

Wait for the Chord: An Interview with Scott Hamilton

JM: Scott, in all truthfulness, you're one of our most contemporary links to the great heritage of the tenor saxophone and, also, of that whole tradition at the heart of what I call the jazz archive. If you were to think out loud about the way you've carved your own identity in the middle of that tradition, how would you talk about that?

SH: Oh, that's tough. I would think that the main thing is, there isn't very much to talk about because, I mean, if anything has happened right for me, it's been sort of organic, you know . . . to ignore the idea of style and just work toward the same sort of things that everybody else is working toward. Do you know what I mean?

JM: Sure.

SH: What are you gonna do? I have to spend most of my time ignoring the fact that I'm playing traditional so that I can concentrate on the things that are important. The language [of traditional jazz] is just something that I fell into. I'm happy I did. I'm comfortable with it, and I wouldn't be comfortable

doing something else. I figured out a long time ago that it wouldn't really be me if I were doing something else. But at the same time, you know, it's a difficult stance to defend if you're talking to somebody very concerned with style. It's hard to explain to somebody . . .

JM: . . . who's ignorant of the whole thing.

SH: Well, somebody who's based their whole knowledge of jazz on the idea of development and things like that, different styles being in vogue and going out of vogue and new styles coming in. Most of the nonmusicians involved with jazz . . . that's their primary concern. So, when they come up with somebody like myself, it's more of a political thing to them. It's almost as though I am deliberately trying to do something outlandish, whereas it's really not that way at all. I'm just sort of playing what I like and, hopefully, at the same time, I'm getting to sound more like myself as years go by.

JM: I think that's exactly right. But, on one hand, it's quite clear to a number of musicians who talk to me regularly, as you know, that you're one of the people they most admire. They'll say, "Scott's magnificent." No political squabble or problem. They think that you do continue precisely what's important in their own work. You're a brother, as it were. On the other side is your own identity as a musician, something that clearly emerges piece by piece in the relentless way an artist has an identity that solidifies, not into a style but into a presentation of a world. What I like about what you've just said, and I wonder if you could say a little more, is the notion of a language—a jazz language—that you took on or fell into.

SH: Yeah, sure. I suppose I made a choice a long time ago, but it wasn't really much of a choice to make. I sort of half fell into it and half pursued it. It came out of what appealed to me the most when I was at a particular age, fourteen or fifteen years old, and I was just beginning to be a professional. I'd been around music all my life. Some of the directions that I could've gone in—or that people say I could have gone in—I really couldn't have. I didn't understand that kind of music. I didn't have any real desire to understand it. It wasn't even a question of disliking it or liking it.

JM: You're talking about "Chinese music," as somebody we know once called it?

SH: Well, you know, it's funny, but I always enjoyed the kind of jazz that I enjoy now, and that covers a pretty broad range of stuff. I would go see Duke Ellington's band, and I'd go see Sonny Stitt, and I'd go to see Charlie

Mingus's band another night, and Stan Getz or Illinois Jacquet. There was an awful lot of stuff. And it didn't, at the time, seem like old music or out-of-date music. Most of the guys that were playing it were in their forties and fifties—a lot of them in their forties. But, at the same time, it wasn't what, say, Gary Burton and Larry Coryell were doing, or it wasn't what . . .

JM: . . . Herbie Hancock was doing.

SH: Right. It wasn't what Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea were doing. But at the same time, it didn't feel like antiquated stuff, either. It seemed sort of just straight-ahead kind of music.

JM: Which it is.

SH: That was what I understood, and that was what I liked. That was what I aimed for. The other stuff would've been . . . I don't know. I never even considered playing anything else, because it just wasn't something that I understood. I still have trouble, if I am in a situation where things get a little modal. Then I really am out of my depth.

JM: That obviously doesn't interest you a whole lot.

SH: Frankly, it doesn't, but that's kind of insulting to say. I try to be a little more courteous about it than that, because I hate it when somebody says that playing the way I play doesn't interest them. I say, "Well, you know, there's room for a lot of different tastes," and I never held anything against those guys. When [Miles Davis's] *Bitches Brew* came out, I listened to it once or twice, and I thought it was kind of interesting at the time, but it never occurred to me that that would be something I would want to play. At the time, it didn't seem necessary for me to go out and do that unless I were gonna go to the Berklee School [College] of Music or something. I think the fact that I developed my playing on the job, rather than at music school, automatically kept me going in the direction I went in. It seemed a simple enough thing at the time. It didn't seem unusual at all.

In fact, I knew a lot of other people my age headed in the same direction. We played a lot of blues as we got a little bit older, and, starting out, most of us had played some rock 'n' roll at one time or another. We played a lot of dances and college fraternity parties, sailor bars, you know, and whatever you could get. It was really a different sort of background than a guy [who] graduated from high school, then went straight to music school. They were sort of—a lot of them—put in a totally different direction. You would learn the modes, and you'd get a fake book and go through a certain

amount of things. You'd learn how to read very well, and then, if you're lucky, you'd get a spot with Woody's [Woody Herman's] band or Buddy Rich's band or Maynard Ferguson's band. And, if you're lucky, maybe something would come of that. Maybe four or five guys out of that whole class found a career.

I was looking for a career right away. I was looking for a career when I was still in high school. I basically wanted to work every night of the week, and I managed to do it two or three nights a week. It wouldn't have worked playing anything other than what I was playing.

JM: You've invoked a couple of things that almost define what's happened over the last twenty to thirty years in jazz. On one hand, that notion of the academicization of the music, with the Berklee School of Music being the most obvious place, and the North Texas State University Lab Bands another.

SH: Sure.

JM: A number of musicians who don't have to be named, but who've talked about this for attribution, point out exactly what you say, Scott—the sameness of the production of the sound and of approach to the music that has come out of that academic schooling. On the other hand, what you invoke less overtly is how important it is to remember the kind of thing that, for example, Lockjaw Davis used to talk about—the importance of entertaining your audience and not just doing something that is faddish and hip, that entertains your own sense of what you're supposed to do. You have to speak from the heart as a musician.

