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Appearing at Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, January 25-28, 2018
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SPECIAL SUNDAY JAZZ BRUNCH
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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
Nilson Matta

Appearing at Dizzy's Club, January 25-28

Photos of Nilson Matta on page 4 and 6 © Eric Nemeyer
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"Hustle and bustle recharges me"

Amina Figarova

Jazz At Lincoln Center, Dizzy’s Club
January 29, 2018

Interview by Eric Nemeyer

JI: Could you talk about the development of your composition September Suite that creates a musical homage to the victims of the 2001 September 11th attacks?

AF: It was a very unusual process for me. I lived in The Netherlands than, and to be exact it was on September 16, when I came home traumatized. The whole experience was surreal, I was so happy to be home, to see my husband. I did not want to see or to hear anything about 9/11. I had enough. I was not thinking to write about it or to write at all. But after I’ve seen the documentary on BBC that I describe in the booklet of the September Suite, music came to me. I could not help it. It was pouring out. It was therapeutic. But at the same time it did not arrive at once. All the experiences I had and the documentaries and the interview I’ve seen were transforming into music, in a very different way than usual. I was describing a different kind of life, not a pretty part of life, but sad, devastating, ugly part of life. I was writing what I felt and for the first time in my life I was confronted with this level of honesty and depth. I would write down what ever would come into my head, and I could not believe that it was me who wrote it because it was so very different from what I used to. It was new to me. In the process I lost my father, and I felt that I went in to even deeper level of honesty. That’s why I call it tribute to mourning, tribute to 9/11. I think it helped me to rediscover music, writing and myself.

JI: When you were growing up in Azerbaijan you began on a path that led you to study at the Baku JI: and develop your improvisational skills?

AF: I grew up listening to all kinds of music. At the time the popular music in Azerbaijan was very jazz oriented music. My parents, and most of all my mother, loved jazz. We had LP’s of Lois Armstrong, Ella, Oscar Peterson, Earl Garner etcetera. Music was on all the time - LP’s, radio, TV. Besides, folk music in Azerbaijan is very rhythmical and based on improvisation. Of course, there was lots of great classical music around as well — which all together, I guess formed my music taste and love to all styles. At the time there was not a jazz school. The only way was to study classical music. When I was a teenager, I was into Motown music. Music education in the former USSR was not a pretty part of life, but sad, devastating, ugly part of life. I was describing a different kind of life, transforming into music, in a very different way than usual. I was confronted with this level of honesty and depth. I would write down what ever would come into my head, and I could not believe that it was me who wrote it because it was so very different from what I used to. It was new to me. In the process I lost my father, and I felt that I went in to even deeper level of honesty. That’s why I call it tribute to mourning, tribute to 9/11. I think it helped me to rediscover music, writing and myself.

JI: What were the challenges that you experienced in making the transition from classical music — characterized by where reading and memorizing of already created pieces, and the accompanying strictures and structures — to jazz, which involves summoning in the moment all of one’s experiences, musical skills, and creativity to create something meaningful and inspiring on the spot?

AF: The whole process was very “playful.” I thought I will take a few jazz lessons for fun. I wanted to try. I could not imagine that it would go that fast. And as far as it goes for writing, I wrote music all my life, since I was 3. That never changed. It developed as I was developing and it still does. I love this process. You play and you compose differently as you grow, getting more experiences. Sometimes I would take a look as an outsider at my life, at my choices in every thing, not just in music. I think it’s fascinating to see how necessarily the top voice melody, it can be the melody in the bass. At the same time, I guess coming from a “percussion oriented country” and also growing up listening to lots of “groovy” music - groove is as important to me. But again, it’s all about honesty, I love to describe musically all my experiences, sometimes melody line comes first, sometimes rhythm, or both - it’s all depends

JI: Could you share some of the ideas you’ve picked up about leadership, creativity and focus from some of the artists with whom you’ve played or studied?

AF: To be honest, I started my own band when I just started. I had the strongest musicians in the band while I was just learning. I was not afraid to fail, or to sound bad in comparison to other guys. I was enjoying this experience, and I always wanted every musician in my band to have equal freedom to create. Later on when I started to work with other musicians I found that I was most comfortable when the bandleader was treating the musicians the same. I don’t like very “notaries” way of leadership - it shuts your creativity, you feel like you are doing your job. It’s not for me. I love my band, we are great friends, we love to play together, to travel, to be together...

JI: Could you share some discussions you may have had or words of wisdom you may have received from one of your mentors, or influential jazz artists, that have made a significant impact on your artistry, life or thinking?

AF: One of my favorite comes from Bob Brookmeyer. He was a guest teacher at the Rotterdam Conservatory. I was in his ensemble class. During our first lesson, of course, all of us students tried to make an impression on him - to show off, playing crazy, all bebop, altered, pentatonic scales up and down, fast, a million notes a minute. He stopped us and he said: “Please stop, play me a children’s song.” Until today, if I get too excited while playing, I am thinking “Children’s song.” Beautiful. He has an amazing melodic approach, and “Children’s song” is the best way to describe it.

JI: What have you discovered about human nature as a result of your business and or creative pursuits in the music world?

AF: Making music — playing, writing — is a very honest business. You can’t hide. You can’t pretend to be a different person. You can’t pretend that you understand certain feelings, matters, situations. The listener will feel it, one way or another. We are channels, we pass our world through the music to the world, and there is no room for pretending.

JI: What do you do to recharge your batteries in the face of the hustle and bustle of our contemporary world?

AF: Hustle and bustle recharges me. I need it. I feel like a “battery.” I need this energy and all the craziness around me, and I need sun. I have it all in New York. That’s why I am here. This city makes me complete.
Amina Figarova

Hear Amina at Dizzy's Club at Jazz At Lincoln Center
January 29

© Zak Shelby-Szyzko
“Create without judgment or fear”

Lauren Sevian & Alexa Tarantino [LSAT]  
Jazz At Lincoln Center, Dizzy’s Club  
January 12, 2018

Interview By Eric Nemezyer  
Photo by Sharon Bushman

JI: What inspired you to pursue a career in jazz?

LS: I discovered at a relatively young age how much I loved this music. My father introduced me to this music with his record collection when I was around fourteen or fifteen. After that I told my teacher I wanted to study jazz, and he exposed me even more with introducing me to Charlie Parker, Hank Mobley, John Coltrane, and Pepper Adams. A turning point for me was during high school when I won a competition called the Count Basie Invitational, and I was given the opportunity to play a solo with the Basie Band! I knew after that night that this was what I wanted to do with my life; play jazz music and perform with other people.

JI: What kinds of eye-opening lessons or understandings about human nature have you gained through your experiences in the music business?

LS: I’ve discovered a multitude of lessons from people throughout the years, mostly positive. I try not to focus on the negative. I have certainly been in situations where I have been taken advantage of—i.e. not being paid properly for work that I have done, and wound up in lawsuits because of it! For the most part I have experienced the generosity of musicians, when it comes to playing each others music, getting together for a session, or in general just looking out for each other. For example, when I first started playing with the Mingus Band, I was 23 or 24 years old. I was pretty intimidated playing with such a high profile group and initially felt pretty out of place, but very quickly adapted due to the members of that band; especially John Stubblefield, who I sat next to for a couple of years. He helped me along with the music, gave me constructive criticism, and really helped me grow into the chair.

JI: What are the benefits and drawbacks of women segregating themselves into all-women groups and endeavors?

LS: One irrefutable benefit is the bond that develops between women in an all female group. There is an empowering energy that can happen. On the business end, one benefit of an all female group is that it is marketable. I feel like it’s still a novelty to be a woman in the jazz world, and I don’t think that will change for a long time. I’ve played with several all female groups and never thought to myself, “This would be better if there was a man in the mix.” I wish that we could get to the point where it doesn’t matter. I guess the drawback is that by limiting yourself to having an all female band sends a message that you’re intentionally separating yourself from male artists, which can create a larger divide. I mean, we have “Women in Jazz,” but we don’t have “Men in Jazz” festivals. If we did, it may sound a bit sexist.

JI: What kinds of interests or activities do you pursue in addition to music? If applicable, how do they contribute to your awareness and development as an artist?

LS: I’m really into physical fitness—strength training, cardio vascular exercise, yoga, & pilates. Yoga is especially helpful for keeping me focused and centered. I love the philosophy behind yoga, being in the moment, in not the past or the future and concentrating on breathing, and being only concerned with that. As an artist it has helped me handle the very physical nature of my instrument—the baritone saxophone! — and keeps my mind clear so I can continue practicing and growing as a musician.

JI: Many musicians have not developed business and marketing skills commensurate with their musical abilities. These shortcomings have often resulted in musicians not understanding how to effectively market themselves or profit from their music, recordings and performances. This lack of skills, replaced purely by hopes and dreams, have also been the source of musicians being taken advantage of by labels, promoters, venues and so forth. If women have experienced more challenges in the jazz world then men, could you comment or offer advice on the importance of developing relevant business acumen?

