Eric Nemeyer's Jazz Inside

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MAY-JUNE 2017

INTERVIEWS
Kahil El’Zabar

Barry Harris
Dizzy’s Club, June 16

Dion Parson
Dizzy’s Club, June 9-11

Sonny Fortune
4 Generations of Miles
Birdland, May 23-26

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Clayton-Hamilton
Together with an all-star lineup of Los Angeles-based musicians, the big band received an enthusiastic response from reviewers and fans.

Charles McPherson
He remains a strong, viable force on the jazz scene today. He is at the height of his powers. His playing combines passionate feeling with intricate patterns of improvisation.

Terell Stafford
Stafford’s exceptionally expressive and well defined musical talent allows him to dance in and around the rich trumpet tradition of his predecessors while making his own inroads.

Joshua Breakstone
His flowing lines on up-tempo cookers are impeccably clean and fiery, bearing the mark of a first-rate improviser, while his chordal work on heartbreaker ballads is the final word in finesse. — Guitar Player magazine.

Ken Peplowski
Ken Peplowski is reunited with his NYC working group that includes Ted Rosenthal on piano, Martin Wind on bass and Matt Wilson on drums.

Stranahan / Zaleski / Rosato
Limitless shows that the partnership is working quite well and in all likelihood hadn’t even hit its ceiling yet. — S. Victor Aaron, Something Else Reviews

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Interview by Eric Nemeyer

LH: Philly Joe Jones more or less adopted me as being his man, and Papa Jo Jones was my mentor. All these people were here in New York at the time. You're exposed to all these great people.

JI: How was working with Cannonball Adderley different than working with Horace Silver?

LH: Cannon was a lot different than Horace. Horace would rehearse his music and we would play it before we went into the studio. Cannon was more spontaneous. Our first job was in Philadelphia, at Pep’s, and then we went to the Jazz Workshop in San Francisco. We drove out there—which was another different experience—driving all the way out there. With Cannon, we all got along so well. It was a real family feeling with the group. Bobby Timmons was the first pianist. He wrote “Dis Here” which was one of the tunes that got the group established. Barry Harris was also marvelous. But, when Joe Zawinul got there, the group was more complete—because Joe fit in on a very high level. He wrote tunes also. The piano chair was changing until Joe got there. We just made so much history and played so well together. I was there from 1959 to 1965. Eventually, Yusef [Lateef] came in, and then Charles Lloyd. We recorded with Nancy Wilson. Miles [Davis] used to come to me and ask me to join his group. This was about 1961, before Tony Williams—who I got to know very well after he joined Miles. I think when Miles contacted me, Joe [Philly Joe Jones] was still in the group and Miles was trying to make a change. Arthur Taylor played with Miles for a little bit before Jimmy Cobb. But I couldn’t do it. Much as I would have loved to make some history with Miles, I couldn’t do that. I was with Cannon. Stan Getz used to call me and we used to talk. He wanted me to join his quartet. I loved Stan too. But I couldn’t leave Cannon. It was amazing during that time—that you could get that kind of experience, and be in groups and learn with those kinds of musicians and learn on that high level. It all changed later, and there was no possibility for bands to be able to do that. In 1965 Sam Jones and I made a decision that we would go with Oscar Peterson.

(Continued on page 6)
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I’d like to have and I said Yusef [Lateef], and we recorded. I enjoyed it, and I enjoy listening to it now. As far as with Oscar, I had to be very conscious of the dynamics and different things that occurred in the trio.

LH: I can’t recall the name of those tunes we were performing at the time. But I had a feature, whatever it was called. I enjoyed Oscar as a person and I respect his musical ability completely. I’m just not the kind of person, the drummer, that can follow too well. I can play arrangements. But I have my own way of doing things. That’s the way I’m comfortable. I more or less play music because I enjoy it and want to have fun and do what I want to do. If I can’t express myself the way I really want to express myself, then I’m not going to be there for too long. Much as I respected his musical ability, I could only do that for a certain period of time. So after that Freddie [Hubbard] and I were doing some things. As time goes on and you do certain things, you have no choice. You have to become a leader. Eventually I got together with McCoy [Tyner] in 1985. Avery Sharpe was already with him. The trio took off. We were very busy. We all got along just great. I didn’t know it was going to last as long as it did—over three years.

Ji: Could you talk about your own group in the 1970s before your work with Dexter Gordon.

LH: What had happened was that Cedar Walton lived around the corner from me. He went to Europe to do something with the promoter Wim Wigt form Holland. He wanted me to come over and bring a group. But I didn’t have a group at the time. So I got Junior Cook and Woody Shaw, and Ronnie Mathews, and Stafford. So it was the Louis Hayes-Junior Cook Quintet featuring Woody Shaw. We went to Europe quite a bit. That was a very strong group. We did that for two or three years. Rene McLean took Junior’s place and we recorded A Real Thing on Muse Records. Around that time I was down at the Village Vanguard to see Thad Jones and Mel Lewis’ Big Band. Mel said I ought to go see Norman Schwartz. So I called him and we struck a groove right away. Norman liked to do big things. So he added congas, and Leon Thomas sung a couple of tunes. I wrote a tune for my wife, and he put the words to that and to a Freddie Hubbard composition. So we did that date for Gryphon Records. That recording got five stars.

Ji: Could you talk about the Cannonball Legacy Band?

LH: The group includes Vincent Herring, Vincent Archer, Rick Germanson [piano]. We’re still doing quite a bit. The CD on High Note that came out did very well. I’m still doing that but I also have some other things coming up. Curtis Fuller and myself are teaming up to make some history together. We go back all the way to the beginning in Detroit. We put together a band called the Curtis Fuller-Louis Hayes Rising Stars, and we’re traveling around with that.

Background
Louis Hayes left Detroit for New York City at age 19 and quickly began associations with leading artists including: Horace Silver’s Quintet (1956–1959), the Cannonball Adderley Quintet (1959–1965), and the Oscar Peterson Trio (1965–1967). Hayes and bassist Sam Jones, both with Adderley and Peterson, eventually joined Oscar Peterson’s trio. Hayes worked with Yusef Lateef and Curtis Fuller from 1955 to 1956, moved to New York in August 1956 to replace Art Taylor in the Horace Silver Quintet and in 1959 joined the Cannonball Adderley Quintet, with which he remained until mid-1965. After replacing drummer Ed Thigpen in the Peterson trio, Hayes continued for three years in that seat. In 1967, he formed a series of groups, which he led alone or with others; among his sidemen were Freddie Hubbard, Joe Henderson, Kenny Barron, and James Spaulding. He returned to Peterson in 1971. From 1972 to 1975 he co-led the Louis Hayes-Junior Cook Quintet and the Woody Shaw-Louis Hayes Quintet. In 1976 Dexter Gordon returned to the United States after leaving for Europe in the early 1960s and Hayes’ group became the foundation for Gordon’s return. After Shaw left the group in 1977, Hayes continued to lead it as a hard-bop quintet. Hayes has appeared on numerous recordings as a leader and sideman (see discography ahead) - performing with John Coltrane, Kenny Burrell, Freddie Hubbard, Bobby Timmons, Hank Mobley, Booker Little, Tommy Flanagan, Cecil Taylor, McCoy Tyner, Ray Brown, Joe Henderson, Gary Bartz, and Tony Williams. His recordings appear on record labels including Vee-Jay (1960), Timeless (1976), Muse (1977), Candid (1989), Steeplechase (1989–1994), and TCB (2000–2002). After being a member of McCoy Tyner’s trio for over three years, Hayes has led his own bands and together with Vincent Herring formed the Cannonball Legacy Band.

(Continued on page 8)
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Discography

As leader/co-leader
- Louis Hayes (Vee-Jay, 1960)
- Breath of Life (Muse, 1974)
- Ichi-Ban (Timeless, 1976) with Junior Cook
- The Real Thing (Muse, 1977)
- Variety Is the Spice (Gryphon, 1979)
- Light and Lively (SteepleChase, 1989)
- The Crawl (Candid, 1989)
- Una Max (SteepleChase, 1989)
- Nightfall (SteepleChase, 1991)
- Blue Lou (SteepleChase, 1993)
- The Super Quartet (Timeless, 1994)
- Louis at Large (Sharp Nine, 1996)
- Quintessential Lou (TCB, 2000)
- The Candy Man (TCB, 2001)
- Dreamin' of Cannonball (TCB, 2002)
- Maximum Firepower (Savant, 2006)
- Return of the Jazz Communicators (Smoke Sessions, 2014)[2]

As sideman
With Cannonball Adderley
- In San Francisco (1959, Riverside)
- Them Dirty Blues (1960, Riverside)
- Nancy Wilson/Cannonball Adderley (1961, Capitol)
- Nippon Soul (1963, Riverside)
- Sextet in New York (1964, Riverside)
- Phenix (1975, Fantasy)

With Nat Adderley
- Work Song (1960, Riverside)
- Naturally! (1961, Jazzland)

With Gene Ammons
- Goodbye (Prestige, 1974)
- With Kenny Burrell
- K. B. Blues (Blue Note, 1957 [1979])
- Bluesin' Around (Columbia, 1961 [1983])

With James Clay
- A Double Dose of Soul (Riverside, 1960)

With Al Cohn
- Son of Drum Suite (RCA Victor, 1960)
- True Blue (1976, Xanadu) with Dexter Gordon

With John Coltrane
- Silver Blue (1976, Xanadu) with Dexter Gordon

With Richard Davis
- Lush Life (1958, Prestige)
- The Last Trane (1958, Prestige)
- Coltrane Time (1958, United Artists, Blue Note)
- The Believer (1963, Prestige)

With Victor Feldman
- Merry Olde Soul (Riverside, 1961)

With Tommy Flanagan, John Coltrane, Kenny Burrell, and Idrees Sulieman
- The Cats (1957, Prestige)

With Curtis Fuller
- New Trombone (Prestige, 1957)
- Curtis Fuller with Red Garland (New Jazz, 1957 [1962])
- Jazz ...It's Magic! (Regent, 1957)
- Curtis Fuller Volume 3 (1957, Blue Note)

With Terry Gibbs
- Take It from Me (Impulse!, 1964)

With Dexter Gordon
- Ca' Purange (Prestige, 1972)
- Tangerine (Prestige, 1972)

With Bennie Green
- Back on the Scene (1958, Blue Note)

With Grant Green
- Gooden's Corner (1961, Blue Note)
- Oleo (1962, Blue Note)

With Barry Harris
- At the Jazz Workshop (Riverside, 1960)

With Joe Henderson
- The Kicker (1967, Milestone)
- Tetragon (1968, Milestone)

With Johnny Hodges
- Blue Hodge (Verve, 1961)

With Freddie Hubbard
- The Artistry of Freddie Hubbard (Impulse!, 1962)
- Without a Song: Live in Europe 1969 (Blue Note)

With J. J. Johnson
- A Touch of Satin (Columbia, 1962)

With Sam Jones
- The Soul Society (Riverside, 1960)
- The Chant (Riverside, 1961)
- Changes & Things (Xanadu, 1977)
- Something in Common (Muse, 1977)

With Clifford Jordan
- Cliff Craft (Blue Note, 1957)
- Inward Fire (Muse, 1978)

With Yusef Lateef
- Jazz for the Thinker (Savoy, 1957)
- Stable Mates (Savoy, 1957)
- Jazz Mood (Savoy, 1957)

With Johnny Lytle
- Nice and Easy (Jazzland, 1962)

With Jackie McLean
- Strange Blues (Prestige, 1957)

With Phineas Newborn, Jr.
- A World of Piano! (Contemporary, 1962)
- The Great Jazz Piano of Phineas Newborn Jr. (Contemporary, 1963)

With Freddie Redd
- Shades of Redd (1960, Blue Note)

With Woody Shaw
- The Woody Shaw Concert Ensemble at the Berliner Jazztage (Muse, 1976)

With Horace Silver
- 6 Pieces of Silver (1956, Blue Note)
- The Stylings of Silver (1957, Blue Note)
- Finger Poppin' (1959, Blue Note)
- Blowin' the Blues Away (1959, Blue Note)

With Sonny Stitt
- 121 (Muse, 1972)

With Idrees Sulieman
- Roots (New Jazz, 1958) with the Prestige All Stars

With McCoy Tyner
- Uptown/Downtown (1988, Milestone)
- With Cedar Walton
- A Night At Boomers, Vol. 1 (Muse, 1973)
- A Night At Boomers, Vol. 2 (Muse, 1973)
- Firm Roots (Muse, 1974 [1976])
- Pit Inn (East Wind, 1974)

With Roosevelt Wardell
- The Revelation (Prestige, 1960)

With Phil Woods
- Four Altos (Prestige, 1957) - with Gene Quill, Sahib Shihab, and Hal Stein

With The Young Lions
- The Young Lions (1960) Vee-Jay

With Joe Zawinul
- Money in the Pocket (Atlantic, 1967)
- With Rein de Graaff
- New York Jazz (Timeless, 1979) - with Sam Jones [3]
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Interview

Dion Parson
Perseverance

Hear Dion Parson at Dizzy’s Club, June 9-11

Interview by Eric Nemeyer

JI: What are the elements that contribute to the unique sound, styles, repertoire, personnel?

