

InVisible jukebox

THELONIOUS MONK

"It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing" from Plays Duke Ellington (Riverside)

Monk. What can I say? Monk is my favourite pianist. He was a true original, someone you can't really imitate because his style is so personal. If I'm playing a Monk tune I might use certain inflections, but what I try to do is interpret the tune rather than Monk. I don't approach it like him because any kind of imitation seems exactly that. Monk was very daring, and took chances, and people of his generation didn't quite understand him because his mind was different and he stayed very much in his own space. They were adventurous times, but he was somewhere else again and he stretched the music even further. It took years for him to get recognition and then all of a sudden everybody was a Monk fan. I also like his simplicity. He seems to be able to strip something down and make it appear simple, but there's always a subtlety and complexity to it. And my appreciation of him is still growing — every time I hear him I hear something different, something more fascinating.

Do you think there is any similarity between him and Ellington?

Yes. They were both geniuses. I know it's an overused term, but when you hear Monk or Duke you can define it just by hearing what they do.

ANDREW HILL

"Samba Rasta" from Eternal Spirit (Blue Note)

I've no idea. Who was it?

It's Andrew Hill with Bobby Hutcherson, Greg Osby, Rufus Reid and Ben Riley.

I've never heard him with that group. I think the rhythm section should have been laying into the Latin thing more — they didn't really capture the flavour of it. I haven't really heard

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they're asked to identify and comment on — with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear.

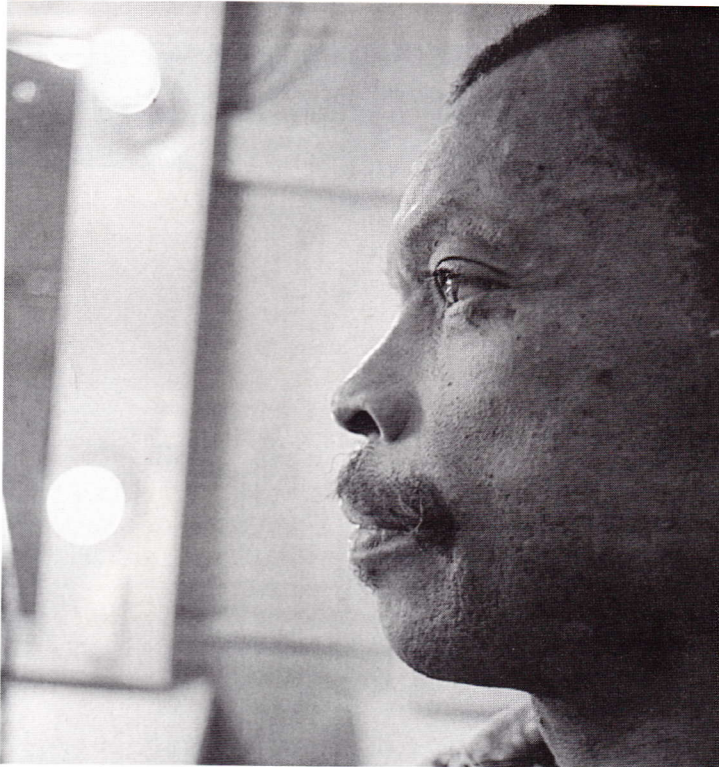


PHOTO: ANDREW POTHECARY

don pullen
tested by Philip Watson

Pianist, organist and composer Don Pullen is a musical polyglot. Raised in Virginia on a diet of gospel, blues, soul and R&B, he immersed himself in, and remains influenced by, the New York avant-garde of the 60s. But Pullen has also used jazz as a springboard to music as diverse as flamenco, calypso, and Arabic and Indian folk forms. His most recent album, *Kele Mou Bana* (Blue Note), mixes jazz with African and Brazilian rhythms and vocals. Although he has recorded several solo albums and had stints with Art Blakey, Charles Mingus, Nina Simone and

