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Dave Burrell

Turbulence and Romance

Interview & Photos by Ken Weiss
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Dave Burrell
Turbulence and Romance

Interview and photo by Ken Weiss

Pianist/composer Dave Burrell is a uniquely creative jazz master who combines the entire range of jazz’s rich history into his work. Boogie-woogie, ragtime, stride, bebop, and free jazz elements can all organically appear during his performances and compositions. Burrell was born in Middletown, Ohio on September 10, 1940, while visiting his grandmother. After graduating from Fisk University in 1938, his parents moved to the newly built Harlem River Houses in Harlem, New York. At the age of four, his family moved to Cleveland, Ohio where Dave’s father Herman Burrell enrolled at Western Reserve University for graduate studies in Sociology. Right after Herman Burrell received a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation to finish his doctoral thesis on race relations at the University of Hawaii, the young family moved to Honolulu, Hawaii in 1946. Music was always a part of Burrell’s life. His parents had both been part of the Jubilee Singers at Fisk University in Nashville and were frequently rehearsing for Broadway shows or operas. Additionally, his mother was a popular radio personality in Hawaii. The family entertained a number of popular artists such as Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders, Marion Brown, Beaver Harris, Gran- chan Moncur III, Andrew Cyrille, Sonny Sharrock, David Murray, William Parker, Odean Pope, Sunny Murray, Roswell Rudd, Bob Stew- art, Billy Martin, Steve Swell and Bobby Zankel. This extensive interview took place on a snowy December 15, 2017 at his condominium across from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Burrell’s wife, Monika Larsson, the noted librettist/poet, was present at the time of the interview session. Burrell was the recipient of lifetime achievement honors at the 23rd annual Vision Festival at Roulette in Brooklyn from May 23 to 28.

Jazz Inside Magazine: You’re almost alone in being a current pianist who routinely incorporates the entire spectrum of jazz and older piano styles into their playing. What draws you to the older piano styles?

DB: I am an avant garde, free jazz pianist that sometimes explores the history of African-American music. I remember, for instance, the jazz historian Sam Charters came into a jazz club where I was playing on 6th Avenue in New York City and said to me, “I hear in your playing what I hear in Jelly Roll Morton’s playing sometimes”. He asked me if I played any of his music. I told him no and he suggested I get a book by James Dapogny with everything that Morton ever wrote transcribed exactly. At the time, Charters was contributing to a tribute to Jelly Roll Morton in Washington, DC along with NPR and he wanted me to include it. I started playing Morton’s music very gingerly and the more I got into it the more I realized that I had overlooked this music and that it was good for my chops. I ended up playing a solo of Morton’s Monk-like composition “Freakish” on the “Dr. Jazz Jelly Roll Morton Special” that was held July 3-4, 1991. The other participants included Wynton Marsalis, Marcus Roberts and Dick Hyman.

DB: Is there an underlying process by which you incorporate the older piano styles into your playing? Is it a conscious effort that you make or a natural creative path that just comes out?

J: In the liner notes to your recording The Jelly Roll Joys [1991, Gazell] you say that in regards to playing Jelly Roll Morton’s music that “Nothing in the jazz repertoire is more challenging. How so?

DB: Octaves and intervals. When I listened with Sam Charters he said, “You hear how hard it’s swinging? It’s really swinging.” I thought, “Is mine swinging that hard? Am I up there in that category with him?” And I thought, ‘Not yet, I have to go a little bit deeper into the thrust and relax with it.’ I was a little tentative at that point. When you think you know Morton well enough to sit down and play it, I think that there’s a point where you free yourself up, and that did eventually come. After that, what I needed to do next was take sections, different strains, and figure out how I could improvise the way I did at that time.

DB: I think there’s the thought of having some-
Dave Burrell

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thing that surprises you. There’s universality to any jazz audience just wanting that phenomena, that vibe, and that’s common all over the world. It was the French, in particular, who were first to embrace the avant garde we brought over from New York and Chicago in the sixties.

JI: What early musical influences did you have?

DB: My parents had an extensive record collection. In 1955 I was fifteen and I remember listening to Erroll Garner’s Mambo Moves Garner with Candido. I wore that one out, and later on I met and played with Candido in New York. Also, Ahmad Jamal’s Live at the Pershing Lounge record fascinated me in how incredibly hypnotic it was, just one in a lifetime, perfect album. My thing was Fats Domino. I had a group that played “Blueberry Hill,” and that goes back to the stride, the Fats Domino boogie-woogie baseline on “Blueberry Hill,” for example. In the second half of the fifties, I was on a weekly Hawaiian variety TV show with my band. We all lived on a country dirt road. All of my band members grew up in families that would sit on their back porches and play, usually string instruments – mandolin, guitar, banjo and ukulele.

JI: Both of your parents were accomplished singers. Did you inherit their vocal chops?

DB: I was singing in my group as a teenager and I think I was better than then as an adult. My parents were always in Broadway musicals like South Pacific and Paint Your Wagon because those plays went straight from Broadway to the Fort Ruger Theater in Honolulu. I was around at the rehearsals but I wasn’t really that interested in the Broadway shows, although certain compositions would just stick in my musical craw. Meanwhile, I was a kid living in the country side with horses and plenty of beaches and Hawaiian friends, not exactly an environment to learn the piano. You had all these cultural confrontations so we all took karate and other martial arts seriously in order to protect ourselves from kids from other neighborhoods. It was a pretty rough time as far as gangs and who’s gonna take a seat on the bus, and who’s gonna go home with a bloody nose. So when I heard Obama say the same thing years later, it was good. I was laughing to myself.

JI: Hence the origination of Frances Davis’ “karate clusters.”

DB: I remember watching a John Cage concert at MIT when he had put microphones on balloons and amplified chairs which he scraped on the floor. He fondled the balloons to create new sounds. Then he took sledge hammers and smashed two nine-foot Steinway pianos and just left them there with the sound ringing. I didn’t want to play the piano wrong but I wanted to use my fingers and do other things. With Sunny Murray I had that opportunity because [Laughs] I couldn’t be heard otherwise. I had to play below him or above him, and I started to figure out any sound I could get. I played the other night with Bobby Zankel at the Philadelphia Clef Club and I found a new sound where I could go “tonk,” “tonk,” “ronk.” I did it some more and Odean Pope, who was also playing, looked at me approvingly, although I didn’t know how to get out of it. I mean, what do you follow that with? So finally I took the palms of my hands and slapped them on the keys to end as an anchor.

JI: Have there been other prominent jazz musicians with firm roots in Hawaii?

DB: I don’t really know. Trombonist Trummy Young from Duke Ellington’s orchestra retired out there. He was my father’s friend and he was teaching me a little bit. The biggest thing going on in Hawaii is people passing through on their way around the world. We had a lot of people like Herb Jeffries and Tempest Storm come to our house because the word was out that if you wanted to get some of Harlem and the East Coast stuff, call the Burrell’s. Herb Jeffries was gonna do a concert in Waikiki at a club and said that he would use me if I knew my chords better. I met the Delta Rhythm Boys who actually wanted my mom to join them but my dad said, “No way are you gonna join the Delta Rhythm Boys!” They were in Honolulu quite often; it was one of their hubs. There was not a lot of live jazz but everybody seemed hungry for it. They didn’t get any jazz from the East Coast until I brought a group from Berklee in Boston home one summer, around 1963. We played all summer, being booked at one place in particular, Forbidden City, where we played opposite Lenny Bruce.

JI: In 1961 you transferred from the University of Hawaii to Boston’s Berklee College of Music to join a very impressive student body that included Quincy Jones, Gary Burton, Keith Jarrett and Sonny Sharrock. What was your experience there?

DB: A baritone sax player friend of mine named Emmett Simmons joined James Brown and he would come back to school and start playing these lines on baritone sax, which was of great interest. At the time, I was the music director for a group that played regularly at Louie’s Lounge, which was an R & B club, and we’d play Ray Charles’ “Drown in My Own Tears.” We were one big happy family.

“There are many people playing free today with concepts that mirror the concepts of the sixties but they go off into their own territory. It’s refreshing. It’s like in the beginning when one first heard the New Yorkers in Paris. You could hear a pin drop because everybody in the audience was hearing the music for the first time. Today there’s that same kind of phenomena all over again.”

JI: After graduating Berklee in ’65, you moved back to New York and into a duplex loft on Bond Street and, as you mentioned earlier, soon many notable artists including Elvin Jones, Gil Evans, Kenny Dorham, Archie Shepp, John Coltrane, Paul Bley and Albert Ayler started coming by.

DB: Yeah, the loft was huge. I never saw a loft like that with an upstairs skylight. I heard Mingus looked at it and wanted to rent it. I kept my Wurlitzer baby grand piano on the top floor. I had the piano up on blocks. I was very particular about the way I sat, I don’t know if the piano was comfortable for anybody else. It kind of looked like a hot rod car. I rented the top space of my loft to Paul Bley for him to practice. He was very serious about the time that he was practicing there. Down the street, Archie had a place and had rehearsals with Rashied Ali, who was playing with knitting needles. It was a time when one experimented.

JI: You quickly found work in New York with pivotal free jazz leaders Marion Brown, Archie Shepp and Pharoah Sanders, and appeared on numerous essential albums of the time. How did it feel to perform during the peak of free jazz compared to the current day?