DP: The members of the 21st Century band are all from the US Virgin Islands, except Carlton Holmes on Piano and Alioune Faye on Percussion. The musical culture of the VI is very unique because we are an American territory, but we are located in the heart of the Caribbean. The musical culture of the VI ranges from Calypso, Soca, Jazz, Latin, Zook, Brazilian, Quelbe, Reggae, R&B, Pop, Soul, Hip Hop, Country and Western and Classical Music. All of these styles of music is what makes the VI a unique place to visit and a unique culture in the Caribbean. 21st Century Band plays a variety of musical styles from the Caribbean and combines it with traditional Jazz harmonies, melodies and improvisational nuances that allows us to be a fully functioning Jazz group that plays music with a Caribbean flare. All the members of the 21st Century band have music degrees and are employed at universities and teach privately. The members of the 21st Century band were picked to be in the band based on their musicality and professionalism. Ron Blake and I started the band in 1998 and the first time doing that recording and I learned so much about the origins of American music and foundation of modern drumming.

JI: What is the United Jazz Foundation?

DP: United Jazz Foundation is a Non-For-Profit 501C3 Music Education organization that I co-founded with my wife Nicole Koerts-Parson. Nicole and I decided to start this organization based on the education work that I was doing in the Virgin Islands over the past 20 years. All of the members of 21st Century Band work with us to execute the programs throughout the Virgin Islands. We also have a partnership with the local government of the Virgin Islands as well as other music organizations in New York City to help educate the young musicians of the Virgin Islands. We help these young and talented students get into Colleges and/or Universities and in return we ask them to return back to the Virgin Islands to help educate the next generation of music and to perform at our free community concerts which helps promote them as up and coming Jazz artists and to build cultural awareness in the Virgin Islands.

JI: What are the key activities of “Mentoring Through the Arts of Music” an organization which you founded?

DP: Mentoring Through the Arts of Music provides music workshops, clinics, master classes and private lessons to students in the public and private schools of the Virgin Islands. We also do free community concerts during our visits to the schools on St. John, St. Croix and St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

JI: Could you share some of the highlights and or inspiring conversations you may have had with some of the notable musicians with whom you have developed associations - and how they may have made an impact on you? Milt Jackson?

DP: I met Milt Jackson through my association with Bob Cranshaw. Milt always made it clear that the music came first and to always get to the point. I really enjoyed working with him and he treated me like family from the first day I met him.

JI: Monty Alexander?

DP: I met Monty Alexander through the great bassist Ira Coleman. I had been in New York City for about three years and I got a call to play at a club call Cleopatra’s Needle. However, what I didn’t realize was that a snow storm was about to hit New York City that afternoon. By the time the snow started to come down I could not get a taxi to the gig, so I started to walk with my drums strapped on my back … I lived on 156th street and St. Nicolas Ave and the gig was on 94th and Broadway. That’s a long walk! Well, I got to the gig...”

JI: How did your association with Jazz At Lincoln Center develop and how has it grown over the years?

DP: The first time 21st Century Band performed at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola was in 2008 for Father’s Day weekend. As you know, June is Caribbean Heritage month and we are a band with our roots based in Caribbean music, therefore, we were invited to come and perform our style of Jazz for the wonderful audience at JALC. We worked hard to make that first gig and all the other gigs successful, and it was. 21st Century band has been performing at JALC ever since then and we have recorded two live CD’s there—Dion Parson and 21st Century Band Live at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola Volume 1 and Volume 2. I also work for JALC presenting and performing their Jazz For Young People education programs throughout the different boroughs in NYC.

JI: Could you talk about your association with saxophonist Ron Blake and how that developed and plays an integral part of your musical pursuits?

DP: Ron and I grew up together on St. Thomas. We became friends in high school in 1982, Ron actually transferred to Interlochen music academy in Ann Arbor, Michigan for high school. However, during our high school breaks, we would spend our Christmas and summer breaks hanging out, teaching summer band and going around the island trying to find jam sessions to play at. We eventually just hung out playing duets together for years. That was the foundation of our relationship, playing duets. I moved to New York City after finishing up my bachelor’s degree at Rutgers University in 1990 and Ron moved to NYC couple years after. We became roommates for about seven years. We would practice all day and hang out all night going from session to session and we would have sessions of our own at the apartment we lived in, or upstairs at our friend Marc Cary’s (the piano player) apartment. During that time we really worked on putting a band together and that’s when 21st Century band was formed in 1998.

JI: What are some of the highlights and or inspiring conversations you may have had with some of the notable musicians with whom you have developed associations - and how they may have made an impact on you? Milt Jackson?

DP: I met Milt Jackson through my association with Bob Cranshaw. Milt always made it clear that the music came first and to always get to the point. I really enjoyed working with him and he treated me like family from the first day I met him. (Continued on page 12)
Dion Parson

(Continued from page 10)

gig was on 94th and Broadway. That’s a long walk! Well, I got to the gig and met Ira Coleman and we had a lot of fun playing that night. Ira was kind enough to drive me home and I spent the next two weeks in bed sick. But during those two weeks while I was sick, I got a call from Monty saying that Ira recommended me for the gig and he wanted me to join his band. I worked with Monty for about three and a half years and we did one recording together called “Steamin’ with the Monty Alexander Trio”. I learned a lot from Monty. There were three musicians that steered me in the direction of perusing my Caribbean musical heritage. The first one was Donald Harrison, then Monty Alexander and then Ernest Ranglin. All three of these amazing musicians gave me the opportunity to experiment with my Caribbean musical heritage while I was working with them. However, Monty’s influenced me a bit more because I worked with him longer. His sense of rhythm is amazing. But, I feel that what I walked away from his gig with was a better understanding of arranging music. He is a master of arranging, and, on the spot arranging, mind you. I have seen him do it and I have been part on his impromptu on the spot arrangements. Its great!

JI: Jon Faddis?

DP: I first got introduced to Jon Faddis by my late best friend and bassist, Mr. Dwayne Burno in 1994. Jon called me one day and asked if he could stop by my apartment to talk to me about a gig he had coming up that weekend and he said that Dwayne had recommended me for the gig. I knew of Jon from his work with Dizzy Gillespie and also my good friend and brother Ralph Peterson, use to play with Jon, so I immediately got excited and said sure, you can come by. So Jon came by my place and we talked for a while and he auditioned me on the spot, left me some CD’s and said I’ll see you on Saturday. We drove up to Rhode Island and performed that night. It was the Jon Faddis Quartet, with Cyrus Chestnut, Dwayne Burno and Dion Parson. After that gig Jon asked me if I wanted to join his band and I said yes. I have been working with the Jon Faddis quartet for the past 20 years. I also performed with the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band under his direction between 1998 and 2000. Imagine, having a gig for 20 years these days is unheard of. I’ve learned a lot from Jon. He is a great educator and businessman. Just being around him is a lesson. I have watched trumpet players come up to Jon at gigs with different issues, and he is always cordial, supportive and giving. Jon Faddis is a true Master and I’m blessed to be able to support his music with my drums.

JF: Steve Turre?

DP: I first me Steve Turre in 2000 while I was doing a performance with the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band plus an Orchestra. We were doing a presentation of Duke Ellington’s music at Carnegie Hall. During one of the rehearsals Steve asked me for my phone number and as they say the rest is history. I have enjoyed working with Steve over the years, mainly because I grew up playing the trombone. It’s a voice that I can hear and I can follow and support that instrument well. Steve has 5 bands that I perform in. He has his quartet, his quintet with sax, his quintet with trumpet, his trombone group and his shell choir. Each one of these groups are unique from each other and the repertoire is very different. Steve have motioned to me in the past that he hires me because of my versatility when it comes to the different styles of music that he likes to play—music that ranges from Louis Armstrong to Woody Shaw, Ray Charles to McCoy Tyner and Latin music to conch shell music. I enjoy the challenge and the creative process that goes along with figuring out all of the particulars that goes along with his gig.

JF: Gary Bartz?

DP: Gary Bartz was that first professional saxophone player that I was focused on playing with. I met Gary on St. Thomas in 1987 at the Virgin Islands Jazz Festival. I was still in college at the time and was trying to figure things out musically. Gary Bartz connected with Ron Blake during that time on St. Thomas and I got a chance to build a relationship with Gary because of Ron. I worked a couple of gigs here and there with Gary when I first came to New York City, but it wasn’t until I stated working with Steve Turre in 2000, that I really got a chance to play with Gary on some of Steve’s gigs. Steve Turre has a Rahaan Roland Kirk tribute band that I’m a part of and Gary works in that band also.

JF: You’ve taught at Rutgers University and conducted workshops around the world. How has your work as an educator and the strictures and structures of the academic environment helped and or hindered your artistic pursuits?

DP: I have always considered myself to be a performer as well as an educator. I love doing both and I feel that I can continue to do both. I just had to find the right balance. I can tell you this, I know I could not sit in a classroom everyday just teaching students. My brain doesn’t work like that. I need a balance life of performing and teaching. Being able to go on the road and perform brings another set of lessons and energy to your teaching experience, both as a teacher and a student. You can teach with a more hands on approach because you have lived it. Now, I’m not talking about beginning or even intermediate level of teaching music. I’m talk about the advance/professional level. Rutgers offered me my first teaching opportunity. At that particular time in my life I had just finished my undergraduate degree and was starting my masters degree when my drum teacher at that time [Keith Copeland] decided to leave Rutgers University for a teaching job in Germany and the Department Chair at Rutgers University asked me to step in and take over his responsibilities, so I did for one year, then I relocated to Cheyenne University in Pennsylvania and taught there also. I also taught for eight years at New Jersey Performing Arts Center Wachovia Jazz for Teens program in Newark, New Jersey. I am now teaching at the University of the Virgin Islands as an Artist in Residence for the past three years.

JF: Given the nature of the niche that jazz is, the current reality of this being a contracting market, what kind of vision do you have for yourself about experiencing some of your hopes and goals in the next five or even ten years?

DP: I’m not sure what is going to happen in the Jazz scene right now as far as contracting yourself out to perform with different bands. There are a lot of new musician on the scene in New York City every year and not that many gigs. You just have to be smart about what you want to do these days. How does the old saying goes, been there and done that. I have a great opportunity to develop quality music in the Virgin Islands and the Caribbean in general and I feel that that is my calling for now. Also, to continue to promote and work the 21st Century Band so that we can continue to create a market for Virgin Islands musicians as well as other Caribbean musicians to promote their music on a high level. At the same time trying to create an exchange of musical culture.

JF: What do you do to decompress outside of music and the stresses of daily life in contemporary society?

DP: Well, I have a [young] son, so decompressing is not part of my daily life right now. However, I like to cook. That does for me. Preparing a really good home cook meal for my family and friends is my way of relaxing when I’m off the road.

JF: Is there anything you’d like to discuss for which I haven’t prompted you?

DP: I would like to thank Michael Carvin (Each One Teach One) for all his support he has given me over the 14 years that I have studied with him. Also for being the first producer to have worked with the 21st Century Band to develop our unique style and sound. Thanks Michael for your time, wisdom and ears! Finally, to all the musicians that have worked with the 21st Century band over the years, thanks for your great musicianship! Gary Bartz, Terrell Stafford, Bobby Thomas, Stephen Scott, Clifton Anderson, Myron Walden, Reginald Cyntji, Jeremy Pelt, Marcus Printup, Jimmy Basch, Yosvany Terry, Kenny Davis, Desron Douglas, Mamado Ba, Ira Coleman, Xavier Davis, Helen Sung, Daniel Sadowrnick, Renato Thom.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Monday, May 15

- Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
- Jazzmeia Horn, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard
- Chucu Váldes Quartet 75th Birthday Celebration, Blue Note
- Jim Caruso’s Cast Party, Birdland
- Randy Ingram Quartet, Ari Hoenig Trio, Jonathan Michel - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Tuesday, May 16

- Anat Cohen & Trio Brasileiro, Jazz Standard
- Bill Charlap Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Ruben Fox, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Keyon Harrold & Friends ft Special Guests, Blue Note
- Steve Coleman and Five Elements, Village Vanguard
- New York Voices Sings the Great American Songbook, Birdland
- Steve Nelson Quintet, Abraham Burton Quartet, Small’s

Wednesday, May 17

- Anat Cohen & Trio Brasileiro, Jazz Standard
- Bill Charlap Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Ruben Fox, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Keyon Harrold & Friends ft Special Guests, Blue Note
- Steve Coleman and Five Elements, Village Vanguard
- New York Voices Sings the Great American Songbook, Birdland
- Alex Wintz Quintet, Harold Mabern Trio, Jovian Alexandre - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Thursday, May 18

- Regina Carter: Simply Ella, Jazz Standard
- Bill Charlap Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Ruben Fox, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- The Manhattan Transfer 45th Anniversary Celebration, Blue Note
- Steve Coleman and Five Elements, Village Vanguard
- New York Voices Sings the Great American Songbook, Birdland
- Phil Markowitz Trio, Carlos Abadie Quintet, Sarah Sionim Project - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Friday, May 19

