

MUSICIAN

PERFORMER & LISTENER

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THE CLASH

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INTERVIEWS

JOE

STRUMMER

MICK JONES

PHOEBE SNOW

JOHN MARTYN

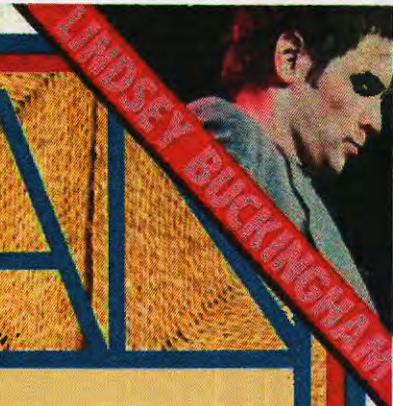
R. S. JACKSON

L. TRISTANO

INDEPENDENTS

NEW GUITARS

RECORDING



Lindsey Buckingham has lately emerged as the moving creative force behind Fleetwood Mac both on "Tusk" and on their recent tour. Here he talks with Dan Forte about Big Mac's musical growth and directions as well as his own.



The Clash is without question the strongest, most creative group to come out of the punk revolution. In two in-depth interviews Clint Roswell, Vic Garbarini, Robert Fripp, Joe Strummer and Mick Jones talk about the Clash myth and reality, social directions and musical desires.



Ronald Shannon Jackson is the future of jazz drumming right now. He tells his own story, from the heartland of Texas through playing with Ayler, Ornette and Cecil to his monastic retreat learning to express the rhythms between the beats.



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PLAYER & LISTENER

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Cover Photo by Steve Sandon



RONALD SHANNON JACKSON

THE FUTURE OF JAZZ DRUMMING

By Rafi Zabor and David Breskin



The first wave of a fusion between jazz and rock idioms began with Miles Davis around 1970 and was quickly taken up by a generation of musicians sensing a unique artistic opportunity and by record companies smelling bigger, better bucks. With the continuing exception of Weather Report and occasional one-shot successes like Michael Mantler's *Movies*, the movement was artistically bankrupt if financially solvent by the end of its first half-decade. The second wave must have begun before the first — otherwise

how explain the presence of an electric band at Ornette Coleman's 1962 Town Hall concert? — but only became noticeable in 1977 with the release of Ornette Coleman's *Dancing in Your Head*, a colossal celebration of the possibilities of music and life that sounded anomalous at the time but which now can be seen to have ushered in a whole new musical genre (A&M Horizon has let it go out of print, anxious not to disturb in its inexplicable course the bizarre public fate of Ornette Coleman). This second meeting of the ways had less to do with the possibility of a dialogue between the American races — the dreams of the 60s have not died so hard after all — than with the reweaving of several strands in a more specifically black tradition. Coleman had always encountered the blues at a

point aesthetically prior to its recorded traditions, before its assumption of history and form; it was as if he had touched the music's heart. With *Dancing* he celebrated the life of that heart in what should have been an unendurable chaos: screaming guitars in two keys, bass in a third, a riot of rhythms: as if in the middle of the sundering racket of our cities it were still possible for a whole human being, body and spirit, to dance. You could not immediately tell how important the drummer on the record was to the synthesis, but when *Body Meta* came out on Artists House, presenting music from the same sessions but without a multiple percussion track, it became apparent that Ronald Shannon Jackson was some new kind of drummer who could match Coleman vision for vision, violation for violation, and who might conceivably have something to say on his own. Of course by then he had appeared with Coleman's double quartet at Carnegie and, in a sudden eruption of reality, with Coleman on *Saturday Night Live* (leaving guest host Milton Berle more than a little puzzled and the audience apparently speechless), and gone on to join Cecil Taylor's band, in which, amid thundering tom-toms and 4/4 shuffles, he precipitated the first changes in Taylor's rhythmic landscape in nearly twenty years. Shortly thereafter he animated fellow Coleman alumnus Blood Ulmer's avant-funk quartet (with Amin Ali and David Murray), initiating a major portion of the Punk Jazz phenomenon (still largely an occurrence in the press) while starting up his own very different band, the Decoding Society. Joachim Berendt called him "simply the most important new drummer of today" while other incautious souls let on that he was the first man with something new to say on the instrument since Tony Williams. Well, you know how people talk, but clearly Shannon Jackson was a sudden force to be reckoned with — what else could have made the great ship Cecil



From a musical education in the heartland of Texas and Missouri, to the man of all styles on the pavements of the Apple, to the University of Ornette and the harmolodics of knowledge in Paris, to a 13th street apartment and a monk-like sacrifice to discover a true self, to the fulfillment of a radical new sense of space within time, the saga of Ronald Shannon Jackson is one of inspired purpose.

change course? — and a new meeting place for free rhythm, funk, tribal time polyphony and second line-marches. Shannon Jackson speaking:

I was born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas and I stayed there until I went off to college. My mother plays piano and organ, and my father always wanted to play the saxophone. He was the local juke-box man. He owned juke-boxes and record stores. He had the record store in the black neighborhood, and we sold gospel and race music and Red Foxx stuff, which was basically under the counter and illegal — for parties and all. We always had to put the most sellable blues on the juke, because we didn't have that much money and so my father had to make the right choices; it would boil down to choosing Jimmy Reed and Muddy Waters and B.B. King and Bobby Bland and Guitar Slim and Gatemouth Brown. So I grew up listening to them, because that's what he put on the boxes — all that intermixed with Horace Silver, who was hitting at the time with that Blue Note scene. This was mid-50s. I used to spend my summers out in the country, place called Aola, Texas, way out there in east Texas. Place just has a barber shop and a little grocery store. Train didn't even stop. Local man just put the mail up on a post, trainman would snag it on the way through. That was the environment I grew up in.

