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CONTENTS
CLUBS, CONCERTS, EVENTS
13 Calendar of Events
18 Clubs & Venue Listings

4 Mike Stern by Ken Weiss
Jazz History FEATURE
32 Art Blakey, Part 8 by John R. Barrett

20 Steve Wilson (9/6-9 Jazz Standard)
24 Rufus Reid (9/13-16 Jazz Standard)

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Mike Stern
The Fall and Rise of Mike Stern

By Ken Weiss

Mike Stern (b. January 10, 1953, Boston, Massachusetts) has long been one of music’s finest guitarists. He’s received six Grammy-nominations after early associations with Miles Davis, Billy Cobham, Blood, Sweat & Tears, and Jaco Pastorius. This interview took place on April 7, 2018 just prior to his performance at South Jazz Club in Philadelphia. Stern openly spoke of his recent devastating accident and details about his past.

Jazz Inside Magazine: You were Michael Sedgwick at birth, how did you become Mike Stern?

Mike Stern: I was adopted by my stepfather. I kind of didn’t see my dad. I saw him for the first few years after my parents got divorced but he had a different family at that point, and I think he was in favor of not having to pay for two families. I met my half-sister, [actress] Kyra Sedgwick about twenty years ago for the first time. We have the same dad. She’s a totally great person, unbelievable. She married Kevin Bacon and so that makes him my half-brother-in-law. They’re really down to earth.

JI: Trip (Heads Up) is your first release since 23rd Street. I was catching a cab to take a flight to go on the road that day. I looked at both sides of the street, like you normally would, and I tripped over the debris and broke both of my humerus bones. The right one was badly injured. I ended up seeing a great hand specialist that [guitarist] Wayne Krantz recommended and a couple months later I was able to play with Chick Corea at the Blue Note.

MS: I was more than scared that I wasn’t going to play again, that I wouldn’t even be able to teach. I love to play the guitar, it just helps in so many ways – my whole vibe. It’s a real gift for me to be able to play and be into music.

JI: So you feared your career was over?

MS: Not really, the tunes were already written. I was actually going to do something with Chick and then the accident happened. I titled them after I did the record. I named it Trip because that’s what happened and I didn’t want to try to hide from it. You have to just keep going when these things happen to you in life. I wanted to embrace this and maybe give somebody else some inspiration, and I’ve had good feedback.

MS: I did the record. I named it Trip. I did get into recently. Not to memorize the licks but just to have that vocabulary in my brain, to see how he’s thinking. I’ll transcribe something from Sonny Rollins’ Saxophone Colossus or something, which I did get into recently. Not to memorize the licks but just to have that vocabulary in my brain, to see how he’s thinking.

JI: The new recording’s titles read like a chronological presentation of your accident and recovery process. Did you set out to capture your journey in that way?

MS: The recording’s titles read like a chronological presentation of your accident and recovery process. Did you set out to capture your journey in that way?

MS: I’ve always been partial to ballads, I think it’s a natural thing for me in my heart. I want to be who you are. There’s some stuff that I like to be exciting on, and playing more with up-tempo. But there’s also bluesy stuff, that’s in the middle or more melodic, I love that, and there’s stuff that I really want to be sad. That’s what I try to do when I write and play.

JI: You’re known to be a practice-aholic, you’ll practice 8 hours a day. How do you practice and is excessive practicing still necessary for you?

MS: I love to do it because music is so endless. I feel like I’m a beginner, we all are. It’s just so huge, there’s so much you can learn. I’m usually practicing stuff that I don’t know first. The things I’m working on, brand new stuff, and not the stuff that I’m getting better at and have already played with for a month.”
Mike Stern

scribe solos of other musicians at this point in your career. Is that something you hear other very established musicians doing?

MS: Yes, I know a lot of cats that do that, or at least play along with the records. I think ultimately that’s how you learn any language. You learn it by hearing other people do it that are more fluent in the language and you cop their stuff. I tell my students that it will be very awkward in the beginning. When I was first learning how to play jazz, I was a pretty good blues player and had really learned by ear. I was listening to a lot of diatonic music – more rock, some soul music - growing up in Washington, DC. My mom used to play classical piano so I listened to a lot of Bach. She also played a lot of jazz records so I learned from that. I started studying more and learned how to read and went to Berklee College of Musical Knowledge. [Laughs] To learn, you have to play with people who are more fluent than you. I was very aware of that’s what I needed to do and I put myself in a lot of situations that were weird for me. I felt scared to do them and I did them anyway.

JI: Your first prominent gig was the two years spent with Blood Sweat & Tears. How was the experience of suddenly moving from the role of student to that of a performer in front of large audiences with high expectations?

MS: I was scared to play with that band, they were more like beboppers. Ron McClure and Larry Willis were in the band. Eventually, Roy McCurdy, who played with Cannonball for many years, joined the band. Bobby Colombo was the original drummer and Jaco [Pastorius] joined the band for a few months before he joined Weather Report. “Spinning Wheel” never sounded so good! I got that opportunity because of Pat Metheny, who I was studying with at Berklee. We were playing and he said, “You have some special stuff.”

JI: You started your career playing fusion jazz. Was that the primary focus of what you wanted to do or was that reflective of where the work opportunities were?

MS: No, it was just an honest way of being who I was because I grew up listening to rock and blues, a lot of blues. Pop tunes and soul tunes. I was really into Aretha. It’s just natural to include that in my music, to write that way. And the guitar tends to lend itself to more eclecticism than maybe other instruments because it’s such a popular instrument. My favorite kind of music is jazz, though. To give you an idea, one of my favorite records is Friday & Saturday Night at the Black Hawk by Miles Davis.

JI: Miles Davis famously returned to the stage in 1981 after a five-year hiatus and hired you for his comeback band. What was that first week like with Miles?

MS: I got the gig on the recommendation of saxophonist Bill Evans, who’s a badass musician. When we first started rehearsing, I thought Miles was a little nuts. He asked me to play on something that had already been recorded for his comeback record – The Man with the Horn. I went to Columbia’s studio and he said, “Just play over this.” But I didn’t really hear it. I tried and I said, “Miles, it sounds to me. It sounds

“[Continued on page 8]”
Miles came back in and said, “Okay, that’s it.” And I said, “Can’t we do it again, chief? I think I can do it better,” and he said, “Fat Time,” that’s what he was calling me when I first met him. I was heavier and he liked my time feel. He said, “Fat Time, when you’re at a party, you got to know when to leave.” [Laughs] So in other words, the session was over. He liked it and he called the tune “Fat Time” after my nickname what was going on. To me, that’s enough, I would have loved to have heard that myself. We were always trying to get him to swing out a little. I think he kind of threw us a bone when he did “My Man is Gone Now,” but we did it in a different way. So the [Kool Jazz Festival] gig sucked, we all thought that the Avery Fisher Hall was not happening. I mean nothing could really suck with Miles, there are always moments that he would hit a note right in the right place, and most of his playing was just so soulful, no matter he told me something like this also, he could tell the guy was nervous and he called him over and said, “Yeah, man, I know you’re nervous, so am I, but fuck it!” [Laughs] That’s how he dealt with it. You got to push past it no matter what. Miles was an extremely sensitive guy, obviously. He played incredibly sensitive, beautiful ballads. It would just make you cry, the way that he’d play sometimes. He was so sensitive that sometimes I think he had this kind of tough guy thing as a defense. I always thought that, and I wasn’t alone in thinking that because if you got to know him, he was a lot warmer. Miles was always warm because he had a sense of humor about himself, underneath all of it. But he was very, very shy in some ways, and insecure in a lot of ways. And my respect kind of grew over the years, even after I had stopped playing for him, that he couldn’t play with him anymore. He got really pissed off and said, “Man, you promised me when you got out of that place,” because I went to a rehab finally and I got sober, and I told him, “I’m not gonna go on the road if you’re doing what you’re doing. I’m not gonna talk you out of it, man. You do what you want to do but I can’t hang because I’ll get fucked up again.” After a couple years he saw me and that I was still sober. He knew how fucked up I had been back in the day and said, “Man, you’re doing pretty good. How long has it been?” I said, “A couple years. I’m going to meetings, I ask for help. Mike Brecker helped me a lot, a lot of people.” And he started asking about it so I thought he was really bottoming out, which he was, and he wanted to get his shit together. It was finally time for him and then he said the wrong thing to the wrong guy and got his ass kicked. It was really tragic. He should still be around. That was really a loss.
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**JI:** You brought up Jaco Pastorius earlier. Would you share a memory about him?

**MS:** He had a great sense of humor. He was just a beautiful cat, a really good friend of mine. One time, me and my wife Leni were down at his house in Ft. Lauderdale, and we were all getting fucked up in those days. It was a Saturday night and we got really drunk and did a lot of blow. But we were feeling horrible the next day. We hung out and Jaco comes in with a rose and little, tiny cat that he somehow found in the street. He came into our room and said, “Happy Sunday” with a sweet smile. He knew that Leni loved cats. His dad was really cool too. He was a good singer, he really swung. Jaco got a lot from his dad. His dad lived in Philly. He used to hang in all the bars, unfortunately. Jaco was born drunk, legally, I really think because his parents were really “professionals” in that regard. His dad was beautiful but it was sad. He told me one time how hurt he was when Jaco died. He was so drunk at times. He went to Jaco’s funeral and started banging on the coffin like it was bongos. Jaco would have loved doing something like that, that’s their sense of humor. I think they kind of believed that when you’re gone, you send people off with a smile, but it was weird for the people that were there. It was just out of context. Jaco was especially great. Wow, what a musician, what a composer. Of course, his bass playing was amazing. When he played with Blood, Sweat & Tears, we couldn’t believe it. First of all his time was so strong, and we got along really good because of that. And I was way not playing like on his level at all, but he was patient. We used to jam together and then after I played with Miles he hired me to play with his band, and we were playing together all the time. He was so deep in all his writing. I heard his first record at Bobby Colombo’s. Bobby was his producer and they were recording at Bobby’s studio, and I went and heard that because I had just joined Blood, Sweat & Tears. Bobby said I had to hear this guy. Apparently, I had met Jaco a couple of times before. One time at the Flying Machine, which was a disco and Jaco was playing at halftime after a rock band. He played and nobody was paying attention as he played his ass off. We went up to him and told him we was going to Berklee soon and I loved the way he was playing. And then I saw him again in Boston around ’72 when I was studying with Pat. Pat said, “You have to hear this bass player.” And I went and heard him at the Zircon, this tiny place, he was playing with Bob Moses and Pat. Jaco was playing his ass off and I went up to him and I said, “Man, you look familiar,” and he looked down from the stage and said, “Man, I don’t remember your name but we met maybe five years ago at the Flying Machine.” He had a photographic memory. It broke my heart not to play with him after I got out of rehab, but I think I made the right choice. I don’t think I would have been able to sustain Jaco and stayed sober.

**JI:** You’ve played with many great guitarists during your career. Would you comment on playing with Jim Hall and Pat Martino?

**MS:** Both of them are fantastic and Pat is still playing his ass off and he’s a big inspiration of somebody’s who’s come back from a lot. And Jim, much the same. He had his bout with alcohol. We used to go to meetings together. It was just an amazing opportunity to play with those guys. I was really scared to play with both of them in some ways, and I told them that. I said, “Man, you’re a hero,” and they were cool. They just said, “Just play, let’s play.” I’d love to do more with Pat Martino and would have loved to have done more with Jim. We were talking about doing more but Jim had such back issues, he had a titanium back at the end of his life. He’s always such an amazing inspiration. When I first got into jazz, he was like my favorite, him and Wes. Pat Metheny loved those guys and he kind of pushed me in that direction. I also loved George Benson.

**JI:** You also live with a great guitarist – your wife Leni Stern. How did you meet?

**MS:** We met in Boston. I had already gone through Berklee and she was still going there, studying some composition, guitar and film scoring. We met through Bill Frisell. He introduced us and one thing led to another. We were living together but said we were never going to get married, unless she needed a Green Card. And then she needed a Green Card, and I didn’t even think about it. At that point we’d been together for a couple years. I said, “Let’s get a Green Card,” and so we got married. So far it’s lasted thirty-seven years, we’ve been married a long time.

**JI:** You have certain rules that help govern and strengthen your marriage. Why is one of the rules not playing together often and are there guidelines regarding performing each other’s compositions?

