

JAZZ IS SOMETHING ELSE

by Ian Muldoon*



*Charlie Parker (left):
“There are boundary
lines to music, but there
are no boundary lines to
Art.”*



*Bill Evans (left): "There's
nothing more degrading
to me than to think of 70
or 80 musicians who
have become almost
machines serving this
one thing (composition).
It's a respectful thing, it's
a wonderful testimony to
people who will go this
far to serve somebody's
mind, but somehow it
bothers me."*

**Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour.*



Sonny Rollins (above): “The thing about jazz is that jazz is not necessarily a style. Jazz is something else. It’s an attempt to reach into the unknown, into the extemporaneous, into the - I don’t want to say into the abyss - I could say that. It never dies. It reaches into there and it’s there and it’s everywhere at the same time. So it’s not a matter of style. You could say that - ‘Oh yeah, Dixieland, nobody’s listening to Dixieland’ - but that’s not, you know, that seems to be the essence of (the statement) that ‘jazz is dying.’ No, that’s styles of jazz... Jazz itself is beyond that. It’s not any particular thing. It’s ephemeral.” (Notes to Sonny Rollins In Holland: The 1967 Studio & Live Recordings, 2020)

Some have definite ideas of what “jazz” is. It must swing. Or it must have collective polyphony. Or a distinctive melody. In this regard Sonny Rollins manages to express what most music (jazz) lovers understand but are perhaps unable to articulate. Yet Sonny leaves unsaid at least one other element of the music: jazz is *the* great enabler for music appreciation generally, whatever its provenance.

By that I mean it may be Fats Waller and his organ playing that leads one to Dietrich Buxtehude; it was definitely Fred Katz playing cello with Chico Hamilton that introduced me to the wonderful sound of that instrument and later on to Bach’s cello suites; Dizzy Gillespie aroused interest in Latin American music; and John Coltrane

an interest in Indian music; whilst Duke Ellington aroused interest in Debussy and Messiaen who, like Ellington, incorporated birdsong into his music. John Lewis was influenced by Bach, Bartok, and Schoenberg, and these are evident in his work over the years. Works like Duke Ellington's *Come Sunday* remind one that Church music and gospel can have amazing power and beauty. The use of the oud in a jazz context may lead to interest in Algerian music and hearing John Graas led me to Tom Varner. But the swing of the Mills Brothers, Fats Waller and others forged a deep-seated delight in the rhythmic power of jazz to affect one emotionally in such a way that cannot be found in other music. Just as the English language is the greatest living language, taking what it needs from wherever it finds it, so jazz is the greatest living music, taking what it needs from wherever it finds it. The combination of individual invention and rhythm, combined at times with melodic sweep and harmonic thrills, is irresistibly tantalising and infinitely intriguing and interesting. Contemporary art was also involved.

It was an interest in rhythm, and jazz drummers, and enticing contemporary art that drove me to buy around 1958 a 10" LP called *Shelly Manne Vol 2 - New Works by Bob Cooper, Jimmy Giuffre, Bill Holman, Jack Montrose, Marty Paich, Shorty Rogers* with its black cover by Catherine Heerman. The cover was glossy black to its very edges and had Shelly Manne in large red letters and a falling jumble of what looked like white drum sticks or those used in the childhood game of fiddle sticks. Heerman was the wife of Contemporary Records founder Lester Koenig and designed some artistically noteworthy covers including one for *Lenny Niehaus The Octet #2*. Such artistically effective modern works and their packaging enhanced my interest in modern art, as was the case with many lovers of this music including John Shand.



In other words, the marketing of the music, its presentation, design, and visual appeal were spot on for the time (1953) of the post WWII cultural revolution in the arts. Although the visual arts revolution began at the beginning of the 20th century, it all seemed to come together in the 1950s, out of the museums and into cinema, advertising, and design generally - the mass production of the arts got into full swing. The appeal of *Shelly Manne Vol 2* was that it seemed music of the *now*. Where to next?

