



on disc

ART BLAKEY

Live Messengers (Blue Note)

Duke Ellington wrote in the early thirties, "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing." Drummer Art Blakey has never forgotten, living by those words ever since he began leading the Jazz Messengers in 1954. Many of his sidemen became stars in their own right after departing Blakey.

Live Messengers features two separate editions of the Messengers and is taken from three previously unissued live dates. Trumpeter Clifford Brown was one of the giants of jazz before his premature death in a car accident. His creativity and total control of his instrument were an inspiration to many young trumpeters. Clifford recorded at Birdland with Blakey on Feb. 21, 1954, in a unit that actually predated the Messengers by a few months. Two previous albums from that night were released long ago, but this twofer includes three additional numbers: a fast blues, a slow blues and "The Way You Look Tonight." Although the recording quality is a bit shaky at times, any new recordings by Brown are a revelation and he is in fine form.

Most of *Live Messengers* features one of Blakey's strongest units, his 1962-62 sextet. Trumpeter Freddie Hubbard was only in his early twenties but was already a virtuoso possessing an easily recognizable if not striking sound. Tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter was more explorative but still firmly rooted in the bop tradition. Curtis Fuller has always been a very fluent inventive trombonist despite his lack of notoriety, while pianist Cedar Walton is a bit overshadowed by the three horn soloists but provides excellent backing.

This sextet performs six numbers, five at least 11 minutes long. The jam-session style is pure bop with many extended solos and much riffing. Swing is the main thing and although there are a few moments of hesitancy, these are greatly outnumbered by the many moments of brilliance.

Scott Yanow

JACK DEJOHNETTE

New Directions (ECM)

Lester Bowie, a member of the dazzling quartet on this album, is probably the best contemporary jazz trumpeter playing today. He has a casual but complete (as opposed to a cold, strictly formal) mastery of his horn. His tone is beautiful. He glistens and glares and soars and strikes. He is nimble and brash and breathes like an angel. He plays with a kind of passionate excitement reminiscent both of Lee Morgan's later live recordings, though he has more muscle than Morgan, and of *Bitches' Brew*. Bowie is not better-known, simply because most of his playing has been firmly in the avant-garde, mostly with the Art Ensemble of Chicago. The exigencies of that sort of playing (his work with the Art Ensemble spans many styles and stances and at different times both satirizes and apotheosizes many kinds of music, both black and European) have apparently given Bowie both an incredible fluency and an extremely broad dramatic range. He is a complete player.

It should be added that the group as a whole is quite wonderful, too. DeJohnette's drumming seems unusually sensitive and even sometimes sly, and he holds his merely



Lester Bowie: the best jazz trumpeter playing today?

competent piano playing to a minimum. John Abercrombie plays mandolin and, particularly, guitar with rare articulateness: his languid ascending and descending figures on "Where or Wayne" are a subtle masterpiece. And bassist Eddie Gomez holds a perfect balance between force and delicacy. This is perhaps the best he's ever sounded.

For some reason, ECM releases a lot of quartet albums in which the solo horn is a trumpet. This is without question the best of them, and by a good, long way. It might even be the jazz album of the year.

Colman Andrews

THE DOORS

An American Prayer (Elektra)

Jim Morrison recorded some of his poetry in the Elektra studios shortly before he went to Paris in 1971, where he died later that year. That poetry, with new instrumental accompaniment by the original Doors (Ray Manzarek, keyboards; Robbie Krieger, guitar; and John Densmore, drums) and two previously unreleased live recordings by the band, make up *An American Prayer*, the first original Doors-with-Morrison material released since *L. A. Woman* in the year of Morrison's death.

Morrison's lyrics and poetry came the closest of any rock songwriter to capturing the spirit of Raymond Chandler's vision of Los Angeles: erotic, exotic, a sunny city with a grim dark underbelly. In Morrison's songs, sex was equated with death and resurrection; although he sometimes lapsed into corniness, he more often jolted us with images and passions we didn't expect to find in good old rock and roll. Seven years after his death, his poetry still has that same power.

The new music here is restrained, tasteful, almost too subdued, reflecting the old Doors sound but not recapturing it. "The Hitchhiker" has Manonesque overtones of death in the desert, while Morrison's "Lament" (for his cock, no less) is a dose of serio-comic Freudianism; a live version of "Roadhouse Blues" from 1970's *Morrison Hotel* is brief relief from the chilling mysteries and violent undercurrents.

For those unfamiliar with one of the best and most unusual groups of the Sixties, *An American Prayer* is a good introduction; for the rest of us, it's a slightly perverse pleasure to sink into Morrison's twisted mind again. I've missed him.