LS: I have been in several situations where I discovered that I wasn’t being paid as much as the male musicians were. I would say that this doesn’t happen too often anymore but experience has taught me to have everything in writing. In fact, when I’m contracted for a gig I prefer to deal with email because everything is documented. It’s unfortunate to be paranoid about this kind of thing but you have to be mindful that people can be duplicitous in this business. Think of it as protecting yourself. There were times where I stood up for myself and lost gigs because of that but sometimes the principle is more important than hanging on to a gig.

JI: What kinds of practice, studies or other activities do you currently engage in to stay fresh, develop your skills, broaden your awareness, and constantly grow?

LS: I play my instrument everyday. It’s important to keep your mind as active as possible.

JI: John Ruskin said: “The highest reward for a person’s toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.” Could you comment on how this might be relevant in your own life and artistry?

LS: As a musician, this quote is extremely relevant. In general, society measures success by money, the kind of car you drive, the house that you live in, material possessions. Jazz musicians in general certainly aren’t in it for the money. Of course we need it to survive, so yes we work so we can earn a living. There’s no escaping that. But what happens in the meantime is a really beautiful thing. We’re pursuing a higher ideal; we’re mastering what we love to do. Money comes and goes, but nobody can take mastery away from you.
Ali Jackson

Hear Ali at
Dizzy’s Club at Jazz At Lincoln Center
January 5

© Eric Nemeyer
Saturday, December 9
- Bill Frisell & Thomas Morgan Duo; Jazz Standard, 7:30, 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Renee Rosnes Deep In The Blue - Featuring Melissa Aldana, Steve Nelson, Peter Washington And Lerrie White, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Broadway.

Sunday, December 10
- Bill Frisell & Thomas Morgan Duo; Jazz Standard, 7:30, 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Renee Rosnes Deep In The Blue - Featuring Melissa Aldana, Steve Nelson, Peter Washington And Lerrie White, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Broadway.

Monday, December 11
- New York Youth Symphony: Ted Nash, Extended Works; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Broadway.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Jim Cuno's Cast Party, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, December 12
- Joe Lovano Classic Quartet, Jazz Standard, 7:30, 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Marquis Hill Backett With Special Guest Willie Pickens, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Broadway.

Wednesday, December 13
- Big Band Holidays Featuring The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis And Vocalists Catherine Russell And Kenny Washington; Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Joe Lovano Classic Quartet, Jazz Standard, 7:30, 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Kenny Barron Quintet - Mike Rodriguez, Trumpet; Dayna Stephens, Saxophone; Kenny Barron, Piano; Kyoshi Kitagawa, Bass; Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

Thursday, December 14
- Big Band Holidays Featuring The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis And Vocalists Catherine Russell And Kenny Washington; Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Joe Lovano Classic Quartet, Jazz Standard, 7:30, 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.

Friday, December 15
- Joe Lovano Classic Qt; Jazz Standard, 7:30, 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Riley’s Red Hot Holidays; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Broadway.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Birdland Big Band; Stacey Kent, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Kenny Barron Quintet - Mike Rodriguez, Trumpet; Dayna Stephens, Saxophone; Kenny Barron, Piano; Kyoshi Kitagawa, Bass; Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Duane Eubanks Quintet; Ralph Bowen Quartet; After-hours Jam Session with Joe Farnsworth; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, December 16
- Joe Lovano Classic Quartet, Jazz Standard, 7:30, 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Riley’s Red Hot Holidays; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Broadway.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Stacey Kent; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Kenny Barron Quintet - Mike Rodriguez, Trumpet; Dayna Stephens, Saxophone; Kenny Barron, Piano; Kyoshi Kitagawa, Bass; Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Duane Eubanks Quintet; Ralph Bowen Quartet; Eric Wyatt Quartet & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
Friday, December 22
- Spanish Harlem Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 7:30; 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Sherman Irby: A New Christmas Story; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 6th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Klea Blackhurst, Jim Caruso & Billy Stritch In “A Swingin’ Birdland Christmas”; Freddy Cole Quartet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Kenny Barron Trio - Kenny Barron, Piano; Kiyoshi Kitagawa, Bass; Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

Saturday, December 23
- Spanish Harlem Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 7:30; 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- Sherman Irby: A New Christmas Story; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 6th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Klea Blackhurst, Jim Caruso & Billy Stritch In “A Swingin’ Birdland Christmas”; Freddy Cole Quartet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Kenny Barron Trio - Kenny Barron, Piano; Kiyoshi Kitagawa, Bass; Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

Sunday, December 24
- Sherman Irby: A New Christmas Story; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 6th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Klea Blackhurst, Jim Caruso & Billy Stritch In “A Swingin’ Birdland Christmas”; Freddy Cole Quartet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Kenny Barron Trio - Kenny Barron, Piano; Kiyoshi Kitagawa, Bass; Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

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Monday, December 25
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Klea Blackhurst, Jim Caruso & Billy Stritch In “A Swingin’ Birdland Christmas”; Freddy Cole Quartet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christmas With The Bad Plus - Reid Anderson, Bass; Ethan Iversen, Piano; Dave King, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

Tuesday, December 26
- Carlos Henriquez Octet: The Latin Side Of Dizzy; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Birdland Big Band with Special Guest Vocalist Veronica Swift; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- The Bad Plus - Reid Anderson, Bass; Ethan Iversen, Piano; Dave King, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Robert Edwards - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesday, December 27
- Carlos Henriquez Octet: The Latin Side Of Dizzy; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Birdland Big Band with Special Guest Vocalist Veronica Swift; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- The Bad Plus - Reid Anderson, Bass; Ethan Iversen, Piano; Dave King, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Pat Collins, Quartet; Akiko Tsuruga Quartet; Aaron Seeber - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Thursday, December 28
- Carlos Henriquez Octet: The Latin Side Of Dizzy; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Birdland Big Band with Special Guest Vocalist Veronica Swift; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- The Bad Plus - Reid Anderson, Bass; Ethan Iversen, Piano; Dave King, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Adam Larson Quartet; Saul Rubin Quartet; Jonathan Thomas - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Friday, December 29
- Carlos Henriquez Octet: The Latin Side Of Dizzy; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Birdland Big Band with Special Guest Vocalist Veronica Swift; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- The Bad Plus - Reid Anderson, Bass; Ethan Iversen, Piano; Dave King, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Matt Hurlbut Trio; Dezron Douglas/Johnathan Blake Quartet; After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, December 30
- Carlos Henriquez Octet: The Latin Side Of Dizzy; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Birdland Big Band with Special Guest Vocalist Veronica Swift; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- The Bad Plus - Reid Anderson, Bass; Ethan Iversen, Piano; Dave King, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Small’s Showcase; Fima Chupakhin Quintet; Mark Whitfield Trio; Brooklyn Circle; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Sunday, December 31
- Rene Marie; Jazz Standard, 7:30, 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th.
- New Year’s Eve With Paquito D’Rivera and Carlos Henriquez; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Ctr, 60th & Bdwy.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Birdland Big Band with Special Guest Vocalist Veronica Swift; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- The Bad Plus - Reid Anderson, Bass; Ethan Iversen, Piano; Dave King, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Small’s Showcase; Fima Chupakhin Quintet; Mark Whitfield Trio; Brooklyn Circle; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, January 1, 2018
- Sunport JAZZ Festival In NY: “Night At Birdland” with Swingin’ Wonderland JAZZ Orch; John Colianni Big Band, Birdland, 315 W. 44th

