve 835418-2] was compiled from recordings Django cut for the Blue Star label in 1947 and 1953. Most of the pieces here — standards that Reinhardt and everyone else (and his mother) had recorded dozens of times — feature him in the company of a wartime quintet lineup (clarinet, acoustic rhythm guitar, bass, drums). But the eight selections from 1953 feature him

in a standard rhythm section context and provide a fascinating glimpse into what Reinhardt could’ve accomplished had he not died prematurely.

Django Reinhardt was and is an important figure in the history of jazz, both as a musician and a composer. He was the first to create a distinctively European jazz style at a time when most of his contemporaries were imitating American records. And Reinhardt forever liberated the guitar in jazz, bringing an intuitively orchestral vision to an instrument that had previously been relegated to a minor role in the rhythm section.

Great music should be of its time while transcending it, and Reinhardt accomplished both. In spades.

POST SCRIPT: It is on his fellow Gypsies that Reinhardt has had the greatest impact. Django was a Manouche, the French-speaking Romany tribe that settled in Belgium, Holland, Germany and the Alsace region of northern France; they continue to carry his musical legacy. Several Manouche guitarists have achieved international reputations. Three of the brightest are:

**Bireli Lagrene** He began as a devoted Django disciple (he was once known as ‘l’enfant Django’) but has since matured into one of the finest electric jazz guitarists on the continent. His CD *Live in Marciac* [Dreyfus Jazz] captures Bireli in his native element, the stage. Spellbinding, breathtaking, awe-inspiring — no adjective can articulate the endlessly imaginative improvisations that Lagrene, supported by just bass and drums, is capable of. This is an incredibly gifted musician unafraid to take risks in his playing. His harmonic conception is extremely advanced, to say the least.

**Boulou and Elios Ferré** “Probably the greatest duo in the history of the guitar,” in the words of musician and educator Ian Cruickshank, “Boulou and his younger brother Elios make a formidable team. They are able to play virtually any piece of music in a dazzling variety of styles and, if fed intravenously, could probably play for weeks without repeating themselves.

“Boulou has the ability to take the attentive listener into realms unknown, employing many Gypsy devices in his playing to manipulate his

audience onto a higher level of consciousness. He differs from the other [Reinhardt-influenced Gypsy] guitarists in that he doesn't attempt to play exactly like Django but prefers to extend Django's harmonic concept in a mish-mash of forms that extend from medieval times through to and beyond the present." 🎵

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# KEYS OF GOLD

BY CHRIS HOVAN

A native of Boston, pianist and organist Larry Goldings boasts a resume that takes in formative training with the likes of Ran Blake and Keith Jarrett, plus gigs with a Who's Who of jazz greats that would have to include Jim Hall, Leon Parker, John Scofield, Michael Brecker, James Moody, and Carla Bley. He has recorded eight albums of his own as a leader, including the eclectic *Voodoo Dogs* and the newly issued, *As One*. Part of the flourishing organ jazz revitalization, Goldings can be counted among one of its most unique practitioners. In addition, his stellar piano work helps make him a resourceful and precious sideman capable of crossing any variety of stylistic boundaries. Recently, Goldings sat down to chat with All About Jazz about his early development and his most recent activities.

**All About Jazz:** Tell me about your exposure to music while still a child.

**Larry Goldings:** I was very attuned to pop music of the time (late 70's, early 80's), some of which made a lasting impression, if only sub-consciously. Billy Joel was a big one. I think I was already aware that he

was harmonically ahead of 1-4-5 based pop songs, and that attracted me. He's also a great melodist, and understands shape and form. I used to learn his songs by ear fairly early on, say 10 or 11 years old. I remember my brother and I listening to The Beatles, whom I now consider geniuses. I have vivid memories of my father playing tapes of Brahms symphonies in the car; this is something that stayed with me, definitely. Aside from that, there was a hell of a lot of crap that a kid listens to, but I would say that the most MELODIC "crap" I heard has probably stuck with me on some level, because a good melody makes a big impression.

**AAJ:** Were there any records that tipped your ears to jazz early on?

**LG:** Yes. Oscar Peterson 6 — *Live at Montreux*, Miles Davis with Red Garland (some sort of "best of" thing), Stan Getz — *The Dolphin* (with the late Lou Levy), Dave McKenna — *Giant Strides*, Erroll Garner (my mom liked him), and *Bill Evans at The Vanguard* (this was a little later). These were the important early ones.

**AAJ:** Do you consider yourself a pianist who also plays organ or an organist who also plays

piano?

**LG:** I consider myself a pianist-organist-keyboardist-composer, I guess.

**AAJ:** What spawned your interest in taking up the B-3 and who are some of the organists that have influenced you?

**LG:** A few seemingly unrelated experiences came into play. Early on, I had been trying to emulate the solo piano style of Dave McKenna, who walks his own bass lines better than anyone. When I was still in my early teens I used to play parties with a drummer friend of mine (Chad Fischer) playing piano with my right hand and a Korg synth with my left, walking bass lines. I got pretty good at that. I've only recently realized the direct relation between that experience and the present, where I'm playing organ. Simultaneously, I always loved Aretha Franklin, where organ was dominant, in particular, Billy Preston on "Bridge Over Troubled Water." That might have been the single track that inspired me to say, "I think I want to try that." I mean, it touched me, and it still does.

Shortly after that I was exposed to Wes Montgomery records featuring Mel Rhyne and

later Jimmy Smith. But it wasn't until the late 80's, when I was living in New York, that by a fluke percussionist Leon Parker called me to play with him up at Augie's (now Smoke). His bass player had cancelled and Leon wanted me to walk bass lines. I found a slightly cruddy B3 sound on my DX7, and that was the beginning of a still ongoing career of SCHLEPPING crap from gig to gig. Thanks, Leon.

Aside from the influences I mentioned, I must name Larry Young, Shirley Scott, Chester Thompson, Joe Zawinul (not an organist, but he might as well be), and Jack McDuff.

**AAJ:** What were some of the early gigs that put you squarely on the New York scene?

**LG:** Clearly the first one was as ringleader for the Village Gate jam session every Sunday afternoon when I was 18 years old. I would play my own set with a trio and people would listen (sometimes) and then the army of tenor players would line up to play "Oleo" or "There Will Never Be Another You." But, it was a great experience for a while because people heard me, I met excellent musicians (some terrible ones, too), and gigs came out of it, and it was a chance to play.

Directly out of that experience I was hired to play solo piano there — at The Gate every Friday and Saturday from 6-10. I'm indebted to Raphael D'Lugoff for giving me that opportunity because it led to a lot of growth and it was great exposure.

The other gigs were at Augie's, which went through many transformations. The group with Bill [Stewart] and Peter [Bernstein] grew out of this. We also played frequently at The Village Gate, as did I in a piano trio.

**AAJ:** How did you hook up with Peter Bernstein and Bill Stewart?

**LG:** I met Peter the summer of '84 at a summer program for high school students at The Eastman School in Rochester. I met Bill later, through Pete.

**AAJ:** The Voodoo Dogs project was an interesting departure, any other plans to do more things along that line?

**LG:** Yes, I intend to experiment more and more in the studio to create something that is original, sonically satisfying, soulful, but not necessarily jazz. I'm tired of categories because my musical personality doesn't really fit into one, at least not anymore. I also

intend to play more piano in the upcoming years.

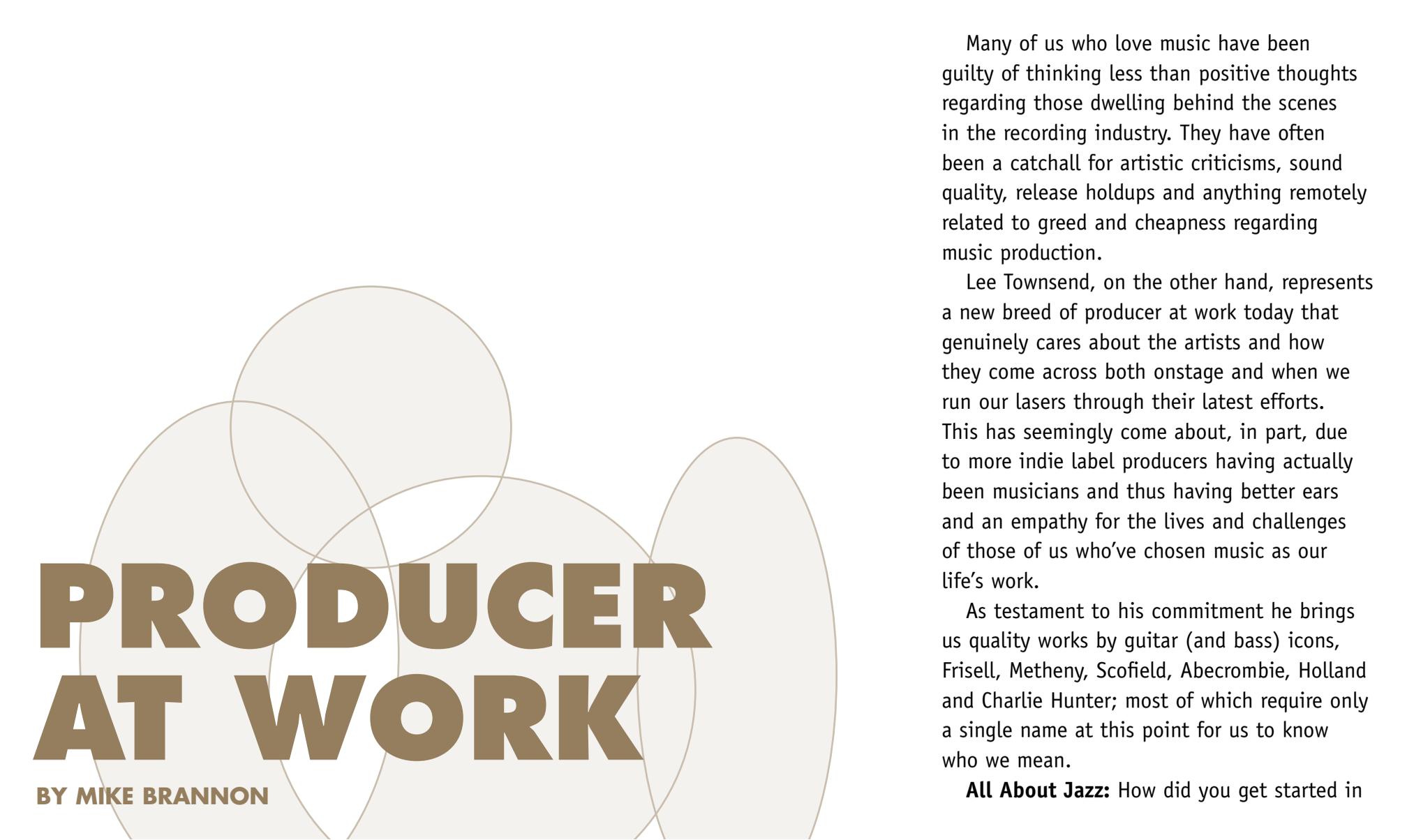
**AAJ:** How about giving us some insight into *As One*?

