

MOS DEF & ROBERT GLASPER: HIP-HOP MEETS JAZZ

DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

SUMMER SWING!

INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL GUIDE

GOLDEN VIBES: MONTEREY

JAZZ FESTIVAL'S UTOPIAN
50-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

ORNETTE COLEMAN WITH GREG OSBY

L.A. BIG BAND
RENAISSANCE:
GORDON GOODWIN'S
BIG PHAT BAND,
CLAYTON-HAMILTON
JAZZ ORCHESTRA & MORE

RON CARTER LIVE BLINDFOLD TEST

ERIC REED

TOUMANI DIABATÉ

THE ZAWINUL EXPERIMENT

JOE ZAWINUL
DELIVERS HIS
WEATHER
REPORT
REPERTOIRE
BIG-BAND STYLE.
THE RESULT?
A REVELATION!

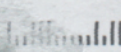
DownBeat.com

\$4.99US \$6.99CAN

05>



730 W. ...
SANTA BARBARA



105

15 957

2440

0 74470 01393 5

Boogie Woogie Big Time

At the 2005 Berlin Jazz Festival, big band culture to the left of center emerged as a strong thematic current, with groups such as Maria Schneider's Orchestra and Charlie Haden and Carla Bley's Liberation Music Orchestra taking the stage.

The show-stopping big band event of the festival, however, was the pairing of Joe Zawinul and the Cologne, Germany-based WDR Big Band. A gleaming set of charts, mostly arranged by Vince Mendoza, resulted in a bracing "big band-ification" of Zawinul's songbook. The material, drawn mostly from the Weather Report library, also included Zawinul's classic "In A Silent Way," recorded by Miles Davis in 1969, "March Of The Lost Children" from the Zawinul Syndicate—his mainstay combo for the past 20 years—and a set-closing favorite, "Carnivalito," from his 1986 solo project, *Dialects*.

The show became a "This Is Your Life" summary in a smartly machined, large ensemble way. The WDR project offered a thrilling realization that Zawinul's elaborate textures and musical puzzle-making prowess—played in his synth-driven Weather Report and Zawinul Syndicate—had natural parallels in big band concepts. It also proved to be a revelation to hear Zawinul's music with horns again.

For the WDR, accustomed to adapting to different special projects and guest artists, this served as an especially challenging gig, in that Zawinul wanted to maintain his legendary looseness and control the music's structural fluidity. They sounded razor-sharp in Berlin, having just come from a stint at Zawinul's own club, Birdland, in Vienna, where they recorded the newly released live account of the project, *Brown Street* (Heads Up).

Zawinul came into the project with great respect for the ensemble. "They are good musicians who have played together for 25 years," he said. "They've played a lot with American musicians, from Joe Williams to Ray Brown and Milt Jackson. They have a spread of knowledge that's amazing. But then again, that is some regular jazz. My phraseology threw them off a little bit, because it has another lope. So it took some time."

Zawinul sat down to talk about this project on a crisp, clear day in

Malibu, Calif., just after Christmas last year, as his home buzzed with activity. His son Erich was in town from Vienna, where he runs Birdland. Zawinul's boxing trainer, Phil Garcia, stopped by to pay respects. The two talked about a trip to Las Vegas to check out a boxing match. Grandchildren scampered about—the progeny of Joe's son Ivan, who was entrenched in a project in the fully equipped home recording studio, known as the "Music Room." Ivan, the engineer for his father's

Joe Zawinul Gives His Weather Report Songbook its First Big Band Recordings

» By Josef Woodard » Photos By Dan Steinberg

music, live and in the studio, for 20 years, was putting together a three-CD set of material culled from 20 years of performance recordings by the Zawinul Syndicate. He said that he spent eight months poring over two decades of live tapes to whittle it all down to a manageable retrospective.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime thing," said Ivan, his eyeballs strained from peering at wave forms on Pro Tools. "I'm not doing this again. This one will have a lot more Joe on it, all the solos he plays and the interludes. The other albums don't feature him that much. With these, the tapes are all done, so Joe can't come in and mix anything. That's good, in a way.

"This will be the best record for Joe, playing-wise," he continued. "You hear 20 years of his stuff. It's not hidden, masked or mixed in a tune that's part of an arrangement. It's a live show."

Joe glowed about Ivan's work: "He has such a sound. It's like a montage; it's visual."