On the album there are six compositions: *Alternation* (Jimmy Giuffre); *Dimension in Thirds* (Marty Paich); *Shapes, Motions, Colors* (Shorty Rogers); *Lullaby* (Bill Holman); *Etude De Concert* (Jack Montrose); and *Divertimento for Brass and Rhythm* (Bob Cooper). On the first three the musicians were Don Fagerquist, trumpet; Shorty Rogers, trumpet & flugelhorn; Bob Enevoldsen, valve trombone; Paul Sarmiento, tuba; Marty Paich, piano; Joe Mondragon, bass; and Shelly Manne, drums; and was recorded on 18/12/53 in Hollywood. The second three were recorded on 17/3/54 in Hollywood with the following septet: Ollie Mitchell, trumpet; Shorty Rogers, trumpet & flugelhorn; Bob Enevoldsen, valve trombone; Paul Sarmiento, tuba; Marty Paich, piano; and Shelly Manne, drums.

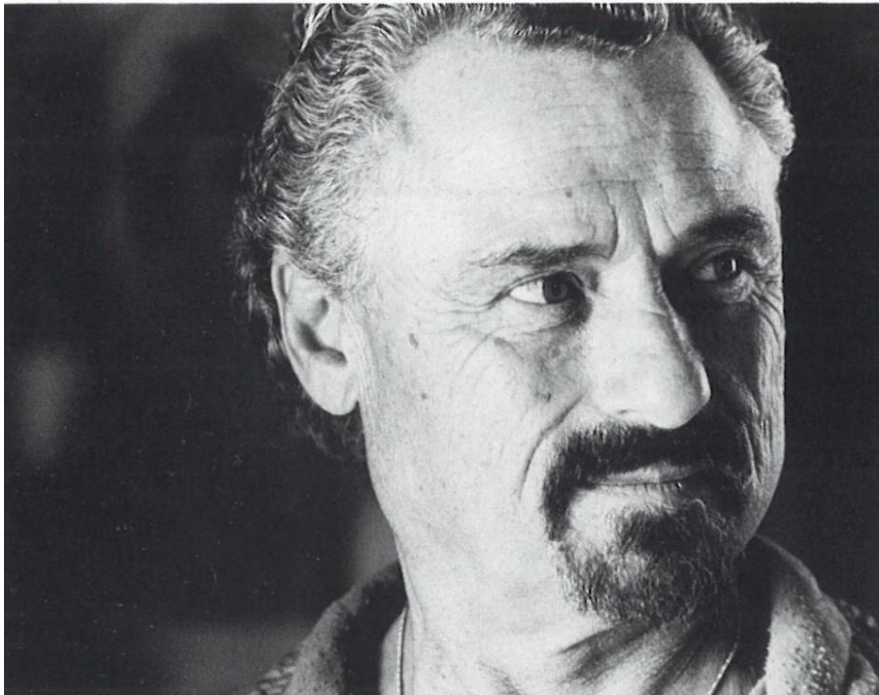


Marty Paich: how will the jazz composer be able to integrate the sounds of Bartok, the rhythms of Stravinsky, the twelve-tone of Schoenberg, and still maintain the most important element in jazz, the swing?...

Excepting Marty Paich, Paul Sarmiento, and Bob Enevoldsen, the musicians were Stan Kenton alumni. All were influenced in some way by Kenton. Note the titles of the compositions and their association with the “classical music” tradition. Kenton had ambitions for the music directed towards that tradition, sometimes successfully sometimes not. Marty Paich talks about the challenges of jazz: “How will the jazz composer be able to integrate the sounds of Bartok, the rhythms of Stravinsky, the twelve-tone of Schoenberg, and still maintain the most important element in jazz, the

swing?” (Notes to *Shelly Manne Vol 2*). Interestingly, these composers used the leadership of one of the great drummers to give reality to their works, a drummer who didn’t always need sticks to swing, who could swing just by using his fingers to drum.

