

**Weather Bird:
Jazz at the Dawn of its
Second Century**

GARY GIDDINS

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Weather Bird

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SECOND CENTURY

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FOR LEA, DEBORAH, AND ALICE
AND FOR ROBERT CHRISTGAU

AND IN MEMORY:

LESTER BOWIE
NICK BRIGNOLA
JAKI BYARD
BENNY CARTER
ROSEMARY CLOONEY
TOMMY FLANAGAN
JOHN LEWIS
BUDDY TATE

In bygone times a feeling for nobility was always maintained in the art of music, and all its elements skillfully retained the orderly beauty appropriate to them. Today, however, people take up music in a haphazard and irrational manner. The musicians of our day set as their goal success with their audiences.

—Athenaeus, *The Learned Banquet* (c. 200 C.E)

Music awakens time, awakens us to the finest enjoyment of time; music awakens—and thus has moral value. Art has moral value, in that it awakens. But what if it does the opposite? What if it dulls us, puts us to sleep, opposes all action and progress? Music can do that too; it knows very well the power of opiates. A gift of the Devil, my dear sirs; opiates make for lethargy, inflexibility, stagnation, slavish inertia. There is something uncertain about music, gentlemen. I tell you that music is, by its very nature, equivocal. I do not exaggerate when I insist that it is politically suspect.

—Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*

The shaking air rattled Lord Edward's membrana tympani; the interlocked malleus, incus and stirrup bones were set in motion so as to agitate the membrane of the oval window and raise an infinitesimal storm in the fluid of the labyrinth. The hairy endings of the auditory nerve shuddered like weeds in a rough sea; a vast number of obscure miracles were performed in the brain, and Lord Edward ecstatically whispered "Bach!"

—Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*

Anyone can make the simple complicated. Creativity is making the complicated simple.

—Charles Mingus

Everybody has the blues. Everybody longs for meaning. Everybody needs to love and be loved. Everybody needs to clap hands and be happy. Everybody longs for faith. In music, especially this broad category called jazz, there is a stepping-stone to all of these.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Contents

Introduction and Acknowledgments	xiii
PART ONE: THE BEIGE DECADE, 1990–2000	
1 Tender Moments (JVC 1990)	3
2 Front Porch Blues (Colorado 1990)	7
3 Chippin' Off the Old Block (Javon Jackson)	11
4 Heavy Mettle Thunder (Ronald Shannon Jackson)	13
5 Go Wes, Young Man (Mark Whitfield)	16
6 Jazz Danish (The Jazzpar Concert)	19
7 The Glow of Doc Cheatham (JVC 1991, Part One)	23
8 Miles Ahead (JVC 1991, Part Two)	29
9 Benny's Brood (Rickey Woodard / Jesse Davis)	32
10 The Advocate (Eddie Condon)	36
11 Martin Williams, 1924–1992	41
12 Grand-Lee (Lee Konitz)	45
13 Swing to Black (Doc Severinsen)	47
14 Lions in Summer (JVC 1992)	51
15 Yin, Yang, and Noir (Oliver Lake / Charlie Haden)	59
16 Always True in Her Fashion (Peggy Lee)	62
17 Computer Wars (Robert Parker)	66
18 Giant Step (Jackie McLean)	70
19 Vivid Multitudes (The Best Jazz Records of 1992)	72
20 PG-13 (Rosemary Clooney)	76
21 Living Large (Bobby Watson)	78
22 Gallic Swing (Stephane Grappelli)	81
23 A Surprise Banquet (JVC 1993)	84
24 Tremolos and Elegies (Cyrus Chestnut)	91
25 The Power and the Reticence (JVC 1994)	95
26 Leonard Feather, 1914–1994	99
27 After the Ball (Gerry Mulligan / Maria Schneider)	103
28 Redefining Dizzy (The Carnegie Hall Jazz Band / Lalo Schifrin)	107
29 The Swinging Cowboy (Herb Jeffries)	111

30	Festival Blues (JVC 1995)	116
31	Young and Verbal (Carmen McRae)	122
32	Three by Three (Tim Hagans / Dave Douglas / Roy Hargrove)	125
33	Different Drummer (Modern Jazz Quartet)	128
34	They Never Went Away (Big Bands)	132
35	Beyond the Rudiments (The Best Jazz Records of 1995)	135
36	Lost and Found (Brian Barley / Andrew Hill)	140
37	Monk with Frets (Marc Ribot)	143
38	The King (Benny Carter)	146
39	Drum Dada (Han Bennink)	156
40	On Their Own (Gerry Gibbs / Ravi Coltrane)	159
41	Classic Ambition (Wynton Marsalis)	162
42	Hard of Hearing (JVC 1997)	165
43	= 2 (Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock)	170
44	New Tunes for an Old Ax (Joe Morris)	173
45	Lit at Both Ends (D. D. Jackson)	176
46	They're Bo-o-o-xed! (The Best Reissues of 1997)	179
47	Piano Men (Teddy Wilson / Lennie Tristano / Bill Evans)	183
48	The Arranger's Monk (Bill Holman / T. S. Monk / Fred Hersch)	186
49	Reviving the It Girls (The Boswell Sisters)	190
50	Turner Classic Moves (Mark Turner)	193
51	Fusions (Wayne Shorter / Odyssey)	196
52	Is Everybody Happy? (Texaco–New York Jazz Festival)	199
53	Requiem for a Flag-Waver (JVC 1998)	203
54	The Original Dixieland One-Step (New Orleans Jazz)	208
55	Rousing Rabble (JATP)	211
56	Old Guys Yes, Retro Never (The Best Jazz Records of 1998)	215
57	A Bottomless Well (Duke Ellington)	219
58	Jaki Byard, 1922–1999	222
59	Out of the Vinyl Deepes (Record Rarities)	225
60	Prisoners of the Past (JVC 1999)	228
61	Rapprochement (Cecil Taylor / Elvin Jones / Dewey Redman)	232
62	Good Vibrations (Stefon Harris)	235

63	Lester Bowie, 1941–1999	238
64	The Masters Have It (The Best Jazz Records of 1999)	242
65	Hammond's Best and Brightest (<i>From Spirituals to Swing</i>)	245
66	Hipper Than Thou (Bob Dorough)	248
67	Freed Jazz: Bell One (Ornette Coleman)	251
68	Comeback Number Six (Lonnie Johnson)	255
69	Mrs. Swing (Mildred Bailey)	257
70	Saved by the Classics: Bell Two (Bell Atlantic 2000)	263
71	Touring the Jazz Museum (JVC 2000)	267
72	Carterology (James Carter)	272
73	Zooids New and Old (Henry Threadgill / Roswell Rudd and Archie Shepp)	275
74	Saturnal Sorcery (Sun Ra)	279
75	The One You've Been Waiting For (Sonny Rollins)	283
76	All the Things He Was (Carnegie Hall Jazz Band)	286
77	Signposts of Post-history (The Best Jazz Records of 2000)	290
78	Bedside Jazz (More Best Jazz Records of 2000)	295
79	Parajazz (The Avant-garde)	299

PART TWO: THE SECOND CENTURY, 2001–2003

80	The Neglected King of Song (Bing Crosby)	313
81	Here's the Melody (John Lewis)	320
82	Over the Transom (Arnie Carruthers / Larry Vuckovich / Nicholas Hoffman / Gold Sparkle)	323
83	Memorophiliac (Vijay Iyer)	327
84	Weird and Forgotten Dreams (Charles Mingus / Helen Carr / Herb Jeffries / LH&R / Sarah Vaughan)	329
85	A Quartet of Five (Dave Brubeck)	333
86	Billy Higgins, 1936–2001	339
87	Boom! (Louis Armstrong)	343
88	Found and Lost (Terence Blanchard)	349
89	Ladies Day (Billie Holiday)	352
90	Mood Swings (Tom Harrell)	362
91	Nashville (Ted Nash)	366
92	Minnie the Moocher's Revenge (JVC 2001)	369
93	Go Tell It on the Mountain (David S. Ware)	376

94	Looking for Better Than That (Diana Krall / Jeanie Bryson / Vanessa Rubin / Etta James / Rosemary Clooney)	380
	95 Strictly Solalian (Martial Solal)	383
	96 Heir to a Secret History (Jason Moran)	387
	97 Master Class (Jimmy Heath)	390
	98 Fearless (Tony Bennett)	394
	99 All Around the Town (Uri Caine)	398
100	Bad Haircut, Good Ragtime (Brun Campbell)	401
	101 Laureate (Irving Berlin)	405
	102 Heroes at Work (“Made in America”)	407
103	Brutality and Revival (The Best Jazz Records of 2001)	410
	104 Reissues by the Box, Singers by the Cut (More Best Jazz Records of 2001)	415
	105 Long Roads (Harry Belafonte)	419
	106 Gypsy State of Mind (Bireli Lagrene)	422
107	Surviving the Marketplace (Sonny Stitt / Bobby Hackett)	425
	108 The Microtonal Man (Joe Maneri)	429
	109 Singing Cool and Hot (Cassandra Wilson / Dee Dee Bridgewater)	432
	110 Our Chopin (Cecil Taylor)	435
	111 She Writes the Songs (Abbey Lincoln)	439
	112 Black Arthur’s Return (Arthur Blythe)	442
113	Enchantment (Johnny Hodges / Rex Stewart)	446
	114 Continuing Education (Marian McPartland)	450
	115 Fully Interactive (Bill Charlap)	454
	116 Fetishizing the LP (Verve Miniatures)	458
	117 Personality (Houston Person)	461
118	Postwar Jazz: An Arbitrary Roadmap (1945–2001)	465
	119 How Not to Broaden the Jazz Canvas (Carnegie Hall Jazz Band)	488
	120 Where’s Waldo? (JVC 2002)	492
121	Almost Peas in a Pod (Tony Bennett / Sarah Vaughan)	497
	122 Lionel Hampton, 1908–2002	501
	123 Genius (Charlie Christian)	505
	124 At the Summit (Sonny Rollins)	507
125	Purely Piano (Ethan Iverson / Vijay Iyer / Jason Moran)	511

126	Point Counter Point (Dave Holland)	514
127	Christmas Gilt (Ella Fitzgerald / Johnny Smith / Grant Green / Others)	518
128	Jazzman of the Year: 2002 (Clark Terry)	521
129	Everything That Rises Must Converge (The Best Jazz Records of 2002)	525
	130 Hot (Louis Armstrong)	529
131	Out of the Territories (Steven Bernstein)	540
132	Aqui Se Habla Espanol (David Murray)	543
133	French Music, Not Necessarily Freedom Music (Louis Sclavis)	547
134	Equilateral Chamber Jazz (The Bad Plus)	551
	135 Satchuated (Louis Armstrong)	554
136	The Academy's Pulitzer (Jazz and the Pulitzer Prize)	558
	137 Savoooooy Be Goooood (Jazz Jive)	562
	138 Swashbuckler (Erroll Garner)	565
139	Deep Easy Listening (Jim Hall / Cyrus Chestnut)	569
140	Masters of Time (Roy Haynes / Max Roach)	573
	141 Ornette and Others (JVC 2003)	577
142	Overview and Meditation (Art Ensemble of Chicago)	583
143	All Duke's Chillun Got Melody (Gerry Mulligan)	585
	144 Midlife Bloom (Dianne Reeves)	588
	145 Flee as a Bird (Weather Bird)	590
146	How Come Jazz Isn't Dead? (Music's Four Stations)	592

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Introduction and Acknowledgments

The sense of enlargement of life may be so uplifting that personal motives and inhibitions, commonly omnipotent, become too insignificant for notice, and new reaches of patience and fortitude open out. Fears and anxieties go, and blissful equanimity takes their place. Come heaven, come hell, it makes no difference now!

—William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

It is now 40 years since I found in Louis Armstrong specifically and in jazz in general a substitute for the God of my fathers—though I didn't realize it at the time. If, as William James argues, an authentic religious experience is one that permanently transforms, unlike, say, the cheap tickets to holiness provided by a variety of hallucinogens in my college years, then the Armstrong conversion seems to have held pretty well. It transfigured my adolescence and has governed most of what I've made of my adulthood. Of course, the limits of my talent had something to do with this. I didn't abandon my childhood ambition of becoming Hawthorne because I hooked onto something better. A writer will write and the only question is the subject. For a long time, I fought against criticism as a capitulation; sometimes, I fight still. But then I return to Armstrong and company and know I'm right, or in any case still locked in the bonds of worship. The trouble with choosing your own god is that it chooses you in turn, and there you are, come heaven, come hell.

My parents' home was not especially musical, beyond a few popular singers and bands: albums by Sinatra, Belafonte, Ted Heath, various cha-cha-cha and mambo ensembles with sexy covers. Yet as progressive Spockian suburbanites determined to raise the sights of their children, they also invested in—along with World Book Encyclopedia and an unabridged Webster, purchased in installments—two bulky Reader's Digest anthologies of classical music. Inexplicably, that company declined to honor conductors: only in small print on the disc-labels could one find their names, from Sir Adrian Boult and Rene Leibowitz to the more obscure Massimo Freccia and—unforgettable name—Odd Gruner-Hegge. The music did its job, however, despite its mostly negative connotations in my adolescent circles. I shut the door and merrily conducted the first Brandenburg, Mozart's G-minor symphony, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, the Eroica, Italian, and Pathetique symphonies. That habit and my inclination to memorize long passages led my parents to the sorry conclusion that I had a talent for music making when my true gift lay in record

playing. Thus followed lessons on a succession of instruments until the most patient of instructors conceded that I was hopeless. My ability to read the bass clef paralleled that of a four-year-old confronted with Faulkner; as notes flew off the treble staff, I sheepishly intoned, "Every good boy does fine."

Rock and roll soon entered the picture: Little Richard, Lloyd Price, Fats Domino, Ray Charles, Jackie Wilson, Dee Clark, the Coasters, Bobby Darin, Sammy Turner, the Five Satins, the Diamonds, the Shirelles, Buddy Holly, Bo Diddley, Bobby Day, Bobby Rydell, Chuck Berry, Jimmy Jones, Marv Johnson, Johnny and the Hurricanes, and U.S. Bonds, among many others. They racially integrated my world in a way the neighborhood, movies, and TV did not. My friends and I marveled that most of our favorites were Negroes, to us an unknown and estimable breed—so dapper in their tailored tuxedos and high-swept conks. We debated which of them looked the coolest and wondered what they were like. The only Negroes we knew were women, deputized authority figures: maids, mothers' helpers—every home had one. Where did they disappear to every Thursday, maid's day off? Did they all go to Harlem? And what kind of place was Harlem that dispatched, dozens, perhaps hundreds of women to look after white households? What if our own mothers had to leave us to take care of Negro families? You don't read this sort of thing in Civil Rights histories, but that was the kind of conversation rife among twelve-year-olds in white upper-middle-class Long Island towns of the late '50s and early '60s.

Here I pay thanks to Pearl Hill, who came from Alabama—her father operated a chain of black movie theaters and wanted her out of there—to live with my family. A teenager herself (I wasn't as yet) and the object of my first irreconcilable crush, Pearl lived upstairs, and whenever she bought a new 45, I raced up to hear it: Little Richard grinding out "Shake a Hand," Lloyd Price thundering the scary saga of "Stagger Lee." On one occasion I was transported by a totally different music wafting down. The cover depicted a man with a smooth Indian-like face, eyes closed, sporting a madly plaid sports coat. Listening to the rhythm, which punched the beat without rocking it, and his voice, taking all the time in the world, I thought: This is deep stuff from a place I don't know anything about. A good seven or eight years would go by before I next encountered the name or music of B. B. King. The subject of jazz came up once when she wanted to impress a jazz fan she was dating, and asked me if Dizzy Gillespie pronounced his name with a hard or soft G; I had no idea. When I was 12 or 13, my mother gave her permission to take me with her on Thursdays to rock and roll matinees, at which point I suppose she became my governess. We went to the Apollo in Harlem,

the Hillside in Queens, and the Brooklyn Paramount, cheering the acrobatic Isley Brothers and mimicking (one simply held one's nose) the hilarious nasality of Rosie and the Originals.

