Guitarist George Benson has been considered a premier jazz artist for more than a decade. In that time he’s recorded just as many well-received albums and come to command much respect from the musical community. But, like a lot of jazz musicians, Benson’s route to where he is today wasn’t necessarily direct.

Originally from Pittsburgh, he’s been living in New York since 1963. He did his first record (for RCA) back in ’54 or ’53, then later he sang with a vocal singing group in the late 50s. “Then I formed my own rhythm and blues group which featured organ, baritone and trombone. I’ve always had funny combinations in my groups because I’ve never realized a set pattern for a band. I believe if you can play, you can play with anybody. It can be a whistler, if the cat can play.”

Benson began playing at age eight. His ukulele performance in a ghetto candy store drew raves and subsequently led to gigs at local parties and carnivals. Before he was in his teens he’d cut his first single and by fifteen he was contributing high falsetto vocals to a Frankie Lymon-styled vocal group. Though he did it well, singing wasn’t destined to be Benson’s key to musical success. Before long, he switched to guitar and joined amateur bands in Pittsburgh.

Instead of following rock and R&B models, the young Benson looked to jazz for his inspiration, listening to guitarists Charlie Christian, Wes Montgomery, Hank Garland and Grant Green.

“I could tell by the first records I heard by each one of them that they were very vital to music. Green because of his lyricism, Montgomery because of his knowledge of the instrument, his approach to harmony and theory. Hank Garland for his fire and technique and Charlie Christian because he could swing so hard and not lose his feeling.”

He was 20 when Jack McDuff invited him to join his band. McDuff’s bag was funky R & B but his repertoire included jazz pieces. “R & B was natural to me but the jazz tunes involved a lot of chord changes and I had to be more alert to play them; I began to like the challenge of inventing something new, as opposed to playing just for feeling.”
In 1965 Benson left McDuff to form his own band, with Lonnie Smith on organ, Ronnie Cuber on baritone and drummer Phil Turner. Off to a flying start, Benson's solo work led to a succession of albums (for Columbia, A & M and CTI), that has defined his as a steadily progressing, richly rewarding career. His albums with Freddie Hubbard, Stanley Turrentine, Esther Phillips and Hank Crawford, not to mention solo sets like Body Talk, Beyond the Blue Horizon and the Grammy-nominated White Rabbit have both established Benson's credentials and contributed to the growth of instrumental jazz.

Benson's achievements have won him the Playboy All-Star Poll, a Grammy nomination and the long-standing support of a loyal following. Signing with Warner Bros. in late 1975 George Benson would seem to be moving in the direction of both increased popularity and continued artistic success. His first Warners album, Breezin', was released early in 1976. It is now one of the best selling albums in the country.

Benson will be appearing in Buffalo on August 6 at the Buffalo Theatre. The concert will be presented by Magnum Entertainment. For more information, consult the ad in this issue. Its always wise to pick up tickets in advance.

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NEWS

The Port East, Grider & Ferry, has announced that jazz will continue on Tuesday & Sunday nights, but not on Thursday. Fine vegetarian food is served, and music starts at 10.

As of July 11, Birthright has sold 400 copies of their second album Breath of Life in the Buffalo area. In the jazz market, that's a lot of records, especially since it's only been out for six weeks.

In this issue you'll find a feature on the local jazz group Spyro Gyra and a blues column by WBFO blues announcer Ron Weinstock. This is some of the needed expansion allowed us by

spyro gyra
photo: michael ketter

the large format, now in its third month. We will also print some of the negative record reviews people have been asking for, previously cut due to lack of space.

LIVE MUSIC REVIEW

Omitted this month in lieu of Spyro Gyra feature. Words about Mark Murphy, Phil Woods & Spider Martin will appear in September.

SPYRO GYRA

It's been nearly eleven months since jazz began its reign every Tuesday and Sunday at Jack Daniel's on Forest Ave. Since that overcast evening in September, Buffalo's music scene has experienced growing pains and not all of the formative changes have been for the better. A constant, however, has been the endurance and maturation of the group that has filled the Tuesday and Sunday slot all these months at Jack Daniel's: Spyro Gyra.

