

SEVEN STEPS TO HEAVEN: THE GLORIOUS SEPTET IN JAZZ

by Ian Muldoon*

A septet in jazz is not a big band, or a small band, or a classic band as the trumpet, sax, piano, bass and drums is sometimes thought of as the *sine qua non* of bebop bands. Perhaps it's a "little big band". Sometimes it's called an "orchestra" as in the 1930s by Ellington *alumni*. A septet led by Benny Goodman which he called Benny Goodman's Sextet was in fact Goodman plus six other players. Henry Threadgill called his septet a sextet because he counted two drummers as a single percussion unit in his band Henry Threadgill's Sextet. Louis Prima called his septet a "gang".



Henry Threadgill (above) called his septet a sextet because he counted two drummers as a single percussion unit in his band...

**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.*

Whatever it is designated or labelled by its maker, a septet is a congregation of instruments that is amazingly rich in possibilities in the use of colours, rhythms, timbres, moods, complexity, effects, patterns and structures that provide a delicious and enticing sound experience for the music lover. It has the mobility of a small group with the orchestral resources of a big band. There are, for example, 16 different kinds of clarinet and when it comes to percussion, many, many more from a range of cultures. It is however, rare to have a band that is established and maintained as a septet over decades, as has Lloyd Swanton's catholics. In contrast, Henry Threadgill's band of the 1990s *Very, Very Circus* lasted for three albums. The recorded Okeh legacy of Louis Armstrong's *Hot Seven** is eleven three-minute tracks.

Usually septets seem to be established for a particular occasion such as William Parker's *Quartet* might be augmented from time to time, or Lionel Hampton's where he engaged the cream of the best big bands for his renowned *Victor Sessions*, or the 1962 Count Basie Impulse recording *Kansas City Seven* which was a sentimental return to one of Basie's most famous aggregations, or a temporary arrangement out of a bigger band.



Count Basie's Kansas City Seven pictured in New York in 1940...

One imagines Swanton would not have impulsively established a septet because that's who was in the room at the time, or it just sounded like "a good idea" but after quite a bit of musical and creative thought about what his artistic goals were bearing in mind that it has been established for decades.

**Editor's note: Louis Armstrong's Hot Seven other than Armstrong included Johnny Dodds (clarinet), Baby Dodds (drums), Pete Briggs (tuba), John Thomas (trombone), Lil Armstrong piano), Johnny St Cyr (banjo). They recorded in Chicago on May 10, 1927...*

In the beginning of jazz at the birth of the 20th century, there was this and that and the impermanence of the casual rent party, the juke joint, the honky tonk, all very entertaining and fun, and then God said: "Let there be Louis". And there was Louis. And then there came about the studio bands of The Hot Five and the Hot Seven and we can give thanks to Yahweh that documents exist that allow us to hear the magic of those bands, forever. And I say Yahweh because it was Louis' work as a delivery boy for the Jewish family called the Karnofskys who Louis said encouraged him in his music and helped him buy his first cornet. They also encouraged his singing. "I thrilled every night," Armstrong wrote, "singing with them when putting little David to sleep in Mama Karnofsky's arm, Russian lullaby. Every night I would look forward to joining in singing with Mama and Papa with the baby in her arms".*



Louis Armstrong's Hot Five in 1924... PHOTO COURTESY RIVERWALK JAZZ COLLECTION

Stanley Crouch in some purple prose describes Louis this way:

*Louis Armstrong is always above us, maintaining a celestial relationship of heat and illumination or moving the tides and sending down the snow, sustaining an aesthetic quality of photosynthesis and giving the ocean its colour as that wet mirror reflects through its waves the infinite meanings of the blues. Yes, he is the sky of modern American music at its most original. No matter where you turn, there he is. In the morning, the sky is there; when it storms, the sky is there; during a drought, the sky is there; when it floods, the sky is there.***

**Notes to Louis Armstrong: The Complete Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings Columbia Legacy, 2006, Sony, New York, p 59.*

***Ibid, p 54*

Louis Armstrong Hot Five consisted of Armstrong, trumpet; Kid Ory, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Lil Armstrong, piano; and Johnny St Cyr, banjo and as brilliant as the music is, the rhythm section has been described as “spare” and “awkward” (Phil Schaap). Nevertheless, Armstrong’s own power of swing was altogether unique.

... Armstrong’s sense of timing was at least as remarkable as his power of invention as a creator of solos. With his horn or with his voice, he could relax behind the beat, shadowing it, caressing it, playing hide-and-seek with it. He could play directly on the beat, or he could ride through it like a military bandsman with an urge to roll his hips and shoulders until the march became a dance. If the beat were a steady, rocking on the rails, Armstrong was a bird in flight, soaring, dancing in the breeze, now just ahead of the train below, now just behind it, now landing on one of the cars and riding steady for a while before taking flight again.

What does it mean to swing? It involves what Andre Hodeir called ‘a vital drive’ or ‘rhythmic fluidity without which the musical swing is markedly attenuated. This drive is a manifestation of personal magnetism.’ Swing is forward-tilting, dynamic process of coordinating with diverse but nonetheless connected fellow-workers/players and listeners/dancers alike.... Armstrong swung his solos and



Andre Hodeir: swing involves ‘a vital drive’ or ‘rhythmic fluidity’ ...

he swung the brass sections and indeed the bands in which he played. He swung half and *even whole notes*... Gunther Schuller makes the point that with his top-spinning sense of vibrato, Armstrong could make a *single note swing*." *

This explanation may be a corrective to Louis' response to the question: What is swing? Louis: If you have to ask you ain't got it!

And then the words, not of critics, or commentators, but of two masters of their chosen instruments who are giants of the music known as jazz: Teddy Wilson, one of the greatest swing pianists said: "Every musician, no matter how good, usually has something out of balance. But in Armstrong's everything was in balance. He had no weak point. I don't think there's been a musician since Armstrong who has had all the factors in balance, all the factors equally developed."



Teddy Wilson: in Armstrong, everything was in balance. He had no weak point...

**Notes to Louis Armstrong: The Complete Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings Columbia Legacy, 2006, Sony, New York, p 56/57.*



Jaki Byard: I felt Armstrong was the most natural man. Playing, talking, singing, he was so perfectly natural the tears came to my eyes...

And then Jaki Byard, on his first meeting with Armstrong: "As I watched him and talked with him, I felt he was the most *natural* man. Playing, talking, singing, he was so perfectly natural the tears came to my eyes."*

To the "sparse and awkward" rhythm of the Hot Five, Armstrong added Pete Briggs and Baby Dodds and recorded 11 tracks on 14th May 1927.

