INTERVIEWS

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Buster Williams
Dizzy’s Club, September 26-28

HAROLD DANKO
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By Ken Weiss

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Terell Stafford

Stafford’s exceptionally expressive and well defined musical talent allows him to dance in and around the rich trumpet tradition of his predecessors while making his own inroads.

Joshua Breakstone

His flowing lines on up-tempo cookers are impeccably clean and fiery, bearing the mark of a first-rate improviser, while his chordal work on heartbreaker ballads is the final word in finesse. — Guitar Player magazine.

Ken Peplowski

Ken Peplowski is reunited with his NYC working group that includes Ted Rosenthal on piano, Martin Wind on bass and Matt Wilson on drums.

Stranahan / Zaleski / Rosato

Limitless shows that the partnership is working quite well and in all likelihood hadn’t even hit its ceiling yet.

— S. Victor Aaron, Something Else Reviews
Harold Danko
The Language of Music

By Ken Weiss

Harold Danko [b. June 13, 1947, Sharon, PA] has built a long and distinguished career as an adaptive and creative pianist, both as a leader and a sideman, a prolific composer, and as a valuable educator, the bulk of which includes 19 years at Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, where he recently stepped down from. He continues to record and perform. After graduating from Youngstown State University, he spent time in an army band stationed in Staten Island that allowed him to build connections in the New York jazz scene. He soon was playing with the Woody Herman band and later leaders such as Chet Baker, Lee Konitz, the Thad Jones/ Mel Lewis bands, and Gerry Mulligan. He also worked with singers Chris Connor, Anita O’Day and Liza Minnelli. While many may think of Danko as a traditionalist, he has maintained an interest in free improvisation and exploration inside the piano as modalities to further his personal musical statements. This interview took place in Elkins Park, PA while Danko was in the area to visit family on May 3, 2019.

Spisske Vlachy, in the Spis area. They lived in Smock, Pennsylvania, before moving to Masury, Ohio, where I grew up. My parents spoke English and Slovak, that’s my heritage. There was supposedly a famous Gypsy violinist that Hungarians have told me about named Pista Dankó.

Ji: Any chance that you’re related to Rick Danko [The Band]?

HD: No. I did meet him once and his heritage is more southern Slavic, so there’s not much chance we’re related.

Ji: Since 1993, you’ve remained with one record label, SteepleChase, and recorded 24 albums for them. That shows perhaps unparalleled loyalty on both sides. What makes your association with this Danish label work for you?

HD: [Laughs] I didn’t know the count. I had a time when I wasn’t recording as a leader. It wasn’t a dry spell; I was busy with everything else. I had recorded for Sunnyside. François Zalacaín was a good friend of mine, still is, I did his first record with Rufus Reid. So, I was associated with Sunnyside for some time, did a few records, but Sunnyside was going into a different direction. François was no longer producing records himself anymore. I led a quartet with Rich Perry around New York, and I decided to record some demos. I had accumulated about 90 minutes worth of demos and I sent it out to various people I knew in the business who I thought might be interested. All the ones that got back to me said they couldn’t do it but Nils Winther, from SteepleChase, got back and said he loved the music but wanted to record Rich Perry first. He had heard Rich Perry on a Ron McClure record. So, we did Rich Perry’s first record To Start Again with the quartet we had been co-leading. The next recording for Steeplechase was mine, Next Age, which had all my originals. The relationship has continued. Nils calls every once in a while and nobody else does. [Laughs]

Ji: How much are you sacrificing in recognition in the States by recording for a foreign label?

HD: Nils does have his distribution channels and the record gets out there, it just doesn’t seem to get a lot of reviews. I got so tired of going around to record companies, and that’s why I got more interested in teaching. The number of dollars from teaching numerous lessons adds up, so I was much more loyal to my students than I was to a one-time club owner who was gonna pay me whatever. By teaching, I found I was talking about music, rather than talking about business, and then I would get paid at the end of that hour. That felt better than waiting around till four in the morning to get paid. Recording is more like a documentation at this point. I feel like my adult life has been documented. In my darkest moments, I say, ‘Steeplechase has documented my decline.’ [Laughs] I think with most bigger record companies, if you get your shot and it doesn’t do anything, you’re done. Nils asks me every year or so to do a project or asks me what I have. He hit on the idea of recording with somebody like Kirk, who I hadn’t encountered, which was a great idea.

Ji: It’s interesting that up until this year’s release with cornetist Kirk Knuffke [Play Date, SteepleChase], you had only recorded with nine musicians on the previous 23 SteepleChase records. Would you discuss maintaining a small set of artists to record with versus utilizing new groupings?

HD: [Laughs] I hadn’t done the math. Those are the guys that agreed to rehearse and made time for me. I’d love to record with Billy Hart, but could I grab Billy Hart for two afternoons? Michael Formanek, Scott Colley and Jay Anderson, for example, those guys I know, and they might make a rehearsal if I asked them to. It’s really the guys who were interested and available. I would like to play with a whole lot of people, if that were possible. Also, in the last 20 years, in Rochester, I was very off the New York scene, so it wasn’t like I was in contact with a lot of the New York players. Plus, the artistry of these guys is so high. I feel that I sound good with these guys, even if I haven’t played with them [for some time].

Ji: Play Date represents a significant departure for you. You’ve done duet recordings before, most notably with Lee Konitz, but this release is with Knuffke, an artist you’d never met before the day of the recording. How did this album represent a significant departure for you? What are you sacrificing in recognition in the States by recording for a foreign label?

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come about and how was it to create with a new partner?

**HD:** Nils recommended Kirk and that I listen to him on the Internet. I found him interesting. I liked his sound and the way he controlled it. I brought along some tunes but wanted to see where things would go if we played some free things. SteepleChase owns the publishing of all the Duke Jordan material, and Duke Jordan’s *Flight to Copenhagen* is his biggest record. Duke Jordan is his Keith Jarrett. We did free tunes and the Duke Jordan stuff just kind of goes down pretty easily. I brought those tunes as a backup but as we got into them, especially as we got into *Flight to Copenhagen*, not just because it’s the big hit, it just worked out. We did three different takes and I thought it would be good to alternate the free tunes with the Duke Jordan tunes.

**JI:** Alternating with the Duke Jordan tunes are seven short tracks that are spontaneous improvisations. They fit together so well that it’s not

You’ve done spontaneous compositions in the past, you enjoy playing inside the piano, and you’ve covered pieces by avant-garde composers such as Andrew Hill, Ornette Coleman and Eric Dolphy. Would you address the misconception of you being solely a jazz traditionalist?

**HD:** [Laughs] I would love to be a funk-rhythm player, if I could do that, I’d be so happy just to play rhythms, in the style of Richard Tee. I love

apparent that they’re instant works. What’s your approach to making spontaneous pieces?

**HD:** To try to listen as deeply as you can and respond/react, and then initiate. You’re hearing what the other person is initiating, and then you either support them or put it in another direction. I have a short attention span, I really do, especially if you rent a Steinway, you can’t do that. On my own Yamaha piano that I had in my loft in New York, I started marking the insides of the piano so I could really understand where stuff was – how much I’d have to spread my fingers to get a certain interval. It’s working with the theory of acoustics, really. With half of the string, you get a certain harmonic. It’s different on a Yamaha from a Steinway, and on every piano. I’m pretty good on my own piano since I did mark things on the inside. So, I spent a con-siderable amount of time with my head in there, looking at the length of the strings, seeing where on the piano that the strings are not damped. Like at the top of the piano, they’re just open, so if you get really high on the piano, they’ll ring. You can do something low and then high, and damp things down with your hands on another part. There’s also the middle pedal of the grand piano that will sustain certain notes and not others, which is sort of a secret thing. There are pedals on a grand piano and I’ve seen very few people use the middle pedal. There are ways of using the piano as an instrument other than the keyboard - it can be like a harp or a zither. I was happy that Kirk seemed to be very engaged with that. It’s the same thing of listening and reacting, and if I can do a percussive thing in there then maybe I can do some initiating. I can also slap the metal parts. It’s mostly a studio thing because in a live venue, unless it’s very quiet, it gets lost, so it’s a thing that I’ve mainly done in studios. With Thad Jones, I started my strum-
mning thing. I don’t know how I started that, it’s like a Freddie Green thing. The Thad Jones band had a guitarist in the beginning, and when we played “A’ That’s Freedom,” I strummed [inside the piano] because on the original, the guitarist strummed four to the bar. Thad let out a loud grunt when he first heard me do it, which meant keep it in! I did that every time. So, the strumming is a special effect, and people have asked me how I do it. It has to be like a guitar, it has to stop, it can’t have a long sound. It’s just the way I lift my hand off. That’s one of the effects that can be done in a concert setting and not get lost.

**JI:** Have you ever played as a sideman under a leader who restricted you from not playing inside the piano?

**HD:** I never did it with Gerry Mulligan, not because he said not to do it, just because it just never seemed to be… I wonder how that would have gone over? I don’t know. No, Konitz liked it, occasionally if I did it. It would have to be the right piano and the right setting to do it. No one ever restricted me.

**JI:** What’s the best advice you were ever given?

**HD:** I consider myself a fairly serious composer of tunes, not a composer in the way that Bob Brookmeyer or Maria Schneider or Jim McNeely, who’s one of my favorites, are, because they can sit down and develop something. They really enjoy that process. I enjoy the process of playing. It goes back to college. There was a composer in Ohio named Robert “Bob” Witt, he was blind and taught at the Dana School of Music at Youngstown State University, where I went to school. I was a freshman and my friends were composition majors studying with him and I thought I might want to do that. Bob Witt would know you by your footsteps the second time you came in. He’d say, “Hey, Harold, how you doing?” At one point, Bob had come to hear me playing some jazz, thanks to my teacher, Gene Rush, who was studying with Bob. Afterwards, I went into Bob Witt’s office and said I’d like to change my major to composition and Witt said that he had heard me play jazz and that he thought I really enjoyed playing. He asked if I’d really enjoy sitting down and writing as much as I enjoyed playing, which I’d never thought about it. He said, “You gotta get writing chops. If you want to be able to write music, you’ve got to be able to sit under a tree and have all the orchestra involved.” I understood what he was saying, and I didn’t know if I wanted to acquire all of those chops. His advice to me was to learn the piano as best as I could and then see what came. I’m still in that process, and I owe a nod to Robert Witt for alerting me. It’s been a pretty good occupation for me.

**JI:** You’ve been performing mostly in Europe and Asia. Why are you so popular there but don’t play more in the States?

**HD:** [Laughs] People don’t call me. I’m not very aggressive, I don’t like rejection. Like I said, when I was trying to get my demo around, I just decided that students didn’t reject me and that they would actually come [to me], and they’d come the next week, and pay me again. So, I take the easy way out. Right now, in Taiwan, my wife is Taiwanese and a classical pianist, and she’s of the age that a lot of her friends are now in positions to hire me and there’s a novelty of this classical pianist who married a jazz guy. Jazz is pretty new in Taiwan, so I get called to do things – six out of the last seven years. It’s the same in Europe, I had a very dear friend, and wonderful musician, Gigi Di Gregorio, who died of cancer last year. He’s the reason I played in Italy, because one guy, Gigi Di Gregorio would arrange gigs. He liked to play my music with his band so I walked into Italy, ate well, drank well, played with beautiful friends, and played pretty amazingly free. I started to get a few things going in Portugal, which I love, but I ended up in East Rochester [Laughs].

**JI:** You mentioned your wife Fei-Yan is a classical pianist born in Taiwan. How did you two meet and have you collaborated together?

**HD:** I was born in a hospital in Sharon, Pennsylvania, right across the Ohio state line from where I grew up in Masury, Ohio, near Youngstown, where I went to college. There was an honor about being a musician in my family, which I’m really proud of. My parents were insistent that teaching was the way out of the steel mills and coal mines. Maybe becoming a music teacher – that’s what my older brother, Joe, became. My college degree was in music education. It was an honorable way out, plus my brother Joe, had forged the way in the early World War II era because he was 19 years older than me. He was earning more or as much money in the early ‘40s as my father was by being a teenager playing in these gangster clubs across the Ohio line. There were stories about John Dillinger hanging out in Masury. [Laughs] Youngstown, even when I hit the scene there in the mid-’60s, was still known as a pretty wild town and the steel mills were still there going strong.

**JI:** Your first day job was working in a steel mill with your dad. What did that experience do for you?

**HD:** My father was a coal miner first, starting at the age of 12 or 13 in Slovakia, and came to America and got into the coal mining trade in Western Pennsylvania, before moving out of the coal mines to a steel mill in Ohio. He was one of
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the guys that got out of the coal mine. It was real working class in Ohio. I worked at the mill the first summer after I started college. My dad got me in the mill, which is what guys would do. I couldn’t believe how loud and hot it was, and what my old man did, working some little hand operated crane near the blast furnace. The noise factor was just unbelievable to me, and the fact that my old man did have that every day was a revelation. [Laughs] It eliminated the possibility [of me working there] but some of my friends ended up there. You could drive a pretty nice car by working there but that was it. I saw music as the way out. Later on, when I was working with Mel Tormé, a name my mother knew, she asked, “Are you getting paid?” My parents were always by working there but that was it. I saw music as [of me working there] but some of my friends and I got a chance to go to Staten Island. [Continued from page 7]

JI: After graduating from Youngstown State University in 1969, you knew you wanted to play jazz but you didn’t think you’d end up as a player, so you signed up for the army band?

HD: I was performing a lot in Ohio and was getting some good experience, but at the end of graduation I got my draft notice in 1969. I went out to Indianapolis to take an audition [for the army band], figuring it was close enough to Ohio, and the guy who auditioned me in Indianapolis for the big band said, “You don’t want to come out here and be in a fort band.” He said, “The only thing the army can offer you is a location. If you ever wanted to go to New York or Europe.” I picked New York, so he made a call and I got a chance to go to Staten Island.

