

record REVIEWS

ANTHONY BRAXTON

FOR ALTO—Delmark DS 420/421: *Dedicated to Multi-instrumentalist Jack Gell; To composer John Cage; To Artist Murray De Pillars; To Pianist Cecil Taylor; Dedicated to Ann and Peter Allen; Dedicated to Susan Axelrod; To My Friend Kenny McKenny; Dedicated to Multi-instrumentalist Leroy Jenkins.*

Personnel: Braxton, alto sax.

Rating: ★★★★★

When the editor laid this album on me, he told me that it contains four sides of unaccompanied alto saxophone solos. How revolutionary? Not completely. Back in 1720, J.S. Bach wrote six sonatas for unaccompanied violin and six suites for unaccompanied cello. Still, this recording is revolutionary, for the saxophone is normally capable of producing only one note at the time, whereas strings are capable of multiple stops.

Anthony Braxton is a living, breathing player whose work, like that of so many of the avant garde, is of an extremely personal nature. By fully exposing his inner emotions, Braxton has left himself vulnerable to criticism. Yet it is unfair to express criticism of honesty. If there are faults (and I have not found any with the playing or writing on this album) the listener has little choice but to overlook them because they are expressions of personal experiences and feelings which only Braxton himself can judge properly.

For this reason, I debated whether or not to put any rating on this album. I finally arrived at the conclusion that even as an expression of nothing more than my personal enjoyment of what I heard, the album deserves a five-star rating.

The dedications to the pieces are simply that. The full titles were omitted due to an error on the part of the record company, which will be rectified on later printings of the sleeve.

Bill Quinn's liner notes ask the musical question "Who is Anthony Braxton?" The best way to answer it is to dig these four sides. —Klee

CHASE

CHASE—Epic E 30472: *Open Up Wide; Livin' In Heat; Hello Groceries; Handbags and Glad-rags; Get It On; Boys and Girls Together; Invitation to a River (Two Minds Meet); Stay; Paint It Sad; Reflections; River.*

Personnel: Bill Chase, Alan Ware, trumpeter; Ted Piercefield, Jerry Van Blair, trumpet, vocal; Phil Porter, keyboards; Angel South, guitar, vocal; Dennis Johnson, bass, vocal; Jay Burrid, percussion; Terry Richards, lead vocal.

Rating: ★★★★★

If you like trumpets—and I'm an old trumpet freak—Chase will give you good kicks. The group rightfully takes its name from leader-lead trumpeter-arranger Bill Chase, well remembered for his work with Woody Herman (big band and small

Records are reviewed by Chris Albertson, Mike Bourne, Bill Cole, Alan Heineman, Wayne Jones, Larry Kart, Joe H. Klee, John Litweiler, John McDonough, Dan Morgenstern, Don Nelsen, Doug Ramsey, Larry Ridley, Harvey Siders, Carol Sloane, and Jim Szantor. Reviews are signed by the writers.

Ratings are: ★★★★★ excellent, ★★★★ very good, ★★★ good, ★★ fair, ★ poor.

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group) and a man equipped with a set of chops entitling him to air rights in that zone of the stratosphere inhabited by Cat Anderson, Maynard Ferguson, and a very few others.

Leading a trumpet section is Chase's natural habitat, and the one he has gathered here is first-rate. In full cry, it rivals the best ever assembled, in or out of studios. The trumpets give the band its own special character and color, and their energy output, range, bite and precision are something else.

For this aspect, the album can be enjoyed by all. If you are a jazz purist, be forewarned that this is a rock-jazz band—in that order of priorities. But these are hard times for purists, and even at its rockiest, the music is not too far removed from that of Rich and Herman, contemporary style. And those who like Maynard's high stuff will not be disappointed by Chase's.

The singing, of course, is—for this reviewer, and he would guess, for many of his orientation—an acquired taste. Terry Richards, who is featured, is at his best on *Paint It Sad* and not hard to take at any time, and Van Blair and Piercefield, who also sing solo, are pleasant and musical. None of them quite make it when trying to sound black, but there's no getting away from that, I guess, though it can be done so much more convincingly with emphasis on feeling rather than sound. (This a general comment; these particular singers are lesser sinners than most.)

Perhaps it is this orientation that causes me to pick *Open Up Wide*, the album's only instrumental, as my favorite track. But I prefer to think I like it because it has the most jazz content and feeling, Chase's kickiest solo, and a good outing by Porter, a gifted organist I recall from a Howard McGhee album and in person at Birdland, and from whom I would like to hear more featured work, though he is a fine accompanist, too.

This piece is by Chase, and he is also responsible for the music to *Invitation to a River*, a "suite" of the type popular in post-Sgt. Pepper-BS&T rock. The story line—a doomed love affair—is a bit melodramatic, and so, at times, is the music, but there are substantial ideas at work here. The opening, *Two Minds Meet*, gets to swing and has fine scoring touches. There are a variety of moods, and the ad lib *Reflections* is a tour de force for the leader, involving tape-and-chop wizardry and a gigantic climax bringing in the whole band. The canonic stuff on *Stay* sounds for all the world like a segment from some Kentonian opus, but is imme-

diately followed by a groovy Fender bass interlude and guitarist South's tasteful use of electronic devices.