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Dave Burrell

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East 3rd Street, where I had a forty dollar a month bathtub in the kitchen flat. They saw that “The kid is really serious!” It was crude living and I was only interested in my piano and my tape recorder. It didn’t matter when I ate, I was eating after I finished practicing, and sometimes that would be in the middle of the night. There were—no too many good pianos around and the word got out that I had one. Sun Ra lived across the street and I was over there a number of times, which was very inspiring because there was music all over their floor, and there was one big pot of soup that everybody was gonna eat from eventually. If you went to Pharoah’s house, he already had a baby, so sometimes he would make me babysit. There are many people playing free today with concepts that mirror the concepts of the sixties but they go off into their own territory. It’s inspiring. It’s like in the beginning when one first heard the New Yorkers in Paris. You could hear a pin drop because everybody in the audience when I played with my group at Lincoln Center in the mid-70s. I had a painter painting while we were playing who got paint all over us and himself. [Laughs] We thought that was a good thing, we were so into it. I also had a synthesizer player there who put the vocalist through the piano and drums. It was a new sound and the critic loved it. He wrote “space-age electronic jazz.” The performance included stride and pieces from Leonard Bernstein’s West Side Story.

“we came down Interstate 1 during Hurricane Gloria with my grand piano in the back of the truck. I didn’t know anything about the way that jazz was set up in Philadelphia, although I had come down for shows at venues like the Empty Foxhole and the Aqua Lounge. I needed to have another crack at being in the woodshed and thought that Philadelphia would allow me to do that.”

Ji: What did you do to prepare to play free jazz music?

DB: The Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns by Nicolas Slonimsky was the main book that I played from with Pharoah Sanders and Marion Brown. Pharoah had told me that he and Coltrane had practiced out of this book every day—twenty pages a day. So I bought the book. Pharoah, who came over almost every day to practice, played in his key and I played in mine. I know I got better as a pianist from that practice routine.

Ji: Ragtime was considered musically and politically regressive when you began your career. Was there pushback to you recording ragtime sections at that time?

DB: I hardly ever listened to the radio, or knew what was going on. We were just so plugged into it. I see that it takes a long time for anything to really gel. Of course, ragtime wasn’t the outstanding part of my repertoire. I started with one piece, and that one piece, people that were into downtown jazz would say, “Don’t ever stop playing that piece. That piece is a real gem.” And I would think ‘Why? It’s just another portrait that I did.’ That was just one direction that I was pushing towards once. There was a critic from the New York Times in the audience when I played with my group at Lincoln Center in the mid-70s. I had a painter painting while we were playing who got paint all over us and himself. [Laughs] We thought that was a good thing, we were so into it. I also had a synthesizer player there who put the vocalist through the piano and drums. It was a new sound and the critic loved it. He wrote “space-age electronic jazz.” The performance included stride and pieces from Leonard Bernstein’s West Side Story.

Ji: Your first time overseas as a musician came in 1969 at the Pan-African Festival in Algiers when the State Department brought you over in Archie Shepp’s group. That festival featured artists from every African country and exposed you to new rhythms, music and drums. How did that experience effect your career?

DB: It was a phenomenon and it made the whole sixties experience valid. Ending the decade with the trip to Africa changed my way of thinking about sound and rhythm. My take away from that was I knew that was holding me back in New York was the same thing that was freeing me up in Africa. I realized that I didn’t have to play songs in a way that the New York establishment was playing. I could do whatever I wanted to do and it would be accepted. I played with the nomadic musicians, the Tuaregs from the Sahara Desert, and they were so intense, much more intense than I was. Other Americans there frowoned on me playing with them because they were so “scary.” They invited us to play with them but asked that we not look at their women in the eye because we would be cursed for life. I went out to the stage where ten to twelve Tuareg women singers, stunningly dressed in bright colors, stood in a horseshoe around the piano. When I started playing a D minor drone, they blossomed and went into song. From that moment on I had a feeling of weightlessness. I could do whatever I wanted to do on the piano and it sounded appropriate.

Ji: How did Pharoah Sanders come to play on your second album High Two [1968, Freedom]?

DB: The producer was Alan Douglas and it was at a time when Woodstock was still ringing in everybody’s ears. Pharoah and I had been rehearsing my quartet arrangement of Leonard Bernstein’s West Side Story at my apartment for a long time. So when I learned that Alan Douglas wanted to record me in a piano trio context and I needed to find a way to pay Pharoah, I put him on tambourine and he got a check from the union.

Ji: Coltrane’s bassist, Jimmy Garrison, came to live with you after you moved into a brownstone in Harlem in 1970. How did he come to move in and what was happening musically in your home then?

DB: Jimmy Garrison was at Coltrane’s funeral and I knew Jimmy needed a place to stay. I had a brownstone in Harlem and I asked him if he wanted to stay there. He moved in and started to

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teach me things that he and Coltrane and McCoy were into. We started to play at a place on 9th Street called Hilly’s. Hilly, the club owner also owned CBGB’s.

JI: One of your compositions that you’ve recorded multiple times and still play is “Teardrops for Jimmy.” What triggered that tribute to Jimmy Garrison?

DB: His bass solos became an integral part of every Coltrane set. You knew there was gonna be twenty minutes from the bass at every performance and if you listened, you saw that he was building something phenomenal. After he died of cancer I went home and wrote “Teardrops for Jimmy,” and later Moni [his wife Monika Larsen] put lyrics to the piece. It became a popular song for many of the vocalists in New York at the time. Leena Conquest is on my recent RAJ Trade recording singing “Teardrops for Jimmy.”

JI: Saxophonist Bobby Zankel, who has played extensively with Cecil Taylor through the years, says that Cecil told him that you were, “The first to get it,” the first one to get what he was doing and apply it to their own work.

DB: That’s flattering. I think that’s pertaining to the energy that Cecil put out. He’s like a dictionary of free.

JI: What compelled you to undertake composing a jazz opera? It took you eight years of work.

DB: I was always told that opera was the highest art form and I wanted something to fall back on when I became older. I thought that if you had an opera in your repertoire it would always come back. A work that had dance, drama, the improvisation of jazz with precision, the lighting, the sets, the theater, all in one, you could pull it out whenever you wanted. For example, I left a piano-vocal score in Milan with some Italian musicians about ten years ago, after we did a week-long workshop together. I’m about to fly to Milan and rehearse with their orchestra. The week-long workshop will culminate in a concert at Novara Jazz Festival. Moni was asked to write a poem that will be recited by the Ivory Coast actor Rufin Doh for the concert. The orchestra has expanded on my original score with Armenian folk themes, African poetry, and thus with these extensions, the story took some new turns. At first we thought, “Hey, what are they doing changing our opera around?” And then we realized by joining them we would be part of the next generation of this work. The band members enriched and renewed the arrangement because they truly felt passionate about working on it. So in a way, I did get my wish for this longevity that I think is necessary.

JI: Another major endeavor has been your American Civil War: 1861-65 project, a five-year exploration of the war made possible by your ten-year position as Composer-in-Residence at Philadelphia’s Rosenbach Museum and Library. You had unlimited access to the museum’s extensive collection of rare books, letters and manuscripts. How did you approach the challenge of bringing 19th century events back to life by way of modern music?

DB: The director of the Rosenbach Museum and Library said to me, “You bring our collection to life through music.” I went into the archives and found out everything I could about the American Civil War. The recommended reading from some of the staff became imperative to me to complement my archival research at the Museum, three scholarly examinations in particular come to mind - Drew Gilpin Faust’s This Republic of Suffering: Death and the Civil War, Chandra Manning’s What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War, and Douglas L. Wilson’s book Lincoln’s Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words. As the war progressed so did my research and interest. The idea of doing portraits became clearer as the project developed and matured. My annual concert presentations followed the war consequently. In my first year I created musical portraits of General Robert E. Lee, Elmer Ellsworth, John Brown, and Ulysses S. Grant. In the case of John Brown, I wrote two separate portraits, John Brown: Life, and John Brown: Death. During my second year I read letters home from the war front, newspaper articles, eye-witness reports resulting in a suite I named Civilians During War Time. By now a theme started to grow out of my composition, One Nation: American Civil War where I built the composition from both Yankee Doodle and Dixie. I refer to the two major battles that took place in the third year of the war, Vicksburg and Gettysburg, in my suite Turning Point. I invited trombonist Steve Swell to perform with me. The center piece from this suite is a composition, “Paradox of Freedom,” where I pour my heart into the tension and release created by the emancipation. The live performance resulted in a CD, Turning Point (NoBusiness) accompanied by outstanding liner notes by Ed Hazell. The two last years of the war kept me glued to the archives, reading as many daily front pages of some of the South’s leading newspapers, adding a vocal to the score with a libretto by Monika Larsson, Listening to Lincoln and Ode to a Prairie Lawyer. Monika and I were invited to Messina, Italy to present Ode to a Prairie Lawyer with mezzo soprano Veronica Cardullo in 2017. I intend to continue presenting my American Civil War suite to international audiences and to keep stretching the arrangement to include more instruments.

JI: What’s the new project you are currently involved with?

