Jazz History

Feature
Art Blakey, Part 5

Interviews
Manuel Valera
Jazz Standard, April 11
Javon Jackson
Mizzy's Club, May 14

Photos
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“If you put the time in, you’ll get better. When I chose to be a musician I had an idea of what it would be like. In my early life it was a fantasized dream based on what I saw. My family worked day jobs and then went and played at night. So that set me up for an all-day/all-night work ethic.”

Victor Lewis: Both of my parents considered learning an instrument as part of your growth in life. It was their way of showing us the concept of effort and reward. My father knew that music gets kids more than arithmetic, as far as

ics could go into. My family had some doctors, nurses and accountants, but I’m baby brother, I just had to do music, and my father said, “Okay, you made your choice.” I ended up finding my day job after I moved to New York. I got there at the tail end of the real recording industry in New York, so my day job was recording. I worked all day and all night, but it was all music and that cooled my father out.

VL: Yes, that’s a sequence that deals with first gravitation and puberty. The first instrument I gravitated towards, and to this day I still love it but I was too small, was the acoustic bass. That’s how I ended up with the cello. I have a photo of me at five-years-old standing there on Christmas day with a cello that was my bass that Santa had brought me. Propor-

tionately it worked. So they sent me to take lessons and the first thing the teacher made me do was pull out the bow and start playing arco. No, that wasn’t what I wanted to do, I wanted to get to pizzicato like the walking jazz bass players. I studied it about a year or two but was disillusioned because I never got to the pizzica-

to thing. I took classical piano from seven to eleven and then at eleven puberty started to kick in and all of a sudden it wasn’t manly enough for me to be a brother taking classical piano lesson. I mean that’s all bull but now I thank God that I took classical piano lessons.

Then came the Fourth of July Parade that they used to have in the black neighborhood of Omaha and I saw this drum corp in the parade – Boom! Talk about a calling. I got to junior high and after I convinced my folks, they rented

ed a snare drum and a pair of sticks for me. I wanted to be in the school band and play drums so I went to the band director but he said, “We’ve got too many drummers, what we need is French horn players.” So I played French horn in junior high. I just wanted to be in the band. Christmas came, my second year in junior high, and I got my first drum set. I lobbied hard for that and I’m bonkers, I’ve got my first drum set and I had no idea of how to put it together. It took me all afternoon and I just could not wait to get busy. So I finally get it set up in the basement and then Slam-Bam-Boom-Boom-Boom-Kapieya-Chuum-Blu-Blu-

Boom. So that went on for a couple of months and then all of a sudden one day I came to a screeching halt. ‘There’s something wrong with this picture.’ Finally it hit me. I didn’t want to be down in the basement by myself, I wanted to play with a band! That was a heavy revelation so from that point on I started to tailor all of my efforts to convincing guys to let me play in a band. It put a selflessness perspec-

tive on how I viewed my participation in the band. It’s a team effort and that’s how that calling began.

JL: After initially studying cello and then classical piano how did you get the calling to play drums?

JL: Those early years of classical training taught you to read music which ended up setting you apart from many of the other drum-

mers in Omaha and you got a lot of commercial work as a result. What commercial work were you doing?

VL: I did jingles. They needed a drummer who could read music because you had to start
Victor Lewis

and stop together. I did my first jingle when I was like eighteen and it was a great experience. It was a Union Pacific Railroad jingle and I was really proud of it because it was representative of an accomplishment of mine in music that I could listen to. My first time checking myself out.

JI: You also worked for the circus?

VL: Yes, and I talk a lot about the circus a lot to my students. The first mistake that they can make is to think that they can only get good at playing jazz in a so-called “hip” jazz situation. No, they don’t realize that you take stuff from all different areas. The circus had to do with what I experienced from working with the clown in terms of participating with the dialogue and responding and keeping the tether. The clown is going to do something funny on the tightrope and the band plays a waltz for him so I had to watch him and make some sort of response to what he did to be funny and then go back to the waltz. It gave me a great experience at responding and going back to the tether. That’s something you’d never think could be applied to your “hip” jazz situation.

JI: What did you do for the Bob Hope Show?

VL: I got hooked up with contractors because I could read music and they would call me when the shows would come to town. I did the Bob Hope Show and the Red Fox Show with the great, bless her soul, Melba Liston playing trombone and musical conductor. I did a Las Vegas topless review and tried to keep my place in the music! [Laughs] I also played a month with a Turkish belly dancer named Özeltürkbas who came to play in Lincoln, Nebraska around 1969. I got to the rehearsal and she said, “Veektor, what I want from you is mad, passionate mallets on the tom-toms. Just watch me.” And she proceeded to dance and I watched her and thought, ‘Oh, man, this is a chance I can try to explore my Art Blakey mallets on tom-tom stuff!’ That was a wonderful experience I tell my students about.

JI: How did hearing Tony Williams’ drumming change the course of your playing and career direction?

VL: That’s a very deep story in terms of my development. I’m fourteen-years-old, 1964 in Omaha, Nebraska. One of my best buddies, who was a drummer also, his father was a jazz trumpet player who was heavily into Miles and would buy his records as soon as they came out. So here it was in February with snow up to here and I happen to look out my window and saw my buddy running and slipping on the way to my house to tell me about the new Miles record with a new drummer on it named Tony Williams. I told him, ‘I never heard of him.’ [Laughs] He said, “He’s got some stuff, man. It’s different.” So we ran slipping to his house and his father puts on Miles’ Four & More record and Boom it was everything my man said it was and more. I grew up during part of the Midwest territory big bands and I had checked out all the cats. I saw Basie, Duke, Buddy Rich, Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, all several times, so I had an imprint on me from the big band drummers but this was a small ensemble drummer that resonated with me because of the freedom and the dialogue. I’m a rebel at heart and the reason I chose jazz was because I like to play how I’m feeling that day. I’d had enough of reading exactly what’s on the page. So hence my decision not to be what my professors at University of Nebraska envisioned for me to be, maybe the first African American tympani player in the New York Philharmonic. I got another calling and I pursued exploring smaller ensembles. Fast forward from fourteen to age twenty-one. I heard that Tony was playing in New York with Stan Getz but my funds were poor so I only had enough money for a one-way ticket. I bought the ticket to see Tony but then I had to figure how to get back home. That’s where big brothers come in. If your family is half-way functional, your first heroes should be your father and big brothers. [Laughs] When I went to see Tony I didn’t say anything to him. I just sat in the corner. That was around 1970. I moved to New York in 1974 and in the beginning of ’75, I got the gig with Joe Farrell and I played the Village Vanguard for the first time. There was a waitress that worked there who came to me after the second night and said, “You sound okay. I’m gonna tell my boyfriend about you. He’s a drummer, you might know him, maybe.” She said he was Tony Williams. I forgot about it and four nights later, we’re playing one of the tunes of the day “Captain Marvel,” days I was never happy with my playing because I was trying to get to something. And I look out and see Tony Williams and Billy Hart sitting in the audience and it’s, ‘Oh, man, what am I gonna do? I’m gonna be exposed as an imposter!’ [Laughs] So we played the set, and I wanted to go and hide, but I have to go over and pay my respects to these cats and say hello. So I walk over — a little puppy dog, all sad — “Hi guys, how ya’ doing?” And the thing is, Tony said something to me that for sure he would know, but humbly speaking, I was blown away with the fact that he said it to me! I didn’t feel that I was at that level yet but Tony said, “You may not have been happy with your playing because you never heard it played before,” meaning I was on a path to my own innovation of being me. And there’s no reference for that and although I felt not worthy, he planted a seed that I’ve milked to this day. And part of that seed that he nourished, I had a couple of events that helped give me a kick towards it. So here I am, highly influenced by Tony and I’m playing a club back in the day called the Pin Palace and Clifford Jordan, who lived in that neighborhood, happened to walk in to hear the set. On the break he came to me and said, “Yeah, youngblood, you sound pretty good but I hear who you’ve been listening to. It’s time to cut him loose and get your own shit.” Boom! And that started that. Thank God.

(Continued on page 8)
“Thank God that I paid attention to the stepping stones in my life because what you gonna do when you end up playing opposite Tony Williams trying to play all of Tony’s licks cheaply? You better have some of your own self. So when that happened I was me. Studying the legacy is an essential part but the doctorate that you get in this art form is when you get your own style.”
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Victor Lewis

(Continued from page 8)

Woody Shaw?

VL: I’ve got so many memories and I share them when I talk about tough love in terms of the level of the music and what it takes to play it. This is a great story that I tell my students. I had made The Moontrane with Woody, and this was before he signed with CBS and got really busy, we did occasional gigs. This happened in 1977. We were in Knoxville and I had just broken up with my first New York girlfriend. Woe is me, heartbroken, deflated, uninspired, and I go to play with Woody. We play the first set and on the intermission Woody asked to speak with me and he took me way away from the rest of the band and turned to me and said, “Motherfucker, what the fuck is wrong with you?” I said, ‘Well, I broke up with my lady,’ and he said, “Fuck a girlfriend… Fuck all that,” and stepped off and left me in a spin. So here I am like the first night I froze at Boomers, and I went through the same cycle until I got my life force back by triggering my vibrations and spinning my chakras. I went out to play the second set and went for broke and you know what Woody did to acknowledge it? He stopped in the middle of his solo and turned around to me and said, “Yeah, that’s what I’m talkin’ about, play for your mf’n life.” So that was a lesson that maybe you can’t learn until you’re there.

JL: You mentioned that your very first recording was Woody Shaw’s 1974 classic The Moontrane. Would you talk about that session?

VL: Once again, nervous like a big dog, my first record. ‘Oh man, oh man,’ and Buster was on that too. Buster said, “Well, it’s just another gig.” [Laughs] Conceptually he’s right but I didn’t have the time under my belt like Buster did. It came out alright. Something I learned from Woody is, I do a lot of composing, and with jazz musicians a lot of the time the tunes are triggered from something, an event, somebody, and I learned not to put the name on the tune. Find something that makes the same statement but doesn’t announce the direct meaning because Woody wrote songs for his girlfriedns. They were great songs but when they would break up, he didn’t want to play the song anymore. We’d ask him to play them and he would say, “No, man, later for her!” I only named one tune kind of directly but it’s still camouflaged. It’s called “P.D. on Great Jones Street,” and who she is is Patricia Dow, mother of my two daughters, and we lived on Great Jones Street at the time.

JL: You wrote a composition in honor of Woody Shaw called “The Shaw of Newark.” What were you conveying with that tune?

VL: I used his intervallic concept. Woody’s style on the trumpet was not naturally conducive to the natural bugle partial series. He told me that he checked out all the trumpet players and after checking them all out he went to McCoy and Trane for inspiration and therefore embracing intervallic concepts that aren’t natural to the trumpet. He worked it out. So “The Shaw of Newark” has that intervallic concept. I always liked that from when I played Bartok – the 4th intervals and the dissonance always resonated with me. The melody of that song is right up in his alley. Woody was also a great drummer on the trumpet. His time was impeccable and very rhythmic and high articulation. The trumpet’s a hard instrument. I don’t play the trumpet but I own a trumpet and I mess around.