(Continued on page 16)
Tuesday, January 2
- Monty Alexander; Louis Armstrong Eternity Band, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Ghost Train Orchestra, Book Of Rhapsodies Vol. II Album Release, Dizzy’s Club Jazz at Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Brad Mehldau, Piano, Larry Grenadier, Bass, Jeff Ballard, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Orrin Evans’ Captain Black Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Steve Nelson Quartet; Abraham Burton Quartet & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesday, January 3
- Monty Alexander, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Larry Willis & Heavy Blue, Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Brad Mehldau, Piano, Larry Grenadier, Bass, Jeff Ballard, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Orrin Evans’ Captain Black Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Pat Bianchi Trio; Itai Kris & TELAVANA; Jovan Alexandre - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Thursday, January 4
- Fleurine; Monty Alexander, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Larry Willis & Heavy Blue, Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Brad Mehldau, Piano, Larry Grenadier, Bass, Jeff Ballard, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Cleg Butman & Natalie Smirnova Quartet; Sam Dillon Quartet; Davis Whitfield - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Friday, January 5
- Birdland Big Band; Monty Alexander, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Ali Jackson Quartet, Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Brad Mehldau, Piano, Larry Grenadier, Bass, Jeff Ballard, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- John Marshall Quintet; The Small’s Live Collective; After-hours Jam Session with Joe Farnsworth; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, January 6
- Veronica Swift; Monty Alexander, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Ali Jackson Quartet, Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Brad Mehldau, Piano, Larry Grenadier, Bass, Jeff Ballard, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Arthur Vint, Smokestack Jazz Brunch, 12pm-1:30pm, 116 E. 27th St.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Small’s Showcase; Nick Masters Sextet; John Marshall Quartet; Small’s Live Collective; Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Sunday, January 7
- Ken Peplowski Quartet; Afro Latin Jazz Orch; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Ali Jackson Quartet, Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Brad Mehldau, Piano, Larry Grenadier, Bass, Jeff Ballard, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Chris Botti; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Vocal Masterclass with McCarthy Cowings; Al Murakami Trio feat. Sacha Perry, Deborah Davis & A Few Good Men; Ralph Laiuma & ’Top-Juice’; Hildi Saimel - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, January 8
- Gabriele Stravelli & Billy Stritch; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Latvian Radio Big Band, Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- BLUE NOTE
- Ari Hoenig Trio; Jonathan Barber Group & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Tuesday, January 9
- Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Lee Konitz At 90, Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Baylor Project; Jean Baylor, Marcus Baylor, Keith Loftis, Terry Brewer, Dezron Douglas; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joshua Redman Quartet With Aaron Goldberg; Reuben Rogers, Gregory Hutchison; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Cory Weeds Quartet; Frank Lacy Group & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesday, January 10
- Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Lee Konitz At 90, Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Baylor Project; Jean Baylor, Marcus Baylor, Keith Loftis, Terry Brewer, Dezron Douglas; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joshua Redman Quartet With Aaron Goldberg; Reuben Rogers, Gregory Hutchison; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Bill Goodwin Trio; Jamale Davis Sextet; Jovan Alexandre - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Thursday, January 11
- Veronica Swift; Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Pedrito Martinez & Alfredo Rodriguez; Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Goodman: King Of Swing ~ The Anniversary Landmark Concert; Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis, Music Director Victor Goines, And Clarinetists Anat Cohen, Janellie Reichman, Ken Peplowski, Ted Nash, January 11-13, 2018; Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Dr. Lonnie Smith with Smith Trio, Jovon Alexander - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Friday, January 12
- Birdland Big Band; Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Pedrito Martinez & Alfredo Rodriguez; Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Goodman: King Of Swing ~ The Anniversary Landmark Concert; Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis, Music Director Victor Goines, And Clarinetists Anat Cohen, Janellie Reichman, Ken Peplowski, Ted Nash, January 11-13, 2018; Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Dr. Lonnie Smith with Smith Trio, Jovon Alexander - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Orange Peeples Quintet; St. Louis Jazz Series; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Friday, January 12:
  - Birdland Big Band; Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
  - Pedrito Martinez & Alfredo Rodriguez; Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
  - Goodman: King Of Swing ~ The Anniversary Landmark Concert; Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis, Music Director Victor Goines, And Clarinetists Anat Cohen, Janellie Reichman, Ken Peplowski, Ted Nash, January 11-13, 2018; Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
  - Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
  - Dr. Lonnie Smith with Smith Trio, Jovon Alexander - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, January 13
- Veronica Swift; Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Pedrito Martinez Group; Dizzy’s Club; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Goodman: King Of Swing ~ The Anniversary Landmark Concert; Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis, Music Director Victor Goines, And Clarinetists Anat Cohen, Janellie Reichman, Ken Peplowski, Ted Nash, January 11-13, 2018; Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 177 7th Ave S.
- Emmett Cohen Organ Quartet, Smokin’ Jazz Brunch, 12pm-1:30pm, 116 E. 27th St.
- Dr. Lonnie Smith with Smith Trio, Jovon Alexander - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Cory Weeds Quartet; Frank Lacy Group & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

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Small's
Burton Quintet; Eric Wyatt Quartet & After-hours Jam Session;
Rhoda Scott's Lady Quartet,
Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass,
Birdland
Kurt Elling and Ann Hampton Callaway; Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra,
Mingus Big Band,
Jenny Scheinman's Mischief Mayhem, Nels Cline - Todd Sickafoose -
Jim Black, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
Tim Hagans Quartet; Freddie Hendrix Quartet; After-hours Jam Session with Joe Farnsworth; Small's, 183 W. 10th St.
Saturday, January 20
Eric Comstock and Sean Smith; John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
Igor Butman And The Moscow Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy's Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 60th
Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Jaleel Shaw, Alto Sax, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Joe Dyson, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
Jenny Scheinman's Mischief Mayhem, Nels Cline - Todd Sickafoose - Jim Black, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
Saturday, January 20
Eric Comstock and Sean Smith; John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
Igor Butman And The Moscow Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy's Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 60th
Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Jaleel Shaw, Alto Sax, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Joe Dyson, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
Jenny Scheinman's Mischief Mayhem, Nels Cline - Todd Sickafoose - Jim Black, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
Saturday, January 20
Eric Comstock and Sean Smith; John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
Igor Butman And The Moscow Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy's Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 60th
Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Jaleel Shaw, Alto Sax, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Joe Dyson, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
Jenny Scheinman's Mischief Mayhem, Nels Cline - Todd Sickafoose - Jim Black, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
Tim Hagans Quartet; Freddie Hendrix Quartet; After-hours Jam Session with Joe Farnsworth; Small's, 183 W. 10th St.
Saturday, January 20
Eric Comstock and Sean Smith; John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
Igor Butman And The Moscow Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy's Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 60th
Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Jaleel Shaw, Alto Sax, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Joe Dyson, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
Jenny Scheinman's Mischief Mayhem, Nels Cline - Todd Sickafoose - Jim Black, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
Tim Hagans Quartet; Freddie Hendrix Quartet; After-hours Jam Session with Joe Farnsworth; Small's, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, January 15
John Pizzarelli’s Nat King Cole Centennial Tribute, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
Rhoda Scott’s Lady Quartet, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 60th
Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
Mingus Big Band, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
Keyon Harrod & Friends, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
Pernice Manski - Christopher Leikl Quartet; Fred Nardin Trio; Samy Thiebault quartet; Gare Holleroil & Ari Hoengan; Guilhun Floxur Quart; Jonathan Barber Group & After-hours Jam Session; Small's, 183 W. 10th St.
“a system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true.”

— Socrates
Hugh Ragin
The Aesthetic of the Whisper

Interview & Photos By Ken Weiss

Hugh Ragin (b. April 9, 1951) is a true musician, which is to say his razor-sharp, professional trumpet skills, clarion tone and musical inventiveness have always been highly valued and better acknowledged by Ragin’s peers than the listening public. Raised in Houston, he began on trumpet in eighth grade and proceeded on to a masters in classical trumpet performance from Colorado State University in 1977. He also attended the Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, NY where he studied with Roscoe Mitchell and made valuable contacts. Ragin has toured with Mitchell, Anthony Braxton, Maynard Ferguson, Wadada Leo Smith, and David Murray. He is also a gifted composer and music educator. This interview took place on October 8, 2017 in Philadelphia while Ragin was in town to perform as a member of the Art Ensemble of Chicago at the October Revolution of Jazz and Contemporary Music festival.

“I...when Coltrane played in Dizzy’s band, he sounded a lot like Parker, and Dizzy pulled Coltrane to the side and said, ‘That’s great you can play like Charlie Parker but I want to hear your thing.’”

Jazz Inside Magazine: You took a trumpet lesson from Dizzy Gillespie in the mid-’80s. Would you talk about that?

Hugh Ragin: That was in 1986, playing at the Botanic Gardens with an all-star Colorado big band. I was living in Ft. Collins at the time and Dizzy recreated his big band and brought his charts. Dizzy was a pure clown, I’ll tell you, just from meeting him. His clownmanship was just as strong as his trumpeting. He was warming up in such a way that it was baffling a lot of people because it didn’t make sense to the average classical musician. He had his elbows on his knees but I could see through the clown and see that he was playing perfect fourths, which is the motor which runs our musical boat. He was one of the masters of what’s called the 2-5-1, that’s how music moves in perfect fourths, and he was practicing his articulation, but I wanted to get a little more out of him so I went up to him and said, ‘Excuse me Mr. Gillespie, is that the way you really practice?’ He had this Groucho Marx demeanor – he moved his eyebrows up and down, looked around the room, and said, “No, man, come over here, I’m gonna show you something.” So we went off in the corner and he made two main points. He said, “I’m gonna show you something but first you need to know how it feels. Put your horn down.” I thought, ‘Oh, no, I better get through this part of it or the lesson might be over. So he clapped this rhythm with his hands and indicated that I was to clap it with the accents. I got it. Then he showed it to me on the trumpet, along with some alternate fingerings on how to make it work. I got that and then he extended that line and I said, ‘Wait a minute Mr. Gillespie, I have to write that down.’ And that was the first time he admonished me in the lesson for anyone listening. Somebody said, ‘I bet he’s saying something here. It also said to play very soft and that you want to get to this idea of “whisper tones.”’ He said after you play for twenty minutes, breathe when necessary. So having sat in a room with Cat, and knowing his demeanor and how he speaks, I said, ‘I bet he’s saying something here. It also said to play very soft and that you want to get to this idea of “whisper tones.”’

J: What other prominent musicians have you taken formal lessons from?