Weary Blues (A Matthews) 14/5/27 Louis Armstrong Hot Seven. The band comprises: Louis Armstrong, trumpet; John Thomas, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Lil Armstrong, piano; Johnny St Cyr, banjo; Pete Briggs, tuba, and Warren "Baby" Dodds, drums. The original Hot Five was augmented with the additional rhythm of Pete Briggs and Baby Dodds. Thomas replacing Kid Ory was the other change to the Hot Five. *Weary Blues* is one of the actual and finite eleven tracks made on the Okeh label recorded in Chicago between May 7-14, 1927. The mystique surrounding the Hot Seven relates in part to the consistent incredibly high quality of the issued takes.

Weary Blues is three minutes of unbridled joy opening with an up-tempo stomp overseen by a Dodds wailing clarinet. A banjo solo is backed by the thumping tuba and there follows a fine clarinet solo, a trombone solo, and an upper limit series of breaks on trumpet by the leader. It swings unrelentingly right to its close.

**Reading Jazz - A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism from 1919 to Now*, Ed by Robert Gottlieb, quoting *Louis Armstrong: An American Genius* by Dan Morgenstern; p 1, 041).

Blue Light 'Til Dawn (Title Track) 1993 Cassandra Wilson, vocal (voice as another horn) composer, leader; Gib Wharton, pedal steel guitar; Kenny Davis, bass; Charlie Burnham, violin and arrangement; Bill McLellan, drums; Jeff Haynes, percussion; and Cyro Baptista, percussion.



Cassandra Wilson: you have to know a song before you sing it, and I mean really know it...

In 1993 Cassandra Wilson said: “You have to know a song before you sing it, and I mean *really* know it: what the words mean, what the chords do, who has sung it before and what they’ve done with it. Only when you get all that together are you ready to sing even the simplest one.”

On the album, *Blue Light 'Til Dawn*, Wilson interprets a dozen songs, three of them from her own hand, including the title song. With an easy tempo and solid beat backing her vocal, it’s a simple arrangement with the guitar and violin providing a simple figure and responding to the vocal as it unfolds. Wilson’s voice (horn) she uses to great expressive effect.

The Way Ahead (Album) 1968 *New Africa* (Grachan Moncur III) Archie Shepp, leader, tenor saxophone; Jimmy Owens, trumpet; Grachan Moncur III, trombone; Charles Davis, baritone saxophone; Dave Burrell, piano; Walter Booker, bass; and Beaver Harris, drums.

Shepp played alto sax in dance bands but switched to tenor. He has a degree in dramatic literature. He is a published playwright. His early work on tenor was fiery and rage filled, then fatback/swing-based R&B then bebop, ballads and blues in the 1980s. Archie Shepp has always been a favourite of mine, especially his deep toned, wild and expressive tenor with its big sound. He has said: “Coming from

where I do, and with the background I have, there were times when I thought I should be working as a lawyer, expressing social engagement in some more direct and practical way, but you see the fallacy of that: the idea that one is practical and useful, and the other not?" In the music of *New Africa* the throbbing, insistent vamp throughout, is driven by pianist Dave Burrell whilst drummer Beaver Harris manages to sound like a bevy of drummers not least with the cymbals. The melody is strong and the solos by Shepp, Davis and Moncur replied to by the chorus, are fine. Occasional shouts by band members add to the atmosphere of the 12-minute piece.



Archie Shepp: a deep toned, wild and expressive tenor with a big sound...

Glitter Wolf (Album) 2019 *Malaga* (Alison Miller). The group Boom Tic Boom is: Alison Miller, leader, arranger, drums, vibraphone, celeste; Myra Melford, piano, harmonium; Jenny Scheinman; violin; Kirk Knuffke, cornet; Ben Goldberg, clarinet and contra alto clarinet; Todd Sickafoose, bass; and John Hatfield, percussion.



Drummer Alison Miller: leading the group Boom Tic Boom...

The mid-tempo piece *Malaga* begins with the piano of Melford repetitious phrasing, plucking of violin and the light busy drumming of the leader. The tone is light and delicate with a melodic chorus and nice harmony. Melford gives a lovely melodic solo managing a bell-like tone, expressive and uplifting in feeling. There is a fine bass solo by Sickafoose overseen by violin plucking. The chorus enters backed by an easy rhythm and the violin plucked notes end the (happy) piece.

Drawn Inward (Album) 1999 *Writing on Ice* (Wachsman) Electro-Acoustic Ensemble is led by Evan Parker, on soprano and tenor saxophones, khene (bamboo mouth organ with pipes - Vietnam); with Philipp Wachsmann, violin, viola, live electronics, sound processing; Barry Guy, double bass; Paul Lytton, percussion, live electronics; Lawrence Casserley, live electronics, sound processing; Walter Prati; live electronics, sound processing; and Marco Vecchi, live electronics, and sound processing.

In brief comments accompanying the album which he titles *Sound and Improvisation*, Simon Emmerson notes: "We are different each time we hear these identical bits and bytes, more experienced, more critical, perhaps even more appreciating. What we can do with repeated listenings is *get inside the sounds*, and more than anything else that is what this music demands - to be *Drawn*

Inward. Maybe the live performance gives us more of the feeling of the social dynamic (though not always) but it can be difficult to follow, on a first hearing, work so much articulated through *sonority* as is much of this music.” There is a tapestry of sounds, plucks, clicks, wind sounds, as well as silence, and with the violin, on this piece by Wachsmann, dominating with dramatic phrases and interjections throughout. It is impressionistic perhaps of the scraping, silence, and crackling of ice overseen by sounds of wind ebbing and flowing.



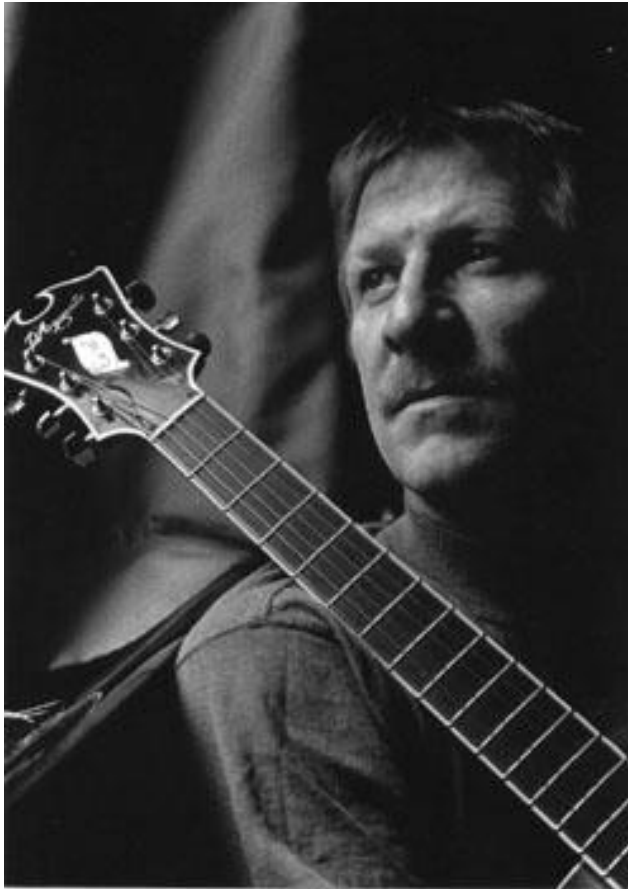
Evan Parker, on soprano and tenor saxophones, khene (bamboo mouth organ with pipes - Vietnam)...