JL: You made one recording with Eddie Lockjaw Davis – The Heavy Hitter in 1979. He was known for his unusual performance style of playing “backwards,” using the opposite phrasing. Was it difficult to play for him?

VL: No, it wasn’t and in fact the way that recording session went down was he was on a mission to get it down with, with dignity, and get out of there. And thank God he felt that way because earlier that same day I was recording the Woody III record with Woody Shaw so I had back-to-back dates so by the time I got to Eddie Lockjaw’s date I was already tired. It’s the quickest record date I’ve ever done in my life. Do you know we did that record in an hour and a half? No rehearsals, no rundown, just talk down – “roll em.” All one takes. We had to stop one time because of me! [Laughs] It was all medleys. This was the one and only time I got the chance to play with the great George Duvivier. This was a hero if you ever saw one. So elegant and just used to another day in the office, playing great music. And there was also the great Albert Dailey. It was over so fast I was delicious trying to figure out what happened. Are we done?

JL: Would you share a memory of Lockjaw Davis? He was known to be a rough character.

VL: I never played any gigs with him. He was always nice to me. It was another day at the office for him. It was a great thing to witness. These were like professional artists, hired guns.

JL: You were part of Stan Getz’s quartet through the ’80s.

VL: Those were great bands, it was like driving a Rolls Royce playing with those bands. The first band was kind of a fusion band with Mark Egan on electric bass, Mitchell Foreman on keyboards, Chuck Loeb on guitar, Bobby Thomas Jr. on percussion. I did a couple tours with that band and then Stan changed bands but kept me. The next band was Lou Levy and Monty Budwig which recorded The Dolphin record. Then there was Marc Johnson and Jim McNeely, and then George Mraz and Jim McNeely, and eventually Kenny Barron and Rufus Reid. After I left, Stan was mainly working duet with Kenny. I developed something working with Stan. Working with Stan did a lot for my touch in terms of what I call playing on simmer. To where you’re not bashing out, you don’t have the laws of physics intensity of bashing out. And when you have to play a softer volume, and still want to get that same intensity, you have to recalibrate how you deal with the laws of physics because playing the drums is seriously about the laws of physics – distance, velocity. Stan liked the dialogue, he liked for me to stretch out, he just didn’t want me to bash too hard, so I really developed another part of my touch spectrum with him. There’s a Charlie Parker song called “Sippin’ at Bell’s” that Stan used to like to play. He and Marc Johnson would play the melody together and McNeely wouldn’t come in until the solo started, so it’s me, Stan and Marc Johnson, and I wasn’t happy just [hitting a steady pattern] while they were playing the melody so I decided to play the melody with them. I started it off by thinking about the wording and played the melody on the bells of the cymbal but I wasn’t satisfied with the intensity, so one day I decided to play on the rims of the cymbals and in that way I could dig in and accent it and it wasn’t overbearing. That kind of became a trademark of my style, playing on the sides of the cymbals.

JL: Do you have a memory of Stan Getz to share?

VL: Let me think about that and edit myself, like they say to protect the innocent. [Laughs] You may want to leave this out. Stanford University at Palo Alto used to have a summer jazz workshop with Stan as the figurehead artist-in-residence and mascot for the program. We used to do three-week workshops every summer and in the summer of 1984 there was a big event where they invited all of the chancellors, regents and deans to the lobby to get a full curriculum jazz program for the school year. It was a big concert with Dizzy Gillespie. So it was Stan Getz and Dizzy Gillespie, first time doing a recording together in twenty five years. It was a big thing. Before we did the soundcheck, Dizzy did a master class and he turned it out. Now Stan never finished high school, he went on the road instead, and he felt like he didn’t have anything to say [as a teacher] and meanwhile we’re saying, “Come on man, this is Stan Getz. You got a lot to say, just start talking.” But watching Dizzy’s prowess at giving a formal education presentation kind of took him out. Immediately afterwards we do a
soundcheck and then between the soundcheck and the concert, Stan disappears and doesn’t show up at the gig or the after party. There was a wrecking ball of events that happened as a result of that. Of course, the recording got screwed up, so we didn’t get paid for that! Hey, I got a couple of kids and responsibilities. Stan turns up three days later, and of course there’s a wrath of hell from Jane, his girlfriend, who gives him hell. Now, they were staying in one of the professor’s houses who was away on sabbatical and Stan gets mad and starts to trash the professor’s house. What happened as a result is that they started a new study about alcoholism at Stanford University! [Laughs] They tried to figure out Stan Getz after he fell off the wagon. I like to tell these stories to people who may look at somebody up there on stage playing, and it seems so effortless for them that you think this shit is easy, but it’s not. It takes more than prowess on the instrument and studying jazz. It takes a lot and the biggest element about it that creates a distortion of what guys go through is that for this art form, you can’t depend on how you played last night because every time it’s different. You have to call “the spirit” every night, and if you don’t, it’s gonna stay in the mundane or lower and once you’ve experienced a drop, you’ll do anything to keep it from dropping like that again. I like to call it the commitment that a jazz artist makes to getting it across to the audience. Our job is to open people’s hearts and raise their vibrations and resonate different emotions through the abstract intellect of notes and beats and harmony. Guys know that and guys do what they do just to be in the right zone to do what they’re supposed to do, and sometimes things can go awry. Charlie Parker died young by doing what he did so that he could make the presentation that he wanted to make and move people’s hearts. He paid a heavy price, but check this out – we still riding on him too! It’s what you do while you’re here that’s important. And that’s a big issue for me with the jazz legacy because at 67, I’m older than maybe eighty percent of my early heroes when they died and we still riding on them.

JI: You’re not exposing Stan Getz here, Donald Maggin’s biography Stan Getz: A Life in Jazz details many stories such as this.

VL: Okay.

JI: You’re not thought of as a free jazz drummer but you’ve recorded with artists in that genre such as Anthony Braxton, Paul Bley and Oliver Lake. How much do you resonate with jazz’s avant-garde?

VL: I like everything and opportunity sometimes comes that embraces whatever your desires are, put the ripple-effect into the cosmos and so on. A lot of people don’t know this about Tony Williams, he was very influenced by the avant-garde in his early days. I used to listen to Ornette and all that stuff. I used to do duet concerts with Julius Hemphill, who was part of the World Saxophone Quartet, and it would be – ready, set, go! [Laughs] So I like that but I like the challenge of it’s not a free-for-all, there has to be music, a focal point, a tether between the people playing whatever it is, as abstract as it may be, there’s still a discipline involved. Yeah, it was a great experience doing a record with Oliver Lake. That record Heavy Spirits was either my second or third record and came shortly after The Moontrane with the same producer Michael Cuscuna. It was my first avant-garde record and I just went from what I had listened to and Oliver, who’s a master at playing avant-garde and other genres, the way he set it up…For example, there’s a tune on there called “While Pushing Down Turn” and he said, “Imagine the sound of [a prescription container opening]. It’s a point of departure to convey some kind of picture in your mind, to tailor where it goes with some kind of communal goal together.

JI: You’ve been one of jazz’s busiest freelancers since the late ‘80s. Who were you most surprised to hear wanted to hire you?

VL: Steely Dan, I passed on it though. People couldn’t believe it. I was honored that they called in to consider me but at that time, I didn’t want to do the getting back in shape of playing that style that would require for me to do the job I wanted to do. And I had too much going on swinging. I was a part of a couple of groups and with a gig like Steely Dan there’s a chunk of time that you can’t commit to anything else because you’re for hire. You can’t commit to anything because if they call, you got to go. So I turned that down and I said, ‘Wow, I’m at a point where I can artistically pass on the Steely Dan gig. Huh, wouldn’t never thought that back in the day in Omaha, Nebraska as a kid.’ I had a few chances and the choices I made didn’t have anything to do with money at all.

JI: You play with so many different people, how do you arrange your schedule and how many gigs a year is ideal for you?

VL: It’s changed the older I get. I don’t like to work every day. I like to think about and practice music every day but I don’t like to work or travel every day. It’s too taxing. I hate it even worse in the wintertime when it’s cold. I’ve done enough tours where you’re standing on the corner with a drum set waiting for the promoter’s guy to pick you up and hasn’t showed up yet and you’re freezing to death. I don’t want to do those six – week tours anymore. A couple of weeks for me is enough at one time. Because I’m getting older there’s maintenance stuff I have to do to my body when I’m at home that I can’t do on tour. For example, my hang upside down Teeter [inversion table], because I’ve had back surgery, it’s essential. I hang upside down, it’s one of the first things I do when I get up in the morning. These days performing two or three times a week is enough, not even every week. I’m in an inspired composing period now and it’s hard to compose on the road because you got to schlep so much stuff. Also I have to travel light now, that’s what the surgeon told me. He told me without a lumbar 4-5 fusion I was headed for a wheelchair. He gave me new life!

JI: You’ve only made four recordings as a leader. Why haven’t you focused more on that?

VL: The industry hustle, that along with the record labels basically becoming extinct, which means they’re scrambling to find the next lucrative artist. I understand it’s business. What I want to do is produce my next record myself, meaning pay for it myself, because I think the future of this industry is not gonna be record labels. That’s just gonna for the hyped artists. Kids these days are putting out their stuff on the Internet. The reason it’s been awhile since I recorded is that my younger daughter got out of college eight years ago so I’m saving up again! [Laughs] I want to have full control and do it the way I want which is what I was able to do with past records, but times have changed.

JI: You’re an acclaimed drum master but what do you feel you still need to work on and when’s the last time you took a drum lesson?

