JAZZ HISTORY

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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.

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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 hasn’t even hit its ceiling yet. — S. Victor Aaron, Something Else Reviews
Feature

Billy Hart

Appearing at Jazz Standard, February 8-11

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Nicholas Payton

“Following through with what you believe”

Nicholas Payton
Jazz At Lincoln Center, Dizzy’s Club
February 22-25

NP: I’ve been doing some things with my own group, a couple of European joints, did Asia, did some stuff in New York. Last weekend I did a festival in Kansas City. So I’ve been pretty active with my band and doing some other things as well… some teaching things. I did a residency at Thelonious Monk Institute … did some things over the summer as well, like a Stanford jazz workshop, and some other stuff. I completed a record, a vocal record—my first vocal album with some special guests. It’s the first project on which I’ve actually played all the instruments throughout the recording - piano, bass, drums, drum machine, various keyboards.

JI: What was the process in moving from concept to sound?

NP: Well when I did my record, Into the Blue, I had just bought a home studio set up. It was the first time I went into the studio having supplied musicians with instrumental demos of the material. I found it to be quite cool because as opposed to sheets of music, they came into the session with a sound and a vibe. So a lot of stuff didn’t have to be talked about. When you’re dealing with a feel, a lot can be lost in translation with words. So the feel of the project was already imbued in the de-

mos. After that project one of the cats in the band was like, “Well man you don’t need us, you know? You could make a record yourself.” And it’s something I had done on a couple tracks on previous records.

JI: Talk about playing with a big band versus a small group.

NP: Well, it depends if I am playing in a section or functioning more as a soloist. If I’m a soloist, things don’t really change too much for me, be-
to take a chance and to be daring, or maybe to fail, or maybe to do something that is wrong out in the field – then you’re not really living. That’s something I learned from the experience of working with him, and seeing how he lived life, and being true to who you are as an artist. The older I get, the more and more I see that that is a rare thing. You know, there are very few people who are willing to follow through with what they really believe if it seems [to others] like it’s not the right thing to do, if it seems completely wrong.

JI: Could you talk about some of the mentors with whom you’ve played, who may have shared with you some advice or words of wisdom?

NP: Years ago I was hanging out with Elvin Jones when I was in this band. It was my first extensive tour through Europe. On the planes they would give you a meal and these miniature bottles of wine. I thought it was kind of hip, so I started collecting them. I didn’t drink at the time so I would put them in my trumpet case. Elvin noticed that I was collecting these wines. So, one morning, at like 6:00 AM, at the airport or something, he asked, “Hey, you got those wines?” I said “Yeah!” He said “Come follow me to the bathroom.” So he asked me for the wine. I’m thinking “OK.” He cracks one open and he said, “Aren’t you going to drink some?” I said, “No, I don’t really drink.” And he kind of stared at me, like just kind of scowled. He was like, “Hm. Somethin’ ain’t right about somebody who don’t do nothing wrong.” That put a lot on my mind—just thinking about living in a society, particularly in a genre of music whose boundaries have become so stiff in terms of the people and the expectations of what one is supposed to do. Maybe even the larger question is, what is the right behavior versus wrong and all these different things. What I took from it was that someone who is always catering to some idea of righteousness, and not ever stepping out on a limb, 

cause the band serves as a pad underneath my ideas.

JI: Could you talk about some of the mentors with whom you’ve played, who may have shared with you some advice or words of wisdom?

NP: Yeah, that’s really true, and it has to be a solemn reward for you. You can’t necessarily do it expecting that this or that will happen necessarily. A lot of people, a lot of times just won’t get it. Often times you will suffer a great deal, because it’ll make other people feel uncomfortable about their ineptitude; their unwillingness to be authentic. If you speak about what’s true and how things really are, that can make people very uncomfortable, and you run a risk of not necessarily being too liked. It’s another thing entirely to deny what you felt to be true in your heart, to do something for someone else’s sake for some kind of other gain, be it monetary or whatever, and then to not have to come through … also having to deal with the fact that you weren’t true to who you were. You know, that’s something I’m just not willing to do. I don’t care how rough it gets. I’ve dealt with a lot of stuff.

JI: Talk about your commitment to quality and integrity.

NP: For me good enough is not good enough. I’m always seeking to try to push forward. I’m not afraid to get my hands dirty - to do what’s required in order to try to create great art, what I feel is great art. I just feel like a lot of people within this industry believe that good enough is OK. You know the amount of mediocrity that is passable or that’s acceptable, is disturbing.

JI: Could you talk about leadership?

NP: You have to know yourself in order to lead others. I think once you have a firm understanding and a direction you want to go in, and you have your feet firmly planted there, people will naturally follow. I don’t believe that you have to rule people with an iron fist or hover over others. In fact, I don’t like to run my band like that. The reason I have a band and have other musicians is they have other voices and experiences that they can bring into my music to make it more dynamic. I don’t want clones of me on every instrument. I want a music that’s multi-layered, that’s flexible, and that might go in directions that I may not have thought of. If you tell people too much about what to do, they develop all kinds of complexes. I just don’t find that it creates a good energy. If you have to start talking a lot about what you want out of this and from that, then I think its time to find somebody else to do that job – someone who is more in sync with what you’re hearing and what you’re looking for … as you progress and there becomes more resistance. Perhaps the closer you get to what it is you are trying to actually do … the struggle becomes bigger … there is the temptation to give up at a time where you actually might be upon your biggest breakthrough."

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NI: Well, e.e. cummings said: “To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting.”

NP: Yeah, that’s really true, and it has to be a solemn reward for you. You can’t necessarily do it expecting that this or that will happen necessarily. A lot of people, a lot of times just won’t get it. Often times you will suffer a great deal, because it’ll make other people feel uncomfortable about their ineptitude; their unwillingness to be authentic. If you speak about what’s true and how things really are, that can make people very uncomfortable, and you run a risk of not necessarily being too liked. It’s another thing entirely to deny what you felt to be true in your heart, to do something for someone else’s sake for some kind of other gain, be it monetary or whatever, and then to not have to come through … also having to deal with the fact that you weren’t true to who you were. You know, that’s something I’m just not willing to do. I don’t care how rough it gets. I’ve dealt with a lot of stuff.

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Carmen Lundy: It’s an inspiration playing with like minded musicians who bring everything to the music. Heart, soul, virtuosity, authenticity, grit, elegance, experience, spontaneity, genius, all things jazz. I spread my wings and soared under the safety of players who know how to swing – my pianist Anthony Wonsey, Kenny Davis on bass, and the young and energetic Jamison Ross on drums.

Jazz Inside: Talk about your new recording “Changes” and how the creation might have challenged or stretched you.

JI: Could you tell us about some of the noteworthy discussions that you may have had, or wisdom you picked up from some of the artists with whom you have performed - Kenny Barron, Ron Carter, Jimmy Cobb, others?

CL: So many great musicians have offered support and teaching through their art over the years. The lesson learned? To thine own self be true.

CL: My influences have not only been vocal - John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughn, My Mother. I grew up in the church, and that has always influenced me and my music greatly.

JI: Talk about the importance of learning melodies and maintaining the integrity of the original composer’s intent as you interpret a song.

CL: Honor the composer’s melody, then do your own thing.

JI: What is it that you want from your accompanists that will enable you to soar in your performances and recordings?

CL: Play with confidence. Never second guess your choices. Listen to one another!

JI: What jazz recordings initially inspired your pursuit of this creative path?


CL: When I teach, I learn. While I share my ideas, I remain open and receptive to the concepts revealed by those developing artists who respectfully share the journey of musical discovery. I met my drummer Jamison Ross this way – he’s one of the young, gifted players coming through Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead Program at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., where I have been on the faculty for the past 12 years. Very inspirational.

JI: How do you share the journey of musical discovery. I met my drummer Jamison Ross this way – he’s one of the young, gifted players coming through Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead Program at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., where I have been on the faculty for the past 12 years. Very inspirational.

CL: How has your work as an educator - conducting Master Classes and clinics — challenged, bolstered or otherwise influenced your creative pursuits?

JI: One must be a willing participant. Go out and listen to live music and become an integral part of how this music develops. Do not take the critics word as gospel.

CL: One must be a willing participant. Go out and listen to live music and become an integral part of how this music develops. Do not take the critics word as gospel. In my early years, I was out at the clubs listening to anything and everybody and sitting in at any opportunity.

JI: What jazz recordings initially inspired your pursuit of this creative path?


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JI: How do your musical pursuits influence your visual art, in which you work as a painter in oils on canvas, and vice versa?

CL: Color = Sound. Lines and Spaces = Form. Emotions = Content.

JI: Could you discuss several of your vocal influences and the wisdom you have discovered among those that you try to embody in your own creative pursuits?

CL: Think. Create. I work on my paintings and other mixed media to get into that other zone, that other creative space. I love working on the piano, but I’ve also taught myself to play lots of instruments – I have a huge collection of musical instruments in my studio – guitar, bass, harp, trumpet, trombone. Learning to play makes me appreciate what it takes to really master something.

JI: Is there anything you’d like to talk about that I haven’t prompted you about?

CL: Especially at this time, everyone – fans and promoters alike - must be open to allowing the repertoire to expand and grow in this 21st century. There is room for the new Jazz Standard, the New Songbook, and we should embrace it!
Dianne Reeves

“The culture of the music has inspired me”

Interview by Eric Nemeyer
Photo: Courtesy Dianne Reeves

JI: You mentioned spirituality and I wanted to know if you could comment about how your journey has enabled you to discover the things that go beyond just the physical and into the spiritual in regards to the music?

DR: Part of it is. When you’re working with musicians that really have all their tools in order that is a big thing, because they don’t rely on what they think – they rely on what they feel. They also rely on the connection that happens when you bring people together. I remember when I first started singing, Clark Terry took me under his wing, and he would put me in these situations with these musicians that, at the time, I didn’t know who they were. I certainly do now, but he would stick me in the middle and I had my little arrangements and one of the things that I realized was, “Wow! They’re talking with each other and I’m not in on the conversation!” And I wanted to be in on that. That “thing.” And that thing comes with trust and knowing the other person musically. You can tell where somebody is at when you jump down in there. They have this call and response; they have all of these things going on, and I was just singing down in front and I said, “I don’t want to be a singer with a back-up band, I want to be involved with the band.” So, from very early on, I just knew that it was really important to do that. One of the ways that I find is – even when you’re writing arrangements—I work a lot with Billy Childs; we’ve known each other since we’re nineteen—and he knows the kinds of things I like to sing over. He’ll write something that sounds very complex, but really it’s just this wonderful atmosphere that he puts me in and allows me to improvise. If it’s an orchestra, since we can’t change the form of the song, he gives me things that allow me to create vertically, I always say. It changes every time, so it’s always fresh and it’s always new. I think that one of the things about arranging, is firstly, giving people something that they can sink their teeth into, and secondly, something that releases their own personality. Duke Ellington was great at that. He was able to take people’s strengths and weaknesses, and turn it into something great. We as musicians have to interpret the songs and the interpretation can be so different one to the next. Being able to trust that and have that, makes the arrangement change.

JI: Like you’re saying, when you’re playing with really great players, and you’re surrounding yourself with people who are sensitive and in the moment and have those tools, in much the same way you or I create a conversation using the English language, the English language is just the language. You want to forget about the words and the meanings, and you want to convey an energy.

DR: Exactly! I loved Betty Carter for that. The very first time I saw her, I had a totally religious experience—it just wrecked me for a month. I walked around kind of weeping. I had never seen anything like that. Because it was something that I aspired to do and it existed and I couldn’t believe it. Basically, the musicians were an extension of her sound and they were co-creators on stage, and I thought, “Oh my god, how do you create that?”

JI: As you had mentioned, Clark Terry became a mentor early on in your career. Can you talk about the kind of discussions or advise that you received, or opportunities that he may have helped develop for you?

DR: It wasn’t so much what he said, as much as all the things that he did and all the places that he would present me. One of the biggest things was I was so eager to improvise and he would always say to me, “You know, you have to learn the melodies first and you have to sing the lyrics.” Well, I got from him was, the building block of improvisation was phrasing. I don’t view myself as an entertainer, but I think that my music is entertaining. I think it is because all of those things are there and Clark really showed me how to do that. One of the things that I found with the voice—which is why I loved Sarah Vaughn so much—is that with the voice, you can really refine your sound. And there’s so many things that the voice has possibilities of doing and it doesn’t have to just be one sound. When certain harmonies are put by me, I respond to them. Or if I work with a different pianist, I respond to that. And Clark always liked that I was different with everybody that I sang with.

JI: When Miles Davis was going through some changes between Hank Mobley and John Coltrane, he had Sonny Stitt. And as great a player as Stitt was, he was playing his stuff. It was unlike the rest of Miles’s concept – it was a constantly changing amoeba-like organism – like, if Wynton Kelly was going one way, Hank Mobley would go with him...

DR: Exactly! And I think that’s the essence. When I first started out working, Billy and I used to have this group together out in the beach area. It was a place where the owner didn’t care what you played and how many people came in because he didn’t pay you (laughs). But it was a cool thing because you could pass a hat and after a while, we started making big money…which would pay for the gas! At the time, Larry Klein was in the band, and Billy, myself and drummer that came from the Latin tradition and we would create this music. The whole concept was to write, arrange and then we would take this music as far as we could. Sometimes, we couldn’t even get back, we’d be gone so far. It was a great experience because it gave us an opportunity to keep having that thing that keeps inspiring one another and try different things. I think from that, it was the thing that allowed me to sing any kind of music or even perform with anybody.

