



“The

# HUBBARD FREDDIE HUBBARD Will Return”

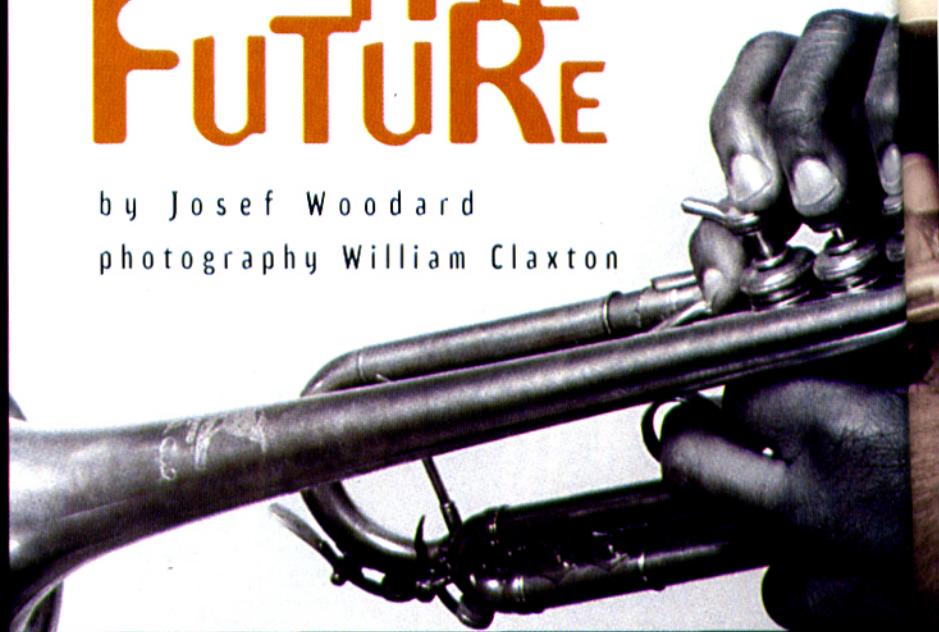
Jazz history slouches towards the millennium, lining itself up for scrutiny at the end of its first century of existence. Who's who, what impact was made and what types of lineage have threaded the whole meandering saga together?

