

## HALL OF FAME

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Hall of Fame | By Josef Woodard

# Jackie McLean

The annals of jazz history are populated with stories of revelations and revolutions occurring in small rooms. Bebop evolved over long nights at Minton's. Ornette Coleman blew his new sound into the Five Spot and out into cultural consciousness. John Coltrane's experiments in the laboratory of the Village Vanguard resulted in some of the most timeless music in all of jazz.

One of the less-appreciated cases of a musical epiphany took place when Jackie McLean brought his new band to the Blue Coronet in Brooklyn in 1963. The alto saxophonist had solidified his role in the jazz world and was itching

to stretch the boundaries he felt were confining him. For the date, he corralled trombonist Grachan Moncur, vibist Bobby Hutcherson, a then-teenaged Tony Williams on drums and bassist Eddie Khan.

Their music was unlike McLean's earlier work: alternately free, structured and suitable for description as "chamber jazz," it was captured on two 1963 albums for Blue Note, *One Step Beyond* and *Destination ... Out!* (the second album featured drummer Roy Haynes and bassist Larry Ridley in the rhythm section). Those albums, bringing to fruition McLean's more tentative avant-garde peregrinations on

1962's *Let Freedom Ring*, helped launch the solo careers of Moncur—who wrote most of the pieces in McLean's band—Hutcherson and Williams' own early Blue Note dates before he joined Miles Davis' '60s quintet.

In an interview with Ira Gitler that appeared in the Sept. 12, 1963, issue of *DownBeat*, McLean admitted that listeners at the Blue Coronet met the music with some hostility, but that he would press on with his inspiration: "[The fans] are still going to have to put up with what I'm doing, because maybe I'll play around for a while, but as soon as the emotion hits me—because this is a thing that's done emotionally—

I'm going to go ahead and stretch out and play as much as I can. I'm going to look around. Actually, it's exploring."

McLean's death on March 31 and his induction into the DownBeat Hall of Fame in the Critics Poll call for a new appreciation for the saxophonist's accomplishments, especially his 1963 year of living, if not dangerously, then progressively. His career timeline frames the dates fortuitously: McLean served time on drug charges in 1964, and by 1967 had been dropped by Blue Note. Those 1963 albums are ripe for rediscovery, as they maintain a surprising freshness today, partly because the distinctive vibes and trombone format has rarely been used—except by Dave Holland's quintet—a few decades later.

Of the musicians involved in McLean's life in that whirlwind year, Moncur especially benefited from the leader's advocacy. The Newark, N.J.-born trombonist had played with the Jazztet and Ray Charles, but found his first major esthetic ally in McLean.

Moncur met McLean at the Newark club Sugar Hill, where the trombonist played with Wayne Shorter. He had been a McLean fan since childhood. "I was in grammar school when I checked out his first album," Moncur said. "It was in the window of Savoy Records. I saw his picture and liked the fact that he looked so young. I thought, wow, a young dude like this has an album out? It inspired me to work hard."

Moncur kept tabs on McLean. "Sometime after I went out with Ray," Moncur said, "Jackie invited me over to his house when he was living on the Lower East Side. I went over to his house and we practiced together all afternoon.

"We were exchanging ideas and tunes, and he was showing me experimental little things, like this bagpipe-sounding stuff he was playing on his horn. These were little experimentations, trying to open his ears, going one step beyond the normal things. We noticed that we both had ears like that, on the experimental tip, maybe just one step beyond the bebop that we had been exploring."

Meanwhile, Hutcherson was between roles after his gig with Al Grey and Billy Mitchell ended. He was driving a taxi when he got a call from bassist Herbie Lewis, who had played with Moncur in the Jazztet. McLean showed up at a jam at Lewis' Greenwich Village home—Moncur and Hutcherson were there—and announced the upcoming gig at the Blue Coronet.

A band was born. They quickly rehearsed up a few new original songs, including "Frankenstein" and "Saturday And Sunday," and added a few standards to make the date.

"The stuff sounded so strange to the club owners," Moncur said. "They didn't dig the band, but the word got around that we were doing some different stuff. It seemed like every musician in the world eventually came through. We were bringing so much business in there, the

club owners wound up keeping us there for a month.

"Every time we played, it would come off differently. The sound was taking us somewhere that we hadn't been before. After the gig ended, we went right into the studio and Rudy Van Gelder recorded it. [Blue Note head] Alfred [Lion] liked the thing we were doing, so it led to me doing my date and other dates with Jackie. It opened up the doors for everybody."

## Hall of Fame

Legends in jazz, blues and beyond can be elected into the DownBeat Hall of Fame by way of the annual Readers Poll (designated by "R") or Critics Poll ("C"). It all started in 1952 with the readers; the critics got into the game later, in 1961. With this month's addition of Jackie McLean, there are currently 105 DownBeat Hall of Famers, listed below in chronological order of their induction.

