

"A Rare Celestial Event"

This astonishing windfall of an album, recorded at Slugs' in the spring of 1966, captures the crackling push-pull current of its time — a moment when jazz practice at its highest levels felt both grounded and volatile. The title of "In 'n Out," an altered blues by Joe Henderson at the top of our set, sums up this tension nicely. But let's also consider that titular phrase as it relates to input and output, because the music on this live recording, from one galvanic moment to the next, tells us so much about what was in the air musically, and how it was being received and transmitted. Each of the brilliant players heard here — Henderson on tenor saxophone, McCoy Tyner on piano, Henry Grimes on bass, Jack DeJohnette on drums — was operating as a sensitive instrument. Each, in his own way, was also at a pivotal juncture in his career, whirling through a cycle of endings and beginnings.

Henderson, just turning 30 at the time, and Tyner, 27, came with the deepest collaborative history. Tyner had played on the original version of "In 'n Out," the title track of a Henderson album released in 1965; a couple years prior, he'd also played on Henderson's debut as a leader, *Page One*. Those albums were released on Blue Note Records, for which Henderson and Tyner were recording extensively as sidemen. In fact, they worked together on a session around the time of this gig, laying four tracks for trumpeter Lee Morgan's *Delightfulee*.

Another thing Henderson and Tyner had in common at this time was the recent termination of a major appointment. Henderson had just abruptly quit the ever-popular Horace Silver Quintet in the middle of a San Francisco engagement, ending his highly productive two-year tenure in the band. (The shock of his resignation, that April 2, occasioned a news item in *Downbeat*.) For Tyner, the break was less decisive, more of a dissolution: after more than five years in the exalted John Coltrane Quartet, he had become increasingly flustered by the squalling atonality subsuming Coltrane's musical focus. His final recording with Coltrane — *Meditations*, an immediate lodestar for the free-improvising avant-garde — was made at the end of 1965.

Speaking with critic Stanley Dance two years earlier, Tyner made a thoughtful attempt to explain what made the classic John Coltrane Quartet such a model of expressive unity. "Everyone plays his personal concept, and nobody tells anyone else what to do," he said. "It is surprisingly spontaneous, and there's a lot of give and take, for we all listen carefully to one another." Every part of this statement also applies to the dynamic in this thrilling recording, among musicians who'd all made a close study of Coltrane's ecstatic working band.

Slugs' occupies a mythic place in the jazz imagination. Situated on East Third Street between Avenues B and C, in an East Village enclave now known as Alphabet City, it embodied a spirit of bohemian adventure from the start. (Its owners, Robert Schoenholt and Jerry Schultz, named the bar after an idea articulated by the rogue philosopher George Gurdjieff.) The club owes much of its notoriety to the tragic events of Feb. 19, 1972, when Lee Morgan was fatally shot there by his longtime companion, Helen Morgan — a story poignantly told in the documentary film *I Called Him Morgan*, and one contributing factor in Slugs' closure later that year.

But in the spring of 1966, the club was still in its prime, a creative cauldron and a gathering place not only for jazz musicians but also artists like the painter Bob Thompson and poet Amiri Baraka (then still known as LeRoi Jones), along with an assortment of colorful characters from the neighborhood. (Most every reminiscence of the club includes a nod to fisticuffs, muggings, or narcotics. Some also mention a well-curated jukebox.) Sun Ra had just started a Monday-night residency with his Arkestra. The booking otherwise ranged from hard-bop stalwarts to "New Thing" exponents. Thanks to the efforts of a few enterprising souls with recording gear, we have some albums chronicling this scene, including a Charles Lloyd performance from 1965 (the Resonance release *Manhattan Stories*) and an Albert Ayler set from May 1, 1966 (the ESP-Disk' album *Slugs' Saloon*). That this recording now joins

that heady company is only fitting: Joe Henderson placed third, behind his fellow tenor saxophonists Lloyd and Ayler, for “Talent Deserving of Wider Recognition” in the 1966 *Downbeat* Critics Poll.

The on-the-fly engineer on this occasion was Orville O’Brien, an integral part of the independent jazz scene. Trumpeter-composer Charles Tolliver remembers him as “a jack-of-all-trades,” a pilot as well as an audio technician: “He could do practically anything electronically, and mechanically as well.” (He was also the stepfather of Guy O’Brien, who as Master Gee later became a member of the pioneering hip-hop group The Sugarhill Gang.) With his portable Ampex reel-to-reel tape recorder, O’Brien — one of only a few Black engineers working in that era — documented plenty of music that later saw release, often at the artists’ request. Among the historic albums produced through this pipeline were a pair of two-volume classics: *Live at Slugs’*, by Tolliver’s Music Inc., and *The Night of the Cookers: Live at Club la Marchal*, featuring Morgan and Freddie Hubbard.

The long, narrow dimensions of *Slugs’* presented a familiar working environment for O’Brien, and the recording quality on these tapes retains an authentic rough-and-tumble energy. And while his original tapes in this case are lost to history, it’s fortunate that DeJohnette requested a copy: that set of seven-inch reel-to-reels, kept in his extensive personal archives for more than half a century, provided our source material here. Recent advances in mixing and mastering technology have made it worth the considerable wait.

In the booklet essay for *The Complete Joe Henderson Blue Note Studio Sessions*, a 2021 Mosaic Records boxed set, jazz critic Bob Blumenthal characterizes Henderson as “a musician whose every appearance was significant.” The ring of truth in that statement becomes a deafening roar in the case of this testament, which finds The Phantom (as he was affectionately known) wailing on the mountaintop. It opens with an “In ‘n Out” that sprawls past 26 minutes, recalling the marathon exertion of Coltrane touchstones like “Chasin’ the Trane.” Indeed, you could make a strong argument that this *is* Henderson’s chief entry in that heroic category: over the course of 79 blistering choruses, he races up and down the register of his horn, rattling off fresh ideas with inexhaustible creative flair.