DB: I’m working with Moni on a project originally inspired by the music of James P. Johnson. He was from New Brunswick, [New Jersey] and part of the Harlem Renaissance. The James P. Johnson project includes Carolina Shout and will be a category short of being an opera. When you get involved with a project like this you have to go year by year or opportunity by opportunity. It’s a work in progress. I didn’t know that he had written the Charleston, which became the international dance craze. He seemed to be the link between Scott Joplin and modern jazz /Duke/ Monk. Johnson’s stride was so strong; it must have been what Monk took away. James P. Johnson originated this exodus from the kind of Mozart-inspired rags of Joplin that I like. The stride of James P. Johnson sounds different, and I hear it in Monk’s playing. We are developing a storyline from reading these interesting books relating to several contributing artists from the period. By now I have read several biographies, novels and earth shattering opinions from some great voices, and listened to great music from this historical landmark period. I am very impressed in particular by James Weldon Johnson’s work, as well as the poetry of Langston Hughes. A few years back I was commissioned to write a score to Oscar Micheaux’s silent black and white film “Body and Soul”. Four or five of the compositions from my work appear on my Momentum CD with Guillermo Brown and Michael Formanek on the HighTwo label. As it happened, my mother was the secretary to James Weldon Johnson while she went to Fisk University in the mid-’30s up until the time of his death. I have the original copies of James Weldon Johnson’s 2 volumes “The Book of American Negro Spirituals” from my mother’s music collection. My new project Full-Blown Rhapsody will come together with Moni exploring the events leading up to the 1919 Red Summer-riots, her interpretations of the many emerging art forms, and my own discoveries of the linkage from the Harlem Renaissance. It is quite a thrilling process, to listen, to learn and to conceptualize musical portraits from yet another important era of African-American history.

JI: It seems most of your playing is outside the States?

DB: I would say so, there’s just been a wave of me performing and recording abroad. I did an...
other recording this year in Italy with some Sicilian musicians that I’m really proud of and that I think represents where I want to be in free jazz trio setting.

Ji: You look at your time in Paris with Sam Woodyard (Duke Ellington’s drummer) as one of your career highlights.

Db: Sam Woodyard gave me confidence. He was a beautiful human being. We worked very hard, we laughed a lot and I learned more from that summer than ever before. He loved our opera score. Moni and I had just started writing Windward Passages. She wrote the book and the libretto. The music kept evolving along with the libretto. We started writing right after we’d met in Honolulu in June, 1978. After we’d settled in the Upper West Side in New York, later in the fall the concept became clearer to us. By the time we went to Paris in the spring of 1979 there was enough new material from our project to spring on Sam Woodyard. He would call out from his drums, “What you got for me tonight, buddy”, and I would pull out some new thing we were working on, like “Punaluʻu Peter,” “Sarah’s Lament,” and so on. He loved it. We played two sets night after night to a packed house at the club Campagne Premier right off rue Raspail in Montparnasse for a whole summer. Who is who in jazz in Paris at the time showed up: Steve Lacy, Kenny “Kludge” Clarke, the critic Mike Scherwin and Slugs’ owner Jerry Schultz, to name a few. A young French actress sat up front several nights a week. Moni and I lived on Boulevard St. Jacques around the corner so we would walk to the club with a new composition, or arrangement, freshly noted on paper every other night. It kept both Sam and me very happy. I often relate to our collaboration, really the three of us together, Moni, Sam and me, as one of the highlights of my compositional career. Moni is writing a book, A Jazz Life, and the chapter from the time we lived in Paris is as wondrous as we remembered. My summer with Sam culminated in a solo piano concert in September at Basel Stadthaus and Werner Uehlinger put it out as a double-LP, Windward Passages on his Swiss label HatArt. I wish Sam could have heard me that night. After Basel, Moni and I headed back to New York to finish the score, and orchestra.

Ji: What happens at your country home deep in the woods of the western region of Sweden that you and Monika retreat to?

Db: We have a kind of sanctuary there, happily existing among the many animals in the wild. You can hear yourself think there and a lot of the first ideas that I put on paper come to me there, as with Moni and her poetry and other writing. There are three small cottages; one has a grand piano and a huge desk for writing. We are surrounded by woods, farms, fields and dirt roads. A neighbor keeps a dozen horses grazing nearby. At the end of the day most horses have found their way closer to my studio. A couple of summers ago we planted an orchard with apples, cherries, pears and plums. We look forward to returning for many more years to follow our efforts to fruition.

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

Billy Martin (drums) said: “Dave is a one of a kind; he’s an incredible true artist. He’s a really singular artist. He’s a very generous person when he plays. He’s very powerful. I don’t know any other piano player that can play louder than me acoustically! [Laughs] I’m exaggerating there but I don’t know any other piano player that can really hold a certain intensity and volume like he can. And he’s really hip to the whole spectrum of getting things out of the piano. My question for you is you know you’ve worked on an opera and I wanted to know if it’s finished, has it premiered yet, and how I could see it?”

Db: It’s a “nine lives” opera in a lot of ways because it’s finished on one level and that first level led me to many other steps. For example, we never got to the danciers that we’d envisioned. We had people that wanted to do the sets before we were ready to think about sets. But the whole idea of having it for a lifetime and you can work on it when you have the funding is the kind of project I have always thought it should be. It seems natural and normal for it to take so many twists and turns. It’s not a big mainstream production mentality and approach, it is cutting-edge kind of formulas that are only funded occasionally and sometimes we are vigorously looking for those monies and at other times we’re doing something that’s away from it because you can’t do it all the time. It’s a little bit overwhelming and I didn’t know that in the beginning.

Bob Stewart (tuba) asked: “What led you to do the Jelly Roll project [The Crave, NoBusiness Records, 2016] with tuba and did the results fulfill what you imagined?”

Db: Yes, thanks to Bob Stewart. I didn’t know how well we had played in Germany on a radio show as part of a festival in the nineties. When the company released the LP last year, I realized how important what we did really was. At some point, we’re gonna have to get together again. I’d like to do more things with Bob.

Odean Pope (saxophone) asked: “How did you come up with your harmonic concept?”

Db: My harmonic concept comes from the leadership of John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders out of the Nicolas Slonimsky Theauras of Scales and Melodic Patterns book. Pharoah told me about it and that Coltrane and Monk used the book. You find just page after page of these international scales. We heard stories back then, in the mid-‘60s, of Miles’ group with Coltrane and Cannonball listening to East Indian ragas, so anything they did we had to do as well. I had a reel-to-reel on a slow speed playing Indian ragas all day long. And the scales of course I would find in that book.

Bobby Zankel (saxophone) asked: “What did you experience the first time you heard Cecil and how did your approach to playing begin to evolve in that direction?”

Db: I first heard Cecil, it was somewhere in Europe, and I never heard anybody play like that, even till this day. He was always someone that inspired me but once I met him in person at a restaurant in Brooklyn, I found out what a genuinely total artist he is. He’s always had interest in all of the arts. What you find with Cecil Taylor is clarity. You hear everything that he does, it reminds me of architecture.

William Parker (bass) said: “Dave you have accomplished so much. Your music has constantly been an inspiration to me. One of the most touching moments I’ve experienced through your work comes on your 1969 recording La Vie de Bohème [BYG Actuel]. The inclusion of the voice of your mother Eleanor on one song seems to reach back to an inspired time. What was it like?”

Db: My mother started her own opera company called the Windward Opera Guild, which is where the title for our opera comes from. She was wearing a lot of hats, doing many different things, and then all of a sudden she had cancer. I went to Hawaii and on her deathbed at Queens Hospital; I recorded her singing one of her favorite arias from Puccini’s La Bohème. I went back to Paris from there and returned to the recording studio with the reel-to-reel tape of my mother singing to be mixed. At first the recording sounded very abstract. It also sounded very much like the kind of pain I had standing there watching my mother just fade away.
Jaleel Shaw
Hear Jaleel with Shamie Royston at
Dizzy’s Club at Jazz At Lincoln Center
June 20, 2018
© Eric Nemeyer
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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Friday, June 1
- Benny Green Trio; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Joey Defrancesco With Mark Whitfield And Lenny White; Jazz; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Birdland Big Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Billy Hart With Chris Potter, Tenor Saxophone, Ethan Iverson, Piano, Ben Street, Bass; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Neal Smith New Breed Sextet; Michael Weiss Quartet; JD Allen “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- The Bad Plus; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Saturday, June 2
- Benny Green Trio; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Joey Defrancesco With Mark Whitfield And Lenny White; Jazz; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bossa Brasil, 315 W. 44th St.
- Billy Hart With Chris Potter, Tenor Saxophone, Ethan Iverson, Piano, Ben Street, Bass; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Small’s Showcase; Jimmy O’Connell Sextet; Neal Smith New Breed Sextet; Michael Weiss Quartet; Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- The Bad Plus; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Sunday, June 3
- Benny Green Trio; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Joey Defrancesco With Mark Whitfield And Lenny White; Jazz; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bossa Brasil, 315 W. 44th St.
- Billy Hart With Chris Potter, Tenor Saxophone, Ethan Iverson, Piano, Ben Street, Bass; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Sacha Perry Trio; Deborah Davis; Bruce Harris Group; Jon Beshay “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- The Bad Plus; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Monday, June 4
- Jazz At Lincoln Center Youth Orchestra; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Danny Baker, 315 W. 44th St.
- Vanguard Big Band; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Ari Hoenig Trio; Joe Farnsworth Group; “After-hours Jam Session”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Tuesday, June 5
- Alex Sipiagin Sextet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Joey Alexander Trio; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Stacey Kent; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Scott Colley Trio With Mark Turner, Tenor Sax, Kenny Wollesen, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Keyon Harrod; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Wednesday, June 6
- Sharel Cassity Elektra; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Elina Engleyian; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Stacey Kent; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Scott Colley Trio With Mark Turner, Tenor Sax, Kenny Wollesen, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Lage Lund Quartet; Fukushi Tainaka Quintet; Jovan Alexander “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Keyon Harrod; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Thursday, June 7
- Felix Pekil & Joe Doubledley’s Showtime Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Dafnis Prieto Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Stacey Kent; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Scott Colley Trio With Mark Turner, Tenor Sax, Kenny Wollesen, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Lage Lund Quartet; Jure Puki Quartet; Charles Gould “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Keyon Harrod; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Friday, June 8
- Dion Parson & 21st Century; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Dafnis Prieto Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Birdland Big Band, Stacey Kent, 315 W. 44th St.
- Scott Colley Trio With Mark Turner, Tenor Sax, Kenny Wollesen, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Venture; Mike Rodriguez Quintet; Corey Wallace DUBtet “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Keyon Harrod; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Saturday, June 9
- Dion Parson & 21st Century; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Dafnis Prieto Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Birdland Big Band, Stacey Kent, 315 W. 44th St.
- Scott Colley Trio With Mark Turner, Tenor Sax, Kenny Wollesen, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Venture; Mike Rodriguez Quintet; Corey Wallace DUBtet “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Keyon Harrod; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS (Continued on page 14)
Monday, June 11
- Dafnis Prieto Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bruce Harris; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Scott Colley Trio With Mark Turner, Tenor Sax, Kenny Wollesen, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Sacha Perry Trio; JC Stylies Organ Quartet; Hillel Salem "After-hours"; Small's, 183 W. 10th St.
- Keyon Harrold; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Tuesday, June 12
- Dafnis Prieto Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th Ave S.
- Joe Frahm Trio; Jonathan Barber Group; Small's, 183 W. 10th St.
- McCoy Tyner; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
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Gil Gutierrez

