

record REVIEWS

DON ELLIS

DON ELLIS AT FILLMORE—Columbia G30243: *Final Analysis*; *Excursion II*; *The Magic Bus Ate My Doughnut*; *The Blues*; *Salvatore Sam*; *Rock Odyssey*; *Hey Jude*; *Antea*; *Old Man's Tear*; *Great Divide*; *Pussy Wiggle Stomp*.

Personnel: Ellis, trumpet, drums; Glenn Stuart, Stu Blumberg, John Rosenberg, Jack Coan, trumpets; Ernie Carlson, Glenn Ferris, trombones; Don Switzer, bass trombone; Doug Bixby, contrabass, tuba; Fred Selden, Lonnie Shetter, Sam Falzone, John Klemmer, Jon Clarke, reeds; Jay Graydon, guitar; Tom Garvin, piano; Dennis Parker, bass; Ralph Humphrey, drums; Ron Dunn, drums, percussion; Lee Pastora, conga.

Rating: ★★★★★

Don Ellis' brand of salted-in-the-shell big band excitement has amused some, confused others, and led to a most interesting mixture of critical observations.

This double album, recorded live at Fillmore West, offers 86:37 of music, effects, and avant garde showmanship—most of it good, some of it humorous, but none of it dull. The band occasionally indulges in pie-in-the-face musical burlesqueries, but most of what's here is valid, genuinely creative, and above all, well played.

Ellis, himself, is a phenomenal musician—another one of those who I suspect has yet to put his best work on record and perhaps never will. But credit must go to this intrepid innovator who has done more than his share to expand the potential of the big band. First, the time barrier went, then came electronic experimentation (heard here when Ellis utilizes the Conn Multivider and the Ring Modulator); all of this coming into play in various contexts—the blues, pop tunes, jazz standards, and academic-type material.

Sides one and two contain a melange of Ellisian moods and effects. The most startling is *Excursion*, a frenetic tour de force for tenorist Klemmer's technique and fertile imagination; the most unusual is Ellis' quasi-spoken, grunted, raspberried electric trumpet intro on *The Blues*. Hank Levy's *Rock Odyssey*, a most interesting work, employs multiple time signatures and features excellent work by Humphrey. *Final Analysis* ends with a hilarious, appropriately overdone spoof on symphonic climaxes; according to Ellis "a musical reductio ad absurdum stolen from some of the best-known classical composers (who should have known better)."

Anyone wishing to make a case for branding Ellis as a musical Andy Warhol had better listen to *Hey Jude*. An incredible electric trumpet intro, done live with no overdubbing, sets the stage, and what ensues runs the gamut from straight melody to what sounds like the cast of *Satyricon* masquerading as better-than-average Salvation Army bandmen trying to

Records are reviewed by Chris Albertson, Mike Bourne, Don DeMicheal, Alan Heineman, Wayne Jones, Larry Kart, John Litweiler, John McDonough, Dan Morgenstern, Don Nelsen, Harvey PeKar, Doug Ramsey, 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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play rock. A high camp crowdpleaser.

Antea, another fine Levy original, precedes the album's highlight, *Old Man's Tear*, a melancholy ballad portraying "an old man's life—his joys and sorrows . . ." Though Klemmer's composition and arrangement are excellent, Ellis steals his thunder with stunning virtuosity. *Great Divide*, in 13/4, is a pulsating vehicle highlighted by Shetter's alto, more dazzling Ellis, and a brief but shimmering up-tempo reed soli. The infectious, riotous *Stomp* (a close cousin melodically and harmonically to Horace Silver's *The Preacher*) wraps it up.

What Ellis' standing will be in that distant day when all votes are in is still open to question, but I must respect him as a sincere, well-schooled musician—one who not only knows his instrument but perhaps more music than all but a few contemporary musicians. In a day when many jazz artists are opting for (make that being cowed into) jazz-rock amalgams not suited to their talents and/or ambitions, it's refreshing and pleasantly surprising to see a *double* album of original, straight-ahead, adventurous music. Though I've heard better sound reproduction from in-person recordings, this LP—at whatever the special low price is—is still a good investment.

—Szantor

BUD FREEMAN

THE COMPLEAT BUD FREEMAN—Monmouth-Evergreen MES/7022: *Dinah*; *Another Sunday*; *Exactly Like You*; *You Took Advantage Of Me*; *What Is There To Say?*; *I Got Rhythm*; *Uncle Haggart's Blues*; *Out Of My Road*, *Mr. Toad*; *Ain't Misbehavin'*; *Song Of The Dove*; *That D Minor Thing*; *Just One Of Those Things*.

Personnel: Freeman, tenor saxophone; Bob Wilber, clarinet, soprano saxophone (tracks 7-12 only); Ralph Sutton, piano; Bob Haggart, bass; Gus Johnson, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★

Bud Freeman's playing on this album is so fresh it seems hard to believe he has been a vital part of jazz since the mid-1920s. On the surface, his style has remained relatively unchanged since reaching maturity in the late '30s, but while he may sometimes appear to coast along on a set vocabulary (always unmistakably his own, however), he will surprise you when inspired.

Here, he is inspired—especially on the first side, the one devoted to quartet performances. He particularly shines at slower tempos, playing with that utter relaxation only the great veterans seem able to achieve.