(Continued on page 20)
Houston Person

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Tuesday, April 3
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- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Jane Monheit; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, April 4
- Mary Halvorson; Code Grill; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Louis Armstrong Eternity 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; Joel Weinhart; Dizzy’s Club, 60th & B’way

Thursday, April 5
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- John Scofield Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Charles Turner; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Randy Weston’s African Rhythms Sextet; 92nd Birthday Celebration; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

Friday, April 6
- Crescent City Monk, with Herlin Riley, Eric “Elew” Lewis, Ellis Marsalis, Todd Williams, Reginald Veal, Pedrito Martinez, Melanie Charles, And More, 7PM, 9:30 PM, The Appel Room
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- John Scofield Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Monk/Sung - Helen Sung Quartet with Special Guest Catherine Russell; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Randy Weston’s African Rhythms Sextet; 92nd Birthday Celebration; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

Saturday, April 7
- Crescent City Monk, with Herlin Riley, Eric “Elew” Lewis, Ellis Marsalis, Todd Williams, Reginald Veal, Pedrito Martinez, Melanie Charles, And More, 7PM, 9:30 PM, The Appel Room
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- John Scofield Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Monk On Tap - “The Monk Mob” With Special Guest Michela Marino Leonard; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Randy Weston’s African Rhythms Sextet; 92nd Birthday Celebration; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

Sunday, April 8
- Randy Weston’s African Rhythms Sextet; 92nd Birthday Celebration; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Jazz For Kids; Randy Weston African Rhythms: Blues Night; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Renee Rosnes; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Vocal Masterclass With Marion Cowings; Sacha Perry Trio; Tardo Hammer Trio; Ken Fowser Quintet; Jon Bathey “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- John Scofield Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Monk: High Priest Of Bebop Helen Sung Quartet With Special Guest Dr. Eddie Henderson; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Monday, April 9
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Ari Hoenig Trio; Joel Frahm Trio; After-Hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Natalie Douglas Tributes; Elvis; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- MSM Jazz Orchestra: A Love Supreme By John Coltrane; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Tuesday, April 10
- Walter Smith III “TWIO”; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Spike Wilner Quartet; Frank Lacy Group; After-Hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Eliane Elias: Music From Man Of La Mancha; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride’s New Jawn; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Wednesday, April 11
- Manuel Valera Trio; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- John Stetch Quartet; Troy Roberts Quartet; Isaiah Thompson “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Eliane Elias: Music From Man Of La Mancha; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride’s New Jawn; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Thursday, April 12
- SFJAZZ Collective: The Music Of Miles Davis; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Philip Dizack Quintet; Steve Hall Sextet; Davis Whitfield “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Michel Legrand Trio Featuring Ron Carter; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Eliane Elias: Music From Man Of La Mancha; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride’s New Jawn; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

Friday, April 13
- SFJAZZ Collective: The Music Of Miles Davis; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

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**Saturday, April 14**

- The Smokestack Brunch: Ted Chubb Band; SFJAZZ Collective: The Music Of Miles Davis; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Smalls Showcase: Ark Ovrutski Quartet; Mark Zaleski Band; Rob Scheps Core-Tet; HP Quartet; Small's, 183 W. 10th St.
- Michel Legrand Trio Featuring Ron Carter, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Christian McBride’s New Jawn; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

**Sunday, April 15**

- Jazz For Kids; SFJAZZ Collective: The Music Of Miles Davis; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Enrico Pieranunzi; Village Vanguard, 178 7th Ave S.
- Vocal Masterclass With Marion Cowings; Sacha Perry Trio; David Schmitt; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Michel Legrand Trio Featuring Ron Carter, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride’s New Jawn; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

**Monday, April 16**

- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Lucas Pino Nonet; Jonathan Michel Group; After-Hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Frank Wildhorn & Friends; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- MONDAY NIGHTS WITH WBGO, Emmet Cohen Trio Featuring Tootie Heath; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

**Tuesday, April 17**

- Ethan Iverson; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Linda Oh; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Steve Nelson Quartet; Abraham Burton Quartet; After-Hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Dizzy Gillespie Afro Cuban Experience; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Curtis Stigers; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- James Morrison Quartet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Evan Sherman; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

**Wednesday, April 18**

- Roxy Coss; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Linda Oh; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Adam Larson Quartet; Harold Mabern Trio; Theo Hill “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Dizzy Gillespie Afro Cuban Experience; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Curtis Stigers; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride Big Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

**Thursday, April 19**

- Mike McGinnes / Art Lande / Steve Swallow; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Linda Oh; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Brockowtiz Quartet; Carlos Aladje Quartet; Charles Goold “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Kenny Garrett; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Curtis Stigers; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride Big Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

**Friday, April 20**

- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Linda Oh; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Paul Nedzela Quartet; Quincy Davis Sextet; Corey Wallace Dubell “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Kenny Garrett; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Curtis Stigers; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride Big Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

**Saturday, April 21**

- Smokestack Brunch; Andrew Gould; Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Linda Oh; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Paul Nedzela Quartet; Quincy Davis Sextet; Brooklyn Circle; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Kenny Garrett; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Curtis Stigers; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride Big Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way

**Sunday, April 22**

- Jazz For Kids; Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Linda Oh; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Vocal Masterclass With Marion Cowings; Sacha Perry Trio; Nick Hamptton Band; JC Stylers/Steve Nelson Hutcherson Band; Jon Beshay “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Kenny Garrett; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Gunhild Carling; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
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SUNDAY APR 28
TEDD CHU LAMBERT BAND
Monday, April 23
- Christian McBride Big Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Mingus Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Ari Hoenig Trio; Jonathan Barber Group; After-Hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Maureen Mogwem; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Purchase Jazz Orchestra With Special Guest Mike LeDonne; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy

Tuesday, April 24
- Nate Smith + Kinfolk; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Javon Jackson; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Ian Hendrickson-Smith Quartet; Frank Lacy Group; After-Hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Irakere 45; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Karrin Allyson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- 9:30pm: Chamy Presents: “Four By Four”; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy

Wednesday, April 25
- Black, Brown & Beige & The Best Of Basie Featuring The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis; Program Is Presented As Part Of The Etergun Jazz Concert Series. 8PM, Rose Theater
- Houston Person Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Javon Jackson; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Chet Doxas Quartet; Matt Chertkoff Quintet; Asaf Yuria “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Irakere 45; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Karrin Allyson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Thursday, April 26
- Black, Brown & Beige & The Best Of Basie Featuring The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis; Program Is Presented As Part Of The Etergun Jazz Concert Series. 8PM, Rose Theater
- Houston Person Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Javon Jackson; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- John Ellis Quartet; Lew Tabackin Trio; JD Allen “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Irakere 45; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Karrin Allyson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, April 27
- Black, Brown & Beige & The Best Of Basie Featuring The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis; Program Is Presented As Part Of The Etergun Jazz Concert Series. 8PM, Jazz At Lincoln Center, Rose Theater
- Joe Locke “Subtle Disguise”; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Houston Person Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Javon Jackson; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- John Ellis Quartet; Lew Tabackin Trio; JD Allen “After-Hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Irakere 45; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Karrin Allyson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Saturday, April 28
- Black, Brown & Beige & The Best Of Basie Featuring The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis; Program Is Presented As Part Of The Etergun Jazz Concert Series. 8PM, Rose Theater
- Joe Locke “Subtle Disguise”; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Smokeyjazz Brunch; Theo Hill Trio; Houston Person Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Javon Jackson; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Irakere 45; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Karrin Allyson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Sunday, April 29
- Joe Locke “Subtle Disguise”; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Jazz For Kids: Houston Person Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Smalls Showcase: Ben Barnett; John Ellis Quartet; Lew Tabackin Trio; Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
**SATURDAY, MAY 5**
- Zakir Hussain and Dave Holland: Crosscurrents - Jazz Legend Dave Holland, Tabla Percussion Master Zakir Hussain, Chris Potter, Amit Chatterjee, Louiz Banks, Gino Banks, and Shankar Mahadevan. This Program Is Presented As Part Of The Ertegun Jazz Concert Series. 8PM, Rose Theater
- Smokey Stack Brunch: The Ladybugs; Kenny Barron Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Eric Reed Quartet, Village Vanguard, 176 7th Ave S.
- Chico Valdés; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Dida Pelled; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

**SUNDAY, MAY 6**
- Jazz For Kids; Kenny Barron Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Eric Reed Quartet, Village Vanguard, 176 7th Ave S.
- Chico Valdés; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

**MONDAY, MAY 7**
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.

**TUESDAY, MAY 8**
- Jeff Hamilton Trio; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bldwy
- Fred Hersch Duo Invitation Series With Anat Cohen; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Steve Coleman & Five Elements, Village Vanguard, 176 7th Ave S.
- Bill Charlap; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 9**
- Fred Hersch Duo Invitation Series With Kate McGarry; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Steve Coleman & Five Elements, Village Vanguard, 176 7th Ave S.
- Bill Charlap; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Essentially Ellington Alumni Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bldwy

**THURSDAY, MAY 10**
- Fred Hersch Duo Invitation Series With Miguel Zenon; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Steve Coleman & Five Elements, Village Vanguard, 176 7th Ave S.
- Bill Charlap; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

**FRIDAY, MAY 11**
- Fred Hersch Pocket Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Steve Coleman & Five Elements, Village Vanguard, 176 7th Ave S.
- Bill Charlap; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

**SATURDAY, MAY 12**
- Smokey Stack Brunch: Carmen Staaf’s “Day Dream”; Fred Hersch Pocket Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Steve Coleman & Five Elements, Village Vanguard, 176 7th Ave S.

**TUESDAY, MAY 14**
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Bill Charlap; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Javon Jackson’s Berklee Sextet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bldwy

**FRIDAY, MAY 18**
- Celebrating Ornette Coleman, Featuring The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis And Music Director Ted Nash; 8PM, Jazz At Lincoln Center, Rose Theater

**SATURDAY, MAY 19**
- Celebrating Ornette Coleman, Featuring The Jazz At Lincoln Center Orchestra With Wynton Marsalis And Music Director Ted Nash; 8PM, Jazz At Lincoln Center, Rose Theater

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“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.” — Socrates
Victor Lewis

(Continued from Page 11)

VL: Oh, man, I take unofficial drum lessons every day and I’m always practicing in my head. I’m at the point now that I can work out [in my mind] what I want to do and I know what the movement is gonna be. Now what I’m working on is really exploring to me the fullest extent without feeling that I have to add more chops to my arsenal. They say every generation runs faster and jumps higher and there’s a lot of young cats now that have more chops than they’ll ever need but they’re still seeking for more chops thinking that’s gonna get them musically to what they’re trying to do, but not necessarily. I had a revelation. I’ve been playing the drums for 55 years and say, maybe for 25 or 30 of them, I tried to collect all the licks and beats and rhythms. The last 25 years I’ve been trying to figure out how to play one lick a thousand different ways. I’m trying to use the facility that I have because I used to be a practice-aholic. I’d be scared to go to the gig if I didn’t at least put a couple hours in and then life threw me a wonderful curve ball where my living situation changed and I couldn’t practice before I had to go to the gig. That was a great thing for me because that meant that I had to play music with what I had, whatever I showed up with, and that’s the whole point, which is to play music as opposed to playing facility.

JI: In addition to drumming, you’ve excelled as a composer. Your songs have rich, memorable melodies. What stimulates you to compose?

