

mon. Murray offers more or less conventional material played by a homogenous, if apparently random, group. There are too many players for six tracks, the quality of players as individuals and as a group is not notable, and certain conventions of the Free Jazz movement are simplistically, perhaps ritualistically, observed, making this the least worthy of the three LPs Murray has directed.

It is possible that this review is half a lie—but nobody will ever know for sure, because the LP is so foully recorded as to be unlistenable. How did they fit all those people into that gopher hole? *Angels* has everyone improvising at once for several minutes; *Hilarious* and *Now* have solos, two New York-hip saxes, a fluent trumpeter, and inaudible others; *Angel Son* is pretentious impressionism; *Straight* is some simple notes played over and over behind an inaudible poem; *This Nearly* is the stupid Richard Rodgers song played several times by the band—no solos.

More accurately, the LP is an incredibly irritating low hum, with overtones and undertones of varying duration, pitch and density from which the above descriptions were deduced. Murray has seldom been properly recorded, whereas the Art Ensemble players have never been less than sensitively documented, and *People in Sorrow* is no exception. To be precise, *People* itself is a small mourning Mitchell theme, repeated at least 21 times in whole or in part in this 43-minute group improvisation, far too often for maximum impact. The long improvisation is dominated by—but creates far beyond—that suggestive theme.

The work flows through several stages. Quiet tinkling bells open, over which the fluegelhorn suddenly enters on a low, wounded note, to present the theme in completely brutalized terms: squeaks, cracked moans, hoarse expiring cries, the brutality emphasized by suddenly struck discordant bells. Percussion variation increases ensemble density as Bowie emits splintered cries. A mournful Debussy-like flute solo then appears, a line that predicts the bass's ensuing complexity—a complexity that grows to turbulence throughout the theme's restatement and flute-trumpet duo improvisation until the rush of struggling contradictions in his line brings the bass violently to the fore. The bass falls into submission, subliminally disrupted silence becomes threatening with the muted, growly falsetto announcement: "Hey, Ma, there's a rat skretchin' in the rug!" Muffled voices and percussion then indicate mock-horror and agitation, both at once.

Note that this first side largely ranges in volume from *p* to *ppp* (the only *forte* is an abstract, momentary vibes flurry in the midst of the bass solo), and that tinkling or gently ringing percussion is almost constant. Most remarkable is the bassist's power, both as improviser and as group unifier. If the bass line is sympathetic to the others' projections, its agitation is its own: Favors internalizes the group thrust, returning it in more complex, abstract term as broken, fully realized conflicts. Surely the long, developed bass accompaniment-solo sequence is the finest feature of this side.

The opening half of the second side

might very well stand as a complete, fully developed work of art. As bassoonist Jarman introduces some blues ideas, the bass yet again introduces a confusion of emotions. Bass in flux continues behind a very lonely, distant trumpet solo. After the bass's peak of challenging violence, and despite Bowie's flamenco despair, a percussionist introduces vicious cymbal/drum bursts, immensely dramatic bursts of aggression that break the trumpet into short blasts, then demolish, one by one, the other players. Mitchell's soprano screams a brief, terrific summary before being crushed, and soon bass and that central percussionist reintroduce violence, magnified to an extreme degree of force and threat. Altoist Jarman, in an amazing vocalized solo, presents in tones all the more savage for their measured proportion, accusation, recapitulation and frightening irony, halting to state the theme with calm respect, then drawing the trumpet into shattered mutual prophecies.

The "third movement" begins with a buzzer. Muted trumpet and altoist Jarman improvise freely over fast, busy bass, without reference to preceding "movements". Twice the theme is played by open trumpet and two altos over bass, the second time challenging, predicting triumph, followed by beautiful, dense communal improvisation which fades on the theme stated by the same bells that initiated the entire work—but this time discordant complications in the bass line violate, with finality, such a statement of resolution.

This description is actually a pretty general one, for cataloging the multiplicity of momentary events would demand a review twice this length. The disparity of features in conflict, straining then amplifying the percussionist's central thrust in the "second movement," is most notable; and that "movement" itself is one of the most remarkable things these players have recorded to date.

What is "freedom" in music? The flutters, rumbles and scratches of the Murray LP indicate constrictions both of choice and of necessity, for ritual in the New Music can be depersonalizing, and hence a potentially dishonest method of obscurantism. The Art Ensemble, here, recognizes differences, the players define themselves through the intercourse of improvisation, unity is asserted not through massing but by dialogue and reinforcement.

This is not to use the Ensemble to attack Murray. Indeed, *People in Sorrow* has its sometime failures of unity or intention, and surely the Ensemble's approach to music would be wrong for many others. A fair portion of *People in Sorrow* is based on ideas and approaches that these players have long since examined at length in concerts—but even these, and the sometime flaws in the LP reinforce the essential life-giving, humanistic thrust of the music. "Freedom" is a term frequently used in connection with the Art Ensemble's music, and the concept fairly demands an extended essay to indicate its importance in jazz.