Suddenly, rock and roll went into a coma—as Little Richard turned to gospel, Buddy Holly died in an airplane crash, Jackie Wilson got shot, Elvis got drafted, Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis got arrested or blackballed, and Dee Clark, Lloyd Price, Fats Domino, and everyone else I liked disappeared, quite mysteriously, from the Top 40, to be replaced by parody acts like Fabian and novelty recitations of which “Big Bad John” still makes me shudder. In truth, boredom had also set in. Classical music, though, continued to hold my attention, and I eagerly sought guidance. Huxley's dazzling *Point Counter Point* sent me in search of Bach's B minor Suite for Flute and Strings (the clerk at Macy's, bless her, insisted I buy Antonio Janigro's I Solesti di Zagreb version, coupled with the fifth Brandenburg and featuring Jean-Pierre Rampal, a flutist then too little known to merit a sleeve mention) and prompted a fascination with the Beethoven quartets, especially the A Minor, through which, with the Guarneri String Quartet on the turntable and my first Kalmus Study Score in hand, I hoped to understand the radical sway that sped Huxley's anarchist Spandrell to suicide by firing squad. In Spandrell's maunderings over Beethoven, I also encountered the Lydian mode, years before I heard of George Russell. No one wrote more euphorically about music than Huxley, who abominated jazz as art, metaphor, and social disease. No one's perfect.

An enthusiastic review sent me in search of Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*, the incomparable 1947 abridgement, of which I can still sing large segments from memory. A CBS special on Casals led me to the Bach cello sonatas; a piano teacher recommended *Rhapsody in Blue* (the symphonic Oscar Levant version). I can no longer recall who or what brought the Mass in B Minor into my life, but the reel-to-reel edition of Hermann Scherchen's 1959 recording—stately, slow, huge, rapturous—sent me reeling. I would hyperventilate so badly through the Kyrie that the Gloria would have to be postponed: The B Minor Mass loomed for me as the grandest achievement in Western civilization, the stick by which to measure everything else.

Still, those records represented a furtive passion, leaving the abyss vacated by rock and roll. Hanging out in the Village, I burrowed into the renascent folk boom, especially the rediscovered Delta bluesmen, dead (Robert Johnson) and alive: Son House, Skip James (eventually the first musician I ever interviewed), and Mississippi John Hurt (who one night in Boston asked to use the Martin D-18 I had saved for but could barely play, and later sat at our table and taught me to pick “Do Lord”).

None of this quite did the trick. But Ray Charles made an album called *Genius + Soul = Jazz*, and I thought if Ray is jazz then that's the place to look, especially after I met a girl who said she liked jazz and when I said "me too," quizzed me, humming a tune and challenging me to name it. I could think of only two jazz titles, "One O'Clock Jump" and "Take Five," neither of which had I ever heard, but I crumpled my brow and scratched my chin, and said, "Um, it sounds a little bit like 'Take Five,' a little, maybe." She said, "You really *do* know jazz." Thank you, Lord.

A friend loaned me albums by Cannonball Adderley and Charles Mingus about which my mother remarked, "What is that? It sounds like they're tuning up." Surly as I was, I could mount no effective retaliation as I wasn't certain she was far wrong. Then came my first serious encounter with jazz, in New Orleans in the summer of 1963 (see the ensuing essay, "The Original Dixieland One-Step"), and a band billed as Emanuel Sayles and his Silverleaf Ragtimers featuring George Lewis, with Kid Howard, Big Jim Robinson, Joe Robichaux, Alcide "Slow Drag" Pavageau, and Joe Watkins, most of them unknown north of Mason-Dixon, their records—which my father would later enable me to buy—available only through mail-order. Manny Sayles was the gatekeeper ushering me into a new world.

On a Sunday in September before school started, I reluctantly accompanied my parents on a long drive to visit their friends, and spent the afternoon, as they talked, reading a stack of *Cue* magazines, one of which had a poll in which a dozen or so jazz critics named their top-ten albums. I memorized many of the titles, most especially the one that appeared on virtually every list: *The Louis Armstrong Story, Volume 3: Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines*. The long name interested me; in pop music, volume two contained second-draw stuff that didn't fit on the first, so why *Volume 3*? And who was Earl Hines? Above all: Louis Armstrong?—the beaming, perspiring guy who sang "Blueberry Hill" on Ed Sullivan? I had always enjoyed watching him, but was he a genuinely vital figure or a tourist attraction, like the other super-famous jazz musician of the day, Al Hirt? I bought the album, sneaked it into my collection, and bided my time until my sister and parents were out of the house.

And so I am sitting on the navy-patterned sofa in the den, scrupulously designed by my mother, with its ceiling of red damask wallpaper and oak beams, the walls fitted with a redwood chair-railing painted white, an oak floor with oak pegs, a brick fireplace to my left, and some ten or twelve feet before me a dark pine unit that housed the stereo, a television, and book shelves; and though this room disappeared in 1973 and my memory has slackened, it and the moment—not least a gentle, Indian-summer stillness in the air—are kept persistently vivid by the

recollection of putting the platter on the turntable and returning to the sofa before the automatic tone arm descended to the first groove of "Basin Street Blues." I briefly describe that performance in the essay "Hot," included here, but when I first heard the opening measures with their tinkling celeste, my stomach sank and I groaned: This was worse than I feared, \$2.79 down the drain. Yet almost immediately, a soft and gravelly, wordless crooning—truly "a kind of excellent dumb discourse"—emerged from what universe I could not imagine. After the final trumpet solo, which builds in spiritual increments, I was at the turntable before the next track began, and played it again, standing there, and then a third time, after which I lifted the platter and noticed a wet spot, a drop of water on the vinyl, and realized I was crying.

I returned the album to its place knowing, at fifteen, that I was in possession, as far as my provincial world was concerned, of a fairly astonishing secret. It was the B Minor Mass all over again; Louis Armstrong, the clowning TV personality, was Bach; and I was then and for some years to come defensive enough not to tell anyone. But, of course, everything had changed. The world was not as it seemed, genius was not confined to the realm of marble busts and high-school music rooms. It took me six months to listen to all of side one, in part because I played it only when no one else was around, and memorized each selection before moving to the next. "Weather Bird," the madman joust with Hines, made me laugh aloud. I did skip quickly over "No, Papa, No." But not "Muggles," which begins tediously, until midway in its string of solos Armstrong alights for one of the most dramatic entrances in musical history and turns a blues into his own Kyrie eleison; or "St. James Infirmary," an inspired rendition of a tune I knew from my immersion in blues and folk; or "Tight Like This," which was too confusing, head-spinning, fearsome, and weird to share indiscriminately with anyone—all that transgender japing as Armstrong erects a pyramid made of three increasingly blissed-out segments I assumed he could not surpass.

My jazz obsession waxed over those six months as I bought records, listened to the few hours of daily jazz broadcasting, read reviews, lost myself for hours at a time in Leonard Feather's *The New Edition of the Encyclopedia of Jazz*, and borrowed ID to gain admittance to the Village Vanguard and the Village Gate. I drifted increasingly into my own world, surreptitiously reading Modern Libraries and paperbacks in class or mentally improvising solos while the second-hand beat out another fifty-minute torment. Pretending to take class notes, I made lists of musicians I had heard or needed to hear. Or I'd fasten on a tune, improvising for days on end—"Airegin," "Criss Cross"—one chorus

after another, bebopping relentlessly into oblivion. Only English engaged my interest—many days, I did not attend school at all. The Beatles arrived; I hardly noticed. Among dozens of albums I accumulated, there were more by Armstrong and I played them with the others in normal fashion—I could hardly wait to get the platters on the turntable, each one a mystery until spun, since, unlike pop, jazz was not much previewed on radio.

My sixteenth birthday fell on a Saturday, and by way of giving myself a present, I figured it was time to finally flip *The Louis Armstrong Story, Volume 3*. The punch line is this: “West End Blues” leads off side two. Armstrong had, in fact, surpassed “Tight Like This.” Fortunately, the rest of the side, which I also played that afternoon, represented an unmistakable falling off—Louis had already exhausted me and it was consoling to know that, like Hercules, he was half god and half human. Years later Decca released an album of big-band Armstrong, *Rare Items*, annotated by Dan Morgenstern, which confirmed my suspicion that Armstrong is inexhaustibly exhausting and that there is nothing to be done except surrender. To borrow Harold Bloom’s conceit, Armstrong invented the human in American music, supplanting the mechanics of ragtime and traditional polyphonic jazz as well as classical alloys (from Gottschalk to Dvořák to Gershwin) that attempted to create “serious” music from American folk sources, with a fluid, graceful, rhythmically unparalleled model on which a durable art grounded in individualism could flourish.

In Armstrong’s world, it was no longer sufficient to merely master the trumpet or saxophone; instead, jazz musicians adapted their instruments as extensions of themselves, making each solo as distinct as a signature or fingerprint. At a 1966 concert on Randall’s Island, Edmund Hall and Pee Wee Russell played a duet, and I could scarcely believe they were playing the same instrument, so utterly distinctive was each man’s approach to the clarinet. By then I had learned, with immense satisfaction, that not only is character fate, but also style, timbre, and attack. Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Ben Webster, Bud Freeman, and Herschel Evans all played tenor saxophone and were of similar age and background, yet announced themselves unconditionally in the space of a few notes. Nor was this generational: for the same could be said of their successors, tenor players like Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins, Stan Getz, John Coltrane, Charlie Rouse, Wayne Shorter, Zoot Sims, Booker Ervin, and—here is the thing—*many others*. This apparently infinite well of personal expression quickened my fixation and deepened my resolve.

Which may not be the best preparation for writing jazz criticism. I recently asked pianist and broadcaster Marian McPartland what she lis-

tened for in the young musicians she actively encourages. She identified a range of technical abilities; when I mentioned originality, she thought for a moment and said, no, she didn't look for that. She was concerned with mastery of the form. Not me: I take a certain degree of mastery for granted (one doesn't review amateurs) and search for a core of singularity that, in jazz, frequently trumps conventional virtuosity. That approach may no longer be fair when the majority of them emerge not from diverse apprenticeships with acknowledged maestros, but from the classroom, where conformity is a virtue and requirement. In this atmosphere, individuality becomes a luxury, sometimes defined by geography. If you visit Des Moines and you go to a bar where someone is playing luminous piano in the manner of Hank Jones, you may feel you have stumbled into heaven. In New York, that same someone would be just a guy who plays Hank Jones; we've already got the original (from Vicksburg, Mississippi, by way of Pontiac, Michigan). Lester Young once said, "Originality's the thing. You can have tone and technique and a lot of other things but without originality you ain't really nowhere." Easy for him—he was also half god, half human.

Bill Crow tells a story in which Gene Quill walks off the stage at Birdland and a heckler tells him, "All you do is play like Charlie Parker," whereupon Quill holds out his alto and says, "Here, *you* play like Charlie Parker." I've heard the same story involving Richie Kamuca and Lester Young—it's probably generic. A lover of Beethoven's sonatas is pleased to encounter someone who plays them well, yet Parker or Young lovers decry a musician who can do the same. Interpretation, the lifeblood of classical music, is downgraded to imitation in jazz, beyond occasional attempts at orchestral repertory. One does grow weary as the generation of Rollins clones gives way to Coltrane clones followed by Shorter clones. We are, of course, spoiled, those of us who lived through the jazz eras in which individuality ruled.

In 1919, the Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet, who premiered *The Soldier's Tale* and other early 20th-century musical benchmarks, reviewed a concert he attended in London by Will Marion Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra. He concluded his essay by comparing Cook's musicians, among them clarinet virtuoso Sidney Bechet, to "those figures to whom we owe the advent of our art," the 17th- and 18th-century pioneers "who made expressive works of dance airs, clearing the way for Haydn and Mozart." He suggested that Bechet's way was "perhaps the high way the whole world" would soon travel.

Ansermet was most prescient in his assumption that Cook's men were heralds of permanent artists like Haydn and Mozart, not the finished product. Within a decade the world would learn of Bechet, Armstrong,

Ellington, Bessie Smith, Hines, Beiderbecke, Hawkins, Fletcher Henderson, Benny Carter, and other artists who fulfilled his prophecy. For a while jazz also fulfilled Adrian Leverkühn's prognostication (*Doctor Faustus*) that "A great deal of melancholy ambition will fall away from art, and a new innocence, yes, a harmlessness, will emerge. Art will embrace the future, reclaiming its role as the servant of a community that encompasses far more than 'education' and that does not acquire culture, but perhaps is culture." As for that jarring word, *harmlessness*, recall Dr. Johnson's colloquy with Boswell:

BOSWELL: Is not *harmless pleasure* very tame?

JOHNSON: Nay, Sir, harmless pleasure is the highest praise. Pleasure is a word of dubious import; pleasure is in general dangerous, and pernicious to virtue; to be able therefore to furnish pleasure that is harmless, pleasure pure and unalloyed, is as great a power as men can possess.

Ansermet exulted at being present at genesis. We are not far removed from genesis now, though far enough to feel the pressing burden of history. Until recently, jazz critics were engaged in evaluating potential classics; now we are just as likely to review interpretations of, remakes of, and homages to those classics. When I began writing, it was possible to see five of the jazz grandees mentioned above. Jazz sustains its allure in part because so much early history continues on parade. But the longer the parade grows the harder it is to find a place in line.

The trade of writing about music hasn't changed in the nearly 200 years since it became a journalistic sideline. The trick is still to find concrete images to describe and appraise non-verbal art and the feelings it engenders while sustaining one's youthful ardor and openness—despite the mellowing or wisdom or crankiness or despair or revelation that comes with age. The death of jazz, movies, literature, and civilization is as confidently predicted as the end of the world and the second coming. Sidney Bechet, in his posthumous memoir, offered a more realistic credo: "You got to be in the sun to feel the sun. It's that way with music too." It's that way with everything. Criticism is often a battleground between empathy and disdain. A musician once complained that my work is too emotional. He's right. Much as I admire the writing of categorical intellectuals, feeling is the only arbiter I completely trust. Like everyone else, I aspired to join William James's tough-minded tribe—just as I determined to be one of those who, in Bertrand Russell's dictum, braved the future rather than retreat to the past. It didn't work out that way: As a critic, I am chiefly an enthusiast mired in the past and reliant on sensi-

bility. This confession is not an apology, just fair warning to anyone who wandered out of the rain into these pages.

A vigorous art deserves and requires a disputatious criticism. Better to be wrongheaded and punitive from time to time than reliably soft, predictable, and accommodating. But with the eradication of antitrust laws and the selling out of the FCC, not to mention the retailing of art to corporate interests (through an insidious extension of copyright protection for what amounts to perpetuity), jazz has all but disappeared from commercial TV and radio. I concluded some time ago that I could not justify using the space allotted me in the *Village Voice* or other venues to caution readers against records they've never heard of. Much of my time was spent searching for performances and recordings I liked well enough to explore in essay form and that exemplified the art's liveliness. As a result, enthusiasm became a safe harbor and disputation a matter of personal grousing, except once in a while, usually when covering festivals that guarantee excuses to pick nits.

This selection of moderately revised pieces from a period of nearly 14 years is the fourth drawn principally from the Weather Bird column I began writing for the *Voice* in 1974 and discontinued at the end of 2003; it follows *Riding on a Blue Note*, *Rhythm-a-ning*, and *Faces in the Crowd*. Policy changes altered the kind of work done there, and I found myself drawn to other projects, as I had been for much of the '90s. I have nothing but gratitude for the *Voice*, which allowed me free rein and paid me well to pursue a kind of writing no other publication permitted. I had a long run and few complaints.

When Bob Christgau initially asked me to write the column, I thought it would co-exist namelessly with other writings in *Music*. But, of course, it had to have its own heading; I objected to *Jazz* because I was too sensitive to the implication—rampant in those days—that jazz and music were mutually exclusive. Most universities with jazz programs then, and quite a few now, inserted them in Folklore, African American, and English departments, anything but Music. So I reasoned: Let the banner be something neutral and personal. I chose Weather Bird mainly because the Armstrong-Hines record's blending of humor and drama, finery and thrills, like-mindedness and canny aggression, and its uniqueness (even now, after more than 75 years) incarnates the essence and peculiar logic of jazz. Moreover, it is the greatest of all jazz duets, and I had thought of criticism as a dialogue between writer and reader—that's the way it seemed to me, reading the great critics, their impressions fueling my own. It came as quite a shock to discover that many readers think

criticism is merely a sermon to which they are obliged to respond with huzzahs or catcalls. Like George Brent in *Jezebel*: "I like my convictions undiluted, same as I do my bourbon."