VL: One is that it’s cheaper than seeing a shrink and you might make some money with royalties. It’s a vent, it’s a purging, it’s a mission. Really I started composing from getting bored with my classical piano lesson for the week and just started screwing around on the piano when I was eleven. Then when I got my drum set and I assembled some cats to come and play at the crib in the basement, it got to the point of, ‘Ok, here we are, what are we gonna play?’ I started coming up with little ditties on the piano that I could teach the cats and then we could play them. Over the years, I just like creating music, expressing a feeling. I didn’t just want to be a drummer, I wanted to be a musician. In my early days in New York, I got chumped off as a composer because the scene wasn’t evolved enough to embrace drummers who were composers. When I hit New York there were only a few cats who were composers – Joe Chambers, Jack DeJohnette, Tony Williams, but Woody encouraged me to bring in music when I joined his band. He told me the reason why was because when he was a young man, playing with Horace Silver, he was always up in Horace’s ear asking to play one of his tunes and Horace wouldn’t play them. Woody kept hassling him so finally Horace agreed to play one. So they rehearsed it and played it and it got a standing ovation. He didn’t play the tune anymore after that! Woody said he vowed that once he got his own band that he wouldn’t just play his own stuff. He almost demanded other’s bring music in and lucky me. You can’t buy that kind of opportunity at Berklee.

JI: One of your most popular tunes is “Big Girls.” What’s the story behind that title?

VL: “Big Girls” is all about grownup women who are really responsible little girls at heart and the relationship between men and women. Sometimes the girlfriend is kind of motherly to the guy and sometimes the guy is kind of fatherly to the girl in terms of looking out for each other. It has to do with the dance of the relationship and how the pendulum can swing to either side. When we recordered that with Kenny Barron’s Quintet [Quickstep, 1991, Enja] there was an incident that you would think would have killed the vibe. It was recorded at Rudy Van Gelder’s and Rudy, who was an analog genius, bless his soul, but eccentric and a little cocky and could be a drag sometimes, but he was good at what he did. Somedays he was cranky. So we’re getting ready to record “Big Girls” and John Stubblefield mentioned something to Rudy about the sound of the horn in his headphones and Rudy says the wrong thing. He said, “And is this your record? Then don’t worry about it!” It wasn’t cool. [Laughs] He roughed off Stubblefield and was being nice to each other until that wore off but for about a month it was intensely unified.

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

Herlin Riley (drums) said: “Thanks for reaching out to me for my input in interviewing my well respected friend, colleague and fellow drummer - the great Victor Lewis. I checked out a few of Vic’s interviews and performances on YouTube. One of his interviews talked about intellect vs. the whole band felt a vibe of disss. I was thinking, ‘Oh, man, the vibe is screwed up. It’s gonna kill it,’ but it did just the opposite. It made everybody in the band arch up and say, “Look, until we play the first note there ain’t nothin’ for you to do. We come first!” That’s the spirit that we had to get to rally to transcend how Rudy fucked up the vibe. And John Stubblefield, who he dissed the most, every time I listen to his solo on it, I start to cry because it was such a challenge. Everyone arched up so much, the tune ended up being fifteen minutes and Kenny kept all of it.

JI: Do you have a 9/11 experience to share?

VL: Indeed I do. I was supposed to go to Bogotá, Columbia the day after 9/11. On 9/11 I woke up around 7:30 with a mission to buy a new pair of shoes to take with me. I put on NY1 to see what was happening in the world and I saw this plane crash into the World Trade Center. I figured it was a trailer for a new movie and then I realized it was real. Boom! It was on! I had a daughter who was at City College and her campus was right next to the World Trade Center. My daughter still has an imprint of what she saw. She said, “Daddy, they had us come out of the building and we looked at the World Trade Center and at first, I thought that they were throwing valuables out of the windows but then I realized they were jumping.” Can you imagine a twenty-year-old girl seeing that? Needless to say, I never made it to Bogotá the next day because nothing was flying. But the thing that was disarmingly beautiful about it was it made the comaraderie level in New York go up tenfold. Everyone was being nice to each other until that wore off but for about a month it was intensely unified.

(Continued on page 22)
Photo of Victor Lewis performing with Sonny Rollins, Damrosch Park, New York City, August 26, 2006

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spirit in musicians. He said Woody Shaw challenged him on that issue! Today’s musicians go to college to study with different teachers to develop their musical intellect. I’d like to ask you Vic, how does a musician develop the spiritual component of playing jazz music?”

Vic Lewis (Continued from page 20)

VL: That’s a great question, Herlin, my man! Yeah, I’ve studied. Yeah, I went to college. Yeah, I know what a flatted 5th chord is, I know a bunch of stuff, but that doesn’t always give you a ticket to make music. These are tools and you need to put as many tools into your bag as you can so that when your heart decides what you musically want to play, you look in the bag and see which tool you need. That comes from a non-detached spiritual ceremony when you play. I believe there’s a spirit that you have to call when you play that helps you distribute your tools purely as opposed to it being

playing music, it’s just that I do it with the drums. A pitfall for the younger musicians is that the access to the vocabulary is so easy now with the Internet. Herlin knows that you have to balance the intellect with the emotional and the spirit. When I play or compose my best, it’s not just me playing, I’m a vessel, I’m a channel.

Herlin Riley also asked: “Where do you start when composing a tune? Do you start from the bass line or do you hear the chord structure first and fill in the melody, or the opposite - the melody first and fill in the chords. What’s your method?”

VL: It comes through either one of those channels. There are some tunes where I had a bassline and I found some chords to put around it and a melody to put on top of it. Some tunes, I heard the melody first, and other tunes I had a drum groove I wanted to explore. I used to do it methodically, just checking to see what I stumbled on but now I’ve come to realize those inspirational moments when it went somewhere, it was channeled. I hear the band playing [in my head], I hear all the parts, and then I sit down and write it out. I hear what I want to play - the melody and potential solos. I like to through-compose the vision of it. I won’t bring a tune to be improvised on if I haven’t already explored hearing an improvised solo in my head on it to see where it can go, what mood it conjures up. In that sense I’m a medium when I compose but don’t tell everybody that, I don’t want to be hung as a heretic, ha!

[Laughs]

Carmen Lundy (vocalist) asked: “I know that you sing. Would you talk about your connection to singing and have you ever sung on any recordings?”

VL: My girl, yeah, I’ve done some small vocal parts on my recordings. I have never done a recording singing lyrics but I come from, not only a family of instrumentalists but a family of singers too and everybody used to sing a lot! I used to sing doo-wop on the corner with my boys imitating Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. Actually, my folks didn’t want me to make a career out of music but when they accepted the idea, they wanted me to be a vocalist – you may as well be out in front. But back then I didn’t feel that I had the personality to be out in front, working the crowd, talking stuff. I wanted to just be behind the drums, close my eyes, playing music. I didn’t have much to say back then but now, with most of the legacy gone, somebody’s got to say something so here I is!

Carmen Lundy also asked: “Who creatively inspires you now?”

VL: She does! The music that I listen to at any time is something that raises my vibrations and inspires me and the last couple of weeks, I’ve been revisiting a record I did with Carmen called This is

“Yeah, I’ve studied. Yeah, I went to college. Yeah, I know what a flatted 5th chord is, I know a bunch of stuff, but that doesn’t always give you a ticket to make music. These are tools … so that when your heart decides what you musically want to play, you look in the bag and see which tool you need. That comes from a non-detached spiritual ceremony when you play. I believe there’s a spirit that you have to call when you play that helps you distribute your tools purely as opposed to it being calisthenics…”

calisthenics, and these are things that I would like to be addressed more in the educational institutions. Eddie Henderson tells a story about the time Miles Davis came to his house for dinner when Eddie was five-years-old and he played his little horn for Miles and Miles said, “Okay, good kid. I’ll see you in twenty years.” Twenty years go by and little Eddie has grown up and worked on his stuff, and low and behold, another opportunity for Miles to hear him. He came to a gig Eddie was playing and Eddie played his heart out. On the break he went over to Miles hoping to fetch some kudos and Miles said, “When you gonna stop playing the trumpet and start playing music?” So I stopped playing the drums twenty years ago and started
Victor Lewis

what that means?”

VL: That’s a really important issue. I’ve been trying to convey to them what it takes to get out of the mundane. There’s a lot of generic because it’s easy to get facility and vocabulary but guys are not innovating because it is not coming from their heart, they’re emulating. There’s a spiritual element to this music that’s not being addressed in the schools. I tell my students that you are dealing with things that you cannot see and I learned it from the guys that I grew up under. That’s what Curtis is talking about. I tell them stories about rubbing shoulders with the cats and I think that the younger generation has to be hungry to get that wisdom, that’s part of their lesson. Access is so easy for them that they are complacent about that and they miss the spiritual part of it. They’re really getting good at emulatation but they’re getting stuck there. The original guys of this music were not spoon-fed the music, they had to hunt for it and be in a creative zone.

Yoron Israel (drums) asked: “I have always enjoyed the tone that you produce from your drums and cymbals, whether you’re using sticks, brushes or mallets. Could you talk a bit about the personal development of your touch and sound?”

VL: I think that comes from my classical percussion days [and training] in specific textures and working with the tympani being at the right pitch. Pitch and touch and tambour comes out of there. I went through the fusion period, I love it all, and in the fusion era, cats had all kinds of stuff to hit. They would have one thing to hit for every sound they wanted to get to. Necessity is the mother of invention, and to tell you the truth, I got tired of carrying all that stuff around. I had to have back surgery from carrying drums for fifty-five-years. It’s kind of a badge of honor, I wouldn’t have it any other way, but it took its toll. I started to travel lighter to the gigs and I began to try to find all those sounds that you had one thing to hit for, find all those sounds on three things. If you look at Tony Williams you’ll notice efficiency of movement, no superfluous movement what so ever. It was like a Ferrari steering wheel! Yeah, when it’s my gig, I’ll add a few things, because it’s my gig. I’ll put my Chinese cymbal way up in the air but I just got to make sure I Tiger Balm up the night before.

Yoron Israel also asked: “The last time that I saw you perform was at the Berklee Performance Center in Boston a few years ago. It was a project that you led, featuring your compositions. Interestingly, you did not play any drum solos the entire set, yet as a drummer, your presence, personality and individuality spoke so clearly through the music. Is this that manifest in the way you play the composition and groove. I suspect this may have something to do with the way in which you listen to and learn music. How do you typically go about learning a new tune and how can others develop this intimate knowledge and relationship to a tune?”

VL: When you deal with a tune, from the point of view of a drummer, the first thing you gotta do is look at it as a drummer, you’ll only derive a limited amount of information. I always ask them not to give me a drum part that says, “Play fifteen bars and play a fill on the sixteenth bar and then play another eight bars.” Meanwhile when you’re reading the chart down, you’re hearing all kinds of things that are going on in the band that you should be addressing but it’s not on your part. So I want a lead sheet like everybody else has. I want to be looking at the same thing as everybody else. If there’s a bassline, I want to be aware of it. I want to see how the chords go by. It’s all essential information for you to have an overview of the tune in order to accentuate the melody and feel the colors of the different chords. I have to say something about Edward. He is such a masterful musician. He’s a master at having a vision that’s off the paper. It’s so important to have the right guys in the band. With cats like Ed, you give them the music, and you start playing it, and you say, “Yeah man, that was just the way I heard it! Oh, boy, you’re a genius!” [Laughs] John Stubblefield played my tunes just like I wrote it. Joe Henderson played my tunes like he wrote them.