HR: Most of the lessons come by just talking to people, I call those “street lessons.” When I was in middle school, I saw Cat Anderson playing with Duke Ellington. At one point, I was in a room with a bunch of young trumpet players and Cat Anderson. It was nonchalant but it was a big lesson for anyone listening. Somebody said, “Cat, what was the highest note you hit?” He said, “Triple B natural.” And then somebody jokingly said, “Cat, give me some of those lips so I can play high notes like you,” and he said, “I would do that if I thought it would help you but I get my high notes from here,” and he pointed to his temple. Everybody in the room went, “Whoa, whoa!” We weren’t expecting that at all. Later I saw this book of Cat Anderson’s and he listed an exercise that I do to this day. He had four bars with a repeat sign and a second line G and he said play for twenty minutes, breathe when necessary. So having sat in a room with Cat, and knowing his demeanor and how he speaks, I said, ‘I bet he’s saying something here. It also said to play very soft and that you want to get to this idea of “whisper tones.”’ He said after you play for twenty minutes, rest for ten because you have been exercising little muscles. This helps you balance out when you’re playing really hard and high. Had I not been in a room with Cat, I would not have taken this exercise to heart and I find it valuable to this day. Donald Byrd was also helpful, I saw him on four occasions and he took me through some of the exercise books. So Dizzy Gillespie, Cat Anderson and Donald Byrd were huge for me and I also studied with Lester Bowie when I was at the Creative Music Studio in 1978 for a New Year’s Eve intensive.

JI: Why did Donald Byrd take such an interest in you?

HR: I was in college and he was playing with the Blackbyrds but he had Bell’s palsy and he couldn’t play at that time. It was also actually kind of a way to get me to go to Howard [University] and to maybe even play with the Blackbyrds. He didn’t know what the future of his Bell’s palsy was so I think he was just setting up different avenues to proceed but the Bell’s...
Hugh Ragin

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grew up with Horace Silver, and he instilled a work ethic. His thing was he wanted us to have a “New York mindset.” That’s what I was hearing in eighth grade, he had high goals for us. At our concerts, we’d wear white dinner jackets and play the *William Tell Overture* and a Duke Ellington medley. He told us that Duke Ellington was going to be at Texas Southern University and we were to go see him and hear how this music works. That’s when I get exposed to Cat Anderson, as well as Duke Ellington. At first I didn’t practice that much, but once I found out that if you practice, you’ll make some things happen and I didn’t put the horn down.

**JI:** Why did you leave Houston to study classical trumpet at Colorado State University?

**HR:** My father went there to get a doctorate in genetics. He actually recruited a lot of people from Houston to come there so some of my peers went before me and gave me good feedback. My wife and I moved there and she got her masters in sociology and I got mine in classical trumpet performance. The idea was to come back to Houston after two years but we liked it there so much that we stayed. When I studied with Roscoe Mitchell he was living on a farm in Hollandale, Wisconsin and he felt you could pivot from anywhere and keep playing. He told me, “Don’t think that you have to rush to New York to get something done. You just keep working, practicing, and things will happen.”

**JI:** What was Donald Byrd stress with you?

**HR:** Fundamentals, bebop, swing and work ethic. At the time he had an airplane pilot’s license, he had a doctorate in composition, he had a law degree. He would fly himself to different cities in Texas. So just to watch his work ethic meant a lot. A favorite book of mine that I use to this day is *Clarke’s Technical Studies* and we went over a lot of those exercises, and I still do that. One heavy practice period I had was a summer in the early ‘90s when I would play the *Clarke’s Technical Studies* cover to cover and then go to the *Charlie Parker Omnibook* and play that from cover to cover within six hours. I played this at the soft, dynamic level so that way my lips didn’t get tired. So all this goes together in the whole lesson scheme of what I do to this day and what I teach students.

**JI:** How did you decide that it was going to be trumpet for you?

**HR:** It was about six weeks into beginning band where I just knew I was gonna be carrying that trumpet, I just knew it. I started playing in eighth grade but I had learned the fundamentals in second grade when we got a piano. Actually, my mother was a music teacher and she would take me to her elementary classes and I can remember being three to five years old and memorizing in her script that a quarter note equals one beat and this is 4/4 time, etc. So music was always around me, my dad played saxophone and we listened to a wide variety of music in the house. Also a lot of the people I played football with in the neighborhood, we kind of got into playing trumpets at the same time. We studied with James Harrison, who grew up with Horace Silver, and he instilled the same time. We studied with James Harrison, we kind of got into playing trumpets at a wide variety of music in the house. Also a lot of this is 4/4 time, etc. So music was always around me to her elementary classes and I can remember going from a student to a peer within a matter of days?

**HR:** It was very gratifying. It was unexpected but I just presented myself as a hard worker and things just worked out, that was not planned by any means. My goal was just to learn as much as I could and I was very happy that he was happy with my performance. I eventually became a member of Roscoe’s Sound Ensemble – a group with Spencer Barefield on guitar, Jaribu Shahid on bass and Tani Tabbal on drums and we recorded *Smardy McGardy and Her Dancin’ Shoes.*

**JI:** Also soon after your time at the Creative Music Studio, you toured with Anthony Braxton as a duo. What are your memories of that time and talk about the challenge of taking the stage night after night with the future NEA Jazz Master?

**HR:** We started out with a duo tour and then we ended up doing large ensemble things. I had met Braxton on three occasions. First, he came to Boulder as a soloist and I transcribed a lot of his music and I said, ‘Mr. Braxton, I’d like you to look over this and tell me how I did,’ and he said, “You are a hundred percent correct.” Then at the Creative Music Studio we played chess together, we played about ten chess games, and he got to know me as a chess player as well as a student of transcription. Then he met me playing in Leo Smith’s group after the Woodstock training. We were recording in a studio in France, playing a solo on the same tune, and afterwards he ran over to me and said, “I didn’t know you played trumpet!” [Laughs] So I had certainly been working up to something with him, hoping it would happen, and it just followed a natural path. I think luck plays a role in there. Going on the road with Braxton, we played chess a lot and we talked about music a lot. We had a real great time. We’d have little coaching sessions on how to make the duo work even better, how to use space, things like that. It was definitely a lucky period, a lot of things just fell into place. I put a hard work ethic on the instrument and tried to be versatile to people who I liked what they were doing and then I ended up playing with them.

**JI:** Who was winning the chess matches?

**HR:** Oh, Braxton without a doubt but I could be a formidable opponent. You know Anthony had a desire to be a chess master at one time, a grand master. He would go to Washington Square Park in New York and he would be a chess hustler. We both loved the game itself and how composition and chess kind of works. I think that peaked both of our interest in what chess was about and then actually putting it together playing music.”
our interest in what chess was about and then actually putting it together playing music. It’s always fun playing chess with Braxton. [Laughs]

**JI:** You also spent time with Maynard Ferguson, touring as a member of his band in ’83. How is it to play for a noted leader who plays the same instrument you play?

**HR:** First of all, I look at both of us as musicians. A lot of people miss the real musicianship of what Maynard is about. He was a four-year-old child prodigy playing violin, a twelve-year-old leading big bands, and Maynard recognized musicianship. It was just a real musical experience that was beyond trumpeting, although he certainly would sit down on the bus and talk about trumpet ideas through what he knew through yoga. At the time, he was studying with Sathya Sai Baba, of whom Alice Coltrane was also a devotee, and he was running the music department of Sathya Sai Baba’s school in India. Maynard would always talk about Hatha yoga and how to breathe, and talk about growth. I got into that band just to see if I could play different situations. So I changed up my equipment a little bit and I did the job that he wanted to hear. On the second gig, he said, “Come here, let’s do some trading on “Chameleon.” And then on the third gig, he said, “Okay, I’m gonna let you have “Chameleon” so that I can rest for “MacArthur Park.” You’ll see a handful of trumpet players of who Maynard has let solo. I think he looked at your musicianship. Some trumpet players just see high and loud versus the musicians that can see music theory and creativity. You could kind of get out of Maynard what you wanted to get out of him. Sometimes, to me, he was like a high note opera singer — what he did with expression and freedom. Actually, on one gig, he whispered in my ear, I was soloing on “Chameleon,” he said, “Just keep playing, I’m gonna do a few things,” and he did a conduction kind of thing behind me. It was a Sun Ra/Butch Morris kind of conduction. And after that he said, “Now look, I just wanted to show you that I could do that but we probably won’t do that again.” [Laughs] Everything was in good natured, spirited fun. I really enjoyed that period with him. I played with Fred Wesley too for a while, which was also a lot of fun. We played jazz and funk. So I’ve come up doing pretty much 360 degrees of music in different situations and I’ve always enjoyed it and the fundamentals are the same thing. Like Quincy Jones says, it’s the same twelve notes but we put a different culture and aesthetic around it depending on who you’re playing with.”