The rhythm moves along throughout, and there isn't a weak link in the group. Use of multitracking and such is kept at a minimum (and effective when used), so one gets the impression that this band can say what it says on record as well (and probably even better) in person. (Spies tell me that Van Blair is a fine jazz soloist, for one thing.)

This is a very well done first album by a group that certainly should make it, if excitement combined with musicality and expert craftsmanship are qualities that appeal to current audiences. And it's a must-hear for students of the trumpet—graduates included.

—Morgenstern

BOOKER ERVIN

THAT'S IT—Barnaby Z 30560: *Mojo; Uranus; Poinciana; Speak Low; Booker's Blues; Boo.*

Personnel: Ervin, tenor sax; Horace Parlan, piano; George Tucker, bass; Al Harewood, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★

EXULTATION!—Prestige 7844: *Mooche Mooche; Black and Blue; Tune In; Just in Time (short take); Just in Time (long take); No Land's Man (short take); No Land's Man (long take); Mour.*

Personnel: Frank Strozier, alto sax; Ervin, tenor sax; Horace Parlan, piano; Butch Warren, bass; Walter Perkins, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★

The loss of Booker Ervin, as listening to these albums makes one acutely aware, was a serious blow to jazz. One of the very few wholly original tenorists to appear in the music of the past decade, he was a man totally dedicated to his art, one of those rare players who break new ground without breaking with tradition.

That's It, recorded in 1961, was Ervin's third LP of his own, and the first to give him free rein. Originally on the Candid label and long unavailable, it is one of three important jazz albums in Barnaby's new Candid reissue series (the other two are by Charles Mingus and Cecil Taylor).

At the time, the quartet heard on the LP was a regular working group, with the late George Tucker's bass a tower of strength. Ervin's gift for writing fresh original lines is demonstrated in *Uranus*, an appealing ballad; *Mojo*, a typically charging and deceptively "simple" up-tempo piece, and the happy *Boo*.

But the tenorist's strongest playing of the session comes on *Booker's Blues*, masterful re-telling of an age-old story, sermon in music with that special Texan accent Booker shared with other great southwestern tenormen, and on *Speak Low*, a standard made to order for his moods and mournful yet elating sound, take

at a sizzling tempo.

Booker liked to stretch out, but there was never any waste of notes or space. His music is concentrated, bristling with energy, and a veritable definition of swing.

By the time he recorded *Exultation* some two years later, his style was fully matured. The tone has taken on a new brilliance, and there is even more conviction and assurance in the playing.

This was the first of a remarkable series of albums for Prestige, and the reissue includes two "short takes" originally issued on 45 rpm only. They show how concisely Booker could tell a story.

Black and Blue, the fine old Fats Waller tune immortalized by Louis Armstrong, is one of Ervin's masterpieces. A balladist of uncommon stature, he exposes the melody with unmistakably personal touches (note his use of the shake), then launches on an improvisation that recreates the song. After Strozier's bridge, he comes back with a sublime melodic paraphrase.

Tune In makes interesting use of polytonality, and the head is beautifully played by the two saxophonists. Booker kicks off his solo, as always, with the "I'm here" authority that rivets the listener's attention.

Mooche Mooche exemplifies Booker's love of tempo. No matter what the speed, his statements never lose continuity and coherence, and his forward momentum is spectacular. Speed and beauty is a rare combination. Charlie Parker had it. Booker Ervin had it.

He also had the ability to inspire his fellow musicians, and Parlan (much stronger here than on the 1961 date) comes up with some fine, sensitive playing, notably on *Mooche* and *Tune In*. Warren is excellent (wonder what happened to him?), and Perkins, who contributed the interesting *No Land's Man*, is at the top of his form—don't miss his well-recorded bass drum accents, which are something special.

Strozier, a gifted player from whom too little has been heard in recent years, attunes himself sensitively to Ervin, and has his best moments on *Just In Time*.

But it is, rightfully, the leader who dominates. These are not his very greatest records, but everything he played was of significance. Booker Ervin's music had rare dignity, even nobility, and it is weighted with musical meaning and emotional power. He had his own thing, and musicians would do well to listen to what he had to say. It is ironic that Coltrane imitators and other lesser players achieved more fame and fortune than he, but in time the record will show that he was a giant.

—Morgenstern

JOHN KLEMMER

ERUPTIONS—Cadet Concept LPS 330: *Gardens of Uranus; Summer Song; Regions of Fire; Rose Petals; Lady Toad; A Mon Frer Africain; La De Dab; Earib Emancipation.*

Personnel: Klemmer, tenor sax, wood flute, flute, echo-plex, wah wah pedal; Mike Lang, organ, Fender piano; Lynn Blessing, vibes; Art Johnson, guitar, echo-plex and wah-wah pedal; John Dentz, drums; Wolfgang Meltz, electric bass; Mark Stevens, percussion; Gary Coleman, percussion.

Rating: ★★★★★

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