**LG:** It features the same astounding players, Peter Bernstein and Bill Stewart. I wrote some tunes that I'm pretty happy with and they come to life with this band. There are also some covers: Carla Bley's "Calls" (an eccentric blues where we take it a bit out), a Zombie's hit, ("Time of The Season," which we suited to our personalities), a tune by Bill called "Mynah" (Bill's a great writer, as is Peter), and an improvised solo organ piece called "Glass" where I tried to find some not so familiar sounds on the organ. I like this record. It's honest. And it's highly listenable. And it's recorded well.

**AAJ:** Well, Larry, thanks for taking the time to chat. Are there any other projects you'd like to quickly mention before we go?

**LG:** I'm working with the organ trio in the spring (L.A.) and some other places, as well as this summer in Europe with the trio. As a sideman, I'm going to Brazil with John Pizzarelli (I'm playing piano) in May. As

far as recordings, I'm playing piano on the upcoming Matt Wilson record, I'm playing piano on some of the new James Taylor record (now I'm just dropping names), and for whatever else, you can find it at my website: [www.larrygoldings.com](http://www.larrygoldings.com). 



# PRODUCER AT WORK

BY MIKE BRANNON

Many of us who love music have been guilty of thinking less than positive thoughts regarding those dwelling behind the scenes in the recording industry. They have often been a catchall for artistic criticisms, sound quality, release holdups and anything remotely related to greed and cheapness regarding music production.

Lee Townsend, on the other hand, represents a new breed of producer at work today that genuinely cares about the artists and how they come across both onstage and when we run our lasers through their latest efforts. This has seemingly come about, in part, due to more indie label producers having actually been musicians and thus having better ears and an empathy for the lives and challenges of those of us who've chosen music as our life's work.

As testament to his commitment he brings us quality works by guitar (and bass) icons, Frisell, Metheny, Scofield, Abecrombie, Holland and Charlie Hunter; most of which require only a single name at this point for us to know who we mean.

**All About Jazz:** How did you get started in

production and are you a musician as well?

**Lee Townsend:** I studied piano first when I was in grade school, then I played trombone in the junior high school band. I was in kind of a hokey singing group for awhile, too. Then in high school and college, I played around a little bit with guitar, but I never really considered myself a performer. It's not something I ever felt really drawn to. Since I took up record producing, I have found it to be such a challenging and absorbing endeavor that I have pretty much let playing go by the wayside, which has not been too frustrating since I am still concentrating on finding ways to get better at it. It's a lifelong process, really. So it feels like I have my hands full.

**AAJ:** It really is. What is your background?

**LT:** As far as growing up and all that, I was born and grew up in Southern California.

My mother played the piano beautifully and even some accordion all throughout my childhood. Prior to that, she had been first violinist in the Los Angeles Youth Orchestra. We were always singing songs and listening to records. My brother played trumpet around the same time I was playing the trombone.

And my Dad, even though he was not a musician, listened to music a lot. Altogether they provided an atmosphere where a lot of joy and inspiration came from music. So I guess I ended up with some sort of blending of my parents musical interests.

In high school, I got into rock and popular music, just like everybody else. And to this day, I still haven't lost interest in it. When I went to college at Univ. of Calif., Santa Cruz, I studied Psychology. I even went to Berkeley for a year of graduate school in Clinical Psych. But all through these years, I just became obsessed with investigating Indian music, jazz, blues, reggae, classical music, African music, 20th century composers. I had a radio show, hung around studios, etc.

At some point in there, it dawned on me that there was at least a craft, if not an art, to producing records. I think the first time might have been between high school and college when I heard Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* on a good stereo for the first time. I just couldn't believe it. I pretty much flipped out at that point. But, in the 70's, I also heard something special and deep in the work of Manfred Eicher,

Teo Macero, Brian Eno of course, and on Glenn Gould's, Joni Mitchell's and Bob Marley's records — to name only a few. From that point on I was pretty much ruined in terms of my prospective career in Psychology. Music and the idea of producing it became such a driving interest that all of that other stuff just took a back seat.

Finally, the year my Dad died (1981), in the midst of a lot of pain and sadness I came to the liberating realization that life is too short not to pursue one's passion. So I started down this path.

**AAJ:** It's true... whatever causes us to come to that realization happens for a reason. What attracts you to a prospective artist?

**LT:** Originality, commitment, honesty and soulfulness above all, as well as a certain sense of the music flowing out of them or even through them. So execution is obviously a part of it. But a singularity of sound or voice is much more important to me than ostentatious virtuosity. And even though originality is the essential component, I also appreciate when an artist has a sense of history so that they know what kind of legacy they are a part of

and trying to bring something fresh to.

I am fortunate to work in a number of different genres with many different kinds of artists. But some qualities which many of the musicians I work with share are a gift for conveying melody in a memorable way, a strong sense of lyricism and rhythmic vitality, regardless of whether they are an instrumentalist or vocalist. These are talents and musical values to which I am truly drawn.

And last but not least, I like people who have a sense of humor and whose work reflects some playfulness and wit. If we're not having a good time working on their music together, it's a squandered opportunity and something is wrong.

Obviously not everyone is on the same level of brilliance as everyone else. But if I like the people involved and somehow resonate with some important aspects of their music — and if I feel like I can learn something from them and make a meaningful contribution to their work, then I like to dive in.

**AAJ:** You've worked with some of the most original and talented guitarists in contemporary jazz: Metheny, Scofield, Frisell,

Abecrombie, Hunter and in particular on some very creative sessions such as *I Can See Your House from Here* etc. What was that session like, for example?

**LT:** First of all, it was an honor to do it. Let's face it. Those guys are monsters. And in addition, we had a rhythm section of Steve Swallow (who in my mind is a legend) and Bill Stewart. So to be entrusted with what had the potential to be such an important inter-generational meeting was a responsibility that I took seriously. Part of the task was to balance the way John likes to work with the way Pat likes to work. The dynamic was pretty fascinating. And it was a challenge to have the record tell a story that transcended whether a particular song was John's or Pat's and not have it be an album that came off like a string of impressive guitar solos — because spectacular soloing is a given when you are dealing with improvisers of that caliber.

**AAJ:** What do you find yourself doing at these sessions to help make them happen?

**LT:** You know, part of what keeps producing music interesting is that every project is different and each one requires something

different from me. My responsibilities range from helping develop the idea for a project to planning the logistics of it all; helping select material, musicians, the engineer, going to rehearsals, making suggestions about musical arrangements and overdub orchestration, recognizing when there is some magic happening and of course, helping shape the whole thing sonically. So it is often a balancing act between paying attention to the smallest details while at the same time maintaining a larger overall vision for what the project can become — having a respect for the process to insure an engaging and hopefully, provocative product.

**AAJ:** Why do you think artists want to use you most? What do you bring out in a session?

**LT:** I'm not so sure. Hopefully because we share a sense of exploration and wonder and have some fun working on their music together. I guess to really find out you would have to ask them. But I can imagine that it comes down mostly to trust and taste. I am simply trying to bring the level of the production up to the potential of the music — so that it somehow elevates it rather

than suppressing the spirit of it in some way — which is always a risk when you are in such an artificial and stressful situation with the burden of posterity on your shoulders under time constraints. Part of it must have something to do with making people comfortable and helping to elicit good performances and giving them a feeling of confidence that the stuff is going to come out sounding good and engaging. I don't want to make too many claims on my own behalf, but I guess I have a pretty decent sense of when something feels good rhythmically and maybe even a bit of a knack for recognizing when an exceptional performance is taking place or a special moment is happening... bottling that and then building upon it. Part of the job is coming up with right kind of idea to take a piece to an unexpected or more fully realized place. Sometimes that happens, but I wish it could happen more.

**AAJ:** I know. Seems to be about being so entranced when it does happen that those moments keep us searching for more of that. Can you discuss your production company Songline/Tonefield and its evolution?

**LT:** Well we started it in 1988 when I left ECM and New York and moved back to the Bay area. It all started with Bill Frisell and that relationship has continued to grow and blossom ever since. In fact, the entire situation with Bill has in a certain way, turned out to be something like a foundation for my work especially in the way our musical values have developed in a parallel way over the years. It's very reassuring and rewarding to have that kind of camaraderie. It really is a privilege to work with someone of that level of artistic importance and extraordinary humanity. I am very grateful.

**That was never an intentional plan. It just kind of worked out that way.**

As you mentioned, I guess I am known for working with a lot of guitar players. But that was never an intentional plan. It just kind of worked out that way. Those players happen to reflect the multi-faceted sensibilities that I am drawn to in music. Scofield is a perfect

example of it... even someone I would call a master of it. And in a way, Bill is the embodiment of the cross-genre approach to a lot of the work I do with other artists — singer/songwriters, composers, improvising musicians and what people like to call “World” musicians. His composing and his playing are so unfailingly lyrical in any context that it seems more like working with a singer-songwriter than an instrumentalist.