**I’ve come up doing pretty much 360 degrees of music in different situations and I’ve always enjoyed it and the fundamentals are the same thing. Like Quincy Jones says, it’s the same twelve notes but we put a different culture and aesthetic around it depending on who you’re playing with.”**

**“You know, I really felt like I got my air going.” And he would meditate for thirty minutes before each gig so this “air thing” was very serious to what he would do. So I would say what he has taught me about air, technically, was the use of the air. Esthetically, the enjoyment of all kind of different styles. He would talk to me about Herbie Hancock too, as a person who did multiple styles. He actually said, “There’s a reason I have you playing on “Chameleon,” and we talked about Herbie and his variety of styles. So those are some moments that really stand out to this day of having played with him.”**

**Ji:** David Murray hired you in 1985 for what would be a long association. How did that connection form?

**HR:** I saw him in Moers a lot when I was playing with Roscoe and I’d see him in New York when I was with Maynard, we’d be playing and David would be playing. He came to Boulder with his octet and it was interesting because I just loved his music and I loved the way he used his range and the way he had varied musician- ship. He said to me, “I know you can play but I want to hear how you sound in my band. I said, “I can’t sit in, I didn’t bring my horn.” He said, “Well, I got two trumpet players up there. Why don’t you borrow one of theirs? I said, ‘David, that’s hard.’ This was the third time he asked me and he said, “Well, let me hear how hard is it. I just want to hear what you’re gonna do when you’re up there.” So six weeks later I was playing with the octet in New York. I sat in. I knew his music, I was very familiar with it, and I knew his style and feel. Back then he was calling his thing “gutbucket avant-garde” and we played a lot of it in the pocket as well as avant-garde. We still talk and I played recently with him at the Village Vanguard.

**Ji:** You’ve been a member of the Art Ensemble of Chicago for a few years now, holding down the spot that Lester Bowie held for so long. How does his legacy impart on your role in the band?

**HR:** I feel like I’m sitting in the Lester Bowie chair of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and I try to honor Lester’s work ethic. Having studied creative music and group improvisation with Roscoe really helped me get prepared for something like this, so I think just as a progression of work and study, this is a very happy evolution of all of that for me

**Ji:** Does what Bowie played before you impact on what you play?

**HR:** Just as what Dizzy said, you find your own thing within that. What Lester did with the horn and his sense of humor, I think was very special but I try to put my own thing on it. The whole idea is for everybody to bring something new to the table in the end.

**Ji:** So you won’t be wearing a white lab coat during a performance anytime soon?

**HR:** Oh, Lester would never want me to follow him like that. No, you do your thing. Now, I will tell you that I have a white lab coat but I’ve never worn it [Laughs] because I would feel that Lester would be disappointed that I was not trying to do my thing.

**Ji:** Why do you have the lab coat?

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Hugh Ragin

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HR: Just as a memory of the master. [Laughs]

JI: The AEOC was founded on a spiritual platform of performing “Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future.” Is your approach with the ensemble different from other bands you play with?

HR: Yes, Roscoe’s a real spiritual leader. Right now, with Roscoe and Moye, I really follow their energy versus David Murray and his west coast energy and Maynard had his own energy. I try to get into the energy of the leadership and try to support that leadership as much as possible. And nine times out of ten, they’re gonna offer you your own freedom within that leadership so there’s a balance there that works out really well.

JI: How do you fulfill the lofty goal of “Ancient to the Future?”

HR: I think you try to know your history and be yourself. That’s my approach to fulfilling “Ancient to the Future.” Know your history and be yourself.

JI: In June, 2017, at the time you were playing with the AACM Great Black Music Ensemble, you met with Kelan Phil Cohran, one of the founders of the AACM. He died three weeks after your time with him. What did he share with you?

HR: He talked for thirty minutes straight and he jumped on many subjects. One wasintonation, playing in tune. One subject was long tones and connecting with the universe. He was telling me to connect with the chakras, really get involved with astronomy and how it applied to the Egyptians. He talked about the Bible – knowing Revelation 4 and 5. One of the real highlights was after talking for thirty minutes, it was kind of funny the way he said, “Okay, I’ve talked enough. I’m taking questions now.” So I asked him if he would listen to my piece called “The Moors of Spain.” He had written a piece about the Moors and that’s why I wanted him to listen to mine and he really enjoyed it. There was this real genuine smile on his face and he said, “You have the right idea, you’re right on track. You keep doing what you’re doing.” He liked the extended form and what I was doing with sound, and that was really a lift to hear from a founding member of the AACM. He also talked about his time with Sun Ra and how Sun Ra had taught him discipline. He chose to stay in Chicago when Sun Ra left to go to New York. You know, Phil was one of the first persons to use kalimba, the African instrument, of which Maurice White later started using with Earth, Wind and Fire and became famous for it. Phil was a part of a lot of underground excellence and he impressed me as someone who was okay with not being in the limelight but wherever he was, there was gonna be some excellence going down.

“I looked at Sun Ra and he looked at me, and then he looked over at the band and there was a little twinkle in his eye. Sun Ra sat up straight and he started playing just a basic boogie-woogie and it energized the band and sent us out into the audience. That showed me the power of the blues.”

JI: The AEOC was founded on a spiritual platform of performing “Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future.” Is your approach with the ensemble different from other bands you play with?

HR: Yes, Roscoe’s a real spiritual leader. Right now, with Roscoe and Moye, I really follow their energy versus David Murray and his west coast energy and Maynard had his own energy. I try to get into the energy of the leadership and try to support that leadership as much as possible. And nine times out of ten, they’re gonna offer you your own freedom within that leadership so there’s a balance there that works out really well.

JI: How do you fulfill the lofty goal of “Ancient to the Future?”

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JI: One of the too few recordings under your own name is Back to Saturn [Black Saint, 1993]. Why did you dedicate that record to Sun Ra?

HR: Sun Ra also gave me a thirty minute lecture and there were no periods. I played with his band, Labor Day weekend, 1987 at the Village Gate in New York. I was in town to play at Sweet Basil’s festival, Music is an Open Sky. I closed Sunday night and I was hanging out with some of Sun Ra’s band members and they said, “Hey, we’re short on trumpets and I told Sun Ra about you and he wants to know if you would meet him at the Village Gate at 7:30. So Sun Ra spoke for thirty minutes and the last thing he said was, “So do you want to play?” I told him yes and he told me to go see the wardrobe man. So I had to get my “space outfit” and I had a ball. We ambled on stage and Sun Ra had me go on last. John Gilmore was like the second director and he turned around in the back of his chair and he looked at me and pointed. That meant solo so I just started circular breathing and listening to what was going on and after about two minutes, I let my solo evolve. It was a beautiful night and I think Marshall Allen and I had a little space battle on the stage. [Laughter] You know what was really interesting was that after three and a half hours, I was getting a little tired and I wondered if anyone else was getting tired. And then I looked at Sun Ra and he looked at me, and then he looked over at the band and there was a little twinkle in his eye. Sun Ra sat up straight and he started playing just a basic boogie-woogie and it energized the band and sent us out into the audience. That showed me the power of the blues. To this day, I really think about the power and the simplicity of the rhythm and blues. Sun Ra was rooted into that, and the blues were just as heavy as outer space. So Sun Ra and Kelan Phil Cohran and their thirty minute lectures made a big impact on me. It was like a gift.

JI: Sound Pictures for Solo Trumpet [Hopscotch, 2002] is one of your most recent recordings. What was the challenge of doing a solo trumpet recording?

HR: I always wanted to do it and the guys always encouraged solo performance so it really wasn’t anything new. A lot of times when I’m practicing I’ll make an imaginary setting where I’m doing a solo performance. I had a body of tunes and I wanted to feature some Leo Smith compositions that came out of a book that I got when I played with the Roscoe Mitchell-Leo Smith Creative Orchestra. So I recorded it, and I sent it to him and I asked him if it was okay, was it representative of what he wanted? He gave me his blessing and I recorded about seven of his tunes and about four of mine.

JI: Anyone who questions your chops should listen to “Perpetual Motion, Variations on a Theme by Paganini” from your solo trumpet recording.

HR: Thanks, yeah, I enjoy it, that’s also on the recording. It’s kind of a combination of Paganini and Gershwin. Usually when I play that I call it “Paganini’s Got Rhythm.”

JI: You hired trumpet legend Clark Terry for your trumpet ensemble in the late ’90s. Why Clark Terry?