JI: Why didn’t you feel that performing was your future?

HD: I didn’t know what level, I guess. I knew I could perform, that I could probably have some kind of career in Ohio, but at that point, if I did that, I was gonna get drafted, and by signing up for three years, I could get a location. You could take your chances with the draft or enlist, and that’s what I did. Being stationed in Staten Island allowed me to take a look at the scene. Billy Taylor at that point had the Jazz Interactions program, and as an army guy, with my little, short hair, I was able to go into New York in 1970 and take these classes they had. I got to look around, and I’m not a pushy guy, but I looked to see if there was a place I could fit. Other army band players that had come before me in the Staten Island band included Mike Garson and Lew Soloff.

JI: How was your time in the army band?

HD: I was very involved in an unnamed anti-war, active duty GI band. We got into some trouble over that. I didn’t get shipped out, but some people did. Staten Island was a transfer point and we’d see all the people that came back from Vietnam with very bad drug-related problems. They’d hold that over our heads. “So, you don’t like it here, then you can go to ‘Nam.” The anti-war band did a gig at the Ethical Culture Society in New York where we opened for Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland. That was Jane Fonda in her real prime. We all had Barbarella on our minds then, and there was Jane Fonda in the same room with us. That was pretty amazing. As far as performing, I played a lot of cocktail piano. We were a pretty crazy band. If we had to sing in a chorus, I would be shouting [Makes a guttural throat sound]. If we played on Fifth Avenue, I’d be playing glockenspiel and I’d try to hit all the wrong notes. Fort Hamilton was the fort right across from us in Brooklyn, and that’s where they’d entertain the big dignitaries and we would do gigs there and just get really loaded, if we could. I remember playing for [General William] Westmoreland once. I wasn’t really happy about that and I remember low crawling in the mud after that in my tuxedo. [Laughs] It was raining that night and I was wearing this white outfit. The guys in ‘Nam would have to low crawl, so I got down in the mud and low crawled to my barracks. I was pretty stoned and filled with mud, and the next day, I saw in my locker this white tuxedo ruined. So, I washed it and then I took it to a local dry cleaner. I told the sergeant, when I handed it back, that I took it to get cleaned but it ended up coming back ruined, of course, and he said, “Oh, those civilian dry cleaners can’t get it together.” So, I kept getting saved from my insane actions. We were really misfits. The fact that we never ended up getting sent to ‘Nam...

JI: Apparently, you were able to convince the army to release you early so that you could become an apprentice to Saul Fromkin, the noted woodwind repairman. How did you negotiate your army release in 1972 and what attracted you to become a repairman?

HD: [Laughs] Okay, you’re getting all the good stuff. The repairman thing came about because at the end of the Vietnam War, they got some money from taxpayers to retrain people that could only shoot guns or whatever. You could train as an apprentice, so some guys apprenticed as fruit stand operators from a relative and the army would pay a couple grand. When I went in [to sign up for the program], they saw that I had a college degree, but I told them that it was just a teaching music thing and that I had to get a trade. I wanted to get piano technician training but the only piano tuner that would take me on was a blind guy in Staten Island who said, “Look, I’m just looking for a ride. If you would just ride me around to my clients, I’d kind of train you.” That didn’t seem good, but Saul Fromkin had done another apprentice from my army band and Saul talked me into it because he wanted to get more money from the army. So, I went to work with him every day. I wasn’t discharged, I was just excused from duty for the last three months. I had no real plan outside of the army, I was married at the time and I told my then father-in-law that we would be on food stamps and collecting unemployment for six months, but then I got the call from Woody Herman. He had heard about me from his drummer Joe LaBarbera, who had also served in the army, but at Fort Dix.

JI: Would you share some Woody Herman anecdotes?

HD: Woody knew exactly what he wanted. He was such a professional. He usually wasn’t on the tour bus, he drove his own car to gigs, I believe it was a Corvette. Woody didn’t even set up his own horn, he had Tom Anastas, the baritone player, warm his horns up, and Woody would come on stage and play the first note beautifully. He was a total pro, and I’d never encountered that. Plus, he turned 60-years-old when I was in the band, which seemed like the oldest guy in the world. And he knew every good steakhouse on the road, he knew every good place to eat everywhere. He had friends everywhere. I remember once he did a little tap-dance out of nowhere. He was a vaudevilleian, he could do anything. He could tell jokes, he sang, actually fairly well, and when I listen back to the records, even though at that time we felt he was old fashioned, his solos sound really good. His lead alto playing was amazing. Being in that setting, being on that bus, doing gigs when you were tired, the expectations on you to perform a fast tempo like “Caldonia” faster than you ever thought imaginable - your level comes up to the expectations. I felt like I was a pro now. I did get to repair Woody’s horn once. Tom Anastas had done something to it and I was able to do a quick repair, so my woodwind repair actually came in handy to bail Tom out. I wasn’t a very good repairman, at all, but fixed it so it wasn’t horrid.

JI: What memories do you have from travels in the Woody Herman bus?

HD: [Laughs] I have a good one. My first day, I didn’t know how things worked. They had a toilet on the bus, but I didn’t know you were only supposed to pee in it. I didn’t know you weren’t supposed to take a dump. [Laughs] I went back and had a lengthy dump. As I came back to my seat, my friend Joe LaBarbera said something like, “Bro, you didn’t drop an axe back there, did you?” And I didn’t even know about the term “drop an axe” so I said, ‘No.’ He said, “Did you take a shit?” I said, ‘Yeah,’ and he said, “Don’t take a shit on the bus.” I could see Joe’s whole reputation going down because he had recommended me for the gig and on my first day I took a shit on the bus, but nobody told me, and as far as I was concerned, [Hysterical laughing] I didn’t drop an axe. There are some (Continued on page 10)
many bus stories. We had Frank Tiberi, who was the musical guru of a lot of us. Frank had this beautiful, sort of Lester Young/Stan Getz sound and approach, and he knew everyone from Philadelphia, including John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner. He had that content in his playing. It was kind of a mind-bending experience to see his approach. He really had it together, and I think all the people that went through the band, including Joe Lovano, had their playing undergo a little change from things that he would play that would kind of “infect” everyone’s playing. He really stressed to not be an obvious player, to play deceptively. He takes joy in playing something and us not knowing where it’s going to go. He’s revered by those around him. Plus, he played the doubles and he played bassoon. I used him on a recording called Coincidence with Tom Harrell, which is one of Frank Tiberi’s only small group recordings. He was a character and a real ladies’ man of the day. He had an amazing strange sense of humor. There were other very funny guys on the bus. There was something about the bus and during my decades of teaching, I tried to bring the band bus and bandstand mentality because the band bus is where you really get to know people and you get to understand their quirks and who you really connect with.

**JI:** Would you care to share the Frank Tiberi story you told me before the interview?

**HD:** As I remember it, Frank would engage a new tour bus driver in a long, long conversation about their family. Eventually, after hours, because you have time on the bus, he would get the guy to show a picture of his kids, and Frank would explain along the way that he had a son with a malformation, as he would put it. And then he would show a gag photo of a baby with a huge penis, but only after getting to the point where the bus driver was asking to see a photo of the baby and Frank puts the gag picture in front of the driver and gets a huge charge out of the bus going in different directions as the guy would be laughing. Frank also had a TV set up on the bus, this was 1972, so you can imagine how the wires were going around it. He’d be watching a show and then it would get out of area and he’d lose the picture. You know, people having to live a life on the bus, adults, and they’re away from their wives and loved ones. It was an education. That experience that I had was very formative to my growing up.

**JI:** How did you end up playing with Chet Baker after the Woody Herman band in 1973?

**HD:** I got to New York, and I was still doing a little woodwind repair, and doing some freelance gigs, including working with saxophonist Turk Mauro. Turk was playing at the Half Note and Chet came in with Phil Urso, his saxophonist, and they hired the rhythm section from Turk’s band, because Chet was gonna perform at the Half Note. Thank goodness Phil Urso had done charts for Chet because Chet didn’t have anything. Phil was just there for a few weeks as sort of a transition, and he told me what Chet liked. I stuck after that, even when we changed the rhythm section. I was off the road with Woody, and I certainly wanted to play, but I don’t know how ready I was for playing with Chet. But I hung in there and got better, and I’m glad that I had a chance later on, in 1987, to have a second chance to play with him. I felt I was much more musically ready, and glad I got the chance to record the Tokyo concert.

**JI:** Chet Baker was making his comeback at the time you joined him. He hadn’t played New York since relocating to Europe in 1959. Would you talk about his comeback attempt, how the audiences perceived him, and your impression upon seeing and hearing him, as a member of his band, that first time?

**HD:** The thing that really impressed me about Chet, from the first night, because he was having chop problems, was his time. His time was so good. He played a phrase, and I hadn’t heard time like that. This guy was supposed to be the pretty boy, but his time was really strong, and when the chops would go out, the time was still there. He was having teeth problems. He hadn’t found the adhesive that he eventually found that would put his teeth in good. A lot of times when he would have a problem, people would think it was drugs, but it was just that the adhesive had given way and he’d have to sing the end of his phrase. But he sang the way he played so you would get the same content. It wouldn’t faze him, but then he’d have to go to the bathroom and put the adhesive in, and people would think he was shooting up, and then he’d come back really strong. One of the things that I was impressed with was that Chet respected that I had no interest in experimenting with any kind of drugs. I was done with that and it just never came up. He did this, which he considered to be a medical thing, and in Europe, he would have his medical people that would help him, and in America he had methadone. He was very disciplined about how he did things. At that point, he was on a comeback. He’d practiced and gotten his chops back in shape, and you have to really respect that for trumpet. Also, he did that with a new set of teeth. His own teeth had a separation and the false teeth weren’t like that, so even the teeth were different. But he learned to get his sound back, and even got a sound, on good nights, that was richer than his early sound, which was amazing. He was like a spellcaster. There were always wonderful looking women in the audience, and even at the end, when I played with him in the late ’80s, when he looked like the old Oklahoma cowboy that he was, but somehow these women in the front row, they saw something else. But really it was about the music. Plus, early on I got in good with the people at the Half Note and they hired me as an intermission solo pianist there after I came off the road with Woody Herman.

**JI:** You got to experience Chet Baker as an insider. Would you talk about Baker? What was he like? What did he talk about?

**HD:** It was pretty simple. He didn’t say much, he would talk about the music. He would say that he had to learn how to play the piano. He could kind of plank out notes. He played the piano the same way he played the trumpet. It was uncanny, he played the same kind of phrases. He knew more than people gave him credit for. He could read [music] and he knew something about theory. I rode in the car with him, he had this wonderful Mustang with a great, big motor. He liked cars, he liked women. Chet spoke Italian very well, he learned it in jail. He was not an intellectual guy. People would have all these romantic ideas about him, they would ask what he was thinking about, was he thinking about his tough life, and he would say, “No, just the next pretty note.” Life was simple. His drug thing to him was his medical condition, just like someone would take something for high blood pressure. That was his private business, and it took him less time a day than it would [to drink]. He was really down on alcoholics because they spent all the night drinking. If he was right, he was right for the whole day, and if he was not right, there were adventures that could happen. Generally, I was out of the picture on that part of the day.

**JI:** In James Gavin’s 2011 book Deep in a Dream, Gavin reports that you “held things together in Chet Baker’s band.” You even hired the sidemen. What was life like with Baker? You did a European tour with him in 1975.

**HD:** James Gavin interviewed me. He doesn’t know much about music. The Gavin book and the movies about Chet are not about the music, they’re about some persona, some idealized thing. Chet was just a guy who liked cars and played music for a living. He had to have that next gig, not just because he needed drugs, that’s the way he made his living, Chet didn’t know the New York musicians, he knew the older guys that were busy. I knew the guys who might make rehearsal and do the gig. Michael Moore and Jimmy Madison were my go-to guys. I kept a list of every bass player and drummer in town for many years. Chet counted on me to assemble a group that would be there. He was a big star in Europe, especially returning to Italy for the first time. I had no idea he spoke fluent Italian until he got right in there and I said, “Whoa, Chet speaks Italian!” He went and bought himself an amazing suit and he knew the culture well. The Italians treated him like a star. We did some festivals using Beaver Harris on drums and he would do these really crazy, out solos. That was my first time in Europe, and it was a very validating experience for me.
Harold Danko

JI: What was the low point of your time with Baker?

HD: I think it was when Gregory Herbert told Chet that I was gonna be leaving and going with Thad [Jones] and Mel [Lewis] before I had a chance to tell Chet. Gregory was on the good side of Thad and Mel and told them about me. After that, the vibe with Chet was like, “Oh, you’re leaving.” I felt bad that I wasn’t able to say that I had this chance to do this thing that I really want to do, and because there was a trust that Chet had in me and I had in him. My first week with Thad and Mel, we recorded with Rhoda Scott, I made some money, and I felt like I was on the New York scene.

JI: I thought you might have noted visiting him in a German jail in 1976 as the low point.

HD: Yeah, that was Burghausen, Germany, but Chet was totally cool because he had a chunk of hash that he had eaten [Laughs] before they’d arrested him. So, when I went to visit him in jail, he said, “Yeah, Harold, everything’s gonna be good.” With Chet, things were simple. It wasn’t a dramatic thing. It was Chet sitting in jail, smiling.

JI: Gavin’s book also documents that Chet Baker was playing to sparse crowds at that time for fifty-dollar gigs. Why did you stick it out with Baker for three years?