Thus, the opening *Dinah*, in the ballad treatment that has made it a Freeman classic (though hitherto unrecorded), tells

a unique story in less than three minutes, while the equally unexpected slow tempo applied to *Exactly* yields equally warm, affecting results. On the third ballad, *What Is There To Say?*, Bud gives himself more room to stretch, and the result is a small masterpiece, reflective and more introspective than is his custom, and reminiscent in mood of later Lester Young—a rare groove to capture.

Originality of treatment is also evident on *Rhythm*, done in a deliberate, easy-swinging middle tempo, the theme played almost straight in the exposition—a novel and charming effect.

Advantage, long a Freeman favorite, brings forth some new ideas and is graced by a fine Sutton intro and solo in a Waller mold.

Side two, by the quintet, is notable for the excellent, sympathetic interplay between Freeman and Wilber, both unison and polyphonic; four fine Freeman originals, and Wilber's singing, sparkling soprano solos (he uses both his horns in the ensemble).

Particularly fetching among Freeman's pieces is *Dove*, a haunting, tender theme, and *D Minor*, a jauntily swinging romp in a rather contemporary mold, with Sutton's solo a standout.

Misbehavin' is also given superior treatment, and the two saxophonists work together in almost telepathic communion on *Things*.

Without the sterling support from Sutton, Haggart and Johnson (the latter a delight on brushes) this album would not be what it is. But then, it should come as no surprise that this bunch works together well: all hands are members of the World's Greatest Jazz Band. Mellow, tasteful, uncontrived but imaginative music from a label that seems to specialize in labors of love, and happily lets the musicians decide what and how to record. —Morgenstern

DAVE FRISHBERG

OKLAHOMA TOAD—CTI 1004: *One Horse Town*; *Van Lingle Mungo*; *The Secret of Success*; *Oklahoma Toad*; *The Prophet Of Doom*; *Rocky Mountain Water*; *You Can't Go*; *Wallflower Lonely*; *Cornflower Blue*; *Nasty Nasty Habit*; *I Don't Believe You*.

Personnel: Bill Berry, trumpet, flugelhorn; Garnett Brown, trombone; Al Cohn, tenor saxophone; Sol Schlinger, baritone saxophone; Frishberg, piano, organ, electric piano, clavinet, vocals, arranger; Stuart Scharf, guitar; Russell George, electric bass; Herb Lovelle, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★

Despite the promising personnel and Frishberg's notable talents as a jazz pianist, this is not a jazz album. It is a show-



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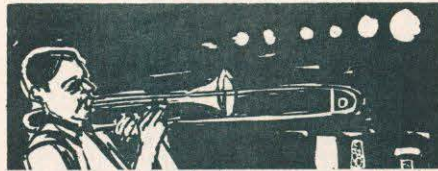
case for Frishberg's song-writing (music and lyrics), arranging and vocal gifts, which are considerable.

Frishberg is a true original. His forte is a whimsical, quite unique sense of humor. If he ever reminds of anyone, it may be of his sometime song-writing partner and fellow pianist-singer Bob Dorough, but this is mainly a matter of similarities in off-hand delivery and vocal timbre, and the rare combination of humor and first-rate musicianship.

The ten songs offered here, all originals, vary in mood and quality, but none is less than good. My favorite is *Van Lingle Mungo*, named after a baseball player who was with the Dodgers in the 1940s (the song has done well enough to earn Mungo and Frishberg a joint appearance on the *Dick Cavett Show*). The lyric consists entirely of a recitation the names of legendary and not-so-legendary ballplayers, set to a romantic bossa-nova melody. It has to be heard to be appreciated; description can't do it justice.

Also excellent are *Nasty Nasty Habit* (one never learns just what the habit is, but the song contains the immortal lines "... I'm pinned up against the wall/like a beat-up ping-pong ball/stuck against the radiator); the tender *Wallflower*, a c&w-type ballad tailor-made for Ray Charles; and *Success* and *Rocky Mountain*, in their different ways fine parodies of silly "folk" songs.

Though there are some good wa-wa



spots from Scharf, there are no solos by the hornmen (excepting some brief Berry flurries on *Mungo*). But almost every track has a sample of Frishberg's delightful keyboard work—perhaps the best are on *Toad* and *Nasty*. They are, of course, only teasers. His arrangements are first-rate, and everything on the album swings. His singing may be an acquired taste, like Greek olives, but I dig it, and he puts the lyrics across.

I hope this album, or at least some of its songs, makes it big. Then, perhaps, we'll get that long-overdue jazz LP featuring Frishberg as an instrumentalist (a role in which, so far, he's only been recorded on a Jimmy Rushing *BluesWay* LP). It will be a treat, for Frishberg is one of the best jazz pianists around today, not to slight his other talents. —Morgenstern

BARRY HARRIS

MAGNIFICENT—Prestige 7733: *Bean and the Boys; You Sweet and Fancy Lady; Rouge; Ableu-cha; Just Open Your Heart; Sun Dance; These Foolish Things; Dexterity.*

Personnel: Harris, piano; Ron Carter, bass; Leroy Williams, drums.

Rating: ★★★★★

This is perhaps Barry Harris' finest album to date, which is to say that it is an event, for Harris is as good as they come.

Though still a young man, Harris was a musical father-figure to most of the talented players who came out of Detroit in the '50s. Today, he stands as one of the

down beat

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