HR: During that period I was playing lead trumpet with one of Roy Hargrove’s early big bands. In Chicago, they did a thing where there was going to be a trumpet summit with Roy Hargrove, Clark Terry, Marcus Belgrave, Lew Soloff, and they were looking for Terence Blanchard but Terence couldn’t make it so Roy Hargrove’s manager said, “Well, we have Hugh Ragin here who can fill that chair.” And the promoter said, “Who is Hugh Ragin?” The manager told him I was playing lead trumpet in the Roy Hargrove Big Band and promised the promoter he would not be disappointed. So that’s how I got in there and when I saw Clark Terry was there I just stuck with him like glue the whole time. He was very gracious and I said, ‘You know I’d like to duplicate what we did at this trumpet summit.’ At the time, I was working on a trumpet quartet modeled on the World Saxophone Quartet. That album was called The Hugh Ragin Trumpet Quartet Featuring Clark Terry and I did two of his tunes. One of his tunes was called “Spacemen” so I saw it as an opportunity. I said, ‘Mr. Terry, we’re gonna do a little skit before we play “Spacemen.” We’re gonna get into a Roscoe Mitchell type of outer space sound and you’re gonna be Professor Jive.’ He had this persona he used called Professor Jive – there’s an album of him with a graduation cap and trumpets and he
scats from a position of Professor Jive. So I told him he was gonna be Professor Jive and I was gonna be the student and we would talk about him doing a lecture on Jupiter and he was totally with it. So we started the band off and we got into a lot of the stuff that I had learned at the Creative Music Studio. We got into the character, which was kind of like the Joseph Jarman drama thing too. I said, ‘Professor Jive,’ he said, ‘Yes, yes.’ I said, ‘I hear you’re going to do a lecture on the planet Jupiter,’ and he said, ‘Yes, yes, that’s correct.’ And it was funny, in the studio I kind of froze thinking what am I gonna say next and what came out of my mouth was, ‘So would you tell me a little bit about Jupiter-Bupiter,’ and he just took off from there [into his Mumbles routine] before we went into ‘Spacemen.’ A lot of people don’t know that Clark Terry has recorded with Cecil Taylor. Clark was just so vast. I also took another one of his tunes called ‘Finger Filibuster,’ a 12-bar blues, and I told him, ‘I made it into an A-A-B-A form where we do the tune, we repeat the tune, then we all do a collective improvisation on the altered dominant, and then we’re gonna come back in with your tune.’ He was totally with it. So we played it in the studio and everybody was so knocked out by his playing that when he put his horn down, I stopped the band and asked, ‘Mr. Terry, why did you stop?’ He said, ‘What happened to the 25th bar? That’s when we were supposed to go into the altered dominant,’ and we were so knocked out because he was just so on. That’s when we got ourselves back into the business of what we were doing. The producer had asked if Clark Terry was really gonna work with this but it ended up that Clark Terry carried us. [Laughs] He was a great teacher. He was like a mentor without coming on like a mentor. He was a friendly guy, always talking about positive stuff. My conversations with him were very important to me.

JI: Your trumpet ensemble at the time included Terry along with Marcus Belgrave and Lew Soloff, all of whom strangely passed away in 2015, just outside of three months of each other.

HR: I had another trumpet ensemble that played as part of the Festival of New Trumpet Music in 2013 and Lew Soloff was in that. I got to know him very well because we’d often have long conversations. When I asked him to play in this later trumpet ensemble he said, “I’ll play on one condition – that we are two trumpets making music together and not two trumpets battling each other. I thought that was a beautiful comment. He said he got that from Gil Evans.”

JI: You taught at a Denver high school for some time. Are you still there?

HR: I’m no longer at the high school, I’m a second year graduate student at the University of Colorado, Boulder. I am honoring a scholarship package that is allowing me to pursue studying for a Doctorate of Musical Arts with an emphasis on Jazz Studies. At the same time, I’m teaching the jazz trumpet majors during the fall 2017 semester while the current professor is on sabbatical. I am in the big band which will perform my composition “A Prayer for Lester Bowie” and I am in a small group which played my composition “Feel the Sunshine.”

JI: What do you find to be the most difficult aspect of teaching?

HR: It’s not so much that it’s a difficult aspect but whenever I am teaching I just try to find out where the student is and come to them from where they are and I try to add on to it. It’s a concept that I developed, and Yusef Lateef was very influential on this, where I look at music as mathematics, kinesthetic, which is the physicality of the instrument, semantics, which is knowledge of the historical facts of the tune, and syntax, which is putting it together.

JI: I’ve spoken to a few of your ex-students and they recall you as a great teacher, very energetic. One remembered you playing a recording and repeatedly jumping in the air as if you were jump shooting a basketball to denote the tune’s changes.

HR: [Laughs] Well, sometimes you just forget the changes. [Laughs] Changes can be very tricky as far as what one might expect.

JI: So you’ve returned to school yourself now at the University of Colorado, Boulder. How is it to return to school in your mid-sixties after having mastered the instruments you play, and having all the onstage experience that you’ve had with the great masters?

HR: I’m always a student of the art. Like Dizzy Gillespie said at seventy, “I’m still trying to learn on this trumpet.” I think most musicians are about growth and how can they get better. There’s a combination of teaching and performing that really works for me and I love to do both. I love to study and learn about this music and get a new energy from different people.
Hugh Ragin

(Continued from page 25)

struments. What I didn’t realize was that he was teaching me a work ethic because I said, ‘I’m gonna fix him, I’m gonna practice two hours a day, get that out of the way, and change instruments.’ But then things started working out, and that was within the first six weeks of playing the trumpet.

JI: You actually advanced very quickly on trumpet once you approached it seriously to the point where after only a few years, following your late start, you qualified to tour England and Wales with the Houston All-City High School Orchestra?

HR: After the two hour directive from my father I was pretty relentless, I turned that into a three and a half hour routine and I really stayed on it. No television, no nothing. [Laughs]

Ron Miles (trumpet) said: “I don’t have a question, just the observation that when he showed up in Colorado, I would regularly hear him with the great drummer Bruno Carr and that quintet with Fred Hess on tenor, Phil Sparks on bass, and Eric Moon on piano, which turned our town on its ear. It was a chance to hear a small group playing at a major league creative level. And to speak to Hugh about Roscoe Mitchell and Anthony Braxton at a major league creative level. And to speak to Hugh about Roscoe Mitchell and Anthony Braxton and other AACM heroes was so inspirational. One of the greatest brass performances I ever heard was Mr. Ragin playing with George Lewis at the Knitting Factory. He’s truly one of the real giants of the trumpet.”

HR: Wow, well I really appreciate hearing that from Ron. I actually opened for Ron as a solo player. That was a very vibrant period of people just getting together and trying to take it further. Bruno was a swing master but he had an open mind and really spearheaded that particular movement. He wanted to hire people with different ideas – keep it grounded in swing but yet we had the freedom to go anywhere we wanted to.

Kirk Knuffke (cornet) said: “Ron Miles and Hugh Ragin were the shining lights in Colorado, the only proof you could get out into the world and do anything. Colorado is so isolated, those guys were the inspiration to young players like me. I took a few very early lessons from Hugh, some of my only actual trumpet lessons to be honest. I only play cornet these days. I remember Hugh saying he would practice exercises on trumpet and then on cornet when he was playing both. My question for you is I’d love to know your take on the difference between the two and why you would practice the same thing twice on both horns?”

HR: They’re very different instruments, and I got that cornet from Bobby Bradford, who played with Ornette Coleman. I was playing with Bobby a lot with David Murray in a Duke Elling-
Lee Konitz
Hear Lee at
Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center
January 9-10
© Eric Nemeyer
Orrin Evans

Hear Orrin at Jazz Standard
January 2-7

© Eric Nemeyer
Art Blakey
His Life & Music — Part 1

This is the first of a multi-part feature on one of the most influential drummers in jazz history, leader of the renowned Jazz Messengers from the 1950s through the 1980s, one of several jazz groups in which some of the most influential jazz artists “apprenticed” before themselves becoming leaders—including Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter, Clifford Brown, Benny Golson, Wynton Marsalis and many others.

[Shown at right: Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers album from 1961, on Blue Note Records, Mosaic]

BY JOHN BARRETT JR.

Of all the misunderstood terms in the language of jazz, the most misunderstood may be “bandleader”. As the decades roll by the word acquires new meanings and a variety of connotations, not all of them pleasant. In the days of dance bands the leader was a silly man waving a baton; sometimes he would try to sing and he might play an instrument, but he rarely had much to do with the music. In the Swing Era the leader was typically a musician, often a virtuoso, and usually the center of attention. These leaders would often take most of the solos, and most of the bows as well — in many cases, the actual band was a bit actor in a show where the leader was writer, director, and star.

When bebop reintroduced the small group to jazz, the concept of “leader” became less formal, more of an abstraction. As many groups were formed on the spot for a particular gig, the leader was simply the player whose name appeared on the marquee, the player best known at the time. And because the typical small group only stayed together a short time, it was rare to become famous just by leading such a group.

Because of these different definitions, we tend to give varying recognition to leaders: some are known for their musical skill, some are known for the groups they organized. Not many meet both standards, and few for as long a time as Art Blakey. In a career spanning six decades, he led his own group for most of that time, introducing a steady stream of top talent, co-leading the groups they organized. Not many meet both standards, and few for as long a time as Art Blakey.

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Art Blakey

(Continued from page 29)

After a speedy fanfare, Webb does a machine-gun riff for four bars — first on the snares, then moving to toms. Elsewhere the cymbals hold court, steadily and softly — come the exchanges, Chick tours his kit in the same way Blakey would. While the styles are not identical (Webb tended to be more showy than Art) the same components are used, in much the same way … for a totally different genre.

