

# Don't Discard the '70s Quite Yet

By Conrad Silvert

**T**WO WEEKS ago, this column attempted, in 800 words or less, to evaluate the state of the art of jazz today "in light of the past ten years." Needless to say, no matter how comprehensive and thorough I tried to be, the article was necessarily an outline rather than a full picture.

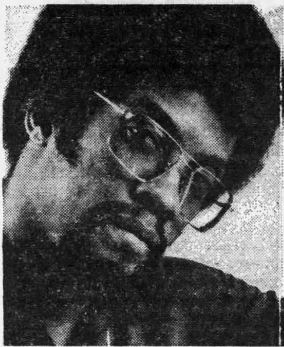
A book would be required to properly delineate the history of jazz in the '70s. That is not possible to print here but there are other shortcut ways to look back upon the achievements of the last decade before forgetting those years in the frenzy of current events, artistic and otherwise.

Knowing in advance how silly arbitrary lists can be, I have endeavored to choose a list of ten significant jazz albums from the '70s. Though I've tried to maintain a degree of objectivity, this list has been compiled according to personal taste and is not intended to be definitive. The happy fact is that there were easily more than 100 albums whose quality and

## THE JAZZ SCENE

with which Weather Report has made exciting, original music that transcends category. WR's ten albums form a genre of their own. All of them are colorful, exotic combinations of unexpected rhythms and melodies that have a universal feeling that is both ultra-modern and timeless. The current band, a quartet including Jaco Pastorius and Peter Erskine, may be the most effective yet, but I've chosen "Mysterious Traveller," from the band's middle period, because of its track-by-track strength and because it showcases Zawinul's and Shorter's talents equally.

(3) Herbie Hancock, "Crossings" — One of the tragedies of the decade was that Herbie's best band ever — Eddie Henderson, Julian Priester, Bennie Maupin, Buster Williams and Billy Hart — broke up before it received the recogni-



HERBIE HANCOCK



MILES DAVIS

influence would qualify them for singing out. However, I believe these ten reveal the way jazz has branched out and prospered without losing touch with its roots.

(1) Miles Davis, "Bitches Brew" — Recorded late in 1969 and released in January, 1970, this was Miles' epochal farewell to acoustic jazz and signaled, for better or for worse, an onslaught of "fusion" music that has seen jazz interact with electronic instruments, rock & roll, and music from other cultures around the world. But Miles had little to do with the subsequent popularity of "crossover" music, as long as you interpret crossover, as I do, to mean a kind of middle-of-the-road, admittedly commercial pop music with little artistic pretensions. "Bitches Brew" and Miles' later efforts have a funky element, and there were indications that Miles wanted to become something of an eccentric rock star, but his music continued to have integrity, to be daring and imaginative and, despite "Bitches Brew"'s eventual gold status, not terribly accessible to the masses.

(2) Weather Report, "Mysterious Traveller" — Wayne Shorter and Josef Zawinul probably influenced Miles as much as he influenced them, so it was no surprise that when Zawinul and Shorter joined forces late in 1970, that they should commence to make extraordinary music. The surprise is the consistency

tion it deserved. "Crossings" is a flawed masterpiece, not nearly so good as much of the music the band played live. The instrumental colors were different, the rhythms — often African-derived and in meters such as 1% — were hypnotic and the music was both tribal and futuristic. (This brilliant band will reunite, under Eddie Henderson's leadership, for a March record date. Now, if they could only return to the stage.)

(4) Keith Jarrett, "Koln Concert" — Jarrett's "Solo-Concerts" first exposed his marvelous pianistic wanderings to a wide audience. That set, plus parts of the too-weighty "Sun Bear Concerts" are exceptional, as are parts of just about everything Jarrett has recorded (not the least being a series of LPs with Charlie Haden, Dewey Redman and Paul Motian). "Koln" is Jarrett's most dramatic and accessible live album.

In general, despite his obnoxious self-important, histrionics, Jarrett has exercised an enormously positive influence in keeping lit the torch of acoustic music. And he has revived interest in the piano.

(5) V.S.O.P., "The Quintet" — Keith Jarrett would probably say that this reunion of the '60s Miles Davis quintet, with Freddie Hubbard replacing Miles, was a phony and crass attempt to turn nostalgia into capital gain. But such was not the case. This superb band of masters created powerful new music that was mercilessly virtuosic and emotionally

## POP RECORDS

### A Classic Rock 'Clash'

**THE CLASH:** "London Calling" (Epic Records) — Since this English foursome first emerged in London in 1976, they have been at the very forefront of rock and roll. Their debut album, "The Clash" is considered by some to be one of the best rock and roll albums recorded in rock's relatively brief, 35-year existence.