JI: In addition to Clark, you’ve worked with some of the greats in Jazz like Harry “Sweets” Edison, Phil Woods, Kenny Barron. Can you share some highlights with working with such people, or more specifically, any ideas, or wisdom, or observations that you made that expanded your awareness that expanded your musical direction or artistry?

DR: When I worked with Sweets and Joe Williams, Clark on the Grand Encounter record, the thing that taught me volumes more than anything, was the life and the music were the same. Back then, I looked at all those guys – they were old, but they were young. You’d ask them how old they were and they’d say, “Eight!” and I believed it! I had the opportunity to work with Dizzy and it was the same thing. The stage is a sacred place – like a holy place where you can experience such a euphoria that you can’t have anywhere else. I can be wearing shoes that are just killing my feet and I walk on stage and they just don’t hurt. I look at Clark and Oscar Peterson – there was such a joy about what they did, to me, beyond the music. It has to be a great love. One of the things that I wish that I had in that session was just a tape recorder just to have captured all the stories because they were just unbelievable. Some of them were just the rudest and nastiest stories (laughs), but they were great because they were life stories, and I loved it. I loved the whole experience. The culture of the music has inspired me more than anything and respect they have for one another.
In”, “Well, You Needn’t”, and of course “Georgia Brown”. Gales is extra-facile, with Monk humming along to his beat, and the crowd gives its thanks. “Epistrophy”, normally heard as a minute-long closer, here gets a full treatment: Charlie is brusque, twisting a phrase in many directions. It’s busy but uneventful; Monk fares better, with stark notes, hammered hard and echoing loudly. This mood is brief and returns to the theme, which is drenched in enduring applause. This ranks among the best live Monk albums I’ve heard: tougher than normal, sharper than normal … and beautiful as always.

The DVD covers a TV broadcast in Oslo, made a year later with the same cast. The picture is excellent; an annoying station logo stays in one corner throughout, but that’s the only distraction. Instead of a stage, they seem to be in a ballroom, an enormous tapestry on the back wall: this is no crowd and only two cameras, one for group shots and one up close. This simple arrangement ignores artifice and lets the band do its job – suffice to say, it does.

Some floating dissonance leads us into “Lulu’s Back in Town”, played slower than usual. The theme is straightforward, with few real Monk-isms; in comes Rouse, exuding power and confidence. Monk stands up and slowly spins in place, gazing at Charlie with intense concentration. (This is where the sax picks up: Rollins-like phrases, with a few squeaks thrown in.) Monk’s solo has a strict pattern: prim on the bridge, explorative on the theme. The camera gets right up in the keys, showing every nuance and quirky note choice. Riley’s brushwork is given the same treatment; he moves mountains with just a bass drum, one snare, and two cymbals. Rouse’s return is super-strong, the finish is proud – and your eyes have feasted.

In an instant the pianist moves on to “Blue Monk”, with no obvious sign to the others. (Watch Riley frantically choosing between brushes and sticks.) Charlie is now laconic, letting Monk fill the silence with sour-balls (including a quote of “Straight, No Chaser!”). As he proceeds, Rouse moves closer to Coltrane; Monk’s turn is a series of chords, banged in harsh precision. Another quote (of “C-Jam Blues”) lasts for a chorus, during which we get another close-up on the fingers. Gales is studious on his solo, better than his effort on “Lulu”; Riley is martial and merry. “‘Round Midnight” comes right after, the standard opening barely hinted at. Charlie is direct, with a burnished tone; Monk adds comments all over. Rouse’s solo is the best of the set, swirling fast and honking hard; Monk’s bit is short but effective.

The whole film is succinct but satisfying: if there were any faults, it is a wish for color, or that the broadcast be longer. This package proves what hardly needed saying: give Monk the right group and the right audience, and he will do no wrong.
THE BACKSTORY — Valarteri #10.

JohnALewisJazz.com. Backstory; Deadline; Kacked; Complicity; Bylines; Liable; Precocity; Excerpt from the “Ancient Dance Suite”; What Say; A Cautionary Ruse.

PERSONNEL: John A. Lewis, piano; Robert Trusko, bass; Merik Gillett, drums.

By Clive Griffin

The Backstory is the ninth independently-released album, an eclectic mix of jazz and blues by John A. Lewis a lifelong Texan, hailing from Dallas. This latest effort appears on his Valarteri label and is an excursion through ten original compositions by the leader — and follows his most recent recording One Trip Out, which reached number eight on the CMJ chart.

Like many other musicians, John A. Lewis is not an upstart or novice when it comes to exposure to jazz. He was surrounded by the music and the music business from an early age. His father John Sr. and grandfather Howard Lewis booked, promoted and managed Dallas area musicians Etta James, David Newman and James Clay. Not only was Mr. Lewis constantly around the music, he was able to get up close with such influential musical artists as James Moody, Johnnie Taylor and Ray Charles. Of course, his surroundings inspired his desire to make music and initially, Mr. Lewis was a trumpet player who studied at Mountain View Junior College and Southern Methodist University, gaining experience playing in Top 40 bands, and eventually switching his focus to piano. Nowadays, John A. Lewis keeps his trio and quartet busy in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

“Backstory” opens the set at a comfortable medium groove. Mr. Lewis punctuates the simple theme with block chord jabs, closely voiced, with suggestions of Thelonious Monk and Herbie Nichols. He trades ideas with drummer Gillett before returning to the melody.

Lewis maintains a medium groove for the second track, “Deadline” and receives capable support from drummer Gillett and bassist Robert Trusko, who also gets a moment in the sun with a brief bass solo.

The angular, dissonant theme, hinting at inspirations from Thelonious Monk, and the twisting and unexpected rhythms of “Jacked”, are the foundation for the trio’s explorations. A solid medium groove, locked in by bassist Trusko and Gillett who stay “home”, provide the leader, Lewis, with the freedom to explore the possibilities.

Lewis changes up the groove on “Complicity,” with a down and dirty “Mercy, Mercy”-like dose of blues. Gillett and Trusko provide the exactly appropriate accompaniment — never intruding, always supporting - to complement the simplicity of Lewis’ melody and solo that follows.

Bassist Trusko and Gillett are all alone on “Bylines” — which is a brief one-minute musical excursion. Highlighted by changing tempos, it includes a brief walking bass groove, abstractions and angularity that characterize its brevity.

“Liable” is a more up-tempo piece with a swinging groove — modally based with extended harmonic rhythms. Lewis serves up a combination of block chords interspersed with brief melodic phrases — an earmark of his approach.

“Precocity” is another Lewis original that suggests his affinity for Thelonious Monk — with his use of space, brief melodic fragments punctuated by block chords expressed with more forceful dynamics to end the phrases. Trusko gets a few moments to solo, backed sparingly by Lewis’ chords.

Lewis’ Excerpt from the “Ancient Dance Suite” is an introspective and all-too-brief ballad, on which the composer delivers a magnificent, uncomplicated solo statement.

“What Say” is a straightforward, laid back, medium groove minor blues, with the drive powerfully underscored by Trusko’s bass.

It would be interesting to hear pianist John A. Lewis performing several standards on his next outing. That would enable listeners to enjoy his unique perspective in interpreting some of the repertoire that committed jazz fans often use to gain clarity on how the given improviser fits into the lineage of artists — especially since Mr. Lewis acknowledges that his musical influences include Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Wayne Shorter and classical composers Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Eric Satie. That aside, The Backstory is a polished set by a pianist and composer who has spent years pursuing the music he loves and is energetically devoted to continuing to create his own repertoire.

MONK IN PARIS: LIVE AT THE OLYMPIA.

Thelonious Records TMF-9316. Thelonious Records, 2603 Electric Avenue (Suite 4), Port Huron, MI 48060. Phone: 1-877- 666-5663. Fax: 810-987-1060. Website: www.monnkzone.com. Rhythm-A-Ning; Body and Soul; I Mean You; April in Paris; Well, You Needn’t; Bright Mississippi; Epistrophy; plus, on bonus DVD: Lulu’s Back in Town; Blue Monk; ’Round Midnight.

PERSONNEL: Thelonious Monk, piano; Charlie Rouse, tenor sax; Larry Gales, bass; Ben Riley, drums.

By John R. Barrett

For a multitude of reasons, this was the best of all worlds. Charlie Rouse had been in the group seven years; with more success than anyone else, Rouse could take these prickly tunes and give them his own personality. Monk recognized this, and gave him space to explore — the comps here are simpler than in past years, though still pungent. Around them was one of Monk’s strongest rhythm sections, perhaps ever: bass solos, rare on his previous efforts, are numerous and buoyant. On top of all else, you can’t forget the venue: an immense crowd, cheering madly as it begins … and they all turn stone-silent from the moment Monk plays.

This is the proper audience for Thelonious — and for the next hour, the pianist reciprocates.

With a minimum of fuss, “Rhythm-A-Ning” gets the ball rolling; Rouse is burly with the theme, accented by Monk’s left hand. Come the solo, Charlie shifts to a nervous hum, shuffling three notes as Monk hits a tremolo. While sticking to this approach, Rouse then darkens his tone, coming close to Dexter Gordon; Gales’ breezy walk is the perfect counterpart. Monk’s first chorus pulses hard in the lower register: later on he quotes “Thelonious”, “Well, You Needn’t”, and thumps wicked tone clusters. Gales’ effort blends fast single notes with woody strums — some chorded stuff near the end is charming. And Riley simply erupts: splashy snares, lengthy rolls, quotes of “Salt Peanuts” … all here, and all good.

The applause still rains, but Monk can’t wait: alone, crafts a choppy “Body and Soul”, where the harmonies add depth … and menace. His stride work is on full display, plus a near-quote of “Monk’s Mood” — two minutes, but that’s all it needs. Rouse is ready on “I Mean You”, a buttered tone that suggests Gene Ammons. The longer he goes the tougher he gets — at one point he could be Rollins. Monk plies him with dainty chords, barely heard in the tumult; his own solo is lithe, gliding where Rouse chose to stomp. A churning refrain is traced by Gales, who carries it on to his solo — excellent note choice, and subtle variations. Hear ‘em whistle during Riley’s bit, and holler for Monk’s return: the crowd is respectful, but that won’t stop them enjoying the music. Nor will it you.

Another solo feature, this one “April in Paris”. (Actually, it was March, but who’s complaining?) A long-time staple of his repertoire, the arrangement stays close to the version on Thelonious Himself; a trifle, but a good one. “Well, You Needn’t” speeds it up a little: here Monk takes the theme, and Rouse keeps his distance. They take the first chorus together, and Thelonious recedes — Charlie now sounds like Johnny Griffin, the man he replaced in the saxophone chair. Monk walks down the scale on this solo, then thumps loud as Rouse gets stronger … they really had something going.

High above his range, Rouse toots the theme to “Bright Mississippi”, sounding like an alto … or a harmonica. The cymbals boil madly as Charlie takes it slow; he shows grit on the second chorus, where he quotes “Sweet Georgia Brown” — and betrays the tune’s origin. On most of the solo he’s in Johnny Griffin territory, with a hint of Ben Webster; the crowd approves, as do I. Monks makes it choppy, quoting all over the place: “Lester Leaps

(Continued on page 11)
### Monday, January 8

- Gabrielle Stravelli & Billy Stritch, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Latvian Radio Big Band, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- 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 & Broadway
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugiona Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Baylor Project, Jean Baylor, Marcus Baylor, Keith Loftis, Terry Brewer, Dezron Douglas; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

### Wednesday, January 10

- Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Lee Konitz At 90, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugiona Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 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 Hutchinson; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Bill Goodwin Trio; James 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.
- Pedro Martinez & Alfredo Rodriguez, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Goodman: King Of Swing ~ The Anniversary Landmark Concert, Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis, Music Director Victor Goines, And Clarinetists Anat Cohen, Janelle Reichman, Ken Pepolowski, Ted Nash, January 11-13, 2018, Rose Theater; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugiona Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Emmett Cohen Organ Quartet, Smokestack Jazz Brunch, 12pm-1:30 Pm, 116 W. 44th St.
- Dr. Lonnie Smith with Smith Trio Jonathan Kreisberg - Johnathan Blake; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

### Sunday, January 14

- Kurt Elling and Ann Hampton Callaway, Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Pedro Martinez Group, Dizzy’s Club Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugiona Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Dr. Lonnie Smith with Smith Trio Jonathan Kreisberg - Johnathan Blake; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joshua Redman Quartet With Aaron Goldberg, Reuben Rogers, Gregory Hutchinson; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Ai Murakami Trio feat. Sacha Peery; Tap Dance Show with Michela Lerman; JC Stylies/Steve Nelson Hutcherson Project; Robert Edwards - After-hours Jam Session; 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 & Broadway
- 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.