Concluding thoughts: this, the Mitchell-Bowie-Favors group's fourth LP, is at least the equal of their previous, somewhat diffuse *Congluptious*; and is certainly superior to the last Jarman LP. The out-

standing single portion is the magnificent, unformed Jarman alto solo, the first time on record that this brilliant altoist has suggested the range and profundity of his vision. As for the performance of the astonishing Favors, it is quite the outstanding work of art on his instrument of the past decade. The ensemble has recorded several times as a unit during their extended stay in France, and it is very much hoped that their new works, presently the most significant in jazz, will soon be made available in the United States.

—Litweiler

Ray Nance

BODY AND SOUL—Solid State SS 18062: *Take the A Train; Get Happy; Sunny; Body and Soul; Mimi; A Hard Day's Night; Oh Happy Day; Stardust; She's Funny that Way; Jolie Janice; Guitar Amour; Tranquility.*

Personnel: Nance, violin, vocal (track 7); Brew Moore, tenor saxophone (tracks 3, 6); Jaki Byard, piano; Roland Hanna, piano, organ; Tiny Grimes, Tommy Lucas, guitars; Carl Pruitt, bass; Steve Little, drums.

Rating: ★★½

Ray Nance had to wait a long time for an LP of his own. (Yes, I know, there's another album around with his name on it, but that was Cat Anderson's date and originally issued as such.)

Having clamored for a Nance album for years, I must confess to a slight disappointment. To be sure, there are some lovely things here, but most of the tracks are too short, and no use was made of the leader's cornet artistry, as much a part of his total musical profile as the violin. And his single vocal, though affecting, is only a taste of that aspect of this astonishing, delightful musician.

However, an imperfect Nance LP is better—far better—than none, and there are solid entrées among the appetizers. Among them: the beautiful ballad version of *A-Train*, as first conceived at Billy Strayhorn's requiem service, and *Body and Soul*, dedicated to Coleman Hawkins. Both are deeply felt statements.

The album emphasizes Nance's romantic side. The Gypsy in his soul comes out on *Guitar Amour* (a one-time feature with Ellington), the only track on which he really gets a chance to stretch. More Romany echoes can be heard in the two originals, *Janice* and *Tranquility*, the latter a theme that could have sustained more than the two minutes allotted here.

The swinging Nance is well displayed on *Get Happy*. He really gets into something here, but his choruses are segmented by excursions from the two guitarists and piano, not giving him the chance to build excitement as he can so well. *Funny*, done with a bounce, shows Nance's debt to Eddie South—a matter of tone and overall instrumental conception—but Nance's treatment of melodic tunes was always less prone to sentimentality. As Duke Ellington put it: Ray has perfect taste.

Mimi, a trifle, is soon transformed by Nance's wit and imagination, but another take would have produced a surer third chorus, I think, though the concluding passages are fine. *Stardust* is the lovely verse only.

Brew Moore appears to good advantage but all too briefly on the two contemporary tunes, and this was his only record date during two years in New York! No wonder he went back to Europe. The two

guitarists have nice moments, and there's a characteristic glimpse of Byard on *Funny*. The underrated Carl Pruitt turns in a first-rate job throughout.

Nance's unashamedly emotional, hot-blooded approach to the violin is an interesting and instructive contrast to that of Jean-Luc Ponty, but in any case, Ray is a complete individualist. For the inspired abandon of which he is capable, I recommend *Jaki Byard With Strings* (Prestige 7573), but this LP is a good enough introduction to a fascinating artist.

(Nota bene: My copy of this LP was an off-center pressing, causing the type of distortion to which the violin is particularly vulnerable. Two of three others I checked were similarly flawed.)

—Morgenstern

Freddy Robinson

THE COMING ATLANTIS—World Pacific Jazz ST-20162: *Before Six*; *The Coming Atlantis*; (*I'm a*) *Fool for You*; *Freddy's Sermon*; *Black Fox*; *The Oogum Boogum Song*; *Rita*; *Monkin' Around*.

Personnel: Allen Brisbois, trumpet; Plas Johnson, tenor saxophone; Ernest Williams, baritone saxophone and bass clarinet; Allen Butler, flute; Joseph L. Sample, piano; Monk Higgins, organ; Alan C. Estes, vibraphone; Robinson, guitar; Bob West, bass, Fender bass; Paul Humphrey, drums; King Errison, bongos and congas; strings; vocal group; arranged and conducted by Monk Higgins.

No Rating

Freddy Robinson is a Wes Montgomery-inspired, five-star guitarist trapped in a one-star album.

—Albertson

Frank Strazzeri

THAT'S HIM & THIS IS NEW—Revelation 10: *Night and Day*; *Jo Ann*; *My Lament*; *Straztatic*; *That's Him*; *This Is New*.