“Miles Davis came to his house for dinner when Eddie [Henderson] was five-years-old and he played his little horn for Miles and Miles said, ‘Okay, good kid. I’ll see you in twenty years.’ Twenty years go by and little Eddie has grown up and worked on his stuff, and … another opportunity for Miles to hear him. He came to a gig Eddie was playing and Eddie played his heart out. On the break he went over to Miles and asked “Do you want some more Miles?” and Eddie said “No, man.” Miles said “I want to feel that you like playing with me. I’ll put you on my gig, I’ll add a few things, because it’s my gig. I’ll put my Chinese cymbal way up in the air but I just got to make sure I Tiger Balm up the night before.”
INTERVIEW

Manuel Valera
From Cuba to the United States

Hear Manuel Valera at Jazz Standard with
Hans Glawischnig, Mark Whitfield Jr.,
April 11, 2018

JI: Talk a little bit about how you discovered your interest and passion for jazz and the opportunities that opened the door for your development in this music.

MV: Well, since a very early age in Cuba I was exposed to jazz, straight-ahead jazz, via my father who’s a very well-known saxophonist in Cuba. His name is also Manuel Valera. He played with people like Gonzalo Rubalcaba and with Chucho Valdés. So jazz was always around the house. At a very early age I was introduced to people like Ted Baker, Paul Desmond. He liked a lot of the West Coast guys, but he also liked Charlie Parker and Chick Corea and there was some Michael Brecker stuff in the 80s. When the fusion thing started going, he also listened to a lot of the 80s stuff like Chick Corea’s Three Quartets, Steps Ahead, stuff like that. I always had an ear for it. And in 94, when I moved to the United States, I really started playing with people and furthering discovering jazz. And I got a chance to get into the New School in Manhattan. That’s when it really opened my ears – being in New York City and being able to play with a lot of people and just thriving and all the stuff that everybody does.

JI: When you came to the United States, you went to New School and you already had a lot of stuff together. But what kinds of challenges did you experience when you first arrived in the United States?

MV: The most interesting discovery is that everybody likes good music. And it could be jazz, it could be whatever you want, but when you go – like last year we went to India which doesn’t have a huge jazz culture. But people seemed to have an appreciation for I guess what they call intelligent music or whatever, like jazz, classical music or something. I’ve found that those things are really universal. You can connect with many people even if they’ve never heard jazz. A lot of the

MV: The first one is the language. I couldn’t really speak English so that was a really hard challenge for me and I would imagine for anybody that’s from a different country that travels here. English, that’s a ginormous challenge. Fortunately for me, I really caught on quite quickly to the English and I finished my last couple of years of high school in Miami and then I moved up here. There are many challenges other than that by being in New York and being in the states; it’s just a different culture than Cuba. Fortunately for me, I didn’t have that much of a hard time adapting to the new culture, but I know a lot of Cubans do have a tough time adapting because the system is completely different. We come from a place that if you’re a musician, there’s never a lot of money involved in Cuba of course. But if you’re a musician you have work. And musicians are musicians. There is no need to get a day job or anything like that. Musicians are just musicians. And here, a lot of people feel that they have to get a job and stuff like that. For me fortunately, that was not the case. But it can be a very difficult switch for a Cuban to come to the States.

JI: Yes. Now that you’ve lived in Cuba, you’ve lived in Miami, you’ve lived here in New York, so you’ve lived in three rather different places and you’ve traveled around the world and had a chance to come in contact with lots of people and observe different cultures and so on and so forth. What kinds of interesting discoveries have you made about human nature in your travels?

MV: Everybody is responding to music as you said ... yes, it’s a universal language. And maybe some people like different types of music more than others, or in different ways, or maybe there is more of a universal connection that somehow Bach and Beethoven and Mozart hit us in a certain way because there’s a universal kind of logic to the way that the frequencies and the tones are laid out. But either way, we’re all made up of different chemicals so your body would be different than mine and maybe therefore the cells would resonate in different ways and we’d each like different types of music based on the way our cells are kind of responding to a feel from those resonances.

JI: Everybody is responding to music as you said ... yes, it’s a universal language. And maybe some people like different types of music more than others, or in different ways, or maybe there is more of a universal connection that somehow Bach and Beethoven and Mozart hit us in a certain way because there’s a universal kind of logic to the way that the frequencies and the tones are laid out. But either way, we’re all made up of different chemicals so your body would be different than mine and maybe therefore the cells would resonate in different ways and we’d each like different types of music based on the way our cells are kind of responding to a feel from those resonances.

MV: Right. There’s definitely something like that happening, I’m certain of it. Because some of the places that we’ve gone to play, people hardly have any idea of what we’re doing on any intellectual level like they do here. They just hear stuff and they’re like “Oh, yes. We like that.” Also it helps that my music is very rhythmic, and a lot of these places, they’re very strong rhythmic places. Like India, for example, is a very strong rhythmic place. Between Africa and India, I think they’re the two strongest rhythmic places in the world probably. We got to connect there, and also when I went to Nepal, the same thing happened. Nepal is even more distant from India, it’s even further away from Western music than India is. So I guess that’s what it comes down to; there’s a mystical power to music.

JI: Yes, for sure. Can you talk about your experiences working with Arturo Sandoval and Paquito D’Rivera who also, like you, hail from Cuba?

MV: Yes. Working with both of them was very interesting and I learned quite a bit. With Paquito, I’ve done over the years things with Paquito. I never really played in his band but we’ve done a lot of things together like I’ve done arrangements for him. We’ve played dual concerts. We’ve done a bunch of projects and things like that together. Back in the day, he was sort of like a mentor to me in some ways. He’s also very good friends with my father from Cuba so he’s almost like family. And as far as Arturo, I played with Arturo for four years in his band, and we did travel a lot all over the world. I learned a lot about the music business from him; he’s a great business man. He has a way of just staying busy all the time. I think people seem to like what he does.

JI: What is it about Paquito and about Arturo Sandoval, the kinds of things that you picked up in terms of leadership and business things in addition to the music that was a valuable experience for you? What kinds of things did you pick up that kind of gave you some larger perspectives?

MV: It’s kind of hard for me to generalize it like that. Arturo liked to get paid. So there was always emphasis on that – you must get paid. He had some aspects that I’m not going to relate it to...
manuel valera

music like he has showmanship. His concerts, they always have a show element to them. And really entertaining; he could definitely play the trumpet. He has a way of grabbing people’s attention via just being himself really. He played some piano, keyboards, played the trumpet of course. There’s an element of showmanship from Arturo that a lot of people could learn from. As far as Paquito, I always found really inspiring his need to always move forward musically. He’s always writing, he’s always composing, he’s always applying for grants, he’s always writing a grant. He’s always doing something new like developing a project with some South American cats or some European people. He’s always moving around. He’s never stagnant.

JI: Right, he’s a showman.

MV: Right. That has value as well. Arturo’s thing has value as well, but typically I think Paquito is superior in my opinion to Arturo.

JI: Being around all these different artists, what’s your approach to leading your band and teaching the people that you play with your music and what are you looking for from them? How does that communication work for you?

MV: I’ve basically been fortunate that the people that are playing in my band are sort of the ideal people that I want to play in my band. So playing new music and teaching them new music is super easy because I sort of write the music for them in a way because I already know the sound of each of them. So it’s really when you write something for somebody, it will take shape really quickly because you really hear how they’re going to do it and you hardly ever have to say anything. That part is generally really painless for me, mainly for the reason that I write the things for them. When I write something, I write it for just Bonnie and Tom or whoever. So with that in mind, it’s real easy.

JI: Your wife does your artwork for you, so you’re pretty lucky that you have someone kind of like onboard to handle the design of your album jackets and all of your stuff. Talk a little bit about what it’s like for you at the world headquarters of Manuel Valera Incorporated.

MV: Like you said, I’m super fortunate that my wife is such an amazing graphic designer and she’s willing to help me get all these things going. We’ve been working on getting sort of a look on everything that I produce, getting a consistent sort of look with the fonts and other stuff. I have a couple of great people on the team that I work with all the time. I have a great booking agent, her name is JoAnne Jimenez, she works with Ron Carter and people like that. So I’m really fortunate to have people behind me willing to help me get everything moving forward. Just the whole graphic design thing is a super plus because generally people would have to pay for that. I get to pay for it in other ways but I don’t have to pay for it monetarily.

JI: If you could wave a magic wand, what are some of the things that you’d like to accomplish in the upcoming couple of years and people that you might want to play with. Give us a quick wish list here.

MV: I can always play more with my band. Sometimes I feel that people are a little reluctant to book the band even now at this stage and that’s the one thing that I wish to be a little bit different. But people that I want to play with, I don’t know. I’ve been focusing so much on my own thing that that whole thing of playing with other people is a little behind my wish list. I would always want to play with people like Wayne Shorter or something like that. I think that would be really fantastic, but I don’t think that’s happening. That’s definitely a wish list for real.

JI: Maybe Danilo Perez will let you sit in.

MV: Maybe, I don’t know. Probably not. I really hope that my career as a leader keeps growing and growing in the next couple of years even more. We’ve been very fortunate so far. I think this year, we’re doing the solo thing and the group thing. We’re doing between 40 and 50 gigs. That’s actually much better than last year on my own. I’m doing other things with Daphnis and Yosvany and a bunch of people. But on my own, I hope to get even more work because I really enjoy the possibility of working new music and just playing more live. That would be a great wish.

JI: Are you teaching too?

MV: I don’t teach so much. Once in a while I teach writing lessons and things like that but it’s not something that’s on my schedule too much.
Interview & Photo by Eric Nemeyer

Javon Jackson
Mastery By Ear

Hear Javon Jackson’s Berklee Sextet at Dizzy’s Club, May 14;
Javon Jackson, Village Vanguard, April 24-29

J: Can you talk a little bit about how earlier jazz musicians like Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Duke Ellington may have impacted and influenced you?