I was about four years old when I saw a set of drums in a church basement in Houston, and I knew I was going to be doin' that. I didn't know what they were, but I knew they had something to do with me. I used to keep time on pots and pans and everything I could find to keep time on. When I was in 3rd grade was the first time I had actual access to a set. Fellow named John Carter, who now teaches at the University of Southern California, was my first music teacher. In the 3rd grade they asked everybody who had training on instruments,

they write your name down an' all, then they send you to the band room. They gave me a clarinet, but I moved to the drums in the back of the room — which I knew I wanted to do. I just happened to have a natural talent for it. So we had to learn the Sousa's, other marches by English composers. By the time I got to junior high, we were playing Wagner. At high school, it was marching music during the football season and classical music during the rest of the year. Now for our own enjoyment, we used to jam during lunch hour. The band director let us have the band room. We had access to all the instruments, every day during lunch. He would just lock us in. We didn't go to lunch in those days. We weren't playing blues, we were playing jazz. Charlie Parker had been through town and there was a local contingent of guys who could really play. Dallas was bigger than Fort Worth, but Fort Worth always had the cats who were on the money in terms of the music. It had a lot to do with our music teacher there, Mr. Baxter. He played all the instruments. He loved to perfect a band. He put his whole life into music — to the point it would drive him mad, so dedicated, totally dedicated. A lot of people come through this man: he was Ornette Coleman's teacher, he was Dewey Redman's teacher, he was Julius Hemphill's teacher, Charles Moffett's teacher and John Carter's and mine. King Curtis, my father's cousin, also came from there. Billy Toman and I used to take our instruments home over the weekends, he was a saxophone player, used to play with Mingus. We couldn't get into the clubs much. I'd sneak in a lotta places 'cause my father had the juke-boxes, just long enough to catch a few sounds until someone got wise and realized I wasn't there dealing with the juke-boxes. Then we started goin' to Dallas. Saw a group called James Clay and the Red Tops, and I loved what everybody was doing and I wanted to sit in but I just wouldn't. Fellow

named Leroy Cooper, a baritone player who played with Ray Charles, was the one that got me up there. Billy had told him I played drums. I was 15 then.

I'd been so indoctrinated to the fact that the life of a musician is so hard. I'd seen a lot of musicians, and I thought I could do better in terms of living. But the music was something I just did. In church, I sang in the choir. In school, I sang in the choir. And the bands. And I played some gospel music, some spiritual music. It took a long time to actually make up my mind that this was what I was gonna do.

I went off to school, to Lincoln University in Missouri, to study music. But when I got there I realized it wasn't the kind of music I wanted. It wasn't jazz, which was the music I most liked to play. I'd been gigging in Dallas with James Clay and playing in Fort Worth. Ornette, of course, was long gone by that time, and Hemphill was four, five years ahead of me. So we didn't have a chance to play together until I got to college. In the marching band and symphony orchestra at Lincoln was Oliver Nelson, Lester Bowie, John Hicks, Julius Hemphill, a bass and tuba player, Bill Davis, and myself. There we all were in Jefferson City, Missouri. I had chosen Lincoln over other schools because Lincoln was right between St. Louis and Kansas City and I knew I'd get the chance to catch all the players that came through there. With the background I had, I was afraid to come to New York, absolutely frightened to death.

At Lincoln, I learned how to play — uh, I *had* to play — hillbilly music, which paid for my food. Pure Ozark music. Also, some Boots Randolph-type music, screamin' saxophone sorta thing. Just drums and sax in these back hills clubs up in the Ozarks. It was what they call, *real* redneck music. Redneck Honky-tonk music, it had nothin' to do with the blues. And there were like no black people in the club except me and the sax player. And they would call out the weirdest songs and we'd have to play 'em and make those people dance. Just me and the saxist: that's how I got a foundation in being able to play without a bass player or anything else. Actually, it was like a life and death situation. The saxophone player grew up in that area and all the white people knew him — he was their local idol, they always gave him work. And so he could play any song that they would ever want; it might be outa tune, in the wrong key, whatever, but he could play it. He had a good ear and he could scream.

You don't have to play it from time, you can play it from rhythm. To me, making music swing means putting a beat there without actually playing it. The beat is in your body, the pulse can just come directly from life.

We'd have to play "The Yellow Rose of Texas" and then go to "Polkadots and Moonbeams" then "Honky-tonk" then maybe "How Much Is That Doggie In The Window." People came down to get drunk and we couldn't jive 'em, we really had to be playing. They'd throw all kinds of things at us. Look: we were black so we were in trouble anyway. So we'd better not do nothin' wrong, or else; you know, just play it boy. I guess we usually came through the front door but we had to come through it pretty early in the night, which was pretty much the same thing as coming in the back. And we'd play roller skating rinks, which were much better than the bars. No organ. Just me and the saxophone. In the Ozarks I had to learn how to fill in for other instruments, like the organ at the rink, I'd hear in my head where those other instruments were supposed to be and I'd know how to fill in — and *still* swing.

See, the whole gist of what I'm doing now is to play music that swings — swings just as madly, just as profoundly as any music has ever swung — but without having to play it in the context of keeping time. In other words, I play rhythms and let the rhythms create the time itself. So having to do those type of

things early on — playing with no bass or no piano for instance — helped me think about the drums in a different way. And I had to play for everything and anything: bar mitzvahs, weddings too, and Mass, and honky-tonks, and everything else. I bought my first telephone in New York with money from a strip-tease gig. Me and a saxophone player from Philly, C. Sharpe, had that gig. Bump an' grind, boom ba-ba-boom ba-ba-boom and all that. Most of it was on the toms and the bass drum, geared to your basic hip-shaking and then the undressing ceremony. Uh-huh, I've played everything.

I was at Lincoln a few weeks less than a year, 'cause I took off to see John Coltrane and Dizzy in St. Louis. Coming from Texas you could only hear all these people on record. I played in Dallas that summer and after that enrolled at Texas Southern University in Houston. I started working an evening gig, then an evening gig *and* an after-hours gig. I was working so much, I quit school again. My father became very ill and I went back home to run his business. It was then I decided to take school very seriously, in terms of trying to learn something other than music.