### Tuesday, January 16

- John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Igor Butman And The Moscow Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Jaleel Shaw, Alto Sax, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugiona Okegwo, Bass, Joe Dyson, Drums, Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Jason Marsalis’ 21st Century Trad Band with Austin Johnson, Will Golbe, Dave Potter; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Keyon Harrod & Friends; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Josh Evans Quintet; Abraham Burton Quartet & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

### Wednesday, January 17

- John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Igor Butman And The Moscow Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Jaleel Shaw, Alto Sax, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugiona Okegwo, Bass, Joe Dyson, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Sasha Masakowski - New Orleans Art Market, Cliff Hines, Chris Bullock, Martin Masakowski, Peter Varnardo

### Thursday, January 18

- La Tanya Hall and The Andy Milne Trio; John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Pedro Martinez Group, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Goodman: King Of Swing ~ The Anniversary Landmark Concert, Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis, Music Director Victor Goines, And Clarinetists Anat Cohen, Janelle Reichman, Ken Pepolowski, Ted Nash, January 11-13, 2018, Rose Theater; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugiona Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Emmett Cohen Organ Quartet, Smokestack Jazz Brunch, 12pm-1:30 Pm, 116 W. 44th St.
- Dr. Lonnie Smith with Smith Trio Jonathan Kreisberg - Johnathan Blake; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

### Friday, January 12

- Birdland Big Band; Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Pedro Martinez & Alfredo Rodriguez, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway
- Goodman: King Of Swing ~ The Anniversary Landmark Concert, Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis, Music Director Victor Goines, And Clarinetists Anat Cohen, Janelle Reichman, Ken Pepolowski, Ted Nash, January 11-13, 2018, Rose Theater; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Broadway.
- Tom Harrell, Trumpet, Danny Grissett, Piano, Ugiona Okegwo, Bass, Adam Cruz, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Dr. Lonnie Smith with Smith Trio Jonathan Kreisberg - Johnathan Blake; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joshua Redman Quartet With Aaron Goldberg, Reuben Rogers, Gregory Hutchinson; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Joey “G-Clef” Cavasano Quartet; George Burton Quintet; The Corey Wallace DUOBet “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

### Saturday, January 13

- Veronica Swift; Vijay Iyer Sextet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
Friday, January 19

Birdland Big Band: John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Igor Butman And The Moscow Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy’s Club Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

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 Sickafosse - Jim Black, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th 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 & B’way

Tom Harrell, Trumpet; Jaleel Shaw, Alto Sax; Danny Grissett, Piano; Ugonna Okegwo, Bass; Joe Dyson, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

Bruce Harris, Smokestack Jazz Brunch, 12pm-1:30 Pm, 116 E. 27th St.

Jenny Scheinman’s Mischief Mayhem, Nels Cline - Todd Sickafosse - 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.

Thursday, January 18

Vincent Herring, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Elliot Mason “Before, Now And After” Album Release Celebration

Steve Wilson, Saxophone, Uri Caine, Piano, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Bill Stewart, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

Benny Golson With Emmett Cohen, Buster Williams, Alveaster Garnett, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

Jazz-Ageddon: Ray Angry, Warren Wolf & Friends; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Ari Hoenig & Edmar Castaneda; Jonathan Michel : After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Friday, January 19

Birdland Big Band: John Pizzarelli, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Igor Butman And The Moscow Jazz Orchestra, Dizzy’s Club Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

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 Sickafosse - Jim Black, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th 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 & B’way

Tom Harrell, Trumpet; Jaleel Shaw, Alto Sax; Danny Grissett, Piano; Ugonna Okegwo, Bass; Joe Dyson, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

Bruce Harris, Smokestack Jazz Brunch, 12pm-1:30 Pm, 116 E. 27th St.

Jenny Scheinman’s Mischief Mayhem, Nels Cline - Todd Sickafosse - 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.

(Continued on page 16)
JAZZ STANDARD
January

Orrin Evans's Captain Black Big Band
Josh Lawrence - Ingrid Jensen - Stafford Hunter
David Gibson - Todd Bashore - Morgan Guerin - Alex Claffy
Anwar Marshall - Milton Luggs - Joanne Pascalle

Thu-Sun Jan 4-7

Orrin Evans Sextet

Tue-Wed Jan 9-10

The Baylor Project
Jean Baylor - Marcus Baylor - Keith Loftis
Terry Brewer - Dezron Douglas

Thu-Sun Jan 11-14

Dr. Lonnie Smith Trio
Jonathan Kreisberg - Johnathan Blake

Tue Jan 16

Jason Marsalis' 21st Century Trad Band
Austin Johnson - Will Goble - Dave Potter

Wed Jan 17

Masakowski New Orleans & Art Market
Cliff Hines - Chris Bullock - Martin Masakowski - Peter Varnard

**Upcoming**

- Jan 1-4: Billy Hart Quartet
- Jan 8-11: Jamison Ross
- Jan 13: Mardis Gras with Marcia Ball
- Feb 14: Valentine's Day with Kate McGarry

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Sunday, January 28

• Wee Trio + special guest Luis Perdomo; Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
• Nilton Matta’s Brazilian Voyage, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Steve Wilson, Saxophone, Uri Caine, Piano, Ugona Okeowo, Bass, Bill Stewart, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Jazz Standard Closed - Private Event
• Talb Kwel W Live Band Residency; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Small’s Showcase; Robert Tierenz Trio; Humanity Quartet; Alex Spiagin Quartet; Brooklyn Circle; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
• Benny Golson With Emmet Cohen, Buster Williams, Alvester Garnett, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

Monday, January 29

• Victoria Shaw, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
• Monday Nights With WBGO-Amina Figaravo Sextet
Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Roberta Gambarini; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Logan Richardson Quartet; Jonathan Michel; After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Tuesday, January 30

• David Murray Infinity Quartet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
• Jeremy Pelt, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Donny McCaslin, Saxophone, Jason Lindner, Piano, Nate Wood, Bass, Mark Giuliana, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• David Virelles Nosotros With Roman Diaz, Keisel Jiminez, Raashan Carter, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Roberta Gambarini; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Spike Wilner Trio; Abraham Burton Quartet & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesday, January 31

• Murray Infinity Quartet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
• Jeremy Pelt, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Donny McCaslin, Saxophone, Jason Lindner, Piano, Nate Wood, Bass, Mark Giuliana, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• David Virelles Nosotros With Roman Diaz, Keisel Jiminez, Raashan Carter, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Roberta Gambarini; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Gilad Hekelman Quartet; Belh Gillece Quartet; Aaron Seeger - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Thursday, February 1

• Jools Holland, “Piano, Vocals And Drum Frenzy”, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Franklin Kimmyer: Scatter The Atoms That Remain, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Jamison Ross, Rick Lollar, Cory Invin, Chris Pattinshall, Barry Stephenson; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Donny McCaslin, Saxophone; Jason Lindner, Piano, Nate Wood, Bass; Mark Giuliana, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Carl Bartlett Jr. Quartet, Sam Dillon Quartet, Davis Whitfield-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
• Olivia Chindamo With The Rajiv Jayaweera Trio, David Murray Infinity Quartet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, February 2

• Jools Holland, “Piano, Vocals And Drum Frenzy”, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Azar Lawrence Experience, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Jamison Ross, Rick Lollar, Cory Invin, Chris Pattinshall, Barry Stephenson; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Donny McCaslin, Saxophone; Jason Lindner, Piano, Nate Wood, Bass; Mark Giuliana, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Tom Dempsey/Tim Ferguson Quartet, Joe Farnsworth Quartet, Eric Wyatt Quartet & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
• Birdland Big Band, David Murray Infinity Quartet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Saturday, February 3

• Jools Holland, “Piano, Vocals And Drum Frenzy”, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Azar Lawrence Experience, Dizzy’s Club, 60th & B’dwy
• Smokeybush Brunch; Michael Stephenson, Jamison Ross, Rick Lollar, Cory Invin, Chris Pattinshall, Barry Stephenson; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Donny McCaslin, Saxophone; Jason Lindner, Piano; Nate Wood; Bass; Mark Giuliana, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Small’s Showcase; Lucine Yeghiazaryan, David Bolder Quintet, Joe Farnsworth Quartet, Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
• David Murray Infinity Quartet, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Sunday, February 4

• Jools Holland, “Piano, Vocals And Drum Frenzy”, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Azar Lawrence Experience, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Magoo and The Kids; Jamison Ross, Rick Lollar, Cory Invin, Chris Pattinshall, Barry Stephenson; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Donny McCaslin, Saxophone; Jason Lindner, Piano; Nate Wood; Bass; Mark Giuliana, Drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Small’s Showcase; Lucine Yeghiazaryan, David Bolder Quintet, Joe Farnsworth Quartet, Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, February 5

• Jose James: The Dreamer’s, 10th Anniversary, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Polo Gibbons: A New York Moment, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Avi Hoenig Trio, Jonathan Barber Group & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
• Jim Caruso’s Cast Party; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, February 6

• Jose James: The Dreamer’s, 10th Anniversary; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Adam Bimbaum Trio Featuring Doug Weiss, Al Foster; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Tom Gurna Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Miguel Zenon; saxophone; Luis Perdomo, piano; Hans Glawischnig, bass; Henry Cole, drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Spike Wilner Quartet; Frank Lacy Group; Malt McLauren; After-hours; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
• Joe Lovano Us Five featuring James Weidman, Esperanza Spalding, Otis Brown III, Francisco Mela; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, February 7

• Jose James: The Dreamer’s, 10th Anniversary; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Anything Mosè! Mose Allison Project With Richard Julian & John Chih Quartet, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• John Raymond Real Feels; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Miguel Zenon; saxophone; Luis Perdomo, piano; Hans Glawischnig, bass; Henry Cole, drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Jure Pukl; Sound Pictures, BLACK ART JAZZ COLLECTIVE, Jovan Alexandre-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
• David Ostad’s Louis Armstrong Ensemble Band; Joe Lovano Us Five featuring James Weidman, Esperanza Spalding, Otis Brown III, Francisco Mela; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Thursday, February 8

• Jose James: The Dreamer’s, 10th Anniversary, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Christian Sands Trio With Special Guests, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy.
• Billy Hart Quartet With Mark Turner, Ethan Iverson, Ben Street; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Miguel Zenon; saxophone; Luis Perdomo, piano; Hans Glawischnig, bass; Henry Cole, drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
• Itamar Borochov Quartet; Pete Zimmer Trio; Jonathan Thomas-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
• David Ostad’s Louis Armstrong Ensemble Band; Joe Lovano Us Five featuring James Weidman, Esperanza Spalding, Otis Brown III, Francisco Mela; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, February 9

• The Bqb Swingers Mardi Gras Celebration, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
• Mario Adnet; Jobim Jazz, Dizzy’s Club, 60th & B’dwy.
• Billy Hart Quartet With Mark Turner, Ethan Iverson, Ben Street; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
• Miguel Zenon; saxophone; Luis Perdomo, piano; Hans Glawischnig, bass; Henry Cole, drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.

(Continued on page 17)
Tuesday, February 15

- Marilyn Maye, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Gerald Clayton Quartet with special guest Joel Ross, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, 52nd Anniversary Week; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Rob Bargado’s Reunion Trio, Corey Wilcox Quartet, Davis Whitlett-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Catherine Russell and Her Sextet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, February 16

- Valentine’s Week, Rachelle Ferrell, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Marilyn Maye, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Gerald Clayton Quartet with special guest Joel Ross, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, 52nd Anniversary Week; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Dave Stayer Quartet, David Weiss Sextet, After-hours Jam Session with Joe Fawcett; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Birdland Big Band; Catherine Russell and Her Sextet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Saturday, February 17

- Valentine’s Week, Rachelle Ferrell, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Marilyn Maye, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Jazz For Kids; Gerald Clayton Quartet with special guest Yosvany Terry, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, 52nd Anniversary Week; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Small’s Showcase: Kate Cosco & Laura Dreyer Project, Jonathan Volzko & Slim Hampton Quintet, David Weiss Sextet, Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Catherine Russell and Her Sextet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Sunday, February 18

- Valentine’s Week, Rachelle Ferrell, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Marilyn Maye, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Jazz For Kids; Gerald Clayton Quartet with special guest Yosvany Terry; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, 52nd Anniversary Week; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings, Al Mikaramo Trio feat. Sacha Perry, Andy Farber Septet, Joe Magannarello Group, Robert Edwards-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Pete Zimmer, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Monday, February 19

- Julian Bliss Sextet: A Tribute To Benny Goodman
- Mingus Orchestra, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Linda Purl and the DIVA Jazz Orchestra; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, February 20

- Roy Hargrove, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Allen Lowe: A Love Supreme: A Dixieland Love Supreme, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Jaelee Shaw and Steve Wilson, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Peter Bernstein, guitar; Sullivan Forther, piano; Doug Weiss, bass; Leon Parker, drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Lucas Pino Nonet, Abrahm Burton Quartet, Malik McLaurine-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Tierny Sutton Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, February 21

- Roy Hargrove, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- George Burton Quintet, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Jaelee Shaw and Steve Wilson, Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Peter Bernstein, guitar; Sullivan Forther, piano; Doug Weiss, bass; Leon Parker, drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Russ Nolan Quartet, Harlod Maben Trio, Jovan Alexandre-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Tierny Sutton Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Thursday, February 22

- Roy Hargrove, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Nicholas Payton Trio, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Carmen Lundy; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Peter Bernstein, guitar; Sullivan Forther, piano; Doug Weiss, bass; Leon Parker, drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Willy Rodriguez Quintet, Claffy Special Edition, Jonathan Thomas-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Tierny Sutton Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, February 23