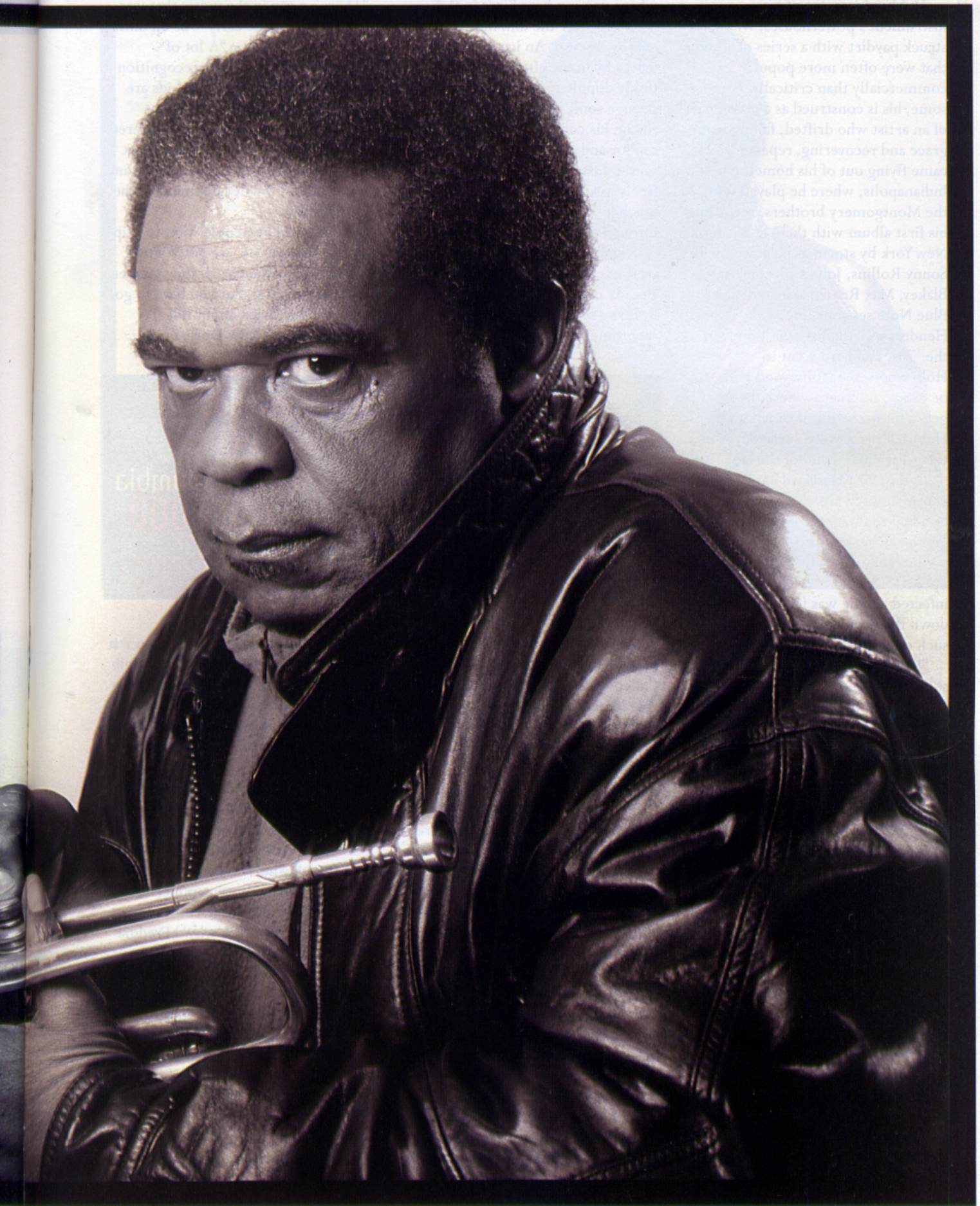
There are other questions that need to be answered, one of them being: “Where's Freddie?” As one of the most notable and fiery trumpeters of the hard bop crop coming up during the '60s, Freddie Hubbard plays a critical role in the development of the horn in jazz, and as many of that era's icons are passing away, his presence on the scene is requested more and more. But where is he?

MAPS  
OUT  
THE  
FUTURE

by Josef Woodard

photography William Claxton





Hubbard was one of his instrument's powerhouses, who later struck paydirt with a series of albums that were often more popular commercially than critically. For some, his is construed as a classic tale of an artist who drifted, falling from grace and recovering, repeatedly. He came flying out of his hometown of Indianapolis, where he played with the Montgomery brothers, recording his first album with them at 17, took New York by storm as he played with Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Art Blakey, Max Roach, assorted classic Blue Note sessions, Joe Henderson...the list won't quit. In the '70s, Hubbard went to Hollywood, the Hollywood Hills, to be exact, and that's where the story gets a bit fuzzy. But through it all, Hubbard's jazz voice surfaced, as in the great VSOP band of the late '70s.

In the '90s, Hubbard has been conspicuous by his absence, dogged by a bad reputation for no-shows at gigs and a general retreat from the public scene. In fact, Hubbard split his lip in 1992, which then became infected and he was forced to lay down the horn he had played with such might for so long.

"I keep forgetting that I'll be 60 soon," he reflects, in his living room. "I don't feel that way, because in the last four years, I haven't worked that hard. Lee Morgan was great—he died young. Coltrane was great and died young. Booker Little died when he was 22, a clean cut kid who went to conservatory. Everything was music. Then he got leukemia. What can you do? He didn't use drugs, but he still died. You look at life and say 'wow, maybe I should be thankful for what I've done and what I have.' Let the other stuff go. I just need to work on getting back to where I was."