I had dissipated an awful lot as a young person. I was always with people much older and so I was always doin' what they were doin'. In order to prove myself I was always doin' it to the extreme. So when I went home to take care of business it was a breather for me; I got away from the life I'd been living. I'd been playing a regular singer-type gig with bass and drums from 8-to-12, and then a be-bop and blues gig from 'bout one till 6 or 7 in the morning in these gambling joints. Gambling's illegal down there and these joints stayed open all night long. We used to get raided all the time. Shot at and everything else. They'd be so bombed out all the time they just didn't care. The raids wouldn't be the sort of thing that they'd cart the black folk to jail, because where I grew up if black people killed each other it was: "Oh well, another nigger dead." No big deal. What the cops wanted was to catch up all the piles of money before the cats could grab it away. Now Texas allowed everybody to carry a gun, so everybody had one.

So from there I decided I had to go to school and study. And I went and studied ancient philosophy and business and tried to work from that end. As a music major, they'd been teaching me out of the same books as in high school and I'd been playing the same Sousa and Wagner and the other European classics. And technically, the teachers couldn't teach me nothing new. Meanwhile, I was looking for people to teach me jazz. I had this concept that people actually *taught* jazz; I'd been playing be-bop in night clubs and had the notion that someone was teaching this somewhere.

I wasn't aware at the time that the music you play comes from your life, not teaching. I was living that type of life and that's where the music was comin' from. But some of the cats I'd run into on gigs would tell me a few things about the drums and I picked up on that. I wanted to go to New York but I was too scared, so I found myself a school near there — University of Bridgeport up in Connecticut — that would be close enough so I could come down to the city. I started comin' in and got my first gig with a foot-stompin' piano player over at the Inner Circle on Sutton Place. Just piano and drums. I played a lot of duos.

At the University of Bridgeport I was truly and sincerely trying to become an American businessman. My parents wanted that. I had fucked up so royally from all the nightlife that it was time to put this other thing together. But then I found that wherever I'd be, I'd be playing music. Or if I had some time alone I'd be drawing drum sets, designing them the way I wanted them to be. I was working at United Aircraft as a market researcher. I was only there to do calculations, so I'd take off with other reports down to New York, and down there I started putting together the kind of drum set I wanted. So, needless to say, I was back playing the drums.

I gigged around in Connecticut and then moved to the city for good early in '67. I moved into Bennie Maupin's place between Avenues C and D on 10th Street. Cecil McBee was living right up the street. Another bass player's apartment



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

became vacant and I moved in there. One night at Slug's, Grachan Moncur told me about there were scholarships open for jazz musicians if you could qualify and take the tests and so on. The biggest requirement was to be able to play. I got a scholarship to N.Y.U. College of Music. My life was split between the strip-tease gig, playing at Slug's or The Five Spot or on Staten Island or New Jersey or that morning playing for high school kids. This was the situation.

Then I began working for Albert Ayler. Charles Moffett took me to a recording session he was supposed to do. He didn't want to do it because he was working with Ornette, so he asked me to do it. Charles Tyler was the leader. I met him for the first time in the studio. He told me what his kind of music was. We sat down and made the record. All first takes, no second takes. That was my very first record. Never got paid. But one of the people in the studio was Albert Ayler. Now I don't know if I'd even heard of Albert Ayler; if I had, I didn't remember him. Albert comes up to me and said he liked the way I played, would I join his band. He'd just come back from Europe and was looking for a drummer. I said: O.K. It didn't bother me, didn't faze me one way or another 'cause not only didn't I know who he was, but I didn't even think he was serious.

He called me. We started playing gigs down at the Lafayette Theatre. I'd been playing by myself a lot, and I'd played with duos and trios and orchestras and choirs, but never with someone who told me to play everything I could possibly play. It blew my mind. I could try anything. All four mediums — both feet, both hands — used to the maximum, with total concentration in each one. You know, the whole set-up was so massive: the total spiritual self, which can be a million different things at one time, but trying to make it concise and particular at a given moment. It was like somebody taking the plug out of a dam. So I was playing that, but one night I went over to the Five Spot where Mingus was trying to play "Stormy Weather." That was one of the songs I used to practice by myself all the time; my father used to love to hear Lena Horne sing "Stormy Weather," so it was in my psych. I used to practice it all the time, I could always play phrases on the drums from "Stormy Weather." Now Dannie Richmond was the drummer, but I had the key for the music Mingus wanted to play. But he said NO. Allright, during their break Toshiko Akioshi comes out to play some solo piano. Herb Bushler comes up and starts playing bass. So I figure, why not. When we got through playing, some tune like "I Remember April," the audience started applauding like mad. I remember a guy, right behind me, clapping LOUD. And then the guy says, "O.K. come in tomorrow." I turn around

going through a lot of degrading things in my personal life and I dropped out of the scene for awhile. This is at the end of the 60s, marches, riots and all that. I moved to Queens. Worked on a lot of social jobs: high school gigs during the week, small bars at night, every Saturday morning a bar mitzvah or an Irish wedding, which paid me more money than I made all week on all my other jobs. At this time I made a recording with Weldon Irvine. I met him when I worked with the Joe Henderson/Kenny Dorham big band. Then I did a record with Teruo Nakamura. And then I started chanting.

I was driving to a gig with a young pianist Onaje Alan Gumbs. I was a real speed demon, so I was driving very fast. So he starts chanting. I'm speeding down the highway, double-clutching, and he's scared to death. He's chanting: *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo* and I say: what in the hell are you saying? He said he'd tell me about it after the gig. He did, and I picked up from there. My life changed. I realized all the things I'd been seeking were right there in the rhythm of chanting *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo*. In other words, all the discipline I needed in my life — the thing that was gonna put the pieces together for me — was the chanting. I moved back to Manhattan. I chanted. I wanted to live off music, not have to do anything else. That happened. I continued chanting; I wanted to put it to the test in terms of my life.

