

Grant Green - Talkin' About

1965 album liner notes by Leonard Feather

Talkin' about Grant Green...almost four years have gone by since *Grant's First Stand* (Blue Note 4064) established this St. Louis blues-merchant as an artist to reckon with on the New York scene. At that time Robert Levin appropriately observed that Green "is particularly concerned with the guitar's horn-like possibilities and has reduced certain elements of Charlie Christian's approach to their basics."

Since then, Grant Green has consolidated his reputation through a succession of personal appearances reinforced by a consistently impressive series of albums, including a half dozen as a leader. His style has moved many listeners to many reactions, but perhaps the most succinct summation of the characteristics of his style was offered by John S. Wilson in a [Down Beat review](#):

"He shows an attack that stems from Christian - the effortlessly rolling pulsation and the shifty, off-balance phrasing - without betraying him as simply a Christian imitator, His notes are clean, deliberate, and full-bodied, avoiding both the clanger of some post-Christian guitarists and the muddiness of recent soul-influenced guitar men. He plays with a strong singing quality on both ballads and up-tempo swingers. His ideas are fresh without stretching for effect. He is working time-worn and time-proved jazz territory in a manner that shows how lastingly useful the basic elements of jazz can be in firmly creative hands."

This was said of Green's performances on his second album, *Green Street*. To my way of thinking (and hearing) the comments apply even more aptly to his present work, for on these new sides he is in sensational form. Not a little of the value of his great groove can be attributed to the inspiring presence of a musician who, in my opinion, is the most remarkable of the four organists who have worked on his albums to date...

Talkin' about Larry Young...you call him up at his home in Newark, N.J., ask for "Larry Young, the organist," and the reply will be, "Which one, Junior or Senior?" Larry is the first important young jazz organist to claim second-generation status in this profession. His father was his first

important musical influence and it was when Young Sr. bought an organ for the house that Larry Jr., who had studied piano, took to the console for the first time.

Born October 7, 1940, Junior was guided by his father to a thorough knowledge of both classical music and jazz, acquiring a feeling for the modern sounds through Bud Powell records. But around 1951 he lost interest, and for seven years he had little active contact with music.

“The organ,” he recalls, “really helped me to get started again. My father explained all the stops and the pedals for me, and by 1958 I was really back into it seriously.

“My first real job with a rock ‘n’ roll group. I was stuck with that scene for a year or two, but my ears were soon opened to other things. I worked with two girl tenor players, Willene Barton and Elsie Smith, who had a combo and I was with Lou Donaldson for a while.

“I listen to just about everything; I never want to close my ears. I have great respect for Jimmy Smith, but I never particularly wanted to go in his direction; I felt some other things that I wanted to develop. A lot of the things that have influenced me have not been organists - Miles, Trane, and pianists like Bud, Tatum, Monk, McCoy Tyner.”

After working with Hank Mobley, Kenny Dorham, Tommy Turrentine and various other hornmen around New York and New Jersey, Larry started gigging with groups of his own, usually featuring the same instrumentation heard of these sides. “I went through a long trial-and-error period,” he says, fighting the commercial influence and seeing what could or couldn’t be done with the instrument. I made some records, but they sound kind of commercial to me now. This is the first time I feel I’ve really arrived on records, and a lot of it is due to Grant and, of course, Elvin. It’s beautiful playing with them. Elvin is like a loose-leaf notebook - he can put in or take out just about anything.”

Talkin’ about Elvin Jones...if anything is certain in this often unpredictable world of jazz trends, it is that Elvin is the next No. 1 jazz drummer, just as surely as Max Roach and Shelly Manne were the foremost popular idols of the 1940s and ‘50s. A decade has passed since Elvin, then 27, breezed in from Detroit and played the Newport festival with Charles Mingus and Teddy Charles. He moved to New York for good in the spring of 1956, working with Bud Powell, Pepper Adams and Donald Byrd, and even with swing-style groups like Tyree Glenn’s. But it was not until his

alliance with John Coltrane began that his astonishing cross-weavings of rhythms made their full impact on the jazz world.

Talkin' About JC...mention of Coltrane brings to mind the first title in the album, dedicated of course to Trane. Elvin here reminds us that greatness is not just composed of new and unprecedented qualities. It includes also the facets that went into everything preceding it. As he shows in the early passages of this minor, up-tempo Larry Young original, he has no reluctance at all about showing you where "one" is - in other words, he can lay down a firm and simple beat when this is what is required; yet at other times the complexity of his hand and footwork is something so inexplicable and incomprehensible that there is no point in trying to analyze it technically; it is better simply to absorb it as an exciting and essential part of the over-all sound. Both Grant and Larry have long, flowing solos that make this a charging, challenging opening track.

Talkin' about *People*...once in a while a new pop song comes along that immediately strikes the fancy of jazz musicians and is adopted by them, ultimately becoming a standard. Such a tune, I think, is Jules Styne's *People* from the Barbra Streisand Broadway hit *Funny Girl*. Obviously it appealed to Grant Green, for he has this track virtually to himself, with tastefully subdued backing by Larry and Elvin. Listen to how uncluttered and swinging his lines are here, and how warm and personal his sound and style.

Talkin' about *Lyny Tune*..."This is an expression I use," says Larry Young, who wrote this most beguiling number. "Some people who are beautiful may seem goofy or loony to others, but in fact they're in tune with a lot of things." Notice here the spare structure of the tune - the unused third and fourth bars, for example. And when Grant takes off, he goes into a solo that encompasses every element cited by the above mentioned Mr. Wilson as well as by LeRoi Jones and all the others that have praised him.

Talkin' about love... *You Don't Know What Love Is*, a lovely melody by Gene De Paul, goes all the way back to the year after Larry Young's birth. Here you will find a reminder that although his technique and ideas are stunningly revealed at up tempos, excitement is by no means the only

value in which Larry deals. Both as soloists and accompanist he plays a quietly effective role here as Grant wends his way in and out of the tune's attractive melodic contours.

Talkin' about an old cowhand...Bing Crosby sang this song in a 1936 movie called *Rhythm on the Range*, and it's one of those rare items for which Johnny Mercer wrote the words and the music. As you may recall, it was somewhat of a put-on song in the first place, lyrically at least, so it is not surprising that Grant and his colleagues here give it a light treatment - one that swings, incidentally, at what seems like a perfect medium tempo. Listen particularly to the very tricky rhythmic effects introduced by Larry near the beginning of Grant's first blowing chorus. Elvin, too, plays an extraordinarily valuable role in this funky, ingenious and spirited performance.

Talkin' about this album: this is one of those all-too-infrequent occasions when, considering the individual merits of the musicians involved, you can truthfully claim that the whole is even more than the sum of the parts. And with Larry Young - who will be heard in Blue Note albums of his own very soon - this label has added another outstanding talent to the long list on its twenty-five years roster.

Talkin' about...but why continue talkin'? Listen!