JY: Lester Young was a guy who’s always telling a story. It’s always swinging no matter how fast or how slow he’s telling the story. There were certain things that he did on saxophone—things like false fingering [furnus example]. He was the guy that was at the forefront of those kind of things. He just had a pretty sound. Hawk, Coleman Hawkins was a guy with a strong muscular tone—very aggressive, lots of facility. Lester came another way. You hear these fast tempos, and you wonder how is he going to make these tempos. They are so fast, but it was just effortless, and all these beautiful melodies. He seemed to use the common tones of chords. Sonny Rollins was a guy who played the common tones like Lester, but he had the muscular sound like Coleman Hawkins. So, those guys were very important for me. I listened to them and I still listen to them. I loved the record with Lester young, Nat Cole and Buddy Rich. Or The President Plays. I listen to those records a lot. As you begin to listen more and more it’s not even about a certain period. Jazz music and life, there is no separation. He lived jazz. It wasn’t about money. It wasn’t about accolades. He was one of the originators of the art form. So the art form was as serious as cancer to him, he would say. Every time he got behind the drums onstage he treated it as if it was his last time. He was a very impromptu, in-the-moment musician, which is something that can’t be said for everybody. You’d see him do these openings before we did the songs. People would say that they had seen they same openings for ten, fifteen years in some way. But, they always sounded like it was the first time, because he had that zest. The big thing I learned from Art was how much he valued people, how much he valued the audience. He would always take the time to say “I thank you for coming. We appreciate you.” He always stressed to us never to play down to the audience. Play to them and respect them—because the audience heightens your ability to go for things you might not go for. And professionalism—he always wanted us to wear a tie and look professional. He’d always say they see you before they hear you. He was just a supportive guy for young people. His only goal was swing them to death, and make sure that we have some fun. He also didn’t want you to be like anyone else. That’s the thing I loved. When you think of all the different groups, all of the varied musicians that were in his band—Chuck Mangione, Wynton Marsalis, Freddie Hubbard, Lee Morgan… All of these different people—but he never tried to put anybody into a particular box.

J: With the expansive repertoire that the group had accumulated over many years, did you have access to parts in advance? Or, were you working out the music in hotel rooms?

JY: No, what happened was when you joined Art Blakey’s band, all the musicians said, “I play this and this and this.” Your job was to go and learn your part. But there was no music. Either they taught it to you themselves, or you went to the recording. If a guy had his own original, he’d teach you his music. In general, you just had to learn on your own. So that was a challenge. And then if you got there and you learned it and it was wrong, someone would say, “well it’s not quite that note, but that’s how it worked.” There was no music. Art Blakey’s thing was that there was no music on stage. If you’ve brought a Real Book onstage, you’ve been fired immediately. I’m serious. I don’t think I’ve ever worked with a band… If I’d have brought a Real Book onstage with Freddie Hubbard, he wouldn’t have fired me, but he’d laugh me to death. He’d laugh because that’s not how music was learned in their era. Everything they do is by ear. Everything they do by ear.” I think we are influenced by more of the modern melodies in general, of Coltrane, and that period of the 60’s. But you’d be surprised at the number of musicians who actually understand that stuff or really do appreciate it when you talk to them. We are in an era where the further you move up in history, the further you go back.

J: Talk about your association with Art Blakey and some of the ideas you might have picked up.

JY: Art was such an incredible human being. He comes from an era where music is your life. In other words, when you talk about Art Blakey and Horace Silver, Art Blakey, Cannonball. There was no need for [sheet] music. Of course, they were working every night.

J: Everything now is transient. Guys get together for one gig. Somebody may call you next week for a gig. They show you some music. You look at it. You play it one time. You know you may never see the music again. There were record dates like that too. But the bands developed a lot more. I think that’s possibly what’s missing from today. It’s just
JI: How was your association with Blue Note different from Criss Cross?

JJ: Really, it’s about the same. Bruce [Lundvall] didn’t tell us who to play with. He gave me artistic freedom. He was a great lover of the music, like Teekens. Criss Cross is probably what Blue Note was in the sixties. Blue Note is a bigger machine, but Blue was definitely appreciative of what we were trying to do. I never remember him telling any musicians what they had to play. He supported that artist. If he hired you, if he signed you to the label, than he believed in you and he allowed you to do what you wanted to. And if you needed some help, if you wanted some artist as a special guest, he’d try to make it come together as best he could—within the numbers. I had a lot of respect for Blue. He was a really special person to me.

JI: Are there any lessons you learned you want to share about your dealings with record labels, producers, or managers?

JJ: Well, I can say that I think I have learned not to take anything personally. It’s business. Sometimes we mistake a business decision, or things might happen to us that appear personal, and it’s not necessarily that. Under the guise of business things happen. If you take it personally, you kind of beat yourself up, and that person on the other side of the fence.

JI: Someone might have had an entirely different reason for their activities than we might perceive. As artists we can be overly sensitive about our creations, and deeply impacted by criticism.

JJ: Yeah, and the bottom line is, if they don’t like it, that’s okay too. It’s just business. Eddie Harris taught me something very, very important. He said that no matter how good you might sound, there are always going to be people who don’t like you; and no matter how terrible you might sound, there are going to be a bunch of people who love you. As much as we love Coltrane—and it’s hard to believe that people don’t like Coltrane, but—there are some people who don’t like John Coltrane. This cat gave up everything. Yet there may be another guy who has that kind of impact on the world, and it’s not necessarily that. Under the guise of business things happen. If you take it personally, you kind of beat yourself up, and that person on the other side of the fence.

JI: Can you talk about your first albums—the ones you recorded for Criss Cross, on which you used different rhythm sections. On one album you used Kirk Lightsey and Louis Hayes and on Me and Mr. Jones you used James Williams, Elvin Jones. Was that a decision by you or the producer?

JJ: No, Jerry Teekens had no claim as to who I had to use. That was my choice. I wanted to play with Elvin. I met him a couple of times when I was with Art. He played a gig when Art was sick one time, so I played with him that time. I’d known James from Boston as well. Christian McBride would come by and play all the songs we had just recorded. I thought that was amazing. He’s not that much younger than me. It was just amazing that he was already on top of stuff. So I just wanted the opportunity to get Christian up on stage with me to play and to record and that’s how that happened. Kirk Lightsey obviously was a favorite of mine, from his work with Dexter Gordon. I heard him on records with Sonny Stitt as well. And Louis Hayes, he’s another person who’s been close to me. We are still very good friends. I was very appreciative of each of these players who came out and played to support me.

JI: As we try to develop our skills over many years, we work on scales, chords, patterns—a body of technical and theoretical understanding.

JJ: As artists we can be overly sensitive about our things doesn’t mean that I should assume that somebody who hasn’t been playing for the same twenty-five or thirty years might have the same understanding.

JI: Art Blakey was the ultimate band leader. You felt like he was a General and we were Privates. The ultimate general. Cedar Walton was a band leader, but in a different kind of way. Cedar has an idea of the direction in terms of the way he wants the music to go. Cedar is definitely a strong band leader. And Elvin was a band leader, but his thing was that we are going to go out and swing and have a good time. It wasn’t that he didn’t take everything seriously. Charlie Haden was a person who was very open for everybody. He wanted everybody to express themselves. Art Blakey was like that too, but he was more about the framework: this is the jazz message, it goes like this, and within that structure, we are going to have some fun. But it wasn’t completely wide open. He did want you to be yourself, but there were certain things you had to do. There backgrounds. There was going to be a lot of background. You were going to play with him that time. I had a lot of respect for Blue. He was a really special person to me.

JI: The music came first. It was what they were feeling.

JJ: They were one and the same. Nowadays, it’s not necessarily. Depending on who you are listening to and who’s listening, it may not always sound musical first. It might sound more like an exercise. It might have more quantity there, but I don’t know about the quality of it. So, we’re saying the same thing.

JI: Talk a little bit about how your involvement in jazz education, teaching at the college level, at SUNY Purchase has contributed to or challenged your creativity and artistry?

JJ: Well, it helps me actually to be around young people who are inspired and interested to learn. It helps me because it helps me keep things in perspective and think about some aspect of what they are working on and keep that in my current progress. It’s kind of like Michael Jordan. To me, he was so great because he was the master of the fundamentals. Like Coltrane, he was really, really great, but he was the master of the fundamentals. Same with Elvin Jones, Tony Williams. They had all this great stuff they could play. But they mastered the fundamentals. When you are around young people and you can express this, it gives them a way to look at it. It’s a good thing to have a chance to share some of the experiences I’ve had with the great artists with whom I’ve played. They are artists that, in some cases, the students won’t have the opportunity to meet, unfortunately. They see Art Blakey as just a guy on a record. They never got to meet him, they didn’t get to see him. I was lucky enough to see them. I feel like I’m passing something on, and that’s a good thing. Also, I just try to stress to them that school is great, and it’s great that you are here, and we’re going to share something. But when you really learn, is when you get out there on the street, in the club, and hang out and meet people. That’s where it’s really at. So there’s that balance there, but I don’t really find it a challenge. Do you find it a challenge?

JI: No. As a result of teaching, I get ideas—ideas for improvisation, composing, writing articles. Somebody will ask me a question, and I’ll think: “Gee, I forgot about that.” Then I realize that just because I know something, or I understand something doesn’t mean that I should assume that somebody who hadn’t been playing for the same twenty-five or thirty years might have the same understanding.
Frank Morgan
August 22, 2004
Charlie Parker Jazz Festival
© Eric Nemeyer
Art Blakey
His Life & Music — Part 5

By John R. Barrett, Jr.

The title cut opens much as “Study in Rhythm” did: a go-for-the-throat solo, helped by extra percussion. Art’s work adheres to the mold of the earlier tune, going from cymbals to toms and back — suddenly the reeds hit the counter riff as Hardman does his best Dizzy. Hearing his soft touch on Reflections, his intensity here is shocking; also good is McLean, who sounds like a flute in places. Jackie’s solo begins, twisting wildly around Sam’s visceral comp; Spanky DeBrest has a fun time, walking fast along the edges.

Hardman’s turn has an exotic tinge, often returning to the theme and venturing far. Griffin sounds the most “foreign”, his notes bending high like a soprano. In the second chorus he earns his nickname “The Fastest Gun in the West”, going at least triple-time; he also does the quavering yowl made famous in his duets with Lockjaw Davis. Dockery ripples slowly, setting a tension that Blakey enhances. (It’s great hearing Sam front and center – he was not served well by the Elektra disc.) A brief interlude by DeBrest returns us to the percussion motif, a tad noisier this time. Art takes the bridge alone on the end-theme, there’s an unaccompanied bit by Griffin, and it ends in a cloud of cymbals.

The alternate take is the same, with a few exceptions: Art’s intro is stronger, there is no bass solo, Hardman fumbles the theme slightly, a riff develops during Bill’s solo, and Griffin’s turn is somewhat bland (that doesn’t happen often.) Clearly they selected the right take for the album, and clearly this was a “Night” to remember.

“Off the Wall” has the horns in full scream, charging the theme as Blakey gets busy. McLean is assertive, starting his solo where the theme ends – hear him push the beat with a blunt, stinging tone. Hardman continues the thought with a little less tension; his improvement from the last date is instantly apparent. Griffin raises the bar again, matching Jackie’s ferocity even more speed. Sam is elegant, Blakey concise, and the ensemble fade is outstanding. McLean is superior on the alternate take, but Bill sounds a little pinched … too bad, since Johnny’s effort tops the released version.

Hardman’s “Theory of Art” is a hot mover, showing the reeds in full combat. Jackie fills the air with curlicues, airy in tone and relentless in pace. Hardman has an agreeable drawl, quoting “Dixie” as he runs his own maze. There are points in this solo when he sounds like Kenny Dorham – high praise indeed. Bill’s effort is the cream of this crop; Griffin’s solo is fast, but not much else. Jackie is slower on the alternate, and perhaps a little more tuneful. His intertwined phrases are really outstanding; Bill’s is at least equal to this, and he shines when Art turns to waltzing. Griffin has a screaming good time, and the whole thing is very cohesive – why wasn’t this the released take? The label must have a different theory of art.