Up until this time I was playing totally from natural talent. But this made me think of music in a different way. I'd been very egotistical; I could go anywhere and just play, literally, in any musical context. And I did it all the time, sitting in all over New York: Latin, blues, rock, jazz, whatever, gospel music. But when I started chanting in '74, this changed. I began practicing. I went to a religious convention in Hawaii, played out there in a trio with Buster Williams and Onaje. Herbie (Hancock) sat in. I came back and kept chanting. Had a steady gig in a cabaret, made a lot of money: I'd make \$150.00 for 15 minutes at a press party for Elizabeth Taylor, things like that, and I'd never made money like that. You would not believe some of the places in New York: money, money, money these people had. I knew this was all happening for a reason...

I said my Buddhist prayers and practiced. Pray and practice. Then one Sunday morning I went down to the Pink Tea Cup, a soul food joint in the Village, and Ornette walks in. Now I had met him every once in a while over the years. Julius Hemphill had introduced me to him. I asked him what he was doing and he said he was looking for a drummer. I gave him my number. At the time I was makin' more money than I had conceived was possible just playing the drums, so I wasn't

CHARLES STEWART



"Albert Ayler had such a presence, he could play just two notes in a club and everyone would have to stop and listen. He told me to play everything I could possibly play. It blew my mind. I could try anything. It was like somebody taking the plug out of a dam."

and it's Mingus. Crazy. I enjoyed it, I played with the group as the second drummer for a few weeks. He liked what I was doing and wanted to rent some tympani for me, 'cause Dannie was his regular drummer and he knew I could play them, and he was working on some pieces and all. But Albert Ayler had gotten more work and there was a conflict. I couldn't do both. I'd already been bitten by this Albert Ayler bug — he had such presence, he could play just two notes in a club and everyone would have to stop to listen — so I went to work for Albert. Which went along fine, until Albert wasn't working for awhile.

Then I started up with Betty Carter. Working with her was one of the highlights of my life. The way she sings — rhythmically, her be-bop phrasing — really allowed me to extend the playing of my left hand tremendously. She would play with the rhythm section. It was a beautiful thing, but unfortunately I was

even thinking about it: I had a nice place, a telephone with an answering service, I could close up when I wanted to and come out when I wanted to. And he called a day later. Bern Nix was there at the rehearsal, and he'd been chanting also. Ornette had a gig with the Symphony Orchestra in Paris and he wanted to go over and spend a month. So we rehearsed for a month: Ornette; Jamaladeen Tacuma on bass, Bern Nix and Charles Ellerbee on guitars, a Chilean percussion player and myself. We rehearsed all day, every day. They'd already moved into his loft on Prince Street. And we left for Paris. This was the first time I'd been abroad and we were like travelling gypsies. We did everything ourselves. Got our own gigs. A fellow gave us the keys to his studio; all the equipment had been stolen out of it and we could use it for as long as we liked to rehearse. We ended up staying from October to March, this

is '76, '77. We go out to Italy or wherever and play for awhile. We came back from one trip round Christmas, went into the studio and recorded *Dancing In Your Head*. We'd already done the pieces with the Orchestra.

Ornette had begun to show me different things: how I was playing according to the rules about playing *behind* someone and all, and encouraged me to do some writing, and work on my ideas. There was the same freedom to play as with Albert, but in this context you'd know everything you could or would play before you got up to the bandstand. Still improvisational, but ordered — no more guessing games. Already the chanting had allowed me to put my finger on what I wanted to do. I see

state and works to stay there long enough. No one in my neighborhood cared when I played, so I played regardless of time. I'd get up at 3:00 or 5:00 in the morning and start playing the drums. Didn't bother no one. I'd play into the afternoon, go make myself a cheese sandwich or egg sandwich, go to sleep for a few more hours, wake up and start playing again. After I'd been working on my ideas for over two years, I felt I needed actual group playing to further develop them. So I kept chanting and chanting — I'd told myself that I'd never miss my morning or evening practice — and I hadn't so I knew if I set a goal for myself I could achieve it. I could send out the vibrations and basically get into the situation I desired.

JAMES HAMILTON



Ornette showed me different things, to not play according to the rules about playing behind someone. There was the same freedom to play as with Albert but you'd know everything you could or would play before you got up on the bandstand. Still improvisational, but ordered — no more guessing games.

music all around me. Everything is raining sixteenth and eighth notes all the time. I was becoming aware of all this and finally disciplining myself to sit down and write it out and perfect it. Since I had the keys to the studio, I'd get up early and go down there and work by myself, then the band would come by around 3:00, and we'd work till 9:00, sometimes till midnight. One night the police broke in; we were playing so late, the neighbors had complained. We played everyday, and the people 'round there weren't used to this sort of thing. And I played all day. Any day I wasn't there I'd be off to some museum of African art or history or maybe the Louvre, or the Museum of Man out at the Eiffel Tower 'cause that really had the stuff. I learned about the world, about life, and at the same time I was writing out all sorts of rhythms. The experience changed my life, changed what I wanted to play. We came back and played that Avery Fisher concert and then the spot on the "Saturday Night Live" show, which was the last thing I did with that group.

After that I had no place to live in the city, I had to move around again. I chanted and chanted so I could get a place to work on my ideas. And I ran into a saxophone player who was getting ready to leave his studio down on 13th street, which had a full apartment in back. All I had to do was move in, and I did. I wrote music and wrote music and wrote music and learned how to play the flute. I had no responsibilities: from the opening of my eyes to the closing of my eyes it was just music. I'd go out and work a press review or something for a few hundred dollars, but that would be it. I wasn't working any gigs, didn't have to. Other than rent, all I needed was 10, 15 dollars a week; I'd become a vegetarian, only eat one meal a day.

