

Entertainment

"The mist is in my mouth."
-Marie-Claire Blais-

Collin Wallcott interview...

A sitar is born

Steven Hacker
and Howard Goldstein

One of the most refreshing things to happen in jazz in recent years has been its increased association with Third World folk forms. Though Africa has always been at the heart of the music, it is only recently that these connections have been brought to the forefront. Thanks to pioneers like Randy Weston and Don Cherry, traditional music is now an accepted and vital part of today's jazz.

One of the most successful products of this movement in jazz is a trio of musicians known as Codona. Codona consists of American trumpeter Cherry (not to be confused with the former Bruin coach), known for his work with Ornette Coleman's historic quartet, Brazilian percussionist Nana Vasconcelos (who has played with everyone from Eno to Egberto), and American sitarist and tabla player Collin Wallcott. Together they combine to produce a unique fusion of musical forms. From the jungles of South America to Ornette Coleman, and from the deserts of North Africa to Stevie Wonder—such is the scope of their music.

Of the three, Wallcott is probably the best known, because of his membership in Oregon, a popular band among younger jazz fans. Though Oregon takes up much of his time, it hasn't prevented him from playing with performers as diverse as Miles Davis and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Perhaps the only jazz musician whose career rests solely on sitar and tabla, he shared a few moments during a recent Oregon performance in Lewiston, N.Y.



Howard Goldstein

"Take two tablas and call me in the morning," advises Dr. Wallcott.

How did you get interested in the music that you play?

When I was in music school I was a straight percussionist and fledgling conductor, but somehow or other I wanted to improvise, and Indian, African and Cuban music struck me before jazz did. At that time—late 50's, early 60's—the only jazz that I was exposed to was pretty progressive, like Coltrane and Mingus in periods when they were really 'out there', and it just didn't appeal to me as an alternative to what I was doing. Whereas the Third World thing and a more intimate, 'chambery' kind of thing—but still something that swung—did.

A lot of people have closed attitudes to Third World music. Do you find this to be an obstacle?

Not really. In a way it opens people up more than it closes them. They say, 'wow it's weird—let's listen to it.' It's the reverse with John Abercrombie (whose quartet is playing in the background) using guitar, piano, bass and drums. Everybody's heard that combination. To make people listen to those instruments

you have to be really incredible, as they are. With us, we've got such weird instruments that you at least have the audience for fifteen minutes, just out of curiosity and then obviously you've got to deliver the music.

You've studied sitar with Ravi Shankar and tabla with Alla Rakha. Does the traditionalist Indian view you as faithful to the tradition?

No. But also not heretical. Traditional Indian musicians can appreciate that I've spent a lot of time practicing and that I've developed my own style of playing, not according to Indian rules. Now, if I was going on the stage and saying 'Now I'm going to play raga such-and-such', then they would get upset. They don't object to people experimenting with the instruments but they do object to people playing piano—Indian music—getting dressed in Indian clothes and going out saying they're playing Indian music when they're not.

So you don't concern yourself with the spiritual implications of the music?

Not particularly. When I first heard it, I was primarily interested in it as music. A lot of people got into Indian music and the whole Indian trip as a spiritual basis. They were more into the music because it was trippy than because they liked it.

I was primarily interested in the music. I've never been drawn to Hinduism or Islam as religious practices. But I am involved with Buddhism, or rather I should say Buddhist psychology, since Buddhism is more about psychology than religion. All of us in Oregon are somewhat closet to it even though we're not practicing Buddhists.

Many people are familiar with the

sitar, but they have little knowledge of the tablas.

Basically you have two drums, a high drum and a low drum. The low one is very unusual in that it has a very loose head, and it gives a very watery, liquid sound. It's almost like a kettle drum with a pedal on it which you can make go up and down with your hand. The high drum is a very clear, specifically tuned drum with a very clean sound.

How did Codona come about?

It started out as my record and my tunes, but it ended up that as soon as we got in the studio it was apparent that we were a democratic trio and not my group.

The first Codona record on ECM was well-received by both fans and critics. Is there anything we should know about the new album, Codona 2 (just released in Canada)?

Well, it's much stranger than usual. We use kettle drums and accordions with lots of overdubs. It's very strange. Lots of singing. It's just weird. A very weird record.

Are you sure that's what you want said on behalf of your new record? This is a commercial, you know.

(Wallcott reconsiders and then answers sarcastically) It's a wonderful record full of rich instrumental variety...

With Oregon planning to take the year off so that the musicians can pursue their solo careers, Wallcott is left with considerable time to himself. He plans to use it by touring with Codona as well as continuing his study of African music with a drummer from Senegal. And beyond that, well, only your sitar knows for sure.

Friends or foes

Michael Monastyrskij

Alan Ayckbourn's *Absent Friends* which was recently presented at the Atkinson Cafeteria transforms a tired theme into a very successful comedy. It may be no great secret that marrying a girl or boy of your dreams doesn't guarantee bliss but Ayckbourn's play still serves as an enjoyable reminder.

Absent Friends concerns a group of former schoolmates who have all found their ideal marriage partners. The action begins when the fiancée of one of the group drowns, bringing the characters together for a party to console Colin, the heartbroken suitor.