The music on *Shelly Manne Vol 2* is jazz with a focus on composition. Composer, educator and musician Dr Wesley La Violette (1894-1978) was cited by both Jimmy Giuffre and Shorty Rogers. Rogers dedicated his composition *Shapes, Motions, Colors* to Violette. The composition is in three parts. The acoustic bass and drums play a prominent role throughout. The piece opens with a staccato urgency of horns with the bass and drums in conversation and the horns providing harmonic shapes. The bass and drums are both prominent and converse. The second part is introduced by a drum figure South American in character, which theme is repeated by harmonic horns. There is a middle interlude of swinging piano trio, followed by horn solos - trombone and trumpet in conversation. Drum solo. Repeat of theme. Bass and drums in conversation lead to the concluding coda. Rogers wrote the piece unconcerned with its reception either as “jazz” or whether it was “likeable” - rather as an exercise in music that he was drawn to. He evolved into a major arranger for many artists including Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass; Chet Baker; Elmer Bernstein; Les Brown; Bobby Darin; Bobby Gentry; Jerry Goldsmith; Frankie Laine; Peggy Lee; The Monkees; Buddy Rich; and Mel Tormé. Another striking instance of jazz’s influence on music.



Shorty Rogers: his evolution into a major arranger for many artists is another striking instance of jazz’s influence on music...PHOTO CREDIT JOHN REEVES

The example of Duke Ellington, the experimentations of Stan Kenton, and the educational initiatives of the post WWII artists such as Giuffre and Rogers, led to such masterpieces as John Carter’s magisterial five-hour, five-part suite *Roots and Folklore: Episodes in the Development of American Folk Music*, one of the great artistic works of the 1980s.

My teenage interest in drummers, fuelled by very early exposure to Frankie Carlson's 34-bar drum solo on Woody Herman's *Golden Wedding* (Jean Gabriel-Marie, arr Noble) led me not only to Shelly Manne, but also to Louie Bellson, George Wettling, Cliff Leeman, Ray Baudac, and Chico Hamilton. The latter adorned the cover of his album *Spectacular* (1955) which featured members of his quintet on the cover, with Hamilton strolling to the right on the top left corner and his drum kit waiting for his arrival on the bottom right-hand corner. I confess I probably bought it for its cover as most of the tunes were unfamiliar originals. Its musical content however, had a huge impact.



There were surprises of the most pleasing kind: hearing Jim Hall for the first time; realising the (classical) cello could rival Chet Baker's version of *My Funny Valentine* (Rodgers/Hart); that exposure to freely improvised jazz could be musically satisfying; and that five musicians could provide a remarkable range of music in a short period of time, unlike traditional jazz which sounded formulaic after a while, even that of Eddie Condon on works like *Bixieland* of 1955. Part of the reason for variety was the multi-instrumentalism of Buddy Collette, the sharing of compositional duties, and a range of tempos, with compositions ranging from ballads to contrapuntal pieces, to up-tempo swinging numbers. There was a variety of styles and colours in the music - yellow, blues, brown, red. Buddy Collette's example of multi-instrumentalism was familiar to aficionados of Duke Ellington's reed players, but great musicians like Coleman Hawkins played the cello, not just the tenor, and Milt Jackson played piano, drums, guitar, bass and drums, not just his instrument of choice, the vibraharp.

The musicians were Buddy Collette, tenor saxophone, alto saxophone, flute, clarinet; Fred Katz, cello; Jim Hall, guitar; Carson Smith, bass; and Hamilton, drums. Over time two tracks resonated more powerfully than others - they also were musically perhaps the simplest: *Blue Sands* (Collette) and *The Sage* (Katz). The first was a *Caravan* (Tizol) type piece which featured an outstanding solo by Hall. The second was a ballad by the cellist. Which is not to say the others were second rate, such as *Buddy Boo* (Collette) which is a swinging delight; they were not.

The Sage begins with the cello stating the melody, backed by a strolling acoustic bass at mid-tempo, followed by a higher register guitar solo from Jim Hall, with an enticing arco cello rondo figure in a lower register, with the bass continuing, then a clarinet plays the melody backed by the bass, the guitar replies to the quite beautiful clarinet solo, which at the climax segues into a cello and a group improv, concluding with a low register cello coda. It's a quietly beautiful and affecting performance.



