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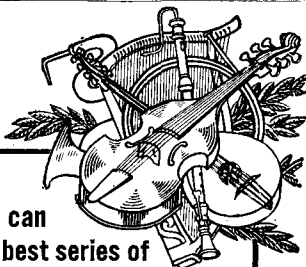
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MOSTLY MODERNISTS

The Public Miles Davis

COLUMBIA seems to be culling its Miles Davis releases from concert performances recently. And whereas this involves a certain repetitiousness in repertory (in concert he usually plays pieces he has previously recorded), it does not involve repetitiousness of content, for Davis projecting to an audience is not the same as Davis playing to a studio microphone, and the public Davis, occasional mistakes and all, sometimes challenges himself musically in ways that the other Davis may not.

In *Europe* (CL 2183/CS 8983) comes from the 1963 Jazz Festival at Antibes. It is a provocative recital. Why—one finds himself asking—is he doing that piece so fast? Or why is his opening statement on the other piece so seemingly lackadaisical? Is he bored and impatient with this repertory? But his playing answers such questions almost as soon as they are asked, for in Miles Davis we are listening to a brilliant sketch artist whose abstractions of standards like "Autumn Leaves" and "All of You" are as knowingly precise as they are evocative. Anyone who doubts Davis's far from obvious command of his horn should hear "Joshua." And anyone who doubts his sense of discipline should hear his blues solo on "Walkin'," which ends as his melodic ideas reach a deadlock of elliptical simplicity that is still somehow satisfying.

The pleasures of hearing Davis's sidemen here, George Coleman on tenor saxophone and Herbie Hancock on piano, are not the pleasures of hearing playing that is surprisingly new but of hearing the clarity and precision with which each man has selected and refined his musical vocabulary from the contemporary tradition—particularly so in Coleman's fast *tour de force* on "Walkin'." But the most arresting music after Davis's comes from his young drummer, Tony Williams (then only seventeen). Williams would be an exceptional player if only because of his manifest sensitivity to the sounds of his cymbals and of his tight snare drum. But he is an attentive, understanding, and technically accomplished accompanist, and he is so sure of his craft that, for example, he can momentarily splash away at a large cymbal, building a tension almost at variance with the beat, then release it by plunging back into the momentum of the piece, all without



—Columbia Records.

Miles Davis—"a brilliant sketch
artist . . . precise and evocative."

drawing undue attention to himself or obstructing his fellow performers.

An earlier Davis can be heard on half of *Miles and Monk at Newport* (Columbia CL 2178/CS 8978), recorded at the 1958 Festival and presenting a sextet that featured both John Coltrane and "Cannonball" Adderley on saxophones, and also had Bill Evans (*not* Wynton Kelly as the liner copy says) on piano—a group whose work is preserved on only one other recording.

The sustained swing of Davis, juxtaposed against his rhythm section, during his logically unfolded blues solo on "Straight No Chaser" is exceptional. Coltrane darts about in a vertical maze of scales that are played outright or merely suggested, and notes that are played, twisted, and sometimes shrieked. It is as if he were determined to get in every note that could possibly fit, attacked and inflected in every way he could possibly execute. Coltrane is fascinating, whether he is ultimately satisfying or not.

The other side of the LP preserves the 1963 alliance between Thelonious Monk's quartet and clarinetist Pee Wee Russell. A good idea on the face of it, since the analogies between Russell's timeless asymmetry and Monk's obliqueness are striking. But it might have been better to have Russell improvise on Monk's pieces with a group of his own. Here, even in so well constructed

an episode as his solo on "Blue Monk," the clarinetist's plaintive lyricism seems quiet indeed to be finding itself in this assertive ensemble. There was no rehearsal for the event, by the way, and it shows in an interesting way on "Nuttty," as Monk unaccustomedly and precisely lays out the harmonic skeleton of his piece as a preliminary guide to Russell, whose solo, however, ends rather indecisively in mid-chorus.

It's Monk's Time (Columbia CL 2184/CS 8984) is more successful, and, granted that I hold reservations about Ben Riley as the right drummer for Monk, it seems Monk's best quartet record in some time. A dual-tempoed "Lulu's Back in Town" begins with Monk exhibiting his delightful talent for respectful satire on the styles of his pianistic elders. "Nice Work If You Can Get It" is embellished only according to Monkian conventions, but "Memories of You" is more deeply mined, and Monk's handling of essentially traditional ideas in his own piece "Shuffle Boil" is as rhythmically refreshing as one expects him to be. Tenor saxophonist Charlie Rouse does not play it safe here, and the rapport between him and the leader is sometimes a delight. On "Brake's Sake" Rouse's lines and Monk's romping accompaniment develop into a momentary duet, full of banter and even affectionate insult. The group achieves a variety of textures as Monk accompanies Rouse with barking harmonic reminders, or with fragments of melody—or with nothing at all, suspending the tenor saxophonist above strong bass and subdued drums.

