



## **CEDAR WALTON QUARTET**

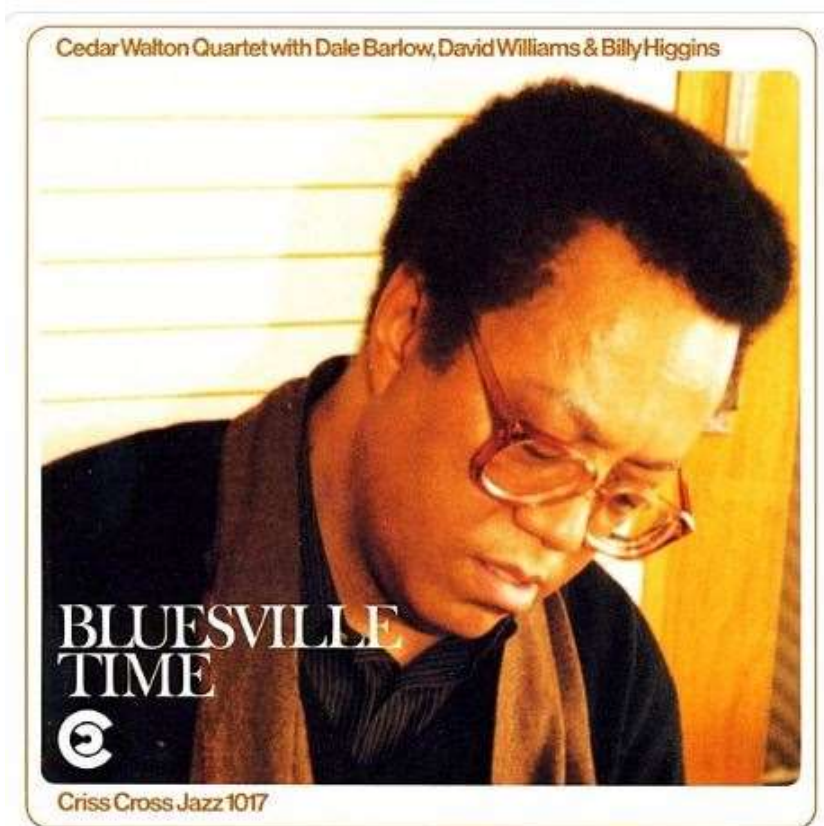
**“Bluesville Time” (Criss Cross Jazz 1017)**

**Album Review by Bruce Johnson**

**Artists: Cedar Walton (piano), Dale Barlow (tenor saxophone), David Williams (bass), Billy Higgins (drums).**

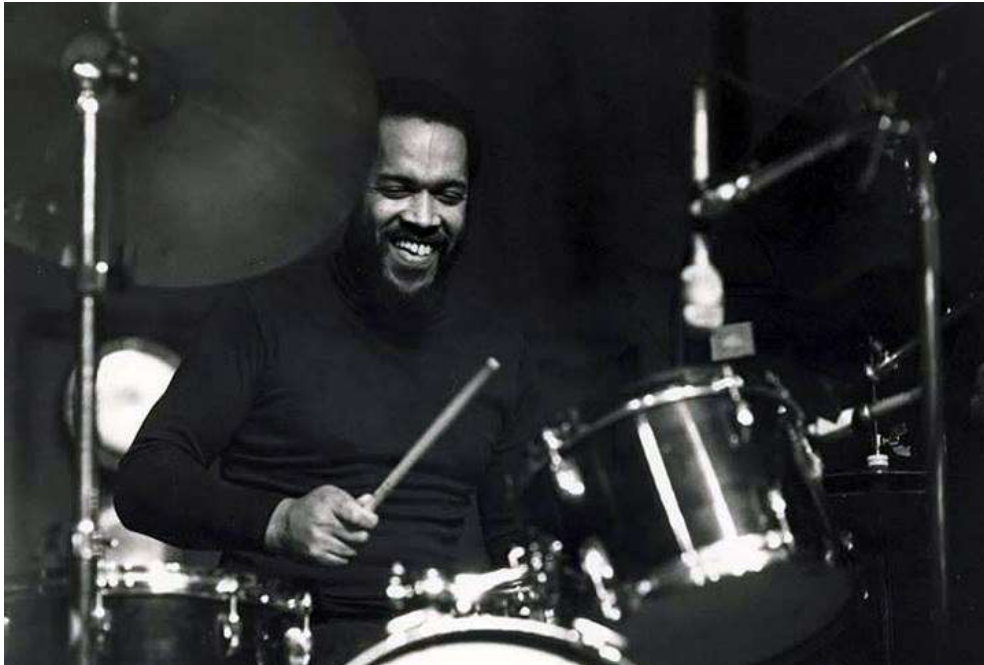
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*[This review appeared in the Winter, 1986 edition of Jazz Magazine.]*



**C**edar Walton is a 52-year-old veteran of some of the definitive hard-bop groups, including the Benny Golson-Art Farmer Jazztet, and Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers in some of their classic incarnations. He is something of a jazz elder statesman, one of the revered icons in the music.