The theme to “Couldn’t It Be You?” is first played by McLean, the tune’s author. The other horns make it a rondo, and the rhythm gets into place. While one horn is the focus, another is sure to repeat the theme in the background – priceless. Griffin swings through his turn, laying off the speed for the most part; Hardman adds a sweet riff in the middle of this. Bill’s solo is somewhat ragged, but soon smooths out: his high calls are mellowed by the background riff. Jackie sounds like Griffin on this, keeping it slow and mellow. And check out DeBrest, who ends the tune with a groan from his bow. As good as “Tunisia” is, I call this the cram of the album.

“Evans”, credited to Sonny Rollins, was first heard as “Out of the Blue” on Miles Davis’ Dig album, where Miles is the listed composer. Whoever wrote it, it’s a beauty: based on “Get Happy”, Hardman has a great time leaping through the bridge. Jackie takes the advice, with a very happy solo; Bill goes for baroque, sounding almost classical with an ornate string of staccato notes. Griffin is restless as usual, and Sam contributes a calm, stylish solo. A solid effort from beginning to end, this sextet proved very cohesive – sadly, this would be their only album. In a month McLean would be gone, soon followed by Dockery and DeBrest – their replacements would start the next great era for the Messengers. But before this happened, the group would join forces with another jazz legend, to produce a legendary album.

A brief stay at Atlantic gave Blakey another session with Thelonious Monk, this time with the support of The Messengers. (The predictable title was Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers with Thelonious Monk.) While Monk often recorded with guests, this was the first time he played with an established group; unlike a later attempt with Shelly Manne and His Men, this one was an unqualified success.

Two tunes were recorded on May 14: “Blue Monk” is among Thelonious’ best-known, most accessible tunes. (Legend says Monk improvised it after a record producer asked why the pianist “didn’t play blues”.) Art opens with a proud roll, and the horns march gravely behind him, sounding like a New Orleans funeral. Griffin hits some jagged lines, then cools into a slow ascent; his tone is also cleaner than on previous records. Quoting “Rhapsody in Blue”, Johnny then moves into the fast lane, while never losing control: Monk adds solemn chords where needed, but is otherwise silent.

Nest is Thelonious: his hands do a call-and-response, volleying back and forth against Spanky’s walk. Icy and spare, the blues creep in near the end of the solo, where he quotes “Misterioso”. Bill’s leisurely turn is accompanied by a “Misterioso” riff; he’s fairly fast, but not much happens. Spanky’s moment is agile, chorded and deep – probably his high mark as a Messenger.

The alternate finds Monk more active, striking dissonance into the theme statement. Johnny is far busier, blowing multiphonics at various points. There is stride in Monk’s effort; instead of “Misterioso”, he quotes “April in Paris”, interspersed with many Monk bleeps. Hardman’s turn is ordinary, but Spanky’s excels, more tuneful than the official release. The first take is sweeter, but this is more “Monkish” – there was no “best” here, as they both are.

“I Mean You” offers up unison horns, served with a garnish of cymbals. Griffin is on fire, referring to “Round Midnight” as he whips through a barwalking solo. Monk slows it way down, taking gingerly steps along the chords. Bill goes racing as Thelonious showers sour notes on him – later he shoots up high, inspiring a good double-time sequence. Art’s solo culminates in a mighty roll, easing back to
the theme. The theme is more forceful on the alternate, and Johnny’s turn is super-fast, maybe too much so. Monk follows with a dainty solo, full of tremolos and other old-fashioned devices; Bill is mellow, and bests his solo on the released version. This day was fruitful, if not especially productive; the rest of the disc would be finished the following day.

Four songs were recorded on March 15, completing the Messengers with Monk album. “Evidence” would become a standard part of the Blakey repertoire, often retitled “Justice”. (Referring to Monk in his introductions, Art would say “He calls it ‘Evidence’ but we call it ‘Justice’”.) The horns give the theme together, especially productive; the rest of the disc would be leased version. This day was fruitful, if not excellent; Bill is mellow, and bests his solo on the alternate, and Johnny’s turn is super

If the nonet date broadened the Blakey palette, Art Blakey Big Band made it wide as the horizon. Cut in New York at the end of the year’s end he would employ Johnny Griffin, filling the chair vacated by John Coltrane.

After Griffin, other Messengers would leave the group in swift fashion, and when 1958 came around, Blakey needed to hire a whole new band. The new bassist was Jymie Merritt, unknown at the time but prodigiously talented. Griffin would be replaced by Benny Golson, a stylish tenor with a gift for composing; the majority of his best tunes would be introduced by the Messengers. Dockery’s chair was filled briefly by Junior Mance and then by Bobby Timmons, a songwriter whose skills rivaled Golson’s – here at last was a successor to Horace Silver.

But the greatest improvement would come on trumpet – Lee Morgan, an admirer of Clifford Brown (he briefly studied under Clifford) who got his professional start in Dizzy Gillespie’s big band. It is hard to underestimate how important these men were to the Messengers – this was like drawing a new poker hand and coming up with four aces.

If the nonet date broadened the Blakey palette, Art Blakey Big Band made it wide as the horizon. Cut in New York at the end of 1957, this was Art’s first big band record since "In Walked Bud" gets a gentle reading, with Monk fussing at the edges of the tune. With his rustiest tone, Griffin turns it into a speed trial – technique triumphs over melody, which is rarely a good thing. Thelonious lingers with Monk fussing at the edges of the tune. Could Happen to You”; Art’s moment is short, but powerful all the same.

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“Rhythm-a-Ning”, but it really belongs to Monk, who is quieter than usual. Blakey is also reticent, restricting himself to rimshots; this lets Hardman soar, his hovering notes surrounded by silence. Johnny is agreeable, taking it slow … slower, anyway. The torch is then handed to Art, who is not silent this time: bass drums, toms, and an endless parade of snares leading back to the theme.

The disc ends with “Purple Shades”, a blues composed by Griffin. (Philly Joe Jones would record it a few years later, retitled “Blues for Dracula”.) Johnny is the primary voice, snapping notes downward as Blakey pounds the low keys. As Spanky makes a menacing walk, Thelonious drops a few solemn notes, then provides variations. Bill calls out like a foghorn, weeping at some private sorrow. Monk lays out on this section, leaving Art’s brushes to provide accompaniment. Griffin does his own sobbing, in wavelike notes that pick up speed. A challenging, confident album, things were looking up for Thelonious Monk. In a month he’d make the outstanding Monk’s Music, also with Blakey; he year’s end he would employ Johnny Griffin, filling the chair vacated by John Coltrane.

The sound is expansive, a vast improvement on the Eckstine dates. A soft echo floats in the background, adding punch to the proceedings: you can hear this on “Midriff”, as the sections go after each other. After a theme with rollicking trumpets, one of them (Idrees Suliman, maybe?) angles his way upward, with sweet reeds blaring behind him.

Coltrane is next, unwinding a fast spiral – his “sheets of sound” style, while not mature, is certainly present. By the second chorus he’s sprinting up the scale, as Art keeps the pace steady. Trane ends on a ecstatic squeak, a sign of things to come. Blakey gets a showy break, and the band roars home – that’s how you start an album!

“Take One” (included on the CD reissue) is rough on the ensembles; Trane’s solo has its moments but is cut short by the ending. “Take Three” has a calmer, more confident trumpet; this might be Byrd, but I’m far from certain. Coltrane lacks the fireworks of the released take, but it is beautifully realized – one thought carried seamlessly over two choruses. There’s even an allusion to “While My Lady Sleeps”, Coltrane’s most-used quote of the ‘Fifties. May-

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“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)
heartfelt, inventive solo. Wendell Marshall’s bass is warm and buoyant; the trombone is velvety and the tune is golden. Two further takes are offered: Trane’s solo on each has variations but all are cut from the same cloth. You can hear the band argue on the chatter between takes, as they work out their parts – a quest for a setting to match Trane’s gem-like effort.

One tune, “Oasis”, was recorded but not used until the CD release. The opening is priceless: a bored engineer says “‘Oasis’, Take Four”; a musician starts singing the theme, Melba joins him, Marshall is consulted … and the engineer snarls “‘Oasis! Take Four!” After a pricky intro the reeds glide together, and Art gets some juicy breaks. Someone says “Yeah” at take’s end, but they were still having trouble with it; definitely interesting, though not exactly good.

As a sendoff we have Cohn’s “The Outer World”, with a swagger you must hear to believe. The tom-toms are crushed, the reeds creak at the depth of their range, over a thick cushion of brass. There’s a call-and-response between sections, and a circular theme turning ever faster. Trane has one of his more animated solos, somewhat drowned by the roar behind him. Art thunders for a spell, Byrd’s turn is calm and raspy, building to a scream as the band goes into orbit.

Take two takes a light approach: the cymbals have a Latin tinge, and the horns are less raucous. But not Coltrane: his notes are dark-hued, darting with urgency in tight angles. Making the most of his one chorus, the solo is perfect … if only the ensembles were. Number Five is closer to the finished take, as Coltrane goes sailing – this is good, but it takes no chances. (He’s certainly more passionate before the tune starts, shooting tough phrases as the band debates something.) Also, the pace is a little sluggish, despite Art’s fine effort. In all, the bonus tracks, while interesting, add little to an already strong album.

To complete the disc, most of the horns were sent home, as Blakley took charge of a mighty quintet – Byrd, Bishop, Coltrane, and Timmons), then Wendell (a pleasant rolling bounce), then Arthur, with a melodic display on toms.

Take One is all different but the melody: the tempo is faster than the released version, and Coltrane is slower. This time Byrd gets the first solo, and he’s assertive throughout. His high notes are hard, while down the scale the tone is wrinkled – a friendly sound, and raucous too. Trane is in vertical mode, fluttering through the scale on a big sheet of sound. This approach, which Coltrane made famous, is better heard here than anywhere else on the session. Bishop is tuneful but morose on his effort; Marshall is delicate and Blakley is not. Take Three has the pace of the released track, and Trane gets the first solo: he’s slow at first, and turns up the heat in tiny steps. Notes multiply and the tempo quickens, all in good melodic order – we have a winner. Don’s solo is rhythmic and quiet, Bishop packs big blues in a small space, and Art thunders like mad. If there’s a reason why this take missed the album, I’ve yet to discover it.

The aptly-named “Pristine” is Coltrane’s rewrite on the chords of “Lady Bird”. (It was his second such composition, the first being “Lady Bird” on Blue Train.) Bishop skips through the light theme, and the horns breathe a dark harmony. Trane is ecstatic, scattering fast notes in an airy tone, while Byrd takes a gentler path. As always, Art is a rock, keeping a steady, busy pace. The bonus tracks offer a variety of flavors: Coltrane is more strident on Take Two, with definite hints of his ‘Sixties style.