At the time of that first gig, Spyro Gyra was a quartet consisting of Tom Walsh/drums, Jeremy Wall/Fender Rhodes electric piano, Jay Beckenstein/tenor, alto and soprano sax, and Jim Kertzdorfer/bass. Since then the group has grown to a quintet and has rotated various members but the formula has remained the same: tightly executed, uptempo jazz with decided rhythmic rock overtones. Parallels can be drawn between their sound and that of the Crusaders, Tom Scott, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter.

Most readers of the Buffalo Jazz Report are aware of drummer Tom Walsh's recent departure from Buffalo to join the rock group America as their percussionist. Immediately after Walsh left for the America tour (they're currently touring the Orient), John "Duffy" Fornes moved in to fill the drumming vacancy. He worked with Spyro Gyra for some time then left and was replaced by Hari Pinder, a respected drummer in the
Jay Beckenstein, Jeremy Wall and Tom Walsh are former members of the Buffalo Jazz Ensemble and were participants in last summer's concert -in-the-park series which turned some 31,000 people on to jazz. The reason they left is simple enough - they felt it was, "...time to be movin' on."

Wall wrote and arranged many tunes for the ensemble including the parts for all instruments for one of the pieces used in rehearsal of the Buffalo Jazz Ensemble and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra for a scheduled performance that unfortunately never materialized. The BJE, by the way, is in a current lull but is still active.

Spyro Gyra reflects the solid background each member possesses: Walsh's work with S.U.N.Y.A.B.'s Creative Associates and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra; Wall's training at the California Institute of the Arts; Beckenstein's performance with the S.E.M. Ensemble and the House Rockers; Kertzdorfer's appearance on Birthright's first album and his current gig with Jaman. Their music which Jeremy Wall says, "...is closer to jazz than anything else," continues to grow as do the crowds each Tuesday and Sunday at Jack Daniel's. Buffalo is a town rich in musical resources. Spyro Gyra is an index of those resources and a giant step towards capitalizing on them.

John H. Hunt

recordings

GABOR SZABO - NIGHTFLIGHT - MERCURY 1091

After doing two fine albums for CTI and one commercial but acceptable one for Salvation (a CTI subsidiary), guitarist Szabo has moved to Mercury. The result is Nightflight, and if this album was the result of hard work, it wasn't on Szabo's part. While he had previously done pop tunes with artistic originality, he's succumbed to disco-fied sounds (complete with vocals) that give you no idea of just how good he really is. I'm afraid that if you're a Szabo fan, the only thing that Nightflight will do for you is make you grab one of his older sides from your collection for a returnflight to the turntable.

B.W.

"JACK DANIEL'S CONTINUES AS THE PLACE TO BE IN BUFFALO, SUNDAYS AND TUESDAYS"

SPYROGYRA: STILL HERE AND GOING STRONG

Jack Daniel's
FOREST NEAR ELMWOOD
BUDDY RICH - SPEAK NO EVIL - RCA APL1-1503

Having convinced himself he is the greatest drummer in the world, Buddy Rich apparently does not feel the need to create responsible music anymore. Rich is jumping on the disco band wagon as so many big bands, and the writing, playing and arrangement of Love naciones (BN 893), is Born is a mild version of Thad Jones and Wiirtschaftbe. Garnett's What the World Needs Now is Peace and Love is a standout. Check this one out. Fine work on the conga / percussionist Joe Bonner/piano, some tasteful trombone playing from Steve Blakey, and is verry much certain is deserving of this package (the recently cut a new side for Contemporary records that should be out soon). Music is collected here from three sessions Circa '56-7, originally cut for the now defunct Intro & Jazz West labels. Some of the featured artists are Joe Morelle, Shelly Manne, Red Norvo, Leroy Vinegar & Jack Sheldon. If you dig West Coast pop - check this out.