He doesn’t really evoke Coltrane so much as Sonny Rollins, in his motivic approach to the development of ideas. But Henderson’s tenor language, as a totality, is unmistakably his own: a trademark blend of boppish rhythmic brio, zigzagging diatonic movement, fluid articulation, and extended techniques. The deft composure of his extemporizing is awe-inspiring, and inextricable from the actions of his rhythm section — especially DeJohnette, with whom he strikes a heavy rapport, the sort of shared intuition that enables the two musicians to finish each other’s sentences. (You’ll find a good example heading into the 40th chorus of Henderson’s solo, shortly after the six-minute mark, when he fires a quick fusillade of syncopated offbeats that DeJohnette instantly picks up, completing the phrase.)

DeJohnette was 23 in the spring of ‘66, already a drummer of superhuman ingenuity and prowess, though career-wise he was a rocket still in launch phase. He had just made his first two appearances on record — with Jackie McLean (for a Blue Note album, *Jackknife*, that would see release almost a decade later) and Lloyd (*Dream Weaver*, the first album by a heralded quartet with Keith Jarrett and Cecil McGee). What’s most striking about DeJohnette’s magnificent work here is the synthesis of multiple rhythmic modalities from the post-bop vanguard. Tyner’s powerful chordal presence — and, for long stretches of Henderson’s solos, his strategic *absence* — naturally brings out some of the polyrhythmic tussle of Elvin Jones, the combustion engine in the Coltrane Quartet. And during a preposterously fast minor blues, identified here as “Taking Off,” DeJohnette occasionally superimposes an implied new tempo based on a triplet subdivision — the same metric-modulation concept that a contemporary, drummer Tony Williams, had recently made a signature device in the Miles Davis Quintet. Again, things were in the air. But as much as this recording testifies to the capacity of DeJohnette’s input, it also underscores the exceptional quality of his output. At every turn, he expresses a rare and distinctive ability to direct the flow of energy in the band — working

with texture and tone color even as he stays on top of the beat in the manner of his hero Roy Haynes (who happened to have given him the Slingerland drum set he was playing on the gig).

Grimes, 30 at the time, is no less impressive in his dynamic acumen and unflagging endurance. Listen again to “Taking Off” with an ear toward the walking bass line, which traces the harmonic cycle of a minor blues form — with hair-trigger attunement to each soloist and an avoidance of rote pattern, at a supersonic tempo somewhere in the vicinity of 325 bpm. Grimes, who with Haynes had made up the rhythm team on Tyner’s superb trio album *Reaching Fourth*, came to this bandstand with a prominent list of affiliations; he’d worked extensively with Rollins, Thelonious Monk and Gerry Mulligan, among others. He also had a deep investment in the avant-garde, having recently recorded with Ayler, pianist Cecil Taylor, and trumpeter Don Cherry. His own debut album, *The Call*, was released in 1966, very much in that spirit. But on *this* bandstand, behind Henderson and Tyner, he understands that his role has more to do with the firmament than the frontier; he’s entrusted to hold it down, and hold it down he does.

I mentioned endings and beginnings earlier, and it’s worth noting that Blue Note experienced its own transition around the time of the Slugs’ gig, as founder Alfred Lion sold his company to Liberty Records in May 1966. Henderson, whose album *Mode for Joe* had been recorded early that year, did not stay on the roster under the new regime. He did, however, continue to record as a sideman, next playing on the Bobby Hutcherson album *Stick-Up!* — and the following year, on Tyner’s *The Real McCoy*, whose spirit flows from the same wellspring as this recording.

To the extent that anyone can generalize about a “Blue Note sound,” you hear it most clearly here on the less overheated fare, including “Isotope,” which had just been released on Henderson’s *Inner Urge*. (The album, also featuring Tyner, was recorded back in ‘64.) More surprising is the inclusion of “The Believer,” a jangly blues waltz that Tyner composed as a teenager; recorded by Coltrane in 1958 (with Red Garland on piano), it provided the title track to an album released on Prestige in ‘64. With DeJohnette and Grimes feeding the churn, it’s a perfect vehicle for both Henderson and Tyner to explore modal terrain.

As for the lone standard and single ballad in this set, “We’ll Be Together Again,” it provides an excellent reminder of the lyrical grace that these musicians had at their fingertips. Tyner opens with a delicate flourish, before Henderson delivers a rangy iteration of the melody, brushing up against both the foghorn depths and altissimo reaches of his horn. He begins his tenor solo with part of a melodic phrase that seems to remind him of a folk melody — specifically, the Irish fiddle tune “Swallowtail Jig,” which he quotes and then modulates (and cites again near the top of his second chorus, as a callback). Tyner, whose comping behind Henderson is a paragon of harmonic intuition, goes on to play an exquisite piano solo, varying his phrasing and inflection with masterly authority. He ends with a polytonal nod to another key.

“We’ll Be Together Again” — the promise in that title held true, at least in part. Henderson performed again with Tyner and DeJohnette a month or so later, on June 5, at the Left Bank Jazz Society in Baltimore. (According to official records, bassist Herbie Lewis stood in for Grimes on that gig. It wasn’t long after this that Henry Grimes vanished from the scene. He returned to great fanfare in the early 2000s and resumed his prolific contribution to the avant-garde until his death in 2020.)

Henderson would record again with Tyner on the aforementioned *The Real McCoy*, and reenlist DeJohnette for several Milestone albums, including his *Power to the People* (1969) and *Black is the Color* (1972). Much later, during a 1990s Joe Henderson renaissance on Verve, the saxophonist reunited with DeJohnette for a Gershwin tribute titled *Porgy and Bess*. (Earlier that same decade, he’d reunited with Tyner for an album plainly titled *New York Reunion*.) But as for the extraordinary lineup heard here, it seems to have been a rare celestial event. We’re fortunate to have this

snapshot — a valuable addition to each artist's discography, and a portrait of what DeJohnette rightly remembers as a moment of transformation.