SH: Oh yeah. I think that's true. I don't blame the schools for that, because I don't think there's any way they can teach that end of the business. I think that's something that you have to learn on the job, you know. And by entertaining, of course, we don't mean telling jokes, necessarily—although there's nothing wrong with that, either. It doesn't necessarily mean making a fool of yourself. Actually, it just means trying to hold the audience's attention.

JM: That's right. Communicating.

SH: And to give them enjoyment, so that when they leave the club, they're gonna say they're glad they went and they felt that the money was well spent. And maybe they'll pick up your record the next time they go to the store.

JM: There is something more at stake here in this notion that, I think, Lock-jaw best put as the need to entertain and communicate and not be (although he didn't use the word) in a masturbatory relationship with your own sense of what's hip. The notion at work there is that jazz—and great music of any kind—is telling a set of stories. It seems to me, Scott, as I listen to your music over the course of a long time, you are one of the people who tell a story with your horn.

SH: I like to try to, anyway. It seems to me to be one of the goals. If you're gonna interest a person who maybe has a little familiarity with jazz music but is not a musician and not knowledgeable about harmony and abstract things like that . . . to hold their attention without singing lyrics is a difficult thing, you know. And it has to be done, as you said, like telling a story on the horn. That's a trick, you know, a hell of a trick.

JM: It really is.

SH: But it's worth trying to do.

JM: There are actually a lot of tricks; it's not just one trick. There're a lot of tricks involved.

SH: Yeah. What I mean is that there are ways of holding the audience's attention without wearing a funny hat or . . .

JM: . . . proselytizing.

SH: Yeah. Basically, it can be done, and if you succeed at it, then you know you're doing something that's actually very difficult.

JM: I have some recordings that I hope you might respond to. This is not a blindfold test, because you'll know what they are, and we'll talk about what they are.

SH: Fine. Sure.

JM: For example, one of the hippest things that I've ever heard in my life is this live concert in Germany. I think it's 1960, with Bud Powell on piano and Coleman Hawkins on tenor.

SH: Oh yeah. I love that record.

JM: You probably know it.

SH: Fabulous.

[MUSIC BEGINS: *Bud Powell: The Complete Essen Jazz Festival Concert*, Black Lion Records, 2 April 1960—Powell, piano; Oscar Pettiford, bass; Coleman Hawkins, tenor saxophone; Kenny Clarke, drums]

JM: I wanted to get your response to that session.

SH: Beautiful record. I love it.

JM: One of the interesting aspects of that performance is its conjunction of styles. You've got Coleman Hawkins, the first great tenor saxophonist, a powerhouse swing-oriented dynamo. And you've got the man who is one of the founding fathers of bebop, Bud Powell. They play like they grew up together. There's no clashing. There's a melding, nearly unconscious in its perfect fit. And it goes beyond that. Talk to me about what you hear there. What's going on in that collaboration?

SH: Well, I can't help but be influenced by what I know about their personal histories, about the way each of them was—although I didn't know either one. The same goes for Oscar Pettiford and Kenny Clarke, as well. I think at the time that they made this record, there may have been a good deal of sympathy between Coleman and Bud Powell, because both of them were suffering from severe mental problems. And it comes out in the work, I think.

JM: Absolutely.

SH: But that's, I think, incidental. Still, it may be part of what fuels that whole thing, you know. Both of them were in pretty bad shape, but they were not yet in such bad shape that they couldn't play. Both of them were still playing very well. And I suppose Pettiford, too—from what I understand. It must've been a wild scene. The other thing is that Coleman is such a creative son of a bitch. From the very beginning, he embraced that style of piano [bop]. He championed those guys—Monk and Bud and a few other like-minded pianists—from the very beginning, from the first time he heard them.

JM: Like Dodo Marmarosa.

SH: Yeah. I think that meant a lot to Hawk, because I think he had a difficult time finding accompanists in the thirties that were as sophisticated harmonically as he was. And the ones that were—say, Teddy Wilson and Art Tatum, people like that—were not . . . well, Teddy Wilson was certainly as knowledgeable as Hawk was about harmony, but he was not interested in playing as far out as Hawk was. So Hawk first started to use Monk and

Bud Powell, and, in the fifties, his favorite pianists were Tommy Flanagan and Barry Harris.

JM: That's right.

SH: He was very, very happy, I think, with that. It was almost as though he had been waiting all of his life for those guys to come along. And Pettiford, too. He had Pettiford in his band when he was nineteen or twenty years old. In a way, by the time they made this record, they were really old, old mates, you know. It is a great record. One of the last really great Hawkins records.

JM: I think so, too. Does that collaboration strike you, when you've heard it over time or hear it now, as having an unusual rhythmic quality—for lack of a better word, a rhythmic “hipness”? There's a time sense that they set up which is just unbelievable.

SH: Oh yeah. I agree. These are, you know, awfully sophisticated musicians, and, yeah, it's beautiful. I mean, rhythmically, what can you say? Yes, it is very hip.

JM: I hear this thing all the time, and it just rivets me. I've heard it hundreds of times, and every time it seems brand-new.

SH: The warm-up set of the trio is just as good, I think. The whole concept was right. Some of the best Oscar Pettiford solos ever, I think.

JM: “Blues in the Closet,” for example.

SH: Yeah, oh, man. I've been stealing stuff from that solo for years!

JM: That's nice. That's nice.

SH: It's a great record. In fact, I've gotta get that on CD. Is it out on CD?

JM: Here it is right here. And here's another great session. I've got a Lucky Thompson thing. I don't know if you've heard this. It just came out.

SH: Is this the one with Tete [Montoliu]?

JM: That's the one. Have you heard it?

SH: I think I've heard only one tune.

JM: Do you know what you've heard?

SH: I think “Body and Soul.” In fact, I heard it in a blindfold test.

JM: No kidding?

SH: Yes, that's the only time I ever heard it. This was one of the last records Lucky ever made. It's nice, though, isn't it?

