

JAZZ

By Francis Davis

SHORT TAKES

In no particular order, this month's new and noteworthies-for-one-reason-or-another....

Keith Jarrett—*Concerts* (ECM). I didn't see it myself, but I'm told that when Jarrett guested on *Today* a few years back, Jane Pauley reverently informed her viewers that the pianist makes up each note as he goes along. Well, yes and no, Jane—it's *the order they go in* he makes up, and the order they go in rather than the notes themselves that has sometimes given me qualms. So if I'm surprised that some relatively simple passages are thunderously, even clumsily executed on this three-record set, I'm even more astonished (and pleased) by the number of long improvised passages spun out with composer's logic. The first disc is available separately as *Bregenz Concerts*, though for my money, the most lyrical playing as well as the most incisive occurs midway through the Munchen event. So if you want this, you want this set.

Sphere—*Four In One* (Elektra/Musician). A Monk tribute even Monk might have enjoyed—loyal, sovereign, conservative, rash. Charlie Rouse and Ben Riley guarantee authenticity; Buster Williams is an asset to any date; and pianist Kenny Barron, by resisting the urge to mimic, by simply playing like no one but himself, demonstrates how all-pervasive Monk's influence remains. I'm happy this quartet tackled the more difficult Monk pieces most other jazzmen shy away from, too.

Benny Wallace Trio With Chick Corea (Enja/PolyGram). Another impressive, well-paced LP by a pebbly-toned tenorist who somehow combines the jagged phrasing of the 60s avant-gardists with the suavity and swagger of the great mainstreamers. Despite able assistance from Eddie Gomez and Danny Richmond, Wallace continues to experience rhythm problems, but he works hard and passionately, and here he's even gotten an honest day's work from Corea, who turns in some of his leanest, most ruffleless playing in years.

Joe Albany—*Portrait Of An Artist* (Elektra/Musician). Probably the best LP the elusive former Parker pianist has made since his most recent rediscovery ten years ago. Moved as I am by his somber, thinking-out-loud ballads, I'd like them

even better, I think, if there were one or two more fast-movers setting them off. And for all the mind Albany pays bass and drums, E/M might just as well have recorded him solo and saved on session fees.

Art Hodes & Milt Hinton—*Just The Two Of Us* (Muse). Good jazz soloists are born storytellers, but the seventy-eight-year-old pianist Hodes is even something of a raconteur, and he can hold you spellbound with his total recall of jazz piano history. He and the bassist roll off each other very nicely on this delightful program of ballads and blues. But the pressing is one of the worst I've ever heard.

James Williams—*The Arioso Touch* (Concord Jazz). With Blakey, Williams impressed me more as a band pianist than as a soloist, but he more than holds my interest on this trio LP (with Buster Williams and Billy Higgins). He has a flair for modalizing older tunes without distorting their pretty melodies, though I'd question the efficacy of some of his racehorse tempos.

Jimmy Smith—*Off The Top* (Elektra-Musician). **Charlie Earland**—*In The Pocket* (Muse). Smith's all-star gathering (George Benson, Stanley Turrentine, Ron Carter, Grady Tate) really cooks, especially on "I'll Drink To That," but the missing ingredient is the grease that used to crackle and sputter from the grooves of his old Verves and Blue Notes. This is where you'll hear Benson at his absolute best, however. The Earland (with Houston Person) is funkier but (you can't win) a lot less tasty.

Elvin Jones—*Earth Jones* (Palo Alto). This LP gives you more sense of the God of Thunder's power than any he has made recently, and more sense of the power he holds in reserve. But if Coltrane needed an Elvin Jones, Jones needs a Coltrane even more, and Dave Liebman and Teremaso Hino hardly fill the bill. Still, a solid modal-bop effort, and most encouraging.

Jack Walrath—*The Revenge Of The Fat People* (Stash). Good straight-down-the-middle bop with flashes of wit from a tight quintet sparked by tenorist Ricky Ford and bassist Cameron Brown and led by the trumpeter who played in Mingus' last band and orchestrated some of his last opuses. Walrath's own playing

and writing could use some of Mingus' vituperative spontaneity, but so could most jazz, I suppose.

Billy Bang & Charles Tyler—*Live At Green Space* (Anima). Not as blisteringly hot as Bang's duet with John Lindberg, but looser-limbed, better structured and just as provocative. Tyler, a former Ayler sideman, has never sounded better—on alto, baritone, even harmonica. He and folksy free jazz fiddler Bang share a penchant for minor, rhythmically charging, triplet-laden lines, and an ear for charming off-the-wall material that might sound twee in hands less stalwart than theirs ("Alouette," for example).

Jerome Cooper—*Root Assumption* (Anima). Ex-Revolutionary Ensemble percussionist Cooper is both minimalist and one-man-band, using bass drum, sock cymbal and African thumb and mallet instruments to create a thinking man's music thinking men so inclined could probably dance to as well. His sense of time and his hand and foot coordination are astonishing on this album-length performance, and so are many of his ideas. (Available from NMDS, 500 Broadway, New York City, NY 10012.)

Stan Getz—*Pure Getz*. **Woody Herman**—*Live At The Concord Jazz Festival* (both Concord Jazz). The Great Gatsby of the tenor saxophone has gradually acquired some of the eloquence and economy of expression we associate with a Hodges or Webster, and he's seldom been blessed with a rhythm section sprucer or more pulsating than the one he has on his new LP (especially the tracks with Billy Hart on drums). Not even Getz or fellow homecoming hero Al Cohn can save the current Herd from sounding mechanical and green, unfortunately.

Sergey Kuryokhin—*The Ways Of Freedom*. **The Ganelin Trio**—*Ancora Da Capo, Parts 1 & 2* (all Leo, via NMDS). K. is either the fastest pianist who ever lived or (my guess) the tapes have been speeded up. It hardly matters, for the effect of hearing glancing Taylor-like runs at twice the velocity and less than half the tonal weight is stunning enough to impose its own aural reality. The Ganelins are a free ("constructivist") tenor-piano-drums-and-dozens-of-other-instruments-big-and-

small trio with echoes of Scriabin and a wild streak of humor I can only assume is Slavic. It was curiosity that drew me to these records from the U.S.S.R., but it's the nerve and skill of the musicians that makes me anxious to hear more, as well as reluctant to pass judgment just yet.

Reissues: Not many this month, but a pair of Prestige twofers are eminently worthy of mention—*The Red Norvo Trios*, resurrecting '53 and '54 sessions by one of the pithiest, most quietly interactive small groups ever, with the vibist, bassist Red Mitchell, and either Tal Farlow or the great Jimmy Raney on guitar; and *Basie Reunions*, two 1957 dates which gave some of the lesser sung Basie horns (Shad Collins, Buck Clayton, Paul Quinichette and a faltering but affecting Jack Washington) a chance to stretch out above the All-American rhythm section (Freddie Green, Walter Page, Jo Jones and Basie surrogate Nat Pierce). Needless to say, it swings.

Next month: the new PolyGram releases, including the long-awaited Soul Notes and Black Saints.