



Jazzcraft Studio Recordings 1978-79
Various Artists (Storyville)
by George Kanzler

Largely forgotten today, Howard McGhee (who died 25 years ago this month at age 69) was a pioneering bebop trumpeter in the '40s, a member of Coleman Hawkins' seminal bop band as well as a recording partner of Charlie Parker in Los Angeles. In those years he was often compared to Dizzy Gillespie as another fleet, soaring trumpeter, but one with a less abstract, more melodic style.

When these recordings were made, McGhee, already in his 60s and buffeted by health problems, was a more introverted, reflective player with slightly blurry intonation, rarely rising above his mid-register. But, as these sessions prove, he was also a font of musical ideas, capable of producing sturdy, lyrically flowing, logically intriguing solos. Made at the end of the '70s, just on the cusp of the neo-bop revival - before Wynton Marsalis mania - the music here comes from two Jazzcraft CDs: *Wise in Time* by the Howard McGhee/Teddy Edwards Quintet and *Home Run* from the Howard McGhee/Benny Bailey Sextet, the latter including outtakes from the quintet session to round out the CD.

The Quintet repertoire is almost all from the early bebop era, plus a Clifford Brown bop tune as well as "I Remember Clifford" and, the one anomaly, John Coltrane's modal "Crescent". The mood verges on elegiac, with ballads and midtempo dominating. It's a mature bebop album by veterans fondly remembering, but not necessarily trying to emulate, the heady, breakneck excitement of those earlier times. What they bring is the wisdom of elders leavened with affection for the music of their youth.

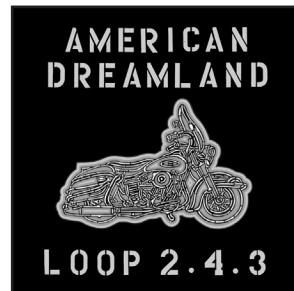
Edwards, whose tenor's vocal timbre harks back to the Swing Era, quotes a Kansas City staple of the time, "I Want a Little Girl", on Billy Eckstine's "I Want to Talk About You". Other bop ballads include Tadd Dameron's "If You Could See Me Now", showcasing McGhee's lyricism, a valid alternative to Miles Davis' modern ballad approach; Bud Powell's "Time Waits" and a sumptuous version of Monk's "Ruby My Dear". Monk's "In Walked Bud" and a trio of Charlie Parker pieces plus Oscar Pettiford's "Blues in the Closet" are done at fast but not blistering tempos,

bringing out the songful intricacies of the tunes. Both McGhee and Edwards bring admirably personal voices to their playing, avoiding the facile technique and polished clichés endemic to so many of today's neo- and postbop players.

Of the 12 tracks on the *Home Run* CD, only seven are by the McGhee/Bailey Sextet, as one is a feature for hard-edged tenor saxist Sonny Redd and four are outtakes (three alternates) from the Edwards Quintet sessions. However, those seven tracks are winners, the presence of trumpeter Benny Bailey stirring McGhee's competitive instincts, resulting in his best solos on the album.

Right from the opening track, his own bluesy hardbop "Get It On", McGhee plays faster, higher and with more crackling intensity than his mellower form with the *Wise in Time* quintet. Bailey, who forged most of his career in Europe, is a mercurial bopper who plays with bright bravura and a brilliant tone to match. On "Get It On" he brings out a plunger for fours with McGhee and the trades, down from half-choruses to fours and twos, on "Brownie Speaks" are a scintillating brass battle capped off by Bailey's exuberant slide whistle-effect ending. Other highlights include "Jonas", McGhee's "Love for Sale" contrafact with the composer Harmon-muted, Bailey tight muted with plunger; "Funky Señor", Bailey's nod to Horace Silver's "Señor Blues", with more wah-wah trumpet and Fats Navarro's "Nostalgia", an "Out of Nowhere" contrafact worth reviving.

For more information, visit storyvillerecords.com



American Dreamland
Loop 2.4.3 (Music Starts From Silence)
by Sharon Mizrahi

Before you can get a thought in edgewise, two voices say, "Change. The minds will be surfing in our blood... No more sexuality. No more stress...Total collapse. Again." These are some of the words to Loop 2.4.3's "Total Collapse", the half-minute opener to *American Dreamland*.