JM: It's awesome.

SH: He's such a great sax player.

JM: I want you to say a few things about Lucky. He's one of the neglected giants, as far as I'm concerned.

SH: Oh yeah.

[MUSIC BEGINS: *Lucky Thompson: Soul's Night Out*, En Sayo Records, 1970—Tete Montoliu, piano; Peter Wyboris, drums; Eric Peter, bass]

JM: I love that record.

SH: That's incredible!

JM: The first thing that strikes me is the sound that Lucky gets on soprano.

SH: Yeah, it's beautiful. You know, I just started listening to his soprano playing. I always turned the record player off on that before, because I love his tenor playing so much. I've always felt, up until a couple of months ago, that his soprano playing was a letdown. Now I'm kind of reversing my opinion.

JM: I've done the same thing. [LAUGHTER]

SH: I don't know what made me, all of a sudden, be able to hear it, but sometimes that happens, you know. This is a case where that's happened. I haven't heard that particular cut before. That's absolutely amazing.

JM: Isn't it, though?

SH: What he's doing . . . well, I hadn't realized that he pushed it that far. Lucky's playing in the fifties is so interesting. I've got a lot of Lucky Thompson records, and I've listened to a lot of stuff that he made—millions of records in the forties, and he was a beautiful player in the forties—but for a long time, I felt he was kind of incomplete until around 1950. All of a sudden he came up with this style, this real personal style of his, and everything he made after that was brilliant. I mean, absolute perfection.

JM: Exactly.

SH: Totally different than anything I had ever heard anybody else do on a

sax. On this thing, he's pushed it even further. I thought you'd be lucky if he sounded like he was in shape. But this is really not the case. No, that's not the case at all. He's gone even farther. Some of the stuff that he just played on that . . . I've gotta hear it again. I've gotta get it. That's amazing.

JM: It's also beautifully recorded.

SH: Yeah, the recording was good. I just never heard anybody do what he was just doing there.

JM: It's an absolutely special performance and way of approaching the horn. When you say, with your knowledge about the horn, that it's amazing, I want to know what is so distinctive there. What is it that amazes you?

SH: Well, it's distinctive. His sound is very distinctive. That, of course, has something to do with it, but the thing that really knocked me out about it is the fact that he's playing around the upper intervals of the chords but hasn't changed his earlier style really very much at all. Here, he's taking it even farther out. It's so sophisticated, what he's doing with the chord changes. I lack the technical language here.

JM: It's hard to nail it exactly, I think.

SH: I lack the technical knowledge to say in words what he's doing. I know what he's doing musically, and it's a very hip thing. To be able to play melodically around those extended notes, you know, through the upper harmonies, and still keep a melodic line going . . . A story—it's a story, if you want to get back to what you were saying before. That's something that you almost never hear. Usually, musicians sophisticated enough to play around with those notes are not really interested in a narrative line.

JM: Yes, that's right.

SH: Whereas what he's doing is very easy to understand and very melodic. At the same time, he's playing around the hip part of the chords.

JM: He's very advanced. That's immediately evident in the almost infinite sense of calm his playing carries out.

SH: Yeah. I love it. I gotta hear more.

JM: Tommy Flanagan was the one who turned me on to Lucky. He just insisted for years, "Jim, listen to Lucky Thompson." I sort of fluffed Lucky off, in a way, myself, ignorantly, in a way like you were suggesting that you

didn't hear his work on soprano sax. And then one day, Flanagan put this stuff on for me at his apartment. Holy shit! It smacked me right in the face very quietly. Of course, Flanagan knew, because he grew up with Lucky, and I believe he got his first gig with Lucky.

SH: I've got three or four of Lucky's CDs with me. Most of 'em are made in the fifties—stuff he did with Milt Jackson at Savoy. There's been a couple of reissues of things that he did with Bags [Milt Jackson] that I just got maybe six or seven months ago. I can't stop listening. There's some other stuff from France that he made in the late fifties. Beautiful stuff. One of 'em's got—like, a part of it—original compositions, and there's about an eight-piece band. He did all the arrangements for the horns and everything. Fabulous. Mostly French guys.

JM: I take it that Lucky's gone now, although people ask me if I know.

SH: No, as far as I know, Lucky's still alive . . .

JM: Is that right?

SH: . . . but he's not playing.

JM: Several people, over the course of the last four or five years, have asked where the hell Lucky is. Hank Jones wondered about him.

SH: He's been reported as dead in the press, I think, three or four times. But, as far as I know, for the last four years or so—maybe longer, maybe five years—he's been living outside of Seattle someplace.

JM: Really?

SH: This is what I understand. A friend of mine just saw him in Seattle, because he was with Johnny Griffin. Lucky fell by the club. He's an unusual person. He always came right out and said exactly what was on his mind. And that's not really a way to get ahead in the music business. I think he finally had some personal tragedies. I don't know Lucky, so I hesitate to say it, but I'm pretty sure that it's true that a lot of awful things have happened to him, and, in addition to that, he's been kind of ostracized in the business for being a troublemaker. You know, a guy that . . . a guy that spoke out against. He spoke out against the press. He spoke out against club owners. He basically spoke out against . . .

JM: . . . the establishment.

SH: Some people just don't want to hear that. From what I understand, he leaves the room if somebody begins to talk to him about music. So maybe he's just finally lost all interest in his playing, and that's where he's ended up.

JM: Another great musician who just dropped out of the scene a while back—I guess for the same kinds of personal reasons—is the great pianist who used to play with Chet Baker, Russ Freeman.

SH: I love Russ's playing. I sort of assumed he must be dead, because I haven't heard anything about him in a long time.

JM: I'm told he still lives in Los Angeles and that if any of his friends ask him if he'll play or why he won't play, he just walks away. Whatever all this amounts to, we're worse off not having Lucky Thompson and Russ on the scene.

SH: It's too bad, because I really like his music.

JM: Very unique guy, a powerful, yet tender, off-center approach. Russ was both a surging, hell-bent stylist and deeply reflective. Remember that delicate piece he wrote, "Summer Sketch"?

