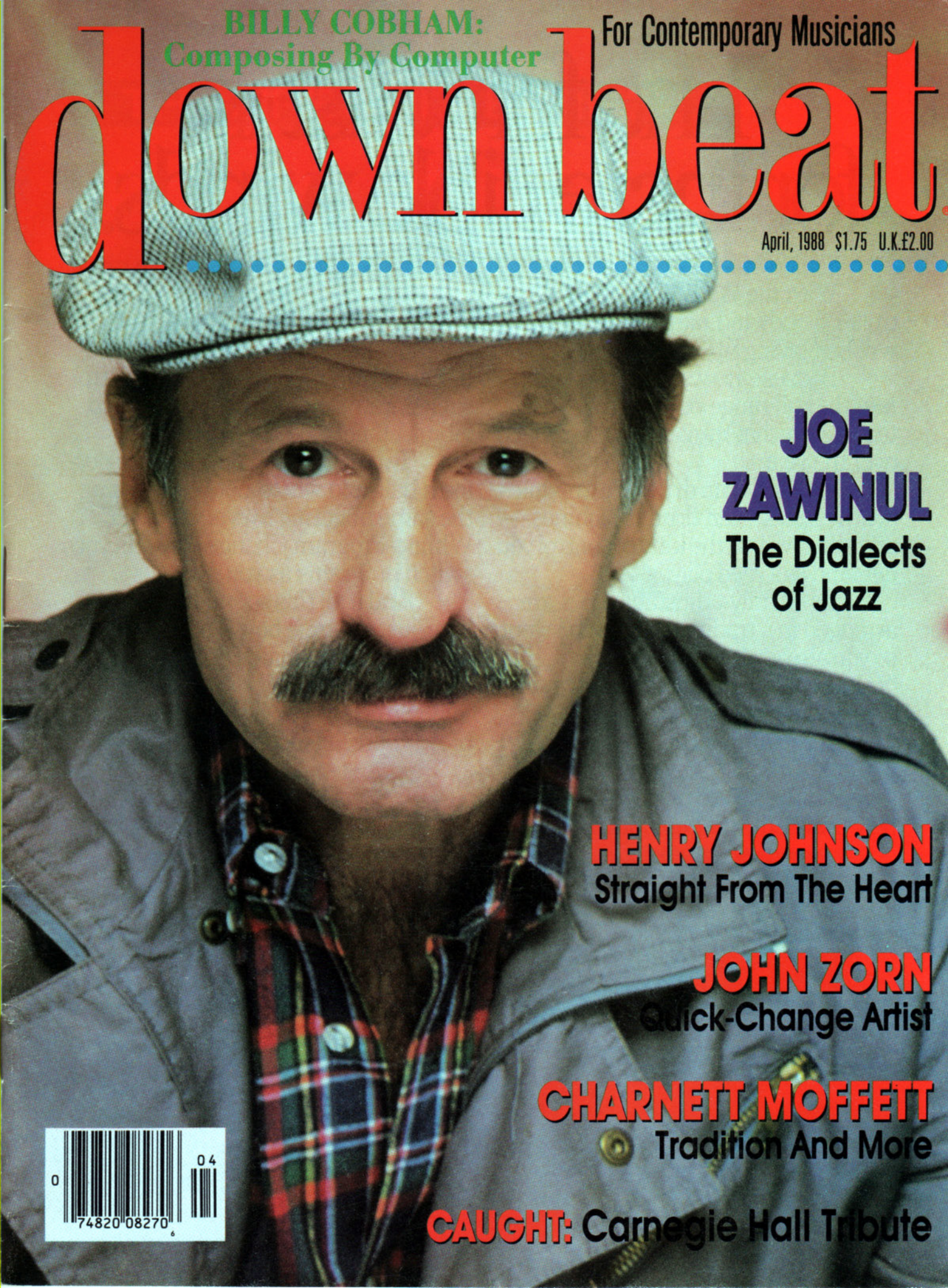
BILLY COBHAM:
Composing By Computer

For Contemporary Musicians

down beat

April, 1988 $1.75 U.K.£2.00



JOE ZAWINUL
The Dialects of Jazz

HENRY JOHNSON
Straight From The Heart

JOHN ZORN
Quick-Change Artist

CHARNETT MOFFETT
Tradition And More

CAUGHT: Carnegie Hall Tribute

0 74820 08270 6 04

Joe Zawinul

The Dialects of Jazz

by Josef Woodard

CHRIS CUFFARO/VISAGES

Few liaisons in the jazz world have much permanence, which made the long-standing legacy of Weather Report so unique. Here was a band turning out albums like clockwork, creating a gold idiomatic ethos, recruiting young titans and maintaining a cogent sound and fury even through multiple personnel changes. While the urgent fire of '70s and early '80s fusion fizzled and burned out, Weather Report consistently rose above the din with new concepts, improvisatory zeal, and rugged integrity. Electricity never sounded so organic.

Through it all remained the curious bond of Josef Zawinul and Wayne Shorter, the imperious keyboardist from Austria and the mysterious traveller from Newark. After 15 albums in as many years together, the pair finally went separate ways two years ago, although neither will claim final severance. Nothing is forever in love, life, and music. Only the soul survives.

Now, with the release of *The Immigrants*, Zawinul—as ringleader of the Zawinul Syndicate—breaks an almost two-year silence from the recording ring: by his standards, a long hiatus. Zawinul has coralled a new band of mates, and, of course, applied generous deposits of his own signature keyboard conceptualism to the job. Although peppered with Weather Report-like sonorities, the Syndicate album extends the reach of that aggregate, most notably via the guitaristic input of Los Angeles-based Scott Henderson.

For the sessions, he also drew on one-time Weather Report drummer Alex Acuna, bassist Abe Laboriel, drummer Cornell Rochester (who, along with bassist Gerald Veasley will be in the live rhythm section). We also hear cameos by Mr. Mister vocalist and lyricist Richard Page (on the ballad *Shadows And Light*) and the four-voiced Perri sisters (on *No Mercy For Me*, a swampy rereading of Zawinul's Cannonball Adderley-era hit *Mercy, Mercy, Mercy*). In the case of *Criollo,* vocalist/percussionist Rudy Regalado sang a chant based on the historical hero Simon Bolivar, who liberated five Latin American countries in Napoleonic times. "I put on a chord structure and made a hymn out of it, because of the significance of the song. I played a real hip bass line on it," says Zawinul, never one hindered by false modesty. "I think it's going to scare most bass players."