I had a loft bed, from which I'd write drum rhythms all over the ceiling. My conscious state was completely dominated by music. I'd never worked that hard, 'cause I could do all the things I'd hear being done by other drummers. But I was going for something else. I'd also been exposed to the Joujouka drummers of Morocco by Ornette. My playing was Ornette's harmolodic concept from a rhythmic point of view. Ornette is a master saxophonist, melody-writer, magician, teacher. The whole time in Paris was like being in Coleman University. We were totally under his influence. He just paid us so we'd have money to eat and expenses. He was paying the hotel bills and everything. All we had to do was rehearse. We only played concerts when they'd pay him enough money that he thought it was worth it. My concept started there, but it didn't begin to jell for me until I was alone down on 13th Street.

I realized that to get to the point that I wanted I would have to sacrifice for it. My father had always told me that. You've got to sacrifice. I'd been reading a lot of books, and learning how man can attain what he wants if he places himself in a desired

So one night I'm walking up 7th Avenue, have a dollar in my pocket, figure I'll go get myself a falafel sandwich. Then something in my mind said: no, don't get something to eat now, go on up to the Vanguard. I never liked to go the Vanguard 'cause the fellah at the door and I didn't get along, and I didn't like havin' to go to places where I had to pay to get in. On this night a young lady was on the door and I just walked in and went into the kitchen and there was Cecil Taylor drinking champagne out of a bottle. We started talking. He asked me what I do, I say I play drums. He ask me how good are you? And I told him I was the best person on this planet at doing what I do. I told him I play drums the way I play them better than anybody else because nobody plays 'em the way I do: playing drums from rhythm instead of from time, but still swinging. He didn't know I had played with Ornette or anything; what impressed him was that I told him I was the baddest motherfucker that did what I did. Nobody could play drums like I could. So he said: (in a skeptical tone of voice) O.K., gimme your number. I did. The next day he calls and says come over — with your drums. I go over and he had five flights of stairs to walk up. Whew! We just started playing together and immediately hit it off. From the shit I was working on it was a great situation: I could modulate, I could play rhythms, I could play the numerical sequences I hear and construct myself — and still make it fit within the frame of what he's doing. I could enhance his thing and still keep the drums and the rhythms as melodic as possible. Making the beat, without the time; like African rhythms, which talk about events and appearances in life, not time.

This is when I realized that the stuff I'd been working on down at the 13th street basement — 'cause I'd been down there two whole years, right? — could really happen. And Cecil liked what I was doing. So we rehearsed every day, from about 2 till 7, just the two of us. I knew he liked what I was doing 'cause friends used to call at certain times of the day. Cecil had a clock on his piano and if it was a particular time he knew someone regularly called at he'd pick up the phone, otherwise he'd let it ring and it might be from upstate or California or something, and Cecil would say "Listen to this" and go around taking all the phones in the apartment off the hook so that the whole space would be like a music chamber. Then he and I would play — maybe for 20 or 30 minutes — for these long distance calls and Cecil would pick up the phone again and say, "Did you hear *that*?" We had a ball. I have a whole library of cassette tapes of duos with Cecil. I've got alternate takes of things that are better than some of the stuff that's been put out. I'd only heard Cecil play once before I met him, very briefly at the Five Spot. And I hadn't heard Ornette either when I started playing with him, though we were supposed to be comrades, being from the same home town and all. I hadn't become

conscious of their music until I played with them. And I don't think I could have handled that if I hadn't been chanting.

Everyone sees themselves as what they are potentially capable of doing. But I think society blocks all that. There are so many obstacles. People settle for whatever they're doing, instead of accomplishing whatever they want to do. The practice of chanting allows a person to look at and reflect on what they are and what they may become. By doing it every day, it reinforces this reflection. Since the practice requires action — it's action because it's vocal and rhythmical, which are actions themselves — you begin to accumulate more and more of your potential, whatever it is. Maybe you might want to be the best cab driver? Then you focus on all the things that would make people want to ride in your cab. But more than that, it makes you see that each person is an individual jewel... if they can take what they have and develop it. I've seen a lot of people fall by the wayside, who never got to where I am now 'cause they never stopped to change what they were doing. I realized the environment I was in wasn't gonna get me to the place I want to go. I'd worked with Ayler and Mingus and Betty Carter but I'd gone back to working bar mitzvahs and parties. I

him, he has reconnected himself to traditions that modern jazz has either ignored or put to its own more urban uses. If music is a hidden river every artist has to find within himself, Jackson's findings have led him back from the cluttered island of modernity to the fruitful and murderous fields of America — its folk continuum, trembling wooden churches and football fields, its festivals in Congo Square and, ultimately, Africa. So we are talking about a larger landscape than the city allows and a shared, communal music in which there is no extraneous compulsion to be clever, nor any fear of the simplicity of things as they are. Jackson's technique may be extraordinary, he may dominate the bands in which he appears, but he does not communicate egocentricity. No matter how astonishing he gets, there is an implicit modesty in his work and a devotion to the music and what might come out of it. He communicates not "look what I can do" but "this is some of the power implicit in rhythm."

The Jackson discography is small for the moment but impressive. *Dancing in Your Head*, nice start, is one of the (ahem) great recordings in the history of jazz, and the followup, *Body Meta*, still available on Artists House, bless 'em, comes



TOM COPP

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heard many things, but I didn't have the discipline to make them a reality. I was seeking, but I didn't know who I was as a person. And that's what chanting gave me. It broke down all the other characters and gave me *me*. I could sit in with anybody, 'cause I could play any kind of way — but not Shannon Jackson's way. When I was seven years old I told my mother that I was gonna become rich by the time I was 35 but before that time I figured I might as well do everything; and David, I did *everything*. Believe me. About 99% of the things humans do, I did. And it's funny, the year before my deadline I began chanting, and became rich by another standard...

