

JAZZ

By Rafi Zabor

SHORT TAKES

Hey there angelheaded hipsters. Are you burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night? Waal, let's see what's in the feedbag this month. I've been trying for some time now to find my way into the recordings of tenorist **Joe McPhee**, having heard so much about his excellence live, and finally an album has come along that gives me ingress and pleasure. *Po Music* (hat ART via NMDS; 500 Broadway, New York, NY 10012) features McPhee with a largish ensemble of, you know, Europeans (most of them from hat Hut's continental contingent, whose albums I have likewise labored in vain to appreciate/enjoy) and for starters they play some good ol' free jazz — honks of horror, bizarre whickerings, voices gibbeted with terror, hey ho — and that makes it, but what I like best are McPhee's two ballad features. He formerly struck me as a strong musician whose attack was forbiddingly harsh even by 60s standards, but this playing is coherent, impassioned and grand. Some of the freeblow successfully recalls the derangement of the great Ayler sessions, there are shortcomings among the Yurpeens when bop is attempted (like a bassist with weak time on a spookily successful "Pithecanthropus Erectus"), and the half-hour title piece is a series of recitatives less effective than the music on disc one. Recommended.

Likewise, naturally, the second volume of Inner City's superb **Django Reinhardt** issue, *Solos/Duets/Trios*. You hear the guitarist in tighter close-up than with the usual quintet, and the greatest revelations come from the five solo selections, in which Reinhardt's romanticism, usually distanced by brilliance of wit in a group context, breaks almost violently free of formal constraints, particularly on the impassioned 1937 "Improvisation." There are also unexpected echoes of Spanish gypsy music (flamenco). Genius you expect from Reinhardt, but not this kind of power and willful depth. One of the best records of this or any month. Of course.

There are a number of straight-ahead albums of excellence this month, two of them from **Art Blakey** and the edition of the Jazz Messengers including the young trumpet phenom Wynton Marsa-



George Adams

lis. *Straight Ahead* (Concord Jazz) is a California live date on which Blakey reserved the Messenger book and had the band play standards (which leads me to wonder how Concord deals with publishing royalties). It's a spirited affair, everyone plays well and Marsalis, who outplays everyone except Papa, gets the traditional Messenger ballad feature ("Once In Awhile" for Brownie, "Blue Moon" for the Hub) with "How Deep Is The Ocean," and doesn't let history down. *Album Of The Year* (Timeless, now distributed by Rounder), a studio date from Paris, uses Messenger originals and is a sprightlier and better album, Blakey himself being in notably classic form. If I didn't know Blakey so well I'd be amazed at the inexhaustible energy of his drumming and band-leading. At his age and half deaf, he can still play all the younger, fancier drummers in town under the table, and the Jazz Messengers are still, after 25 years, the best hard-bop band in the world. **Tommy Flanagan's** *Super Session* (Inner City) is a trio date with Red Mitchell and the quite mad Elvin Jones, who boots the proceedings into the next dimension and gets Flanagan to play as fluently but more viscerally than usual. Like Blakey, Jones is one of the greatest drummers in the history of the instrument, and has come, amazingly, to be somewhat taken for granted of late. I'd like to see him take over some of the

ECM caseload from DeJohnette. Now that would be interesting. Flanagan has been taken for granted forever, and on this album he deserves it as little as ever. Mitchell is fine. So buy a copy already. **Bob Wilber and the Bechet Legacy** (Bodeswell; Box 624; Brewster, MA 02631): being an archivist in jazz, the very music of the breaking wave, seems an odd game, but Wilber's reconstructions of his mentor's music finds come fully to life, not in the exact and affectionate charts but in Wilber's own solo work, easily excellent enough to transcend the occasion.

On **Eric Dolphy**, *The Stockholm Sessions* (Inner City), you'll find the greatest alto playing out this month. It's amazing how unimpeded Dolphy was by the European rhythm sections he recorded with so often, powered by his own inner music into unexampled brilliance and flight. The legacy is intact; for all the superb altoists we've seen in the last few years, no one has touched him. Not to mention bass clarinet. I used to enjoy

Bob Brookmeyer quite a lot in the old days, despite his faintly corny humor and the sneaking suspicion that to play valve trombone is to cheat the gods of slide. Now that he's back from a 15-year slumber in the studios of the Empire with albums like *Through A Looking Glass* (Finesse), I'm floored. He's writing fine, genuinely original material, and his playing has emotional resonances I'd never heard before — same burry tone, but sadder and more telling. The album features (FEATURES! how many times a month do I have to use the goddam word FEATURES? Reader help solicited.) an excellent sextet with guys like Tom Harrell and Jim McNeely — fine, burnished, melodic jazz, but it sounds like it was mixed by Mel Lewis' mother ("I want to hear more of my son's cymbal, it sounds so nice. No, not so much trumpet, such a headache it gives me."), despite a fine initial recording job. A fleet, super-accomplished album comes from the **George Adams-Don Pullen Quartet**, *Lifeline* (Timeless), which also FEATURES (expletive deleted) bassist Cameron Brown and the mighty Dannie Richmond. Adams is at his most muscular but also his most intelligent — at times he can seem a powerful but

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unthinking player — he not only hollers a blues but croons a hopeful ballad, Pullen sounds great, Richmond flies....

