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Feature

David Murray

Reclaiming the Kingdom

Interview & Photos by Ken Weiss
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David Murray
Reclaiming the Kingdom

Interview and photo by Ken Weiss

David Murray (b. February 19, 1955, Oakland, California) remains instantly recognizable on tenor and bass clarinet, partly due to never following the typical pattern of using John Coltrane as the guide and partly due to pure, innate talent. As far back as the ‘80s, Murray was critically acclaimed to be more than the voice of his generation, he was the present and future of jazz, along with Wynton Marsalis. A founding member of the influential World Saxophone Quartet, Murray moved to Paris in ‘96 and collaborated with numerous musicians from all over the globe including Cuba, Africa and Guadeloupe. He moved back to New York City in 2016, although he still maintains residences in Paris and Portugal. This interview took place on June 1, 2017 at a Mexican restaurant near Murray’s Harlem home.

Jazz Inside Magazine: Some may not be aware that you’ve partly moved back to the States in early 2016 after living in Europe for twenty years. Why was it time to return to New York?

David Murray: The fact is, I came here pretty much yearly and played in different clubs for all those 20 years that I was gone. So, although I wasn’t living here, I came here quite often and during the first 10 years I was still recording here so I’d come back maybe every 3 months, still doing my records for Justin Time Records. I came back this time to get a place in Harlem because my wife wanted me to come back and reclaim what was mine. I did a lot of projects in Europe with her, Valerie Malot and [our booking/management/publishing company] 3D Family. For example my Pushkin project that I did with [actor] Avery Brooks. The problem is if you don’t do it in New York, they think you haven’t done anything, but I did that to audiences all over the world. Of course, because I didn’t do it in New York, it’s almost as if it didn’t happen, but it did happen. I went to Guadeloupe and Martinique and I did Creole projects. I’ve had people say that I’d only left to Europe but I’d left jazz. I’ve had people say that while in fact, I was creating jazz, introducing it to different cultures. I was doing something with jazz and trying to build on it with some kind of folk. I was looking for a collaboration from the core of the writing of the music. All the projects I did are jazz because I’m jazz. I’m educated as a jazz musician so everything I’m trying to do is jazz. I don’t see how people can say that about me just because I don’t sit around here and play with the same quartet like everybody else does, that I don’t have my path. I’ve chosen a very individualistic path, a very creative path, and I’m still doing it. I wasn’t standing around for 20 years. I’ve written more music than most people have in several lifetimes. I’ve never been one to be complacent with music.

Jazz Inside Magazine:

David Murray: No, actually it’s been easier than I thought it would be. The fact that I had some help in getting a place to stay was the biggest part. People have been very gracious to me. People are glad to see me come back as evidenced two weeks ago at the Village Vanguard where we sold out every set, every night. They even wrote an article about “The Return of the King.” I thought LeBron [James] was playing or something. I really didn’t understand it but it brought out the people. Gary Giddins was talking about it reminded him when Dexter [Gordon] came back after many years of being away.

David Murray: Well, everybody got scared when Wynton started talking because he had the power behind him of the Lincoln Center. Me, personally, I got tired of him talking bad about my friends and people whose music I admired so I figured somebody had to fight back. I’m sure it cost me a few points but I’ll debate him. I’m not scared of him or whatever he represents. There’s no reason to be afraid, we’re just men.

Jazz Inside Magazine: You’re currently living in Harlem, Paris and Sines, Portugal at the same time. Why have so many spots?

David Murray: I’d like to get more. I’d like to have a place in California, and I would love to have a place in Hawaii, and maybe a spot in Africa and Cuba. It’d be nice, the more places the better. You never get stuck that way. Getting stuck [in one place] is something I’ve always been against. I’m sitting here with you now but maybe I’d really rather be in Paris or Portugal, and I’ll be there soon.

Jazz Inside Magazine: You’ve always made it a point to play in different settings and groupings. As you alluded to earlier, while you were in Europe you collaborated with a wide array of ethnic musicians including artists from Guadeloupe, South Africa, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Cuba and Martinique. How did these performances come together? Did you actively seek them out?

David Murray: Initially, I was working with Valerie Malot and 3D Family, and even before that with Banlieues Bleues, the French jazz festival. We were doing workshops and sometimes the work-
shops turned into collaborations with great musicians like Doudou Ndiaye Rose from Senegal and Klôd Kiavué from Guadeloupe. So these collaborations go on and then people talk and they get familiar with other people’s music and then the proper thing is to do a collaboration, to make a memory of the meeting and the experience of playing together. It’s something to travel to these countries and play in front of their audiences and see what their reaction is to their music that is somehow mixed with this music we call jazz. What does that sound like to them? They like it. It loosens their music up because, quite frankly, when you’re dealing with folk music, it’s the repetition that gets to be a little boring and it needs some kind of spontaneity, which jazz has to offer. Jazz can strengthen it to give it some kind of future. Ornette Coleman used to say it and Blood [Ulmer] even wrote a song about it – “Jazz is the Teacher (Funk is the Preacher).” That means that whatever you mix jazz with, it comes out of a better channel, it gives it more substance.

JI: How did you get involved with so many different ethnic projects?

DM: Valerie was very important in my development over there because she was in contact with a lot of African and ethnic musicians. During this developed an audience for me, a wider audience. If I just played for the people that liked me, I mean, more than half of my audience from the ’70s has died. I can’t rely on them anymore, I’m trying to do like Arthur Blythe and create a world music right inside of jazz, right in America. Maybe there’s more pockets I might have missed right inside of America, like music from the Deep South. May-be there’s some other musics that I can explore. I produced a lot of records for Justin Time records, but you can’t make somebody like somebody else. I look, I turned a lot of people on to my contacts but you can’t make somebody like somebody else. I produced a lot of records for Justin Time and Disc Union, and turned-on a lot of my friends, and I’ve had a lot of things come back saying a lot of bad things about me. But I’ve got thick skin, I can take it.

JI: What world music might you explore next?

DM: I don’t know, something has to hit me over the head. I’m trying to do like Arthur Blythe and create a world music right inside of jazz, right in America. Maybe there’s a lot of African and ethnic musicians. Losing right inside of America, like music from the Deep South. May-be there’s some other musics that I can explore right inside of this country. Everybody wants to come to America so maybe right out here on 116th Street there may be a project for me that will be just as strong as the one in Senegal.

JI: You’re one of the most frequently recorded musician leaders in jazz history. During the ’80s and ’90s you were releasing up to twelve albums yearly. That led to criticism in the press. There were complaints that you were releasing too much and that you were overexposed. That was puzzling because the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics bemoaning the same critics. Bobby Bradford, and several octets that I really wanted to record. I did a Duke Ellington project with James Newton that was a fantastic project but they didn’t want to record that. You know, it’s not my problem, they picked me. When [producer] Bob Thiele died, to me, that was the end of a big career for me in New York. That was the end of the legitimate record dates. People don’t understand that because a lot of these people saying those kind of things about me never had a legitimate record date. I was maybe one of the last to have done that. Now everybody is paying to do their own records. Musicians were angry with me because they asked why producers and record labels picked me. Look, I turned a lot of people on to my contacts but you can’t make somebody like somebody else. I produced a lot of records for Justin Time and Disc Union, and turned-on a lot of my friends, and I’ve had a lot of things come back saying a lot of bad things about me. But I’ve got thick skin, I can take it.

JI: Your release rate has slowed over the past decade. Is there a reason for that?

DM: I probably got lazy or something. Maybe with all these people talking about me. I said that I slowly slowed down because they said something.

JI: Is there a specific number of recordings you aim for to document your work or do you wait to be approached to record?

DM: Oh, I’d like to do a record a day, it be great. Three hundred and sixty-five records a year would be great for me. I love to be in the studio. [Laughs]

JI: Do you want to be approached or do you take the approach that you must document a project?

DM: It comes a lot of ways. People will see something or most times I would convince people that it was their idea and then they do it. When people think it’s their idea, they’re all over it. But my record production has slowed because record companies in general have slowed. I’m not gonna make records just because I want to make them. I make records because there’s finances there to do a record. I have to pay the musicians, not ask them to pay for free like a lot of people do these days. They ask musicians to play on their record and promise them a dinner … I don’t do that, I think that’s ridiculous. If nobody really wants you to record, don’t record.”

“I’m not gonna make records just because I want to make them. I make records because there’s finances there to do a record. I have to pay the musicians, not ask them to pay for free like a lot of people do these days. They ask musicians to play on their record and promise them a dinner … I don’t do that, I think that’s ridiculous. If nobody really wants you to record, don’t record.”

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Macy Grey at the same time that I was working with the guys from The Roots. It was not so much that it was women, it was more that they were popular and appealed to young people, and I think that Valerie wanted to get in on that kind of popularity and at the same time mix it with jazz. I also worked with Omara Portuondo, who was the only woman in the Buena Vista Social Club. She sang in my Nat King Cole Cuban project. We did a beautiful concert at Salle Pleyel in Paris and after that, the band was ready to go to Vegas. We had a slick act that could have been in Vegas the next week and I’m sure if it got to Vegas, it would still be there, even if I left, because it was just done well. It’s not so much that it’s females, because there’s a lot of females in the music now, it’s that I’m an equal opportunity employer. There are women in jazz, all you have to do is point at them instead of pointing at some of the fellas. They’re just as good.

JI: The Perfection recording is named after an Ornette Coleman composition that had never been recorded before. How did you become the one to cover that piece?

DM: Because of Bobby Bradford, he used to be with Ornette at the time of Science Fiction, and actually, he was the one who got Ornette the job as an elevator operator in Bullocks department store in Los Angeles and got him out of Fort Worth. Bobby was very important to Ornette and he was actually playing trumpet with him before Don Cherry. That piece was just something that Bobby wrote out when Ornette was playing. He was playing it over and over and Bobby wrote it out and showed it to Ornette and Bobby just put it away until one day he pulled it out and showed it to me while we were just practicing one day. He said, “Here’s a song that I kinda wrote with Ornette,” and I looked at it and told him I wanted to record it. I actually recorded it before I did it with Geri Allen and Terri Lyne but the critics missed that one. I recorded it on an album called Saxophones where I did compositions of all of my favorite saxophone players, but they missed that because they’re so intelligent. [Laughs]

JI: You performed, along with a cast of many, at Ornette’s final public performance at Brooklyn’s Prospect Park in June of 2014. What was your relationship with Ornette?

DM: I’m a post-Ornette player. Coming up in LA, it was all about Ornette. If you wanted to choose a certain path in music it was either bebop or Ornette, so I chose Ornette because I was around John Carter and Bobby Bradford. I was part of the “out cats,” so it was only natural, I grew up under Arthur Blythe, Stanley Crouch, Dave Baker, James Newton, Butch and Wilbur Morris, that was my crew. We were all post-Ornette people. I was friends with Ornette but it always protected my music and tried to incorporate it into what he’s doing. He’s been playing about ten years, not a long time, but he’s absorbed a lot in ten years of playing. He really helps me in this group Class Struggle to bring a more contemporary sound to what I’m doing already so I rely on him a lot. We are actually co-leaders of this band because he helps me in trying to not be so old fuddy-duddy. We might even put a rapper in there one day. I’m not opposed to that, you gotta get the young people in there some kinda way. Everybody loves guitar and he’s playing the heck out of the blues. I feature him doing a blues number each set and I wish I could get him to sing because he can sing but he doesn’t.

JI: Did you have any reservations regarding your son entering into the music business?

