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ANNUAL JAZZ
EDUCATION GUIDE

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TOM BROWNE

*re-ordering
his priorities*

TRUMPETER TOM BROWNE'S GOT A BRAND-NEW BAG, A STRAIGHTAHEAD SOUND THAT'S MILES AWAY FROM HIS 1980 GOLD SINGLE, "FUNKIN' FOR JAMAICA." HE'S PLAYING BY PATRICIA MYERS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY NITRO



the kind of jazz that first attracted him in high school, back before he took a sharp turn into a detour of R&B and adult-contemporary fusion. To get back on track, he left the music world to pursue another profession—aviation.

Browne had been flying high in music from 1979 to 1988 as "Mr. Jamaica Funk," a favorite of dance DJs from coast to coast, from London to Tokyo. He was a hot property, feeding a fast-growing international fusion audience to become a chart-topping R&B and adult-contemporary artist with a worldwide following.

In 1980 and '81, Browne had three certified golds for GRP Records: his "Funkin'" single and second two albums, *Love Approach* and *Magic*. After his fourth GRP release, Browne switched labels to Arista to do more R&B/adult-contemporary issues, winning *Billboard* honors as Best Instrumentalist-Black Oriented Album and Singles, Best Jazz Cross-Over, Best Jazz Artist-Trumpet and Best Jazz Solo Album. His 1992 performances in New York, Tokyo and London were huge successes.

Only problem, he says, was that he was way off the course he'd mapped out after studying classical music at New York's High School of Music and Art. "Jazz entered the picture in 1972 when I went to Kingsborough College in Brooklyn. A friend turned me on to Don Cherry, but I didn't accept it because it was too avant garde for my classical background. But I started listening to Clifford Brown and Lee Morgan and Woody Shaw.

"I cut my teeth playing straight-ahead jazz, listening and sitting in at jazz clubs, including a place in Queens, the Village Door. I was hanging out in the right place at the right time, with guys like Lenny White, Freddie Hubbard and Richard Williams."

After joining Weldon Irvine's nine-piece band, Browne worked with high-energy saxophonist Sonny Fortune. By the time Dave Grusin of GRP Records discovered him, Browne was playing bebop in Manhattan, sharing the stage with organist Lonnie Liston Smith.

"My albums for GRP did well and we did big grosses at concerts," Browne recalls. "But it wasn't the music that I had come to love. I just adapted to it because that's what was selling. As my music ca-

reer progressed, I dug a hole deeper and deeper where I was making R&B records that had only tinge elements of my straight-ahead roots. A lot of my peers have done well playing the commercialized version of jazz, but it was never where my heart was. It was something I had to leave behind."

His growing disillusion with the recording industry caused a drastic departure from music. In 1986, he and his wife and two sons moved to Garner, NC, where he revived a long-ago interest in flying. He earned a commercial pilot's license and began flying and working in management for a charter airline in nearby Raleigh.

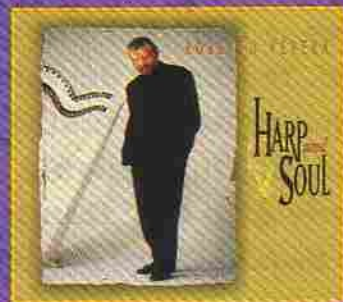
During a six-year break from music, except for occasional performances as a sideman, Browne acquired a vantage view of the music scene. He laments the change in the perception of jazz with the advent of the "easy-listening, smooth" genre. "I think the foundation of this whole so-called jazz style that's out now is a comfort factor. To a lot of people, straight-ahead jazz is very threatening. They relate it to an era of—and I hate to say it this way but—black rebellion.

"I've had a chance to see that there's a lot of Middle America that really feels most at peace—how can I put this—with the Kenny G's of music because it's a non-threatening, generic music. It doesn't make you have to think too much, make you have to understand where the music came from.