HD: He was the guy who was calling. I was doing some other gigs too. Chet needed to work, and occasionally we had better gigs than that. Gavin had such an agenda to portray Chet as some sort of villain. Yes, we did play some [bad paying] gigs but we also played some gigs that paid pretty well. The thing is, that’s all that Chet did, so if there was a fifty-dollar gig, that is what he did, and I did it if I didn’t have anything else that night. I had no complaints about doing a thirty-dollar gig, and Chet was upfront about being sorry it didn’t pay better.

JI: At the same time that you were with Chet Baker, you also performed with Lee Konitz. Would you talk about playing with them at the same time?

HD: It happened because of Strykers, a club on 86th Street, right across the street from where Lee lived. I originally met Lee at Fromkin’s repair shop, and I got to know him because of Chet and at Strykers, and also because of walking our dogs in Central Park. I lived on West 82nd at that point, so it was a natural outgrowth. We talked about music. I never studied with Lee but rehearsing with him was like lessons in a way because he would want to play things very slowly—excruciatingly slowly sometimes—to make sure we were improvising. Are you really thinking of your next note or are you playing on your automatic pilot stuff? I remember Lee accusing me of using my technique too much and my inner reaction was, ‘You want to see technical? I’m no technical [guy].’ He said, “You should be able to play with one finger.”

JI: Lee Konitz trained under Lennie Tristano. Were his expectations for you as a pianist in his band different from other bandleaders you’ve worked with?

HD: There was no expectation that I would play in that style, it was just that Lee had to feel comfortable. It was the same with all the guys I played with, including Chet and Thad. I knew these guys from their records, and I revere them. My idea was can I make these guys comfortable? If they sound good playing with me then I’m probably on the next gig, and that’s really what I wanted. With Lee, I think it was just the thing of really improvising. The thing of slow practice, I think, was from Tristano. The thing of not playing your clichés, of not bringing that technical artillery into it. I certainly could not play like Tristano. I debated about studying with Tristano early on, but I ran into some guys in Staten Island, when I was in the army, that had studied with Tristano and they were cultish. They’d only play for themselves. They’d work as postmen during the day if they had to, they didn’t want to play gigs. I didn’t quite understand that, so I shied away from that. Lennie was available for lessons and I also heard that if you took a lesson with Tristano, that you had to do a day lesson because at night, there wouldn’t be lights. He wouldn’t give a shit. [Laughs] You’d have to make your way in.

JI: You made it to India and Africa with Konitz.

HD: Yeah, traveling with Lee Konitz. [Laughs] His wife Tavia was much more adventurous than Lee. I remember Lee looked so uncomfortable in Africa. Tavia wanted to go out and we went to some small fishing village and he was so uncomfortable. I happen to know a fairly good amount about Southern Indian vocal music, which I’m a real fan of. When we went to India in 1984, we went to a 5-hour vocal concert. I had mentioned my interest in Indian vocal music to a native and he said there was concert of five of the finest vocalists on our one night off. The Indian vocal thing starts out really slow and Lee was really bored, but I was freaking out and bought all these cassettes.

JI: Andy Hamilton, in his 2007 book Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art, describes the kind of fun that you and Konitz had. He quotes Konitz to say, “I had a ‘Keith Jarrett’ routine with Harold Danko. We went into the sounds of moaning, and gestures. We did that one time in Denmark, when Keith and his wife were in the audience. I asked Harold, ‘Should we?’ and we did. I looked over and Keith was kind of laughing.” Do you remember that routine?

HD: [Laughs] I absolutely remember that. It was around Lee’s birthday. They had a cake for him so, Lee could do no wrong, in a way. Keith Jarrett was in the audience and this was my only time of interacting with Keith Jarrett. Actually, I like to use the word intercourse, the real use of the word. So I had my only intercourse with Keith Jarrett, it was amazingly pretty nice. We talked about Bartók’s “Piano Concerto No. 2.” Then, once on stage, Lee asks should we do it, because we’d done this thing where we’d play “All the Things You Are,” and we start moan-ing. That was in our encores. We had a Charlie Parker encore where we’d play two rhythm changes tunes at the same time – “Moose the Mooch” and “Anthropology,” as our tribute to Bird. We played a Tristano tribute, where we’d play free, and then we’d play our Keith Jarrett thing as the final piece, which would last 10 seconds long. And Lee wanted to do it! It was his birthday, so we did it. But the thing is, you know when you get to the punchline, you stop. Right? But this night, Lee carried on, so it got even more uncomfortable. Keith Jarrett was sitting there, maybe nervously laughing, the people were laughing, and we went on for another phrase. This time it was a tiny bit longer – an excurciating four seconds of life. Fortunately Jarrett left before we had a chance to get his real reaction.

JI: You also worked in the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra from 1976-78. How was that ensemble able to get that big, unique sound?

HD: Boy, talk about a vibe. That band, the vibe was just so amazing, it was all-embracing. I just felt I never played anything wrong with Thad, he had such a bigness. With Chet, especially that first time spent with him, I felt very self-conscious. I felt like I was doing shit wrong. With Thad, it was like I’d put my hands down on the piano and Thad would reflect what I played, especially with the quartet. My first gig with Thad and Mel was a quartet with Sam Jones. Wow! That was my introduction to Thad, and then Thad said, [In a deep voice] “We’re looking for somebody for the band.” I knew Thad’s playing from Mingus and Monk, I didn’t know Thad’s writing. Now I get goosebumps [from Thad’s writing]. One of my things now is that I have some Thad Jones charts which I can send out first and then I can play with a band. I listen to some of that stuff now and Thad’s writing is some of the greatest music. What I always felt with Thad is that I’m putting the technicolor into black and white. I’m trying to translate that into my line drawings — that analogy. Thad is just like full technicolor, it’s just amazing what’s going on in the band. The phrases are totally full. Mel was like the Poppa of the band. Thankfully, he gave me the music ahead of time, because if I would have had to sight-read that music on a Monday—no way. Mel was essential to that music, it never sounds the same without him.

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Harold Danko

(Continued from page 11)

JI: Would you share your favorite and worst memory from your time with the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra?

HD: The favorite times were just to hear Thad play, because he was amazing. The times on the bus were all fun. Gregory Herbert used to get into it with Mel, about Mel telling stories about how he’s always the hero. Mel’s thing was whatever story you’d have about how the bus was horrible, Mel would have a story from 1948 about how the band bus had a breakdown. He always had something worse. Nothing you could come up with was worse than what Mel had experienced. Thad was more on his own, but I got to ride in the car with Thad. I’ve got long car rides with Chet and Thad as part of my memory, and nobody else has these. The car rides with Thad where he’d be playing James Brown. Thad loved that stuff. I think the low part was finding out that Gregory Herbert had died. He had left the band and went with Blood, Sweat and Tears. When he died, it was big news. It was on the network news. We were at the Vanguard when it came out and we were just devastated.

JI: You backed a number of high-profile vocalists during your career. In 1978 you toured Japan with Chris Connor. Memories from that time?

HD: Chris was going through some alcohol then. The band was Ed Soph on drums and Ron McClure on bass. It was my first time in Japan. We did a record, which was direct to disc, where you’ve gotten way down the list. At Liza’s level, all the piano players they want are all doing studio work, and they needed somebody to go to Brazil. I did a little rehearsal where I had to play some fast show tunes, and then they said, “We’re going to Brazil next week, do you have a passport? Can you get this music ready by rehearsal Sunday?” So, I got to go to Brazil, and I almost drowned. In fact, Jay Leonhart ended up writing a line in a tune about it. The first day, everyone else was out at the beach and I was just trying to get the music together. After I survived the first concert, I did go to the beach and there were strong waves going out. You weren’t supposed to be in the water, and I was getting carried out, almost at my end, but a guy dragged me back. I just remember the cigarette breath of the guy bringing me in and then collapsing on the beach for a while. But I made the gig that night.

JI: In 1984 you worked with Anita O’Day, another high-profile singer.

HD: I went to Brazil, too, with Anita, which is interesting. Anita was battling whatever her demons were and she was kind of nasty to some of the people in Brazil, and Brazilians are very sweet people. We played in São Paulo at the Maksound Plaza. We came in on separate flights, and she had evidently been unhappy with her flight, and when they presented her with flowers at the beginning of the tour, she gave them right back. We didn’t know that until later, and then it made sense why our hosts were a bit reserved toward us. When I first got called to do a gig with her in New York City, she didn’t have her drummer for a few days. Her drummer was John Poole, who was her drug buddy and a Buddy Rich kind of drummer. Anita’s time was ridiculous, it was amazing. We did the first few gigs without drums and we were stretching out, time-wise. I remember calling Francois Zalacain from Sunnyside Records and saying, ‘Man, Anita sounds so modern, you won’t believe what she’s doing!’ So, Francois comes up and we’re taking these rhythmic liberties, and Anita’s going with it. And then, after one of the sets, we’re back in the dressing room, and she said to me, “I just want to ask you one thing. What the f*ck are you doing out there?” [laughs] And then when John Poole did show up it became more of a metronomic thing, which she was comfortable with. We were doing it [without drums], hopefully keeping good time, but maybe it wasn’t quite there for her. I had been saying that, ‘This was the most modern thing,’ and that ‘We have to record her like this!’ She was really outspoken, and we had some scenes about the way she would do intros, the verses of tunes. I haven’t played with vocalists much since then. Sheila Jordan was one who was really easy to work with. Sheila just loves the music so much; she’d sit on the bandstand and just listen to us. Most of the other experiences I had [with vocalists] were more like show business than music.


“Frank Tiberi, who was the musical guru of a lot of us. Frank had this beautiful, sort of Lester Young/Stan Getz sound and approach, and he knew everyone from Philadelphia, including John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner. He had that content in his playing ... He really had it together, and I think all the people that went through the band ... had their playing undergo a little change from things that he would play that would kind of ‘infect’ everyone’s playing. He really stressed to not be an obvious player, to play deceptively.”

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Sunday, September 1

- Alex Sipiagin & NYU Jazz Ensemble at Blue Note, 11:30 AM and 1:30 PM, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Miss Maybell & The Jazz Age Artists at Fine & Rare, 12:00 PM, 9 E. 37th
- Elizabeth Tamboulian at North Square, 12:30 and 2:15 PM, 103 Waverly Pl.
- YeraSan Trio at Havana Central, 1:00 PM, 151 W. 4th St.
- Miki Yomoya at 55 Bar, 3:00 PM, 55 Christopher.
- Adam Moezina at Edison Rum House, 4:00 PM, 228 W. 47th St.
- Jill McCarron at Jazz Forum, 4:00 and 6:00 PM, 1 Dixon Ln., Tarrytown, NY.
- Duke Ellington Center Big Band: Sacred Sunday at Birdland, 5:30 PM, 315 W. 44th St.
- Vic Juris at 3 at 55 Bar, 6:00 PM, 55 Christopher.
- Sam Weinberg at Downtown Music Gallery, 6:00 PM, 13 Monroe.
- YeraSan Orquesta Charranga at Havana Central, 6:00 PM, 151 W. 4th St.
- So French Cabaret: From Paris with Love at Club Bonafide, 6:30 PM, 212 E. 52nd St.
- Felipe Vargas at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM, 41 Mercer.
- Darren Johnston at Downtown Music Gallery, 7:00 PM, 13 Monroe.
- Bill Stevens at 3 at Tomi Jazz, 7:00 PM, 239 E. 53rd St.
- Sarah Borukhov: An American Chanteuse at Treme, 7:00 PM, 553 Main, Islip, NY.
- Trio da Paz & Friends: Music of Gezit, Jobim & Brazilian Classics at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM, 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Orrin Evans feat. Kevin Eubanks at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM, 116 E. 26th St.
- Richie Vitale at Small’s, 7:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.
- Take 6 at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM, 131 W. 3rd St.
- La Vie en Rose feat, Violette at Club Bonafide, 8:30 PM, 212 E. 52nd St.
- Fat Cat Big Band at Fat Cat, 8:30 PM, 75 Christopher.
- Stephen Santoro Orchestra feat. Michelle Colliler at Swing 46, 8:30 PM, 349 W. 46th St.
- Chris Potter Undergraduate at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM, 178 7th Ave. S.
- Enigma Tango Trio at Zinc Bar, 9:00, 10:00, and 11:00 PM, 82 W. 3rd St.
- Moses Petro at 55 Bar, 9:30 PM, 55 Christopher.
- Ryoji Fukushoro at Tomi Jazz, 9:30 PM, 239 E. 53rd St.
- Bhein Gillece at Small’s, 10:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.
- J. C. Stylles feat. Steve Nelson at Small’s, 10:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.
- David Gibson at Small’s, 1:00 AM, 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, September 2

- Sue Maskalireris at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM, 1065 6th Ave.
- Camila Celin at Fat Cat, 6:00 PM, 75 Christopher.
- Lisa Hoppe at Bar Next Door, 6:30 PM, 129 MacDougal.
- Mark McIntyre Syndicate at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM, 55 Christopher.
- Chris Johannson at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM, 41 Mercer.
- Chico Tainaka at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM, 313 Church.
- Clint Holmes at Birdland, 7:00 PM, 315 W. 44th St.
- Ellingtonia feat. Joy Brown, Vanisha Gould & others at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM, 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Rale Micic at Small’s, 7:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.
- Ferenc Nemeth at Small’s, 7:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.
- Dizzy Gillespie Afro-Latin Experience at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Naama Geiber at Bar Next Door, 8:30 PM, 129 MacDougal.
- Vitaly Golouven at Birdland Theater, 8:30 PM, 315 W. 44th.
- Marcos Valera Group at Fat Cat, 9:00 PM, 75 Christopher.
- Kate Curran & Rogers’ Gallery at Edison Rum House, 9:30 PM, 228 W. 47th St.
- Mike Stern at 55 Bar, 10:00 PM, 55 Christopher.
- Rodney Green/ Jackson Miller at Small’s, 10:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.