Fred Katz: he may have been the most influential jazz cellist stemming from his work with Chico Hamilton...

Katz (1919-2013) was classically trained. He studied under Pablo Casals and performed with several symphony orchestras. He was a member of the National Symphony Orchestra. He was a child prodigy on both the cello and piano. He may have been the most influential jazz cellist stemming from his work with Chico Hamilton, and he may have been the one who successfully brought the cello into the jazz fold so to speak. What I find interesting, if not irritating, is that as soon as the word “cello” is mentioned by critics or jazz commentators, the word “classical” is not too far behind. And yet the same rush to mention classical is not found when

discussing the quintessential “classical” instrument, the piano. It’s as if the use of the cello is of and by itself enough to invoke “third stream” references, or greater status because it is closer to “proper” music.

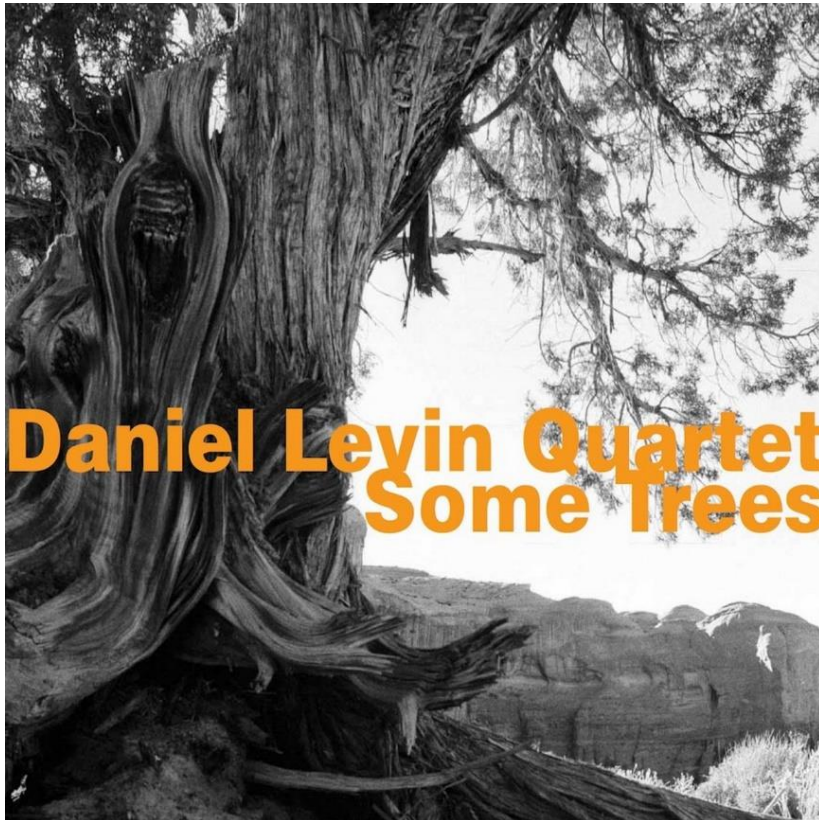
By concentrating on jazz rather than classical music, Katz rose higher in artistic achievement, not lower. He did release a Third Stream effort *Zen: The Music of Fred Katz* (1957) which had little success. But Katz was not the only cellist engaged by Chico Hamilton. Nathan Gershman (cello) appeared on a number of Hamilton’s documents *The Original Ellington Suite* (1958) and *Gongs East* (1958) as well as *With Strings Attached* (1958). The latter had Hamilton, drums, percussion; Eric Dolphy, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, flute; Nathan Gershman, cello; Dennis Budimir, guitar; Wyatt Ruther, bass with unidentified string section arranged and conducted by Fred Katz. Gershman also appeared on *That Hamilton Man* (1959); *The Three Faces of Chico* (1959); *The Chico Hamilton Quintet Plays Selections from Bye Bye Birdie-Irma La Douce* (1961); and *The Chico Hamilton Special* (1961).