Dialogue aside, the name also served as a quadruple pun—signaling Armstrong, New Orleans funerals ("Flee as a Bird to the Mountain"), Charlie Parker (Bird), the god of postwar jazz; and Bob Dylan ("You don't need a weather man to know which way the wind blows"), the swami of my generation, which I had vainly sought to engage. Part One, covering the not very gay '90s, is called "The Beige Decade," a paraphrase of Thomas Beer's summa of the 1890s, *The Mauve Decade*, so titled, because—he explained, restating Whistler—his was a pink era trying to be purple. The beige decade was a time in which white tried to be black and vice versa, indicating a large stride toward Duke Ellington's "fantasy" of a common ground for black and tan.

During most of those years I worked on two books, a biography of Bing Crosby and *Visions of Jazz*, and consequently was often on halftime at or on sabbatical from the *Voice*. With the books finished, I was ravenous to resume my old regimen; the reader will note that Part Two, representing the work of three years, is almost as long as Part One. I hardly need add that I've selected pieces that seemed to me worth revisiting and suppressed those that were more ephemeral or should never have seeped through my modem. It was a mostly pleasant surprise to reread the jazz festival reviews, which I had initially not planned on including. One of my more frequent complaints about the JVC Jazz Festival is that it rarely succeeds in summarizing the state of things, yet in retrospect it often appears to have done precisely that, one way or another. If the triptych of Armstrong pieces in the last section seems to close a circle, given the foregoing remarks, that outcome was not intentional. I'm not sure what triggered the renewed obsession: his centenary, my Crosby research, Ken Burns and Geoffrey C. Ward's *Jazz*, and a liner note assignment all played a part. Though none of this work has appeared in book form before, other essays about many of the same artists have; I hope that in each instance I've come up with something new.

All but 16 pieces and the introduction originally appeared in the *Village Voice*, and are copyright V.V. Publishing Corporation and reprinted by permission. I am indebted to several *Voice* editors who presided over the work included here: Chuck Eddy, Eric Weisbard, Joe Levy, and Doug Simmons, as well as the Editor in Chief, Don Forst. I take this opportunity to thank Diane Fisher, who first brought me into the paper in 1973. Chiefly, I thank Robert Christgau, the editor of the vast majority of these pages. This book is in part dedicated to him—a gesture that can

hardly convey the immense satisfaction of working with him for so many years.

I'm grateful to John Rockwell and Fletcher Roberts for asking me to write the pieces that appeared in the *Arts & Leisure* section of *The New York Times*. I thank Fred Kaplan for bringing me to the short-lived magazine *Fi* and *The Absolute Sound*, which published a few of these reviews. I was honored when Benny Carter asked me to write an appreciation for his Kennedy Center Honor, and more so when he gave me a rare interview. Seth Rothstein of Columbia/Legacy convinced me to write liner notes, and I'm glad he did. Four essays were commissioned for books, and I am grateful to their editors and publishers: Eric Weisbard asked me to deliver a paper at the 2002 Experimental Music Project symposium in Seattle, and shrewdly persuaded me to expand it for *This Is Pop* (Harvard University Press); Geoffrey Ward requested "Parajazz" for his invaluable companion to *Jazz* (Knopf); Robert Wilson and Stanley Marcus included Ellington in *American Greats* (Public Affairs); and Bea Friedland recruited the introduction to Eddie Condon's *We Called It Music* (Da Capo).

It's a lucky writer who gets to eulogize two of his editors while they continue to flourish—formal appreciations of Sheldon Meyer (for the *New York Times Book Review*) and Robert Christgau (for the festschrift *Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough*) will reappear in a subsequent volume of my essays. The one written on the occasion of Sheldon's retirement proved to be way premature. This is our fifth book together—one neither of us anticipated when we worked on *Visions of Jazz*. I am delighted, as ever, to acknowledge the splendid support of OUP, especially music editor Kim Robinson, and a staff that includes the venerable Joellyn Ausranka, Eve Bachrach, Woody Gilmartin, copyeditor Patterson Lamb, cover designer Kathleen Lynch, and publicist Jordan Bucher. I was honored to be photographed by Herman Leonard, the George Hurrell of jazz photography, an incomparable master of lighting and indefatigable companion, who provided a memorable sojourn in New Orleans; my thanks as well to his indispensable aides, Jenny Bagert, Elizabeth Underwood, and Annie Ripper. Thanks also to Michael Anderson, who convinced me to go memoir-heavy in the preceding pages, and Steve Futterman, who encouraged me to keep some of those that follow.

I am grateful to have my interests represented by Georges Borchardt, Inc., and thank Georges and Anne Borchardt and DeAnna Heindel for working so hard for such meager commissions. My assistant Elora Charles, a classics expert who doubles as muse ("Shouldn't you be working on, uh, something?"), has taught me more about Alexander the Great

and other ancients than I thought I wanted to know. Norma Salfarlie brings order from chaos. I am lucky to be embedded in a small but close family, and owe more than gratitude to Norman and Helen Halper, Donna and Paul Rothchild and my nieces, Lee and Jenny Rothchild; and Ronnie Halper and Marc Donner and my nephew, Aaron Donner. This book is largely dedicated, along with everything I do, to three women. My mother, Alice Giddins, is a beacon of independence and a lifelong inspiration. Deborah Halper is the love of my life and the soul of my work, which she actually reads, exceeding all marital obligations. Lea Giddins, having entered high school, writes more than I do, and not only doesn't get paid for it but has to suffer the indignity of grading. Yet she helps me more than I do her. But for Debbie and Lea, I'd play hooky all the time.

G.G.
April 2004

PART ONE



The Beige Decade, 1990–2000

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1 ❖ Tender Moments (JVC 1990)

I didn't attend many events at the JVC Jazz Festival this year, in part because of other commitments and in part because there wasn't much I wanted to hear. From what I saw, the staid schedule was given a lack-luster presentation. My sense of foreboding was triggered opening night when I noticed that the usual program was replaced by a JVC brochure in which pride of place was given not to greetings from the "organizer," George Wein, but to the sponsor, JVC president Hiroshi Sano. The general absence of Wein at the concerts was also notable: His enthusiasm can usually be counted on to impart a touch of festiveness. Too many of the disc jockey announcers, on the other hand, recalled Zippy: Hey, kids, are we having fun yet? One of them obliviously advised the audience to attend an Oscar Peterson concert that had been canceled weeks earlier. The venues were troublesome as usual, excepting the marvelous Weill Recital Hall. Most nettlesome was the rudeness of latecomers who, per usual, were encouraged to flounce in whenever they liked. Still, there were tender moments even amid the chaos, and lessons to be gleaned.

Dizzy Gillespie and his United Nations All-Star Orchestra were preceded by Marcus Roberts and a band so repressed by its own dignity it might have been playing conservatory etudes. The best pieces were an Ellington blues and an original called "The Cat in the Hat Comes Back," which featured an exacting, vigorous trumpet solo by Scotty Barnhard, who alone seemed determined to get some sparks flying. Roberts himself was most engaging in an unaccompanied version of Monk's "Misterioso," with supple guitar-like washes and a brief stride interlude, and even then his touch was chilly. Contrast Gillespie, who floated out playing a miked trumpet while the orchestra asserted the various rhythmic figures of "Manteca," turning Carnegie Hall from blue to Caribbean red. Having announced his own preeminence in a characteristically jostling solo, combining introspective timbre and dazzling pyrotechnics, restoring the inclination to dance and revel, he served as host for the specialty numbers that followed—James Moody hurtling through Gillespie's Afrocentric "Kush" and his own "Moody's Mood for Love" (for which Dizzy sang the woman's part); Paquito D'Rivera employing clarinet and alto on a "Latin American Suite" that also showcased Slide Hampton, Claudio Roditi, and a rousing young pianist from Panama named Danilo Perez; Jon Faddis and Gillespie splitting the atom on "And Then She Danced" from Gillespie's undervalued album *Jambo Caribe*. Flora Purim

dispelled the magic, but a conguero named Giovanni Hidalgo restored it. The sound was boxy.

The sound was exactly what it's supposed to be at Carnegie Hall the following evening for a flamboyant set by the World Saxophone Quartet. The absence of amplification allowed all the nuances and dynamics to resound the way the players intended. After the opening theme, "Step-pin'," David Murray reached back to his gospel past for a dedication to Nelson Mandela, played over a rigorous vamp stated first in real time and then in double time by Hamiet Bluiett's baritone, while Oliver Lake and Arthur Blythe meshed their altos in response. Oliver took the lead on "Sittin' on the Dock of the Play," defining a backbeat so palpable you could hear the drums that weren't there; Bluiett showed off his extravagant command in a cadenza to "Sophisticated Lady," melding pianissimo undertones, popped keys, stentorian barks, and siren whistles (all in dramatic service to Ellington's melody), before the ensemble filled out the release. A cadenza by Blythe led into a fast, swing riff with diverse voicings and a free episode. Murray, backed by humming chords, played top to bottom on a ballad, working up an array of blazing harmonics. Together and individually, the WSQ makes the blood roar.

I appreciated the opportunity to hear, on the same bill, Steve Reich and his ensemble performing *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* and *Music for 18 Instruments*, two pieces written in the mid-'70s. But I'm not eager to hear them again. Imagine Red Norvo's "Dance of the Octopus" played repeatedly for an hour. The subtle shifts in rhythmic figures and the glacial articulation—especially in the latter piece, which combined four voices, cello, violin, and two clarinets with rotating pianists and xylophonists—were intoxicating for minutes at a time, occasionally conveying the white light given off by Gregorian chant. Yet at length, the goal seemed to be to induce a trance, the last thing I want from music. At times, the ceaseless malletting suggested a confluence of drills, a visit to the dentist. Yet the blending of clarinets and strings was tantalizing; arrangers could do some happy fishing in this pond.

Perhaps the week's most exhilarating surprise took place in direct contravention to what was intended. "An Evening of American Song," at Town Hall, promised restrained interpretations of all the usual suspects. But Barbara Lea, who was supposed to sing Berlin, Gershwin, and Porter, switched to Vincent Youmans—for the most part, obscure Vincent Youmans at that; and Ruby Braff and Dick Hyman, who were scheduled to perform songs from *My Fair Lady*, did for a while, then switched to Fats Waller and James P. Johnson. Two acts makes for a long first set. Gerry Mulligan, who wasn't aware of the changes, came out after intermission and announced that since we'd been hearing all that Berlin,

Gershwin, and Porter, he'd play his own material—which is what he'd been scheduled to do all along. A few Tin Pan Alleycats grumbled, but not for long. Mulligan was in peak form as player and composer. He introduced several new pieces from an upcoming album that had the tangy lyricism and rhythmic gait of his best work, among them "Lonesome Boulevard," which has the solid ease of a country air; "A Gift for Dizzy," a heady samba; "Sun on Stairs," which combines swing riffs with a delicate release; and his latest and fastest train song, "The Flying Scotsman." His satiny, expressive timbre remains unrivaled on baritone, his improvisations as lucid and coherent as his themes.

Of Mulligan's older pieces, "Line for Lyons" ("written in 1910 by Jelly Roll Morton," the composer announced), one of the most enduring melodies to come out of the cool era, was exceptional. Mulligan began his solo accompanied by Dean Johnson's bass and built to a sequence of nimble fours with drummer Dave Ratajczak. Bill Charlap, an intense robust pianist who favors rigorous rhythmic figures and knuckle-busting clusters, proved his mastery of dynamics by following the tumult with a quiet solo of his own. On his autobiographical lament, "I Never Was a Young Man," Mulligan sang the rueful lyric and the mike went dead, as it had done repeatedly during Lea's set. Throwing his head back, he managed to fill the hall anyway, and mused afterward, "I'm probably the only singer on Broadway who's not miked." He ought to have been given an evening to himself, quartet for one set and big band for the other.

Evenings given over to Jim Hall and Stan Getz were agreeable, though each was sabotaged by strings, real and synthesized. Pat Metheny served charmingly as an informal host for Hall, noting on behalf of the many participating guitarists, "We can all trace the biggest parts of our styles to Jim." The tribute provided the most elliptical of stylists an opportunity to revive several of his musical associations from the past 30-plus years. With Ron Carter, he played "Alone Together" and "St. Thomas"; with Bob Brookmeyer, a medley of "Skylark" and "Begin the Beguine," which found the rarely heard valve trombonist's conversational tone, proliferating ideas, and long phrases fully intact; with Mulligan, "All the Things You Are" (contrapuntal and fresh) and "Prelude to a Kiss." Hall's clarity and economy, his sliding pitches and dense harmonies were buoyant throughout. The program's pace was fatally skewed by two extended works that combined string quartet with a jazz rhythm section—a piece Hall wrote in college and a more recent opus by Don Thompson. A third piece for strings and Gary Burton—Astor Piazzola's "Laura's Dream"—had a pleasing romantic edge, but little spontaneity. The subsequent guitar duets came alive twice: John Scofield joined Hall on the old Coleman

Hawkins showstopper, "Sancticity," an outstanding vehicle; and Metheny contrasted his rangy riffs with Hall's tranquil chime-like notes and snare-like strumming on Jobim's "Chega de Saudade." Incredibly, a battery of photographers whose cannon roar devastated one piece after another invaded the concert. One photographer explained that this was a producer's idea, to get shots for a forthcoming album cover. Sol Hurok is spinning.

Stan Getz alternated between playing with his superb quartet (Kenny Barron, Alex Blake, Terri Lyne Carrington) and the quartet augmented by two synthesizers, played by Eddie Del Barrio and Frank Zottoli. The latter were present to perform virtually his entire new album, *Apasionado*, written by Del Barrio, Herb Alpert, and Getz. Getz's comeback after serious illness is cause for celebration ("I'm too evil to die," he told Mel Lewis), and he performed with vigor and ingenuity, but the album is second-rate; only on a blues did he slice decisively through the caloric fake strings. The quartet pieces were something else, of course. *Apasionado* may sell better this year (though that remains to be seen), but his other new album, *Anniversary*, is the one that will take permanent place among the Getz benchmarks. When he returned to that material, he blazed—the famous Getz sound variously smoky and electrifying, his alliance with Kenny Barron even more developed than on the album. A couple of times, he called for the mikes to be turned off, but the grateful applause of the audience didn't deter him from having them turned back on as he returned to yet another selection from *Apasionado*. As a result, he never sustained the head of steam he can build on a great night. But he came damn close at the end, following a galvanizing "What Is This Thing Called Love?" with an impassioned "Blood Count."

The big surprise of the week was the appearance by pianist Sir Charles Thompson in the Weill Recital series. Thompson achieved a secure, individual approach in the '40s and '50s, notably on recordings with Coleman Hawkins and Jimmy Rushing—he had edited down a glossary of swing techniques to a spare style of acute melodic ideas. At 72, he chose to use his hour for a musical memoir, recalling his associations with Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Hawkins, and others, and showed how firmly rooted he is in the Tatum/Wilson/Waller tradition. He described his solo on Hawkins's "Stuffy" (a Thompson original) as "the first time someone heard me and thought it was me playing and not Count Basie." He incorporated lovely stride episodes in an Ellington-Strayhorn medley, showed off his bop (cum Garner) sensibility on "Stella by Starlight" and "All the Things You Are," and played the entire Basie arrangements of "April in Paris" and "One O'Clock Jump," before closing with his "claim to fame," "Robbins' Nest." It was an eminently civilized presentation,

nostalgic and compelling at the same time, the sort of epiphany that should make a jazz festival feel good about itself the next morning.

[*Village Voice*, 24 July 1990]

2 ❖ *Front Porch Blues* (*Colorado 1990*)

Early in the first afternoon of music at Dick and Maddie Gibson's 28th annual Colorado Jazz Party, I found myself especially looking forward to the sets with Herb Ellis, hoping to hear some blues. Even before the party was off to an official start, at the Friday night musicians' jam, he got off a few lucid 12-bar strophes that made me realize how hungry I was for that southwestern minor-third twang, the gospel according to Charlie Christian. Ellis's phrases have an easy, loping quality that whisks you along; they are buoyed by familiar dissonances yet surprisingly unfogged by cliché.