Tuesday, September 3

- Sue Maskalireris at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM, 1065 6th Ave.
- Adam Cordero at Bar Next Door, 6:30 PM, 129 MacDougal.
- Ben Monder feat. Tony Malaby at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM, 55 Christopher.
- Behn Gillece Band at Fat Cat, 7:00 PM, 75 Christopher.
- Kelly Green at Flatiron Room, 7:00 PM, 37 W. 20th St.
- Ted Nash feat. Ben Allison at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM, 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Maria Raquel at Dizzy, 7:30 PM, 2nd Ave.
- Newvelle Live: Rufus Reid 3 + Sirius Quartet at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM, 116 E. 27th St.
- Justin Robinson at Small’s, 7:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.
- Brian Charette at Jules Bistro, 7:30 PM, 65 St. Marks Pl.
- Geoff Keezer/ Joe Locke at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM, 163 W.
- Adam Kahan at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM, 313 Church, 10th St.
- Wallace Roney Jr. at Zinc Bar, 7:30 and 9:30 PM, 313 W. 4th St.
- Monty Alexander at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Tsuyoshi Niwa at Tomi Jazz, 8:00 PM, 239 E. 53rd St.
- Carol Maorgan at Bar Next Door, 8:30 PM, 129 MacDougal.
- Dave Liebman/ Ralph Alessi 5 at Birdland, 8:30 and 11:00 PM, 315 W. 44th St.
- Bill Charlap at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM, 178 7th Ave. S.
- Kumbakhin at Fat Cat, 9:00 PM, 75 Christopher.
- Allison Leyton-Brown 3 at Edison Rum House, 9:30 PM, 228 W. 47th St.
- Leni Stern at 55 Bar, 10:00 PM, 55 Christopher.
- Los Hacheros at Django, 10:00 PM, 3rd Ave.
- Vanisha Gould at Mezzrow, 10:30 PM, 163 W, 10th St.
- Abraham Burton 4 at Small’s, 10:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.
- Jinjoo Yoo at Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM, 239 E. 53rd St.
- Bruce Harris at Dizzy’s Club, 11:15 PM, 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Alexi David at Fat Cat, 12:30 PM, 75 Christopher.

Wednesday, September 4

- Sue Maskalireris at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM, 1065 6th Ave.
- Andrew Cheng at Bar Next Door, 6:30 PM, 129 MacDougal.
- K.J. Denhart at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM, 55 Christopher.
- Chris Johannson at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM, 41 Mercer.
- Diego Campo at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM, 313 Church.
- Augie Haas at Birdland Theater, 7:00 and 9:45 PM, 315 W. 44th St.
- Ryan Berg Group at Fat Cat, 7:00 PM, 75 Christopher.
- Tres de Solar at Havana Central, 7:00 PM, 151 W. 44th St.
- Charlie Apicella & Iron City at Shanghai Jazz, 7:00 PM, 24 Main, Madison NJ.
- Frank Lacy’s Tromboniverse at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM, 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Newvelle Live: Tribute to Booker Little and Don Friedman feat. Charles Tolliver & Dave Douglas at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM, 116 E. 27th St.
- Diego Voglino at Jules Bistro, 7:30 PM, 65 St. Marks Pl.
- Geoff Keezer/ Ben Williams at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM, 163 W. 10th St.
- Matt Chernoff 5 at Small’s, 7:30 PM, 183 W. 10th St.
- Frode Gjestad 3 feat. Matthew Shipp at 244 Rehearsal Studio, 8:00 PM, 244 W. 54th.
- Monty Alexander at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM, 131 W. 3rd St.
- Yuto Mitomi 3 at Tomi Jazz, 8:00 PM, 239 E. 53rd St.
- Yerason Trio at Willie’s Steak House, 8:00 PM, 1832 Westchester,
Adam Kahan
Rafael Castillo
Erena Terakubo & Nana Quintet
Dave Liebman/ Ralph Alessi
Bronx.
55 Bar at Bar Next Door, 8:30 PM. 2 6
7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.

Sheila Jordan/ Steve Kuhn at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

Tuesday, September 5

Sue Maskaleris at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.
Erena Terakubo & Nana Quintet at Birdland, 5:30 PM. 315 W. 44th.
Erich Johnson at Bar Next Door, 8:30 PM. 129 MacDougal.
Amy Cervini at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM. 55 Christopher.
Rafael Castillo at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
Adam Kahn at Antique Garage Trumca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church.

Troy Roberts Record Release Party at Birdland Theater, 7:00 and 8:45 PM. 315 W. 44th.
Tomas Janzon at Fat Cat, 7:00 PM. 75 Christopher.
Dan Levinson w/ Kris Tokarski at Shanghai Jazz, 7:00 PM. 24 Main, Madison NJ.
Kazu & Cats at Tomi Jazz, 7:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd.
Shelia Jordan/ Steve Kuhn at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
Cedric Bluman at Jules Bistro, 7:30 PM. 65 St. Marks Pl.
Monty Alexander at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
Dave Liebman/ Ralph Alessi 5 at Birdland, 8:30 and 11:00 PM. 315 W. 44th.
Bill Charlap 3 at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM. 178 7th Ave. S.
Wayne Krantz at 55 Bar, 10:00 PM. 55 Christopher.
Johnny O’Neal at Django, 10:00 PM. 74th Ave.

Saul Rubin Zebbet at Fat Cat, 10:00 PM. 75 Christopher.
Greg Merritt at 3 Tomi Jazz, 10:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd.
Michael Blake at Small’s, 10:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
Bruce Harris at Dizzy’s Club, 11:15 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
Mitzi Jones & The Lab Session at Small’s, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.
Paul Nowinski at Fat Cat, 1:30 AM. 75 Christopher.

Friday, September 6

Emily Braden at 55 Bar, 6:00 PM. 55 Christopher.
Steve Ash at Fat Cat, 6:30 PM. 75 Christopher.
Emilie Surtees: Tribute to Whitney Houston at Club Bonafide, 6:30 PM. 212 E. 52nd.
Jamie Stave at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
Troy Roberts Record Release Party at Birdland Theater, 7:00 and 8:45 PM. 315 W. 44th.

John Pizzarelli: 100 Year Salute to Nat Cole at Jazz Forum, 7:00 and 9:30 PM. 1 Dixon Ln., Tarrytown NY.
Jazz Loft Big Band at Jazz Loft, 7:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.
Francois Wiss at Jules Bistro, 7:00 and 9:30 PM. 65 St. Marks Pl.
Jerry Vivino at Shanghai Jazz, 7:00 PM. 24 Main, Madison NJ.
Akira Ishiguro 3 at Bar Next Door, 7:30, 9:30, and 11:30 PM. 129 MacDougal.
Victor Lewis w/Josh Evans 5 at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
Newvelle Live: Billy Lester at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th St.
Joan Belgrave 3 feat. Sullivan Fortner at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
Monty Alexander at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
King Solomon Hicks at Ginny’s, 8:00 PM. 310 Lenox.
Bill Charlap 3 at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM. 178 7th Ave. S.
Joel Forrest at Knickerbocker Bar, 9:00 PM. 33 University Pl.
Trio Cachimbo at Edison Room House, 9:30 PM. 228 W. 47th.
Swingadelic at Swing 46, 9:30 PM. 349 W. 46th.
Fred Barton’s Broadway Band at 54 Below, 9:45 PM. 254 W. 54th.
Pete & The Master Keys at Django, 10:30 PM. 2 6th Ave.
Dave Gibson Band at Fat Cat, 10:30 PM. 75 Christopher.
Ben Zweig at Mezzrow, 10:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
Alex Sipiagin 5 feat. Chris Potter at Smalls, 10:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
Takenni Nishii at Dizzy’s Club, 10:30 PM. 239 E. 53rd.
Bruce Harris at Dizzy’s Club, 11:15 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
Wallace Roney Jr. at Small’s, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.
Craig Wiser at Fat Cat, 1:30 AM. 75 Christopher.

Saturday, September 7

Marco DiGennaro at Antique Garage, 12:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
Carrie Jackson at Candlelight Lounge, 3:30 PM. 24 Passaic, Trenton NJ.
Avana Lowe at 55 Bar, 6:00 PM. 55 Christopher.
Ken Kobayashi at 3 Tomi Jazz, 6:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd.
Nicki Denner’s Brazilian Piano Trios at Shanghai Jazz, 6:15 and 8:35 PM. 24 Main, Madison NJ.
Kenny Allen Smith at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
Marc Devine at Antique Garage Trumca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church.
Troy Roberts Record Release Party at Birdland Theater, 7:00 and 8:45 PM. 315 W. 44th.
Vanderlei Pereira’s Brazilian Quartet at Fat Cat, 7:00 PM. 75 Christopher.
Etienne Charles Big Band at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
Ed Cherry at Django, 7:30 PM. 2 6th Ave.
Monty Alexander at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
Bill Charlap 3 at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM. 178 7th Ave.
Joel Forrest at Knickerbocker Bar, 9:00 PM. 33 University Pl.
Bushwick Blooze Band at Edison Room House, 9:30 PM. 228 W. 47th.
Stephen Santoro Orchestra feat. Michelle Collier at Swing 46, 9:30 PM. 349 W. 46th.
K. J. Denhert & NY Unit at 55 Bar, 10:00 PM. 55 Christopher.
Raphael D’Lugoff 5 at Fat Cat, 10:00 PM. 75 Christopher.
Binky Grice at Django, 10:30 PM. 2 6th Ave.
Anthony Wonsey at Mezzrow, 10:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
Alex Sipiagin 5 feat. Chris Potter at Small’s, 10:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
Craig Brann at 3 Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd.
Bruce Harris at Dizzy’s Club, 11:15 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

(Continued on page 16)
DIZZY GILLESPIE AFRO-LATIN EXPERIENCE
SEPTEMBER 2

MONTY ALEXANDER
SEPTEMBER 3 - 8

BILLY COBHAM
75TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
SEPTEMBER 10 - 15

A CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE SITUATION
SEPTEMBER 17 - 22

KEYON HARROLD
SEPTEMBER 23 - 25

ERIC KRASNO’S E3 ORGAN TRIO
SEPTEMBER 26 - 29

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TWO SHOWS NIGHTLY 8PM & 10:30PM • FRIDAY & SATURDAY LATE NIGHTS: 12:30AM

Stan Killian at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM. 55 Christopher.

Ryo Sasaki at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church.

America’s Sweethearts at Birdland Theater, 7:00 PM. 315 W. 44th.

Saul Rubin Zebet at Fat Cat, 7:00 PM. 75 Christopher.

Josh Lawrence & Fresh Cut Orchestra feat. Terrell Stafford, Duane Eubanks & others at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

Michelle Coeltrane at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th St.

Andreas Tofteeckmark at Jules Bistro, 7:30 PM. 65 St Marks Pl.

Michelle Lordi feat. Donny McCoil at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.

Steve Nelson at Smalls, 7:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.

Billy Cobham 75th Birthday Celebration at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.

Dave Mosko Band at George St. Ale House, 8:00 PM. 378 George, New Brunswick NJ.

Yuki Shibata at Tomi Jazz, 8:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd.

Tal Yahalom at Bar Next Door, 8:30 PM. 129 MacDougal.

Mike Stem/ Bill Evans Band at Birdland, 8:30 and 11:00 PM. 315 W. 44th.

Bill Charlap at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM. 178 7th Ave. S.

Peter Brainin Latin Jazz Workshop at Fat Cat, 9:00 PM. 75 Christopher.

Matt Parker at Edison Rum House, 9:30 PM. 228 W. 47th.

Jam Session at George St. Ale House, 9:30 PM. 378 George, New Brunswick NJ.

Ben Flocks Album Release Party at 55 Bar, 10:00 PM. 55 Christopher.

Naama Geber at Mezzrow, 10:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.

Frank Lacy Band at Smalls, 10:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.

Kana Miyamoto at Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd.

Ishahl J. Thompson at Dizzy’s Club, 11:15 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

Ari Rothbard at Fat Cat, 12:30 AM. 75 Christopher.

Kuni Mikami at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.

Young at Heart: Those Great Big Bands at Jazz Loft, 1:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.

John Monteleone: The Art of the Guitar at Jazz Loft, 6:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.

Juan Munuza at Bar Next Door, 6:30 PM. 129 MacDougal.

Amanda Khalil Group at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM. 55 Christopher.

Ochion Jewel at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.

Marc Devine at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church.

Manuel Valera 5: Tribute to Ernesto Lecuona at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

Monday, September 9

Kuni Mikami at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.

Johnny O’Neal at Fat Cat, 6:00 PM. 75 Christopher.

Leoneile Scheuble 3 at Shanghai Jazz, 6:00 PM. 24 Main, Madison NJ.

Nick Marzian 3 at Bar Next Door, 6:30 PM. 129 MacDougal.

Jim Ridl at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM. 55 Christopher.

Alexandra Riel off at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.

Melanie Marod at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church.

Miggy Augmented Orchestra at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

FONT: Samantha Boshnack’s Seismic Belt/ John Raymond’s Real Jiim Ridl

Wednesday, September 11

Kuni Mikami at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.

Young at Heart: Those Great Big Bands at Jazz Loft, 1:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.

John Monteleone: The Art of the Guitar at Jazz Loft, 6:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.

Juan Munuza at Bar Next Door, 6:30 PM. 129 MacDougal.

Amanda Khalil Group at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM. 55 Christopher.

Ochion Jewel at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.

Marc Devine at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church.

Manuel Valera 5: Tribute to Ernesto Lecuona at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

Jeb Patton 3 at Django, 7:30 PM. 2 8th Ave.

Harleh Raghavan: Savannah Harris at Jazz Gallery, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 1160 Broadway.

Allison Miller’s Boom Tic Boom at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 1160 E. 27th St.

