

JAZZ

Trane slides in, Pepper strings out,
Taylor and Cooper, Abercrombie
and Farlow pluck
while Grappelli saws.

By Jon Pareles

SHORT TAKES

The big news this month is **John Coltrane's** *Bye Bye Blackbird* (Pablo Live), 36½ minutes of music by the classic quartet recorded in 1962. The title tune and "Traneing In" occupy a side each, but to my ear "Bye Bye Blackbird" is just a warmup — lots of Coltraneisms you've already heard, though he was just discovering them at the time. In 1962, Coltrane was still teetering at the edge of transcendence, not quite ready to flatten changes into modes, yet well aware that something had to give. All those pent-up ideas — and maybe a little frustration — make "Traneing In" a volcanic performance, continually pushing, pushing, pushing. Tyner, Jones and Garrison play lighter than they would in the years to come, which makes Coltrane's power stand out even more. It may not be "his greatest concert performance," as the album's off-putting cover says (there are, after all, the Vanguard sessions to contend with), but it is nothing short of remarkable.

Pharoah Sanders is still trading on Coltraneiana with *Rejoice* (Theresa), which includes lyrics to "Moments Notice" that turn it into a Trane commercial, as if one were needed. Sanders has two moods, it seems — facile mainstream and Afro-bliss — and he uses a different group for each; I prefer the Afro vamping paced by pianist Joe Bonner.

Art Pepper's *Winter Moon* (Galaxy) brandishes the dread phrase "With Strings," and I would've skipped it if I hadn't heard him play one of the most scarifyingly brilliant sets in my experience, last year at Fat Tuesday's. The strings, thank goodness, are kept in the background, used as they would be on a pop album to add a little emotional resonance. Pepper doesn't need it, of course, and though he does seem to be holding back a little, spooks appear on the title cut and in Pepper's clarinet (!) playing on "Blues in the Night." It'll give muzak consumers considerably more than they bargained for. Unlike **Jay Hoggard's** *Rain Forest* (Contemporary), a tame effort that even Chico Freeman can't get off the ground. Blending into the background is an occupational hazard for vibes players; Hoggard — as a leader — acts as if it's a virtue.

While I'm quibbling, I'll bring up **Cecil Taylor's** *It Is in the Brewing Luminous*



CHARLES STEWART

(hat Hut SIXTEEN), a double album recorded last year at Fat Tuesday's by a Taylor sextet. The music is wonderful, Taylor's inimitable roil and quall, but the mix misinterprets a lot of it as soloists backed by a band instead of the incredibly polyphonic unit (hmmmm) any Taylor band aims to be. And it takes headphones to hear the interchanges between splash-and-burn Sonny Murray and precision-personified Jerome Cooper on drums. But it's there.

Though I wouldn't exactly call it a trend, at least a few jazz musicians are testing out minimalism as a strategy toward creating a genuinely pan-ethnic music, something that doesn't have to turn its back on Africa or Asia or even Europe. Last year **Jerome Cooper** released *The Unpredictability of Predictability* (About Time), a one-man band manifesto of rigorously schematic expansions on the simplest motifs, with a clock-steady pulse. For all its structural priorities, it turned out to be cheerful and catchy. So does *For the People* (hat Hut SEVEN), a duet album by Cooper with Oliver Lake that's built on a three-note melody and its rhythm equivalent, both tenacious as barnacles. Each player does his duty — Lake squirreling around his alto sax and flute, Cooper providing both rhythmic and tonal centers on his tightly tuned drums — and the result is both loose and purposive.

If you want to try minimalism from the classical side, I recommend **Jon Gib-**

son's *Two Solo Pieces* (Chatham Square LP24, now distributed by New Music Distribution Service, 500 Broadway, New York City, NY 10012). Although Gibson plays winds in the Philip Glass Ensemble, the two semi-improvised pieces on the album are far less choppy than Glass' music. "Cycles," for pipe organ, sounds like one rich slowly changing organ chord; "Untitled" is an alto flute melody pieced together out of prescribed melodic fragments, in a warmly elegiac performance. Great cover, too.

Minimal devices like ostinatos and augmentation (adding a note each time a riff comes around) serve **John Abercrombie** well on the Abercrombie Quartet's *M* (ECM). In "Boat Song," tolling guitar notes generate that proto-ECM hypnosis, and pianist Richard Beirach's arpeggios come close in bassist George Mraz's tune, "Pebbles." In between, though, Abercrombie and Beirach spend too much time imitating Metheny and McLaughlin (what does M stand for, anyway?) and Bill Evans via Keith Jarrett; their own zaniness only emerges in "What Are the Rules" by Beirach, who deserves co-billing.

Speaking of guitarists, there's a slew of 'em this month. **Tal Farlow**, who's been known to pull fast fades behind his sidemen in concert, steps out front on *Trilogy* (Inner City), calmly upstaging Mike Nock on piano and Lynn Christie on bass (plus a drummer on the final cut). Farlow is steely-fingered and indefatigable as ever, inverting harmonies and rhythms like The Amazing Randi with a handful of handkerchiefs. Nock and Christie don't make the mistake of trying to match Farlow note for note; the astonishing thing is that Farlow never wastes one. Skip Teo Macero's vamp-until-ready "The Wolf and the Lamb," and prepare for a jolt with "Funk Among the Keys," where Farlow trades his usual exact pitch and warm goosed-acoustic tone for slideyness and echo-y electronics. A very peculiar ending to an album of standards. Larry Coryell, call your office.

Don't ask me how **Sangeeta Michael Berardi** got Archie Shepp, Roswell Rudd, Rashied Ali, and Eddie Gomez to play on *Divine Song* (New Pulse Artists). You probably shouldn't ask him

how long they rehearsed, either — the group is woefully untogether on Coltrane's "Some Other Blues," and barely coherent in "The Fifth Heart String Sings," although the latter has a few good wrangling Rudd-Shepp collisions. On the other cuts, backed only by basses and/or drums, Sangeeta sounds like he's been practicing scales and arpeggios alone in his room too long.

Meanwhile, **Jimmy Ponder** turns in a suavely aggressive set of chitlin'-circuit blues with an unnamed rhythm section on *Ponderin'* (51 West, distributed by CBS), and acoustic guitarist Nels Cline and bassist Eric von Essen free-associate six *Elegies* (Nine Winds, 11609 West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90064), one dedicated to Charlie Haden, whose hushed profundity is what they're aiming for (and often reach). A must for brooders.

Any Excuse for an Ellington LP Dept.: **Teresa Brewer** treats the Duke tunes on *A Sophisticated Lady* (Columbia) as sassy high-society romps, digging her little-girl voice into the rhythms nicely — and leaving the other nine-tenths of the songs unplumbed. If you've got cash to burn, though, the record might be worth it for some pearly Benny Carter solos (over-echoed) and the way Oscar Brashear's muted trumpet tone mocks Brewer mercilessly.

Ellington is among the dedicatees on **Stephane Grappelli's** "tribute to" (Europa JP2001, P.O. Box 20513, Orlando, Florida 32814), along with Basie, Jobim, Reinhardt, Waller and seven others. Other than their titles, it's hard to tell what makes the tunes tributes except for the occasional bossa nova pulse; "Dizzy," for instance, doesn't bop or make its way up to the high register. Still, Grappelli plays a lot better with his French quartet than with David Grisman's bluegrass refugees on *Stephane Grappelli/David Grisman Live* (Warner Bros.), where he goes for those crowd-pleasing portamentos. **M**