Ayckbourn uses the party as a vehicle to highlight some unexpected contrasts between the unhappy Colin and the 'happy' couples.

Paul and Di's marriage has hit a rough patch, and Evelyn isn't exactly enamoured with her husband John. At first glance, Marge is the only satisfied spouse but it is soon obvious that her husband's never-ceasing illnesses have left her drained. In fact, he is sick during the party and actually never appears on stage.

Much of the comedy is ironic. For example the 'romantically involved' Evelyn laughs off a romantic story in which a man sings and dances through fields after his girl kisses him. While the 'emotionally shattered' Colin while talking about Carol, intricately describes the same scene.

Most of the comedy was reserved for midway throughout the first half, giving the audience a chance to build up some sympathy for the unfortunate characters.

As Evelyn, Siobhan Stevenson met a difficult challenge that required her to do a lot of acting



Anderson Lookkin

Family portrait

without the benefit of many lines. Don Martin's Colin was suitably bubbly.

In the wrong hands Di could have become an uninteresting kvetch, but the actor who played her created a personality that earned the audience's condolences.

Alex Galatis, who directed the play, did himself a favour by playing the part of Paul for it's not hard to imagine him sitting in an office, grimaced, directing cat food sales. John "I'm used to those bastards getting my name wrong" Beirne was technical director.

Sparks from the dark

Peter Robinson

Why Brownlee Left by Paul Muldoon, Faber & Faber, 1980, \$11.25. 48 pp.

At age 30 Paul Muldoon has established quite a reputation in his native Northern Ireland. Though this is not so well known on this side of the Atlantic, his third book, *Why Brownlee Left*, should put things right.

Muldoon favours plain-speaking, but his poems are full of odd twists and turns and his images are constantly surprising. For example, in "Hedgehog" from his first book, *New Weather* (1973), he presents a very unusual view of a snail: "The snail moves like a/Hovercraft, held up by a/Rubber cushion of itself." The subjects he treats are ordinary enough—childhood, nature, journeys, war—but the way he handles them is always unexpected.

In the opening poem of his second book, *Mules* (1977), "Lunch with Pancho Villa," Muldoon takes up the question of what a poet should write about. The "celebrated pamphleteer" tells him:

*There's more to living in this country
Than stars and horses, pigs and trees,
Not that you'd guess it from your poems.
Do you ever listen to the news?
You want to get down to something true,
Something a little nearer home.*

And this is all the more effective when one remembers that "home", for Muldoon, is Northern Ireland. But in the second part of the poem, Muldoon twists everything around, pointing out that it was "All made up as I went along", and ends by wondering what he will say to the "callow youth" coming for lunch—"He'll be rambling on, no doubt/About pigs and trees, stars and horses."

Why Brownlee Left picks up the concern with narrative begun in *New Weather* and *Mules*. In many ways, the poems merely act as introductions to greater mysteries: they pose questions and offer no answers. In "October 1950", Muldoon writes:

*Whatever it is, it all comes down to this;
My father's cock
Between my mother's thighs.
Might he have forgotten to wind the clock?*

Yet he ends the poem: "Whatever it is, it leaves me in the dark."

The title poem is a good example of the mysteries that stories sometimes provoke. Nobody knows

"why Brownlee left, and where he went", but his leaving turns him into a local legend. People talk about him, and the reader is left, like Brownlee's deserted horses, "shifting...from foot to/foot, and gazing into the future."

The final poem, a ten-page narrative called "Imram", has already been hailed by other reviewers as Muldoon's finest achievements. It certainly is a magnificent piece, a pleasure the joy comes from the way Muldoon handles the language. Seeking his father, the poet journeys through a world that veers between the sordid reality of Foster's pool hall and the Atlantic Club, and the realm of hallucination, "the Morgue/Of all the cities of America." There is no way a brief review can do the poem justice, but perhaps a stanza will give some sense of the range and vigour of Muldoon's narrative. At the Atlantic Club ("Not the kind of place you took your wife/Unless she had it in mind to strip/Or you had a mind to put her up for sale"), the poet meets a girl:

*She was wearing what looked like a dead fox
Over a low-cut sequined gown,
And went by the name of Susan, or Suzanne.
A girl who would never pass out of fashion
So long as there's an 'if' in California.
I stood her one or two pink gins
And the talk might have come around to passion
Had it not been for a pair of thugs
Who suggested that we both take a wander,
She upstairs, I into the wild, blue yonder.*

Susan, or Suzanne, reappears later in the poem in rather unusual circumstances, but that would be giving too much away. Part quest, part detective story, "Imram" brings something fresh and new to narrative poetry.

Muldoon will be reading in Winters Junior Common Room on Monday, March 9 at 8 p.m. The reading will form part of a whole evening's entertainment called "Upstairs in a Tent." John Morrow will be reading some of his stories. His book, *Northern Myths*, appeared in 1979 and is full of funny, irreverent tales delivered in a voice, I'm told, that must be heard. Ciaran Carson, a poet, will also be playing flute and whistles, and Deirdre Shannon will add some lively fiddle. The event is free and a cash bar is being provided.