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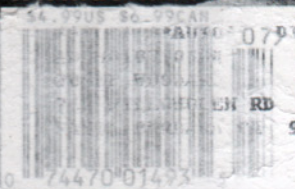
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# Charles LLOYD

**'I Was On a Mission  
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FROM FOREST FLOWER  
TO HIS CURRENT TRIO,  
CHARLES LLOYD'S CAREER  
HAS BEEN A JOURNEY  
TO DISCOVER THE MUSICAL  
UNKNOWN

# Spirit SEEKER

**I**t seems fitting that the road to Charles Lloyd's lavish yet soulful hilltop compound in Santa Barbara, Calif., is one of the less-taken roads in this scenic burg. Lloyd has lived here for a quarter century, having moved to this area outside of Montecito to be close to the local Vedanta Temple.

Lloyd is one of jazz's most intriguing anomalies. There isn't a jazz musician alive who has achieved meteoric fame—and sales—on a level rivaling pop music as Lloyd's '60s quartet did. He then chucked it all for a life of seclusion in Big Sur and Santa Barbara for many years. The saxophonist re-emerged, on a commercially humbler but artistically uncompromising scale, in the late '80s and has become evermore relevant through the '90s and this decade.

Throughout his career, Lloyd—whose mixed blood heritage includes Irish, African-American and Cherokee—has found himself on a mission. "I've got all these tribes in me, so I was definitely trying to figure out the concept of 'what is man,'" he says, citing the opening cut of his two-CD collaboration with Billy Higgins, *Which Way Is East*, which was released in 2004. "I never understand why we can't get together and do this dance on this planet in a way filled with humility and gratitude to the creator that we're all here, and respect everyone. I believe in the harmony of all traditions and approaches.

"I'm an idealist about this notion of the universe as a place where all God's children can sing their song and infuse something into the journey through here. You've got generations coming after us, so you want to leave the planet a better place."

On this rainy spring day, the afternoon wanes and the light dims over the Santa Barbara Channel and harbor, laid out panoramically below Lloyd's hilltop outpost. At 68, Lloyd seems more committed to music than ever. The ongoing creative spirit of his musical soulmate Higgins is palpable in his work, and Lloyd seems a bit drained thinking and talking about his fruitful close encounter with the late drummer.



Tapping into a mantra-like refrain, Lloyd declares, "I'm going to keep trying to elevate. That's what I do best. The thing that sparks me up so much is that I have all of these people wanting to serve with me. It's a beautiful offering to do this on such a level of commitment and dedication."

"I've been bringing it all these years and I'm still here. It's a calling and a blessing. As long as I'm able, I'm going to keep singing the song."

Lloyd's musical life is a convergence of projects and legacies old and new. His new release, *Sangam* (ECM), features a trio with tabla master Zakir Hussain and bold young jazz drummer Eric Harland, recorded live in Santa Barbara's acoustically and atmospherically kind Lobero Theater. The trio paid tribute to Higgins, who the Memphis, Tenn.-born Lloyd first met and collaborated with in Los Angeles in the late '50s and reconnected with for several projects before Higgins' death.

History has come calling in other ways, too: Lloyd's wildly successful 1966 album, *Forest Flower*, featuring the then-fledgling young pianist Keith Jarrett, drummer Jack DeJohnette and bassist Cecil McBee, celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. It's being toasted in September at the Monterey Jazz Festival, the scene of the original recording, with Lloyd re-creating the album with his current group.

Another lesser-known piece of Lloyd's past has only recently surfaced: Lloyd's important second album as a leader, 1965's *Of Course, Of Course*, has been issued on CD for the first time by Mosaic. The session—with guitarist Gabor Szabo, drummer Tony Williams and bassist Ron Carter—sheds new light on the early development of Lloyd's musical concept, before he started hanging out with rock stars and entertaining thoughts of retreating from the public eye.

*Of Course, Of Course* grew naturally out of Lloyd's first chapter as a musician. He first met Szabo in the ranks of drummer Chico Hamilton's group, Lloyd's first major gig. Lloyd went on to play with saxophonist Cannonball Adderley and then launched his own career, having by then made the inevitable pilgrimage to New York City.

Sitting at his kitchen table for a characteristically rambling, non-linear but internally logical interview, Lloyd considers the circumstances around that early underrated album. He remembers the grouping being a happy matter of confluences. "Ron and Tony had this rapport. Gabor and I did, and I had a rapport with Ron and Tony, too," he said. "We were young guys who were moved by modernity and how we could move through space and create waves through sounds. We had sat on the shoulders of all this tradition. We were modernists. We had a need."