— Nate Chinen, April 2024

*Nate Chinen is the editorial director at WRTI and a regular contributor to NPR. He is the author of *Playing Changes: Jazz for the New Century*, and a Substack newsletter, *The Gig*.*

"One thought: If you can fly to Chicago easily, I can get a direct flight to Chicago. We could rendezvous at O'Hare."

That was part of a February 2, 2024, e-mail I sent to producer Zev Feldman regarding how to get the original tapes of this incredibly vibrant quartet session from the home of Jack DeJohnette to the Mastering Lab, half a nation away, in Salina, Kansas. Jack and his wife, Lydia, understandably didn't want to ship these fragile, unique testaments to the living, breathing excitement that pulsed inside Slugs' Saloon in the East Village nearly sixty years ago, so we had to find a way to shuttle the recordings personally from upstate New York to the middle of the American Midwest.

Zev had meetings in Chicago and flew in from the East Coast with "the Goods" firmly in hand. I arrived in Chicago from my home in Seattle, met Zev at his arrival gate, had a stranger take a picture to memorialize the moment, parted company, grabbed breakfast to go at McDonald's on the concourse, then the tapes and I were back on a plane for Kansas. It couldn't have gone more smoothly. It was over in a few minutes.

Preparations for the tape's arrival had begun a month earlier. We knew that the tapes were quarter-track, not the typical studio-use standard format, and while the Mastering Lab studio was capable of quarter-track reel-to-reel tape playback, it was not 100% optimized for it, so the goal was to convert one of our professional-use Ampex ATR-102 machines for quarter-track use.

Following phone calls and texts with Andrey Kosobutsky at ATR Services, I was able to re-wire an existing, tucked-away ATR quarter-track playback head in lieu of the typical 2-track professional head, and we were in business. Test playback (on other, less-important tapes) provided stellar results. All good!

Everybody involved was happy to find that the tapes were not only in good condition for the most part, but that the recording, made by experienced NYC "jazz-on-location" engineer Orville O'Brien on a Crown tape machine (according to Jack), was quite good. We knew we had a winner on our hands.

Almost immediately, we made a very exciting discovery regarding the tune "In 'n Out." "In 'n Out" required some degree of editing for the simple reason that part of the performance was not captured on tape. The reel ran out during the bass solo, and as only one machine was running, part of the solo was missed as fresh tape was put on. An older digital transfer of the tune had resulted in an existing edit that ran 13:08, and we all were happy with the edit that had been performed. Upon reviewing the raw, unedited recording, it became obvious that there was much more "In 'n Out" than had been previously included, and we were able to more than double the length of the final track from 13:08 to a whopping 26:41! (Had the complete bass solo been captured, the track would have run over 30 minutes.)

We were not completely without technical hurdles to overcome, including many instantaneous, fleeting dropouts, but most of these could be mitigated digitally, copied to tape, and spliced back into the analog reels, (hopefully) seamlessly. Also, the song "Taking Off" had a subtle problem in the bass, causing intermodulation distortion in spots, which could not be fully dodged.

In the end, via a true team effort, guided by our fine drummer for the evening's entertainment, Mr. DeJohnette, four new reels (one for each LP side — plus new digital transfers) now exist so this album can live on for decades to come, allowing future jazz fans to listen in to that night in the East Village and say, "Man, those guys could PLAY."

Enjoy!

— Matthew Lutthans
The Mastering Lab, Salina, Kansas, USA

"People need to hear music played like this." - by Jack DeJohnette

I first met McCoy Tyner in Chicago when I sat in on drums with the Coltrane Quartet at a place called McKee Fitzbugh's. I played three numbers with them and afterward, I got the chance to talk to McCoy. Later on, when I got to New York, he hired me to play in some different trios. He had trios with different bassists. We had a trio with Larry Ridley, one with Scotty Holt and another one with George Mraz, and then Henry. I played a couple of gigs with them and Joe Henderson around New York. I'd done some record dates with Joe and I really liked his playing. And as it happened, the opportunity came to play at Slugs' with this combination.

There was some anticipation that this would really be great. And sure enough, everybody really played like there was no tomorrow. Luckily, we have this document from that week with this incredible personnel making this incredible music with this intensity and commitment. That is rare.

Around the time this was recorded, I was freelancing. I was playing some with Charles Lloyd and playing with Charles Tolliver. I had played and recorded with Jackie McLean and Betty Carter, so I was getting seasoned working with the pros who I could learn something from and grow.

The club was appropriately named Slugs'. There were two guys who ran Slugs', one of them was a kind of a wild man named Jerry Shultz. Slugs' was aptly named because occasionally fights would break out there. I remember one night Jerry was behind the bar and some guy was giving him a hard time. All of a sudden, we saw Jerry with a beer mug coming over the bar and breaking this beer mug over the guy's head. I remember another fight that broke out with Clifford Jarvis. Clifford had an edge to him. One day he was playing and then on a break, here came Clifford charging down through the door and he and another guy commenced to rolling around the floor, banging each other. It had to be broken up.

In those days, there was always some interesting music being played at Slugs'. I first got to meet and get to know Chick Corea there. This was back when the bar was in the middle of the room. Later, they later moved it to the back, which is where it was when we recorded this music. Junior Cook and Blue Mitchell had formed a quartet with Chick and Al Foster. They made a record, and had a little hit called "Fungii Mama." I saw them playing that music live at Slugs'. It was great.