Noe Socha 3 at Jules Bistro, 7:30 PM. 65 St. Marks Pl.

Tyler Blanton 3 at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.

Ben Winkelman 3 at Smalls, 7:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.

Bill Charlap at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM. 178 7th Ave. S.

Harold Mabern 3 at Fat Cat, 9:00 PM. 75 Christopher.

Gerard McDowell 2 at Knickerbocker Bar, 9:00 PM. 33 University Pl.

Dan Weiss Group at Birdland, 8:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.

Keri Johnsmier at Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd.

Ishahl J. Thompson 4 at Dizzy’s Club, 11:15 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

Ned Good at Fat Cat, 12:30 AM. 75 Christopher.

Julius Rodriguez 3 at Smalls, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.

(Continued on page 17)
Thursday, September 12

- Kuni Kamiki at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.
- Charles Blenzinger at Birdland, 5:30 PM. 315 W. 44th St.
- Yuma Usakusa at Bar Next Door, 6:30 PM. 129 MacDougal St.
- Nicole Zuraitis at 55 Bar, 7:00 PM. 55 Christopher
- Dimrit Landrain at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer
- Melanie Marot at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church
- Larry Fuller at Birdland Theater, 7:00 and 9:45 PM. 315 W. 44th St.
- La Descarga at Fat Cat, 7:00 PM. 75 Christopher
- David Love at Tomi Jazz, 7:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Desmond White 4 + Guests at Jazz Gallery, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 1160 Broadway
- John Monteleone: The Art of the Guitar at Jazz Loft, 7:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.
- Corcoran Holt at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10
- Javier Niero at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 PM. 26 Ave.
- Miguel Zenón: Music of Ismael Rivera at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th St.
- Rick Germanson 2 at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
- Karlea Lynne at Minton’s, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 206 W. 11th St.
- Rachel Z. Hakim: Inventions and Dimensions at Small’s, 7:30 PM. 163 W. 11th St.
- CJUF: Jeanie Gies at Stangl Factory, 7:30 PM. 4 Stangl Rd, Flemington NJ.
- Marius Duboule at Tomi Jazz, 7:30 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Emilio Modesto at 4 Zinc Bar, 7:30 and 9:00 PM. 82 W. 3rd St.
- Lawrence Anthony & Soul Bean at BeanRunner, 8:00 PM. 201 S. Division, Peekskill NY.
- Billy Cobham 75th Birthday Celebration at Blue Note, 8:00 and 10:30 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Russell Brunson at Ginny’s, 8:00 PM. 310 Lenox Ave.
- LCJO w/ Wynton Marsalis: South African Songbook at Rose Theater, Lincoln Center, 8:00 PM. Broadway @ 60th St.
- Bill Ware & Club Bird All-Stars at the Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM. 178 7th Ave. S.
- Bill McCarron at Knickerbocker Bar, 9:00 PM. 30 University Pl.
- CJUF: Winard Harper at Stangl Factory, 9:00 PM. 4 Stangl Rd, Flemington NJ.
- Nadine Simmons at Edison Rum House, 9:30 PM. 228 W. 47th St.
- George Gee Swing Dance Band at Swing Dance, 9:30 PM. 349 W. 46th St.
- Leslie Harrison at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 PM. 26 Ave.
- Jason Marshall Band at Fat Cat, 10:30 PM. 75 Christopher
- Dan Aran at Mezzrow, 10:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
- John Feddick at Small’s, 10:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Sharp Tree at Tomi Jazz, 10:30 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Isaiah J. Thompson at Dizzy’s Club, 11:15 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Kojo Odu Roney at Blue Note, 12:30 AM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Corey Wallace Dublet at Small’s, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Nick Hempton at Fat Cat, 1:30 AM. 75 Christopher.

Saturday, September 14

- Hilton Schilder/ Bokani Dyer at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Nick Millevoi at Greenwich House, 7:30 PM. 41 Barrow.
- Horace Sanders at Iridium, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 165th Broadway
- Miguel Zenón: Music of Ismael Rivera at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 116 E. 27th St.
- Rick Germanson 2 at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
- Rachel Z. Hakim: Inventions and Dimensions at Small’s, 7:30 PM. 163 W. 11th St.
- Kirk Knutkie at 344 Rehearsal Studio, 8:00 PM. 244 W. 54th St.
- Carlos Barbosa-Lima/Larry Del Casale at BeanRunner, 8:00 PM. 201 S. Division, Peekskill NY.
- Billy Cobham 75th Birthday Celebration at Blue Note, 8:00 PM. 310 Lenox Ave.
- Natu Camara at Ginny’s, 8:00 PM. 310 Lenox.
- LCJO w/ Wynton Marsalis: South African Songbook at Rose Theater, Lincoln Center, 8:00 PM. Broadway @ 60th St.
- Mr. Gone: Music of Weather Report at Maureen’s Jazz Cellar, 8:00 and 9:30 PM. 2 N. Broadway, Nyack NY.
- Daniel Bennett Group at Tomi Jazz, 8:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Mike Stern/ Bill Evans Band at Birdland, 8:30 and 11:00 PM. 315 W. 44th St.
- Bill Charlap at Village Vanguard, 8:30 and 10:30 PM. 178 7th Ave. S.
- Jon-Erik Kellso feat. Rossano Sportiello at Birdland, 8:30 PM. 313 Church.
- Andrea Balducci at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church.
- Ed Palermo Big Band at Iridium, 7:00 PM. 1650 Broadway.
- Oliver Lake Big Band at Dizzy’s Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Matt Wenckfest at Fat Cat, 9:00 PM. 75 Christopher.
- Tsuyoshi Yamamoto at Tomi Jazz, 9:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Nick Hempton at Small’s, 10:30 PM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Jam Session at Small’s, 1:30 AM. 183 W. 10th St.

Monday, September 16

- Yuka Akaiwa at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.
- Kavita Shah at 55 Bar, 6:00 PM. 55 Christopher.
- Ben Patterson 2 at Fat Cat, 6:00 PM. 75 Christopher.
- Lisa Hoppe 3 at Bar Next Door, 8:30 PM. 129 MacDougal St.
- Ochion Jewel at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
- Andrea Balducci at Antique Garage Tribeca, 7:00 PM. 313 Church.
- Ed Palermo Big Band at Iridium, 7:00 PM. 1650 Broadway.
- Lou Caputo & Company at Edison Rum House, 9:30 PM. 228 W. 47th St.
- Mike Stern 4 at Bar Next Door, 10:00 PM. 55 Christopher.
- Takaaki Otomo 2 at Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.

Tuesday, September 17

- Yuka Akaiwa at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.
- Kate Curran 3 at Fine & Rare, 6:00 PM. 9 E. 37th St.
- Adam Cordero 3 at Bar Next Door, 6:30 PM. 129 MacDougal St.
- Takaaki Otomo at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.

...among human beings jealousy ranks distinctly as a weakness; a trademark of small minds; a property even the smallest is ashamed of; and when accused of its possession will lightly deny it and resent the accusation as an insult." -Mark Twain
Wednesday, September 18

- Yuka Alkawa at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.
- Arturo O'Farrill & Harlem Dance Company at Birdland Theater, 7:30 PM. 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride at Dizzy's Club, 7:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

Thursday, September 19

- Yuka Alkawa at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.
- Arturo O'Farrill & Harlem Dance Company at Birdland Theater, 7:30 PM. 315 W. 44th St.
- Christian McBride at Dizzy's Club, 7:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.

Friday, September 20

- Yuka Alkawa at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.
- Gabriela Anders at 55 Bar, 6:00 PM. 55 Christopher St.
- Theory Conspiracy at Cafe, 6:00 PM. 75 Christopher St.
- Alex Collins at Duke Ellington, 8:30 PM. 76 Albany, New Brunswick NJ.
- Lee Tomboulian at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
- Carol Sloane at Birdland Theater, 7:00 PM. 315 W. 44th St.
- Freddie Hendrix 5 at Jazz Forum, 7:00 and 9:30 PM. 1 Dison Ln., Tarrytown NY.
- Darrell Smith 3 at Dizzy's Club, 9:00 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Reid Taylor at Fat Cat, 1:30 AM. 75 Christopher St.

Saturday, September 21

- Marco DiGennaro at Antique Garage, 12:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
- The Queen's Cartoonists at Blue Note, 12:00 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Frank Catalano at Candlelight Lounge, 3:30 PM. 22 Passacon, Trenton NJ.
- Akihoro Yamamoto at 3 Tomi Jazz, 8:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- choir Takai at Antique Garage, 7:00 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Marc Devine at Antique Garage, 10:30 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Rodney Whitaker at Smalls, 10:30 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Takenori Nishii at 3 Tomi Jazz, 10:30 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Julian Lee at Dizzy's Club, 11:15 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Harvey Valdes at Greenwich House, 7:30 PM. 41 Barrow St.
- Paul Cornish Group at Jazz at Lincoln Center, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 1160 Broadway.
- Houston Person at 5 Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 116 W. 3rd St.
- Ken Pepolowski 3 feat. Rossano Sportiello at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM. 315 W. 44th St.
- Joy Hanson at Mintons, 7:30 and 9:00 PM. 216 W. 11th St.
- Sebastian Amman/Twig/Timo Vollbrecht at Owls Music Bar, 7:00 PM. 183 W. 44th St.
- Richard Hazard at 3 Smalls, 8:00 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Yuto Kanazawa at 3 Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Eva Reindl at 3 Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Julian Lee at Dizzy's Club, 1:00 AM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Reindl Taylor at Blue Note, 7:30 AM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Brooklyn Circle at Smalls, 1:00 AM. 183 W. 10th St.
- Greg Glassman at Fat Cat, 1:30 AM. 75 Christopher St.
Tuesday, September 24

- Honey Smith at Edison Rum House, 9:30 PM. 228 W. 46th St.
- Mike Stern 4 at 55 Bar, 10:00 PM. 55 Christopher St.
- Joe Farnsworth 4 at Smalls, 10:30 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Richard Thai at Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.

Friday, September 27

- Roy Eaton at Bryant Park, 12:30 PM. 1065 6th Ave.
- HJF: VIP Festival Reception at Jazz Loft, 8:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.
- J. J. Sanseverino & Groove Messengers at Jazz Loft, 7:30 and 9:30 PM.
- Miki Yokoyama 3 at Edison Rum House, 9:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.

Saturday, September 28

- Unso Ho at Antigone Garage, 12:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
- HJF: Frank Vignola/ Houston Person at Jazz Loft, 1:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.
- Matt Parrish at Candlelight Lounge, 3:30 PM. 228 W. 46th St.
- HJF: Champion Fulton 4 at Jazz Loft, 4:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.
- Calvin & The Critters at Fiftion Room, 5:30 PM. 37 W. 26th St.
- String Theory at Tomi Jazz, 6:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
- Nilsson Matta's Brazilian Quartet at Shanghai Jazz, 6:15 and 8:35 PM. 214 W. 30th St.
- Nuboku Kiyi at Antigone Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
- Adam Kahan at Antigone Garage, 7:00 PM. 313 Church St.
- Javon Jackson 4: Celebrating John Coltrane at Jazz Loft, 7:00 and 9:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.

Sunday, September 29

- Sony Holland at Blue Note, 11:30 AM and 1:30 PM. 131 W. 3rd St.
- Miss Jubilee & The Jazz Age Artists at Fine & Rare, 12:00 PM. 9 E. 37th St.
- HJF: Houston Person 4 at Jazz Loft, 12:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.
- Alex T. Cole/Barr Wallenstein: A Summer Night in Brazil (Jazz and Poetry) at BeanRunner, 4:00 PM. 201 S. Division, Peekskill NY.
- HJF: Nikki Parrott 3 at Jazz Loft, 3:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.
- George Gee Orchestra at Birdland, 5:30 PM. 315 W. 44th St.
- Benny Golson at Antigone Garage, 7:00 PM. 41 Mercer.
- Epiphany Kelly & David Weckler at Village Vanguard, 9:00 PM. 275 Christian, Stony Brook NY.
- Jam Session at Treme, 7:00 PM. 553 Main, Islip NY.
- Clarice Assaad: Viva Brasil at Dizzy's Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Joey DeFrancesco 3 at Jazz Standard, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.

Monday, September 30

- Juan Andres Ospina Big Band at Dizzy's Club, 7:30 and 9:30 PM. 10 Columbus Cir. #10.
- Yuval Aharil 3 at Mezzrow, 7:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
- Lauren Lee 3 at Bar Next Door, 8:00 PM. 129 MacDougal.
- Eric Krasno 3 at Birdland, 8:30 and 10:30 PM. 313 W. 44th St.
- Lucien Garnett at Village Rum House, 9:30 PM. 228 W. 47th St.
- Joel Frank at Smalls, 10:30 PM. 163 W. 10th St.
- Kiyoko Sparrow at Tomi Jazz, 11:00 PM. 239 E. 53rd St.
“With Thad, it was like I’d put my hands down on the piano and Thad would reflect what I played, especially with the quartet.