- Roy Hargrove, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Nicholas Payton Trio, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Carmen Lundy; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Peter Bernstein, guitar; Sullivan Forther, piano; Doug Weiss, bass; Leon Parker, drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Lawrence Leathers Quartet, Immanuel Wilkins Quartet, Corey Wallace DuBout-After-hours; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Birdland Big Band; Tierny Sutton Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Dave Douglas; Dizzy Atmosphere Dizzy Gillespie At Zero Gravity With Dave Douglas, Ambrose Akimusins, Gerald Clayton, Linda Oj, Jerry Ondi, and Billfishel This Program Is Presented As Part Of The Ertegun Jazz Concert Series, 7PM, 9:30 PM, Appel Room; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way

Saturday, February 24

- Roy Hargrove, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Nicholas Payton Trio, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Rob Bargado’s Reunion Trio, David Gibson; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Steve Nelson Quartet, Abraham Burton Quartet, Malik McLaurine-After-hours Jam Session; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Pete Zimmer; Novelty, 60th & B‘way
- Small’s Showcase: Kate Cosco & Laura Dreyer Project, Jonathan Volzko & Slim Hampton Quintet, David Weiss Sextet, Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Catherine Russell and Her Sextet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Sunday, February 25

- Roy Hargrove, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Nicholas Payton Trio, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Jazz For Kids; David Gibson; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Pete Zimmer, Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Lawrence Leathers Quartet, Immanuel Wilkins Quartet, Corey Wallace DuBout-After-hours; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Birdland Big Band; Tierny Sutton Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Dave Douglas; Dizzy Atmosphere Dizzy Gillespie At Zero Gravity With Dave Douglas, Ambrose Akimusins, Gerald Clayton, Linda Oj, Jerry Ondi, and Billfishel This Program Is Presented As Part Of The Ertegun Jazz Concert Series, 7PM, 9:30 PM, Appel Room; Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way

Monday, February 26

- Monday Nights With WBGCO: Scott Tiwar Quinetet, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Ari Hoenig Trio, Jonathan Barber Group & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Linda Purl and the DIVA Jazz Orchestra; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, February 27

- Macy Parker, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Edmar Castachehata Quartet Featuring Jorge Glenn, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Adam Nussbaum: The Leadbelly Project; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Ben Wendel, saxophone; Gilad Hekelman, guitar; Aaron Parks, piano; Matt Brewer, bass; Eric Harland; drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Steve Nelson Quartet, Frank Lacy Group, Malik McLaurine-After-hours; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Steps Ahead Meets Scooboo, Mike Mainieri, Randy Brecker, Bill Evans featuring Steve Smith and Tom Kennedy; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, February 28

- Macy Parker, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Edmar Castachehata Quartet Featuring Jorge Glenn, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B‘way
- Chris Bergson Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Ben Wendel, saxophone; Gilad Hekelman, guitar; Aaron Parks, piano; Matt Brewer, bass; Eric Harland; drums; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Greg Murphy Quintet, Jared Gold Trio, Aaron Seeber-After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Steps Ahead Meets Scooboo, Mike Mainieri, Randy Brecker, Bill Evans featuring Steve Smith and Tom Kennedy; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
Clubs, Venues & Jazz Resources

**Clubs, Venues & Jazz Resources**

- **Candlelight Lounge**
- **Bickford Theatre**
- **Beco Bar**
- **bbkingblues.com**
- **Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn, 718**
- **Lincoln Center, Time Warner Center, Broadway and Road, east of downtown Morristown. 973**
- **B.B. King's Blues Bar**
- **Café St. Bart's**
- **Bowery Poetry Club**
- **Blue Note**
- **Bar Lunatico,**
- **American Museum of Natural History, 81st St. & Central Park**
- **Alice Tully Hall**
- **Aaron Davis Hall**, 1395 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10128,
- **American Museum of Natural History, 81st St. & Central Park**
- **February 2018**
Interview

Karen Borca
Blood On The Floor Bassoon

Interview and photo by Ken Weiss

Karen Borca (born September 5, 1948, Green Bay, Wisconsin) is more than the most stunning double-reed player in jazz history, she is a true pioneer. Grossly underrecognized throughout her career, not only was Borca the rare female performing in the macho universe of the early ‘70s free jazz world but she dignified the bassoon as an imposing front-line instrument in a jazz setting. The bassoon had appeared in jazz rarely in the past by saxophonists doubling on the horn but Borca may have been the very first to specialize in it. She is best known for her association with Cecil Taylor and her partner Jimmy Lyons. Drummer Andrew Cyrille, who played with Borca in Taylor’s bands, when asked for a comment, said, “Karen Borca’s extraordinary facility and speed on the bassoon equaled alto saxophonist Jimmy Lyons’ speed on the alto. A commendable feat for an extraordinary bassoonist.” Borca has also performed or recorded with Bill Dixon, William Parker, Frank Wright, Irene Schweitzer, Jimmy Lyons’ speed on the alto. A commendable feat for an extraordinary bassoonist.” Borca has also performed or recorded with Bill Dixon, William Parker, Frank Wright, Irene Schweitzer, was in college. I was a hotshot alto saxophone player in high school. I had been playing it since I was in the third grade. I really enjoyed it and I was the whiz kid but eventually the teacher told me the [school band’s] bassoon player graduated and that I should play the bassoon because I wasn’t going to get a college scholarship on saxophone because there were too many saxophonists. I didn’t think I wasn’t capable but I didn’t know that much. I was told I’d get a scholarship to play the bassoon and he was right about that. I took my audition on piano, alto and bassoon, with bassoon being the least accomplished of the three. Once I got into college with someone who knew something about the bassoon, then I started to roll along pretty well. John Barrows, who got me in to the University of Wisconsin, arranged for me to study with the New York Woodwind Quintet in Milwaukee for the summer after my freshman year and then I also met and studied with Arthur Weisberg, who was really a super bassoonist. That’s when I finally got really, really in love with the bassoon.

Butch Morris, Sonny Simmons and Paul Murphy. This rare Karen Borca interview took place at her apartment room in New York City’s Inwood section on June 2, 2017.

Jazz Inside Magazine: Karen Borca, born September 5, 1948, Green Bay, Wisconsin, is more than the most stunning double-reed player in jazz history. She is a true pioneer. Grossly underrecognized throughout her career, not only was Borca the rare female performing in the macho universe of the early ‘70s free jazz world but she dignified the bassoon as an imposing front-line instrument in a jazz setting. The bassoon had appeared in jazz rarely in the past by saxophonists doubling on the horn but Borca may have been the very first to specialize in it. She is best known for her association with Cecil Taylor and her partner Jimmy Lyons. Drummer Andrew Cyrille, who played with Borca in Taylor’s bands, when asked for a comment, said, “Karen Borca’s extraordinary facility and speed on the bassoon equaled alto saxophonist Jimmy Lyons’ speed on the alto. A commendable feat for an extraordinary bassoonist.” Borca has also performed or recorded with Bill Dixon, William Parker, Frank Wright, Irene Schweitzer, was in college. I was a hotshot alto saxophone player in high school. I had been playing it since I was in the third grade. I really enjoyed it and I was the whiz kid but eventually the teacher told me the [school band’s] bassoon player graduated and that I should play the bassoon because I wasn’t going to get a college scholarship on saxophone because there were too many saxophonists. I didn’t think I wasn’t capable but I didn’t know that much. I was told I’d get a scholarship to play the bassoon and he was right about that. I took my audition on piano, alto and bassoon, with bassoon being the least accomplished of the three. Once I got into college with someone who knew something about the bassoon, then I started to roll along pretty well. John Barrows, who got me in to the University of Wisconsin, arranged for me to study with the New York Woodwind Quintet in Milwaukee for the summer after my freshman year and then I also met and studied with Arthur Weisberg, who was really a super bassoonist. That’s when I finally got really, really in love with the bassoon.

“As you know, when you’ve met a really great musician, such as Cecil, Jimmy Lyons, Andrew Cyrille, and William Parker, not only do they have their music together but they’ve got their head together. These people inspired me.”

J: What does it mean to you to “fly?”
KB: A certain feeling you feel when the music is really flowing. It’s a freedom without any encumbrments and the music is unstoppable.

J: Talk about the difficulty of playing bassoon in a jazz setting.
KB: The main difficulty is amplifying it because the sound is not coming out of the bell like it does for the most part on saxophone and absolutely how it comes out of the trumpet. Eric Dolphy ran into that issue with bass clarinet but bass clarinet has a point where a lot of sound is coming out. With bassoon, sound is coming out all up and down the instrument, anywhere you see a tone hole, the sound is coming out there. Actually, Arthur Weisberg’s brother was into acoustics and the technical knowledge of reproducing sounds. He came to one of the gigs I had with Jimmy [Lyons] and said, “We’ll put clip-on mics all up and down the bassoon,” but we never did get to that point. The other instruments that need amplification, such as the bass and piano, they’ve figured out how to do that now but not the bassoon. If you turn me up too loud then you’re gonna pick up the rest of the band and that defeats the whole purpose.

J: I spoke with Mark Gigliotti (co-principal bassoonist of the Philadelphia Orchestra) and he felt that the instrument might create problems for a jazz artist trying to play slurs and limit flexibility in general.

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Karen Borca

(Continued from page 20)

KB: No, not necessarily. For a while I was making reeds with more and more wood on them because I figured I needed the reeds to be louder but it’s impossible. The reeds will never have that much presence in this orchestration where you’re playing with trumpets, saxophones and drums, and with a big band.

JI: You brought up the issue with making your own reeds, certainly a major factor for every professional bassoonist. Would you expound on that?

KB: Right, I make my own. I’ve bought some at times but I’ve always changed them to what I wanted. I recently bought some from a reed maker because I was behind in my reed making which means you can’t practice if your reeds aren’t working. If you’re not happy [with your reed] when you’re practicing, it’s all over. The reed is everything – it’s your sound, it’s your articulation. When the classical bassoonist you spoke with mentioned slurs, that was about articulation. My reeds are very different, I would think, than his. Mine are not only heavier, I don’t think the reeds I’ve been using could be used to play the Mozart Bassoon Concerto, and I have played the Mozart Bassoon Concerto with an orchestra when I was in college, and I’ve played woodwind quintets, which I love, so the reed would be too heavy for that but it’s not too heavy for a slur in this music.

JI: The bassoon’s double reed is a bit of a mystery to many. Would you talk about how you make the double reed and the time involvement?

KB: I start with cane that I buy already profiled, shaped and gouged. The cane comes from a round tube called Arundo Donax, which is split in three parts. Machinery that costs a few thousand dollars profiles and gouges the cane to make it even and takes the outer shell off in a precise manner. After you’ve worked on making your own reeds and become proficient, you’re thinking about your sound, articulation, flexibility, anything that holds you back from flying. Whether you’re playing classical music or jazz, you’re gonna hear it if somebody’s not feeling free. If the reed has certain things stopping you from blowing freely through the horn then there’s a problem. I use files and knives. My favorite knife was made with a specific kind of steel that this knife maker used to make knives for people who filleted fish. [It resembles a prison shank] You leave wood on the center mostly and try to get a shape that’s similar for every reed. The more sameness you can get in the reed, more it’s gonna be dependable and do what you want. The preparation takes three days. You have to soak the wood and then rub the hairs of the wood into the pores so that it’s pretty waterproof in what will be the inside of the reed. You then fold the stick of cane over when it’s wet and put wires on it to hold it in place and then you put a mandrel through it after you’ve made little cuts to be sure it gets round evenly. That’s the first day. You let it sit and dry out. The second day you have to tighten up the wires because the wood shrunk and then wrap the thread around it and glue it and wait for that to dry and then cut the tip.

JI: How long will a reed last you?

KB: If you have three or four reeds that are really popping, but usually it ends up to be one or two, then it will last for one to two months. My repairman told me about a lady who plays in the Metropolitan Opera who brings him bags of reeds that she’s made and doesn’t use so some people are constantly making reeds every day. One bassoon player I’ve heard had a closet hermetically sealed and lined in copper and had all his cane in there. I have a little cigar box to hold mine. My longest lasting reed, I’m embarrassed to say, bassoon players are gonna laugh, I have a reed that was still playing after two years. I wasn’t using only that reed but for some reason I couldn’t let it go. It was just insanity so I keep it to remind me never to go there again. [Laughs]

JI: Bassoon is very thumb oriented, the left thumb controls nine different keys. How does that effect your playing and what about wear and tear on your thumb?

KB: Yep, you get little callouses. Some people, like Weisberg, have rollers on all the keys instead of a few crucial keys. Some things just are not going to be easy, there’s gonna be a gap going from one note to another. The real art of it is to go from one note to another without hearing a bump when you don’t want a bump to be there. The hard thing is to move from one place to another quickly with the thumbs, especially from the lowest range up into the next part of the horn.

JI: Another issue with bassoon is cost. A professional model can run twenty to sixty thousand dollars. What type of bassoon do you play and how old is it?

KB: I play a Polisi. At the time I got it, Arthur Weisberg introduced me to Polisi who played in the Metropolitan Opera and was a well-known bassoonist. He decided to put his name on a horn and what was different about his horns was that in those bottom thumb keys he had an extra thing put on the low C so that you could move from the low C going up a little easier. It’s basically a Kohlert and I paid five hundred bucks for it in the ‘60s, but if I had to replace it now it would cost between fifteen and thirty thousand. A Heckle bassoon, which is the bassoon, can run you up to ninety thousand. I could have gotten one of those in 1970 for a couple thousand dollars because Germany was in a depression and the instrument went from fifteen thousand suddenly to only two thousand. How I did not come up with that two thousand is really so stupid. I should have begged, borrowed, stole, robbed a bank, anything! And depending on who played them, I heard Weisberg’s horn in the ‘70s, before they jumped up to thirty thousand, his went for fifty grand.

