

# Record Reviews

Records are reviewed by Chris Albertson, Don DeMicheal, Gilbert M. Erskine, Ira Gitler, Alan Heineman, Wayne Jones, Lawrence Kart, John Litweiler, John McDonough, Dan Morgenstern, Don Nelsen, Harvey Pekar, Harvey Siders, Carol Sloane, Jim Szantor, and Pete Welding. Reviews are signed by the writers.

Ratings are: ★★★★★ excellent, ★★★★ very good, ★★★ good, ★★ fair, ★ poor. When two catalog numbers are listed, the first is mono, and the second is stereo.

## SPOTLIGHT REVIEW

### Charlie Haden

**LIBERATION MUSIC ORCHESTRA**—Impulse AS 9183: *The Introduction; Song of the United Front; El Quinto Regimiento; Los Cuatros Generales; Viva La Quince Brigada; The Ending to the First Side; Song for Che; War Orphans; The Interlude (Drinking Music); Circus '68 '69; We Shall Overcome.*

Personnel: Mike Mantler, trumpet; Don Cherry, cornet, Indian wood and bamboo flutes (tracks 3, 4, 5, 7 only); Roswell Rudd, trombone; Bob Northern, French horn, military whistle, crow call, bells, wood blocks; Perry Robinson, clarinet; Gato Barbieri, clarinet, tenor saxophone; Dewey Redman, alto and tenor saxophone; Howard Johnson, tuba; Carla Bley, piano, arranger; Sam Brown, guitar, Tanganykian guitar, thumb piano; Haden, bass; Paul Motian, drums, percussion; Andrew Cyrille, percussion (track 11 only).

Rating: ★★★★★

This unusual and interesting record, the political aspects of which already have been debated in our *Chords and Discords* section, ranks among the most mature and accomplished artistic statements yet produced by what is loosely called "the new music."

Not since Max Roach's *Freedom Suite* has there been a jazz record so strongly and emphatically allied to a non-musical cause. The reference points here range from the Spanish Civil War to the Cuban revolutionary movement, the Chicago disorders, and human and civil rights in general. According to one's outlook, this may be cause for rejoicing, alarm, or ennui, but regardless of what the reaction in this sphere may be, the resultant creative inspiration is undeniable.

The ensemble (and a stellar one it is) tackles its task with enthusiastic conviction, and has produced a potent musical document. Since jazz has often been accused of being insular and/or esoteric, the advent of the Liberation Orchestra is significant in and of itself, but we shall here concern ourselves with the music rather than other matters.

First off, Carla Bley must be credited with pulling together the diverse threads (Spanish folk songs and jazz originals among them) into a coherent musical tapestry. She has provided a good balance between scored passages, collective improvisation, and solo freedom, and in addition, her introduction and interludes, short as they may be, both serve valuable connective functions and are charming and worthwhile pieces as such.

The beautiful melodies of the three Spanish songs, though one appears only obliquely, are good springboards for the soloists. Guitarist Sam Brown plays beautifully on *Quinto*, in the appropriate Flamenco spirit. Haden also has a fine spot on this piece, and Cherry is imaginative. Rudd's work on *Generales* is outstanding; I love his burry, emotional trombone

sound and what he does with it. I do not love or even like Barbieri's agonized tenor on *Brigada*, but that stems from my general dislike of playing that seems to imitate an emotion rather than attempting to evoke it. But those who favor the shriek school of modern saxophone playing will dig it.

By the same standards, *Circus* at times overreaches, but as direct program music it has its points. However, Rudd's simple, unaffected and song-like statement of *Overcome* offers welcome relief after the histrionics.

Haden's *Che* solo is a tour de force, a blend of awesome instrumental skill (what a gorgeous tone he gets!) and solid musical thought. Miss Bley offers lucid playing on Ornette Coleman's *War Orphans*, a genuinely moving piece of music.