Robert Stern – David Rodriguez

**THU-SUN MAY 24-27**

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Matt Brewer – Marcus Gilmore

**THU MAY 24**

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**FRI MAY 25**

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**MON MAY 28** (Closed for Memorial Day)

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- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Big Band; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Lucas Pino Nonet; Joe Farnsworth Group; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Paquito D’Rivera, Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Tuesday, June 19
- Jazztopad Festival Presents: Maciej Obara Quartet Presented In Partnership With The Polish Cultural Institute Of New York; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Django Bates Trio With Peter Elof, Peter Bruun; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Freddie Cole Quartet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- David Murray & Class Struggle With Craig Harris, Trombone, Mingus Murray, Guitar, Lafayette Gilchrist, Piano, Rashaan Carter, Bass, Russell Carter, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Nick Finzer Sextet; Harold Mabern Trio; Aaron Seeger “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Victor Wooten With Dennis Chambers, Bob Franceschini; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Wednesday, June 20
- Shamie Royston Trio With Special Guests Jaleel Shaw And Lee Hogans Album Release Party; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Django Bates Trio With Peter Elof, Peter Bruun; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Freddie Cole Quartet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Thursday, June 21
- Ann Hampton Callaway; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Vinicius Centuria With Heilo Alves, Paul Sokolow, Adrianno; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Freddie Cole Quartet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- David Murray & Class Struggle With Craig Harris, Trombone, Mingus Murray, Guitar, Lafayette Gilchrist, Piano, Rashaan Carter, Bass, Russell Carter, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Frank Perowsky Quartet; Bruce Williams Quartet; Asaf Yuria “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Victor Wooten With Dennis Chambers, Bob Franceschini; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Friday, June 22
- Ann Hampton Callaway; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Vinicius Centuria With Heilo Alves, Paul Sokolow, Adrianno; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Birdland Big Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- David Murray & Class Struggle With Craig Harris, Trombone, Mingus Murray, Guitar, Lafayette Gilchrist, Piano, Rashaan Carter, Bass, Russell Carter, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- John Bailey Quintet; Ken Fowser Quintet; Corey Wallace DU/Beat “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Victor Wooten With Dennis Chambers, Bob Franceschini; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Saturday, June 23
- Ann Hampton Callaway; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Vinicius Centuria With Heilo Alves, Paul Sokolow, Adrianno; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Freddie Cole Quartet; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- David Murray & Class Struggle With Craig Harris, Trombone, Mingus Murray, Guitar, Lafayette Gilchrist, Piano, Rashaan Carter, Bass, Russell Carter, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Small’s Showcase: Jody Synstelen Trio; John Bailey Quintet; Ken Fowser Quintet; Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Victor Wooten With Dennis Chambers, Bob Franceschini; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Sunday, June 24
- Ann Hampton Callaway; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Vinicius Centuria With Heilo Alves, Paul Sokolow, Adrianno; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Benny Benack III ft. the DW Jazz Orchestra; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- David Murray & Class Struggle With Craig Harris, Trombone, Mingus Murray, Guitar, Lafayette Gilchrist, Piano, Rashaan Carter, Bass, Russell Carter, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Monty Alexander; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Monday, June 25
- Band Director Academy Faculty Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- David Murray & Class Struggle With Craig Harris, Trombone, Mingus Murray, Guitar, Lafayette Gilchrist, Piano, Rashaan Carter, Bass, Russell Carter, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Nick Finzer Sextet; Harold Mabern Trio; Aaron Seeger “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Victor Wooten With Dennis Chambers, Bob Franceschini; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Tuesday, June 26
- Christian Sands Trio; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Janis Siegel; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Ravi Coltrane; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Tom Harrell With Mark Tumer, Tenor Sax, Charles Altura, Guitar, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Steve Nelson Quartet; Frank Lacy Group; After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Monty Alexander; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Wednesday, June 27
- Christian Sands Trio; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Duchess; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Ravi Coltrane; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Tom Harrell With Mark Tumer, Tenor Sax, Charles Altura, Guitar, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Emanuelle Cisi Quartet; George Papageorge Group; Mike Troy - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Lettuce; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Thursday, June 28
- Adrian Cunningham Quintet With Special Guest Vocalist Brianna Thomas From My Fair Lady To Camelot; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Grant Green Evolution Of Funk With Grant Green Jr., Donald Harrison, Marc Cary, Khari Simmons, Mike Clark; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Ravi Coltrane; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Tom Harrell With Mark Tumer, Tenor Sax, Charles Altura, Guitar, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Darrell Green Quartet; Keith Brown Group; Jonathan Thomas “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Lettuce; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

Friday, June 29
- Adrian Cunningham Quintet With Special Guest Vocalist Brianna Thomas From My Fair Lady To Camelot; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & 6th
- Grant Green Evolution Of Funk With Grant Green Jr., Donald Harrison, Marc Cary, Khari Simmons, Mike Clark; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Ravi Coltrane; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Tom Harrell With Mark Tumer, Tenor Sax, Charles Altura, (Continued on page 17)
Saturday, June 30

- Adrian Cunningham Quintet With Special Guest Vocalist Brianna Thomas From My Fair Lady To Camelot; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bway
- Grant Green Evolution Of Funk With Grant Green Jr., Donald Harrison, Marc Cary, Khari Simmons, Mike Clark; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Ravi Coltrane; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.
- Tom Harrell With Mark Turner, Tenor Sax, Charles Altura, Guitar, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Johnathan Blake, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.

Guitar, Ugonna Okegwo, Bass, Johnathan Blake, Drums;
Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Andy Fusco Quintet; Dmitry Baevsky Quartet; JD Allen “After-hours”; Small’s, 163 W. 10th St.
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New York Blues & Jazz Society, NYBluesandJazz.org

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**JI:** Tell us about your upbringing and the kind of feelings and sounds you experienced at home growing up in Detroit.

**GG:** Detroit was a great musical experience for me. You had Motown Records and Detroit was the home for so many great jazz musicians...many of whom still live there. I remember meeting James Jamerson. I knew he was a bass player, but I didn’t know how great he was until later in my life. He influenced so many bass players. This is my James Jamerson Experience: He bought a new Cadillac Fleetwood and I was about fifteen at the time. I always wanted to drive, but didn’t have a license. So, I asked him if I could drive his car and he said, “Yes”. Off we went in his new Cadillac...I’m driving down the street real cool...Then he said, “You’re driving to slow,” and he takes his foot and smashed mine on the gas pedal. We were flying down the street and that scared the crap out of me. I didn’t want to drive for a long time after that.

**JI:** How has your father’s, Grant Green’s, legacy and harmonic concept influenced your development and approach?

**GG:** It was huge. To be there and watch him play—it was amazing. I learned so much from watching and listening.

**JI:** Discuss your involvement in preserving Grant Green’s legacy.

**GG:** At a gig, I always do a number he wrote or played. Also, when young players come up to talk about music, I try to take them back to my roots, because they are the future of the music.

**JI:** Could you share some of your perspectives about learning how to improvise?

**GG:** Improvising comes from the heart. Make no mistake about it, you have to feel what you are playing. Yes, you have to think too, but it’s really from the heart. If you can feel it, so will your listening audience.

**JI:** What kind of practice do you do when you are not publicly performing, and what purposes or goals do you have in mind when you practice?

**GG:** I try to play anything I hear, no matter what it is. It keeps your ears sharp.

**JI:** Could you cite one or more artists who have inspired you, and discuss how specifically that they have significantly influenced you and impacted your art or artistry?

**GG:** Of course, my father. And, a big inspira-

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"Improvising comes from the heart. Make no mistake about it, you have to feel what you are playing. Yes, you have to think too, but it’s really from the heart. If you can feel it, so will your listening audience."
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Grant Green Jr.

(Continued from page 20)

tion has always been George Benson - He’s still a big influence on me; a great musician and a great person. The same thing with Steve Wonder. I would also have to say Pat Metheny and John Scofield — They’re great musicians.

JI: Discuss the idea of doing the right things versus doing things right, and how you may or may not have implemented those ideas, or behaved in those ways in your life, music.

GG. As musicians, we have a lot of influence...in what we say, what we do, how we dress. There are so many kids that want to do what we do. You want to do the right thing for them. They will take what we do and play it to the next level.

JI: How do you stay balanced-as an artist, as an individual-and nurture deeper meaningful ideas and feelings in this contemporary society in the face the incessant stress and sensory overload that surrounds us?

