

## OH TROMBONE, TROMBONE, WHEREFORE ART THOU TROMBONE?

by Ian Muldoon\*

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**A**lthough a much loved instrument, the trombone seems to be forever in the shadows and somewhat ignored compared to the saxophone and trumpet, even though the evidence shows how central to jazz the instrument has been and remains today. Its best days may be yet to come. In the beginning of my particular jazz journey, the trombone was central to my experience, which began with the 1940s hit parade.

In common with much of the Western world, there was much music flooding the airwaves on our home radio, a central source of entertainment in the 1940s. An upright piano was part of the furniture even though my home in Manly, NSW, was rented accommodation. Popular music of those times, unlike the era following the rise of the teenage demographic, was music that crossed age, class, and cultural boundaries. My grandmother and I would sing together “pardon me boy, is that the Chattanooga Choo Choo, track 29, won’t you give me a shine” as we polished my shoes for school - an old-fashioned strange habit from former times!



*Musicians such as Duke Ellington (left) and Louis Armstrong (right) were jazz musicians who appeared on “hit parades”...*

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*\*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.*

Popular music in those days was sometimes jazz, or frequently jazz orientated, but always jazz influenced. Musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, or Duke Ellington were jazz musicians who appeared on “hit parades”. The popular songs of that time had strong melodies, delightful harmonies and strong rhythms.

Even now, some songs echo in my mind - (*I'll Be Loving You*) *Always* (Berlin) Sinatra, 1946; *Civilization* (Hilliard and Sigman) Andrew Sisters and Danny Kaye, 1947; and *Nature Boy* (Eden Ahbez) Cole, 1947. But there were some that resonated much more powerfully because of a combination of melodic richness, instrumental beauty, and rhythmic appeal. One was the theme to a program each Saturday night at 6pm which meant that as we had tea (the term then for “dinner” in Australia) *Juke Box Saturday Night* (Al Stillman and Paul McGrane) Glenn Miller, 1942, was the entree. Another memorable performance was *Who (Stole My Heart Away)* (Kern, Harbachand, Hammerstein II) Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, 1937. Another was *Caravan* (Tizol and Ellington) Ellington, 1937, of which more than 350 versions have been recorded. Each of these last three was the work of trombone playing artists.



*“Juke Box Saturday Night” from Glenn Miller (left), “Who (Stole My Heart Away)” from Tommy Dorsey (below) and “Caravan” (from Juan Tizol, over the page) were the work of trombone playing artists...*





*Juan Tizol, composer of Duke Ellington's big hit "Caravan"...*

One of the most popular aggregations (in music ever) was the Glenn Miller Orchestra, named after its trombone playing leader, which had sold two million discs by 1944. Also popular was the orchestra led by trombone player Tommy Dorsey, which had recorded seven songs by 1944 that had each sold a million units. And then there was the Duke Ellington Orchestra whose trombone players were then and are still today considered "poets" of their instruments: Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton (dead at 42) who featured on *Mood Indigo* (Ellington, Bigard, Mills), and *Ko-Ko* (Ellington) two of the most revered compositions of the thousands Ellington composed; Juan Tizol, who featured on *Sepia Panorama* (Ellington); and one of the great artists of the instrument Lawrence Brown, who featured on *Delta Serenade* (Ellington). Ellington's music was at another level of artistry.

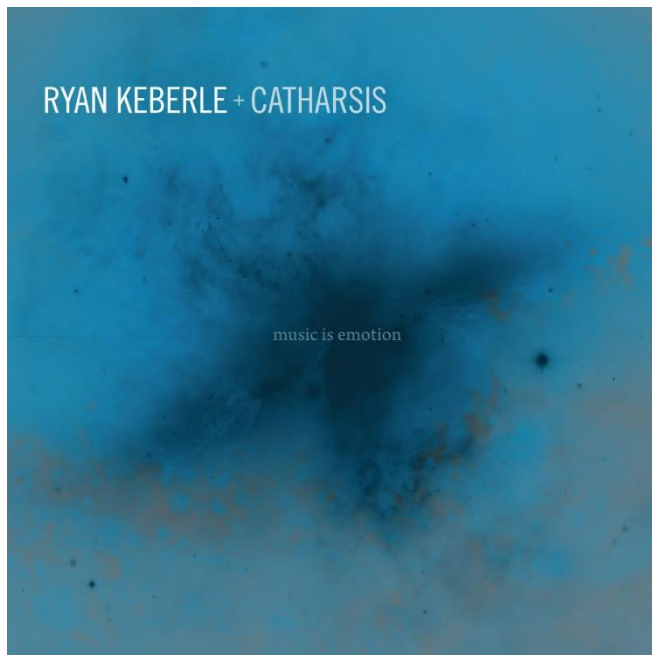


*Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, who featured on Ellington's "Mood Indigo" and "Ko-Ko": he was dead at 42...*

The trombone is the granddaddy of brass instruments being the oldest surviving instrument in Western music. This is to say it is virtually unchanged in its basic construction and technical function since the late 15th century (the trumpet had valves added around 1814). To the layman, it seems large and unwieldy considering the efforts needed to find notes by sliding, and by the breath involved to sound the beast. Some trombone players have turned their hand to modifying the trombone to improve its handling - see below innovations by Jack Teagarden and John Fedchock. Even so, laymen see its place in marching bands as its proper home, and it's true, it is an instrument that even jazz aficionados seem to overlook.

The jazz trombone is like the middle child of a three-child family. The first or eldest child is the one that had to suffer all the experimentation of the parent, and the discipline, and the criticism. That's the trumpet. The youngest child, is the golden haired spoilt brat who is waited on by parents, and grandparents, for whom nothing is too good, who is full of promise and potential but ends up on heroin and unemployed. That's the saxophone which turned up in 1846, all golden and curvy with filigree and buttons and bows and bits and pieces all over. The middle child is the one pretty much ignored, taken for granted, who does ok at school but is a bit slow and doesn't excel, settles down in a good job, performs well and reliably rises through the ranks in a profession and raises some successful children. That's the trombone - taken for granted, but making the greatness out of music in an unobtrusive way. Trombonist Ryan Keberle (see his album *Music is Emotion*) explains:

*Trombonists are strange because we are so totally normal. There's no vibe or pretension. To get work, we tend to be resourceful and versatile. But things are opening up more for the trombone, and the trombonists that I know are some of the busiest musicians around these days.\**



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*\*Downbeat, April 2013.*

In the Downbeat Hall Of Fame, saxophonists outnumber trombonists seven to one. But as Steve Turré (trombone, shells) pointed out in 1989: “Things changed for the trombone with bebop, which was hard and challenging. The only man who could stand up with Bird and Diz was J J Johnson and that sort of underlined the idea that the trombone wasn’t such a central instrument in new jazz. But that’s a short-term thing. As long as there has been jazz, there has been a trombone at the heart of it”.\*



*Steve Turré (left):  
Things changed for the  
trombone with bebop...  
The only man who  
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Bird and Diz was J J  
Johnson (below)...  
JOHNSON PHOTO  
COURTESY PINTEREST*



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*\*The Penguin Jazz Guide: The History of the Music in the 1001 Best Albums, Morton & Cook, 2019, p 517).*

It is incomprehensible to lovers of this music to think of the following recorded instances of it not existing, and it would not exist without the involvement of the trombone (trombone instrumentalists only shown): *Blue Train* (Coltrane) Curtis Fuller; *Africa Brass* (Coltrane) Britt Woodman (4/6/61 only); *Mingus Ah Um* (Mingus) Willie Dennis, Jimmy Knepper; *City of Glass* (Kenton) Bob Burgess, Frank Rosolino, Bill Russo, Keith Moon; Armstrong's *Hot Five and Sevens* (various) Kid Ory, Honore Dutrey, John Thomas, Fred Robinson, Jack Teagarden, J C Higginbotham; and, in Mulligan's Concert Jazz Band, Willie Dennis, Bob Brookmeyer and Alan Ralph (btb); in Gil Evans's Orchestra, Keg Johnson, Jimmy Knepper, Jimmy Cleveland, and Tony Studd (btb); Miles Davis's *Birth of the Cool* with Mike Zwerin, J J Johnson and Kai Winding; Lloyd Swanton's *The Catholics*, with James Greening; Anita O'Day's *This Is Anita* by Buddy Bregman with Joe Howard, Lloyd Elliott, Milt Bernhart, Cy Zentner; Yves Robert in *Les Violences des Rameau* by the Louis Sclavis Sextet; in Woody Herman's big band a trombone section of six; and virtually any aggregation of the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

But there is another noteworthy aspect: some of the greatest popular songs ever recorded are brought to the level of art through the contribution of the trombone: one such is *Night and Day* (Cole Porter) the opening track of the album *A Swingin' Affair* by Frank Sinatra, with orchestration and arrangement by Nelson Riddle. The trombone solo in the middle of that arrangement is by Juan Tizol. His contribution and artistry is worthy of study by students in trombone university courses. With Tizol in the Riddle orchestra (1956) were fellow trombonists Murray McEachern and Dick Noel.