Since Weather Report's official dismantlement, the ever-prolific Zawinul has ventured into new artistic terrain. His 1986 solo project, *Dialects*, proved an enticing collage of self-generated ideas on his wrap-around synthesizer arsenal: ethnic jazz concepts artfully wedded to a deft electronic musical instinct. Following a tour with a band he dubbed Weather Update (guitarist Steve Khan assumed Wayne Shorter's role), Zawinul veered away from the domestic public eye, spending a good deal of time in Europe playing various concerts with his Austrian compatriot, piano virtuoso Friedrich Gulda.

Aligning himself with Gulda served as a sort of homecoming for Zawinul. Gulda, whose considerable reputation on the continent straddles classical and jazz veins, is a fellow Austrian with a penchant for razing musical boundaries. Zawinul remembers: "Every music student—including myself—put him up on a

pedestal, he was almost a god-like figure. We became friends from the moment we met. We played four-hand piano. We always played together, for years. He had a deal with a radio station to compose 90 songs and he gave half of the assignment to me. That's where I first started writing. He always had great trust in my ability. He's a real Austrian from the head to the toes. What we're more or less doing is playing Austrian music."

In 1986, Zawinul and Gulda performed numerous European duet concerts and a trio concert with Chick Corea—who has also performed fairly extensively with Gulda. Through the reunion with Gulda, Zawinul rediscovered the beauty of the acoustic piano, and the inspiration of the classical repertoire. "I never will be a classical piano player," he confesses, "but Gulda thinks that the way we played the Brahms (*Variations On A Theme By Haydn*) was never played better by anybody, the reason being that particular piece is a peasant type of piece, and that's where my heart is. We played the hell out of this piece. That's going to be on the next Syndicate record."