DM: No. You know he was all-American coming out of high school playing point guard and I just wish he had another foot on him because he could run the offense on the Knicks right now. They need a good point guard. I told him I can’t help him with the basketball but I certainly can with the music, and he’s eager and talented as well. Music has been successful for a lot of fathers and sons. I didn’t force him to play music, he had to come to me to do it. When he was young, I bought him a drum set and he would play with me every time I picked up the horn. At that time, I brought people around me like Sunny Murray, Steve McCall, and he would try to imitate every drummer that I played with. He even imitated Eddie Blackwell there for a while. Kids are like sponges, if you leave the door open while you’re practicing, they’ll come in. Now my daughter Crystal is singing and also has a modeling job with the Gucci Gang in Paris. My other son Ruben just won the Boren Scholarship award, which is for language, and he’s going to study international relations in Senegal. All of my kids are quite talented and they’re going to be somebody. I’m very much in their lives, I’m living through them vicariously. I’m very proud of them. I’m very proud of Mingus, he’s very close to me.

JI: You named your son Mingus and you’ve written a composition called “David – Mingus” in the past. Would you talk about your connection with Charles Mingus?

DM: My second wife’s name was Ming and my grandfather’s name was Gus, so we got that going. Of course, I like Charlie Mingus, but he wasn’t the main inspiration for Mingus’ name, I have to say. I love Mingus but that wasn’t the reason.

JI: Unlike many tenor saxophonists of your generation and the generations that followed you, your prominent influences come an era in front of John Coltrane. You’ve acknowledged them to include Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster...

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ster, Don Byas and Paul Gonsalves. Did Coltrane’s playing not resonate as much with you as the other artists mentioned or was it a conscious decision to avoid becoming another of the numerous Coltrane-clones?

DM: When I was growing up, the whole world was studying Coltrane and I didn’t want to sound like that and so I looked at the people that Coltrane studied - Tab Smith, Bird, Coleman Hawkins, even Sonny Rollins. I wanted to have another root of studying. Coltrane’s solos were printed out in those days. It took something more to transcribe solos that weren’t as popular as “Giant Steps” and songs like that. You’d have to go that extra mile to get those guy’s solos off a record, slow it down to 16, hear it an octave lower, and then speed it up and play with it. It took more study to not sound like Coltrane. You had to get it yourself some kinda way. I would wear out records and have to buy them several times. I had to go far to sound the way I sounded. When I met Arthur Blythe, he was like the Coltrane of the West Coast so all I had to do was listen to him because he had it all, even though he was playing alto. I tried to copy him. Getting it off a record is one thing, but it ain’t nothing like getting it first-hand being next to a great player. I mean if you’re standing next to Sonny Rollins, some of it’s gonna wear off.

JI: Have you met other established musicians your age or younger who claim Paul Gonsalves as their guiding light?

DM: Not really, no, I can’t say that I have. There are some good players out there, some young cats who are very studious. You know, Paul Gonsalves was a different kind of guy. I met his son, Paul Jr., when I first got to New York, I gave him saxophone lessons. Imagine me giving his son lessons. He was a nice guy with all these tattoos, a very different kind of guy, a beautiful Cape Verdean guy. He told me stories about his dad and let me play his dad’s saxophone once and I noticed that the mouthpiece was bitten all the way through the metal. He just left it like that. I could hardly play it, I had to use my mouthpiece, but the horn was nice. Sometimes Paul [Sr.] would play and you’d hear that alcohol all up in the sound, man, those cats...He said his father always smelled of alcohol. He said he’d come to his room in the middle of the night with another musician, wake him up and give him a present, and then leave, and then the next morning going to school, he’d smell the alcohol going all the way down the hallway. I’m sure he wanted to have more time with his father but he was always on the road with Duke Ellington. I used to hang around with Jimmy Hamilton and learned a little bit more about Paul Gonsalves through him. He seemed like a real cool guy. They said he was the kind of guy who after a gig in another country, he wouldn’t get on the bus or train, then they’d get to the next gig and here’d be Paul being driven in somebody’s Maserati, sitting in there with champagne or something, waiting for the bus to arrive. Nobody knew how he did that but people really liked him.

DM: I learned that John Cage didn’t talk for about two or three hours, and then he did. It took him a while to even say a word. Oh yeah, I sat with all of them. Cecil Taylor asked me to play with him. I must have played with him for a couple of weeks at his house. He answered his questions that way. Ornette Coleman, I went to his loft and we hung out, shot pool. That took a while too, like over a couple month period. They wouldn’t let me just come there, take information and leave like some student. It wasn’t about that, and I learned that right away. I interviewed a lot of other people like Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden and Don Cherry, a lot of people who were around Ornette. I always had my horn and I remember Dewey Redman said, “Man, put down that pencil and pick up your saxophone. Forget about all that shit. You ain’t gonna learn nothing like that.” And he was right. That’s when I decided I needed to just get into this music and play as much as I could and be part of it, and not be a writer, which I had plans of doing too. Finally, I found myself in the middle of loft jazz. [Multi-instrumentalist] Daniel Carter will tell you that I had it all written down — what I wanted to do in my career but I really didn’t. I was just asking questions.

JI: You caught the end of the loft scene.

DM: I was there and it was happening. If I had gone back to Pomona, like I was supposed to, and finish my schooling, I’d have missed the whole loft jazz thing. I wouldn’t have been able to do it. I started recording, man, in 1976. I have regrets that I didn’t finish because my father would have appreciated that diploma. I did get an honorary diploma and my dad is looking down somewhere.

JI: You ended up living in New York at Second and Bowery with your former Pomona College professor [drummer and future critic] Stanley Crouch, above the Tin Palace, and hosting poetry readings, salons and concerts at your own loft space Sunrise Studio.

DM: Yeah, that was my loft. I got that loft because I sold Jimmy Lyons a brand new saxophone for $800 that a good friend had given me because I rode across the country with him to Ohio. I lived there with Stanley for a few years. There was a poetry/writing session downstairs that happened on Sundays and then it morphed into a jazz series, and then all of a sudden, we’re like the center of the world, man. We were right down the street from Studio Rivbea and Joe Lee Wilson’s place Bond Street. We lived right next door to the Ramones and CBGB’s was there. It was just happening, I couldn’t leave all that. When Stanley lost his job at Pomona he came out east.

JI: How did you decide who was to play at your loft space?

DM: I wanted to have poetry. I gave a few poetry sessions, parties, concerts. Stanley and I put together a duo concert series there and then we did Hamiet Bluiett’s big band in there a couple of times which brought out Swing Journal and all the Japanese came. It was a big deal. Of course, the police came and had to mess everything up like they always do.

JI: Are you saying you did poetry yourself?

DM: No, I was just producing it. I had all my friends that were poets. I had evenings of two great poets. I had Ted Jones and Stanley Reed, a session with Quincy Troupe and Ishmael Reed, and I even had Albert Murray speak there once. I’d put up the flyers and try to get a [Village] Voice choice. It was just something that I was doing. I was doing concerts in a lot of places and I was very good at putting up flyers because I had some skates and a backpack, and guys would stick their flyers in my backpack and I would put up stuff for them since I was already doing it for myself. That’s how I became a star of loft jazz by doing stuff like that. It was just self-determination. I had the energy, I don’t have that kind of energy now, but that was the time to do that. It was about promoting yourself.

JI: Any memories of loft jazz to share? What you saw, how it affected you?

DM: We had a big meeting one time of all the loft-type jazz musicians. We wanted to organize but then we ended up arguing. There was a big argument between Stanley and Muhal Richard Abrams. Everybody was making their power play and I told them that I didn’t agree with neither one of them. I said, “It’s about the young people and we just need to get away from you guys,” and that’s what we did. I wasn’t going to join the AACM [in Chicago] or the BAG [in St. Louis]. I didn’t want to be part of no group, I just wanted to be who I was. In California, we didn’t really have a group like that, we were just individuals. I think that’s why people that came from California might have been somewhat stronger players because we had our own individual selves and not this kind of group thing to
David Murray

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rely on. Arthur Blythe had to be Arthur Blythe and James Newton had to be him. We didn’t need abbreviations to define who we were, the music spoke for itself. You know, different parts of the United States produce different sounds and I think that loft jazz kind of filtered all those places. Loft jazz was important because it brought together all these different regions and gave us a New York camaraderie. We were the Lower East Side guys, the loft jazz guys, the guys on the cutting edge. It was good for that.

JI: The World Saxophone Quartet (WSQ), which you co-founded in 1976, became a huge and influential success.

DM: Oliver [Lake] and I used to play duets and I had played in a couple of Julius [Hemphill’s] groups. I met [Hamiet] Bluiett at the Ted Danials’ Energy Band. We were all downtown cats who thought a lot of themselves.

JI: What was your early experience playing in a saxophone quartet? Had you played in that setting before? Was it a difficult process to organize four horns as a unit?

DM: No, we’d done duets and played with cats who wouldn’t even need a rhythm section to get out there. You didn’t need a full group during that time to play with anybody. You’d just play or play by yourself. I think that was the whole concept of the AACM and the Black Artist Group. They brought that style of not having a whole band and playing anyway, whoever shows up. In California, we used to wait for the bass player all the time. Now it’s not unusual to have a group that lacks a rhythm section.

JI: Fellow WSQ co-founder, Julius Hemphill, left the group in the early ’90s. His influence on other musicians was significant at the time prior to his death in ’95 but he’s rarely mentioned today. Would you share some memories of him?

DM: He is a genius. Julius is just as every bit dynamic as Ornette Coleman, every bit. In fact, I see them as the same, the same level of aptitude, and both being from Fort Worth, I see them together in my mind. As far as people not talking about him, Julius was also Julius. He had his ways. But I never met anybody that could write like that before and play the way he played. He was a greater composer than people like Ornette, and especially as an arranger. Listen to his piece “Long Tongues,” it’s fantastic. He would create plays and theater work. He was extremely creative, on the highest level. He could have ended up in L.A. doing big scores like John Williams had he wanted to. He had all the talent that anyone would want to have in music.

JI: Do you have a memory to share about Julius Hemphill?

DM: We’d get on a plane. He’d always sit in the front, and by time we’d get off the plane, he’d have written a song and our parts. He wrote it in his head. He hadn’t even touched the saxophone, and arranged it in his head, and copied our parts and handed them out to us as we got off the plane. He’d say, “Practice it in the room, we’re going to play it tonight.” That’s one of the most dearest, the most positive things I can say. I can tell you a lot of negative ones. We were drinking buddies.

JI: The WSQ was finally retired recently after forty years. Why did if finally end?

DM: It’s not officially retired. Blueitt’s getting therapy on his hand, he’s had a couple strokes. If he gets sick, we’re sick. I wouldn’t say we’re done because if Blueitt makes it back, we’re back. We can’t have the group without Blueitt, that’s like the Grateful Dead without Jerry Garcia. You can try but it ain’t gonna work. We barely survived without Julius. We got a lot of great players but that alto seat is still never been replaced, never. He was just that great. There’s been a lot of gigs I couldn’t make but I’m not Julius, and I’m not Hamiet Blueitt either. They can replace me but they can’t really them, they are individuals that are so dominant, so strong.

JI: As mentioned earlier, you worked with legendary producer Bob Thiele on a number of recordings. What memories do you have of him?

DM: He never let me do what I really wanted to do and you can tell that by the recordings. He always wanted to do what he wanted to do but he paid me for that. He paid me to do that so, in his case, I had to step back a bit and do the professional thing to do. It changed my music a lot. He’s the only producer that ever touched my music, but he paid for that.

JI: What sort of restrictions did he place on you?