- Regina Carter: Simply Ella, Jazz Standard
- Count Meets The Duke, Wynton Marsalis, Vincent Gardner and Rodney Whitaker are joined by the next generation of jazz greats to perform the music of Duke Ellington and Count Basie, 8PM, Rose Theatre, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Cecile McLorin Salvant & The Aaron Diehl Trio, 7PM & 9:30 PM, The Appel Room, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Bill Charlap Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Ruben Fox, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- The Manhattan Transfer 45th Anniversary Celebration, Blue Note
- Steve Coleman and Five Elements, Village Vanguard
- New York Voices In Brazil, Birdland
- Dave Stoler Quartet, Mike Rodriguez Quintet, Lawrence Leathers - “After-hours”, Small’s

Saturday, May 20

- Regina Carter: Simply Ella, Jazz Standard
- Count Meets The Duke, Wynton Marsalis, Vincent Gardner
- and Rodney Whitaker are joined by the next generation of jazz greats to perform the music of Duke Ellington and Count Basie, 8PM, Rose Theatre, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Cecile McLorin Salvant & The Aaron Diehl Trio, 7PM & 9:30 PM, The Appel Room, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Bill Charlap Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Ruben Fox, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- The Manhattan Transfer 45th Anniversary Celebration, Blue Note
- Steve Coleman and Five Elements, Village Vanguard
- New York Voices In Brazil, Birdland
- Dave Stoler Quartet, Mike Rodriguez Quintet, Lawrence Leathers - “After-hours”, Small’s

Sunday, May 21

- Jazz For Kids, Jazz Standard
- Regina Carter: Simply Ella, Jazz Standard
- The Manhattan Transfer 45th Anniversary Celebration, Blue Note
- Steve Coleman and Five Elements, Village Vanguard
- New York Hot Jazz Camp All-Stars, Birdland
- Vocals Masterclass with Marion Cowings, Murakami Trio feat. Sacha Perry, Johnny O’Neal Trio, Ari Ambrose Quintet, Jon Beshay - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Monday, May 22

- Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
- Chris Cheek Berklee Quintet, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Inspired: Celebrating Jim Hall w/ Juris, Bernstein, Micic & Lund, Blue Note
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard
- Glenn Close and the Cast of Sunset Boulevard In “Vintage Hollywood”, Birdland
- Matt Pavao’s Home Band, Jonathan Michel Group & After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Tuesday, May 23

- David Kikoski Trio, Jazz Standard
- Bill Charlap Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Dan Chmielinski 4 By 4, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Stanton Moore, Blue Note
- Gerald Clayton Trio, Village Vanguard
- “Four Generations of Miles” Jimmy Cobb, Mike Stern, Buster Williams, Sonny Fortune, Birdland
- Theo Hill Birthday Celebration, Abraham Burton Quartet, Small’s

Wednesday, May 24

- Gil Gutierrez, Jazz Standard
- Bill Charlap Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Dan Chmielinski 4 By 4, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Stanton Moore, Blue Note
- Gerald Clayton Trio, Village Vanguard
- “Four Generations of Miles” Jimmy Cobb, Mike Stern, Buster Williams, Sonny Fortune, Birdland
- Christopher McBride & Whole Proof, Jimmy O’Connel Sextet, Aaron Seeger - After-hours Jam Session, Small’s

Thursday, May 25

- Gil Evans Project, Directed by Ryan雷斯, Jazz Standard
- Bill Charlap Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center

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- Dan Chmielinski 4 By 4, *Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Larry Harlow & The Latin Legends, *Blue Note*
- Gerald Clayton Trio, *Village Vanguard*
- “Four Generations of Miles” Jimmy Cobb, Mike Stern, Buster Williams, Sonny Fortune, *Birdland*
- Russ Nolan Quartet, Michael Dease Sextet, *After-hours Jam Session with Corey Wallace, Small’s*

Saturday, May 27

- Gil Evans Project Presents Miles Ahead 60th Anniversary, Directed by Ryan Truesdell, *Jazz At Lincoln Center*
- Dan Chmielinski 4 By 4, *Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Larry Harlow & The Latin Legends, *Blue Note*
- Gerald Clayton Trio, *Village Vanguard*
- Eric Comstock and Sean Smith, *Birdland*
- Michael Bond - Afternoon Jam Session, *Brooklyn Circle, Small’s*

Sunday, May 28

- Gil Evans Project Presents Miles Ahead 60th Anniversary, Directed by Ryan Truesdell, Jazz Standard
- Larry Harlow & The Latin Legends, *Blue Note*
- Gerald Clayton Trio, *Village Vanguard*
- Pleurtine Featuring Boys From Brazil and Special, *Birdland*
- P. Shaposhnikoff (Brooklyn)
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings, Al Murakami Trio feat. Sacha Perry, JD Walter Quintet, Jerry Weldon Quartet, Hillel Salem - *After-hours Jam Session, Small’s*

Monday, May 29

- Jazz Standard
- Louis Hayes, Serenade For Horace Silver, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center*
- Micah Thomas, *Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- A Beautiful Night Of Jazz feat. Julie E. & Alex Blake, *Blue Note*
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, *Village Vanguard*
- Christina Bianco, *Birdland*
- John Chin Quintet, Jonathan Barber - *After-hours Jam Session, Small’s*

Tuesday, May 30

- Helen Sung’s Sung With Words, Jazz Standard
- Louis Hayes, Serenade For Horace Silver, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center*
- Micah Thomas, *Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- McCoy Tyner, *Blue Note*
- Jovan Jackson Quartet, *Village Vanguard*
- Ravi Coltrane, *Birdland*
- Lucas Pino Nonet, *Abraham Burton Quartet, Small’s*

Wednesday, May 31

- Glenn Zaleski, Jazz Standard
- Louis Hayes, Serenade For Horace Silver, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center*
- Micah Thomas, *Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Jovan Jackson Quartet, *Village Vanguard*
- McCoy Tyner, *Blue Note*
- Ravi Coltrane, *Birdland*
- Melissa Aldana Quintet, Adam Bimbaum Quintet, Jovan Alexandre - *After-hours Jam Session, Small’s*

Thursday, June 1

- Sean Jones Quartet, Jazz Standard
- World Of Monk, Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis and special guests Baqir Abbas and Hamilton de Holanda, 8PM, Rose Theatre, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Gabe Schnider & Friends Celebrate Monk, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center*
- Micah Thomas, *Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Dirty Dozen Brass Band 40th Anniversary Celebration, *Blue Note*
- Jovan Jackson Quartet, *Village Vanguard*
- Emmet Cohen, *Birdland*

Friday, June 2

- Sean Jones Quartet, Jazz Standard
- World Of Monk, Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis and special guests Baqir Abbas and Hamilton de Holanda, 8PM, Rose Theatre, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Monk’s Dream:Russell Hall Plays Monk, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center*
- Micah Thomas, *Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*
- Dirty Dozen Brass Band 40th Anniversary Celebration, *Blue Note*
- Jovan Jackson Quartet, *Village Vanguard*
- Ravi Coltrane, *Birdland*

Saturday, June 3

- Sean Jones Quartet, Jazz Standard
- World Of Monk, Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis and special guests Baqir Abbas and Hamilton de Holanda, 8PM, Rose Theatre, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Monk’s Dream:Russell Hall Plays Monk, *Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center*
- Micah Thomas, *Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola*

(Continued on page 16)
Fred Hersch Duo Series
TUE-SUN MAY 2-7

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TUE MAY 23

Jazz Inside Magazine
May

Donny McCaslin
Wed May 3
Gilad Hekselman
Thu May 4
Jo Lawry

Robert Stern - David Rodriguez
Wed May 24

Steve Wilson
Fri May 5
Stefon Harris
Sun May 7
Chris Potter

Gil Evans Project
Thu-Fri May 25-26
Sat-Sun May 27-28

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The Bad Plus
Tue-Wed May 16-17

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Thu-Sun May 18-21

Regina Carter: Simply Ella

Wed May 31

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Sunday, June 4
• Sean Jones Quartet, Jazz Standard
• Monk’s Dream: Russell Hall Plays Monk, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
• Micah Thomas, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
• Javon Jackson Quartet, Village Vanguard
• Dirty Dozen Brass Band 40th Anniversary Celebration, Blue Note
• Vanessa Raci, Italiana Fresca, CD Release, Birdland

Monday, June 5
• Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
• Jazz At Lincoln Center Youth Orchestra with Justin Robinson, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
• The Hot Sardines, Blue Note
• Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard

Tuesday, June 6
• Sasha Masakowski & New Orleans Art Market, Jazz Standard
• Paul Nedzala, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
• Alphonse Horne, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
• Mark Turner Quartet, Village Vanguard
• Hiromi & Edmar Castaneda Duet, Blue Note
• Troy Roberts Tales & Tones Record Release, Birdland

Wednesday, June 7
• Charnett Moffett’s Nettwork, Jazz Standard
• Chico Freeman, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
• Alphonse Horne, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
• Hiromi & Edmar Castaneda Duet, Blue Note
• David Finck, Low Standards CD Release Event, Birdland

Thursday, June 8
• Etienne Charles Creole Soul, Jazz Standard
• Chico Freeman, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
• Alphonse Horne, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
• Mark Turner Quartet, Village Vanguard
• Hiromi & Edmar Castaneda Duet, Blue Note
• Urbanity featuring Albare and Phil Turcio, Birdland

Friday, June 9
• Etienne Charles Creole Soul, Jazz Standard
• Dion Parson, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
• Alphonso Horne, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
• Mark Turner Quartet, Village Vanguard
• Hiromi & Edmar Castaneda Duet, Blue Note
• Urbanity featuring Albare and Phil Turcio, Birdland

Saturday, June 10
• Etienne Charles Creole Soul, Jazz Standard
• Dion Parson, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
• Alphonso Horne, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
• Mark Turner Quartet, Village Vanguard
• Hiromi & Edmar Castaneda Duet, Blue Note
• Urbanity featuring Albare and Phil Turcio, Birdland

Sunday, June 11
• Etienne Charles Creole Soul, Jazz Standard
• Mark Turner Quartet, Village Vanguard
• Hiromi & Edmar Castaneda Duet, Blue Note
• Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Birdland

Monday, June 12
• Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
• WBGO Presents — Samora Pinderhughes, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
• Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard
• The Hot Sardines, Blue Note
• Jessica Molaskey “Portraits of Joni”, Birdland

(Continued on page 17)
“Some people’s idea of free speech is that they are free to say what they like, but if anyone says anything back that is an outrage.”

- Winston Churchill

Tuesday, June 13

- David Gilmore Group, Jazz Standard
- Peter & Will Anderson, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Kush Abadey, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Russell Malone Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Danilo Pérez/Jonathan Blake Trio, Blue Note
- Freddy Cole Quartet, Birdland

Wednesday, June 14

- Benoit Delbeuzy’s The Conversation, Jazz Standard
- Allan Harris Band, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Kush Abadey, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Russell Malone Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Danilo Pérez/John Pattitucci/Brian Blade Trio, Blue Note

Thursday, June 15

- Tierney Sutton Band: Sting Variations, Jazz Standard
- Allan Harris Band, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Kush Abadey, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Russell Malone Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Danilo Pérez/John Pattitucci/Brian Blade Trio, Blue Note

Friday, June 16

- Tierney Sutton Band: Sting Variations, Jazz Standard
- Barry Harris, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Kush Abadey, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Russell Malone Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Danilo Pérez/John Pattitucci/Brian Blade Trio, Blue Note

Saturday, June 17

- Tierney Sutton Band: Sting Variations, Jazz Standard
- Barry Harris, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Kush Abadey, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Russell Malone Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Danilo Pérez/John Pattitucci/Brian Blade Trio, Blue Note

Sunday, June 18

- The Smokeystack Brunch: Peter Brendler, Jazz Standard
- Tierney Sutton Band: Sting Variations, Jazz Standard
- Barry Harris, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Kush Abadey, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Danilo Pérez/John Pattitucci/Brian Blade Trio, Blue Note
- Russell Malone Quartet, Village Vanguard

Monday, June 19

- Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
- Jon Gordon, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard
- The Hot Sardines, Blue Note

Tuesday, June 20

- Shai Maestro Trio with Gretchen Parlato, Jazz Standard
- Theo Hill Trio, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Alina Engbayarn, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Chris Potter Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Jacob Collier, Blue Note

Wednesday, June 21

- Steve Slagle A.M, Band, Jazz Standard

Jazztopad Festival: Wojcinski / Szmanda Quartet & STRYJO, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Alina Engbayarn, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Chris Potter Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Jacob Collier, Blue Note

Thursday, June 22

- Azar Lawrence Quintet featuring Steve Turre, Jazz Standard
- Kurt Elling, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Alina Engbayarn, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Chris Potter Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Michel Camilo Trio, Blue Note

Saturday, June 24

- Azar Lawrence Quintet featuring Steve Turre, Jazz Standard
- Kurt Elling, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Alina Engbayarn, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Chris Potter Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Jill Newman Productions Presents: Ntozake Shange “Wild Beasts”, Blue Note

Sunday, June 25

- The Smokeystack Brunch: Vuyo Sotashe, Jazz Standard
- Azar Lawrence Quintet featuring Steve Turre, Jazz Standard
- Monterey Jazz Festival’s Next Generation Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Chris Potter Quartet, Village Vanguard
- Michel Camilo Trio, Blue Note

Monday, June 26

- Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard
- Band Director Academy Faculty Band, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard
- The Hot Sardines, Blue Note

Tuesday, June 27

- Dr. Lonnie Smith 75th Birthday Celebration—Trio, Jazz Standard
- Black Arts Collective, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Poole & The Gang, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Charlie Haden’s Liberation Music Orchestra w/ Carla Bley, Blue Note

Wednesday, June 28

- Dr. Lonnie Smith 75th Birthday Celebration—Trio, Jazz Standard
- Black Arts Collective, Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola, Jazz At Lincoln Center
- Poole & The Gang, Late Night at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola
- Dave Holland Trio, Village Vanguard
- McCoy Tyner, Blue Note

Thursday, June 29

- Dr. Lonnie Smith 75th Birthday Celebration—Trio, Jazz Standard
- Cassandra Wilson, Blue Note
- Dave Holland Trio, Village Vanguard

Friday, June 30

- Dr. Lonnie Smith 75th Birthday Celebration—Odet, Jazz Standard
- Dave Holland Trio, Village Vanguard
- Cassandra Wilson, Blue Note

REGULAR GIGS

Mondays

- Mingus Big Band at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Jon Weiss 2 at Cleopatra’s Needle, 8:00 PM. 2485 Broadway.
- Swingadelic at Swing 46, 8:30 PM. 349 W. 46th.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30

PM. 178 7th Ave. S.