His drummer on this date is Billy Higgins, long-time colleague and a member of the very influential Ornette Coleman group in the late 'fifties. David Williams is from a younger generation, a mere 40 years old, but has worked with Coleman, Elvin Jones, Donald Byrd, and in top professional studio company like Quincy Jones.



*Cedar Walton's trio at Ronnie Scott's included drummer Billy Higgins (above) and bassist David Williams (below)... HIGGINS PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ REFLECTIONS; WILLIAMS PHOTO COURTESY WIKIPEDIA*



Walton can call his own tune, pick his own sidemen from among the best. He was leading Williams and Higgins as his Trio in Ronnie Scott's Club in London, when a young tenor player in his early twenties sat in. On the strength of that performance, Walton invited — commanded — the saxophonist to make the group up to a quartet on an imminent recording date. Walton's choice was one of the vindications — as if any were needed — of those who have been appraising Dale Barlow as the most accomplished and mature of the young jazz musicians to emerge from Australia in the wake of the general spread of institutional support for jazz from the mid-seventies.



*Dale Barlow (above) sat in with the Cedar Walton Trio at Ronnie Scott's in London, and was subsequently invited to record with Walton, resulting in the album "Bluesville Time" ... PHOTO COURTESY PETER SMETANA*

With the foundation of his quartet, which was to become The Benders, Barlow had already made an indelible mark on local jazz while barely out of his teens. Being chosen to accompany a master such as Walton in the demanding and highly visible role of saxophonist in a quartet should help to inspire confidence not only in the standard of Australian jazz musicianship, but in the judgement of local observers who have rated his work so highly.



*The Dale Barlow Quartet, which was to become The Benders. Drummer Andrew Gander is obscured then, L-R, Barlow, Lloyd Swanton (double bass), Chris Abrahams (piano)...*

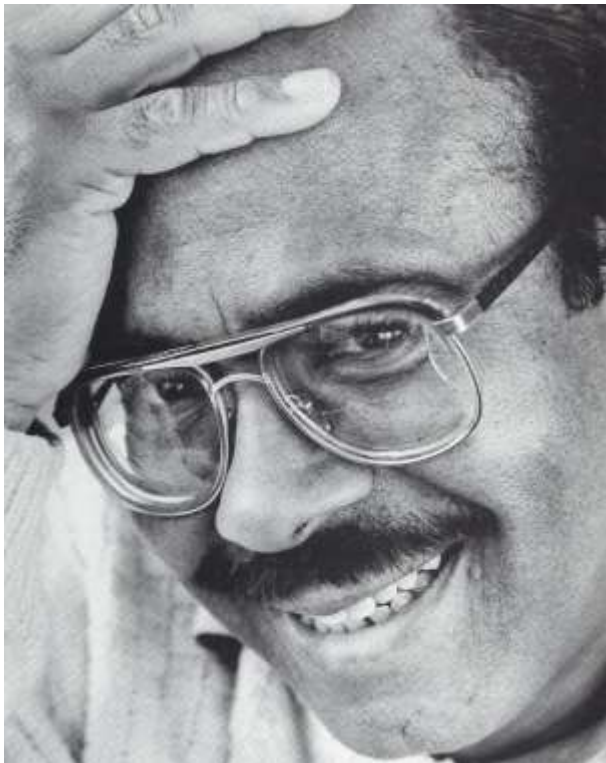
Thus, this album acquires a certain degree of symbolic as well as inherent music . importance. At the symbolic level it represents yet another confirmation of the fact that Australia should not have to keep deferring to other countries when reviewing its own jazz talent. Barlow is by no means the first home-grown musician to assume a commanding role among his overseas peers, and lest we forget just how long this has been going on, cast your minds back to pioneers like Frank Coughlan, and the lesser known trombonist Clarrie Collins who left Australia in the 'twenties and joined Paul Whiteman's band for the 1930 movie *King of Jazz*. The two points are equally important: Barlow is world-class (a word which in itself hints at an unnecessary national self-effacement), but he is neither the only, nor the first, Australian musician of whom this is true.



*The Australian trombonist Clarrie Collins left Australia in the 'twenties and joined Paul Whiteman's band for the 1930 movie "King of Jazz"... IMAGE COURTESY WIKIPEDIA*

Now, does the intrinsic musical value sustain the symbolic burden of the album? The quartet is a paradigm of assurance, and Barlow's melding with the group at such short notice on both standards and unfamiliar originals, is remarkable. Walton's own *Ojos de Rojos* is taken at a very fast clip, but there is no faltering, no-one is ever bullied by the tempo, and no-one resorts to desperate bluster to keep abreast of the changes.