DM: I’ll give you a positive one and then I’ll give you a negative one. He gave me a song that’s called “Blue Piano” that he swears was a Duke Ellington song. He said that Duke had agreed to write a song for him one time and then later he ran into Duke on the street and asked about what that song about Duke. Song said, “Well, come upstairs,” and Duke sat at a piano, wrote the song and gave it to Bob for 500 dollars. At a record date, Bob brought this tune out and I recorded it. So that was a positive thing. The other thing was we did a recording called Jazzosaurus Rex and finished a nice photo shoot but as I was about to go to the booth, a cat jumped out from behind the door and scared me and took a picture. They put that on the album cover. It’s the worst album I ever had. Terrible title, terrible photo, and terrible way to get a photo. I was so pissed but I couldn’t sue the dude. He’d always want to choose my band too. I might be able to choose one guy. He even made me do a record with Teresa Brewer (who was married to Bob Thiele). On that record [Softly I Swing] Grady Tate was her vocalist, Grady Tate didn’t talk to me for the ten hours in the studio. He was in the booth and if he had a question for me he would ask Bob and Bob would ask me the question. So he never even said hello to me. But like I said, Bob paid me for that. So I miss Bob in the worst way. I was supposed to be in the studio doing my sixth recording for Red Baron Records but he went into a coma. I have to say one more good thing about his ass. We were in studio A at Columbia one time doing the album Ming’s Samba. Bob kept going between the booth and the studio, he was having problems. And after two songs, he said, “David have a stomach ache.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Get sick, you’re sick now, right?” I said, “Yeah, I got a stomach ache,’ so Bob ended the session. About a month and a half later, we go back and record Ming’s Samba. He didn’t like the original engineer so that’s why he made me get sick so he wouldn’t have to pay for that studio. Bob taught me a lesson there, an old-school lesson that a lot of cats my age didn’t get. I feel like I’m the missing link in a lot of ways because of stuff like that. I couldn’t say no to Bob because he paid for it and he was a hell of a producer.

JI: It sounds like you experienced a lot through Bob Thiele.

DM: Yes, I met Frank Military (Warner Brothers executive) through him. One time I was up at Military’s office with Teresa and Bob and Frank, and we were about to go to lunch and then here comes (lyricist, songwriter) Sammy Cahn with a tune he’s trying to pitch to Teresa. [In a gravelly voice] “I’ve got a song for you! It’s called “I Want a Big Yellow Boat for Christmas.”” I looked at them and they’re treating him like “Mr. Bubblegum,” or something and I’m like, ‘Hey, that’s Sammy Cahn!’ We got on the elevator and Teresa pressed the button to go down and Sammy Cahn was still talking as we went down. It was like I was in the ’30s all of a sudden. Sammy Cahn was still pitching his tune – “You got to record this, ‘I Want a Big Yellow Boat for Christmas”’ Again, I feel like a missing link, there ain’t many cats that can tell you these stories, but me. And I know I’m gonna hurt a lot of people when I say these things but you can print it because it’s the truth. It’s gonna be in my book anyway.

JI: You’re writing a book?

DM: Oh, yeah, it’s serious. It might be out in a year from now. I’m not gonna say anymore.

JI: You’ve been quite a prolific and skilled composer throughout your career. More so than most other artists, you’ve made it a point to record your original works numerous times in varying group formations.

(Continued on page 20)
Lew Tabackin
Hear Lew at
Dizzy's Club at Jazz At Lincoln Center
March 12 & April 4, 2018

© Eric Nemeyer
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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Thursday, March 1
- Jazzmeia Horn; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Maceo Parker; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Charles McPherson Quartet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Friday, March 2
- Jazzmeia Horn; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Maceo Parker; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Charles McPherson Quartet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Saturday, March 3
- Jazzmeia Horn; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Maceo Parker; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Charles McPherson Quartet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Sunday, March 4
- Jazzmeia Horn; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Maceo Parker; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Charles McPherson Quartet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Monday, March 5
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Monday Nights With WOSG, New York Youth Symphony Jazz Featuring Vuyo Sotashe; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- The Showdown Kids Ft Scott Metzger, Katie Jacoby & Simon Kafita 8pm / Wolf; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Cheryl yen eARrangements Of Shadows; Birdland, 315 W. 44th 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.

Tuesday, March 6
- Logan Richardson Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Denise Thimes; Dizzy’s Club, 60th & B’way
- Cyrus Chestnut Quartet with Buster Williams, Lenny White, Warren Wolf; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Pete Rock & The Soul Brothers; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Fred Hersch; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Theo Hill Trio; Abraham Burton Quartet; “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesday, March 7
- James Frances Trio With Special Guest Nicholas Payton; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Denise Thimes; Dizzy’s Club, 60th & B’way
- Cyrus Chestnut Quartet with Buster Williams, Lenny White, Warren Wolf; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Fred Hersch; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Wee-Dee Brainard & Friends; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Yotam Silberstein Quartet; Simona Premazzi Quartet “Dreamteam”; Jovan Alexandrov – After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Thursday, March 8
- Steven Bernstein’s Sexmobl; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Dukuduka Da Fonseca & Hélio Alves Featuring Maucha Adnet; Samba Jazz And The Music Of Bobi; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Laila Biali; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Rebirth Brass Band; Blue Note Residency; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Fred Hersch; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Yotam Silberstein Quartet; Belin Gilloise Quartet; Jonathan Thomas - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Friday, March 9
- Steven Bernstein’s Sexmobl With Special Guest John Medeski; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Dukuduka Da Fonseca & Hélio Alves Featuring Maucha Adnet; Samba Jazz And The Music Of Bobi; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Nursery Song Swing. Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis Re-imagine Your Favorite Childhood Music. Witness How Jazz Can Transform Even The Most Familiar Songs. This Program Is Presented As Part Of The Eutregen Jazz Concert Series; 8PM, Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Rebirth Brass Band; Blue Note Residency; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Cyrus Chestnut Quartet with Buster Williams, Lenny White, Warren Wolf; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Fred Hersch; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Greg Glassman Quartet; Steve Slagle A.M. Quartet; Corey Wallace DUblast “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, March 10
- The Smokey Stockton Brunch: John Faturm And Friends; Steven Bernstein’s Millenium Territory Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Dukuduka Da Fonseca & Hélio Alves Featuring Maucha Adnet; Samba Jazz And The Music Of Bobi; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Nursery Song Swing. Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis Re-imagine Your Favorite Childhood Music. Witness How Jazz Can Transform Even The Most Familiar Songs. This Program Is Presented As Part Of The Eutregen Jazz Concert Series; 8PM, Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Rebirth Brass Band; Blue Note Residency; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Cyrus Chestnut Quartet with Buster Williams, Lenny White, Warren Wolf; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Fred Hersch; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Small’s Showcase; The Jeff McGregor Quartet; Valerie Ponowarek Quintet; Steve Slagle A.M. Quartet; Brooklyn Circle; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Sunday, March 11
- Jazz For Kids; Steven Bernstein’s Millenium Territory Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Dukuduka Da Fonseca & Hélio Alves Featuring Maucha Adnet; Samba Jazz And The Music Of Bobi; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- ‘The Donny Nova Band Featuring Julia Trojan’ Starring Corey Cott, Laura Osnes, Brandon J. Ellis, Joe Carroll, Joey Pero, Geoff

Monday, March 12
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Jazz At Lincoln Center Youth Orchestra With Special Guest Lew Tabackin; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Ari Hoenig Trio; Jonathan Barber Group & After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Tuesday, March 13
- Theo Croker Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Akira Tana And Otonowa; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Jane Bunnett & Maqueque; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Mccoy Tyner; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Frank Lacy Group & After-hours Jam Session; “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesday, March 14
- Owen Broder: The American Roots Project; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Mark Sherman Quartet With Special Guest Bruce Barth; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Mccoy Tyner; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Kurt Elling “The Questions”; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Michael Feinberg Quintet; Dan Aran Trio; Aaron Seeger - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Thursday, March 15
- Jimmy Greene’s Love In Action; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Freddy Cole Quintet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roy Haynes 93rd Birthday Celebration With Special Guests; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Kurt Elling “The Questions”; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christopher McBride & The Whole Proof; Asaf Yuria Quintet; Davis Whitfield - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Friday, March 16
- Jimmy Greene’s Love In Action; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Freddy Cole Quintet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Paquito D’Rivera: To Bird With Strings, Anniversary Landmark Concert, Saxophonist, Clarinetist, 14-Time Grammy Award Winner Paquito D’Rivera Puts His Spin On Charlie Parker’s Bird With Strings; 8PM, Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Roy Haynes 93rd Birthday Celebration With Special Guests; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Kurt Elling “The Questions”; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Mike Clark Trio; Donald Edwards Quintet; After-hours Jam Session Joe Farnsworth; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, March 17
- Freddy Cole Quintet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Paquito D’Rivera: To Bird With Strings, Anniversary Landmark Concert, Saxophonist, Clarinetist, 14-Time Grammy Award Winner Paquito D’Rivera Puts His Spin On Charlie Parker’s Bird With Strings; 8PM, Rose Theater, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roger Haynes 93rd Birthday Celebration With Special Guests; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Kurt Elling “The Questions”; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Small’s Showcase; Francesco Ciniglio; Matt Haviland Quintet; Donald Edwards Quintet; Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Sunday, March 18
- Jimmy Greene’s Love In Action; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Jazz For Kids; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Freddy Cole Quintet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roy Haynes 93rd Birthday Celebration With Special Guests; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Chad Lefkowitz-Brown; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Ai Murakami Trio feat. Sacha Perry; Charles Owens Quartet; Hillel Salem - After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, March 19
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Brubeck Brothers Quartet With Special Guest Carl Allen; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Constantine Maroulis; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Eric Krasno & Chapter 2 Featuring Questlove, Robert Randolph, Cory Henry & More; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Lucas Pino Nonet; Jonathan Michel; After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

