

HAPPENINGS

Getting Down With Dave

It becomes increasingly clear that Dave Brubeck is a lasting influence in music. It has been more than 25 years since he organized his intriguing, controversial quartet, and there has never been a period in that quarter-century, despite the changing tastes of a fickle public, when Brubeck has not been productive and in demand.

Given his drives and energies, there is little doubt that Brubeck would have been productive in any profession. Born in 1920, he grew up on a Northern California ranch where his father was manager, and he might have become a successful cattleman. But his mother was a piano teacher, and she insisted that Dave learn the keyboard as well as the range. Today all three Brubeck boys are respected musicians, Howard and Henry in education, Dave as a world-famous jazz artist.

With an eye toward ranch life, Brubeck enrolled as a student of veterinary medicine at College of the Pacific in 1938. Shortly after, he switched to music and was graduated in 1942. World War Two interrupted his private studies with the great French composer, Darius Milhaud. He served in the Army and returned to his work with Milhaud at Mills College in 1946. Milhaud, long a student of jazz, incorporated its elements into some of his greatest compositions. He encouraged Brubeck to play jazz. Dave formed a trio, and in the late Forties organized an octet that is regarded as one of the most important experimental groups in jazz history. One of the members of the octet was alto saxophonist and clarinetist Paul Desmond, who had earlier crossed paths with Brubeck.

"I met Dave in 1944 when he was coming through San Francisco on his way overseas as a rifleman," Desmond told *Down Beat*. "We had a quick session, started playing the blues in B-flat, and the first chord played was G-major. Knowing absolutely nothing at the time about polytonality, I thought he was stark, raving mad."

"His appearance at the time supported this point of view admirably. Wild-haired, ferocious-looking, with a pile-driver approach to the piano, and the expression of a surly Sioux. It took much patient explaining and several more listenings before I began to understand what he was up to."

When that understanding was complete, Desmond and Brubeck became one of the most empathetic pairs of improvisors in all of music, and their career together was to last uninterrupted from 1951 to 1968. During that



THE DAVE BRUBECK QUARTET

The legendary composer, jazz performer, and winner of numerous Downbeat polls, Dave Brubeck.

period, the Brubeck Quartet made dozens of record albums and toured the world many times. Brubeck recalls one punishing stretch of 90 cities in 90 days. That sort of schedule helped lead to the quartet's decision to disband after 17 years of undiluted success. Brubeck and Desmond have frequently rejoined on special occasions, Desmond sometimes sharing the spotlight with baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan, an old friend who first appeared with Brubeck at the New Orleans Jazz Festival in 1968 and subsequently has often been a special guest at Brubeck concerts. One of the most special recent Brubeck-Desmond encounters was a 25th anniversary reunion tour in 1976, in which the two, bassist Eugene Wright, and drummer Joe Morello gave concerts in 25 cities. This was the reconstitution of the most famous and long-lived of the Brubeck groups, and its music can be heard on the live *25th Anniversary Reunion* album.

The tour included the Two Generations of Brubeck unit, made up of Dave and his sons Chris, Danny, and Darius, all accomplished professional musicians with jazz careers of their own.

Among Brubeck's many other contributions to jazz, his work with unusual time signatures has received the widest acceptance by other musicians. Until the mid-Fifties, when Brubeck and drummer Max Roach began experimenting independently with 3/4 time, virtually all serious jazz performances were in 2/4 or 4/4. From combining 3/4 and 4/4, Brubeck moved on to work successfully in 5/4, 7/4, 9/8, 10/4, and some divisions of 13 and 15. Using Brubeck's and Desmond's pioneering work as a point of departure, younger musicians have developed proficiency in even more unconventional time signatures, such as 19/4, 32/8, 7/8, and, in the case of trumpeter-bandleader Don Ellis, 3 1/2/4.

In addition to his jazz playing and composing, Brubeck has written several large-scale compositions with religious orientations, including "The Light in the Wilderness," "The Gates of Justice," and "Truth is Fallen." He has performed and recorded these major works with prominent symphony orchestras.

Brubeck's piano style has not always met with critical approval, but his influence can be heard in the work of a number of important young pianists, just as the inspiration of James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Art Tatum, and Duke Ellington can be heard in Brubeck's playing. He is a vital link in the jazz piano tradition and a strong contributor to it.

—Doug Ramsey



STARPOINT

Keep On Dancing

With their second album, *Keep On It*, this Baltimore/Washington-area sextet continues its innovative take on tried-and-true rhythm and blues, with an early hit-bound candidate in the title track, a more-than-worthy successor to their smash single off last year's debut, "I Just Wanna Dance With You."

Four of the six Starpoint members are brothers—Ernesto, Orlando, Greg and George Phillips—who discovered a passion for music at an early age while growing up in Baltimore. As teenagers, the Phillips brothers found a kindred musical spirit in Kayode Adeyemo, who brought a wealth of influences to their sound, from Michigan to Barbados to Nigeria, all areas where the well-travelled Adeyemo had once made his home. Vocalist Renee Diggs rounds out the outfit, with the present line-up including Ernesto on guitar, Orlando on bass, Greg on drums, George on keyboards and Kayode on percussion, bass and timbales.

Together they formed a series of

bands, playing all over the Baltimore/Washington district. Known as Lyciniana when they first started performing in 1972, the group appeared up and down the east coast, doing assorted session work for both Motown and All Platinum Records. In 1978, the group became Starpoint, and after a continual sharpening of their ensemble skills, inked an agreement with Casablanca Records.

On the Lionel Job-produced *Keep On It*, Starpoint offers a platter of steamy, uncompromised funk and soul, with the exotic allure of their international backgrounds. Songs like "For You," "I Want You Closer," "Baby Let Me Do It" and the no-holds-barred rhythms of "Starpoint's Here Tonight," display the ferocious musicianship of this veteran band and their constant striving to redefine the borders of funk, soul, R&B and good-time dance music. "We simply strive for the best," claims brother Ernesto. On *Keep On It*, Starpoint has achieved just that.

Attention All Black Students who attended and/or graduated from the University of Oregon:

For those of you who have not received the information for the upcoming reunion on August 27, 28, 29, please call any one of the following numbers:

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