Spectral Domains (Album) 1998 Sound Action

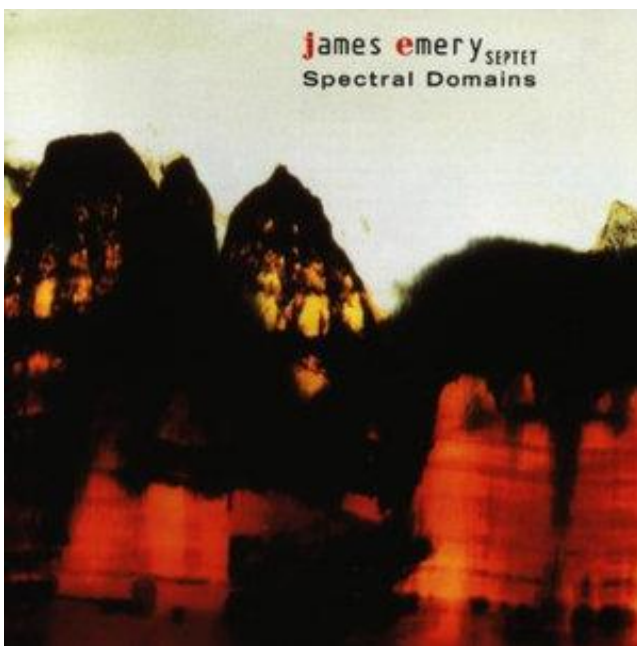
Seven (Emery) Emery Septet (conducted by Mark Helias), James Emery, guitar; Marty Ehrlich, alto sax, flute, soprano sax; Chris Speed, clarinet, tenor sax; Mark Feldman, violin; Michael Formanek, bass; Gerry Hemingway, drums and Kevin Norton, vibes, marimba, tympani, small percussion.

Emery started playing organ at six, switched to guitar at ten, and at age 11 started playing with a violinist from George Szell’s Cleveland Orchestra, Ann Stanley. Emery remarks: “Some harmony, theory, the way rhythm works. She gave me a thorough

education so when I encountered Charlie Parker at 17 I was able to break it down into its component parts, define it for myself musically, theoretically, and transfer that to the guitar. I did the same thing to the music of Ornette, Coltrane, Braxton and the AACM. Ornette liberated the music from the bar line.”



Guitarist James Emery: he encountered Charlie Parker at 17... PHOTO CREDIT SSIRUS PAKZAD. The Spectral Domains album cover is below...



The track *Sound Action Seven* is a pastiche of sounds made up from the 13 instruments employed by the septet. It is a case of listening and responding where phrases, smatterings and small gestures prevail. The bass player may at one moment pluck, then strum then bow his instrument. The tenor of Chris Speed at one point explores the sound of the instrument. A guitar may speak, the arco bass responds, then the violin answers in turn. The strings seem to prevail in this performance.

Spirit of Nuff...Nuff (Album) 1991 *Unrealistic Love* (Threadgill) Very Very Circus band with Henry Threadgill, alto saxophone, flute; Curtis Fowlkes, trombone or French horn; Brandon Ross, electric guitar; Masujaa, electric guitar; Marcus Rojas, tuba; Edwin Rodriguez, tuba; and Gene Lake, drums.



Very Very Circus consisted of two tubas, two electric guitars, a trombone or French horn, and drums. With this group he explored more complex and highly structured forms of composition, augmenting the group with Latin percussion, French horn, violin, accordion, vocalists, and exotic instruments.



Henry Threadgill: he emerged from Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM)...

Threadgill is a composer who emerged from Chicago's Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). The aggregation on *Unrealistic Love* does work against orchestral richness with two tubas and two guitars. The former reflect perhaps Threadgill's bias to march tempos and there is hints of that throughout this piece. The bottom end is emphasised and the tone is dark. There is a soaring guitar solo over mournful tubas and trombones and much cymbal work and drumming from Gene Lake. There is drama and intelligence but the music is intriguing rather than compelling and moving.

Gondola (Album) 2006 *Meniscus* (Lloyd Swanton). The catholics band with: Lloyd Swanton, leader, acoustic bass; Sandy Evans, soprano, tenor saxophone; James Greening, trombone, pocket trumpet; Fabian Hevia, percussion; Jonathan Pease, electric guitar; Bruce Reid, national steel guitar, dobro, lap steel guitar, whistling; and Hamish Stuart, drums, hand whistling.



In 1963 John Coltrane was interviewed for a radio programme during a tour in Stockholm with his classic quartet. One of the standard questions was about the future, and Coltrane responded that his goal was to improve his sound, the basic sound he made on the tenor and soprano saxophones, to make it more beautiful. One of the most beautiful alto saxophone sounds on record is Paul Desmond, another is Johnny Hodges. Ben Webster on tenor is perhaps unmatched for the rich beauty of his tone. Art Farmer, Tom Harrell, Phil Slater, Miles Davis are examples of modern