GG. We live in a totally different world from when our parents were growing up and raising families...It gives us a lot to write about - I hope there will be something left for our children to write about...

JI: Could you relate a humorous or unusual experience you’ve had during recording or in live performance?

GG. I played with a comic and blues musician named Charlie Eckstein. He was a wonderful man; like a dad to me after my father passed. One day, we were playing in Toronto and I had a wireless remote unit, so, I decided to jump off the stage and walk through the audience. I don’t know why, but I decided to jump back on stage. Well, I made this huge jump and made it to the stage, but my foot caught the edge and I flew right in to the drums and banged up my leg...very smooth...but, I got up like nothing was wrong. Needless to say, I was embarrassed.

JI: What will you need to feel successful? Happy, fulfilled? (in or out of music)

GG. Living your life and giving this gift of music, There’s nothing greater than putting a smile on someone’s face because they loved what you played.

JI: In a couple of sentences, how do you want your music to influence people-what do you want it to say or do?

GG: Just to know my music touched someone in some way.

JI: If there is one for you, what is the connection between music and spirituality?

GG: Well if you feel it in your heart and soul...it’s spiritual.

“As musicians, we have a lot of influence...in what we say, what we do, how we dress. There are so many kids that want to do what we do. You want to do the right thing for them. They will take what we do and play it to the next level.”

JI: Dan Boorstin, former Librarian of Congress stated that “The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge.” How have you experienced and dealt with this?

GG. Yes I have. You would be surprised what some people have said to me, like the blues comes from Irish folk music or that John Coltrane only honks his horn, No joke people have said these things to me...

JI: If there is a profound quote or idea (or more than one) that has significantly impacted the way you live your life, could you cite that/those foundational understandings?

GG. You see I believe you can never be a master because you are always learning.

“Have the courage to say no. Have the courage to face the truth. Do the right thing because it is right. These are the magic keys to living your life with integrity.”

- W. Clement Stone
Herbie Hancock
Newport Jazz Festival
August 3, 2013
© Eric Nemeyer
Jimmy Bruno
Connecting with that energy ...

Interview & Photo By Eric Nemeyer

JI: Tell us about your upbringing in Philadelphia, your family and the kinds of feelings, sounds and sights you experienced at home.

JB: I was fortunate enough to grow up in a musical family. My father was a professional guitarist and my mother was a singer. They met playing in a club on Locust street. I think it was called the Cove. They both loved jazz but had to play all kinds of music to make a living. They never seemed to be bothered by that, in fact they were happy to be working playing any kind of music... different times, I guess. I grew up hearing Ella and Louie and Frank Sinatra. My first recollection of music was Ella and Louie doing “Foggy Day”. From there it went to Bird, Oscar Petersen, Coltrane, etc. all the guitarists especially Johnny Smith “Moonlight In Vermont” and Hank Garland “Jazz Winds form a New Direction”. I never heard of rock music until I went to high school. Both my parents had great ears. There were no Real Books, etc., so they had to learn everything by ear. I think that is a better way to learn music but that’s another topic. Through my father I met bassist Al Stauffer. I began studying with Al around the age of fifteen or sixteen. He was my only formal training in jazz. He was a marvelous teacher because he inspired you to practice constantly. Around the same time there were a few violinists that were friends of my parents. I first learned to play the guitar from violin books.

People always focus on that aspect of my playing [technique], because it’s the easiest thing to notice ... What about Oscar and Tatum and Bird and Coltrane? Too much technique?

JI: What is the nature of your practice approach?

JB: These days I am so busy playing jazz and recording and traveling that I don’t have a practice routine anymore. When I was younger, I’d practice scales, arpeggios, chords and tunes. Then I would spend hours playing over all the tunes and a few common harmonic progressions in all twelve keys. Some of that time was spent learning the violin literature. I used to practice around eight to twelve hours a day, now I am playing the guitar or involved in some musical experience most of the day almost everyday. I have finally realized that practice and performing are two different things, two different mental processes.

JI: Your technique is praised by everyone who plays the guitar. Discuss the temptation to focus on or be drawn to technique over the music itself that some artists experience. How have you worked to balance the two?

JB: Early in my career it was very hard to not let my technique get in the way of the music. I never thought I had exceptional technique. Every classical musician had great facility, I thought that was part of learning your instrument. Later I became upset with comments about my playing being too technical, etc. It didn’t change my approach any, because I soon realized that most of those type comments come from people who have no technique and will never have any facility. To some, having no technique makes the more intellectual somehow. What a crock. To play any type of music, a musician needs to have technique. Knowing how to use takes years of experience. I think I have reached a point where only the bar lines, and through the chords and not over them. What about Oscar and Tatum and Bird and Coltrane? Too much technique? Or Isaac Stern, or Itzhak Perlman, or Yo-Yo Ma? Is their playing sterile because they have phenomenal technique? That’s not to say that I don’t love and appreciate people like Miles Davis, or Jim Hall, or Bill Evans. What bothers me about the whole technique thing, is when I hear a lot of younger players struggling with their instrument to get their ideas out. Sometimes they have a marvelous concept or conception but lack the foundation of playing skills on their instrument to effectively present those musical ideas. Less is not always more. Music needs to touch people on some level. If you can do that with a few notes or a hundred or a combination of both, you have communicated something to your audience. To me that’s the bottom line of all art.

JI: Could you discuss one or two of the artists who have significantly influenced your own approach to music and improvisation and cite specifically how they have done so?

JB: Johnny Smith: impeccable technique and articulation. Same goes for Pat Martino and Hank Garland. Pat Martino for his totally unique approach to music and the guitar. He is very inspirational to me because of his work ethic. No one can ever play like Pat. The point of being inspired by anyone is to let that inspiration drive you discover something unique about your own music, not to copy them. no one can ever copy greatness. You can only imitate it. Learning someone’s lines isn’t going to make your music be unique. Classical composers such as Stravinsky, Debussy, Ravel or Philip Glass have shown me about form and harmonic freedom. Jazz doesn’t have to be AABA or ABA. Their sense of harmony is free. I hear the same harmonic freedom in Pat Martino’s music as well. Most classical virtuosos have inspired me to pursue my drive to master the guitar. No one can ever master an instrument entirely, it’s the “getting there” that’s important.

JI: Could you share some of your perspectives about learning how to improvise?

JB: I think eventually there comes a time when you have to stop using the chord/scale approach. I don’t think it works to make music. I don’t think it is even a tool for analysis. You can do that with a few notes or a hundred or a combination of both, you have communicated something to your audience. To me that’s the bottom line of all art.

(Continued on page 26)
would say that at any given point in an harmonic progression or lack of one, the twelve notes are constantly spinning around a tonal center. That center can be key related or related to something else such as a pedal tone or a chord cluster. The art is to make a good melody or line with those twelve notes. You have to know how they will sound in relation to one another and in relation to the harmonic progression not each individual chord. The same hold true for music that is based on a few chords or one or two harmonic entities. The linear aspect of the line is more important then its vertical considerations. Look at Bach’s music. It is totally linear. The theorist will always find a way to analyze a given group of notes against a given chord. What they will never be able to do is to analyze or conclude some formula or rule for how to make a line over a series of chords. Or why it sounds good or bad. Sometimes the music is vertical: one chord one line etc. But that’s only a small part of the picture. The linear or horizontal nature of music, all music, is totally ignored by almost every text I have ever seen. Theoretical analysis is good for learning what some other player might have been thinking. But the more I play the older I get, I have found that that type of thinking is only an educated guess. If you talk to most improvisers, most will tell you they were not think about any particular theoretical concept or approach. There is flow to music that you have to tap into. You will never tap into that stream if you are thinking about music that you have to tap into. You will never get a better or in the air or in the cosmos or the universe or in the spirit or soul. It is essential to learn how to connect with that energy. there is not one way to do it. Every individual finds his own path to that same pool of creativity.

**JB:** There is a stream of music that’s in the air or in the cosmos or the universe or in the spirit or soul. It is essential to learn how to connect with that energy. There is not one way to do it. Every individual finds his own path to that same pool of creativity.

**JI:** Discuss your new solo album on Concord Records? Repertoire? Preparation? Recording?

**JB:** I have been working on this project for about 6 months. I never realized how difficult it would be. I keep changing the repertoire. I want to find more tunes that do not lend themselves to solo guitar. In a perfect situation I would choose every tune like that but because of time constraints that is not possible. An example would be “Freedom Jazz Dance” or “Milestones”. I’m still working on that. At the same time I don’t want to work anything out. I want it to be spontaneous, otherwise is would be a performance of a classical piece. With that in mind, the idea of going into a studio is out of the question. The cost would be astronomical. I decided to record it myself. That way I can play a few tunes anytime I like. Hopefully, I will capture the best performances. I am using a Roland 2480, Pro tools and Mac G4 with a few good mics. I have miked the guitar through the amp and acoustically. I am using a sure SM 57 for the amp, a direct line from the amp which is a Koch and using an AKG C 1000 S and a small Marshall condenser mic. I am playing it on the Jimmy Bruno proto type Hofner with a custom Jimmy Bruno pick up designed by Seymour Duncan. The guitar is due in stores around April. The pick-up is available from Seymour Duncan’s web site. The CD, with any luck, will be released in the summer. I am also working with a producer Nick Phillips of Concord records. The internet is an amazing thing. I can send files back and forth etc and discuss various options etc.

**JI:** Discuss what is essential beyond learning the musical vocabulary that is critical in one’s development of depth as a composer and improviser.