Finding Freddie Hubbard these days is not such a thorny task, if you know where to look. Hang a left off the 101 freeway in Sherman Oaks, curl around the suburban streets and head to the end of a quiet cul de sac, where a black Mercedes sits in the driveway. Here, Hubbard lives with his wife of 25 years, Brigitte, and is slowly gearing up for resuming his career. It's a bastion of tranquility,

where you can hear birds in the backyard over the dim hum of the nearby freeway. An ice cream truck drives by in the afternoon, with its tinkly doppelganger tune providing a strange sonic backdrop as Hubbard sits on his couch, speaking with candor and amiability about his life in music. Listening to Hubbard as he freely associates, you realize how much his career has taken him right through the vortex of jazz history.

Rumors of a Hubbard comeback aren't yet confirmed, but his legend is already paving the way for a return. Reissues have put his best old recordings back on the shelves. His

"There's a gap in the music that was left from, say, the early '70s up until now," Hubbard says. "A lot of musicians didn't get the recognition they deserve. The younger kids are going to have to go through that period before they can be considered great. There was a lot of music, not only in jazz, that was very serious and important in the development of the music today.

"It seems like people want to skip over it and say, 'ok, we got Wynton and Terrence Blanchard, the younger trumpet players.' But you have to go back and say 'what about Bill Hartman and Kenny Dorham, the

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best-known tune, "Red Clay," was used by the hip hop group A Tribe Called Quest. "That's how I bought that Mercedes, from the first statement," Hubbard says of his royalties. "I said 'these little kids are alright. Big Daddy Kane did something else, I think it was 'Leapfrog.' I like what they did, but there was some nasty stuff in there, what they were saying. It didn't have to do with anything, all this 'sucka, nigger' stuff."

More to the musical point, Blue Note has just released *Hubsongs*, an album of Hubbard tunes played by young horn men Marcus Printup and Tim Hagans, and produced by the man himself. "These cats must have practiced on this stuff, to interpret the music that well," Hubbard says of the session. "They were ready in there. I didn't know they were that much into my music. That makes me feel good."

In general, though, Hubbard feels that younger musicians have an incomplete picture of jazz history.

guys who laid this music out there.' It takes time to develop ideas."

The '70s are often dismissed, by some, as the era that gave rise to fusion and took many jazz musicians off the artistic track. Hubbard won't deny the lure. "When it got into fusion, most of the cats started making a lot of money, like myself. I went with Columbia because I said 'if I can make \$125,000 instead of \$5,000, why not?' Of course, that entailed making more commercial music. But I went for it. A lot of my peers and critics said 'why'd Freddie have to do that?' That's what was happening at the time. I don't regret it, because I was able to accumulate a little money and send my kid to school and take vacations. I used to dream about taking those cruises, so I was finally able to do that. I took my wife all over the world.

"But there was a period, when I lived up there in the Hollywood Hills, when the music started to be secondary. I started to have too much fun. It basically affected my chops and



my playing. That was the beginning. It didn't really start being a problem until the early '90s, because my body just said 'hey, you just can't do all that and still produce the kind of music that you were.' But during that period in the '70s, it was a fun period.

"Chick moved out here, Herbie, Wayne, Tony moved. A bunch of us in that age group moved out here and you notice the music became a little more commercial. Chick started *Return to Forever*. I didn't use too much electricity. When Miles quit for five years, they said 'why don't you do some of that stuff,' but I never could do it that way. But I did use electric piano. I sold a few records. I won a Grammy for *First Light* (CTI). I made that record with Billy Joel and even made one with Elton John—I don't know what they did with it.