Judith Sims

FLINT

(Columbia)

There's considerably more variety here than one might expect from a Grand Funk spinoff (Brewer, Schacter, Frost, and a couple of ringers). But there's the same hard edge and crude energy that won the earlier band plenty of fans, plus the guest participation of Todd Rundgren, Frank Zappa, and Wet Willie's Jimmy Hall. Good try.

Del Porter

STEVE FORBERT

Alive on Arrival (Nemperor)

The fact that Forbert is *really good* is liable to be overshadowed by the equally valid truth that he's this year's "Next Dylan." You'd think that CBS (of which body Nemperor is an appendage) would have learned by now. Historical note: "Settle Down" is probably the world's first Eddie Money imitation.

Lynne Manor

ARLYN GAYLE

Back to the Midwest Night (ABC)

Surely only PR people pretend to believe in virgins, yet here's a spectacularly complete new writer-singer from an ambiguous obscurity whose ten-line auto-bio tells you exactly nothing. Arlyn Gale and his debut album have the tough acrylic finish and confident authority of a career in midspan, more authentic than most of Springsteen, as arrogant as Billy Joel and infinitely fresher than Dylan.

He sings with a hoarse intensity, backed by a tight, whippin'-along four-piece rock band made up of people whose names are as unfamiliar as is their star's. His melodies are mostly low contrast to his biting lyrics—sample: "You're gonna claw the night to pieces/Then you'll fingerpaint the dawn/You're gonna curl up on the sofa/Like a Tiger on the Lawn."

Interestingly, Gale's producers, Mike Appel and Louis Lahav, were both formerly associated with Bruce Springsteen. Apparently they learned a lesson about over-hype from that outrageous example.

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Leonard Brown

LEVON HELM

(ABC)

Evidently Levon really enjoyed the Band's *Rock of Ages*, where Allen Toussaint came up

with those snappy New Orleans-style horn charts. Each track here uses that format, but mostly to ill effect. It works on "Play Something Sweet," a Toussaint original with Levon singing in his best (for a drummer) barroom baritone, and "Let's Do It in Slow Motion," which the horns accentuate without getting in the way. Where Helm's style falters is on the already overdone *Remake of the Year*, Al Green's "Take Me to the River." The song is so conventionally arranged that it adds nothing to Green's definitive version nor to the quirky remakes that Brian Ferry and Talking Heads came up with earlier this year. The only tunes that make it are where Helm cops to his Band influence. If only as derivations, "Driving at Night" and "Standing on a Mountaintop" work because of what they sound like, rather than what they are.

You may not believe it, but there is such a thing as too much of a good thing. And in the case of Band solo spinoffs, I'll take a pass.

Tom Vickers

MARK-ALMOND

Other People's Rooms (A&M/Horizon)

The lyrics of Mark-Almond's first album in several years probably reflect their advancing age, as well as that of whomever signed them to the label: listeners under 25 just aren't going to be able to relate to songs like the Danny O'Keefe composition, "You Look Just Like a Girl Again." Most of the other selections' lyrical content also lacks aptness or imagination, and the arrangements put together by guitarist/singer/composer Jon Mark and multi-reedman Johnny Almond barely make the grade as easy-listening music.

However, two things about this album do stand out: Tommy LiPuma's production and a new version of "The City," first recorded for the duo's 1970 debut album, also produced by LiPuma. "The City" has life and a memorable tune, without falling into the trap of catchiness with nothing to back it up.

LiPuma and engineers Hank Cicalo and Al Schmitt live up to their hard-earned reputations with clear, distinct sound on this album. It's too bad, though, that they didn't have more exciting material to work with.

Becky Sue Epstein

LEE MORGAN

The Procrastinator (Blue Note)

Lee Morgan was one of the most significant jazz trumpeters of the Sixties. He extended the boppish style of Clifford Brown to fit the more complex compositions of his time and influenced both Freddie Hubbard and Woody Shaw. But his death at age 34 cut short his career and has resulted in his accomplishments being underrated.

The Procrastinator teams together two previously unissued sessions from Morgan's prime. The first date showcases Lee in a sextet from 1967 that includes tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter. Shorter was greatly influenced by John Coltrane (circa 1960) and resembles him on up-tempo numbers. However Shorter's two compositions are original and memorable, especially the quiet, sparse "Dear Sir." Vibist Bobby Hutcherson and pianist Herbie Hancock fit in well during the six modern hard-bop pieces although their solo spots are brief. Lee Morgan, who contributed the brilliant multi-theme title cut, is in excellent form with many sharply crisp but tasty trumpet flights during the date.

The second session on this twofer is from 1969 and has more of a Jazz Messenger feel to it. The front line includes trombonist Julian Priester, one of the few new voices on this instrument during the late sixties, and Miles Davis veteran, tenor saxist George Coleman.

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