(Continued on page 16)
Tuesday, March 20
- Camille Bertault; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Brubeck Brothers Quintet With Special Guest Carl Allen; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Eric Krasno & Chapter 2 Featuring Questlove, Robert Randolph, Cory Henry & More; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Steve Smith “Groove: Blue” Organ Trio with Tony Monaco (organ) Vinny Valentino (guitar); Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Steve Nelson Quartet; Abraham Burton Quartet; “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesday, March 21
- Camille Bertault; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Duchess; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Eric Krasno & Chapter 2 Featuring Questlove, Robert Randolph, Cory Henry & More; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Steve Smith “Groove: Blue” Organ Trio with Tony Monaco (organ) Vinny Valentino (guitar); Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Will Bernard Quartet; Harold Mabern Trio; Jovan Alexandre - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Thursday, March 22
- Billy Childs Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Flamenco Festival NY - Dorantes With Adam Ben Ezra And Special Guest Tim Reeves; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Matthew Whittaker Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Steve Smith “Groove: Blue” Organ Trio with Tony Monaco (organ) Vinny Valentino (guitar); Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Leren Stillman Quintet; Andrew Gould Quintet; Jonathan Thomas - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Friday, March 23
- Billy Childs Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Flamenco Festival NY - Dorantes With Adam Ben Ezra And Special Guest Tim Reeves; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- The Swing Collective, With Melissa Aldana, Etienne Charles, Elio Villafranca, Yasushi Nakamura, Ulysses Owens, Jr.; 7PM & 9:30PM, The Appel Room, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bobby McFerrin; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Steve Smith “Groove: Blue” Organ Trio with Tony Monaco (organ) Vinny Valentino (guitar); Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Gerry Gibbs and Thrasher People; Adam Bimbaum Quartet; Corey Wallace DUBtet “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, March 24
- Smokeyastock Brunch: Caroline Davis; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Billy Childs Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Flamenco Festival NY - Dorantes With Adam Ben Ezra And Special Guest Tim Reeves; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- The Swing Collective, With Melissa Aldana, Etienne Charles, Elio Villafranca, Yasushi Nakamura, Ulysses Owens, Jr.; 7PM & 9:30PM, The Appel Room, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bobby McFerrin; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Steve Smith “Groove: Blue” Organ Trio with Tony Monaco (organ) Vinny Valentino (guitar); Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Small’s Showcase: Nick Masters Quartet; Gerry Gibbs and Thrasher People; Adam Bimbaum Quartet; Brooklyn Circle; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Sunday, March 25
- Jazz For Kids; Billy Childs Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Miho Hazama And M-Unit; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bill Frisell; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Bobby McFerrin; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Anita Gillette Celebrates Irving Berlin; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Ai Murakami Trio feat. Sacha Perry; Spike Winters Quartet feat. Joe Magnarelli; Bruce Harris Quintet; Robert Edwards - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, March 26
- Mingus Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Manhattan School Of Music Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Bobby McFerrin; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Anita Gillette Celebrates Irving Berlin; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Ari Hoenig Trio; Corcoran Holt Quintet; Jonathan Michel - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Tuesday, March 27
- Ravi Coltrane Trio; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Judy Carmichael Quartet With Special Guest Harry Allen; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Steve Smith “Groove: Blue” Organ Trio with Tony Monaco (organ) Vinny Valentino (guitar); Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Bobby McFerrin; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Tristano Project: with Greg Osby, Jaleel Shaw, Melissa Aldana, Vinny Valentino, Ben Allison, Matt Wilson and Billy Drummond; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Josh Evans Quintet; “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Wednesday, March 28
- Ravi Coltrane Trio Plus Tomoki Sanders; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Judy Carmichael Quartet With Special Guest Harry Allen; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Michael Feinstein: Celebrating Frank, Dean & Sammy; Michael Feinstein And Guest Vocalists Finn Sagal, Clint Holmes Celebrate The Rat Pack; 7PM, 9PM, Appel Room, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bobby McFerrin; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Tristano Project: with Greg Osby, Jaleel Shaw, Melissa Aldana, Vinny Valentino, Ben Allison, Matt Wilson and Billy Drummond; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Andrew Cyrille; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Travis Shock Quartet; Le Boeuf Brothers; Aaron Seeger - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Thursday, March 29
- Ravi Coltrane Trio; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Diva Jazz Orchestra’s 25th Anniversary Celebration And CD Release Party; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway.
- Michael Feinstein: Celebrating Frank, Dean & Sammy; Michael Feinstein And Guest Vocalists Finn Sagal, Clint Holmes Celebrate The Rat Pack; 7PM, 9PM, Appel Room, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Bobby McFerrin; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Tristano Project: with Greg Osby, Jaleel Shaw, Melissa Aldana, Vinny Valentino, Ben Allison, Matt Wilson and Billy Drummond; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Andrew Cyrille; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Mathis Picard Sextet/Carlos Adefie Quartet; Davis Whitlef - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Friday, March 30
- Ravi Coltrane Trio Plus Brandee Younger; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Diva Jazz Orchestra’s 25th Anniversary Celebration And CD Release Party; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway.
- Andrew Cyrille; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Bobby McFerrin; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Tristano Project: with Greg Osby, Jaleel Shaw, Melissa Aldana, Vinny Valentino, Ben Allison, Matt Wilson and Billy Drummond; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Scott Wendhol/Adrian Kolker Quartet; Wayne Escoffery & Tenor Traditions; J.D. Allen After hours; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, March 31
- Ravi Coltrane Trio; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Smokeyastock Brunch: Laurin Talese; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
(Continued on page 17)
- Winston Churchill

"Some people’s idea of free speech is that they are free to say what they like, but if anyone says anything back that is an outrage."

New England On The Road Tour 2018

February 27 – March 4

Program: Diva Jazz Orchestra’s 25th Anniversary Celebration and CD Release Party; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy

Tuesday, April 3

- Mary Halvorson: Code Girl; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Jane Monheit; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, April 4

- Mary Halvorson: Code Girl; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Louis Armstrong Elegy Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Lew Tabackin; Trio with special guest Randy Brecker; Late Night Session; Dizzy’s Club, 60th & B’dwy

Thursday, April 5

- Randy Weston African Rhythms Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Jane Monheit; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Charles Turner; Dizzy’s Club, 60th & B’dwy

Friday, April 6

- Randy Weston African Rhythms Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Monk Festival; Thelonious Himself; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy

Saturday, April 7

- Smokestack Brunch: Josh Lawrence’s Color Theory; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Randy Weston Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.

Sunday, April 8

- Scott Alan; "Home Again"; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Brubeck Institute Jazz Quintet with Special Guest Carl Allen; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy

Monday, April 9

- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Manhattan School of Music Jazz Orchestra: A Love Supreme by John Coltrane; Dizzy’s Club, 60th & B’dwy

Tuesday, April 10

- Walter Smith III “Two”; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian McBride’s New Jaan; Late Night Session; Theo Hill; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’dwy

Wednesday, April 11

- Manuel Valera Trio; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.

Thursday, April 12

- SF Jazz Collective; The Music Of Miles Davis; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.

Friday, April 13

- SF Jazz Collective; The Music Of Miles Davis; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.

Saturday, April 14

- SF Jazz Collective; Music Of Miles Davis; Jazz Standard
- Smokestack Brunch: Ted Chubb; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
"A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing in it and nothing true."
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“...It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare.”
— Mark Twain

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David Murray

(Continued from page 11)

DM: It’s important, I even teach my students about that when I do semesters at institutions. I challenge them to write a song. They all try to learn the same songs that everybody knows but after they’ve gotten past their initial year I always try to have my composition class write a song of their own and then I have them come up with a quartet version, a sextet and octet version and finally a big band version of it. So that one song can represent them. It’s something they did and not what somebody else did. It’s hard, it’s hard to be creative. I use that same element of surprise for myself. I pull the rug out. It’s like if you get a bebop player and you erase the changes, just give them the melody, all of a sudden, they don’t know what to play. I’ll tell them what you want to play. Even if it doesn’t have changes, it’s still music. Some of them stop, some won’t play. Butch Morris used to always have that problem when he’d get classical players inside of his ensemble. When the music ran out, they’d put down their instruments. Butch would say, “No, now you can watch me.” They’d say, “Watch you do what?” He’d say, “Do what I tell you to do.” They’d say, “But there’s no music on the page. We have to stop.” Butch would say, “Really?” So there begins another kind of creation. Like I’m saying, you get the most gifted bebop players and they’re lost because without the changes they don’t have any information. In other words, they’re not really listening anyway, they’re just adding things up in their solo, trying to figure out how to go from lick to lick. It’s not even musical, it’s more mathematics than music…”

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DM: You go on line you’ll see who’s covering my things. I’ve seen from the good to the bad. I hear “Morning Song” a lot at jam sessions, not in America, but in European jam sessions. They developed some kind of alternative Fake Book and somehow “Morning Song” and “Flowers for Albert” have gotten in it there. I don’t think my songs will ever get covered here. The thing I like about “Flowers for Albert” is that it’s a very simple thing and kids can play it. I love when people play my work.

JI: Who else has been covering your composi-

Jazz Inside Magazine

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present because he didn’t want to be compared to Eric Dolphy. He gave away his alto and bass clarinet and just stuck with the flute. For clarinet, I just basically transferred everything I knew about the tenor and made it the lower octave of the tenor and changed a few things with my little knowledge of the clarinet. I got a few tips from [Hamiet] Bluiett and he sold me another clarinet which I still play.

JI: How was it to sit in with the Grateful Dead at Madison Square Garden in 1993?

DM: Great, the greatest audience in the world. They’ve got a built in audience. I played [out] and I saw their heads [going back]. They’re totally organic. Their fans are totally enthusiastic about what they’re listening to even when it’s not great. They love their Grateful Dead and I was fortunate to get in on some of it. It put me into another category, the fact that I had played with them. If we had that kind of audience base in jazz, we’d be like the Yankees.

JI: What other prominent rock or popular music settings have you played or recorded in?

DM: I think I played with Fish once but that’s it. The only reason I played with the Dead was because of my connection with Bob Weir. We were working on bringing the Satchel Paige stage musical to Broadway at the time.

JI: What’s been the most unusual setting that you’ve ever played in?

DM: I was in Paris and James Carter and I had just come back from visiting the Selmer [Company] and some Japanese food and he called me up from his hotel and said, “Turn on the TV!” So we stayed on the phone for two hours and I hate to be on the phone because only bad news comes on the phone. The impact was awful, it destroyed entertainment for a long time in New York. It was so devastating.

DM: The last time I played there, they came out, they came out en masse. That was the same this time. The Vanguard is old school. It’s not a lot of frills, there’s no food, thank God, it’s just straight music. I like that the diehards come in there, people who really want to listen. As far as the general jazz scene, what I see is more studious musicians, more guys that can read better and play better changes, but guys that don’t interpret music as well. They’re not as gifted at being creative in the sense that I need. That Lower East Side loft jazz format has been forgotten and I think they need me here to remind them what that is. I might be one of the only guys playing at the Vanguard that can show them that…

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DM: Yes, I’m an old soul. I feel like I’ve been here before. I’ve been in various ceremonies in Africa, Cuba and Brazil where I found some old things within religion. In certain churches I’ve spoken in tongue and been part of old ceremonies. I’ve spoken in tongues that I didn’t know, maybe I was part of it, I don’t know. Yea, I’ve been here before but I don’t know where. Maybe I wasn’t even human, maybe I was an ant.

Aki Takase (piano) asked: “You are a great player and you always have such a strong sound with very good intonation. Does that beautiful, strong sound come from your nature/instinctive desire or more so from training and experience?”

DM: It’s instinctual. She’s that way, she’s very to the moment. She has so much technique that it’s infectious. She can go anywhere she wants because she has so much technique. What she likes from me is that she likes the power and what I like about her is that she can be like James P. Johnson or John Hicks or Cecil Taylor or Bud Powell or Art Tatum.

Kahlil El’Zabar (percussion) asked: “What does the Albert Ayler sound mean to you?”

DM: Speaking in tongues which is the spirituality of the Holy Ghost and spirit possession in sound. Nobody talks about those things these days but they used to talk about that in the beginning of the ’70s. That’s not talked about anymore, Lincoln Center has taken over.

Kahlil El’Zabar also asked: “What was it like playing with Ed Blackwell, Steve McCall, Jack DeJohnette, Sonny Murray, and Elvin Jones, some of the greatest drummers who ever lived?”

DM: Precision and rhythm, the rhythm is the key. Harmony is second to rhythm and always has been for me. Rhythm and meter and percussion sounds. Beats are the most attractive thing in music. It attracts everyone but especially Africans who are attracted by rhythm. Europeans are attracted by chords. You put it together, you’ve got jazz. I think people like jazz for different reasons.

Hugh Ragin (trumpet) asked: “Will you speak to the fact on why you chose to identify your music as ‘extended music’ as opposed to ‘avant-garde’?”

DM: Oh, he asked me that question before. Yea, extended music is better, it just gives you more room for the naysayers because the naysayers, you don’t want them to be right at all cost. They can’t define your music by calling it something, it’s better you name your music yourself. Extended music, that’s a far richer approach than avant-garde can mean. Avant-garde describes a painting style in a certain time period of painting but it doesn’t define the music at all. It just makes a mockery of it, that’s all it does.

Baikida Carroll (trumpet) asked: “David, remember the time Julius Hemphill and I saved your life?”

DM: Yeah, oh! Yeah, they saved my life. Thank you Baikida. I can say that to him, he did save my life. This cat was getting ready to hit me in the head with a tire iron outside of the Tin Palace. He had this tire iron above me and was about to hit me. Julius came with his knife and Baikida was getting ready to fuck this dude up. They saved my life literally. Yes, I do remember and thank you both. It happened because I was in a cab. I told the cabbie to let me out at the Tin Palace but he went past it. I asked him to make a U-turn but he said, “I don’t make U-turns!” He got in an argument with me. He made me get out of the cab and was about to hit me but they saw it out the window and they came and saved me. This cat was a big old six-foot-five dude with a tire iron about to slam me in the head with it. It was terrible, I can never forget that.

JJI: Any final comments?

DM: Whew! No more interviews today.
Mark Sherman
Sticking With It!