I didn't know Orville O'Brien, the engineer who recorded this album, all that well. I had seen him with his professional recorder at different locations. At *Night of the Cookers*, I actually came over and witnessed that live. Orville would come around and record without getting any fee and try and sell the music to the record companies. He recorded Charles Tolliver with a band with Gary Bartz, Cecil McBee, John Hicks and me. We played with Betty Carter too, so he had a reputation when he turned up at a place. I guess he made agreements with people to record their music on a professional level. Musicians want to have something live that sounded good and that's what I remember him doing. The fortunate thing about this recording, the master tape disappeared, but early on, I had asked Orville if he could give me a seven-and-a-half i.p.s. copy of that show and he did. Thanks to that seven-and-half reel-to-reel, we have the gift of this music.

"In 'n Out" was a tune I'd played with Joe before. It's a nice middle-medium blues with some alternate changes, and it's light and happy with a great melody. The way we played it was uplifting. Joe sounded great. Joe and McCoy really stretched out in making their statements, then we took the tune out.

"We'll Be Together Again" was beautiful. McCoy opens it up with this great arpeggiated intro and Joe plays that melody very beautifully and then he plays a light-hearted, whimsical, virtuosic solo followed by McCoy who plays a great solo that picks up intensity as he goes. Toward the end of the solo, he plays some reharmonizations, some whole-tone voicings leading into a solo by Henry and then Joe takes it out. It's a beautiful rendition of that piece.

"Taking Off" was impromptu. McCoy and Joe just said, "Let's play some minor blues" and they counted off a real fast tempo that just took off and just kept on getting more and more intense until the song ended. It's like off to the races. Got that kind of pull to it. And again, everybody was playing. You hear the intensity of it. Everybody's playing like their life depended on it.

This was the first time I'd ever played "The Believer." It was a nice, simple melody. We didn't play it too long, but it did have an interesting ending where the drums kind of put the period on all the tracks. It was a medium 3/4 piece that was more laid back than some of the other tracks and I think all the pieces held together; they had a thread about them and a level of intensity that was really consistent.

"Isotope" is a medium, pushing blues. It features McCoy and Joe, no trades with the bass or the drums. That's a great melody. That's one of my favorite tunes of Joe's and so I was really excited to play it live and get a live version of it that actually measured up to the rest of the music on the program.

This recording represents a time and period where musicians were really playing, intensely searching and experimenting with new things. It was a highly creative time then. Musicians were trying things and of course, there were venues like Slugs' where people could actually play and develop their craft. There were bands that people could play in and develop. At that time, things were shifting in music; shifting over to a more, shall we say, exploratory music. And so that environment encouraged those explorations.

I am glad people will be able to hear this music now. I'm glad that after so long, we finally got it together and Blue Note is putting it out, because a lot of people who hear this are going to say, "Man, what the hell? People need to hear this." I think so, too. People need to hear music played like this. And hopefully it'll be a great inspiration to other players and listeners too. I'm really grateful for that.

Excerpted from an interview with Jack DeJohnette conducted by Zev Feldman on April 10, 2024

"There is no second take. This is life and it is real." - by Jason Moran

I was obsessed with Thelonious Monk in high school. Monk connected me to other parts of the musical family tree. It was Monk who led me to John Coltrane and it was Coltrane who brought me to McCoy Tyner. Tyner changed it all. His playing is related to Monk's, but Tyner plays with considerably more bite than Monk. McCoy's precise attack of the keys helped his hands/teeth gnaw the music. He bit deeper into each note to unleash remarkable flavors. McCoy's flavor made an indelible impression on me and consistently peppers my music.

McCoy Tyner was born in Philadelphia in 1938. He often spoke of the early years playing the piano in

his mother's beauty parlor. This sense of warmth and support from his mother and her clients helps contextualize the warmth he carefully places in the music. McCoy is one of the few pianists who innovated both a soloing style and an accompanist style. His epic solos spin the song into a frenzy. The clarity of his articulation syncopates every measure. Sometimes it seems as if McCoy has sped the music up as if he were playing 17 times faster than the rest of the band. Each solo becomes a novel that leads with the swing while selling you the blues.

Meanwhile his "comping" pushes the band and the soloists to new plateaus. Generally, the pianist that "comps" for the other musicians is in a more passive role, but McCoy shifted the attitude. He brought considerably more protest to this role. His chords yell just as loud as Henderson's horn. This is a major shift in modern music and echoes a fracturing America. Joe Henderson's mighty quartet explodes on this incredible recording.

Joe Henderson's tenor blazes the songs and the band fans his flame. McCoy and Jack DeJohnette lock into rhythmic cadences that elevate the bandstand with Henry Grimes providing a malleable foundation. And when Henderson passes the solo baton to McCoy, McCoy maintains the intensity. At times, McCoy feels like his own weather event. His left hand makes the upright piano thunder, creating billowing clouds and then outpours pellets of icy hail. Time and time again, this band exposes the music by turning each song inside-out.

I love hearing this band in a live recording because it is "as is." There is no second take. This is life and it is real. Henderson presented elevated music situated in a fabricated saloon on the Lower East Side of New York. The quartet survives a time by moving through each composition in the repertoire chorus-by-chorus. How did they use their friendship in this music, on this stage, with this audience, on this night to survive? This record reveals that the answer to that question emerges from hearts and souls of the giants who make up this partnership and each one's affinity for the other's extraordinary and unique musical character.

Follow the sound and let it take you places." - by Joe Lovano

I first heard Joe Henderson and McCoy Tyner's music when I was in high school — *In 'n Out, Inner Urge*, and other recordings on Blue Note. In 1971 Joe came to play in Cleveland, my hometown, that was the first time I heard him live and was totally captured by his stage presence, delivery and constant flowing ideas. I heard him in Boston at the Jazz Workshop shortly after that when *In Pursuit of Blackness* was released. Throughout the week, I went multiple nights and then on Sunday, there was a matinee. I had my horn and Ricky Ford was also there with his horn. Joe saw us and invited us to sit in. We played his blues "Isotope" on that matinee set, which was amazing. That was when I first met Joe. Through the years, I heard him a lot and got to know him a little bit.