Once Jackson put it together, he was unmistakable, one of the handful of drummers whose rhythmic identity is so strong that he changes every musician with whom he plays and the way you hear them. More than that, his inventions run so deep that you find yourself rethinking the American rhythmic tradition the way you had to, for example, when Elvin Jones came along.

One afternoon up at Soundscape, the New York City music loft where he practices, Jackson showed me how some of his rhythmic figures were put together, the right hand, left hand and right foot playing three different configurations of the same phrase while the left foot chopped out a steady series of eighth-notes on the high-hat. The result was a fairly funky, unusually spacious second-line beat that reminded me of some of the things Zig Modeliste had done with the Meters, but when Jackson began developing his three lines independently of one another he moved beyond the strictures of a 4/4 bar line into a rhythmic field in which any combination of polyrhythms was possible without any loss of beat.

A number of jazz-rock drummers since Tony Williams have worked out similar coordinations, and studio aces like Steve Gadd have evolved their own specialties; the big difference is the way Jackson has made it feel. It's not just that he's made the free-jazz connection or brought a lot of his playing down from the cymbals and back onto the set or even that (like two other Coleman graduates, Eddie Blackwell and Charles Moffett) he is an enthusiastic player of marches. The Jackson effect has more to do with musical essences than with new stylistic wrinkles or technical nuance; like Coleman before

in a notch or two lower on the pole but still sets the spirit dancing. The four recordings with Cecil Taylor reveal Jackson as the most stately free-jazz drummer in the history of the idiom, a regal and thundering presence. The two New World issues, Cecil Taylor and 3 Phasis, are colossal enough; the three-record *One Too Many Salty Swift* and *Not Goodbye on hat Hut* is positively Wagnerian (also has the most obliquely fealthy title of the decade so far). *Live in the Black Forest*, on PAUSA, does not feature elves but does boast another shuffle and shorter, more easily assimilable pieces. Five stars to them all, or am I in the wrong magazine? Of the two albums with "James" Blood Ulmer, rock fans tends to prefer the Rough Trade import *Are You Glad to be in America?* (good God yes, especially now) for its raw, funk-punk spunk, but *No Wave on Moers Music* is my favorite for its unbridled energy and the way Jackson overpowers the already strong band of Ulmer, David Murray and Amin Ali with wave upon wave of rhythm (notice especially the stunning onslaught that opens the album).

Clearly this was one drummer who would wind up leading a band. What's interesting about the Decoding Society's debut disc, *Eye On You*, on About Time records, is not that it threatens to be the Next Big Thing (a designation apparently destined for Ulmer, who has been signed by Columbia for more money than you thought they spent on jazz) but that it looks like the beginning of a real oeuvre. Jackson did all the writing for the date — eleven tunes, since the cuts are kept short — and has effectively extended his penchant for polyrhythm into the sphere of composition. Most of the tunes are written in more than one tempo, often with haunted, Ornettish melodies suspended above faster, more driving rhythms, the orchestration thickly layered, almost sculptural in use of the two saxophone, one violin, two-guitar front line. Jackson is onto something, certainly a portion of Ornette's harmolodic vision of the divine simultaneity, but also something all Jackson's own just beginning to find its voice. I know where the rhythms come from, but why should the melodies and textures keep reminding me of China, Southeast Asia, Java, Chad... Of course, when you begin to crack the code there's no telling what connections may turn up and what barriers may come down. The artist with

a thousand faces has always enjoyed chatting with himself whenever he can get his instruments working right. Jackson resumes:

Cecil and Ornette are like suns. Not planets, but light for other planets. From Cecil I learned construction, how to really structure my ideas in terms of melody. All that time I'd been working on the rhythms and I had to sit up and block the clichés. I had to de-program all of that and say: BLOOM, you don't have to go *there* no more, put in your own things. You don't have to eat hamburgers every night. BLOOM! BLOOM! You can have shrimp and garlic sauce tonight, you can have lobster — you don't have to play the same breaks and the same runs no more. You don't have to play it from time, you can play it from rhythm. And from the basic rhythm you can create a million patterns from that, and keep the whole thing flowing. To me, making Cecil's music swing means putting a beat there without actually playing it. I want the listener to feel the beat without the beat having to be there physically. The beat is in your body.

As far as be-bop time, I love the way Kenny Clarke and Max Roach and all those cats set it up. But they played it when Charlie Parker was around and this is no longer the Charlie Parker era. It's been done. So I'm doing something different, playing time by just playing rhythms. If you ever saw the gatherings down South where people would start to dance and you'd see a person start to go in a circle 'cause the spirit hit them, and the moment it hit them might not have been on one, two, three or four. It might happen on five or six, or in between the two. Or the way the hearts beat: *da-duh, da-duh, da-duh* — that kind of pulse can be used in different tempos. I can set up a time, using sixteenth or eighth notes on the sock cymbal, but the pulse don't have to be with that. The pulse can just come directly from life, or from the music that's being played. I place different rhythms, different numerical sequences together. And these rhythms aren't corporal — one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight; the rhythms of your heartbeat; a march rhythm — but rather they're spiritual, which can vary in their numerical sequence. That variation indicates a different pulse movement. The foundation might be the type of beat you hear in a ritual ceremony in an African village.

I go there in spirit all the time. I've been going there, as a matter of fact, quite frequently since 1975. I can very easily go to a dance or a celebration. I often find myself there if I begin to read something and get off in my solitude and — BLOOM — I'm there, and it will take something startling to bring me back.

The Decoding Society is an organization for decoding musical and spiritual messages. Melody itself, like poetry, comes

from the spiritual world, and we serve as a medium for it. When I began to write melodies I wondered where they came from, they'd become locked in my head and I couldn't do anything about them until I wrote them down. That happens when I walk around certain parts of the city and it happens when I play the drums. In the middle of practicing the drums I naturally hear melodies. My whole life force now is directed towards presenting what I hear.