The opening sets on Saturday afternoon usually smack of warm-up time, and so it was when Snooky Young and Urbie Green played a duet on "When Your Lover Has Gone" and Flip Phillips and Kenny Davern followed with "Hindustan." It was when those same players, plus a rhythm section including Ellis, went into "Blues Walk," however, that the stakes went up a notch. Ellis let loose one chorus after another, grunting in unison with his solo, his eyes shut and mouth distorted by the divine afflatus. Years ago people talked about his technical agility—this was the guy who nightly traded body blows with Oscar Peterson and earned a niche in the studios. But the most winning quality of his playing all Labor Day weekend was simplicity of technique and a corresponding inflation of feeling.

During a subsequent set, when Ellis sidled out of the verse to "The More I See You" into a backbeat pocket for the chorus, Maddie Gibson suggested his playing might reflect a salutary move, two years ago, from L.A. to Arkansas. I've never seen Arkansas, let alone his home, so there was nothing to stop me from imagining him just a-settin' and a-rockin' on his front porch, his knee crossed high on the other leg, unfurling blues choruses until the strings got too hot to touch. That was the image suggested when he laid back in his chair, face clenched, for a molasses-slow "Georgia on My Mind" and a chipper "Sweet Georgia Brown," backed by Bob Haggart's bass and Bruno Carr's drums. On another set, he joined

with Carr, Major Holley, and pianist Roger Kellaway, but signaled them to lay out as he triggered a pumping, stop-time solo. When Kellaway got knee-deep into his own solo, Ellis motioned for bass and drums to drop out again, and countered Kellaway's flamboyance with his own bass line and choked chords. They were rocking.

In the early 1960s, when I first became enamored of jazz guitar, I got the wrong idea about Ellis, who will be 70 next August. His one slick and negligible effort with Charlie Byrd for Columbia was enough to put me off: Since I wasn't an Oscar Peterson fan, I failed to excavate there for early Ellis; and since his own albums for Verve and Epic (sessions with Buddy Tate and Stuff Smith) were out of catalogue—many still are—it remained for the Gibson parties, which I first attended in 1975, and the Concord Jazz series he began recording around the same time, to disabuse me of my prejudice. It's ironic, because for me, in the depths of my ignorance, the lineage of jazz guitar was pretty narrow—Christian to Barney Kessel (especially the Contemporary albums with the elusive flutist Marvin Jenkins) to Wes Montgomery, who had not yet sold out. If anyone had a stake in that lineup, it was Ellis, who came from Farmersville, Texas, and who, notwithstanding an apprenticeship with a couple of dim dance bands, was one of the first to build on Christian's accomplishment. But we are all victimized by the records that aren't available. Fortunately, Concord appears to be preparing everything for CD; look out for *Soft and Mellow, Montreux Summer 1979* (which has a characteristic "Georgia on My Mind"), and especially the neglected jewel, *Rhythm Willie*, in which Freddie Green chomps away at the rhythm, freeing Ray Brown to engage Ellis on his own linear turf. Verve and Epic need to air their archives, and someone ought to get Ellis into a studio now for a whole session of front-porch blues.

The Gibson weekends—some 35 hours of jam session music in three days—always revive my energy. This year Dick produced it in association with his youngest son, Josh, though Maddie helped as well. Having missed it last year, I was mildly surprised by two changes in the sociology of Denver. (1) Smoking was banned from the ballroom where the music is played. (2) Drinking is now permitted on Sunday nights. The wisdom of those priorities enhanced the music, which follows a fairly predictable evolutionary arc over the three days.

On Saturday, most of the pleasures are provided by individual solos, whether featured or in the midst of roaring vehicles by seven- or eight-piece bands. On Sunday, the ensemble begins to subsume the soloists, the sum dilating way beyond the parts. It's at that moment that the short hairs on the back of your neck certify the total transcendence of jam session music. On Monday, invariably the payoff day, individuals and

ensemble are in perfect accord and revelations are commonplace. I suspect the change has something to do with the gradual equalizing of so many different musicians. At first you have 60 players, mostly from New York and California, but from several other places as well, reflecting a medley of backgrounds and career choices, from club circuit stardom to studio anonymity; from blues, swing, bop, stride, and traditionalism; from as far back as 1905 (Doc Cheatham) to at least as recently as 1954 (Scott Hamilton). A day later, most such distinctions have been abandoned and you have five-dozen musicians dealing with the present moment.

A few set pieces broke up the usual routine of small instrumental bands. Joe Williams was on hand as boy singer, fronting a handpicked group: Harry Edison, Snooky Young, Bill Berry, Jerome Richardson, and a tenor terror who never gets East, Red Holloway, in the front line; and Ross Tompkins, John Heard, and Panama Francis out back. Williams was in good voice and of stirring mettle, breaking up a regimen of blues, including "In the Evening" and "Shake, Rattle and Roll," with occasional ballads, and actually managed to outrage several people with the single-entendre lyrics of "Who She Do." Since neither the Gibsons nor Williams are funded by the NEA, they have nothing to worry about.

Peanuts Hucko was asked to choose 15 musicians for a Benny Goodman repertory band, and, while the leader felt obliged to apologize for severe limitations in rehearsal time, he might well have boasted about the shine they brought to the material. Most of the arrangements were by the Henderson brothers, plus well-chosen ringers by Mel Powell ("Oh, Baby"), Mary Lou Williams ("Camel Hop"), Eddie Sauter ("Scarecrow"), and Claude Hopkins ("I Would Do Anything for You"), as well as a Bob Haggart chart written to feature Irving Fazola during their days in the Bob Crosby band. Highlights included Phil Woods swaggering through "I Found a New Baby," Dan Barrett interpreting the Lou McGarity stop-time solo on "String of Pearls," and various chorus and half-chorus epics by Hucko, Randy Sandke, Warren Vaché, and Bob Cooper, whose resplendently cool tenor reflected more than a touch of ghostly Al Cohn heat. The one grievous lapse came during "Sing Sing Sing," when pianist Paul Smith decided to burlesque the great Jess Stacy solo. Smith generally tends to go for laughs, perhaps to disguise his execrable time (one musician said of Smith after another set, "He was three beats off the entire piece. Every time he hit four, we were still pedaling through one, two, and three"), but his usual litany of corny quotes was particularly vulgar in the midst of an otherwise persuasive performance.

Benny Powell and Buddy Tate, recent survivors of serious illness, played two of the most poignant solos. Powell, who was hospitalized

most of last year for a kidney ailment, thanked everyone for sending cards and gifts, and ended, "I better shut up before I start crying." He transmuted the tears in a boldly imaginative "But Beautiful," the tone a tad wider than usual, but the ideas luminous and decisive, the drama prudently controlled. Tate is one of jazz's supermen, rebounding from one calamity after another (most recently a car accident), his Texas cry remaining untarnished. On "Billie's Bounce" and a featured solo on "Just Friends," his tenor roared: If the phrases seemed shorter, the time and resonance were yeoman—passionate, authoritative, swinging, and crested with patented shouts and moans, keeling down from the upper register. He played a duet with Scott Hamilton ("All of Me")—their first in two years—and the lockstep unison was gripping.

The two comedians of the weekend were Marty Grosz, whose canny guitar solos and vocals (he sings like Fats Waller) were preceded by straight-faced monologues, including one about a society band contractor, Bullets Auchincloss, who produces tea dances at Sing Sing (you had to be there); and Peter Appleyard, the Canadian vibraphonist and Goodman alum, who did spot-on impressions of Red Norvo, Terry Gibbs, Lionel Hampton, and Milt Jackson (in shades and listing way to the right).

Standout performances abounded: Benny Carter, unperturbed by a surge of arthritis in his neck, making "Misty" sound novel (no one else, not even Sarah Vaughan, not even Erroll Garner could do that) and "Out of Nowhere" sound easy; Phil Woods delivering an impassioned "Prelude to a Kiss" and exchanging blistering figures with Roland Hanna on "The Song Is You"; Slide Hampton, perhaps the most underrated bebop virtuoso soloist alive, approaching familiar material like "Body and Soul," "My Funny Valentine," and "Laura" with gambits so wily you didn't know what he was into until he'd already played a chorus of variations; the imperturbably personal Jimmy Knepper, inspired by or undeterred by Hampton's "Laura," following with one of his own; Kenny Davern elaborating the climaxes on "St. Louis Blues" (paced by Herb Ellis slapping the fret board), and chiming with Bob Wilber, whose own penchant for drama was realized with a painstaking "Memories of You"; Nick Brignola cheerfully transforming "Blues in the Closet," backed only by bassist Major Holley; plus Bob Cooper's mentholated "We'll Be Together Again," Scott Hamilton's shaded "Chelsea Bridge," Al Grey's mischievous "Don't Blame Me," and on and on. I've said nothing about the rhythm players, so I'll close with two words of rejoicing: Alan Dawson.

[*Village Voice*, 2 October 1990]

3 ❖ *Chippin' Off the Old Block* (Javon Jackson)

Tenor saxophonist Javon Jackson was a 22-year-old student at the Berkeley College of Music when he auditioned for Art Blakey in 1987. Blakey took him on, and three years later, when the roving graduate program known as the Jazz Messengers came to an end, Jackson had seniority among the band's sidemen. Tracing his early development on records is a gratifying game of cat and mouse. For one thing, his improvisations are short and efficient (he hasn't the time to outwear his welcome), and for another, he has crafted a cagey style from readily identifiable gambits associated with Sonny Rollins and Joe Henderson, among others. You keep waiting for an authoritative leap, a departure that lets you know the gifted student is now on his own road, and you get plenty of indications. Compare his solos on the title tracks of Blakey's *Not Yet* (Black Saint, 1988) and *Chippin' In* (Timeless, 1990). The former, five choruses long, starts with two modulated riffs, expands with Rollinsesque triplets and a fluent navigation through the low register, and finishes with a whirling Hendersonian arpeggio. It's a fine solo, but you can practically see the wheels turning.

On *Chippin' In*—not only the title track but also “Brain Stormin’,” “Byrd Flight,” “Love Walked In,” and even “Kay Pea,” where he applies Rollins's craggy low-end attack to the hypnotic midrange permutations of Prestige-era Coltrane—the influences are consolidated. You can still isolate the Rollins turnback or the Henderson riff-pattern, but his idiomatic control is richer—rhythmically halting units lead to flowing phrases gracefully draped over the chords at a precipitous tempo. The stylistic development on “Chippin' In” reverses that of “Not Yet,” beginning with Henderson-like bluster and coming to earth with the short, charged, thematic figures reminiscent of Rollins. Yet the solo has a logic and vitality that comes from inside, which is one reason after you hear it, you want to hear it again. Within months, he went beyond that, as demonstrated by a quintet he introduced at the short-lived New York jazz club, Time Jazz, in February.

The musicians assembled for that engagement embody a shorthand history of hard bop, the style that dominates today's mainstream jazz. The old man of the group is Louis Hayes, who, having served with the Adderleys, Horace Silver, and Freddie Hubbard, is the drummer most identified with the idiom after Blakey himself. The band's baby, about whom much will be heard, is 20-year-old bassist Christian McBride (who

has played with Hubbard and Benny Golson), the possessor of fleet fingers and a pre-amplifier-age tone that bounces off all the walls. In between are two more Blakey alums. The robust pianist James Williams taught at Berklee before his four-year stint as a Messenger, beginning in 1977, and has an admirable reputation for generously encouraging young musicians. Brian Lynch, a great section player who alternates between the jazz and Latin scenes, made his name with Horace Silver and played with most of New York's big bands before bringing his virtuosic Clifford Brown-inspired trumpet to the last edition of the Messengers.

Small wonder that the band clicked. The leader initiated two especially memorable dramas—the first on the immortal test piece for tenor saxophonists, “Body and Soul,” which Jackson began working on in Denver, where he grew up and started playing clubs at 16. After an eight-bar cadenza, he charted the melody with his broad dark sound, spirited tremolos, and a persuasive lyric bite. Ballads always come late for even the most gifted jazz players—Jackson's version of “You've Changed” on the final Blakey album, *One for All* (A&M), is his most awkward moment on records, though he shines when the tempo picks up after the theme statement and he's on his own—and on “Body” his tone occasionally veered a bit flat. Yet his hefty sound and steady gait kept the chorus on track. Williams came in with a diverting riff and then picked out melody notes with such authority and power (including locked-hands harmony for a couple of bars) that when Jackson returned, sustaining the brighter tempo, he was plainly aroused. As Hayes supported him with finessed waves, he began with a discursive reference to “Blues in the Night” and swaggered—Rollins's headiness very much in the air—into a sustained closing cadenza built on the materials of the song yet capped with a reference to “The March of the Children” from *The King and I*.

That hard bop isn't nearly as monolithic as its detractors used to complain was made vitally clear on an ebullient version of Rollins's blues, “Tenor Madness.” The three soloists took it in three different directions. Jackson roared, building his early choruses on discrete riffs, then generating longer phrases, bopping naturally between the lower and middle registers. Lynch likes to turn the rhythm around, displacing accents, and he succeeded to the extent that it was hard to hear the up beats; he superimposed his own time over that of the rhythm section, but he never got lost and, as Jack Webb says in *Pete Kelly's Blues*, they finished together. Williams focuses as hard on coherent phrases as on the chords, so that the harmonic structure is subordinated to his long and intense melodic figures. His firm touch makes the piano ring, and his use of rhythmic patterns in the bass augments everything he does in the treble. Also memorable were a “Star Eyes,” complete with the old Walter

Bishop Jr. intro and an effective contrapuntal tenor-trumpet finale; and Jackson's "Kay Pea," on which Lynch once again juggled the beat and Williams opposed the ardor of his linear phrases with concentrated open fourths. McBride's spacious sound (all wood, all natural) and Hayes's diplomatic snare work never failed them.

Jackson is a shy, modest man and in some respects a shy, modest player. His best solos are crystal in design and geometrical in their logic; you can follow them easily, because he plots them with deliberation, never screaming when a murmur will do, never speeding when the traffic is already flowing. It is a remarkable thing to encounter a young musician who has nothing to prove except the ability to craft a telling improvisation, and in doing so reminding us that that's accomplishment enough.

[*Village Voice*, 12 February 1991]

4 ❖ *Heavy Mettle Thunder* (Ronald Shannon Jackson)

The trouble with most fusion is that nothing ever really fuses. A few surface aspects of jazz and rock are tacked together in a highly calculated manner that only confirms the suspicion that jazz-rock is more often than not an oxymoron—an exceedingly dull one at that. As a movement, fusion is to music what melting-pot civics is to sociology. Which is, I suppose, why it has a huge popular following and a minute body of critical confirmation. A unique situation: Fusion has been with us for a quarter of a century, twice as long as the Swing Era, but virtually all commentary is focused on things like equipment and technique or nostalgia. Yet one recalls, and even revisits, some of the rousing beginnings—Tony Williams's *Emergency!* (blemished by the leader's decision to sing), and the crushing sound-storms created by Miles Davis and John McLaughlin—and wonders anew at how its potential could so quickly be sapped of vitality and innovation.

And then there was that wholly surprising incursion of the harmonic forces marshaled by Ornette Coleman. Suddenly the prophet of free jazz was notating parts for electric guitars and basses with the same meticulous zeal with which he had composed for chamber groups and symphony orchestra. The result was genuine fusion, in that you could not identify the generic parts, let alone separate them. The sound proved

no more alluring to the masses than Coleman's original assaults on musical conventions, but he did generate a voluminous critical patronage. *Dancing in Your Head* was that rarest of birds, a new sound: Nothing like it had ever been heard before. Critics on both sides of the aisle recognized that and found something congenial to applaud. Coleman went far beyond the initial spurt with *Of Human Feelings*, *Song X*, *In All Languages*, and *Virgin Beauty*. Yet instead of expanding, his audience—critics and public alike—seemed to abate. He carved his own following from the larger tribes without winning over the mainstream in jazz or rock. Which wasn't surprising. His music was visionary and absolute and hard, too new to pass as anyone's idea of fusion. You could not smell the glue or see the nuts and bolts.