John Lewis used two cellos in his album *Jazz Abstractions* (1960) in his venture into Third Stream music but the next significant recorded instance of cello being used throughout a jazz programme was Eric Dolphy’s document *Out There* (1960) which had no chordal instrument like guitar or piano, but both acoustic bass by George Duvivier and cello played by bassist Ron Carter. Dolphy had worked with Hamilton (*Gongs East* and the *Original Ellington Suite*). Mingus used cellist Jackson Wiley on tracks 1-3 on his album *The Jazz Experiments of Charlie Mingus* (1955).



Harry Babian in 1947 recorded the first cello solos known in jazz music, with the Dodo Marmarosa Trio. In order to do so he tuned his strings in fourths. Bassists who doubled on cello include Oscar Pettiford, Ron Carter, Richard Davis, Dave Holland, Doug Watkins, Sam Jones and Eberhard Weber. But it was Fred Katz who exposed the cello to jazz most comprehensively.

50 years after Katz performed with Chico Hamilton, cellist Daniel Levin, 47, led a quartet and produced the document *Some Trees* (2005) released by hatOLOGY. The title is the same used by poet John Ashbery's 1956 book of poems which was chosen by W H Auden to receive the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award, yet was unknown to Levin. Coincidence?



Some Trees has Nate Wooley, trumpet; Matt Moran, vibes (except track 8); Levin, cello; and Joe Morris, double bass. Levin had formed this group in 2001. There are five compositions by Levin, plus *Out To Lunch* (Dolph); *Wickets* (Lacy); and *Morning Song* (Coleman). Levin began learning the cello at six years of age and during schooling also played the alto and tenor saxophones. In 1993 aged 19, during a music festival, he volunteered when invited to improvise with a dancer. He graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music in 2001. He continues:

When I got on stage, I had no idea what to do. I just watched the dancer and allowed myself to respond to her gestures – it was physical and visual information that informed what to play. What I remember best about that experience was the last 10 or 15 seconds: she was spinning, very fast. I matched this movement by going way up the fingerboard and trilling. As I was doing this, at a certain point, I had the uncanny feeling that she was about to crash to the ground. I just went with it, and slid all the way down to the low end of the cello, the bottom of the C string. She and I hit the bottom at exactly the same time. I was astounded, and excited. The music no longer had to come from the page. It could come from other places – a dancer, my own ideas. This was the first big step in finding my voice as an improviser and composer. (London Jazz News (8/2/16).

Levin found that what he had learned about the cello was limiting and claustrophobic. He realised his bowing had a “kind of built-in delayed attack and response.” He gave up cello and worked on his tenor sax playing and because he didn’t have a technique to follow he felt free. “I wasn’t expected to ‘sound good’, since it wasn’t my primary instrument. The expectation I had of myself to sound great and perfect all the time was a big obstacle for me when I started to improvise on the cello... the shift from being a capable and convincing interpretative musician to becoming a strong improviser/composer requires a bunch of psychological work.” (ibid, *London Jazz News*).



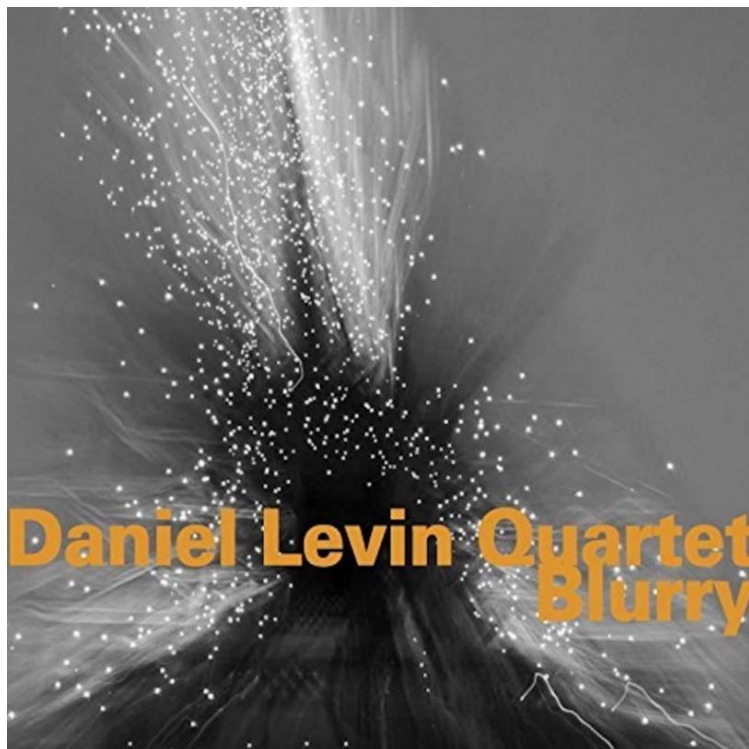
*Daniel Levin:
finding my voice as
an improviser and
composer...*