In recent years I have had the opportunity to work with some extraordinarily talented singers from all over the world like Shweta Jhaveri from India, Vinicius Cantuaria from Brazil and Gabriela from Argentina. We were able to place all of them in situations where they are playing with cross-cultural collaborators. And that has been very stimulating for me — and them too, I am sure.

**AAJ:** Why did you leave ECM?

**LT:** Basically I wanted to put more energy into developing my craft. And I wanted to broaden the types of music I was involved with in order to better reflect my other interests beyond the ECM aesthetic. I had been there

for four years, which was a great experience and even a dream come true, at the time. And while Manfred Eicher was kind enough to allow me some plum producing opportunities, most of my time was spent running the U.S. operations of the company. So I decided that it was time to stick my neck out a little and risk coming up with my own approach to production outside of the protection and limitations of such a prestigious and influential company.

**AAJ:** What makes a good producer, would you say?

**LT:** Well, one analogy for the role of the producer that I hope isn't too corny or overused would be to that of a midwife. Obviously making a record involves musicians playing music, but it is not only a documentation of that. It is also about sculpting something together that will hold up to repeated listening and have a reason for existing beyond the moment it is being made. So in that sense, the objective is for it to have a life after the birth. And in another sense it shares characteristics with a birth in that there are often difficult and painful moments in the

recording process as well as exciting and even euphoric ones. My feeling is that the producer needs to recognize those moments and use them in a way that is constructive for the goals of the project, empathizing with the musicians at those moments while at the same time maintaining a perspective about the overall outcome of the endeavor. One thing I have learned is that the inherent tension of being in the studio with time pressure and what not does not necessarily need to be a negative thing. Rather it can provide an edgy sort of energy that, if harnessed, can yield some interesting and unexpected results.

One other thing is for sure. You have to find inspiration and satisfaction in collaboration. It's important for a producer not to not have his or her ego invested in such a way that you forget that you are primarily there to help artists realize a vision for their work. Obviously it makes the most sense to work together when there is a shared vision for that work. Or better yet, a vision that a producer can help steer in ways that keeps it fresh and surprising rather than too insular and self-absorbed. The last thing that someone needs is a yes-man. So

I do think it's possible to challenge an artist to go in a different direction and still be supportive of their overall aesthetic purpose. But even though a project is shared and collaborative in nature, the producer can never forget that it is still the artist's music that is being showcased rather than one's own production approach.

**AAJ:** Do you have certain studios you prefer over most?

**LT:** In San Francisco, I like recording at Möbius and mixing at Different Fur, both of which are small operations that are run by the people who own them. And that is something I like to support. These are folks who have been in it for the long haul and have carried out a commitment to developing something unique and strong in an area that they have consciously chosen to specialize in. Oliver DiCicco basically built Möbius himself. He use to do most of the engineering, but in recent years has moved in to doing his own artwork. It is a very comfortable tracking room with the right complement of vintage gear. And Susan Skaggs and Howard Johnston at Fur have developed a very fine mixing and editing

room that just works great for me. The other thing about Fur that is very telling is that they always have an excellent staff who stick around for a long time. The Site, out in Marin county, is also a special place, although I have only had the opportunity to do a couple of projects there.

In New York, I record and mix a lot at Avatar — formerly Power Station. The place has a lot of history and three wonderfully designed recording rooms with a lot of flexibility in terms of setting up a nice environment for musicians to play in. I also have had good experiences mixing at River Sound and Shelter Island.

In Los Angeles, Oh Henry is simply world class in every way. Hank Sanicola is another studio owner that has really put his heart and soul into his place. He has pretty much created an ideal place to work. More important than the studios even are the engineers that I work with on an ongoing basis — Joe Ferla from New York, Judy Clapp from L.A. and up until a couple of years ago, Christian Jones here in San Francisco, who left engineering to become one of those blasted

dot-commers. In the past year, I have started working more with Adam Muñoz here in town. I must say that I have learned so much from these people.

For mastering, I work almost exclusively with Greg Calbi and have for at least twelve years now. He is simply the man as far as knowing how to sort out whatever sonic problems I may bring in. His new studio at Sterling Sound is, in my experience, the ultimate place to hear music. It's really astonishing.

**AAJ:** What is your basic philosophy of what you do?

**LT:** I have felt in my life the transformative power of recorded music for many years now. When I hear a Handel or Bach piano sonata performed and recorded sensitively or certain recordings of Robert Johnson, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Aaron Copland's music, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Frisell, Marley, Caetano Veloso, Peter Gabriel, Shweta Jhaveri or so many others, I feel that it changes me and challenges me to be a better person. So basically I am just trying to honor that feeling and make a small contribution to that

legacy by making other contemporary musical resources available to the listening public. In the right situation, someone can get a pretty potent piece of art for fifteen bucks. In that sense, we are working in a pretty populist medium.

I am still looking for ways to sculpt sound and serve music in a way that displays the most depth, dimension and texture, revealing its inherent capacity for mystery, sonic richness and new discoveries upon repeated listening. I like to think of a mix as a sound sculpture that the listener can walk around in with a sense of wonder, examining and touching all the facets of the music from different perspectives. As with the painters and sculptors whose work moves me the most, it is also an attempt to achieve a blend of the elements of nature, humanity and technology to create, in this case, a listening experience that is somehow illuminating. It is always approaching an ideal that I can never quite reach, which I hope is a good enough reason to keep doing it.

**AAJ:** Can you discuss the current projects you're working on?

**LT:** Most recently, Bill and I just finished all of the guitar overdubs to orchestrate the trio recording we did with Dave Holland and Elvin Jones last year. Needless to say, that was a thrill. Those guys are nothing less than musical heroes. It will come out on Nonesuch in the fall.

I also recently finished the upcoming Vinicius Cantuaria album. He's a great songwriter, a beautiful singer, a fine guitarist and an amazing percussionist from Brazil who is one of the most brilliant under-discovered musicians I have ever come into contact with. I hope this record will help change that. It is coming out on Transparent Music in March. The album has a number of high-profile guests such as Caetano Veloso, Frisell, Brad Mehldau, Joey Baron, Marc Ribot, Marc Johnson and David Byrne.

I am also just finishing the new CD from the San Francisco rock band Laughing Stock. The group performs the songs of singer Alex Nahas, who plays Chapman stick with the intriguing instrumentation of Hammond B3, celeste, melodica and theremin, drums, percussion and a string section of violin and

cello. So it's a pretty rich set of sonic textures. I like them a lot and I think the record is turning out to be very strong.

Last but not least, Bill and I are in the middle of working on a recording with his band called "The Willies" featuring Danny Barnes on banjo and guitar and Keith Lowe on bass. It's Bill's take on old bluegrass, country and blues songs, as well as material that he writes sort of in the indigenous vein. It will also be a Nonesuch record, but I'm not sure yet when it will be released. 🎵



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# SOFTLY...

BY ROB MARIANI

New York City empties out like a condemned playground on a Sunday afternoon in July. People cooped up in air-dried apartments and offices all week escape in search of sunshine and trees. The good things that still happen in the City on weekends happen mostly inside of little hidden enclaves, isolated places well below street level. Places like the Village Vanguard, a wedge-shaped East Village cellar smaller than a one-car garage, where not so much as a splinter of daylight has ever penetrated its night-colored walls.

There is light in The Vanguard, but it's an artificial, blood-stained colored light that seeps out from somewhere behind the ceiling's blackness, coating everything it falls on like a sepia St. Elmo's Fire: Nondescript bar stools. Little one-foot-square tables.

On this particular July Sunday afternoon, it's falling on the dark tailored pinstriped lapels of Percy Heath. It's falling across the shapely wood-carved shoulders of his contra bass, highlighting the instrument's graceful violin shape, its swan's head, the chestnut burls in its dark honey-colored torso.

There in the Village Vanguard's boozy-

smelling back space just behind the bar at the foot of the famous stairs that go down from Seventh Avenue, Percy Heath is tuning his instrument. His skin has turned a deep plum color in the bleeding Vanguard light, his left hand flutters at the slender neck of the bass while his right arm reaches ardently across the curved body with the bow producing a softly polished, oak-tinged voice. It's the sound an ancient tree might make during a forest storm, a sotto voce creak that turns into a soft, singing sigh. The dank floor around him resonates with the sound.

He thrums the strings just above the notched bridge, rolling his fingers outward, letting the notes resonate as they escape, moth-like into the surrounding stillness. He walks a few blues-y measures in four-four. And there it is: the unmistakable throb, the exquisitely reliable heartbeat of The Modern Jazz Quartet. Four men that comprise an entire orchestra.

• • •

What these four gentlemen brought to jazz and the world of music, out of the careening bebop fury of the early '50's was the sound

of elegance. Elegance that swung just as hard as the raucous Count Basie rhythm section, or the leaping schizophrenic Parker-Gillespie-Powell groups. Duke Ellington had shown everyone the possibilities for elegance on a large canvas. But John Lewis, Milt Jackson, Connie Kay and Percy Heath had distilled it into a small, white-hot, opalescent fire in a four-man crucible that defined cool, seemingly effortless swinging. Their music had all the headlong push of bop, the tension and release, the dangerous turns; plus the confident, sophisticated feet-on-the-floor veracity and nuance of a perfectly balanced classical chamber group.

There were moments when the MJQ was all about nuance — about the meaning behind the beat, the afterglow of a perfect note bent ever so slightly to increase the tension.

They were "Modern." They were "Jazz." And they were a "Quartet." Four musicians who played, who thought, who pulsed like one. And at the center of that pulse, the bass player. Percy Heath.