JI: And how much would a horn played by Karen Borca go for?

KB: [Laughs] Hopefully something—especially since I carved a little niche that wasn’t there before in this kind of music.

JI: Although you’ve been playing bassoon in a jazz setting since the early ‘70s, there are only a handful of semi-prominent bassoonists in jazz today. Are you surprised that your instrument has not become more popular?

KB: No, I’m not surprised. Fats Waller had bassoons in his orchestras, way back in the early 1900’s. In a certain way it’s not accepted. Some people don’t accept it as a “jazz sound.” I had a gig with my own band, which at the time was Paul Murphy, Mary Anne Driscoll and Jay Oliver, and it got reviewed. The guy wrote, “And the dour sound of the bassoon…” and I’m saying, “What? What dour? I was feeling very happy as a matter of fact!” [Laughs] There weren’t many people who tried to do it after Fats Waller.

JI: There have been a few popular musicians who have doubled, to an extent, on bassoon through the years. What have you thought of the bassoon playing of Illinois Jacquet, Yusef Lateef, Bennie Maupin and Makanda Ken McIntyre?
Karen Borca

**KB:** I actually heard Illinois play it live down at Sweet Basil. He played “Round Midnight” and sounded great. When I first discovered the records he did I said, ‘Oh, wow, this is wonderful, he plays the bassoon and he’s a tenor player!’ I never saw the others you mentioned play it but yeah, they were getting around on the bassoon, actually placing it in the music to make it work and I was happy they were there.

**JI:** There’s a rumor that Ornette Coleman tried his hand at bassoon.

**KB:** Yeah, when I first came to New York, there was a picture of Ornette with a bassoon in the *New York Times.* I don’t know if he actually ever played it. He played a lot of different instruments.

**JI:** When you’re hired for a gig, do the leaders understand how to use you or do you typically have to find your own place in the music?

**KB:** It’s a little of both, you’re both dealing with something new. Some know how to use me. Cecil knew [once he heard me], he put me with the tenors in the big band setting to the chagrin of the tenors. When Cecil came to the University of Wisconsin, he first had the people who came to his class improvise for him. He went around the room and said to me, “And that instrument over there.” I’m sure he knew what it was but the likes to mess with people. I’m sure he was wondering how to use it as well as I was in how to make it fit in.

**JI:** You started on piano around the age of four but it wasn’t fun because your mother was a strict teacher and when you started to compose in grade school, she insisted that composing meant that you were to write material that had never been written before.

**KB:** Yes, because she was an improviser. The first jazz I ever heard was my mother playing stride piano. What happened was I was practicing a Mozart piece that was four voices but it had three-noted chords in the right and two things happening in the left hand, so what I did was, away from the piano, I wrote down what I’d been practicing, all the notes and articulations, and she said, “Well you have to write your own thing. That’s what composing is.” So I got a little… I didn’t dislike the piano at first, but after a couple of years of the correcting, I landed on the alto. She’d be in the kitchen cooking and saying “Ah, that’s a mistake,” every time I messed up.

**JI:** Were your original plans to play classical music as a profession?

**KB:** Yeah, I knew about the jazz my mother was doing but not much after that. When I got to college I heard Bird and Miles for the first time.

They were teaching me classical music in college. John Barrows and Arthur Weisberg were really heavy, not only musicians but people. As you know, when you’ve met a really great musician, such as Cecil, Jimmy [Lyons], Andrew [Cyrille] and William [Parker], not only do they have their music together but they’ve got their head together. These people inspired me. At that time, I wasn’t too aware of improvising being such a different art form but once I started doing it I knew I had to get it together the right way.

They were teaching me classical music in college. John Barrows and Arthur Weisberg were really heavy, not only musicians but people. As you know, when you’ve met a really great musician, such as Cecil, Jimmy [Lyons], Andrew [Cyrille] and William [Parker], not only do they have their music together but they’ve got their head together. These people inspired me. At that time, I wasn’t too aware of improvising being such a different art form but once I started doing it I knew I had to get it together the right way.

**KB:** The orchestration, that’s the one thing he dug about Miles. The fact that the notes are there but then you’ve got to let it go. Jimmy was stricter and had more specific things in mind and if you went into the improvising section and you didn’t pay attention to those things, he would stop you, whereas Cecil would say, “This is the structure. We have all these lines but rhythmically any one of these lines can be played with any other juxtaposed depending on the rhythm.” So he brought out the fact that this music is very, very rhythmically involved. Rhythm is very central to classical music too but it’s in a different way. He was stressing the orchestration, with the lines working together, the rhythm, and the respect for your predecessors.

**JI:** Did Cecil have any special plans for how to use bassoon?

**KB:** He wrote some notes for me in the beginning. I was playing on everything. Mainly in the beginning he had me in the tenor section so all the lines the tenors were playing I played. When we got to Antioch, he changed me to different sections – the sopranos and then French horn. But he had me playing on everything. There was no tacit bassoon, there was no such thing. I was in it and I could win it if I knew what I was doing. I was just another instrument to him.

**JI:** What did you learn about the process of how Cecil put his music together?

**KB:** Cecil was a prolific composer and he just loved big bands. Every day he’d come in with new charts, especially at Antioch because it was a huge band. People came from all over the country to be in that band. I learned his structure of placing the lines, different sections having different sets of lines, putting them together. When you’re in a section you’re playing unison but you can stretch that, but then there’s another...

“I said, ‘Let’s go and just hang out in Long Island and go fishing and swimming.’ And he said, ‘What? Fishing and swimming?’ Cecil was there and said, ‘Huh, Jimmy? You’re going on a vacation?’ [Laughs] Because musicians never go on a vacation. I mean, it’s always there. You are never anywhere where the music is not, even if no concerts are happening.”

(Continued on page 24)
section, and another section. When I went to Duke Ellington’s rehearsal, they were having the same discussions we were about the placement of sections. Everything is in sections and you have these lines communicating with one another rhythmically a lot and they develop as the whole band and it has to develop into something that means something and then it settles and then you start another section with different lines and a different feel. And of course, everyone was expected to improvise. In Wisconsin, I didn’t know that I was supposed to stretch out when I played with him until we did the gig at Hunter College.

He took the college band with him to New York and the big band played opposite the quartet - Jimmy, Andrew and Sam Rivers, at the time.

JI: You mentioned that Cecil hired you to work for him at Antioch. What did you do for him?

KB: Part of what I did for him was being in the band and helping people who weren’t familiar with his music because people were coming from all over and they needed help to get up to speed as quickly as possible no matter how accomplished they were. Cecil writes a lot of stuff and so you can have a lot of different lines happening at the same time and if they don’t hook up the right way rhythmically, it can stop everything. Everyone who goes to play Cecil’s music has questions. Another part of my duties were to write down his poetry. He had written it down but it wasn’t annotated in a concise way. He had it in books and pieces of paper laying around so he wanted it organized. I also got the programs ready for the gigs, the names on the flyers, all the stuff for the band. I was also in charge of rehearsing the band when he, Jimmy and Andrew weren’t there. There was a core of four or five of us from Madison that went to Antioch. I got paid, I don’t know about the others.

JI: What was your experience performing with the Cecil Taylor Unit?

KB: The Unit was more crystalized of course. Playing as a small band you get the chance to be tighter with each other. I remember playing at Carlos 1 with the Unit which had drummer Freddie Waits, he was incredible, William [Parker], Carlos Ward and Thurman Barker. It was packed every night. The first night we got there, they didn’t have the piano that Cecil wanted so Cecil walked out and the owner said, “What? Why he’s a prima donna! That’s an expensive piano right there!” But he got his way and the piano he wanted.

JI: You had a Carnegie Hall gig with Cecil.

KB: After Antioch, a lot of people moved to New York. They called us the “Wisconsin people.” We just started rehearsing without him as he was coming back to me. They were handing it from person to person all back to me. They showed great respect.”


KB: I really met Jimmy at Antioch when we were all there. Jimmy came to all the rehearsals and I got to know him and he seemed to be interested in the music I was doing. He’d be surprised with what I was doing at times. Pretty soon he started coming past and hanging out at my apartment and then after a while I started hanging out at his apartment and so we just got together. I was seeing him every day at rehearsal and things just happened. We dug each other.

JI: I’m dying to know who played in your wedding band.

KB: The wedding band, well, we didn’t actually have a wedding band. [Laughs] By the time we came to New York we got a place together. We just did it, we didn’t have a big party. There was no ceremony, I never thought it was necessary actually. There’s a thing that’s there and whether you have a piece of paper saying it’s there or not… There was no wedding but everybody just

“in Moers, as we were finishing the set, a strong wind came and blew all my music off the stand and out into the audience and I thought, ‘Oh no, it’s gone,’ but then all of a sudden, the music was coming back to me. They were handing it from person to person all back to me. They showed great respect.”
assumed we were married and fourteen years is nothing to sneeze at.

JI: Would you share some Jimmy Lyons memories?

KB: He was a real strict jazz guy. He knew Bud [Powell], Elmo [Hope] and Monk when he was a kid and teenager. His mother moved to the Bronx to get away from the drugs in Harlem. He lived in the same building as a woman named Fern Daley who had a grand piano in her apartment and all those guys, plus others including Sonny Rollins, would come to play at her place. Bud and Elmo would also come over to his apartment because his mother had a little spinet piano until one day, they were crazy Bud and Elmo, you know, so one of them hit on her. I don’t know which one but they said, “Come on, let’s get naked and dance!” [Laughs] His mother was very prim and proper and she said, “Okay, out! Get out and don’t you ever darken my doorstep again!” Jimmy didn’t tell me that story for a long time. Jimmy had a certain thing ingrained in him, a strictness he learned from spending time with these older musicians. When he went to play with Cecil, Bud and Elmo would not speak to him again. He said one day he was walking down the street and Elmo purposely went to the other side of the street to not cross his path. I felt so bad for him when he told me that story. One time we went down to hear Jackie “Mac” [McLean] at the Five Spot. Jackie came off the stand and said, “Oh, hi Jimmy,” and he walked away. The older guys were pissed off at Jimmy. Jimmy was a taskmaster at anything he did. He was very neat, neat, neat. If you saw his manuscript it had perfect penmanship, his notation looked pretty. When we bought the house, it was a two-sided coin for him because it took time away from music but he loved doing the kind of work to make the house look better like plastering and painting and sawing boards. I remember the time we actually took a vacation. It was after he had been on the road for a while and before he had to have an enormous amount of work done on his teeth. I said, ‘Let’s go and just hang out in Long Island and go fishing and swimming.’ And he said, “What? Fishing and swimming?” Cecil was there and said, “Huh, Jimmy? You’re going on a vacation?” [Laughs] Because musicians never go on a vacation. I mean, it’s always there. You are never anywhere where the music is not, even if no concerts are happening. It’s always there, you hear it in the waves or the elevator going up and down. So we went out to Montauk and we got this little cabin and the not nice part of it was there was a little prejudice out there. I had made arrangements ahead of time and sent the money. We got there and they looked at the two of us and they said, “Oh no, there was a mistake. We’re very sorry.” At that time I didn’t realize about this whole black and white thing. To me it never made a difference. So we’re out in Montauk with no place to stay. We finally found a place of a guy who loved jazz and he let us have a cabin and gave us fishing gear. I ended up finding what looked to be a really private part of the beach but we had to crawl over all these rocks to get down there while holding our horns. The beach was blocked off at both ends by a whole bunch of rocks going up the cliff. We were there playing and having a good old time until we started hearing this sound, this low sound that scared the shit out of Jimmy. We had to scamper back up the rocks before the high tide came in. He later told Cecil that he didn’t want to go down there but when we went fishing and he started catching so many fish, oh man, you couldn’t stop him.

“At the time I didn’t realize that [my career] was getting ready to take off and I became disheartened. I kept practicing and playing and I was always doing something. I was still in the music but I wasn’t doing it as much as I should have to take care of business.”

JI: You played in Jimmy Lyons’ band for twelve years, until his death in 1986. Would you talk about those European tours with him?

KB: Those were really nice, they treated us like kings and queens in Europe. It’s part of their culture to enjoy music and view it as art. It was my first time in Europe so I was so excited. Jay Oliver and Paul Murphy were with us. In Amsterdam we’re on the stage at Bimhuis, Jimmy came out and said, “Something’s wrong with my horn.” so I told him, ‘Go backstage and fix it because I cannot play these heads at this speed if there’s something wrong with your horn. It’s that key there, you’ve fixed it before! Go back and fix it!’ Another time in Moers, as we were finishing the set, a strong wind came and blew all my music off the stand and out into the audience and I thought, ‘Oh no, it’s gone,’ but then all of a sudden, the music was coming back to me. They were handing it from person to person all back to me. They showed great respect.

JI: How did Jimmy’s leadership style differ from that of Cecil?