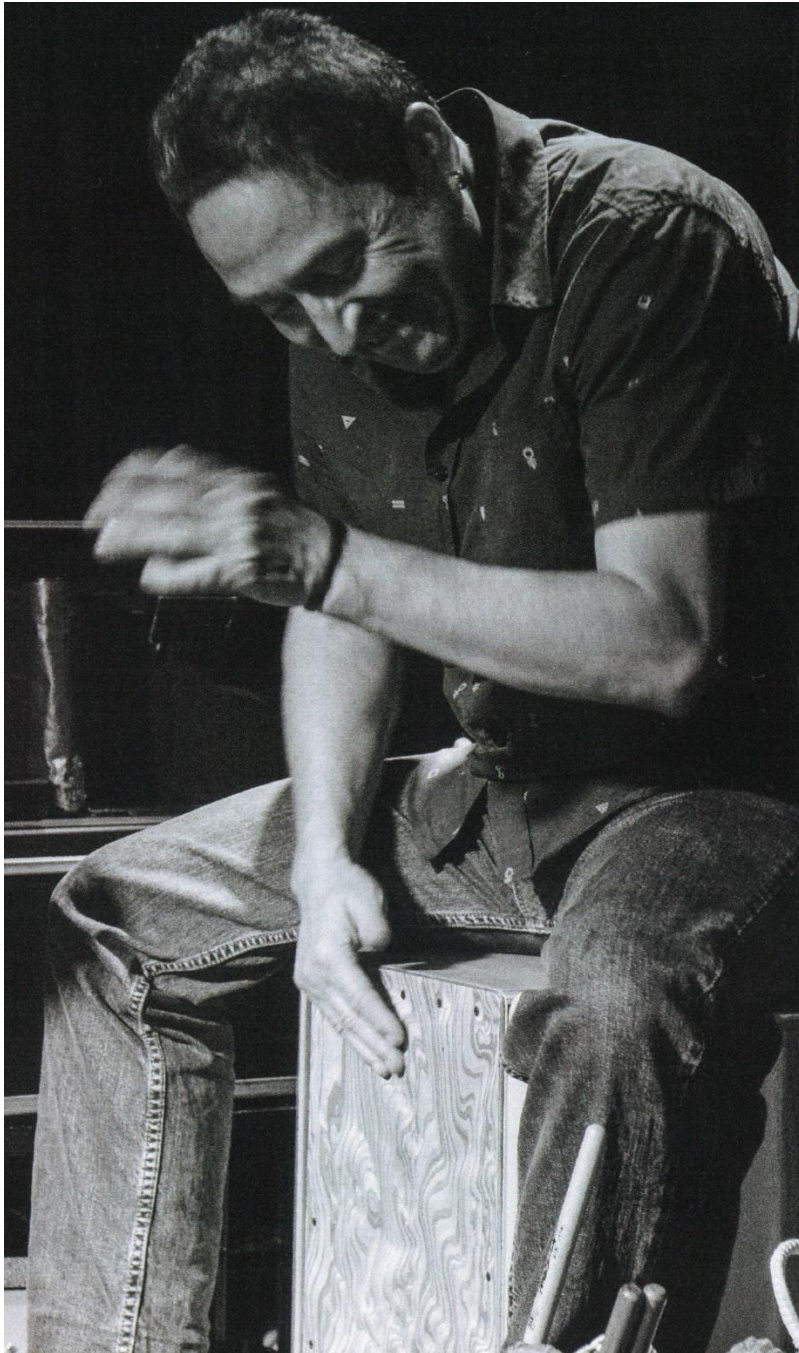
trumpet sounds of beauty as is Tomasz Stanko, whilst looming over all is Louis Armstrong. On clarinet, Artie Shaw strove to get as beautiful a sound as he could.



One of the most beautiful alto saxophone sounds on record is Paul Desmond (above)... PHOTO CREDIT SVEND RASMUSSEN, another is Johnny Hodges (below)... HODGES PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST



Of the septets considered in this essay, and the playing of their representative works, Swanton's is perhaps unmatched for its beauty. Some of the elements that contribute to that beauty include the composition, the unhurried spaciousness of the work - almost a hushed anticipation of the next note from the soloists - the delicate, latticework of percussion especially the handiwork of Fabian Hevia, the exquisite emotional power of the stunning soprano saxophone solo by Evans, perfectly structured, and ringing with a beautiful tone, and then the exuberant, swaggering, bubbling response to it by Greening. All this bedded by Swanton's bass and perfectly honed interjections of atmospheric guitar sounds from Pease. Its downright beauty is an aural joy - improvisation and rhythm prevailing at their best.

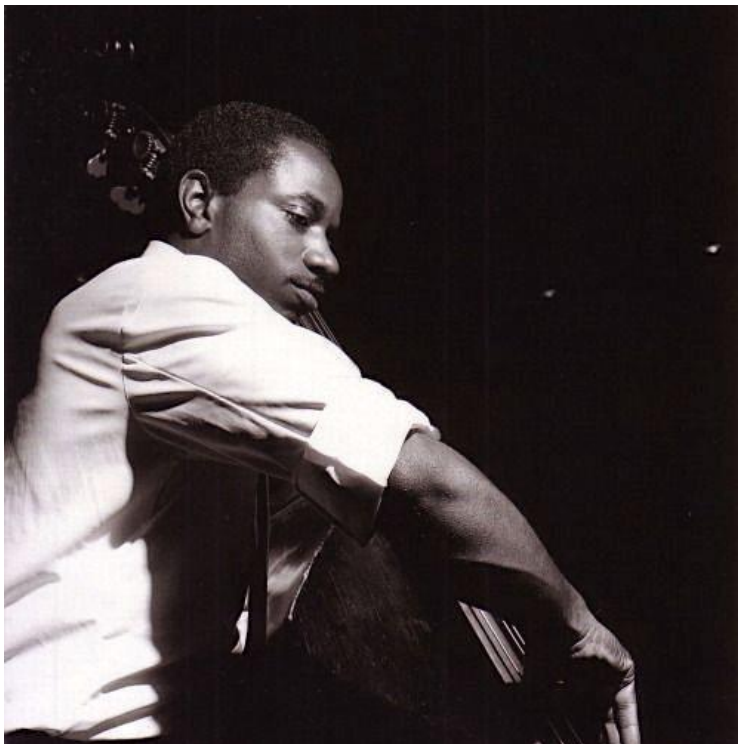


Delicate, latticework of percussion by Fabian Hevia (above)... PHOTO CREDIT TOMAS POKORNY



The exquisite emotional power of the stunning soprano saxophone solo by Sandy Evans (above left) perfectly structured, and ringing with a beautiful tone, and then the exuberant, swaggering, bubbling response to it by James Greening (above right)... PHOTO COURTESY JUDY BAILEY

Cerebral Caverns (Album) 1995 Half of My Soul (Tristan's Love Theme) (Workman): Reggie Workman Septet is Workman, leader, bass; Sam Rivers, flute; Julian Priester, trombone; Geri Allen, piano; Elizabeth Panzer, harp; Al Foster, drums; and Tapan Modak, tablas.



Reggie Workman (above) was 58 years old when Cerebral Caverns was recorded... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

By any reckoning this is a star studded group of modern jazz musicians. Workman (Coltrane alumni) was 58 years old at the time of this recording. The eight compositions of the album are by the leader and bassist. *Half of my Soul* is the only septet piece, a ballad, featuring two solos by Sam Rivers on flute. It opens with a spacious and elegant piano solo by Geri Allen and after some cascading runs, the flute, backed by bass enters. The pace changes when Priester's lively trombone enters and gifts us with a free flowing solo, backed by Foster's swinging rhythm. Rivers returns with another solo to close the piece.

Light Cottage Draped in a Curtain of Blues (Album) 2009 William Parker Septet, New York City, Vision Festival XIV, Orensanz Center, June 15, 2009. *Gilmore's Hat* (Parker) with William Parker, leader, bass; Hamid Drake, drums; Rob Brown, alto sax; Lewis Barnes, Trumpet; Billy Bang, violin; Bobby Bradford, cornet; and James Spaulding, alto sax.