- Woody Allen & Eddy Davis New Orleans Jazz Band at Cafe Carlyle, 8:45 PM. 35 E. 72nd.
- Jam Session at Cleopatra’s Needle, 10:00 PM. 2485 Broadway.

Tuesdays

- Earl Rose at Belémans, 5:30 PM. 35 E. 76th.
- Marc Devine 3 at Cleopatra’s Needle, 8:00 PM. 2485 Broadway.
- Chris Gillespie 3 at Belémans, 9:30 PM. 35 E. 76th.
- Jam Session at Cleopatra’s Needle, 10:00 PM. 2485 Broadway.
- Jam Session at Small’s, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesdays

- Louis Armstrong Eternity Band at Birdland, 5:30 PM. 315 W. 44th.
- Les Kurz 3 at Cleopatra’s Needle, 7:30 PM. 2485 Broadway.
- Stan Rubin Orchestra at Swing 46, 7:15 PM. 349 W. 46th.
- Chris Gillespie 3 at Belémans, 9:30 PM. 35 E. 76th.
- Tony Hewitt/Pete Malinverni at Mezzrow, 11:00 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
- Jam at Cleopatra’s Needle, 11:30 PM. 2485 Broadway.
- Jam Session at Small’s, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.

Thursdays

- Earl Rose at Belémans, 5:30 PM. 35 E. 76th.
- Vanessa Trouble: Red Hot Swing at Swing 46, 349 W. 46th.
- Chris Gillespie 3 at Belémans, 9:30 PM. 35 E. 76th.
- Spike Wilner & Guests at Mezzrow, 11:00 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
- Jam w/Kazu Trio at Cleopatra’s Needle, 11:30 PM. 2485 Broadway.
- Jam Session at Small’s, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.

Fridays

- Jam Session at Small’s, 4:00 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Birdland Big Band at Birdland, 5:15 PM. 315 W. 44th.
- Earl Rose at Belémans, 5:30 PM. 35 E. 76th.
- Chris Gillespie 3 at Belémans, 9:30 PM. 35 E. 76th.
- Johnny O’Neal at Mezzrow, 11:00 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
- Jam Session at Cleopatra’s Needle, 12:30 AM. 2485 Broadway.
- Jam Session at Small’s, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.

Saturdays

- Jam Session at Small’s, 4:00 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Jay Leonhart/Tomoko Ohno (except 1/7) at Birdland, 6:00 PM. 315 W. 44th.
- Charlie Apicella & Iron City at bpromo, 7:00 PM. 37 Washington Ave., Bklyn.
- Chris Gillespie 3 at Belémans, 9:30 PM. 35 E. 76th.

Sundays

- Marion Cowings Vocal Class at Smalls, 1:00 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Jazz for Kids: Jazz Standard Youth Orchestra at Jazz Standard, 2:00 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Keith Ingham at Cleopatra’s Needle, 4:00 PM. 2485 Broadway.
- Al Murakami 3 at Smalls, 4:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Terry Waldo’s Gotham City Band at Fat Cat, 6:00 PM. 75 Christopher.
- Johnny O’Neal 3 at Smalls, 7:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Peter Maizza 3 (except 1/1) at Bar Next Door, 8:00 PM. 129 MacDougal.
- Jam at Cleopatra’s Needle, 9:00 PM. 2485 Broadway.
Interview

Kahil El’Zabar

Putting the Renaissance in Renaissance Man

Photo & Interview by Ken Weiss

If you thought you already knew about percussionist Kahil El’Zabar this interview will still shock you, he’s done much more than you thought one person could do in a lifetime and he’s just now hitting his golden years. Born Clifton Blackburn (November 11, 1953 in Chicago, Illinois), El’Zabar is an acclaimed Broadway arranger, designer of couture fashion, writer, poet, instrument creator, past chairman of the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) and community scene builder, in addition to his role as a highly accomplished musician and bandleader of his Ethnic Heritage Ensemble and Ritual Trio groups since the ’70s. He’s collaborated with Dizzy Gillespie, Nina Simone, Stevie Wonder, Cannonball Adderley, Paul Simon, Donny Hathaway, Eddie Harris, David Murray, Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders, Lester Bowie, Billy Bang and Nona Hendryx. His current largescale project is building a revolutionary school of music - the Chicago Academy of Music. He talks about it all in this wide-ranging interview done on February 24, 2017 in Philadelphia, prior to an appearance of his Ethnic Heritage Ensemble.

“’You can’t sell McDonalds or other big conglomerations if you have millions of individuals in cognitive pursuit of their spiritual and intellectual selves. There are many things in popular media that deter us from the vulnerability and the sensitivity of the metaphysical…”

Jazz Inside Magazine: Your mission as a musician has always been to “be of service” rather than to entertain. What does “being of service” mean to you and why is that important as a career choice?

Kahil El’Zabar: The media associated with music usually takes it into the realm of entertainment so that there’s a focus on the idea of how it’s marketed, but music came way before marketing and the historical nature of music is that it was a service to the cultural development of communities. So, if what I’m saying is true, then it has a lot more to do with utility than fascination. It’s a primary source of giving, it’s a vibrational source that impacts human beings. Most cultures associate music with spiritual upliftment and if you look at these aspects as the assets of the musician and the music that they perform, then service would be much more an accurate description of its role, rather than entertainment.

JI: There are numerous times during your performances that feel like a meditation. How do you form the music you choose to present?

KEZ: That’s a good question. I think presentation is part meditation and part strategic. Great performers have an innate ability, as well as a studied ability, to understand the nature of a room. How that room corresponds to the response of the performance and therefore choices of material for the response of the room to that. The instinct in the moment must correspond to what the artists are ready to express, as well as what the audience is ready to receive, and then the well thought out meditation of time before the tour and each performance. What creates the colors, what creates the moods, what is the message that is intended to be expressed, and what is the aspirations that you can see being in the performance before you are even in the performance.

JI: When did you realize the powerful effect that music could potentially have on listeners?

KEZ: One of the key moments came when I was 15 and an older friend took me to McKeel [Chicago jazz club] to hear Coltrane. I think Elvin Jones had possibly taken too much “stuff” and he fell asleep while playing. He was snoring but wasn’t missing a beat on “Impressions,” and at 15-years-old, to see the telepathic communication at the highest level in adverse circumstances, made me believe that there was something very, very powerful going on. I also made a choice that I wouldn’t mess with any stuff, which has been my whole life, but it didn’t intimidate me nor did I feel any less of the intellectual and spiritual height of Elvin or Trane’s expression. Beyond all the bullshit in life, the purity that the energy of music can pierce is quite profound and if one accepted the sacrifices necessary on various levels to achieve that communication, they potentially could.

JI: The heavily, spiritually-based music you present has become an area of jazz that is rare these days. There are others, such as Pharoah Sanders, Charles Lloyd, James “Blood” Ulmer, Omar Sosa, Billy Harper and Douglas Ewart who also feature it, but there’s not many. Why do you think more artist don’t center on spirituality?

KEZ: I think there are many artists that focus on spirituality but the themes of delivery have changed today. There was a time even a Laura Nyro or a Sly Stone or Rahsaan Roland Kirk or Frank Zappa, performers in various genres, [had spirituality] but the idea of ascension through expression, that was very akin to Hendrix, Trane, Mahalia Jackson and Vladimir Horowitz, who performed as a classical artist completely internal in acceptance of the metaphysical force within that expression. You can’t sell McDonalds or other big conglomerations if you have millions of individuals in cognitive pursuit of their spiritual and intellectual selves. There are many things in popular media that deter us from the vulnerability and the sensitivity of the metaphysical expression. There’s also that idea to entertain, to fill the needs of media, that’s left many musicians without the same attraction to the pursuance of spiritual music. I’ve never been a person, because of how my parents raised me, intimidated through association or intimidated by groups. I’ve pretty much walked my own road and that’s allowed me to stay consistent in defining my own reality.

JI: There was a controversial 94-minute documentary entitled Be Known made in 2015 about you that shows your best and worst sides. At one point in the film, marshals show up at a student performance you’re leading with a warrant for your arrest for back child support and at another point you’re berating a colleague and then showing up late for a performance. Did you have any reluctance or concerns about revealing so much?

KEZ: Yeah, and I was surprised when I saw the unedited version which was even more controversial. [Laughs] When I asked the director of the film, Dwayne Johnson-Cochran, who’s a friend and I had given him total freedom to do with me, why would he show me in that way? He captured more than I was aware of because, at a point, I (Continued on page 22)
wasn’t even aware the camera was on me since it was on me all the time. I had to come to grips with it. When I’m performing, I don’t allow anyone to change my composition. When I’m working in my art form I do what I do and it wasn’t my art form, it was his art form and he had a story he was telling. I happened to be the subject but I was not the decision maker of the art. So if I became too critical of that, then I would very much deter from his process and I had very much trusted and allowed him to capture all of it so I had to trust in the overall outcome. It was funny, it was sold out for four and a half an hour. It was funny, it was sold out for four hours. It was funny, it was sold out for four hours, then I would very much deter from his composing. When I’m working in my art form I do what I do and it wasn’t my art form, it was his art form and he had a story he was telling. I happened to be the subject but I was not the decision maker of the art. So if I became too critical of that, then I would very much deter from his process and I had very much trusted and allowed him to capture all of it so I had to trust in the overall outcome.

It was funny, it was sold out for four days in Chicago at the Gene Siskel Theater and there were friends asking, “Are you okay?” [Laughs] I’m okay, I can live with my inadequacies as a human being, as well as my talents as a human being. I’ve always told my children, ‘Be honest in your pursuit to life by the definitions of what would bring you a sense of security for all that you go through.’ So if nothing else with that film, there’s nothing else to hide. Whatever is my so-called worst — it’s out there — so at this point, there’s nothing but going up! [Laughs]

JI: What’s been the reaction to the film by your audience members who’ve seen it?

KEZ: There have been a few who’ve been morally judgmental. We performed and the film was shown at the LA Film Festival and there was an older woman very upset with me. I told her I was sorry for whatever disturbed her but I’m not sorry for being who I am which is very different. I don’t think that an artist is supposed to be judged purely morally or socially. I think the body of my work, the consistency, the quality, and the sincerity of my pursuance, speaks for itself. And I have to tell that to my children — ‘Dad has got some inadequacies and human frailties but I’ve tried to be an honest, loving person. I’ve made a few mistakes. Sorry, let’s keep moving.’”

JI: What also comes through in the documentary is your deep love for the music which you refer to as “my life,” and how your biggest aspiration was to be one of the “Cats.” Would you elaborate on being one of the “Cats”?

KEZ: I grew up hearing live music and seeing musicians in my community being honored for their ability to express something of value that helped to release and inspire the community. That admirable quality was extremely attractive to me from a small child on. I grew up with trombonist George Lewis and Chico Freeman in the same neighborhood surrounded by legendary musicians who were a part of our daily life. As a child, I was going to picnics with George and Von [Freeman]. My father was an amateur drummer and if Sonny Stitt was in town, he’d be there. Jug [Gene Ammons] and all of these people were around. I went to Mt. Carmel Baptist Church where Ramsey Lewis Sr. was the minister of music. In high school I used to go to the Grand Theater and upstairs was Andrew Hill, Malachi Favors and Steve McCall in a trio and downstairs was Ramsey Lewis, Red Holt and L.D. Young. I saw everything. There was no fee to get into the clubs then, you’d just walked in. Seeing Jack DeJohnette when I was a teenager as a piano player, not a drummer, was my normal life. The comradery and the sense of nobleness about that role, and the hipness. These guys were usually well-dressed, articulate and charismatic in a less than egoistic way. They had a command of presence because of the development of their craft and the character that went with time, discipline, focus and an internal sense of self, and I wanted to be a part of that. I’ve been doing this professionally since 1970 and never achieved any real major success even though I’ve been a part of people who’ve become very successful and I’ve also seen that much from it. I’m not on TV, I’m not really on the radio. My dedication wasn’t about notoriety or achieving what a Wynton Marsalis achieved. I haven’t been the critic’s choice. [Laughs] I haven’t had the superstar success but I like being on the ground and connected. I have friends all over the world. I have friends and musicians who are extremely famous but they go to hotels and they just stay there by themselves. Last night, I played in a friend of mine’s home in Baltimore. We had 60 people, they paid $20 apiece, so we still made $1200 in someone’s home. We played a full concert for very nice people and I actually cooked a 7-course meal in 3 hours. That was part of the deal. I did jerk chicken, potato salad, collard greens, black-eyed peas and a jerk tofu. That’s something you can’t do if you’re bigger than the people. You’ve got to be in the moment in order to express and express real life and I think it comes through in your music.