*Juan Tizol, pictured in 1948: he plays the trombone solo in the middle of Nelson Riddle's arrangement of "Night and Day", sung by Frank Sinatra...*

Another interesting aside is that one of the most beautifully designed and powerful record covers ever produced was one featuring five trombones: those of Frank Rosolino, Harry Betts, Milt Bernhart, Tommy Pederson and George Roberts on the Capitol album *Four Freshmen and Five Trombones*.



If the trombone features as an instrument central to some of the most popular music of the 20th Century - Miller, Dorsey, Ellington- it is also central to some of the most distinguished artistic accomplishments in jazz music or music generally. A pre-eminent trombone player in this regard is Bill Russo, who has written over 200 works for jazz orchestra, and collaborated with Duke Ellington, Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa, Cannonball Adderley, Yehudi Menuhin, Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Carter, Maynard Ferguson, Billie Holiday, Cleo Laine, and Annie Ross. His legacy must include his seminal involvement with Stan Kenton, which led to what most reckon is among Kenton's greatest works, covering the period 1950-1954.

William Joseph (Bill) Russo was born 28th June 1928 in Chicago. In 1943 at age 15 he studied with Lennie Tristano. He learned to improvise on the trombone but was especially interested in composing and arranging. During summer vacations he worked in popular orchestras of the day - Orrin Tucker, Clyde McCoy, Billie Rogers - and in 1947 he assembled his own "rehearsal" big band. He even made two records by his Experiment in Jazz Orchestra at Universal records when Pete Rugolo, who was Stan Kenton's musical director at the time, invited 20-year-old Russo to a performance of the Stan Kenton Orchestra where he was introduced to Kenton.

A couple of years later he was employed by Kenton as trombonist and arranger for the band. Arrangements included *Reverie* (Debussy) 1953; *Invention for Guitar and Trumpet* (Holman) 1952; and *Crazy Rhythm* (Caesar, Kahn, & Meyer) 1953. He also composed over 30 pieces including *Ennui*; *Portrait of a Count*; and *23 Degrees North, 82 Degrees West*. In the 1951 Kenton Orchestra he was one of the five-member trombone section: Bob Fitzpatrick, Harry Betts, Bill Russo, Dick Kenny, and George Roberts (bass tb). Russo worked with the London Jazz Orchestra in the 1960s and, through his authorship of many books on techniques for creating jazz for large ensembles, has “virtually defined the realm of orchestral jazz theory”.\*



*Bill Russo: through his authorship of many books on techniques for creating jazz for large ensembles, he has “virtually defined the realm of orchestral jazz theory”...*

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*\*Will Friedland in notes to “Stan Kenton: The Complete Capitol Recordings of the Holman and Russo Charts”, (Mosaic Records).*



Notably, trombone solos were taken on the following recorded performances of the Stan Kenton Orchestra over the period concerning Russo's tenure: Milt Bernhardt, on *Solitaire* (Russo); Bob Fitzpatrick, on *Halls of Brass* (Russo); Harry Betts, on *Ennui*, (Russo); Bob Fitzpatrick on *Bill's Blues* (Russo); Frank Rosolino, on *Frank's Speaking* (Russo) and *23 Degrees North, 82 Degrees West* (Russo); Bob Burgess on *Improvisation* (Russo); Frank Rosolino on *Harlem Nocturne* (Hagen); Bob Burgess on *Over the Rainbow* (Arlen & Koehler); Frank Rosolino on *Shadow Waltz* (Warren & Dubin), *Fascinating Rhythm* (Gershwin & Gershwin), *I Got It Bad* (Ellington & Webster), and *Bacante* (Russo).

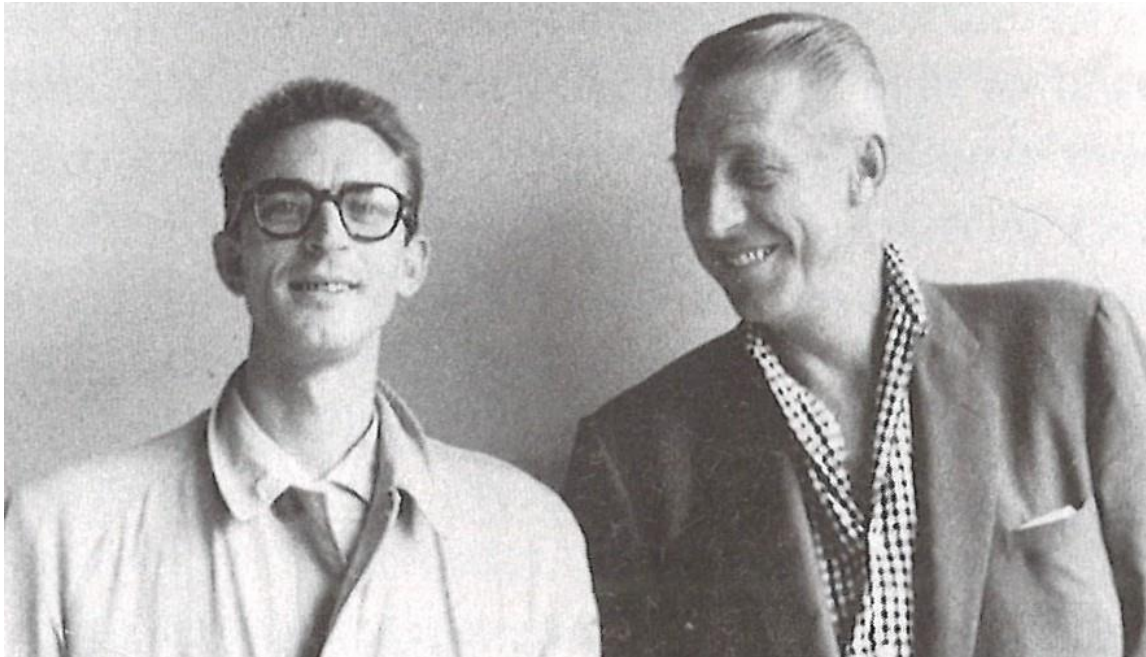
The album *Kenton in Hi Fi* (1956) was an interesting and richly documented summary of the orchestral richness of the Kenton sound, as well as featuring one of the greatest trombone solos in an orchestral setting, that by Carl Fontana on *Intermission Riff* (Wetzel).



*Carl Fontana: he plays one of the greatest trombone solos in an orchestral setting, on "Intermission Riff"...*

The brilliant trombone section comprised Milt Bernhart, Bob Fitzpatrick, Carl Fontana, Kent Larsen, trombones and Don Kelly, bass trombone. *Kenton in Hi Fi* is a stunning legacy of Stan Kenton whose dedication, leadership and experimentation nurtured literally hundreds of the finest musicians in the genre, and provided an unparalleled outlet for the jazz trombone beyond the sound of swing established by Dorsey and Miller. The former used a lot of vibrato with a wide fuzzy sound. The Kenton band trombone sound was more centred, solid with less vibrato and technical difficulties with the slide were overcome to the extent that improvisation became more involved and interesting. Kenton used four and five-part chorale voicings where the top trombone would play the melody and the lower voices would fill in harmony creating chord changes with smooth voice leading. A

fine example of Kenton's arrangements is *Artistry in Rhythm* which begins with a riff by the rhythm section, over which the sax section plays the main melody, over which the trombones enter with another melody. Bewitching stuff!



*US bandleader Stan Kenton (right), pictured here in Sydney with the Australian trombonist Johnny Bamford... PHOTO COURTESY MIKE SUTCLIFFE & OXFORD COMPANION TO AUSTRALIAN JAZZ*

A contemporary trombonist, one of the most distinguished regarding overall contribution to music, and long associated with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) is George Lewis. As an accomplished performer and recognised scholar and award-winning writer, he may be unique amongst jazz trombone players. Modern musicians frequently eschew the use of the word “jazz”, but it remains a useful shorthand to distinguish the direction a musician may be taking.

Lewis has performed with some of the most outstanding modern improvisers in the world - cf *Globe Unity - 40 Years* (Intakt) which featured the following trombone section: Paul Rutherford, Jeb Bishop, Johannes Bauer and Lewis. He has also worked with Anthony Braxton, Count Basie, David Murray, Derek Bailey, Douglas Ewart, Evan Parker, Gil Evans, Han Bennink, Irène Schweizer, J D Parran, James Newton, Joel Ryan, Joëlle Léandre, John Zorn, Karl E H Seigfried, Laurie Anderson, Leroy Jenkins, Marina Rosenfeld, Michel Portal, Misha Mengelberg, Muhal Richard Abrams, Nicole Mitchell, Roscoe Mitchell, Sam Rivers, Steve Lacy, and Wadada Leo Smith.

In 2013 he was Professor of American Music at Columbia University. His book *The AACM and American Experimental Music* (University of Chicago) received the 2009 American Book Award. The book is something of an antidote to the Euro-centric focus of the arts elite, which has tended to ignore the achievements of the AACM.

George Lewis was in residence at Monash University in 2013 during which he composed and arranged and presented the four-part suite *Hexis* in collaboration with Paul Grabowsky and the Sir Zelman Cowan School of Music and elements of The Australian Art Orchestra. Soloists included Gian Slater, voice; Paul Grabowsky, piano; George Lewis, trombone; Lachlan Davidson, piccolo; Joe O'Connor, piano; and Frank Di Sario, double bass.