WILLIAM PARKER SEPTET

WILLIAM PARKER BASS
HAMID DRAKE DRUMS
ROB BROWN ALTO SAX
LEWIS BARNES TRUMPET
BILLY BANG VIOLIN
BOBBY BRADFORD CORNET
JAMES SPAULDING ALTO SAX

***LIGHT COTTAGE DRAPED
IN A CURTAIN OF BLUES***

**NEW YORK CITY, VISION FESTIVAL XIV
ORENSANZ CENTER, JUNE 15, 2009**

ALBUM THREE OF THE
WOOD FLUTE SONGS
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Parker has said: "When I first played bass, I could see each string as a beam of light and the bow as a kind of prism, and each string broke up into different colour bands, different harmonies. It was very spiritual and very beautiful." And he also remarked about the state of jazz in 1999: "You know why jazz and improvised music are marginalised? Why great musicians are playing to a handful of people in a cellar still? Because we lost the support of the community. We lost any sense that this music belongs to a community. We can't blame anyone else. We just have to try to get it back."



Bassist William Parker: we lost the support of the community. We lost any sense that this music belongs to a community. We can't blame anyone else...

Parker's idea for the concert at Vision Festival 2009 was to invite three musicians to augment his working quartet. He believes master musicians can play together without any rehearsal. Bang, Bradford, and Spaulding agreed to play and nothing was said until after the concert. Parker comments: "Africa is always there and maybe some kind of Blue Mountain music and some reverse Reggae. Flexibility of time and rhythm changing all the time with no particular pattern don't know why it does what it does. Listen and dance to the music within. Each voice is different we don't rehearse the music we are improvisers our entire life is a rehearsal for heaven." (Notes to 8CD AUMFIDELITY 2013 Vision Suite 2009 CD5). The working quartet would lay down a framework and the guests would find a way in.

The song *Gilmore's Hat* refers to John Gilmore, saxophonist and occasional bass clarinet player for many years with Sun Ra, who was always seen in performance wearing some kind of hat, much like Thelonious Monk was famous for doing. Ra's orchestra however was much more colourful and ambitious than

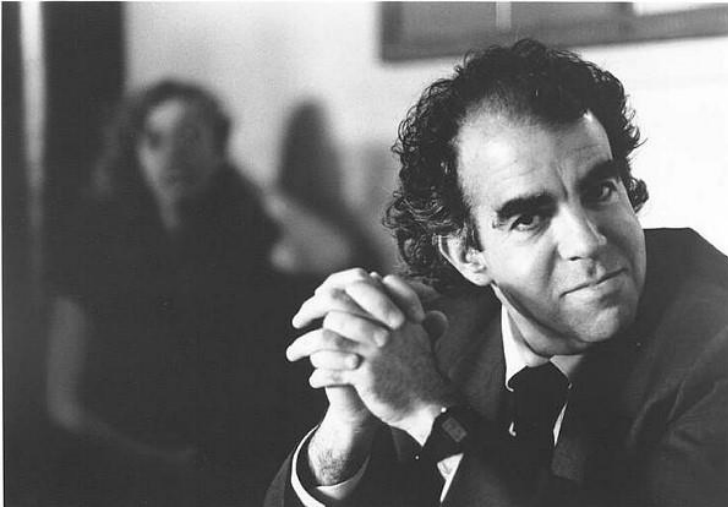
Monk's. The piece opens with a swaggering tempo set by Parker and Drake's emphatic percussion work. Bobby Bradford does a long solo, underpinned by an easy rhythm. During the Dolphy tinged sax solo that follows, there is a tempo change, and "talking" by the sax sometimes which sometimes goes as deep as a tenor, with the chorus responding like Yeah, Yeah! The piece builds to an enthusiastic climax where all join in. It has a fun-loving Ra feel about it.



John Gilmore, saxophonist and occasional bass clarinet player for many years with Sun Ra, who was always seen in performance wearing some kind of hat...

Nighttown (Album) 1992 Don Grolnick Septet *The Cost of Living* (Grolnick) Don Grolnick, piano, arrangements; Randy Brecker, trumpet; Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone; Marty Ehrlich, bass clarinet; Steve Turre, trombone; Dave Holland, bass; and Bill Stewart, drums.

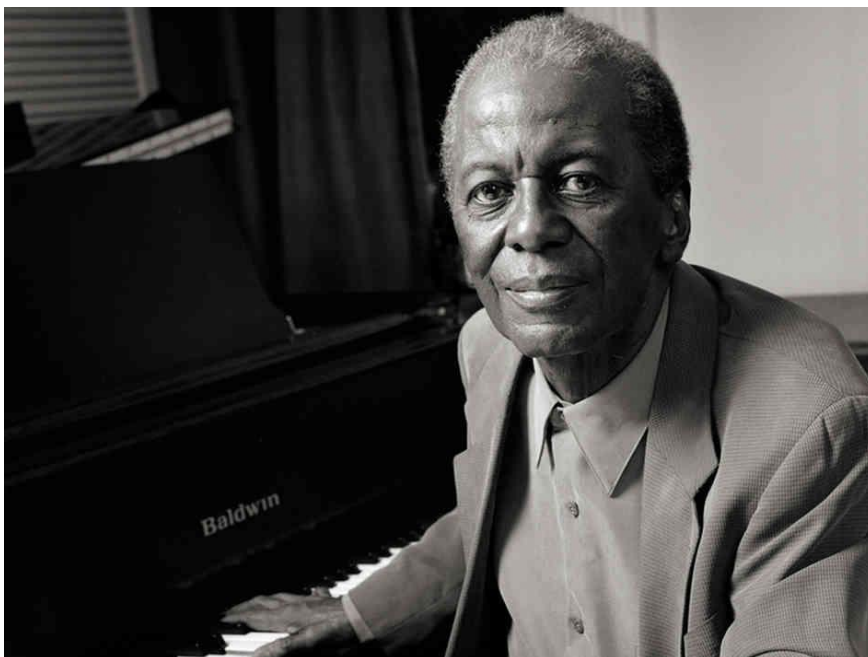
After university studies Grolnick formed the jazz-rock band Fire & Ice with Ken Melville on guitar and Stuart Schulman on bass guitar. He worked with, *inter alia*, Bette Midler, Mark Murphy, Roberta Flack, Boz Scaggs, Brecker Brothers, James Taylor, John Scofield, Linda Rondstadt, and Manhattan Transfer. Four years after *Nighttown* he was dead at 48. His widow, Jeanne O'Connor says: "Don used to talk about how he liked the simultaneous horn-playing in traditional Dixieland music, and he tried to bring that feel to the modern jazz idiom. 'One thing I love about Mingus's parts for horns,' he once said, 'is the way they sound improvised, even though they're written.' At the *Nighttown* session he encouraged the players to 'mess around' with the parts - how they got from one note to another was up to them."