JI: Would you go back? Did you say Kanye West lived with you when he was 14?

KEZ: Kanye’s mom was an academic colleague. I was teaching at the University of Illinois, I was associate professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, and his mom was at Chicago State University. Kanye would spend a lot of time at my place in his early teens because my girlfriend, who I was living with at that time—her son was one of Kanye’s best friends. I took Kanye to his shows. I worked on Common’s first record [Common Sense]. Lupe Fiasco’s dad, Jace, was my student, so I’ve known Lupe since he was born. Lupe had a project last

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Kahlil El’Zabar

year with Google doing startups and he honored me based on the contributions that I made in his life. So everybody knows me from the underground and that’s why Dwayne made the movie Be Known because here’s this guy [that people don’t know about]. I went to Jean Paul Gaultier’s first show in ‘75 at La Chapelle des Lombard and I own one of the first peacoats that he made. I had an apartment next to [designer] Yohji Yamamoto. I presented David Murray’s first professional concert out of college. Billy Bang and I met at Rucker Park Street Ball Tournament. He was a point guard opposite Nate [Tiny] Archibald and I was a shooting guard. All these relationships and the tie-ins and the connects are far and beyond the assumed ideas of media. When Kanye did his big fashion thing 4 years ago, I was the consultant for him to go to Paris, to meet certain people, ateliers and sourcing. My son Kahari was high school classmates with Chance the Rapper so when Chance did South by Southwest the first time, Kahari called me because they had driven from Chicago and they didn’t have any money to pay for the hotel so I paid and now I just saw Chance win three Grammy Awards. So life is a very exciting constant moving adventure.

JI: This may be a good time to get that money back from Chance.

KEZ: It may be a good time.

JI: I have inside information that your basketball nickname was “Graveyard.” Where did that come from?

El’Zabor. When I was a teenager in the ’60s, my very good friend, a great percussionist now in LA named Derf Reklaw, who played with The Pharaohs in the ’60s and Eddie Harris, changed his name. In high school Derf’s name was Fred Walk- er and he turned it backwards and it sounded pretty cool. So I said, “I’m gonna do the same thing as Derf,” but it didn’t work out the same way – it turned into Notfilc Nrubkcalb. [Laughs] So I thought it be better to use my mom’s name and my uncle Wardell had given me Kahil, which in Hamitic is “force of light.” That gave me a name and a principle of how I’ve tried to express my life journey. El’Zabar is a sect name. You find that name all over North and Northeast Africa. It has different meanings in different areas but what I know is that in Northeast it derived from people who were teachers of the abacas. So my name became for me – “force of light, the teacher.” That has guided me in terms of my life goal.

JI: In this day and age of terrorism and general mistrust, how is it for you to travel the world with a Muslim name? Have you had instances of mistreatment?

KEZ: Yes, instances of mistreatment and disrespect. We were going to Munich, myself, Pharoah Sanders, Ari Brown and Malachi Favors, it was right after 9/11 and we had first class seats and they said I was a risk and couldn’t be behind the cockpit. So they put me in second class. There were various instances like that, so about a year later, I changed my passport from Kahil El’Zabar to Clifton Blackburn and since 9/11 I’ve been traveling as Clifton Blackburn because it made it extremely difficult being a fair skin, black person that has East African features with what is an assumed Muslim name. Very difficult.

“I have friends and musicians who are extremely famous but they go to hotels and they just stay there by themselves. Last night, I played in a friend of mine’s home in Baltimore. We had 60 people, they paid $20 apiece, so we still made $1200 in someone’s home. We played a full concert for very nice people and I actually cooked a 7-course meal in 3 hours. That was part of the deal.”

KEZ: I was deadl on the court! I would take teams to their graves. Got it?

JI: Your given name was Clifton Henry Blackburn Jr. When and why did you change your name?

KEZ: My mother is part Eritrean [area of northern Ethiopia] and a lot of people don’t realize that Kahil is not a Muslim name, it’s a Coptic name. Kahil is a Muslim name, Kahil is Hamitic, it goes back to the Bible, the children of Ham, and they were Coptics. The family name of my mother is

Jl: You formed an attachment to drums and percussion at age four. Your father liked to play them and your uncle, Candy Finch, played professionally with Fats Navarro and Dizzy Gillespie. Would you talk about your connection with drums and percussion and what it means to play them?

KEZ: Rhythm is language, not in the didactic perspective but much more in the vibrational science to physics. We know that everything in matter is not necessarily solid but it’s connected through vibration, and those vibrations have infi- nite rhythmic associations. My father and uncle scatted. It’s one thing to physically play but when you scat, you live in the rhythm continually. Really great drummers have duplex meter sensibility because just to play from the hi-hat to the kick to the ride with the left hand creates that sensibility of duplex rhythm. So growing up with that at an extremely young age was normal at that time for an African American child in the ’50s and ’60s. I took tap dance classes because everybody did. That was like today doing tennis, but when I was growing up damn near everybody took tap dance classes. Rhythm was a very important attribute to one’s expressiveness and those who had more of a proclivity would then go into performing or playing instruments, whether it was a church gospel sort of thing, or a social setting, or in a more refined higher arts sensibility like with Jazz. Everyone had an aptitude for it and understood it. I don’t think you could have had a Charlie Parker if there wasn’t the aptitudinal development of the Kansas City audience. That audience was so sophisticated that anyone that performed had to reach a certain standard in order to find the approval of what the community already understood, what the community was already hearing and seeing. So if I’m five, six, seven years old, and Gene Ammons is playing at a picnic, I mean can you get better than that? Marshall Thompson and Wilbur Campbell and Jodie Christian, George Freeman, Bepop Sam, Clifford Jordan and Eddie Harris. These are the people I saw all the time as a kid, and not just as musicians, seeing them play softball, and seeing the same attributes that translate in other elements. Everything they did was with finesse, including the way they dressed. You know, some of the musicians of my generation, and especially the younger generation, have become much more grunge focused since the ’60s and hippies, and the people who know me well know that I was never a part of where my generation was. I was always a “cat.” I was always well-dressed, always in the nature of what the so-called jazz impresario was about, that hipness. Even with the AACM, I was a little bit different than a lot of the cats. I worked with everybody but I had this other way of approaching things that a lot of times people didn’t see as the AACM. I always had that kind of churchy, audience participation part. My stuff was much more rhythmic than arhythmic. I understood everybody’s concepts and forms because I was academically educated, but I saw something that was more connected to the experience that I grew up with as a child and trying to translate those things to all the sophisticated harmonic sensibilities and counterpoints and contemporary rhythmic perceptions, but I wanted to still have that same element that Gene Ammons had and Sun Ra’s band had. That old fashion kind of energy with a modern, contemporary interpretation.

JI: Growing up on the South Side of Chicago, you had significant musical mentors in Eddie Harris and Von Freeman. How did they help you?

KEZ: I’ll give you an example. It was years later, at the Leverkusen Festival [Germany] when I asked to present a 20-year retrospective of my work produced by the festival and Eddie Harris was there with his group. I had been given a large

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piece of money for the event and I brought a big band called Orchestra Infinity. I brought over bands of other people who had come through me like Ernest Dawkins, Light Henry Huff and Edward Wilkerson, and I brought an African group I played with in the ‘60s called The Sun Drummer. I just brought everybody. So Eddie Harris looked at me and hit me in the back of the head. I said, ‘Hey, what’s up with you?’ He said, “I know you ain’t gonna make no money off of this. You got seven kids. I told you, you gotta’ always figure how to make a dollar for yourself when you make a dollar for somebody else. If you don’t do that, then you have nothing to take care of for yourself and your family.” That was an incredible lesson. That’s not music talk, it’s not talk about the changes, it’s about the changes of life. Von’s whole thing was when I went to his sessions, and I always went to Von’s sessions, he’d say, “Yeah, he’s from the AACM but still can swing.” And it was always important for me to have that acknowledgment in both camps. I never became more sophisticated than the streets but I never took the streets out of the sophistication of the things that I do. And I learned that from Von Freeman. I’ve had several conversations with Sonny Rollins where he talked about the importance of tenor consciousness from Chicago and why he came to Chicago to the ‘40s and was working as a custodian in a school just so he could be around Lucky Thompson, Jug, Von, King Kolax and Clifford Jordan. That was very important to Sonny and Von was the master of that. When Eddie Harris would come in from LA, and he had all those big hits, he did not come up the jam session to solo until Von said he could. That let me know that the idea of what media offers to identity and the inter-social graces and re-

blues which is basically the jump idiom. When you look at how Muddy carried himself with the confidence of being, and that was something that I found very similar in Africa. The confidence in being, not the ego of presence, which is very different. Ego of presence is defining who you are, rather than living who you are. A confidence in living is the ability to flow and follow through with your expression and that is what I’ve tried to pick up from artists.

JI: You’re mentioning important musicians that have influenced you. I’d like to ask you to share some anecdotes of musicians you’ve worked with.

KEZ: Oh, man. I think in terms of musical note choices, elegance personified to the highest order. When you hear Kind of Blue and Trane is just spraying out notes, and then Cannonball rearticulates the ideas in more crystalized impact. With Trane, you’ve got this major, major sense of voice but Cannonball has this decisive way of approaching rhythm, harmonic sensibility, and note choices. He’s the only guy I know where Miles decides to be sideman on albums in that period because this was a consummate deliverer of poetic expression with music. He was very well educated, extremely articulate, he was a person of refined agility in a larger person with sensitive vibrato, great confidence, and could bring anybody into his environment and create a lot of happiness. I tried to learn from that. The biggest memory I have is being in Lucerne, Switzerland when the Mingus band and Cannonball’s band played the festival, and then to sit down with Mingus and Cannonball to watch them eat. Mingus with two hands, with everything going in fast, and Cannonball with his knife and fork, delicately dissecting the same chicken meal with totally different ways of consuming. What an eloquent soul dude. And I loved the personal relationship of Nat and Cannonball. They were older guys that seemed young when they were together because of the fraternity that they had.

JI: What about Gene Ammons?

KEZ: Just sound. I had a gig at Dickie’s Lounge where I played the conga for Lady Boogaloo, a shake dancer, and then afterwards Jug’s group would come on and my job was to sit next to him to sometimes nudge him to let him know it was time to hit. Jug was so accurate. If things were going rhythmically in a certain kind of way, the harmonics or the changes of the tune, and he’d hit one note—“Whooooomp”—and that one note would be beyond anything that anyone would do and for the entire night, all that anybody remembered is when Jug hit one fuckin’ note. So that kind of accurate means that you are aware of everything going on. Even during sleep, he would be in the music. You don’t see Jug getting the recognition that others got but, as far as what everybody told me, from Von Freeman to Jodie Christian to Sonny Rollins, that when Jug walked in the room, it was music royalty to the musicians because the whole key beyond all the stuff you played was your sound and there was, to my knowledge, no greater sound on any instrument than the Gene Ammons sound.

JI: A Stevie Wonder memory?

KEZ: Enormous humility in the love of music. Here you have a person equal to Michael Jackson or Lady Gaga fame and at the height of his success, he walks out of the industry to get a master’s degree at UCLA Music so he could advance his writing and producing skills. That’s enormous humility and confidence and a greater value than societal comparables, which most of us are very vulnerable to. Stevie Wonder’s in his own world and that’s not a cliché. I remember doing a concert in Atlanta, and we’ve already gone about two hours but he’s written so many hit songs that peo-

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people are still calling out requests, and my hands and my arms are damn near ready to bust, and in that moment I was like, ‘Damn, I wish bro could see!’ [Laughs] Because he would see that he has wore this band out! But he was still just as enthusiastic and he pushed us on. I learned from his humility.

JI: A Dizzy Gillespie memory?

KEZ: We played at the New Morning in Geneva. There used to be one there as well as the one that is still active in Paris and owned by the same people. Dizzy was supposed to end the set at 11 PM, but ended up getting excited and played 3 more encores! We finished closer to 1 AM. I on congas and Mickey Roker on drums were super tired after that! My hands were hurting a little, so I said something to Dizzy complaining about how long we played! He laughed and then looked at James Moody saying, “These young cats just don’t get it Moody.” Moody replied, “I hear you Diz!” Dizzy then looked me dead in the eye and said in a very serious non-joking manner to me, “You are having the opportunity to play and learn from me, plus I’m paying you! Shut the fuck up and enjoy the ride!” He was absolutely right. I never complained again and learned to enjoy the journey!

JI: During college in 1971, you made special arrangements to study African music as an exchange student at the University of Ghana. Today it’s not uncommon for musicians to study in Africa but you did it 45 years ago. Were there other American jazz artists studying in Africa at that time or were you one of the first?