In Lloyd's 40-plus-year discography, his longest and strongest label association has been his current affiliation with ECM, dating back to *Fish Out Of Water*, recorded in 1989 with a Scandinavian quartet with Swedish pianist Bobo Stenson, bassist Palle Danielsson and drummer Jon Christensen. At the time of *Fish Out Of Water*, Lloyd was expanding his vision while navigating familiar waters. Like many quartets through Lloyd's career, that Scandinavian group extended back to the classic quartet model set forth by the group featuring Jarrett.

"Those guys heard the original quartet with Keith, Jack and Cecil, when we first went to Stockholm," Lloyd says. "That was in '66. We had lines around the block. But we planted the seed, and those guys heard it, and they're open. I still love that recording for the empathy and also for the way it was recorded."

Eleven albums later, Lloyd has built up a powerful, poetic body of work on ECM and played with some of the finest and most flexible musicians in jazz, including Stenson, Brad Mehldau, John Abercrombie, Larry Grenadier, Billy Hart, Anders Jormin and, in his current quartet, Geri Allen and Harland.

Interestingly, despite Lloyd's longstanding and proudly held license to deviate from norms of structure or strict cultural vocabularies in his music, his freest and most adventurous albums have been released only in the last couple of years. Both have links to Higgins, directly and otherwise. The duet project *Which Way Is East* is a rambling set of music, casually recorded in Lloyd's house by Dorothy Darr, his wife and manager. *Sangam* is the first recording—a live document of what was actually their first gig—of a trio project originally designated as a tribute to Higgins after his passing. With these albums, Lloyd finally breaks out of the quartet mode which has been his foundation for decades.

Higgins has had a major impact on Lloyd's musical life in the past few years, even beyond his mortal presence. "The thing with Billy was nearer than near," Lloyd says. "It opened up something and made me nude in a way that continues to go forward. Billy is the closest I have come with another musician. All of the arti-



Clockwise from left: Jack DeJohnette, Cecil McBee, Charles Lloyd, George Avakian and Keith Jarrett

## CATCHING *Forest Flower*

DownBeat was at the 1966 Monterey Jazz Festival when Charles Lloyd led his quartet featuring Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette and Cecil McBee through the set that became the million-selling album *Forest Flower*. Here's the review of that set, by Pete Welding, from the Nov. 3, 1966, issue.

In quiet contrast was the lovely, impressionistic music of the Charles Lloyd quartet (Keith Jarrett, piano; Cecil McBee, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums). A long, freely improvised introduction set the mood for "Autumn Leaves," with Jarrett stroking and damping the piano strings to good effect. Lloyd's dulcet flute solo made most sensitive use of space, semitones and cries, while Jarrett constructed a contrasting solo of dissonances, blocks of sounds that can be called chords only by extension, and crashes of glasslike notes that resolved to placidity before McBee paraphrased the melodic line beautifully, making artful use of the full arsenal of the bass' sonic resources, including slaps.

A bossa nova followed, its theme a delicious shiver of sound on Lloyd's tenor saxophone. He played with shuddering, quicksilver grace; McBee fashioned an epigrammatic solo, then Lloyd returned for a flashing improvisation that was cast in a John Coltrane-like harsh sonority. The piece ended slowly over a long vamp that built to climax after climax, carefully and knowingly extended, moving eventually into a calypso before it eased to a halt. Lloyd's tenor, again in a Trane vein, was heard in a concluding exploration of "East Of The Sun" that was full of flowing power.

Throughout the set, Lloyd's quartet evidenced a concern with the possibilities and pleasures of the exploration of sound that signaled the healthiest, most productive kind of experimentation. And its music was deliciously warm and lovely, full of strength and sinew and the play of light and shade.

DB



fice was stripped away and we were left with the pure love of elevation. How could I continue on when he left? But then he sent Eric and Zakir to me from the other shore. As he said to me before he left town, 'I will always be with you.' Whether I am playing alone or with others, he is present. The simpatico is there.

"On his deathbed, Master Higgins told me 'Man, we've got to keep working on this music.' I will do that, as long as I'm able, as long as I have a breath. The thing with Zakir and Eric is so natural. It's that mystical thing, again."

Tracing back over the evolution of the trio with Hussain and Harland, Lloyd points out a succession of intriguing junctures of happenstance. Higgins died May 3, 2001. In September 2001, Lloyd's week-long stint at the Blue Note in New York was delayed by 9/11 (the exact date the gig was to have started). When Lloyd's band did begin playing that week, he heard Harland in an after-hours jam. Later that year, Lloyd performed a duet with Hussain in San Francisco's Grace Cathedral as part of the San Francisco Jazz Festival. Disparate pieces were connected, as if guided by Higgins' spirit.