SH: Great accompanist, too. I've got all the things he did with Art Pepper, which are fantastic. And all the things with Chet, of course.

JM: He made a few trio things, also.

SH: I don't have them, but I always thought that his style of comping was the most. That's what I would like to have behind me.

JM: Isn't that right, man. Yes.

SH: That style. That's it for me.

JM: Speaking about great style . . . I called Gerry Wiggins yesterday, because yesterday was his seventy-second birthday.

SH: They're having a bash for him that he doesn't know about tomorrow. I'm playing with him the day after. His wife [Lynn] called and asked if there was any way I could get there tomorrow night.

JM: Well, if Lynn has a private helicopter . . .

SH: Yeah, right. I told her that. [LAUGHTER] I'll see him Sunday anyway, so . . .

JM: I've got another thing I want to play for you. Can I do that?

SH: Yeah, sure.

JM: I don't know the last time you might have heard this—it's Kenny Dorham with Joe Henderson.

SH: I may never have heard it.

JM: This is a piece called "Short Story."

[MUSIC BEGINS: *Joe Henderson: In 'N Out*, Blue Note, 10 April 1964—Kenny Dorham, trumpet; Henderson, tenor saxophone; McCoy Tyner, piano; Richard Davis, bass; Elvin Jones, drums]

JM: It's a Dorham composition. Let's listen to the whole thing, because I find it quite unusual.

[MUSIC]

JM: The ending knocks me out. I don't know what they're doing there on the ending, but the way they come out of that thing is unbelievable.

SH: I love it. That's very nice. I always liked Kenny Dorham. Joe Henderson sounds great, too.

JM: It's an incredible piece. Lou Donaldson and I once had a kind of friendly argument about which is the greatest Kenny Dorham composition. He, of course, takes the standard line that it's "Blue Bossa." I argue for this one, "Short Story." Perhaps I'm simply taken with the execution. What they do with it is in the realm of the sublime, I think.

SH: It is beautiful. I never heard that before.

JM: When guys can nail that kind of an exit, it indicates a huge amount of experience together and compatibility. You can't script it. That's not written.

SH: Certainly Elvin [Jones] and McCoy [Tyner] were a compatible team. And Richard Davis sounds beautiful, too. I don't know. I would think that guys who had never played together before would be capable of doing that under the right circumstances, you know? But it's not something that you can expect. I don't know . . . with guys that good, yeah, why not?

JM: There's a touching delicacy in their out chorus that is almost unrivaled. You can hear them hearing one another, the mark of special moments that

seldom occur. Kenny Dorham is another guy who has never gotten his full due, in my estimation.

SH: That's true. Although, I think it's in the wash. It's coming out. He's certainly talked about a lot more now than he was when he was playing. Things [as good as that] usually do work out in the end.

JM: Like Nelson Mandela becoming president of South Africa?

SH: Sort of, yeah.

JM: If you survive long enough, Scott, there may be justice somewhere.

SH: I don't know if that always works in politics, but in music or in art . . . I think it does in the end. Not for everybody, but an awful lot of the time.

JM: You grew up in an extraordinarily artistic family, didn't you?

SH: Well, yeah. Both of my parents are artists, so there was nothing unusual about that.

JM: Well, not everybody grows up with two parents who are accomplished.

SH: It was great, because if you grow up as your father makes paintings, then you grow up with the idea that making paintings for your life's work is something normal and reasonable. You don't feel guilty about thinking that you want to do something like that.

JM: Yes. And your mother?

SH: My mother, as well, although my mother didn't really become serious about working until I was fifteen, sixteen years old. But my father's always been a professor, as well, but that was really just to put food on the table. He retired in '82, and, since then, he's been painting full-time. He gets better every year.

JM: Isn't that wonderful. You have some of his stuff hanging up at your place, don't you?

SH: Yeah, I've got five or six paintings, just about as many as we can hold in the apartment [in New York City]. I just figure, one of these days, if somebody decides they want to buy them, I want to have them on hand. We could put up a show without having to lug them all down from Maine.

JM: There you go. Scott, over the course of time, I've heard so many guys

who play the saxophone grouse and grumble about the choosing of reeds. Is that a thing that plagues you, too?

SH: Yeah, oh yeah. It's murder, you know.

JM: How do you finally choose? Just trial and error?

SH: The more years you spend playing the horn, the easier it is, for me, anyway. The easier it becomes to play with more reeds, and also the less time you waste on a reed that's not playing well. If I put something on, and I don't like it, I throw it away. There have been times in my life when I've become too obsessed with it. Then you lose your objectivity. That's sort of an occupational disease. When I'm being smart about it, I just look through the box for something that plays, and I stick with it for as long as it seems to be *holding its own*. I try not to think about it too much, 'cause that's where I run into trouble—if I get too analytical about my equipment. I know some guys that just . . . well, I suppose they enjoy it in a way.

JM: The agony of it.

SH: Yeah. I really don't wanna . . . I work toward not having to think about it. I'm doing okay with that. I've had the same mouthpiece since 1978, and I can't find another one. If I lost that, well, I'd get used to something else. But I sure would miss it. If I lost my horn, I'd be able to find another one that would be pretty good. Maybe not as good, but then again I might find a better one. You never know.

JM: It's a French Selmer?

SH: Yeah. When I was eighteen years old or something, I bought a new Selmer. I think it was an American Selmer. The difference was, I think, that the parts were made over there [in France], but it was assembled in the U.S. I think they make them in Paris, and the ones in Paris are supposed to be better. I don't know. I stopped buying new horns a while ago. I went through a phase of buying a lot of old horns.

JM: You like the sound?

SH: Well, I found, in the end, that some of the old horns I was buying were giving me problems I wouldn't have gotten from new horns. They were beat up beyond repair, sort of. I remember I finally got a good repairman around 1981 or 1982.

JM: Emilio?