They dressed in sedate matching, shadow-colored three-piece suits, like diplomats there

to deliver an urgent, possibly even disturbing message in the quietest, most reassuring tones. They stood squarely behind their instruments, piano, bass, vibes and drums in the center of the stage and they played. Their acoustic balance was perfect, honest, with no electronic "compensating" required. When a bass note needed to be let through the curtain of the other instruments, to be louder, to make a point, the other instruments parted momentarily and it emerged in precisely the right place, dropping like a diamond into a velvet glove. Every note they played had that uncompromising exactness. That inevitability. The only possible note that could have been played then and there.

And the Quartet rode on the shoulders of Percy Heath, who, like all good bass players, bore it like an eager workhorse. His contribution was the musical equivalent of charity and of humble support from pure unwavering strength.

I stood a few feet away from the man, letting the sound of his bass notes define the space around us. When he looked up and saw me, a 19-year old college kid just discovering

his music, he smiled a little crooked, friendly, smile and went back to his assiduous tuning process. Always the workman.

I had nothing to say, and yet I wanted more than anything to talk with him, to hear him speak, to find out what he could tell me about The Music. I had a million questions and I couldn't think of one. I was here at The Vanguard because I had seen the MJQ a few months earlier "live" on Steve Allen's old Tonight. The Quartet was four or five years old then, just starting to be noticed, like some new constellation appearing unexpectedly in the night sky.

That evening at The Tonight Show, they played "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise" and "I'll Remember April." It was a life-changing moment for me. This was a whole other way to think about music, I realized gradually. It was like discovering a color I'd never even seen before.

It was all still so new to me, I did not even have the language to formulate the questions. I was still too new at jazz to know that Percy Heath had been part of it all since the beginning, since Bird and Dizzy. Since Monk

and Bud. He was already in the history books. To me he was simply the bassist with The MJQ, a job so large and important that I could only assume he must have spent his entire musical life focused only on this.

Finally, I manufactured a question simply as a reason for staying there with him in the bleeding light behind the bar at the foot of the narrow, legendary stairway.

"Do you ever play with any other groups?"

He smiled without looking up from his long

**His precise hairline and jaw repeated the curve of his bass. It reminded me of an Egyptian mask.**

silvery bass strings. His face was long and sculptured with high cheek bones. His precise hairline and jaw repeated the curve of his bass. It reminded me of an Egyptian mask, or a face carved into the marble on some cornice on a Greek temple. He laughed silently but he did not answer my question. He seemed a little embarrassed by it, as if it would have

been some kind of PR faux pas for him to acknowledge that he did, on occasion, stray from the dark monastic brotherhood of the MJQ to play in some more profane context.

I restated my question: "Who else do you like to play with, besides the MJQ?"

His brown eyes darted around the nebulous space where the walls bled into shadows, as if searching for an escape. My persistence had made him uncomfortable but I could not let go of his attention now. I inched closer, hoping to engage his eyes.

At last, too kind, too much a gentleman not to answer, he replied.

"Well," he said finally, "I guess Miles."

This was at a time just before anyone but musicians and astute music critics knew there was going to even be a MILES. Heath used only Miles' first name the way that the insiders who had played among the Giants, always did — "Miles," "Sonny," "Bud," "Diz." "Max." "Percy." There was only one of each.

I had heard the name, but the sound, the revelation that would be Miles Davis, had not reached me yet. Had not, in fact, really happened yet to the planet, but was only just

about to.

“Miles Davis?” I asked innocently, proud of my ability to put the last name to the first. Percy Heath nodded.

“You ever make any records with him?” I asked.

Again, the fear of making some kind of P.R. misstep flickered beneath his polite smile, but again, too much the gentleman, he replied. “Yeah. There’s one coming out soon called ‘Walking’.”

And that was it. More than I had hoped for, actually. I had something now, a small treasure to take away with me. A conversation, albeit only a few sentences long, had happened between Percy Heath and me. I took it away with me into the midnight of the Vanguard’s tiny angular space, to my miniature table where I waited with my friends for the music to start. For The Quartet to materialize on stage. I did not share the conversation with my friends or anyone but only mentioned in passing that I had seen Percy Heath back there behind the bar.

“What was he doing?” one of my buddies asked me.

“Tuning up,” I said casually, giving away not one iota more of my precious exchange with Percy Heath than I had to, keeping it close and private until it became a true part of my slowly expanding musical memory.

And then it was time to hear him play. 🎧

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# OH YOSHI!

BY DAVE ROBERTS

For many years Yoshi's has been a jazz oasis in the Bay Area. While one club after another closed in San Francisco, a club across the Bay continued bringing in many of the greatest artists for week-long stays.

Marshall Lamm has been Yoshi's PR man for the past four years. Just 29, he's already had a remarkable career as a publicist first at Verve Records, then at GRP Records, after which he started his own label, putting out nine records, including *The Latin Side of John Coltrane*.

In the following interview he, of course, waxes poetic about all that Yoshi's offers, but he also has interesting things to say concerning the fees paid today's leading jazz artists, the precarious nature of the jazz club business, the need to nurture today's up-and-coming artists to become the legends of tomorrow, and the necessity for folks to attend live jazz performances in order for the music to survive.

**All About Jazz:** Tell me about Yoshi's. How long has it been around?

**Marshall Lamm:** Yoshi's has been around for 27 years. It's owned by three Japanese folks. They started in north Berkeley 27 years ago

as a small, little Sushi bar that organically grew into presenting a piano player or an acoustic guitar player. And then when time went by they started having national acts. At the Claremont location in Oakland they for 15, 16 years put on national and international artists. Four years ago we moved to downtown Oakland here in Jack London Square in the Port of Oakland area.

It's amazing to me as someone who's a jazz fan to see how consistently busy it is. And the types of people, the complete scope of the demographics. Our matinee programs that we have here on Sunday afternoons, we get 5-year-olds to 95-year-olds, every color, race, religion, everything. Everybody comes. It's an amazing phenomenon.

When people talk about the industry hurting, or there being some negative aspects to it — the whole Ken Burns thing — I haven't seen any decrease in the attendance, decrease in the amount of people that come to shows at all. I see it increasing, and it has been over the last year.

**AAJ:** That's great.

**ML:** I think it has a lot to do with the fact

that Yoshi's is one-stop shopping, it's like an entertainment complex in one. We have a "Top 100 Bay Area" restaurant, we have a great bar, and then we have one of the best jazz clubs in the world — all in one place. And you can park upstairs. So you don't have to go to three different places — you can just come to one place. And I think that has a lot to do with it.

I think it also has a lot to do with the fact that we've marketed Yoshi's in a way, not as a kind of high-falutin' jazz club, but as one where it's a great introduction to the music. It's a very easy way to get involved with jazz and Japanese food and those sorts of things. So, we're very fortunate.

**AAJ:** Who is Yoshi?

**ML:** She is a Japanese woman, Yoshi Akiba. And she's a dancer and a Buddhist priestess. And she and Kazuo Kajimura, and Hiroyuki Hori have owned Yoshi's for 27 years. If you come down on a Friday night or a Saturday night, you'll see her at the hostess stand — she'll seat you. And then you might see her dancing around. When the music's going on she'll go in there and dance. She hangs out.

**AAJ:** How many seats do you have? How much was this place to build? Did they buy it?

**ML:** No, they're a tenant of the Port of Oakland. The city of Oakland and Port of Oakland allowed Yoshi's to build this place six years ago. And then two years later we moved in.

First of all, I think what needs to be stated about Yoshi's is that we're one of a kind. It's not a concept restaurant really. There's no place I've ever heard of where you can have top Japanese food and McCoy Tyner in one. It's a pretty amazing hybrid location.

The Yoshi's Jazz House is a start-of-the-art room that was designed by Meyer Sound. And it's acoustically and sonically perfect pretty much. We do two sets a night every night of the year except Sunday when we do a 2 o'clock in the afternoon and an 8 o'clock show. We seat 320 people. It's a start-of-the-art room, the lighting, sound system.

And it's also a room within a room. You can see the railroad tracks [just outside Yoshi's front door]. You have trains going by, freight trains, Amtrak trains. The walls are insulated to

keep the sound of the trains out from inside the room. And it works perfectly.

**AAJ:** How much did it cost?

**ML:** \$6 million is what the whole deal was.

**AAJ:** How have you guys been able to do it? In this crazy jazz world, you guys have been about it in the Bay Area in terms of name artists in a club environment. How do you do it?

**ML:** If you've got the money you can have these guys come play at your house pretty much. That's one way to look at it. I think the other way, more importantly, to look at it is that the artists have been treated so well by the people at Yoshi's, the staff, over the years, that it's not a hard sell. It's like, "Hey, come play at Yoshi's." And nine times out ten everybody wants to come play here.

I think the reputation internationally has really put Yoshi's on the map to where people want to play here. I think it's not a question of we have to go after people and beg them and plead and pay them exorbitant money to come play here. I think the reputation of the hospitality, the food, the hotels, the transportation, there's no other place that

rivals it really. And we make it easy for the artist to come and feel comfortable and perform.

I think on the other side we offer a service that you can't find anywhere else. Either you come and eat in the restaurant and not go to the show, or you do the whole experience. And you do the dinner, the sushi, and then you go into the club, where you can also eat Japanese food and sushi, appetizers and such. And I think those two things have really combined to make Yoshi's successful over the years.

Frankly, the jazz business, like you just said, is a very difficult one. And if for, say, six weeks or two months in a row we lose considerable amounts of money on the shows, we will go out of business. It's not something where we're making money and people are getting rich. It's not that at all. It's a very precarious business. The shows we book, if people didn't come, we would close, period. Just like any other business. But I think this one would close much faster because of the amount of money that's being spent on the artists and the overhead.

**AAJ:** Can you give me an idea of the amount

of money? I know you don't want to talk about specific contracts, but what's a ballpark for a Tuesday-through-Sunday engagement for a name artist?