KEZ: I was probably one of the first but there were people before me. At the height of his career, Ginger Baker left Cream and went to Ghana, Don Cherry traveled in India and Africa, Sonny Rollins went to India, Yusuf Lateef, on his own, traveled all over the world to learn about exotic forms of music and integrated them very successfully into jazz. All of those folks influenced me in terms of my journey. I don’t think there was anyone that had used the kalimba [thumb piano] as sophisticated as I had in contemporary acoustic improvised music. And I couldn’t do many of the things I do now if there wasn’t an exposure to those opportunities. I feel very grateful to be open to other perspectives of organized sound, and that’s what music is. This is a big world and I hope that music will be a tool to create tolerance and excitement beyond culture barriers. Music is a connecting fabric for people.

JI: What was your first impression of Africa and the music you found there?

KEZ: First impression was why are people in my face? In America, distance is a very important part of etiquette. Coming out of Chicago you’re very defensive to your sense of space. Human communication is naturally ether but as we gain power we re-determine our position and we elude ourselves to think that we own spaces. So that was a hell of a thing to step out of my comfort zone. As far as the music, I was struck by the sophistication of syncopation and duplex meter. It made me realize that rhythm was as dominant and as important as melody. In our society, melodic invention is looked at as the superior extension of musical expression but you really have no melodic extension if you don’t have rhythmic context in order to shape melody.

JI: Was there a specific musical experience you had during that first Ghana trip that most affected you?

KEZ: Being with a couple of teachers and trying to show them all that I had learned, and thinking that I was doing it really well, until one said, “Bruni,” which means “child of the white man,” that’s what he called me because I was from the U.S. but it wasn’t said with malice, he said, “Bruni, all you do and not how you do. You’re not that.” And then they asked if I could play a blues and I sang one to them and they said, “That’s your African language.” So that formed the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble. I came back from that experience and took an historical heritage to the reality of my practical urban experience. I told my father I was going to develop this band with horns and my drums and he said, “You’ll never make a living.” [Laughs] In ‘86 I took my father on a European tour of 20 cities and he called my mother—“Gwen! They know this fool’s music! I can’t believe it! I think he gonna be okay.” If you have discipline and understand the value of form, and are able to translate your concepts into form, you are able to develop a formula of expression that can be successfully delivered. So it was that African experience. They were basically telling me that my language was the urban vernacular and to take that and translate that into my system of expression.

JI: You perhaps, with your deep roots in African rhythms, best fulfill the AACM’s operating motto - “Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future.” What’s your approach to the concept of “Ancient to the Future”?

KEZ: I taught a class at the University of Illinois for six years. I was hired by the School of Architecture and I was trying to figure out why do they want me at the School of Architecture? I had lived and studied in an inter-disciplinary sense, socially and academically. I’m a published writer as a poet, I was an internationally acknowledged fashion designer, I’m a painter and a musician. So they wanted me to take architecture students and bring them, with students in other disciplines that I had a background in, and help them get a more holistic understanding of making art. The whole idea of the AACM’s “Ancient to the Future” is we’re looking at principles of human interaction and value from a cultural stance and then taking those values into an immediate contemporary experience and finding a parallel reality that a million years ago people interpreted the vibrational sequences of organized sound into a common expression that fulfilled their cultural social utility. The same thing happens chemically today. The idea of vibration connecting matter, which is actually not together, it’s only held together by the vibrational frequencies, tighter or lesser. And when you look at music, it is the representation of things in physics associated to the cultural vernacular of Indian, European, African, American, South American, and all of that. There’s no growth in the possibilities of tradition without experimentation, which means abstractions have to be reinterpreted to become tradition. So Louis Armstrong was an abstraction of the ideas of things from African, European, Spanish, Arabic music into what it would evolve in jazz, and then in parallel, he becomes tradition and then anything counter to that by Charlie Parker becomes abstract, and then after he becomes modern, it becomes conventional, and then comes things by Trane and into the AACM and Cecil and whatever. I think the AACM motto becomes very constructive because we have to help the young artists understand that in ancient times, the principals of physics were no different than they are today, and that’s what I did in my class. No matter what we do as artists, we cannot get out of the realms of the constants of the universe as we individually interpret our abstract idea upon the phenomena of existence. People have a sense that there’s nothing they can do about the world but once we have this “Ancient to the Future” to realize that through time and every day, we’ve gone through changes to re-evolve our opportunity to see a new idea to create a new opportunity that is way more relevant other than just music. When you see the success of Leo Smith,
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Kahlil El’Zabar

pression that I quit The Paul Simon Band.

**Ji:** That was quite a move. You were touring with Paul Simon, making $1500 a week, and gave that up to focus on work as a member of the AACM.

**Kez:** My father was very upset because I was making a lot of money with Paul Simon, and then left that band to make only $50. I was playing once a week, playing on Sundays with Muhly. My Dad asked why I couldn’t have stayed with both bands.

**Ji:** It's impressive that you achieved the role of AACM Chairman in 1975 after only being a full member for three years. What were the major hurdles you encountered during your time as Chairman of the AACM ('75-'82) and what were your greatest accomplishments?

**Kez:** It was to translate the new opportunities for grants funding and representing the fiscal agent, the legal not-for-profit, in the way that translated from urban grassroots organizing into long-term institutional viability. The older guys had observed my organizing skills. My mother owned a bridal business so we had been in business our whole lives so knowing how to make decisions with money, meeting timelines with obligations toward your consumers, marketing, all that was innate by my life experience. By the time I had officially joined the organization, the other musicians were older than I was, but I had already been out with Cannonball, I had already been to New York, so I didn’t have the same fascination with new acknowledgement and notoriety. I had already been with what was considered some of the great- est musicians that had ever lived. Once I became chairman, I was focused on how we organize, and how we put together funding for the school, how we create the patterns for the obligated responsibilities as artists to fulfill their service to the community. Be on time to teach your class if you want your $50. Concerts had to start on time and a calendar was put together so there was no choosing who was to play at the last minute. At the time of my 3 years as chairman, we did festivals through corporate funding. I went to radio stations and said that we had demographic value and I qualified it by knowing how to write the grant. I sat at panels and articulated the issues associated with what was going on. I think that I was that step that moved it from the grassroots into the sophisticated, long-term institution from the administrative perspective. Because it became so successful, people like Steppenwolf Theater hired me and I became part of panels with the National Endowment of the Arts because people wanted to learn how I was able to organize with that kind of sophistication in the inner city institution.

**Ji:** You've led two powerful bands since the early '70s. Would you talk about the significance of the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble and the Ritual Trio?

**Kez:** I presented the first Ethnic Heritage Ensemble concerts in '73. The band included Rasul Siddick (trumpet), Light Henry Huff (reeds), Mecha Uba (bass), Kirk Brown (piano) and Don Moye (drums). In ‘74 it became a quintet featuring two tenor saxophonists – Huff and Edward Wilkerson – along with Yosef Ben Israel (bass) and Ben Montgomery (drums). In ‘77 the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble became a trio of two horns and percussion because we made our first European tour and could only afford three musicians. I had to learn how to write and arrange music for that unique instrumentation! I started the first Ritual Trio in '75 with Lester Bowie and Malachi Favors.

**Ji:** What conceptual musical differences exist between the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble and the Ritual Trio?

**Kez:** The model for the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble comes out of traditional African practices of music organizing. Many times the approaches are in pentatonic concepts of the construct of melody in the harmonic progressions. The Ritual Trio is more based on the model of the original Sonny Rollins trio with Oscar Pettiford and Max Roach and moving outside of the harmonics of the piano for further exploration. At first I had Lester Bowie and Malachi Favors, they were the right guys that just had invention and unconventional approaches and all the jazz history within it so it was like having the modern Satchmo with me and Favors behind that, and exploring all of the contemporary sense of Jazz harmonic sensibilities.

**Ji:** With your Ritual Trio group you got to play with master musicians who have since passed - Malachi Favors, Lester Bowie and Billy Bang. How is it to have worked so intimately with these great artists and to have them suddenly taken from you?

**Kez:** It's laughter only expressed now in memory. What conceptual musical differences exist because I didn’t grow up poor, I grew up as a middleclass kid. I wasn’t one of those black kids that was struggling so I never felt I had to make money. I felt so honored to be invited to play in this all-star band of sophisticated, high-level expression that I quit the Paul Simon Band.”

**Ji:** How has your career progressed?

**Kez:** Starting in the mid-'70s, I became a very in demand percussionist working with several AACM bands and that’s when I worked with Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball, Eddie Harris and Nina Simone. In the '80s I toured and recorded extensively with both my bands as well as worked with Billy Bang and David Murray. The '80s were quite a lucrative time for avant-garde jazz! We did big festivals and TV globally. That slowed down by the late-'80s when the young classic jazz players became popular so I focused on an academic career to earn a living. I taught Inter-Disciplinary Arts and Modern Jazz Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln [1988-1998] and then at the University of Illinois at Chicago [1999-2005]. I received a doctorate from Lake Forrest College in 2006 in Inter-Disciplinary Arts and since then I’ve actively worked and an Arts in Education consultant on a global scale while touring internationally on a continuous basis. I’ve been an artist-in-residence for the city of Bordeaux, France for the past 11 years. I was knighted by the Counsel General of France in 2014, making me a “Chevalier Medal of Letters,” of which I was most honored! I

(Continued on page 28)
am also most proud of the fact that I have toured the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble every year in the U.S. since 1973, that’s more than 44 years! There are few bands in jazz that can boast that kind of history and I feel my recorded work and history of live performances speak for themselves.

JI: How do you feel your work has been received?

KEZ: It is very difficult for this society to understand and appreciate the intellectual value and compositional sophistication of my work as a percussionist. Western thinkers rarely understand the essential value of rhythm to the construction and evolution of great music. I am an influencer and innovator far beyond what most jazz critics realize. Some of the most influential players in the last 50 years have expressed some of their best performances with me and my music, including Pharoah Sanders, Lester Bowie, Billy Bang, Archie Shepp, Fred Hopkins, Joseph Jarman, Kalaaparusha, David Murray, Edward Wilkerson and Hamiet Bluiett. I feel I have a gift and talent in knowing how to inspire and bring out the best in those I play with.

JI: Why did you start the Chicago Academy of Music and what value does it bring to the current status of music education?

KEZ: I’m approaching my mid-sixties and I think I will be pretty physically active into my mid-seventies and then I want to be even more abstract. To give back is so important and the idea of the Chicago Academy of Music is to gather master musicians who have been successful at making a living playing music which is very different than making a living teaching music. The majority of the educators in traditional institutions are people who have made a living teaching. I think the nature of how people are playing because of that academic acculturation speaks less to what had been the historical, organic receptive way in which jazz musicians learn. It’s much more like a cookie cutter box than it is the organic delivery and romanticism of language. I think we need to develop an institution where people across jazz, classical, Latin, world and other fields have made their careers as soloists. My kids tell me, “You ain’t super famous dad,” which is true, but I am my own individual style of expression in a time when most things have been consumed by a very traditional idea of what the construction of musical forms should be and so our school will focus on the prodigy of invention, the prodigy of individual sense of lyricism across multiple genres to create a pedagogy of transparency ideally. It will take time. At other schools there’s a jazz school, a classical school, and never will they meet. I want to give young people opportunities and creating new communities with that. If I leave as a legacy, that I opened it up for other people to have possibilities to feel secure about a nontraditional approach inside a consumer based society, where they can find their own way to make it? That’s what I did. I found my own way to make it, nobody can take that away from me.

JI: How did you come to do the arranging for the stage performance of Disney’s The Lion King what else have you worked on?

KEZ: I had worked on a Cal Arts panel along with Julie Taymor for the Alpert Awards in 1995. When she got the Disney project she thought of me because she knew I studied African music and that I write and score. It was Jan Hammer and Elton John’s music but it had to be translated from a predominantly synthesized score for an animated film into giving the breath of a live experience that has the sophistication of contemporary arrangements for a large ensemble but has a feeling of Africa and I was a perfect candidate for that. [Laughs] I chose the original band, it was Makanda Ken McIntyre, Bobby Irving, Fred Cash, Chief Bey, Ed Cherry, Craig Harris, all the bad cats. We rehearsed for six months at Sony Studios in New York and it came to be the fourth most successful musical in Broadway history. I also did the scoring and arranging for Love Jones, one of the most successful soundtracks of the nineties. Mo Money for Damon Williams and in 2016 I did a documentary called America the Beautiful which won a lot of awards. I’m about to score a film with a punk rock band. I’ve been arranging for an orchestra in Bordeaux, France for 11 years called Infinity Orchestra. Doing film scores and pop arrangements allowed me when I toured with the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble and it didn’t make enough money, I still wanted to pay my musicians a minimum of $300 a night, that’s how I could do it.

JI: What was your role in the development of Acid Jazz? You’re considered to be a founding father of that genre.