Just as Duke Ellington or W C Handy talked about birds (like the mockingbird) as inspiration for their music, Lewis talks about the Australian pied butcherbird in reference to the piece *Angry Bird*. The suite *Hexis* is music which is unpredictable and intriguingly flecked with beautiful passages of harmony or sound collages, repetition, and captivating solos. It is not entertainment but music that requires immersion and frequent listening to allow it to work on one's sensibilities for maximum impact. In answering the question: how much of that was improvised, how much composed? Lewis responds that such boundaries are porous and interpenetrative. *Hexis* is contemporary orchestral improvised music of the highest standard. His interactive electronic works allow live musicians to improvise together in real time.



*George Lewis: as an accomplished performer and recognised scholar, and award-winning writer, he may be unique amongst jazz trombone players.*

For Lewis in a small group, see *Yankees* (1997) with Derek Bailey, guitars; George Lewis, trombone; and John Zorn, reeds.

Another outstanding contemporary trombone player who has made a significant contribution to musical education is Julian Priester who spent 30 years at Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts, retiring in 2011. Coltrane's *Africa Brass* (1961) is part of

his recorded legacy. He's also recorded with Duke Ellington, Anthony Braxton and Jane Ira Bloom, and as part of the Dave Holland Quintet on *Jumpin' In* (1983). He is a brilliant improviser: see especially the Blue Note release *Involution*, Sam Rivers (1967) with Sam Rivers and James Spaulding, reeds; Donald Byrd, trumpet; Priestler, trombone; Cecil McBee, bass; and Steve Ellington, drums.



*Julian Priester: he spent 30 years at Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts retiring in 2011... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

Perhaps the most highly regarded trombone player in “traditional” jazz is Jack Teagarden. What is interesting about Teagarden is that his sound is one of the most beautiful (creamiest?) of all trombone players. And yet, he may not be the player who inspires or moves a listener like some other players of the instrument. In the same way, Artie Shaw is considered by many to have produced the most beautiful tone, the most perfect sound on the clarinet than others, yet some may prefer Irving Fazola (dead at 36) as more engaging and more emotionally stirring. In short, a pre-eminent feature of jazz is the idiosyncratic individualism of its practitioners - to some Billie Holiday may be much more moving, beautiful and richly involving than Joan Sutherland, where the latter may have been a supreme and perfect coloratura

soprano. Such preferences - and both can be loved and enjoyed - do not mean one is better than the other, just that where one is rich in the living, emotionally flawed and struggling sound of being human, the other is reaching for some musical purity of sound, some pure unblemished celebration of perfection. The great Duke Ellington wanted his music to sound the way he heard it in his mind or “inner ear”, not to sound like some other sound, pure or otherwise.

Jack Teagarden wouldn't join Ellington for that very reason.



*Jack Teagarden: his sound is one of the most beautiful (creamiest?) of all trombone players... PHOTO COURTESY DEFINITIVE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ & BLUES*

Teagarden spent his life mastering the trombone's "deceptive, resistant techniques, and redesigning mouthpieces, water valves, and mutes. His father, an engineer, who took care of Texas cotton gins, taught him mechanics. When Teagarden was 13, he replaced the pipes in his grandmother's house, and a year later he became a full-fledged automobile mechanic. .... he rebuilt and drove two Stanley Steamers. He was a flamboyant inventor.... sometimes he built machines simply for the sake of building them. He constructed one that filled a room, and when asked what it did, he replied, 'Why, it's runnin', ain't it?'... His trombone and his machines were the interchangeable lyrical centres of his life" ...\*



*Trumpeter Don Goldie: Teagarden invented a mouthpiece that enabled him to play a whole octave higher...*

Teagarden had an extraordinary lip, able to play any kind of long run, obligato, or triplet. Trumpet player and colleague Don Goldie recalled: "He (Teagarden) generally only used three positions on his slide, and his fingers rarely moved below the bell of the horn. And he didn't hold his slide between his thumb and index fingers as most trombonists do, but held it between his index and middle fingers. He was always using his mechanical knowledge to improve his playing and your playing. He invented a mouthpiece that enabled me to play a whole octave higher. He invented a new water valve, a kind of petcock, that gave his horn a better seal. He invented a musical slide rule that showed you, for instance, exactly what chords the notes in the C scale could be used in. He started every trombonist in the country using Pond's Cold Cream on his slide, and later he switched to Pam, the cooking lubricant. His ear was as extraordinary as his lip. When we flew, he'd tell me exactly how many rpm's the engine was making, and what key it was in".\*\*

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\* Whitney Balliett, "Big T in American Musicians II" in "72 Portraits in jazz", OUP, New York, 1996, p 183).

\*\*Balliett, *ibid*, pp188/189).

This “tradition” of looking to improve the mechanical side of the instrument is carried on in contemporary times by the leader of the New York Big Band, John Fedchock, who developed in collaboration with XO Professional Brass the XO 1634GL-LT trombone, which is “very lightweight, warm and relaxed sounding”.\*



*John Fedchock: he developed in collaboration with XO Professional Brass the XO 1634GL-LT trombone...*

Improvements in technique have been championed by Bob McChesney in his book *Doodle Studies and Etudes* in which he writes about ‘doodle-tonguing’ on the trombone, which enables his crisp, rapid-fire playing. It began in childhood. He says: “I was tonguing and articulating on the trombone like this from an early age where I can’t even remember how or what I was doing. I didn’t invent it. Carl Fontana did it. There are even writings of trombonists back in the 1800s using it on certain things. It’s a way of playing really smooth and fast.” (*Downbeat*, June, 2015).

Teagarden had perfect pitch and carried a tuning fork with him. He had an extremely appealing voice and contributed many classic vocals including *Basin Street Blues* (Williams) to which he added the words “won’t you come along with me to the Mississippi”. His greatest works may be those he made whilst a member of firstly Eddie Condon’s bands (cf *Eddie Condon & His Windy City* 7, 1938) and secondly the 1947 band of Louis Armstrong’s featured on *The Complete Town Hall Concert*. Teagarden, like Louis Armstrong, is another great musician whose voice played a vital role in their instrumental music, to the extent each seemed an extension of their being, undifferentiated. The voice and the instrument are not uncommon bedfellows amongst trombone artists.

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\**Downbeat*, July, 2019, p 22.



*Jack Teagarden (left) and Louis Armstrong: both had voices which played a vital role in their instrumental music, to the extent each seemed an extension of their being, undifferentiated...*

Consider for example the major production of the complete *Porgy and Bess* (Gershwin/Gershwin) of 1956, featuring Mel Tormé and Frances Faye and cast, the orchestras of Russell Garcia and Duke Ellington, and arrangements by Russell Garcia. Frank Rosolino as the character Jake is the hit performance who livens up the show. *A Woman is a Sometime Thing* is his beautiful, longing ballad, and *Agoin' Out to the Blackfish Banks* showcases Rosolino's own personality as a wisecracking wit. Rosolino was both vocalist and trombone player for the show. The human voice and the trombone voice are close; that closeness was brought home vividly to me through a performance by Jack Teagarden.



*Frank Rosolino: both vocalist and trombone player for this production of Porgy & Bess...*



It was one of the most memorable jazz moments in my teens, a moment which brought tears to my eyes. It was a simple number called *Jack Hits The Road* (Bowman) on a 10" LP *Comes Jazz* under the leadership of Bud Freeman (an Australian produced compilation of 78" issues). The line-up was Max Kaminsky, trumpet; Jack Teagarden, trombone; Bud Freeman, tenor; Pee Wee Russell, clarinet; Dave Bowman, piano; Eddie Condon, guitar; Mort Stuhlmaker, bass; and Dave Tough, drums. It's a simple tune which opens with blues-tinged piano and a trombone solo, followed by Teagarden singing: "Oh I started out to see Bud Freeman, but I lost my way...(repeat)...and I thought for a minute I was on the road by MCA (Music Corporation of America)". Pee Wee Russell and Freeman also solo.



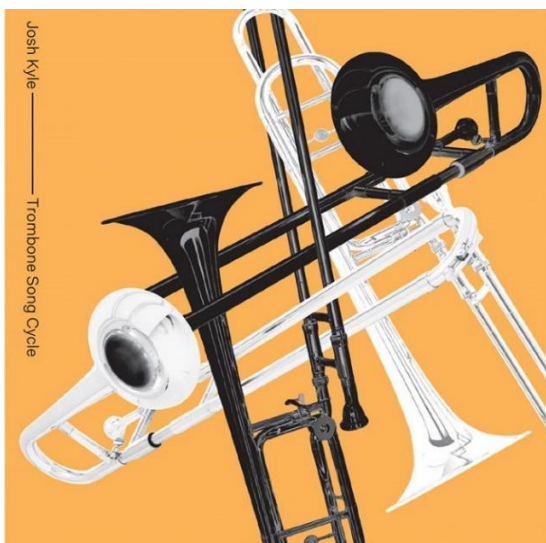
It's a three-minute musical moment of restrained and understated beauty, simplicity and elegance. Never has the word "way" ever been sung so beautifully. In its grace this music feels like the best Veronica by the greatest bullfighter because it appears easy. Such apparent ease comes from Teagarden's remarkable control. He created his own technique because, when he started to learn trombone his arms were too short for the correct slide positions, so he used his chops instead. Teagarden was unique and his style transcended categories. His vocal on *Jack Hits The Road* rivals the master vocals of Louis Armstrong. The voice/trombone connection is not just a past phenomenon.