SH: No. I love Emilio [Lyons], but I was introduced to Saul Fromkin, and after Saul retired and went to Florida, his apprentice, Roberto Romeo. They're as good as anybody, including Emilio. I think you know that Emilio is awfully good. I mean, Emilio is the best in the business, they say. I'm sure you know there's a reason for that. But I haven't needed to go to Emilio. I've got Roberto. When I'm in trouble, and I've got a gig the next day or something, if something's happened to the horn, or it's been mashed out of shape by a stewardess trying to shove a suitcase on top of it or something, he fixes it in time for the gig. Saul the repairman kind of straightened me out, told me that I should be playing a horn that works. He found me an old horn that hadn't been played to death. And that's what I've been playing for twelve or thirteen years.

JM: One day, Clifford Jordan and I went into Emilio's place [in Boston]. Clifford had one of his horns there and went to pick it up, and Emilio grabs Cliff and says, "I got Getz's horn, and I'm gonna show you what I've done with it." He went back, hauled out the horn, and Clifford picked it up and lovingly caressed it, while Emilio carried on about the wonders of metal and valves. I wish we had that on videotape. That was an incredible ten minutes, watching Clifford enjoy Emilio's stories about fixing broken horns.

SH: Beautiful. That says a lot for Emilio. The fact that guys like Getz and Rollins and Illinois [Jacquet] and several others actually go that far out of their way to get a horn fixed . . .

JM: Yeah, exactly.

SH: . . . that they go to Boston to get their horns fixed, that's saying an awful lot.

JM: I suspect Emilio's very proud of that.

SH: He's a good guy, too. He's funny. The last time I saw him, I was playing outside of Boston at a benefit for a guy that died. Emilio was in the audience, and I was having just the slightest bit of trouble. I don't know what it was. I had a little slow leak in the bottom of the horn or something—typical sort of everyday problem. And a couple of times, I hit a note, and it came out wrong. I could see him looking at me like, "Jesus," you know, "see what happens when you go to somebody else?"

JM: [LAUGHTER] That's great.

SH: His look said everything.

JM: He didn't come backstage at the intermission to fix it?

SH: No, but he did say something to me about it, like, "You wouldn't have that problem if you'd done like I told you to a long time ago and come to me."

JM: He's funny. The jazz world has a variety of people who help keep it going, and he's certainly one of those people.

SH: Yup, that's right.

JM: I have another CD I'd like you to comment on. You know the old game, "What's the Greatest Jazz CD Ever Made"? This one is a candidate.

SH: Okay.

JM: I'm sure you know this. Michel LeGrand, *LeGrand Jazz*.

[MUSIC BEGINS: "Nuages," *LeGrand Jazz*, Philips Records, 1958—Ben Webster, tenor saxophone; Hank Jones, piano; George Duvivier, bass; Don Lamond, drums; et al.]

SH: I've heard it before, but not for years, I think.

JM: This is a fluffy, wonderful piece for Ben Webster here.

SH: "Nuages."

JM: "Nuages," yes.

SH: What a band!

JM: Isn't it something?

SH: Was that Jimmy Cleveland [on trombone]?

JM: Yeah.

SH: That was amazing. I've never heard that before. I gotta get this.

JM: If I had to take only one jazz disc to the proverbial desert island, this may be the one. Say something about Ben [Webster]. I know he has to mean as much to you as he does to me—maybe even more.

SH: There ain't much I can say, you know. It's awful powerful stuff here. I suppose I could think of something to say, but the impact of that piece, that was . . . that was incredible, him coming out of that.

JM: There's another one here that you should listen to, also. Listen to this. "Blue and Sentimental."

[MUSIC]

SH: Wow. That's great.

JM: I love the way they recorded that with the microphones backed off so you get all that hall ambiance.

SH: That's beautiful recording. Very dramatic.

JM: Absolutely.

SH: Beautifully done, all the way around. I don't know this record at all. I got to get it.

JM: I've been listening to that since the month it came out. I guess I was sixteen years old—so, almost the whole of my life. I guess I've worn out two LPs and a cassette. Now this.

SH: Amazing.

JM: I keep wishing that there were outtakes in some can and we could find more of that stuff, you know. It's just awesome. It was originally on Columbia but re-released on Philips. It was back there in the days when they were doing those Columbia six-eye recordings. I don't know if you paid any attention to that stuff over the years.

SH: I'm not sure.

JM: In the fifties, Columbia made a six-eye label, startling recordings. They're among the great recordings ever made in terms of sonic quality.

SH: I don't know what *six-eye* means.

JM: It's a series of recordings, the label for the series on Columbia. *Kind of Blue* was in that series.

SH: Oh. Okay.

JM: And the Dave Brubeck Quartet stuff at Newport (*Newport '58*), *Jazz Impressions of Eurasia*, and so on. Also, the Miles Davis classic quintet thing, *Milestones*. All that stuff.

SH: Alright.

JM: They were using ambient miking techniques. Everything was not close-miked.

SH: Right, right.

JM: He didn't come backstage at the intermission to fix it?

SH: No, but he did say something to me about it, like, "You wouldn't have that problem if you'd done like I told you to a long time ago and come to me."

JM: He's funny. The jazz world has a variety of people who help keep it going, and he's certainly one of those people.

SH: Yup, that's right.

JM: I have another CD I'd like you to comment on. You know the old game, "What's the Greatest Jazz CD Ever Made"? This one is a candidate.

SH: Okay.

JM: I'm sure you know this. Michel LeGrand, *LeGrand Jazz*.

[MUSIC BEGINS: "Nuages," *LeGrand Jazz*, Philips Records, 1958—Ben Webster, tenor saxophone; Hank Jones, piano; George Duvivier, bass; Don Lamond, drums; et al.]

SH: I've heard it before, but not for years, I think.

JM: This is a fluffy, wonderful piece for Ben Webster here.

SH: "Nuages."

JM: "Nuages," yes.

SH: What a band!

JM: Isn't it something?

SH: Was that Jimmy Cleveland [on trombone]?

JM: Yeah.

SH: That was amazing. I've never heard that before. I gotta get this.

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SH: Alright.