**MS:** No, not regarding playing each other’s compositions. I’ve done a couple of her’s on my records and I played on a couple of her records. We always like to write our own tunes. Her own tunes are beautiful, I want to do some more. And we play together at home all the time, but at one point, years and years ago, we were doing a few gigs in clubs, and we just decided maybe it would be wiser to kind of separate and not go on the road together ever. So we never really did that together. Sometimes she comes out, if she’s visiting me, and she plays a tune. What happens is sometimes you’re playing a gig and you’re dealing with whoever you’re dealing with on the bandstand, and you get into a little argument with them – “Hey, you’re playing too loud or it was a little...” And you get a little pissed off, at least you don’t have to go home and sleep with them.

[Laughs] It can be too much in that same world where you’re smothering each other. But we might start doing some gigs together as we get older. We’re talking about it some. But I get so much inspiration from her. She keeps moving, her records are so different. She’s doing this African stuff now but her first record was with Paul Motian, he used to play with her at the 55 Bar for like fifty dollars. He really dug her vibe. He said, “You just get the drums there,” which was easy because he didn’t use a big kit. She’s amazing.

**JI:** Has Leni’s work with African musicians influenced you and has she taught you to play the n’goni?

**MS:** No, I can’t play the n’goni, that’s for damn sure, but she can. She played on *Trip*. Every time I hear her write in that kind of world music thing, I get inspired by it. It’s really cool, she keeps moving.

**JI:** Which of you owns more guitars?

**MS:** She does. I’m the type of guy who likes to stick with something and just get deeper into it. The same thing with the kind of music I write. I always loved Bill Evans, the piano player. He would play and just grow within the certain thing he kept doing with his trio stuff. I like to change up and have a lot of variety on my records, but it’s still my tunes, and it’s still in a certain kind of genre. Each record changes a little bit and guitar-wise, I like to use one or two guitars.

**JI:** So you own only two guitars?

**MS:** Yeah, I do and Leni owns about ten.

**JI:** When Yamaha approached you about developing the Mike Stern Signature Pacifica Guitar, what elements did you insist the instrument needed to have?

**MS:** Yamaha came to me and said they wanted to build a Mike Stern model and I said, “Yeah!” I worked with them for a while and we got something that really sounded good to me and they built it. I’ve used it ever since. I wanted my model to have a warm sound and it was based off of Roy Buchanan’s old guitar that I used to have. Telecasters are not known for their warmth but I had a tele that Pat Metheny heard me play and he said, “Man, you should never play anything but that. That’s your thing, it’s special.”

**JI:** You’ve been playing at the 55 Bar in the Village for many years.

**MS:** I love to play there. It’s been over thirty years, off and on. Jeff Andrews and I actually found the place in the early ’80s. He’s a fantastic bass player, we played together in Mike Brecker’s first band. Jeff heard about the place and asked me if I wanted to play. We did it and got almost no bread. I was drinking in those days, I’ve been sober for more than thirty years, so the guy just gave me a whole bunch of wine. That’s all I needed, and Jeff got like twenty-five bucks.
Mike Stern

(Continued from page 10)

Now there’s a new owner and the place is hipper. I was still playing with Miles at the time, but even then, a place to play was a place to play, for me. Not everybody wanted to play there but now it’s a little place that people want to play. Cecil Taylor used to come in there a lot and hang. He dug the music and I was always very happy about that because I dug him, man.

JI: What are your pleasures outside of music?

MS: I like to swim every day. I like to swim and then go practice. Music is so much of what I love to do. I love to read different stuff. I’m a news junkie. I like to see what’s going on with the world, which is a tragedy nowadays. There’s plenty of inspiration from the blues today.

JI: I understand that you swim outdoors during midwinter.

MS: Well, I have done that. I’m crazy enough to do that. One time in Norway during March I went into a Fjord and people said, “You’re a true Viking!”

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

Randy Brecker (trumpet) asked: “Hey Mike, can you explain to the readers how you keep forging ahead in spite of all your recent physical challenges? I remember you telling me once on the bus that when the business started changing, you refused to let yourself be a ‘victim’ of the changes… maybe if you have a minute expound upon that thought. Love ya’ Mike! Gain a lot of inspiration from you and your attitude or maybe it’s just the M&Ms…?”

MS: [Laughs] That’s beautiful. Randy is like one of my heroes for years. He’s a ridiculously great player. Talk about a guy who’s been through all kinds of stuff and had to deal with it. The loss of his brother was huge. I know that he’s had to deal with physical stuff and every time he plays, he plays great. He’s an inspiration in forging ahead no matter what. So I follow his footsteps.

John Scofield (guitar) asked: “Mike, what about those Fender guitars that you owned as a young man in D.C. that were formerly owned by Roy Buchanan and Danny Gatton?”

MS: Those were really cool guitars. I actually bought two guitars from Danny Gatton and one was Roy’s. All Gatton used to do was repair guitars until he became famous as a guitar player. He wanted to buy a used car one day so he said, “I’ve got Roy Buchanan’s spare. Do you want to buy it?” So I bought it and it was great and then it got ripped off in Boston. Somebody pulled a gun on me. I always say they had a persuasive argument. John’s another guy that I just love so much. It’s such a treat to have played with him.

John Scofield also asked: “What memories do you have about living upstairs at 55 Grand Street and playing the club downstairs, and playing a lot with me, Peter Warren and Victor Lewis? Give Mike my love, ok? He’s so great.”

MS: Wow, that’s beautiful. A lot of memories with that and a lot that I can’t remember [Laughs] because those days were, yeah, I was pretty out there. But Leni and I moved into this little loft space and there was this little bar downstairs 55 Grand Street, which has no connection to the 55 Bar. They wanted jazz at this bar so Leni and I played there as a duo and then we started getting people to play with us. Then other bands came. That was the hang after hours in New York for a while. Every jazz musician in the world was there and we were all getting toasted. But the music was smoking’. I played with Sco there and every time I play with him, every time, it’s a real treat. That band with Victor Lewis, Peter Warren and John Purcell was badass. Man that was fun. And then to play with Miles together with Sco, what awesome music. I’ve been a fan of Sco even before I could really play jazz. He’s one of the guys that I heard at Berklee when he was playing with Joe Hunt. He could really play the blues.

Billy Cobham (drums) had a personal request and then a question: “Is there only one arrangement for ‘Brooze’? If yes, please send me a lead sheet.”

MS: [Laughs] Wow, I’ve got to get that to him. We played that with his band. I will, I’ll do that. Billy is special and I love the fact that he writes all the time. There are drummers that do that but not a whole bunch. He’s always trying to come up with different concepts and he just plays his ass off.

Billy Cobham also asked: “How long did you play with Chet Baker and did you record?”

MS: I never recorded with Chet, we only played a little bit together from time to time. I wanted to play with him more but it never happened. We played sometimes just hanging, getting high and playing, but it wasn’t gigs. It would have been great.

Jean-Paul Bourelly (guitar) asked: “Although institutions, such as Berklee, can prepare people very well for success in the music field, was there any belief system you held strongly as a student to speak it yourself and by books and checking out different musicians. I think at a point you just have to jump out there. Berklee for me was very helpful. I did what they taught me and I did extra stuff and put myself in situations with other players that were kicking my ass, which wasn’t hard at that time because I couldn’t play for shit but I learned a lot that way. It was awkward as hell but you gotta do it.

Bob Franceschini (saxophone) asked: “Can you give some advice on how to avoid overweight charges at the airport?” Bob added – “Mike is the best at getting our gear on board without paying exorbitant airline overweight charges. He is also great at getting his guitar on the plane and from keeping people from putting luggage on top of his guitar in the overheads. It’s uncanny. He told me Bob Berg used to kid him saying that while he was a great guitar player, his real talent is negotiating at the airport. Mike will get a laugh from this.”

MS: [Laughs] I am getting a laugh and Bob Berg did say that one time, he said, “Man, you can play the hell outta the guitar but this shit, you’re a motherfucker!” Now, those days are over. I used to travel with all my own stuff. I had a trio with Dave Weckl and Jeff Andrews and I would bring two amps and Dave would bring all his own drums and Jeff brought his amp top and bottom and we’d pay fifty dollars or sometimes for free. After 2001 it stopped and now you have to buy the plane. So I rent amps and I bring my guitar on board because finally they’re a lot looser.

Bill Evans (saxophone) recalled how you became a member of the Miles Davis band: “In short, 1980 was Miles’ comeback into the music world, and I was his liaison to helping him put his touring band of musicians together. Miles and I had already been recording in the studio with Miles’ nephew Vince Wilburn and Vince’s crew of musicians for several months in New York. I was spending everyday hanging with Miles and discussing the music, band, etc. I had introduced him to Marcus Miller and he loved Marcus, so Miles trusted my judgement when it came to musicians. Barry Finnerty was playing guitar, but Miles wanted someone else. I liked Barry, but Miles said, “Bill, do you know another guitar player?’ “ I had played with Mike Stern in Boston and loved his playing, and said, “Yes, I think I do.” So sight unseen, we almost flew Mike to New York on the spot, but then Miles said, “Wait a minute” and some weeks went by. It just so happened that Mike was playing with Billy Cobham in New York so I said to Miles, “You know that guitarist I mentioned? He’s playing in New York next week with Billy Cobham, let’s go down and you can hear him for yourself.” He said, “I don’t want to go to a club.” I said, “Come on, let’s do it!” He finally agreed and I told Mike, “I’m bringing Miles down to hear you.” Miles listened to the first set and then said to me, “Ok, let’s try him out.” So he went backstage and told Mike he wanted him to meet us in the studio soon in New York. That’s how it started. Miles thanked me for bringing him down to hear him and then said, “If he didn’t play his ass off, I was going to kill you!”

MS: Thank you very much! That was a fun interview.
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Friday, August 17
- Trio da Paz & Friends; Late Night Session: Adam Moezizia; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Kurt Rosenwinkel, Guitar; Aaron Parks, Piano; Eric Revis, Bass; Allan Mednard, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Jerome Jennings Sextet; Steve Davis Quintet; JD Allen “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Saturday, August 18
- Kurt Rosenwinkel, Guitar; Aaron Parks, Piano; Eric Revis, Bass; Allan Mednard, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Al Murakami Quartet feat. Sacha Perry; Tad Shull Quartet; Charles Owens Quartet; Hillel Salem “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, August 20
- Late Night Session: Adam Moezizia; Meg Okura & The Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Gilad Hekselman Trio; Joe Farnsworth Trio; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Natalie Douglas Tributes: Elle; Jim Caruso’s Cast Party; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, August 21
- Late Night Session: Alphonso Home August; Late Night Dance Session: Alphonso Home; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Brandee Younger Quintet; Electric; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Harold Mabern Trio - Harold Mabern, Piano; John Webber, Bass; Joe Farnsworth, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Gilad Hekselman Trio; Lucas Pine Nonet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Nina Storey; Susie Mosher; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, August 22
- Harold Mabern Trio - Harold Mabern, Piano; John Webber, Bass; Joe Farnsworth, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Pierre Christophe / Joel Frahm / Joe Martin Trio; Curtis Novosad’s CNO; Mike Troy - “After-hours” Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Nina Storey; Susie Mosher; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, August 23
- Eileen Charles Creole Soul; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Harold Mabern Trio - Harold Mabern, Piano; John Webber, Bass; Joe Farnsworth, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roberta Gambarini ft. George Cables, John Lee & Victor Lewis; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- David Oswald’s Louis Armstrong Eternity Band; Sean Harkness Duo; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Saturday, August 25
- Harold Mabern Trio - Harold Mabern, Piano; John Webber, Bass; Joe Farnsworth, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roberta Gambarini ft. George Cables, John Lee & Victor Lewis; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- David Berkman Quintet; Jared Gold Organ Quartet; JD Allen “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Sunday, August 26
- Eileen Charles Creole Big Band with Special Guest René Marie; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Harold Mabern Trio - Harold Mabern, Piano; John Webber, Bass; Joe Farnsworth, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roberta Gambarini ft. George Cables, John Lee & Victor Lewis; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Al Murakami Quartet feat. Sacha Perry; Pete Zimmer Quartet; Bruce Harris Quartet; Jon Beshay “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Jane Scheckter “I’ve (still) Got My Standards” With Mike Renzi, Jon Beshay “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Jane Scheckter “I’ve (still) Got My Standards” With Mike Renzi, Jon Beshay “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, August 27
- DW Jazz Orchestra featuring Benny Benack III; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Mingus Orchestra; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Eddie Palmieri & Friends; Honoring The Legacy of McCoy Tyner; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Ari Hoenig Trio; Rafal Sarnecki Sextet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Evan Ruggiero and The S’Evan Legs; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, August 28
- William Parker: In Order to Survive Extended Ensemble; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Dayna Stephens Group; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.