Some 1969 JEAN-LUC PONTY is back out under the title of CANTOLEUPE ISLAND (LA 632). The first record was originally released as King Kong (Pacific jazz), and contains four groupings of Ponty with some of his Frank Zappa cohorts doing one Ponty and five Zappa originals. Most of the music is similar to the electric jazz rock sound Ponty is into now. Music for Electric Jazz is a sidetrip into this side of Ponty and is very much like the Mothers of Invention, conducted by Ian Underwood. Cello, viola, bassoon, oboe and French horn are included. Record two is a straight jazz session recorded live in Hollywood. Ponty is with a rhythm section, which worked as the Geo. Duke Trio - Duke, John Heard & Dick Berk. The highlight is the violinist treatment of H. Hancock's Cantoloupe Island. More often than not, this live session swings.

Note: Two other records from this release are unissued material by McCoy Tyner & Elvin Jones, and are reviewed in length in this issue.

CATHALYST - JAZZ FROM JAPAN SERIES

Catalyst Records' second release is made up of five albums previously available in Japan on the JVC label.

CARL CARLSON ALONE - AS TIME GOES BY (7904) finds the singer recorded live at the Dug, (in Tokyo), accompanied only by her own piano. This intimate, relaxed set was recorded in 1973 and is among the best of her recent recordings.

A similar situation is heard on HELEN SINGS, TEDDY SWING (7903) featuring vocalist Helen Merrill and pianist Teddy Wilson. Again the music is relaxed, with the pair accompanied by piano and drums.

JAZZ MESSENGERS '70 (7902) is an excellent album from ART BLAKEY, featuring his regular working group of that time. Two members of this band - saxophonists Carlos Garnett and pianist Joanne Brackeen now have albums of their own. Bill Hardman is on trumpet and Jon Arnet is on bass included are versions Moanin', Whisper Not, A Night in Tunisia and the humorous Blues March. Garnett's What the World Needs Now is Peace and Love is a standout. Check this one out. Fine work from everyone.

Vocalist KIMIKO KASAI and pianist MAL WALDRON team up for One For Lady (7900). This is my favorite of the three vocal albums in the release backed by bass and drums, Kasai and Waldron deliver refreshingly original renditions of eight tunes, most of which were made popular by Lady Day. Komiko's, sexy, breathy vocals are all in near perfect English. Waldron, of course, is a former Holiday pianist.

FUJI comes from the TERUMUSA HINO SEXTET (7901), a very popular all Japanese group. Since jazz is more popular in Japan than perhaps anywhere in the world, one should never underestimate the Japanese jazzman. The musicianship here is good, with each player working his tail off - the music moves.

Reaction is a frantic coocker, as is Fuji. Be and Know sounds like a Pharoah Sanders imitation, but is good. Ballad Ballad Ballad is Born is a very nice Town Of Trudy's. Komiko's trumpet - he shines. In all - not terribly original - but a good record from a super trumpet player.

I've seen JVC/Japan's catalogue and look forward to future releases. By the way -- Catalyst pressings are clean.

THE BLUE NOTE RE-ISSUE SERIES

Three albums of previously released, but (except for the Monk package) long unavailable music comes from Blue Note.

THE LONIOUS MONK - THE COMPLETE GENIUS (LA 579) gives you Monk's complete output for Blue Note issued under his own name (he did some tracks for Sonny Rollins which aren't included). The six sessions were recorded from 1947-1951, and the tunes are presented here in order by sessions (it makes sense but is not always done). This is great Monk, aided by such people as Milt Jackson, Kenny Dorham, Art Blakey, Lou Donaldson, Max Roach, Sahib Shihab and many more. Most of the thirty tunes are Monk's, and the recording quality is good.