**ML:** It varies considerably.

One of the ways Yoshi's in the past was able to attract Milt Jackson, Cedar Walton, all those artists to come play there is that most clubs — and this isn't just jazz clubs particularly — in general clubs don't offer ground transportation. They say, "Here's \$10,000, show starts at 8, sound check's at 3. Show up." What we do here is we have a group of volunteers, we have two vans, and we pick people up at the airport. So that really helped booking agents in the past route their artists through Yoshi's, because we would do all the dirty work. We'd pick them up, we'd drive them to the airport and back, we'd take them to the hotel, etc. So that was a very helpful thing for Yoshi's in the past.

When we book our artists we pay a fee. But we also fly them in, put them up in the hotels, we provide ground transportation, we feed them each night, and our hospitality includes a lot of things that other clubs don't

offer. That has all combined, like I said earlier, to make people want to come play here. This is the spot. In the Bay Area you can sell a lot of CDs, you can do a lot of interviews, you can do a lot of press, you can do a lot of retail stuff.

So it makes a lot of sense for artists who normally wouldn't play here. Like, Bruce Hornsby was not a hard sell here, loves sushi. Pat Metheny called us up and said personally "I want to play there." You get guys like the Mingus Big Band, who's playing [March 2-4], they don't do clubs outside of New York. But they're doing ours because they've heard such good things from other musicians over the last several years. "This is the spot, you'll love it, it's great — plus they'll pick you up at the airport." So that's really helped.

I think, ballpark, on an average show without naming names, some artists we'll pay 30 grand a week. We pride ourselves on the fact that we do a lot of exclusive bands. Peter Williams will put quartets together that never played together before, that you've never seen anywhere else, that aren't on record. Like our McCoy Tyner two-week residency that we do

each year, McCoy says, "Hey, you put the band together, I'll show up and play." So, we'll pay McCoy separately, we'll pay all the other artists separately.

The Afro-Cuban All-Star show, that Telarc recently recorded, got started here. The Michael Brecker/McCoy Tyner Trio, that was an Impulse record that won a Grammy, was created here. So there's a lot of those exclusive shows. We just had Dr. Lonnie Smith and Jimmy McGriff with Red Holloway. That was a band that we put together. Jimmy McGriff and Lonnie Smith have played together, but never in a club. They had done record dates together. So, we really like to do different bands, things you won't see anywhere else. As long as people keep showing up, we'll keep doing it.

**AAJ:** Do you record each show?

**ML:** No, we do not. We do a lot of broadcasts on radio stations, KPFA, KFOG, and KCSM. We do live recordings for labels. Blue Note just recorded Pat Martino. Dee Dee Bridgewater's *Live at Yoshi's* was just nominated for a Grammy. So there's those types of recordings. But we don't tape the shows.

**AAJ:** What about videotaping?

**ML:** We sometimes have companies that come in, like *Jazz Online*, and record shows. That's all through record companies. We have closed-circuit video here internally to show the shows. But no, we don't do that stuff. We're very anti-bootlegging, unless there's certain things said upfront where we can. But we don't really do that. And we think that adds a lot to the "You gotta come see the show. Because it's not gonna happen that way again ever."

**AAJ:** How has the business changed in the four years you've been at Yoshi's and over your career in jazz?

**ML:** I do know it stays busy and gets busier. One thing that helped, not only Yoshi's but perhaps the other clubs and the outdoor festivals, is the matinee program we started almost three and a half years ago. It just made families apt to come to Yoshi's. I also think it's cultivating new audiences for the future. So families come on Sunday at 2, and then hopefully the parents will get a babysitter and come back on Saturday night.

So that you see it's not an intimidating music. It's not something that you have to be

a certain adept at music to understand and get into. We've really made it one where due to the cross-section of bookings, the food, the great press — we're the best club in the Bay Area according to the San Francisco Chronicle — all those things have certainly helped to make it more of a destination, great entertainment, a great night out. Those sorts of things have certainly helped.

I also think the caliber of the artists have helped to keep the place in business. Granted, it's been rough at certain times. But overall it has a lot to do with the matinee concerts, our student and senior discounts, and just the top-notch artists we've had come through. Those things just kept it going, kept the wave going.

In my career in jazz, I think the jam bands — Medeski, Martin and Woods, the Charlie Hunters of the world — really helped in a lot of ways to turn on young people to jazz. I'm 29 and we see people my age and younger all the time here. I think that bodes well for the future. I think people like Diana Krall have really helped jazz. Certain artists have done interesting records that have helped. I think the Ken Burns thing really helped.

One thing you'll see this summer is all the free festivals around the country from the San Jose Festival to the Navy Pier in Chicago to you name them. There's 55,000 jazz festivals. You will see an amazing, dramatic increase in the amount of people. And that bodes well for the future too. I think a lot of people now think, "I never thought to go to the St. Louis Jazz Festival, but now I will because I've heard so much about it and it sounds like a great time, and I might be able to meet chicks." You know, those sorts of things. That all really helps, and it bodes well for the future.

**AAJ:** Have there been any highlights that stand out in your four years here?

**ML:** Musically? Yeah, when we had the Jazz Passengers with Debbie Harry here it was great. We did a Pat Metheny Trio show. One thing that was very interesting was the first Bobby Short and his Orchestra shows that we did for Valentine's Day a couple years ago. When we had John Zorn's Masada here it was a highlight. I also think all the McCoy Tyner shows we've done, the residencies we've done. We've put together exclusive bands with Cedar Walton and Milt Jackson. I'm just looking at all

the photos here. It's non-stop.

Ottmar Liebart's performed here, which was great. And the reason I say that is because it brought in a new audience to Yoshi's. I think we've done great with a lot of the cutting-edge Cuban bands, like Maraca. Irakere we've done exceptionally with. And I don't mean business-wise, I just mean in terms of the vibe and the buzz we're able to create in the Bay Area.

But what I think's amazing about a place like Yoshi's is for four years we've been able to consistently bring in Shirley Horn, Ahmad Jamal, Pharaoh Sanders, Jimmy Smith, Arturo Sandoval, and those artists that, without a place like this, I don't know how well they would be doing professionally as musicians. I think Yoshi's really helps them in the Bay Area. And it helps them sell CDs and keep going.

I'm just again looking at all the photos. Medeski, Martin and Wood were great shows. Like I said, it keeps going and going and going and going.

**AAJ:** I see these two guys [pointing to photos of David Benoit and John Butler, who will be performing at Yoshi's the fourth and fifth weeks of March, respectively.] Are you

guys going contemporary?

**ML:** We like to keep it fresh. We get a lot of people who like to hear smooth jazz. We don't do Rick Braun, but we do David Benoit and Jonathan Butler. We do the Yellowjackets, which they kind of fit in there a little bit, Keiko Matsui, Hiroshima have performed here. If we think we can do well with people, we'll bring them in, definitely.

**AAJ:** I guess there's a fear from some of the more mainstream artists that these contemporary guys are going to push them out, and the whole thing gets diluted.

**ML:** Well, you can tell those people that without Jonathan Butler and David Benoit selling out all their shows, it's tough to bring in the mainstream artists that are going to lose money. It pays for those other artists that we hope will be the artists of the future. Russell Malone, for one, while he's a great guitar player, doesn't sell a lot of tickets. And in order for us to do three nights with Russell Malone, we have to do Jonathan Butler, we have to do David Benoit. We have to bring in Nancy Wilson in order to pay for those other artists.

Roy Hargrove, Josh Redman, Christian McBride. Those artists have to be able to do six nights like Milt Jackson did, like Cedar Walton can do, like Branford Marsalis can do. Those artists have to be the ones in the future that you will write about, that the radio stations will play, that will get big articles in the [San Francisco Chronicle's] pink section, that will bring 3600 people down here. Those artists have to be subsidized at this point in their careers by guys like Jonathan Butler. I wish I could book Russell Malone for six nights and he'd sell 3600 tickets — but he can't do it. But we have to give him the opportunity to establish his own name in the Bay Area for the future.

It's not about today — it's about 35 years from now. I feel obligated to help these artists be successful.

Because it's not about today — it's about 35 years from now. I feel personally obligated to help these guys and these artists and these women be successful for 50 years. They have

to be 80 years old coming in here and playing and being "The Legends Of ...". And we have all these guys that 40 years from now no one will know, who now are extremely popular and mainstream. That's the only way we can do it. It's the only way the genre will survive.

If Brad Mehldau, Christian McBride, Roy Hargrove, those artists, can't consistently be popular and commercially successful here at Yoshi's — and I know I'm speaking for every other jazz club in the country — it won't happen, the genre will fall apart. There has to be stars. There has to be people who are interested in seeing them play. And I'm not talking Diana Krall, she's beyond this now, she's beyond Yoshi's. But anybody in their 30s, Chris Potter, any of those guys, they have to be the ones that will keep it going in the future.

**AAJ:** In addition to Oscar Peterson in late August, any other big names coming this year?

**ML:** We're doing the only North American appearance of the Gateway Trio with John Abercrombie, Dave Holland, Jack DeJohnette in June. Bill Frisell's coming back with his new quartet, which is great. I think it might be Dr.

John for New Year's. The Gateway Trio in June and Oscar Peterson are the two highlights. This will be the 12th annual Eddie Moore Jazz Festival, which is put on by Jazz in Flight. They do more creative, avant-garde stuff. We'll have creative musicians from all over the country and all over the world.

**AAJ:** It's great that you often feature local artists on Monday nights.

**ML:** Yeah, and I think that's really important. Dmitri Matheny's local and we can do three nights. We really pride ourselves on doing local artists, artists that aren't going to do that well ticket-wise. But we try very hard to incorporate women musicians/artists, world music, artists that are doing something very creative, that isn't commercial or mainstream. And we try to do everything, we try to cover the spectrum of the music. And I think we do a very good job of that.