Wednesday, August 29

- Late Night Session: Joshua Bruneau; Dizzy's Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Darcy James Argue’s Secret Society; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joe Lovano, Saxophone; Lawrence Fields, Piano; Marc Johnson, Bass; Andrew Cyrille, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roy Hargrove Quintet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Sebastian Chames Quartet; Sanah Kadoura Group; Isaiah J. Thompson "After-hours"; Small's, 183 W. 10th St.
- Louis Armstrong Eternity Band; Katie Thiroux and Special Guest Ken Peplowski; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Thursday, August 30

- Camille Thurman; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Cyrus Chestnut Trio featuring Buster Williams and Lenny White; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joe Lovano, Saxophone; Lawrence Fields, Piano; Marc Johnson, Bass; Andrew Cyrille, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roy Hargrove Quintet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Roberta Piket Quartet; Dan Pugach Nomet; Davis Whitfield "After-hours"; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Kat Gang; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, August 31

- Lessons from Our Masters: George Coleman; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Cyrus Chestnut Trio featuring Buster Williams and Lenny White; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joe Lovano, Saxophone; Lawrence Fields, Piano; Marc Johnson, Bass; Andrew Cyrille, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Roy Hargrove Quintet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Philip Dizack Quintet; Alex Sipiagin Quintet; Corey Wallace DUBtet "After-hours"; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Birdland Big Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Saturday, September 1

- Josh Evans Quintet; Late Night Session: Joshua Bruneau; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Cyrus Chestnut Trio featuring Buster Williams and Lenny White; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joe Lovano, Saxophone; Lawrence Fields, Piano; Marc Johnson, Bass; Andrew Cyrille, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Small’s Showcase: Kristina Koller Quartet; Philip Dizack Quintet; Alex Sipiagin Quintet; Brooklyn Circle; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Billy Stritch; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Sunday, September 2

- Lessons from Our Masters: Houston Person Quartet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Cyrus Chestnut Trio featuring Buster Williams and Lenny White; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Joe Lovano, Saxophone; Lawrence Fields, Piano; Marc Johnson, Bass; Andrew Cyrille, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Al Murakami Quartet feat. Sacha Penny; Ralph Lalama & “Boj-Juice”; JC Styles/Steve Nelson Hutcherson Band; Alon Benjamin "After-hours"; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Birdland Latin Jazz Orchestra; Adison Evans "Moravian" Album Release Show; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Monday, September 3

- Scott Reeves Jazz Orchestra; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- George Coleman; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Ari Hoenig Trio; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Clint Holmes; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, September 4

- Henry Conerway III Trio: "With Pride for Dignity" Album Release Concert; Godwin Louis; Late Night Session: Lucy Yeghiazaryan The Music of Fats Waller; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Steel House; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian McBride & The New Jawn Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Spike Wilner Quartet; Theo Hill Trio; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Nicole Zuraitis; The Cookers; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, September 5

- Trumpet meets Latin America featuring Linda Briceño, Michael Rodriguez & Rachel Therrien; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Steel House; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian McBride & The New Jawn Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Jochen Rueckert Quartet; Dan Blake & The Digging; Aaron Seeber "After-hours"; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Louis Armstrong Eternity Band; Emmet Cohen Trio; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Thursday, September 6

- Steve Wilson & The Analog Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.

(Continued on page 16)
Friday, September 7

- Kurt Elling and Friends Celebrate Jon Hendricks; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Steve Wilson & The Analog Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian McBride & The New Jawn Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Matt Haviland Quintet; Jack Walrath Group; JD Allen “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Birdland Big Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Saturday, September 8

- Steve Wilson & The Analog Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian McBride & The New Jawn Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Smalls Showcase: Nick Masters Quartet; Matt Haviland Quintet; Jack Walrath Group; Philip Harper Quintet; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Billy Stritch; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Sunday, September 9

- George Cables Trio featuring Victor Lewis & Essiet Essiet; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Smokestack Brunch: Anthony Ware; Steve Wilson & The Analog Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Christian McBride & The New Jawn Quartet; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Ai Murakami Quartet feat. Sacha Perry; Sam Raderman Trio; David Gibson Quintet; Jon Beshay “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Emilio Solis Tango Jazz Orchestra; T. Oliver Reid Celebrates Bobby Short; Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Monday, September 10

- Zaccai Curtis Orkestra: An Evolution in Latin-Jazz Big Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Lawrence - “Living Room” Album Release Week; Victory; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Jonathan Barber Quintet; Joe Fawsworth Group; After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Amanda McBroom With Michele Brouman; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, September 11

- Jonathan Barber, Victor Gould and Buster Williams; Late Night Session: Endea Owens; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Marquis Hill Blacktet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Donald Harrison, Ron Carter & Billy Cobham Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Steve Nelson Quartet; Abraham Burton Quartet; After-hours Jam Session; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Joey Defrancesco With Terri Lynne Carrington and Mark Whitfield; Roseanna Vitro; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, September 12

- Doug Wamble presents Memphis in Harlem; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Marquis Hill Blacktet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Donald Harrison, Ron Carter & Billy Cobham Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.

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Thursday, September 13

- Roy Haynes Fountain of Youth Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Rufus Reid Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Donald Harrison, Ron Carter & Billy Cobham Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Francisco Mela Group; Julius Rodriguez “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Joey Defrancesco With Terri Lynne Carrington and Mark Whitfield; Roseanna Vitro; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, September 14

- Rufus Reid Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Donald Harrison, Ron Carter & Billy Cobham Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Melissa Aldana Quartet; Peter Zak Quartet; Corey Wallace DUJilfet “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Joey Defrancesco With Terri Lynne Carrington and Mark Whitfield; Roseanna Vitro; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Saturday, September 15

- Rufus Reid Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Donald Harrison, Ron Carter & Billy Cobham Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Smalls Showcase: Ben Barnett Quartet; Melissa Aldana Quartet; Peter Zak Quartet; Brookly Circle; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Joey Defrancesco With Terri Lynne Carrington and Mark Whitfield; Roseanna Vitro; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Sunday, September 16

- Celebrating Cannonball’s 90th with special guest Jimmy Cobb; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Smokestack Brunch: Astrid; Rufus Reid Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Charlap Trio - Bill Charlap, Piano; Peter Washington, Bass; Kenny Washington, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Donald Harrison, Ron Carter & Billy Cobham Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Vocal Masterclass with Marion Cowings; Ai Murakami Quartet feat. Sacha Perry; Tendo Hamme Trio; Richie Vitale Quintet; Alon Benjamini “After-hours”; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.
- Cheryl Bentyne and Mark Winkler; Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra; Erkin Kadykbaev & Salt Peanuts Jazz Band; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Monday, September 17

- Clockwise: The Music of Cedar Walton with the Ben Markley Big Band; Terril Stafford, Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Eddie Palmieri & Friends: Honoring The Legacy of McCoy Tyner; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- "After-hour`; Small’s, 183 W. 10th St.

Tuesday, September 18

- Todd Marcus Quintet; Late Night Session: Charles Turner III; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & Bdwy
- Ethan Iverson / Mark Turner Duo; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Stewart Trio - Walter Smith III, Saxophone; Larry Grenadier, Bass; Bill Stewart, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Stanley Clarke Band; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Coltrane Revisited: Eric Alexander, Greg Osby, Jon Irabagon, Helen Sung, Lonnie Plaxico, Matt Wilson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

(Continued on page 17)
Wednesday, September 19
- Regina Carter & Xavier Davis; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Davina and the Vagabonds; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Stewart Trio - Walter Smith iii, Saxophone; Larry Grenadier, Bass; Bill Stewart, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Stanley Clarke Band; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Cottrane Revisited; Eric Alexander, Greg Osby, Jon Irabagon, Helen Sung, Lonnie Plaxico, Matt Wilson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Thursday, September 20
- Ulysses Owens, Jr. THREE; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Theo Croker Quintet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Stewart Trio - Walter Smith iii, Saxophone; Larry Grenadier, Bass; Bill Stewart, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Stanley Clarke Band; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Cottrane Revisited; Eric Alexander, Greg Osby, Jon Irabagon, Helen Sung, Lonnie Plaxico, Matt Wilson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, September 21
- Ulysses Owens, Jr. New Century Big Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Sip Spreti; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Natalia Hidalgo Trio; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Maria Farantouri & Her Greek Ensemble; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Tord Gustavsen Trio; Late Night Session; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Scott Allan; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Monday, September 24
- Monday Nights with WBGO; Orrin Evans Captain Black Big Band; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Mingus Big Band; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Eddie Palmieri & Friends; The Legacy of McCoy Tyner; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Lizz Wright; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Tuesday, September 25
- Tord Gustavsen Trio; Late Night Session; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Regina Carter & Xavier Davis; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Davina and the Vagabonds; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Bill Stewart Trio - Walter Smith iii, Saxophone; Larry Grenadier, Bass; Bill Stewart, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Stanley Clarke Band; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Cottrane Revisited; Eric Alexander, Greg Osby, Jon Irabagon, Helen Sung, Lonnie Plaxico, Matt Wilson; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Wednesday, September 26
- Ted Rosenthal Trio; Rhapsody in Gershwin; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Mark Guiliana SPACE HEROES; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Chris Potter; Saxophone; James Francis, Piano; Eric Harland, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Chick Corea Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Allyson Briggs & Fleur Seule; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Thursday, September 27
- Magos Herrera and Brooklyn Rider; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Freddy Cole Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Chris Potter; Saxophone; James Francis, Piano; Eric Harland, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Chick Corea Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Yellowjackets; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

Friday, September 28
- Louis Hayes: Serenade to Horace Silver; Dizzy’s Club, Jazz At Lincoln Center, 60th & B’way
- Freddy Cole Quartet; Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.
- Chris Potter; Saxophone; James Francis, Piano; Eric Harland, Drums; Village Vanguard 178 7th Ave S.
- Chick Corea Trio; Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Yellowjackets; Birdland, 315 W. 44th St.

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Socrates

“A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing in it and nothing true.”
Steve Wilson
“When you hit the stage, just be ready to play all the time”

By Eric Nemeyer

Steve Wilson, a native of Hampton, Virginia, attended Virginia Commonwealth University and has performed with Chick Corea, Dave Holland, Mulgrew Miller, Mingus Big Band and numerous other artists, in addition to leading his own group.

JI: Talk about your association with Bruce Barth.

SW: Bruce and I have done a few duo gigs here and there, though we had never really sat down and planned a project. We were invited out to play a duo concert by Jon Poses, who has an jazz organization that stages concerts. He said that as long as we were performing, why don’t we also record it? The recording came out beyond our expectations. We have a great time playing together. It was actually a house concert, rather than in a concert hall. So the setting was very casual and intimate with 60 or 70 people. We always talk about feeling like you’re playing in a living room, and this time we did. [laughs] So, along with the vibe of the people, the intimacy of the setting, our long standing relationship of playing together that Bruce and I have worked so that all of the elements just came together for that day.

JI: Could you talk about one or more of the influential artists with whom you’ve played who have provided you with guidance or advice that has significantly influenced you?

SW: I’ve been fortunate because there have been many. One of those is someone who may not be known to many—my teacher, Doug Richards of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. He was the one who really opened my eyes to the full history. Legacy and greatness of this music, and prepared me for being a professional. He turned me on to a lot of the early jazz, the Duke Ellington, Jelly Roll Morton, Benny Carter. After that, I worked with Lionel Hampton and learned about giving it all up for the audience. When you hit the stage, just be ready to play all the time. He loved the showmanship. After that, Buster Williams—who really taught me how to listen. I was recommended to him by Billy Drummond, who is a dear friend of mine, who was working with him. Buster called me and said: “I don’t like to audition people but Billy recommended you and I would love for you to come in and make a rehearsal.” Whether it was at a rehearsal or at one of the gigs, he would always say, “Listen. Listen. Listen for the sound. Listen for the beat.” He really taught me about listening for melody. He is one of the best melody writers of all time, in my opinion. And, his music commands you to listen. One of the things I tell my students is that playing is 50% listening. Another mentor is Dave Holland, whose band I joined in 1996 or 97. Dave helped me hear the different possibilities of the music—playing in odd meters, playing with unusual song forms, and the whole thing about being spontaneous and in the moment. Dave is just so strong and so fast, that you could play something and he would challenge you to come up with something new every night. Dave didn’t say a lot, but the way he played commanded that you had to think very fast. You couldn’t rely on what you knew. You had to be totally in the moment.”