Zawinul has also been in transit in 1986, moving from his sprawling property in Pasadena (a holler from the Rose Bowl) to Malibu (a spit from the Pacific Ocean). We met just after Southern California had been hit with a token storm, replete with the gusty winds, pounding surf, and heavy rains that make locals nervous. Malibu is a perenially vulnerable spot, given to landslides, especially under houses on bluffs such as Zawinul's. Does that make him nervous? He shakes his head. "If it slides, it slides. How can you beat that? I'll take a chance at anything. If it goes, it goes. We're on the street. So what. What a way to go, man," he laughs bravely.

JOSEF WOODARD: *What significance does the title of the new album have?*

JOE ZAWINUL: It's called *The Immigrants* because I realized that everybody, except for Scott and Cornell, is an immigrant. I'm an Austrian citizen. Acuna is a Peruvian Indian. Abraham Laboriel is from Mexico City. Rudy Regalado is from Venezuela. Often it deals with the restlessness where you want to go to other countries to see what's happening. That was my thing. I always wanted to go to America right after the war, trying to find a way to go to America and I finally did.

JW: *Why did you decide to drop the Weather Update concept? Was that just an interim project?*

JZ: Everything happened so fast. Wayne fired the management and had his solo thing. Our record contract was over with in '85, but CBS came up with this extra, optional record we owed them. So we made *This Is This* real quick. I think it was a pretty nice record. Then I wanted to support that album and I thought we could go out and find a way to call it Weather Report. But Wayne's management said we couldn't do that. I understood that. I wouldn't have wanted Wayne to go out and call his band Weather Report; it was *our* thing. But the promoters in Europe at that time got a little scared. I said, 'Well, call the band Weather Update.'

JW: *After you parted ways with Wayne, did you have in mind to find another horn player foil? Or did Scott Henderson fill that role in your mind?*

JZ: I never thought I'd have somebody to replace Wayne. I don't think I'll ever have a saxophone player, because now with this instrument I have [his self-designed Pepe: see instrument box], I have a soprano sound that will floor you. But I have a real right hand now, just as powerful. It's not the same thing; it's another kind of power. Scott's got it all. He can play the blues authentically. He plays the blues like we used to in the older days with Dinah [Washington], like those guys down in Texas and Louisiana play the blues, but with that modern mind.

When I was looking for a bass player in 1982, I went to hear Jeff Berlin, and who really caught my attention was the guitar player, but there wasn't a need for one yet. He has all the elements. He has the personality. He's a really outgoing, wild kid. That's why I like him. I don't like shy people. That's why I liked Jaco, because he had that thing I have. I'm an old man now, but I still have that sense of fun, that youth energy. Once you have that, you never lose it. That doesn't change with your age.

That boy here, he's got it, that fire. And he can play. He's almost got McLaughlin's chops. His soul is happening.

JW: *Did you sense that energetic quality in Jaco when you first met him?*

JZ: I was impressed by the way he approached me. I was standing with two ladies on the corner by the Gusman Theater in Miami. This kid came up and said 'Excuse me, Mr. Zawinul, my name is John Francis Pastorius III and I am the greatest bass player in the world.' I said 'Get the hell out of here, man.' He said 'Really, I wish we could get together and show you what I got.' I said, 'That sounds good to me.' The next day, he came with his brother to the hotel.

I liked Jaco from the beginning, because I liked his personality. Okay, it's a little crazy to a lot of people. But you know who always feels a draft about people like that? The people who ain't got it. They always feel, 'Well, he's opening his mouth. He's leading with his lips. It's not nice to brag,' and all that. He was not bragging. Facts, that's all.

The less talented don't have a feeling for that and they'll always put down people like Jaco. I always was put down. When I grew up, I used to say 'I'm the greatest, man.' I heard people play and said 'If this is great, then I am the greatest.' And people resented that. When Ali came out as young Cassius Clay and said he was the greatest, I cracked up because I liked that. The cats in Cannon's [Cannonball Adderley] band would say 'Hey, that young punk—he thinks he's bad.' And so it is.