KB: Jimmy gave more specific directions whereas Cecil, it would have to be more extreme for him to jump in and correct you. He would just do something different and get you going in a different direction and hope it would work out. Cecil was more of an educator and Jimmy was more of, “I don’t know why you don’t know how to do this, it’s so simple,” type of guy.

JI: As you mentioned, Jimmy Lyons’ close association with Cecil Taylor led other artists not to call him for work and he certainly never got the recognition that his talent deserved. Did he talk about that to you?

KB: Yeah, and he’d feel really bad about it. He talked to me about it but this had been happening since the ‘60s when he went with Cecil. He didn’t say too much about it but there was always that thing there where he was frustrated about not being appreciated for what he was doing and what he was doing was so incredible. He was pretty much ignored by the press. In the late ‘70s, the Village Voice wrote about his quartet and said that I was “the perfect foil” for him and Jimmy said, “Yeah, foiled again.” He was really frustrated when he’d see these younger guys pushed up like great artists while he was labeled as a sideman. Some people thought that way but you’re talking about Andrew Cyrille and Jimmy Lyons! Get out of here.

JI: There were long stretches of time that Cecil did not have work. What did Jimmy do then?

KB: He was working in the post office and he got his Social Security in order. It’s a shame that these people stopped calling him for gigs, he could have done both. He had his own apartment down in the Village. At one point they hadn’t worked in a long time and he saved up a bunch of money and he was gonna go to Europe by himself but then all of a sudden Cecil came up with a gig so he didn’t do that.

JI: What happened with you in New York immediately after Jimmy died in 1986 and you were on your own?

KB: I had already been teaching in the public schools before that. I was working at the Village Voice for a while but I had a teacher’s license so I was substituting until things looked like Jimmy was getting more gigs so I moved away from (Continued on page 26)
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(Continued from page 25)

teaching. After he passed away, I went back to teaching but that has always been sort of frustrating for me because that’s not my cup of tea, telling people to stay in precise places. But kids are kids and if you’re gonna have a whole room of them together they’re gonna go crazy if you don’t lay some rules down. I wouldn’t let them mess around because I know there could be blood on the floor. There was blood on the floor in many of my classes because, although I have a degree, I’m not into bogarting kids much. It was tough for me. I’d go teach and come home and not be able to practice because I was so wound up.

Ji: There was blood on the floor of your classrooms?

KB: Oh, yeah, for lack of keeping them in order, for lack of cracking the whip. Whatever it was, kids are always gonna fight. I don’t know how the other teachers did it but my classes, it was blood on the floor a couple of times. Yeah, black eye, broken tooth in the play yard. One time they tried to take me out with a basketball but I saw it coming right at me. They thought it was fun but it’s a good thing I have quick reflexes.

Ji: Talk about the bands you led in New York

KB: There were some really nice groups. The first things were communal groups including a group with Jeff Hoyer, Susan Feiner and Jackson Krall. We’d get together once a week, work out and play. At that time there were a lot more places to get gigs. You would make up your flyers, advertise, and see if anybody would come. There were so many little places you could play it was almost like 52nd Street. I don’t know how I decided I wanted to have a quartet on my own but I did. I was starting to write more on my own and the first band was with Paul Murphy and his wife at the time, pianist Mary Anne Driscoll, and bassist Jay Oliver. When the Knitting Factory came along you could always get a gig there. You could also always get a gig at Soundscape. Verna Gillis was very good, you could get a gig there even if only two people showed up at your gig the last time.

Ji: What has life brought you over the past 25 years?

KB: After I went to Europe with my own band in ’98, it was really exciting because people started calling me to do more things here when they saw I had played the Berlin Jazz Festival. Cadence wanted to put out a number of my records but I’m not a business person. I’m better at doing things for other people. In the past I had put things together for Jimmy, getting him grants, setting up his gigs in Europe. That wasn’t as hard as to take care of my own business. After that European tour, going to Berlin, things started to trickle in here but my living situation was tenuous. I had to move around a bit. I don’t want to go into the whole thing about the sale of our house, which didn’t go well. It wasn’t that people stopped asking me to play. My making reeds didn’t continue as it should. At the time I didn’t realize that [my career] was getting ready to take off and I became disheartened. I kept practicing and playing and I was always doing something. I was still in the music but I wasn’t doing it as much as I should have to take care of business.

Ji: Why have you never recorded as a leader?

KB: I have tapes of my bands but I haven’t released them. For some reason, to do things for my own stuff is just very difficult. I was offered to put out four or four recordings but they weren’t going to give me any money, just CDs, and what I didn’t know at the time was that a lot of people were doing that. They were taking CDs as payment. I was thinking how am I gonna pay these people in the band? I should have spoken with other people but I didn’t. Shit! This could have happened in 1999 and I would have had my own records out. I still have the tapes and it’s incredible music.

Ji: What do you have to say about being a female playing in jazz bands from the ‘70s and on?

KB: Every once in a while I’d run into somebody who’d have a problem about women musicians but it was rare from other musicians that a guy would just treat me really poorly. It did happen but I didn’t think too much of it at the time that I was in the minority. There are a lot more women doing it now and they’re really on top of it.

Ji: You didn’t have problems with musicians coming on to you?

KB: Yeah, that happened sometimes but I could tell them to get out of here. It happened and not necessarily in groups that I was playing with. I’d go out to hear somebody playing and they’d get the wrong idea. They weren’t used to seeing women on the scene and they figured it must be a groupie. I don’t remember having problems with musicians that I was playing with in the same band.

Ji: You’ve played in settings of all women. You played in an all-women’s band in Europe which included Irene Schweitzer, Joëlle Léandre and Maggie Nichols in Portugal. Do you perceive there to be a significant difference when performing with all women versus all men?

KB: Actually, no. I guess sometimes men in their music can sound macho, if there is such a thing as macho. I don’t perceive that much of a difference. We’re talking about a creative process here which I don’t think is within any physical boundary.

Ji: In our communications leading up to this interview, you mentioned wanting to talk about the importance of keeping improvisation and composition in free jazz and the need to keep avant-garde jazz on the edge.

KB: I should explain what I mean by “the edge.” The thing about this music that keeps it moving forward is that it has naturally evolved and changed over time – from the pre-nineteen-hundreds and the field hollers, from ragtime and Dixieland to Swing, it’s kept evolving. This is what it’s supposed to do, especially in improvisatory music. If you get too comfortable in doing a thing, you can get lazy because that is always going to work, whereas if you’re on the edge, you’ll be out there and it won’t work and it’s not a comfortable feeling but new things do develop by you doing that, by taking those chances. For me the edge is that point that you jump into the unknown. I term free jazz to be music that’s produced without any written charts. To do that really well, you have to be playing with people for a while and establish a rapport. It doesn’t

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26 January-February 2018 • Jazz Inside Magazine • www.JazzInsideMagazine.com

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always work. You can hit a wall. Sometimes it works one time but not the next and you’ll learn something from that.

**JI:** I’d like to give you some names and see what memories you have. How about Bill Dixon?

**KB:** It was an honor to play in his bands. He was another really central force in this music. He was very compositionally oriented. He was very into chord changes when he first came on the scene. He went up and asked Bird at one time something and Bird said, “Just play it man, don’t worry about that change.” He was a conversationalist. Part of his rehearsals or sometimes afterwards, would be him telling stories, which was very enjoyable. He was also a taskmaster. He wrote these things and he wanted them played to plan. He liked working with big groups as well. He came with a set of values – personally and musically – like most of the great guys.

**JI:** Drummer Andrew Cyrille?

**KB:** He’s such a sweet guy and an incredible musician. He can play with anyone. When we were at Antioch, he brought in his pieces too. He’s right there in the center of what’s happening in the music. His apartment was across the hall from my apartment in Antioch and there was this big, long stairway going down to the street and one day my five-year-old son, Jerry, who used to like to go down to the neighborhood Yellow Gulch Saloon and watch people play pool, he got out of the house and I didn’t realize it. It was early in the morning and I hear this car — Screech! And then I hear my kid screaming! I went down those really long stairs in three jumps somehow in my mini sleep wear and I get out there and he hadn’t been hit, thank God. He jumped backwards and hit his lip on the curb and he was crying up a storm. Andrew came out and said, “You made it down the stairs okay, huh?” And he was very calm and he drove me to the hospital with Jerry. We were very close and he’s a very compassionate man but on the bandstand, don’t fuck with Andrew Cyrille because he can do anything.

**JI:** Bassist William Parker?

**KB:** William was one of the first people I saw when I came to New York. He was in Cecil’s band at Carnegie Hall. I didn’t realize what a central figure he was, how he gathered musicians around him. William is the more the better, let’s all do this, and he has a belief, like many musicians do, that this music is a healing force. William lives by that and he’s all about music, music, music. He does it all — poetry.

**JI:** Trumpeter Raphe Malik?

**KB:** Another perfectionist. When he and Jimmy were playing together, they would always be challenging each other to see who could play it faster. And he’d always be bemoaning the fact that he only had three keys on trumpet because if he had more keys, he could go faster. He was a great technician and he could talk a mile a minute for hours and hours. He could be annoying at times. [laughs] He was an incredible musician.

**JI:** Saxophonist Glenn Spearman?

**KB:** Glenn was an earthy kind of a guy. He loved Frank Wright and, of course, Albert Ayler. He hung out with Frank in Europe. He was all music, all the time. When he was in Cecil's band for a few years, and I had been in it for years and years, he heard me play one thing that Cecil had given out notes for and I had elaborated on it and it came out sort of how Cecil would elaborate and he looked over at me like, “Oh, man, how’d she do that?” He was another really nice guy and very honored to play with Cecil in the Unit.

**Ji:** When I contacted you to do this interview, you noted that you weren’t checking your emails because you’ve, “Been bombarded by political stuff because of some of the activities I got involved in.” Do you care to talk about what you were up to?

**KB:** I did not think that Trump was gonna get elected but other people thought it was inevitable. When Nixon did his thing I said, ‘Oh, bad, but what can I do about it?’ But Trump actually got elected? I started reading political stuff and I gave a few dollars to political causes such as stopping the Muslim ban but once you do that... Signing petitions, that’s the worst thing you can do, although you feel really good doing it. I’ve finally realized that all these nasty people are running our country and I suddenly became active, giving a little bit of money. I signed petitions online and now my email is bombarded from different sources, they’re not even the ones I gave money to. Once they see that you’ve given, they are all over you and it doesn’t help to there and when I tried to use that bank, man, you could smell it in the air. For them to tell those workers the air was fine, that was not cool. I didn’t want to go in to view the center of the thing. I didn’t want to be running across any arms and legs. It was enough for me, after I finally looked at a television to see these people leaping off the building. And then the music stopped, right after that. There was a real big hull and you just felt so terrible. With that, the whole world had changed. I’d compare it to Hiroshima or Pearl Harbor.

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

**Bobby Zankel (sax) said: “What you did on some of those recordings is just incredible. How did you have the audacity to play the bassoon as fast as Jimmy Lyons?”**

**KB:** [laughs] Because if I didn’t, I would be left in the wind, behind the whole band. Jimmy was the fastest. I would have to be skipping notes. At a certain point I said, ‘As long as I keep up with him rhythmically and melodically, the main thing is if he’s gonna set that tempo, I’ve got to be there.’ And that’s one thing all the beboppers always said – “The new guys coming in, they’re dragging the tempo, dragging the tempo,” so that’s like the worst thing you could do with somebody who came up in that tradition. I’ve
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known Bobby from the beginning of this music in Wisconsin, so thanks Bobby. Audacity, huh? Well, you better have it or you ain’t gonna be playing this music.

Gunter Hampel (multi-instrument) asked: “How should someone who plays your instrument, go about getting into jazz? Where can they learn and what should they listen to?”

KB: First you have to hang out with jazz musicians. There are more centers now including what Gunter is doing in Germany and around the world. Since there aren’t a lot of people to teach the bassoon in this music, the main thing is to get into a setting where they can play this music. Just go there and play with the other people. There was one time that Bill Dixon was teaching at the University of Wisconsin when I went back to visit and so I sat down with the group to join in and the violin player next to me was just sitting there. He wasn’t playing a note and I asked him, ‘Are you waiting for him to give you a note?’ He said, ‘Yeah.’ I said, ‘Just pick anything. Get in there and do it. He’s not gonna take your head off.’ There are rules but you just gotta go in there, you gotta be in it to learn it. You could learn it by playing along with records like a lot of people have done on other instruments but you have to go where people are doing jazz. If they don’t like you, find another group and insist on getting some notes. I never had to ask for notes.

Dave Sewelson (saxophone) asked: “When did you have the best reed you ever had. I certainly remember mine and I’m sure you remember yours.”

KB: Yeah, I do actually. Dave, how did you know that? It was in a gig I did with Jimmy’s quartet and I had this reed I wasn’t using because I was afraid it was too good and it would be too overpowering with the way the mics were set up. If I were to switch to that reed it would put me even more out front. But I was backstage and somebody asked me how my reeds were and, for a change, I was saying, ‘Yeah, I got a good one here. It’s so good, I’m afraid to use it.’ They said, ‘Ah, go ahead and use it.’ That was around ’82 at Soundscape. The house was packed and it was recorded but never came out. Afterwards, I told Jimmy I used that reed and he said, ‘Yeah, I know you did.’” [Laughs] Because it changed the balance of the sound. That reed just did everything. It had a real edge to it and you could do anything. It had more gusto. You can never tell, even if you leave the wood on the reed in all the right places, each piece of cane is different. They have machines now that can duplicate your favorite reed but it doesn’t work that way since the threads of the reeds are all different. I used to have a whole drawer of reeds so that when I laid off the reed making, I had reeds to last for years, which you’re not supposed to do. I haven’t had a special reed for years but he’s inspired me to work on that.