Roughness and feeling count for much in Zawinul's musical world. He's always embraced the power of the improvised moment and resisted preconceptions about structure. Even his bona fide hits—"Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" and "Birdland"—are odd by conventional standards of how a song is put together. He claims to have a trove of thousands of cassettes of improvisations, which he gleans and transcribes into set compositions. But even then, each performance of a tune—in the Syndicate, for instance—is subject to change on short notice, with a stern glance from the boss's perch behind his wraparound keyboard setup.

Zawinul has been working in another music room in the house, on a solo album in progress. Like his groundbreaking *Dialects*, Zawinul has pieced together another entirely solo project, but this time with acoustic instruments instead of the heavily digital/MIDI nature of the earlier project. Some unplugged instruments help fill the room, including his grand piano, acoustic guitar, percussion from around the world and a lavishly decorated accordion. Accordion was his first instrument, as a child prodigy from a working-class family in Vienna.

Lining the walls of the room are countless awards, including poll-winning plaques from DownBeat. One of the extra-musical events on Zawinul's agenda these days is as a recurring model for a new Japanese magazine called Z, geared toward successful men over 55. He brings out a couple of issues, with his familiar, athletic frame on the cover, decked out in designer clothes. "It is nice, man," he smiled and shook his head. "That's something, to be 75 years old and in a fashion magazine."

Zawinul's home, perched on the edge of a cliff high above the Pacific

Coast Highway, offers a dramatic, unobstructed view of the ocean. He lives not far from the last residence of Miles Davis, with whom he kept in touch all the years after playing in Davis' band in the late '60s on pivotal classics like *In A Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*.

"He used to call me," Zawinul said, waxing nostalgic about Davis. "One day he called me and he said, 'I have every album you ever made, and there's always one masterpiece on it. I took my tape recorder and played "Corner Pocket" over and over, and I painted my ass off with it.'"

Tagging the generic description of "fusion era survivor" on Zawinul is not an apt categorization, nor is labeling him a rare bird in the world of synthesizers. Listeners sometimes misunderstand him because he tends to wrap himself up in his own world and self-generated projects, without the free crosstalk of other jazz players common to this music. Yet his half-century in and around jazz, in Europe and the United States, has been a diverse ride. He's interacted with jazz legends and become a hugely influential figure—a legend in his own right.

Bassist Victor Bailey, a longtime musical ally, feels that Zawinul may be misunderstood and underappreciated in some electronics-fearing jazz quarters, but that his work speaks for itself. "There are people who think you should be playing the music and the instrumentation of the 1940s and '50s," Bailey said. "But I find them all so boring and uninteresting that I don't know what they appreciate. The world I live in and the people I associate with all appreciate Joe as a great innovator in jazz and beyond."

Zawinul remains frustrated by the lack of respect for electronic keyboards and technology in jazz. "You have 100 piano players playing synthesizers, because it's like a piano," he explained. "They play the piano on it, and they have these stupid sounds, and they play the piano, which is exactly the opposite of what you've got to do. Therefore, the music has a bad rap. Every damn producer thinks they can just push a button and let the drum machines roll, and they are trigger-happy. Therefore, the music is being put down, and they are right."

As jazz's premier synthesist, Zawinul continues his crusade, asserting that his "instrument is so maligned. Electronic instruments are valid instruments, but it all depends on how you use them." With the WDR, he broke new ground by blending his synths with the horn section, and explains that he "wanted to bring the keyboards to the front."

Zawinul brings his own ideas and ideals to everything he touches, including big band culture. "With big bands, if you have somebody like



Duke Ellington and people who can treat that right, it can be a good thing," he said. "But big band music can also be a nagging thing, with too much sound, and often stuck in the mud. It's often too thick, too fat. Ellington, when he played, you could hear every single player. That's what I want."

In bringing his approach to music to the expanded context of a big band, Zawinul found a strong ally in Mendoza, whose arrangements are adapted from Zawinul's original recordings of the tunes. "All those little lines I played would sometimes get lost," Zawinul said. "Hearing it in the big band gives the composition itself another meaning. I wanted to have a big band, but treat it like a small band. I conducted the band from the keyboards. The only thing I had to do was to connect with the [WDR] tenor saxophone player Oliver Peters. We did it so that we made signs when I wanted them to come in with the next part of the song. I had the charts in my head, so I knew what could happen. I wanted them to loosen up."

"Out of these arrangements, I cut down a lot," he continued. "There was a lot of thick writing, sometimes a little too muddy. I cleaned it out, left a trumpet out, maybe. I rehearsed hard with them, and I did it with sections. I started with the woodwind section, without the rhythm. The next day, I had a whole day with the brass, and then a day with the whole ensemble together. I played with them and had to go over phrasing. I have a lot of phraseology."

