

JAZZ

A lot of melted records: Alberta Hunter comes out on top, there's some well-done pop jazz, we remember bebop and we always have the blues.

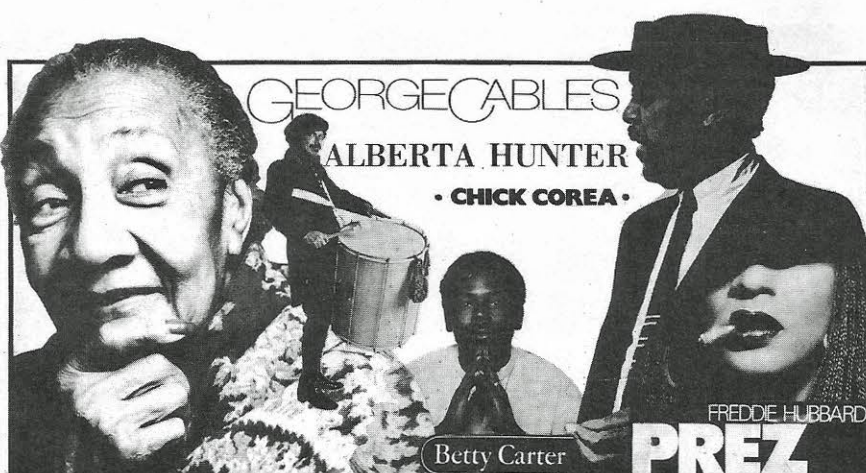
By Rafi Zabor

S H O R T T A K E S

The album I feel like crowing loudest about is *Amtrak Blues* (Columbia 36430) by Alberta Hunter. That's her in the illustration; if Chick Corea were standing on my shoulder I'd be trying to knock him off. On the other hand, Hunter promises that if she catches up with her man, she's "gonna crack his head, drink his blood like wine." She's pretty spry for a woman of 84. Finally on record, you get all the vigor and commitment of her live work at the Cookery and elsewhere. She seems to grab a song by the throat and tell it to be something; as a result, no phrase, no word goes by without standing up straight and telling you exactly what it means. In person, Alberta Hunter can work the sleepest audience up to a standing ovation; you may feel stupid standing up in your living room and applauding this record, but if you get the urge, I say go with it.

Le Jazz-Rock

No, no, don't run away, don't cry, please stop screaming. There's some good stuff in the bag this month and I promise to avoid the stock responses. For instance: poor Woody Shaw. There he goes, turning out creative, honorable hard bop albums one after the other, and here comes **Freddie Hubbard** shucking and jiving his way through El Lay studio funk and just plain cutting him to pieces. At least for the first side of *Skagly* (Columbia 36418) — wunnerful title, Fred; how's about *Do the Funky Overdose* for a followup — Hubbard plays with wonderful continuity and gorgeous tone despite the efficient but uninspired backup. He may not take himself seriously anymore, but he seems to have resolved some of his conflicts about commerce and art by settling down to a relatively fruitful compromise. So he's a great trumpeter taking it easy, though that won't save him on side two, with its stronger-than-dirt riffs. **Chick Corea**, *Tap Step* (Warner Bros. 3425): not bad, but all that stays with me is the fine percussion, most of it by Airtio. The little Chick-melodies and Spanish heart-aches all sound alike, and "Granpa Blues" is a disgrace. Still, I have to admit that the album is an improvement, though it would be hard to say on what. Wait for *Delphi II*. **Bobby Hutcherson's** *Un Poco Loco* is reviewed elsewhere in



this issue, and it's good AOR jazz (AORJ? AOJR? AOJ?), the funny thing is that **George Cables' Cables' Vision** (Contemporary 14001) is both a better Hutcherson album than *Loco* and a better Freddie Hubbard record than *Skagly*. Overpolite stuff, but well written and thoughtfully done. Hubbard, recovering from root canal work, plays some lovely middle-register stuff (should he hire Ken Norton to sock him in the jaw now and then?), and Hutcherson is brilliant, as usual. Peter Erskine and Ernie Watts sound pretty good too. Definitely JOARJ (George) of the month. If only the B theme of "Morning Song" didn't sound like Mangione... **Stuff, Live in New York** (Warner Bros. 3417) sounds like a set of rhythm tracks, a Music Minus One record (Sanborn? You? Me? Maybe Don Pardo?) "Duh hey, we do this in the studios all the time." That's right, you do, and well, but it's silly without a front man. You rouse yourselves a bit on side two, for "Ain't No Mountain," and Gadd and Tee sound terrific, but gee fellas, it's just not enough. **Irakere 2** (Columbia 36107) must be accounted a major disappointment. *Irakere* showed the band off at its live best, not the most original band in the world but absolutely one of the hottest and most committed. This new studio album is a relatively low-voltage return to the Latin music norm, with too much fake-funk, not enough fire, and not enough solo work from Paquito and Sandoval. What a letdown. This band should always be recorded live. A better example of Latino jazz is provided by

Cal Tjader's La Onda Va Bien (Concord/Picante 113), too mellow for salsa but melodious and expert enough to please. Notice particularly the conga playing of Poncho Sanchez in the Puerto Rican rather than the Cuban style: few notes, rock solid time, and stirring tone. Tjader himself seems a bit lost in the mix. *Por que?* **Manhattan Transfer, Extensions** (Atlantic 19258). I may be perverse, but I always thought Weather Report's "Birdland" sounded like a perfect theme for a daytime TV game-show once the introduction was done with. On the other hand, I find the Transfer's vocal version (lyrics by Jon Hendricks) rather bracing, much better arranged and more energetic. "Trickle Trickle" is also revived, and I've missed the tune ever since I lost my 45. Otherwise *Extensions* is the usual coy, fey, prefab crapola you'd expect. So *this* is how rock critics write....