Our society has gone as far as it can possibly go in the direction we've been programmed to go in. We're becoming conscious of the problem. I think people have begun to go into themselves, much more so than even three years ago, to find some spiritual solutions. I feel I've been blessed with an opportunity and I'm gonna do all that's within my power to carry it out. Perhaps it's just that certain people are given certain keys to carry out certain plans that already exist on a metaphysical plane. Beethoven worked on *his* ideas, but also on spiritual ideas. I'm trying to structure my life the same way. Sometimes now I wish I had more classical training, because with it, I feel a whole other feeling could be brought to music. I'd like to be able to present my music in totally orchestrated form. Not traditionally, but the way I hear it. I've had glimpses of it since my youth: to be able to present the music with such joy and warmth and giving that it will carry over into the person's regular life. In ten years I'd like to take a group, a small group, to anywhere in the world and play, perhaps supplemented by an orchestra on certain pieces.

Rhythm is the pulse of life, and when you use those rhythms in the right way, in the positive way, it can carry your life into a sphere you might not experience unless you are deep into yoga or are charged with electro-telepathic impulses like a clairvoyant. There are melodies that come directly from the drums that I'd like to play that I don't get a chance to play: I've had to *create* in terms of producing the concert, getting the musicians together and rehearsing, putting out the flyers, helping organize, advertise, carry the whole thing through... All of which doesn't allow for the leisure of just going and doin' it. Many times I hit on an idea but I don't have the resources to carry it out. I found myself the other day taking money I had allocated for food and the telephone bill, and buying music books with it, just so I could keep writing music. I have a lot of music I'm working on right now, but since I don't have a contract at the moment, I can't very well ask people to rehearse it all the time. Last year, About Time gave me enough money and a month to do it the way I wanted to do it. David Baker did a fantastic job recording the instruments. This type of music would be *fantastic* in Digital. You don't need Digital for disco or be-bop, but it came along at the right time for this music. I was told at CBS there wasn't enough money for it. But if they want to — "they" being the people who market it or rather create the market for it — they could sell this music. Hell, they can create a market for whatever they want to. They can go down the beach and pick up some rocks and sell 'em on television. "Get Your Pebbles, Get Your Pebbles!!" — put it on TV commercials and you'll have a run on rocks. That's the irony of them saying there's not enough money for something. They can sell *anything* if they want to.

For a lot of people, my music is music they hear also. I know I'm not the only one hearing this music. If I'm hearing it, there are millions and millions of others hearing it in their own minds. And for those people my work would be a verification that they're not alone. I want my music to be a joy for people. The problem with it — since it's called "art" music — is that it doesn't get the same airplay as "commercial" music. And it's also not SupClub music, mine is not music to eat dinner to. It's more of a ritual. It's not "finger-popping-at-work" music, and it's certainly not "I-love-you-baby" music. But I don't ever want to be limited, 'cause my responsibility is not limited. Just because I've been associated with jazz, doesn't mean I'm limited to doing this or that. Hell, the first tune on my new record, *Sortie*, blends an Eastern-Africa feel with an overlay of a march, the kind of spiritual movement at a football game. As a young kid I used to sit behind the band at the football

Ronald Shannon Jackson's Drums

I have a standard set, a set that was self-designed. I use Sonor drums and Paiste cymbals. The cymbals are the new dark sound cymbals, New Creations. Very much like the old K. Zildjians, which were handpressed in Turkey. I use two 15" hi-hats, an 18" Chinese splash, a 21" flat ride, an 18" dark ride (as a crash), and a 16" crash — 2000 series, and also 10" 2000 series interchangeably with a small gong-like cymbal which was Tchaikovsky's which his son gave me. The drums are Sonor. Basically what I wanted was a heavier sound from the mounted tom-toms, a deeper, richer, lower sound from my left hand. One of the things I had in mind was piano design, where you come from the lower registers on up. I play more drums than cymbals, because I'm more interested in getting into the depths of drums in music — since to me, a lot of melody itself comes from rhythm.

I use two different size sticks because the two hands are different. The two hands and the two feet are not evenly matched, though I've used a matched-grip for the past 7 or 8 years. So in the right hand, I use a stick with some kind of round beater, to get the proper effect on both drum and cymbal, but of a lighter weight than the one for my left, since my right hand will always be a little stronger.

games, and they used to spread such joy when there was a touchdown or someone caught a pass. I go *there*, to that feeling, when I play. My father used to take me to games when I was very, very small. And I would freeze, my feet would be frozen, almost frostbit by the time the game was over. But I was so into the music: they used to have some phrases everybody would sing, and the drummers, of course, would *always* be playing. That was where it was.

The second piece on the album, "Nightwhistlers," is a blues, but it's like a person walking between buildings in New York and whistling and hearing the reflection of that sound bouncing off the buildings and singing the blues all at the same time. He's humming the blues *and* whistling. In other words, coming out of the country and whistling in the kind of echo-chamber we have here in a big city creates that kind of thing. So I wrote it all down, and played it the way people feel in an environment I used to be a part of — where people worked all week picking cotton and corn, and worked in wheat fields and watermelon patches — when they'd get together, starting Saturday afternoon puttin' all the ice on the beer, and then after the sun went down they'd get together and start dancin'. And I used the kind of beat they'd dance to, it would be goin' up and down at the same time, it would be like a volleyball beat. In "Apache Love Cry" I interlocked two melodies; one is the result of being at a West Indian Festival over in Brooklyn, the other comes out of a Bowery bar where I used to stop and get a beer after everything closed. One guitar player plays the one — which is lively, happy, full of carnival gaiety — while the other guitarist plays the depths of despair. And "Apache" as a symbol for what this country is all about. They represent the true spirit of what this country was and still is; no matter how many bulldozers and buildings we put up you can still get the spirit of this country if you go check them out. "Shaman" is a tribute to Max Roach, who's a shaman. The first part, which has an African influence — and by that I mean a Southern Blues beat played in 6/5 — gives way to a drum solo and then a waltz-type thing. "Eastern Voices, Western Dreams" came through chanting. While I was