American pianist Don Grolnick: dead at 48...PHOTO CREDIT DARRYL PITT

As opposed to say, the title track *Nighttown* which is a series of solos bookended by the theme voiced by the horns, *The Cost of Living* is a more intricate arrangement where the chorus - something like a Greek dramatic chorus in theatre - responds throughout to the soloists: piano and bass clarinet. Ehrlich manages quite a range of expression even at the conclusion a whinnying climax to his solo. The piece is meditative in tone exemplified by Grolnick's fine piano solo towards the conclusion of the piece.

Compulsion (Album) 1965 Andrew Hill Septet *Compulsion* (Hill): Freddie Hubbard, trumpet; John Gilmore, tenor sax; Andrew Hill, piano, leader, arranger; Cecil McBee, bass; Joe Chambers, drums; Nadi Qamar, African drums, percussion; and Renaud Simmons, ega, percussion.



Pianist, leader & arranger Andrew Hill: listen to what is called 'avant grade' and you can hear the basic roots of jazz...

Nadi Qamar was christened Spaulding Givens but changed his name and his instrument. He played with Charles Mingus as a pianist. In the 1960s he worked with various African musical and dance troupes as a percussionist. In the event, he lectured on African percussion, and built his own instruments. *Compulsion* is interesting for a number of reasons: Freddie Hubbard gives one of his more fierce, piercing, fiery solos with long held notes over a quintet of percussion and rhythm (which includes Andrew Hill's piano), Gilmore contributes some bass clarinet in duet with the trumpet, and also provides a solid tenor solo. The tone of the piece is set at the beginning with some ominous drumming from Joe Chambers and dark phrases from Hill. At the climax Hill stabs away repeatedly at the same high note, until the piece fades to silence.



Freddie Hubbard: he gives one of his more fierce, piercing, fiery solos... PHOTO COURTESY ABC JAZZ

Hill commented: "Listen to what is called 'avant grade' and you can hear African kinds of rhythms. You can hear field cries. You can hear the basic roots of jazz. And that is one of the healthy elements in the move forward. You can best extend a heritage by understanding its past thoroughly. Another healthy element in what's happening now is that we're engaged in the first real musical breakthrough since the bebop period. Although some writers tend to categorise all avant-garde players as being part of the same style, the fact is that there are so many *individual* styles instead of everybody trying to mimic Charlie Parker and playing fast series of eighth notes and flatted notes. I think that this rise in individuality is also linked to a growing awareness among the young players of how deep and diversified our musical roots actually are... I had a compulsion to construct an album expressing the legacy of the Negro tradition. For one thing, you'll notice I try to use the piano in this set more as a percussive than as a lyrical instrument." (Notes to *The Complete Blue Note Andrew Hill Sessions 1963-1966*, Mosaic, 1995, Michael Cuscuna, p 9)

2:19 *Blues* (78 rpm) 27/5/40 (*Mamie Desdoume*) Louis Armstrong and His Orchestra: Louis Armstrong, trumpet, vocal; Claude Jones, trombone; Sidney Bechet, clarinet, alto saxophone, Louis Russell, piano, Bernard Addison, guitar; Wellman Braud, bass; and Zutty Singleton, drums.

This is a perfect example of Armstrong's subservience to the music as opposed to bravura displays of instrumental power. The opening chorus reveals Bechet's clarinet responding to the trumpet, and following Armstrong's superb vocal, Bechet's soprano sax solo backed by a foundation of strong rhythm, is a highlight of the piece. Louis gives a subdued instrumental contribution until the coda where his trumpet soars.

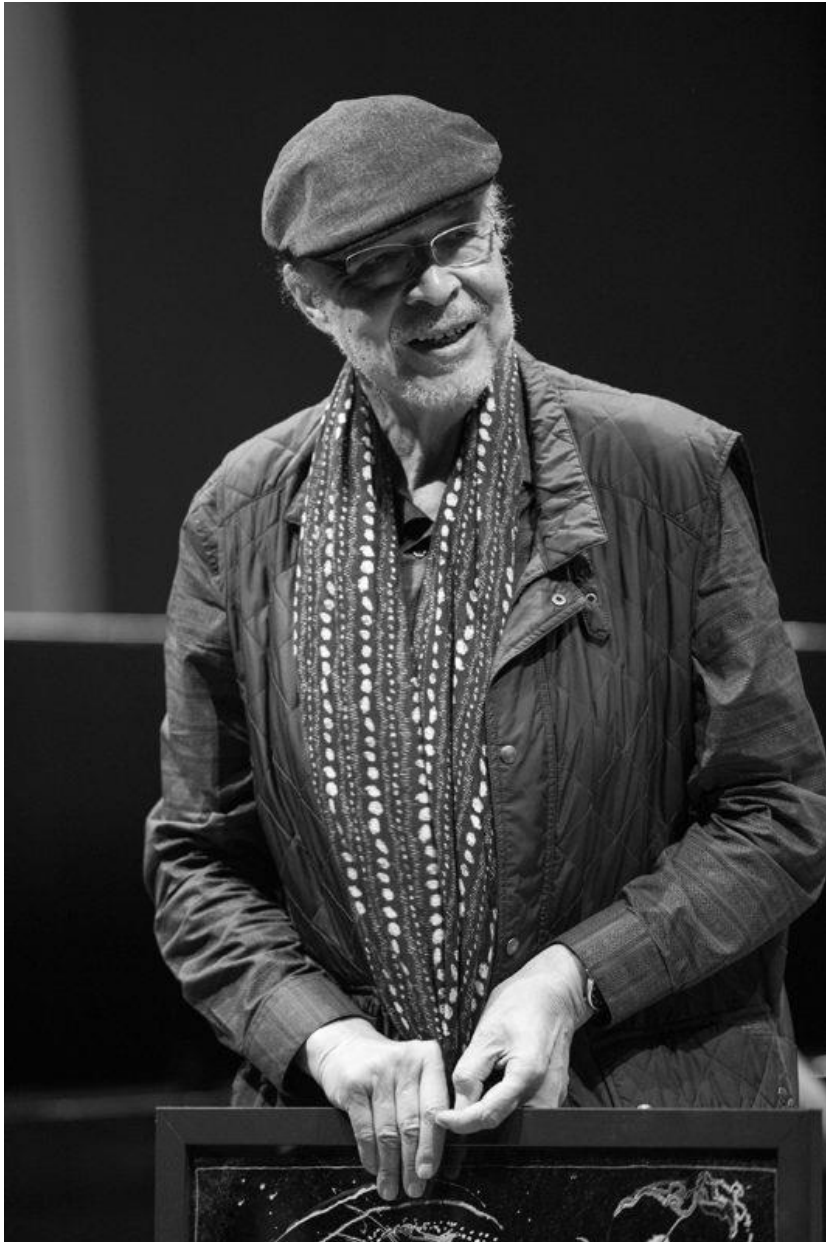


Sidney Bechet: his soprano sax solo backed by a foundation of strong rhythm, is a highlight of the piece....