Jemeel Mondoc (saxophone) said: “When I went to visit Jimmy and you up in the Bronx, the two of you were always practicing. Could you tell us something about Jimmy’s practice regimen and his influence on you?”

KB: Jimmy practiced a lot. A lot, a lot, every day without exception. If you didn’t hear him practicing one day, you’d think he was sick. My son came to visit in the summers, for a while he was staying with my mother, and once Jimmy was down in the dumps because a gig that we thought was coming through didn’t come through, and then a gig he thought he had with Cecil didn’t come through, so one day he actually didn’t practice very much. And my son asked, “What’s wrong with Jimmy? Why isn’t he practicing?” Jimmy had just as much joy in practicing as he did in performing. He practiced every day, at least two or three hours. I was used to doing that myself, and since we were in the same house, I didn’t want to distract him and likewise, so we’d try to get in our own space. I also love to practice, it makes me feel more alive, and maybe I practice more because of him. He also influenced me in that I sometimes saw him technically doing things that I hadn’t thought of. We reinforced each other.

JI: Jimmy has been gone for so long, it must seem like a lifetime ago to you.

KB: Shit, it’s thirty years! In a way, it doesn’t seem like that but that’s a long time. He really got screwed. He was ready to become really, really famous, I think. Not that he wasn’t already famous, but recognized in his own thing. So many people looked upon him as Cecil’s sideman, whereas it wasn’t like that. It was like Duke and Johny Hodges and Duke and Billy Strayhorn. He died really young, right before it finally was gonna happen for him. He was in the hospital for a lung operation before I even met him. It was very, very serious. His lung was going to collapse from a congenital bleb and they had to go in there and cut ribs to get rid of that. It took him a long time to recover. I met him shortly after that. He came to a party at Cecil’s and I was wondering why he was walking a little stiff. He said when he was in the hospital he would go into a room and smoke his cigarette and the doctor came past and yelled at him – “You just went through this serious operation on your lung and you’re sitting here smoking a cigarette!” He didn’t take care of himself a lot. He was as mindful about his health as I am about my business.

Paul Murphy (drum) asked: “What did you think about playing at Le Drehler, the jazz club in Paris, a long time ago?”

KB: That was incredible, we were all flying. You couldn’t repeat that experience. It was very unusual for a jazz group to get a gig in one place on tour for ten days. It was right across the bridge from the Notre-Dame and up the street from the Louvre. It was flying, tempo-wise – fast, fast, fast. As fast as Jimmy could go, Paul Murphy was right there, right there! And this group with Murph and Jay Oliver had been together for a while. Murphy and Oliver had to share a room and Murphy was not happy about it – “I’m not gonna sleep with any man!” He put the mattress down on the floor and the hotel was complaining that he was sleeping on the floor. But on the bandstand, man, that shit was flying. The record that came out on Hat Hut [Riffs] was only a small part of it. I don’t even think it was the best of our playing. Jimmy was surprised when we got there and he saw a big poster advertising the band. “Oh, I didn’t know they were going to have all that for me,” because he was used to not being recognized. This was only our second time in Europe with his band.

Paul Murphy also asked: “When did you put the peace sign on your bassoon?”

KB: I think it was the late ’60s, after I had come back from studying with Arthur Weisberg in New York. I went back to Wisconsin to do my degree. I had taken a vacation from the bassoon for a while in the interim and I was really not happy with my reeds and my playing. Viet Nam was happening and I just started carving with my reed knife into the maple wood of the bassoon because I was frustrated with my playing and the war. It’s carved so I couldn’t get rid of it and I had to put the black ink over it so it didn’t pop out that much. People kept noticing that thing and it was upsetting them. They’d say, “Oh, what did you do? My God, how could you do that to a bassoon?” I carved it when people were talking about going up to Canada to get out of the war. I mean, Jesus, when are we gonna get this shit together? It seems so simple when the Dalai Lama explains it.

JI: Final thoughts?

KB: I’m just really grateful to have a life in music and to have known the musicians I’ve known. I can’t imagine what I’d be doing right now if I wasn’t playing music, it really would be a sad state of affairs. If I wasn’t playing music I probably would be a much more negative person than I am. What would people do without art and music? This place would have been burnt to a crisp by now.

As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.

- Henry David Thoreau
Jaleel Shaw

Hear Jaleel and Steve Wilson at
Jazz Standard
February 20-21

© Eric Nemeyer
Art Blakey
His Life & Music — Part 2

Already a legend by the 1940’s, Coleman Hawkins was one of the first American jazzmen to take residence in Europe. After some fruitful years there he returned to the states for World War II, went back for a lengthy tour in the late ‘Forties, and repatriated for good in 1950. His first session back in America was made for Royal Roost on August 5, in a quintet with Art, a young Billy Taylor, Percy Heath on bass, and the guitarist John Collins. Now part of the compilation Coleman Hawkins 1947-50, the band forms a quiet stream, on which Hawkins sails with vibrato and strength. Art is barely heard; the beat is carried by Collins, a simple comp bolstered by Taylor’s chords.

“You’ve Got Me Crying” lives up to its name, Hawk drawing the theme in calm surroundings. Collins’ harmonies are subtle but sweet, inspiring the leader’s emotion… lament never sounded this good. The tiniest brushes adorn “Can Anyone Explain?”, and Hawkins babbles, almost as an alto would. Piano and guitar are now independent, trading comments while the saxophone coos. (To paraphrase a record producer: “He could play a tune once and make you think he wrote it.”) John’s solo is delicate and too short; Hawk comes back for the finish, which he plays like “As Time Goes By”! No doubt, his talent defies explanation.

“I Cross My Fingers” is a carbon copy of the last tune: lovely to be sure, but we’ve heard this before. Billy gets a nice spot, where carefully placed notes radiate in a pool of echo. “I’ll Know” eases up on the vibrato, but the emotion stays rich. It is centered on Heath, whose deep bounce seems like a heartbeat; Hawk answers with sleek double-time, and Taylor wraps it in a gossamer flourish. Lightweight but lovely, this session finds Hawkins at his gentle best; the next time he’d record with Blakey, the circumstances would be more intense, and even more lovely.

December 15 would bring another date with Sonny Stitt; two tunes were recorded, both of which would appear on the Kaleidoscope album. Completing the band were Eugene “The Senator” Wright, later to play bass for Dave Brubeck, and Junior Mance, an underrated pianist with a bluesy approach. “Imagination” finds Sonny on alto, slithering fast and avoiding ties to Parker. (If anything, he sounds like Johnny Griffin here.) Blakey is almost invisible, confined to gentle taps buried beneath Wright’s walk. There’s a feathery comp from Mance, but otherwise this is all Sonny – perhaps the best ever assembled – consisted of Dizzy, Miles Davis, Fats Navarro, Kenny Dorham, and Red Rodney! (Sadly, this band only played once; even more sadly, no recordings appear to exist.)

Other gigs at Birdland included two dates with Dinah Washington, now included in the compilation Queen of the Jukebox “Live” 1948-1955. The first session, from January 13, 1951, gives Dinah the trio of Blakey, Percy Heath, and Wynton Kelly at the start of his professional career. “I’ll Never Be Free” finds the singer in a splendid mood; the harrowing words, which most singers take as a dirge, are flunted, like a badge of honor. Kelly surrounds her in barroom elegance, while Art stays quiet on brushes. She’s girlish on “I Cross My Fingers”, absolutely thrilled at what the lyric implies – like a gutsier version of Ella. Wynton’s flamboyance is everywhere, bursting with happy choruses; it’s a wonderful comp, but it silences the rest of the band. (This is not Kelly’s fault – the music comes from a portable wire recorder, making it sound a little fuzzy.)

“Harbor Lights” is a triumph: Washington pleads in her brightest voice, while Kelly alternates between stride and block chords. Wynton appears to be her only accompaniment, and it’s all she needs. “Only a Moment Ago”, a trifle of a song, becomes poetry in her hands, as Heath provides a stately walk. Wynton is heard sparingly this time, in a few lush choruses; Art is either quiet or absent. Another set with Dinah, made the following week, offers three songs: “I Wanna Be Loved”, where she smiles through the witty lyric; “My Heart Cries for You”, where the voice transcends a mediocre score, and “Time Out for Tears”, a smoky break-up punctuated with boogie lines. Blakey shouts on this number, but the focus is on Kelly, whose surge in tempo perks Dinah’s interest, as well as ours.

His first major job in a jazz context, Wynton is fascinating here: while feeding chords and staying out of the singer’s way, elements of his later style keep peeking through, the same lusciousness adored by Miles and others. While a minor footnote in Blakey’s career, the Washington session form a big chapter in Kelly’s, as an important voice gets its first hearing.

The next session is a matter of speculation: a January 31 outing for Sonny Stitt including Eugene Wright and Charlie Bateman. While the album credits for Kaleidoscope list Teddy Stewart as the drummer, a reliable discography gives Blakey the honors. No style is discernable on “Can’t We Be Friends”: a slow-tapping cymbal, this could be any drummer. The horn is sleek and ambles through the theme; his solo is more aggressive but the sweetness remains. Almost with a clarinet’s tone he whistles happily on, ending with a sharp, eye-opening tag.

“Liza” is closer to form, Stitt pushing strong over Bateman’s rumbling comp. The drumming does sound like Art: thick steady cymbals, punctuated by irregular thuds. Wright is front and center, giving a tuneful, woody bounce – the drum exchanges are austere by Blakey’s standards, using more silence than is his wont. The first of these breaks – a tight snare roll followed but one note on bass drum and a lone cymbal – is almost tentative, something I’d never say about Blakey. While the tunes here are good (as they are for the whole of Kaleidoscope), my verdict on Art’s participation would be “possible, but not conclusive”. Stitt would finish the album the next day, with Teddy Stewart at the drums; the next time he recorded with Art, over a decade had passed.

Blakey had a strong friendship with Dizzy Gillespie, one that lasted many years. Dizzy and Art had much in common: they relished the role of bandleader, were avid scouts of new talent, and
were competitive as anything. Because of their breakneck schedules, they rarely got the chance to record together; an exception was made on April 16, on a session produced by Dave Usher. This was made under the auspices of Dee-Gee Records, a label owned by Usher and Dizzy. Coming after the demise of his trailblazing big band, these tracks lack ambition but are laden with power.

This session had three songs, with singers added as needed: the horns included Budd and J.J. Johnson, with a rhythm section composed of Milt Jackson, Percy Heath, and Art. He gets “The Champ” off to a cracking start, working cymbals as Budd takes the theme. Milt and Dizzy join him at the second chorus, and it’s Bags who gets the opening solo: fast, rhythmic, adventuresome. He gets uncredited help at the piano: it could be Usher or one of the singers, since it’s just a single chord banged over and over.

Budd starts a nice riff on this solo, and varies it on Dizzy’s: sharp zigzags rising to the sky, with a little tang on the trumpet. According to the cred-

- John Maxwell

A bigger date – both in size and stature – involved Miles Davis at Birdland on June 2. The session comprised Kenny Drew and Tommy Potter, both familiar to Blakey; the supporting horns were J. J. Johnson and a young Sonny Rollins. A professional for only three years, this appears to be Sonny’s first recording with Miles, released on Miles Davis: Complete Birdland Recordings.

Art Blakey

“Blakey had a strong friendship with Dizzy Gillespie, one that lasted many years. Dizzy and Art had much in common: they relished the role of bandleader, were avid scouts of new talent, and were competitive as anything. Because of their breakneck schedules, they rarely got the chance to record together…”

Fists, Milt mans the piano at the end of his vibes solo; it’s certainly more accomplished than the comp he received. Meanwhile, Dizzy keeps moving: staccato notes on his fifth chorus, ecstatic screaming on the sixth, and then we get J. J., whom we haven’t heard yet. Calmer than his norm, his notes are smooth, rounded, and clustered in a whooping sequence.

Behind him Art is restless, and Bags’ piano is more than adequate. The horn riff is modified again, this time with Diz joining in – the sound is a little off, as if they’re playing in another room. Budd’s solo is less creative than his riffing; he hangs on one note for the better part of two choruses! In time he gets moving, in the mold of Gene Ammons; this is followed by his trademark, an ornate fluttering trill. (Hear Dizzy shout “Yeah!” behind him.) And then he starts walking the bar, a honk that starts like Illinois Jacquet … and ends like “Mighty” Joe Houston! The least known of the players makes the most interesting solo – some things are worth waiting for.

The two vocals on this session offer different voices, and different temperaments. Bold hand-
pouncing off the rhythm; Thelonious reacts to him, with Sahib along for the ride. The vibes sound brittle here, as tight notes reflect the slightest vibra-
to. Sahib swagger, tenor-like as he slides down a backdrop of cymbals and rainy chords. Monk’s solo is marvelously realized: all aspects of his style in equal proportion, and not a note wasted. An alternate take finds Milt on center stage: his solo is good but quiet in places, which may have insured its rejection.