JI: Could you talk about one or more of the ways say, “Listen. Listen. Listen for the sound. Listen for the beat.” He really taught me about listening for melody. He is one of the best melody writers of all time, in my opinion. And, his music commands you to listen. One of the things I tell my students is that playing is 50% listening. Another mentor is Dave Holland, whose band I joined in 1996 or 97. Dave helped me hear the different possibilities of the music—playing in odd meters, playing with unusual song forms, and the whole thing about being spontaneous and in the moment. Dave is just so strong and so fast, that you could play something and he would challenge you to come up with something new every night. Dave didn’t say a lot, but the way he played commanded that you had to think very fast. You couldn’t rely on what you knew. You had to be totally in the moment.”

JI: What was it like when you first came to New York?

SW: When I was in Richmond, I was working a lot. I was doing studio work and all sorts of gigs, and Ellis Marsalis was there, so I was working with him. When I came to New York, I went from working all the time to having no work. [laughs] But there were a lot of different scenes and a lot going on here. I would sit in with David Murray, Jon Faddis’

(Continued on page 22)
quartet that would play at the Vanguard. I was introduced to Dick Oatts, who got me into the sub rotation with the Vanguard Orchestra. I did get to play with Mel Lewis quite a few times, and he was a great mentor who told me some great stories and the importance of time and feel. It was priceless. I also got to play along side of another mentor, Jerry Dodgion, in the last year of the American Jazz Orchestra, led by John Lewis. I was doing kind of the opposite of what other guys my age were doing at the time. It was the height of the Young Lions period, and everyone was going after record deals. I wasn’t focusing on being a leader or a recording star. I was just trying to find my way and learn, to explore a lot of different kinds of music, and to get next to the elders. That’s really why I came to New York. It widened my relationships across different generations of musicians and it provide me with a lot of different working and playing opportunities—which carries me to this day, because I didn’t get pigeonholed.

JI: Someone commented to me that the concept used to be about established musicians, for example Coltrane, “What is John Coltrane going to do next?” as opposed to the media and business hype constantly and every few weeks or months focusing on “Who is going to be the next John Coltrane?”

SW: Exactly. That’s exactly right. We’re now seeing the effects of this on the music, and culturally also. What I see with a lot of the new music now—a lot of which I enjoy—is that the foundations of swing an blues getting left behind. That is also palpable and is a real concern—because when you think culturally and esthetically about the foundation of what we call jazz, it is blues and swing. When that gets left behind, and we take these key ingredients out of the music—is it still jazz, just because it has some improvisation? I don’t know. I see that there is a push to play in odd meters and to see how intellectual, how tricky and complex it can get. Okay. That has its merits. But, when we’re talking about this music—whose foundation is blues, swing, and spirituality, and being about communication, and a folk music—and you remove those ingredients, it makes it something else. What that means is that a lot of young people are not going to get the kinds of experiences we’re talking about—such as going into clubs and communicating with an audience, who are there to be moved and to hear and feel the music. Most audiences don’t care if you’re playing a flat 6th over a Major chord. They couldn’t care less. I couldn’t really care less either when I go to hear music. I don’t go to hear music to discover how much they’re calculating, I go to be moved and to hear and feel the music.

JI: The creative side of jazz—composing music, playing, improvising—will be strong as long as there are people who want to create, which is why we’re all here. I see the industry figures cross my desk everyday. The business side of the jazz world is a contracting market. There are fewer venues (outside of New York). There is a bigger gap between the top paying gigs, that is those at festivals and for more well-known artists compared to the one-nighters, or one-offs for most musicians, playing for $50 to $100 to even just the door. With few record labels, artists have both the challenge and responsibility and the opportunities to create their own successes. There are fewer radio stations. 50 to 100 radio spins nationally in a week will get you into the top 20 for airplay. Airplay doesn’t help to generate sales of recordings now, and so on. All of this is combined with the fact that, as always, there are an array of predatory (and sometimes not very competent) business creatures in jazz who camouflage themselves well, in their self-swerving efforts to take advantage of artists’ emotional connection to the music. So artists have the added challenges of trying to distinguish the honest record executives, managers, publicists, promoters and others, from the wolves in sheep’s clothing and those who want to lord over the . With the shrinking market, there is a palpable and pervasive anxiety over fewer gigs for artists who have committed their lives to this, and so on. What are your views on how the business side is intersecting with the creative side and what are the prospects for the future.

SW: You know that’s a loaded question. First of all, it’s a great observation—and I totally agree with it. It’s anybody’s guess now. On one hand, with most of the major record companies getting out of the jazz business, I think it’s positive. It puts the music back into the hands of the musicians. You don’t have record companies determining the pecking order so to speak. The music traditionally has always determined that. When you look at the history of this music, there has always been an apprenticeship system in place until 15 or 20 years ago. Then they started to elevate younger musicians over some of the more mature musicians. There is always going to be great young talent around. To me it got turned around by default. The record companies promoted a lot of younger musicians who weren’t necessarily ready to be leaders. In so doing, they dismantled the apprenticeship system. That changed the music in a profound way.

“What I see with a lot of the new music now—a lot of which I enjoy—is that the foundations of swing an blues getting left behind. That is also palpable and is a real concern—because when you think culturally and esthetically about the foundation of what we call jazz, it is blues and swing. When that gets left behind, and we take these key ingredients out of the music—is it still jazz, just because it has some improvisation? I don’t know.”
Cyrus Chestnut
Appearing at Jazz Standard
August 30-September 2
© Eric Nemeyer
Rufus Reid

“if you write your book, you own it”

By Eric Nemeyer

JI: Could you talk about how your association with Dexter Gordon developed and how that contributed to shaping your musical and/or personal development?

RR: Well, I’m still reaping the benefits of playing with Dexter to this day. I played with him a little bit in Chicago. He came back almost every year, although when he made that Homecoming record, he made the decision that he was really going to stay in the United States this time. Homecoming was with Woody Shaw’s band. Then, drummer Eddie Gladden had just left Horace Silver’s band and we got him. I played four years with Dexter’s band. Dexter was so consistent with everything. He was a great guy - never had any arguments even with him. He use to make me angry because he would be so laid back sometimes - laid back about being on time and stuff like that.

RI: Did that prompt you to take more of a leadership role in the day to day business of the band?

JI: What prompted your departure from the group?

RR: It was just getting too much for me. I loved Dexter so much, that I had to leave before I didn’t like him anymore. I wanted to protect that. I wasn’t as happy because of all the stuff. We were starting to work so much and get into the college circuits - which was not an easy thing for Dexter. When you have the schedules and concerts at these colleges, eight o’clock concerts - that’s what time they wanted to go. It was hard work for the management to make sure that Dexter was always towing the mark.

JI: Was Dexter’s move to Europe in the 1960s, because of the racial issues here in the United States, ever a topic of discussion?

RR: Yes. In Europe he was appreciated much more. He could be loose, and everybody still loved him. He was able to work enough to keep himself together. Nils Winther of Steeplechase would be right there to give him a record date. I guess he was trying to live like that here when he came back but he still couldn’t really deal with that.

JI: Traveling in some of those communist bloc countries must have felt really isolating then

RR: That was an ideal period because we were on tour five weeks tour and we knew the music. Stan wasn’t drinking. He was still smoking but they were trying to get him to eat better and be healthier. That record was recorded when we were in Copenhagen, Denmark. The piano was great, the room was great, the atmosphere felt great, the engineer was really nice, my bass felt great. It was perfect.

JI: Those albums that you did, Serenity and Anniversary, with him and Kenny are just magnificent, everything just flows so right.

RR: Well it was really interesting Stan and Dexter were very close in age. They both had the same pulse, rhythmically I think. Stan kind of played the upper part of his horn and Dexter played on the lower half of the horn. It was a totally different dynamic because Stan knew he was a star. He knew what he wanted. He would tell me, “You know I don’t like bowed solos, so don’t take bowed solos. No offense to you. You know George Mraz plays great with the bow, but I didn’t like them either. I just don’t like bowed solos.” When I played with him during that period, he wasn’t drinking. He was actually trying to become a little healthier because he had to have this big operation. I had played with him a few months or a year on and off. Stan was easy to get along with as long as you didn’t let him manipulate you. Stan wasn’t a really a nice guy, although he was a gentleman to me and to my wife. I didn’t have to have that gig if he was going to treat me like trash. Then I wouldn’t have played with him. Stan would mess with certain guys because they allowed him to. But I loved playing with him because he had a beautiful sound. You had to play beautifully with him, otherwise you were out of place.

(Continued on page 26)
Rufus Reid
Appearing at Jazz Standard
September 13-16

By Jimmy Katz
Rufus Reid

(Continued from page 24)

JI: I guess what your sayings that as long as you didn’t allow him to manipulate you things were cool.

RR: Right, exactly. Stan would pay for the extra weight charges to ship my bass, and he would almost do it reluctantly. He was still whining that he had to pay these charges, and they were minuscule compared to the money that he was making. I would laugh at him. I played with him once when he was just coming off his wagon. I told him, I’m really proud of you. I’ve been with Dexter when he was drinking too much and Dexter was nice. He just got more lovable. But when Stan would drink he would go the other way. He was not nice. He compared to the money that he was making. I would laugh at him. I played with him once when he was just coming off his wagon. I told him, I’m really proud of you. I’ve been with Dexter when he was drinking too much and Dexter was nice. He just got more lovable. But when Stan would drink he would go the other way. He was not nice. He lived in the upper echelon of money, hob-nobbing with actresses and people who have money. He would just act stupid sometimes - but he never did that with me. He was very respectful to me and particularly to my wife. He would call up and say, “You got your bags packed? We’re getting ready to go.” She would say, “You know Stan you’re so nice.” He would say, No, I’m really not nice.” He knew what he was. He was a very shrewd business man too. Musically, he was fabulous.

JI: How did you prepare for the recordings with Stan?

“On the solo, Stan’s Blues, I’ll never forget this. We played somewhere in California. There were about ten thousand people - one of those festivals outside. We were playing this blues, medium tempo and he said, ‘Don’t take a solo, just walk.’ So I walked for about ten choruses or more, all over the bass - up and down, high register and low register. I would get louder and louder. Victor and Kenny got louder with me and the people went nuts. Then Stan came over by my ear and said, ‘See I told you.’ He was a special guy.”

RR: We were on the road for five weeks, and that recording was the fifth week. We knew the material. It couldn’t have been better. To me that is the way you should record. All those records that Miles did? Those guys were on the road playing that stuff, all the time. Those records are magnificent because the music went to another place. It was fun playing with Victor Lewis, and Kenny Barron was tremendous, and Stan. People have always come up to me and they said, “I have every record that Stan has ever recorded and I love this one the best.” Stan taught me a few things. On the solo, Stan’s Blues, I’ll never forget this. We played somewhere in California. There were about ten thousand people - one of those festivals outside. We were playing this blues, medium tempo and he said, “Don’t take a solo, just walk.” So I walked for about ten choruses or more, all over the bass - up and down, high register and low register. I would get louder and louder. Victor and Kenny got louder with me and the people went nuts. Then Stan came over by my ear and said, “See I told you.” He was a special guy.

JI: Could you talk about your participation in the BMI Jazz Composers workshop? What kind of experiences you might have had that motivated you to devote more time to composition?