My first gig with Thad and Mel was a quartet with Sam Jones. Wow! That was my introduction to Thad, and then Thad said, [In a deep voice] ‘We’re looking for somebody for the band.’ I knew Thad’s playing from Mingus and Monk, I didn’t know Thad’s writing. Now I get goose-bumps [from Thad’s writing].”

me through junior high.’ [Laughs] I don’t know. I said the most inane thing, and she said, “You’re just trying to flatter a middle-aged lady.” And I looked at her, right in the eye, and said, ‘No way.’ So, anyway, Mel’s still standing there with me and [her husband/actor] Bobby Troup. She said to Mel and me, “Mel and Harold, why don’t you come over while you’re here?” And Mel said, “No, my niece is here,” and I’m thinking, ‘Mel! Don’t! This is it!’ So, Julie London looks at me and says, “Well, Harold, can you make it?” I might still have this somewhere; she wrote down on a napkin “Julie” and her number. And the guys in the band were just rolling because I’m like in the sky. The next day comes and I’m debating to call or not. We had a few days off, and I finally call. It was after a day or so, and it was Bobby Troup that answers the phone. I say, ‘This is Harold D-D-D-Danko, piano, ah, ah, dahl, dah…’ and he said, “You probably want to talk to Julie.” So, she said, “Harold, come over.” I said, ‘Well, I don’t have a car.’ So, Bobby Troup comes and gets me at the hotel and drives me up to wherever they lived, and there was Julie London at home. Her daughter was taking driving lessons and I went out and did a drive with her daughter while Julie cooked some fettuccini. So, I had fettuccini with Julie London and Bobby Troup, and for days, it was like the Jane Fonda thing, I was just like – ‘Ahhhh.’ I was on the bus [dazed] and the guys said, “You’re missing Julie, aren’t you?” It became this band joke.

JII: Gerry Mulligan had you work in his quartet and big band between 1980-’88.

HD: He had the quartet some nights and then the big band, just like Thad and Mel. The difference with Gerry was that Gerry did the same music [in both settings]. Usually, when Thad did a quartet gig, he would do standards, not his own music. But with Gerry, we’d do quartet versions of his tunes because he just wanted to play his music. The professionalism of what he did as a composer and as a presenter of his own music was very influential. He had slow tunes, he had bossa novas, and once in a while he’d do a Duke Ellington tune, but he was out there to do his own music. He was much more complex than the other guys I worked for. He left high school, but he was very self-educated, very well read, and kind of protective in a certain kind of way of his intellect because he didn’t have the advantage of certain things. At first, I didn’t know if he liked the way I played or not, but then he had a Heineken or two one night, because he wasn’t supposed to drink at that point, and he told me how much he loved my playing. And then I was happy. The presentation of his music was really important to him, even to the point that he was wearing tuxes in those days. I remember once I didn’t have my tie on and he kind of [scolded] me. But I understand it in a way, he had gotten to the point that if he played the biggest venue in that town, he didn’t want to come back and play a club. That’s the way his career was going, plus he was doing things with symphonies. He respected the music and himself. The band guys had fun with it at the time because we thought it was pretentious, but looking back at it, I can understand it. He wanted it to be right.

JII: You’ve made numerous fine recordings as a leader, many of which are built around a concept. Shorter by Two [1984] is a duet with Kirk Lightsey covering Wayne Shorter tunes, After the Rain [1994] is a solo piano celebration of John Coltrane, The Feeling of Jazz [1996] is a remake of the Duke Ellington - John Coltrane 1963 Impulse! album collaboration, …This Isn’t Maybe [1998] is a tribute to Chet Baker, and Prestigious [2001] is tribute to Eric Dolphy. Concept projects are common these days and help win Grammy Awards. What attracted you to producing concept albums before they became popular?

HD: I got to know [record producer/musician] Teo [Macero]. I did a lot of sessions for him and that clarified my own thinking [of making albums]. Like I said, I’m a three-minute guy, but I’m also an album guy. Teo’s thing was to get the product, that’s what he was doing with Miles and the others. If Columbia needed two albums a year, then it was Teo’s responsibility to deal with that and present the product. There were two sides to each LP and getting to know Teo, I got to know my own thing, like the concept of an album. I think Teo said on the day that he did Dave Brubeck’s Time Out, he also did a Johnny Mathis record! Teo’s pressure was to make something out of the sessions and put it in order. So I was attracted to something that had a concept to it, whether it was stated or not. Later on, I put it together that Teo was also responsible for my 20-minute attention span, [the length of an album side], and then I needed to take a break. Or maybe I needed to flip the side. But the CD concept, Teo hated when people would put out the extra takes. He said, “Gil Evans would be rolling over in his grave! He didn’t want this shit out! He wanted the one that I picked, that was my job!” He was down August-September 2019 ● Jazz Inside Magazine ● www.JazzInsideMagazine.com
Harold Danko

(Continued from page 22)

on Bob Belden when Bob re-did Bitches Brew. Teo said, “Bitches Brew was my thing! I put that together. That’s what they wanted!” When I do an album, I think about it a lot. Like why would a person want to buy a Harold Danko record?

JI: You also released Hinesight, a 2005 album that covered twelve Earl Hines compositions. What’s your connection with Earl Hines?

HD: I saw Earl Hines at the 1977 Nice Jazz Festival and it changed my life. I thought it was the freest stuff I’d ever seen in my life. It was “Tea for Two,” but it was so free. When his 100th anniversary of his birth, which is disputed, came and nobody was saying anything, that’s when I said somebody’s got to do something. So, I had my own 100th anniversary festival at my house. I played all my Earl Hines records. He was really avant-garde, in a way. Yeah, the Earl Hines thing, I’m pretty passionate about Earl Hines. I think he’s so important, and I turned as many students on to him as I could, but some of them just didn’t get it. He’s improvising. That’s what I love about him, that and his ideas about presentation.

JI: Lately, you’ve been concentrating on your own compositions, partly because you don’t feel the same degree of freedom when you play other people’s music. Why do you feel so tethered to the original work of others?

HD: There’s a certain point of disrespect. Sometimes I’ll hear somebody’s version of something, and I’ll think they haven’t done their homework on it, and they’re just playing “creatively”. Well, it doesn’t sound right. What was the context of that tune? Were there words to that? I’m always saying that I like jazz instrumental tunes more because the standards, sometimes the words don’t connect with me. With my own tunes, I can do them however I want. It’s my stuff, so I don’t have to feel particularly respectful. I also find that I was ahead of myself twenty to thirty years ago as a composer, and then had to learn to improvise on those things.

JI: How does it make you feel when you hear someone improvising on one of your own compositions?

HD: Anyone playing my music, I would love. I keep joking that since Herbie Hancock’s not playing my music, I better be the best I can. When I think of a young Herbie playing on that early Wayne Shorter music, Herbie’s almost sight reading that music, and he’s 23-years-old! I say to students that, ‘I’m still pissed off at the young Herbie Hancock for how mature he was. It’s like he was playing those tunes for years, and I’m not that way with my own music. It’s taken me a longer time in my own music to arrive at a place where I think, ‘Wow, I’m playing this as good as anyone’s gonna play this.’ If anyone’s willing to give my music a shot, I’d be thrilled. If I could get any kind of royalties, even if it was a horrible version of anything, I’d be just so grateful to go out and eat that night! [Laughs]

JI: You’ve been a prolific composer. Would you name five of your pieces that you feel are most deserving of wider attention?

HD: “Tidal Breeze” has been my hit. I wrote that away from the piano. I lucked out, I really did. I think one of the other pieces would be “Nightscapes,” which is an extended suite. It’s my only attempt at stringing together something longer. It is a suite, so there are different pieces, but there are things that recur and bind it together. I managed to use some Stravinsky “Rite of Spring” stuff in “Omniperception”, “Notzenytes” and “Rhythm’s Child”. “Waiting Time” is a piece I still practice myself that informs me of a lot of things. I wrote a piece called “For Bud,” which is a tribute to Bud Powell in a way, which has a lot of Jackie McLean-ish stuff in it, too. I’m not a New York guy, but when I hear Jackie McLean, I hear that sound, and, yeah, I like that. I got to teach at Hartt College for a while and got to know Jackie a bit but never got to play with him. “To Start Again,” I keep playing that one. There are some melodic things like “Alone But Not Forgotten,” which is a piece where I use some space that creates a stillness, which I don’t hear much of today. I’m very proud of my still moment in “Alone But Not Forgotten,” and I’ve used that in improvising. As a composer, I try to invent these environments where you can stretch out. When people say, “Why don’t you play free?” I’d love to play free all the time, but I think my tunes, and the way that I can approach them, give me something to rely on, because I don’t know that I’m going to be that interesting playing totally free for 19 minutes.

JI: A good part of your career has been spent as an educator. You’ve gone from teaching out of your New York City apartment, while playing with Chet Baker to pay rent, to teaching at the Manhattan School of music, and then at Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York for nineteen years. I ran across a 1977 DownBeat interview of yours that noted you had gotten an education degree in college but had no plans to teach. You said, “I cannot think, okay, that’s a four-year lesson and I hope I never have to use the degree.” So, what happened?

HD: That was about public school student teaching and I just couldn’t do that. It wasn’t the teaching, so much, it was the teaching in that institutional framework. Even at Eastman, there’s certain institutional things. The kids had to have a degree, and there’s pressure like crazy. I’m a generous grader. Like Jaki Byard used to say, “If you’re studying jazz, you get an A.” [Laughs]

JI: As a featured columnist in Keyboard Magazine for more than five years, you detailed many of your compositional and improvisational processes. Would you give a brief overview of what you do that is unique?

HD: When I’ve been complimented, there’s a kind of a harmonic thing that I think I engage the listener in. I’m trying to create this environment for five or seven minutes with each composition, to create different templates to be able to have a successful five or seven minutes. I’ve thought about it, a lot. I’ve composed country and western music and a very unsuccessful Broadway show [A Matter of Opinion], so I’ve had some training in the craft of it. I really appreciate the songwriting craft.

JI: You’re an admitted linguistics buff. Part of your time at Eastman was spent investigating the mystery and complexity of how music and language meet. What did you learn and what’s to be done with that knowledge?

HD: At first, I was pretty naive. I have real affinity for phonetics and phonology but didn’t know that’s what I liked until I met Joyce McDonough, a colleague from the linguistics department at the University of Rochester. I met Joyce on line at one of the provost’s lunches. ‘Oh, you’re a linguist? I’m an amateur linguist,’ I said. I told her what books I had and that I wasn’t interested in semantics, just the sounds of people talking in any language, and she said, “It sounds like you’re an intonational and metric phonologist.” After that, I studied in the linguistics department for a year. My naïve idea at the beginning was that something in Louis Armstrong’s speech patterns would resemble his opening statement on “West End Blues,” but we didn’t find that. Joyce and I focused on Jelly Roll Morton as well as Louis Armstrong, because they were active prior to the advent of formal jazz education, and they’re both from New Orleans. We looked into their storytelling and Louis Armstrong’s spoken intros, and Jelly Roll’s recordings where he’s telling his stories and then goes into songs. There’s got to be some correlation there, but our study did not reach any real conclusion. Even so, it was a very interesting journey. Lewis Porter asked me what I got out of this and I said, ‘I don’t know, but I try not to play just eighth notes because that’s not the way language goes.’ And that’s the beauty of certain free jazz, where some of the players may not be musically advanced but can create conversations. A squawk on a saxophone could mimic
the way someone talks - maybe the way crazy people talk, and it communicates somehow. There are avenues of research and collaboration that could be done with this that would take another lifetime, and I just don’t have the scholarly nerdiness to go about it.

JI: Is it true that you retired from Eastman in 2017 after discovering you had a small pension from the New York Musicians Union from your years of playing cocktail piano in hotels?

HD: Which practically almost covers my health insurance, so at that point, I figured I could balance it all. Also, I’d run the whole institutional thing. I’m grateful to Eastman and the University of Rochester for many, many things, but I’d seen changes in the students. I was always engaged in albums, and it became less charming for me to tell students, because they just didn’t relate, like how when that new Miles record came out, my friend twelve miles away had it, I’d go to his house to listen to that new Miles record and try to get him to lend it to me because I’d brought the new Joe Henderson record. Now music is on Spotify, but how do you know you’re listening to the best tracks? My scratchy Louis Armstrong albums seemed to be less relevant. It was time. I’d had a good run.

JI: There’s a few more experiences to touch on. You got to spend some time over the years with famed Columbia Records producer/musician/composer Teo Macero.

HD: I met him on a concert at Cooper Union I did with Lee Konitz and Teo’s music was being played on it. At first we talked about classical music and Teo wanted me to play some of his classical music. Teo said I could improvise with it, but you really couldn’t. He had me do a record date of his music which totally failed. He said, “I thought you could read!” Teo was very animated. In the course of that, he told me how many Miles sessions had failed, so I guess my thing was not as frustrating. For me, I was just totally embarrassed. I thought he would never call me, but we had a pretty long run. I’m on quite a few of his own records. I did some pretty good playing for him. Teo was pretty well off and would use his money to hire top musicians to play music, and one time some things that Teddy Charles and I played free, ended up on a recording of his with the London Philharmonic. Lee Konitz said Teo always used to pay scale. You’d do the record date, and then Teo could use it any way he wanted. He was a master splicer. Lee said, “I was in Japan once and I heard myself on a commercial!” Well, you got paid for it. You got scale. Teo would do these dates with people like [Dave] Liebman and Lew Soloff, and some of the playing is really inspired, but he wanted it to stay loose. The final one I did with him was when I was at Eastman. He wanted to do a tribute to Monk, so he sent me his Monk inspired music, which, since I was living in Rochester, I really got a chance to prepare. Usually, the stuff he’d send me when I lived in New York City, I’d have no time to prepare for. This Monk thing I really prepared so I got to New York City and started playing, and he said, “Danko, what are you doing?” I said I had the chance to look at the music, and he said, “No!” So, I failed him early-on on his own music, needing to get it more precise, and then I really did my homework on his Monk music, and that wasn’t what he wanted. He was about really improvising in the studio and then he would put it together or use it some way. He was a pretty creative character.

JI: What was your experience working for NBC’s Another World soap opera?