Echo (Album) 1969 Dave Burrell, *Echo* (Burrell): Dave Burrell Septet: Dave Burrell, piano; Clifford Thornton, cornet; Granchan Moncur III, trombone; Arthur Jones, alto saxophone; Archie Shepp, tenor saxophone; Alan Silva, bass; and Sunny Murray, drums. Paris, 13/8/69.

Recorded in the dying years of the Vietnam war following the assassination of Martin Luther King and the election of the lying President Nixon, black outrage was front and centre in the USA and that *Echo* was recorded in Paris should be no surprise. Dave Burrell was born in Connecticut but studied music at the University of

Hawaii before transferring to Berklee College of Music in Boston in 1961. Both of his parents sang and his mother was once invited to join the Delta Rhythm Boys. He had a rock and roll band in his teens. His pianism traverses the whole history of jazz pianism and in his solos dixieland, bebop, boogie and free have no primacy.



African American pianist Dave Burrell: his pianism traverses the whole history of jazz pianism and in his solos dixieland, bebop, boogie and free have no primacy...

With his septet, *Echo* is an unrelentingly 20 minutes of free jazz noteworthy for his pounding dark toned piano playing cutting through the churning mass of sound created by his colleagues. If your interest is a beginning middle and end, or melody, or harmony, or an identifiable rhythm, look elsewhere. The notes to the piece concluded that he later became more contemplative and questingly ecstatic and that *Echo* is a one off. Even so, it is a very interesting reflection of its time when the whole world did seem to be teetering off balance.

Pyramid (78 rpm) 22/6/38 (Gordon-Ellington-Tizol) Johnny Hodges and His Orchestra: Cootie Williams, trumpet; Lawrence Brown, trombone; Johnny Hodges, soprano sax, alto sax; Harry Carney, baritone sax; Duke Ellington, piano; Billy Taylor, bass; and Sonny Greer, drums. *Pyramid* opens and closes with Ellington's piano, and features Johnny Hodges on alto. His first solo segues in perfect harmony into one by Cootie Williams and overall the work is distinguished by a strong melody and firm rhythmic base.



Pyramid opens and closes with piano from Duke Ellington (above left), and features Johnny Hodges (above right) on alto: this shot was taken at the BBC in London in 1964...

Alice Blue Gown (78 rpm) 28/2/36 (J McCarthy – H Tierney) Louis Prima and His New Orleans Gang: Louis Prima, trumpet and vocal; Pee Wee Russell, clarinet; Joe Catalyne, tenor saxophone; Frank Pinero, piano; Garry McAdams, guitar; Jack Ryan, bass; and George Pemberty, drums.

The song from the 1919 Broadway musical *Irene*, was inspired by Alice Roosevelt Longworth's signature gown. She was the eldest child of US President Theodore Roosevelt. It was first recorded in 1920. There are versions by Duke Ellington,

Frank Sinatra, and Chet Atkins. The highlights of Prima's version is a familiar quirky and wild solo by Pee Wee Russell, and two fine trumpet solos from Prima, the second using a felt cap over the bell of his horn to get a softer sound.



Louis Prima: two fine trumpet solos from him, the second using a felt cap mute...

Riverboat Shuffle 24/11/53 (D Voynow-H Carmichael-I Mills-M Parish) Eddie Condon's All Stars: Wild Bill Davison, cornet; Edmond Hall, clarinet; Gene Schroeder, piano; Eddie Condon, guitar; Walter Page, bass; and Cliff Leeman, drums.

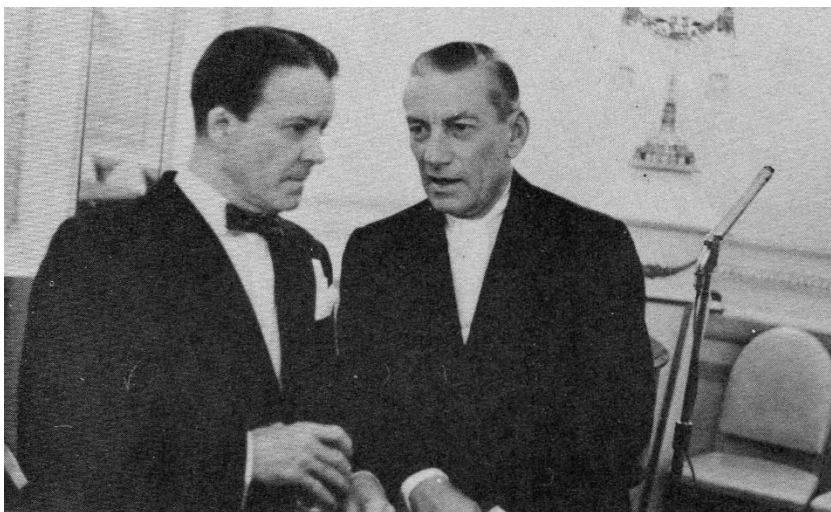
Eddie Condon may be somewhat ill considered among some *cognoscenti* but if you think about the musicians who chose to submit themselves to his leadership and organisation, that alone might give pause. Edmond Hall, Pee Wee Russell, Louis Armstrong, Walter Page, Fats Waller, Bud Freeman and George Wettling are some. At the time of his *All Stars* date above, Davison had been in his band for over 12 years; Schroeder was the pianist at Condon's club for 17 years; and Cutshall for 19 years.



Three of Eddie Condon's confreres, L-R, Pee Wee Russell, George Wettling & Max Kaminsky... PHOTO COURTESY EDDIE CONDON'S SCRAPBOOK OF JAZZ