"I was doing all kinds of stuff, making records and doing commercials. I partied up a lot of that money. Three cars, a big house, parties all the time. I developed a stomach ulcer. You never really get rid

of those. I was drinking that Jack Daniels. Whew. I went to the bathroom and passed that blood and it scared the shit out of me. I went to London and a doctor said 'if you had lost much more, you'd be dead.' No more of that, no smoking that weed, doing that blow and stuff.

"I go back to the guys who have been through all of this and I ask them 'man, what is this stuff?' The people who called me when I was seriously sick were Sonny Rollins, McCoy Tyner, J.J. Johnson, Louis Hayes, of course. These guys called me and told me to come out of it. It was amazing. When you look at guys, you see them being successful, but you don't know what they've been through. After you talk to them, you find out what makes them them.

"I thought you just get good, play music and be happy. But I'm really lucky to have had the experiences I've had, which I don't think any other musicians have had. I did studio work, work in Europe, Japan, North Africa, Brazil, and met all these great artists

who appreciated my music. Everybody fell in love with 'Little Sunflower.' To me, it was just a little thing I wrote for my son, but it touched a lot of people. People said, 'Freddie, how could you write a soft, sensitive tune like that when you're so crazy?' I said, 'I'm not crazy.' But you almost have to be crazy to be a jazz musician."

To hear him tell it, the crazy life started on a mellow note, when he heard, and fell in love with, Miles Davis' *Musings with Miles* as a teenager in Indianapolis, where he was born on April 7, 1938. "I used to cut school and play that record. My father said, 'what are you doing?' I said, 'I can't figure this stuff out.' I was sitting there in Indiana, listening to this hip, slick stuff. I said to myself, 'I'm going to go play with these guys.' Sure enough, I ended up meeting Miles and I said, 'oh wow, Miles...' He didn't say nothing. He just looked at my shoes and then looked at me and walked away. That's how cold he was, you know."



Hubbard's sister was a trumpeter, and he naturally gravitated to the instrument. But it was the Montgomery Brothers, Wes, Monk and Buddy, who caught his ear. "I was in such awe of Wes Montgomery that that's all I thought about. I quit school to be with those guys. In order to get into this conservatory I was going to, I had to walk past their house. I was on 13th and they were on 14th. You crossed those tracks, and you were in Montgomery territory.

"Those guys were in all the top clubs. This was before integration. I used to follow them into the clubs, going through the kitchen. Those guys used to rehearse. Wes had a day job across the street from me. I used to look out the window and he'd be asleep. He used to wash milk trucks—that was his day job.

"Then he would work at the Turf Club, which was a club we had out at Speedway City, a nice club. Then he'd work at an after-hours joint, the

Missile Room. Can you imagine? And he had six kids, and then they'd rehearse all the time. When did they have time to rehearse? None of them read music, but they were tight. They could get these arrangements together.

"I finally did a record with them when I was 17. When he had me do the record date, he sang all the parts to me for six of these songs. I had been used to reading.

There were not just melodic parts—they also had some funny harmony parts. I just memorized them. He said that's the best way. It was that way a lot with Coltrane and Sonny—"Trane more than Sonny. They'd show you different things."

At age 21, Hubbard had a chance to play with Sonny Rollins, a memorable experience for the young firebrand. "This cat played so much on 'Cherokee,' and it was so fast, I couldn't even tap my foot. He'd just play and practice and play and then walk out the door. I thought 'that's the shit.' He would double up the tempo. Let me tell you, he used to give me a headache, man. When I played with him, I really felt like I was one of the cats, like I was good.

"I used to go between Sonny's house and 'Trane's house, and those cats were jealous of each other. Two grown, great guys. Neither one of them had to worry

about nothing. One would say 'Man, what's he working on?' I'd show him a lick, and then I'd go to the other one, and 'Trane would say, 'what's Sonny working on?' I was like the messenger boy. It took two years off of my life, going back and forth between their houses.