**JB:** That was a fluke. John Burke, Vice President at Concord, said I was the only artist he ever signed from a demo. About fifteen years ago a friend of mine, Jack Prince, owned a club called JJ’S Grotto. He is a real jazz guitar fan. He sent a demo tape to Concord and somehow got John Burk to listen to it and a few months later I was offered a recording deal. I have been with them since the early 90’s. Because of them I have some sort of a profile in the jazz community.

**JI:** Could you share some of your business experience as a recording artist.

**JB:** Fortunately, all my experiences with Concord have been positive. I have good luck with booking agents and venues; also with endorsement deals. An offshoot of the whole thing is that because I have achieved some notoriety, I have been making videos and writing books for Mel Bay. Mel Bay is a great company. They treat every author with respect and decency. You also get paid on time and the amount is correct. That’s a real novelty in this business. I work with three people there, Bill Bay, Doug Witherspoon and Corey Christiansen. The endorsement aspect has worked out as well. I have worked with and for Bob Benedetto, Guild guitars and now Hofner. Raezer’s Edge Cabinets, Thomastik strings and now Koch Amps and Acoustic Image and Aer.

**JI:** Please provide any interesting or unusual stories, advice, wisdom that would shed light on the current state of the recording business, and the current and future of jazz records in particular.

**JB:** My only advice is to be true to your art and never give up. The recording industry is in the midst of a major upheaval. The usual outlets for CDS and jazz in general has changed. The internet, with it’s MP3 and file sharing technology and the computer’s ability to burn any disk in under ten minutes has changed the whole thing. The record companies are trying to fit into that new structure. Ten years from now I don’t think we will be buying music in the traditional way I think it will be all gone. It has moved to the MP3 player or music files on your computer. The technology is only going to get better and it’s not going to go away. It moves at a pace that no one can keep up with. I can’t predict the future but I think whatever the result, it will be better for the artist. With the internet it is possible for every artist to interact with his fans base. I try to answer every email I get. I enjoy talking to anyone who takes the time to email me. I think people will be able to attend a concert and a few days later be able to download it from the internet. A few bands are already doing that. The band “Phish” comes to mind. They are already doing just that. I think it will be a big part of how we will buy and listen to music. All music, not just jazz. I also...
foresee changes in the print medium as well, although the magazine industry has not been hit as hard as the record companies.

**JI:** What changes do you foresee? What would you like to see happening in the record industry?

**JB:** I wish that every music critic would first be able to play an instrument. I wish that they would take a music course so they know what they are talking about. Some of them need a course in journalism as well. There are a handful of knowledgeable writers. The rest are morons. They are clueless when it comes to music. They have a few pet phrases they use to describe someone’s playing: words like “angular lines”, “edgy”, “innovative”, “retro”, etc., come to mind... all overused clichés And then have the audacity to call someone’s music “Cliche”. Very few can actually talk about the music in a way that the non musician can understand. They don’t recognize reharmonization, innovative forms and structures, etc. These are things I think would be interesting to any reader. Innovation to these guys is a new sound on the guitar. What about the music? Well they can hear a different guitar sound but they can’t hear any music. Just because the sound is different doesn’t make it innovative. You can still have bad music, just with a different (innovative?) sound. Sometimes they don’t even get the instrumentation right. I had a guy from “ALL Music Guide”, not know the difference between a bass and guitar on my CD Midnight Blue. It was a duo track the Gerald Veasley and I did on the tune “Stella”. Well this idiot thought it was Gerald overdubbing himself. I’ve contacted the publication, they still let the review stand. This goes for good reviews as well. What good is it if a guy gives you a great review and in the very same publication writes moronically about some other artist good or bad. That doesn’t give much credibility to the good review he gave you. I should not being saying this as most of my reviews are positive but for all the wrong reasons. This is something that needs to be said. I don’t think it will change anything but I give the public a lot of credit for not being stupid. I think they are being duped by these mindless bottom feeders. That being said, there are a handful of excellent writers that I would be proud to be critiqued by...good or bad. I won’t name them because I fear I may leave out an excellent critic and have him think that I have lumped him in with the rest of the idiots. The problem is that the bad writers don’t know they suck. And the magazine editors are unaware as well. Some of these guys are not fit to write for a high school newspaper, where, incidentally, I have seen much better journalism and more interesting stories than in major music publications.

**JI:** Jazz musicians are often preaching to the choir—at industry conventions, and in the media. What ideas do you have that might work to broaden the interest in jazz?

**JB:** Education in the schools is the answer. It should start in grade school. Jazz is an American art form that was brought to this country by black people. It’s roots are in the black community. That fact needs to be taught in the same way we know about how the early European classical music was developed, its roots and development. The same need to be done for jazz.

**JI:** Could you cite one or more of the most valuable or rewarding things you’ve experienced or observed in your experiences as a recording and performing musician? Could you cite one or more of the most preposterous?

**JB:** A guy named Charles Carlini brought me to New York about fifteen years ago. I played a little club called the Zinc Bar. Right before we started, he came up to me and said, “A lot of guitar players are coming to check you out, including George Benson.” I thought to myself, “Yeah George Benson is going to come here.” After one tune I looked up during a bass solo, and sitting at the bar were Russell Malone, Jack Wilkins, Paul Hollanden, Ron Affif, and sitting two feet in front of me was George Benson. So, to say that I got a little unnerved is a giant understatement. Since then, I have met almost all my guitar heroes: Tal Farlow, Joe Pass, Hank Garland, Johnny Smith, Gene Bertoncini, Les Paul, Herb Ellis, John Pisano, Joe Diorio, and Charlie Byrd, to name a few. Another time was in Philly, when Pat Martino walked into this pizza joint I was playing. I had met Pat a long time ago when I was around fifteen, but just at a concert to say hello. It took me a while to feel comfortable playing in front of George and Pat. The next night, in walks Eddie Gomez. Since then, I have become good friends with all of these gentle giants. Each one has helped me in my career.

One other instance, was when I met the great Bobby Watson. I had always been a huge fan of Bobby. A rather old guy, very intoxicated, came to me and said, “Bobby is coming to sit in.” I said, “Bobby who?” “Watson,” he says and looks at me like I was nuts. An hour later Bobby Watson walks on stage and we start to play. I was lucky enough to record a CD with him, Live at Birdland. There are many others. Some of the fans I meet are extremely extraordinary people. I wish I could name them all.

**JI:** In a couple of sentences, how do you want your music to influence people—what do you want it to say or do?

**JB:** I only want my music to touch people on some level, intellectual, spiritual or emotionally. Audiences identify with feel. How does the music make them feel. I think that is the most import and sometimes only necessary ingredient. I hope that I have helped and inspired a few young people with my teaching.

**JI:** Could you discuss what ideas or activities outside of music you engage in and how they provide fulfillment for you?

**JB:** These days I don’t have much time for hobbies but I do love photography and hope to get back into it one day. The whole concept of light in photographs is very similar to texture and harmony in music.

**JI:** How do you stay balanced—as an artist, as an individual—and nurture deeper meaningful ideas and feelings in this contemporary society in the face the incessant stress and sensory overload that surrounds us?

**JB:** I don’t know that I do stay balanced. I think that if I did not have music as a form of self expression, I would have a hard time dealing with all the sensory overload. Our whole culture is disappearing. Look at our movies and TV. Sadly, that is the culture of America. Reality game shows, stupid sitcoms, news shows that not about news but about hype. They even hype the weather. Talk show hosts capitalizing on someone’s misfortune. Music keeps me centered. Music doesn’t lie or plot or hype. Music gives you back whatever you put into it. Music has a structure that is ordered and at the same time free. I focus on the positive things music has given me. And then I think what a lucky individual I am. I make a good living at what I love to do. I have a wonderful family and a great circle of friends and fans. What else is there? I know....health. I wish I had never started smoking, because my health these days is not the best, and yet, I am not sick thanks to the many doctors who are constantly helping me. Anyone thinking about starting to smoke is playing Russian roulette with all the chambers loaded.

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"A man’s character may be learned from the adjectives which he habitually uses in conversation.”

- Mark Twain
Enrico Pieranunzi
Charleston Jazz Festival
May 31, 2007
© Eric Nemeyer
Art Blakey
His Life & Music — Part 6

By John R. Barrett, Jr.

Always intrigued by world rhythms, Blakey organized a series of drum ensemble records, usually stressing Afro-Cuban (Orgy in Rhythm, Holiday for Skins) or African music (The African Beat). An exception to this would be Drums Around the Corner, which explored the world of mainstream jazz drumming. (His only other disc in this vein would be the live Gretsch Drum Night at Birdland, made in 1960.) Made on November 2, 1958 (just three days after Moanin'), all of the Messengers were present, minus Benny Golson. Three other drummers joined Art: Roy Haynes, Philly Joe Jones (doubling on tympani), and Ray Barretto, the premier conguero in jazz.

Ray and Roy are heard on the left speaker, the others on the right. The drummers start with “Moose the Mooche”, the theme apparent in the rhythms they play. On the bridge there’s a little exchange: Art is first, followed by Roy, Philly, and Blakey again. The theme then starts proper, with Morgan’s exuberant shout; cymbals ring on both speakers, and Barretto taps gently. Timmons has a sweet melodic chorus, backed by Haynes’ hi-hat; Art cuts in with a mighty roll, and backs Bobby on the second chorus. Another roll and Lee’s on: high, passionate screams, enhanced by vibraphone and Jones’ ecstatic snares. Barretto’s rippling turn is enhanced by Merritt; he’s barely perceptible, and highly melodic.