Hamiett Bluiett, 51 year-old Pullen is perhaps best known for his ten-year collaboration with tenor saxophonist George Adams. From 1979 they co-led a post-bop power quartet which stands as one of contemporary jazz's most successful long-term units. It was as a pianist that Pullen signed to Blue Note in 1988, but much of his recent work has been on organ, playing with John Scofield, David Murray, Maceo Parker and Kip Hanrahan. "I think a lot of people are afraid to hire me on piano," he explains. "They think I'm too unpredictable, too risky."

enough of his playing recently, but about two or three years ago I did catch him in a club in New York and he played "Sweet Georgia Brown" and it wasn't like anything I'd ever heard before. It was coming from a totally different space, and I'd like to hear it again and again just to find out what the hell he was doing. His originality was fantastic, and then the set was over. And Andrew has never been afraid to use the fact that he come from outside the States. [*Hill was born in Haiti.*] A lot of musicians think they have to abandon their backgrounds and totally involve themselves in what is happening in America. But that's not the case. You know, I'm always reaching out, hunting for something, taking musical inspiration from any source. And I want people to bring their own cultures, their own feelings into my music. There are always new challenges — I'm not content to just stand still.

BUD POWELL

"Embraceable You" from The Greatest Jazz Concert Ever (Prestige)

That's Bud Powell, but I've never heard that album.

It's the famous Massey Hall concert: Bud Powell's first date after being released from Creedmore sanitarium. He was said to be stone drunk from the first number on.

That may have been the case, but he was still a fantastic pianist; in his time he was *the* piano player — everyone had to listen to Bud because everything was coming from him. Bud grasped the bebop concept like no other pianist and ran away with it. And his influence on pianists today is amazing. We all have some Bud in us and we have to acknowledge the fact that he originated a lot of the things we do today.

How do you feel about the tragedy of



his life?

Well, he lived it. I wish he'd stayed around longer. I wish I'd known him better, and got to spend some time with him. But I think all of us do the best we can at that moment. The conditions at that time were difficult, especially being black in America, but we all handle it the best way we know how, and some of us may not handle it as well as we think.

LIBERACE
"Rhapsody In Blue" from Silver Anniversary: Highlights From The Fabulous Career of Mr Showmanship (EMI/Music For Pleasure)

Is that Gershwin himself? How about Art Tatum — he used to play runs and slide down the scales like that?

Think Las Vegas. Silver Tamé? Glass pianos? Candelabras?

Oh, my man, Liberace. Liberace was the Little Richard of his particular area of entertainment — he was flamboyant and did a lot of things people thought were shocking. He decided he was going to be outrageous, and it takes guts to dare to do something different, to go out on stage in whatever he wanted to wear. I like that kind of wildness. There's a great story about his version of Chopin's "Minute Waltz". Apparently, he cut it down to just 37 seconds because he preferred to "leave out all the dull parts".



Yeah, I like that too. He was an original. But I've never really thought of him as a pianist. He's more of a personality, yet I always thought he could play because he was classically trained.

JELLY ROLL MORTON
"London Blues" from The 1923-24 Piano Solos (Fountain)

Is that James P Johnson? Well, I don't know who it is.

It's the man who claimed he invented jazz: Jelly Roll Morton.

I love this early music because there's so much going on melodically, harmonically, technically. You've got to realise that all these early pianists were totally self-taught. And I have always thought it was they who were the greatest influences on the early jazz bands because they played so much. They are the fathers of the music — and those before them who were not recorded. The interesting thing about pianists from this era is that they played the piano orchestrally — you can even hear where the horn players could come in.

LARRY YOUNG
"Zoltan" from Unity (Blue Note)

Is that Larry Young? Larry was the alternative to Jimmy Smith. Jimmy was the originator of the modern way of playing organ; he created a new sound, and Jimmy will funk you to death because when Jimmy lays it down, Jimmy lays it down. Larry knew all about Jimmy's style, but he was the only one really doing something different with the organ. His melodic concept was more like that of a piano player. Larry didn't use guitar in his groups; I always thought that his sound and concept would have come over more clearly if he had. A lot of the time, he had to interrupt the lines he was playing to fill in chordally, whereas guitar and organ can be like a marriage — a good guitarist can feel what you're doing, lay the chords down, and give you more freedom in the right hand. He's great on this and the other records he made, but he was much better live — he would do all kinds of things, point out different directions, show how the organ could be used. I was in awe of him. But his life was too short.