A fresh stab at “Eronel” gives all attention to the alto, heard as sweet as Sahib can make it. Milt is present but does little; mostly he decorates the ensembles. Thelonious is more busy than usual, and more conventional … it’s a reprise of the theme, with slight variations. “Straight, No Chaser” begins with Art – atmospheric as a silent movie. Papa Jo’s hi-hat routine is interrupted by fierce rimshots, a series of ride cymbals, and the leader’s acidic piano.

The theme enters with caution, and Monk develops his solo with sinusous turns, ending with a few bars of “Misterioso”. Sahib answers by quoting “Kerry Dance”, giving his notes a Hawkins lilt. Milt tries a softer tack as he hovers, leaving a trail of sweet glassy notes. Blame the 78 format and its forced brevity; had they played a minute longer, these ideas would be better explored. “Ask Me Why” is almost a cocktail piece, its theme played in slick octaves with discord at a minimum. The horns stay home and McKibbon is barely heard – in essence, a duet, with Art’s brushes guiding the passionate keys. The alternate is more thorny, but the idea is still there.

After a laconic intro by Monk, “Willow Weep for Me” is entirely Bags, from the gentle theme to the bluesy bridge. The strikes are hard, the vibrato slight, and the quote of “Swingin’ on a Star” is fun. Monk is strictly a sideman, playing conventional (and intermittent) chords; Art creeps behind with a brush, and that is all. A vast improvement on the ‘47 sides, sales were still disappointing; Monk would have more session for Blue Note before being dropped by the label. The pianist would find work at other labels, and Art would be around to help.

When Art returned to Birdland on September 29, he found himself in another sextet with Miles Davis, this one markedly different from the last. In June, Miles blew tough while his partners were reticent; here the band is super-competitive …

Miles gets sassy: high notes are slurred, and the others follow meekly. Lockjaw’s tone is subdued (like a bass harmonica in places) but his attack remains strong, angling through Taylor’s warm comp. Getting tough on his last chorus, he hands off to Nicholas, whose tone is a match for Lock-

“Go! Go!” … and you will agree. The torch goes to Big Nick Nicholas, who starts in calm contemplation – for ten seconds, anyway. Soon he’s burning up the track, in a tone similar to Lockjaw’s, and then they joust for a while. The exchanges shrink to two bars, Miles interrupts with blistering phrases, and Art’s interjections are different every time. As advertised, this one moves, and the applause could go on forever.

“The Squirrel” comes from the soft side, with big chords from Taylor and quiet reaction from Miles. His playful solo does much with silence: disparate phrases seem connected, thanks to the pauses. (In a way it’s like lacework: the pattern comes not from the material but from its absence.) Mingus makes himself known with an expansive walk; Art remains in the background, whisking a light cymbal. After a few lighthearted choruses, the tormented figure goes guttural, bubbling with a sharp horn riff …

ALTERNATE CHORDS

When Art returned to Birdland on September 29, he found himself in another sextet with Miles Davis, this one markedly different from the last. In June, Miles blew tough while his partners were reticent; here the band is super-competitive …

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(Continued from page 31)

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Art Blakey

sent were the pianist Walter Bishop, Sonny Rollins, and (for some of the tracks) Jackie McLean. This was among the first Davis sessions planned for 10-inch LP, The New Sounds; seven songs were recorded, though only four appeared on the album. “It’s Only a Paper Moon” gets the soft treatment, its theme discarded within the first minute. With buoyant chords behind him, Davis ruminates: the phrases are short, the texture is feathery. While the notes are distinct and the attack fairly hard, the effect is fragile, introspective – early steps toward Miles “quiet” style.

Following his turn, Rollins tries the same thing: it’s decent at times, but a squeaking reed gets in the way. (He was using a borrowed tenor from J. R. Montrose, a visitor at the session.) It’s loud, and disrupts the flow of the solo; I don’t know why they didn’t try a retake, unless Miles objected. Everything else is sterling, from Bishop’s comp to the steady march of the cymbals.

“Dig” (called “Dig?” on The New Sounds) is a tangy, irresistible tone; unlike the others, he never strays much from the theme. Miles returns for another solo, calmer than the first; we hear the same quote of “Rhythm-a-ning” he did at Birdland the previous week. Bishop’s comp in this sequence is dreamy – then comes the end, and you’ll do what the title implores.

Miles’ 1949 nonet sessions for Capitol, later compiled as Birth of the Cool, included a tune called “Deception”. A fast number with a rhythmic theme, it was a note-for-note lift of George Shearing’s “Conception”, with only a chord change to differ them. (You might say “Deception” was aptly titled.) Shearing’s publisher threatened a lawsuit, which was averted when Miles offered to record “Conception” on a future album. That album proved to be The New Sounds: both reeds start the theme which is finished by Miles, using the same chart from Birth of the Cool. (The harmonies are still rich, even without the extra horns.) The trumpet bobs along with Walter’s splashy chords; faster and faster he goes, with a delicacy most horns never reach. Sonny’s turn is short and somewhat bland – Bishop’s is springy, but over too soon. This was quickly tossed off, but surprisingly well made.

The disc was completed with “My Old Flame”, a sweet ballad that starts without drums. Miles takes tiny steps, exploring the chord structure more than the melody. Bishop pours on the harmonies, with full advantage of the studio echo; Potter keeps to a simple, sad walk. Sonny does his own weeping, in a short, vibrato-filled moment; a few squeaks are there, but nothing major. Art sits out for the majority of the song, then, during Miles’ second solo, a couple of loud (accidental?) cymbals come out of nowhere. After this, Art picks up the brushes and taps lightly for the last minute. You could call it sloppy … but you must call it beautiful.

When the album was reissued as a 12-inch LP in the mid-’Fifties, several changes were made. The album was retitled Dig, “My Old Flame” and “Conception” were removed from the set (they would later appear on Conception, a various-artists collection), to be replaced by the other three tunes cut at this session.

“Denial” is a happy little mover, clearly based on the chords of “Confirmation”. (As with “Deception”, the title tells the story.) Miles wanders through quickly, spraying dozens of feathery notes. The reeds offer a soaring riff; Bishop’s comp is a straight reading of “Confirmation”. Sonny’s turn is perfunctory, but McLean gets his best solo of the session. Starting high, his notes slither down before rebounding, all rendered with a propulsive kick. Art gets his say on the exchanges, where snares interact with rimshots. Davis’ return solo tops the first, and Blakey concludes with a long roll – no denying this one.

Bishop leans back on the intro to “Bluing”, a slow blues in the mold of “After Hours”. Essentially themeless, Miles makes the first solo by drawling long notes. A leisurely riff bubbles from the saxes, while Miles hovers in the upper register. Gentle, soft-focused, and emotional, this is the tone that would make him a celebrity. Sonny follows, cycling with weathered grace … it sounds like polished copper. Jackie sneaks in mid-phrase, finishing Rollins’ thought in the same tone. McLean would later dismiss much of his work from this period, calling it ill-prepared; such is not the case here. Davis picks up steam near the end, and when Art mis-times the final drumroll, Miles is heard to say “We’ll have to do that again – you know the arrangement!” It’s a cute – and human – moment at the end of a fine performance.

“Out of the Blue” moves gently despite a busy theme; the harmonies on the bridge are rather nice. While credited to Miles, the same melody was called “Evans” by Sonny Rollins; Blakey would record it under that name in 1957. Miles’ first solo asserts itself quietly, with many sidesteps; his second is tougher, climbing fast to the top. In between is a ragged effort from Sonny (quoting “Well, You Needn’t”) and a splashy bit from McLean (throughout the disc, he deserves more solo time than he gets.) While at the time it seemed like “just another session”, the sides from Dig set Miles on the path to his first stylistic change. It also helped launch the career of Sonny Rollins: within a month he’d be cutting first solo album, with the assistance of Mr. Blakey.

By 1952 Zoot Sims had been a professional musician for nearly a decade, and was still known for his time with Woody Herman, as a member of the “Four Brothers” sax section. At first in the image of Lester Young, Zoot would turn aggressive in later years, at times becoming the tenor equivalent of Art Pepper. An example of this was a September 8 session; he was joined on tenor by Al Cohn, in one of their first recordings as a duo. The third horn was Kai Winding, soon to team up with J. J. Johnson; handling the rhythm were George Wallington, Percy Heath, and Blakey.

“The Red Door” finds the tenors in lockstep, as Winding blows some strong counterpoint. Cohn gets the first solo, and bubbling high notes give way to resonant hums at the bottom. (In these low notes you can hear the approach he’d later give to the baritone sax.) Kai follows in a busy, rubberty sequence; Zoot bubbles up high and Art feeds him (Continued on page 35)
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a steady brush-pulse. “Zootcase”, a hyperactive blues, finds its namesake on a two-note riff: the second is the anchor, and the first note flies everywhere. Winding is punchy (he quotes “I’m Gonna Wash That Man!”) and Cohn circles up fast in alto range. Wallington’s solo is mostly one note, turning blue, hammered often – much more interesting than you’d expect. Art has two exchanges, and does well with both: the first is dominated by rimshots, the second with snares. The end is abrupt, but the whole is stimulating.

Cohn is the arranger for “Tangerine”, which gives the theme to Kai as the reeds whistle beside him. Zoot is faster than normal, hitting the high notes in a wistful mood. His style here lies somewhere between Lester Young and Paul Desmond … which is a good place to be. Winding’s bouncy solo gives way to Al’s graceful zigzags, in what may be my favorite solo of the session. And “Morning Fun” is all about the riff, a fun thing on the changes to “I Never Knew”. Al has a good mini-solo on the bridge, while Zoot asserts himself well, sounding like Cohn at times. Wallington stays out of the way; Blakey is mostly light, using a steady diet of cymbals. Al wanders down low, spicing it up with surprising high notes. Kai is absent, and not missed; it’s great hearing these tenors really go at it. In all a solid session, it begins to break Sims away from the Herman mold. (Perhaps inevitably, this session was released on LP with an earlier “Four Brothers”-inspired outing, which was titled The Brothers.)

Vocalise singing was invented by Eddie Jefferson, who wrote lyrics to the tunes of Charlie Parker solos. The first hit in the genre was King Pleasure’s rendition of “Moody’s Mood for Love”; it did well for Prestige but spurred a lawsuit from the publishers of “I’m in the Mood for Love”. Wanting more tunes in this style, the label signed Annie Ross, an actress who was singing the solos of Wardell Gray. Her lyrics were clever, with an added bonus: as Gray’s publishing was controlled by Prestige, no one would be sued. A session was set for New York on October 2, 1952, with an unusual cast: Ram Ramirez (the composer of “Lover Man”) on organ, arranger Teacho Wiltshire on piano, Percy Heath at the bass, and Art with the beat. Four tunes were recorded, issued first on 78s and later on the anthology King Pleasure Sings/ Annie Ross Sings.

Blakey cracks hard on “Twisted”, using Roy Haynes’ intro from the original version. He pours on the cymbals as Annie does her thing: throaty at first, the voice becomes girlish, stunned that anyone could doubt her. (“I knew that he thought! I was crazy but I’m not, oh no!”) Ram hits some big chords but the background is mostly quiet – so you can hear all the jokes, all the witty phrasing. Heath gets a good solo, Art closes with a long roll, and Annie has the last laugh: “Instead of one head? Ha! Ha! Ha! I got two/ And you know two heads are better than one!” When Jon Hendricks and Dave Lambert formed their vocal trio, they hired Annie on the strength of this song – as well they should.

“Farmer’s Market” comes from another Wardell Gray session, on which was featured a young Art Farmer. Fast and incredibly wordy, Ross describes a breathless romance, all over the purchase of beans. Her acting skills are put to good use: after the boy hyps his beans for three choruses, the cynical girl replies “What are you trying to prove with all your talk of beans?/ Yes, I know that they look cray-ZEEE.” Style is more than substance here; Ramirez keeps it pumping, along with the steady drums. George Wallington replaces Wiltshire for the final tracks, which are decidedly more ordinary; “The Time Was Right” is a sad ballad, pleasant but average. And “Annie’s Lament” fits an ethereal wordless vocal with a Latin cymbal riff; it’s a scat, but she sings it like a foreign language. These two are OK, but were clearly meant as B-sides; listen to the Gray tracks, and try to keep from smiling.

Between his two stints for Prestige Records, Miles Davis spent a short and memorable time at Blue Note. Two albums were released, both of sextets; this one, made on April 20, 1953, combines proven veterans (Blakey, Percy Heath, J. J. Johnson) with emerging talent. (Jimmy Heath was fresh from the Gillespie band; pianist Gil Coggins would be known for his work with Jackie McLean.) The charts are taut and the band responding like Rollins. Coggins follows with Bud Powell intonations, and Art keeps driving on. Speaking of Powell, his “Tempus Fugit” takes off like a shot, as tight trumpet notes hit their mark again and again. Art stays simple here, but goes to town on Heath’s solo, booming the toms, wracking the snares, and switching to waltz time for a moment. The tenor surges with strength, but only hear the drums; a rounded solo by J. J. calms Blakey, before a rimshot sends him running again. He also gets a quick solo, a tribal rhythm he’d use on “A Night in Tunisia”. In a way he’s showing off, but he’s also moving everyone forward … the same way he would later lead the Messengers. If you seek the origin of Art’s mature style, you might find it here.

“The Night in Tunisia” is the title was unimaginative … unlike the music.
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