The drummers have another exchange (Haynes wins this one); Lee revisits the theme, and it was supposed to end here but, Philly begins another solo, a monstrous survey of distant cymbals, and the terse comments of Timmons. Morgan sort of slouches in, drawing his notes and keeping it simple. When Lee takes it louder, Blakey turns tough, crushing the two-beat; the clubbing continues on Bobby’s back-room solo. Hear the funk quotient rise when Merritt solos, and Philly Joe follows with a chorus of big snares. Roy is better still, Ray pops it hard, and Blakey tops them all. No doubt about it – this is his blues.

“Lee’s Tune” is a headlong rush through a bad part of town: Jymie starts a wicked vamp, Bobby repeats with his left hand, while the right does chords that sound like car horns. This is cop-show music, exemplified by Morgan’s world-weary solo. Blakey provides fierce support as Barretto bubbles along … the turmoil of a city street. Exchanges follow, with Jones using silence, Haynes working out his toms, and Blakey’s snares at their loudest.

“Let’s Take 16 Bars” is all a drum fan could want: an earthy solo by Barretto, Philly’s mad bombast, Roy’s organization, and Art’s kitchen sink. The actual tune is standard-issue blues, which Lee stomps good; Timmons creeps along the scale and the exchanges return. Catch the ending, where the drums tap out “The Theme” – this tune is short on substance, but totally laden with style.

“Drums in the Rain” plays like a lengthy conversation: Ray’s solo, a mess of bumps and thumps, and continued by Art with greater intensity. Joe rumbles on the mallets, Blakey takes it back, and the drums coalesce. There is no real theme, nor does there need to be. “Lover” is ridiculously fast, started by all drummers in a collective solo of dense power. Morgan’s solo is a thing of wonder, a series of coherent interlocking phrases where there is hardly a room for breath.

In the liner notes to this album, Kenny Washington calls this Lee’s best recorded solo; it’s certainly in contention. Roy is ecstatic on cymbals, Joe drives down low, Art rolls along, and Barretto mists like the rain – a heady climax to a stellar album. It would not be released until 1999, but it was worth the wait.

In late November the Messengers took a tour of Europe, including a week at the Olympia Theatre in Paris. After one of these shows Art was approached by film director Edouard Molinaro – he had just completed a movie, Des Femmes Disparaissent, which was still without a soundtrack. When Blakey agreed to record the music, he was peppered with other requests: the group was to write the music, with all original themes … and could you do it this week? Art accepted the challenge, assigning Golson to work on the themes; the band saw the film later in the week, and recorded the music in early December, now available on the disc Jazz in Paris: Jazz & Cinema Volume Two.

Because of the short notice, there was no time to compose an original score; most of the tunes are reworks of earlier Golson pieces. For example, “Ne Chuchote Pas” is “Whisper Not” is miniature, the whole thing played in ninety seconds. Morgan wields a mute, twisting the notes with fragile beauty – Golson whips his part, in a breathy sort of fog. Timmons is nearly silent ‘til the end, when an ominous chord ends the piece.

“Pierre et Beatrice” varies the theme but retains the mood; the short running times ensure concise performance, everything reduce to its essence. “Generique” weds a moody drum piece to a smooth-gliding blues, built again on Morgan’s mute. Three Blakey-penned blues, the longest pieces in the set, plumb a variety of feelings: “Blues Pour Dou dou” is largely a duet between Merritt and Morgan, playing behind a ton of echo.

“Blues Pour Marcel” is a workout for Timmons, where notes rise like weary smoke. Benny has the mood perfect, growling in zigzags like Ammons, or maybe Plas Johnson. Lee’s turn is good, although the mute grows repetitive. Benny gets more room – and his best solo – on “Blues Pour Vava”, pacing slowly with a gravelly horn. What a gorgeous mood: tunes like this aren’t composed, they are felt.
Most of the music takes the form of short cues, a means of transition from one scene to the next. “Nasol” lets Blakey work the tympani; grave thumps are answered by nervous horns. (“Tom” is basically the same thing, with more horns and less tympani.) There are drum breaks (“Poursuite dans le Ruelle”), Latin pieces (“Mambo dans le Voiture”), and swinging waltzes (“La Divorçée de Leo Fall”).

Most of these count as sketches, of little value outside the context of the film – the long pieces are different, where the group chemistry has time to work its magic. While a footnote in the history of the Messengers, *Des Femmes Disparaissent* was praised by French critics, some of whom found the music better than the film it accompanied. This would be true of the group’s next soundtrack, made for a cartoon in 1960.

An unusual various-artists project (Blue Note artists playing the music of Irving Berlin) caused Blakey to form a duet with the great bassist Paul Chambers. Recorded on March 29, 1959, “I’ve Got My Love to Keep Me Warm” finds Chambers slippery on the theme, as Art stays quiet on the hi-hat. Paul’s notes are thick, agile, carefully delineated – later bassists would use more technique, but few would ever play better. Brushes and clicks form the bulk of Art’s solo, where snares take the day on the exchanges. Seeing how well they play together, one wishes Chambers could have played in the Messengers; the closest he’d come would be Lee Morgan’s album *Leeway*, made in 1960.

Also recorded at this session was “What Is This Thing Called Love?”; like “I’ve Got My Love”, this would turn up as a bonus track on *This Thing Called Love?*; like “I’ve Got My Love to Keep Me Warm”, it was a public service film, *Driving Us Crazy!* commissioned by the Performance Board of the Methodist Church, and performed an entire soundtrack, for an animated cartoon. Recorded on March 29, 1959, “I’ve Got My Love to Keep Me Warm” was praised by French critics, *Disparaissent* being a car. As Mars is running out of oxygen, Rusty, a wheeled Martian spy who vaguely resembles a car, is advertised as abstract shapes. (This seems inspired by the Bach sequence in *Disney’s Fantasia.*) A skidding noise (seen as a growing triangle) is capped by a red explosion, punctuated by Blakey’s cymbal. He then clicks his sticks, and a nervous bass twang introduces our narrator, voiced by comedian Howard Morris. He is Rusty, a wheeled Martian spy who vaguely resembles a car.

“Invited on stage during a Canadian jazz festival, Shorter blew Art away with his rendition of ‘Evidence’; in short time Blakey called up Ferguson, pleading the case in his inimitable manner. ‘Look, we’re in trouble. We don’t have a sax player and you know Wayne ain’t gonna stay with you too long because he’s a small group man.’ Ferguson consented, and Blakey had another ace in his hand.”

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

- John Maxwell

(Continued on page 32)
Art Blakey, Part 6

(Continued from page 31)

‘58 band) and was presently in the Maynard Ferguson big band.

Invited on stage during a Canadian jazz festival, Shorter blew Art away with his rendition of “Evidence”; in short time Blakey called up Ferguson, pleading the case in his inimitable manner. “Look, we’re in trouble. We don’t have a sax player and you know Wayne ain’t gonna stay with you too long because he’s a small group man.” Ferguson consented, and Blakey had another ace in his hand.

A European tour was set to close 1959; the promoter of the show at Paris’ Théâtre des Champs-Elysées promised a Blakey big band, with appearances by Bud Powell, Barney Wilen, Duke Jordan, and other expatriates. It turned out Blakey knew nothing of it – the promoter simply put those names on the poster, and Blakey called up Ferguson, pleading the case in his inimitable manner. “Look, we’re in trouble. We don’t have a sax player and you know Wayne ain’t gonna stay with you too long because he’s a small group man.” Ferguson consented, and Blakey had another ace in his hand.

In addition to the usual advertisements, Gretsch sponsored an annual drum concert at Birdland, starting in 1958. Blakey picked the talent for these events, and outdid himself for the show on April 25, 1960, which was recorded by Roulette as Gretsch Drum Night at Birdland, Volumes One and Two.”

“Art signed an endorsement with the Gretsch Drum Company in the late ‘Fifties, an arrangement that would last many years. In addition to the usual advertisements, Gretsch sponsored an annual drum concert at Birdland, starting in 1958. Blakey picked the talent for these events, and outdid himself for the show on April 25, 1960, which was recorded by Roulette as Gretsch Drum Night at Birdland, Volumes One and Two.”

with Morgan playing right from the start. Art launches a massive roll, then it’s Wayne’s turn: a rusty wave of sound always pushing forward. Powell’s comps are warm and thick, a match for Art’s cymbals. Morgan takes it slower, but is no less intense, hitting the roof with pure clipped notes. Jymie’s walk is fast and inventive; he’s like a tiger stalking through the brush. Barney has another tight solo, more melodic than his last – he seems to emulate Shorter’s approach. Bud is next, tripping pleasantly through several choruses; the end is short and the applause is long.

At this time the guests left the stage, and solo and the crowd goes wild suring Art’s bit. As well they should: this was a potent concert, with Wayne Shorter giving notice to the world.

As it turned out, Bobby Timmons was only gone a few months; Art welcomed him back and the tunes kept flowing, as if he had never left. (He would again quit and return at the end of the year, again replaced by Walter Davis.) The Big Beat, recorded on March 6, 1960, shows a friendly battle for the post of chief songwriter – Shorter was improving at a frightening pace. His “The Chess Players” has a delicious slow groove, Lee floating high as Wayne makes deep hums. The tenor goes first, with a smoother tone than he showed in Paris; he coasts through in wavelike patterns, showing his skill but not showing off. His wispy lines are offset by throaty groans, with churning chords for a backdrop. Lee goes for the fast approach: high spikes at the start, down-home chants thereafter. They instinctively know what works together; these horns are in partnership, not competition. Bobby turn is typically funky, typically effortless – these cornet men are bish-ops, stretching long, working the angles, and preaching fierce.