RR: Well, quite honestly, you may or may not have known I’ve had a great fortune to play with a lot of fantastic people in my career thus far. When I first came to New York I was playing with Thad Jones and Mel Lewis’ Big Band for a couple of years, before Thad actually went to Europe. It was always fascinating to me to play these charts. I thought “Wow, I wish I could write like that.” I never studied composition in school, per se, but I always tried to write little songs, and buy books on orchestrating and arranging, and do all these things on my own. I’ve always somehow ended up wanting to get deeper into it. I just never really had the

RR: Yes, it’s specifically for big band. But they don’t want it to sound like a basic band or Stan Kenton band or Woody Herman Band. It’s just using that instrumentation. Although the instrumentation could also be augmented with woodwinds, if you liked - oboe or wanted English Horn. You had to specify that and those people would bring those instruments. If you wanted an extra guitar, or to use vibes or something then it aged me to submit some scores. I was accepted and a whole other world just began to open up. I had difficulty at first because people were expecting a lot of things from me - because they saw Rufus Reid the bass player. I said you know, when I’m playing that’s one thing, but when having to write I’m a novice, I’m in here studying just like you, so don’t do that to me. It just opened up my head - all the devices you would learn, and all the things you learn from each other. When everyone was present, there could have been twenty-five to thirty people in the class. We met a couple times a month, and then a reading session. We would actually go over people’s music, literally, sitting around the piano discussing, why did you use that, and what motivated you to do that. We would listen and read. We had a reading session and we would play that back. You got a chance to really get intimate with yourself. The biggest thing that really sold me on the BMI thing was that you didn’t have to write to appease or please anyone. Most of the stuff we do as players or even just people, we do to please other people. There is some kind of mandate, I hate to use the word shackles, but you know, if you are going to record you got to get to some air space, or the tone can’t be that long so you got to make the publisher happy or someone happy. If its not bebop and this person likes bebop, then you’re not going to make this person happy, and so forth. This wasn’t an arranging course. That was the first thing Manny Albam, Jim McNeely and Mike Abene said. You could go down the street, and there are incredible arrangers, all over New York. We want you to start a little charm of an idea and we want to see it work, and we want to see it develop. This is my fourth season and not ever have I ever heard either one of these guys say, “I don’t like it or this was no good,” or anything else that was trying to help you make this sound like you wanted it to sound like. If that is what you wanted it to sound like then they accepted it. But they tried to make it sound the best way possible - through the techniques of orchestration, and getting you out of your comfort zone. That’s mainly also one of the great things for me. I have written some big band charts and some arrangements and I knew some things that sounded really good. Then they said why don’t you try this, and use this instrument and that instrument. It completely just blew my stuff away. It completely just dismantled it and eventually I began to search and investigate other ways. They encourage you. If you had eight measures of something, re-orchestrate it three or four times before you actually made a decision. You don’t get that opportunity in most situations, unless you are under tutelage of someone and your studying in this kind of curriculum. They would have the top notch players in New York for the reading sessions, so you actually got to hear your music read quite well.

JI: Was the reading session designed for specific instrumentation?

RR: Yes, it’s specifically for big band. But they don’t want it to sound like a basic band or Stan Kenton band or Woody Herman Band. It’s just using that instrumentation. Although the instrumentation could also be augmented with woodwinds, if you liked - oboe or wanted English Horn. You had to specify that and these people would bring those instruments. If you wanted an extra guitar, or to use vibes or something then it
Rufus Reid

was your responsibility to see that those persons were there. Other then that, that was the only thing that you would say would be a normal big band. It was just the instrumentation, but not the material. That was the most exciting thing for me.

JI: You mentioned they didn’t want to pre-direct you to what instrumentation to use.

RR: Well, first of all, I have to assume it was specifically a big band; and that’s how it was delivered. I didn’t have a problem with that because what I was trying to do was to just expand myself in terms of ideas. It has opened up for me in other ways. The BMI is specifically for the big band. But what I learned from it, I can take to any ensemble, and I have done so. Bob Brookmeyer and Burt Konall got this thing started about eighteen or nineteen years ago. It’s really blossoming and driving some of the musicians who are there, and writing some incredible stuff. It was really inspirational. Jim McNeely, Mike Abene and Manny Albam before he died, were very impressed and very happy to see us learn from each other. They weren’t saying don’t do it just because we say this. We have more experience then you and we suggest things, but if you are really adamant about something lets see what’s up. That was really a very healthy situation. I won a commission the first year and that was really exciting.

JI: What was the process that was involved in your winning that Charlie Parker jazz composition award for Sky’s Over Amelia?

RR: There was twelve people who had been chosen at the end of the season which is in June, to be put on the concert. There is a concert at the end of each season, to showcase the music. Mine was one of them. When this award came in, they chose three of the twelve that they felt would benefit, or that were extra special or whatever. That year, they hired Dan Morganstern, Slide Hampton and Phil Schaap. They were the judges. They put my piece on the first half of the program. Then they went and deliberated during the intermission and they came back. They just heard it for what it was, and I won, and I couldn’t believe it. It was three thousand dollars. It really empowered me that I was on the right track. There were some wood wind doubles in the arrangement. I needed bass clarinet. That was the first piece, and that piece guides what I did. The commission piece ended up being called the Hymns of the Blue Bird. I then was charged to have that ready for the following year. What I’ve done even with those pieces was that I extracted themes out of “Skies” and condensed them down to my quartz. This gave us some more things to do other then just playing a hit and everybody taking a solo in the traditional sense.

JI: One of the most important steps in the creative process is that we all start with some excitement and enthusiasm – when we have a new idea for a song or whatever. Then the enthusiasm wears off and we go through the trials and tribulation of having to get it to the next stage and the next stage until finally you’re almost done. When you are almost done, that is the most difficult point. At that point we are close to completion but not there, and it is a point where we might be tempted to delay or lay back or get lazy. This is the point where we have to apply ourselves the most. And, in the completion are the seeds of your next creation. When I have arranged for big bands or studio orchestra or whatever, I find that many of the ideas that come much later, that I might use in other compositions, are little germs from those pieces I completed earlier.

RR: Right, right. Well it’s amazing to me, because I have difficulty getting started. Arranging is some-one else’s song that you like, or someone wants you to write an arrangement. Then a lot of the stuff is already prescribed for you. If you have some kind of imagination, the arrangement might develop something else you heard and then it kind of flows okay. But to come up with a whole idea yourself … and of course I had to learn that the first things I wrote weren’t necessarily going to be first in the piece. It was a trip the first year, it’s gotten a little easier for me and now I have scrap books, and the time to put down little kernels of ideas all the time. I’m beginning to have, not a surplus, but beginning to have a lot of ideas that I can actually bounce off into other things.

JI: What medium are you using to document your musical ideas?

RR: I’ve tried to do it with the computer, which I eventually dump it into the computer. But I can’t function with the midi stuff initially. I don’t know if it’s because sitting at the piano enables me to hear the resonance of the piano and decay and all that stuff. It sounds better. I find that everything that I come up with at the real piano and having the pencil and actually making erasures and changing minds … I invariably like. It is ninety-nine percent better then if I did it at the computer. It’s a great tool now to be able to have that. I’ve been taking a few lessons from McNeely, and he really feels he likes to see the erasures and coffee stains and stuff on the scores. He says he kind of sees your brain working a little bit in terms of decision making and etc. Looking at some of your worksheets are sketches - and I can see that. Of course being able to write and transpose a score was kind of mandatory because they want us to write what the actual musicians sees - particularly with woodwinds. I’m pretty familiar with this. I used to be a trumpet player so I know that about brass players. It has helped me a great deal to think like that.

JI: What was it like for you to play with Mel Lewis on drums?

RR: I tell people that if you couldn’t play with Mel Lewis something was really wrong. This guy was like a clock. He was amazing. I had done a play-along recording with Mel Lewis. We did about fourteen tunes, and we started out with one and it ended up being about six minutes and thirty seconds. Then we played the rest of the stuff, and they said well lets go back to the first one - this was three or four hours later. Let’s do it again because the sound was better. We played the tune again, and it was like six minutes and thirty-two seconds. It was so close, and he said I got it, and just cut it off. He was like that, and he was amazing to me because he was one of the first drummers whoever said to me, “I got a cymbal for your sound. I got a cymbal for George Mraz’s sound. I had one for Richard Davis, and I got one for you.” It was great. That was a magnificent time for me. That’s actually when people began to realize I was in New York. I’d been in New York maybe six months, just kind of doing jam sessions. Playing with that band was a big credential thing. It was a pretty hot chair in that you had to swing and you had to be able to read and you had to have a good sound, etc. I couldn’t have planned it better if I tried.

JI: Could you talk about your association with Thad Jones and how he was influential for you?

“We kept asking Thad, ‘but what are we going to play, but what are we going to play?’ - almost up to the time we were about to go on. He just called tunes and we knew them about that soon. It was exciting! Thad was an incredible improviser and had an incredible imagination rhythmically and obviously harmonically. A lot of people are asleep on his trumpet playing.”

(Continued on page 28)
Rufus Reid

(Reduced from page 27)

Rascal On A Rock.” So I had shedded on some of those things. I was able to get the charts from them. That Monday night I played. Then I left to come back to Chicago. I guess about a year later, I came back and here I am. Actually they had Bob Bowman who was going to play in the band. I called Mel and he said, “You know we’ve been using Bob Bowman, so we are going to go with him.” I said, “Well okay, I’m here, I’m just letting you know I’m here.” Two weeks later, he said Bob Bowman didn’t want to live in New York, and that he was moving back to Texas or wherever. He said, “You still want to play?” I said “Yes, I did.” I was there for a solid two years. It was two of the busiest years with that band with Thad. We were busy and traveling a lot. Thad had such a strong command of the band. You know the Vanguard is small - so my legs were damn near touching the bass drum. Although you only heard the bass drum when he really wanted you to hear it, it was always playing. I could always feel his pulse at all times. When I was soloing, Thad said, “You don’t have to play all the changes. Let some of them go by.” Then of course his written stuff. … I really did try to write and play some things that were my own but they were never better than the ones he wrote. When he wrote something they would have the graphic shape of the line of the saxophones or whatever harmonically. They were very specific. When he wrote changes, he expected you to open it up. I grew a lot in that band because the rhythm section really stretched. Harold Danko was there most of the time when I was there. We had so much fun. We would have gotten fired playing in most other big bands, when I was there. We had so much fun. We would play the way we did rhythmically and super imposing pedal points. It felt great and then we got a chance to do the quartets.

**JI**: Yeah, and you recorded that one album for Artist House Records.

**RR**: Right! It was supposed to have been recorded in two days but it ended up only being one. We kept asking Thad, “but what are we going to play, but what are we going to play?” - almost up to the time we were about to go on. He just called tunes and we knew them about that soon. It was exciting! Thad was an incredible improviser and had an incredible imagination rhythmically and obviously harmonically. A lot of people are asleep on his trumpet playing.

**JI**: I’ve always thought that Thad is among the most creative, most original trumpet players. One thing that I admired about him and have always strived for is to not play licks or patterns or anything - but to be totally immersed in the present, in the moment … to be able to feed off of the other people with whom you’re playing. One of the things that really struck me about him when I was analyzing his work years ago is how his melodic and rhythmic and harmonic conception on trumpet was so closely aligned with his writing. There was an extraordinary connection. Many incredible improvisers may write tunes but they cannot necessarily be identified as having come from the same thought process.

**RR**: I guess that is really why it worked. He had the audacity to do a lot of things that most people just would not do. Of course, if you look at or deal with a lot of his scores, he would probably flunk some music classes - doing some of the things he did. But they worked. If you listen to the big picture, he was really amazing. I think to get back to your question on how he inspired me… When I came here, I was ready to fly and go, although I was very well seated, I’ve learned to fly even freer. I think as I get older, ensemble-wise, I learned how to play through the sound and still not be so predictable with my bass lines. Playing with Thad, particularly with that quartet - and a lot of that is evident on that quartet record - we were just having fun and were moving into other things. We couldn’t have planned it. We had to do it right then and that was very exciting. It was like even with the big bands. He was doing different things with the band changing backgrounds etc. You had to be alert, all the time because he was always manipulating the music. I still play his music as much as I possibly can with the group or even solo stuff that I do. The music is unbelievable and strong. When I play with McNeely, we always play at least one tune of Thad’s.

**JI**: Did you ever hear him speaking about his writing approach or discussing any of his musical ideas?

**RR**: Actually, you couldn’t really get real close to Thad. I mean you could hang with him and have fun. He was a fun-loving guy. I remember one time we were in Europe and we were on a bus going to a recording session. It was the only record I actually did with Thad and Mel and with the singer Monica Zetterlund. We had about a five-hundred mile bus trip. Thad still needed to write two charts. I sat across from him on the bus. I saw him put on his baseball hat and put on his glasses. This invisible bubble just kind of came over him. He just went inside and he started writing. When we got to the recording session, he checked the stuff just a little bit at the piano. I was curious. Then he gave it gave to the copyists. By the time we recorded the other stuff, they had copied the music. The counterpoint and the other stuff was unreal. Everyone was flabbergasted. Jerry Dodgion and Pepper Adams — that was the band. We were all wondering what the charts were going to sound like. We all knew he wrote them on the bus. I deliberately wanted to watch him to see what he did. He didn’t change much, if anything. He just checked a couple things and handed the score to the guy, and I said “OK.” Then when I heard it, it was just wonderful. But he never really discussed anything. At that time, I didn’t even know what to discuss with him about that. I didn’t feel I was even anywhere close to that. He liked the way I played and he did say a couple of times, “Well you know, I really need this part to be played better.” After that he never had to tell me anything. I realized I had to pay more attention to the written stuff and be as accurate as possible.

**JI**: That’s pretty interesting that he would hear those subtleties that called for probably very minor adjustments in terms of what you were doing.

