

his perfect obbligato to Hines' jaunty vocal on *Back Yard*, and the piano work on *Harvest* and *Love*. Jackson and Pemberton give ideal support throughout, and briefly step front and center on *Thinking*. The drummer's brush work is outstanding, and Pemberton gets an unusually pleasing sound from his Ampeg bass—not at all dry.

This tasty album is a sleeper and Decca has kept it a well-guarded secret. But it can—and should—be had. —*Morgenstern*

Moondog

MOONDOG—Columbia MS 7335: *Theme: Stamping Ground; Symphonique #3 (Ode to Venus); Symphonique #6 (Good for Goodie); minisym #1; Lament I (Bird's Lament); Witch of Endor; Symphonique #1.*

Personnel: Joe Wilder, Teddy Weiss, Mel Broiles, Alan Dean, Danny Repole, trumpets; Paul Faulise, Tony Studd, Charles Small, Buddy Morrow, trombones; James Buffington, Richard Berg, Ray Alonge, Brooks Tillotson, French horns; Don Butterfield, Bill Stanley, Bill Elton, John Swallow, Phil Giardina, tubas; Harold Bennett, Andrew Lolya, Harold Jones, Hubert Laws, flutes; Henry Shuman, Irving Horowitz, English horns; George Silfies, Phil Bodner, Ernie Bright, Jack Knitzer, Don Macourt, Ryohei Nakagawa, George Berg, Wally Kane, Joyce Kelly, reeds; George Duvivier, Ron Carter, Alfred Brown, Louis Hardin (Moondog), bass; Jack Jennings, Dave Carey, Elayne Jones, Bob Rosengarden, percussion; Paul Gershman, Aaron Rosand, Emanuel Vardi, David Schwartz, Eugene Becker, Raoul Poliakin, George Ricci, Joe Tekula, Charles McCracken, strings.

Rating: ★★★★★

This music is essentially classical in conception and purpose, but it is clear that the composer-conductor has absorbed a strong feeling for the contemporary. Although he maintains his heart is not in jazz, it has seeped into his consciousness and enhances much of this LP. With each hearing it becomes a richer pleasure.

Moondog is the pseudonym of Louis Hardin, 53, who is blind, writes all his music in braille, and enjoyed some popularity in jazz circles during the early '50s.

Initially, *Symphonique #6* makes the strongest impression. In a sense, it is nothing more than a simple 8-bar figure raised to the 17th power, on what is called a ground. The theme is introduced by the bass, then is picked up by the clarinet (it was conceived in 1955 as a dedication to Benny Goodman), then a duo of violas, then the bassoon and so on until it builds to a 17-part counterpoint. The effect is stunning and must be heard.

Lament I, which honors Charlie Parker, is not an attempt to orchestrate the swirls and whiplashes of Bird's style. It's a simple four-bar figure which becomes a tapestry for a free melodic line played by alto and baritone saxophones. Hardin and Bird knew each other, and even talked once about doing an album together. It's too bad it never materialized. His salute to Parker haunts the mind.

The opening track, *Theme*, is another ground, this time using a basic 16-bar theme in 5/4 time. It has a sweeping, almost pastoral quality to it, although unfortunately it fails to develop to a logical conclusion.

Minisym is a short work in three parts, alternating between the snappy and the lyrical in 4/4 time. The rhythms are infectious, with an especially appropriate interlude using a trio of bassoons.

Moondog adheres to the disciplines of traditional tonality throughout, but yet

achieves an adventurous musical experience that is very much of today—perhaps because his tools are the basic ones, producing a sound for all seasons. There is much here that jazz lovers, especially those bending toward the mainstream, should find stimulating, even though this is not a jazz or "swing" package. Recommended. —*McDonough*

Big Joe Williams

HAND ME DOWN MY OLD WALKING STICK—World Pacific 21897: *Oh Baby; Hand Me Down My Old Walking Stick; Shady Grove; Mama Don't Like Me Runnin' Round; Sittin' N' Thinkin'; Scardie Mama; Blues Round the World; Everybody's Gonna Miss Me When I'm Gone; Pearly Mae; Baby Keeps On Breakin' 'Em Down; Church Bells Ring; Take It All.*

Personnel: Williams, nine string guitar, vocals; unidentified drums, (tracks 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12); probably unidentified electric bass, track 7.

Rating: ★★★★★

This is Big Joe's first new LP in several long years, offering new and unfamiliar older material even more eclectic in inspiration than usual from this resourceful



performer (*Oh Baby* is a melange of familiar lines, and for all you or I know, this version is the source of them all). If it is not Big Joe's best music, it is nonetheless good to hear, and after all it is a new LP and the others are largely unavailable.

Big Joe cut it in three hours, but it must have taken at least a week of full-time work to dub in that totally useless drummer who muddies up the works in seven of the songs. Whoever he is, he attempts to be unobtrusive, probably because he realized that the hare-brained producer's scheme of presenting Big Joe as a "modernist" is a shoddy way to acquire a few pounds. There is some cute jive with a double-time bit in *World* and with the sock cymbal in *Scardie*, but otherwise he stays as modest as possible—even so, the purists who constitute most of the record's potential audience are likely to be put off. The bass line in *World* is so dead and motionless that it is surely an interloper's work, too. This is Big Joe's record, though, and the music is extremely valuable.