Levin has recorded with Billy Bang, Tim Berne, Anthony Braxton, Gerald Cleaver, Mark Dresser, William Parker and Ken Vandermark. He incorporates classical music, jazz, new music and European improvisation in his compositions. Sometimes the sounds he creates mirror ominous sawing. He uses the instrument percussively when bow tapping. His trio can create a musical cacophony. Cello rips are part of his armoury - as are some of the most beautiful sounds in music.

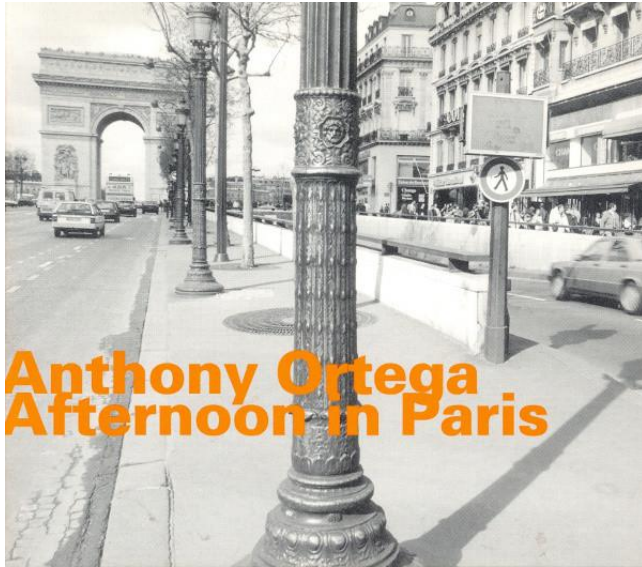
15 months later on 3/6/2006 with the same quartet, Levin produced and recorded the album *Blurry* (2007) also on hatOLOGY. There are two standards: *Relaxin’ With Lee* (Parker) and *Law Years* (Coleman) with five originals and one group improvisation. He has had this line-up since 2001, though the original trumpeter was Dave Ballou. His choice of quartet arose from his interest in classical string quartets

with their independence and interdependence being equally important. Eric Dolphy's album *Out To Lunch* had made an impression too, with Bobby Hutcherson on vibes and Freddie Hubbard on trumpet. It seems Levin, who plays saxophones, has absorbed, at least to some extent in his cello playing, the language and voices of Steve Lacy, Eric Dolphy, Ornette Coleman and Charlie Parker.

In *Blurry* one notes in particular the powerful role of the acoustic bass of Joe Morris which grounds *Law Years* (Coleman). He executes an amazingly largo take on *Relaxin' With Lee* (Parker); walks swingingly through *Cannery Row* (Levin); and provides an engrossing bass figure on the up-tempo *Untitled* (Levin). He is a powerful presence throughout the programme. Trumpeter Nate Wooley gets some fine harmony in the high register with the low register cello in *Law Years*. His lengthy solo on *209 Willard Street* (Levin) is a highlight. Sometimes Wooley makes his trumpet sound eerily electronic, as he does on *Cannery Row* (Levin). On *Improv II* (group) he opens with mouthpiece squiggles and moves on to a range of sounds. The free improvisation on this track is another highlight of the programme. Noteworthy too is the playing of Matt Moran on vibraphone, whose sustains just hang in memory as the music moves on. The melodic beauty of Levin's cello is heard throughout, and noteworthy are the bass/cello harmonies on *Untitled*.