**RR**: Right! Right! And I mean it wasn’t like I played some really funky notes. But the notes simply weren’t the ones he had heard. After Thad had left, I stayed with the band and recorded the album of the music of Bob Brookmeyer: “Hello Goodbye,” “Skylark.” Bob was very, very specific about the notes. He was actually much more adamant about than Thad was, in terms of verbally. Bob has gone through a whole bunch of transformations I think in the way he writes. Thad’s music was dense but it was accessible. I learned that if he was writing backgrounds for the trombones they would sound good by themselves. Then he would write another background for the trumpets to go over the same chord changes. They would sound great together or by themselves.

**JI**: Was it your observation that Thad might not have wanted to discuss his approach in order to avoid analyzing himself.

**RR**: I don’t really think he even went there at all. I think he was just a raw talent that he didn’t need to discuss anything. He knew what he wanted to sound like. He wrote in such a way that players would look at him and say, wow what is this? Saxophone parts were pretty treacherous. But when they played it they heard how it fit. I was like one of those puzzles with a lot of colors in it. If you don’t play it, it looks okay. But when you actually play it right it says wow, and just kind of jumps out. That was very exciting for me and I really feel that, I certainly don’t try to write like him, but I hear that stuff in my head.

**JI**: Could you talk a little bit about your experience playing with Eddie Harris – one of your first major gigs? What kinds of instruction did Eddie Harris provide? What kinds of lessons did you learn?

**RR**: Eddie Harris did all of that for me. It’s pretty incredible. As a leader, all he would say is, “All I want you to do is be on time and be able to play.” That sounds simple but a lot of people might have abused that. We got paid on time. He said, “I’m giving you X amount of dollars and I’ll pay you on Friday.” We never had to hunt for him. He was always there. He paid us by a check, and it was a band checking account. Then he had his books and that was another name, and of course he had his own personal checks. That was the beginning of understanding that “oh the band is a business.” He would run it like that. He would actually be very specific. He would say, “Okay I want to play the tune like kind of a bebop tune and I don’t want you to hear any outside stuff. If we play a ballad, I want it to really be beautiful and I don’t want it to really get hyper. Just let it be beautiful. Then when we play funk, I want it to be funky. I don’t want it to be outside. When we play outside, I don’t want to hear a triad, I want it to be out.” He was very graphic in terms of how he wanted to paint the picture. We would do all those things in the course of a set. I was with him for five years. It was like “wow.” I was playing through echo-plexus and ring modulators. With the bow, it sounded like a B52, but it was fun! Then I was playing the electric bass and the double bass at the same time - within the same set. Eddie was very respectful and he was very knowledgeable about people. He said, “I hired you because you said you liked my music.” There
Rufus Reid

are a lot of people who want to play with certain people because they are recording artists and they’re very visible people. Other then just liking their music, it’s the way they can get more famous too. But Eddie didn’t want that to be the reason why you played with him. He was really a very sensitive man. He was magnificent. He taught us the posture for recording, how to prepare to go into the recording studio. Don’t waste time because that’s money. The producers at Atlantic Records wanted him to use Chuck Rainey and Bernard Purdie – the hit makers. They had just done something with Aretha Franklin, and they were really hot. He said, “You know they don’t want me to use you guys. But I want you. Because you played good enough to play with me on the road, you can play good enough to record with me.” He was adamant about it. He’s the one that actually gave me the inspiration to write my book. He wanted me to finish school before I played with him. He said “Go ahead.” I had a year to go and I was ready to quit and my wife was going to kill me. He said, “No no, there’s enough out here. Just go ahead and get your degree because education is important, and if I got some work, I’ll use you.” And he did. He was a super guy. I bitched and moaned. It was one of the reasons when Jamie Aebersold heard me play with Eddie, he asked me if I would do a workshop with him, in Grand Forks, North Dakota. I will never forget that. I had twenty-five bass players, little kids about fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old. They didn’t know much, but they wanted to know. I

“When everybody went right, he went left automatically. He was not a conformist ... he was so good musically ... he could do some many different things so well. Whenever I get some work for myself, for my own band and music. I try to treat them just like I would like to be treated. Eddie Harris was my biggest mentor.”

would tell Eddie and Ray Brown that I had just sold twenty-five books for him. Eddie said, “Well why don’t you write your own books?” He was a very wise man. When everybody went right, he went left automatically. He was not a conformist. That’s why a lot of people really couldn’t get with him. He was really adamant, and he was so good musically, and he was so strong and he could do some many different things so well. The industry really had difficulty putting him in a place where they could say this is Eddie Harris. He was more then that, he was bigger than that. The most profound thing he told me was that if you write your book, you own it. He said, “If it collects dust, it’s your dust.” The book has been out over thirty-three years now, and I still own it and I’m thankful to

ing. I loved it but I didn’t know what was happening. Kenny Dorham was really a nice man and nice music. Although the first year I played with him, I guess it was around ’71 or something like that, and he was ill. Then the next time, which was about nine months later he was more ill, then he passed away. So I didn’t really get a chance to get to talk with him to much. He wasn’t a really talkative guy, but he was really nice and straight ahead.

Ji: Did McCoy give you any instruction or tell you what he wanted at all?

Rr: No, no. Probably the other most significant person during that period that I got to play with was Moody, Kenny Burrell. Bobby Hutcherson and Harold Land were two that were really significant. They took me to Europe for the first time in 1972.

Ji: What the was dynamic like playing with their group and what kind of interaction or discussion went on?

Rr: The interaction and discussion was very refined. Bobby was very very adamant about what he wanted to hear. From the piano voicing and pedal points - the music was very specific. In fact, of all the people I’ve very played with during those days, Harold Land and Bobby Hutcherson were adamant about rehearsing - I mean really rehearsing, not just going over it with the head tunes, really trying to get the concept clear.

Ji: Did they have very specific or elaborate arrangements for you to become aware of?

Rr: They were specific but I won’t say that they were super elaborate. They did have some very specific ways that they wanted the music to develop. Even to this day, Bobby Hutcherson is one of the most exciting persons to play with. He’s very special and I talk about him all the time. It was actually he who kind of slapped me in the face and said, “You need to go to New York.” This was in 1971. I found I wasn’t playing with that kind of energy for awhile. These guys would come into Chicago they’d bring that energy force with them, and when they left, they took it with them. It was really hard. There were some great players in Chicago and I was playing. This one time he came through and I played with him. We played Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and on Sunday night when he paid me, he said, “What’s wrong with you? Your stuff doesn’t seem like it was.” I really hadn’t been playing at that level. I was almost in tears. I came home and I told my wife. We’d been thinking about coming to New York. It still took us almost two years to get that together. But mentally I left, I was ready to go. I thanked Bobby Hutcherson because he loved me enough to say that. The next time I saw him was 1977.

Ji: It was on the record with Dexter Gordon—the one that Slide Hampton arranged.

Rr: That’s right, My Manhattan Symphony, and Sophisticated Giant. Bobby was on that record. So he hadn’t seen me since that event in Chicago where he busted me. Then he looked over to me and said, “Oh your chops aren’t down now.” He remembered that and to me those were really incredible periods for my growth. To not get placed and to not ever let that happen again like that.

Ji: How did you prepare yourself for the move to New York?

Rr: Mentally and financially. But when Bobby said that to me, that kind of put the fire on to really get it together and to make the move, and not just talk about it.

Ji: It sounds like you wife was very supportive and that this was a very carefully planned and understood move. And during that time, when you really need that kind of support, when you make a move to a new town, there wasn’t any of the doubt but

(Continued on page 30)
This page contains a continuation of the previous page discussing the experiences and views of Rufus Reid, a renowned jazz musician and educator. The text delves into his reflections on various periods in his career, his relationships with other musicians, and his approach to music-making. Reid discusses his time in New York, his working relationship with Thad Jones, and his efforts to build a list of drummers he would like to play with. He also talks about his collaboration with Akira Tana and his experiences with Thad Jones while they worked together. Reid's thoughts on the importance of human nature and the impact of experiences on his work are also highlighted. The conversation moves on to his approach to teaching and the joy of sharing knowledge with students. This page provides a glimpse into the personal and professional life of Rufus Reid, offering insights into his philosophies and the evolution of his career in jazz music.
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77 Critical Questions You Must Ask & Answer Before You Even Think Of Hiring A Publicist
Rufus Reid

(Continued from page 30)

who the hell is that.” So I go downstairs and it’s Sam Jones and Nat Adderley, and they said “welcome to the neighborhood.” I said “Wow, that’s it. We made the right move by those two.” Sam lived in Teaneck. I said, “Well how did you know I was going to be here in this house?” He said, “Well I knew the guy you bought the house from, and I asked who he sold it to.” He said, “Some bass player named Rufus Reid.” They knew me. I met Sam in Japan with Oscar. I was very close with Sam up until the day he died. I’ve always loved Oscar Pettiford.

JI: Could you talk a little bit about your perspectives about learning how to improvise and the process of improvisation?

RR: I had to learn how to do that. I did a lot of things naturally. When I came up there were no books. My first gig as a bass player was in Montgomery Alabama when I was playing electric bass. I was playing with this saxophone player, off the base, 1961. I was at Maxwell Field Air Force Base in Montgomery Alabama for two years. That’s were I basically taught myself how to play the bass. I had a lot of time. It was very segregated. I had to go across town where all the black people lived because that’s the only place you could hang out. That’s where I saw Ike and Tina Tuner’s bands, James Brown’s band, and the first Motown review - with the Supremes, Mary Wells. It was a pretty special time. I auditioned to play in this guy’s band. He hired me because I had a good feel I guess. He just taught me the right notes to play on the electric bass because I didn’t have a string bass at all. The military had one. I would try to practice it, but I wasn’t strong enough really to do this. We had to learn stuff off the juke box for that weekend. There were tunes coming out almost every week on the radio. Every Wednesday we would learn all these tunes on the juke box and have them ready to play for the public on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. That way we knew we were on top of the new stuff. That’s how I learned how to play. I could read music because I was a trumpet player, but bass was different. I didn’t read bass clef. I didn’t know what chords were. I really didn’t. I just knew what sounded good to me. I didn’t really think about putting it in a formal kind of way until I began to work with Jamey Aebersold. I would say “well what’s wrong with it, it sounds okay to me.” I would get very angry sometimes because they were trying to make everything perfect - in terms of this scale goes with this, that scale goes with that. When you are learning right away you wanted to do what they tell you to do. Then I would play stuff, and people would say, “I heard you play that note. Why did you do that.” I would say, “I don’t know.” Eventually I began to really listen to myself, and be a little more like, “oh okay that makes sense.” I began to see the importance of messing with the keyboard and really understanding. Nobody really told me that stuff before. I began to really assimilate all those things together. When I started writing that book I had to become a lot more explicit and much more articulate in terms of what I meant. Then to put it down in ink, I had to feel pretty good about it and explain why I did certain things. I still do the workshops and clinics with Jamey. There was a period when I was so busy I couldn’t do them. I enjoy them and I really feel it’s important. I’ve seen a lot of the players who have become well known. I saw them when they were really young. I feel my teaching has solidified. Doing the thing at William Patterson ... being the Director of the Jazz Studies Program meant I had to establish a curriculum. I had to have a big picture. So when I teach now it’s a broader thing. Students must be able to see, so they can put it together on their own eventually. That’s what a good teacher is - one who can help you teach yourself.

JI: You mentioned earlier about how you used to get angry when you played a wrong note.

RR: The thing is I hated it. I still do with a lot of the things in the academic world about what is correct. When you play music it is neither correct, it either feels good nor it doesn’t. I would hear these young players, and they sounded great. They were really creating some wonderful things. I would say “oh man that sounds great” and they would say, “oh man I suck.” I said, “what are you talking about?” They would say, “I missed a change and I played a wrong note.” Some of them would be so depressed.

RR: That’s really were you learn to get it together. I was also trying to get the students to not be so super critical about one note here or there. That’s not the way you make music. I had a good deal of playing with people like Buddy Montgomery. If he looked at a piece of manuscript paper, he would have gotten hives. Both he and his brother Wes didn’t know anything about written music. But they played fabulously. If you have the ability to read and understand chords, do not let it get in the way of your flow of ideas. It’s just there to help you. You got a parachute. Use your intellect, that’s where all this knowledge comes in. Many of the mistakes end up being “wow that’s where it should have gone in the first place maybe…” because it’s about the way it has to feel. I use to wonder how people would write this music, then all of the sudden there would be a three four bar or a five four bar or a two four bars somewhere. I wondered why they did that. Then when I started writing stuff and I would play it, I realized this or that doesn’t feel right.

