

# STACKIN' SHELLAC

## A light guide to hit-seeking in Edmonton

Feature by Rick Dembicki

In just a few more weeks, classes will be finished. Gateway will cease publication for another school year and yours truly will no longer enlighten you with the famed jazz reviews.

I got to thinking—perhaps there will be a few bright students out there this summer who really want to get into the new jazz, but don't quite know how.

I therefore propose to provide a simple (but not really) guide to buying a good new jazz recording. This way you will have no fear in selecting an LP, in spite of the fact you didn't have me there to review it.

**Why the new jazz?** To answer that, I have to explain in a backwards fashion. A guide to rock music would be superfluous as *The Rolling Stone* and *Billboard* provide ample reading material on the subject, and *ED* does seem to supply a basic amount of the stuff. For disco, we all know what a waste of time and energy discussing that would be.) Classical music consumers face a plethora of excellent guides—*U of A* students also being able to attend Edmonton Symphony Orchestra concerts at bargain basement prices. I am omitting Hungarian 27-man accordion folk music because of space limitations.

More importantly though, I did leave out the oldies. The reason being, music by the likes of Count Basie and Duke Ellington is fairly well known; there is a high probability of selecting a bad LP. But with the new jazz, a whole host of wierdos have begun recording strange material—your margin of error is increasing significantly. With the growing popularity of jazz in North America though, there are some fine albums available that warrant wading through the sea of crap. It is up to you to find them.

**Can I listen to the new jazz?** Yes, but you should have a stereo. Without one, listening becomes rather difficult. However, any guide worth the paper it's printed on should be able to propose a solution, so I will.

The CKUA and CBC radio stations offer some of the best jazz going. Their selection is near infinite with many programs often featuring material not even available on disc. Imagine! Your friends will be listening with envy when you tell them that you listen to the cream of the new jazz; every day! They will of course, rip their hair out trying to find non-existent recordings by the artists you have been raving about. Best of all though, anybody with a cheap, \$3.95 transistor radio can do this.

To further simplify matters, I have gathered together some station guides and condensed them into a handy and concise wallet-sized program schedule of jazz in Edmonton. (See the starred box.) Just for your readers.

### radio guide

FM MONDAY-FRIDAY 11:00 pm - 12:00 am  
SATURDAY All Afternoon & All Evening  
SUNDAY All Evening

AM FRIDAY 8:30 pm - 10:00 pm  
SUNDAY 12:10 am - 1:00 am

MONDAY-FRIDAY 12:00 am - 1:00 am  
SATURDAY 12:30 pm - 2:00 pm  
SUNDAY 11:00



This unidentified consumer shows the strain of record buying. Note the terse expression, the tense facial muscles...

photo Russ Sampson

An aside (should you own a stereo): I must draw attention to the fact that you cannot listen to the new jazz if there are any Donna Summer records in your collection. (Sad but true.) However, massive doses of jazz and a strong willingness to repent have cured even her most deranged followers.

**OK, you've sold me. Tell me how to pick a good jazz LP.** Fine. To begin with, you must be willing to take a chance. Records are not getting any cheaper, I realize as much. But you've got to go out and purchase an album by someone you have never heard of before you can really see who is who in the business. Nonetheless, purchasing a record without prior knowledge of its contents gives everybody the jitters. Thus, I have compiled some ways in which you can minimize the costs of this trial and error process. (And I bet you thought this was going to be another dumb artsy-fartsy record review, didn't you?)

First. Talk to the clerks at record stores. Usually they have nothing better to do, so don't be shy. Tell them what you listen to now and ask for recommendation. Some of the better places in town in terms of selection and good advice are: **Opus 69, SU Records, and Kelly's** at Kingsway Garden Mall.

Second. Borrow records from the Edmonton Public Library (central branch) whenever feasible. The library offers hundreds of quality jazz recordings with monthly updates to the collection. (The date they bought the album is on the back cover of the record jacket.) Beware though. Anything over four years old may be pretty well hacked. Check out each record for bad scratches etc., before you borrow it.

Third. If you're lucky enough to own a stereo FM receiver; get even with those bozos using transistor radios and listen to the programs as they should be heard.

**I did everything you said and got burned. What now?** It's time to be honest. Are you *sure* you got rid of those Donna Summer LPs? Assuming an answer in the affirmative, then you will just have to try again. Don't be afraid to go back to the sales-clerk (at the store you were dealing) and tell him that the particular album you bought was lousy. This will help narrow the field down, and make it easier for him to select something to your liking. Switching from store to store at this stage only worsens your possibilities as no one clerk is going to get to know your tastes as well as he should. Once you can choose good-sounding albums independent of others' advice is the time to consider branching out to other shops in the city.

**I managed to find a good LP. But where do I go from here?** Ah, my little fledglings have learned to fly. Spread your tiny wings and ... oh, sorry. I just get a little sentimental every once in a while, that's all.

OK. Now for some background. As most of you are well aware, rock music is usually comprised of four or five member bands who proceed to churn out albums at regular intervals. The process may operate this way for a short period of time, or at the other extreme—for as long as a decade or more. The point is; rock music is fairly consistent. Any new album by Kiss will not deviate too far from their established norm, for their audience would be lost.

Jazz musicians on the other hand, tend to drift around often performing with artists completely different from ones featured on earlier releases. So it is important to ascertain why you like the LP you have chosen. Is it because of the trumpet on the album, or the electric guitar, or what? Read the credits on the record jacket carefully and check out who plays the instruments you are interested in. Then you can go back to the record racks and look for albums by him. This is the tip of the iceberg. Chances are the next



Here, Joe Consumer pauses to contemplate SU Records vast selection.

photo Russ Sampson

album you pick will feature someone else you like, which leads to more new artists, and more albums to hear, and...

Sounds complicated? Admittedly, it is at first. But remember, you have already begun to build a good jazz collection. Take time to enjoy the jewels you have found, and savour them slowly. Only fools rush out and buy 10 albums a week. You can get by with a fraction as many and obtain an equal (or greater) amount of pleasure.

**Since you're the Gateway's resident jazz critic, why not recommend some of your personal favourites?** I thought you would never ask. Most of my favorite LPs are released on ECM, a German record label distributed by WEA in Canada. ECM recordings have a cosmopolitan flavour, with a heavy-handed European influence. One such release is Jack DeJohnette's *Directions' Untitled*. It is a fast paced album with some excellent guitar work. *Arbour Zena* by Keith Jarrett centers around his piano compositions; backing provided by the Stuttgart Symphony Orchestra. I find it relaxing after an evening of hard rock party music.

*Mysterious Traveller* by Weather Report is a good American release, as are any of their newer albums. With four members at present, the group has a full sound which tends to move along briskly. Jaco Pastorius is their bass player, and is perhaps the best in the world—in jazz, or any music discipline.

Finally, Jean Luc Ponty's *Imaginary Voyage* highlights the man on electric violin. Ponty is reputedly the second best jazz violinist in the world, which is not bad for a person who once played with Frank Zappa. And so on.

I suppose I could conclude by saying that it shouldn't be hard work listening to music. If you have made a sincere effort to listen to the new jazz and still do not like it, then by all means—don't feel bad. There is nothing wrong with listening to a good album of classical, folk, reggae, or whatever kind of music; if you enjoy it. After all, that is the objective.

Best of luck to you.