In England, the Clash's musical-ly raw, almost primitive early singles like "White Riot" and "Clash City Rockers" were critical and popular successes. In America, however, the group has a large cult following (4000 people attended a fairly recent Bay Area appearance) but is basically an unknown quantity.

Its first album, "The Clash" was deemed to "raw" for American tastes and, initially wasn't released in the U.S. The group was saddled with American rock producer Sandy Pearlman who was supposed to smooth out the Clash's sound and make it appealing to American tastes. Near legendary battles took place on both sides of the ocean between Pearlman and the Clash. The result was the excellent "Give 'Em Enough Rope," which failed to please American record buyers.

Still, as the decade came to a close, rock critics were including the Clash on their lists of bands expected to make the significant rock and roll of the 80's.

With "London Calling," an album released in England at the end of December, which is being released in America in the next week or so, the Clash has created a classic rock album; an album which, literally, defines the state of rock and roll and against which the very best rock of this decade will have to be judged.

"London Calling" is a two-record set which, at the conclusion of its fourth side, leaves the listener hungering for another two sides.

When the Clash last toured America, they appeared on American stages with their hair greased back like Fifties rockabilly singers. In fact, wearing tight-pegged pants and bright red and pink shirts with the collars up, they looked like a cross between Elvis Presley and James Dean. And, in a way, their outfits made a certain kind of sense. For it was as if this English rock band had come searching for an America that no longer existed.

As they crossed America, they sought out indigenous American music: zydeco, blues, rockabilly, country-western and jazz. Sometimes they performed with American country-western musician, rockers and rockabilly revivalists. On several occasions they jammed with coun-

try singer Joe Ely on a rockabilly song, "Fingernails."

Thus it's not totally unexpected to find the Clash exploring the terrain of American music in sections of "London Calling," even as they reshape it to fit their own purposes. "Brand New Cadillac," is an out and out rockabilly song that Carl Perkins himself would certainly appreciate. Vocalist/songwriter/rhythm guitarist Joe Strummer blusters the lyrics, his voice bathed in classic Sun Records-style echo. "My baby drove up in a brand new Cadillac," sings Strummer. "She said 'Hey come here daddy, I ain't never coming back.'"

"Jimmy Jazz" finds the groups working in a near blues idiom. Sometimes, it's the American Dream the Clash tamper with as in "Lost in the Supermarket," when lead guitarist/vocalist/songwriter Mick Jones sings with forced innocence, "I'm all lost in the supermarket/ I can no longer shop happily/ I came in here for that special offer/ Guaranteed personality."

Two other sides of the Clash are in evidence on this album. A number of tracks, "Revolution Rock" and "Wrong 'Em Boyo" for example, ride on Jamaican reggae rhythms. And on "Lost in the Supermarket" and "Lover's Rock," the Clash reveals a fondness for the pop ballad. Somehow, the group makes all this diverse music fit together.

Literally, the group remains the outstanding political voice of rock and roll, tearing away at materialism, sexism, stardom, capitalism, nuclear power and more, in the tradition of Bob Dylan, John Lennon, the MC5 and other one time rock radicals.

If there is one song on the album that sums up the Clash, it is the title track, "London Calling." Set to a military beat, Joe Strummer sings of impending world crisis. "The ice age is coming/ The sun is zooming in/ Engines stop running and the wheat is growing thin/ A nuclear error/ But I have no fear/ London is drowning/ And I live by the river." Guitars come crashing down with relentless fury. This is rock and roll to start a revolution; powerful stuff that exhales the intense fire that has been the mark of the classic rock and roll: songs like "My Generation" by the Who, "Money" by the Beatles and "Gimmie Shelter" by the Rolling Stones.

"London Calling" is, simply, a masterpiece; as ambitious in its own way as both the Rolling Stones' classic seventies album, "Exile on Main Street" and "The Beatles" (the "white album"). It's that good.

—Michael Goldberg

charged. Remarkably close rapport among the musicians combined with a certain competitive tension to make this

album especially vibrant and alive. (We will cover the other five albums at a future date).