JI: Could you address what you think are some of the essential non-musical perspectives or qualities that an artist needs to embody.

RR: That’s a big one. In a nut shell I think we as human nature want people to like us. But you know everyone doesn’t like you. Even if you try, you can’t please everybody because everybody’s got different things that please them. Music is so subjective that I really found out that you must please the music. If you play a tune by Wayne Shorter or George Gershwin or Cole Porter, you have to play that music the way that composer wanted it, being respectful of the melody. Then the people that don’t even like you respect you. Barry Harris heard me play one time. I’ll never forget it. He came over to me and said, “Rufus, on this tune, the bridge goes like this. Okay?” He didn’t get angry at me. He didn’t trash me. It was just - this is how it goes. Then I went with Hank Jones. I played one with him and he showed me one. He said, “You know everyone is playing the changes to “Love For Sale” wrong. Do you know how Cole Porter wrote this?” He’s really clever. He has the major chord there, and the dominant chord here. I was in a recording studio with Hank Jones, doing something with Frank Wass and Frank Foster. We were making some changes to some of the arrangements. It was a simple change. I was standing there waiting for everyone to mark their parts. Hank looks at me and says, “Rufus, do you have a pencil?” It was his polite way of saying, “Write it down Rufus, so we don’t mess this up - because this is not your money if we have to stop.” I will never forget that.

JI: It was a very subtle way of communicating the lesson.

RR: Right. This is how you do it. He was one of the guys of the studio, having the posture of being ready to deal. Grady Tate was always talking to me about how he would do three or four records a day of big band stuff - hard stuff. “We’d write it down, sight read it, record it next and then move on. You don’t even remember half the stuff you’re recording.” So I get very angry with the way the kids are coming up and want to rehearse two or three times over a phrase. Then they say “we got it.” But you don’t have it. You haven’t the skills. Ron Carter went into the studio to do Stan Getz’ “Sweet Rain” album. Two hours. They had recorded the day before with some other bass player. Stan didn’t like it. Ron said, “Well I’m so busy, but I have this two hour window.” He came in and played and it’s a classic.

JI: How do you stay on the right path and do the right thing?

RR: I don’t know, I really feel that what goes around comes around - Karma or whatever you want to call it. I think one has to be spiritual, I don’t feel that you have to be religious. I’m not talking about ethnic religion. I really feel that it is important that you have integrity about life. Everybody wants to make a fast buck and they don’t want to work for it. I really feel that if you can stay busy mentally - even if it’s not what you wish you could do - it’s healthy. If you’re busy, people see you’re busy, and then they make you busier. I’ve seen it happen.
Art Blakey
His Life & Music — Part 8

By John R. Barrett, Jr.

While extra players were added on some dates, the main unit consisted of Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Stitt, Kai Winding, Al McKibbon, and Thelonious Monk, on his final extended tour. Art had played with all of them before, but agreed to the tour because of Monk, who he hadn’t recorded with since 1957. While live discs exist of the various tour spots, the only studio recording took place in London, on November 15, 1971.

Monk was the leader, playing solo for most of the session; on five of the tunes he was joined by McKibbon and Blakey, recalling his various ‘Fifties trios. The music, now available as Thelonious Monk: The London Collection, Volume Three, marks several milestones: besides being Art’s last album as a sideman, it was also Monk’s final studio date as a leader. Blakey was glad to be part of it: “We did the one trio date in London, and he [Monk] just did it because they asked him to, and I did it because I’d do anything they’d ask me to do with Monk.”

It may have been quickly planned, but that doesn’t make it sloppy. “Evidence” is given new harmonies, sounding like a cocktail pianist through the spindly theme. Art keeps the rhythm fast and steady, the cymbal consistent as Monk slows down, engrossed in the chord structure. “Crespuscule with Nellie” is somewhat faster than usual, and far moodier: Art’s rhythm is delicate, propelled by McKibbon’s hard thrum. “Nuttty” finds Thelonious active, with sidetracks and grace notes all over the melody. The rhythm chores are well-performed but never the focus — this is Monk’s show all the way, and it is grand.

The Messengers continued to work during the Giants of Jazz tour, though at a reduced schedule. Woody Shaw took over on trumpet, for the first of several stays; Joanne Brackeen was the pianist for about a year, replaced by the returning John Hicks. The 1972 album Child’s Dance found the group in major transition: recorded over three sessions, the disc featured two flutes (Ramon Morris and Manny Boyd), two basses (Stanley Clarke and Mickey Bass, who played together on one track), piano duties shared by John Hicks and George Cables, and no less than four percussionists. For a short time a guitar was used — James “Blood” Ulmer, years before his experiments in “punk jazz”! (This proved to be short-lived: “Ulmer only played five jobs in three months with the group.”)

Cedar Walton returned to the group in early 1973, this time on electric piano. A marathon block of sessions in late March yielded the albums Anthenagin and Bahaiana; the lineup, with Shaw and Steve Turre, was Blakey’s strongest in years. Soon after Shaw was replaced by Eddie Henderson, and the group underwent a series of changes, few of them lasting. (To quote a later Messenger, James Williams: “John Hicks and Albert Dailey were practically platooning on the gig. Schnitter [saxophonist David Schnitter] told me that around 1974-75 on a given night, he wouldn’t know who’d be on the stool.”)

Stability returned to the group in early 1977, as Blakey entered the recording studio for the first time in four years. It began at New York’s Storyville Club on October 11, 1976, when Art sat in with Curtis Fuller’s group. It was there that Blakey met Bobby Watson, a young alto just out of college. Educated at the University of Miami (where he attended at the advice of a friend, Pat Metheny) Watson arrived in New York that August, and found out from somebody that Art’s birthday party would be at Storyville. He took his horn to the club, played a few tunes, and was surprised when Blakey approached him: “Art asked me, ‘Whatcha doin’? How’d you like to join the Messengers?’ Looking back on it, I’m probably one of the only guys he asked who wasn’t beating the doors down.

When I told everyone Art asked me to join, nobody believed me.”

Three months after this meeting Bobby was in the Messengers, on a two-taxi line with David Schnitter. Their trumpeter was Johnny Coles, who had played for Horace Silver and Duke Ellington — this group played just one engagement, a weekend at the Village Gate. If Blakey found Watson in unlikely circumstances, Coles’ successor came by a stranger route — from a nation where jazz was illegal.

Valery Ponomarev had been a drum student in a Moscow university, learning the classical repertoire; he picked up jazz from Voice of America radio broadcasts, studying the tunes through the fuzzy, jammed signals. His first love was Clifford Brown, who he heard from smuggled LPs and tapes borrowed from other fans. When he heard his first Messengers album — Moanin’ — he memorized all the solos, and acquired Lee Morgan as an influence.

It was Brown who inspired Valery to become a trumpeter, and he started in an unlikely way: as his college orchestra was rehearsing, Ponomarev waited for the trumpet section to stop playing, then grabbed a horn and blew a strong note. “At that moment — I’ll remember it forever — everybody stopped and turned to me. The bandleader was standing in front of the band, and he showed a look of surprise and appreciation. Everybody said, ‘What was this?’ Then they said ‘That was Val!’ The bandleader told me that I had a beautiful tone and that I should practice. Trumpet I loved anyway. He didn’t have to persuade me to practice trumpet after he gave me one.”

Once he got his horn, Valery practiced assiduously, jamming with anyone willing to play jazz. For practical purposes the music was banned, though the Soviet government allowed jazz clubs in major cities — clubs that only foreigners could attend. (“The authorities tried to fool the West by showing them, ‘Look, we don’t forbid jazz. We have it right here.’”) He started playing the Moscow clubs, seated beside decades-old veterans, and appeared on his first album, a live set at a Moscow jazz festival. By this time Valery was getting restless, and by 1973 obtained an exit visa under false pretenses.

Once out of Russia, Ponomarev contacted the International Rescue Committee, a group that protected Soviet defectors. They successfully argued his case to American immigration, and found him a job and apartment in New York. Within a week he had a gig, playing for trombonist Matthew Gee at Churchill’s. A few months later he got to sit in with the Messengers at the Five Spot, where he impressed Art with his Clifford Brown inflections. (“He was shocked I had traveled so far from the Iron Curtain.”) Blakey promised him a spot in the band, which opened up in early ’77; his first disc with the group was Gypsy Folk Tales, cut in late Feb-

(Continued on page 34)
Art Blakey, Part 8

(Continued from page 33)

ruary. Now out of print, Scott Yanow describes the album by saying “[T]he hard-bop solos are consistently fresh.”

The new school of Messengers was completed by pianist James Williams, added to the group in October 1977. An intense, funky player with a flair for composition, Williams would later form his own band patterned after Art’s, with talent like Kevin Eubanks and his nephew Tony Reedsus, a rising drummer. Thoroughly schooled in the ways of Blakey pianists (especially Bobby Timmons), Williams could not have been a better fit. Art now had another hand of aces, and the next golden era of Messengers would begin.

The first album made by this new crop was In My Prime, recorded for Timeless on December 29, 1977. Curtis Fuller was added to the mix, making for a four-horn front line, Blakey’s largest for a working group. The tunes mostly con- eled in the best company, recording with Freddie Hubbard, Charles Earland, and others – he never became a big name, though not for lack of talent. This solo has the strength of Dexter Gordon, with a little Coltrane mixed in; it culminates in a long mad circular twirl. While free, the bit is exquisitely structured: a long phrase is played out, given variations, then truncated (with variations on the shortened theme), cut further, and so it goes. Schnitter never loses melody no matter how fast it gets … and he ends with a witty quote of “Do You Know the Way to San Jose?” The handoff to Watson is pretty good, and there he goes … you can tell they competed every gig they played.

“In This Korner” comes through with a smoky old sound – the right mood for Valery and his mute. Sounding exactly like Lee Morgan, he walks cautiously with sly phrases, as Williams gets happy in the background. That comp is so “jazzy” in the ‘Fifties sense that it’s almost a parody of the style – in this context it works, and I can’t explain why. Ponomarev gets good applause as he leaves, and Schnitter raises the bar: a full-bore take-no-prisoners saxophone

“Three months after this meeting Bobby was in the Messengers, on a two-sax line with David Schnitter. Their trumpeter was Johnny Coles, who had played for Horace Silver and Duke Ellington – this group played just one engagement, a weekend at the Village Gate. If Blakey found Watson in unlikely circumstances, Coles’ successor came by a stranger route – from a nation where jazz was illegal ...

Valery Ponomarev …”

sisted of things from recent album, including “Hawkman” and “Estimated Time of Arrival”. Five months later the same group, minus Fuller, would be in San Francisco, playing a week at the Keystone Korner; the May 8 show was recorded by Concord as In This Korner.

Blakey gets it started with a merciless solo; the sound quality is excellent, especially for a live album. (This was standard at the Korner, which had a sound engineer on staff during shows.) “Pamela” is a showcase for Watson’s power, his maturity at such a young age. His tone combines the metallic bite of an alto with the airy surge of a soprano; his solo switches from mannered leaps at precise intervals to excited trills, and then to mad screams. There are elements of Trane and elements of Shorter, but it never sounds like either musicians – Bobby uses those devices his way, not theirs. Williams decorates it with warm chords, somewhat like Cedar Walton; Blakey adds some thunderous snares, and it’s all you need.

Next up is “Unlimited”, and Schnitter shows what he can do. In the Seventies he trav- strut, somewhere between Dexter and Rollins. Williams’ moment comes on “The Song Is You”, where cocktail chords are taken fast and mixed with Monkish sourballs. This is aggressive lyricism, taken to the edge but never beyond; Mulgrew Miller would use the same approach on his features. Valery’s solo is terse but good, and the whole album seems to say “Blakey Is Back”. That is, if he ever left.

The Messengers spent much of 1979 on the road, keeping the same lineup most of the way. Starting at the end of October, special guests – all former Messengers – were added to the group, giving it as many as 13 members. This started informally, at the Berlin Jazz Festival: several alumni were playing there, and were invited onstage during Blakey’s set. This meant Bobby Watson dueling Jackie McLean, Schnitter trading solos with Benny Golson, Cedar Walton next to James Williams. Blakey was pleased with the results, and invited alumni (this time McLean, Fuller, Billy Harper, Eddie Henderson, Walton, and Airto Moreira) to his December 31 show at the Keystone Korner. Freddie Hubbard was apparently promised on the poster, but never appeared; Blakey claimed this set was recorded by Timeless but if so it has yet to be released.

