

# 61st Annual Critics Poll DOWNBEAT

Ja:

## Wayne WINS!

Jazz  
**ARTIST**

Jazz  
**ALBUM**  
*Without A Net*

Jazz  
**GROUP**  
Wayne Shorter  
Quartet

**Soprano  
SAX**

### Hall of Fame

Charlie Haden  
Robert Johnson

### Poll Winners

Wadada Leo Smith  
Christian McBride  
Gregory Porter  
Gerald Clayton  
Tia Fuller

AUGUST 2013

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**91** Top  
Albums

61<sup>st</sup> ANNUAL  
CRITICS POLL

Jazz Artist ∞ Jazz Album ∞ Jazz Group ∞ Soprano Saxophone

# Wayne Shorter

## The Eternal Process

By Josef Woodard ∞ Photography by Adam McCullough

WAYNE SHORTER HAS CHARTED THE trajectory of an elusive giant. Through his work with Art Blakey, the classic '60s Miles Davis Quintet, the massively popular Weather Report and his own solo work, Shorter has exerted a huge influence as composer, soloist and musical thinker. Yet he has also slinked on the sidelines, going years without an album and assiduously avoiding an obvious "commercial" path.

Suddenly, this year, ramping up to his 80th birthday on Aug. 25, Shorter is living large in cultural news, releasing *Without A Net*, his first Blue Note album in more than 40 years and, by many accounts, the finest recording by his long-standing quartet with pianist Danilo Pérez, bassist John Patitucci and drummer Brian Blade. Shorter has also been making bold steps into the jazz-classical side of his musical being lately. It makes perfect sense, then, that he has landed a quadruple-crown of wins in this year's DownBeat Critics Poll, topping the categories for Jazz Artist, Jazz Album, Jazz Group and Soprano Saxophone.





Wayne Shorter  
at the New  
Orleans Jazz  
& Heritage  
Festival on  
May 5



Speaking on the phone from his home in Los Angeles, Shorter was typically humble about the accolades, which added to a healthy pile of other laurels, including the UNESCO Medal he was awarded at the "International Jazz Day" event in Istanbul on April 30. "I think that's nice," he said of the poll wins, "especially if it sparks the curiosity of young people, boys and girls, as to why that is, and go beyond why that kind of award exists and then explore the context in which that has been put. It's great if they can say, 'Let me listen to that stuff.'"

Said stuff—as heard on *Without A Net*—is structurally unpredictable. Yet the music can be vivid and ear-grabbing even to those who don't grasp the complexities beneath the shifting surfaces of the music. Shorter has his own poetic way of conceiving of what he does as a musician, with this group and beyond: "What we play can be not only storytelling, but a metaphor. Metaphorically, it's a chronicle of how segments of life have been perceived and how the perception changes, and what visionary means. You break out of the chains of safety zones and boxes and pyramids and circles, and get into the unknown."

This has been a busy and itinerant year for Shorter, both geographically and contextually. In January, he was the headliner of the 10th annual Panama Jazz Festival, an idealistic and education-oriented endeavor led by Pérez. Then in February, Shorter dove seriously into the "serious" music realm: Within little more than a week, he performed with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall—recording the next day, for a possible release later this year—and then flew home to Los Angeles, where he premiered an ambitious new work, *Gaia*, in the grand, postmodern ambience of Walt Disney Concert Hall. *Gaia* was a masterful stroke of hybrid aesthetics involving his quartet, the Los Angeles Philharmonic (conducted by Vince Mendoza) and some bedazzling, gymnastic vocal parts sung by Esperanza Spalding.

Without any braggadocio, Shorter tells the story of his *Gaia* triumph at Disney Hall and how he had a brief conversation afterward with esteemed architect Frank Gehry, whose sculptural design for that concert hall is legendary: "He was backstage. We shook hands. Then he said, 'It will never be the same.' That's all he said."

April brought Shorter to Istanbul and the "International Jazz Day" happenings, another case of jazz-fueled idealism, this one built around efforts of his longtime friend, ally and partner in Buddhist practice, Herbie

Hancock. Shorter received his medal from UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova early in the morning, in a setting in the ancient Galatasary High School, before performing his standard "Footprints" with the young band from the Thelonious Monk Institute, which Shorter has helped to mentor back at UCLA. That night, he was part of the all-star grand concert event in the vast Hagia Eirene, on a tune featuring his past collaborator, Brazilian legend Milton Nascimento, with Hancock on piano and Spalding on bass.

Reflecting on Istanbul, Shorter remembers a short rehearsal before the big show: "We did a one-take rehearsal and said, 'Is that it?' Milton turned around and said, 'Of course.' He doesn't make a great big thing out of perfection. That's what I like. The group that I'm working with—Danilo, Brian and John—is not based on any kind of formula, but we have the notion that there's no such thing as a coincidence or a mistake and that reaching for something called perfection, to perfect what you're doing—like rehearsing until you get something *down*—is almost like immersing what you're doing in liquid hydrogen. It becomes frozen, or statuesque.

"There is no such thing as excuses, either, but is there such a thing as the imperfect transcending perfection? Miles said, 'If you write something, put a window in there so we can get out of it,'" he laughs.