I'll tell you something; until about a year before the end, I didn't know that boy was doing all that heavy messing around with drugs. He had the greatest PR I've ever seen. He did all the right things; he jumped into the Emperor's lake with his bass and rode his motorcycle through the hotel and all that. This is the baddest PR. You cannot do better. You can do all that, but at performance time, you've got to be on.

The only mistake was when it came time to perform later on in his life—but not with our band. He had a lot of respect for Wayne and me. With our band, he was sometimes drunk, the drug thing was minor. He was only actually incapable of playing good maybe four times in all the years with Weather Report. We all did wild things. It's hard to really say, because I can't really put anybody down. Everybody has their own character and their own route of growing up and their own M.O. I'm wild myself, I can't put anybody down. I still drink. I like to drink. I was always a little crazy, but I never was sick.

JW: *When Jaco joined the band, the group really crystallized all of a sudden; the collective presence solidified right around the time of the album* Heavy Weather.

JZ: That was a very powerful group before that. [Bassist] Alfonso Johnson was incredible. [Drummer] Chester Thompson and Acuna playing percussion . . . it was powerful in another way. But Jaco was in a space all his own. He was so different than all the other guys.

We were a black band; in spite of me not being black, it was always a black band, more or less. But with Jaco coming in, there was also a change in the audience. He brought the white kids in. He had that Americana element. He was all of a sudden a real white All-American folk hero.

I loved Jaco. Everytime I think of him, I smile. He was one of the nicest people I've ever known and he did things nobody ever did. When my parents had their Golden Wedding Anniversary, in the tiny village where I come from, he and Ingrid sent the biggest flower arrangement you've ever seen. He bought me an accordion one birthday. He was a very thoughtful human being. He had a good soul and good character. Something in his head was strange when he took alcohol and then, of course, drugs really made it worse.

The last time I saw him, I had my solo concert in Carnegie Hall and he was so helpful. He was healthy, in shape. He was running up to the second balcony to check my sound and work on the bass drum sound. He was a total gentleman, and I thought he was going to get it together. I miss this guy.

JW: *Did you ever have unrealized plans to do more work with him?*

JZ: Yeah. It would have taken awhile, but I had this incredible offer from Italy. The guy who did the concert with Gulda and I in Parma wanted to put on a return of Weather Report. We would have made a killing and I was seriously thinking about it. I got back August 28 and there was a birthday card on a ripped-up paper bag—but very neat, not funky, and well written. It said 'Happy Birthday, Maestro.' He was living in the park already, but he never forgot my birthday.

JW: *Despite the liberation of the instrument over the last few years, bass is really the unsung hero in jazz. Where would the music be without it?*

JZ: And not only in jazz. There is an old Czech saying. To put it into English: If I don't hear the bass, to hell with the melody. You need the bass.

JW: *In a tune like* A Remark You Made, *the very tone of the bass makes the melody sing.*

JZ: I'm a composer who works with sound. If you drop a dime, I can write a song based on the tone. When I heard Jaco's tone, I immediately began to write a song, based on him and the saxophone and my little jive. That's where I'm coming from. I dial myself up a sound on my synthesizer and turn on my tape recorder and that's for sure a song. I live from sound, and he had a sound for all time. Nobody had a better, cleaner sound.

JW: *Do you find yourself adapting to the Duke Ellington concept of targeting music for specific players, whose sounds you have circulating in your head?*

JZ: Very much so. First of all, I bring them into my world and teach them. Then I learn from them and see what they have come up with. Therefore, I had to do a few things on my new record myself, because there wasn't enough time to teach everybody my concept. We talked about it and we rehearsed. They were great throughout. It really feels like a band. On *The Devil Never Sleeps*, Abe Laboriel plays some bass that's some of the best bass playing I've ever heard. It's a very fast waltz, an Afro-cajun type of thing. Alex plays tremendous stuff, Scott and Cornell, everybody.

Then there's this song I did called *You Understand*, a bebop ballad, scat style. You don't understand a single word, but when you feel it, you understand it all. In other words, language becomes obsolete. I've got a sound of a train station announcer and a passing train I taped with my walkman in Italy on the song *From Venice To Vienna*, and it gives the song its meaning.

For me, music is nothing but what we're talking about now. It's a story of the human condition or the condition of things, maybe a landscape or a portrait. If I could paint, maybe it would be easier. So I try to paint it with music.