Another interesting programme of music featuring the cello is *Afternoon in Paris* (2007, hatOLOGY) a programme by Anthony Ortega who may be one of those very fine jazz artists somewhat unrecognised, though considerably accomplished both as a composer and a fluent exponent of the clarinet, alto saxophone, flute and piano. He was involved in the quite remarkable music soundtrack of *The Pawnbroker* (Sidney Lumet, 1964). He also plays throughout John Cassavetes film *Gloria* (1980). Now 93 he recorded *Afternoon In Paris* in 2002 with *Blue Monk* (Monk), *I'll Remember*



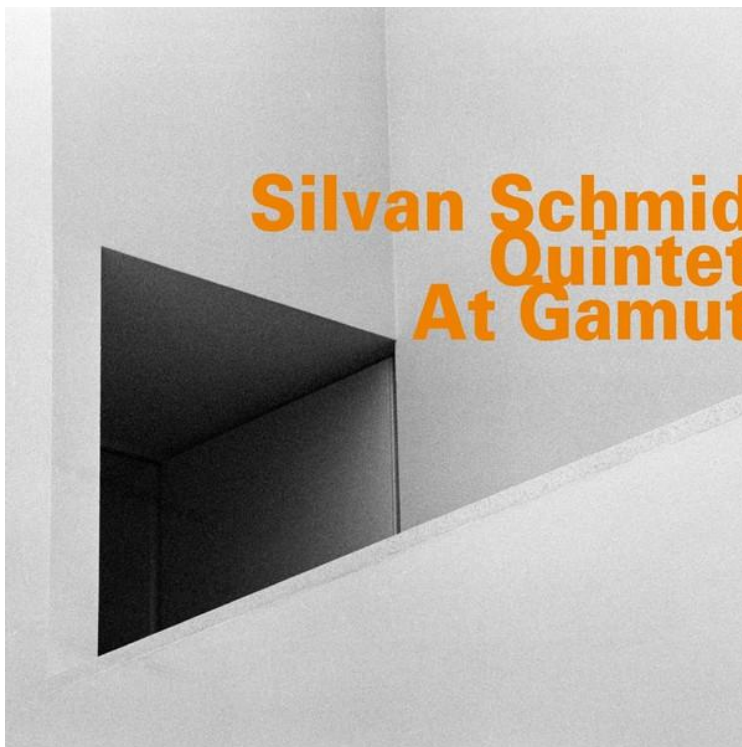
April (De Paul), and *Open Spaces* (Ortega) as solo pieces. In 2005 *Ask Me Now* (Monk); *Jupiter* (Ortega); *Afternoon in Paris* (Lewis); and *One* (Hamlich) are duos recorded with bassist/cellist Kash Killion. *Ornithology* (Parker) a duo with Chuck Domanico was recorded in 1966. A highlight of the programme is the flute/cello duet on *I'll Remember April*, another telling instance of the beauty and effectiveness of the jazz cello.



Bassist/cellist Kash Killion (above) has recorded with a cavalcade of artists...

Kash Killion has recorded with B B King, Cecil Taylor, John Zorn, Julius Hemphill, Reggie Workman, Sun Ra, Butch Morris, Paul Murphy, Glen Spearman, George Lewis, and Alvin Baptiste. He studied sarangi and cello with the great Indian musician Ali Akbar Khan, and recorded with his orchestra. He has also studied sarangi with the great masters Sultan Khan and Rhamish Mishra. Major poets he has accompanied include Amiri Baraka, Alice Walker, Quincy Troupe, Shirley Le Flore and Jessica Hagedorn.