Among the other points of activity and attention in Shorter's life is a documentary titled *Zero Gravity*, currently in the midst of production and grassroots fundraising. From the historical archives, Shorter is a powerful presence on soprano and tenor sax on the Miles Davis Quintet's *Live In Europe 1969: The Bootleg Series Vol. 2*, a crackling, vibrant four-disc set of live recordings from the officially "unrecorded" band with Chick Corea, Jack DeJohnette and Dave Holland. *Vol. 2* was voted the top Historical Album in this year's Critics Poll (see page 38).

Meanwhile, in the here and now, the touring season of summer festivals and concerts was awaiting at the time of our interview. I ask Shorter if, on his travels with his quartet, the group will heed the improvisational, moment-chasing spirit rather than, in conventional post-album touring terms, be content to "play" *Without A Net*. "Yeah," he laughs. "We're going to see if we can jump off the *Without A Net* diving board with these four different sounds and transcend the notion of [*in a pinched, whiny voice*] saxophone, piano, bass and drums. I saw Lily Tomlin's face when I did that

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From left: Danillo Pérez, Wayne Shorter, John Patitucci and Brian Blade in New Orleans on May 5

[with my voice], with the telephone to her ear.”

What Shorter’s quartet does follows no smooth or easily sellable route, but he stops short of shrugging off the business interests of the music business altogether: “I look at the resistance of the corporate world, the resistance to what they say is difficult to market, and the accessibility is not there, which presents resistance to the creative process, the unbridled creative process. I look at that resistance as the same as the resistance that is needed for an airplane to take off. A plane cannot take off without resistance to give it lift. Now, I’m thinking, ‘What is the real function of resistance?’”

“I want to include what is known as resistant elements to what comes after you say, ‘Once upon a time ...’ It has to be in the music. Creative music, or creative *anything*, cannot divorce itself and sit in some ivory tower, or segregate from what is thought of as cold, resistant, corporate thinking, the executive mind.

“Someone asked Sonny Rollins, ‘Why are you guys doing all this creative stuff, with your horns and bebop?’ Sonny Rollins said, ‘We’re not doing this stuff to become famous. We’re doing this stuff to be human.’ I feel like the eternal process is to become more of who we are.

“There’s a phrase we have in Buddhism: ‘doing human revolution.’ It’s about peeling off all of the b.s.—but the b.s. is like fertilizer, needed to help things grow. You want to eternally reveal more and more of your true self, and your true self is eternal, eternally being revealed. And that is the grand, ultimate adventure.”

DB

## Critics Poll Winner *∞* Tenor Saxophone

# Visionary Artist

By Joe Lovano

**T**he All Seeing Eye of Wayne Shorter’s continued vision as an improviser, instrumentalist, composer and spontaneous ensemble orchestrator is awe-inspiring. He is a true virtuoso on his instrument, in the most free-flowing way, in the execution of his ideas as a composer and soloist.

I’ve been inspired along with countless others with his sound, music and passion. His natural gifts have always taken new shapes in surprisingly new directions.

Each and every encounter I’ve had listening to his amazing documented output—as well as knowing him and sharing the space with him on occasion—has been a life-changing experience for me.

As a sideman with Art Blakey, Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard, Donald Byrd, McCoy Tyner, Gil Evans, Herbie Hancock, Joni Mitchell, Milton Nascimento, Miles Davis and others, Wayne Shorter has given us a vision of how we could develop our own voices in other people’s music and still be ourselves.

Wayne never ceases to create music *within* the music at hand. He has arrived into each moment of his career with an inspired approach. He truly lives it. A Jazz Messenger traveling with “Miles In The Sky.” He “Speaks No Evil” and is full of the “Juju” magic. “In A Silent Way” he’s a weatherman moving into today’s explorations “Without A Net.”

His recordings as a leader through the years have given us an insight into who he is and how he’s feeling each step of the way. They are all precious gems.

Wayne has developed a beautiful singular voice in such a natural way. What fuels his ideas is his wild imagination; life, music, art, dance, cinema, his fascination with fantasy and his own cosmic reality, the “unknownables” and all of the people in his life. That’s what it’s all about. Life itself.

His current quartet paints an ongoing story of inspired music from within the world according to Wayne. Danillo Pérez, John Patitucci, Brian Blade and Wayne play together with a total expressive feeling as one. Without a net ... Orbiting ... With zero gravity ... Each concert I’ve attended by the quartet has been full of joy, love and expression.

Wayne’s improvisations in duet with Herbie Hancock, his compositions and the orchestrations for his quartet with the Imani Winds (or for full orchestra) over the last few years have put him in a class of his own beyond category.

In today’s musical universe, Wayne Shorter is the brightest star in the sky.

We celebrate you, Mr. Shorter, in your 80th year and congratulate you on your four current DownBeat Critics Poll Awards. Thank you for your ongoing love, passion and quest for discovery. You have opened the door for all of us who strive to be ourselves in this blessed world of music we live in. Let the celebration continue for many, many, many years to come with lots more music. Salute!

DB



JIMMY KATZ