"Working with 'Trane opened up my mind to that modal type of playing, trying to create over something simple, playing ideas and different scales. He turned me onto

the Slonimsky book, the 'Thesaurus of Scales.' He taught me a lot. Eric used to go over to his house and practice with him. Also Wayne Shorter. You noticed Wayne used to sound a lot like him. He doesn't anymore. 'Trane liked him.

"I started around that time with Louis Hayes. We lived in the same building. He was the only cat who could play fast with me. I wanted to play fast all the time. He could play arrangements."

In his day, Hubbard has flirted with avant garde notions, and, for a time, was a roommate with Eric Dolphy in New York. "I was always curious," Hubbard says about his experimental side. "I wouldn't say that I was really thinking that way. Most everything that I want to play, I have it figured out to see how it's related to the chord. I'm basically a chord man. I

tradition. He had a little more of that classical tradition," he sings a rigid line, "dut-dut-dut-dut. That's where I come in, me and Lee and Booker Little, Bill Hartman, Donald Byrd. If you notice, Byrd tried to do a little Miles thing for awhile. The rest of us were basically Clifford. Clifford was the third man, I think, in that period among jazz cats. He might have taken over, but he died too soon.

"Fats Navarro died young, too. These are hardcore bebop cats. I heard some of his records, and he was spitting more than Dizzy. Nevertheless, it's hard to get in there. What do you do? Dizzy hit all those fast things and high notes. Miles had the inside stuff, so it was kind of weird to get in there. I tried to do a lot of runs. I figured if I tried to play like a saxophone, I could do something a little different. And it

scene in a way."

After landing in the Hollywood Hills, Hubbard's jazz profile rose considerably when Herbie Hancock reassembled the classic Miles acoustic quintet of the '60s—with Shorter, Tony Williams, and Ron Carter, but with Hubbard instead of Miles, then in his five-year hiatus and with no interest in covering old territory, anyway. "When Miles laid out, they said 'Freddie, why don't you play with us?' I'll never forget when Miles said 'Freddie, you want to work with them? Well then give me 350 apiece.' I never figured that out, what the brother was talking about," he laughs. "He was a wild dude."

In a way, VSOP, coming amidst the plugged-in sound of fusion, paved the way for the arrival of Wynton Marsalis and the new acoustic mainstream jazz rebirth of the '80s.

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might go outside the chord, but I still like something that's relative.

"Eric would hear a bird like that," Hubbard points in the direction of the birdsong in the backyard, "and he'd try to play it on his flute. He'd be up at 6 o'clock in the morning. I'd say 'Eric, I just went to bed.' He was into nature: he liked honey and sunflower seeds and all that. But he was a live guy. He was a beautiful cat, but just out there. Eric's swing never got to me, but I don't know if he intended to swing.

"If you listen to Sonny and 'Trane, even though they went outside into the freeform stuff a little bit, it wasn't funny. It pertained to something. It's hard to find something that meaningful besides those heavy cats, outside of Dizzy and Miles.

"I followed the Clifford Brown

worked."

In the '60s, Hubbard was supposedly engaged in a kindly rivalry with fellow horn icon Lee Morgan. "We really liked each other. You know, at one time, he was bigger than Miles, when *Sidewinder* came out. I used to follow him around. I went out and bought me a sports car like he had, drive down Broadway by Birdland. Miles was looking at us. Lee had it, man. But he didn't know how to take care of it.

"Lee Morgan was brilliant, but I had maybe a little more hipness going on, for playing the chord changes. But he had the soul, that got to the people. It used to make me mad, because no matter how good I played, he'd play one good lick and the people would go crazy. But we were two young guys, kind of rivals on the

When this idea is put forth, Hubbard cocks his head. "I never thought of that, man. That's something to think about," he laughs and lays back on the couch, overcome by the thought. "I swear, man, I was getting bitter. That loosens me up a bit, because I was getting bitter. Here was this guy, putting on a tie, this young motherfucker out of college playing classical music and now he's going to play jazz. But he's a smart kid."