JM: They were using ambient miking techniques. Everything was not close-miked.

SH: Right, right.

JM: It was backed off. And that's where you get that huge three-dimensional sound.

SH: Beautiful, beautiful.

JM: Here's the late-thirties' Ellington band with Jimmie Blanton and Ben Webster. Very, very powerful. Blanton-Webster just about defines the sound of jazz.

[MUSIC BEGINS: "Jeep's Blues," *The Duke's Men*, vol. 2 (1938–1939), Columbia Records]

SH: There's nothing like it. There's no sound like it.

JM: Nothing. It's like the sound of God speaking.

SH: It's a beautiful sound.

JM: Can you imagine what the Blanton-Webster band must have really sounded like? These old recordings, of course, can't capture what those guys must have really sounded like.

SH: I think the closest thing to that . . . it's not a technical recording, but the closest thing to what I believe it must have sounded like is that Fargo, North Dakota, concert. Have you heard that?

JM: I'm not sure.

SH: It was from 1940. It was a one-nighter that they did with that same band. Jimmie Blanton and Ben Webster. And there was a guy named Jack Tower who was an amateur recording cat, exactly what you're doing, except he had a disk cutter. The band was coming in from Canada to Fargo, North Dakota, in the middle of winter. This guy cut disks of the entire night. And it's available again. There's a box set of CDs.

JM: I've got to go check it out.

SH: I think it's two CDs. What you get is a recording of that band live, at a dance, playing their normal night.

JM: With good microphones and a good recording.

SH: I think it's an excellent recording, considering what it is. There are a lot of imperfections in the sound because it is 1940. But it's the most realistic. In other words, the drums are loud, and it's live. You can hear Duke talking to the guys, giving directions to the guys. You can hear the guys practicing

in between songs. I mean, you hear the guys practicing while they are playing the tune. Everything in heaven is there, and you're right in the middle of it. I've been listening to it for the last month or so, heavily.

JM: I've got to check it out.

SH: You've got to hear this thing. If you haven't heard it yet, it's like the one you just played. It's an amazing record.

JM: Thank God for these things.

SH: Ben liked it so much, because he did a version of "Stardust" on there. Gorgeous, beautiful solo. And all through, for twenty-five years after the date, Ben stayed in touch with this guy, Jack Tower. Jack would make him acetates of "Stardust," because Ben used to carry it with him everywhere on the road—it was a 78—and it would break, you know, once every couple of years . . . It would break or wear out, you know, and he'd have to have another one.

JM: I don't blame him.

SH: He was so proud of it that he always kept it with him. It is an amazing, amazing record. Just great. I just got the CD a few months ago. I've been listening to a lot of Duke Ellington for the past couple of months. I didn't work for a month 'cause of this hernia business.

JM: Yeah, right.

SH: So I just started playing a lot of records at home. I don't know, I've got me on this Duke Ellington binge, and he's the one I've been playing the most.

JM: What else are you listening to?

SH: I've gone back and started listening to a lot of older stuff. I've been listening to a lot of Fletcher Henderson. A lot of older Duke things from the thirties. I got a Charlie Parker at Carnegie Hall in 1947, which is absolutely astonishing. I've never heard him play this way. And it's absolutely amazing. A couple other things I've bought recently really knock me out. Some Gene Ammons stuff.

JM: Here's Gene Ammons right now. Gene Ammons with John Coltrane.

[MUSIC BEGINS: *Gene Ammons' All Stars*, Prestige Records, 3 January 1958—Ammons, tenor saxophone; Paul Quinichette, tenor saxophone;

John Coltrane, alto saxophone; Jerome Richardson, flute; Mal Waldron, piano; Jamil Nasser, bass; Art Taylor, drums]

SH: Oh, that's that jam-session record, "Groove Blues."

JM: Yeah.

SH: I love that record. Coltrane plays alto.

JM: Right, exactly.

SH: He plays Ira Gitler's alto.

JM: I didn't know it was Ira's.

SH: I don't know if he was hired for the date or not. I don't know why he was playing Ira's alto, but he ended up making the date.

JM: Maybe they wanted an alto to complement the tenor.

SH: Yeah, I suppose that's what it was.

JM: Well, you know, 'Trane's first horn was an alto.

SH: What?

JM: 'Trane's first horn . . .

SH: He played alto first?

JM: Yeah, yeah, he did. Growing up in Philly. And what's amazing about this record is how much he makes this alto sound like a tenor.

SH: Oh yeah. I would think he'd sound the same on any horn.

JM: 'Trane in the late fifties—and this was recorded in '58—is extremely moving.

SH: I agree absolutely.

JM: Thank God he was in the studio, like, every other day.

SH: He made a lot of records. All those Prestige sessions.

JM: There's a searching quality in his playing in '57, '58 . . . something elemental and genuinely innocent, if I can use that word for it. The later searches, where he's gone beyond "My Favorite Things" and he's doing modal stuff, are powerful and exploratory, transcendent, but almost beyond the edge of comprehensibility. That period tests its own rhetorical urgency.

We might call that last period of Coltrane an attempt at a nonverbal jeremiad. It was a form of lament. But in the late-fifties' recordings, you hear him inside of a "self," as it were, struggling to get out, sometimes peeking like a little chick from its shell, and it's moving to me.

SH: It's very exciting stuff. I never heard him play a note I didn't like.

JM: He can be so casual, too—like a guy cleaning his glasses. It's that simple. There's Pepper Adams, Scott.

SH: Yeah, yeah, Pepper.

JM: The first time I came across Pepper, seriously, was when he was playing in Mingus's band back at the Five Spot in 1964. Do you remember when Pepper was in that band? Lonnie Hilyer was on trumpet, [Charles] McPherson was on alto.

SH: [Was trombonist] Jimmy Knepper in that band?

JM: No, Jimmy wasn't in that band then.

SH: I always saw them together. Jimmy and Pepper used to play together a lot.

JM: Boy, *there's* a guy who has never gotten his due. Jimmy Knepper . . . Jesus Christ, does that guy do stuff or what?