With his musicianship at such a high level, it is remarkable that this talent was at least equaled by the players around him. Of the dozens of people Art hired for the Jazz Messengers, most had been professional musicians for less than three years, and for many it was their first major job. As Blakey was not a major composer, he would encourage the newcomers to write music, to arrange, to assert their own style. In doing these things, Art not only expanded the band’s repertoire … he showed them the way to lead their own group.

He rivals Miles Davis for the sheer number of stars formed in the ranks of his band. In the first three years alone you had Clifford Brown, Horace Silver, Doug Watkins, Lou Donaldson, Jackie McLean, Johnny Griffin, Donald Byrd, Hank Mobley, Bobby Timmons, Lee Morgan, and Wayne Shorter … and the band would last another thirty years. Members would leave to form their own groups, Art would find new stars to replace them … and the stars’ new groups would create stars of their own.

As Blakey had nurtured Horace Silver, so would Horace discover Woody Shaw, Joe Henderson, and many others. Likewise, Benny Golson encouraged Cedar Walton and McCoy Tyner, Donald Byrd found Arthur Taylor for his Jazz Lab … the groups were different, but the student/sage approach came straight from Blakey. It was a rejuvenative process for the Messengers, and, arguably, for jazz itself. In terms of the new players – and new ideas – that he ushered into the business, Terence Blanchard was right when he said “The thing that people don’t give Art Blakey credit for is that he saved jazz.”

Such a proud voice came from humble beginnings — to be precise, Pittsburgh, where Arthur in 1939 featured Walter Harris on trombone and the sax of Musa Kaleem, then known as Orlando Wright. In that same year he was leading a house band at Pittsburgh’s Democratic Club, when the club’s owner approached him in the middle of a set. The owner announced he had a new piano player (legend says it was Erroll Garner) and that Blakey was to move to the drums! When Art explained that this was his band, the owner brandished a .38 pistol and said “You want to work here, kid? Then play the drums and don’t argue with me.” Following this persuasive argument, Art made his professional debut as a drummer. Because of his tour with Webb, Blakey was surprisingly prepared for this change of instruments … but when another job materialized, Art was back on the piano and far away from the Democratic Club.

In 1941 Art made his first trip to New York as a leader — as a pianist accompanying the singer Dorothy Matthews. After this gig he returned to Pittsburgh, forming his strongest band to date. Besides Kaleem, this group featured bassist Edgar Willis (later to work with Ray Charles) and tenor man Norris Turney, who’d play for Duke Ellington in the ‘Sixties. One of their shows was attended by Mary Lou Williams, soon after she left the Andy Kirk band; invited to sit in a few tunes, by the end of the evening, it had become her group! Once again Art Blakey had been bumped from the piano chair – he would never return to it.

Moving to New York in 1942, the group had a six month residency at Kelly’s Stables, with Blakey holding the drum spot. His timing was still suspect, so one night Mary Lou sat him down in an empty room: the pianist was on one side of Blakey, with Harold “Shorty” Baker on the other. Reacting to both players at once, Art eventually got a feel for timing, which became a highlight of his style. On his off-time Art jammed with Thelonious Monk, a former stride pianist making his mark as a composer. The two would go from club to club, seeking the chance to sit in: “If the musicians didn’t want us to sit in, [Monk] he’d run them off the stage, sit down, and play with me.”

Monk introduced Art to the big names in New York jazz, and helped him get established in that hostile environment. The drummer was grateful for this, and would always assist Thelonious when given the chance. He appears on no less than ten Monk albums, including a trio date in 1971, during a tour Art accepted because Monk was in it. These contact sessions paid off soon, as Blakey was asked to join the Fletcher Henderson band, remaining there for close to a year.

Fletcher had a grueling schedule of one-night stands, playing a different state almost every night. According to other musicians, Blakey was green at this point, not up to the task of driving a big band. In this way the schedule helped: with so much music in such a short time Art grew into the role, becoming an equal with his bandmates in a matter of months. By the time he left the band, Blakey returned to leading small groups – at a considerably higher level than he had in Pittsburgh.

After his stint with Henderson ended, Blakey moved up to Boston where he jammed with local musicians (including a young Alan Dawson) and led the house band at the Tic-Toc Ballroom. Some time in the spring of 1944, Art got a call from Billy Eckstine: his musicians had told him of an incredible drummer in Boston, and he asked Art to join his big band. As Blakey went to meet Eckstine, he brought with him two members of the Tic-Toc band: trumpeter Marion Hazel, and trombonist Walter Harris. All three were hired, and they set out at once for a lengthy tour.

At the time Blakey joined, the Billy Eckstine band was one of the most desirable gigs in jazz. While many bandleaders disliked bop, Eckstine encouraged it: most of the era’s modernists were in the band or had been. At the time of Art’s hiring, “The greatest day in your life and mine is when we take total responsibility for our attitudes. That’s the day we truly grow up.”

- John Maxwell
Art Blakey

the group included Tadd Dameron as an arranger, Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughan, Tommy Potter, Leo Parker, the pianist John Malachi, and the tenor sax duo of Dexter Gordon and Gene Ammons.

It was demanding company, and only the best could keep up – Art came through with honors, outlasting the men he brought with him and getting offers from bandleaders to play on their sessions. It was a heady experience, and Art learned much from Eckstine, including his style of leadership. To Billy, a musician played best not by adhering to a style but by finding his own. And with a whole band doing this, the music would improve as a result of the constant, unspoken competition. It worked for Art, as it would work for the dozens of people who became stars from their work in the Messengers.

Blakey’s first recording session is a bit of a mystery, as it isn’t known exactly when he joined Billy Eckstine. The singer cut a session for DeLuxe on April 13, 1944; while it is possible Art played – embraced by the horns, he’s even more romantic vocal. The lyric is corny but the voice is sincere – bones, then to screaming trumpets, then to Mr. B’s “You” would become a standard, recorded by Col-

problem; the session is now found on the album music unlistenable! (Later pressings corrected the center holes had been cut off - but the 78s sold poorly at first – it turned out the 1944, under the auspices of DeLuxe Records, a branch of the King label. Six tunes were recorded, but the 78s sold poorly at first – it turned out the center holes had been cut off-center, making the music unlistenable! (Later pressings corrected the problem; the session is now found on the album Blowing the Blues Away.)

Composed by Billy, “I Want to Talk About You” would become a standard, recorded by Coltrane and many others. The layered arrangement is wonderful, as high reeds lead first to slow trombones, then to screaming trumpets, then to Mr. B’s vocal. The lyric is corny but the voice is sincere – embraced by the horns, he’s even more romantic than usual. The rhythm is carried by a walking bass; Blakey is confined to brushes, if he is heard at all. A mellow chord underlines Billy on “The Real Thing Happened to Me”, the brass make sharp interjections, and slowly take center stage. There are no solos except for a short bit by Malachi – Art asserts himself with the tom-toms, though he is drowned by the romance around him.

Things slow down on “If That’s the Way You Feel”, a soft ballad enhanced by muted horns. The voice is good but the tune is nothing special; Art’s roll at the end is his only real presence. “Blowing the Blues Away” starts with a Basie-like solo by Malachi; Blakey works a hard snare pattern, the most he will hear in this session. The vocal is a challenge: “Blow, Mr. Gene! Blow, Mr. Dexter, too!” – and so they do after a brass fanfare. Ammons is first, in his typical gritty warmth; the surprise is Dexter, switching between gutbucket yowls and modernistic octave leaps. His approach is a good decade ahead of its time, and he spars well with Ammons – Dizzy ends it with a mighty scream, up in the stratosphere.

And a rich palette adorns “I’ll Wait and Pray”, the first hit of a young Sarah Vaughan. The reeds drift in a fog, starting in unison and adding harmo-

ies along the way. As the horns ascend (Dizzy might be taking the lead here), Sarah tells her wistful tale, sounding like a instrument herself. The echo treats her harshly, giving her voice a metallic twang; that same echo helps the band, making it sound like an impressionist painting. A strong, important session for Billy, the drummer has a minor role here … but it would soon grow.

By 1945 Eckstine’s band had switched labels, signing with the newly-founded National Records. (This label was owned by Herb Abramson, who would form Atlantic Records with Ahmet Ertegun a few years later.) Dameron had left the arranger’s chair, now largely filled by Jerry Valente, author of “I’ll Wait and Pray”. Cut in New York on May 2, 1945, the band was a near match to the December ensemble – Fats Navarro replaced Dizzy, and Sonny Stitt joined the alto section. If only you could hear them: the sound is terribly murky, even by the standards of the time. (As George Simon put it, “the band sounded as if it were trying to blow its way out from under a pile of blankets.”)