A young rising artist Natalie Cressman at 29 is in this tradition, as both an accomplished singer and trombonist. She remarks: “So much of what I love is the great storytelling and expression that comes with the human voice... When I play trombone, I try to stay in that mode and not get too caught up in filling the space with too many notes - really trying to be lyrical and melodic.” Ian Faquini (guitar) comments: “ ...she really sings with it (the trombone) more than playing horn riffs.” (Quotes from *Downbeat*, August 2019).



*Natalie Cressman: both an accomplished singer and trombonist...*

Trombonist Shannon Barnett also uses her voice in some performances. A stunning recent recorded example of voice and a trombone “choir”, is the Josh Kyle composition *The One*. (See below about Josh Kyle in his work on his album *Trombone Song Cycle* (JK) 2018).



But consciousness of the trombone as trombone was brought home vividly to me by Cutty Cutshall and Lou McGarity in a twelvetet under the leadership of Eddie Condon, a group put together for a Columbia Recording in 1954, ultimately issued as *Jammin' At Condon's*. Before this I took the trombone sound very much for granted as part of the soundscape, and not noticeable like the clarinet or trumpet were noticeable; plenty of talk of Goodman, or Hall, Shaw, or Armstrong, but we didn't get around to singing the praises of Trummy Young for example, who we viewed, somewhat unfairly, as a musical figure of fun, and Dorsey was remembered more for Sinatra than the leader, and Miller more for the group sound or Tex Beneke.



*Trombonists Cutty Cutshall (left) and Lou McGarity (right) with the US jazz writer/enthusiast Al White...*

In the sessions on 24th June and 1st July, 1954, *How Come You Do Me Like You Do?* (Austin-Bergere) and the medley *When My Sugar Walks Down The Street* (Austin-McHugh-Mills)/*I Can't Believe You're In Love With Me* (Gaskill-McHugh), Cutshall and McGarity are heard to brilliant advantage. The engineering is first class, there are no time limits, the trombones are heard muted or straight, sometimes in conversation with each other, sometimes in glorious harmony, and the mood is relaxed and swinging. It was also unusual to have two trombones in a small Dixieland group. Lou McGarity performed with Benny Goodman, Urbie Green, Bobby Hackett, J J Johnson, Jimmy McPartland, Charlie Parker, Cootie Williams, and the World's Greatest Jazz Band.

The first "trombone" record I bought with my hard-earned, was not bought because of the trombone, but because I had a thing for drummer Max Roach. Anything with Max Roach I reasoned could be bought with absolute confidence. The album moreover, was called *Drum Suite*. But it turned out to be a date under the leadership of Slide Hampton who played trombone, composed the title track and three other numbers, and arranged the music for octet. Featured trumpets included Freddie Hubbard, and the remainder were: Benny Jacobs-El and Hampton, trombones; George Coleman, tenor; Yusef Lateef, flute & tenor; Jay Cameron, baritone

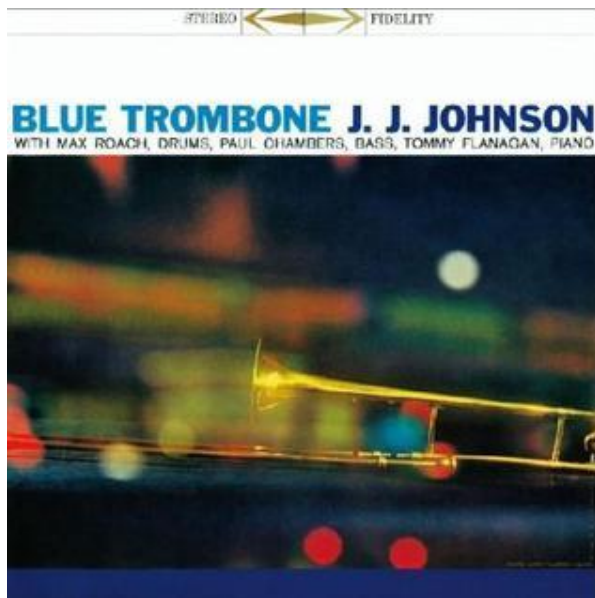
saxophone; Tommy Flanagan, piano; Eddie Khan, bass; and Max Roach, drums. It was a programme of music I listened to many times in 1964. Hampton had worked with Maynard Ferguson as trombonist and key arranger/composer for two years before this release. Hampton's artistic standing is reflected in the musicians attracted to his leadership on this date. Sadly, the album did not succeed commercially at a time when rock and roll was taking off.



*This album turned out to be a date under the leadership of Slide Hampton (below) who played trombone, composed the title track and three other numbers, and arranged the music for octet... HAMPTON PHOTO COURTESY DAVID MARTIN*



Another album that I bought featuring Max Roach was called *Blue Trombone* (1957) which had a nine-minute track called *Blue Trombone* (Johnson). It had J J Johnson on trombone; Tommy Flanagan, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; and Max Roach on drums. Little did I appreciate at that time the masters represented in this group. What I did realise was the complete transformation of the “trombone sound” - smooth, deeply melodic, rich, colourful - to one which did not emphasise sound so much as it did the intricacies of bebop.



*Blue Trombone* opens with an up-tempo swinging piano solo backed by the powerful bedded bass of Chambers and the brushes of Roach. The trombone enters with a melodic phrase repeated a number of times, followed by a long expressive, inventive, confident solo. Chambers provides a typically deep rhythmic solo, followed by the melodic drums of Roach. Johnson closes the proceedings with some humour in another fine solo. If this track could be summarised in a sentence, it could be described as a swinging, confident, joyous romp by artists completely at ease in each other's company, and with the music.



*David Baker: virtually every contemporary trombonist, jazz or otherwise, has been affected by the innovations attributed to J J Johnson...*

David Baker has written: “Virtually every contemporary trombonist, jazz or otherwise, has been affected by the innovations attributed to J J Johnson. Technical feats that were inconceivable prior to Johnson are now commonplace, and the attitude that the trombone is capable of doing anything that saxophone and trumpets can do is generally taken for granted”.\*

After piano lessons, and the baritone saxophone, which he gave up because it was too hard to sound like Lester Young, Johnson took up the trombone. Whilst at high school Johnson studied music theory and harmony and refused to accept the limitations placed on the trombone. He worked with the Benny Carter band for a few years learning much in a band that included Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Clarke and Max Roach. Johnson was the only guest to ever record with the original Charlie Parker Quintet. Over the years he played with many JATP concerts, Benny Golson and Billie Holiday. He recorded instrumental versions of *God Bless the Child* (Holiday) and *Be My Love* (Lanza).



*J J Johnson: he says he came from the big band era, not from the bebop era... PHOTO CREDIT FRANCIS WOLFF*

However, Johnson corrects the impression he was a child of bebop: “I came from the big band era. I didn’t come from the bebop era.... when Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker and Bud Powell were, let’s say, creating and honing and fine-tuning bebop, I was still playing in the big bands. I went from Benny Carter’s Big Band to Count Basie’s Big Band. (*Downbeat*, July 1999, p 23).

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\*Notes to *The Complete Columbia J J Johnson Small Group Sessions*, Mosaic, 1996).

In words typical of a great artist, Johnson says of Teagarden: “In my humble opinion, Jack Teagarden was one of the major players in the evolution of the art and craft of jazz trombone playing. His style was distinctive, unique, and a joy to listen to.... He did not influence me because I didn’t try to play like Jack Teagarden.... I have a big problem with the term ‘bebop’. In my opinion, Dizzy was... much larger than that little box that disc labelled ‘bebop’. I can only hope that J J Johnson is bigger than that little box.” (ibid *Downbeat*).



*J J Johnson (right) with Dizzy Gillespie: Johnson said that “Dizzy was... much larger than that little box, that disc labelled ‘bebop’.” PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

*Wee Dot, Lament, Enigma* (all Johnson) are jazz standards. He composed a suite in six movements, called *Perceptions*, with Gillespie as soloist. His *Poem For Brass* was part of the Third Stream movement of Gunther Schuller and John Lewis.



*Master trombonist Steve Turré, here on conch shell: The first time he heard a J J Johnson record it completely changed his world as a trombonist....*

Master trombonist Steve Turré said, on Johnson's passing: "The first time I heard a J J Johnson record completely changed my world as a trombonist.... J J did for the trombone what Charlie Parker did for the saxophone; and anybody that digs playing jazz trombone, in the historical context, they have to deal with the legacy that he left, because just like Jimi Hendrix did with the electric guitar or Duke Ellington with the big band, he set a level that nobody else has yet matched. and probably never will".\* J J Johnson committed suicide on 4th February 2001. He was 77.