The two primary beneficiaries of Coleman's Prime Time band, James Blood Ulmer and Ronald Shannon Jackson, went further still. Something about the clashing wall-to-wall harmonies admitted all kinds of possibilities. When Ulmer created his masterpiece, *Odyssey*, everyone could distinguish the dense tableaux, the elements of jazz improvisation and rock rhythms, yet the result most often sounds like country music—the real thing, from down yonder. That recording remains an isolated gem; Columbia dumped Ulmer shortly after it was released, and none of his subsequent albums have had comparable impact. I suspect it would have remained isolated even if he had been able to turn out a whole series of follow-ups. Like Coleman, who returns to the fray only when he has something new, Ulmer has not been one for facile repeats. The same is true of Jackson, who, as expected, has devoted the most attention to the music's rhythms. His records throughout the '80s and '90s suggest a steady evolution in dealing with issues as mundane as sound engineering and as substantial as viable instrumentation and the coordination of composition and improvisation.

Jackson is an astounding drummer, as everyone agrees. In the muscularity of his playing, his scrupulous control of every skin and cymbal, his mathematician's ken for subdivision, and his capacity to draw on historic and international traditions of percussion, he has emerged as a kind of all-purpose new-music connoisseur who brings a profound and unshakably individual approach to every playing situation. Considering the wallop he added to recordings by Coleman, Ulmer, Cecil Taylor, and Last Exit, it's surprising he isn't entreated to do more free-lance work and that he remains relatively little known to musicians and fans who think Dave Weckl is God's own drummer. Well, maybe *Red Warrior* (Axiom) will help to change all that. It has the air of a breakthrough; all the elements have been refined and simplified, at least on the surface. No saxophones, no violins. The instrumentation is three guitars, two basses,

and drums. In truth, the record sounds at first blush like heavy metal for intellectuals. I'd expect it to have greater appeal for the readers of *Guitar Player* than of *Down Beat*. Though if, like Coleman and Ulmer, he can amass only the audience he has created for himself, he'll end up with a more discerning crowd of his own.

You can spin the disc in one of two ways, and it's wise to give each a chance. At modest volume, the fastidiousness of the writing—Jackson is melodic without quite being lyrical—and the shape of the six pieces, as well as the variations of the guitar soloists, come across in a deft and non-threatening way. Give it the juice it deserves and clearly expects and *Red Warrior* will shake your home and everyone in the vicinity. At the center of each piece are Jackson's unanticipated changeups in the rhythm patterns—he divides, subdivides, and turns around the beat in so many ways you don't want to even try and count along. Let the musicians worry about that; they're getting paid to do it. Still, you can't miss the implacable conviction of his backbeats—now on the fourth beat, now the first, now on the second beat of alternate measures. On "Elders," every beat is a backbeat during the intro, then each of those is quartered; after a brief storm of *Ascension*-dimensions, followed by a muted guitar riff tapped with all the emotion of Morse code, he effects an incredibly spry and jumping swing riff on the snare, which, after a disarming bass solo, builds to an aroused rock-arrogant crescendo by the ensemble, which leads to a solo by the Fireball.

I don't know who of the three guitarists the Fireball is (the CD has no liner notes or solo information), but that's my shorthand for the guitarist who favors lots of reverb and overtones. I suspect he's Steve Salas, who plays with a rock band called Colorcode and was Jackson's guest on this session. The other guitarists are Jef Lee Johnson and Jack DeSalvo, and the bassists are Ramon Pooser and Conrad Mathieu. The title piece, an attractive eight-to-the bar power riff, gives each guitarist a solo (the Fireball last, of course), and their diversity underscores the album's improvisational variety. Two of them are heard in a canonical theme statement on "Ashes," to which Jackson soon adds a backbeat that has a punch reminiscent of Jimmy Crawford's bass drum in the 1930s Jimmie Lunceford band—which is to say, you feel it in the gut. Nothing is harder to sustain than a slow blues, and—though "Gate to Heaven" is festooned with the usual change-ups—the passages in which Jackson whacks alternate second beats while sustaining a shuffle rhythm have insuperable authority. He evens out the rhythm as he brightens the tempo, and, after the Fireball scrapes the frets, reprises the slow and ardent two-beat.

It's difficult to avoid the thought that *Red Warrior* would find an entirely different audience if the leader was white and 25 instead of black

and twice that. On the other hand, if that were the case, the record would have been released on a rock label and I'd probably never know it existed. Strange the ways genrefication is still determined by racism, ageism, social class, and the vagaries of record distribution.

[*Village Voice*, 26 February 1991]

5 ❖ *Go Wes, Young Man* (*Mark Whitfield*)

You can't help but suspect that much of the delayed interest generated by Mark Whitfield, the talented 23-year-old no-frills jazz guitarist who made his Village Vanguard debut last week, is related to the surprising fact that he records for Warner Bros. I mean, how many critics, having registered the label affiliation, scanned the cover photos on his first album, *The Marksman* (young and clean-cut, brown suit and tasseled loafers, no socks, crouching or leaping, guitar at the ready, in quasi-Chuck Berry poses), and tossed it into the maybe-three-weeks-from-Thursday-if-nothing-else-comes-out-in-the-interim pile? Arriving from a company that construes jazz as stylish background music, which is to say polite fusion or, worse, Quincified sampling, Whitfield is as confounding as an IBM researcher who preaches the merits of the pencil: "Inexpensive and portable, doesn't require electricity or a printer, makes instant corrections and, with practice, can be moved as fast as a cursor. Could be *the* writing implement for the '90s."

Born on Long Island (legit bass in the school band), relocated to Seattle (jazz guitar in the school band), and polished around the edges at the Berklee School, Whitfield was discovered by George Benson, who may have heard something of his own younger self in Whitfield's traditional approach, taut electric sound, fluent chords, and enthusiasm. In a fascinating new instruction book for guitarists that can be read by civilians as well, *Exploring Jazz Guitar* (Hal Leonard), Jim Hall recalls students pumping John Lewis at the School of Jazz in Lenox, Massachusetts, about how they could make a living at jazz: Lewis responded, "Wait a minute! You've got it backwards. Being able to play jazz is your reward. There is no other pay-off." Whitfield plays as if he felt well rewarded. He's got a trick bag that includes fast strumming, parallel octaves, hard plucking, edgy riffs, and fierce double-timing, but his hole card is clarity.

Just how good he is became more apparent from his opening night at

the Vanguard than from the record, or, more precisely, from a comparison between the two. Whitfield has come a long way in a year. He played several selections from the album, but with an earned mark-up in clout and radiance. Not that the album doesn't sustain a charm of its own. It accurately defines his thoroughly traditional repertoire, which consists almost exclusively of blues and ballads. (His first major gig was with organist Jack McDuff, who also gave Benson his initial shove; like Benson, Whitfield's playing is far too urbane to remain at ease in that restrictive genre.) Of the disc's six originals, "The Blues, From Way Back" is what it says, if you accept c. 1959 as "way back"; "Little Digi's Strut" is another 12-bar blues, but in eight; "The Marksman" and "Medgar Evers' Blues" cannily build on 16-bar constructions, the first in AABA song form, but both with the addition of eight-bar tag figures; "A Long Way from Home" and "Namu" are ballads. All three of the disc's standards were written by big band leaders: "The Very Thought of You" (Ray Noble), "In a Sentimental Mood" (Duke Ellington), and "No Greater Love" (Isham Jones).

The album suffers from sameness of tempo—after the opener, which is the title track, medium-up is about as heady as Whitfield gets. When he really comes alive—doubling time on "The Marksman," assembling dynamic riffs on "The Blues, From Way Back" and "Medgar Evers' Blues," displaying deft voicings on "In a Sentimental Mood" (somewhat reminiscent of George Van Eps) and "Namu"—he disarms you with his cool assurance. But live, he also exhibited a raw energy and a discerning lyricism that cut much deeper. Perhaps the most revealing performance was of Ray Noble's great song, "The Very Thought of You," which is merely efficient in the recorded version. The Cambridge-educated Noble is an unjustly eclipsed figure whose 1930s orchestras succeeded on both sides of the Atlantic; some of his songs proved especially appealing to musicians in the postwar era, including "I Hadn't Anyone Till You," "The Touch of Your Lips," and Charlie Parker's mantra, "Cherokee." "The Very Thought of You" is likely the best of them, a perfectly crafted melody that has always sat well with bass-baritone crooners (Arthur Prysock did it right), though perhaps the definitive version is the one Tony Bennett and Bobby Hackett recorded (on the former's *A Time for Love*). In the club, Whitfield established an unerring legato backbeat and picked the melody so gently he seemed to be discovering the tune's ascending cadences for the first time. Thirties ballads are now so old they're new, but musicians who can make you hear them as new are scarce. Even 25 years ago, you didn't often encounter such economy, patience, and respect for song in musicians as young as Whitfield.

He was born in the same period that took the lives of John Coltrane

and Wes Montgomery; like Wynton Marsalis, whom he credits with “guidance” as well as for the use of his rhythm section on the album, Whitfield combines an appealing button-down candor with an arresting sense of accomplishment, in his person as well as his playing, that confuses the radicals because it appeals to the wrong people for the wrong reasons as well as the right ones. I find myself increasingly impatient with those who dismiss the conservatives who dismiss free jazz, just as I am with those who rant against free jazz or swing or bop or jazz repertory. The byword in the 1970s was eclecticism; maybe eclecticism in its mature phase is authenticity. In any case, the music itself is now so diverse that you don’t see individuals spreading themselves as thin as they were wont to do back then. Whitfield is nothing if not authentic. My goodness, he opened the set with his way-back blues, even slower than on the record, wasting not a note and taking his time as though he had long since passed that stage when he might have felt the need to prove anything to anybody.

The blues bring out a lyric bite in Whitfield’s playing, although the shape of his solos isn’t innovative: He works up a riff for eight bars and goes for melodic resolution in the next four. But he’s so sure about where he’s going, and his timing is so good, you find yourself trusting him and paying increasingly close attention. His smooth tone recalls Montgomery and Benson, even Jimmy Raney and Kenny Burrell, but he mixes it up with personalized gambits—knuckle-busting double-time riffs that deserve the applause they invariably get, and brash strumming, often without a pick, Wes-style. Montgomery had a programmatic approach to solos—linear phrases often configured in octaves, followed by chords. On “Freddie Freeloader” (he also played “Bye Bye Blackbird,” confirming the doctrine that every musician under 60 has memorized at least two albums by Miles Davis), Whitfield reversed the order and began with fast chords, almost as though he were warming up for the single-note improv that followed. He climaxed with an ardent riff that made his fingers a blur and had the audience cheering.

What’s more, he’s got a congenial band that shares his ability to dramatize slow blues. Pianist Peter Martin waited out the slower tempos, choosing his direction succinctly, though he was occasionally intrusive on the faster pieces. Tarus Mateen is the second bassist I’ve heard in as many months (Christian McBride was the first) who plays deep and dark in the low register, the Paul Chambers register, preferring an earthy four to the skittery virtuoso approach that has virtually dominated the instrument since the early ’60s. And drummer Billy Kilson gets a hard chomping sound on the ride cymbal, fires up the turnbacks, and moves almost imperceptibly between his sticks and brushes in shading Whit-

field's shifts from thumb to pick, or chords to single notes. The Vanguard hasn't seen the last of these guys. And if Warner treats his records (a second one has been planned) as more than a favor to George Benson, it might open the door for other players who play for the elation of playing. It won't be the first time, incidentally. Warner Bros. actually put out several good albums in the '50s and, on Reprise, in the '60s; the former may be the only domestic jazz series that has never been reissued. Well, I'm sure Quincy is working to rectify that even as we speak.*

[*Village Voice*, 19 March 1991]

*Not quite: To no one's great surprise, Whitfield's second album for Warner was a pop album that did nothing for his career but dim the ardor of his admirers. Realizing that the company did not have his best interests at heart, he switched to Verve, determined, he told me, to make it as "a straight-ahead jazz player."

6 ❖ *Jazz Danish* (*The Jazzpar Concert*)

Denmark is neither the most nor least surprising nation in the world to sponsor the first international jazz prize. It has enjoyed direct contact with black music's perceived threat to European values since the first minstrel troupes visited almost 130 years ago. In the 1890s, Copenhagen was host to the Fisk Jubilee Singers and a black opera company; in 1903, Sousa brought over the cakewalk. Yet for half a century, at least until the 1920s, this famously liberal country, which behaved so bravely during the World War II occupation, shared the typical European paranoia about black music, characterizing it as the product of savages and worse. In his three-volume *Jazz i Danmark*, published in 1982 with a summary chapter in English, Erik Wiedemann identifies five myths that shaped the reception of jazz in Denmark: (1) racism—its creators were "sub-human"; (2) chauvinism—jazz, being primitive and exotic, represented a threat to European culture; (3) reverse racism—jazz can only be played by blacks because they are born with it; (4) biological democracy—jazz is a "natural" music because "everyone is born with it"; (5) aesthetic—jazz is folk, not art, music.

Although Denmark produced talented jazz players as early as 1924, when the first Danish jazz records were made, and had a resident big band (under the leadership of saxophonist Kai Evans) by 1927, general

mastery of the music was resisted and delayed. According to Wiedemann, conservatory-trained musicians felt compromised by the technical and emotional demands of jazz and could not accept its revolutionary aesthetics as a western phenomenon. All the myths, as well as the reluctance to endorse jazz on its own terms, were exploded in the 1940s. The Nazis had a lot to do with it.

During the five years of the occupation, concerts by Danish jazz musicians proliferated, in part because of German injunctions against jazz, which thus came to symbolize resistance. From 1933, Wiedemann writes, "advocating jazz became part of the politics of anti-fascist culture." Worse, as far as the Nazis were concerned, Danes regularly sought news from the BBC, not Danish State Radio, which was then under German control. Since the early 1960s, Danish Radio, with its Radiojazzgruppen and Radioens Big Band, has been internationally celebrated for its work in jazz—Mercer Ellington named it as the repository for his father's unreleased music. But until the war, Danish Radio snubbed jazz. The Nazis changed that in 1944, forcing the station to offer jazz broadcasts in the vain hope of drawing listeners away from the BBC.

After the liberation, however, the jazz boom fizzled and Danish musicians who had become prominent in those years—violinist Svend Asmussen, pianist-singer Leo Mathisen, guitarist-bassist-trombonist Niels Foss, early bop trombonist Peter Rasmussen, Kaz Timmermann's Harlem Kiddies quintet—found themselves playing abroad more often than at home. Mathisen, a humorous performer who modeled his style after Fats Waller's, was reduced to playing lounge piano. Asmussen might have achieved stardom in the U.S., except that on the two occasions when Benny Goodman tried to bring him over, immigration refused him a visa. So what happened? Once again jazz in Denmark, now closely identified with the horrors and affronts of the occupation, was undermined by non-musical factors. After the liberation, audiences no longer wanted to hear a music that reminded them of the dark days. Serious jazz lovers moved onto bebop; the general public went elsewhere.

In a way, the Jazzpar is also a response to nonmusical factors. The Scandinavian Tobacco Company created the prize after the Danish government banned cigarette advertising. The sponsor keeps a low profile at Jazzpar events. As Dan Morgenstern noted at the 1991 Jazzpar concert, after announcing next year's candidates, "We don't have anything like this in the United States, but if we did, you can bet the sponsor's name would be all over the stage, all over the music stands, all over everything." There were no women handing out sample weeds as in the days when Kool sponsored George Wein's New York festival. Of greater significance, the company exerted no influence on the jurors.

The event is unique in many ways. The Jazzpar is the only international jazz award; the jury for the first three years consisted of two Americans and three Europeans, plus Arnvid Meyer, the non-voting director of the Danish Jazz Center who presides, usually in silence, over the meetings. The monetary award, about \$35,000 this year, makes it the biggest jazz prize in the world, and is exclusive of travel and other expenses incurred in performing and eventually recording the programs, which thus far have consisted primarily of new work. The Jazzpar itself is a statuette created by Jorgen Haugen Sorensen; the original is a huge sculpture on display in Copenhagen's Falkoner Centret, where the main concert takes place. The first recipient, in 1990, was Muhal Richard Abrams. This year David Murray was chosen by a committee made up of Morgenstern and myself (U.S.), Philippe Carles (France), Bert Noglik (Germany), and Wiedemann. (Don Cherry, Jackie McLean, Martial Solal, and Randy Weston were the other 1991 nominees.) One key stipulation is that the recipient perform with Danish bandleaders who may select additional international soloists. Those bands were selected by a Danish committee consisting of Wiedemann, Boris Rabinowitsch, and Ib Skovgaard.