I had a one-night gig at the Jazz Coalition Center in New York in November of 1985 recording my first record as a leader for Soul Note Records *Tones, Shapes & Colors*. That same week Joe was playing the Village Vanguard with Ron Carter and Al Foster, also recording his *State of the Tenor* for Blue Note. I was down there digging Joe and that trio every night. Hearing them that week really inspired me for my first date as a leader just down the street.

Joe Henderson Wow! Completely his own sound and way of playing. His wide-open concept opened all kinds of doors for me. He was always just full of ideas and such melodic invention, his rhythm and articulation were all as one. When you went to hear Joe play, you really went to hear him play! He would play 20-minute solos and stretch out. Live, his repertoire stayed the same for years, playing tunes he loved to play and wanted you to hear.

This recording *Live at Slugs'* from 1966 with McCoy Tyner, Henri Grimes and Jack DeJohnette is so fantastic — the energy, the ideas, the way you feel when they play "In 'n Out" it's as if you're there. I

feel like they walked on stage, looked at each other and hit. Joe plays 12 minutes and then McCoy plays another 12 before they start trading with Jack and the whole time, Jack's time is so beautiful. He's the driving force. He's swinging and generating such a rhythmic flow and initiating ideas and then following up on ideas that are happening around him. Jack is incredible. He's around 24 on this date. McCoy was 28, Joe 29 and Henri 31.

Elvin and Coltrane loomed large in the early to mid-'60s. I can only imagine what it was like. I moved to New York in 1976, ten years later, so I never experienced that era at Slugs'. But playing with McCoy and Jack through the years has just been the deepest school of music you can be in. I learned about developing my own sound and approach in the music. Feeding off of everyone's feelings and ideas. McCoy and Jack are so full of beautiful phrases, timing, groove and articulation, it was a thrill to play with them.

I first played with McCoy in 1999 at Yoshi's with Bobby Hutcherson, Charnette Moffitt and Billy Higgins. Incredible! It was a beautiful springboard into the coming years, playing with him in quartets and different configurations. He mainly played trio, but Gary Bartz, Ravi Coltrane and I would alternate playing quartet gigs with him. I'm so proud to have recorded with him on his *Quartet* release on Half Note Records live at Yoshi's with Christian McBride and Jeff "Tain" Watts. Playing with McCoy Tyner was something else! He had so many influences he drew from, like Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, Art Tatum and Hank Jones. But was always himself.

McCoy loved Hank. Around 2004, I was in Italy for some festival dates with my quartet featuring Hank Jones, George Mraz and Dennis Mackrel or Lewis Nash. McCoy was at one of those festivals with a quintet with Ravi Coltrane and Gary Bartz. The little reunion that Hank and McCoy had was amazing. McCoy just worshiped Hank Jones. It was like me going to greet Joe Henderson, Wayne Shorter or Sonny Rollins. It was really an amazing moment.

Henry Grimes is fantastic on this recording. He's in unison with everybody. The way he Jack and McCoy are hooked up on "In 'N Out," that cymbal beat, the bass line, the drive and the flow throughout that 26 minutes is incredible. That's how it should be — the way it is and the way it was that night.

Jack DeJohnette on this recording, as always, is outstanding. He fuels the fire and contributes melodically and rhythmically every second. I treasure all of the moments through the years being around him and feeling his embrace. He's challenged me to rise up and deal with my horn and the music at hand. This recording shows how inspired he is to play and create. That joyous feeling of love comes through loud and clear.

In that period in the '60s, the way Wayne Shorter and Joe Henderson played, they created their own sounds and voices in the middle of all this other powerful music that was going on. From Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, Coltrane and others. Joe and Wayne emerged with the love and passion to discover and find themselves, to be influenced by the history of the saxophone and the music is inspiring for all of us.

All the music that McCoy, Joe, Henry and Jack have documented through the years is incredible. This quartet live at Slugs' shows how much they were all on the cutting edge at that time, on the scene. I've learned every lesson there is to learn about trying to be a bandleader and contribute to whatever situation you're in, from them. Contribute who you are, yet follow the sound that's around you. Follow the sound and let it take you places.

Excerpted from an interview with Joe Lovano conducted by Zev Feldman on April 3, 2024

"It's the mountaintop." - by Joshua Redman

For me, speaking as a tenor saxophonist, this is one of the greatest Joe Henderson records.

I "heard" Joe before I heard him. I've been listening to jazz my whole life and Joe is on so many seminal jazz recordings, so many Blue Note records, Horace Silver Records, his own records and as a sideman, so I heard him before I recognized that the full weight of his musicianship and musical genius.

I started going down the Joe Henderson rabbit hole in earnest — and I went down it big time — in college. That made me wake up to the full depth and breadth of the jazz language. I began taking deep dives into the many sounds and styles and recordings from the classic periods of jazz.

For me, there's a big three of modern, post-bop, jazz tenor saxophone — Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane and I would put Joe Henderson right up there. Joe was ten or so years younger than Sonny or Trane and he was clearly influenced by them both. When I first checked him out and began to grasp what he was about, it felt to me like he represented a distinct third way; he was able to reconcile Trane's and Sonny's visions and the language of bebop and post-bop, but with this incredibly open, freewheeling, very modern sensibility and all of that with his incredible, completely unique sound, his incredible sense of phrasing and rhythmic drive. His approach had a real angularity and he was a very muscular player in a lot of ways, but he also had this deep, gorgeous lyricism.

In high school, I heard *Inner Urge* and I was hooked. From there, I went back to earlier records — *Page One* and *In 'n Out*. *Page One* is his first record, then *In 'n Out* and then *The Real McCoy*, which isn't a Joe Henderson record, it's a quartet record with McCoy and Joe plus Ron Carter and Elvin Jones. That record blew my mind. It's still a desert island record for me. It's one of the greatest records of that period or of any period and it relates very much to the music on this record.