Mendoza has done respected work in giving big band treatments to projects by Joni Mitchell and recently the Brecker Brothers. From his earliest days, Mendoza has always had great respect for the world surrounding Weather Report's collaborators.

"A lot of what I understood to be vital and fresh about jazz composition came from Joe and Wayne [Shorter]," Mendoza said. "The two most important ways that Joe and Wayne had an impact on my composing was their interest in maintaining an improvisational atmosphere throughout their music. The music might not be immediately about blowing, but the

forms and melodies are nonetheless improvised, which generates interesting frames for exploration by the player."

Although it seems to have come from out of the blue, *Brown Street* is the fruition of a long-brewing, multifaceted process, with Mendoza's help at every step. It dates back to original big band charts in 1989, and a WDR Weather Report tribute project as part of Zawinul's 70th birthday celebration at the 2002 Leverkusener Jazztage ("Jazz Days") festival in Germany. That material was fleshed out for the finished product, this time with Zawinul at the vortex of the sound.

"Joe's concept of ensemble writing is inherently big band friendly," Mendoza said. "He has deep roots in big band tutti writing, especially from Ellington. I have a friend that always used to say 'Joe is a big band.' I agree. Nevertheless, I was always concerned with the ability to translate synthesizer lines to acoustic instruments, especially with melodies that are so specific to the original synth timbres. Sometimes it doesn't work. Synthesizers don't blend in a similar manner to acoustic instruments. The best approach was to separate myself as much as I could from the aural memory of the original version and try to create a new palette."

A point of distinction with this project, separating it from big band norms, was the more upfront rhythm section, with Zawinul enmeshed with dynamic drummer Nathaniel Townsley and Bailey on bass. "This was refreshing," Bailey said. "The combination of Joe's keyboard sounds, Nathaniel and my bass is a different kind of rhythm section than what's generally associated with a big band. It made it a lot of fun."

Big band thinking has been a matter of outside speculation for Zawinul for roughly 40 years. Zawinul had brushes with big band music after arriving in America in 1959 on a scholarship to study at Berklee School of Music, which led to playing in Maynard Ferguson and Dinah Washington's bands. On rare occasions, he found himself in big band settings during his decade-long stint with Cannonball Adderley.

MORE THAN JUST A LOUDSPEAKER

A STAND ALONE 3 CHANNEL SYSTEM

CARVIN

LM12A/LM15A REAR PANEL

EASILY CONVERTS TO A MONITOR

Neodymium drivers | 3 channel mixer | 350w Biamp

The LM series loudspeakers are specifically designed to outperform the competition while providing musicians with a versatile, lightweight and affordable powered loudspeaker.

CARVIN

12 MONTHS ZERO INTEREST CARVIN.COM/PROSOUND DIRECT SALES 800-854-2235 • FREE CATALOG • FREE DVD "CARVIN, 60 YEARS IN THE MAKING"

But reflecting on his work with big bands takes Zawinul deeper into his past, when he was a young phenom in Vienna. One of Zawinul's earliest professional gigs started in 1953, when he played in Horst Winter's big band. Winter died in 2001, at age 87. "I learned a lot from him," Zawinul said. "He was a clarinet player and a violin player, bred in the music of the Berliners of the '20s and '30s, when the shit was happening. It was the time of Marlene Dietrich and Kurt Weill. He moved to Vienna after WWII. He was such a great musician that the only people he wanted in his band were the best, and we had some of the finest musicians anywhere in Vienna."

Zawinul is a proud product of Vienna. "One thing about Viennese musicians, they can really groove, more than even the German bands can," he said. "It's something in our nature, perhaps. We're cosmopolitan and interracial—Czech, Slavic, Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Turkish a little bit. All that shit is conglomerated in one place."

Following his experience in Winter's band, Zawinul went on to play in a radio big band, and then another band in the style of Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey. "Wonderful musicians," he said. "Slowly, I gained a lot of experience playing with big bands. But really, I didn't like it that much. I did in the beginning. It was good experience, but then I wanted to play jazz, in combos."

Zawinul's approach to music, as a player, composer and as a thinker, has such an identifiable and unique palette, it might be assumed that his voice was intact, already assembled right out of the box. But even the normally confident musician admits that he was essentially a work-in-progress and a fine mimic in his early days.