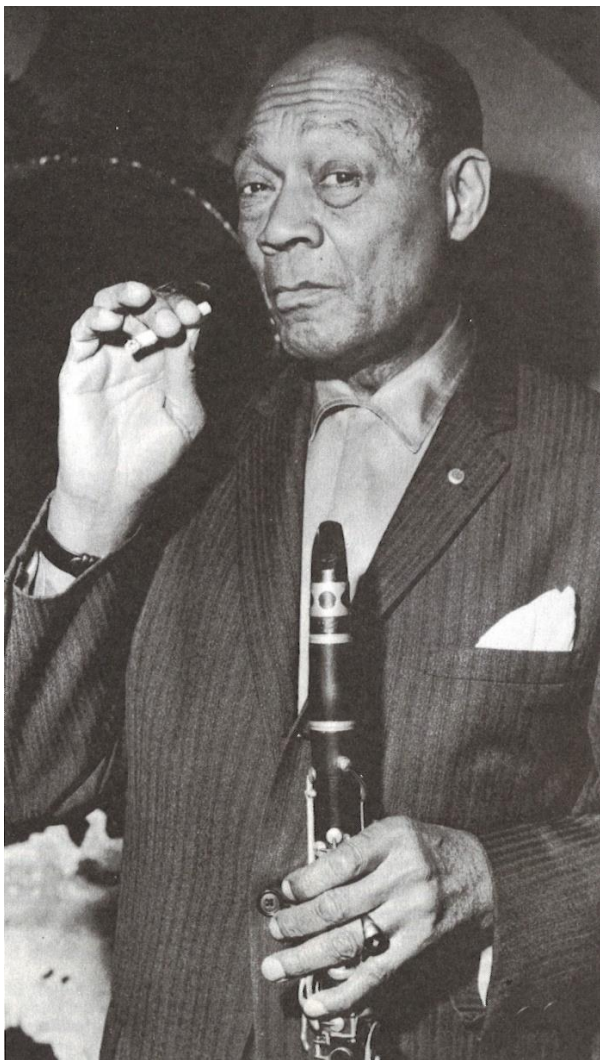
Edmond Hall paired with Wild Bill Davison is a potent combustible mix. Walter Page is of the Count Basie rhythm section *alumni*. Cliff Leeman swing drummer *extraordinaire* was a former employee of Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey, Charlie Barnet, Woody Herman, and Glenn Miller. Condon himself was part of the rhythm section and blended in - he was strong, and could build to a climax, but you may not hear him. In this septet, the piano/bass/guitar/drums was a powerhouse brilliant swinging rhythm section perhaps without parallel in the early 1950s in this genre.

A distinguishing feature of *Riverboat Shuffle* (and Condon's music generally) is its *joie de vivre*, its vitality, its sheer exuberance. It may have something to do with the long association between the musicians, or a reaction to the bebop revolution and Charlie Parker's dominance at the time, or it might be just the love of the music by the musicians.



Eddie Condon (left) with the composer of Riverboat Shuffle Hoagy Carmichael... PHOTO COURTESY EDDIE CONDON'S SCRAPBOOK OF JAZZ

But a large part of the success of the music is Condon's personal drive and leadership and enthusiasm. Another figure renowned for this is Bob Wills (of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys) whose similar personal involvement with his music - calling out, whooping, urging his players on - managed to make "Western Swing" magic. At the opening to *Riverboat Shuffle*, Condon calls a halt to the start (*Hold it George!* probably addressed to George Avakian) and quickly runs over the arrangement: talking the piece in and up! The recording ends with a voice explaining *That's it*.



Edmond Hall: stunning solos by him on clarinet with his vibrato squeezing out delight-filled sounds... PHOTO COURTESY ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ

Riverboat Shuffle is over four minutes of outstanding music with stunning solos by Edmond Hall on clarinet with his vibrato squeezing out the delight-filled sounds, then the soaring, punchy growls of the cornet of Davison and a fine muted trombone solo by Cutshall. The chorus by the horns and the swing of the rhythm section makes this a music lover's delight and puts into stark relief the chunky sounds of revivalist "Dixieland" that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s. Like him or not Condon was a giant and influential member of the music world who was colour blind at a time, pace 1920s, when most were not - it was the music that mattered. to Condon more than anything else.

Twelfth Street Rag (78 rpm) 13/6/39 (E Bowman, A Razaf) Lionel Hampton's All Stars, arranged by Fred Norman: Rex Stewart, cornet; Lawrence Brown, trombone; Harry Carney, baritone sax; Lionel Hampton, vibraphone, vocal; Clyde Hart, piano; Billy Taylor, bass; Sonny Greer, drums. This tune was recorded a few months before this recording by Count Basie. Hampton was a drummer first until Louis Armstrong suggested he try vibes. Hampton remarked: "Louis asked me if I'd tried out on a vibraphone. I picked up the mallets and picked out his solo on *Cornet Chop Suey*. That was how we came to do *Memories of You*." On *Twelfth Street Rag* Hampton uses his one/two finger approach on piano to make it a fun piece if not a novelty. Trombone and baritone sax solos provide colour.



Lionel Hampton: he was a drummer first until Louis Armstrong suggested he try vibes... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

Dickie's Dream (78 rpm) 5/9/39 (L Young, Count Basie), Count Basie Band: Buck Clayton, trumpet, Dicky Wells, trombone; Lester Young, tenor sax; Count Basie, piano; Freddie Green, guitar; and Jo Jones, drums.

This septet, with Lester Young, did one recording session only on 5/9/39. The session is considered a classic. *Dickie's Dream* written by Young was originally called *Conversation Piece*. "At the root of its conception is an intriguing chord known as a minor sixth. This is the chord that Thelonious Monk turned Dizzy Gillespie on to and which partly inspired him to compose *A Night In Tunisia*."* The mid tempo piece is basically a jam and features a fine solo by Basie.



Lester Young (left, tenor sax) with Count Basie at the piano, composers of Dickie's Dream... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

*Loren Schoenberg *Notes to Classic Columbia, Okeh and Vocalion Lester Young With Count Basie 1936-1940* p 14 Mosaic Records 2008).

For Sure! (Album) 1979 Woody Shaw *Joshua* (Shaw): Woody Shaw Septet; Shaw, trumpet, flugelhorn; Gary Bartz, alto sax; Carter Jefferson, soprano sax, tenor sax; Curtis Fuller, trombone; Larry Willis, piano; Stafford James, bass; and Victor Lewis, drums.

This number was originally recorded by Shaw in 1972 as *Love for the One You Can't Have*. It is an unusual 42-bar form. Shaw rarely played AABA. It is an uptempo number by Shaw's usual quintet augmented by Bartz and Fuller. Shaw solos on trumpet with a soaring full-bodied tone, segueing into an alto sax solo, and an intriguing and interesting soprano sax solo by Jefferson. It features a fine bass solo by James and lively exchanges towards the close between trumpet, alto and soprano. The rhythm section just grooves so well!



Woody Shaw: at 13 he heard Clifford Brown and wanted to sound like him.... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ MAGAZINE

Shaw began on bugle but switched to trumpet at 11 years of age. At 13 he heard Clifford Brown and wanted to sound like him. In the late 1970s major record labels were not producing pure jazz but Shaw scored a contract with CBS thanks to Bruce Lundvall. He was legally blind, and had a temper, but at the time of *Joshua*, things were fine with newborn son Woody Louis Armstrong Shaw on hand with wife/manager Maxine Gregg. He died in an accident on 10/5/1989 aged 44.

This brief overview of the septet in jazz (improvised) music does reveal a wide range of approaches, and an extraordinary melange of sounds from the swinging to the free, from the impressionistic to the structured. A wonder world of music indeed.