Trane and Sonny represent two polarities and Joe was somehow an amalgamation of both, but also there's something *suis generis*, something completely other and fully formed with Joe. You listen to him and in literally two notes, you know it's Joe Henderson. There's no doubt. It's the sound, but it's the spirit, the presence and the command.

As a composer he's represented on all those great Blue Note records — *Page One*, *In 'n Out*, *Inner Urge* and *Mode for Joe*. His material is innovative, groundbreaking. He's using the bop language and the modal language, but his sense of harmony is novel. He was one of the first jazz composers to integrate the sound of the major seven sharp 11/major seven sharp four sound, this Lydian sound. But he did it so it felt not so much ethereal and open as visceral and rooted and grounded in the blues. That's typically a bright, airy sound, but he found a way to make it deep and dark. He used it modally, but he also used it tonally so that it could have a really strong presence within a song that had a functionally harmonic system. He's one of the greats. Obviously.

Even though there's no shortage of great records with Joe Henderson on them, this record captures something about his playing in that period from '65 to '69, which I see as a pinnacle of his playing, although, of course, he continued to develop and refine. All the elements came together, a combination of total harmonic and technical mastery and total command of his instrument, the language of jazz, his own vocabulary, a technical virtuosity and also a virtuosity of language combined with this incredibly potent, youthful abandon. It's so refined and yet so raw at the same time.

McCoy is one of the big four of modern pianists (along with Herbie, Chick and Keith Jarrett). I'd heard Joe and McCoy play together like this before, but never live. The liveness is what's so holy grail-ish for me. They're on fire. It's so hot. Thank God for the ballad, "We'll Be Together Again," which is pretty hot itself. "In 'n Out," with Joe's fifteen-minute(!) solo, was great and then the third cut, "Taking Off"

— I actually had to stop in the middle; I couldn't listen to the whole thing — too hot. I had to come back to it.

To hear this band play over a timeless form, the blues, for me, there's almost nothing better. You've got a form that stretches back before the beginnings of jazz. The blues form is the heart and soul of jazz throughout its history. These guys are all incredible blues players, but they're also pushing against the outer limits of the form, really busting it open, but never losing the form. That's what's so beautiful. And they're pushing the form, but they're pushing each other, too. You can feel it. Jack is just 25 or 24. That's youthful energy. But again, the virtuosity. The command. And it's so swinging. It's hard to have that energy and intensity and also swing.

They cracked that code with this; it's so forward moving. It's so strong, but yet there's all this nuance and detail. It's the mountaintop.

Excerpted from an interview with Joshua Redman conducted by Zev Feldman on May 29, 2024

"There's just so much good tension there." - by Christian McBride

The first time I heard Henry Grimes was on the McCoy Tyner album, *Reaching Fourth*, and I heard him on some recordings after that with Cecil Taylor. I heard him with Sonny Rollins, of course. He was one of those great, unsung bass players who, had his career not been interrupted . . . he disappeared for 30 years, but as to why he disappeared, that's still a mystery to me because he was playing wonderfully.

When you start trying to describe people's styles — Ron Carter, Richard Davis, Reggie Workman and all of these giants who were there at that time — it's fair to say that Henry Grimes had a style that just covered a lot of different expressions. He and Richard Davis were cut from that same cloth — playing the in and the out.

But even with Richard, sometimes when he would play the in, he would still go out. Which made it interesting, but I find that oftentimes when Henry Grimes would play in, he would just play in. When Henry played with Sonny Rollins, you never lost the form listening to him. I'm sure that had it been Richard Davis, he would have thrown in a couple of monkey wrenches in there to keep it interesting.

Grimes had a big, powerful beat and good note choices. When he was playing with Cecil or Cherry or even on his own album *The Call*, he would go out, and he went all the way out. It was the '60s, so everybody had to be able to do that. Jack did that, Tony did that, Elvin did that. Every player of that generation was required to do that then.

I performed with him once. There's a video of us playing together at the Visions Festival toward the end of 2012; either 2012 or 2013 with Roy Campbell and John Zorn. I didn't get to know him really; he didn't talk very much. We also did a thing at Roulette in Brooklyn, but we didn't play together then. We played on the same bill, though. And when Aaron Goldberg was putting together a fundraiser for the DNC raising money for the Obama reelection campaign, he put together a big concert at Symphony Space and Henry Grimes did a trio thing with Geri Allen and Jeff "Tain" Watts. They played "Freedom Jazz Dance," and that was one of those times where Henry kept on-the-out all the way. Geri and Tain were playing more of the open B-flat kind of vibe, like Eddie Harris wrote it, but Grimes was, well he was in Deep Space Nine that night.

Grimes was a very solid player. I always liked the recordings with Sonny Rollins. As a bass player, you've got to be on your toes to play with no piano, with no chordal instrument. You've got to pay very close attention to form, you've got to make sure that you are giving the soloist as much harmonic support as possible while keeping it interesting, so that stuff he did with Sonny was

masterful.

When this was recorded, McCoy was around four months out of Trane's band. He was driving a taxi or something to get by. Bobby Hutcherson, too. It's shocking to think that the most influential pianist in the last half-century was driving a cab after he played in Coltrane's band. McCoy Tyner was critically important, not just to the history of jazz and the history of jazz piano, but to me personally. He was definitely a Greek god as far as I'm concerned.

Joe Henderson was just a titan. He's got to be on Mount Rushmore, certainly after training with Sonny Rollins. Sonny and Joe, their presence and what they brought to the history of music throughout the world, you almost can't count them as simply saxophone players. After Sonny Rollins and Trane, Joe Henderson is on that next chapter of Mount Rushmore. Even now, I hear so many saxophone players who play like Trane, but they play like Trane or Sonny through Joe Henderson. Joe's language was just as personal as any of the titans who came before him.