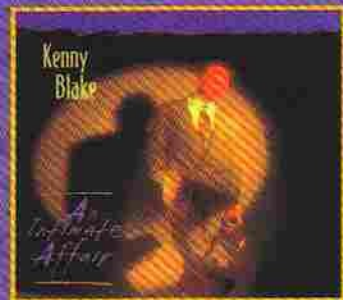
"Then there are those people to whom classical music represents the epitome of intelligence and studiousness. And if you say jazz is on that level—I think that's the one thing Wynton has been trying to establish—these same people are very snooty, like 'We can't accept jazz on that level,' because that kind of implies that the folks who are playing it are artists and intelligent, and they're not ready to accept that.

"So this 'smooth jazz' lets people say, 'Oh, OK, we don't have to look at the history of music here, we don't have to acknowledge anything, we can just sit back and cool out and not think about anything.' That's a lot safer."

Browne also deplors the shift in record production and promotion by big corporations focused on the bottom



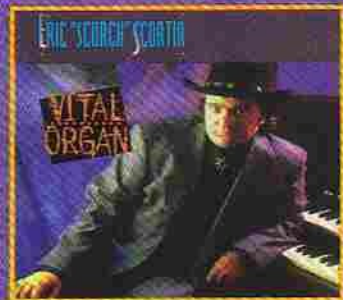
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Continues on page 190

international art form. "One of the things about jazz," he believes, "is that it symbolizes a form of freedom and everybody everywhere wants to be free. Everybody wants to play and express themselves. People also look at jazz musicians as the ultimate form of expression of freedom. What happens with us often is that we travel all over the world and get the same response everywhere, music is universal, it's the sound of air, they both need each other."

As for future plans, McCann has none. "If I knew what tomorrow would bring, I'd probably be all preparing and afraid. Jazz is life and life is jazz. I don't want to know. I'll know when it happens. To me, experience is the thing you talk about after it's happened. I look at everything I do every day as an experience. I can separate things that were highlights in my life, but really, they're no more or less important than the other things you do. It's all connected, it's all part of my life."

MCCANN'S GEAR: *Les plays a Fender Rhodes piano, a Hammond B-3 organ and a Steinway acoustic piano.* ♪

line. "On the whole, the record companies screwed up the jazz scene," he says.

In 1994, after six years of only occasional performances and recordings as a sideman, Browne went back into the studio. He was in a funk mode for his initial release on Hip Bop Records with *Mo' Jamaica Funk*, an album with Marcus Miller, Najee, Toni Smith and Bernard Wright. That was followed by *Essence of Funk*, an acoustic product that led to his new album on the company's acoustic label, Hip Bop Essence.

Now Browne is flying high again musically with *Another Shade of Browne*. This one showcases his straightahead chops in the company of other straightahead players: pianist Larry Goldings, bassist Ron Carter, tenor saxophonist Javon Jackson and drummer Idris Mohammed.

More than half the music is written by jazz trumpeters, including "Blue-sanova" by Lee Morgan, Browne's strongest influence. "He had a way of making a trumpet sing like no one else." The album also has tunes by Kenny Dorham, Booker Little and Freddie Hubbard. Two tracks pay

homage to the past: Harry James' "Sleepy Lagoon" and Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood."

Determined to play jazz in the style of early idols, Browne says, "I'm probably looking for a new audience. It's going to be very hard for the old audience to accept me now doing some of my earlier stuff. So I'm not pursuing a transition from the commercial ground I had."

"There were times when we were making \$10,000 to \$12,000 a night in concerts. The problem was, there were also times when I had \$5 in my wallet for the week. Fortunately I was married to, and still am married to, a very strong woman who grew up knowing what it was like to have \$5 in her wallet for the week. She basically said 'Don't worry, we'll make it.' Which we did."

"But I refuse to go into that kind of situation again, to allow my life to be dictated by the whims of a record company, or a fickle audience, or a concert promoter who says, 'Well, we're not going to do this concert this time even though we have a signed contract because we didn't sell any more than 200 tickets, so we're going to cancel.' I'm not going to go for that."

"I care about the music, but this way I can do it in a relaxed manner and make the music because I love the music. And I don't have to worry about making the music because of the well-being of my family. I respect the artists who do it full-time, but it's just not for me," he affirms.

"Obviously Garner, North Carolina, is not New York City, New York," he says. "But what it is, is peace and quiet, and a chance not to have the rat-race of high dollars chew up everything I had and spit me out. Between the cost of living and having to dodge bullets, I don't want to be in New York."