Don’s turn is decent, though somewhat aimless; he’s better on Take Six, where his prim diction makes for a leisurely mood. At the start of the take, Trane was told to step closer to the mike; he responds with a lyrical solo, twirling his lines with vigor. Maybe this take was too long; otherwise there was no reason to junk it. Trane’s solo is fast on Take Eight, but it’s noteworthy for Bishop’s good comp – Byrd’s effort is nice, though similar to those before. This quintet session was the closest Coltrane got to playing in the Messengers. Hearing it now (currently packaged as John Coltrane: The Bethlehem Years), one wishes that opportunity had come.

While most Blue Note sessions took advance planning, including paid rehearsals, the label took the opposite tack when it came to Jimmy Smith. The organist liked things spontane- nous, often inventing his tunes on the spot; if paired with a sympathetic band he could go all night, with little else needed. For a session held at Manhattan Towers on February 25, 1958, the plan was simplicity itself: in the studio were Jimmy’s working trio (Smith, Eddie McFadden, and Donald Bailey), an all-star rhythm section (Blakley and Kenny Burrell), and a crowd of special guest horns. Players were shuffled in and out for variety’s sake, and Smith played every tune he could think of. The resulting harvest was spread out over three albums, one of which was named for the best tune of the session.

A low-key blues, “The Sermon” begins with a quiet, wavelike theme by Smith; his bass pedals are strong, marching steadily upward. Blakley works the cymbals in light procession; after a minute Burrell drops in, with flashy stings at irregular moments. His part starts as a standard comp and grows from there – the same goes for Smith, whose stutter-notes give way to trebly blues lines. Shril notes will creep in, and rhythmic variations, but the funk is never too far away. Burrell’s solo stays low, like an electric bass; hints of his “sweet” style are present, but mostly he follows what Jimmy is doing.

Tina Brooks is next, in his first recording session: he’s a gruff tenor, with a nice touch of swagger. He drives hard in short phrases, hitting the same notes again and again; Jimmy stokes him with hammered chords. It’s an agreeable style. Well suited to sessions like this; sadly, Brooks would be forgotten when the music changed directions in the ’Sixties. Morgan seems restrained, unsure of what to do – he decides to go quiet, purring phrases beneath the organ’s roar.

He ends on a trailing note, picked up by Lou Donaldson: he develops a wicked little sway, copied by Smith to great effect. This solo creeps up on you: a simple four-note ascent is repeated at length, becoming a charge and then a scream. Jimmy and Art keep the fire burning, and when the horn riff appears (the same one Miles Davis used on “Walkin’”), over twenty minutes have gone by. Slowly burns rarely get hotter than this, the highlight of The Sermon! And the first step to making a star of Jimmy Smith.

Morgan is the only horn on “Flamingo”, a
ballad showing Smith at his most romantic. The trumpet is golden, sending out pure notes with big echo – like a fohorn calling out to sea. The brushes work slowly, Burrell chimes octaves in a nice metallic style, and the organ stands still – a pure, peaceful hum. This track may be superior to “The Sermon”; it’s a restful groove you’ll replay many times over. For a groove of another kind, try “Au Privave”: Jimmy starts the calm quietly and all the horns jump in. Watch Art on Smith’s solo – he ratchets the tempo up fierce, way beyond your typical blues. Screaming notes are everywhere, where bleeps from Burrel, a rising tide of percussion – and then come the horns. Donaldson toodles in high gear, spinning some Parker-isms before running a maze of fast notes and sharp corners. Tina steps out with a hard tone, matched by exploding cymbals and a joyous Smith comp. Kenny is good, the foot pedals rock, and the brushes raise steam. A quick aggressive solo by Jimmy ends it – this one says plenty.

Continuing in the Parker vein, “Confirmation” gives Art and expansive intro, leading to Morgan’s theme. Burrell glides smoothly, picking up grit along the way – perhaps his best effort of the session. Lou perks it up with a pretzel-like solo: there are plenty of curves, and everything comes back on itself. (In the middle of this, Art starts playing a waltz – wonderful.) Lee drawsl as a trombone before scaling high towers, Tina excels with a Rollins-like effort, and Jimmy percolates the way Shirley Scott would. The end-theme is a rouser, as is the snare break by Blakey. A landmark session by Smith, these cuts were divided between The Sermon! And Jimmy Smith’s House Party, making both discs indispensable.

The February 25 session not only sparked the career of Jimmy Smith – it also served as an audition for the young Harold “Tina” Brooks. A tough tenor whose style blended Gene Ammons and Johnny Griffin, Brooks so impressed Blue Note’s Alfred Lion that he was offered his own session for the label, held on March 16. The pianist was Sonny Clark, a lively, underrated writer whose skills rivaled Golson’s – and parallel harmony from the horns: the tune is cerebral melodies. An alternate take is rather forceful, with a series of thrilling peaks. Clark might have the best effort, all tart notes and cerebral melodies. An alternate take is rather similar, with splashier drum licks. And “Everything Happens to Me” is the perfect Ammons ballad, its vibrato-choked tenor leaning against a lavish piano. The brushes whisk, the bass bites deep, and Lee goes wisfultly into his lower register. Tina returns in a more buoyant spirit, yelping high for a relaxed kind of urgency. A strong, evocative album, it is a mystery why it stayed unreleased for so long … as much as a mystery as why fame eluded Tina Brooks.

On July 16 Art would cut a brief session for Jimmy Smith, in a quintet with Burrel, Cec- il Payne, and Donald Bailey – the two drummers made for added depth. One tune was recorded, a take on Moe Koffman’s “Swinging Shepherd Blues”; this would appear on the compilation album Jimmy Smith: The Singles. One month later, on August 18, Art participated in a morning session – a seminal moment in jazz history, though no music was played.

“After Griffin, other Messengers would leave the group in swift fashion, and when 1958 came around, Blakey needed to hire a whole new band. The new bassist was Jymie Merritt, unknown at the time but prodigiously talent- ed. Griffin would be replaced by Benny Golson, a stylish tenor with a gift for composing; the majority of his best tunes would be introduced by the Messengers. Dockery’s chair was filled briefly by Junior Mance and then by Bobby Timmons, a singer whose skills rivaled Golson’s – here at last was a successor to Horace Silver.”

At about 10 A.M. the musicians slowly gathered before a New York brownstone to have their picture taken. The event was being organized for Esquire Magazine by the photographer Arthur Kane; incredibly, this was Kane’s first professional assignment. He knew it was an early hour for the musicians and did not know who would show up: he would be stunned the presence of 57 jazz musicians, from all eras and styles of the music. Here was a saxophone star of the ’Twenties (Bud Freeman), the man he influenced (Lester Young), and the man who made him famous (Continued on page 35)
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Art Blakey

(Continued from page 33)

(Count Basie) ... all standing on the same stairway. Here was the great trumpeter of the 'Thirties (Roy Eldridge) talking to the great trumpeter of the 'Forties (Dizzy Gillespie), as a bemused Gerry Mulligan looked on. Many had not seen each other in years, and incredible stories were told and retold – they never stopped talking, even when Kane said to face the camera. (As the picture was taken, Mary Lou Williams was facing Marian McPartland, engrossed in a conversation now lost to time.) Neighborhood kids, curious about what was happening, sat down in front of the musicians; they too became part of the picture, which is rightly called “A Great Day in Harlem”.

Blakey resides at the top of the stairs, surrounded partly by Messengers, partly by heroes of jazz’ past (including Chubby Jackson, Buck Clayton, and Henry “Red” Allen.) Such was his stature, after five years as a bandleader, that he had recorded or played with nearly a third of the people in this photograph: Farmer, Gillespie, Golson, Griffin, Gryce, Hawkins, Hinton, Jo Jones, Mingus, Monk, Pettiford, Rollins, Shihab, Silver, Wilbur Ware, and Mary Lou Williams.

Art was called for a session, held on October 28, pairing Milt Jackson with the ebullient Cannonball Adderley. Titled Things Are Getting Better, the album featured old tunes like “The Sidewalks of New York”, strong support from Wynton Kelly, and a surprising show of restraint. While both leaders could duel with the best of them, here they are polite, with one mannered solo after another – it’s a good effort, but far from what they were capable of. Two days later, Art entered Van Gelder’s to record Moun in’, his only studio album with this group of Messengers. The bulk of the album was composed by Golson, with one contribution by Timmons – the explosive title cut, which immediately became a standard.

Bobby starts the tune with a slow, languid blues; the horns hum an “Amen” at the end of each phrase. The roles are reversed on the second chorus, with Lee on the high road and Golson beneath him; the bridge is a weary lament, and Morgan screams the first solo. These are high-pitched smears, a lazy yawn soon promoted to rapid-fire leaps. Behind this Timmons is steady, comping with the blues and staying out of Morgan’s way. His sound is perfect for a group like this; where Silver could get too ornate for his surroundings, Bobby’s vamps are direct, emotional, and right. As the solo progresses, Morgan gets softer – it’s the same style, only subtler.

Entering a fresh chorus, Morgan plays a two-bar phrase, then hands off to Golson, who continues the thought. Built mostly on that one phrase, Benny’s solo lurches fast, turns wonderfully harsh, and concludes on a quote of “While My Lady Sleeps”. Timmons is relaxed, bluesy, and highly cool ... as you knew he’d be. He’s with fast flurries and jagged edges. I’m reminded of Lockjaw, mixed with a little Sonny Stitt – Bobby follows with some up-and-down patterns, as he’d use on “This Here”. There’s a short exchange, as Art the Legonnaire trades riffs with Blakey the jazzman – I wish he did this longer. In his interview, Golson remarked that of all the people he’s played “Blues March” with, nobody played it like Blakey. The proof of that is here.

“Along Came Betty” is a perfect piece of soul-jazz, from the softly-coursing piano to the easy surge of the melody. The notes move so naturally, you forget the involved chord structure and lengthy lines – traits also found in Golson’s “Whisper Not”. Morgan plays from the distance: kissed with echo, his notes rise slowly like smoke. His tone alternates between gentle growl and tough-guy rasp; Benny starts in the mold of Ben Webster, then speeds up with a growl like Griffin. So much happens, and he accomplishes it in a single chorus; Terence

“If the nonet date broadened the Blakey palette, Art Blakey Big Band made it wide as the horizon. Cut in New York at the end of 1957, this was Art’s first big band record since the Eckstine sessions, and his first such recording as leader. (In their short existence, the Seventeen Messengers had gone unrecorded.) The cast was full of familiar faces: charts by Eckstine arranger Jerry Valentine; Messengers Byrd, Hardman, Bishop, and Shihab; Melba Liston from the nonet session, and a sax section including Al Cohn and John Coltrane. The potential was immense ... as would be the music.”

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