I've always had a deep love and affection for Jack's playing. As a bass player, my relationship with the drums is the most important musical relationship I've ever had. I always joke that my wedding looked like a drum convention because all my favorite, all my closest friends are drummers. Of course, Jack was there. To play with Jack DeJohnette, to listen to him, the way his beat is; it's got that bounce, the tension between beats. It has to have a little bit of a bounce and Jack's beat is just so much fun to play with. There's just so much good tension there. When certain drummers play those up-tempos they lose that bounce. It becomes a little more driving. Jack still keeps that bounce on those up-tempos; he still keeps that dance-y feel on the ride cymbal. Not a whole lot of players get that. Jack got it, Roy Haynes got it. Tony had it and some new-school guys like Eric Harland have it and I think Eric comes a lot from Jack DeJohnette. Jack always has that and he's just so musical. He's a great piano player, a great composer, he's very much a full circle musician.

I wish Henry Grimes could have stayed around longer because what he contributed, particularly during that era made him one of the most important bass players. I know Ron Carter and Richard Davis get a lot of the props. Not only are they great players, but they stayed around and worked steadily for years. Ron, at age 87, is still playing; he's still at the top of his game. But then, you have somebody like Henry Grimes, who was playing with all the same people and making just as incredible contributions, but for whatever reason, he just disappeared. I'm sorry that the few times I had a chance to be around him, I didn't try to pick his brain more; I wish I could've gotten more out of him, but he just wasn't very talkative. That's who he was. But what a player!

Excerpted from an interview with Christian McBride conducted by Zev Feldman on May 1, 2024

"...fighting for freedom with every note and tone..." - by Terri Lyne Carrington

During these times that I'm asking people to hear jazz differently, to hear a different aesthetic in the music away from the stereotypical, masculine sound aesthetic of "fast and powerful," I am pleasantly reminded of the incredible beauty and political statement that surfaces as a sound aesthetic that is fighting for freedom with every note and tone — a sound that is fast and powerful, strong-willed and unstoppable, a sound that reflects how and why the music was birthed, reflecting the struggle and desire for freedom that was very much prevalent and palpable in 1966 when this recording was made. Today we are looking for other sounds of freedom, reflecting current justice struggles, while still wholly embracing the sounds of freedom of the past century or more. This particular recording is a beautiful capsule of that era, with four incredible musicians in their prime, showing us what freedom and strength sounds like as an attestation of their own lives. Thank God for Jack DeJohnette for many reasons, but in this instance, for being an archivist and having the foresight to ask for and keep a copy of this recorded performance.

I must say that about two choruses into the first song, while driving in my car, the only utterance that repeatedly came from my mouth was "Damn!" This is some of the best Joe Hen playing I have ever heard! His rhythm and connection with the drums is flawless. What I love about Jack De, and one of the important things I take away from his playing, is that he's following the soloist. He's actually both leading and following the soloist at the same time. We can hear and feel a synergy with them that is primary, and as long as that is the case anything can happen and everything sounds musical. The level is so high that every and anything is going to work because of their synchronicity, manifesting as a river of time. The urgency and the tempo never waned, and Henry Grimes' lean on the tempo helps to propel the music into a perfect frenzy. To hear Jack in his prime is such a joy for me personally, but I'm also super happy that the world gets to hear this gem, especially now, since he is the only person alive from this recording.

Jack is one of the most musical drummers ever and musicians playing with him have to be, as well, to understand his elasticity and flow. His trades and solos are about the phrases, opposed to mathematics. You have to be able to listen at a very high level to follow him, hearing the form and chord changes going by as he hears it. You have to be willing to do that kind of intense listening with trust — and without expecting a Philly Joe Jones- or Art Blakey-style lick to bring you in. You can't be lazy listening to or playing with Jack!

Jack's brush playing is masterful on "We'll Be Together Again." It is reminiscent of Elvin Jones, but still has its own sound because of his phrasing and his unique rhythmic responses to what he hears. That he is a pianist himself makes him super melodic as a drummer and super musical in relationship to the forms of songs and in accompanying others.

Jack's brush playing has always been inspiring to me because it didn't lack anything. I didn't miss sticks and always felt equally satisfied listening to him play with brushes as with sticks. It's his sense of "freedom no matter what." That's what I hear in Jack — the ability to always be free within any given set of boundaries — while respecting boundaries as well.

Throughout this recording he sounds like thunder — like a heavyweight champion — the rolling sound, the breaking up of bars with groupings of three. He encapsulates the history of modern drumming up until that point, as well a new sound with the power of rock and roll, with the bass drum leading. Something else that kept coming up for me in the blistering tempos is that Jack also finds a way to make a "1" sound amazing. He can go over bar lines, but hitting beat one sounds just as fulfilling.

The speed and technical virtuosity from all of them is awe-inspiring on this recording, but I also just love to hear Jack play medium tempos. His tight ride with the skip notes (the 3rd triplet stroke very close to the note that falls on the beat) sounds old school yet modern — the best of both worlds, displayed beautifully on "Isotope."

I have a special relationship with Jack. He is a mentor to me and my greatest influence on the drum kit. I also had a special relationship with McCoy Tyner. Both the DeJohnette's and the Tyner's were like a surrogate family, taking me into their inner circle when I was young and contributing to my evolution as a musician and as a human being. To hear McCoy in this setting is also really beautiful because he's stretching in a different way than we heard him do with Coltrane. Joe brought out a different kind of comping during some moments and Jack brought out a different kind of freer, experimental sound at times.