The March 13 concert in Copenhagen (repeated in Odense and Aarhus) began with the Jens Winther Quintet featuring Al Foster. Winther, a 31-year-old trumpeter now living in New York, opened with a glacial cadenza of sustained rubato notes. As Foster kicked in on the toms and cymbals, it became a medium-tempo "Alone Together." He followed with two originals, "Peace Piece" (no relation to Bill Evans's) and "Scorpio Dance," which ably contrasted the leader's plush, laconic trumpet and the stormier arpeggiated style of tenor saxophonist Tomas Franck. The second band was something to write home about. Jasper Thilo, the Danish Radio Big Band's most admired soloist (he's also recorded a fine series of albums with Al Grey, Kenny Drew, and especially Harry Edison), put together a quintet with guest Hank Jones, who arrived the morning of the performance but glittered nonetheless. Most European jazz communities reflect the influence of the key American soloists who have toured or lived with them. Denmark learned saxophone from Coleman Hawkins in 1935 and Benny Carter in 1936. During the next 50 years, the country grew rich in American expatriate musicians, including Don Byas, Oscar Pettiford, Stan Getz, Ben Webster, Dexter Gordon, Horace Parlan, Brew Moore, Thad Jones, Ed Thigpen, and Doug Raney. The Thilo group reflects all this.

Thilo's tenor sax is squarely in the Hawkins-Webster-Byas tradition, warm and lush, lyrical and relaxed. Bassist Hugo Rasmussen has a huge thumping sound in the style of Pettiford, and guitarist Doug Raney, son

of Jimmy Raney, has a deft, muted sound strikingly reminiscent of his father's. Thilo opted for a smart menu of standards from jazz and pop, including "You Leave Me Breathless," "Lover Come Back to Me," and "Tin Tin Deo." A reading of "Thou Swell" was reminiscent of the version the senior Raney recorded with Getz. But it was Jones who quietly hustled off with every number, changing from linear phrases to chords and back throughout "Chelsea Bridge," pumping up the action to a rollicking finish on "Shiny Stockings" (he and Thilo doubled time just enough to generate adrenalin), and displaying flowery open harmonies and broken chords on his patented arrangement of "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning."

The band invited to accompany Murray was Pierre Dorge's New Jungle Orchestra, an inspired choice. Dorge plays guitar and what the Art Ensemble used to call "little instruments." His compositions range over the international palette with particular attention to Africa and America, and are often transmuted by an epic, melancholy Scandinavian fervor. The New Jungle Orchestra averages 10 musicians (John Tchicai used to be a mainstay) and Dorge's music includes an impressive interpretation of *Peer Gynt* as well as the more typical improvisational festivities of *Brikama* and *Different Places Different Bananas*. His musicians entered one at a time (to Dorge's "Do Green Ants Dream?"), followed by Murray, and Horace Parlan, a resident of Denmark for 19 years. Dorge's dedication to the featured guest, "David in Wonderland," was an astute showcase, and was followed by Murray's dedications to his son, Mingus, "Shakill's Warrior," and brother, "Song for Doni." Murray's prolix, bursting tenor charged the band and audience—his high notes arching into the hidden register with deadly accuracy, his enamored ballads coursing with easy candor.

Like Denmark, Parlan has developed an approach to jazz that was dictated by a non-musical factor: polio, which resulted in the partial crippling of his right hand. From records alone, you can't tell how he surmounted that obstacle, but in concert you can see that he plays fluent linear passages with the left hand, while using his right (almost like drumsticks) for powerfully rhythmic chords. The highlight among Murray's new pieces was "Istanbul," which he said later was inspired by a stay at the hotel where Agatha Christie wrote *Murder on the Orient Express*. It opens with synthesized strings and arco bass, to which Murray adds his bass clarinet in unison with mallets. The piece sustains the opening drama—the quality of intrigue—throughout, and represents a distinguished addition to his work.

No less fascinating was Murray's collaboration with his brother Doni, a 27-year-old instructor of gospel choirs in Texas. Parlan opened with church tremolos and Doni threaded his voice through countless melis-

matic twists and turns. Soon, a genuine gospel blush was established on “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” and “Down by the Riverside,” with David roaring the obbligato and the audience clapping on two. This was how Murray had begun, playing with his family’s band in a Pentecostal Church (before Doni, who had never performed with David before, was allowed to join), and offered a rare glimpse into the roots of his music. The encore was the ever-mutating “Flowers for Albert.” The rhythm section didn’t give Murray quite the pulse he needed, but it didn’t matter much since the headiest moments were two elaborate cadenzas, the first by trombonist Jorg Hüge and the second by Murray—a full-rigged showcase of staccato blasts, multiphonics, endlessly roiling arpeggios, circular breathing, conversations between registers, and the rest. He closed with a definitive, hard-earned BLAM!

So, you ask, who are the candidates for the 1992 Jazzpar? The jurors (same as last year except Brian Priestley from the UK replaced Carles) nominated, in alphabetical order, Tommy Flanagan, Charlie Haden, Lee Konitz, Abbey Lincoln, and Albert Manglesdorff. The winner will be announced in May.*

[*Village Voice*, 2 April 1991]

*Konitz won; see “Grand-Lee,” ch. 12 below.

7 ❖ *The Glow of Doc Cheatham* (JVC 1991, Part One)

Seven years ago, I wrote, “Few educated Americans can name even five jazz musicians under the age of 40.” One measure of how quickly jazz evolves is that I can’t imagine typing such a thing today. “Under 40” is the *idée fixe* of the current JVC Jazz Festival, two-thirds over as I write, and thus far the most genial and satisfying in years. Where racism and sexism wouldn’t dare raise their shameful heads, ageism is casually flaunted. Two kinds of musicians predominate this year—under 40 and over 60. Players who came up in the ‘60s and early ‘70s must be on vacation somewhere; either that, or the programming has been done in collusion with *The New Republic* and other regressive think tanks that want to put those scarifying years . . . where? Behind us, of course.

Still, it isn’t a bad thing to underscore a phenomenon that scarcely seemed imaginable seven years back. We have gone beyond Wyntonism.

Wynton himself has gone beyond Wyntonism, which was once defined by an earnest, even didactic, devotion to contained modernism. Marsalis, now at 30 a mentor, has led the way farther back into the future by coming to grips with the full meaning of his New Orleans heritage: As Bing Crosby once said, "Louis Armstrong is the beginning and the end of music in America." If the exhilarating goings-on at the season's most revelatory concert, the salute to Doc Cheatham at Town Hall, fairly represent the zeitgeist, three generalizations may be tendered. First, Armstrong is enjoying his most pervasive influence on the shape of contemporary jazz since the middle 1930s. Second, the capaciousness of jazz repertory, once thought to be an academic, possibly Europhile, certainly white adjunct to the important business of progressive improvisation, is embraced in all its luster by young black musicians, whose support is essential to its growth. Third, momentum is building out there, and you can feel it.

In the first matter, it should be noted that we are encountering the first generation of musicians raised in the post-Armstrong world. I suspect they are liberated by his absence in a way that was never possible for their predecessors. Of matter two, it must be remembered that jazz repertory is not merely the interpretation of written scores, but the witting embrace of discrete styles and movements. At the tribute to Cheatham, we had the spectacle of Jon Faddis, Dizzy Gillespie-inspired prodigy of the '70s; Wynton Marsalis, Miles Davis-inspired prodigy of the '80s; and Byron Stripling, leading Armstrong-legatee of the '90s, playing Pops, Pops, and more Pops—not just the tunes, mind you, but the feeling, the ideas, the erotic glow. To the degree that this concert could not have been brought off 10, 20, 30, or 40 years ago, it was profoundly contemporary. It was also stunningly optimistic, which is one reason I think people were enthusing about it days later. In the parade of veteran players, we confronted the passing scene; at the same time, we had reason to believe that their riches were in good hands. Not, I hasten to stress, because the younger players know "Struttin' with Some Barbecue," but because they respect the power that makes "Struttin'" worth knowing.

Cheatham, himself a figure unique to the post-Armstrong era, is an ideal focus for the pandemic assertion of jazz verities. Watching him, at 86, lean back on his chair, a rail-thin figure of absolute rectitude with his Zero Mostel forward-comb and festive jacket, the trademark amulet hanging from his trumpet, his arms raised high in marching band posture, elbows out like wings, producing a gently perfect tone, cultivated melodies, and insouciant swing, you couldn't help but recall that there never was another music in which a man could so unmistakably find

the full measure of his gift so late in life. At least two other instances of this phenomenon presented themselves in the past two decades, and others may come to light. In 1969, at 86, ragtime pianist and songwriter Eubie Blake appeared from out of nowhere, a cipher in the history books; during the next 14 years, he brought an era back to life, in effect returning to us a part of history we had discarded and might never have recovered. A few years later, Joe Venuti, the nearly forgotten violinist of the '20s and '30s, was also back, playing with a vitality and adaptability that triggered a reassessment of his place and the nature of his art.

In one symbolic vignette of that era, Dick Gibson's Colorado Jazz Party presented Blake and Faddis in a performance of the older man's most famous song, "Memories of You." They were 93 and 23, and while the performance was stately enough, it was also forced, obvious in its appeal to ageist sentimentality, and therefore more cute than dramatic. That was not the case at Town Hall last week, where, despite the perorations of the undoubtedly well-meaning emcee, Phil Schaap, who could contain neither his infinite self-regard nor obtrusive minutiae, the cross-generational weave was more often than not natural as silk. The connective tissue of such veterans as Buddy Tate, Dizzy Gillespie, Harry Edison, Ruby Braff, Al Grey, and Britt Woodman helped bridge the generations, but no one could doubt that the evening's magnetic spell was stimulated by the contagiously impeccable Cheatham, who brushed off the inclination to patronize his seniority with an anecdote. In answer to the oft-posed request for his secret, he quoted his doctor, who instructed one of Doc's fans: "His secret is that his mother married his father." Then Cheatham sang and played one of Armstrong's songs of seduction, "I Double Dare You."

Cheatham's singing is one of the miracles of his autumnal career, a career that would be barely remembered had it ceased at 65. Although he heard King Oliver in the flesh and accompanied Ma Rainey and subbed for Armstrong at the Vendome Theater in Chicago in 1926, he was known as a lead player, which is to say that, beyond the grateful circle of musicians and bandleaders, he was hardly known at all. In the '40s, he dropped out of music, returning several years later to take up lead in Latin bands or ensemble trumpet in traditional jazz groups, like that of the DeParis Brothers. After a mid-'60s tour with Benny Goodman, he started appearing regularly in New York clubs and at festivals, and within a decade he was a fairly ubiquitous presence in the mainstream, an unassuming patriarch—he strolled unattended to his own tribute—who worked every kind of gig. Only in the last decade has he come into his own as a performer, as an entertainer. A man of unlimited charm, he might have mounted a successful career in cabaret, because the key

to his tantalizing way with a song is a mastery of parlando, his fastidious sense of which notes ought to be crooned, spoken, or whispered.

He is so secure in himself that his originality is more accepted than marveled at, though there is something truly marvelous about his manifest distinctiveness. Cheatham's timbre on trumpet occasionally puts me in mind of Bill Coleman, and his love of Armstrong informs the clarity of his phrasing; but the total effect is *sui generis*. His vocal style suggests a vanished era, but no specific antecedents. The songs he adapts become his own because he intimately caresses the lyrics. It is difficult to imagine him singing a song that expressed a sentiment he didn't fully credit. Thus "I Double Dare You" becomes far more coquettish in Cheatham's reading than in Armstrong's, which was edged with the bravado of youth, and "It's the Little Things That Mean a Lot" becomes a discourse on the social contract. In his later years, Armstrong engagingly covered the Mills Brothers' 1946 hit, "I Guess I'll Get the Papers and Go Home," but I doubt if anyone but Cheatham could make it work as an ideal, non-loying curtain closer.

The impact of what Cheatham has learned to do with a song was underscored by contrast with Byron Stripling's overripe performance of "On the Sunny Side of the Street," part of which was an Armstrong impersonation (he also played Armstrong's great solo, though at a tempo too fast to be fully effective). It was the damnedest thing of the evening—an immensely gifted young black jazz musician singing in the theatrical, pursed lips, rolling eyes style of prewar Negro entertainment, without a trace of condescension or embarrassment. Fifteen years ago, he would have been considered eccentric; 25 years ago, he'd have been called a Tom. One privilege of youth is the freedom to decode the past on your own terms. What Stripling might have learned by Cheatham's example, however, is that less is not merely more but of the essence. As a trumpet player, he already knows it. A still more impressive indication of Cheatham's genteel strength emerged in contrast to the teeming might of the three neo-Armstrongian lions in the instrumental arena. Here, more was definitely more.

The concert opened with Charlie Shavers's "Undecided" by a four-man rhythm section (Cyrus Chestnut, Howard Alden, Eddie Jones, Oliver Jackson), two altoists (Michael Hashim, Joey Cavaseno), and the three horsemen of the apocalypse. Almost immediately, you could see that as far as they were concerned bebop was to be banished this night. Stripling played it straightest; Faddis used broad glissandi, controlling the high notes that in the past have often controlled him; Marsalis growled and retarded the time. Then the trio essayed "West End Blues," Faddis and Stripling sharing the cadenza and Marsalis falling in on the theme, and

it was hair-raising. Not as hair-raising as Armstrong's 1928 record, to be sure, but close, and something of a benchmark performance in the parahistorical realm of jazz repertory. In the intensity of the homage, Stripling and Faddis each sustained a four-measure note, the latter also following though with Armstrong's downward arpeggios, while Marsalis achieved convincing authenticity in tone and Chestnut imparted a smart light-fingered interlude before the ride-out. For two choruses, the three trumpets ripped and smeared and echoed each other, and when they joined in apparently fortuitous unison passages, you could feel a cold wind on your brow. And that was just the second tune in a set that lasted 100 minutes.

Trombonists Al Grey, muted, and Britt Woodman, open, played a duet on "I'm Beginning to See the Light," followed by Grey's plunger-intoxicated "St. James Infirmary." Then, with those two riffing in the Basie mold, Buddy Tate, though looking frail and walking haltingly, romped with customary authority through "Jumpin' at the Woodside," his sound a little grayer than usual, but his energy high and his control absolute. Cheatham's full set with his regular band (Chuck Folds, Bucky Calabrese, Jackie Williams) plus Cavaseno closed the first half. The second half began with some changes in the rhythm section (rotund, ingratiating Arvell Shaw made his first appearance) and a parade of six trumpet players—the three horsemen, plus Marcus Belgrave, Harry Edison, and Dizzy Gillespie. Faddis clutched a black handkerchief in his right hand, a witty and credible touch, and Edison, with his perfect sense of space and proportion, underscored the axiom that every trumpeter who created something genuinely original in the 1930s did so by personalizing some aspect of Armstrong's precepts, in his case simplicity of line and attention to timbre.

Marsalis did something that was, in its way, as atavistic and unexpected as Stripling's vocal, and a lot more satisfying. Accompanied only by Wycliffe Gordon on tuba, he paid homage to Armstrong's mentor King Oliver, with a rendition of "King Porter Stomp," one of the two Jelly Roll Morton pieces that Oliver and Morton recorded as a duet in 1924. No one expects less of Marsalis, but it should nevertheless be noted that he did not play only the big band strain, which would have satisfied virtually any young brass player likely to essay that piece between, say, 1930 and 1990, but a complete transcription of the multi-strain work as originally composed for piano. The deed and execution were sublime, incarnating the message that Miles was a diversion for Wynton and that his truest claim to individualism may lie in the idiom of hometown euphoria that has lain dormant too long. The humorlessness that occasionally plagues his appearances was conspicuously absent tonight. Indeed,

the level at which Marsalis is now performing is so far beyond that exhibited on his belatedly released albums of standards that his reputation seems to be hovering precariously in the gap.