By Eric Nemeyer

**JI:** So, now talk about your first album that you did, which was on Columbia. How did that develop?

**MS:** Well, in my twenties sometime I actually introduced Kenny Kirkland to Wynton Marsalis. I hooked Wynton up with Kenny, because he had come up to me at Julliard one day and asked me if I knew any great piano players, because he had this record date with Dr. George Butler at Columbia—his first record—and he wanted to know who was a great piano player here in New York that he could get, because I had been playing with Wynton a lot.

He walked into a practice room when I was playing… I think I was practicing “Giant Steps” or “Moment’s Notice” on the piano, up at Julliard. He just walked in—this black kid with a big bushy afro and wire-rim glasses and his trumpet and he started playing without introducing himself. We eventually met and we used to play a lot of tunes together all the time, daily basically, and fool around with chords and I showed him the things that Kenny used to show me, the things I used to pick off of Kirkland. Eventually he asked me, “Who’s the best piano player in New York that I can get?” and I had been roommates with Mitchell Forman, who’s also another great piano player. So, Mitch and I used to play a lot also because we were roommates, but Kenny and I had been playing trio for years, in his trio I had been playing drums with him. I just said to Wynton flat out “Kenny Kirkland’s the baddest motherfucker in town, man. In the obituary he mentioned it. The reality is that was a great time. Then what happened is, I had some interest from Columbia, through this guy I’d met at Atlantic Studios. Bobby Franceschini and I were doing a record and I had some interest from Columbia through that. What happened was this guy who used to bring apples and nuts to Dr. George Butler; at like ten o’clock every night, he’d go to his office. He was this friend of George’s, he used to bring him like a drink and something up to his office and George would be working late, up in the office at Columbia. He heard the demo I was doing and he said “Oh, George would love this stuff. I’ll go bring this to George.” And he kept saying it, you know? And I didn’t believe it—I had heard all kinds of stuff. I heard all kinds of rumors about what George could be like and I had never met George or anything, I just knew about him and Columbia Records. Sure enough, he came back to me one day, this guy, and said “George wants to meet you. He wants to have a meeting.” So I went into George’s office and he flat out told me he wanted to sign me to a record deal.

**JI:** How did you get started playing vibes?

**MS:** I was a student at the High School of Music and Art and Justin DeCicchio, who now heads the jazz program at Manhattan School of Music, was my teacher. I was a drummer and a piano player. I was a classical pianist and I played drums and studied with Elvin Jones. Justin turned me on to playing mallets. I read piano music already. So I got some sticks…he put some Bach music in front of me and I just started to read through it. I had already been a jazz player, so as soon as I started touching that, I started to get into trying to play some jazz tunes. I started getting into the mallets. I got into Julliard and I had more mallet training. I was going along my harmonic phase, and my language skills were improving. Between 18 and 22 my language skills were okay but it wasn’t what it is now 30 years later. I transcribed a lot of solos…some Milt Jackson blues…a lot of Trane, “Like Sonny.” I have a 32-bar transcription of “Blues for You.” It’s a B-flat blues. I transcribed the whole solo. It took me the longest time. I transcribed it, then I learned it, and then I forgot it, which is what you should do. You retain parts, but you learn what he was playing and learn the language that way. These days, I’m just trying to find some time to practice.

**JI:** Why don’t you talk about some of the things you’ve learned from some of the great players you’ve played with: some of the things that you’ve observed them do that you’ve begun to incorporate into your own life, business and music?

**MS:** The players who’ve had a tremendous influence on me and I’ve learned a lot from… I’d say I grew up with Kenny Kirkland. I learned a lot from Kenny. We used to sit around and transcribe solos in his apartment. He was at Manhattan School of Music; I was at Manhattan Prep. I was playing drums in the Kenny Kirkland Trio. Mike Renzi had a great influence on me. He’s a great harmonist, arranger—he does all the arranging for Sesame Street now. He plugged me into that “singers’ mafia.” I got a lot of singers’ gigs from him. But standing behind him for five to seven years, next to him with the vibes and the piano and having to blend with him harmonically and textually with Maureen McGovern and some other singers—it was a special time for me because I was a kid. I was in my mid-twenties. I would get a couple of solos in each set, but I was mostly playing changes and filling up the space.

**JI:** Talk about any specific conversations or advice you received that provided you with a moment of awakening or enlightenment.

**MS:** Somebody—and I can’t remember who—once told me that you are what you do. And if you go and you play every day, seven jingles a day, then you’re a jingle guy. If you write Broadway shows, then you’re a show composer or writer. If you play Broadway shows all the time, you are a Broadway show musician. So if you want to be a jazz musician, you have to focus on just playing that and playing it really great, getting the language. But you are what you do. It’s a great expression. Also, not practice makes perfect, but perfect practice makes perfect. And I learned that a long time ago. Buster Bailey, from the New York Philharmonic—a snare drummer—told me that. You can practice a thousand times wrong, and you can practice ten times right. And you get more out of ten times right. It’s a big thing for growth, because a lot of people just practice wrong. They keep practicing the same lick wrong all the time, or they’re missing notes or their not phrasing it well. It’s just wrong somehow. But if you do it slow and right, you get a lot more out of it. Those kind things are some vital sayings.

**JI:** What kinds of things did Larry Coryell give you?

**MS:** He gave me six great years of music. The one thing that I can say about Larry that I loved is that when you play on a Larry gig, you’re going to play. He loves to hear you play. It’s all about the music. The other thing that admire about Larry: he’s got about 70, 80 records out under his own name. That’s a lot. That’s a lot of records, man. The music
bic was great for that. We had a great band with Kenwood Dennard and various bass players. Nice quartet. We went to Europe a couple of times. He gave me some great chances to play. He recorded ten of my tunes. That was one of the best things he did for me. When I first started playing with Larry, the very first gig I did, he paid me $150 to drive with him from New York to D.C. and we played until midnight. And after the gig we played two hard sets. I thought we were going right across the street to the Georgetown Inn. He said, “Georgetown? What are you talking about? We’re going back to New York.” Four in the morning we’re driving on the turnpike. I was like, “Damn, Larry.” And I love Larry. We had a good relationship. But I said, “How could you do this—for $150 bucks take them all the way to Washington, sound check, two sets and come home back to New York?” He said, “You’ll understand it someday, when you’re a leader in your own band.” I said, “Understand what?” And he says, “The Golden Rule.” And I said, “What’s that?” He goes, “He who has the gold makes the rules.” Musically, Larry’s thing was cool—some arrangements, some standards. He was a great guitar player.

JI: Who were a couple of other people who have made a significant impact that shows up on the way you lead your life and make your music now?

MS: I think the biggest impact that I had was studying with Elvin—absorbing his intense spirit and the music, the way he approached playing the drums. Sitting behind him at a young age, watching that, watching him and Lieberman, Joe Farrell, Steve Grossman, Gene Perla, Jan Hammer, and all those guys who played together in that band. I was thirteen years old when I started studying with him and chasing Elvin around. That was a tremendous influence on me. That just showed me what I wanted to do. I got totally hooked on Trane and Elvin and the style that they played the music in: that post-bop style. I just fell in love with that, the quartet feeling. Saul Goodman was intense too, but on tympani. What he was doing was kicking an orchestra’s butt. It’s all about the heart and the spirit. And they both had great, spirit for their music. I still get calls for film dates and things here and there. Those tunes that are catalogued at ASCAP, that’s for life. That’s for my son and my little girl. Ultimately, the real goal with the whole thing is to play—to play every night. If I could go on the road and do 300 concerts a year, I would. If I could go out and play quartet like I did in Italy 300 times a year, I’d do it. You grow better from that. That’s how you grow as a player. And the music becomes more rewarding because everyone knows it so well. That’s what you want. That’s the dream that Trane had. He had that dream quartet of McCoy, Jimmy Garrison, and Elvin. That was it. And they played a lot of gigs and they made a lot of recordings.

JI: What suggestions do you have that would enable more of that to occur?

MS: I think that people give up too fast. I mean, I could have changed and not done a record with this band. I did two records with this group. I could have done a third CD and said, “You know, I’m going to do a duo record with Wynton Marsalis.” Or, “I’m going to do a duo record with Kenny Barron.” Or, “I’m going to get Kenny Barron and Buster or Mark Johnson, Peter Erskine, and Lyle Mays to do it.” I think that just as Pat Metheny did—and showed great success with, and just as Trane did—when you stick with the same band for a long time, eventually something good’s going to happen—especially if it’s the right band. I feel like what’s made this thing grow is the combination of what I’m bringing to the table, writing and playing, combined with the incredible musicians in the band, and the fact that we’re together for a long time. And also, you can’t give up. You can’t say it’s impossible and you can’t get it. You gotta keep knocking on the door.

JI: There’s something to be said for consistency and developing long-term relationships.

MS: Yeah. Those guys have also tried to get gigs for the group themselves. They’ve tried to help with extra contacts. Allen used to be a radio promoter for many years, and he knows everybody in the business. He knows a lot of people. He’s given me tons of connections. And Tim Horner’s been traveling around for years playing jazz with different artists, and he’s given me a lot of connections to some promoter. I think that you develop, with the music, those deep friendships.

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Theo Croker

Follow your inner voice

Interview by Eric Nemeyer
Photo by Thomas Brodin

JI: Talk about living in Shanghai.

TC: Yeah, I lived there for seven years. I know the city and I know the culture and I’m adequate at the language. Shanghai is probably the most open of all the cities in China. Of all the areas, it’s kind of always been set up as a place where foreigners can go. Of course the people and the food are still very Chinese, and even the culture. But it’s kind of open to the foreigners. So you can live there and not feel too displaced but you still know you’re in China. The music scene, I’m not sure now, but for the seven years I was there, there were always more gigs than musicians. It wouldn’t be rare for you to, for example, call the piano player to play bass lines on an organ because all the bass players are busy. It also wouldn’t be out of normal to have two, three shows in a day in three different places. You then might have to do one and run to another, do one and run to another. So for audience.

JI: All of the people that you played with, were they native Chinese?

TC: No. Mostly they were other foreigners, Australian, American, so French, Italians, just people from different parts of the world that kind of ended up in Shanghai, a lot of cats from the Mauritius Islands in Africa who are amazing musicians. So it’s a mix of people. And there are some local Chinese who can play very well, especially considering that they’re from China, not even considering, just taking in the fact that they’re from China and haven’t studied in America or grew up around this music. There a lot of really fine players out there. So it was always a mix internationally of people. Shanghai is a city of 29 million people.

JI: How did your interest in Shanghai develop?

TC: Well, originally, one of those offers to fly over with the band to do one club for six months six nights a week. That was originally how I got over there. And then when I was able to spend enough time there, I saw that there was a scene that you could freelance on, they just needed thing doesn’t really exist here. The reason why I think it exists there was because it’s all new for the locals, the Chinese people. It’s all new to have this kind of music or jazz music or any kind of American music that they can go hear every night. So there’s always a new face in the people constantly. You would be playing at one club then somebody would come and try to get you to play at another, to like break the contract and go play at another club. That was real typical just because they have all of these clubs and they have all of the shows or they have all of these events that they want music at but they were new at that time at booking it and dealing with musicians. So the offers would just come nonstop.

JI: So that led you to just stay there for a number of years.

TC: Well, I went back and forth for I guess the first two, three years, maybe four or five months at a time in each place. It can be difficult to get things going in New York, and even when you do you can only play so much as a leader in one city all the time. You have all of these 30-day clauses, 60-mile clauses. So it’s not really in favor of the musician here, whereas there you can play two or three different clubs in one night because the audience is so big.

JI: Did you find that the audiences were very receptive too?

TC: Yes, some of them would be receptive, some of them would have no idea what they’re getting into. For them, I don’t even know if they see it as jazz, it’s just something for them to do, something for them to see. So a lot of them are discovering it. A lot of people when they come to see you play even now it’s their first time ever going to a place like that.