"When I came to America, I was a total copyist," he said. "Bud Powell was my thing. Hank Jones. I say imitate until you've got it together. That's what I did. I imitated everybody."

Jump forward to today, and Zawinul has put it all together, creating a voice that others strive to imitate. A good example of his abiding improvisational imperative can be heard on "Brown Street," the new album's joyous, swinging title track. Originally appearing on Weather Report's 1979 album, *8:30*, the tune, according to Zawinul, is "a total improvisation, exactly taken down, note for note. What happened was that, in the old Pasadena house, we were rehearsing with Peter [Erskine], Wayne and myself. Jaco [Pastorius] was supposed to be there. We get a call. Jaco was arrested. So we were fooling around. My son Erich was with us and he grabbed some shakers. We started a tune, and that's what you hear on the original. I just let the tape recorder roll."

"Later that afternoon, Hubert Laws came over," he continued. "I played with Hubert a lot, but never live. We played a lot of duets, Handel and other types of music, chamber music. I played this for him. I said, 'We just played this a half hour ago.' He said, 'This is not possible. This must come out on the record. It's amazing.'"

At 75, Zawinul is still in fighting form, with no plans to slow down. This year, he's recording a project called *Absolute Zawinul* with the new Absolute Ensemble. "This is something to reckon with," Zawinul said. Absolute Ensemble is a road-tested project, with a couple of concerts in Europe. "It's not the tunes we played with the big band, but other tunes of mine, from the *Dialects* album, things like 'The Great Empire' and 'Ice Pick Willy.' The instrumentation is nice. They have all the instruments of the symphony orchestra, but only one each—one oboe, one violin, one French horn, etc."

Can they swing? "They can," he smiled. "The rhythm section has to be worked with. I'm gonna make it happen. I can do it."

Meanwhile, Zawinul is also working on his solo project, touring Africa with the Syndicate (including a gig in the island nation of Mauritius, from where his technically striking current bassist, Linley Marthe, hails), and pursuing other projects.

Looking at his current spate of musical activity and the full circle maneuvers of projects like *Brown Street*, Zawinul does not feel like he has reached a career peak. "I never thought about arrival," he said. "It's all just part of the flow. One page, the next page. Let's go. But there are a lot of pages."

"Who knows what happens next. When you get to be 75, you have lived most of your life. You got to be realistic. Whatever happens, what the good Lord has in mind, I'm here, man."

DB



four80east
en route

The highly anticipated new album from Jazz/electonica duo Four80East. A remarkably cinematic and fresh spin on their previous albums, *En Route* features their hit single "Noodle Soup." "Rather addictive..." *All About Jazz*

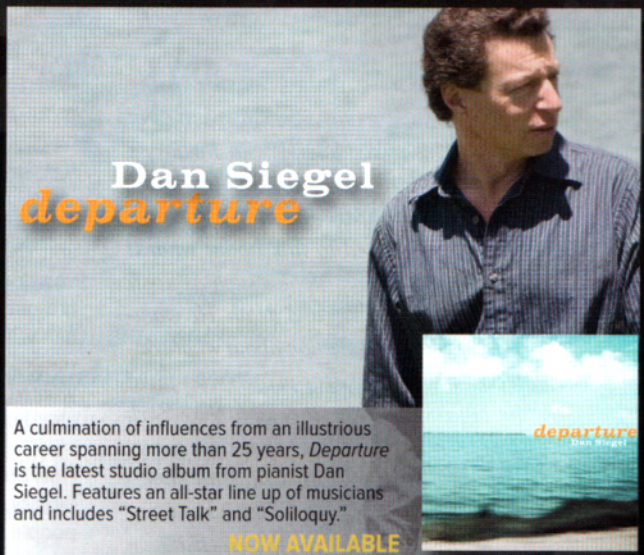
AVAILABLE APRIL 24



Sara Gazarek
Return to You

The heavily anticipated follow-up to Sara's 2005 debut, *Return To You* features a mix of original material and contemporary pop arrangements of songs. "Buzz surrounding this twenty-something singer is hard to ignore." *Jazzweek*

AVAILABLE JUNE 5



Dan Siegel
departure

A culmination of influences from an illustrious career spanning more than 25 years, *Departure* is the latest studio album from pianist Dan Siegel. Features an all-star line up of musicians and includes "Street Talk" and "Soliloquy."

NOW AVAILABLE

TO LISTEN TO SOUND CLIPS AND FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT US AT NATIVELANGUAGE.COM