Similarly, Faddis's recordings of his Faddisphere suggest nothing of his hard-won victory over high-note vulgarity in making his top register ring with purpose, or his success in muting the influence of Gillespie in favor of a more austere means of expression. Snooky Young, the premiere lead trumpeter and as much an influence on Faddis's approach to sound as Gillespie is on his style, usually eschews the high end when he steps out as soloist. For Faddis, that would be a draconian decision, and his superb performance at Town Hall shows it would be an unnecessary one. On a duet with Gillespie on "I Can't Get Started," he took his characteristic clean-up position, but avoided histrionics. The notes were punched cleanly, the phrases tracked dramatically, the power soaring honestly. As for Gillespie, he probably merits an annual JVC tribute, if only for his refusal to give himself a break. Unlike the Armstrong players, he is wedded to an approach that requires lengthy, knotty configurations of a different kind of intellectual, technical, and emotional stamina.

The producer, George Wein, introduced Ruby Braff, trumpet player number eight, and provided himself an opportunity to play piano. They skipped gingerly through "Yesterdays" and "The Man I Love," and on the former, Braff, comped by Howard Alden's guitar, seemed to start every phrase in a different register or chord, as though he were surrounding the melody from all sides. It was an interlude before the deluge: "Struttin' with Some Barbecue" by the entire cast. Usually, such finales are noisily perfunctory, but this one was the concert highlight, a distillation of all that preceded it, a concentrated epiphany concerning Armstrong's dominance and the possibilities of expression under that umbrella. Every player had his chorus, and every chorus was urgent and distinctive. Yet, three stood apart—Cheatham, because his euphonious chiming precision held its own among the fireworks; Faddis, because he crested the summit without losing his head; and Marsalis, because he packed his every measure with a crackerjack surprise, doubling, retarding, sculpting, and mewing each note. The shout from the audience that greeted his last hurtling arpeggio was the sound of jazz. A good enough sound on which to depart, yet the Doc reclaimed the night with his encore, "I Guess I'll Get the Papers," and during a tripping interlude in which he and Marcus Belgrave entwined their trumpets, you could see the whole jazz past and future unfurl before your eyes. And its name is Louis Armstrong.

[*Village Voice*, 9 July 1991]

8 ❖ *Miles Ahead* (*JVC 1991, Part Two*)

The recent banner on the *Voice* cover that read “Best JVC in Memory” took me aback. The salute to Doc Cheatham was one of the best *concerts* in memory (anyway, the best since Sonny Rollins barnstormed Carnegie Hall with Roy Hargrove and Jim Hall in April), but I wrote that review when the festival was still in full swing, just before it took a nosedive in the much abused name of bebop, first in a staid set by the under-40s and then in a misguided tribute to Dexter Gordon. Yet there was a buzz this year, heightened by low expectations. Why, I can’t say. Most of the performers were familiar, sound problems and rude latecomers were omnipresent, among them an unusual number of camera-jockey tourists. Maybe, it’s this simple: For good and bad, and notwithstanding its conservative leanings, it was a jazz festival, largely unpretentious and guileless. The lesson of this particular generation of under-40s is not that they exist, but that they feel no compulsion to seek commercial prestige in the trappings of rock.

Which brings me to Miles Davis, who took a savage beating in the dailies: to Peter Watrous at the *Times*, “the problem seemed simple: Mr. Davis was incapable of sustaining more than a few notes at a time”; to Lee Jeske at the *Post*, his “set contained more noodling than a day at the Ronzoni factory.” Indeed, beforehand I advised a non-musical colleague not to expect much. The word was out that Davis had agreed to play an evening of Gil Evans arrangements at Montreux in a couple of weeks, and I had observed on a couple of occasions the disparity between what he plays in New York and what he offers the more discerning audience in Europe. Yet the first phrases I scribbled into my virginal No. 800 Reporter’s Note Book were: “long mid-register lines, wonderfully lyrical.” In short, it was the most satisfying Davis performance I’ve heard since 1987 (in the Hague). He soloed at length and with what seemed to me obvious pleasure.

It may be true, as Jeske wrote, that he played “the same set he’s been playing every year since 1985,” but he also played the same set throughout most of the ‘60s, when no one was complaining, and I’m not convinced that the slow blues and “Time after Time,” the peaks of his current book, are intrinsically inferior material to “Walkin’” and “Autumn Leaves.” (For that matter, it might be remembered he took “Autumn Leaves” from Roger Williams, who is not intrinsically superior to Cyndi Lauper.) Of course, he looked strange: He wore a curly, shoulder-length wig and

ostentatious clothing designed to show off his Mariah Carey waistline. But Davis's unembarrassed pleasure in showbiz is something I've always enjoyed. He has lately developed the habit of hoisting applause-signs with the first names of each musician in the band, occasionally the wrong sign, so that Deron Johnson got an ovation when Kenny Garrett completed a solo—not that anyone in the group would know who was being applauded when. And, as has been commonplace in recent years, he and his cohort engaged in a lot of shoulder-bumping, palm-slapping, deep crouching, and extensive promenading.

The band also came in for its share of knocks, deservedly in the case of Foley, the lead bassist, who had little to say and numerous episodes in which to say it. Excepting that, the sextet was a commendably tight and elemental unit. Garrett gets a gutsy, fervent sound on alto sax, and his solos complemented the more elusive, introverted improvisations of Davis; he occasionally plays to the gallery with coarse squawking, but he is never boring. Johnson is a find, a deft and modest keyboard player who mines the territory Herbie Hancock explored in the early '60s, bluesy figures alternating with big open chords. The flashpoint of the set came early, a slow biting blues that ideally supplemented B. B. King's opening set. Here the rhythm section—drummer Ricky Wellman, bassist Rich Patterson, and a restrained Foley—really shone, tendering a spare, surprise-filled backdrop for Davis to extend his jutting arpeggios and mournful sustained notes, sometimes open, sometimes muted. In this context, the sudden explosions—crashing cymbal, snapping bass—intensified the drama, and you had the feeling Miles wasn't walking on eggshells but through a minefield.

At other times, the sameness of rhythms—the equally distributed beats for long stretches—was numbingly dull. Is there any response to music more deadly than the dazed nodding of one's limbs because there is no nourishment for mind or body? Those moments were particularly annoying because they broke the concentration of an hour that was otherwise focused and provocative. I too wish Davis had another ballad in his pocket besides "Time after Time," but the piece continues to suit him. His extended variation was engraved with that bruised timbre reminiscent of the records with Gil Evans, and his use of space was characteristic, which is to say canny, seductive, brilliant. One might ask of Davis's critics what Freud asked of women, except that an obvious answer presents itself: What we might all have preferred is the more ambitious program that was being readied for Montreux. Even those of us who prefer Davis's noodles to almost anyone else's pasta would like to hear him aspire for the unreachable.

"Friends of Sassy: A Tribute to the Divine Sarah Vaughan" was amus-

ingly emceed by Bill Cosby. It was fairly short on recollections and anecdotes, yet misty-eyed all the same, because Vaughan is still very much alive in memory and it was hard to believe she wouldn't saunter on stage and take charge. Joe Williams sang a restrained "Misty," Dizzy Gillespie played "Lover Man," and Roberta Flack whined "Tenderly," and that was pretty much it for the direct tributes. Shirley Horn performed "Sarah," a lovely gesture as much for the ailing Carmen McRae, who wrote it, as for the object of its devotion. Opera singer Florence Quivar ended the program with an ardent reading of "The Lord's Prayer," though not with the melody Sarah sang, reminding us what music would have lost had Vaughan been persuaded to pursue "legitimacy." Riding the crest of the evening was Billy Eckstine, who reminisced, sang a couple of his greatest hits, plus "Lush Life" (backed by tenors James Moody and Frank Wess), and demonstrated total control of his vibrato. Flack descended into the pits with a rap version of "Prelude to a Kiss" and a song by Gene McDaniels that had me recalling, for want of anything else to do, the festival debacles of Diahann Carroll and Diana Ross. She did redeem herself with a fervent and persuasive reading of George Jessel's "My Mother's Eyes," a ludicrous exercise in mush that to my knowledge has only been essayed in jazz once, by Pee Wee Russell, but which Flack magically transformed. What's next? Dionne Warwick digging out "My Yiddische Mama"? No, Jackie Wilson already did that.

"One for Dexter" is best forgotten, except that an effort so consistently muddled as this calls for some attempt at explanation. Midway, it occurred to me that this was the kind of tribute to modern jazz that a reactionary like Stanley Dance might have produced if he were of a sufficiently sadistic nature. But in fact the producer was Gordon's widow, Maxine Gordon, who subtitled the event, "The Gala World Premiere of the BeBop Caravan." Shirley Scott served as music director for a program that took an approach exactly opposite to the one in honor of Doc Cheatham. Those who have thrilled to Gordon chasing Wardell Gray, or declaiming "Soy Califa," or getting around with Bobby Hutcherson, or delving into countless ballads know his music is ripe with earthy wit, stalwart charm, and torrid pleasure. None of that was in evidence in this particular caravan; nor was there much tenor saxophone playing or music composed by or associated with Gordon.

Instead there were poems, skits, platitudes, and film clips from *'Round Midnight*, as if its protagonist and Gordon were indivisible, as well as badly executed and, in some cases, badly written big band arrangements and stultifying blackouts between acts. The latter were not merely the result of bad planning (a light on stage would have prevented some of

the tripping over wires, though there was no reason why the next group couldn't be in place when the present one finished), but a peculiarity of the pervasive affectation. The tone was one of inside knowledge, precisely the kind of silly cliquishness that made the music offensive to the meeker jazz enthusiasts of the '40s. Instead of the sensual pleasure that was the cornerstone of Gordon's art, we got defensive self-righteousness. With all the attention accorded matters of race, you couldn't help but note that in the program (which wasn't distributed until intermission), all the black composers were identified, but not the white composers. Still, there were three savory moments: actor Arthur French's masterly recitation of Langston Hughes's Simple story in which the birth of bop is traced to the head-bopping of billy clubs; Bobby Hutcherson's radiant "Love Letters" on marimba; and, best of all, Barry Harris's exquisitely beautiful chorus on Ellington's "All Too Soon." Wouldn't it be nice if JVC paid tribute to Barry Harris—or will he have to be as old as Doc Cheatham?

[*Village Voice*, 23 July 1991]

9 ❖ *Benny's Brood* **(*Rickey Woodard / Jesse Davis*)**

The 29th annual Gibson Jazz Party, held in Denver over the Labor Day weekend, got jump-started at Friday's preliminary musicians' jam. The rhythm section, as good as any of those heard during the 56 sets programmed over 60 hours during the following three days, consisted of Roland Hanna, Ray Brown, Herb Ellis, and Frank Capp, and the ancient tune was "How Come You Do Me Like You Do?" The first soloists to take a shot at it were Harry Edison, the seductive master of the cup mute; Al Grey, the swashbuckling trombonist; Spike Robinson, a Lestorian tenor saxophonist known in Denver and London but not in New York; and Glenn Zottola, a big band trumpeter with an increasingly Armstrongian bite.

Then Benny Carter stepped in, pacing himself at first with curvy elliptical phrases, and soon connecting them in pungent exclamations that slashed at the rhythm, poked open the all too familiar chords, and brought the room to a sudden respectful silence. Carter, at 84, defies expectations about the vigor of jazz elders, not because he can still do it

well, but because he can still make it new. Though sequestered in a limbo beyond the prizes and huzzahs reserved for those who work in the educated European tradition and/or achieve comprehensive celebrity, he astonishes fellow musicians in part because age hasn't laid a glove on his stamina, technical aplomb, or creative edge.

He was followed to the mike by Rickey Woodard, one of five newcomers to the party, two of whom represented an infusion of relatively young blood: 26-year-old Jesse Davis, who has been much heard in New York during the past three years, and 36-year-old Woodard, who is little known outside of L.A. The recent release of their first records, on Concord Jazz, should alter their parochial reputations. Woodard plays tenor and, secondarily, alto sax in a style informed by a varied but aligned tribe of robust players who came up in the '50s; yet following Carter's lead, he played a solo that rippled with recognition of the master's odd lapidary leaps and semi-staccato transitions. Dick Gibson, who has an ear for unlikely affinities, programmed Carter and Woodard in a duet on Monday. The tune was "The More I See You" and the blend was provocative. Woodard's lucid doubling, varied once again by his emulation of Carter's timbre and concept, provided diligent responses in a series of sensational four-bar exchanges.

Woodard's presence struck a particular chord with me because I'd written about him in 1988, after an accidental encounter during a California visit. Leonard Feather and I had gone to hear a member of the Ray Charles band at the Comeback Inn ("the Vegetarian jazz club by the sea") in Venice, but the scheduled performer didn't show, so Woodard, also a member of Charles's reed section, filled in. We were impressed by his uncommon rapport with a tradition of such warm-blooded modernist tenors as Johnny Griffin, Hank Mobley, and George Coleman, which distilled his more expected debt to Coltrane. And never heard another word about him.

But Woodard was no mirage. Born and raised in Nashville, he apprenticed in his father's band, alongside his three siblings, an uncle, and a cousin, playing Top 40/r&b dance gigs in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Alabama. He turned to jazz about 15 years ago, and in 1979 relocated to L.A., where he was brought to the attention of Ray Charles, with whose orchestra he toured for seven years. Woodard married (and divorced) a Raelette and began pursuing a solo career that is now taking off with the release of *The Frank Capp Trio Presents Rickey Woodard*, with two more albums in the wings, one with Horace Silver and the other his own session for Candid.

Asked to name his favorite saxophonists, Woodard fired off a list of tenors that has an almost poetic consistency: "Ben Webster, Coleman

Hawkins, Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Dexter Gordon, George Coleman, Hank Mobley, John Coltrane, Zoot Sims—those are my favorites.” He has named his tenor and alto Pauline and Olita, though I can’t remember which is which. The album with Capp, a mostly one-take party-like session, shows how coherent and sure he is on a ballad (“Polka Dots and Moonbeams”) and on post-bop blowups (“Au Privave” and “Doxy,” on which bassist Chuck Berghofer plays the vamp he created for Nancy Sinatra’s immortal “These Boots Are Made for Walkin’”). But at the party, where he had to measure up to tunes he’d never played and in some instances had never heard, he leaned toward his grayer forebears, building his solos from the root of the harmonies, occasionally depending overmuch on riffs and quotations, but generally letting his lower notes swell and his top ones rip.

Gibson unhappily introduced him at one point with a gratuitous attack on Ornette Coleman (whose name continues to spur mainstreamers to the cross) and a preposterous but by now familiar claim for the current renaissance in milk-fed jazzpersons: “For the first time in 45 years,” he said, “there are great young jazz musicians”—a statement undermined by the demographics of his own party and specifically by the fact that the band massed behind him at that moment consisted entirely of players (Randy Sandke, Carl Fontana, Howard Alden, Roland Hanna, John Heard, Ed Thigpen) who had come to jazz well within the past 45 years. Not to mention most of the musicians on whom Woodard and all the other neo-traditionalists have devised their own angles.

Consider Jesse Davis, who gamely pitched in on every tune hurled at him, including “The Sheik of Araby.” Davis is a commanding saxophonist out of Parker and Adderley, who also made their mark in the past 45 years. His high-water work at the party included readings of “Alone Together” (with an empathic Ray Brown bass line) and “This Is Always” (with an equally empathic Milt Hinton bass line), but it was diverting to also hear him skip gingerly through the foreign territory of an old chestnut, registering the chords like a computer, and then hot-stepping his chorus. The party is invariably an education, and for Davis it was a chance to stand toe to toe with musicians he knew only on records or not at all. “Benny, Al Grey, Sweets, and Cooper—he is bad, bad!” (More about Bob Cooper later.)

Though not part of the Marsalis fold, Davis was born in New Orleans and came into contact with Ellis Marsalis during his senior year in high school, when he took courses at the Center for Creative Arts. “He asked me to play for him, a blues in F. I was playing all these Grover Washington licks. Ellis stopped me, told the band to jam, and took me downstairs to the library and made me a couple of tapes of Charlie Parker

and Sonny Stitt." His inclination to pursue jazz in the first place was a happy accident: He had been twirling the radio dial a few months earlier, and heard an "alto burning"—Cannonball Adderley.