Fine albums likewise appear in the odder crannies of the music. **Kew Rhone**. (Europa via NMDS) is a welcome reissue of an obscure 1977 Virgin album by **Peter Blegvad, John Greaves** and **Lisa Herman**, the lost child, perhaps, of *Escalator Over The Hill*. It's a brilliant piece of work, FEATURING Carla Bley, Michael Mantler and some of their gang, and though Greaves and Blegvad's music owes a great deal to Bley, they wrote it and she didn't and it's great, so there. Blegvad's written that supposed ubiquity but actual rare bird, really good surrealist lyrics ("Peel's foe, not a set animal laminates a tone of

sleep," "Attached to his toe, shackles below the surface hold a neophyte fast who ogles aghast a bone of gold emblazoned with his name"), which Greaves' tunes and orchestrations suit and Herman sings ideally. Makes me feel like hollering, "What a great album! Who are these people?" Too smoothly accomplished, perhaps, to be primary, but full of death's famous opposite. What a great album! Who are these guys? One of the strongest new albums of the month FEATURES some of the same musicians. *Coup De Tete* by **Klip Hanrahan** (American Clave, NMDS) is a streetwise, low-profile-rather-than-minimalist conjunction of SoHo smart-rock, recent jazz and some of the best percussion playing (Daniel Ponce, Jerry Gonzalez, Dom um Romau, Anton Fier, Ignacio Berroa) you'll ever hear. Over the cleanly articulated percussion parts, the excellent bass playing of, alternately, Jamaaladeen Tacuma or Bill Laswell, and insect guitar noise from Arto Lindsay and Henry Kaiser, flit low-key vocals, tenor solos from Chico Freeman, John Stubblefield, Carlos Ward. Hanrahan's place in this is as composer/producer and, less centrally, vocalist; he sings the way you and I do, to ourselves, and doesn't disguise it. Lisa Herman sings a few too, and Carla Bley does one at the bottom of her range. The album's strongest piece, which has stayed with me as tenaciously as anything I've heard lately, is "Sketch For Two Cubas"; percussion, guitar skronk, a stunning dark Sibelian synthesizer wash, and just when you start wondering what Miles Davis would sound like over this, Mike Mantler plays a striking, fire and ice trumpet solo that gives the piece everything it needs.

Well Tex, time to get out there in the north forty and round up all them Yurpeen ECMs this mag ritually neglects, chauvinistic yellow press that it is. **Jan Garbarek's** *Eventyr* seems easily the Big Freeze's warmest album. Joined only by John Abercrombie and Nana Vasconcelos, Garbarek makes the most genuinely interiorized music I've heard from him, virtually always because the pieces (haunting, modal) are based on traditional folk melodies that supply the emotive substrata that Garbarek on his own too often lacks. Enjoyed *The Amazing Adventures Of Simon Simon*, by **John Surman** too. The album, a suite of duos with the always-excellent Jack DeJohnette, stands on the strengths of Surman's command of his multi-reeds and that of his (haunting, modal) written themes. The improvs have their appointed place but are weaker. I kept wishing for, oh, David Murray, someone with fewer scruples and a bit more thrust.

Ohm: Unit Of Resistance (RPM; P.O. Box 42373 San Francisco, CA 94101) is the second promising album from **United Front**, another AECish ensemble out there in the so-called world. A tighter

unit than Kings, this quartet bears some watching; they're adept, smart, play well, and I expect them to get underivative soon.

Other innaresting oddments include **Van Manakis**, *Love Songs* (Rounder), a tuneful Metheny-chaser with an excellent rhythm section (Bob Moses, Mike Richmond). Manakis is quite gifted, and when he learns Metheny-chasing is a duff's game, look for more. **Rocket 88** (Atlantic) is a bunch of English rockstar types (Charlie Watts, Jack Bruce, Ian Stewart) enthusiastically and not-badly playing barrelhouse 8-to-the-bar and like that. The album provides some dated, plodding fun, but please, **Joe Turner**, *Boss Of The Blues*, with its unforgettable reading of "Piney Brown" only came out last month and hasn't gone platinum yet. Nice, though, to finally hear Charlie Watts play "jazz." This month's sentence in Turkish is, "Git ve bashsiz gel," and that's all folks. **M**