JI: Yeah. How was it in terms of learning the language? Was that kind of a challenge for you? Did you have a tutor or how did that work?

TC: It’s still challenging. I picked it up because I just got tired of always having to have somebody order food for me or talk to the driver for me or talk to the delivery man. So I started with that as a basis for those conversations and learning how to say those things, and then I got a tutor to help me kind of fill in the rest.

JI: Do you also write Chinese?

TC: Very little. And maybe know a hundred characters, but you need to know three or four thousand to read the newspaper for example. That kind of time I did not have. I was playing a lot and practicing a lot and writing a lot which I had time to do because I had sufficient work. So I wasn’t struggling.

JI: In your experience, you’ve had an association with Donald Byrd who of course as we know has had a prolific career recording with among others in the fifties John Coltrane on those Prestige albums and then his more popular stuff in the seventies with the Blackbyrds. What kinds of influence and discussions did you have with Donald Byrd and how did that help in your own development, maybe you can elaborate on some of that?

TC: Well, speaking on the instrument, when you’re able to talk to somebody like Donald Byrd, it’s kind of like opening a doorway to people like Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis or Blue Mitchell, Clifford Brown, because he was around these people, and they would share information with each other. I was able to get access to a lot of information on playing the trumpet from what these guys knew through Donald Byrd as well as what Donald Byrd new. And the same goes for composition. He has such a wide
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TC: To quote Donald Byrd can sometimes be quite vulgar because he’s very direct.

JI: We’ll put some asterisks over those letters, you know, but go ahead.

TC: Basically always own your shit. Don’t give that up ever for any kind of payout or anything because it’s about longevity when it comes to publishing. The music that Donald Byrd wrote is contributing to his family for generations to come I’m sure. So you have to think long term when you’re doing these things and making these deals and not think short term.

JI: What ideas did Donald Byrd share with you?

TC: Mostly, we would talk about trumpet players. He would show me fingerings from Dizzy Gillespie or Freddie Hubbard. He would show me harmonic exercises to kind of deal with things. Things that he wrote, he would literally spell them out me note by note and then I would write them down, like, two or three pages at a time. So I have almost like a book’s worth of his exercises that he would just speak off of his mind. Yeah, that kind of [inaudible 00:17:42]. He would show me a Clifford thing or show me a Dizzy thing that I would bring him and be like, man, I don’t understand this. So he would help break that down for me because he knew all of the stuff, he was around those cats. And with composition, his whole main thing was melody. I would write a whole bunch of stuff and he would basically X off four or five of the things I wrote and say okay now just play those two, and I would play those two and he’d say, see, you have your top and your bottom, you don’t need anything else. So he really helped me understand the simplicity when you’re composing and not over composing.

JI: Could you talk about your grandfather, Doc Cheatham?

TC: Well, I knew my grandfather was a musician but I didn’t really understand what that was about until I was about 12 years old. And he died shortly after I started playing, about a year and a half after I started playing. So I never really had a chance to sit down with him and talk about trumpet. And even if that had, I was a kid. Trumpet was just something that I was attracted to and it was fun to me. I didn’t pick it because he played it. I’ve always been into music, and I don’t think I really make that connection until I had just started playing music and then he passed away and then I was able to go to memorials and meet people like Clark Terry and Al Grey and Jon Faddis and Wynton Marsalis. And at that point, I started to make the connection and see what that life and that world is really about. I remember seeing him as a kid all the time and being blown away by how clear and almost perfect, I don’t know if that’s the right word to use, but just spot on he always was every note. And I remember seeing him. I think the last show I saw him play, he did a 90-minute set with just him and piano, him and Chuck Folds. Now when I think about that, I would be scared to do a 90-minute set with just me and the piano. That’s a lot of trumpet playing. So just the fact that he was able to do that at 92 and just play so beautifully, I guess a lot of our relationship musically is me kind of looking back on things I remember or things he would talk about even though when he would say them I didn’t understand anything about it. And then of course I remember him as a person. He was a very sweet man and very kind and patient. I remember sitting at tables with him or going for walks with him, you know, things that aren’t musical but just seeing how much he liked to enjoy life, going for walks, smelling flowers, eating food, and taking his time. So I remember those aspects of him very much.
Jimmy Greene

Keeping it all in perspective

Hear Jimmy Greene
at Jazz Standard, March 15-18, 2018

JG: Talk about your association with Jackie McLean and how that made a significant impact on your early development and provided an entry into your career recording and performing.

JG: Well, I can talk for hours about that. Jackie was in many ways sort of a father figure definitely musically speaking. I met him when I was fifteen years old and he very quickly took me under his wings, and was so helpful in getting me really started in learning how to play the instrument and learning about the music and having a kind of a pathway or guide through the music through his perspective which I think was amazing, but he also looked for opportunities for me, very much in the West African tradition of teaching and learning music, of having me around him, sitting in with him, with his group in performance. I started out with him at the Blue Note, and just learning on the job like that and rehearsing with him, playing alongside him. I had saxophone class every Wednesday, basically us playing with “J Mac.” Just hearing him and playing next to him and trying in some small way to measure up to the sound and the fire and the lyricism and all the swing in the rhythm, and all the things that he’s playing on campus … that was a huge learning experience. And beyond playing music, he realized that you have to make a career out of it. You passed in 2006, I was able to be around him quite a bit and I went to the Hartt school for my undergraduate work and studied with him there and he was very helpful … not only helping me playing the instrument and learning about the music and having a kind of a pathway or guide through the music through his perspective which I think was amazing, but he also looked for opportunities for me, very much in the West African tradition of teaching and learning music, of having me around him, sitting in with him, with his group in performance. I started out with him at the Blue Note, and just learning on the job like that and rehearsing with him, playing alongside him. I had saxophone class every Wednesday, basically us playing with “J Mac.” Just hearing him and playing next to him and trying in some small way to measure up to the sound and the fire and the lyricism and all the swing in the rhythm, and all the things that he’s playing on campus … that was a huge learning experience. And beyond playing music, he realized that you have to make a career out of it. You

what I saw him doing and what he instructed me to do - it was really an invaluable education and I am so thankful that he was a part of my life especially in my development. Now as far as my career goes, I studied with “J Mac” through the latter part of my high school years, because I am from the Hartford area of Connecticut, where he lived for probably the last half of his life … from maybe the late 60’s or 1970’s up until he have to be wise in how you view the business and how you view yourself as an artist, and how you view yourself as a person whose talent and ability should be respected and compensated. So Jackie was very helpful in teaching me. When I got my first offer for a recording deal, I called him up and talked about it with him and he gave me some great advice. He recommended me to Horace Silver when I was still in school. I had an audition with Horace right around the time I graduated and ended up being a part of his last quintet. Jackie was always looking for opportunities for his students that he saw were really, really motivated and dedicated and had promise - to set them career-wise in the right direction. So I really, really appreciated all he did in that respect. In another way, which is very important to my life now, he also got his students started teaching as soon as we all got to the Hartt school. So I started teaching at the Hartt’s collective where I was a student in high school, and when I got into college I started teaching there. Learning how to teach and learning how to articulate all of the things that I would do consciously and subconsciously on the instrument or while I play, or what I thought about while I was playing … that skill is something that is really, really important and shouldn’t be overlooked. I think it has really helped me as an educator, having that experience early on and having a chance of kind of learning while doing, fall flat and pick yourself up and learn what you did wrong and try to improve for next time - the same way you would do for playing, I felt I had the opportunity to do it as a teacher as well.

JG: When you were at Hartt, how did your studies and your educational pursuits help or challenge your artistic pursuits at the time?

JG: I was in music school so everything I was learning was directly benefiting my artistic experience. I was learning about composition, about arranging, about ear training, music history or harmony. All these things were really important to my development as an artist. I was really really busy performing and making sessions and all that stuff while I was at Hartt. I just enjoyed the entire musical experience I had during my time in college, I enjoyed all of it.

JG: Do you remember any specific words of wisdom or advice or suggestions that Jackie gave you?

JG: Sure. One in particular, was during my first year at Hartt. I was in the Grammy American High School jazz band, so I was kind of a young guy but was pretty highly regarded in the Hartford area. Jackie pulled me aside during my first year up at Hartt and said, “You know what son…” I think he kind of saw how things were going - that people were really impressed by me, and he gave some great advice. He pulled me aside into his office, “You know what son? You have a long way to go until you can sleep.” I remember the words like it was yesterday. It was sometime in 1993 or 1994. He said it doesn’t matter what people are saying about you, what matters is what you are doing on an instrument. He said, “You’ve got a long way to go.”

JG: So that sounds like a really good advice that
**JG:** When you think you are on to something, and you think you’ve got it, you got it made on some level - but you can really hinder your growth.

**JI:** Yeah, it’s like the moment you think you are important, you no longer are.

**JG:** That’s right [laughs]. Jackie had great perspective and played alongside others who were the greatest who ever played this music - Miles Davies, John Coltrane, Charley Parker, Charles Mingus, Art Blakey, all these people, Woody Shaw. He had such a deep perspective about what it takes to be a great musician. I am so thankful to him and to all the time he poured into my playing and ultimately my life. Kenny Burrell actually gave me some great advice too at the Monk Competition. It was before I finished my schooling at Hartt. I was in my last year and I was chosen as the semi finalist at the Monk competition and made the finals. I was very ecstatic with the result, even though I wasn’t the first place winner. I was the first runner up – the second place winner. Right afterwards, actually during the competition, I was approached by several record labels and people were kind of quoting me. At the reception after the finals, Kenny Burrell came up to me and said, “Congratulations son. It’s really wonderful that you are playing so well, that you did so well. This competition is a great thing and I am really happy for you, how well you did.” I realized that John Coltrane never did any Monk competition. Miles Davis never did any Monk competition. So basically what he was saying was for me to keep this all in perspective. It might seem like the whole world is your friend right now, and everybody wants to know your name. That’s wonderful. Enjoy it. But keep it all in perspective – because this doesn’t mean you’ve gotten anywhere. I appreciated it.

**JI:** I think anybody who has spent hours and hours in practice, and has worked on their skills over many years, would acknowledge that studying music and particularly playing jazz is a pursuit that requires you to develop a great deal of patience … or it develops for you if you stick with it. It’s a lifelong pursuit. It can go to your head with all that attention. At least you were getting excellent guidance.

**JG:** Absolutely.

**JI:** Could you share some of the experiences you’ve had with Horace Silver?

**JG:** Horace had such an identifiable sound. Every record he ever made had that Horace Silver kind of sound - the composition, the playing. He was a stickler for everybody to play in a certain way. I remember going in for the first rehearsal. He had everything notated very meticulously - even for the rhythm section. The band that I was in was a great band. The rhythm section was John Webber playing base, Willie Jones III playing drums - and those guys really swing. Horace said, “I want you guys to stretch out, play long solos, try to find some stuff, really get loose within the music.” So once he said that, it was like - wow, that’s all I needed to hear. I felt instantly at ease. In the recording session, I did something rhythmically in one of the tunes where I laid back intentionally, way behind the beat, and I resolved something … kind of a delayed resolution or something. I did it on purpose and then we listened back and the producer said “I think we need to fix that.” The thing about Horace’s’ records is that they all carry an impeccable sound. They are all really tightly arranged and have all these great solos on them. But Horace stood up and said, “No, no, no, no, no, no. That’s what he meant to play, that’s what I want on the record. That makes sense. I understand what he is going for right there.” His biggest thing was rhythm. It had to be funky. It had to be swinging. The rhythm was the main thing that he was going for. Number two “harmony”. Whatever you played, you wanted to have a real clear picture harmonically about what you wanted to do. First, what was called for by the music, and second, what you really wanted to do – and having a really clear idea of what you are hearing harmonically. I learned a lot about what makes a great writer, with Horace and with Tom Harrell as well. They both have this habit, and Horace told me Benny Golson does as well. The first thing they do when they wake up every morning is to go and get the piano and start writing - and Horace did that. When Horace was living in Malibu, and when I knew him and was playing with him, he would get up every day and write as the first thing in the morning.
“Bumsy” starts with Blakey, pounding the snares before Sonny works the ultra-fast theme. In his haste to play on this session, Art forgot to bring his hi-hat; he does the whole record with just his ride cymbals, and you can hardly tell. Sonny swaggered, hopping and weaving near the depth of his range; quotes are hinted at but not really explored, as he keeps moving forward. His tone has a marvelous burly snarl, a sound like caramel; there are occasional squeaks, which only add to the charm.