1952	Louis Armstrong (R)	1982	Bill Evans (C)
1953	Glenn Miller (R)		Art Pepper (R)
1954	Stan Kenton (R)		Fats Navarro (C)
1955	Charlie Parker (R)	1983	Stephane Grappelli (R)
1956	Duke Ellington (R)		Albert Ayler (C)
1957	Benny Goodman (R)	1984	Oscar Peterson (R)
1958	Count Basie (R)		Sun Ra (C)
1959	Lester Young (R)	1985	Sarah Vaughan (R)
1960	Dizzy Gillespie (R)		Zoot Sims (C)
1961	Billie Holiday (R)	1986	Stan Getz (R)
	Coleman Hawkins (C)		Gil Evans (C)
1962	Miles Davis (R)	1987	Lionel Hampton (R)
	Bix Beiderbecke (C)		Johnny Dodds (C)
1963	Thelonious Monk (R)		Thad Jones (C)
	Jelly Roll Morton (C)		Teddy Wilson (C)
1964	Eric Dolphy (R)	1988	Jaco Pastorius (R)
1965	Art Tatum (C)		Kenny Clarke (C)
1966	John Coltrane (R)	1989	Woody Shaw (R)
	Earl Hines (C)		Chet Baker (C)
1966	Bud Powell (R)	1990	Red Rodney (R)
	Charlie Christian (C)		Mary Lou Williams (C)
1967	Billy Strayhorn (R)	1991	Lee Morgan (R)
	Bessie Smith (C)		John Carter (C)
1968	Wes Montgomery (R)	1992	Maynard Ferguson (R)
	Sidney Bechet (C)		James P. Johnson (C)
	Fats Waller (C)	1993	Gerry Mulligan (R)
1969	Ornette Coleman (R)		Ed Blackwell (C)
	Pee Wee Russell (C)	1994	Dave Brubeck (R)
	Jack Teagarden (C)		Frank Zappa (C)
1970	Jimi Hendrix (R)	1995	J.J. Johnson (R)
	Johnny Hodges (C)		Julius Hemphill (C)
1971	Charles Mingus (R)	1996	Horace Silver (R)
	Roy Eldridge (C)		Artie Shaw (C)
	Django Reinhardt (C)	1997	Nat "King" Cole (R)
1972	Gene Krupa (R)		Tony Williams (C)
	Clifford Brown (C)	1998	Elvin Jones (C)
1973	Sonny Rollins (R)		Frank Sinatra (R)
	Fletcher Henderson (C)	1999	Betty Carter (C)
1974	Buddy Rich (R)		Milk Jackson (R)
	Ben Webster (C)		Lester Bowie (C)
1975	Cannonball Adderley (R)	2000	Clark Terry (R)
	Cecil Taylor (C)		Milt Hinton (C)
1976	Woody Herman (R)	2001	Joe Henderson (R)
	King Oliver (C)		John Lewis (C)
1977	Paul Desmond (R)	2002	Antonio Carlos Jobim (R)
	Benny Carter (C)		Wayne Shorter (C)
1978	Joe Venuti (R)	2003	Ray Brown (R)
	Rahsaan Roland Kirk (C)		Roy Haynes (C)
1979	Ella Fitzgerald (R)	2004	McCoy Tyner (R)
	Lennie Tristano (C)		Steve Lacy (C)
1980	Dexter Gordon (R)	2005	Herbie Hancock (R)
	Max Roach (C)		Jackie McLean (C)
1981	Art Blakey (R)	2006	

Hutcherson remembers a spirit of experimentation in the group, as well as a sense of humor and freedom. "Jackie would do all kinds of crazy stuff," he said. "We would sit on the floor and he would act like we were the dummies and he was the ventriloquist. He moved his hand in back of your head. So we started doing it and I remember after a couple of weeks, there were all these people coming out to hear us doing some different stuff and having a ball doing it."

On the albums, Moncur's flexible compositional hand is a strong force in what makes them fly: He wrote "Frankenstein" and "Ghost Town" on the first, and "Love And Hate," "Esoteric" and the topsy turvy blues "Riff Raff" on the second. The importance of Moncur's charts wasn't lost on the boss.

"Out of all the musicians I ever worked with," Moncur said, "Jackie showed me more respect. He was big enough to share the bandstand."

In his typically articulate, candid liner notes for *Destination ... Out!*, McLean explained the backdrop of his new sound and attitude. He wrote: "Everything changes with time, and music is no different. Today the compositions are getting more and more involved with form, rhythm changes and time breaks. ... We live in an age of speed and variety; we live in an age of men seeking to explore worlds beyond, and since music is but an expression of the happenings around us, it is quite natural for the young musicians to express or attempt to express the mood and tempo of our time; just as ragtime music painted a portrait of the era of Prohibition, so too does today's jazz paint a portrait of the Space Age."

Space Age, maybe, but also the age of introspection, of drawing on ideas and sounds from different musical realms and an age when revolution was in the air. Hutcherson notes that social and political vibrations were feeding into McLean's new work as much as a desire to get beyond bebop.

"Jackie wanted to do something new," Hutcherson said. "At the same time, he was not just wanting to do something new. There was so much going on that was part of the black revolution happening around the country. It was a different time, when music was describing this heavy feeling and trying to change awareness of who we are, why we're here, what injustices were being done. We were trying to laugh and smile as it was going on, and at the same time crying over a lot of what was happening."

For those in the McLean band, 1963 seems like a blur. "It was happening so fast, the music that was coming through me at the time," Moncur said. "This was a period when the music was coming out of me like pouring water. It was something that was evolving and happening naturally. We didn't even work a whole year together. We didn't have the time to dwell on how different it was or anything. We were just engrossed in the feeling of being a part of this happening. It was like some magic, coming out of nowhere."

Asked about McLean's role in jazz and in life, Hutcherson called his old friend, "a wonderful father, a wonderful husband. Lots of manhood. I loved to see how he would dress when he'd come to the record dates. He might show up in red suspenders and a beautiful shirt. He'd be all dressed up at the record dates. You could tell something special was going to happen.

"I remember lots of times when we'd be playing and we'd have to go into the dressing room because our shirts would be wet," he continued. "Jackie would take off his shirt and flex his muscles, saying, 'All right you guys, look at this.' We'd say, 'Whoa, Jackie.' He was so funny. He'd be flexing his muscles, then he'd put on a dry shirt and we'd go out and play." **DB**