SH: He's far out.

JM: He's really far out.

SH: I haven't seen him in a long time.

JM: The ultimate storyteller on a 'bone, telling four stories at once.

SH: He's deep.

JM: He *is* deep. Isn't Jug [Gene Ammons] something here? I mean, how relaxed this guy is. Such reserved power.

SH: He gets dismissed very easily by a lot of people, because I don't think they realize what a deep player he is.

JM: He made a lot of sentimental records, though.

SH: Well, a lot of it has to do with the fact that he's not a crafty player. That's not his game at all.

JM: But he's soulful.

SH: Oh, he's more soulful than anybody. And he just sounds *right* to me. If I could set up the amount of tension that he makes, you know . . . It is so sophisticated that people miss the whole point. What they hear is somebody playing very simply. But it's not simple at all.

JM: There's an inner-voicing to his playing.

SH: It's very deep stuff, man.

JM: Like a private conversation with himself, isn't it?

SH: Well, I guess I never thought of it that way, but, yeah, why not? All I know is, it's very, very deeply affecting to me. More so than most other horn players. He just goes straight to the heart.

JM: I hear him asking questions and then answering them. That's how I hear him structure his playing. The other player who sounds that way to me is Lockjaw [Davis].

SH: That's funny. I wouldn't have thought of that. The guy I would think of—the only guy that comes to mind when I think of what you're talking about—would be Sonny Stitt. I think of him as playing that way, as sort of a dialogue. I always thought of that being unusual, because he may be one of the only sax players I ever heard that did that thing you're talking about. But, then again, you know, different people hear different things, right?

JM: There's a third player who sometimes approaches that, in my estimation—Jimmy Forrest.

SH: I love Jimmy Forrest. Oh, I love his playing.

JM: With Forrest, what I hear when he's really on—and there aren't enough recordings of Jimmy Forrest, in my estimation . . .

SH: No. No, there aren't.

JM: . . . I hear Jimmy Forrest having a conversation with a question that he asked before he started playing. He always seems to be referring to that. I know this is metaphorical and intuitive, and maybe I'm out to lunch when I put it that way, but this is the way I hear what's going on with these cats.

SH: Yeah, I hear you.

JM: When I hear Stitt, I hear him in a kind of anguish, a kind of anguish of

incompatibility with his own ideas. There is a torment in Stitt's playing, even at its most simple. Stitt always sounds displaced.

SH: Really? That's interesting.

JM: The great Stitt recordings, for me, are the ones that he did with Dizzy and Rollins.

SH: Oh, I love those. Those are incredible. I only know the one with "The Eternal Triangle" and "Con Alma."

JM: You don't have the other one?

SH: I've only got the one, with "Sunny Side of the Street" and "After Hours." I love that record.

JM: There are two versions of "Con Alma" that you ought to hear.

SH: I'd like to. In fact, I meant to bring that along with me, and it was one of the ones I couldn't put my hands on when I was leaving the house this morning.

JM: Have vocalists been important to you over the years?

SH: Oh yeah. I love vocalists. All kinds.

JM: Clifford Jordan used to say that, often, when he was playing, he was hearing somebody singing the song he was playing. He was, as it were, playing along with someone singing in his head, or he was playing the lyric that he heard while he was playing. Does that make sense to you?

SH: Yeah, sure. Sometimes, even if you don't like the lyric that much, it's a question of phrasing. You can look at it in two different ways. Sometimes the meaning of the lyric can actually contribute to the way that you play the song and the way you feel it. And other times, the meaning of the lyric could be . . . well, let's face it, sometimes it's just . . . sometimes the music is better than the lyric. But the lyric affects the way you phrase the thing, because if you phrase it out of sync with the way the lyrics are done, then you lose the musicality of the tune. So even if you don't feel the actual meaning of the lyric itself, the sound of the lyric is important. As a jazz player—and very often you're accompanying yourself at the same time—you're playing the lyric. You're playing the singer's part and the accompanist's part, which can set up some interesting things. It's nice. That allows you to be creative on a ballad and still play the melody, which, I think, is the best way to handle

it. I don't like to take a lot of choruses at that tempo, you know. So, if you're not going to open it up and play a long solo, if you want to be creative and have some improvising on the tune, you can do it in between the words.

JM: Benny Golson once told me that he found Pharoah Sanders to be a very powerful player, because, like 'Trane, Pharoah now can say volumes with one note.

SH: You played me a Pharoah Sanders record the last time I was at your house. I had never heard it before. It was a recent thing of him playing ballads, and it was gorgeous. It was beautiful. I'd never heard him play like that before.

JM: What I find spooky about Pharoah playing over the last few years is how much he sounds like 'Trane. I mean the sound of his horn. I thought I'd never hear somebody who could enter that space.

SH: I'll have to hear that again.

JM: I think if you tried to do that consciously, you couldn't do it.

SH: Well, there's certainly a lot of people trying.

JM: Exactly.

SH: It shows you that it is an impossible thing to do. You can't sound like somebody else. Not really. Superficially, but once you're familiar with a person's sound—really familiar with it—you would never mistake anybody else for that person. It's a physical impossibility.

JM: You're pointing to the way that musicians, at your level, play off one another. That's an interesting and, frankly, intriguing dynamic in the nature of jazz itself, something I've never seen adequately addressed. For example, the variety of pianists that you've played with—this one will do this for you and another will do that. Could you just say some things about the way pianists set up, or frame, melodic possibilities that structure the way that you perform?

SH: I'm not so sure that I know what it is that causes me to play a certain way with a certain pianist. I'm not sure that I know enough about it or if I'm capable of analyzing the situation to be able to say why. I do know that I react a certain way with certain accompanists. And I don't have just one sort of pianist that I like—I like a lot of different types, you know, and I do play differently with [each of] them. There are some players—although right

now nobody really springs to mind except really bad players, and that's just not important—but there are some good players that I don't play well with. I wouldn't be able to put my finger on why. But I know other musicians that would be able to tell you exactly why. I think I've always shied away from it. I find that, not being analytical, I save myself a lot of grief.