KEZ: My friend, Dwain Kylees, owned a club in the early ’80s called La Mirage and it was one of the main house clubs. Dwain didn’t have a liquor license because it was difficult to get one in Chicago at the time so he opened up a juice bar which attracted a younger crowd. At that time I really connected with house music because it was these young people tired of the placid distribution of disco music and they wanted something with more edge and honesty so they started using technology and making their own music in their homes. That’s why it became house music because you made it in your own house. I connected with this younger generation and I always liked to dance so I started hanging out in these clubs with a lot of the early pioneers – Marshall Jefferson, Kym Mazelle, Darrell Pandy, the group Ten City, Byron Stingily – they didn’t write music, they didn’t read. So I was in club and they started asking me to look at what they had and to do arrangements for them. One of the records I worked on “That’s the Way Love is” went gold. Then there were these young people in London and Germany asking me to arrange and do stuff. We started doing a thing on Thursdays around ’82 at La Mirage called Afrocentrix and I put together a group with John Monopoly, and Kanye West would also come over, they were 14. I felt that with the AACM, we were getting our notoriety and we were losing the connect that I always enjoyed from playing neighborhood gigs. I still do that, I always play concerts in my home and it could be with someone super rich or somebody who lives on the street. When I got knighted [he received France’s Medal of the Knight of Arts and Letters in 2014] I had people from every walk of life at my ceremony. So the Afrocentrix thing became really big in Chicago – folks were wearing African clothing and I had AACM musicians playing free with African drummers and DJs. No one had done that before me, I was the first person to really put instrumental solo performance with house music. Melody Maker magazine came over to interview me and I called it Afro house and somehow it got redefined as acid house. Now you have all these projects with Kendrick Lamar and Kamasi Washington being recognized for stuff that I did 20 years ago when nobody was dealing with house music. I was bringing jazz and world musicians together.

JI: You’re a musician, a poet, a writer, a painter and you’re also a fashion designer. How would you describe your design tendencies and do you make clothing as a side business?

KEZ: I did. There’s a line of suits that I did out of Passau, Germany with Elke Burmeister available through her website. I developed a fabric with her which is boiled cashmere because I wanted a fabric that always had form but would work for travel. I also do a line of painted pants with [bassist] Jamaaladeen Tacuma. I recut painters pants into couture fashion and then I individually paint each as if I was doing a painting. I had a line called Zambezi in the ’70s, the flower dresses that the actress Freda Payne and others wore in all the Blaxploitation films, Nina Simone wore my fashions, as did the group Arrested Development.

JI: What does the future hold for you?

KEZ: You can’t do everything but I see pulling all of my skills together through the internet and my two legacy projects for the future are developing a culture network which I call the OOH, Oracles of Humanity, a global culture network which will be built with many thought leaders across many creative fields, and the Chicago Academy of Music, a physical institution where pedagogies can be created and all this will give voice to the voiceless in terms of creative contributors internationally.

JI: The last questions have been given to me by other artists to ask you:

Teodross Avery (tenor saxophone) has given a few questions asking you to choose between two possible selections regarding what has more importance to you.

“What’s more important to you – the rhythms of life or the melodies of women?”

KEZ: [Laughs] He’s so funny. The rhythms of life translate for both men and women having a sensibility to your feminine side is essential to be a romantic lyricist.

Teodross Avery asked: “What’s more important to you -Miles and Coltrane or Lee Morgan and Coltrane?”

KEZ: These are very good questions. Teodross is
such an astute practitioner of the music. They are equally as important for different reasons. With Lee Morgan and Coltrane, it’s learning how to talk the talk and walk the walk. With Trane and Miles, it’s learning how to create the vehicle upon which you can give transportation toward many directions to happen.

Tedder Avery asked: “What’s more important to you – Elvin Jones or Art Blakey?”

KEZ: Again they’re completely important but the foundation for rhythmic thrust is Art Blakey. The exploration of tonal color with power is Elvin Jones.

Douglas Ewart (multi-instrument) asked - “What do you think of women drumming, particularly hand drummers?”

KEZ: There’ve been women drummers all through time and the approach to the feminine instincts and reactions I believe are extremely innovative. The importance of women, not just drummers, in today’s music brings about the truest vitality in that it’s a necessary inclusion in order for the music to advance.

JI: I see there’s a common trend in these questions in asking you about women.

KEZ: Oh, yeah, well everybody knows I love women. The thing is we have to find ways of co-existence trust without everyone having to be the same. I think the generic sense of identity today limits a lot of the appreciation and beauty that is within our differences being that we are all human beings. There is a difference in the way women express things and the way that men express things and there’s nothing wrong with that, but we are essential to one another.

Douglas Ewart also asked - “Do you know the work of drummer Tiorro [pronounced Tiwowa], the Haitian master visionary drummer? If so, how did you learn about him and what do you think of him as an artist and spiritual drummer?”

KEZ: As I said earlier about Tiorro, he’s a human voice through the fabric of drumming. It’s probably one of the most extraordinary examples of lyricism associated with what’s considered a non-lyrical instrument. There’s a lot of melody in percussion that people are just ignorant of hearing and Tiorro has given us extraordinary examples through his improvisation, his technical virtuosity, and his cultural traditionalism, and the innovation that he’s done with it.

Nona Hendryx [vocalist] asked – “I’m always interested to hear you talk about your experiences working and playing with Nina Simone. It’s fascinating! I would like to know more about that relationship and how you survived life on the road with Nina.”

KEZ: [Laughs] The same way I survived life on the road with Nona! It’s understanding that this is a very powerful Nina/Nona - powerful individuals of unlimited inventiveness in expressing human emotion through the gift of music. Don’t get in the way, learn how to move with it. Learn from it and then you’ll have something that you can express to contribute to it. Nina Simone could come in a room, understand the vibration frequencies of the space itself, feel the emotions of the multitudes of many, center into the one, and connect with the truth that would unify everyone into an epiphanal moment of creative expression like no other artist. It was an honor to experience that.

JI: Any final comments?

KEZ: I’m proud to say that I am a global cultural activist! I am one of the founders of the, “National Campaign for Freedom of Expression”(NCFE), which was started in the late 80’s. It was and still is in the forefront of leadership fighting against artist censorship.
Interview

Barry Harris

“You have to continue playing.”

Hear Barry Harris at Dizzy’s Club Coca Cola at Jazz At Lincoln Center, June 16-18

Interview & Photo by Eric Nemeyer

JI: What was the driving motivation behind your creation of the Jazz Cultural Theatre?

BH: I had some people talk me into it. I had a little bit of money and I was thinking I would buy a small brownstone uptown. There was a lady on 132nd Street that was trying to get rid of her place. Some other people we saying, “Barry, why don’t we get a place in midtown?” I said, “Well, we’ll look at the place and we’ll see.” We went to it. We had a meeting and they talked me into it. “Okay, let’s try it.” It began in 1982 and lasted for five years. The whole idea for this teaching thing started a long time ago. I was teaching for [trumpet player] Joe Newman’s Jazz Interactions in the 1970s. One time, at the end of the schedule when I was teaching, I was supposed to be there at 4:00 PM and go involved in things and realized that I was late. And, I said, “Oh my.” I got a cab and it was about 6:30 and I

There was a lady who was my benefactress. I also had a friend I met at Bradley’s. When I decided to do these concerts with strings, I kept talking about it. He said, “All you do is talk about it. When are you going to do something?” When I went back there next time, I told him I was going to do my concert with strings. He handed me a $1,500 check. He was my other helper.

JI: Talk about how you structured the performance and teaching elements of the Jazz Cultural Center.

BH: You sort of goof at things when you start out. I goofed at the beginning. I wanted to have music every weekend. When I had the gig, I was bringing my money to pay the musicians. The first class I had there had 90 people in the class. I thought, “This is nice. Maybe if I do three days of this, that’ll be nice.” That was the dumbest thing I ever did. I should have done one class with 90 people. I spread it out and started getting 30 people at each class because they came when they wanted to. Rent was $3,000 a month and learn—no two chord songs in here … not when I’m paying the rent. Dealing with people is difficult. One of the hardest things to do is to get people to represent you in your manner, not in their manner. You want people to come back to your place, your business. You want people to feel wonderful so they’ll come back.

BH: You young people ask me all the time, “What did you do in Detroit?” I think we had a bunch of older musicians who were great. We had an alto player named Cokey. We thought he was the greatest thing in the world. We had a trumpet player name Cleophus Curtis and a trumpet player named Clair Rockamore. If Miles [Davis] was around, you’d have to ask him, “Who was Clair Rockamore?” He’d tell you. He mentioned him in his book. I’m not too good at remembering everything. I can remember going to see “Bird” in ballrooms, and I can remember sitting in with Charlie Parker. Those were some of the greatest moments of my life. I can remember going to the Forest Club and hearing Charlie Parker with Strings. I can remember that feeling. [pause] That’s why it’s hard to go into clubs—because I want you to give me that feeling … that feeling I felt when I heard him play. I would love to be able to give that feeling to people myself—to make them feel what I felt when Charlie Parker played. See, we had so many good musicians. I was a scrawny kid. At school I couldn’t even do one chin-up. There wasn’t no baseball for me … There wasn’t no football, no basketball. Everybody knew where to find me—at my house, on the piano. When I was living on Russell Street on the East side [of Detroit], I went to see Roland Hanna. He’d heard I had been singing. He sent back a nasty message: “You better get yourself a day job.” [laughs] So I found out that he had a record date through Eddie Locke. I said, “I’ll fix him.” So I went and busted into his date and I said, “Okay man, I heard you need a singer.” He just fell on the floor and roared with laughter. Then he [Roland Hanna] said, “Me and Sonny Redd used to climb those stairs on Russell Street, just to get up there to learn about chords and stuff from you. Sir Roland Hanna was part of me. I might be what a part of Tommy Flanagan and Will Davis and Abe Woodley. But Sonny Redd and Roland Hanna, Donald Byrd, Doug Watkins … Paul Chambers learned to play up in my house. He couldn’t even play the bass at all. He had gotten a bass and couldn’t play it at all. He even came on the gig with his bass trying to play—didn’t know a note, hardly. But he learned to play at my house. Later on I had a band with Yusef Lateef. Then I had developed this system of teaching. I taught a lot of cats—even the Motown cats. Their piano player’s name was Johny Griffith — and the first stuff he learned was from me. The bass player who everybody loved, James Jamerson — he learned at my house. (Continued on page 32)
Barry Harris

(Continued from page 30)

They were all jazz musicians. What we did, which was bad probably — which is maybe why Detroit is messed up — a whole bunch of us left at the same time and came to New York, and we all made it. Frank Gant. Sonny Redd. Hugh Lawson. Yusef Lateef. Doug Watkins. Paul Chambers—he might have been here a little bit before. Then there were musicians who stayed too, and stayed for the whole concert. At one point, I played a concert by myself and later he said to me, “You really touched my heart. What can I do for you?” I just said, “Oh man.” You know, one doesn't know what to say when someone says something like that. I wouldn't even know what to say. He sends me a card at Christmas. Most of the musicians on those records that made that sound are jazz musicians.

JI: When you first came to New York in the 1950s, what kinds of challenges and opportunities did you experience?

BH: Since I didn't stay with Max's band too long, I went back to Detroit. When I really came to New York and stayed was 1960. We had a lot of record dates. I was recording with everybody. The record companies found us and took advantage of us — Cedar Walton, Herbie Hancock, Lee Morgan, Hank Mobley … we all recorded. Since I was recording with all these people on Blue Note, I called Alfred Lion at Blue Note and said, “I recorded with you with Hank Mobley and Lee Morgan, why don’t you give me a date?” He said, “No, no, no, no.” I said, “Why?” He said, “You play too beautiful.” I said, “Thank you man.” I made it. I recorded. I got little gigs. I went out of town with people. I went to Europe occasionally. So I made it, and that's when I stayed around New York. It was around 1960.

JI: Could you talk about your association with Thad Jones with whom you recorded on Blue Note in the 1950s?

BH: Well that started when he came back to Detroit. He was playing at the Bluebird with Billy Mitchell. The Bluebird was our joint. I was too young to get in. Phil Hill was the piano player, and the band stand was in the window. So, I'd knock on the window. He'd see me and he'd nod. Then when the tune stopped, he'd get off the piano, and I'd run in and jump up on the piano and play a tune and go on back outside afterwards, because I was too young. I actually celebrated my 21st birthday in The Bluebird—to make sure that they knew I was 21 years old. I played there with Yusef Lateef. That's when I came up with all this practice stuff—real stuff to practice, to learn how to improvise by yourself. It's almost like I'm the throwback to the figured bass, like what the Europeans used to do.

JI: Well, Bach was really an improviser.

BH: Oh sure. But what Bach did was that he started teaching and he started writing a lot of stuff down. His contemporaries didn't dig that too much because they were improvisers. But what ended up happening was when improvisation stopped in Europe, it started in the USA. We're really the extension of Bach and Chopin and all of them. The big difference is that we have to do this in public. We can't stop and say, “That was wrong. Let's stop and do it over.” You have to continue playing.

JI: Did Thad arrive with the charts on the spot?

BH: I came to New York to record with him. There were charts. What I was really good at was getting a chart down right away — the chords and stuff — so I didn't have to look at the music. That's what it was like with Lee Morgan, with ‘The Sidewinder,’ and all that stuff. With “Sidewinder”, I came into the studio, somebody gave me some music, I made up the intro and that was it.

BH: They had a little spinet piano. It wasn’t bad. At some point they brought in this baby grand piano. It sounded like hell. I wouldn't even go and touch it. After a few weeks or months, I decided I’d touch this piano and see what’s happening. I went over there, and as I played that piano, it got more and more in tune. You wouldn't have believed it. That piano began to sound so good to me. I wondered how could I sit here and play that spinet and not come over here and check out this grand and really work with it. This grand began to sound better and better and better. I'm not lying to you. The piano is funny. It needs attention.

JI: Where were you doing your practicing?