I Remember Mugrup

Here's a silly idea. Let's take *Al Haig, Duke Jordan, John Lewis, Sadik Hakim, Walter Bishop Jr., Barry Harris, Tommy Flanagan* and **Jimmy Rowles** and get them to play the works of one major bop composer, three or so cuts each. We'll make a double set out of it and call it *I Remember Bebop* (Columbia 35381). Thing is, the best laid follies of mice and A&R men can sometimes go awry: the album's terrific. Al Haig unaccompanied is marvelous, John Lewis sounds mysterious so that the lucidity award goes to Flanagan, Bishop does a fine "Ornithol-

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ogy" but gets tangled elsewhere, Barry Harris' four Monk tunes are four revelations. Rowles sounds typically juiced and mandarin, and what a good idea it was to have Duke Jordan play Tadd Dameron. All that's left to redeem the original silliness of the project is the likelihood that only sixteen people will bother to buy a copy. Too bad. What, more Blue Notes? What is this, 1967? **Andrew Hill, Dance with Death** (Blue Note 1030) is yet another fine, piquant Andrew Hill album, a little tidier than usual because Billy Higgins is in the drum chair and neatnik Joe Farrell plays reeds. Best thing is Hill, his writing and playing both. Charles Tolliver was still in his flat Freddie Hubbard stage though... **Lee Morgan, Taru** (BN1031): what, another Lee Morgan album? What is this, 1967? Of course it's a good album, with his man Higgins popping it along, Benny Maupin on tenor and a tentative George Benson on guitar. I don't know about you, but I miss Lee Morgan more with every passing year, his wit, his yawp, his sass, his deep feeling for the sublimely nasty. As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, they shoot us in Slug's for their sport. **Grant Green, Nigeria** (BN1032): pretty hot stuff for a guitar quartet (Sonny Clark, Sam Jones — and Art Blakey having a thunderously good time for himself, which tells you why). **Bill Evans** could have used some thunder on *We Will Meet Again* (Warners 3411). Good Evans, good rhythm section, good tunes, good Tom Harrell, so why does the album sound so lackluster? Can it be the recording? I think it can. There's certainly nothing wrong with the music, but I've found myself, time and time again, simply not listening to this record when it was playing, and all I can do is pass my puzzlement and suspicions along to you. **Betty Carter, Social Call** (Columbia 36425): Me, I prefer early Betty Carter to the current edition, the stylist to the mannerist, but this 1955-56 date may be a bit early even for me. She's hesitant in the studio, stiff, a little supperclubbish, yes, but then that voice drapes itself around a note like a wreath of smoke and you're gone. She lands on high notes like a feather, produces low notes round as plums, she's a wonder... I have the uneasy feeling that she figured it out and then decided to exploit it. Am I wrong? I'm willing to be wrong... **Lester Young, Evening of a Basie-ite** (Columbia 34849): this twofer is the fifth and final volume of Columbia's *Lester Young Story*. It covers 1940-41, two sessions each with Billie and Basie with alternate takes, so be clear we're not talking about the waning-moon Lester Young of the 50s. He seems a bit off the golden standard of 1938, but still at the fountainhead, the first truly modern American improviser, the inventor of virtually everything else that has come after him, and the most natural, inevitable voice in the

music. The liner notes are bizarre at times (Lester sounds like a "comforting mammy," does he?) but richly detailed and informative, and they're right, Lester's solo on the final take of "All of Me" is a miracle of modern science.

Curtain Lines

A number of electric blues albums have commended themselves to my attention recently. **Albert Collins**, whose *Ice Pickin'* was arguably the best urban blues of last year, maintains the level nicely with *Frostbite* (Alligator 4719), with its razor-sharp guitar lines and tense, emotion-packed vocals. The only clinker is the title cut: guitar as stalled car in snowstorm, etc., etc. **The Jimmy Johnson Band, Johnson's Whacks** (Delmark 644) ought not to be passed up either, great guitar and wit, but the blues album that really snuck up and bit me is **Lonesome Sundown's Been Gone Too Long** (Alligator 4716), low-profile Louisiana blues with all the sleepy menace of a snake sunning itself on a rock. Alligator's Bruce Iglauer deserves credit not only for running his own fine label but for finding and reissuing this great but obscure 1977 album on Joliet. Bruce, you're an example to us all, and to all a good knight. **M**

Lou Reed cont. from pg. 20

wonderfully odd timing, and the perverse sing-song of his voice (falling somewhere between doo-wop and Tibetan chant), no one since Woody Guthrie has done more with three chords. (Neil Young and Dylan use four).

Michael Fonfara, Reed's keyboard player, co-producer, and past collaborator (on the questionable "Disco Mystic" from *Bells*), is sensitive to Reed's vocal idiosyncracies and opens the music up to tonalities and time changes that Reed would probably not have tried on his own; but the musical interludes he imposes on many of the songs are bombastic and, what's worse, performed only half heartedly, with eyes averted. Ultimately, the songs that seem to work best are the ones that fall into the patterns of Reed's older songs: the delicate "Think It Over" and the bitchy "Keep Away." Reed is arch, overtly literary, and often funny, but never surprising, never more than witty.

In an earlier, truer song, "Coney Island Baby," Reed begins talking about "wanting to play football for the coach," but soon veers off into left field (talking to himself, talking in circles) and begins singing about spiritual poverty, the strengths that come from sadness, about personal courage, and the constant longing for grace, ending in a long and repeated plea that becomes its own answer and affirmation: The glory of love/The glory of love/The glory of love/Might see you through....

I hope he goes back to talking to himself again soon. **M**