The fierce motorcycle print on the album cover gives no hint at the mindplay to come on Thomas Kozumplik and Lorne Watson's new CD. At a Joe's Pub release concert last month, the duo's vision swelled to full-fledged life.

On a stage packed with drums, keyboards, strings and miscellaneous instruments, Loop 2.4.3 began the evening unaccompanied, fusing into one poignant power. Watson rippled his steel drum to Kozumplik's firm beat, both tussling with delicate assertion.

Guests Aviva Jaye and Jon Catler later rose to the stage on "Sakura (we must love)" (vocalist Shara Warden appears on CD). Kozumplik stepped toward the microphone, swirling his buzzing voice around Jaye's metallic vocals. Both united with the entrancing futurism of Imogen Heap, pierced by Catler's agitated electric guitar. Watson's ritualistic drum cadence further distressed the air. The band reveled in discord, halting abruptly on their way to the apex.

The tune's eerie antithesis (not played live) is "American Elder", featuring Watson on Native American flute and Kozumplik in a harrowing rhythm. "So Strong" echoed the same rhythmic drive, though in a far different context. The rock fusion anthem - played twice in one set - hearkened to the album's motorcycle cover, opened by an edgy drum roll and

spears of electric guitar. Kozumplik's bata conjured a tropical flair as Jaye belted out, "It ain't right, it ain't wrong, we are so strong!"

Loop 2.4.3's guests took center stage on "I Knew (we shouldn't)", marking a refreshing change of pace from the percussive ambience. Cellist An-Lin Bardin nestled into Istvan B'Racz' somber piano - and opera vocalist Scott Bearden carried the weight on his shoulders. As a subway car rumbled beneath the floorboards of Joe's Pub, Bearden, too, rumbled to visceral resonance, seizing the air with his vibrant crescendo.

For more information, visit musicstartsfromsilence.com

ON DVD



Cuba: Island of Music (A Film by Gary Keys)
(MVD Visual)

by Tom Greenland

Cuba: Island of Music (originally released in 2004), one of ten-odd music documentaries from Gary Keys, is based on a 2000 sojourn in Havana. The movie mixes 'drive-by' footage of street scenes and daily life (cigar makers, butchers, clowns, taxi cabs, boys surfing on rainwater puddles, a Santería ceremony complete with a graphic chicken sacrifice, socialist propaganda, beach dancing, oxen plowing, a railroad engine, chess games, a heated argument over a baseball game, restored old American cars, et al.) with some of the city's más caliente nightclub bands (Orquesta Aragón, Grupo Cohiba, Jóvenes Clásicos del Son, Manolín, Los Zafiro, et al.) along with less formal performances of bolero, son, rhumba, salsa and even rap music. Keys narrates the action from the comfort of his own convertible and solicits commentary on the footage from Chico Hamilton and Dr. Billy Taylor, who respond with their own impressions of and insights into the music. Keys views Cuban music, like the gospel, blues and jazz music of black North Americans, as a positive, life-affirming response to oppression, not only the historical legacy of slavery but, in Cuba's case, the current oppression of socialist dictatorship and, most importantly for Keys, the economic slavery imposed by the US embargo.

Unfortunately, the film also contains flaws that undermine its integrity. While it does include translated statements by local musicians, ultimate authority is given to Hamilton, Taylor and the director himself, who at one point proclaims that Cuban music "is the most danceable music in the world" and later wonders, "Is everybody [in Cuba] a musical genius?" More troubling, especially for a film championing local lifestyles, is its treatment of females. Judging from footage of scantily clad nightclub dancers and a scene where a Chinese immigrant singer traces an hourglass shape with his hands as he praises Cuban girls, Cuban culture is complicit in the objectification of women - but a blatantly voyeuristic shot that pans to follow a young roller-skater's swaying behind (the girl quickly takes refuge behind a truck to avoid the camera) sadly demonstrates Keys' own insensitivity.

For more information, visit mvdvisual.com

JHM 205

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Georg Ruby's recent duo project is uncompromisingly dedicated to "instant compositions", spontaneously – on stage or in recording situations – developed improvisations without any guideline or prior agreement.

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