HD: I did about 15 episodes. I got “Tidal Breeze” on as background music and got some nice ASCAP credits. There was no musical director, so at first when I played a little thing, like I played “Body and Soul,” and then they asked me what I was gonna play in the next scene, I said, “Does it matter? I’ll be playing “Tidal Breeze.”” At the time, “Tidal Breeze” was the only thing I had the publishing on. So, I kept doing versions of “Tidal Breeze.” Once I remember getting a check for four grand. [laughs] Yeah, I was the pianist on Another World and I was the accompanist to the character Melissa, who was a singer. She, actress Taro Meyer, was writing little vignettes of her own, and she was making even more money because her’s were featured, mine were background. As I remember, I think the Stan Getz guys, including Billy Hart and Andy LaVerne, were into watching Another World, because on the road you might get into soap operas. So when I got a chance to do Another World, to do the show with Melissa, it was kind of a big deal, but the main thing for me was getting “Tidal Breeze” on national TV.

“[Continued on page 26]
my own gig, kind of thing. But it was just an amazing vibe. To run into people, and then that third set, just to know who was in that audience, especially late. I think Flanagan was in the audience for me when I first played. I’d see Lightsey in there commanding everyone. Celebrities could be in there. I’m glad I at least had a couple shots at it.

**JI:** You met Chick Corea early on, while he was with Miles Davis, and he’s played an important role in your life. Would you talk a bit about that?

**HD:** Chick was his own research guy, as far as the piano and the things he was investigating — Ravel and whatever. When I got a chance to hang out with him I saw how he did things, but he stressed that two people could look at the same source material and come away with completely different stuff, and that meant a lot to me. That’s it, I don’t have to play like this guy. He also introduced me to Scientology, which I studied. I was always interested in the study aspects of it. It had some amazing things about misunderstood words, and things that were really interesting to me and provided a logical way to approach learning. Lee Konitz was also involved with Scientology. The institutional thing of it was another thing. I lapsed as a Catholic and, I guess, I lapsed as a Scientist. [Laughs] Chick hasn’t.

**JI:** You mentioned that you are not a cell phone or technology fan. Are you not on the Internet or is it only the cell phone that you avoid?

**HD:** Email, I’m comfortable with. I don’t have a cell phone because I had one for a while and I didn’t call anyone. I called my son on his birthday, I keep reminding him of that. My wife didn’t call anyone. I called my son on his birthday because I had one for a while and I Email, I’m comfortable with. I don’t have HD:

“I keep joking that since Herbie Hancock’s not playing my music, I better be the best I can. When I think of a young Herbie playing on that early Wayne Shorter music, Herbie’s almost sight reading that music, and he’s 23-years-old!”

**Frank Tiberi** (mult-instruments/leader of the Woody Herman Orchestra) said: “It is indeed a pleasure to be able to say some great things about Harold. One thing is that he gave me the opportunity to record on his [1979, Dreamstreet] record session called Coincidence. I had recorded many sessions with the Woody Herman band, but this was the first time that I was invited to record as a jazz soloist with a small group. Not only that, Harold also gave me the opportunity to expose myself on the jazz bass. Playing his selection of tunes was very enjoyable. The one I particularly enjoyed the most was his composition “Tidal Breeze.” Its construction of chords was comfortable and gave a lot of space that allowed one to really apply their own concept. I have my students play that tune.”

**JI:** Perhaps, in response to his comment about you, you’ll say something about how you came to compose “Tidal Breeze?”

**HD:** I composed that when I first saw the Atlantic Ocean. I actually composed the two-horn part away from the piano and it worked. It’s kind of a natural tune. Some people have said it’s a combination of “Killer Joe” and “Well, You Needn’t,” which it kind of is in a way. It has a kind of backward Elvin kind of feel to the rhythms to it, and that’s what I felt when I wrote it, like I was writing something on the Speak No Evil – Wayne Shorter- Elvin-y sort of thing.

**Kirk Knuffke** (trumpet) asked: “I’m curious to hear more about Thad Jones. People talk about the big band and the great writing, but I’d like to know more about Thad, the musician. He is very underrated in that regard, in my estimation.”

**HD:** If you go back to the stuff he did with Mingus early on — Mingus used to praise Thad. I get goosebumps thinking about the solo Thad played on Mingus’ “What Is This Thing Called Love.” He plays some stuff that is startling, trumpet-wise it’s startling, and idea-wise. It’s like Dizzy Gillespie, who he revered, but he had his own special thing. I’m grateful that I knew his playing well enough that he was comfortable enough with me for his band. As I said, I could put down anything and Thad would reflect what I played and take it somewhere else.

**Laszlo Gardony** (piano) asked: “You were the first artist on Sunnyside and a good friend of Francois [Zalacain]. I joined the label ten years later. Could you tell me about those early years?”

**HD:** Francois was a fan of the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis band. He came to hear us in Nice and became good friends with both me and Rufus [Reid]. He and his wife were both at IBM [Armonk, New York] and he said, “Harold, one day I start a record company and you’re the first record.” I said, ‘Yeah Francois, great,’ and then Francois called me one day and said, “Harold, we do the record, you and Rufus.” And we did Mirth Song. The first song at the session was “In Walked Bud.” We get done with it and Francois is sitting on the floor and he clapped. His own record! He was so naïve, he actually clapped, and we told him we can’t have that on the record. He was very excited about our projects. I recommended Kirk because he asked me who we should have on the label. I said get Kirk Lightsey, get Andy Bey. Andy Bey didn’t want to do it, he had some other thing, but Kirk went for it. That’s the way
we started the record label.

Laszlo Gardony also asked: “Do you feel that mainstream jazz lost its importance today and “anything goes” took over the scene? If you were to write a curriculum of jazz education what would be your emphasis?”

HD: I think just what I was doing. There’s what I call the “common practice” period of jazz. The common practice of classical music starts with Bach and goes into the early Romantic era. The common practice of jazz is the swing and bebop period – it’s swing and standard tunes through some Charlie Parker language. I emphasize the common practice period with the understanding that it could be less relevant to certain students than some things that have happened since that time. I think you have to have that grounding to understand where a lot of music came from, and the offshoots from that.

Nils Winther (SteepleChase label founder) asked: “How did our collaboration regarding your quartet came about?”

HD: He heard the demo, he liked it, but he wanted to record Rich first, which was totally okay with me. Once again, he showed interest and actually followed through.

Dick Oatts (saxophone) asked: “How did you develop your amazing orchestrational approach to comping on piano?”

HD: If I’m comfortable with what the player is playing, I feel I can get up, in, and around it. With Oatts, I know he can burn, so with Oatts, I’m trying to further that burn, to get inside that. Rich Perry’s gonna maybe leave me some more opportunities to throw something in. I really listen and try to know that that’s the agenda. With somebody like Thad Jones, they know what they’re doing, they’re harmonically informed, then it’s going to be easy. It’s the same with Dick and other players I like to play with.

Dick Oatts also asked: “You are always in the moment, and anything can happen. How and when did you start to trust yourself in this area?”

HD: Wow. I don’t know any other way, I’m pretty naïve in a certain way. That’s kind of what I know how to do. I try to bring that with me in life, try to go with what’s there. You do the best you can with it. Sometimes, when your colleagues are more interesting, life becomes more interesting. If the musicians are interesting, and have the same background, then it becomes easy. I’ve some moments when it’s not quite so easy, both in life and in music.

Dick Hyman (piano) said: “I greatly admire your beautiful playing and wide interests, and would like you to know that life goes on, and in some ways you appreciate it more, even after you get to be a septuagenarian! Would you discuss your various influences and how you put them together in your own playing?”

HD: Back to Dick, the video that he did of his playing, all these different styles, is still incredible. I’ve used that in my teaching, so I’d like to acknowledge that. He’s a phenomenal player. I’ve been able to more or less do an impression of various styles, whereas I feel Dick is such an expert at actually getting in there and doing them. If he can appreciate what I’ve done… I’m more of an impressionist, I get the idea. Like I said, I’ve studied Indian vocal music. Now what does that do for the piano? I don’t know, but there’s an impression there and it leaves some indelible mark. Even listening to horn players, listening to the way people speak. I do not have the level of piano expertise that Dick has, but I have an impression of things of not wanting to hear clichés, and Frank Tiberi, that whole deceptive thing. Also, Chet Baker because Chet played melodically, and there’s things he plays again and again, but they’re always in a little different place. I try to remain in that moment. When I’m playing with a player like Joe, I’m also not playing the same way I might play with somebody else. I’m bringing in my own agenda but based on what I’m hearing in their input.

Kirk Lightsey (piano) asked: “What is your favorite Wayne Shorter song and do you have a favorite concert or memory of you and I playing “Shorter by Two?”

HD: “Oh man, my friend, Kirk. He’s killed me with his piano sound, wherever he gets that sound from, and I’ve told him that. I just love his sound. I did see Horowitz live. I’ve seen Herbie live, and Hank Jones, but I’ve been really able to work with Kirk in the same room a lot. That sound is one of my ideals of a sound the piano gets, and Kirk gets it. As far as playing with Kirk, I remember playing outdoors on the pier in New York City. There’re so many highlights with Kirk, although we didn’t play together that much. We played in France and in Montreal where we got a better review than Keith Jarrett got. The favorite tune? I don’t know, maybe “Ana Maria,” I’m not sure because they become favorites as I play them.

Joe LaBarbera (drums) said: “I love Harold and his music; we’ve been friends since the army. His songs are unique and varied in significant ways but always melodic and swinging. I’m always amazed at how original your sound is, knowing full well that you listened to all the important pianists prior to you. I’d like to know how you have managed to be completely free of clichés in your improvisations over the years?”

HD: Thanks, Joe, I’m not completely free of clichés, but when I hear them, my stomach is already rumbling. If I hear myself play a cliché, it’s really not what I want to do. I think that comes also from Lee Konitz in a certain way,
Buster Williams
First Big Break: Working With Heroes
Sonny Stitt & Gene Ammons

Interview & Photo By Eric Nemeyer

JI: You played around Philadelphia in 1959 with Jimmy Heath, Sam Dockery, and Charlie Rice. How did your introduction to that first opportunity happen?

BW: That’s very interesting. I sort of had a master plan that I formulated in my mind early on. I saw people that I wanted to play with. As I listened to records, I knew who I wanted to play with. My father ran a jam session at a club right around the corner from us. The club was called Rip’s. It wasn’t Rest in Peace. It was just Rip’s. That was the owner’s name. It was on Monday nights. On the circuit, guys would come from New York, and they would come to Philadelphia and they play the Showboat or Pep’s. Then they would go to this club in Jersey, out on Route 130—it was called the Red Hill Inn, on their way back to New York, on Sundays—because the clubs in Philly finished on Saturday.

JI: They had the “blue laws” on Sunday.

BW: Yeah, you couldn’t serve liquor in the clubs on Sunday. So they’d go and play the Red Hill Inn. Or, they’d go down to Woodbury and play The Dew Drop Inn, The Tippin Inn. That was a real corn-on-the-cob, barbeque-ribs circuit down in Woodbury. We used to go down there on Sundays, and it was great. You’d get the best ribs; the best corn on the cob. And, don’t drop any of that grease on your suit. I remember I had this great mohair suit, and I dropped some grease on that suit and it never came out. You know, that dripping butter. But, oh man, it was great. Then on Monday, they would come to Rip’s to play the jam session, on their way back to New York. So this particular Monday, my father told me to put together a band, for the jam session. I had targeted Jimmy Heath. I wanted to play with Jimmy Heath. Sam Dockery was playing with Jimmy Heath, and Sam was my buddy. We used to get together every day. I’d take my bass across town to Sam’s house and I would play every day. Sam would talk about Jimmy. Sam was like big time to me. He had played with Art Blakey, with Bill Hardman, with Jackie McLean. He had also played with Roy Haynes. So Sam was big time. So my father gave me this opportunity to put this band together. I couldn’t call Jimmy Heath because he was too big of a star. So I called the next best thing, which was Sam Reed, alto player. He used to work at Spider Kelly’s. I looked at working at Spider Kelly’s as: that was it. Spider Kelly’s was a little club. I think it was on Mole St. in Philadelphia. All of these things I’d always dreamed of. So I called Sam Reed, and I called this drummer that worked with my father. The drummer’s stage name, which he had written on his bass drum, was “Violent” Jim Spriggens. I called him for drums, and I called this piano player who also worked with my father. My determination was to play with them Monday night. They’ll hear me play. And then they’ll call me to come work in Philadelphia. Working in Philadelphia was like working in New York. See, I was never one to hang out and run my mouth; and I didn’t like people who talked a lot. I always felt that those who talked a lot have the least to say. So I wanted my introduction to these musicians to be on my instrument. We played the session on Monday night. On Wednesday, I got a call from Sam Reed to play the Seven Eleven Ballroom, in Philadelphia, with him on Friday night. The Seven Eleven was a ballroom where you used to bring your own liquor. You could bring your own bottles of whiskey, or whatever you wanted to drink. They had a band. You could dance. This happened every weekend. The club provided what they called setups—you know, the ginger ale, the sparkling water, the ice, the lemon and lime, and all of that stuff you need for your drinks. You’d have your table and it would be like a party. There would be at least two bands playing. The two bands this weekend was Sam Reed’s band and Jimmy Heath’s band. 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Buster Williams