"When I grew up there, you could fall asleep on the subway and wake up at your stop and your horn would still be in your hand. Now you have to wonder if your hand will still be attached to your body."

Having accomplished major moves, both physically and musically, Browne concedes that some audiences will still want to hear some of the old "Mr. Jamaica Funk." But, he says, "I can relate to that, as long as I'm not forced

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Tiempo Noventa Orchestra offer straightforward big-brass Latin arrangements on *Musica Caliente* (Naxos Jazz 9503; 45:20), which weaves classic and modern pieces in a web of exuberant percussive backgrounds. Starting with a happily salsa-fied arrangement of "Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White" Citron punches out lively, fiery grooves to complement expert solos. The multi-moded "Another Night in San Juan" and witty "She's a Latin From Manhattan," with its edgy, whirling horn section, are other highlights. Citron's classic stylings even breathe life into a pair of Gloria Estefan/Miami Sound Machine tunes, lighting up "Anything for You" with a pulsing salsa beat, and giving an atmospheric, bristling guitar sizzle to the usually sanitized "Rhythm is Gonna Get You."

Allen Toussaint protege **Amadee Castenell** delivers swanky retro-soul in fine, reverent form on *Amadee* (NYNO Music 9602-2; 56:47). The formidable New Orleans sax & flute man hits his tenor notes with punch and growl, complimenting ringing guitar riffs on the swanky "Just Like

You" and strutting out on the slow-burning, spare and smart "You Dirty F Minor, You." Castenell's riffs are teasing and contagious on "Alley Cat Strut" (penned with Toussaint) and brisk on "Amacasino," which pitts Castenell effectively against Scott Goudeau's dirty little guitar licks. Castenell isn't afraid to mix things up, either, jumping and diving on the flute through the pretty, Brazilian-recalling "Angels" and pumping through the hyped-up semi-surf tune "Maui Moon"—but the majority of Amadee works by appealing to a simple, time-tested pleasure center: it's lean, grungy soul the way it was meant to be played.

That **Greg Lowe** knows how to make his arrangements work for him, making unexpected orchestrations seem perfectly natural, is immediately apparent on the opening title track of *Thrilled Against My Will* (Jazz Inspiration JID 9310; 54:08). The guitarist keeps his catchy, dark melody spinning in a vaguely Spanish sub-texture, accented with simmering horns and well placed string tension. These thoughtfully placed components add emotional depth to Lowe's compositions. "Because It Has

To End" is another good example—a bittersweet, distorted guitar melody over a cushion of strings conveys mixed emotions as effectively as a vocal piece. Lowe's bold compositions cross the genres as well—where "Pretty Blue" is a spare, soft-swinging ballad (with clever lyrics by vocalist Jennifer Henson), "Miles from Davis" is hard-edged and horn-driven, with a hypnotic revolving keyboard riff and occasional guitar spotlights creeping through. Throughout, Lowe's work is deliberate and clever, making *Thrilled Against My Will* both educational and enjoyable. **||**

LABEL WATCH *continued from page 75*

Goodman and Oscar Castro-Neves, the artist lineup includes Ivan Lins, Joyce, Joao Bosco, Ricardo Silvera and Toninho Horta.

Currently in the planning stages are several releases for early '97, including a soul jazz outing from saxophonist Vincent Herring, and pianists Marc Cary's take on go go music.

—Bret Primack **||**

into pursuing that as a career. I'll do it and enjoy playing it for the audience because this is part of who I was, but that's not my total picture."

Browne considers his hiatus from recording a time of self-discovery. "As I'm finding out more and more each day, Tom Browne is a man who loves his wife and family. I've re-prioritized a lot of things in my life. What I do career-wise in music or aviation is not who I am. I am a family man first. I enjoy playing my trumpet but I don't want to be out on the road touring three or four weeks at a time. I've got this nine to five job that I enjoy, and I like coming home to eat dinner at seven each evening. That's something I can live with."

BROWNE'S GEAR: *Boosey & Hawkes Sovereign trumpet and flugelhorn. ||*

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