JW: *Your series of solo concerts after the release of* Dialects *was a daring departure. Judging from the mixed reaction in the concert I saw, some people might not have been ready for it.*

JZ: I got a book of 500 bad reviews given to Richard Wagner. It's so much fun to read. It's amazing. They called him an idiot, a clown. I myself have never been bothered by a good or bad review. I don't have that much respect for critics' opinions in general. I never asked anyone yet to find a musician for my band. The only thing that ever bothers me was falseness.

JW: *Are you now feeling more inclined to play with other musicians, as opposed to when you were locked into the Weather Report regimen?*

JZ: I always wanted to do that, but I wanted to do it more or less under my conditions. There are a few people I want to do something with—John McLaughlin, Sonny Rollins, Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz. I want them to play my music, because I've got the music. I've got the key and I think these people could express what I want to do. Maybe Miles and me one day will do something. We are still kids. And Wayne, of course—the baddest.

JW: *Is it likely that you'll play together again?*

JZ: I hope so, because the duet things we're playing were just amazing. Never anything prepared, never anything talked about. Wayne and me have very seldom spoken outside of being on the road, because we actually don't have to. It's another spirit taking over. We don't have to call each other.

JW: *You were mentioning that you're interested again in the acoustic piano.*

JZ: No, I'm not saying that I am more into the piano. I'm just saying that Gulda rekindled my love for the instrument. My greatest love is the accordion and its relatives: those are synthesizers. That's all they are. An accordion is nothing but a synthesizer, but manually operated instead of electronically. That was my first instrument.

JW: *Jazz is reputedly in a renaissance period, in which the forces of the music are making their presence known on a wide scale again. Is that a valid claim or so much hype?*

JZ: Jazz will always be here. My wife said something interesting the other day. She said 'Jazz is always alive. It's the musicians who are dead.'

The movie *'Round Midnight* was such an opportunity to really turn a lot of people on to jazz music. Maybe that was not the purpose, but I felt it could have done that. The stage was set. Jazz, in other words, was not shown at its best. There was so much talk about the lead character being such a genius, but that was never apparent. That's what bothered me about the movie. There could have been a couple of songs that were devastatingly mean—all of those guys are capable of doing that—especially the main character.

I liked the movie. The acting was good and there was a real nice feeling to it. But not once, either from spoken word or, more importantly, in the music, did I ever have the impression of his being a genius. It was supposed to be a dedication to Bud Powell and Lester Young, but these guys, in spite of their habits, played amazing music. Unfortunately, that class of playing wasn't in the movie; there were too many out-of-time ballads and sloppy at that.

In a way, I felt bad for Herbie. I was happy that he won the Oscar, of course, but I believe it was the first time a jazz musician won an award like that. It brought a lot of people into the theater and it would have been the right time to turn on a lot of people.

JW: *A lot of the jazz records coming out now are reissues, the jazz of 20 or more years ago on the rebound. It's good on the one hand, archivally. But where's the jazz of now and of the future?*

JZ: It's good to remind youngsters, because a lot of people think that Kenny G is the first saxophone player who ever lived. A lot of kids don't know about what was happening. It's very important that they know what Duke Ellington and the other masters did. Louis Armstrong, to me, is still the king of jazz. He had it, the character. He was out there. We have a few here today, too. As history goes on, things collect. Over a period of 80 years, a lot of great musicians came through. Charlie Parker, Art Tatum, Dizzy, Miles, Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, Paul Gonsalves, Coltrane, and so on. It always will be somebody.

JW: *In some way, you're very much a front man, putting your ideas forward without restraint. But there's also an angular quirkiness to your solos and chord progressions that brings Monk to mind.*

JZ: He was one of my all-time favorites. Thelonious and I used to take walks and talk. He and I went for a walk once at the marina near San Diego, when Cannonball's and Monk's groups were touring together. I always loved the way he played. He liked the way I played, I guess. I was doing some experimenting, never playing the changes in a normal way.