Dorham is tougher this time around, blowing clear notes in rapid procession. Hope drums hard on the chords and Art does the same, all to keep the temperature high. Elmo’s turn is a little weak, but Blakey makes up with a lengthy snare workout. So far this disc has been a long, almost formless horn chase – in other words, an opportunity for Sonny to do what he does best.

While this session had been a lightweight affair, “Silk ‘n Satin” puts it in the big leagues. Hope opens with a portentous chord, and off Sonny goes – a sleek, swaggering tower of well-tempered notes. Based on the changes of “All of a Sudden My Heart Sings”, this ballad is a long kiss, stretched and amended from a single note. Elmo walks gently, the brushes add decoration, and Rollins murmurs, his tone covered with smoke. Hope’s solo is ornate in its simplicity, saying its piece in short, direct strokes; Sonny comes back to the end-theme, and there is Kenny, blowing high harmony to frame the sax. It’s the only time you hear him, and this too is perfect: when Sonny plays like this, nothing should get in his way. Smooth music at its finest, this is the type of thing you play when words are superfluous.

After such a performance, “Solid” comes off as an afterthought. A mid-tempo blues, Sonny works his serpentine lines and his sandpaper tone, strutting it nicely. Art keeps the cymbal cracking over Hope’s bubbling comp; Dorham is elegant, if weak in places. Elmo’s turn has its clinkers but is full of intriguing ideas – by my ears, his best effort on the disc. Rollins has some good stuff on the exchanges, and then it ends … it’s a lesser album, but “Solid” makes it a keeper.

Considering his accomplishments, Kenny Dorham may have been too talented: his ambition and skill as a composer may have overshadowed his work as a trumpeter. Always fascinated by world rhythms, Dorham hired Blakey to play on Afro-Cuban, an early Latin disc by a mainstream jazzman. The title is somewhat misleading: the disc was made in two sessions, with the first (cut on January 30, 1955) showing little Latin influence, if any. The group for the first date, a sextet, featured Hank Mobley’s tenor, Cecil Payne on baritone, Horace Silver, and Percy Heath.

Art is first on “La Villa”, blazing trails with his snare and busy bass drum. The bouncy theme is delivered by Payne, with Dorham quietly tracing his steps – a humidity that soon dissipates.

Kenny’s solo starts as a group of demure puffs, tiny notes expertly placed – soon these multiply, and the speed picks up from there. He always seems in control: these lines could be pre-scored, done with a confidence you can hear … this is a winner. In contrast, Mobley’s turn is organic, lunging with rusty turns in bursts of emotion. Art gets going behind him, a strength he displays through Payne’s relaxed effort; the exchanges make a grand tour of Blakey’s kit, a different texture every time.

“Venita’s Dance” is more bop than Latin, a study in tone and angular lines. Kenny sounds like felt, quietly picking through Silver’s chords – he ends with a sound that is strong but vulnerable, a rarity for trumpets. He sketches elaborate vistas, the main lines embellished in a forest of small notes; Mobley does the same on his solo, in a more forceful tone. Horace offers a splashy comp, full but unobtrusive – works well with Payne’s ambling solo.

Two additional cuts from this session would be added for the CD reissue: “K.D.’s Cab Ride” was named by Michael Cuscuna after Mobley called it the kind of tune Dorham would write on the way to the recording session. (It was later discovered that Kenny had given it a title, namely “Echo of Spring”.) Payne churns the theme in a brisk fashion; the bridge is contrapuntal, theme traded by Cecil and Kenny.

Dorham’s solo is first, a high-flying thing focused on five-note clusters. Payne assists with a cool descending riff, and the cymbals add a little kick. Mobley attacks with a likable gruffness, sounding like a lighter-toned Ammons. After Payne’s lackluster effort, the ensemble makes a sweet return; Blakey’s interjections are fun as always.

“K.D.’s Motion” is cut from the same cloth, a blues slightly similar to the R & B tune “One Mint Julep”. After the roaring theme Kenny calms it down, building a pyramid from softly placed notes. Smooth rays lead to elegant zigzags, at which time he turns brassy – all through the disc he maintains a low, steady heat. Payn’e friendly solo has hints of Pepper Adams, where Mobley makes like a brash alto. Silver’s turn is full of bluesy twists and funky vamps – if only he had more time. Decent if not essential, Kenny would change gears for the second session, expanding the band, and, in the process, diversifying the sound.

The January 30 session for Afro-Cuban was pleasant but not terribly distinctive; that problem was solved on March 29, when there were better tunes and a larger ensemble. Most of the original players were back for the new group, this time an octet: J.J. Johnson was added to the horns, and Percy Heath was replaced by the formidable Oscar Pettiford. Most importantly, Blakey was joined by the conga of Carlos “Patato” Valdes, whom Dorham hired at the recommendation of Dizzy Gillespie. He’d become a major figure in the early ‘Sixties, playing in a variety of jazz contexts. If Valdes gave the session its Latin authenticity, Kenny’s writing – and his trumpet – provided the fire.

“Afrodisia” begins with a calm fanfare … and then Patato steps in. The Van Gelder spring-echo is in full force, adding beats to an already crowded palette. Blakey augments him, cracking the cowbell so it sounds like timbales. Syncopated horns deliver the edgy theme, in a chart that recalls “Manteca”; Kenny is tougher than on the January session, weeping here and yowling there. He gets the first solo, percolating close to the theme, a smooth voice in the raucous atmosphere.

Mobley starts with an air of worry, then strengthens with fluid phrasing – Johnson goes chewy, as one grand phrase gets varied with distinction. Valdes’ turn is simple … until Art joins him: vivid tom-toms, wicked rimshots, and big shouts of glee. The title is accurate: what’s not to love?

Silver gleams on the start to “Lotus Flow-er”, which can be called a big-band ballad. Kenny starts the theme humbly as a massive chart unfurls behind him: while probably arranged by...
Art Blakey

Dorham, it sounds like Gryce, or even Neal Hefti. The ingenious scoring makes Payne sound like a tuba and Mobley like a harmonica: Kenny dances softly, made more romantic by the echo. J. J. has a good turn, and the cha-cha ending will make you smile.

“Basheer’s Dream” is the work of Gigi Gryce; the title refers to his Muslim name, Basheer Qusim. A fast mover, Payne shares the opening with Horace, who plays a spindly montuno. Horns fan out on the theme, then lay a slick vamp for Kenny’s hopeful solo. Starting fast and little else: the conga seems relaxed turn by Johnson.

Concluding the set is “Minor’s Holiday”, which is fast and little else: the conga seems misplaced on this bopper. The best thing about this is Dorham, who has his strongest, toughest solo on the date; J. J. is decent, but the cluttered ending is a major letdown. The alternate take fares better on the ensemble, but Kenny’s solo is drowned by the rampaging horns. This is the low point of an otherwise terrific session that wed two of the fewest Monk efforts by Monk’s standards, this session was the centerpiece of a Gigi Gryce album, also called Nica’s Tempo.

One week later, Art was back in the studio with Gigi Gryce, completing work on the Nica’s Tempo album. This time the group was a ten-piece, billed as the Gigi Gryce Orchestra — the players include Art Farmer, Eddie Bert, Horace Silver, Oscar Pettiford, Julius Watkins on French horn, and the vocals of Ernestine Anderson.

The first tune, “Social Call”, has a lyric by Jon Hendricks, a year before Lambert Hendricks and Ross. It’s a standard love song, a little more witty than most. Anderson is girlish in her reading, a pure voice with a husky edge; the chart surrounds her in a cloud of warm brass. Gryce tries to have a leisurely solo, but the horns drown him out; his style also seems at odds with the Swing Era vibe of the band. Better is “The One I Love”, where Gryce wrote the lyrics; Ernestine is deep and she is sincere. The chart is fantastic, pitting a tuba against high brass; Gryce floats atop the arrangement, a vibrato filled dream of a solo. The large ensemble sound would intrigue Blakey, and in two years lead a big band session of his own.

In the middle ’Fifties, live jazz came back to Greenwich Village, under the oddly-painted auspices of the Café Bohemia. This establishment began life as a strip club, but with a difference: on Sundays the city’s jazzmen would jam on stage, taking place of the dancers. On one of these Sundays, a musician told the club owner that if he turned the place into a jazz club, they could get Charlie Parker to play there. Intrigued, the owner said yes — while Bird never played the Bohemia (he died before the club opened in early 1955), most of the big names did.

Oscar Pettiford was the musical director and wrote “Bohemia After Dark” as the club’s theme song; Cannonball Adderley had his New York debut there, as did the first Miles Davis Quintet featuring John Coltrane. Many live albums were recorded there by the likes of Kenny Dorham, Charles Mingus, and Randy Weston; one of the first — and most influential — was The Jazz Messengers at the Café Bohemia Volume One, recorded at the end of November.

The ambiance is informal, much different from the Birdland sets. In the absence of an emcee, Blakey does the introductions, simply and with heartfelt praise: “a new star on the modern jazz horizon – Hank Mobley!” Their first line of

“Considering his accomplishments, Kenny Dorham may have been too talented: his ambition and skill as a composer may have overshadowed his work as a trumpeter. Always fascinated by world rhythms, Dorham hired Blakey to play on Afro-Cuban, an early Latin disc by a mainstream jazzman.”

The greatest day in your life and mine is when we take total responsibility for our attitudes. That’s the day we truly grow up.”

- John Maxwell

(Continued on page 32)
Art Blakey

(Continued from page 31)
leads the theme statement and dashes on the first solo. Blakey clicks the rim as Kenny runs down the scale, and taps the cymbal as he heads back up. Hank starts with a near-quote of “Let’s Fall in Love”, swaying over a burry comp by Silver. Watkins gets a tiny bit, Horace paints a light blue, and Art’s snare does a lot of talking. A voice in the audience (sounding more than a little drunk) shouts “Hey, Art Blakey!” You are inclined to do the same.

“Minor’s Holiday”, first heard on Afro-Cuban, gets a quintet rendition here: without the lavish chart, the tune seems more ordinary. Kenny Dorham’s first chorus is a straight rendition of a Blakey introduction: “On this tune we feature ... no one in particular.” Somewhat in the quiet side, Mobley takes honors with a light, seamless solo. (The unison quote of “Four” at the end is cute as well.)

Doug Watkins gets a feature on “What’s New”: his notes are round, wavy, and very, very heavy. Under a glossy comp by Horace, the bassist meditates – his sound is like a blinking eye, and his solo recalls “You Go To My Head.” Art’s brushes are so quiet that he is drowned by the clinking glasses of the audience ... it’s a second bed of percussion, and actually gives depth to the performance.

“Deciphering the Message”, heard here for the first time, tops the studio version made five months later. Launching at once into the theme, the horns seem alert and strong; Hank has some famous Blakey introduction: “On this tune we feature ... no one in particular.” Somewhat in the quiet side, Mobley takes honors with a light, seamless solo. (The unison quote of “Four” at the end is cute as well.)