This is a music of constant rhythmic change, color and detail variation, fairly extreme yet controlled drama, erratic shifts of tone and character—in short, almost a surrealist-expressionist music, saved only by Big Joe's humanism and the primacy of the blues impulse. True, there is *Church*, a strong kind of story-song, which opens with single note lines, spreads into 3rd, 6th, etc. chords in the second chorus—Big Joe's favorite harmonic medium, a climactic method of his thinking—then into suddenly broken phrases which final-

ize the sense of tragedy and loss so that when the first chorus is repeated it gains profound power. This kind of structural flow is uncharacteristic. By contrast, *Sittin'*, the best song here, offers all of Big Joe's techniques, especially the dramatic contrasts of a cappella vocal or bass string lines against full orchestral-sounding lines, broken passages of rhythmically free yet highly emotional materials placed in a most original construction.

Spontaneity is the motivating element in Big Joe's music. Even more than most of today's allegedly free jazzmen, Big Joe's music has no safeguards: the traditional two or four-measure blues units are ignored except when he deliberately rushes tempo, and although each chorus does manage to at least refer to the blues changes, there is no supporting continuity underlying the foreground vocal-guitar motion of each song.

This is an immensely sophisticated art beside which the music of the leading contemporary blues performers seems crude and vulgar. Big Joe's emotional contemporaries are not modern blues or r&b men, but Jackie McLean, Ornette Coleman, Roscoe Mitchell: free and open musicians who express powerful thoughts through methods equally unbound by other than wholly emotional or artistic considerations.

Few artists in blues or jazz have ever been such dramatic performers. As a singer and guitarist, Big Joe is a complete orchestra, as flexible in his own forceful, idiomatic way as Ellington's, at least when he chooses to be so. Despite the reservations noted above, no track among these 12 is less than excellent. This LP is highly recommended as a sample of a powerful individualist's art, slightly lighter in tone than his earlier best works, and ever faithful to his most musical self. —*Litweiler*

The World's Greatest Jazzband

THE WORLD'S GREATEST JAZZBAND OF YANK LAWSON AND BOB HAGGART—Project 3 PR/5033SD: *Sunny; Panama; Baby, Won't You Please Come Home; Up, Up and Away; Ode to Billy Joe; Honky Tonk Train; A Taste of Honey; Limehouse Blues; Big Noise from Winnetka; This Is All I Ask; Mrs. Robinson; Bugle Call Rag.*

Personnel: Lawson, Billy Butterfield, trumpets; Carl Fontana, Lou McGarity, trombones; Bob Wilber, clarinet, soprano saxophone; Bud Freeman, tenor saxophone; Ralph Sutton, piano, Haggart, bass; Morey Feld, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★

EXTRA!—Project 3 PR/5039SD: *What the World Needs Now; Windmills of Your Mind; South Rampart Street Parade; Do You Know the Way to San Jose?; Wichita Lineman; Wolverine Blues; I'm Prayin' Humble; 59th Street Bridge Song; It Must Be Him; Alfie; Savoy Blues; Love Is Blue.*

Personnel as above, but Butterfield doubles fluegelhorn and Gus Johnson replaces Feld.

Rating: ★★★★★ 1/2

Forget the hyperbolic name—the musicians didn't choose it. But it's a good promotional stunt, and effective and intelligent promotion of jazz is such a rarity these days that we can't complain.

Though the second album is better than the first, neither does justice to the band's in-person capabilities. Perhaps it should record live, or maybe additions to the repertoire were recorded a bit too soon.

But even at less than its absolute best, the WGJ is well worth attention. This is an unusual group in many ways: size, instrumentation, repertoire, personnel. Is it a small big band or a big small band?

Neither, actually, for it combines some of the best features of both in a most original way. Bob Haggart, responsible for the bulk of the arrangements, must be credited with the conception, and this unique ensemble adds up to more than the sum of its all-star parts.

One of the most welcome aspects of the WGJ is its contemporary slant on repertoire. A glance at the 24 tunes listed above will make detailed analysis redundant; suffice it to point out that choice current pops, seasoned with traditional fare from the Dixieland and Swing menus, adds up to a most palatable musical buffet.

It might well be that one of the reasons for jazz's current impasse is that too many musicians have forgotten that the music, in its best years, thrived on popular material of the day as well as original compositions. Most traditional jazz bands are singularly limited in musical outlook, relying almost entirely on warhorses, while too many contemporary groups are equally exclusive in their adherence to originals (most of which they don't even bother to identify to the audience.)

So the WGJ is on to something. It's not just what you do, of course, but also how you do it, and fortunately its treatment of current themes is tasteful and always musical. Haggart's long experience with the Bob Crosby Band, which played a lot of things besides "Dixieland", stands him in good stead.