Personnel: Gary Barone, trumpet; Sam Most, Sal Nistico, tenor saxophones; Strazzeri, piano; Dave Parlato, bass; John Terry, drums.

Rating: ★★☆☆

In thinking about what to say about Strazzeri, words like "solid" and "no nonsense" came to mind. I don't want to imply that Strazzeri is merely a competent musician. He's more than that, but the professionalism of his work is one of its virtues. He isn't a spectacular musician, just a really good one.

Strazzeri is not an innovator. He is an original stylist, though. His playing doesn't sound quite like anybody else's. He seems to have been influenced by a number of pianists, including, possibly, Hank Jones, Bill Evans, Wynton Kelly and McCoy Tyner, but has synthesized these influences into a style of his own.

He is an intelligent improviser. While his solo work, in general, isn't economical enough to be called spare, he doesn't waste notes; every note he plays, it seems, is important to him.

Strazzeri's playing here is melodically attractive and harmonically fresh and interesting. His solos are carefully and well constructed and have good continuity.

He generally plays in a firm but not heavy-handed manner. Sometimes he employs percussive effects, but when he does, it really makes sense; he's not striking the keys hard just to work off excess energy.

Strazzeri is a fine composer as well, and this LP contains three originals by him. Two of these, *Jo Ann* and *My Lament*, are fresh, lovely, and really memorable compositions.

The hornmen appear only on *Jo Ann* and *Straztatic* and solo only on the

latter selection. Most's work is interesting. Although a bit ragged technically, he plays vigorously and confidently. His tone is full and rather soft.

Revelation records are available only from P.O. Box 65593, Los Angeles, CA 90065. —Pekar

BLUES 'N' FOLK

BY JOHN LITWEILER

"THE BLUES IS A HORSE OF MANY COLORS. It could be two eyes meeting and falling in love, only to discover that they belong to the same face." So begin the liners to *After Hour Blues* (Biograph 12010), and I wish I'd written that myself. One side of the LP is given to the pleasant eclectic blues piano of Little Brother Montgomery. As a bluesman (don't forget that Brother is a rewarding performer in several classic jazz media) he presents a sense of Yancey-like sophistication mingled with the less powerful, more decorative—"showier", if you will—music of popular '30s boogie pianists. The instrumental *Vicksburg Blues* and *A&B Blues* thus present curiously subtle touches, perhaps a sudden twist of rhythmic figures or a strikingly placed line fragment, which make the tracks unique, somewhat artistic statements.

Little Brother Stomp is not a blues at all, but a light, delicate near-ragtime-styled piano piece played in a very free rag style—like the liner note writer, I am reminded of Jelly Roll Morton. This is a delicious track, worth buying the album to hear, but also, for collectors, there are two 1930 vocal-piano Brother works added: *No Special Rider* and a different version of *Vicksburg Blues*. (These, by the way, are the only two tracks in this set of three Biograph LPs which do not come from an unidentified record company's 1949 sessions.)

Two takes of a Sunnyland Slim piece are notable for fine tenor solos in a style that's half Getz and half Ammons, by an unidentified bebopper. The rest of the LP is St. Louis Jimmy, who in those days was writing blunt, forceful songs on a number of classic themes. In fact, Jimmy is a remarkable blues poet; familiar-seeming lyrics mix with occasional pungent hyperbole, image on image compounding a sense of utter, unrelenting desperation. *Hard Work Boogie* ("Got corns on my hands, calluses on my feet") is a superior example of this and there are also *Your Evil Ways* ("You go to bed evil, too evil to say your prayers/When it comes time for lovin', I swear your love ain't there") a revealing story of divided feelings over a doomed love, and *I Sit Up All Night*, which describes a friend's pathetic lust for alcohol. The accompanying band is unfortunate, but the works are valuable nonetheless. *After Hour Blues* is certainly a recommended LP, though the three performers have nothing at all in common and it is a shame to reissue material in this random anthology fashion.

A less interesting anthology is *Sugar Mama Blues* (Biograph 12009). The three dull and quite weird Pee Wee Hughes songs aside (a single guitar chord, rhythm

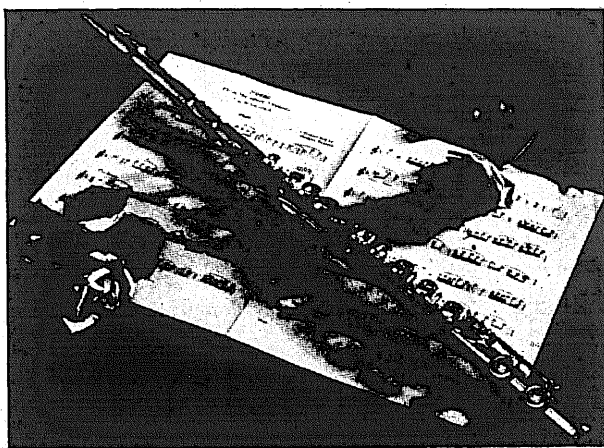
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