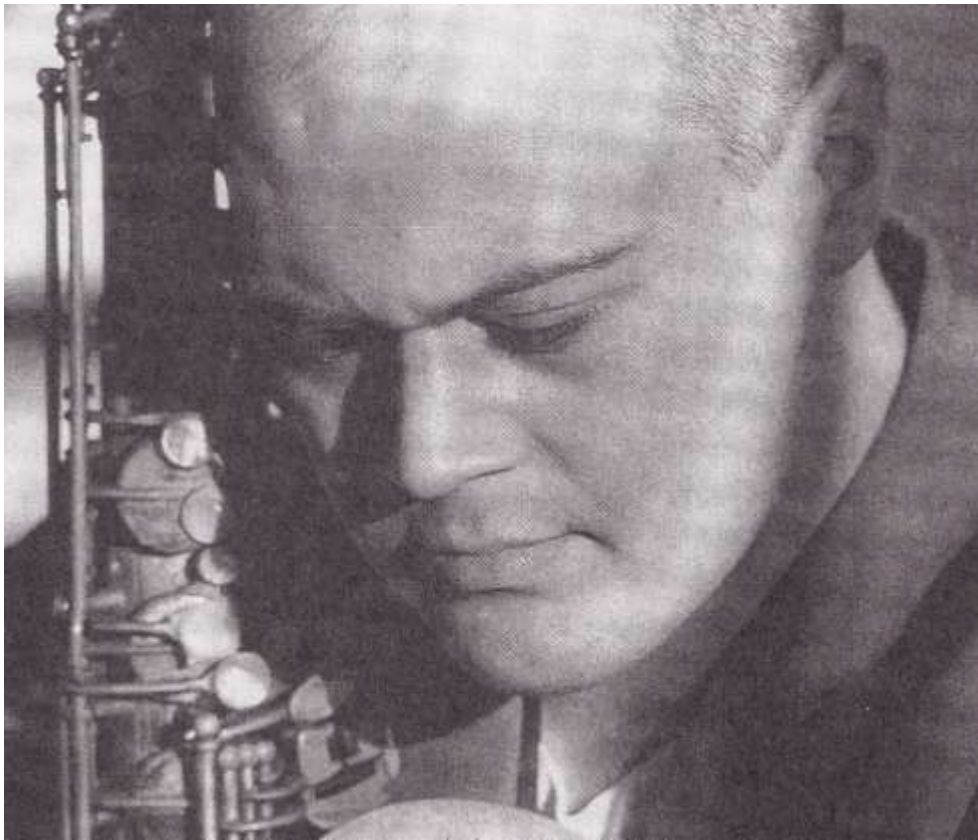
The album includes two compositions which are so intractably melodic that they require particular strength of purpose to improvise convincingly on: Benny Golson's tribute *I Remember Clifford* and Coltrane's *Naima*. On the former, Barlow's tenor takes on a softer edge and warmth which is wholly appropriate to the memory of a musician who, by all reports, was one of the most magnanimous and gentle men in the jazz pantheon. The poise and timing of the saxophone lines bespeak a poise and creative intuition which would be striking in a veteran, and are unbelievably rare in one so young; a surging cadenza has beautiful structure and spacing.



*“Bluesville Time” includes two compositions which are so intractably melodic that they require particular strength of purpose to improvise convincingly on: “I Remember Clifford”, by Benny Golson (pictured left) and “Naima”, by John Coltrane (pictured below)... GOLSON PHOTO CREDIT JOHN REEVES; COLTRANE PHOTO COURTESY ABC JAZZ*



*Naima* is one of the great jazz compositions. It is conspicuously original, yet so formally concluded that it almost seems a thing of nature rather than artifice, becoming Coltrane's statement rather than just the vehicle of the statement. For all its strength and definition it is yet amenable to a range of treatments, and on this occasion the undertone is Latin. It is no disrespect to the three Americans to concentrate on Barlow's contribution to this. On the contrary, it is because of their unquestioned status that the inclusion of this young newcomer on their session deserves attention. Listening to the performance, with its cogency, its total authority, one has to keep reminding oneself that this is not a quartet of equally experienced masters, but that it incorporates a certain amount of demographic eccentricity.



*Barlow: it is encouraging to hear a young musician with such a gigantic talent showing a consciousness of historical context... PHOTO CREDIT ROMAN CERNY*

Barlow is back in Australia at the moment, and our music will be the richer for it. On the cover note he is quoted referring to "a special Australian saxophone tradition with a particular quality of sound". It is encouraging to hear a young musician with such a gigantic talent showing a consciousness of historical context, and one can reasonably expect that this will enrich his work in a way that is missing from other tyros who believe that they found jazz first.