**AAJ:** So what's the future hold for Yoshi's?

**ML:** Keep on going. Just keep doing what we're doing. New chairs, hopefully, in the club. I was interviewed by KQED a couple weeks ago about the whole Ken Burns thing and they said, "What is the most important thing for

the future of jazz and of Yoshi's?" And what I said to them, and what I still believe, is that people have to support local music. They have to support live music. If it's not jazz, it's at the Fillmore, it's at high school, classical music, dance, theater, you gotta support the performing arts, regardless of what it is.

That's what's important, not only for Yoshi's but for every presenting organization in the country. And we consider ourselves a presenting organization that has sushi, that makes Japanese food. And I think that's what's important, that's what the future holds, is that people have to take more of an active interest in local music and in supporting their local venues, regardless of the genre. You have to not only buy CDs but you have to go out and support the music.

Because, I'll tell ya, it's not one of those things where if people stop doing it, it would survive on its own. It wouldn't happen. People have to keep coming out. And if people keep coming out we'll keep doing what we're doing. If they stop coming out, I'll have to find another jazz club to go to.

It's a very precarious business, not only

for us but for every genre of music. Theater groups in San Francisco are being evicted, dance troupes are being evicted. So it's very important to go out and support cultural events and performing arts organizations.

**AAJ:** Anything else you want to say?

**ML:** Check out our Web site:

[www.yoshis.com](http://www.yoshis.com). 

# COLLECTIVE SPIRIT

BY DAVID R. ADLER

Six nights, ten bands. Following up on last year's three-night stint at the Jazz Standard, the Jazz Composers Collective took up residence at the East Side club for an entire Tuesday-Sunday run in early February. The bands were both familiar and new: on Tuesday the Herbie Nichols Project and Ted Nash's "Odeon"; on Wednesday the HNP again and Nash's Double Quartet; on Thursday the Frank Kimbrough Trio and Ron Horton's Genius Envy; on Friday three sets of Ben Allison & Medicine Wheel; on Saturday Michael Blake's Free Association and Frank Kimbrough's Noumena; and on Sunday, Palmetto's "Duke's Motivation" all-star band and Ron Horton's new sextet. Read back over the list and you'll appreciate the rarity of the event, for it includes — to the best of this writer's knowledge — every Collective project to date. And with Horton's new group (Tom Varner, Marcus Rojas, John O'Gallagher, Ben Allison, Tim Horner), the festival also featured works in progress, emphasizing the Collective's dynamic, ever-changing nature. It was too much for one critic to cover, but Tuesday and Thursday nights were a bountiful feast unto themselves.

The Herbie Nichols Project, which kicked off Tuesday's lineup, has been going through some changes. Moving from Soul Note to Palmetto Records, the band expects to have a third album out around October 2001. Live and in the studio, the HNP is showing off a new member: trombonist Wycliffe Gordon of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. Gordon's LCJO credentials may suggest that he's part of the neo-traditionalist camp, but here he was, contributing fresh ideas and helping to resuscitate the corpus of one of jazz's most enigmatic figures — a traditionalist task of sorts, but also a means of innovative self-expression on the part of the Collective. Having Gordon on the same bandstand as the avant-leaning drummer Matt Wilson was a heartening instance of boundary-crossing in the interest of music.

As the fourth horn in addition to the usual suspects Blake, Nash, and Horton, Gordon added a lushness to the arrangements, and a forceful solo voice as well. The band played a set consisting entirely of new material, opening with the polytonal "In Honor of Garner" (not James Garner, Allison helpfully

noted), and going on to include "Delights," "Some Wandering Bushmen," "Enrapture Now," "Moments Magical," and "Ina." As was explained from the bandstand, no recordings of these pieces exist, so no one in the band knows how they originally sounded or were intended to sound — a fact that makes the HNP one of the most unique, philosophically engaging bands in jazz.

The Wycliffe Gordon-Matt Wilson combination then turned into a rhythm section, with Gordon donning a sousaphone (and doubling on trombone) for a set with Ted Nash's Odeon, a band that also includes Miri Ben-Ari on violin, Bill Schimmel on accordion, and Nash on woodwinds. For all its unusual instrumentation, Odeon is a groove band, in a way — vamping hypnotically on "Jumpline" and Duke Ellington's "Amad," with burning solos on both tunes by Ben-Ari, who is getting really good. But there's enormous variety in Nash's concept, even within a single piece, as his arrangement of Debussy's "Premier Rhapsody" makes clear. Nash has an array of instrumental combinations on hand, such as plunger trombone and violin ("Tango Sierra"),

or plunger and bass clarinet ("Street Meeting, part I"), or clarinet and accordion ("Reverie"). There's an invigorating sense of passion and playfulness in this eclectic band. Odeon will release *Street Meeting*, its Arabesque debut, in May of this year.

One of the nicest surprises was the Thursday performance by the Frank Kimbrough Trio, featuring Ben Allison on bass and Jeff Hirshfield on drums. Kimbrough doesn't perform in a trio setting very often, and with his 1998 trio CD *Chant* now out of print, his trio outings are all the more difficult to come by. The pianist brings a subtle, understated approach even to adventurous, free-leaning material such as "Quickening," "Ancestor," and Ornette Coleman's "Feet Music," all tracks that appear on *Chant*. He creates a dark, spellbinding mood with "Svengali," with Allison and Hirshfield climbing dynamically in perfect rapport with the piano solo. The set peaks with a trio arrangement of "Air," a tune from Kimbrough's *Noumena* album, which segues into an edgy, slow bossa reading of the traditional song "I'm Just a Poor, Wayfaring Stranger." Not one to provide instant

gratification, Kimbrough makes you wait, keeping you on your toes as you listen to the trio develop its interplay throughout the course of a tune. And each selection has its own secret, rewarding a close, attentive listen every time.

Finishing off Thursday night was Ron Horton's Genius Envy ensemble, featuring all the players from Horton's Omnitone CD of the same name. The band only played one track from the CD, however, closing the set with Horton's tongue-in-cheek "Claude's Petite Bicyclette." The rest of the show was given over mostly to non-original compositions, beginning with a grooving adaptation of Warne Marsh's "Dixie's Dilemma," a tune worked up by members of the Collective at last year's Lennie Tristano tribute. Next was Tim Berne's "Blue Alpha," with its unfathomably difficult melody line, shifting tempos, and masterful solos by Frank Kimbrough, Jane Ira Bloom, and drummer Rich Rosenzweig. Then, spotlighting the woefully overlooked Jimmy Giuffre, Horton and company interpreted the dark, laid-back "Phoenix," with tenor saxophonist John McKenna (doubling on bass clarinet)

responding beautifully during his solo to rhythmic suggestions from Kimbrough. The penultimate selection, and the second of only two originals, was Horton's wildly free "Groveling," dedicated to all the musicians who've had to grovel for gigs and exposure of any kind. ("Fuck that shit!" exclaimed Allison, a couple of times.)

With this festival, the Jazz Composers Collective demonstrated, perhaps more successfully than ever before, its ability to facilitate jazz happenings: not just CD releases, not just isolated gigs, but rather a gestalt that affords audiences an extended look at the work of the organization and its members. Thanks to the artist-focused integrity of the Jazz Standard, the Collective transformed the ordinary jazz club experience into a sustained, community-wide event that showcased some of the very best in creative music. 🎧



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# CD REVIEWS

## *Eyes Of The Elders*

**T.K. Blue**

**Arkadia Jazz**

When he was the artist known as Talib Qadir Kibwe, T.K. Blue spent a good many years as Randy Weston's musical director and he performed on some of Weston's now-classic recordings with Melba Liston like *The Spirits Of Our Ancestors* and *Volcano Blues*. Previously, Kibwe lived in Paris for eight years after a three-year association with Abdullah Ibrahim in the late 1970's. Journeying to Africa from his Paris base throughout the 1980's, Kibwe delved deeper and deeper into the spiritual basis for his music.

Now, T.K. Blue has pulled together all of those influences on *Eyes Of The Elders*. His insights into the communicative potential of African percussion combines with Weston's profound belief in honoring the wisdom of one's forebears. T.K. Blue expresses the resulting synthesis more brightly than Weston did in some of his blues and 6/8 prayer-like meditations. Concentrating on melody and the joyous magnetism of festivities and celebrations, T.K. Blue has developed a vibrant

voice of his own that communicates ancestral connections to a contemporary audience.

*Eyes Of The Elders* retains some of the elements from T.K. Blue's first release on Arkadia Jazz, *Another Blue*. His friend and pianist James Weidman reappears on several of the tracks, and Blue's instrumentation remain similar, that instrumentation including reeds, trumpet, piano, bass, drums and percussion.

The brilliant addition to *Eyes Of The Elders* is Stefon Harris on vibes and marimba, creating a haunting shimmer and percolation that amplifies the thematic music's rhythmic and subtle harmonic sophistication. The tune "Rites Of Passage" distills the music to include only Blue on kalimba and Harris on marimba, as they expand the initial rhythmic lines into a freed percussive conversation from struck bars. Harris lends a glow to "Frozen Mist", a Hale Smith tune that is reminiscent of the transcendent emotional weight of Billy Strayhorn's "Blood Count".

Joanne Brackeen, another unpredictable Arkadia artist, joins in on "Frozen Mist" to complete the slowly unfolding impressionistic depiction of the title's visual experience.

Fulfilling the potential of Blue's composition honoring the "strength of womanhood", Brackeen breaks loose in a fully developed and confident flowing solo after Blue's statement on C-melody flute.

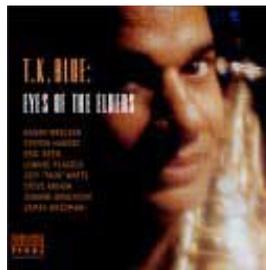
But that's not all. Blue recruited his musicians wisely so that their musical personalities are appropriate for the tunes at hand. Thus, pianist Eric Reed accompanies Blue on "Harold's Theme", Charles Mingus' "Nostalgia In Times Square", and John Coltrane's "Wise One".