“Lonesome Lover” is a series of chords, cluttered with echoes; the sections in turn; the reeds are especially sweet, humming behind Billy’s vocal. The chart is decent, if somewhat plain – Tadd is certainly missed. After the vocal, Gordon gets a couple of choruses: inspired by Lester Young, he opens with a phrase he’d use on “Long Tall Dexter”. On this one, Blakey is almost inaudible. He plays it soft on “A Cottage for Sale”, matching his beat to Connie Wainwright’s guitar. The horns are restrained as Eckstine tells the tale – mawkish words, but a captivating performance.

For “I Love the Rhythm in a Riff”, the band is set to roll at the end is his only real presence. “Blowing the Blues Away.”

blues. This was recorded on October 15, 1947, at the studios of the WOR radio station in New York. To help him, Monk chose a fine supporting cast: Art, Idrees Sulieman on trumpet, Gene Ramey on bass, the tenor of Billy Smith, and the obscure Danny Quebec West at the alto.“Humph” starts with a Morse-code snare … and from there it gets faster. The horns fan out on the frantie theme, Monk adding a few chords; West is up first, a smooth tone that grows strident. Blakey keeps charging, with irregular beats from a mighty bass drum – he sounds like a popcorn ma-

machine!

The heat goes way up when Idrees takes over: scratchy tone, aggressive attack, and power to spare. This solo is halfway between Clifford Brown and Fats Navarro – Art keeps pushing the tempo, as Monk’s comp resembles “Get Happy”. Billy Smith follows on tenor, tough yet mellow; his approach is the first time Art recorded with Miles Davis – many dates would follow, and all better than this.

By the time Thelonious Monk first recorded as a leader, his music may have been more famous than he was. Appearing first as a stride pianist, Monk had played the New York clubs for nearly a decade (he was in the house band at Minton’s Playhouse when bebop was created) but was rarely asked to the recording studio. Not so for his com-

positions: Coleman Hawkins had cut “Hackensack” under the name “Riffdile”, and “‘Round Midnight” received many renditions, including a lush take by the Dizzy Gillespie big band.

Such recognition got Monk a session with Blue Note Records, among its first forays in modern jazz. This was recorded on October 15, 1947, at the studios of the WOR radio station in New York. To help him, Monk chose a fine supporting cast: Art, Idrees Sulieman on trumpet, Gene Ramey on bass, the tenor of Billy Smith, and the obscure Danny Quebec West at the alto.

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Art Blakey
(Continued from page 31)
similar to Hawkins'. The leader’s turn is sparse, descending in waves before a near quote of “Thelonious”. Blakey gets a few bars and the horns rush it home – overall, it’s spotty but strong. The word for this isn’t “Humph” … but “Wow”.

“Evonce” is a hopper of sleek construction; the horns swagger the opening to great effect. West makes it sweet, gently slurring the notes as they head upward. The slower tempo gives the group confidence: it does wonders for Sulieman, who dances in a soft smooth tone. Smith is well-stated but uneven; Monk concludes with a nice but of stride. “Thelonious” opens grandly: the piano starts simply and Art drifts in with cymbals. This goes on as the horns blow a counter-riff – but they do it too loudly, obscuring the piano. They exit quickly, and Monk prevails, hammering a shrill chord and turning it into stride. Sardonic chords follow, a side glance at “Salt Peanuts”, all leading back to the theme – why did they even use the horns?

“When the tour ended Blakey returned to Pittsburgh, plying his trade as a pianist. … leading a house band at Pittsburgh’s Democratic Club, when the club’s owner approached him in the middle of a set. The owner announced he had a new piano player (legend says it was Erroll Garner) and that Blakey was to move to the drums! When Art explained that this was his band, the owner brandished a .38 pistol and said “You want to work here, kid? Then play the drums…” Following this persuasive argument, Art made his professional debut as a drummer.”

“Suburban Eyes” returns us to hop, and a solo by West that makes you want more. (Based on this session, he deserved more success than he got.) Idrees is good, and Monk meditates, during which Art switches from ride cymbal to hi-hat … a small difference, but potent. These tracks, released on 78 RPM, would rank among the worst sellers in Blue Note’s history. It would take the LP reissues, Genius of Modern Music Volumes One & Two, for fans to realize the importance of Monk’s early sessions.

If Monk was somewhat restrained at the October 15th session, his first trio date, made nine days later, shows no such problem. Also made at WOR, this features the same group as the earlier session, minus the horns. It starts with a bung: Art slaams the theme to “Nice Work If You Can Get It”, and Thelonious does the same. Plain at first, the theme goes louder and stronger, ending in surprising dissonance. The solo starts off like “Friday the 13th”, becomes more wayward, and ventures into stride – Gershwin brought out the best in Monk. The Waltz-like ending, with Art churning against Ramey’s ostinato, is precious.

“April in Paris” was a staple for Monk, who recorded it many times in his career. This maiden voyage has the piano roaming free, darting between the theme and the abstract. Ramey is stalwart, keeping the same pattern throughout; Blakey tries double-time, but gives it up when Monk stays the course. By the end it’s almost a cocktail piece, finishing with a grand echo – unexpected, as is his norm.

He’s calmer on “Introspection”, where he eases into the composition as the cymbals march. Ramey plays a heartbeat cadence, barely heard but truly felt; Monk drums more than Art does, in happy trills and meaningful thumps. “Ruby, My Dear” is softer, but not by much. Monk’s lines are enhanced by Art’s delicate tapping. A sustain-laden flourish is answered by rolling toms, and the whole journey has the piano roaming free, darting between the theme and the abstract. Ramey is stalwart, keeping the same pattern throughout; Blakey tries double-time, but gives it up when Monk stays the course. By the end it’s almost a cocktail piece, finishing with a grand echo – unexpected, as is his norm.

Horns lead the way for “In Walked Bud”, Monk’s brilliant rework of the chords to “Blue Skies”. Even this early he uses octave-spanning chords to spice the theme – Monk was constantly tweaking his arrangements, but this one would stay intact for decades. His solo takes a phrase from the bridge and makes a dozen variations; Taitt has a sunny feel, and Sahib swaggerers with style. The best of his early sessions, this one earns Monk his nickname – Genius of Modern Music.

Dexter Gordon played with Art in the Eckstein band, but found his solo time limited. (It didn’t help that he was seated next to Gene Ammons, one of the most competitive horns in jazz history.) Now out of that shadow, Dexter had his own gig for Savoy on December 11, 1947 – it was his third session as a leader, and the first one to make real impact. Gordon’s mate on the front line was Leo Parker; helping Art with the rhythm were Curley Russell and Tadd Dameron.

“Dexter’s Riff” is a nice mover with familiar chords; Dexter betrays the source by quoting “Lady Be Good”. His tone imbued with delicate rasp, his solo moves in sharp corners, a good mix of gentility and guts. He starts honking by the end of the first chorus, but not like Jacquet: this is shrill, metallic, and not unlike ’Sixties Trane. Parker slides into place with a soft, earthy performance, like Prez on a bigger horn. Dameron’s comp is clunky but serviceable; Russell has a round tone, a fast pace, and a good choice of notes. (It is also well recorded, a rarity for the bass in those days.)

Blakey is a minor presence, with cymbals at a dim whisper; not so for “Settin’ the Pace”, on which he cracks a proud intro. Gordon swaggerers a cute phrase, Parker returns the favor, and they’re off, two horns making one sound. After trading some low notes, the solos begin: Dexter floats upward, sweet but still gritty. After his chorus we hear Leo: a leisurely growl, showing more strength than he did on “Dexter’s Riff”. Gordon climbs on Parker’s exit, completing his phrase and making it a quote of “High Society”. This re-inspires Parker, whose next chorus is faster and more inventive

(Continued on page 34)
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than what we’ve heard before. This isn’t a string of unrelated licks, it’s a steady stream of musical thought.

Now Art gets to thinking: with a happy shout he strikes hard, saying plenty in his four bars. The horns resume their joust, Leo getting the early advantage … and as the solos get shorter, Dexter takes over. He dominates on a series of two-bar exchanges, setting off sparks which the laid-back Parker can’t answer. The end-theme seems abrupt, but that’s understandable – at the rate it was going, this could have gone on forever.

“So Easy” paints a slow, cool blues – the harmonies are simple but quite effective. (No arranger is credited, but I suspect Dameron.) Dexter’s notes are slow, drifting up in a smoky haze. Blakey helps with a drizzle of cymbals; he pushes on his own solo, which is decent but hurts the mood. The harmonies are richer on the way out, capping a splendid (if short) session. These tracks were put on 78s are found in all races and nations, its emphasis on tolerance, and its acceptance of music, prohib-}

its is that solo, with a few variations.) Drew ambles in the same vein, Potter excels on a rare solo, and Stitt follows with the memorable theme. A potent but short session, “Misbehavin’” and “Later” would appear on Kaleidoscope, with the rest going on Stitt’s Bits.

Blakey was attracted to Ahmadist Buhaina, since he already had a reputation as Art Blakey, he retained his birth name for professional purposes; friends would call him Buhaina, later shortened to ‘Bu’, a nickname he kept for the rest of his life.”
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