This year, Hubbard plans to make a new album with Creed Taylor's revived CTI label, for which he made strong albums in the '70s. Hubbard's last album was the 1995 date for MusicMasters, *MMTC* (Monk, Miles, Trane & Cannon), but he dismisses it. "I wasn't in playing shape. They said

*Continued on page 132*

and Victoria Spivey. The more rural styles are represented by singers fronting jug bands, including Hattie Hart and Jennie Clayton as well as classic Delta blues women like Geeshie Wiley, Lottie Kimbrough and Ruby Glaze, the wife of Willie McTell. ♪

GROOVES *continued from page 88*

of talent that passed through Miles Davis' latter bands is notable for the stunning diversity of its post-Miles work: While his contemporaries indulged in everything from futuristic soul jazz to thunderous post-Hendrix bio-blasts, **Herbie Hancock** rode electric avenue straight into beat street, with a series of discs that seem more relevant each year. 1975's *Manchild* (Mobile Fidelity/Sony/Columbia, UIDCD 706 45:18), like its predecessor *Headhunters*, and the following year's *Secrets* was not just a showcase for Hancock's stellar groovemeistering, but an object lesson for anyone searching for the sweet spot between the head and the butt. There's the rollicking fright-train groove of the disc-opening "Hang Up Your Hang-ups," building from Wah Wah

Watson's greasy guitar intro to a full-fledged juggernaut, and the leadfooted thump of "The Traitor." Lest Hancock get all the credit, note his collaborators: Wayne Shorter, Louis Johnson, Blackbyrd McKnight, Paul Jackson, Harvey Mason, Bennie Maupin and Stevie Wonder, who drops his trademark harmonica into "Steppin In It"'s post-"Chameleon" slop. ♪

FREDDIE HUBBARD *continued from page 33*

'make it, Freddie, and we'll surround you with some good players.' That was the last thing, and that left a bad taste, a bad sound just before I quit playing. I couldn't even play 'All Blues,' man," he shakes his head.

"If I'm coming back out again, I want to do something that will grab people. It won't be hard bebop stuff. I'm not ready for that. I don't think I should anyway. What have I got to prove? I want to do something good. I don't need to show how hard I can blow, especially right now. I might blow a socket. Then I really won't be able to come back.

"When I was playing with Dizzy in Paris, he couldn't get it going. He was 70-something then. He'd rest one night and then the next night he'd play. He'd say 'Freddie, you've got to pace yourself.' But I never did that. I'd just start off blowing as hard as I could. I want the house to love me, and to scream. Hm-mm. That's how you mess up your lips, by not warming up. If your car's sitting out there in the cold, you can't expect it to warm up right away. It's the same thing with your lips."

Does he feel like he's entering a new chapter?

"It is a new chapter. I feel better about life now. I realize how heavy this music is, man. I didn't know my music reached as many people as it does. A lot of people like jazz. You don't always see them: not that many people come to clubs anymore, but people call me up and say, 'Man, we want to hear you play again, so get it together, whatever you do.' That makes me be thankful."

Late in the afternoon, Hubbard, still in his robe and with yesterday's five o'clock shadow, walks the reporter out to his car. It's peaceful here, free of activity beyond a neighbor walking her dog, exchanging greetings. The following day, he's off to Japan to play some warm-up gigs—"warming up" assuming a new, almost mantra-like level of importance for the trumpeter these days. The new year would bring an Iridium engagement in New York and a record date with Creed Taylor, and the aura of another new beginning.

"The Hub will return," he says in the L.A. twilight, with mock braggadocio and a trademark, hearty laugh, "Freddie's not dead." It's hard not to believe it.

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## Gearbox

Hubbard plays a trumpet made by the Los Angeles-based Calicchio company, which also custom-makes his mouthpieces. He also plays a fluegelhorn by Getzen, out of Elkorn, Wisconsin. ♪