Later that same year, 1982, he moved to Chicago to attend North-eastern Illinois University. He worked with Von Freeman and Redd Holt and soaked up some of the AACM action ("I love Muhal's stuff, his writing, everything") before moving to New York in 1986 and enrolling in Rufus Reid's program at William Patterson College. During his second semester, he got a call from Illinois Jacquet, which led to a two-and-a-half year apprenticeship in a big band ("the man is a master, I'd thought he was a honker from the JATP stuff, but he is so much more"), followed by gigs with Panama Francis, Major Holley, Cedar Walton, and Rufus Reid. "I was playing at Augie's, a small club near Columbia, when two ladies—Janet Silesky and Leah Grammatica—walked in and hired me to open a new place, M.K.'s." A series of weekend appearances at that short-lived room and its successor, Time Cafe, helped establish him on the New York scene.

Davis made his initial recording with TanaReid (*Yours and Mine*, Concord Jazz), turning in a persuasive performance of "Warm Valley," which opens with a canny duet by Reid and Ralph Moore. Carl Jefferson was sufficiently impressed to sign him for his own date, *Horn of Passion*, one of the most impressive debuts in years. Smartly produced and recorded, it combines originals based on standard progressions with standard melodies, and offers exceptional playing by Mulgrew Miller as well. Davis tears through "Lover" changes on "Li'l Mack," produces an authentic hard bop jolt in his teaming with tenor saxophonist Antoine Roney on "Stop and Go," and flares his tone—à la Benny Carter via Cannonball—on "Violets for Your Furs." But the range of his promise is best suggested on two ballads: "Here's That Rainy Day," played in long meter with Latin and gringo rhythms and fierce doubling on the turnbacks, and "Star Dust," with an a cappella verse and lyrical chorus.

The party may have confirmed something of a sea change, as he arrived dreaming of Bird and left, like everyone else, talking about Benny Carter. "I tried to play like Charlie Parker, and couldn't," Davis said. "Then I tried to play like Cannonball, and couldn't. Then Stitt and I couldn't get past the first note—Stitt is bad. Bird is the main influence because he covers so many eras and styles in his playing. He stood for the tradition, and I figured if I studied enough Bird I'd get a hold of it. Now I want to concentrate on how I feel inside, my emotions, and bringing that out in what I play. Ultimately, I want to be like Benny. Not only has he achieved longevity, but his playing is always honest and beautiful, and harmonically he plays a lot of stuff. I'd say he's the ultimate

jazz musician because he's always full of surprises. You'd never think a man who walks so slowly to the stage could get up there and kick ass on the horn like that. But his playing is so beautiful, it really inspires you." As we walked out of the musicians' room, Jimmy Knepper walked in shaking his head: "Those old cats are playing their asses off—John Frigo and, of course, Benny!"

But of the 57 musicians assembled this year, the one most talked about after Carter was undoubtedly Bob Cooper, enjoying his own renewal at 65. A veteran of the west coast scene (the Kenton band, numerous records under his own name and others, accompanist to his late wife, the good singer June Christy), Cooper demonstrated an unmistakable affinity for Al Cohn, whose broad attack and beaming ideas informed most of his appearances, including an a cappella duet with Carter on "All the Things You Are," a captivating "Hackensack," a cagily smooth solo on "There Will Never Be Another You," and a collaboration with Warren Vaché on "Yesterdays." Also unexpectedly notable were two new additions on piano, Eddie Higgins and Gerry Wiggins, who brought a romping boisterousness to their solos, and two duos that have become Gibson house bands: the tenors of Scott Hamilton and Flip Phillips and the clarinet and soprano sax of Kenny Davern and Bob Wilber—reason to call attention to three recent mainstream albums: Wilber and Davern's *Summit Reunion* (Chiaroscuro), Higgins's *Those Quiet Days*, with Kevin Eubanks and Rufus Reid (Sunnyside), and Hamilton's *Radio City*, with Wiggins (Concord Jazz).

[*Village Voice*, 17 September 1991]

10 ❖ *The Advocate* (Eddie Condon)

Eddie Condon was a vigorous jazz activist whose barbed tongue and stubborn beliefs were powerful implements for spreading the jazz gospel as he interpreted it. Decades after his death, in 1973, the kind of music he championed was still widely known as Condon-style, though, inevitably, the prophet and his music receded into memory when the last practitioners passed on. They merit our respect all the same. Condon and the success he enjoyed recall a tremulous period in jazz history, when the racial divide was first breached and the very act of playing jazz or representing oneself as a jazz musician conveyed the thrill of

anarchy. The suspicion of outlawry was real in the United States, where *Ladies Home Journal* blamed jazz for an increase in rape, and severe in the Soviet Union, where playing it was a criminal offense. Condon's career could hardly have been more unorthodox.

Though not an important instrumentalist or bandleader, Condon performed on many fine—even important—recordings and fronted countless bands. His accomplishments as a composer were few, yet he helped to codify an enduring school of jazz. He was a radical in his youth and a reactionary ever after, yet he won a lasting respect as one of jazz's most effective propagandists, heralding America's brave new music on the bandstand and off, as a musician, organizer, memoirist, broadcast personality, newspaper columnist, and club owner.

The Condon-style, also known as Chicago-Dixieland (a phrase he disliked), was born in the late 1920s, reached its apex a decade later, and sustained a popular following throughout the '40s and '50s, even though it had long since jettisoned all signs of progressive development. Indeed, predictability was part of its allure. What started out as a scrappy, every-man-for-himself music, hell-bent on capturing the drive and feeling of pioneer black jazz musicians, became a conservative backwater—a respite from the anxieties and cyclical rebellions of modernism. Played by small ensembles with a driving beat, Condon-style meant a loose-limbed music, inspired by the informality of the jam session and nourished by an intimate ambience that was far too tolerant of journeymen vocalists, roguish bandstand antics, and a petrified repertoire. But it was an honest music at its best, sometimes compellingly so, and it preserved an illusion of effortless musical camaraderie that comforted a generation.

Condon's personality mirrored his music. He worked hard at perfecting a mask of cynicism to hide the sentimentality lurking just below the surface. Had he been the scold he pretended to be, however, he could hardly have gotten away with as much mischief. A genuinely witty man, he made his impudence palatable even to his victims, who quoted Condon's jibes with pleasure. Some of his observations are among jazz's most familiar quotations. Condon on the French critic Hugues Panassié: "Who does the Frog think he is to tell us how to play? We don't tell him how to jump on a grape." On modern jazz: "The boppers flat their fifths. We consume ours." On Pee Wee Russell: "He's gaining weight—under each eye." On any number of singers: "He once tried to carry a tune across the street and broke both legs." *We Called It Music*, the first and most valuable of Condon's three books, includes several lines that have been repeated and rephrased so often most people no longer know where they originated—for example, his elegiac recollection of first hearing Bix Beiderbecke: "The sound came out like a girl saying yes."

In addition to being the entertaining memoir of a jazz musician, *We Called It Music*, subtitled "A Generation of Jazz" so that everyone would understand what *It* referred to, is a definitive statement on the first generation of white jazzmen and how they saw themselves in relation to the black innovators they emulated. Read today, half a century after the coming of modern jazz and in light of decades of myth-making revisionism, Condon's memoir brims with far more socio-musical ironies than were apparent on first publication, in 1947. Some of that irony was underscored by a strange supplementary chapter written for an English edition in 1962, and unavailable in the United States for 25 years.

The main text emphasizes the debt Condon's generation owed Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Ethel Waters, and Bessie Smith—the royalty of the new kind of music. "When [Jimmy] McPartland mentioned King Oliver," Condon writes, "smoke came out of his eyes." The contemporary reader expects no less, but it should be noted that in Condon's early years jazz was popularly associated with Paul Whiteman, Irving Berlin, and George Gershwin. In recognizing the genius of authentic jazz players, Condon and friends were siding with a community of artists that was decidedly left of respectable. The pride that animates *We Called It Music* and similar jazz memoirs reflects the satisfaction of men who were considered outlaws in their youth and pioneers as adults. In addition to serving up anecdotal portraits of the titans in action (Oliver at Lincoln Gardens, Jimmie Noone playing for Ravel, Fats Waller preparing a record date), Condon captures the excitement of young acolytes learning and, in some cases, mastering a newborn art. He recounts with chauvinistic pleasure the arrival of Beiderbecke and Leon Roppolo, who proved that whites could express themselves through black music, and he celebrates the commingling of the Irish, Italians, Jews, and bluebloods who heeded its call.

There is a paradox here. If Condon and friends started out as avant-garde renegades ("One of the ladies told me it was just like having the Indians in town again"), intent on playing jazz despite the indifference of "the Republicans" who preferred saccharine fiddle bands, they soon became the most cautious of musical populists. The more respectable and intellectual jazz became, the more they relished their reputations as "natural" musicians—the kind who can readily identify with young Eddie's rather disingenuous question, "What's reading got to do with music?" At times, he seemed to regard jazz as little more than a folk art, a non-stop jam session sustained in an alcoholic mist; the children of the Volsted Act, he explains, inebriated themselves to show that no government could dictate sobriety.

That attitude proved contagious to fans suffering from unrequited

nostalgia, as witness the gee-whiz prose occasionally served up by commentators in the liner copy of Condon's record albums: "A dozen good guys having a good time. That is, after all, what it is all about," or "This music *is* roadsters and girls and cutting classes and oranges." It also led to grumbling by distinguished players like Jack Teagarden and Pee Wee Russell, who blamed the Condon clique for stereotyping them and limiting their options. Yet Condon's best work had a spark of its own, and though he often "conducted" more than he played, his bands produced memorable work over many years by Russell, Vic Dickenson, Bobby Hackett, Billy Butterfield, Edmund Hall, Buck Clayton, Bud Freeman, Kenny Davern, and quite a few other Condon regulars.

Back in 1947, when Condon and Thomas Sugrue collaborated on *We Called It Music*, Condon was at the height of his fame as a jazz personality. His nightclub, which opened in 1945, met with great success, as did his Town Hall concerts, radio broadcasts, and records. Sugrue, a newspaper and magazine writer who wrote fiction, poetry, and a biography of the psychic Edgar Cayce, was responsible for the book's strictly historical (italicized) passages; they contain valuable information, but need to be read prudently. In excoriating the "theology" of the scholar's approach to jazz, he refuses to distinguish between quaint phrases like "licorice stick" and commonplace musicology on the order of "polyrhythm" and "glissandi." His contention that the piano was introduced in jazz in 1897, the year prostitution was legalized in the French Quarter of New Orleans, is as loony as his refusal to admit that racism helped to launch the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. Does anyone still believe that "prostitution mothered jazz" or that "the Negro is born with rhythm?" There are more mundane errors as well: Paul Whiteman commissioned *Rhapsody in Blue* (hardly "a tune," by the way) for Aeolian Hall not Carnegie; Duke Ellington made his New York debut at Baron Wilkins' Inn not the Kentucky Club; Condon did not produce the first integrated record date (the New Orleans Rhythm Kings session with Jelly Roll Morton is the most famous of those that preceded it); "jazz" and "swing" were not mutually exclusive musics. Minor factual errors aside, Sugrue's and Condon's dated notions have the anthropological value of showing firsthand some common images of jazz in the 1940s.

Condon's readers also deserve a warning about the opening section of the book, pertaining to his childhood. Stilted and jittery, it is filled with incidents of sadistic violence that are probably intended to convey a Tom Sawyer or Little Rascals flavor, but the relentless jokiness is tiresome, especially when it becomes apparent that Condon is unwilling to candidly address the subject of his family and upbringing, most

especially as concerns his ambivalence about his father and his eagerness to leave home. The same problem obtains in the 1962 addition, "Major and Minor Chords," which was originally bannered as "answering in no uncertain manner the criticism he received on his recent tour of Great Britain." Again, the writing is jokey, mannered, and sentimental, with thudding one-liners, self-serving claims, and countless references to booze.

Between these opening and closing chapters, Condon's book comes splendidly alive. From the moment he gets his first banjo and leaves home to tour with a band (at 16), the memoir sparkles. In his description of traveling to Cedar Rapids to join Peavey's Jazz Bandits, Condon makes apparent his need to find a surrogate family in jazz and an outlet for his impish behavior. He vividly portrays his ascent into the mysterious musical culture that thrived in those "mackinaw days," when everyone seemed to be dancing, spooning, and playing music at countless lake resorts all over the Midwest. The insupportable claims that come later, such as his insistence that Benny Goodman didn't play real jazz at Carnegie Hall in 1938, or that by 1947 there were no more than 50 "first class players" (including Ralph Sutton and Johnny Blowers, of course, but not Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie) must be read in the context of Condon's faith in the music that captured his imagination and liberated him from Momence, Indiana, in the early '20s. Credit him with keeping the faith and doing his damndest to sustain some of the innocence at the heart of jazz as he first knew and loved it.

Condon kept active in the years following the appearance of *We Called It Music*. His nightclub changed premises in 1958—relocating from West 3rd Street to East 56th Street—and managed to survive until 1967, for an impressive run of 22 years. He collaborated on two more books: *Eddie Condon's Treasury of Jazz* (1956), a wide-ranging anthology of writings with an accent on literary flair, edited by Condon and Richard Gehman; and *Eddie Condon's Scrapbook of Jazz* (1973), a hugely entertaining collection of pictures and captions, collated by Condon and Hank O'Neal. From 1964 on, illness prevented him from traveling much, though he embarked on occasional tours and appeared from time to time in clubs and at festivals—his last performance was at a tribute to him at the Newport Jazz Festival—New York in 1972, the year before he died. Two years later, bassist Red Balaban opened a new jazz club called Eddie Condon's on 54th Street. The walls were covered with enlarged photographs of Condon and his favorite musicians; the music was Condon-style, plain and simple; and the place prospered through 1985—40 years after Condon opened his original saloon.

[*We Called It Music*, Da Capo Press, 1986, revised 1991]

11 ❖ *Martin Williams, 1924–1992*

It is inconceivable to me that anyone ever called Martin Williams, the tireless advocate and critic of America's native arts (primarily jazz, but also movies, newspaper comics, and TV), Marty. He wore the name Martin, much as he did his inevitable narrow ties, with a casual certitude he was wont to characterize as "insufferable egomania." He had, in a word, presence. Tall and trim, the slender neckwear accentuating the span of his military frame, and exceedingly vain of his good looks, he did not lend himself to diminutives of any sort; on the contrary, he was more martinet than Marty, yet more Martin than Mr. Williams. His death leaves a gaping wound in the field of jazz criticism and education, and in the lives of all who knew and learned from him. Martin had been undergoing radiation treatment for cancer, which left him vulnerable to the flu. He was found dead in his Alexandria, Virginia, home in the early hours of April 13, 1992.

Martin was my mentor—indeed, he instructed a whole generation: critics and listeners and teachers, even musicians, though some of his contemporaries took his measure too lightly, criticizing his austere prose and even questioning the depth of his affections. Others knew he was onto something important, a way of writing about jazz that eschewed familiar anecdotes about colorful semi-mythological musicians in favor of formal but accessible musical analysis. He accomplished this with a diction virtually shorn of metaphor and reminiscence. His ego notwithstanding, Williams's criticism is remarkably selfless. When he returned to writing in the early '80s, after a long and uneasy hiatus, I encouraged him to put more of himself in his work—if not a memoir then at least a personal expression of his involvement with music. He smiled and shook his head decisively. "I can't," he said. Thirty years ago, Whitney Balliett referred to him as a man "who *thinks* about jazz more than any other public observer," and Martin's prose did, in fact, suggest an ascetic's attempt to pose ideas and ask useful questions.

He first exerted a major impact as prolific contributor to and co-editor with Nat Hentoff of *The Jazz Review* (November 1958–January 1961), an unparalleled and lamentably short-lived attempt to apply the principles of the text-focused new criticism to jazz. Many talented writers were introduced in its pages, among them several musicians—Gunther Schuller, Cannonball Adderley, Dick Katz, Bill Crow, Cecil Taylor, Zita Carno. The magazine was often accused of humorlessness, but it ran hilarious parodies of jazzcrit and album cover art. Even its letters column proved