Silvan Jeger (1985) plays bass, cello and guitar, is a vocalist and composer, and appears on the document *Silvan Schmid Quintet at Gamut* (2018) hatOLOGY, recorded live 4/2016 at Gamut Series No 1, Switzerland. Schmid, now 33, has been compared to Kenny Wheeler as being able to bridge lyrical playing and playing free, with equal facility. The instrumentation is again interesting: Schmid, trumpet; Tapiwa Svosve, alto saxophone; Silvan Jeger, cello; Lucas Wirz, tuba; and Vincent Glanzmann, drums. All compositions are by Schmid.



The musically interesting thing about the evolution of this “something else” is the ongoing tension between composition and improvisation. By some accounts the string quartet, as used by Haydn, Mozart and then climactically by Beethoven in the classic period, is seen as perhaps the greatest music in classicism. In the “something else” the small group, quintets in bop, etc, sometimes termed “chamber” when they venture outside the “standard lineup”, have produced the most interesting and arresting music. Part of the enchantment of *Quintet at Gamut* are the compositional devices of Jeger, such as repetition of small intervals, and the individual expression of the soloists. For example the piece *Spartitur 11* has a repetitive figure under an improvised alto solo punctuated by trumpet, with an ominous tuba background and churning drums, with the cello sawing away, ending in a sweet harmonic coda.

With such a small group also it's impressive how such a large ominous orchestral sound can be created on the piece *Motten*. This work has tempo changes, a bright trumpet solo over cello and tuba background, with an up-tempo conclusion in march tempo with tuba backed by drums. *Ins Leere* has an extended cello solo, with the trumpet squeezing out punctuated muffled comments, whilst the cello is bowed, melodic, plucked. One is aware of the colour of the sounds in this piece: yellow for the trumpet perhaps, pink for the alto, brown or black for the tuba which rumbles in contrast to the magenta cello and pink alto in harmonic climax. *Turn Into* features a tuba solo, an intriguing and interesting sound, sometimes resorting to a rumbling bass gurgle. The longest piece at 11 minutes is *In Bocca Al Lupo* which opens with a drum solo. The lyrical trumpet at ballad tempo begins in conversation with the alto which prompts a response by an arco cello and a squeaking tuba. A long cello solo follows, punctuated by the tuba. Trumpet/alto harmonies are quite beautiful. This "new" music, in the "something else" tradition, has a common denominator with much new music; the listener tends to pay close attention, with restored and more sensitive hearing.



Three Lanes L-R, Andrea Keller (piano), Genevieve Lacey (recorders) & Joe Talia (revox B77, electronics & percussion)...

A good example of this effect is the "new" music of Andrea Keller on her *Three Lanes* which has Keller on piano, Genevieve Lacy on recorders, and Joe Alia on Revox B77, electronics & percussion. All compositions are by Keller. I attended a performance of this group at Elder Hall in Adelaide in 2012. The longest work *On A Hill* (Keller) is an atmospheric, impressionistic and haunting work, which highlights the effect electronics can have by enhancing the listening experience to a higher level. Because an electronic sound wave can go from silence to 70 db (piano) in infinite gradations

of volume, the arrival of say the piano at a certain point makes for compelling listening and startling impact at the beauty of the notes created by Keller. There is an arc in this work as if the view from the hill gradually emerges and when comprehended the impact of its significance or beauty is felt, then slowly dissolves, with an echo from the recorder of Lacy.

Synthesizers, electronics and instruments usually associated with “classical” music, French horns, cellos, violas, violins, inter alia, have been part of the “something else” since its beginnings, but especially in the period of the explosion of modern jazz out of WW11. In John Carter’s 1982-1990 masterpiece *Roots and Folklore: Episodes in the Development of American Folk Music*, some of the instruments used include violin, bass trombone, synthesiser, electronics, kete, tuba, bass flute, oboe, water phone, keyboards, and bass clarinet.



*John Carter (above)
composer of the 1982-
1990 masterpiece
“Roots and Folklore:
Episodes in the
Development of
American Folk
Music”...PHOTO
COURTESY WIKIPEDIA*

This “something else” seems to have no limits to its future, just as Charlie Parker intimated when referring to the boundary lines of Art.