says, “who are you?” I said, “my name is Charles Williams.” Wow, this is a formal occasion. I can’t use my nickname. My name is Charles Anthony Williams Jr. So, I tell Sonny, my name is Charles Anthony Williams Jr.—and my father sent me here to play with you. I mentioned all the names …. Nelson Boyd. He said, “oh yeah, so you gonna make the gig?” I said, “sir, I’ll do my best.” He scowled. And, he said, “are you gonna make the gig!!?” I didn’t know how to answer. You know, I’m just trying to be respectful, because I’m in awe. “Sir, I’m really going to do my best.” He said, “are you going to make the gig?” So I said, yes! He said, ok, let’s hit. And that was it. Then Gene Ammons came down, and John Houston. I knew John Houston from Philadelphia. I don’t know these guys, but I do know John, and John is going to help me through all this. We get up on the bandstand. The first thing was a blues in D flat, and we’re off and running. Dude is smiling. He’s left-handed. I’d never seen a left-handed drummer. And he’s looking at me, like, you sound good. Anyway, we’re playing and the tempo is fast. And I’m looking at Dude’s sock cymbal, because he played his sock cymbal on his right-hand side. I’m in the middle between the drums and the piano. So the sock cymbal is right there. And I’m looking at it, sort of as a security to make sure I’m playing in time. Sonny Stitt sees me looking at the sock cymbal. So he goes and stands in front of it and blocks my view. He looks at me, and he gives me that scowl again, which I found as I got to know Sonny, that was his look of endearment. Later Sonny says to me, “not with your eyes, with your ears.” When we finished the set, Gene and Sonny took me upstairs. They were just really nice. “Oh man, you’re really good. What’s your name?” They said, “you want to stay with the band?” I said, “yes!” They said, “tomorrow night when we finish, we’re leaving. We’re going to Chicago. So bring your stuff.” I had never been out on the road before. I had never been anywhere. Seventeen years old. School had just closed. It was in June. And I had just graduated from my high school. So Saturday night, we finished the gig. I went back home. My father gave me his suitcase, and I packed my bag. My mother Houston, Dude Brown, and myself. We played Kansas City for two weeks. There was this guy that was hanging out with Gene Ammons. He was with him all the time. This guy was a real scrungy-looking thing. When we finished the gig each night, they would get in the car and drive to Chicago. They were going back and forth to Chicago every night to get drugs. The first week, Jug [Gene Ammons] had some story about why we had no money—and that we would be getting paid the second week. OK. The second week, we finished the gig on Saturday night. Jug called us all to his room, and his girlfriend Betty was with him. Jug gives us this story about why there’s no money. He says don’t despair, because on Tuesday we’re opening up at McKee’s in Chicago for a 16-week stint with Benny Green on trombone. Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Benny Green. We’re going to have a good time. We all agree that Jug will go on to Chicago, get the money, and send us money so that we can get to Chicago for the gig. Now this is Saturday and we’ve got Sunday, Monday. So Sunday and Monday comes, and we don’t hear anything from Jug. Tuesday comes and we haven’t heard anything. So we called the club. Someone answers the phone, and we heard Jug playing in the background. We left a message for him to call us back, and he never called us back. That’s when we all looked at each other and realized that we had been had. We are stranded. Like Sonny Stitt said to this bass player, Henry Grimes, who he took to Japan. Henry showed up a day late for the gig, in Japan, with no suitcase and no bass. Sonny looked at him and he said, “Henry, have you ever been stranded?” Henry says, “no.” And Sonny says, “well, you are now.” Ha! Ha! And he left him in Japan. So that’s what had happened to us. Now we’re stranded. It turns out that the next day, Wednesday, Al Hibbler is opening up at the club. Al Hibbler had John Malachi, this piano player from Washington. He was one of these great accompanists like Jimmy Jones. All the singers loved Jimmy Jones—Carmen, Sarah. So the club owner needs a trio and agrees that Dude and I will play with Al Hibbler, and John Houston can play piano during the intermissions. We went to the union to report to the union that we had been stranded and to put a claim in against Gene Ammons. The union didn’t care about that, and told us that we could not work at the club with Al Hibbler—because they had their own local musicians. And this is the AFL/CIO. This is the American Federation. This guy was totally insensitive to our situation. We went back and told the club owner that the union refuses to let us work. The club owner says, “oh yeah!” He got on the phone and said something. In about 10 minutes, the union man came to the club with his hat in his hand and apologized profusely, and welcomed us to Kansas City. “Please enjoy. We’re so glad that you can work this job.” The club owner and his brothers, his two brothers, they were mafia. They straightened things out in a hurry. So we got our money and we were on our way. Then I put in a claim. I sued Gene Ammons, and I got all my money. This scrungy character that was in Kansas City with Gene Ammons all this time, turned out to be a federal informant. He arranged for Gene Ammons to either buy some drugs or sell some drugs. So the feds went into Gene Ammons’ house and they arrested him. That’s when Gene Ammons went to jail for the last time. The owner of The Plugged Nickel somehow got Gene Ammons out of jail—and it was said that Gene Ammons had to turn over all his future publishing, or something like that, to this guy. So Gene Ammons comes out of jail and he calls me. “Hey Jr! I’m home! I’m coming to New York! I want you to make a record with me!” You know, bygones are bygones. This is still my man; and I’m still Jr. We made this record called The Boss is Back. The cover is Gene Ammons coming off the airplane, as he steps out of the doorway. That was the last record I made with him.
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Billy Cobham
Recording The Seminal Album, Spectrum

Interview & Photo By Ken Weiss

Jazz Inside: Your first solo recording Spectrum, which turned out to be a very seminal work. How did that recording come about and was it a difficult process?

Billy Cobham: No, it actually came out the most natural way - out of desperation - but a good kind of desperation. I knew that I was reaching a point in my career where I had to take responsibility on my own shoulders. I understood that I needed a calling card, so I decided I was going to make a record. One way or another, I had to get something out there. Knowing that I was going to be released at the end of the year by the Mahavishnu Orchestra, I decided to really lobby and make a record noting that at that period of time, 30 grand, 40 grand to make a record was a drop in the bucket in comparison to what a lot of people were making records for at the time. So I did a little budgeting, not just in terms of the money, because that was minor, the most important thing was the quality of the personnel that I would bring around me. That meant the people that I worked with had to be quick of mind, whether they were drug induced or not, that’s a separate side point, but they had to know what they were doing so that we could go in and record based on their abilities to play well at the drop of a hat. The people you see on that record, you can do anything with them if you work within their wheelhouses. So the whole objective for me being a novice in stature as a writer, was to put down what I felt could be done, what could be absorbed by everyone very easily, which meant that I had to have all my pre-production organized. Having been in the recording studio and worked under the auspices of people like Creed Taylor, Ron Carter, the New York Jazz Sextet, Roland Hanna, I had learned the right way to do things through trial by fire. It worked for me at the time, just being in their presence, I was able to come to the table with something that even I didn’t know what I had. I had this record that I was planning on getting 10-20 copies of and handing out to my family and saying, ‘Well, I made a record, hah!’ and then maybe I could look for an agent who could book me on weddings, ‘cause that’s where I thought I was going. I thought I’d be a studio player, do some jingles, be in New York and raise a family. Lo and behold, six months later …”

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But it hit me, coming out of Mahavishnu, we played two and a half years, close to 500 shows. Someone had to remember us as individuals. I had an audience! He told me I needed a band but I was hesitant after what I had seen bands go through while being part of them so I knew that I’d better hire people who I could trust musically.

Ji: Was it difficult to decide how to commemorate that work for this tour?

Bc: I’ve taken a position that it’s time for me to let others express their appreciation or respect for me musically through the way they perform and play on their own, and based on their contributions individually, we get this personality. I’m using Jerry Goodman, whom I’ve known for 40 years, Dean Brown, whom I’ve known for 30 years, Gary Husband, whom I’ve known for 20 years and one I’ve known for 10 years – Ric Fierabracci, and we all come together and make music where they not only play my music, but I play their music. The concept is to present a unified presentation based on our fundamental connections over the past 100 years of cumulative experience. That’s the musical idea. Celebrating Spectrum is something I do every day anyway but normally I’m doing it on my own with the young people in my band but I decided that I wanted to play their music this time around. And since it’s so rare that I get invited to the United States to perform, when the opportunity presents itself, I try to take advantage of it.

Ji: How does it feel to reach back 40 years and re-examine your life?

Bc: A natural thing for me. Ten or fifteen years ago, I was invited to perform on a recording in celebration of the music of John McLaughlin called Meeting of the Spirits with the Frankfurt Radio Big Band. I first said ‘No, it’s done.’ Actually, the bad memories far outweighed the good memories [from those days with the Mahavishnu Orchestra] and I just didn’t want to have any more to do with it. I had learned a lot, great lessons came out of that time. Gary Husband was the drummer on the project and he came to me on a whim and asked how it would be if I played the older music 30 years later. How would I treat it now? And a bulb just went off! I had never thought about that. I had blocked the music out of my mind so strongly that I had a hard time starting out on that project but suddenly I was playing it the way I am now. The same material but a lot less notes, a lot more selectivity, seeking to try to match up tones within my drum set to the music itself and it really opened up many doors for me and I thought ‘Man, I need to do this more.’ Don’t be afraid

(Continued on page 34)
Billy Cobham

to look back. I don’t say this against Miles but I got the feeling that he never liked to go backwards and play things he had done already, but I find for me, there’s such a wealth of material in my own music. A lot of my music, even from the very beginning, morphs into something else, and I love that. That one pivotal moment gave me a lot of reasons to want to revisit the older music and I never did it with Spectrum because I always felt that it’s all people wanted to hear. I understood why they wanted to hear it so I would grudgingly play “Stratus” and “Red Baron” and then we’d go someplace else, but everything on that record we now play and it’s quite different. I also investigate all my old albums and it’s a far cry from where I was. My arranging and composing just continues to get stronger and richer.

JI: Jerry Goodman, a fellow original member of the Mahavishnu Orchestra, is playing with you on this tour. How often do you get to play with him and how does his playing transform your music?

BC: Jerry is now working with me for the second time in the last 40 years. We came together around the time of the Meeting of the Spirits recording and immediately we fell into the whole Mahavishnu duet thing because that was easy to do. What Jerry brings is a personal-ity and people vicariously want to see the old M.O. but we know that’s not gonna happen. Why? Because time has gone by and we’re all pretty much old, crotchety guys who care barely hold up our pants, much less anything else. That said, we do what we do on an individual basis and we accept what life has supposed is somebody who gets paid by a certain media magazine enough to get bread and butter for the week and the whole objective is to get to say things that will attract readers. Most of the people in the world love bad news. They want to know that somebody else isn’t doing as well as they are doing. It’s all understandable. If I have enough time to read anything, that means I’m not working. Once there was a guy who worked for a magazine called Melody Maker and he came to me when I was mixing in England and he said, “I have something I’d like to show you.” He showed me the magazine and it had something that Buddy Rich had said, some pretty heavy things he had said about me and Tony Williams and Jack DeJohnette. And this guy said, “What do you think of that?” I said, “That’s very profound. At least he said something about me, it might not be very nice, but tell Buddy for me that anytime he wants to talk about me please, I don’t care what you say, just say it, that way all you guys in the media will write about it and I will get promotion that I could never get even if I paid for it - because you guys are writing about Buddy Rich and his opinion is more important to you and to the public than Billy Cobham’s. So if he is going to talk about Billy Cobham in the negative, I don’t care what you call me, just keep going. He never wrote about me again [Laughs]!

JI: What’s your concept of how drums should fit into the music?

BC: I believe that drums are an integral part of everything we do. Drums are not an aberration or an extension of the musical mindset, they are actually in the foundation of much of the music that we perform and it’s not just from a rhythmical standpoint. It’s not from a synchronicity standpoint or rhythmically synchronizing everyone. To me, a good percussionist is someone who is seeking to match up the notes of his instrument, and it can be one instrument that provides different tonal characters, like a djembe, or one drum in a drum set. Just like you can have two pianists play the piano and they will sound completely different from each other, it’s the same with drums. All instruments are a reflection of the personalities of the individuals who play them. So if you have an idea, you can play on a cardboard shoebox, as I’ve seen Papa Jo Jones do and blow a band away because he didn’t have a drum set, he just had a cardboard shoebox for a tom and a daily newspaper with brushes and it was all over, man. He didn’t need anything else besides his foot hit-

JF: In the past, you’ve noted that your musical idols were Miles Davis and John Coltrane and that you didn’t listen to drummers. Why not listen to other drummers?

BC: Because I listened to the band of which the drummers are a part. When I say Miles and Trane, it’s their ideas and concepts and the way they manage the whole musical environment, of which they were a part. They were the conductors of the train, if you will, but they were also players in the band and everyone would follow their lead. I also was influenced by Bill Evans and Erroll Garner.

JI: In the past, you’ve also spoken about life influencing your art. How does that come out in your drumming?

BC: Every note is representative of everything I’ve done up to the point that I play on the drum set.

JI: Your time with Miles Davis is well documented so I’ll just ask one question about your time with him. On the A Tribute to Jack Johnson recording, what’s the story behind Herbie Hancock’s appearance on organ and the uncredited work of Sonny Sharrock?

BC: Sonny wasn’t in the studio with us when we played so obviously it was either an edit by Teo [Macero], which could very well be because Teo was a genius at putting things together in very interesting ways. To answer the other question, when you have someone like Herbie coming in to say hello, in his one hand is a Safeway grocery store bag filled with stuff and in the other is a Fat Albert Rounda LP, brand new off the rack, Miles turned around and said, “Play.” A Farfisa organ was quickly plugged in for Herbie and that’s what you got. Once again, it’s what is this thing, how do I do it, what do I do with it. Enough said, the rest is history as far as what Herbie did with it, genius of course.

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AS PIANIST, CONTEMPORARY KEYBOARD ARTIST, LEADER — RECORDINGS featuring Eric Essix, Kim Waters, Gerald Albright, Lenny White, Larry Coryell, Chuck Loeb, Russ Freeman (Rippingtons), Euge Groove, Najee, Walter Beasley, Marion Meadows ...

AS PRODUCER/COMPOSER/ARRANGER for Paul Brown/ Bob James (#1 Radio), Regina Carter, The Four Tops, Grover Washington, Jr., Richard Elliot, Marion Meadows, Ragan Whiteside, Euge Groove, Ragan Whiteside, Lori Williams, Will Downing. There’s more to come, including some strong indie artists. Stay tuned...

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