Bop alto saxophonist ART PEPPER is featured on EARLY ART (LA 591). Pepper is a fine player, but little known and is certainly deserving of this package (the recently cut a new side for Contemporary records that should be out soon). Music is collected here from three sessions Circa '56-7, originally cut for the now defunct Intro & Jazz West labels. Some of the featured artists are Joe Morelle, Shelly Manne, Red Norvo, Leroy Vinegar & Jack Sheldon. If you dig West Coast pop - check this out.
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Waiting
Including: Waiting/Prime Thought Searchin' The Trane

EARL KLUGH
Including: Las Manos De Fuego/ Vonetta Could It Be I'm Falling In Love Laughter In The Rain

Carmen McRae
Can't Hide Love
Including: Can't Hide Love/Music Only Women Bleed/All By Myself

RONNIE LAWS
Fever
Including: Let's Keep It Together Fever/All The Time From Ronnie With Love

CHICO HAMILTON
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RONNIE LAWS
Fever
Including: Let's Keep It Together Fever/All The Time From Ronnie With Love

JEAN-LUC PONTY
Cantelooupe Island

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ELVIN JONES
The Prime Element
Two previously unreleased sessions by the American drummer of our time Featuring Joe Farrell, Steve Grossman, Frank Foster, George Coleman, Lee Morgan, Joe Passman, Jimmy Witherspoon, Candido Camero and others.

McCOY TYNER
Cosmos
Two previously unreleased sessions by one of the most important pianists in contemporary jazz. Featuring Bobbi Lewis, Gary Bartz, Harold Vick, Al Gibbons, Archie Shepp, Herbie Lewis, Freddie Hubbard, and string quartet under the direction of Kenny Moore.

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BLUE NOTE HITS A NEW NOTE!
Here’s an album that was recorded and previously available only in Italy. It features two of this area’s best known Italian hornmen, who often played the same circuit as Sam Noto, etc. This 1973 session is smooth, pure bop, featuring a trumpeter & trombonist who’ve played for countless big bands and record dates. All but one tune (Star Eyes) are theirs, including the title track - a scat singing affair. The leaders perform admirably both in solos and ensembles, and the rhythm section keeps it all moving with ease.

Pure, acoustic music - well recorded.

RECORD RUNNER;

CONTE CONDOLI & FRANK ROSOLINO - CONVERSATION - RCA TPL-1509

Here’s an album that was recorded and previously available only in Italy. It features two of this area’s best known Italian hornmen, who often played the same circuit as Sam Noto, etc. This 1973 session is smooth, pure bop, featuring a trumpeter & trombonist who’ve played for countless big bands and record dates. All but one tune (Star Eyes) are theirs, including the title track - a scat singing affair. The leaders perform admirably both in solos and ensembles, and the rhythm section keeps it all moving with ease.

Pure, acoustic music - well recorded.

STEVE KUHN - RAINDROPS - MUSE MR 5106

Raindrops is a four-year old live recording done at Folk City in New York. Pianist Steve Kuhn is presented here in a quartet format with the support of highly regarded bassist George Mraz, percussionist Sue Evans and Bruce Ditmas on drums. This album’s release comes after the release of Trance (recorded in 1974) which earned Kuhn many new fans.

Kuhn’s distinctive style, which can be straight or highly improvisational depending on the mood, comes through whether he performs on the acoustic, the electric piano or switches from one to the other in mid-song as he does on several cuts. Raindrops is somewhat less inspiring than his most recent previous recording but illustrates that Kuhn continued to evolve. This album was previously released as Cobblestone 9020.

J.H.

ELVIN JONES - THE PRIME ELEMENT - BLUE NOTE LA-506

Although this twofer was released as part of the Blue Note re-issue series, it is all unreleased material - hence a separate review.

Record one was recorded in 1973 with an 11 piece group including Steve Grossman, Frank Foster, Pepper Adams, Gene Perla, Cornell Dupree, Jan Hammer and four percussionists. The high energy level and relatively loose format is set by the opening track, which includes a Grossman solo similar in intensity and more similar lyrically to his Zulu stomp solo (hear Grossman’s Some Shapes to Come -PM002). Incidentally - I disagree with the liner notes which say it’s Foster’s solo. Currents/Pollen presents a section with only moog, bass & drums, preceding Jones On the Mountain album by two years. Hammer plays moog off and on throughout the record, as he, Perla and Jones are alone again on the title track. Whims of Bal is a strange 5/4, with solos from Adams, Foster & Grossman followed by a solo moog interlude and a free blowing horn segment.