To watch the threesome interact—in a loose, conversational and free-spirited way—makes for one of the more refreshingly category-blurring experiences in current jazz, as heard at last summer's Montreal Jazz Festival.

"The master allows us room to have fun," Hussain says. "There's none of this, 'Watch me and do what I ask' thing. It's more like, 'Here it is. Fill in the blanks.' It's a learning process for me and Eric to work together and see what we can come up with to support Charles."

This is a band, Hussain explains, which has, proudly and by design, never rehearsed. Before the original Lobero Theater gig, Hussain remembers, "I called Charles beforehand and said, 'What pitches of tabla should I be bringing, so it works with the keys you're working in?' And he said, 'Just tune to the key of the universe.' It's so typical (*laughs*). I came in with some tuned pitches, and he adapted to those."

**I**n the trio, one can trace elements back through Lloyd's unusual history in music, back to the essence of Memphis culture. Although he has lived elsewhere for most of his life, Lloyd carries a torch of pride for Memphis and its cultural soil, and particularly its underrated jazz heritage. "If you think about how Kansas City was and all that music that came out of there, we had a parallel situation in Memphis," Lloyd says. "There were a lot of giants and geniuses down there. My father went to college with Jimmie Lunceford.

"We had Phineas [Newborn]. He was our Art Tatum and J.S. Bach. There were guys whose names you've never heard, like Bill Harvey, who had a legendary band. There were tenor players like Doughbelly, who would hook up with Dexter [Gordon] and Wardell [Grey] somewhere and play all night long. Guys would come back and talk about how Doughbelly

wiped everybody out. He died early in a car accident with Tuff Green's band."

Coming to Los Angeles to study music at USC, Lloyd met a healthy contingent of great musicians, including Higgins, Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Gerald Wilson and Buddy Collette.

Lloyd's introduction to the public jazz world came through a call from Hamilton, whose previous group had featured Dolphy and a cellist. Hamilton put together a group with Lloyd, Szabo, bassist Albert Stinson and trombonist George Bohannon.

Hamilton, now 85, has both good and bad memories of Lloyd's tenure in his band. "If I remember correctly, the day Charles graduated from USC, I gave him a job. As a matter of fact, he lived in my house for quite awhile," he says. "I was reorganizing my group. I don't know who recommended him to me. He was playing alto at that time. He hadn't started playing tenor. Strangely enough, everybody wanted me to fire him (*laughs*). They didn't like the way he sounded at that time, but I gave him an opportunity.

"I made him musical director of the group, and when he got ready to leave, I had no idea he was even leaving. I heard on the radio that he was leaving my group to join Cannonball. He never did tell me."

During the early '60s, Lloyd was on the fast track to his life as a leader.

*Forest Flower*, in the illuminating glow of hindsight, seems remarkable on a few fronts. There's the unbridled, and sometimes nearly anarchic energy of Jarrett's playing, and also the fact that music this adventurous would never sell so wildly in today's tamer jazz atmosphere. This group also provided the basis of the chemistry between DeJohnette and Jarrett, which came to fruition in Jarrett's Standards Trio, currently going on a quarter century.

"The Charles Lloyd Quartet was the first band that got me, Keith and Cecil international recognition," says DeJohnette, reflecting on his formative years spent in the group. "It came about around the time when the climate for music in America was more experimental. The group had musical flexibility and it was kind of a visual group, as well, between Keith and Charles. Visually, it was an exciting group to watch, and Charles gave us a lot of liberties to take with the music. Each time we played the pieces, they turned out differently."

Was the Lloyd band trying to spin off in a direction of its own, but out of the Coltrane Quartet mode? "You might say that," DeJohnette says, "although the intent was trying

to reach a wider audience with it, but still have the musical integrity be intact."

As for the notion of reviving the Lloyd quartet connection, a prospect brought up by some promoters, DeJohnette says, "I'm in another space, and I know Keith is, too. That music was great and I enjoyed playing it, but I don't miss it, either. It's not a negative thing. I'm glad that Charles gave us that opportunity and exposed us to an international audience. But I'm too involved in projects that I'm doing now."