Reed lets fly with a dramatic solo on "Wise One", utilizing the entire keyboard in thematic clusters. Percussionist Steve Kroon shines on Benny Carter's "South Side Samba", and bassist Lonnie Plaxico more than adequately fills in the Mingus role "Nostalgia In Times Square" with an extended, buoyant solo in the middle of the tune. Randy Brecker's work keeps getting better and better as well, his harmonic introduction with Blue on "Wee" merely hinting at the soaring work to

follow in the fiery Latin trumpet tradition.

After years of paying his dues — and more importantly, of deepening his understanding of the spiritual tradition of the music—T.K. Blue is slowly but surely emerging as a one of the most original alto saxophonists on the scene.

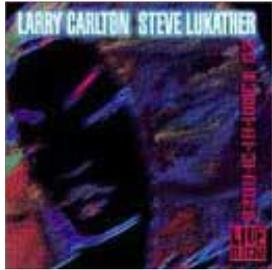
— Don Williamson



## **No Substitutions**

### **Larry Carlton & Steve Lukather Favored Nations**

For those who worship the guitar gods, this meeting of two of the axe's finest, recorded live in Osaka, naturally provides much incredible technique in which to revel. But many of the rest of us will find the date enjoyable, too. The first two



tunes presented here are simply structured jam vehicles, and Carlton and Lukather burn them up for all they're worth. The middle selection, "(It Was) Only

Yesterday", provides gentle relief — it's a heart-on-your-sleeve ballad, with changes ripe for crying, blues-drenched expressiveness. Next, the duo tackles Miles Davis' "All Blues", finding all sorts of new things to do with these familiar changes. They close with Carlton's "Room 335", named for his home studio; it's a bouncy, contemporary jazz treat.

Lukather (formerly of Toto) favors a hard-driving rock edge, while Carlton (formerly of

the Crusaders and currently with Fourplay) employs a gentler jazz/blues touch. It's interesting (and quite enjoyable) to compare their distinctive approaches to their solos in each song. Lukather hits hard, with testosterone-fueled intensity. Carlton usually opts for finesse, yet his caressing passages have just as much impact. During one of the song intros, Lukather states that this isn't a "guitar battle", as the club marquee proclaimed; rather, it's a pairing based on mutual respect and friendship. He twice refers to Carlton as "sensei", which means teacher. And it's true, while chops are displayed with reckless abandon, there's no sense of competitiveness or "cutting" here. It's just plain fun. And I sense that it's an opportunity for both men to play what they really want to play, not what the demands of the studio, the record labels, or the radio programmers dictate. By the way, this label, Favored Nations, was founded by another guitar god, Steve Vai, so I'm sure this program is exactly what this record label wanted!

— Dave Hughes

## **Spread The Word Down To The Bone Q Records**

Ever have a rump quaking groove reach down to the bone and move you? Literally! Well, either you have or you haven't but you would definitely know if you had. I tell you what...check out Down to the Bone's third album for even just a paltry 30 seconds and you'll soon be willing to *spread the word*.

Have I not enticed your sensibilities? Probably not, since you're still reading. When was the last time you heard a CD so alive and free you were willing to spread the word? It's been a while hasn't it? A certain publisher of allaboutjazz was visiting me a month back and I had just received a DTTB advance. I told him that **the motherlode had just landed... AGAIN!** Well, he finally listened and guess which CD is the Publisher's Pick of the Week? The fine friendly publisher of this webzine is doing his part to *spread the word*.

Who or what is Down To The Bone, you wonder? Well the core of DTTB is comprised of the production duo of Stuart Wade and Chris Morgans, who have been making people bump

and gyrate since 1997 when they released *From Manhattan to Staten*. Think Brand New Heavies nestled between US3 and Groove Collective with a sprinkle of Dazz Band. Why don't you chew on that succulent phat. It's tasty enough to make you swallow it whole and *spread the word*.

Down To The Bone is really nothing more than a non-stop instrumentally fueled, tricked out Cadillac. You love the way it feels down to the *bone*. Rev it up, put it into overdrive and cruise down the boogie lane all night long. And when you stop to re-fuel, be sure to *spread the word*.

Each of these ten tracks is in your face, in your blood and down to the bone. Songs like "Sound As A Pound" and "Righteous Reeds" with their buoyant beat, punchy piano and soaring sax make you want to head down to Studio 54. And what will you do when you get there? Light the dance floor on fire and *spread the word*.

And if you haven't had enough after seven pounds of sound, then "Bridgeport Boogie" and "The Lowdown" come barreling at you with a double fistful attack of hip hugging swagger

flaunting booty drenched bottom end. You'll swear Rick James enlisted Chicago to be his backing band and they are on a mission to kick out the jams and *spread the word*.

— Rob Evanoff

### ***At All Costs Unknown***

**Resonance Impeders: Briggan Krauss - Chris Dahlgren - Jay Rosen**

#### **CIMP**

The "Resonance Impeders" represents a modern jazz/improvisational troupe willing to seek out previously uncharted musical frontiers. Simply put, alto saxophonist Briggan Krauss, bassist Chris Dahlgren, and drummer Jay Rosen are among the best and brightest of a genre that some are now referring to as the – "new music". These chaps continue to reinvent the tried and true, as they respectively possess individual voices, which at times, distinguishes them from many of their peers.

On the opener, "Say Then But The Two Gone", Krauss exhibits his unique darkly hued tonalities amid fleeting lines, as the band pursues an abstract type Indian raga motif in conjunction with Western style scales and polyrhythmic back beats. Here, the saxophonist blows exuberant, high-octane choruses and prophetic statements. With "Ant Farming Cousin", the musicians engage in emotive dialogue as Krauss' buzz-saw attack contrasts

Rosen's playful utilization of bells, whistles, and the traps, while Dahlgren perpetuates thick, rumbling notes. Hence, the band takes the listener on an unlikely voyage to some inexplicable, far away land.

The band's inventiveness continues on "All That Dies Gladly Dies" as they get down and dirty via a loosely implemented New Orleans shuffle groove marked by surrealistic qualities, thanks to Krauss' darting and jabbing motifs and Dahlgren's subdued yet effective employment of electronics. Basically, these musicians continue to surge past boundaries that often represent stumbling blocks for more than just a few. Overall, the music is intellectually stimulating yet affably entertaining! Highly recommended.

— Glenn Astarita

### ***This Is What I Do*** **Sonny Rollins** **Milestone**

For those who believe that Sonny Rollins' best days as a recording artist are well behind him, think again. *This Is What I Do* is an unmitigated triumph, a performance that will impress anyone who takes the art of jazz seriously. As the six cuts on the disc attest, Rollins is clearly not content to rest on a half-century of improvisational brilliance. Aside from his intelligence, savvy, and hard-earned experience, Rollins continues to emanate a sense of bravado as well as a willingness to take risks that vitalize the music as a whole.

The first thing that is evident on "Salvador", the opening track, is Rollins' sound, which cuts through the rest of the band (including the electric bass of Bob Cranshaw) without being overly harsh. He states the theme repeatedly, but never exactly the same way twice, and eases into an extended flight. Thriving on the cyclical, repetitive structure of the composition, he plays with remarkable assurance and goes down a variety of paths without losing the thread that holds the

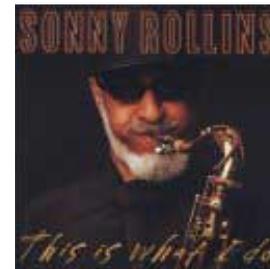
patchwork together. Drummer Jack DeJohnette and Cranshaw enliven pianist Stephen Scott's estimable solo with some rhythmically fluid accompaniment, and then Rollins returns for a brief, exclamatory turn going back to the theme.

"Did You See Harold Vick?" is a mundane funk tune that serves as a starting point for a Rollins marathon.

At first including some brief chordal remarks by Scott and then with just Cranshaw's sparse, droll comments and drummer Perry Wilson's efficient back beat, Rollins solo

gets tougher and more insistent as he goes along. There is a stark, pointed quality to his improvisation even as he ambles through speech-like phrases and spits out an occasional flurry of notes.

The most remarkable cut on the disc is Rollins' twisted performance of "Sweet Leilani". The tune, taken at a deliberately slow tempo, manages to sound both sacred and profane, with touches of gospel as well as blues



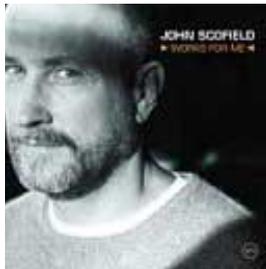
declarations that are suggestive of a long, libation-filled night. With the rhythm section providing solicitous support, Rollins' solo purrs, growls, mumbles, and shouts. Reeling across bar lines, he makes a compelling statement that speaks of both elation and wariness. Sometimes he hangs back and dwells on a note or a phrase for what seems like an eternity; or, he goes into overdrive and can't get the notes out fast enough. Scott follows with a turn that is nearly as persuasive, and then, clamoring for the last word, Rollins reappears, this time imposing a warped magnificence on the music that makes everything complete.

— David A. Orthmann

### ***Works For Me*** **John Scofield** **Verve**

Since 1997's *A Go Go*, which featured the backing of Medeski, Martin & Wood, John Scofield has been increasingly pigeonholed as a sage of the burgeoning "jam band" movement. But the guitarist has been blending post-bop and a more rock/funk-oriented style even since his earliest recordings, and he's always had the uncanny ability to sound like himself no matter what kind of music he's playing. "It's because I only have a few licks," Scofield once modestly quipped to this writer.

*Works For Me* is his first "straight ahead" record in a while. It couldn't be more of a departure from last year's *Bump*,



which featured members of Soul Coughing, Sex Mob, and Deep Banana Blackout and marked Scofield's first use of samplers and other electronic instruments. Now the pendulum swings back to jazz, as Scofield enlists Kenny

Garrett on alto, Brad Mehldau on piano, Christian McBride on bass, and Billy Higgins on drums.