*J J Johnson: he committed suicide on 4th February 2001, aged 77...*

Another 1960s release was *The Popular Duke Ellington* which drew attention once again to works like *Perdido* (Juan Tizol); *Mood Indigo* (trombone in high register); and *Caravan* (Ellington, Tizol, Mills). In other words, three of the 11 tracks were either written by and featured trombonist Tizol, or featured the trombone. Of the thousands of compositions by Ellington three of the then most popular and enduring works had the trombone at their heart. And three of the most distinguished trombone players in all of jazz were Ellington alumni: Tricky Sam Nanton, Juan Tizol and Lawrence Brown.

On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1932, Ellington backed Bing Crosby on a recording of *St Louis Blues* (Handy) and two weeks later he hired Lawrence Brown on the recommendation of Irving Mills. Brown was, along with Jack Teagarden, the most admired trombone player in jazz which included the admiration of modern trombone masters. He was quickly identified with some famous Ellington recordings

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\**Downbeat*, June, 2001, p 21.



Including *Sophisticated Lady* (which he accused Ellington of stealing from him); *Solitude* (Ellington/DeLange/Mills); and *In A Sentimental Mood* (Ellington/Kurtz). Recognised as a master technician with a chocolate smooth, cello-like tone, he was self-critical of his approach which differed to trombone players of his generation: “It was my own idea. Why can’t you play the melody on the trombone just as sweet as on the cello? I can’t play jazz like the other guys in the band. All the others can improvise good solos without a second thought. I’m not a good improviser”.\*



*Lawrence Brown: recognised as a master technician with a chocolate smooth, cello-like tone... PHOTO CREDIT WILLIAM P GOTTLIEB*

Lawrence Brown, like Hodges, Hamilton, et al, was a vital part of the Ellington “sound” and when he left, along with some others in the 1960s, Ellington struggled to replace their distinctive personal sounds.

The trombone player Charlie Irvis was replaced by Tricky Sam Nanton in the Ellington band in 1926. In the band was Bubber Miley who had taken to playing blue notes, and to growl and use mutes like King Oliver. Bubber Miley was with Ellington from 1923 to 1929 and died in 1932, but his influence and legacy was widespread contributing much to the famous “jungle” sound of the Ellington band, and influencing other players such as Nanton and Cootie Williams, who began on drums, switched to trombone and tuba before taking up the trumpet, and Rex Stewart. After Miley, Nanton was the band’s principal solo horn in this period.

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\**Duke: A Life of Duke Ellington, Terry Teachout, Gotham Books, 2014, p 130).*



*The Washingtonians circa 1925, back row L-R, Sonny Greer, Charlie Irvis, Elmer Snowden, Otto Hardwick, seated, Bubber Miley, Duke Ellington...*

Nanton's trombone voice was initially most clearly noticed on Ellington's 1927 recording of *Black and Tan Fantasy* (Ellington/Miley) where he "talked" on the trombone. He subsequently featured on some of Ellington's most revered masterpieces including *East St Louis Toodle-oo*, *Ko-Ko*, *Jack the Bear*, and *St Louis Blues* (with Bing Crosby). He was a master of the plunger mute which solos had a remarkable resemblance to speech. His preferred sound was not "wah-wah" but "yah-yah".



*L-R, Joe (Tricky Sam) Nanton, Harry Carney, W Jones in 1943, at the Hurricane Ballroom...PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN*

In July 1929 Juan Tizol joined Ellington. He was thought of as “legit” by other band members, which is to say he had been classically trained. He was a pit band musician at Howard Theatre, Washington, before joining Ellington. He preferred written-out solos to improvising. Ellington used him in a second role as copyist by which is meant “taking Ellington’s untidy manuscripts and ‘extracting’ in longhand the parts to be played by each musician. It was an intimidating task, both because Ellington was so prolific, and because of his peculiar manner in notating his music.

*“This thing ain’t supposed to work man,” the pianist Jimmy Jones said, after looking at an Ellington score for the first time. Instead of writing “full scores” in which each part has its own line, he opted for three- and four-line “short scores” with the saxophones jammed into a single staff - except for Harry Carney, whose baritone-sax part occupied a line of its own - and the trumpets and trombones on the other staves. The trombone staff also contained a sketchy bass line, but Ellington never wrote out guitar or drum parts, leaving them to be made up by Fred Guy and Sonny Greer. He also improvised his own parts. (Teachout, *ibid*, p 102).*



*Juan Tizol, who died in 1984 aged 84, took Ellington’s untidy manuscripts and ‘extracted’ in longhand the parts to be played by each musician...  
PHOTO CREDIT WILLIAM P GOTTlieb*

Tizol was the fifth brass player in the band and Ellington began thinking of trumpets and trombones separately. Tizol also played valve trombone which meant he was faster and could play chromatic passages like the descending line which ends the first strain of *Caravan* (Tizol). He left Ellington in 1944 but rejoined in 1951. He died in 1984 aged 84.

While the trombone has thrived in the orchestral setting, its role in small groups has been less prominent. This may be due to its ability on the one hand to produce some of the most beautiful sounds in music - cf Dorsey, Teagarden, Brown - and a wide range of (vocal) effects - cf Nanton, Tizol - as opposed to its ability to navigate the intricacies and inventiveness of the bebop and post-bebop genres. J J Johnson may have “liberated” the trombone in this latter regard, but he did not make it any easier to play. Where fingers and embouchure are the saxophone and trumpet mainstays of control and expression, the trombone is much more physical in its demands. To combine beauty of tone and dexterity of performance is probably much more of a challenge for the trombone player than it is for other front line “horns” in the small group. Robin Eubanks may be one of the finest modern musicians to have mastered this beautiful beast.



*Robin Eubanks: he may be one of the finest modern musicians to have mastered this beautiful beast... PHOTO CREDIT ARTISTSHARE*

Dave Holland by any reckoning has been a major figure in jazz since *Bitches Brew* (Davis) 1969. In his quintets he has featured two trombone players: Julian Priester and Robin Eubanks. Eubanks was with Holland for over 15 years where he formed part of the trombone section in the Dave Holland Big Band: *What Goes Around*, 2002, ECM, and *Overtime*, 2005, Dare 2 Records, or in the front line of the Dave Holland Quintet on the ECM documents *Points Of View*, 1998; *Prime Directive*, 1999; and *Not for Nothin'*, 2001. For an instance of some of the finest

examples of trombone playing in modern times, the live recording of the Dave Holland Quintet at Birdland in April 2003 featuring Robin Eubanks, would be hard to equal. It's called *Extended Play: Live at Birdland* (2CD) ECM. It's a modern jazz classic.



*L-R, Robin Eubanks, John McLaughlin, Dave Holland at North Sea...*

Rarely do all the stars align for performing artists when recording but, when they do - *Satchmo at Symphony Hall*, Miles Davis at the Plugged Nickel, Keith Jarrett at the Blue Note, or *Jazz at Massey Hall* - it's pure magic. Such is the case with the Dave Holland Quintet recorded live at Birdland, New York, 21-24 November 2001. The band was Chris Potter, soprano, alto and tenor saxophones; Robin Eubanks, trombone and cowbell; Steve Nelson, vibraphone and marimba; Billy Kilson, drums; and Dave Holland, double bass. Seven pieces were composed by the leader, and one each respectively by Chris Potter and Robin Eubanks.

The shortest number had a 6.42 playing time, the longest 21.00. To take one at random - *Prime Directive* (Holland) - the mid-tempo piece opens with a bass figure outlining the theme, followed by a collective improvisation, then the trombone "riding" with the alto on a joyous romp, sometimes in harmony sometimes not, and then a four-minute conversation between the alto saxophone and trombone sans rhythm. It's a remarkable example of high-end artistry with the sax sometimes at the lower end, and the trombone at the higher. The bass re-enters joined by drums and vibes, the vibraphone solos at the 8.30 point followed by a joyous climax. What the listener notes in this program of music - there are no wasted notes! There are no longueurs! Why does the music have to stop? And the cherry on the top? The music *swings*.

Without taking anything away from the brilliance of Chris Potter, who's never sounded more confident, inventive or swaggeringly good, Robin Eubanks has a moment in the sun rarely reached by any improvising musician, let alone trombone players. It's on his own composition - the final track on the second disc - and it's called *Metamorphos* (Eubanks), coming in at a little over 20 minutes.



*Robin Eubanks (left) pictured here with Chris Potter on soprano saxophone...*

The piece opens with some throbbing up-tempo bass by the leader Holland, who is joined soon by drummer Kilson. There is a beautiful vibraphone solo then the horns in harmony enter interjecting to the vibes voice. What follows is a six-minute trombone solo. It is an astonishing example of beauty (sounds and tone of the trombone) together with inventiveness at the highest creative level. The speed of execution, the control, the structural logic, and the range of expression are astonishing. Vocal sounds, multiphonics, slurring, conversing with the drummer Kilson, and swinging with a powerful riveting pulse, make it a great musical moment. Moreover, there is no sense that Eubanks is “showing what he can do” on the instrument. It's all in the service of the collective enterprise - the Dave Holland Quintet - and the music. It's the beautiful logical meeting point of the Lawrence Brown or Jack Teagarden sound and the inventive genius of J J Johnson. Heaven knows, these moments are jewels in the beautiful jazz crown.