McCoy exercises great restraint by laying out, but we already knew that McCoy was able to be present while not playing, as he deeply understood that there's just as much music in the silence as when he's playing. He exercised great wisdom in knowing the right moments to stroll. McCoy sometimes gives contrapuntal lines behind Joe that add a sense of complexity and textures on the

simpler forms presented on this recording. In fact, the repertoire on this entire album, except the ballad, are blues-form pieces — which is phenomenal, showing the blues as a perfect vehicle for expressing complex ideas in an uncomplicated format. I think it's important to note that as inventive soloists, neither McCoy or Joe ever forsook the blues.

McCoy brilliantly establishes bebop references — a little Horace Silver and Monk — Coltrane-esque lines, as well as all of the classic McCoy stylings we know and love. He plays tension and release perfectly by going back-and-forth from a couple of choruses of fast-moving lines and then a couple of choruses of chordal motifs. He is masterful with call and response with himself, embellishing his motivic ideas as he reaches higher and higher.

The stamina that all of them have at these brisk tempos is incredible. It's almost like the ensemble was driven by some kind of superpower to make them not stop until a certain spirit was satisfied. One of my concerns with young musicians studying jazz is that they are learning to develop by playing in small rehearsal rooms, sitting down, and being told to play softer all the time. They are learning formulas and short cuts, resulting in academy jazz. I fear most will never develop the sound, stamina or imagination to play 12 minutes on an up-tempo blues, with the ability to tell a complete story, while reaching higher and stretching until going past the point they thought they could never go. This is what we hear on this recording and I hope it will be inspiring for young musicians to develop these skills further. At the risk of sounding old, hearing this recording made me realize that I miss the unapologetic soul. I miss the rawness. I miss the drenched clothing after a gig, and I miss the feeling of being lost in the music from the musicians.

I am always amazed at the sound of live recordings, coming through a digital platform into our speakers. It's truly incredible to feel so much from listening to this live recording without having been there. It really speaks to the power of technology, and how it can capture music, sound and vibrations, enabling us to relive a moment over and over again.

This recording is special — and Jacks playing — it makes me want to practice and give up all at the same time . . . lol

"...like running a sprint for a couple of miles..." - by Nasheet Waits

The first time I heard Jack DeJohnette play, he was playing piano. My father, Freddie Waits, did a recording with Jack that Jack played piano on. It was Jack, my father and Eddie Gomez. Jack and my father were close friends, so we used to visit him at his home. A lot of my relationships with many of these incredible masters, these great musicians, were ones where I viewed them as family friends. That was the case with Jack.

I started to become aware of many of our great drummers and learned some of the evolution of the instrument in my late teens. Before that, I'd taken some time away from music and I was just coming back to it then. I was around 19 or 20, a little after my father passed away. Jack came around fairly often in those days. He gave me his book and we played a little bit together down in my father's studio.

After that, I was listening to albums that he was on like *Time on My Hands*, John Scofield's record with Jack, Charlie Haden and Joe Lovano. That was one of the first things I heard him playing drums on. There were also a bunch of his Special Edition records in the house. I would just listen to records randomly in my father's collection, some of those Special Edition ones with Arthur Blythe and Chico Freeman. I did hear some of those then, but I wasn't really a student of the music early on. I was just a young person digging through my father's record collection. Actually, I thought I was going to be a baseball player.

I didn't know a lot about all the great drummers when I was really young, but I did become a big Elvin Jones fan and a Mickey Roker fan. I remember playing to that *Lee Morgan Live at the Lighthouse* album. Once I started really listening to the music in a more critical way in my early 20s or so, I found that my sensibility was close to Jack's. At least it felt like that to me.

Jack's style reflects some influences from some of the earlier drummers, but it's also informed by his harmonic and melodic understanding of music in general and also an acute technical sense where you hear a lot of things layered. There's layering going on in his playing. I always get that.

Jack has invited me to come check him out in a few concerts. I remember going to hear him play with Keith Jarrett on a few occasions. Actually, one time, I was able to play opposite Jack, Gary and Keith. That was one of the highlights of my career. It was in Italy and I was working with M'Boom, which is the percussion ensemble led by Max Roach of which my father was a founding member.

There are times when Jack doesn't make obvious resolutions; sometimes he plays what you might call false cadences. The way he used the hi-hat was not always on two and four. He'd make other, not-so-obvious syncopations and he wouldn't necessarily do it consistently. It reminds me of when I was a kid and I threw this bottle into the Hudson River down by the bottom of Manhattan. At the surface, the current really seemed gentle, but when the bottle sank below the surface, all of a sudden it started going straight in the other direction really fast. It was almost like two separate things happening simultaneously. I see that with Jack's drumming. I've always felt that when I heard him play, like he was moving in both directions simultaneously and at different rates.

In these recordings, I hear Elvin's influence. I'm sure the fact that McCoy Tyner is a part of the unit contributes to that impression. Obviously, the colors Elvin created was and is still a big part of a lot of drummers' palettes. Elvin was 15 years older than Jack. You can hear the influence. For my father, too. He always talked about Elvin, Roy Haynes, Max and people like that being a heavy influence on him, and I think the same was true for Jack. The integrity and intensity of these monumental figures are palpable in these recordings; their creativity and stamina, too. Two of the songs are almost a half an hour long; hundreds of choruses flying by, but you never feel like there's any lull or anybody's skating.

These are heroes of the music. You can relate your experience about what these folks did through their records and then you apply that to what you're doing on the gig. But when you hear the live gigs that they were playing in relation to their recordings, you realize there was exploration happening there and they were testing the limits. It's intense to keep that type of pace up. That's like running a sprint for a couple of miles.

There's incredible power in these performances. No slacking. There's no fat at all. It's like Formula 1, for real. It's so on the edge. But the fact that they're holding it together tightly, that's impressive. That commitment is a testament to their greatness.

Excerpted from an interview with Nasheet Waits conducted by Zev Feldman on April 24, 2024