In March 1980 David Schnitter was replaced by Billy Pierce, an agreeable hard bopper who had played with James Williams. His first disc with them, a live date in West Berlin, was released as Jazzbohne Berlin ’80. The songs included many of these albums, as “Blues March”, “One by One”, and “I Remember Clifford”. On that same European tour, the two oldest Marsalis brothers were added to the lineup, making their first recordings.

At the Northsea festival on July 13, a ten-piece group essayed “Minor Thesis”: the horns walk slowly, atop a prickly bass pattern by Charles Fambrough. Throughout the theme Williams makes little sliding patterns, not really related to the tune, but still complementing it. The first solo belongs to Pierce: hard, direct, a cleaner sound than Schnitter. Four days later the same group played at Montreux, plus another pair of brothers: Robin Eubanks on trombone, Kevin at the guitar. The group is almost the size of a big band, and the harmonies prove it: a big twang opens “Bit a Bittadose”, with Kevin and Fambrough walking the same path. A fiery strutter, Wynton appears to get the first solo, dwalling with force as Blakey gets to pounding. Wallace Roney replaced Ponomarev at the start of August, and this quasi-big band toured Europe for another week or so.

When Blakey returned to the states, the band was back to its usual size: the lineup was Pierce, Watson, Wynton Marsalis, Williams, and Fambrough. Not yet 19, Wynton was the youngest Messenger ever; he was scouted by Valery Ponomarev, who encouraged him even as his own time in the group was coming to an end. As Marsalis tells it: “I have the utmost respect for Valery … I mean, I was young and ambitious, and I came around the band trying to get his job. It was a strange situation …. But Valery was very nice to me, always supportive. He was great as a man.”

The group began its American tour in New York, then moved south for a series of festivals in Florida. On October 11, the band rolled into Bubba’s Jazz Restaurant in Fort Lauderdale for an important date: not only was it Blakey’s birthday, it also marked the only time Wynton’s father Ellis Marsalis played with the Messengers. The entire evening was recorded, yielding enough material for three albums; originally released on the Lionel Hampton-owned Who’s Who in Jazz label, these tracks have been repeated reissued, most recently on the Break Time
Art Blakey, Part 8

Ellis Marsalis plays on “Jody”, which his son begins by shooting high. These notes are pursed, precise, and confident – most trumpeters aren’t this facile, no matter what age. Ellis comes in with muted chords: warm, but nothing to get in the trumpet’s way. For a moment Ellis plays the Cedar Walton riff from “Ugetsu” – perfect in this context. His solo is an extended perbolic flood of notes, screeching at the peaks and revolving like mad. It gets your attention, but it’s also far from the mood of the tune; Williams brings it back, in a blues-soaked effort Timmons would be proud of. The end-theme goes soft and intimate, all for the horns to roar back, as Wynton does eloquently. If he needed to prove something, the mission is accomplished.

1984 began with a new sextet: Johnny O’Neal was replaced by Mulgrew Miller, for a marked improvement. Miller’s approach was a maze of lush chords, percussive jabs, and funky interjections. Clearly indebted to earlier Messen-

gers, this style recalled Cedar Walton – and, at certain moments, Bobby Timmons. It was the right sound for this group and for Miller, who would soon find himself in demand as a sideman, adding sparkle to numerous recording sessions.

After some club dates in February (with a reunion band of past Messengers), Blakey took Mulgrew on the road: they began at Ronnie Scott’s, then return to New York for a week at Mikell’s. Some time in May Concord brought in their tape machine, and the result was New York Scene. At once Miller takes charge, Drilling sharp rhythms into “Oh, By the Way”. The horns blend nicely, with a definite “section” flavor; Blanchard goes beneath the reeds, taking the role of Curtis Fuller. His solo is first, ruminating on a three-note phrase; in time he moves higher, slurring his tone slightly.

Blakey surrounds him with cymbals, accenting with delicate taps; Lonnie keeps the pace, walking one moment, sliding into the next. Harrison slows it down, with an air of caution: his notes are few and placed with care. These phrases are echoed by Mulgrew, who pounces quick – thus goaded, Donald works faster, in a nice throaty tone. There’s a multiphonetic trill, a rush of piano, and restless darting phrases – right as it starts to boil, the theme takes us back home.

As further proof, Mulgrew then offers a ballad medley. Strong on the chords, a sour “Oh! Susannah” becomes a proud “My One and Only Love”. Brittle on the bridge, he tries new harmonies, then strides into “Easy to Remember”. It is here that the rhythm joins him: Lonnie springs hard, at times for its own sake. The final “Who Cares” is glistening romance, with an end phrase worthy of Red Garland … the audience cares, and so will you.

Harrison’s “Controversy” is an organized storm, all busy angles in a sea of changing chords. (To me it sounds like “Giant Steps”, as re-thought by Wayne Shorter.) Donald gets the first solo, slurping the notes in a leisurely circle. With a Tynerish vamp behind him, the reed becomes strong, wailing like a soprano – he hops between octaves, ending in a mad squeal. Mulgrew has a fast, lavish effort; it was good while it lasted.

His mark is more lasting on “Tenderly”: a languid intro, where soft chords moan in eloquent sadness. Blanchard crawls through the echo, bleating gently; come the theme he lingers, drawing each note to beautiful lengths. He gets tough on the third chorus, blowing blue and hitting the ceiling – Miller gets a quick statement and hands it back to Blanchard for the sendoff. Unaccompanied for three minutes, Terence uncorks a fast series of fanfares, in Freddie Hubbard’s tone … his finale is whispered, with applause washing over.

The horns are labyrinthine on Mulgrew’s “Falafel”, twisting their way through the arid background. Donald sounds tart, saying his piece in brief, detached phrases; Terence follows with warmth, a quiet touch, and a sound that blooms. The notes, played without force, just seem to appear – a wall of breezy sound. Miller’s comp becomes strong, turning into a montuno; Blakey responds by clicking a samba. Toussaint walks an introverted circle, in his brightest moment: the lines are rusty, tinged with Trane. Parts of this are nice, but it tends to meander: not so for Miller, who is brash and

(The continuation of page 36)
direct. He gets muscular with the blues as Benny Green would later; horns coalesce on the busy end-theme, for the loudest applause of the date.

While nothing is great, everything is at least good — a typical night’s work for the group. And, as it turned out, another award — the disc won a Grammy for Best Jazz Instrumental by Individual or Small Group. This would be Blakey’s only Grammy — like many deserving musicians, it was not for his best work, but at least he was honored in his lifetime, unlike many deserving musicians.

On February 25, 1985 the sextet arrived at Ronnie Scott’s the visit on this tour. They were met by a crew from Wadham Films, working on a documentary; it would be released in 1991 as Live at Ronnie’s. While just an excerpt appeared in the film, the whole evening was taped and issued on disc as Art Blakey: Live at Ronnie’s.

“Stability returned to the group in early 1977, as Blakey entered the recording studio for the first time in four years. It began at New York’s Storyville Club on October 11, 1976, when Art sat in with Curtis Fuller’s group. It was there that Blakey met Bobby Watson, a young alto just out of college. Art’s birthday party would be at Storyville … [Watson] took his horn to the club, played a few tunes, and was surprised when Blakey approached him … ‘to join the Messengers?’”

Scott’s.

“Ginza” begins with a mighty roar, Blakey expounding with taps and raucous thumps. This is organized power, swift but uncluttered — and a melodic sense to rival Max Roach. He defers to Miller for a half-chorus, then the theme begins: faster than normal, with Harrison in command. His tangle sound is fit to tightly-wound phrases; Mulgrew does the same in his comp. (The bad sound hurts his cause; the piano seems tinny and distant.) As the solo progresses the notes becomes slurred, as Joe Lovano would do it — he ends with fast twirling, and shrieks inspired by Coltrane. Blanchard sounds pinched at first, but goes into a sleek zigzag. Fast and anguished, he floats at the top of his range, propelled by hot cymbals.

When Toussaint plays, all turns quiet: a throaty whisper, accented by big bass. A two-note pattern takes root, gives birth to fluttering phrases, and then blares in fiery beauty. (Plaxico’s bassline is wonderful: bounce bounce phrases, and then blares in fiery beauty. The tenor chugs like a rusty engine, tough but uneventful: Mulgrew then turns a fast blues, like a gentler Junior Mance. Its only flaw is being too short; the theme comes with precision and the applause comes in waves.

“Two of a Kind” is a ride through downtown: fast, smooth, sophisticated. Composed by Blanchard, this tune has the smoky feel of the ’Fifties; I’m reminded of Mingus and “Reincarnation of a Lovebird”. The theme simmers for a minute, then Toussaint gets the first solo.

With Miller’s comp gleaming behind him, Jean moans, darting softly between two notes. Turning muscular on the second chorus, he stutters a bit before venturing upward. Once here, he spins in small circles, filling the silence around Miller’s chords. Flashes of double-time appear, as do multiphonics – and the calm returns just as quickly. This solo has about three different styles without committing to any; as such it accomplishes little, reflected in the mild applause.

Blanchard is tangle in his approach, sounding like Hubbard as he slurs through the first chorus. He works a racetrack fanfare, hurries his way to the top, and hovers on beautiful fluttering notes. Always strong and never shy on ideas, this solo is match for Donald’s on “Dr. Jeckyll”.

Speaking of Harrison, he now appears on soprano, honking like a quizzical duck. He switches between oboe-like sadness and bizarre little squeaks – a mix of Yusef Lateef’s exotic and Coltrane’s exultation. Mulgrew brings the heat down with his stately effort; Lonnie tries to get busy in a way I find distracting. (He’s better on the solo: round cello-like notes, rolling down a slow slope.) Easily the best of the set, Terence and Donald are definitely “Two of a Kind”.

After traversing the world for 14 months, the jazz message was taken to San Francisco, for a week at Kimball’s Nightclub. By this time the group had solidly coalesced, as you can hear on Live at Kimball’s, recorded on April 13, 1985. There is no hesitation on “Second Thought”: the horns unite, in glistening harmony. While the reeds charge, Terence is somewhat pensive, creeping slowly on flaggorn, This creamy vibrato is everywhere — walking down low, then carefully climbing, then shrieking into orbit. It’s a thrilling ride; Art caps it by crushing his cymbal as the applause grows thick. Mulgrew follows with quietude, breaking out the big chords as his solo ends. While nice, it seems tentative, like he was struggling for ideas — certainly Terence set a high standard.

The spotlight then falls on Harrison: he takes “I Love You” through a slow groove, holding the notes while giving them warmth. Art gives him a soft, steady cymbal; when he switches to a bossa beat, Donald blows a perfect Getz. Mulgrew stays delicate, turning stronger on his brief solo – the alto returns with a sly rasp, getting active before the endless fadeout. The end is a parade of proud noise: floods of piano, followed by a foghorn’s blare, followed by the customers’ appreciation.

They still applaud the last number when Art thunders in “Jody”: loud cracking snares, answered by taxi horns. Donald opens with Coltrane trills; the pace is fast and the heat intense. The piano comps sparsely, but lush like Tyner – he’s calmer for Toussaint’s solo, which is jagged and brusque. He also evokes Trane, from an earlier period … with intensity and imagination in equal amounts, this is one of Jean’s better moments. Mulgrew’s turn is rife with anxiety, where hurried notes jab a scary theme. Variations follow, as sour chords find their way in; a great maniac riff is cut short by the final theme. The horns exit in a wild whirl, and Art rains the cymbals with unmistakable passion. And the crowd does likewise.

“Old Folks”: a solo for Miller, combines lingering chords with a busy right hand — like a duel between Bill Evans and Oscar Peterson! The climate is thick and marvelous: effortlessly he switches to stride, and from there to waitz time …precious. “You and the Night and the Music” is the same mood painted dark; Lonnie creeps low for sweet counterpoint. This is miles beyond the New York medley, in style and execution.

Blanchard gets his due on “Polka Dots and Moonbeams”: pristine notes, glowing like a small fire. The tune is slightly decorated, but otherwise played straight … until he quotes “Surrey with the Fringe on Top”! There’s soft blues from Mulgrew, a steady click from Art, and a triumphant sendoff by Terence, where the “Bumblebee” flies and the horn hits the ceiling. After this “Dr. Jeckyll” explodes, even faster than the London version. Donald is frantic and precise at the same time, shooting high with an oboe’s tone. A quote of “Giant Steps” gives him an idea and he takes off, squealing an uproarious Trane whistle. Miller’s effort is frustratingly brief, and the tune dissolves in a cloud of applause. Made as bookends on the mid-’Eighties tour, the Concord discs show the group taking root and blossoming before your ears. ( Appropriately, they are now packaged together, under the name Coast to Coast.)
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