It was a nice Sunday afternoon. He says to me, 'Man, check this boat out. It would be nice to be on one of those boats.' So we go there and I see signs that say 'Private. No Trespassing.' Monk said 'We'll go anyway.' Monk looked like an African king. He had his cap on and expensive clothes. We walked through there and I thought 'I know some dude is going to come up and say something.'

And it was totally the opposite. People looked out and said 'Oh, please, would you come on our boat?' When they found out it was

JOE ZAWINUL'S EQUIPMENT

Despite the fact that Zawinul has long been associated with the pursuit of better and more musical technology, he sincerely clings to the inspiration of his first instrument love. It was that love that led him to devise the one-of-a-kind Pepe, put into technical terms by Ralph Skelton and manufactured by Korg. "Originally, I was an accordion player and it was always my dream to have an instrument like the accordion. It looks like a bassoon mouthpiece, but I used a mouthpiece from a Melodica. On the right hand side, it's an accordion with buttons. It's very difficult to learn the accordion with two notes on each button, but with the Pepe's *six* notes; it becomes a real head trip.

"I know where the six notes are. It's like a boxer, you know, after a while, you just move. You don't think, 'Okay, I have to raise my right hand now.' You just let it hang out."

Defying factory sound consciousness and relying on intuition has long been Zawinul's program in terms of synthesizer gear. His present set-up of electronic gear is a judicious mix of digital and analog equipment. For drum/percussion sounds, he uses the Korg DDD-1 drum machine along with the Oberheim DX, the Korg DDM 110 Drums and DDM 220 Percussion machines, and his latest addition, two Simmons Pads—to store sampled cymbals. Tonally, his set-up at various times has included an Oberheim Expander, Prophet T8, Prophet 5, Korg DW-8000, Casio CZ-101 (which he placed *inside* a grand piano on his dates with Freidrich Gulda), a Korg DSS-1 sampling unit, and the new DSM-1 rack mount sampler. He often blends live vocals with the synthetic source from his Korg DVT Vocoder, as on the new song *You'll Understand*. Zawinul is also an instrument collector, which extends from his broad assortment of ethnic instruments to such "outdated" and unavailable electronic keys as a Chroma Polaris with a Chroma Expander and an Arp sequencer. Connecting his maze of keys are a dozen volume pedals to route the sound.

JOE ZAWINUL SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

THE IMMIGRANTS, ZAWINUL SYNDICATE—Columbia 40969
DIALECTS—Columbia 40081
ZAWINUL—Atlanta 1579
CONCERTO RETITLED—Atlantic 1604
RISE AND FALL OF THE THIRD STREAM—Vortex 2002

with Miles Davis

IN A SILENT WAY—Columbia 40580
BITCHES BREW—Columbia 40577
LIVE-EVIL—Columbia 30954
BIG FUN—Columbia 32866
DIRECTIONS—Columbia 36472
CIRCLE IN THE ROUND—Columbia 36278

with Ben Webster

SOULMATES—Fantasy OJC-109

with Cannonball Adderley

IN EUROPE—Landmark 1307
COAST TO COAST—Milestone 47039
JAPANESE CONCERTS—Milestone 47029
MERCY, MERCY, MERCY—Capitol 16153
BEST OF . . .—Capitol 16002
JAZZ WORKSHOP REVISITED—Landmark 1303

with Weather Report

THIS IS THIS—Columbia 40280
SPORTIN' LIFE—Columbia 39908
DOMINO THEORY—Columbia 39147
PROCESSION—Columbia 38427
WEATHER REPORT—Columbia 37616
NIGHT PASSAGE—Columbia 36793
8:30—Columbia 36030
MR. GONE—Columbia 35358
HAVANA JAM I—Columbia 36053
HAVANA JAM II—Columbia 36180
HEAVY WEATHER—Columbia 34418
BLACK MARKET—Columbia 34099
TALE SPINNIN'—Columbia 33417
MYSTERIOUS TRAVELLER—Columbia 32494
SWEETNIGHTER—Columbia 32210
LIVE IN TOKYO—CBS/Sony 40AP 942 3
I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC—Columbia 31352
WEATHER REPORT—30661

Thelonious Monk, we were invited on six or seven different boats. Some people knew my music. *Mercy, Mercy* was a big hit. When we left, we were drunk.