But everybody, featured or not, plays very well on this record. Obviously, all the musicians were totally involved in the project, and it shows. The dubbed-in taped material (from a film soundtrack and of Cuban singer Carlos Pueblo) is effective.

In all, praise to all involved, particularly Haden, who conceived the project, Miss Bley, who helped it take creative shape, and Rudd, who to this listener provides some of the peak moments of inspiration. This is a record which well merits the attention of serious listeners.—Morgenstern

### Ran Blake

**THE BLUE POTATO**—Milestone MPS 9021: *God Bless the Child; Three Seeds (A Suite); The Blue Potato; All or Nothing At All; Fables of Faubus; Chicago; Never On Sunday; Soul On Ice; Vradiaz; Garvey's Ghost; Bella Ciao; Stars Fell on Alabama.*

Personnel: Blake, solo piano.

Rating: ★★★★★

Ran Blake is a unique musician. Though jazz looms large in his makeup, there are many other influences—in any case, it would be misleading to attempt to categorize his music. It is wholly personal and singular; unlike anything else you might encounter in today's multifaceted musical environment.

Regardless of predilections, no listener could remain unimpressed by Blake's skill as a pianist. His command of the difficult instrument is virtuosic, but there are no empty displays of technique.

Fortunately, the album is beautifully recorded, capturing every nuance of the pianist's wide-ranging dynamics—from silence to gentle pianissimos to triple-forte chord clusters—which he employs with remarkable feeling for dramatic contrast. His pedalling skills are something to marvel at.

In a sense, this is program music. Blake

is a committed artist who makes no secret of his deep involvement in the social and political issues of our time. His treatment of old standards like *Chicago*, *Alabama*, and *All or Nothing at All* is fraught with symbolic overtones—*Chicago* becomes a wry comment on the 1968 Democratic Convention; *Alabama* mixes irony with the inherent romanticism, and *All* is transformed into a compelling civil rights tract. Blake has close emotional ties to Greece, and so his *Never On Sunday* moves from sunny tranquility to turmoil. In other instances, the titles themselves tell the story.

However, it is not necessary to be attuned to or even aware of these matters to enjoy the music simply as music, just as one needs no program notes to savor Beethoven's *Sixth*. Blake's passion for social and political justice may be a prime mover of his art, but the end result is a thing unto itself.

Listeners who require sustained tempi and a strong, steady rhythmic pulse for their enjoyment of music might find Blake's work beyond their ken, but anyone interested in the art of improvisation on the one hand and that of piano playing on the other will be fascinated. If you are among the latter, this album is the best introduction to the very special world of Ran Blake to date.

—Morgenstern

### Maynard Ferguson

**MAYNARD FERGUSON 1969**—Prestige 7636: *Almost Like Being in Love; Knarl; Ole; Dancing Nately; Tenderley; Whisper Not; Got The Spirit.*

Personnel: Ferguson, trumpet, with the Roll-Hans Mueller (Southwest German Radio Dance Orchestra), Rudi Flierl, Gerd Husemann, tenor saxophone; Herbert Feigl, baritone saxophone; Dieter Reith, piano; Herman Mutschler, drums; others unidentified.

Rating: ★★★★★

With a slightly changed sound (more tart, raspy) but basically unaltered conception, Maynard is still at it. Presently residing in Manchester, England, the high-note specialist and spirited helmsman of yore is backed on this set by the excellent Mueller ensemble in a program of worthwhile from the old 12-piece book (remember?).

This trek down memory lane is most pleasant, however. The Mueller outfit is tighter than Ferguson's U.S. bands ever were and the blowing is above average. The arrangements, for the most part, are unchanged—except for Slide Hampton's *Spirit*—and though Maynard had some excellent rhythm sections in the States, this section is even better. Pianist Reith is hard-driving, though very tasteful accompanist, and a fine soloist, and drummer Mutschler is simply fantastic.

Mr. Chops is not up to the improv