Interestingly, John Corbett in his review of Holland's Quintet recording *Critical Mass* (ECM) in *Downbeat* October 2006 argues: “... Eubanks' trombone is *the most exciting single soloist element* on *Critical Mass*, as it is on other of the quintet's outings. Listen to Potter and Eubanks intertwine Arabic lines on *Secret Garden*, playing together and independently in a criss-crossing motion that's punctuated by Steve Nelson's vibe chords.” (my emphasis).



*On this album John Corbett says that “Eubanks' trombone is the most exciting single soloist element...”*

Robin Eubanks has performed with Andrew Hill, Joe Jackson, B B King, Mingus Big Band, Barbra Streisand, Sun Ra, McCoy Tyner, Elvin Jones, Sonny Fortune, and Art Blakey. He taught for 20 years as a tenured professor of Jazz Trombone and Jazz Composition and Oberlin, but his most enduring legacy may be his role as brass player in the Dave Holland Quintet, a role normally filled in traditional modern jazz groups by trumpet. His experimentation with electric trombone was less successful (cf Robin Eubanks & EB3 *Live Vol 1*, 2007, RKM 009)

Which begs the question: why isn't Robin Eubanks talked about in the same way as Dave Douglas, Branford Marsalis, J D Allen or indeed Chris Potter are talked about as a matter of course? It points to, or is another sign of, the persistent sidelining of the trombone as a minor “player” in the jazz firmament.

Andy Hunter, of the WDR big band trombone section, released a quintet album in 2019 called *Confluence* with the same line-up as the Holland Quintet: trombone, vibraphone, saxophone, bass and drums. In 2009 *All About Jazz* said: “Hunter coaxes multiple instruments out of his trombone—the purity of a trumpet... the intrinsic longing of a French horn... and even the blatt of a tuba. But that’s all gravy next to Hunter’s overall solo construction, which should win prizes for architecture.”

Still uncommon is the classic modern jazz quintet led by a trombone player. One such quintet is that of Steve Davis with Davis trombone; Larry Willis, piano; Abraham Burton on tenor; Nat Reeves on bass; and Billy Williams on drums. Just over 50 years old, Davis has recorded with Art Blakey, Freddie Hubbard and

Hank Jones. He is featured in the big bands of Christian McBride and Ron Carter. His exposure has been limited by teaching at the Jackie McLean Institute of Jazz at the University of Hartford and raising a family. Even so Davis's involvement when aged 30 as part of the Chick Corea Sextet - Origin- 1998 *A Week At The Blue Note* (6CD) which seemed something of a tribute by one pianist to the works of two piano legends, Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk, is a telling recognition by his peers of his standing as an artist. His mentor Jackie McLean made a call to Art Blakey at the beginning of Davis's career: "Hey, Bu. I got a little cat, a trombone player - he's bad, man. Uh-huh. Yep, he's white." McLean and Davis, who were listening, both chuckled. Davis was among the last of the Messengers before Blakey passed away.



*Steve Davis: yep, he's white... PHOTO COURTESY WIKIPEDIA*

Davis formed a sextet for his 2019 release *Correlations*. The John Fedchock NY Sextet has trombone, trumpet, tenor, piano, bass and drums. The Shannon Barnett Quartet has trombone, tenor, bass and drums. The John Fedchock Quartet has trombone, piano, bass and drums.

It's clear that the trombone is an essential component of the standard jazz orchestra with a section of four not uncommon, where sometimes this includes the bass trombone and sometimes, as in the 1952 Kenton band, it is in addition to the four. Secondly, the trombone's sound is remarkably close to the sound and range of the human voice and some trombone players use each interchangeably - cf Teagarden and Natalie Cressman noted above. Additionally jazz trombone players develop their own distinctive voices which adds much to the orchestral palette. Finally, the breakthrough engendered by J J Johnson et al means trombone players now improvise as lead horns in the jazz setting.



All these elements have come together in a document by Josh Kyle in his work *Trombone Song Cycle* (JK) 2018 which features a trombone quartet of James Macaulay, James Greening, Jordan Murray and Adrian Sherriff. Whatever one thinks of the “poetic” power of the lyrics there is no doubt about the musical power of Kyle’s voice and that of the trombones, whether in harmony, much like a vocal choir backing Kyle, or in individual musical statements, or in the inspirational improvisational solos that occur. The document is a telling example of the congruence of both beauty and invention at their best. *I Can* (Kyle) at 11 minutes is a beautiful example of the possibilities: impressive harmony, telling moments in the lower range of the trombone, quite beautiful harmony of three trombones and voice in measured beats responding to the improvising horn, and a stunning “shouting” climax of the horns. The arrangements by Andrew Murray are noteworthy.



*Josh Kyle: there is no doubt about the musical power of his voice and that of the trombones, whether in harmony, much like a vocal choir backing Kyle, or in individual musical statements or in the inspirational improvisational solos that occur... PHOTO COURTESY ABC JAZZ*

An especially intricate and compelling arrangement is that of *The One* (Kyle). It opens with a declarative solo trombone statement sometimes in the growling register then, at about one minute, Kyle enters with vocalese and there is a swinging (!) conversation between voice and trombone. Trombones in harmony punctuate the vocalese then the right-hand trombone is joined by one on the left then the middle. The vocal (with lyrics now) is backed by rhythmic trombones in harmony and the piece ends with a collective improvisation. The piece has variety, surprise and much beauty. Indeed, the ballad *Sleepers* (Kyle) may stand as an example of the most beautiful instrumental sounds in music - a beautiful collage of sounds fitting a structural pattern, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in individual lyrical beauty. It’s a prime example, rejecting the notion that complex contemporary music - especially jazz - lacks the melodic and lyrical beauty of old, in its drive for technical brilliance.

If J J Johnson liberated the trombone technically, two leading musicians provide a creative platform for the trombone's voice, allowing the full range of its possibilities to be made in a musical setting - which is to say, using the devices of "Dixieland", the jungle sounds of Ellington, the humour of Trummy Young, the sweetness of Lawrence Brown, the extremes of range of the Kenton orchestra, all in the service of the "new" music of the 1960s. These two leaders were Charles Mingus and Archie Shepp.

Mingus employed Jimmy Knepper on 12 of his defining modern jazz albums, including *Mingus Ah Um*, and *Tonight at Noon*. Here's the great trombone player Roswell Rudd speaking of Knepper's playing on *Invisible Lady* (Mingus) from that album: "Nobody else can do what he can, the way he does it. The masterful portamento, the breathing, that the line is unbroken even though it goes through these incredible transformations, as he suddenly doubles the tempo in the middle of a phrase. That tempo acceleration was so prevalent in Charlie Parker's playing, and to apply such saxophonistic dexterity to the trombone was a heroic musical achievement. I don't know when this was done, but it's the 22nd century - pushing the instrument places it's never been, sustaining the emotional musical content wherever it goes".\*



*Jimmy Knepper: pushing the instrument places it's never been, sustaining the emotional musical content wherever it goes...*

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\**Downbeat*, April, 2002.

Knepper worked with Charlie Parker and Claude Thornhill before Mingus. Although Mingus once called Knepper a white faggot and punched him in the mouth, breaking a tooth which affected his playing (especially with the plunger mute), Mingus confided in his last year when confined to a wheelchair that Knepper had more understanding of his music than anyone who had ever worked for him. Knepper went on to work with Gil Evans on some of the greatest albums in the genre, including *Out of the Cool* (Evans). Whitney Balliett wrote about Knepper:

*The slide trombone is a bully, because of its wayward tone and the constant challenge of finding the right notes with the slide, and it has dominated many of its players. Fighting back, they have cracked frenzied jokes on the instrument, making rude noises and elephantine slurs. Or they have attempted to tame it by making it sound limpid and honeylike (Tommy Dorsey, Lawrence Brown, Bobby Byrne). But Knepper, using little vibrato and no funny noises, sings on his instrument. He has an endless, uncontainable melodic river in his head, and it pours out through his trombone. He likes long phrases, some of them more than eight bars and made up of an intricate mixture of triplets and eighth notes, generally arranged comfortably behind the beat. These phrases often start in odd places, and this oddness is hypnotic. The notes he chooses are almost always surprising; they may be outside the chords of a tune or beyond its melody. Knepper's solos are delivered whole and at one volume and seemingly in one breath. He has never played a melodramatic solo in his life.\**



*Knepper: he should be spoken of in the same way Freddie Hubbard or Jackie McLean or Herbie Hancock are spoken of as major jazz figures...*

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\*Whitney Balliett in "American Musicians II - Seventy-two Portraits in Jazz", OUP, New York, 1998, p 416.

Following Mingus's death, and the death of the first Mingus Dynasty bandleader, drummer Dannie Richmond, Knepper led the Mingus Dynasty Orchestra, and toured the Middle East and Europe. He worked with the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. Knepper died 14th June 2003 aged 75. Knepper should be spoken of in the same way Freddie Hubbard or Jackie McLean or Herbie Hancock are spoken of as major jazz figures.