I recently cited a classic Ben Webster LP in this space. And I think that tenor saxophonist's new one, *See You at the Fair* (Impulse A-65/AS-65), might almost be placed beside it. Jazz, we are told, is a young man's art. Yet here is Ben Webster, a better player today than he was in the Thirties or Forties. He has not only accepted his shortcomings (he is no showy sax virtuoso) but at the same time has learned to pace and structure his solos with emotional and melodic order. Some of the ballads on the LP are teasingly brief, particularly a version of "Stardust," a piece on which Webster has had much to say on occasion. But "Fall of Love" shows how beautifully he can paraphrase a theme, and "Our Love Is Here to Stay" how well he can improvise on one more fully. He can even do "Over the Rainbow" without bathos. The set also has a good medium tempo blues, a new version of "In a Mellow Tone," and there is some very good piano by Hank Jones on several pieces. An improviser by definition takes chances, but Webster takes his chances with a mature sureness of what he is about.

—MARTIN WILLIAMS.

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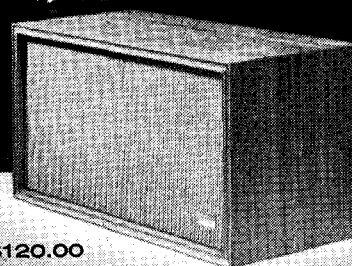
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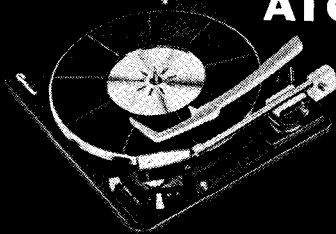


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Harlem Yesterdays

FEW of the many jazz categories have ever been well defined artistically, but the labels attached to them, like flags of convenience, have served their purpose for easy reference. Thus styles have been identified by the cities in which they originated, such as New Orleans, Chicago, and Kansas City, and even by a region as extensive as the West Coast. Yet the greatest of all jazz centers, New York, never gave its name to a style, perhaps because it drew unto itself and digested all the others.

"I can tell a New Orleans band from a Chicago or St. Louis type any time, but New York, of course, doesn't have any particular style," bandleader Fate Marable once said, "because it has everybody's way of playing." But no matter how great the regional reputation, the talented jazz musician or band had, as Coleman Hawkins has testified, to come for judgment and the final seal of approval to New York, and specifically to the city within a city—Harlem.

In the third three-record volume of its *Jazz Odyssey*, Columbia now presents *The Sound of Harlem* (C31-33). The set covers 1920-42, a period roughly similar to that of its two predecessors, but the music, not surprisingly, is more varied in scope. It is accompanied by an unusually valuable, thirty-six-page booklet by George Hoefer, who places a mine of information at the reader's disposal in an illustrated section entitled "Harlem Jazz Spots Then and Now." This is virtually a directory, detailing as never before the histories, addresses, and often bewildering transformations of clubs, theatres, and dance halls famous in the jazz story.

More than the equivalent areas in Chicago or New Orleans, Harlem was influenced by the values of show business, particularly when it developed as an entertainment area for white visitors. Harlem musicians competed with the songwriters of Broadway and Tin Pan Alley, the pianists with notable success. Eubie Blake, for example, wrote "Memories of You," James P. Johnson "If I Could Be with You," Luckey Roberts "Moonlight Cocktail," Claude Hopkins "I Would Do Anything for You," and Fats Waller and Duke Ellington created innumerable song hits and show tunes.

In this collection of forty-eight recordings, arranged more or less chronologically, it is the pianists who also impress first as performers (Eubie Blake and James P. Johnson), closely followed by

the trumpet players (Bubber Miley, Johnny Dunn, Rex Stewart, Joe Smith, and Tommy Ladnier). The early singers, reed players, trombonists, and rhythm sections are far from remarkable, with the dazzling exception of Sidney Bechet, whose buoyant soprano saxophone solo transforms an otherwise rather pedestrian performance of "In Harlem's Araby." There is a dwarfing number from Bessie Smith (the true Empress of the Blues) with appropriate accompaniment by trombonist Charlie Green, but several of the other singers have to cope with dubious lyrics and double entendre of the kind then popular in cabarets. "My Man o' War," a masterpiece of this genre by Spencer Williams and Andy Razaf, is sung by Lena Wilson and would alone have been adequately representative.

RECORDINGS by Gertrude Sanders, Fess Williams, Gladys Bentley, and Alberta Hunter were presumably included to assist perspective and illustrate historical premises. While effectively dispelling any illusions about the Twenties being an age of unrelieved splendor in Harlem jazz, they suggest some of the obstacles that uncompromising jazz musicians overcame and also emphasize the triumphs of Louis Armstrong, who is heard here in "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "Funny Feathers."

The Thirties are somehow almost immediately better. On "Draggin' My Heart Around," one of his first recorded vocals, Fats Waller strikes a new note, at once relaxed, realistic, and humorous. "Listen, baby," he sings, "can't them trills bring you back to me? Listen to my pleadin' on the ivories!" Infectious drive and enthusiasm characterize Ward Pinkett's trumpet playing and scat singing on "Hot Lovin'," where Richard Fullbright and Bill Beason furnish exciting rhythmic support. Dicky Wells's Shim Shammers (three kazooos and rhythm) create a marvelous blues atmosphere in "Baby, Ain't You Satisfied?"; Pete Brown is heard at his best in Frank Newton's "Brittwood Stomp"; and Billie Holiday sings "You Can't Be Mine" with Lester Young and a Basie contingent of 1938. For the rest, it is mostly the big bands in their heyday.

Harlem and its Savoy ballroom anticipated the Swing Era and played a major part in it. Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington, the masters of the big-band idiom, are represented here respec-