Viewing the arc of Lloyd's musical output to date, *Forest Flower* might be seen as something



CARROLL PARIS/LANTAN RECORDS

of a template for his mostly piano-based quartet work to come. Lloyd sees it differently: "I don't think *Forest Flower* is so much of a template, but rather a continuation/extension of the process of breaking out of the constraints and formality of structure. As a group, we had been together a couple of years, and we were all explorers looking for ways to take flight any time we could."

As Lloyd explains, on that fateful day in Monterey, "I didn't even know we were being recorded. After we came off the stage, [engineer] Wally Heider said, 'We got the music.' He was all excited."

Good thing it was recorded, because the album became a cross-demographic phenomenon. "In the mid to late '60s, FM radio was becoming more free form," Lloyd says. "Lines of demarcation were going down. The Grateful Dead were walking around with [my album] *Dream Weaver* under their arms. The mere fact that FM radio would play my music, Hendrix and Ravi Shankar, there was a lot of free-form radio going on. It was a window. Also, I began to be invited to a lot of colleges to play. It was all about music. And then, all these big magazines started to cover us after Monterey—Time,



Life, Look, Harper's."

One of the immediate after-effects of *Forest Flower* and the Monterey Jazz Festival sensation it documented was an introduction into musical realms beyond the jazz world. Lloyd and Co. found themselves embraced by counterculture rock circles, first in San Francisco, land of "Summer of Love" mores and the Haight-Ashbury scene.

After working in a more traditional jazz club in San Francisco, Lloyd recalls, "They told me there's this place called the Fillmore and they thought the young people would like us. I said, 'Who plays there?' 'Muddy Waters, the Grateful Dead, Chuck Berry.' I said, 'McKinley Morganfield (Muddy Waters' real name), I love him.' There was the Delta staring me in the face—I had played with Howlin' Wolf, so I said sure.

"We were supposed to play 45 minutes and the audience wouldn't let us off for an hour-and-a-half. [Rock promoter] Bill Graham immediately started booking us. I didn't make a judgment about the audience. I just did what we do. I remember the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Janis [Joplin], Steve Miller and Jimi [Hendrix]—they always wanted to be on the bill with us. And Carlos Santana has told me how he would stand at the front of the stage yelling, 'Free the people Charles, free the people.'"

Lloyd's fame led him on a trip to Russia—at a time when jazz musicians weren't penetrating the Iron Curtain—captured on the 1967 live recording *Charles Lloyd In The Soviet Union*. Things were looking up, but after that famous quartet lineup shifted in 1969, the saxophonist abruptly departed stage left to escape what he viewed as a blinding limelight and to pursue spiritual paths.

"It was a holy grail thing. I felt that I was on a mission to change the world, and later came to find out I needed to change myself first," he says a bit ruefully, referring to his infamous, protracted hiatus from the public world.

He found solace in the remote outpost of Big Sur. "Big Sur was always calling me even when I was a kid in Memphis," Lloyd says. "Benny Carter had a song called 'Malibu,' and when I played it as a teenager I had tears. But when I got to Malibu it had shifted, so I headed north to Big Sur for the solitude and healing.

"Success is a heady thing," he continues. "I was young and, by the end of the '60s, I had lots of excess—life on the road, life in the fast lane had become unsavory. I was suffering inside and out. The music was suffering. The business people were talking about putting us in stadiums. It didn't seem to have anything to do with me, the art form or about uplifting humanity. Yes, there were times when the Mack truck had me pretty flat, and yes, the music business was a drag.

"I'll never forget during one of Charles Bukowski's readings in the redwoods of the Santa Cruz mountains, there was a beautiful, nubile young woman at the edge of the stage pulling at his pant leg. He kicked her away and

growled, 'Where were you when I needed you?' Burgess Meredith and I worked together for a time. We had been neighbors in Malibu. He was intrigued with Carlos Castaneda and set up a college tour where he read Castaneda and I made music. During these years I was artist-in-residence at Esalen."

This chapter of Lloyd's life outside global eyes and ears was brought to an end courtesy of the prodigious French pianist Michel Petrucciani, seeking out the saxophonist like a young protégé to a mentor. Lloyd returned to the world's stages with Petrucciani for a few years,

although their splash was miniscule compared to the *Forest Flower* sensation. For one thing, by the early '80s, jazz had receded to a humbler position in terms of general popularity.

Lloyd again went into reclusion, but a brush with mortality and a near-fatal intestinal condition led him to, "fully rededicated myself to this music and this beautiful tradition," he says. "When I did come back full time, it was essentially as an unknown—back of the line, kid. But I don't think I'd still be here if I hadn't taken a sabbatical. And it would be a shame to have left town half-baked." **DB**

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