Sco's nasal, slightly overdriven sound and behind-the-beat phrasing are of course ever present. Mehldau gives the new batch of originals a harmonically advanced dimension, recalling the late 70s partnerships Scofield cultivated with pianists Richard Beirach and Hal Galper. (This, by the way, is Mehldau's second sideman appearance with Higgins, following Charles Lloyd's *The Water Is Wide*.) Scofield's guitar and Garrett's alto blend very effectively on the heads, particularly toward the end of "Big J", when the two take a melodic fragment up an octave, shouting it over a soulful vamp. Their interplay is also fun on "Heel to Toe", during which they trade eight- and then four-bar statements in a spirited joust.

The "groove" and "jazz" elements of Scofield's music come together most effortlessly on "Loose Canon". McBride begins the piece with a three-bar bass riff that becomes the basis for the A sections. The B section breaks into a swing feel, setting in

motion the album's most inspired melodic and harmonic passage. Scofield and Garrett solo over an extended A, Mehdau an extended B. (The rotation is guitar, piano, alto.) Here, as well as on the leadoff track, "I'll Catch You", we have the best of both worlds: a groove tune without the repetitiveness of much of the stuff on *Bump*, but also a jazz tune that is not at all staid or predictable.

— David R. Adler

***Water and Stone***  
**Sonic Liberation Front**  
**Eye Dog Records**

With its fist of power, the Sonic Liberation Front asserts freedom from authority. While the group's icon might suggest some kind of militant defiance, their approach is really much more positive and focused at heart. Drummer Kevin Diehl's group brings together a variety of approaches: from interlaced Afro-Cuban percussion, to African-American swing and free jazz traditions, to post-modern adaptations of electronica. While such an unusual combination of elements might suggest cacophony or hopelessly pithy density, it's remarkably successful. The key to making this commingling of styles work, is vision and that quality is present in abundance on *Water and Stone*.

All of the compositions on *Water and Stone* rely upon a polyrhythmic foundation. The ever-shifting net of drums, shakers, and bells draws upon Santeria as well as subtle electronic looping effects. Laid atop this rhythmic fabric, organic melodies sing forth, in addition to the occasional traditional Cuban vocals. And

then, when you least expect it, the mass explodes into polyphonic split-tone freedom. These bursts generate a higher level of energy, because the free jazz edge contrasts strongly with melodic anchors and interwoven rhythms. Hard to describe, hard to resist, and hard to put down. The underlying logic of the Sonic Liberation Front relies upon occupying common ground. Listeners who like their music less hard-edged would be advised to look elsewhere. But for the adventurous, *Water and Stone* can be an amazingly exhilarating experience in sound.

— Nils Jacobson

## **Visual Audio**

### **State of Bengal**

#### **Six Degrees Records**

Finally! A project and CD whose name and title says it all. A State of Bengal (city in India) and its double entendre folklore is what your mind is about to enter when you listen to *Visual Audio*. The CD begins with a sample of an Indian man announcing “Your attention please. Indian Airlines announces the departure of ‘Flight IC 408’. Passengers are requested to proceed to the aircraft.”

The procession is mandatory because your flight is about to commence, and that is where the *Visual Audio* reference comes in.

The visual is that of your pilot, DJ/Producer extraordinaire Sam Zaman, who is generally considered one of the true purveyors of the British/Asian club scene.

From atop the flight deck, Zaman loads up the audio by collecting and processing an amalgam of beat box rhythms, sitar loops and fat bottom bass. Sam



then manages to lacquer the sound with a smattering of guitars, violins and percussion, which preempts one’s desire to be passive. This combination of visual and audio leads to immediate transportation into a *State of Bengal*. This heightened declaration of imagination will cause you to become totally immersed within a sonic barrage of Bengali and western dance explorations sure to make you don layers of multi colored sheaths of material and spin freely in circles.

And eternally spiral you will as this pleasurable visualization of audio continues from beginning to end. In numbers like “Elephant Ride”, the booming thumping bass makes you picture an elephant triumphantly plodding along. This visualization is accented by a funky soundscape leading one’s imagination to believe that you’re somewhere deep in the middle of the jungle steering this one-ton peanut grazer on a safari jaunt. Once you’ve reached the inner jungle, it’s time to slide down the trunk and be engulfed in a “Chittagong Chill”, which effortlessly slaps a trifle of dancehall into the vibe.

And while you’re chillin’, what else could

you imagine, perhaps a beautiful woman singing to you? Zaman imagines this too. Even if you’re a hip DJ melding British club music and ancient Indian flavorings that doesn’t mean that you’re allowed to buck the current trends. Hence the colorization of the music with a female vocal. Track three “Burn Your Toes” is the obligatory nod as it showcases Suzana Ansar. The mix is invigorating as she steps up to the ethereal shrine and deposits an upper register dose of Qaawali-like vocals.

So, visual audio IS a state of Bengal. Furthermore, there lays an inherent visual of what all audio on Six Degrees Records sounds like. If you are into an adventurous combination of both ancient and new world music mixed with the continuous energy of modern beats, then strap your mind in and let the flight begin.

— Rob Evanoff

## ***Peggy's Blue Skylight***

**Andy Summers**

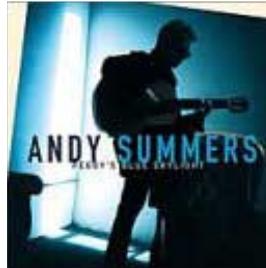
**RCA Victor/BMG**

The former Police guitarist assays the multifaceted works of Charles Mingus on this compelling disc, offering updates of the temperamental bassist's timeless compositions. Summers previously tackled solid material by Mingus, Wayne Shorter, Thelonious Monk, and other jazzmen on his 1997 project *The Last Dance of Mr. X*, with bassist Tony Levin and drummer Gregg Bissonette. *Peggy's Blue Skylight* finds Summers and a wider cast mining Mingus' legacy more deeply, revealing that these classic tunes still have plenty to offer contemporary musicians and fans.

As is his habit, Summers tackles each selection with a different approach, giving this project a kind of Downtown jazz-rock-funk vibe. For example, Mingus' driving train rhythm on "Boogie Stop Shuffle" is sacked in favor of a back-alley slink. "Tonight At Noon" starts off like an acoustic Delta blues but soon shifts into high electric gear. Other tracks echo Pat Metheny, John Scofield, and supermarket soundtracks. It takes a strong talent and fine-

tuned ears like Summers' to weave such a many textured tapestry out of one composer's works while keeping the project entertaining and commercially viable.

The supporting musicians are notably well chosen. Bassist Dave Carpenter is particularly versatile, pumping out steady rock rhythms one moment and mirroring Mingus' own thundering sound the next. Cellist Hank Roberts distinguishes himself mightily on several tracks, leading one to anticipate further collaborations. Rapper Q-Tip of A Tribe Called



Quest evocatively recites a Mingus poem over "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat", and Blondie frontwoman Deborah Harry seductively groans "Weird Nightmare". The Jazz Passengers and Kronos Quartet each contribute excellent performances in their turn. And over it all hover the chameleonic tones of Andy Summers, his impeccable musicianship guiding guitar and ensemble onto paths familiar and uncharted.

This is a much more enjoyable, even-tempered tribute than Hal Willner's *Weird Nightmare* album, with its bizarre Harry Partch instrumentation and skewed arrangements. That disc seemed more reflective of Mingus' troubled mental and emotional state than the true spirit of his compositions. *Peggy's Blue Skylight* simply celebrates one of America's great musical talents without an obligation to analyze his quixotic personality. Highly recommended.

— Todd S. Jenkins

## ***Arts and Crafts***

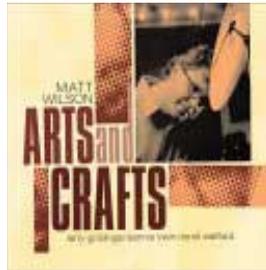
**Matt Wilson**

### **Palmetto**

Ever the restless spirit, Matt Wilson tries something entirely new for his fourth Palmetto CD. Sending the members of his regular Matt Wilson Quartet on a brief vacation, the drummer recruits Terell Stafford on trumpet, Larry Goldings on piano (not organ), and Dennis Irwin on bass for a new band he calls Arts and Crafts. Previous efforts with the MWQ and with Dewey Redman have gained Wilson a left-of-center reputation, but on this album Wilson confounds expectations altogether. He begins with Rahsaan Roland Kirk's "Stompin' Grounds", a no-nonsense ride through "Stomping at the Savoy" changes. Two tracks later, the band runs down Bud Powell's "Webb City". Packing an enormous punch without exceeding four minutes, the performance recalls the concise fury of the earliest bebop sides. In a similarly guileless fashion, the group plays a snappy waltz version of George Gershwin's "Love Walked In". Irwin is featured front and center on Hal Hopper's "There's No You", and Stafford warmly

caresses the bossa nova melody of Nelson Cavaquinho's "Beija Flor".

Wilson's originals are more adventurous — more typically Wilsonian, if you will — but they don't contradict the spirit in which the cover tunes are offered. "Lester", written in honor of the late Lester Bowie, opens with Stafford in wah-wah mode against the unison backdrop of Irwin's bass, then develops into a slow doo-wop blues as the



trumpeter gets increasingly aggressive and stunning. "Final Answer" is a diatonic freebop theme that features Goldings going fairly "outside", something he doesn't do that often. And the title track is a slow groove that again finds Goldings reaching, in subtle but marked contrast to the superb bop playing he does elsewhere on the disc. Indeed, Goldings's presence is one of the album's biggest pluses, not least because the organist's outings on acoustic piano are so rare.

*Arts and Crafts* also puts a boogaloo spin

on Ornette Coleman's "Old Gospel" and wraps up with a soothing, simple arrangement of the folk melody "All Through the Night". On balance, it could be called Wilson's most straight-ahead record yet, but it's clearly not Wilson's intention to fit neatly into any category. Better just to think of it as Matt Wilson music.

— *David R. Adler*