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pomph in his solo, a power he usually kept under wraps. Rusty circles turn fast, propelled by crisp cymbals: later he makes angular hops, and draws his way through “Bye Bye Blackbird.”

Horace’s comp, making it sound richer in the process. “Crazy Rhythm”, left off the album, would appear on Jazz in Transition, a various-artists anthology. The horns start together, prodded gently by Silver. Donald gets the bridge and the first solo: quiet, swift, and surprisingly mellow. Art sprays the foggy cymbals as Byrd flutters – a gentle zigzag with hints of “Bumblebees”. His end phrase is continued by Gordon, who shouts it hard; the liner notes compare him to Roy Eldridge, and rightly so. Where Byrd spun endless phrases, Joe’s are punchy and short; his quote is “Bye Bye Blackbird” as Silver’s comp grows lush. Byrd comes back for a chorus, this time at a near- whisper – Gordon answers by ringing high, his diction worthy of Clifford Brown. The duel gets tighter, until the solos are one bar each; no matter how fast they go, you can always tell who plays what.

After a quick break by Watkins, Horace keeps the heat on, a lyrical solo in a shade of light blue. Art then makes his own crazy rhythm, dovetailing the whole thing on bass drum and snares ... time stands still. This is sloppy, exuberant fun, and the first time Art played with Donald Byrd. Within a few months, Byrd was touring with the Messengers – still a student, but now taught by a new professor.

Once the Messengers were established for good, Blakey did something very shrewd – he did not sign an exclusive deal with any one record company. While an unusual move at the time, for many reasons it made perfect sense. Blakey didn’t need a label’s publicist to make the group famous ... it already was. Signing a contract with one company might inhibit his schedule of sideman dates, then a major source of Art’s income. Most importantly, multiple labels were free to bid for Messengers albums, which not only boosted the group’s asking price but also put more of those albums on the market. This made Art very a man – in 1957 alone he recorded for eight different labels – and that in turn made the band a feasible proposition. In time other bandleaders, including Charles Mingus, would take up this “free agent” approach, to similar success – once again showing Art Bla-

A couple of Mobley compositions show what Donald can do fast. He bubbles fiercely on “Hank’s Tune”, complete with a big brassy tone. Silver’s comp is vigorous, getting the most of the young trumpet; Hank is more relaxed, cruising strong with his mellow phrasing. “Hank’s Other Tune”, heard here for the first time, would soon be retitled “The Late Show”. Here Hank is king, coasting swiftly over a breezy comp by Silver. The chemistry is strong throughout, making this casual date compare favorably with Blue Notes of the same period. (In fact, the whole date would get reissued by Blue Note in 2002, under the name Donald Byrd: The Transition Sessions).

On two tracks Mobley was replaced by Joe Gordon, another trumpeter on the rise; he would later join Shelly Manne’s Men, a West Coast equivalent of the Messengers. They do the theme in unison for “El Sino”, the harmonies fanning out for a sassy touch. The first solo is Donald’s, which he takes slowly, a carefully constructed ascent. He follows the contours of Horace’s comp, making it sound richer in the process. “Crazy Rhythm”, left off the album, would appear on Jazz in Transition, a various-artists anthology. The horns start together, prodded gently by Silver. Donald gets the bridge and the first solo: quiet, swift, and surprisingly mellow. Art sprays the foggy cymbals as Byrd flutters – a gentle zigzag with hints of “Bumblebees”. His end phrase is continued by Gordon, who shouts it hard; the liner notes compare him to Roy Eldridge, and rightly so. Where Byrd spun endless phrases, Joe’s are punchy and short; his quote is “Bye Bye Blackbird” as Silver’s comp grows lush. Byrd comes back for a chorus, this time at a near- whisper – Gordon answers by ringing high, his diction worthy of Clifford Brown. The duel gets tighter, until the solos are one bar each; no matter how fast they go, you can always tell who plays what.

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ny is first, scattering fast note and doing so at a fast hover. Silver’s comp is tart as the quotes fly by: “Donna Lee”, “Sing! Sing! Sing!”; and others I can’t recognize. Mobley is affable with a raft of descending spirals, Horace broods on the low keys, and Art rules the exchanges, as you would expect. Check out Dorham at the end, blowing his best solo backed only by Blakey’s trom-tom.

Hank’s feature, “Alone Together”, blends grandiose piano with deep, foggy inflections by the saxophone. Always influenced by Young, here Mobley comes closest to sounding like his mentor – he leans back, blows simply, and lets the melody do its job. Art’s brushwork is nice, though it’s hardly the focus – your attention belongs to Hank and those perfect, resonant notes.

“Prince Albert”, Kenny’s rewrite of “All the Things You Are”, lets the composer roam free with a cloudlike solo. Airy notes hang in the air, in time linking with others but in leisurely fashion – this turn isn’t showy, and doesn’t need to be. The most noteworthy part of the solo comes in the form of weird quotes: “Camptown Races” followed by “The Woody Woodpecker Song”? Hank takes it even slower, making it lovely when Horace moves into waltz time. The exchanges provide warm moments, and it all fades to a close – a minor effort, and a fun one.

Enough additional material was recorded at this session to make a third Bohemia volume, released in Japan in the ’Eights; three of them appear on the CD version of Volume One. “Lady Bird” was one of the first tunes to receive the
Art Blakey

Blakey’s role as a quiet pioneer.

Their first studio album, The Jazz Messengers, was recorded over two sessions (April 6 and May 4, 1956) at “The Church”, a former Greek Orthodox cathedral on New York’s 30th Street bought by CBS and turned into a recording studio. This spacious facility was remodeled but still retained its high vaulted ceilings, producing an echo few studios could match. This date is noteworthy for one other reason: it would be Donald Byrd’s only album with the group. (The count becomes two if you include Byrd’s Eye View, a Messengers disc in all but name.)

Hank Mobley serves as tenorman and principal composer: his “Infra-Rae” fits tiny notes to the “Morning Sunrise” chord sequence, fueled by insistent cymbals. Byrd shows the fast solo style common for the era, but with the hard tone associated with the boppers. His diction is perfect—a trait Blakey loved in his trumpeters as he draws a series of right angles; the drummer floods him with toms-toms. Silver’s funk-drenched solo owes nothing to Sigmund Romberg; he ends by quoting “Beati Mir Bist du Schön”, which is a cute touch.

Mobley has a golden alto sound, burbling sweet on a turbulent background. Speaking of turbulent: Art cracks it hard on a lengthy solo, getting the most out of that vaulted ceiling. You can actually hear the engineer work on the solo, twiddling dials to deaden the echo, to make the drums sound less metallic. It doesn’t work. Art still looms large, a boisterous spirit no engineer can suppress. The end-theme supercedes the earlier, and the tune leaves you with a lasting impression. Thank Art, and thank the ceiling.

“Nica’s Dream” blends romance and tension, as Byrd’s gauzy notes meet Art’s Latin click. Silver’s comp rumbles like a second bass; it’s long but still retains its high vaulted ceilings, producing an echo few studios could match. This date is noteworthy for one other reason: it would be Donald Byrd’s only album with the group. (The count becomes two if you include Byrd’s Eye View, a Messengers disc in all but name.)

Hank Mobley serves as tenorman and principal composer: his “Infra-Rae” fits tiny notes to the “Morning Sunrise” chord sequence, fueled by insistent cymbals. Byrd shows the fast solo style common for the era, but with the hard tone associated with the boppers. His diction is perfect—a trait Blakey loved in his trumpeters as he draws a series of right angles; the drummer floods him with toms-toms. Silver’s funk-drenched solo owes nothing to Sigmund Romberg; he ends by quoting “Beati Mir Bist du Schön”, which is a cute touch.

Mobley has a golden alto sound, burbling sweet on a turbulent background. Speaking of turbulent: Art cracks it hard on a lengthy solo, getting the most out of that vaulted ceiling. You can actually hear the engineer work on the solo, twiddling dials to deaden the echo, to make the drums sound less metallic. It doesn’t work. Art still looms large, a boisterous spirit no engineer can suppress. The end-theme supercedes the earlier, and the tune leaves you with a lasting impression. Thank Art, and thank the ceiling.

“In the middle ‘Fifties, live jazz came back to Greenwich Village, under the oddly-painted auspices of the Café Bohemia. This establishment began life as a strip club, but with a difference: on Sundays the city’s jazzmen would jam on stage, taking place of the dancers. On one of these Sundays, a musician told the club owner that if he turned the place into a jazz club, they could get Charlie Parker to play there. Intrigued, the owner said yes – while Bird never played the Bohemia (he died before the club opened in early 1955), most of the big names did.”

Blakey entered 1957 with a number of tasks on hand. This would be his busiest year as a recording artist, with twenty albums made for eight different labels. It was also his first major overhaul of the Messengers, as Silver and Byrd had left to form their own groups. The sax chair was filled by Jackie McLean, who played with Art on the Dig album; he was the first alto hired by Blakey since Lou Donaldson in ’54. (As that group was not yet called the Jazz Messengers, McLean can be considered the first alto Messenger.)

McLean was enthused by this status, as he

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Dockery’s active solo, the theme returns (played better this time) and it concludes with a proud fanfare by Art.

“Ugh!” is the sound of thunder: Art uses mallets on a single tom, building a tympani-style crescendo. The horns shriek, the drums get louder; Blakey switches to sticks as the storm gets denser. Patterns develop, each drum in the kit gets its moment, and the horns return, trading notes on the breathless theme. Bill speaks with soft intensity, churning notes in a narrow range; McLean is even faster, propelling himself upward. Art’s solo starts sparse, works a great snare roll, and sets in the toms as the horns beat their exit. It’s a very nice effort, perhaps the best of the album.

Elektra prided itself for being one of the first independent labels to record to stereo. As with many albums of the time, _Midnight Session_ was released in mono and stereo; unlike most of those albums, these two versions actually contained different material. The tune “Reflections” appeared only on the mono edition: a pleasant bopper, Hardman’s warmth competes with Jackie’s aggression. The alto goes first, blowing diagonal lines against Dockery’s hot comp. Bill follows in a mist, a multitude of short quiet notes. He plays them as fanfares, in repetitive bursts; a few massive thuds by Art keep the mood strong.

Those who bought the stereo copy missed this number, getting instead “Study in Rhythm”, a feature for the leader. He begins with light cymbals, working in toms as the pace quickens. Now in a Latin groove, Art’s bandmates add percussion, including cowbell, claves, and possibly shakers. A shimmer of cymbals comes before the thundering tom, to repeat itself with greater intensity … then it suddenly stops without resolution. Whether a time constraint or a flub-induced edit, it matters not – Art has said plenty.

The final tune, Waldron’s “Mirage”, appeared on both versions of the disc. Sam brings it in with soothing chords and McLean does the rest, a sweet stream of romance. Bill’s tone is heartfelt, perking up on the uptempo bridge; Dockery recalls “Violets for Your Furs” in his short solo. Pretty much a minor effort, this could have been a big band session in December.

Art switched labels again in April, making two albums for Vik, a new subsidiary of RCA. The better-known of these, _A Night in Tunisia_ was made on April 2 and 8, with the first sextet edition of the Messengers. This was recorded at RCA New York, produced by R & B veteran Bob Rolontz. (Rolontz is best known for producing “Love Is Strange”, a 1956 hit for Mickey and Sylvia.) The entire cast was back from _Reflections of Buhaina_; as Jackie McLean had just signed with Prestige, he was credited as Ferris Bender (or “Bendo”, if you read the front cover.) Joining them was the exciting Johnny Griffin, a full-throated tenor; knowing McLean was planning to leave the group, Art hired Griffin while Jackie was still in the lineup.

“Once the Messengers were established for good, Blakey did something very shrewd – he did not sign an exclusive deal with any one record company.

While an unusual move at the time, for many reasons it made perfect sense. Blakey didn’t need a label’s publicist to make the group famous … it already was.”

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