BH: Riverside Records had the top floor of a three story building that is still on 46th Street between 8th and 9th Avenue. I had a key to that building. There was a Greek man with a Greek restaurant that made sure that I ate properly. He’d fix me breakfast and dinner. I’d go up in that room after breakfast and then the next thing is I’d look up and it was dark. You’d have to ask Joe Zawinul or Harold Mabern. They all knew where to find me.

JI: So you spent most of the day practicing at the Riverside Records company offices.

BH: Not really. Max was still upset about [the death of] Clifford Brown and Richie Powell. That really got him. It was a nice gig, but he wasn’t over that. When I went back to Detroit after being with Max [Roach] … That band was Max Roach, Sonny Rollins, Donald Byrd, George Morrow and me. That band never recorded. Somebody must have something on us.

JI: What kinds of discussions did you have with Max when you were in that band? Did he offer any suggestions?

BH: We're really the extension of Bach and Chopin, made that sound are jazz musicians. Most of the musicians on those records that made that sound are jazz musicians. We're really the extension of Bach and Chopin and all of them. The big difference is that we have to do this in public. We can't stop and say, “That was wrong. Let’s stop and do it over.” You have to continue playing.

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Interview

Sonny Fortune

“This music asks for what is your spontaneity in this moment.”

Hear Sonny Fortune at Birdland with Four Generations of Miles [Davis], May 23-26

Interview & Photo By Eric Nemeyer

JI: When you got to New York what kind of environment did you experience?

SF: When I came to new York I still had a family so I had to move very cautiously. I came to find out whether or not I could make it in New York. I ended up being a part of an All Star band up on 52nd Street one night at Beef Steak Charlie’s place—at 52nd and 8th Avenue. That’s when I met Elvin [Jones]. Elvin told me to come down to this club to sit in where he was working. At the time he was working at Pookie’s Pub. I ended up working with this All Star Band. Nobody knew who I was, but I ended up being a part of the band because [bassist] Jymie Merritt made it possible for me to be a part of the band.

“Until then, I looked at the whole experience as something very special. I thought that was some real special music that I and Coltrane created. I thought that was a very special kind of a something. There wasn’t much you could say about it. It was so complete. Those who saw it, and those who identified with it just said, “yeah.” So strangely enough I never felt the need to provoke a conversation.”

It was Jymie Merritt, Jane Getz, Joe Henderson, Freddie Hubbard, myself and Elvin Jones. Nobody knew who I was. I had met Freddie about a year or so or two earlier in Harrisburg. He and Jymie Merritt were the only two people who knew me at Beefsteak Charlie’s place. The response there was so favorable. But I had to get a job here because I still had a responsibility with my family. I used to go to work everyday and hang out until three or four in the morning. I’d get up at seven to go to work—four or five days of that man. By the time Friday came around, I was almost dead tired. All of that happened in about two weeks of being in New York. I knew someone here from Philly who had this job—a guy named Ed Smith. He asked me if I wanted to take this job. He was a policeman in Philadelphia. He quit his job to come to New York to become an actor. When I came to New York he was getting ready to take off from his day job to do some summer stock. He wanted to know if I was interested in taking his job. So I took his job. I was doing that during the day and hanging out at night. When you’re that young, you can do anything. New York was always good for me. Almost as soon as I arrived.

JI: What were the circumstances that led to your joining Elvin’s group?

SF: When I came, I went down to Pookie’s Pub and sat in. Somewhere after a couple of weeks of coming down there, Elvin asked me would I make it possible for me to be a part of the band. The reresponse there was so favorable. I came to find out whether or not I could make it in New York. I ended up being a part of an All Star band up on 52nd Street one night at Beef Steak Charlie’s place—at 52nd and 8th Avenue. That’s when I met Elvin [Jones]. Elvin told me to come down to this club to sit in where he was working. At the time he was working at Pookie’s Pub. I ended up working with this All Star Band. Nobody knew who I was, but I ended up being a part of the band because [bassist] Jymie Merritt made it possible for me to be a part of the band.

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JI: Were discussions you had with Elvin about the music?

SF: No. We were just playing tunes. Just you know…hit. Here’s what time we hit or show up. From what I understand he had been at Pookie’s Pub for almost a year. I mean things that are unheard of today in terms of guys working in one place for long periods of time. In ’67, Elvin had left Coltrane. Elvin was very popular in the jazz world and he had this gig where people would come. Musicians as well as people. We worked six nights a week.

JI: With all that work were you also devoting yourself to a lot of practice on your instrument?

SF: Well, yes. I was trying to practice as much as I could. I mean at that particular time in the beginning at least, I was busy trying to get my own apartment and get myself situated. I was staying with someone here in New York. The guy was nice enough to let me stay there but he wasn’t nice enough to let me practice there. I appreciated that because it just helped me to hurry up and get my own place which I did. So when that happened, yeah I practiced. Doing the gig the gig at night and feeling like here I am in the Big Apple, trying to figure it all out.

JI: Do you remember any discussions you might have had with Elvin about Coltrane and his experiences?

SF: No. I never really talked to Elvin about Coltrane. That was my first hit with him. I started working with him again in the 80’s and from the 80’s on into the 90’s off and on. We never had that type of conversation. I more or less looked at that whole thing. I just really came to another level of appreciation with all this within the past seven to eight years. Until then, I looked at the whole experience as something very special. I thought that was some real special music that he and Coltrane created. I thought that was a very special kind of a something. There wasn’t much you could say about it. It was so complete. Those who saw it, and those who identified with it just said, “yeah.” So strangely enough I never felt the need to provoke a conversation. One that I can recall. Coltrane told me, before I came to New York, that if I ever got the opportunity to play with Elvin to take it. I saw him at his mother’s house one night on my way downtown. I had already, I played a concert with him in Philadelphia, so he knew me musically. He knew me from playing with me the last year of his life. I had been meaning to tell him I was working with Elvin and I kept putting it off. I finally called him after about two months or so of working with Elvin. When I called him his wife Alice told me he was sleeping, and he died that Sunday. That was on a Saturday and he died that Sunday. So from what I understand, he had been in the club to see Elvin about three weeks before I started working there. I never saw him again after the time I saw him in front of his mother’s

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house to tell him I was thinking about going to New York.

JI: What lead to your association with Mongo Santamaria?

SF: That was because of some friends in Philadelphia. We had played music together before— Dot and Andy Aaron. I think they had recommended me because there was an opening or something. I think that’s how that all came about. I went and auditioned with Mongo and I started working. I also was at a place called The Last Way Out. We used to do something between shows or between sets rather. There was a percussion ensemble. It consisted of about seven or eight people. We used to fuse the two bands together. The Afro-Cuban ensemble might have had a couple of dancers a couple of times. So it was known that I had a kind of feeling for Afro Cuban music. From a distance I didn’t really know that much about it other than it was something I could identify with.

JI: How did your experience with Mongo help you expand your artistic perspective?

SF: I definitely feel that working with him gave me the opportunity to be exposed to some rhythms that were out of the ordinary, in terms of where I was going with the jazz pursuit. There was Afro-Cuban music in Jazz but not to the degree that Mongo’s music entailed. That was a whole different culture, a whole different emphasis on music as far as how I saw things at that time. That was really a great gig. Mongo was an incredible cat, a heck of an employer—a professional cat and a very gracious cat.

SF: I know I have a vocabulary that I try to stay away from—because this music doesn’t necessarily want you to pronounce your vocabulary. This music doesn’t ask for that. That’s what this music is. That’s why I tell you I love this music. I really do.

JI: It’s always fresh.

SF: Yes indeed Jack and if it isn’t, it’s because you’re stale. You know I mean? It asks all you got, and bring some on if you got it. That’s what I got from Coltrane. That was the thing that really stuck with me about him. Certainly there was a vocabulary. There was an “OK this is Coltrane.” But there was, within that zone of “this is John,” - there was always some other stuff. I’ve certainly tried to embrace that myself. I’m looking for other stuff. I’m looking for the challenge of what this music is about.

JI: When we start out, it is about the notes and the chords and so on. After that seeps into your subconscious, it’s really about the energy and trying to make something meaningful happen on the spot. As you said, each night its got to be different. Because you might be playing with the same players in the same room, in the same key, at the same tempo. If everybody is sensitive, it’s going to be different.

SF: Absolutely. And you’re hoping the members around you feel that way about it. Everybody’s trying to expand. One of the things that really is a turn-on in this music, is the fact that you got to practice. You make sure you have all your stuff together. You make sure you’re alert enough to respond.

JI: I agree with you. It’s like this conversation. We both are interested in this music and the fact that we both know how to speak English represents some common ground that enables it to occur. I didn’t pre-script what we might say, other than writing a few questions that would be guidelines, and you had no idea what I was going to say.

SF: Right. And I have to respond to this. Boy, that’s what this music is. That’s why I tell you I love this music. I really do.

“I know I have a vocabulary that I try to stay away from—because this music doesn’t necessarily want you to pronounce your vocabulary. This music doesn’t ask for that. This music asks for what is your spontaneity in this moment. What are you going to do on this tune tonight? I know you played it the night before last so, what are you going to do on this tune tonight?”

SF: That’s true. I’m from the era and on the tail-end of the era of sounding like somebody else was a no-no. I often tell people that if Sonny Stitt was alive today, there wouldn’t be enough banks for him to keep his money in—for all the saxophone that he played. People used to say, “yeah but he sounds like Charlie Parker.” People used to say Sonny’s playing Bird. Man, Sonny Stitt was playing so much saxophone. I listen to him now and say, God. But like you said, because the music has been institutionalized and people are learning from another perspective, originality is hard to hold on to. In the era that I came along, it was about trying to find your own voice. That’s one of the reason’s I continue to play alto, even being influenced by Trane. For me that’s a means of [maintaining] my own identity. People say things to me like you played alto like a tenor. Or your alto sounds like a tenor. Maybe it’s the influence of the sound of the horn. I more or less try to carry that over to the alto—where I hear the alto not as much on the high end as on the low end. That may be due to the fact of being influenced by the people that I mentioned.

JI: You played briefly with Kenny and tenor saxophonist Sal Nistico in Buddy Rich’s sextet. What was that like?

SF: That was about five or six months of damn near every night. Buddy would go find gigs

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where those cats got to work all the time. They just can’t sit around and not work. And Buddy had to work all the time. He had to play those drums all the time. It was a great experience. It also triggered my jumping off. I was working with Buddy. Max Gordon at The Vanguard asked me if I wanted to bring a band into The Vanguard. We were just getting ready to go on the road. I never went on the road with Buddy. I never experienced the rumors about Buddy. In the situation that I was with him, in his club, it was an all star band. I ended up taking off. I had taken a band into the Vanguard and the last night, Miles asked me to join his band. That’s how I went with Miles.

JI: Was it a shock to your system?
SF: Yeah, it was kind of off from where I wanted to go. I felt like working with Miles is my honor. So I went on in there and did the best I could with that. We did about four or five albums. The Japanese recordings got good reviews.

SF: The challenge for me was trying to figure out how to fit. It was an amplified band and I hadn’t played in a band with that kind of volume. It was an electric band. At times I used to feel like playing an acoustic instrument, I felt kind of awkward. When I first started out, I had a wah-wah pedal. [laughs] Later on, Miles said he didn’t want me to play no wah-wah. And I said well Miles you got a wah-wah why can’t I have a wah-wah? He said he wanted to hear my sound. But I was actually getting something going on that wah-wah, that’s why he didn’t want me to play it. Even though he had an acoustic instrument, he had it hooked up into his wah-wah. So it was a band that was working off of sound effects. Being an acoustic player, there were times when I felt like, “where can I go with this?”

JI: The music wasn’t harmonically difficult.
SF: Right. It was music that I was trying to get a handle on. He was a cat that I had so much respect for. I saw Miles when Trane and Miles were a quintet. Then I saw Miles when Trane and Cannonball were a sextet. He’d been one more of those guys who convinced me that this is the way this stuff is supposed to go.

JI: Do you remember any words of encouragement that you have received from influential artists?
SF: I think one of the things that may have kind of helped me a lot was my appearance of confidence. I used to look and act like “I got it”—even when I felt like I didn’t have it. I don’t recall people saying too much to me. I’m very hard on myself. You’ll never hear me say something as simple as “how do I sound?” I’ve always felt like if I can’t hear myself, then I’m in real trouble. I have had with Coltrane or Sonny Rollins, Miles or Frank Foster. I’m mentioning these people because these are horn players. I never asked them, “how do you do this?” or whatever, because I always felt like, I can figure this out. It doesn’t seem to be something as simple as: well, get up tomorrow morning, and turn to the east, and do fifty push ups—and you’ll have it. People will say stuff to you like “man you got to practice.” Hey, I already know about that one. But that’s the truth. That is the truth. So as an end result, I never heard much more than that. You know you got to practice. John [Coltrane] kind of said that without giving it as advice. John used to practice all the time. I felt from seeing him, and knowing his attitude, that made it somewhat clear in terms of “here’s what I have to do, and how I get there. And I tell you man, as long as I’ve been playing, I’ve only arrived in the past five, six seven years or less, at a comfortable place with myself. I have arrived at a place where I’m playing better now than I’ve played all my life.

“Never be in a hurry. Do everything quietly and in a calm spirit. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset.”
- Saint Francis de Sales

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