The Mingus legacy continued with the Mingus Big Band trombone section c1996 Ku-Umba Frank Lacy, Robin Eubanks, Britt Woodman, Conrad Herwig, and Dave Taylor. Players with Mingus 1945-1949 included Henry Coker, Britt Woodman, Haig Eshow, Bob Lowey, Hawes Coleman, Maxwell Davis, Jimmy Knepper, and Marty Smith.

Music lovers everywhere have their favourite albums. Some albums are the shared love of thousands if not millions. In jazz *Kind of Blue* is an obvious example. *Out To Lunch* may be another. *Bitches Brew* another. Two of mine are ones that have kept resurfacing for over 50 years, and have never failed to stir me. Both were recorded in 1964. Both feature trombone player Roswell Rudd. The first was *The New York Art Quartet* (ESP) and the second was *Four For Trane* (Impulse), the latter produced by John Coltrane in partnership with Bob Thiele.



*Roswell Rudd:  
he taught himself the trombone  
in his teens after seeing and  
hearing Miff Mole with Max  
Kaminsky in 1948...*

Rudd was born on 17th November 1935 with lips he claimed to be right for the French horn and the mellophone. He was in the school band and learned music by listening to dance records. He taught himself the trombone in his teens after being gobsmacked by seeing and hearing Miff Mole with Max Kaminsky in 1948 at a concert in Hamilton. Bass player Buell Neidlinger taught him a lot, but his biggest influence was pianist Herbie Nichols. Rudd went to Yale University, played with several bands before joining Bill Dixon's free jazz group in 1962, which included Archie Shepp and Dennis Charles.

The New York Art Quartet was a free jazz ensemble originally made up of saxophonist John Tchicai, trombonist Roswell Rudd, drummer Milford Graves and bassist Lewis Worrell. Worrell was later replaced by various other bassists, including Don Moore, Reggie Workman and Finn Von Eyben.



*The New York Art Quartet, including co-leaders John Tchicai (alto sax) and Roswell Rudd (trombone), plus Don Moore (bass) and Milford Graves (drums)...*

In 1962, Tchicai and Rudd were both playing with two groups: the New York Contemporary Five and Bill Dixon's group with Archie Shepp and drummer Dennis Charles. Two years later, they played together on *New York Eye and Ear Control*, along with Albert Ayler, Don Cherry, Gary Peacock, and Sunny Murray, and also participated in the October Revolution in Jazz organized by Bill Dixon. Rudd and Tchicai were introduced to drummer Milford Graves by saxophonist Giuseppi Logan, and Graves "wound up playing with them for half an hour, astonishing Rudd and Tchicai, who promptly invited him to join what became The New York Art Quartet." After adding bassist Lewis Worrell, the group first recorded in 1964 as part of ESP Disk's original roster of jazz artists.



*Roswell Rudd (centre, on trombone) on stage with saxophonist Archie Shepp...*

Context may not be all, but it is a hell of a lot. A citizen of the world alive in the 1960s would have to be blind, deaf and dumb not to be aware of the social forces active (riots, art, marches) at that time, not least that of the African American in the country deemed to be the “leader of the free world”. Writers such as James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison had written powerfully about being black in America, and popular films such as *Pinky* (1949) raised again the problems of race. In music, especially jazz, Archie Shepp and his cohort expressed themselves in a series of albums engendered by rage but forged in beautiful music. It does seem a contradiction - anger producing beauty, and joy in the creative act - but the evidence is there in *Fire Music* (1965), *On This Night* (1965) and *Attica Blues* (1972).

Although not featuring Shepp, the ESP release of the album *New York Art Quartet* (1964), was born out of the same angry crucible. The musicians were Roswell Rudd, trombone; John Tchicai, alto sax; Lewis Worrell, bass; and Milford Graves, percussion. Rudd wrote three of the works: *Short*, *Sweet*, and *Rosmosis*. Following a brief horn statement by the horns, an up-tempo drum solo begins the piece *Rosmosis*, then the theme is announced by a chorus of horns. The following trombone solo, growling but swinging, drums and bass backing, reveals humour but the extremes of the range of the trombone are sought out, both in dexterity, inventiveness, and intensity: swaggering, sliding, slurring, crying, shouting, yearning - pause at five minutes - unaccompanied solo trombone continues with vocal effects, then the whole group enters up-tempo at about 6.30 minutes; a long yearning alto solo follows, Milford Graves’ busy drums backing, occasional punctuations from Rudd. At eleven minutes the trombone re-enters with mute, drums then solo. An extended bass solo alone brings the piece to a remarkable conclusion.

## NEW YORK ART QUARTET



Interestingly, on the second track *Sweet*, a poem was included and read by its author Amiri Baraka called *Black Dada Nihilismus*. It's interesting because it is a telling and riveting example of the difference between words on a page (like musical notes in a score) and their astonishing power in recitation by a great voice. The words are sometimes just lists of proper nouns, or angry statements or phrases but when voiced become outstanding music. The track *Sweet/Black Dada Nihilismus* begins with the poem's recitation against Worrell's double bass with the drummer entering as the poem proceeds. Here are some words from the work:

..... *the simple striking arm under  
the streetlamp. The cutters, from under  
their rented earth. Come up, black dada*

*nihilismus. Rape the white girls. Rape  
their fathers. Cut the mothers' throats.*

*Black dada nihilismus, choke my friends*

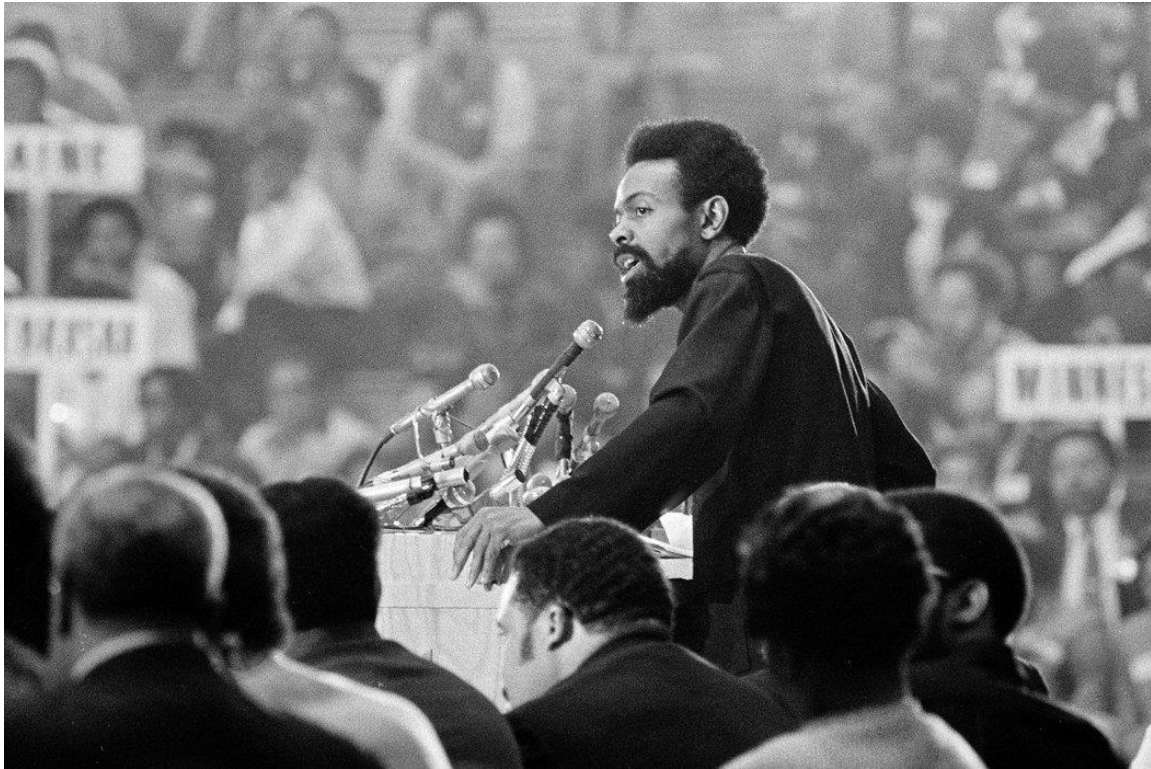
.....

*For tambo, willie best, dubois, patrice, mantan, the  
bronze buckaroos.*

*For Jack Johnson, asbestos, tonto, buckwheat,  
billie holiday.*

*For tom russ, l'overture, vesey, beau jack,*

*(may a lost god damballah, rest or save us  
against the murders we intend against his lost white children  
black dada nihilismus)*



A poem was included on the track “Sweet” and read by its author Amiri Baraka (pictured above)...

The recitation of the list from “*tambo*” to “*beau jack*” has a powerful effect with any even passing knowledge of the meaning and symbolism and the personalities involved. For example, the Aunt Jemima ads and the general media depiction over a hundred years of African American compliant, jolly, serving individuals.

