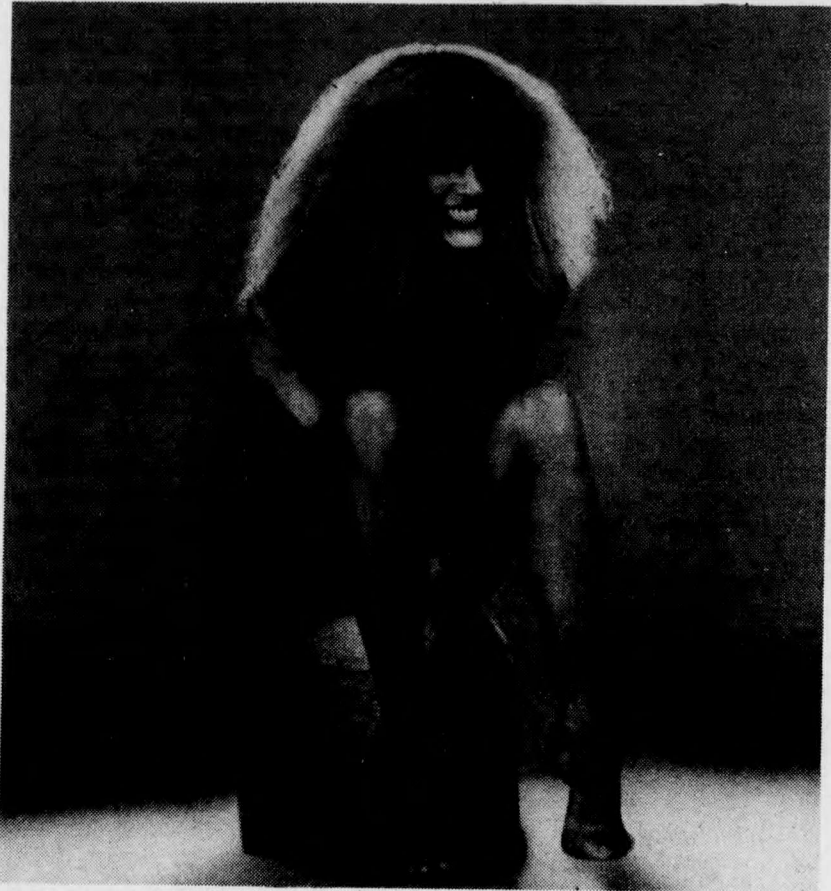


Carla Bley: a thinking jazz pianist



Jazz musician Carla Bley: Vanguard of the bizarre.

STEVEN HACKER AND ROMAN PAWLYSZYN

Carla Bley is part musical humourist, part creative liar, part enigmatic iconoclast, and part giggly valley girl. She's also the leader of one of the most bizarre, fascinating bands in jazz today. Bley and band rolled into the El Mocambo early this week for two nights of bizarreness.

Which is nothing unusual. Composer/arranger/keyboardist Bley has been in the vanguard of the

bizarre ever since here career began in the late 1950's. She started as a recording engineer of sorts, making bootleg tapes of the Ornette Coleman band (which at that time included her then-husband, Canadian pianist Paul Bley). The next thing she knew, she found herself the principal composer of hubby Bley's repertoire--with no musical training herself.

Since then, she's become the composer of some of jazz' hippest

tunes--tunes like "Dreams So Real," "Sing Me Softly of the Blues," and "Vashkar". She's also been involved in some of the most elaborate recordings in jazz. She recorded the monumental *Escalator Over the Hill* for example, a three album behemoth that took years to record and has everyone on it from Don Cherry to Gato Barbieri to Linda Ronstadt. In 1969, she arranged the music for Charlie Haden's overtly political *Liberation Music Orchestra*, an album of revolutionary anthems by a band that was recently revived for a tour and album. And her association with bassist Jack Bruce led to the formation of a mid-'70's supergroup that also included ex-Rolling Stones guitarist Mick Taylor--a supergroup that lasted one spectacular tour and mysteriously disintegrated on the first day of recording an album.

For the past few years, Bley has been involved in leading her own big band, which records for her own label, WATT. Trombonists Roswell Rudd, George Lewis, and currently Gary Valente, have been members, and bassist Steve Swallow and trumpeter Michael Mantler (Bley's current husband) are the mainstays of the 10-piece outfit that played the Elmo this week.

At the Elmo, Bley played mostly material from her last album, *Live*, as well as songs Bley composed for Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason's solo album, *Fictitious Sports*. And there were newer tunes such as a selection from a film score she has just completed for director Claude Miller. And although Valente, Swallow, altoist Steve Swallow, and pianist Mitchel Forman played exceptional solos, the focus of the music lay more in Bley's

arrangements, their textures, their irreverence.

Bley is a tall, gaunt woman. In conversation, she speaks deliberately, taking long pauses between words, enunciating each syllable of key words. She giggles frequently, pouts and generally comes across as a spacey, whimsical eccentric. *Excalibur* spoke to Bley and her husband, Michael Mantler. *Would you say your latest music is more "commercial?"*

Yeah, I think it is. To me, commercial means how many records does it sell? The *Live* album has sold the most so it's more commercial. It's more commercial because it's better and I know what I'm doing. The music I'm doing now is the best I've done.