Monk had a really unique concept. I learned a lot. I used to take music down from his records, to learn what he was doing. I wrote down *Little Rootie Tootie* and *Crepusule With Nellie* and (starts scatting the melody to *Monk's Mood*). He was a great one. I loved him. He was a nice human being, too. He travelled with his whole family.

JW: *Given that he was always stretching attitudes—even though basing his concept in the blues—I wonder if he would have warmed up to electronics eventually.*

JZ: Duke did and that's where Thelonious is coming from, more or less. Right after I got an electric piano, Duke got one. They were both orchestral musicians. And for an orchestral mind, that's the perfect playground. That doesn't mean that you use it all. Of what I saw at the NAMM show, for instance, 80 percent was bullshit. But that 20 percent . . . watch out.

JW: *Is there any validity to the claim that electronics and jazz occupy separate corners of the musical impulse?*

JZ: In the electric culture, everything can be applied to it. It doesn't mean that you have to be a jazz musician or a non-jazz musician to play with electronic instruments. All this is an arena which gives you an opportunity for using what you want to use. It's like you're in a gigantic kitchen and you brew up some things. Or you're in front of an orchestra and this orchestra, instead of 104 people, can be 10,000.

JW: *The problem is, if it's a kitchen, too many people read straight out of the cookbook instead of writing their own recipes.*

JZ: That's always the difference. There are so many opportunities now because you have people who are maybe not that gifted as jazz players, but who are tremendously talented in theatrical ways—how to make a drama. I listen to Laurie Anderson. I saw a show of hers the other day and it's wonderful what she's doing with this stuff. She probably can't play a great fast solo, but so what? She's using space so well and so perfectly in the context of this environment she's creating, it's unbeatable.

JW: *Maybe the secret with her and yourself is that you started with the conceptual strength and brought that to the equipment instead of the other way around.*

JZ: You use what you want to use and then come up with a personality.

JW: *For a young musician who comes up today in the cradle of the electronic world, that's his or her culture. If you came up with Slavic folk songs in your head, this modern person has sequencers dancing in his head.*

JZ: Instruments, electric or acoustic, don't have culture. They are merely tools. In other words, a hammer and a nail don't make a table.

You know what, man, when I came up and played the accordion, I immediately started playing with the instrument. I took the soundboard off and glued felt into it. I got the sound of *Black Market*. I did the same thing on the bass side, where the buttons are and then I reversed the whole thing, to get the melodies with the bass notes. Imagination had limits in the older days. Now it doesn't.

JW: *That can be dangerous if you don't have a strong sense of creative self.*

JZ: Not really. I like when people are doing this wild stuff. I like Sun Ra. He doesn't know what he's doing, but he knows exactly what he's doing. That's what it is. There's no danger to imagination. What about Cecil Taylor playing the piano? There's no danger, and there was no danger with what Count Basie was doing.

JW: *I'm referring to the danger of letting the machines do the talking and the walking.*

JZ: Then you don't use your imagination; you use the machine's. A lot of people don't know that yet. In the new generation coming up, there are going to be some real great ones, because of the immensity, the amount of people doing it, there's always somebody here and there who will come up with some nice stuff.

JW: *It seems like there is this whole new crop of young musicians who are better and more rounded than they were 10 years ago, when the jazz-rock phenomenon bred a sense of quick-lick fever. I'm thinking of Scott Henderson. Have you noticed that in the generation coming up?*

JZ: Oh yeah. There are much better schools today. But there's an old saying: first you learn your instrument, secondly, you learn music, and then you throw all that away. A lot of times, you still hear all these chops, on all instruments. I'm not putting it down, because that also takes a lot of dedication.

But you'll always see that very rare individual come up. I don't care if there are millions and millions who play, those one or two guys will always be there, a little further along. They're the ones who make it sing, who are telling the story the right way. You've got your Robert DeNiro and Marlon Brando and you've got Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. I don't care how much anybody plays, Louis Armstrong ain't never going to lose his spot. Neither will Miles, and, as a matter of fact, neither will I. I'm not worried about anybody. I'm helping them if I can. I'm making it more pleasant when you turn the radio on. For that reason alone, I would like to help. **db**