Record two is more straight ahead than the first, done in 1969. The septet features Joe Farrell, Geo. Coleman, Lee Morgan, Wilbur Little & percussionists Candido Camero and Miovelito Valles. Of special merit here is Farrell’s flute work and Morgan’s muted trumpet on Once I Loved. Elvin’s constant energy flow, the inspired hard core blowing of all three hornmen, and the excellent recording job by Rudy Van Gelder. In all, its typical of Jones’ 67-69 Blue Note recordings, augmented by the late great Lee Morgan. This package is well worth the money!

B.W.

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Aug. 10, 11 Howie Silverman Quartet
Aug. 12, 13, 14 Ron Small (vocal) w/Joel Shulman
Aug. 15 Humber College Big Band
Aug. 17, 18 Lorne Kellett Trio
Aug. 19, 20, 21 George McFetridge Trio
Aug. 22 Mother Necessity Big Band
Aug. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 Ted Moses and Guests
Aug. 29 Mother Necessity Big Band
Aug. 30, 31 Rob Pilotch Trio

McCOY TYNER - COSMOS - BLUE NOTE LA 460

Cosmos comes as a two record set, consisting of three previously unreleased sessions. As is usually the case, all the tunes were written by McCoy.

The first record opens with the original version of Song For My Lady (Milestone 9044). This particular outing finds Tyner with bassist Herbie Lewis, drummer Freddie Waits, Harold Vick and Al Gibbons on reeds and a string quartet directed by Kermit Moore. This version is much tamer than the most recent, with the strings heard only at the beginning and end. The same group is used for Cosmos and Shaken, But Not Forsaken. The strings are effective, but not as interesting as those on Tyner's most recent release Fly With the Wind. Although its not listed, I presume Harold Vick contributes the flute work.

Two tunes feature the trio of Tyner, Lewis & Waits, two musicians McCoy used on other Blue Note sides in '68 & '69. The first tune burns, the second rocks and each contains excellent drumming from Waits. The three remaining tracks find the above mentioned trio joined by Gary Bartz / alto and flute work.

Not Forsaken. The strings are effective, but not as interesting as those on Tyner's most recent release Fly With the Wind. Hopefully some Buffalo bars may follow the Belle Starr and bring in some Chicago bands. Locally Shakin' Smith continues at the Buena Vista Wednesday and Saturday evenings.

1976 has seen the release of a number of very fine albums. Robert Jr. Lockwood and the Aces, Blues Live in Japan (Advent 2807) is the finest of the three albums that Lockwood headlines. Formerly a guitarist with Sonny Boy Williamson and Little Walter, as well as being Robert Johnson's stepson, Lockwood is a brilliant blues guitarist, playing in a jazz-flavored style, and sings in a straight forward fashion that brings new life to such standards as 'Stormy Monday' and 'Worried Life Blues'. An added treat is Louis Myers vocals, slide guitar on Anna Lee and his harp playing on 'Little and Low' behind Lockwood's vocal.

Mr. Johnson's Blues (Mamlish S-3807) is the only American release of Lonnie Johnson's recordings from the 20s and 30s. A well-programmed album, it provides variety in material and setting. Lonnie Johnson is featured both as a singer and accompanist and plays not only guitar, but piano and violin. Also heard are Eddie Lang, Texas Alexander, Clara Smith and Victoria Spivey. An extremely important release which should make many familiar with one of the pioneers in jazz and blues.

Among other albums, Otis Rush's 1st album in 8 years Cold Day in Hell (Delmark DS-638) is one of the finest blues albums in recent years. Rush sings and plays with incredible intensity. Highly recommended to fans of B.B. King styled blues. Hound Dog Taylor's posthumously released live album Beware of the Dog (Alligator 4707) captures the infectious quality of his rocking blues and boogie. He will be missed. The James Cotton Band's Live and on the Move (Buddah BDS 5611-2) also is an album of boogie which also should have wide appeal.