In the past, did you always feel that your newest music was your best? I may have, but I was wrong. Now I'm right. I think I might be wrong in five years.

You still do a lot of older material. Yeah, but it's not as good. I always realize when I do an older piece, "Why did I give that line to the french horn? I've gotta sit back down and re-arrange that piece." But when it comes down to what to do with the eight hours I have that day, I'd rather work on a new piece.

Do you discipline yourself to write? I don't have to. I discipline myself to get up from my desk and eat a meal. I'm definitely a workaholic.

Many of your songs are politically inspired, your song about the Falkland Islands, or "Silent Spring" (after Rachel Carson's book) for example. Are you a political person?

No. (pause) Oh totally. And no. My life is politically radical, but I have no ideas about it; it's just the way I live. Nobody can tell what's

happening in the world really. It's just what we read in the paper--what do we know? We're just being romantic about it. So as a very unromantic person, I don't even let myself think one way or another about any of it.

Can you see allying yourself with a political cause?

I think everybody would if it was the right cause and if it was close enough to their home. But I don't think that's admirable. I think that's sort of boring.

I wrote "*Silent Spring*" 17 years ago, and I did have romantic notions then. But I certainly don't think a piece of music will change anything. Because I read the newspaper, some of it's going to turn up in my music, but I don't do it because I think music will change the world.

Are you becoming more conservative?

Yeah. Musically, I don't allow myself to make mistakes anymore. I don't experiment, I do what I know.

Why?

Old age. (laughs) Maturity. (giggles) I don't have anything I want to experiment on. My ears are a certain shape, and certain things sound good to them, and they're usually sort of sophisticated things. It's nothing I did--I was just born. I know what sounds good and what doesn't. I know so many things that don't sound good, it might seem as if I'm not trying as many things. That's because I've tried and failed at almost everything there is to try and fail at.

You seem to leave the bulk of the playing to your band. In particular you seem to feature the trombone in your bands, perhaps overshadowing

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NOTICE OF CYSF ANNUAL GENERAL ELECTIONS 1983

The annual general elections of the Council of the York Student Federation will be held on Tuesday, March 29 1983. Advanced polling will be held on Monday, March 28

Nominations open at midnight, Friday and close on Thursday, March 17 also at midnight. At 12:01 a.m. on March 18 1983, the campaign will open, and it will close at midnight, Sunday, March 27 1983. It is during this time only that electioneering will be permitted.

The following positions shall be open for nomination: President, Director - Internal Affairs, Director - External Affairs, Director - Women's Affairs, and Board of Governors Representative (one only).

Nomination forms and copies of Bylaw 2 (covering elections) are now available in the CYSF Office, Room 105 Central Square. All candidates are expected to familiarize themselves with the By-law. As per its provisions, ignorance of the By-law will not be accepted as valid proof of error.

My office hours (at the CYSF Office) are as follows:

Monday: 12 p.m.-1 p.m.

Wednesday: 11 a.m.-12 p.m.

Friday: 12 p.m.-1 p.m.

At other times by appointment.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with your problems, questions and concerns.

Larry Till, Chief Returning Officer Council of the York Student Federation

Phone: 667-2515 (CYSF)

In addition to the election of student representatives, a number of referenda will be presented for voter consideration. Their precise wording, pending council approval, is as follows:

Do you support contributing \$2.00 to be levied through your student fees for a period of two years and to be used to create a Multi-cultural society at York University for the benefit of individual York students?

Yes _____ No _____

Are you willing to contribute \$1.00 in addition to your student fees to *Excalibur*, York University's Community Newspaper on a permanent basis?

Yes _____ No _____

Do you support contributing \$1.50 to be levied through your student fees for a period of two years and to be used to create another central student newspaper at York University for the benefit of individual York students?

Yes _____ No _____

Paying \$1.50 to the Vandoo means: More pages per issue. Eight to at least twelve.
More issues per year. From six to at least twelve. More copies of each issue.

Would you be willing to have your student activity fee increased by one dollar and have this go directly to Radio York each year in order to aid in the funding of a campus radio station?

Yes _____ No _____

Do you support contributing \$4.50 to be levied through your student fees for a period of one year only and to be used to create an Ombudsperson's office at York University for the benefit of individual York students?

Yes _____ No _____

Canvassing for the referenda will begin on Monday March 14 1983, and will close on Sunday, March 27 1983. The voting on the referenda will take place simultaneously with the elections themselves.

As per By-law 2, no more than \$300.00 may be spent either in support of, or in opposition to, a given referendum. As with the elections, all times are as of midnight local time.

(All dates are subject to council approval)

ATTENTION STUDENT WORK FORCE MEMBERS:

Any SWF member wishing to work as Deputy Returning Officer and/or Polling Clerk should leave their name and phone number on the list provided in the CYSF office. Attempts will be made to reach all concerned. People with prior experience and free schedules on balloting days will be given preference. Total positions available: 15.