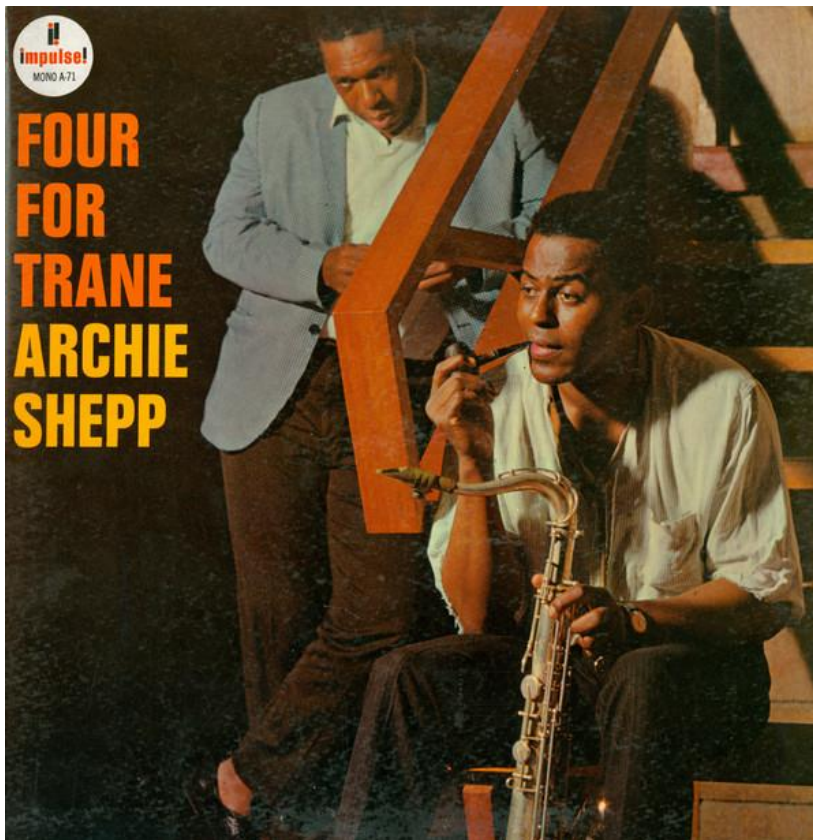
Along with *Strange Fruit* perhaps, this document *New York Art Quartet* sums up better than any other the American tragedy. The May 2020 public execution of George Floyd in South Minneapolis by three police officers that has resonated around the world as an instance of structural social systemic racism in the USA, is evidence that the ESP album *New York Art Quartet* is pulsingly, throbbingly true and relevant, as it was 66 years ago. The USA may have electric cars with Tesla shares at \$1,568 but its people cannot walk fearlessly down many of its streets. Is that progress? Nor can Australia feel superior with over 400 Aboriginal prisoners dying in custody without a single person being charged with any offence? Are we the lucky country? For whom?

I would place the work *New York Art Quartet* as serious and as beautiful an artistic achievement as *A Love Supreme* (Coltrane). As an historical document, a social document, as a mirror up to America, it is one of the greatest artistic statements ever made, whether that of film, or the visual arts. It is striking evidence of the power of jazz to artistically express the living human reality of life as it is lived, and as it should be lived, with the white trombone player and his black cohorts living the artistic experience and expressing their music in their collective love for each other. It is another striking instance that the greatest artistic achievements go beyond entertainment or purity of expression.



Shakespeare's contemporary relevance is the obvious literary example.

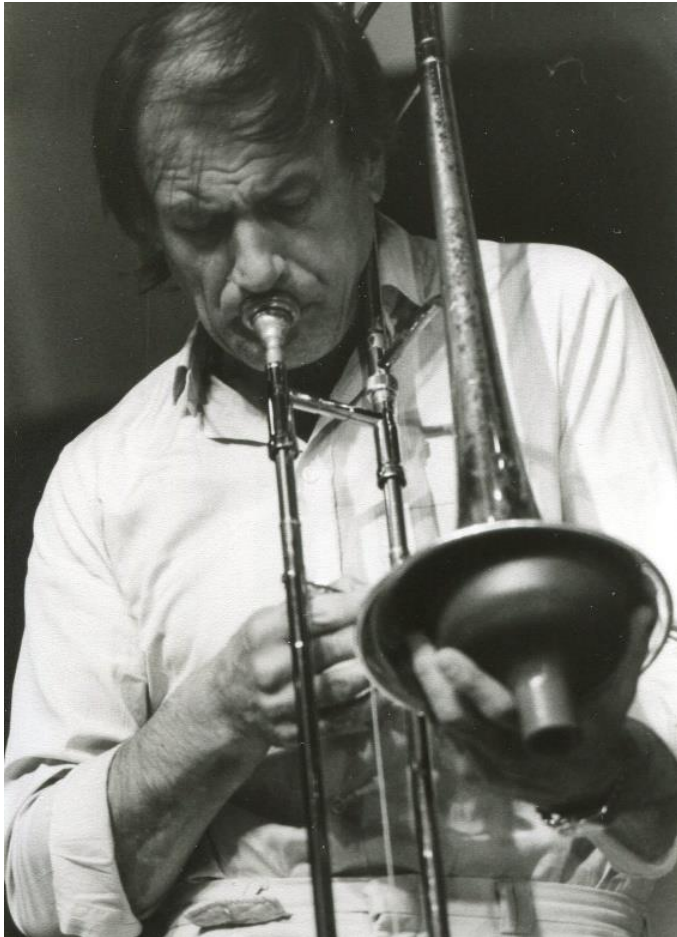
*Four For Trane* (Impulse, 1964), under the leadership of Archie Shepp, has Shepp, tenor; Alan Shorter, flugelhorn; John Tchicai, alto saxophone; Roswell Rudd, trombone; Reggie Workman, double bass; and Charles Moffett, drums. The opening track *Syeeda's Song Flute* (Coltrane) is the standout regarding Rudd's contribution. It begins with a brief declarative chorus, repeated, then a long passionate tenor solo backed by rhythm. The trombone enters into conversation with the tenor at the mid-point, backed by the brilliant Workman's bass and Moffett's drums. The trombone interjects from time to time. The trombone solos seem to adopt some of the tenor's dexterity while the tenor responds, seemingly to adopt some of the trombone's blurry tone. The trombone solo is perhaps one of the finest in the free jazz canon. It climaxes in a full-throated, confident, passionate cry. The whole album is a beautiful testament of that musical time and Rudd's contribution is vital to its success.



Rudd was off the scene from the 1960s for many years, for reasons unknown, but had a resurgence from the mid-1990s. He was a great artist, and a great human, nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Vocal Performance Male and Best Jazz Instrumental Album, *Monk's Dream* (1999) and Trombonist of the Year by the Jazz Journalists Association for most of the 2000s, and Best Trombonist in the 2010 *Down Beat* Critics' Poll.

Any mention of the trombone must include Albert Mangelsdorff who has produced some eminent albums featuring the trombone in a small setting, including the MPS compilation of his documents *The Wide Point* (1975), *Trilogue* (1977), and *Albert Live in Montreux* (1980) titled *Three Originals* (1993). He played solo

trombone at the 1972 Munich Olympics opening ceremony. *Dodging Bullets* (1992), a Black Saint album under the leadership of bassist John Lindberg, has Lindberg, Eric Watson on piano and Albert Mangelsdorff on trombone, and is as good a document as available showing the range of expression and inventiveness possible on the trombone in the hands of a master. Mangelsdorff employs multiphonics and a very wide expressive tonal range to enliven, colour, and propel an intriguing program of nine pieces including two of his own compositions. It's an outstanding example of accessible avant-garde music which swings.



*Germany's Albert Mangelsdorff: showing the range of expression and inventiveness possible on the trombone in the hands of a master...*

Other evidence of the trombone's continuing musical relevance should include Michael Dease, 37, who "articulates warp speed changes with precision and logic, illuminating the lines with a luminous, smeary tone that also entextures his slipping-and-sliding declamation on the ferociously original 5/4 blues *Solid Gold*".\* Originally he taught himself the slide positions but then attended the Jazz Arts programme at the Julliard School of Music. He's worked with Christian McBride, Charles Tolliver and Roy Hargrove.

I have some favourite albums but they do not include, for example, popular trombone records such as *Trombone For Two Kai Winding and J J Johnson*, (Columbia) 1955, as these are exercises in "tromboneology" and more notable for the

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\**Downbeat*, September, 2013, p 20.



*Michael Dease: he articulates warp speed changes with precision and logic...*

speed with which the players can change mutes, improvise up-tempo, or play tight harmony, than being notable for their artistic achievements. They are surely more interesting to students of the trombone than jazz aficionados. My favourite trombone documents aside from those mentioned above include David Murray's album *Octet plays Trane on Justin Time* (1999) with Craig Harris on trombone. Another is Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers, *Free For All*, on Blue Note (1964) with Curtis Fuller on trombone.

One of my favourite trombone live performances was Shannon Barnett, with Andrea Keller, piano; and Sam Anning, bass; at the Newsagency, Annandale on Sunday 8th March, 2020. A beautiful experience and a telling reminder, not just that the future of the jazz trombone is in great hands, but that jazz, like that great Blakey album, is *Indestructible!* (1964 again, with Curtis Fuller on trombone).



*Shannon Barnett, who performed with Andrea Keller (piano) & Sam Anning (bass) at the Newsagency, Annandale in Sydney on Sunday 8th March 2020... PHOTO CREDIT GERHARD RICHTER*