JM: I'm sure that's right, and you should junk my question.

SH: No. What I mean is, I think *not* thinking about it becomes a way of protecting myself.

JM: I think that's right. I have noticed, however, when I've been in the same room with you and Gerry Wiggins, there is a lot of stuff going on.

SH: Well, you know, he's amazing. I *do* like to be led. There are some players that can't stand that. I know a lot of jazz players, for whatever reason, cannot stand to have the rhythm section take them anywhere. They want to be in control all the time. I don't feel that way at all. In fact, I really welcome it. Very often, if I'm left to my own devices, I'll knock out the same thing every night. Forever, maybe. Whereas, somebody comes along like Wig, who really does point you in different directions . . . for me, it's fun. I look forward to that.

JM: Wig is like an instant party.

SH: Yeah. I like that. You don't have to wait for him to get hot.

JM: He's like the guy who comes out of the bullpen already warmed up. The first pitch is ninety-nine miles an hour.

SH: I need that. That's what I look for in a drummer, as well. I'm a little conservative, a little hesitant. If I get with somebody that turns it on right away, I'm much more confident, and much more likely to come out with something good. And Wig is always on. I'm always listening. While I'm playing, I'm always listening to what's going on. It's nice to be fed things and see what you do with them. I enjoy that part.

JM: It's always struck me that you know a million songs.

SH: I probably don't know as many as people think I do.

JM: Well, maybe. But I'm amazed at the way you can hold so many songs in your head. Somebody can throw something out—a fairly obscure song—and bang, you've got it.

SH: Well, you know, a lot of the time I really take advantage of the fact that I'm a horn player, and a jazz horn player, at that. I'm not required to know the exact melody all the time. I can skate. In other words, I can vaguely remember a tune. I've got the harmonic outline in my head, basically. And I know enough to wait for the chord before I play a note. If I were a pianist, I'd be in a much different position—people might be talking about how few songs I know, because I'd have to say no when somebody'd say, "Do you know this?" I'd have to say, "Geez, I do, but I'm not sure I know it well enough to make you happy." Whereas, in my case, I get away with a lot. That's one of the nice things about being a horn player.

JM: When you put it that way, it makes even more dramatic and amazing the repertoire of Tommy Flanagan and Jimmy Rowles, to pick two obvious examples.

SH: Absolutely, absolutely. There you go. These are people that not only know the song they're gonna play but, in Jimmy's case, at least, he has his own version of it. That's what's so remarkable about him. He not only knows several thousand tunes but he's reharmonized several thousand of them himself.

JM: And he's lost a lot of players because of it.

SH: Absolutely. Jimmy would take it to the extreme. It's one of the great things about him. He'll actually change the melody line to suit his reharmonization of the thing. A lot of people consider that sacrilegious, but this is jazz. I think that's what it's all about. Particularly with a guy like Jimmy, who knows the way the thing is written to begin with and probably knows all the other reharmonizations of the tune, as well.

JM: He's a man who has impeccable good taste.

SH: I always agree with Jimmy.

JM: That's an element that frequently goes unstated when people talk about jazz. We were talking before about the modal thing and various nonmelodic explorations. Whatever they may be—interesting, innovative, perhaps important—the element of taste, whether it's literature, painting, film, sculpture, or jazz, is a vital component in the pleasure and significance of the performance. What taste, or aesthetic need, is addressed by a particular musical disposition? Does it stand up to repeated listenings? Is this performance something you want to listen to for the rest of your life? Once a week,

twice a month? You can fall out of bed any time of day and listen to Jimmy Rowles make the piano purr like a kitten. It's better than your dreams.

SH: Jimmy's an artist. I don't hear enough of him these days.

JM: He's hanging in there pretty good, despite his emphysema. And his daughter, Stacey, has become a fine flügelhorn and trumpet player.

SH: Last time I heard Stacey, I loved the way she sounded. I was really impressed. That was three or four years ago. Haven't seen her since.

JM: She grew up listening to all the right people.

SH: The last time I heard her, she was a mature player and original, as unique as anybody I've heard. Just beautiful. I love the way she plays.

JM: Have you run into Dave McKenna lately?

SH: When was the last time I saw him? I played with him right after Christmas [1993]. He was just in New York last week, with Gray [Sargent], doing duets at the Tavern on the Green.

JM: Those are two characters. They were made for each other.

SH: They really were. I've never seen Dave so inspired by another musician before.

JM: Well, Gray seems like his son, almost.

SH: I've never seen Dave take that much interest in another musician. I can see how much he's enjoying playing with Gray regularly. For him to have somebody he can listen to that knocks him out, you know . . . that's a great thing. It's just the transfusion that he must have needed.

JM: Gray has the same kind of humor that Dave does, I think. It's always on the edge of a pun.

SH: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. I love both of them so much, and I always loved their playing. When the two of them get together, it seems perfect.

JM: It seems inevitable, in fact. When you're in the city [New York], I know you're a family man, so you can't get out like you might have in the old days.

SH: Very seldom.

JM: Do you still get out to hear music now and then?

SH: Well, before [baby son] Hiro was born, yeah.

JM: Do you seek out younger pianists who come on the scene? Is that one of the things you check out?

SH: I'm always interested, especially in younger pianists. But I don't get out much. The only time I ever see any younger pianists is if I'm on a festival where there are other guys on the bill. Then I get to hear other people. I'm home very seldom, and when I *am* home, I really don't go out.

JM: There are some powerful young players who have come along in the last few years. Unlike some in the younger generation of saxophone players who often sound like they've come from the same place, some of these younger pianists are quite individual. Cyrus Chestnut and John Opferkuch, for example.

SH: I think so. The tenor saxophone is funny, because it's the one instrument today where you don't really hear that much diversity, although I think that's improving a little bit. It has to, sooner or later. With trumpet players and pianists, and even with alto players, I find that they're more well-rounded, the young guys that I've heard. They sound like they've listened.