“Sakeena’s Vision” is sleek, a brace of straight lines built on bumpy drums. Morgan’s staccato is in full force, with strong clean notes in abundance. Wayne goes for dense clusters, then switches to Coltrane’s sheets of sound. A pacemaker turn by Art follows, a thunderous justification of the album’s title. I would have liked more horns, but what we get is prime.

Timmons’ stake in this contest is “Dat Dere”, a low-down sequel to “This Here”. The theme is sly and the horns eat it up, circling in bluesy precision. Morgan has sass as he blares a tough solo; Timmons’ waterlike comp improves the trumpet. The sax is laid-back but not lazy, sailing with easy, yawn ing lines. Bobby has a wonderful barroom solo, full of tinkling chords – the horns answer with a second theme, and Timmons ends it as it began … if you need a definition of soul-jazz, here it is.

Following this is “Lester Left Town”, perhaps the first standard composed by Shorter. The placid theme recalls Young, but Wayne’s solo does not: insistent, metallic, breathless, aggressive. Bobby’s in the background, almost subliminal with foggy chords – Morgan’s turn is short but potent. Timmons has a nice smooth effort, and the tune exits, sooner than I’d like. Not to worry – Shorter would be back.

Art signed an endorsement with the Gretsch Drum Company in the late ‘Fifties, an arrangement that would last many years. In addition to the usual advertisements, Gretsch sponsored an annual drum concert at Birdland, starting in 1958. Blakey picked the talent for these events, and outdid himself for the show on April 25, 1960, which was recorded by Roulette as Gretsch Drum Night at Birdland, Volumes One and Two.

The drummers for the evening were Bla- key, Phillly Joe Jones, Charli Persip, and Elvin Jones, who would join the Coltrane Quartet a
Art Blakey, Part 6

A rather obvious splice takes us to the end of Red’s solo, with Art back in charge and tapping it lightly. Flanagan’s turn is restrained, unlike the drummers: Art sticks to the hi-hat, as Philly bangs hard to get attention. He sounds desperate to join in – he repeatedly thumps the one-beat (in waltz time … with the rest of the band in 4/4!) and goes to the tom-toms as Blakey keeps time. Finally he drops all pretense and simply horns in, getting a harsh metallic rhythm. (This may actually be another splice at work, but I’m not certain.)

And now we get the drum solo: Philly Joe starts with a martial snare pattern, adding cymbals for heat. After a big flourish Art takes over, a long roll he takes from drum to drum, about all the way. There’s a two-fisted effort on tom-toms, another after the endtheme plays, and a prodigious show of applause – and if you thought two drummers were good…

Now Elvin and Persip take the stage, joining Art as Philly gets a breather. They explore “El Sino”, a tune by Charles Greenlea: Blakey does the intro, then Elvin comes in for the theme statement. Jones is in top form, cymbals shimmering like mad; Art does likewise, for a busy little storm. The first solo goes to Red, whistling down the scale with soft cymbals behind him. Blakey keeps it simple as Sonny gets intense: the first chorus ends in a screaming trill, like Coltrane on alto. (This makes Blakey shout “Yeah!” – me too.) It’s his best solo of the date, as is the case for Greenlea: faster than normal and very melodic, while losing none of his luminous tone. The drummer here is Persip, in the center of the mix; he favors tight cymbals, with clustered snares in between. Flanagan’s comp is gorgeous, mostly told in broad stroking. Charlie works with the silence, in dense, melodic solo, and later goes “All right, Elvin!” during Jones’ abstract effort. Each man gets another solo, this time on brushes – even McGregor gets a short turn, as does Carter.

All three then do a unison drum theme (the crowd goes wild) and here come the drum solos. Jones is first, all busy snares and intense polyrhythms. Charlie works with the silence, in carefully-placed taps that build in volume. He gets a conga pattern from the tom-toms, weaves a long snare roll, and seasons it with tiny cymbals. For some reason they cut Art’s solo, going straight to the unison riff and a messy endtheme – while weak near the end, this is a great display of the men’s ability and their different styles. In other words: this is what you buy a drum album for.

The last two cuts are a little hard on the ears – in shortening them to fit the LP, producer Teddy Reig deleted everything but the drum solos! While preparing the discs’ reissue on CD, Kenny Washington searched for the complete session tapes, which appear to no longer exist. The result is that the solos, without a musical context to frame them, seem like empty display – virtuosity for its own sake. Art doesn’t play on these takes, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t heard: on “Tune Up”, he whoops during Philly Joe’s solo, shouting “Let him play! Let him play!” He announces Persip at the end of his dense, melodic solo, and later goes “All right, Elvin!” during Jones’ abstract effort. Each man gets another solo, this time on brushes – good stuff, but this goes on forever. Blakey is silent for “A Night in Tunisia”, so we can hear all the rhythm: a terrific Latin unison pattern gives way to several cracking solos, Charlie’s being the best. Quite a “Night” … and quite a night.

Three composers shared honors on August 7 for A Night in Tunisia, Blakey’s second disc by that name. Structured on the 1957 version (and, by extension, the 1959 Paris rendition), the title cut is notable for Morgan’s unaccompanied finale and Shorter’s growing strength. Weaving through the first chorus, this reed is “the biggest change to the Messengers in ‘61: Lee Morgan had left to form his own group … Blakey needed the perfect trumpeter to succeed him. He found him in Freddie Hubbard …. he recorded with Coltrane on The Believer and Africa/Brass, was paired with Eric Dolphy on Outward Bound (Dolphy’s first as a leader), and was part of Ornette Coleman’s session for Free Jazz, the album that named a genre. A fiery horn with phenomenal chops, Hubbard was always trying something new – of all the available players to replace Morgan, Art couldn’t have made a better choice.”

(Continued on page 35)
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(Continued from page 33)
edgy, smart, and absolutely relentless. That goes
double for Morgan, whose screaming trills make
you take notice. His solo works on the up-
and-down pattern heard at the end of “Donna
Lee”, with a drawl tossed in at the end. Merritt
has an exceptional solo, but this is so close to
the earlier version I wonder why it was remade.

“Sincerely Diana”, a romance by Shorter,
opens on a pivot: Wayne moves three notes in
this direction, reverses for three, and repeats
many times. Darkly hued, his lines acquire a
passionate quaver near the end, when Morgan
calls high. Glittering and rhythmic, this stuff
will take your breath away – ditto for Bobby,
whose solos are inventive. In a passionate
passage near the end, Morgan

dominates the solo. He finds
himself in Freddie Hubbard, a native of Indianapo-
lis with some impressive dates already under his
belt. Playing briefly with the Mastersounds
(presenting a young Wes Montgomery), Hubbard
then moved to New York and found himself in
tight company. He recorded with Coltrane on
The Believer and Africa/Brass; was paired with
Eric Dolphy on Outward Bound (Dolphy’s first
as a leader), and was part of Ornette Coleman’s
session for Free Jazz, the album that named a
gene. A fiery horn with phenomenal chops,
Hubbard was always trying something new –
of all the available players to replace Morgan, Art
couldn’t have made a better choice.

For two days in October 1962, this sextet
recorded the Caravan album at Plaza Sound
Studios. This famous facility was on the seventh
floor of the Radio City Music Hall – the
elevator only went to the sixth floor and so eve-
ryone had to lug their equipment up a final
flight of stairs. The session opens with
“Caravan”, its chart clearly based on “A Night
in Tunisia”. Unlike the rich echo of the Van
gelder studios, the sound at Plaza is rather
dead, robbing Art of some of his power. His
cymbal-crossed opening is joined by Walton
playing a “Manteca”-style vamp, and then by
the horns theming in unison.

Fuller plays the bridge straightforward, while
the others race madly – Hubbard is first from the
gate, whooping it fast and taking it high. Lee
did this often, but Freddie seems cleaner, more
distinct in his diction. Shorter blows a sad siren,
then twists upward in double-time fury. His last
chorus quotes the theme, tart like an oboe and
then twists upward in double
sequence. (The
sound is improved on this cut, showing
off the fullness of his tone; the other horns hum
a soft chord, and a lone cymbal ticks in the dis-
tant. Shorter swings through for eight bars,
sticking to theme as Coltrane would play it;
when Freddie returns, he shouts through the
roof in a stunning, razor-sharp sequence. (The
Stitt-like tag ending is also nice.)

Hubbard’s “Thermo” is hard-bop personi-
fied, Hubbard racing in Lee Morgan’s image.
Staying up high, he plays a Morse-code riff atop
Blakey’s rimshots. There’s a word to describe
this – luminous. Wayne pushes the beat, per-
haps too much – air leakage from his horn ruins
an alternate take, shelving a marvelous effort
from Hubbard. His solo is regimented, every-
thing done in even steps and regular intervals –
delightful when he does this fast.

Fuller tries a slow glide, in a rich chocolate
tone; it doesn’t exactly fit the mood of the
piece, but is great nonetheless. Walton is suita-
ably bumpy (he’d later say “My playing got
stronger, because with Art’s powerful style I
had to get stronger.”) and the tune coasts to an
exhilarating end. While a decent effort, the
oversized studio did not suit the group – as
many fans of the Messengers would attest, you
had to hear them live, which would take the
label to Birdland eight months later.

Lee is not known as a writer; this proves he
was.

Another example is next: Art’s 4/4 intro
leads to “Kozo’s Waltz”, a study in volume and
harmony. Wayne has a dark tone as he sways
through his solo; he enjoys the tempo and has a
lengthy study of “While My Lady Sleeps”, the
favorite quote of John Coltrane. Lee is trium-
phant, though his spot is too short; Timmons

steps up during Shorter’s solo, which is both
stronger than J. J., as agile as Frank Rosolino.

The Believer

steps on the horn in a stunning, razor-sharp sequence. (The
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