I find the album a little too frantic and the music too hurried though many of you will probably find it to your liking.

what's happening

BUFFALO

See ads.

TORONTO
Albert's Hall, The Brunswick, 491 Bloor St., West. Monday-Wednesday - Kid Bastien, Thursday-Saturday - Jim Abercrombie.
Chez Moi, 30 Hayden St. Saturday Afternoon - Silverleaf Jazzmen.
Church Street Community Centre, 519 Church St. Friday night - Silverleaf Jazzmen.
D.J.'s Bar, Hydro Building, University & College. Six nights a week - Chax Jazz and plus guests.
Executive Restaurant, 254 Eglington Ave., East. - Saturdays 2-6 PM - John Dela Trio.
Inn on the Park, Leslie & Eglington Ave., East - Saturday matinees - various groups.

BLUES by ron weinstock

This is the first of a series of columns which will include both live blues in the area, and recent recordings. WBFO-FM provides the Buffalo area with the only regular blues programming. Shades of Blue with Babe Barlow is heard Saturdays from 10 PM to Midnight. I do both Bon Ton Roulet as part of This is Radio on Wednesdays (3PM) and Ramblin' with the Blues on Thursday evenings from 10 to 11. Other folk programs on WBFO do have feature blues (though not exclusively). Listed in this column will be any regular blues programs in any city the BJR services.

The Belle Starr is the only place in the Buffalo area that is bringing in blues bands from out of town. The Buddy Guy-Junior Wells band appeared in May, and Muddy Waters was there in early July. Both groups played well and were well received.

EDDIE HENDERSON - HERITAGE - BLUE NOTE LA 636

Trumpeter Henderson's previous Blue Note album, Sunburst, was voted as one of the best records of '75 by BJR reviewers. His current effort is almost as good. Eddie was a member of Herbie Hancock's sextet when the albums Mwandishi, Crossings & Sextant were recorded. Since then, he has carried on the sound of that band (though a bit mellowed) while Hancock has become increasingly more commercial. His long time associate trombonist Julian Priester is on hand, as are Hancock's Paul Jackson/bass and Mike Clarke/drums. The most outstanding work comes from Patrice Rushen/keyboards and synthesizer, Henderson, and Hadley Caliman. Caliman, who is heard on bass clarinet, soprano sax and flutes, can play his tail off when producers allow him to, and the sounds great here. One difference between Heritage and Sunburst is that Paul Jackson's bass work is no match for that of Buster Williams and Anthony Jackson.

This one is recommended for fans of Herbie Hancock, Weather Report, etc.
B.W.

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14 - Chuck Mangione.
Mother Necessity Jazz Workshop See ad.
Jazz on the Lake - Wed. Aug. 4 - Norm Bernard’s
Ultimate Sound and Jim Galloway’s Metro Stompers (Norm is
a Buffaloian). Wed., Aug. 18 - as above. Wednesday,
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Monday thru Friday - 10 pm to 1 am - The Jazz Scene
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night Jazz - CBL FM 94.1.
Friday - 10:30 pm to mid. - Major Progressions - CBL
AM 740.
Saturday - 6 am to 12 noon - The Jazz Scene w/Ted O’Reilly
- CJRT FM 91.1; 2 pm to 4 pm - Jazz Radio Canada w/Lee
Major and Mary Nelson - CBL FM 94.1; 6 pm to 9 pm - Jazz
in Concert w/Ted O’Reilly - CJRT FM 91.1; 9 pm to mid.
World of Jazz w/David Lennick, Paul Fisher, Hal Hill & other
hosts - CKQS FM 94.9; 11 pm to mid. - Sound of Jazz - CKDS
FM 95.3; 10:30 pm to 2 am - Jazz w/Jack Cole - CHWA AM
1250; 12 mid. to 6:30 am - Music for Night People w/Paul
Fisher (new show) - CKQS FM 94.9.
Sunday - 8 pm to 10 pm - J is for Jazz w/Jack Cole
- CKTB FM 97.7 and 10 pm to 6 am - All that Jazz w/Phil
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