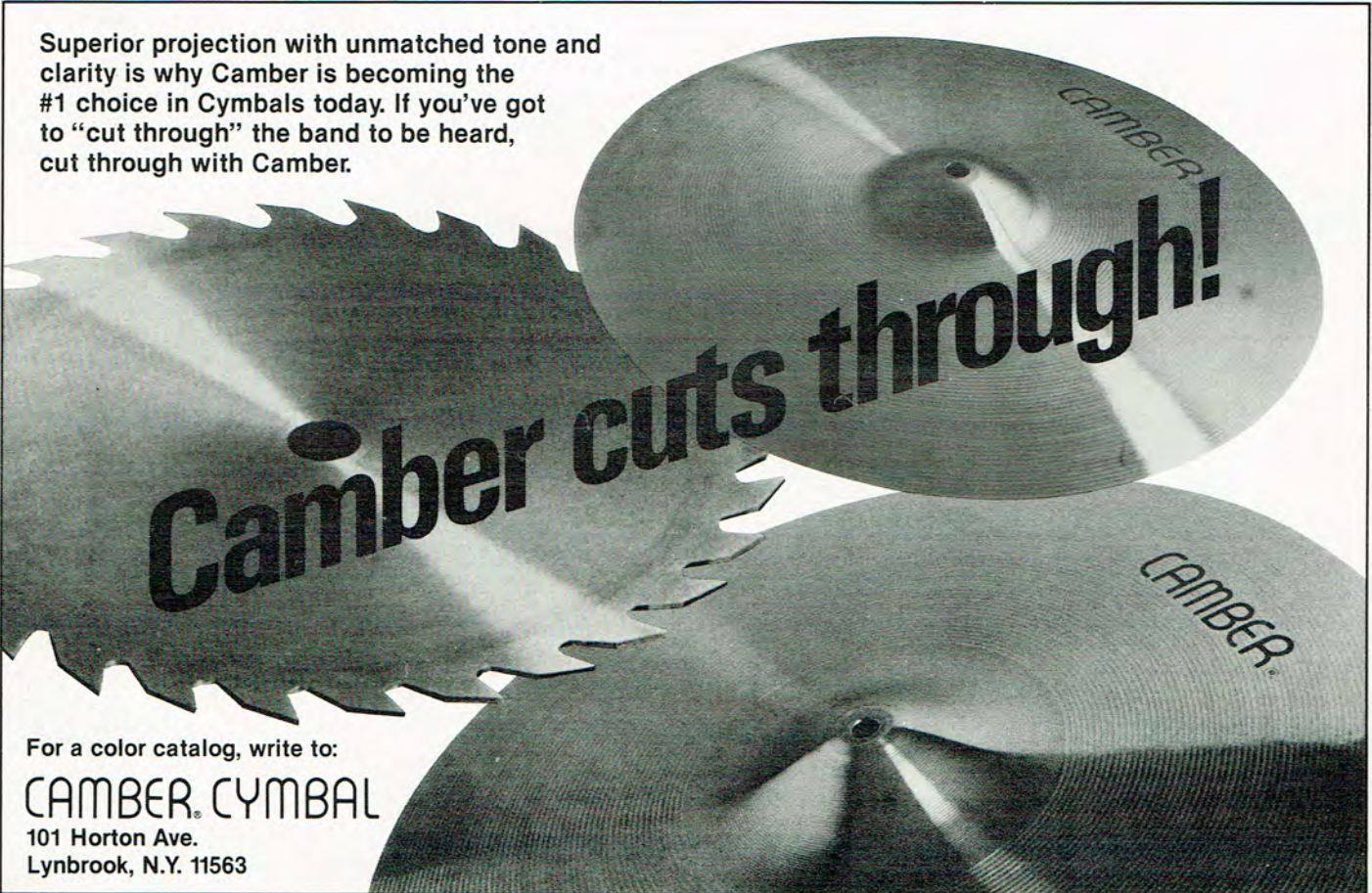
chanting an Oriental voice would speak to me and this is what the voice said. I just got up and wrote down specifically what the voice said. But I come from the West. I live in a western society. I think the two of them are beautiful and will come together in this country, which of course would only bring it back to where it was at first — the American Indians already had that kind of spirit.

I do a lot of writing now from the piano 'cause I have one at my disposal, but everything on the record was written on the flute, or from the drums. For instance, "Dancers of Joy" was written on the drums. When I ride the bus and the subways I see a lot of people coming from dance classes. My thinking and feeling about that is, well, people want to dance the way they feel, not the way they're programmed to dance. If someone comes to you and says, "Here David, here's 50 \$1000 bills, no stigmas attached." You might not jump up and down right then, but when you get out the door and get by yourself, you start *dancin' for joy*. Pure delight. Gurdjieff tried to use — in fact, did use — dance in his teachings, right? When people dance another element comes in, the thing that has to do with *pulse*, because when you really dance, and let the mind-body-spirit be itself then one's mental-logic-reasoning system is cut off and one goes into what the ritual of the dance can bring into a person, another dimension of the self. Whirling dervishes, right? I took the title from a Buddhist phrase, which talked about dancers of joy 3,000 years ago.

"Theme For A Prince" has two melodies. I wrote it in Europe and America. The first I wrote on top of a hill in the middle of a cemetery in France. It was after midnight, I didn't have no money, and some Algerian dude hipped me to this place. Some famous French painter, Monet or somebody, painted up there. On top of the hill there's a bar with money from all over the world, every country that has paper money has a bill pasted to the top of the ceiling. And these people were in there enjoying themselves. Really enjoying themselves. It was like: to hell with the world, the world didn't even matter. The title was for the person I wanted to play it, that's all. **M**

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