Why did you take up the organ?

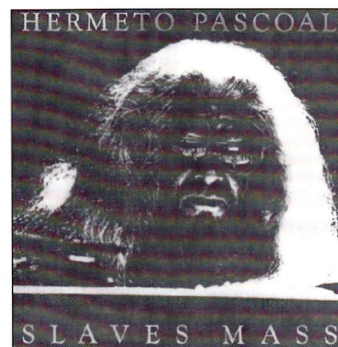
To make a living. When I first came to New York there weren't any piano gigs open to me, so I took to playing the organ. The only difference now is that I play it because I want to not because I have to.

HERMETO PASCOAL
"Just Listen (Escuta Meu Piano)" from Slaves Mass (Warner Bros)

The only person I can think of who plays with that much power is

Chucho Valdes [leader of the Cuban band Irakere].

It's actually Brazilian multi-instrumentalist Hermeto Pascoal.



I don't know him. I didn't really like the beginning because it sounded too much like he was playing exercises or scales, but when he got into it, and it developed, I really liked the power. And I was really impressed with his technique and sound.

What attracts you to Brazilian music?

Well, I first became interested in it when I toured Brazil in 1973 with Mingus. And for my last album I wanted to play with Brazilian musicians and see how Brazilian and African rhythms worked together since they both come from the same source — Africa, as does jazz. It was really just an experiment with rhythm as the meeting point. But I'd like to hear more of Hermeto Pascoal; I'm going to check him out.

CHARLES MINGUS
"Myself When Real" from Mingus Plays Piano (Mobile Fidelity)

I don't know.

I'll give you a clue: you toured Brazil with him in 1973.

Yeah, well, Mingus should have stayed on the bass. That's something that bass players and drummers try to do sometimes — switching to the piano — but they're invading territory they don't really belong in. Mingus used to move Jaki Byard off the piano sometimes and sit down and play himself. That was ridiculous; Jaki is one of the greatest piano players I have ever heard, but Mingus thought he could do it better himself. It may be good as an experiment I guess — to show what you can do — but how would he have felt if I had decided I wanted to play bass? *What was it like working with him?* I enjoyed it. The music was great because we had a really good band

at that time, and we had some good times. I miss him a lot.

But doesn't Mingus have a reputation for treating his sidemen badly?

Mingus was crazy: he had a sense of humour which was really out. If he could spot a weakness in one of his sidemen, he would exploit it. He would stop the band and tell him he was not playing right and that would sometimes lead to a scene. But he never really interfered with me. My agreement with myself was that if he interfered with the way I wanted to play, I would leave. So when he did, I left. We used to play this song by Sy Johnson called "For Harry Carney" and I hated it, so I would play it on the strings inside the piano. Mingus hated that so we had constant arguments about it and one night he tore up the music on the stand and fired me, and then came back 15 minutes later to say he'd changed his mind. But a little later, in Canada, we had another run in over the same tune, so I quit.

CECIL TAYLOR
"For the Rabbit" from For Olim (Soul Note)

[Immediately] That sounds like Cecil. Well, what can I say about Cecil? Cecil's not a jazz musician; he has invented his own individual way of playing and that kind of creativity is unique. I guess he's a classical musician who has found a way to improvise — in a very profound way. But, I mean, he can't swing: I can remember some of the older cats would hire Cecil and fire him after the first tune. But he does have an ability to create a place for himself which allows him to be whatever he wants him to be, and not many musicians can say that. I know he can be very hard to take, and there are some things about his playing I wouldn't say publicly, but you have to give Cecil credit for creating what he did. He freed up a lot of things, he came before me, and broke the ground ahead so I didn't get the kind of attacks he did. I like him because he dared to do it first, 35 years ago, and it takes a lot of heart to step out and play like that and to have the courage to play music which is different to everybody else. People will walk out on you, say you can't play, and it takes a lot of dedication and heart and love for whatever you're doing to continue. □