

Dexter still bebops



Dexter Gordon, almost 90 years old, master of jazz.

review by Brad Johnson

Last fall, a movie entitled *Round Midnight* was released by Columbia Pictures. Well, forget all about that.

Dexter Gordon, the saxophonist who helped revolutionize the bebop jazz scene, has just recently released an album of this movie he starred in, called *The Other Side of Round Midnight*.

This album was recorded on Blue Note, Gordon's usual label, and includes original tracks not found on the Columbia soundtrack album of *Round Midnight*.

Gordon's truly melodic solo style is especially apparent here. He hasn't lost anything to the ravages of time (he is nearly 90 years old!).

You can definitely see in this album why he has come to be known as a legend in the jazz world.

The lineup of other players accompanying Gordon is equally impressive. Pianist Herbie Hancock, saxophonist Wayne Shorter, percussionist Tony Williams, and bass-man Ron Carter, who were in the historically important Miles Davis Quintet of the 1960's, are merely a few names in the cast of musicians.

Rolling Stone Blues

by Mike Spindloe

Last week we left off talking about some of the more prominent cover versions that have recently graced (or disgraced) the airwaves. At the risk of being even more negative, this week I'm going to discuss the literal commercialization of popular music. The idea was given to me quite inadvertently by an acquaintance, who suggested that original/cover comparisons were just about meaningless anyway because of the great commercialized wasteland that pop has become. Unfortunately, I tend to agree with him, but think there is still a lot of hope, as shown by the number of bands (young and old) out there who don't really care if they make the cover of *Rolling Stone* or get signed to a major label or whatever.

It is these people who are carrying the torch of Art in popular music and the irony is that most of them are just too eclectic to attract the kind of audience that would give them media attention, and land them on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. Of course, there's never been a whole lot of Art, or even originality in the Top 40. Chuck Berry wrote a couple of good riffs, and he's still milking them today, along with a thousand other bands, among which the Rolling Stones would surely be the best-known. How many different songs did Chubby Checker milk out the Twist? Three? Four? A dozen?

But rock and roll was never meant to be taken TOO seriously. This is a fact that most people who aspire to criticism need to be reminded of occasionally (including myself). The greatest compliment you can pay to a pop song is still probably the classic line, "it's got a good beat and you can dance to it." I think it was Dick Clark (you know, America's only teenager in geriatric care) who thought that one up.

Even fans, however, take things somewhat seriously. Doesn't it bother you, even just a little bit, when you hear beer being sold to the tune of "A Hard Day's Night", or "Gimme Some Lovin'", or "Shotgun"? Even if it was all a big con job in the first place, even if the music was sold to us originally the same way the beer is now, the music still means something more. I'll bet you can remember what song was playing the first time you kissed a member of the opposite sex in a romantic fashion and a thousand other (hopefully) happy occasions.

Those little three-chord ditties, to use a cliché, become the soundtrack to our lives. And they mean more to us than a brand of beer or soft drink or whatever ever will. And

there are solos by the other artists as well as Gordon. Herbie Hancock does a technically masterful solo version on the ivories of the title track. Vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson is featured on "It's Only a Paper Moon," with Hancock throwing in his bit.

The very well-known "As Time Goes By" is done in a refreshing new light by Gordon as he is accompanied by John McLaughlin on guitar and Hancock.

Another track, "Call Sheet Blues," which wasn't actually on the soundtrack, includes a solo on tenor saxophone by Wayne Shorter. This piece is interesting in that it was spontaneously composed by Shorter and other players between scenes on the set of *Round Midnight*.

I really can't seem to find anything to criticize about this album. It contains a whole lot of excellent musicianship (some of the very best, in fact), a good selection of music, and it really is a case of artists just 'letting go' in the total spontaneity of jazz (no apologies for the cliché).

(I might add that Gordon has just released yet another album on Blue Note, *Nights on the Keystone Corner*, of a late 70's session.)



some songs have even been known to express valid emotions, no matter how seemingly trite, that we can all relate to.

So, getting back to the subject, on the one hand we have "serious" pop musicians attempting to stretch the boundaries of what can be accomplished within the genre; on the other hand, we have all those pretty boys and girls reaching for the top (40) and not giving a hoot about words like 'credibility'. The problem is, the two categories have always overlapped and probably always will. There's a million starving musicians out there who know exactly what one good hit single would do for their chances of paying the rent next month, and there's a whole bunch more pop "superstars" out there who maybe felt like they had something to give or say too, but got trapped in an image foisted upon them by some unscrupulous manager who wanted to get rich even more than they did.

Everything we've discussed so far comes together (no pun intended, at least until I thought of it just now) in one band: The Beatles. You may be sick of hearing about them (again), but think about it for a minute.

The Beatles got their start doing, you guessed it, virtually all cover versions. They even recorded a few. Their own early compositions were basic, simple love songs that you could hum along to and even know the words to after hearing them a few times. This was not completely by accident. They were very skillfully marketed, especially for their time.

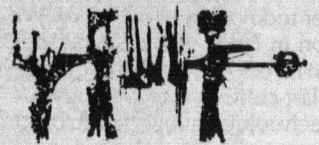
Then they went on to expand the boundaries of pop as few have even attempted to do since, and in the process, left us with a whole raft of great albums that still sound great, about twenty years later. Who knows how they'll be remembered in a hundred years? Perhaps they'll be reviled as pagan, or still be held in great esteem. It doesn't matter though, because no amount of commercialization can really lessen the relevance of what they accomplished.

Next week: I might try to make a little more sense of this, or I might fly off on another tangent altogether. Either way, its 2:30 a.m., my computer science program still doesn't work, so it's off to dreamland.

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