

# L.A. JAZZ SCENE

L.A.'S ONLY JAZZ PAPER

## Joe Harriott - *Helter Skelter* (Acrobat)

Joe Harriott (1928-73) had a fascinating and important if all-too-short career. Born in Jamaica, the altoist moved to England in 1951 where he spent his last 22 years. He was originally rated as one of England's top bop-oriented musicians. While Charlie Parker was naturally a strong influence, Harriott's passionate tone was actually more reminiscent of Sonny Criss. During the 1950s he performed with the who's who of British jazz, occasionally leading his own group.

During 1959-60, Harriott began improvising freer explorations. While his music was sometimes a bit similar to Ornette Coleman's, he actually developed his ideas independently of Coleman. Another innovative period took place later in the 1960s. Harriott teamed up with violinist John Mayer to develop "Indo-Jazz Fusion," a combination of jazz with music from India. Tragically, cancer caused the altoist's premature death at 44.

*Helter Skelter* is mostly drawn from Joe Harriott's bebop years and features him in four different settings. The rare performances showcase him leading a quartet on four songs from 1955, in the spotlight during three previously unreleased numbers with Kurt Edelhagen's orchestra in 1959, taking short solos (along with many others) with the Melody Makers All-Stars in 1957, and making appearances on four songs with the Daily Mail International Jazz Festival All-Stars in 1963. The latter is particularly intriguing for it has Harriott with a modern combo on "Milestones" and "Jackie-ing," and jamming with a diverse big band alongside such major names as Kenny Ball, Humphrey Lyttelton, Chris Barber and Tubby Hayes.

While *Helter Skelter* (which is available from [www.mvdb2b.com](http://www.mvdb2b.com)) does not contain Joe Harriott's most essential sessions, it has more than its share of fun and swinging music from a British jazz legend.

**Scott Yanow**