The musicians are stimulated by not having to play stale things over and over, and it's a kick to hear Freeman bite into *Mrs. Robinson* with gusto, or to find how well Wilber's beautiful soprano sound fits the contours of *Sunny*. If, on the other hand, *Savoy Blues* is the band's best recorded work so far, it could be because it is such a fine piece to begin with, and because the blues has always been where it's at.

On *Savoy*, by the way, Haggart deploys his powerful front line in two units—trumpet and reeds; fluegelhorn and trombones—and with the added lustre of stereo separation, the results are most attractive.

Prayin' Humble, from the old Crosby book, is of special interest because it was one of the first Gospel-inspired pieces for big band. It sounds very contemporary, and Lawson's featured horn is in there. Not nearly as welcome is another piece of Crosbyanna, *South Rampart Street Parade*. It has been done to death, and even the WGJ can't revive it. Crosby item No. 3, *Big Noise*, is an amusing novelty but a throwaway in terms of LP programming.

Each album is graced by a Butterfield ballad feature, *This Is All I Ask* and *Alfie*, respectively; the former on trumpet the latter on fluegel. Both are lovely.

Lawson-Butterfield duets are another nice specialty of the band. The two go well together—sometimes it is difficult to tell them apart, but then each man's distinctive style comes to the fore. Lawson's plunger work sparkles, and the twosome also makes a fine section team.

No less gifted is the trombone duo. McGarity is now the chief carrier of the great Teagarden tradition, with his own barrelhouse flavor added, and he combines

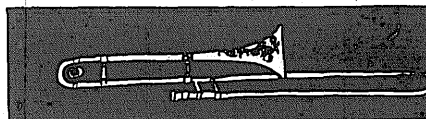
a lusty, direct solo style with sophisticated section craftsmanship. The younger Fontana may seem a somewhat anomalous presence, considering the musical orientation of the rest of the band, yet he not only fits perfectly, but adds an important accent. Always a fine soloist, he has never been better, though he isn't featured enough on the albums for my taste. His facility is astonishing, and his conception matches it.

The reed team is a delight. Not much new can be said in praise of Bud Freeman, who is never less than good and often much more than that. He is as involved in and committed to playing today as he was 40 years ago, and he is always himself. One would like, however, to hear more of his splendid ballad playing. Wilber, the band's other "youngster," is also a gas. His fluent clarinet is always distinguished, but it is his soprano that excites with its joyous, singing tone and lovely phrasing. It is one of my favorite sounds in today's music.

The rhythm section on the second album is superior, due to the buoyant beat of Gus Johnson. No disrespect to Morey Feld, a fine drummer, but Gus gives the band a special lift. Haggart's bass is discreet but essential, his choice of notes a pleasure to hear. Sutton's piano is also indispensable to the team, but he is not given enough solo space (on the whole, the tracks are too short, another reason why the band is better in person.) His feature, *Honky Tonk*, is expertly played in the Bob Zurke tradition, but I'd rather have heard his soulful interpretation of Bix Beiderbecke's *In The Dark*, or his delightful straight-ahead improvisations on a good standard.

Also missing from these LPs is the gentle presence of Maxine Sullivan, whose impeccably phrased singing is a highlight of the band's public appearances. Maybe next time; in any case, the WGJ has a five-star album in it, which I'm sure will materialize. Meanwhile, these records are a substantial contribution to the band's mission, which has our unqualified blessings.

—Morgenstern



ROCK BRIEFS

BY PETE WELDING

Despite what you might think, writing this column isn't much fun. It's kind of like shooting fish in a barrel. But the thing is—and the only reason I continue doing it—that there's so much schlock ground out in the name of rock these days it's very difficult to keep up with it. Album covers, personnel listings, tune selections and, above all, advertising furnish no help at all. The new LP by an unheralded group can be a gem or a dog. And that's where this column seeks to help—usually by pointing out the dogs but occasionally calling attention to a worthwhile disc that might otherwise be ignored. So be it.

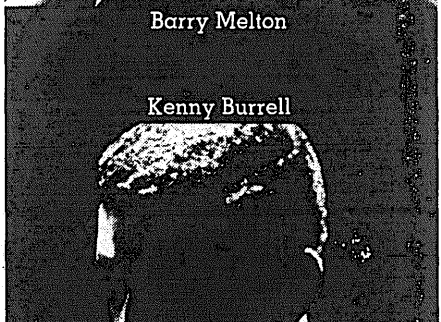
Gibson Strings

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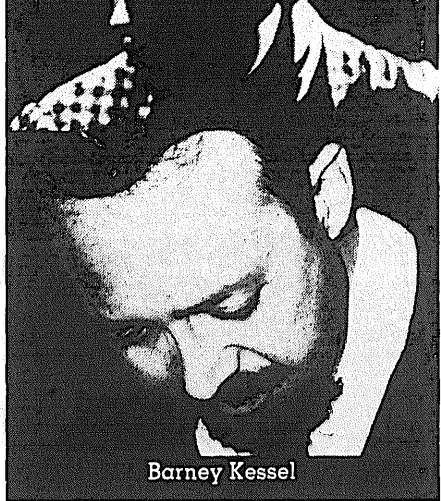
Homer & Jethro



Barry Melton



Kenny Burrell



Barney Kessel