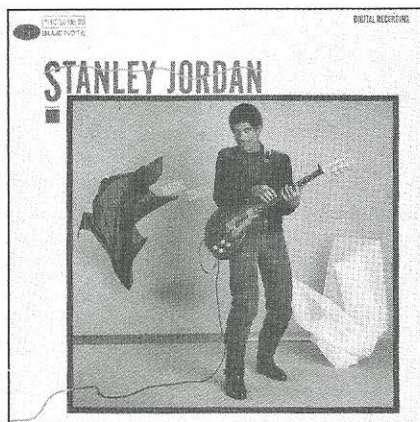


# JAZZ

## S·H·O·R·T T·A·K·E·S



**Stanley Jordan** — *Magic Touch* (Blue Note). The major label debut of a twenty-five-year-old guitarist who has already attracted praise on the strength of an at once percussive and pianistic "tapping" technique that enables him to play bass lines, chords and linear melody simultaneously, this is something of a disappointment. For starters, whether interpreting jazz ("Round Midnight," Thad Jones' "A Child Is Born") or pop (the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Michael Jackson), Jordan's taste in material is distressingly mundane. As a solo improviser he often succumbs to the masturbatory impulse endemic to so many guitar virtuosos when they play alone. Most damaging, he doesn't swing, except on those tracks on which bassist Charnett Moffett and drummer Peter Erskine show him the way. To his credit, Jordan has already perfected a sound uniquely his own—but at this point it's a sound searching for a conception. Still, if this were 1957 or even '63 and "Blue Note" meant what it used to mean, we'd have had ample opportunity to hear him as a sideman before passing judgment—and I have a feeling his playing would strike me as delightful in a setting where his solos had to pull their own weight, rather than support an entire LP. So in all fairness, the jury is still out.

**George Adams & Don Pullen** — *Decisions* (Timeless/Zebra). The highlights this time out include Adams' good-humored warbling on a blues of his own devising, his tenor eruption on drummer Danny Richmond's "Time Over Time," Pullen's kaleidoscopic choruses on "Trees And Grass And Thangs," and a glowing Adams-Pullen duet on the old

spiritual "His Eye Is On The Sparrow." In other words, more of the same. But it just goes to show you a successful formula needn't sound formulaic. The longer this quartet (also featuring bassist Cameron Brown) plays together, the more cohesive, freewheeling, and satisfying its music becomes—the mark of a classic band.

**James Newton** — *Echo Canyon* (Celestial Harmonies/N.M.D.S.). All that saves this album of flute solos recorded under the stars in a "natural amphitheater" high in the mountains of north central New Mexico from pantheistic slumber is the indefatigable hubris of Newton's formidable technique and the dogged structural sense he brings even to a cappella improvisation. It would be a pity if this enormously talented musician were to become yet another casualty of the New Age, but that's where this album seems to be pointing.

**Thad Jones** — *Three Plus One*; **Horace Parlan** — *Glad I Found You* (both SteepleChase). Between channeling his energies into a big band for ten years beginning in the mid-60s and leading the expatriate's life in Denmark thereafter, Jones hasn't made a record showing off his abilities as a cornetist in quite some time. *Three Plus One* is a loose and engaging quartet date from Europe that fills in the gap quite nicely, and the Parlan LP—which teams the tart cornetist with another intriguing and too rarely heard soloist in tenor saxophonist Eddie Harris—is even better.

**Dick Katz** — *In High Profile* (BeeHive). The unexpected (and completely arresting) combination of whimsy and recititude this veteran pianist displays on the four tracks with just bass and drum accompaniment makes his first LP in ages well worth investigating, even if the remaining four tracks adding saxophonist and flutist Frank Wess and trombonist Jimmy Knepper never quite fulfill their potential.

**Khan Jamal** — *Dark Warrior* (SteepleChase). This Philadelphia vibraphonist's solos are noteworthy for their finesse and their stark, ringing insistence; and his writing is at once playful and abstract. With drummer Leroy Lowe, the gutsy South African bassist Johnny Dyani, and the ever-inventive alto and baritone saxophonist Charles Tyler.

**James Williams** — *Alter Ego* (Sunnyside/

N.M.D.S.); **Bob Magnusson** — *Song For Janet Lee* (Discovery). Pianist Williams' best LP so far places the emphasis on his clean, lucid writing (reminiscent of *Speak Like A Child*-period Herbie Hancock in its restive linear motion and its modest sense of scale), though the soloists (Williams, guitarist Kevin Eubanks, and versatile reed players Bill Pierce and Bill Easley) warrant mention as well. Bassist Magnusson's small group writing is even more praiseworthy than Williams'—too bad his soloists let him down (with the exception of guitarist Peter Sprague, who has never sounded this accomplished on his own LPs).

**Maxine Sullivan** — *The Great Songs From The Cotton Club By Harold Arlen And Ted Koehler* (Stash). One of the all-time great interpretive singers on the merit of her shapely and effortless phrasing alone (something age cannot touch), the seventy-three-year-old Sullivan has rarely sung better than she does here; and no singer could ask for better material than the melodies of Harold Arlen, the pop tunesmith most successful at catching the bounce and sass of jazz. The result of this inspired pairing is an almost perfect recital boasting fifteen Arlen-Koehler numbers in all, including a few never previously recorded in addition to such perennials as "Ill Wind," "As Long As I Live," and "Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea." (And speaking of Arlen, wouldn't *The Cotton Club*'s laboriously parallel plot lines have stood a better chance of eventually converging if Richard Gere had played a Jewish songwriter instead of an Irish trumpeter?)

**Stephen Montague** — *Slow Dance On A Burial Ground* (Lovely/N.M.D.S.). A long tape piece conflating folk instruments and computer-generated sounds, plus quick graphs for solo piano and muted piano and trombone from a composer "attracted to the Oriental feeling for musical time and space and their wonderful use of repetitive figures," but guided by "the feeling of expectation, growth, climax, and denouement" characteristic of European concert music of the late nineteenth century. The best of both worlds, in other words, and it's an irresistible combination, euphorically free of the missionary's breast-beating and the convert's navel gazing such cross-cultural expeditions usually yield.